“I looked and frowned and the monster was me”: David Bowie’s progression from mod to freak as traced through his album covers, 1967-1974

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Abstract

This research proposes a model for the visual analysis of the twelve-inch, 33rpm album cover, and uses the work of pre-eminent rock star David Bowie as its subject. A form of art in its own right, an album cover possesses a unique and inherently ekphrastic relationship with the vinyl recording it houses. The size of a small painting, it has the potential to convey a wealth of information to the viewer about the recording within, about the artist behind the work, and about both the time and the social environment in which the album was created. With such broad communicative power, the album cover is of interest to scholars from many disciplines.

Due to the lack of established methodology to aid in this analytical task, the visual analysis of album covers has too often been superficial, speculative and lacking in rigor. By adopting, adapting, and then applying an established analytical method from art history, however, the information contained within album cover imagery can be more comprehensively revealed and this is the primary goal of the thesis. To this end, and set within a broad-ranging and highly interdisciplinary approach, Erwin Panofsky’s robust and oft-utilised three-tiered method of visual analysis provides the starting point for this task.

David Bowie is widely regarded as an artist who placed great importance upon the visual aspects of his work, drawing upon a broad, interdisciplinary palette to do so. To date, however, his album covers have received surprisingly little scholarly attention. Through the process of applying robust visual analysis to these valuable artefacts, much can be ascertained regarding the artistic raison d'être and methodology of one of popular music’s most successful, interesting, and enduring artists. Covering Bowie’s first eight albums, and spanning the years 1967 to 1974, the analysis reveals that Bowie’s manipulation of his cover imagery became significantly more calculated and coherent as his career progressed. Several areas of progression are tracked through the research, including the artist’s increasing investment in artifice, the establishment and then prioritisation of alienation as his dominant central theme, and the withdrawal of personality and self-hood in favour of constructed roles and the promotion of archetypes.
Such findings, it is argued, prove the value of album covers as legitimate and highly valuable historical artifacts and emphatically support the necessity for a robust and rigorous analytical approach such as that used here in order to gain such insights.
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Introduction

In this thesis I analyse and interpret the covers of David Bowie’s first eight albums, spanning the years 1967-1974. In the first instance, I seek to answer two main questions:

- How was Bowie represented on album covers during this period?
- What information might these covers have communicated to his audience?

Throughout the course of this investigation, and leading on from the above, further questions will be addressed:

- To what extent, if any, was Bowie’s image thematically consistent during this formative stage of his career?¹
- To what degree did his visual imagery reflect the primary concerns that he also expressed through his music?
- How did his album covers compare to those of other popular music artists and acts of the era?
- To what degree did the visual imagery of his album covers reflect the wider cultural, artistic and social environment in which he worked; the zeitgeist of the times?
- Can the visual content of Bowie’s album covers, or aspects of it, be linked to wider, historical precursors?

David Bowie has been a prolific artist in terms of album releases with twenty-five studio albums alone, spanning the years 1967 to 2003.² The justification for including only the first eight of these in this study is three-fold. Firstly, there exists a necessary length constraint for this thesis. To attempt to widen its scope to incorporate more albums would mean a reduction in the depth of critique affordable to each individual cover, therefore inflicting an injustice upon the task. Secondly, a natural demarcation point exists at the release of Bowie’s ninth album, Young Americans, 1975. At this point in his career Bowie made a quantum stylistic

¹ NB) The period in question saw him progress from a total unknown to being one of the best-known rock stars in the history of popular music.
² Excluding numerous compilations and live albums.
change in both his image and his music, from glam rock to soul music, thereby largely breaking from an ongoing development that, as will be in seen in my analysis, can be traced progressively through the albums included in the study. Further, after the release of the last album addressed here, *Diamond Dogs*, 1974, he relocated from his homeland, England, to the USA, and then to Berlin, thereby living and working in very different cultural environs to those in which he created his earlier works.³ Lastly, and while not a justification as such, there is nevertheless a pleasing symmetry about the fact that this analysis incorporates Bowie’s first eight albums over the passage of his first eight years as a popular music recording artist.⁴

In both scholarly and popular critical appraisals Bowie has often been described in terms of being ‘alien’, ‘other’, ‘freakish’ and other such adjectives. Ruth Padel, for example, has suggested he is an “alien hermaphrodite messianic pop deity” (2000, p. 239). Alan Moore suggests he acts “as a focus, for the general public, of a whole range of cultural practices converging on rejection” (2001, p. 127), and Simon Frith believes, “Bowie’s fans have always identified with him particularly intensely, because no-one else has captured so well their sense of difference” (1988, p. 136). While not disputing this widely-held and oft-expressed belief, I am interested in how such a conviction has come to exist and seek to find substantive evidence to test what I contend may often be unsubstantiated assumptions. While commentators frequently acknowledge this quality of difference that Bowie exudes, few studies to date have attempted to define that quality with significant depth and clarity, and none at all have done so by focusing their analytical attention solely upon his album covers. For a recording artist such as Bowie his albums are arguably, the primary source of visual information available to the researcher, and so this situation seems a highly surprising oversight and one I seek to redress.

Positioning myself as a scholar in relation to the task ahead, I nevertheless freely admit from the outset that my interest in this subject is not only that of scholarship. Throughout the 1970s, in particular, I was an absolutely committed Bowie fan, owning all of the albums addressed within this research as well as those released beyond the cut-off point for this project. Bowie was the artist whose music I always chose above all others whenever I was asked the ever-popular desert-island-disc question in the school playground, and I confess in all likelihood my answer would be the same today. I am, therefore, neither impartial nor in any way disengaged from my subject matter. Indeed it is largely this unabashed fan element

⁴ Notwithstanding the release of several singles prior to his debut album.
that has led me to this current undertaking. As a teenage Bowie fan I would display in my bedroom the album covers that lie at the centre of this study, propped up on shelves to be enjoyed visually whenever I was not actually playing on my stereo the records that they housed. Were it not for my reluctance to stick pins through the corners of these covers, I surely would have displayed them on the walls in exactly the same manner I did my many posters. Today, I seek to understand better why these album covers were so attractive to me and how it was that they effectively had a life of their own separate to the sleek black vinyl recordings they were tasked with protecting. What messages did these covers communicate to me, either consciously or subconsciously, and how was it that this transaction took place at all?

Pictures possess the inherent potential to convey information to a viewer at several levels of cogniscence, ranging from shallow and obvious to deep and subtle. As long as any investigation aimed at uncovering this information is based upon a robust, appropriate and logical foundation, then analysis is a justifiable, indeed desirable, activity. After similarly stressing the requirement for a robust theoretical foundation when approaching the analysis of visual imagery, Frederick Crane further suggests that,

one should not hesitate to go beyond what is objectively provable in interpreting a picture. One is dealing with the product of other human beings very much like oneself, and it is legitimate and proper to interpret the motives and attitudes that found expression in any picture (Crane, 1986, p. 27).

It is with this spirit that I approach my work.

Tony Schirato and Jen Webb caution that effective visual analysis is complex, demanding “more than just everyday practices: it requires specific skills in the processes of seeing and reading, the relationship between representation and reality, and the ways in which visual experiences are also moments of communication” (Schirato and Webb, 2004, p. 57). It is for this reason that the thesis is primarily located within the discipline of art history and visual culture. Certainly, the investigation is multi-disciplinary and frequently uses additional approaches and resources from performing arts studies, gender studies, cultural studies, theatre studies and popular musicology. However, with visual analysis at the heart of the undertaking, art history and visual culture is the overarching discipline utilised due to its fundamental and long-established engagement with the visual artefact.
It is important to clearly identify the territory that this study addresses; that is, the exact nature of the artefact to be studied. What is an album cover and why does it exist?

Form and Function

The most basic definition of an album cover is that it is a protective sleeve designed to house a vinyl (previously shellac) analogue gramophone record, or records, dating from approximately 1878 until the late 1980s when the primary format for the distribution of music switched to the digital compact disc. Constructed of paper in its early history, cardboard gradually became the industry standard and the eight album covers addressed in this study are all constructed of this material. Although limited editions of some albums are still released on vinyl today, the gramophone record as the industry standard format for the widest possible dissemination of recorded music is a thing of the past, and thus this study is largely historical not only terms of the specific artefacts in question but also the form of these artefacts.

The term ‘album cover’ is actually something of a misnomer, in that the original definition of ‘album’ referred to compilations of two or more 78rpm discs bundled together. Common usage quickly widened the term to include single disc recordings, however, and this is the definition employed throughout the thesis. More specifically, to discern our subject matter from early blank, purely protective sleeves, we are dealing with a clearly delineated pictorial medium that dates back to 1940 when Columbia Records issued the four-disc 78 rpm recording Smash Song Hits by Rodgers & Hart in the first pictorial sleeve. This was a pivotal moment in the iconography of album covers as it was at this point that the practice of covers becoming personalised to reflect the recorded product within began (de Ville, 2003, p. 25). The increasing recognition that album covers could function in a role far more expansive than that of simple packaging is highlighted in the following comments by Pat Dolan, sales promotion manager at CBS Records, in 1940:

Albums should be as bold and dashing as we can make them; they should stand out in dealers’ windows screaming for attention, yet always reflecting the spirit of the music inside. Color should be violent and strong. Copy should be pared to a minimum, and each album should reflect the quality of the Columbia name (Pat Dolan in Schmitz, 1986, p. 88).

This significant change to the form of record packaging in turn brought about rapid and far-reaching changes to retail display and ultimately to the function of the cover. Dougherty suggests that album covers began to develop into a distinct art form from this point onwards when record stores began to display their now more visually attractive products face-out instead of spine-out, as had been the tradition up to this point, akin to the prevailing method of book display:

Record covers . . . may be likened to product packaging design in their need for catching the consumer’s eye and conveying a sense of their contents, but record covers were conceived as more durable and useful than a throw-away cereal box. Book covers had a similar form, but were displayed spines out, mandating different graphic priorities. Album covers’ unique function and status as a new medium made this time period a significant era in the development of album covers as an art form (Kowalski Dougherty, 2007, p. 49).

This, then, marks the beginning point where the advertising function of an album cover, conveyed through the artwork, began to be thought of as at least as important as the original protective function.7

An important additional change in album cover form occurred during 1948-1949 when the new twelve-inch 33rpm ‘long player’ quickly usurped the ten-inch 78rpm record. The more delicate surface of the new recordings required that an inner sleeve made of paper be provided within the outer cover (Edge, 1991, p. 93). Earlier 78rpm covers had featured a label-sized hole in the packaging through which the record companies could advertise their wares via the visibility of the label on the record itself, and although fully enclosed covers for 78s were increasing in popularity, the advent of the LP and its inner sleeve quite suddenly meant “the transition to a form of packaging that entirely hid the record label was complete” (Jones and Sorger, 1991, p. 74). At this point, then, the fully enclosed form that would endure throughout the rest of the history of the album cover came into being, with the unbroken expanse of the two sides of the cover, enlarged by two inches over its predecessor, greatly enhancing the potential for graphic design.

7 Schmitz suggests this highly pictorial approach held sway from this point onwards, continuing through the shift from 78rpm records to 33rpm and assuming ever-increasing importance right up until the point where compact discs became the primary medium for recorded music. See M. Schmitz (1987) ‘Record Packaging: The Beginning of the Art’ in Grammy Pulse Vol. 5, October, Burbank, California: National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, pp. 30-31.
With the new emphasis on personalised, pictorial covers, the attendant function of the album cover had become significantly expanded, the packaging now charged with the role of being, as Jones and Sorger put it, “the silent salesman” (1991, p. 73). Angelynn Grant (1998) suggests, “The covers functioned as posters and the more intriguing the design the better the sales.” This opinion is one shared by O’Meally, who confirms, “album covers were not only advertisements for the contents held within, they were the thing itself: the advertisement one could actually take home” (1997, p. 40).

The advertising function of the album cover promoted two parties: the record company, with the album cover becoming the industry’s primary marketing device (Gronstad and Vagnes, 2010, p. 10), and also the artist. A gradual change in hierarchy occurred between the two, with record company direction and visibility at the forefront of the post-1940 early pictorial covers giving way to the primacy of the artist through the 1950s and into the 1960s. By this point, with rock and roll established as the pre-eminent popular music style, “the recording artists themselves started to influence the aesthetics of their record covers by hiring their own designers” (Gronstad and Vagnes, 2010, p. 10). In clear recognition of the potential for the visual aspects of an album cover to function as an extension of their music, “recording artists gained more leverage and clauses for artistic control began appearing in contracts, including control over packaging. Spearheading the trend were the Beatles” (Jones and Sorger, 1991, p. 75). Schmitz too has commented on this change, suggesting that because the new LP cover format made possible full colour photographic reproductions of the artists, their “egos and demands” reduced the traditional directorship of the record companies in matters of graphic design (1987, p. 31).

The relationship of cover to music had become an increasingly symbiotic one, potentially allowing the free transferral of information between mediums; acknowledgement that “a particular piece of music can alter the way in which one sees a certain image . . . [while] the opposite is also true” (Dean, 1993, p. 8.). As Ian Inglis remarks in his study on the album covers of the Beatles, “the sleeve is not a superfluous thing to be discarded during the act of listening, but an integral component of the listening which assists and expands the musical experience” (2001, p. 84). More than fulfilling the additional requirement of simply advertising the product within, then, an album cover’s function had became even broader still: to work in direct collusion with the music as an ekphrastic partner in conveying the

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information that an artist wished to impart. As Dean and Howells put it, “There are always
signs, codes and symbols which appear within the framework of album cover design,
providing the musicians with an identity and image . . . often the ‘aware’ audience is able to
identify at a glance the ‘type’ of music and a more general musical and visual ambiance”
(1987, p. 10).

While the separate inner sleeve of an album cover that housed the record itself was usually
blank white paper, at times additional written information such as song lyrics, biographical
details, acknowledgements, fan club information, record company advertising and even
pictures were included upon it. Some albums would also have a further bonus sheet inserted
as yet another addition, containing any combination of the contents just mentioned. A folded-
up poster or sometimes a booklet containing information about an act was also at times part of
an album package, such ephemera adding value for the buyer. This study avoids consideration
of any such peripheral material, instead focusing upon the album cover proper; that is, the two
sides of the cardboard cover that housed the product overall; that which confronted the eye of
the potential buyer when picked up for perusal in a record store.

In summation, one function of an album cover, at least, is easy to identify: it offers physical
protection to the enclosed recording. Beyond this, however, its function is far more complex.
Gronstad and Vagnes offer the most useful of definitions written so far in what remains, at
this point in time, a nascent field within scholarship. They suggest of the album cover:

> It is the deceptive mask of recorded music, its arbitrary signifier, the spectacular
preamble to the stories told by the music, the attention-grabbing facade, music’s other,
its totem. [It] . . . simultaneously embodies commercial, indexical, ekphrastic, narrative,
and paratextual qualities (in addition, obviously, to broader artistic, historical, and
political ones). At the same time both a form of graphic design and of art, moreover, the
record cover seems to offer itself up as a particularly suggestive object for the quietly
yet rapidly expanding field of visual studies. As an indivisible part of a larger aesthetic
object, the form also destabilizes the traditional art historical notion of the unity and
purity of the image (Gronstad and Vagnes, 2010, pp. 10-11).

I concur with this view, and via the adaptation and fluid application of a defining interpretive
method from art history, I seek to lift this mask and discern how the album covers of David
Bowie might have conveyed cultural purchase to myself and others as popular music
consumers.

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10 See also Herdeg (1973) Graphic Record Covers, p. 118, and N. de Ville (2003) Album Style and Image in
Literature Review

Existing publications about album covers number relatively few. The majority of those that do exist are aimed at a general popular music fan market and comprise compilations of front covers only, assembled to celebrate the works in question rather than attempting any meaningful level of critique. Benedict and Barton’s *Phonographics: Contemporary Album Cover Art and Design*, 1977, for instance, simply features a succession of 132 album covers reproduced in full colour, with the vast majority of these drawn from pop and rock music but augmented by a few jazz or other titles. There is no evident stylistic linkage between the selections, the justification given by the compilers of the collection simply being that the covers represent the finest achievements in contemporary commercial art (Benedict and Barton, 1977, p. 7). While useful as a visual archive, this type of book makes no attempt at visual analysis of any kind.11 These celebratory works are also frequently concerned with a single popular music style such as blues, reggae, country, punk or techno, for example.12 They may also serve to highlight the work of a specific record label, such as Blue Note (Marsh *et al*., 2001).13 Alternatively, the work of a specific graphic artist or graphic design company may be the subject of such a title, for example, Hipgnosis (Thorgerson and Powell, 2012).14 Or, they may simply concentrate on the personal, taste-based selections of the book’s contributors.15

Other titles go further than simply collating and celebrating examples of the art form. In *Graphis Record Covers: The evolution of graphics reflected in record packaging*, 1974, author Walter Herdeg includes short written contributions from designers, photographers, music writers and record company executives who ruminate on various aspects of the album cover’s role within the music industry. Similar but more in-depth contributions can be found in Roger Dean and David Howell’s popular *Album Cover Album* series, while the most recent publication of this type, Richard Evan’s *The Art of the Album Cover*, 2010, also includes

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detailed background information on the production of specific covers deemed by the author to be groundbreaking in the history of the art form. While all of these useful titles avoid visual analysis, their authors uniformly make a case for album covers to be considered as pieces of art in their own right, worthy of the level of respect afforded other more traditional art forms. As Dean and Howells put it in their introduction, they harbour the wish that their book might prompt the viewer “to look again at some of these covers and to view them in a broader context than simply that of functional album cover packaging” (1987, p. 11). It is precisely this acknowledgement of artistic legitimacy and the desire to consider album covers within just such a broader context that provides much of the motivation for my work.

*The Art of Selling Songs: Graphics for the Music Business 1690-1990*, by Walter Herdig, is a more scholarly title that considers album covers within the context of a broad range of other visual mediums that mix music and art, providing excellent historical and contextual information. Another noteworthy text that provides an in-depth history of the album cover, albeit with a primary focus on jazz covers, is Martina Schmitz’ *Album Cover: Geschichte und Asthetik einer Schallplattenverpackung in den USA nach 1940*. Printed in German but with interviews in English, neither this work nor the Herdig title, however, attempt any engagement with visual analysis.

Of all album cover publications consulted during the course of this thesis, Nick de Ville’s *Album Style and Image in Sleeve Design* is the most comprehensive. While it too is primarily a colourful collection of beautifully reproduced album covers spanning many styles and decades of popular music, the accompanying exposition detailing the form, function and general history of the album cover, as well as information provided about individual covers, is very thorough. In addition, de Ville features many rear covers too, something most other publications avoid. Appropriately, de Ville’s position is that, while not challenging the primacy of the front cover, to disregard the rear - particularly in the case of a gatefold cover - is to potentially overlook much of the cover’s communicative potential. While also refraining from analysis himself, de Ville provides an admirably clear explanation of how album covers might cumulatively act to visually define an artist, an explanation highly appropriate to the task at hand:

Many of the most successful recording artists . . . [have ensured] a strand of continuity from album sleeve to album sleeve, a strategy now known as ‘brand building’ . . . many have employed the tools of brand-building with *élan* – logos and other consistent
typographical elements, themed stylistic tropes and recurring imagery have all been used to build identity and distinctiveness (de Ville, 2003, p 10.)

This thesis will identify such qualities in Bowie’s covers, seeking to plot the artist’s progress “from album sleeve to album sleeve” in the manner that de Ville suggests and codifying how such common elements might have worked cumulatively to help define his artistic identity.

Currently there is only one text published that deals specifically with the visual analysis of album covers. Coverscaping: Discovering Album Aesthetics, edited by Asbjorn Gronstad and Oyvind Vagnes, 2010, is a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary text within which its eleven contributors focus upon unpacking the imagery located within individual album covers, bringing to bear a broad range of approaches to their analytical tasks. Admitting that their publication is simply a humble beginning, the editors rightly appraise, “Equally a part of popular music history and of visual culture, as well as straddling both the sphere of art and that of advertising, album art . . . seems deserving of a phenomenology of its own” (Gronstad and Vagnes, 2010, p. 9).

Several journal articles have traced the history of the album cover, the most comprehensive of these being ‘Covering Music: A brief history and analysis of album cover design’, by Steve Jones and Martin Sorger, 1991. In a similar vein is ‘Record Packaging: The Beginning of the Art’, 1987, by Martina Schmitz. While these studies have been most useful in defining and clarifying matters of development, form and function, once again no in-depth analysis of any covers is attempted. Aspects of the history of album covers have been used in studies that do not focus upon the visual elements of the covers themselves. For instance, the non-employment of African American designers and photographers by record companies is the focus of articles by Robert O’Meally, ‘Jazz Albums as Art: Some Reflections’, 1977, and Carissa Kowalski Dougherty, ‘The Coloring of Jazz: Race and Record Cover Design in

16 de Ville also suggests, with more specificity, “In the album covers of Madonna between 1983 and now we can admire the consummate skill with which her progress from New York ingénue, to Hollywood temptress, to post-feminist icon of female empowerment has been visually represented.” (de Ville (2003) Album Style, pp. 10-11). While making this observation, de Ville leaves all such discernment to the eye of the viewer and does not trace this progress through any written analysis of his own. Nevertheless, it is precisely this type of progressive development that I seek to unpack through my analysis of Bowie’s works.

17 I have a contribution of my own in this work. Titled ‘KISS Alive!: An iconographical approach to album cover analysis’, my chapter tests the applicability of Erwin Panofsky’s analytical method to album cover art. As will be discussed in the methodology section of this introduction, this exercise has in turn informed my approach to this thesis.


American Jazz, 1950 to 1970’, 2007. Perhaps the closest journal article to this current project in terms of its analytical focus upon a specific body of covers is the work of social anthropologist and musician Hasse Huss (2000), who, through his analysis of reggae album cover art, seeks to ascertain the differences between album cover representations of Jamaican musicians and prevailing Western stereotypes. More a short overview, however, significant depth of analysis of individual covers is largely absent.

Given that album covers have enjoyed such enduring popularity as icons of popular culture, it is perhaps no surprise that magazines concerned with popular music, such as *Q*, *Rolling Stone* or *Mojo*, often feature articles about album covers, frequently considering them with a high degree of reverence as stand-alone objects separate from the music they house. These publications also run frequent reader’s polls where readers can vote for their favourite album covers, at the conclusion of which the magazine publishes summative ‘top 50’ or ‘top 100’ lists. At times such magazines also publish special editions solely dedicated to album cover art. While once again more celebratory than analytical in nature these special editions nevertheless at times offer useful, though usually brief, historical critiques of the development and manufacture of specific album covers, as well as featuring interviews with designers and, occasionally, music artists.

**Methodology and approach**

My research methodology is primarily located within an art historical framework and is designed to preserve at all times the primacy of the visual object in question; in this case each of the eight album covers. This simple guiding principle is my overarching dictum for the thesis, the flow of analysis of each album cover being determined by the unique factors displayed upon that individual cover. In the language of the social sciences, it is a grounded theory approach.

Within art history, highly disciplined techniques for visual analysis are firmly established and robust, allowing for a deep engagement with the visual object without necessarily subordinating it to inflexible, overarching theory. As pre-eminent iconographer Aby Warburg

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has suggested, analysis is best conducted when the methodology employed “can range freely with no fear of border guards” (Warburg, 1995, p. 585). This approach is evident in the methodology of M. A. Katritzky, who posits that iconographical research within the performing arts should embrace “an interdisciplinary approach which is able to benefit from advances made in other fields, notably art history” (1999, p. 90). My employment of this fluid yet ultimately contained approach is to ensure a thorough grounding for my research within the field of music iconography and its attendant disciplines, but with the freedom to range beyond when it is appropriate to do so.

Art historian Thomas Heck, editor of *Picturing Performance: The Iconography of the Performing Arts in Concept and Practice*, one of the most important texts on music and theatre/performance iconography within recent times, provides two working definitions of iconography that he regards as pertinent to both historical and current usage: “The study of the subject matter and meaning of works of art”, and “The study of signs and symbols in art” (1999, p. 26). I regard music iconography as incorporating both of these meanings, without valuing either one of them over the other. My research, therefore, will be aligned as closely as possible to these two meanings. In a broader sense, my study also adheres to Howard Mayer Brown’s broad definition of music iconography; that is, “that branch of the history of music which concerns itself with the analysis and interpretation of musical subject matter in works of art” (1980, p. 11).

While not fixedly adhered to in terms of its traditionally meticulous application, nevertheless the underlying basis for the method employed in this thesis lies in the work of Erwin Panofsky (1892-1968). One of the most influential figures in art historical methodology, Panofsky prescribed a three-tiered method for art historical research that proceeds by predetermined, carefully monitored steps and progresses from simple description to uncovering deeply ingrained intrinsic meaning, effectively achieving the most comprehensive level of understanding. Panofsky’s method is a well-trodden path and was obviously not intended to be applied to album covers. Yet, it remains both pertinent and widely utilised across a range of visual mediums and, as Van Leeuwen correctly suggests, the method “can usefully be applied to the analysis of contemporary images” (2001, p. 117). Laurie Schneider Adams, for one, has successfully applied Panofsky’s method of analysis within a relatively contemporaneous setting, outlining a three-tiered analysis of cartoon character Mickey Mouse in her overview of methodologies of art (1996, pp. 37-38). Heck sees Panofsky’s method as one of the best analytical tools available to the iconographer, regarding the method’s
flexibility as its primary strength (1999, p. 64).

Utilising that flexibility, I have adapted Panofsky’s method to some extent for my current application. A summarised breakdown of my own three-tiered approach is as follows.\textsuperscript{23}

**Level 1 - Primary data derived from the object:** This stage is purely descriptive. The intention is to adequately describe the album cover using words alone in order to compile evidence for use in the levels that follow, a process Baxandall describes as “a written representation of a picture” (1985, p. 3). This step requires that one disregards what may be represented by the collected data.

**Level 2 – Analysis within the object’s contemporary context:** This first interpretive step identifies signs, codes and symbols found within the primary data and determines how these might communicate specific themes or concepts within a contemporaneous context. (Here, the social environment within which Bowie released his albums.)

**Level 3 – Analysis within a broad historical context:** Here the task is to go beyond the object’s contemporaneous context, using the specific themes or concepts identified at level two as pointers in a broad search for historical precursors in order to draw deeper conclusions regarding the message(s) that the cover communicates.

Even if adopted more as a guiding principle than a rigidly imposed template, Panofsky’s disciplined approach to analysis remains fundamental throughout this research.

Panofsky’s model is also highly appropriate to my task in that it ensures a privileging of the art object itself over all other considerations, the research beginning “with the visual image of the material object and work[ing] backwards towards understanding its cultural context - not the other way round” (de Vries, 1999, p. 49). Confining myself to analysing visual data gleaned from the album covers themselves is a tactic fully in keeping with my above-stated governing principle that my research be object-driven in nature. The tactic of favouring the art object itself over all else is one also adopted by Norman Bryson who in his thesis *Vision and...*\textsuperscript{23} NB) As mentioned in the review of literature, this is not the first time I have applied this model. In my book chapter in A. Gronstad and O. Vagnes, eds, (2010) *Coverscaping: Discovering Album Aesthetics*, I applied the model to an album cover by KISS as something of a test case. The model used in this thesis is largely the same but is applied less rigidly. That is to say, in the book chapter I organised my analysis into clearly labelled stand-alone sections, whereas in this thesis I apply it more organically, allowing more of a narrative flow.
Painting suggests that materialism - in this context meaning physical reality - provides the most reliable primary data for artistic analysis. “The intellectual quality I find most to admire in materialist thinking is its firm grasp of a tangible world . . . materialism is clear-sightedness” (1983, p. 12). In terms of intention then, my Panofsky-derived though non-rigidly applied methodology mirrors the analytical philosophy of Bryson. At the very least, I seek to emulate his goal of clear-sightedness.

In order to understand what it is that we are viewing, we must also have an understanding of how we go about the act of viewing. To do this, a process of stepping back is required in order to defamiliarise ourselves from an action that we might largely take for granted. This is to ensure that our reading of an image might proceed beyond what is immediately obvious because, as Heck reminds us, “iconographers of the performing arts need to be aware . . . that there are often several levels of interpretation: 1) a surface or literal reading, 2) a deeper, more formal reading, 3) the deepest reading of the work” (1999, p. 4). My goal is to achieve the deepest level of interpretation of Bowie’s album covers that is possible. The method that I have adopted parallels in its intention that of Schirato and Webb who, in also seeking such defamiliarisation, suggest it might be achieved by “developing the literacies that allow us to recognise the extent to which we see through the frames of our cultural location, and by developing skills in analysing how visual culture acts as a medium of communication” (2004, p. 57). One such literacy in particular, Baxandall’s method of the period eye, is particularly apt to the task at hand. Baxendall observed that during different times certain features of the knowledge and culture of viewers attuned them to aspects of images not readily picked up outside the era in which the image was created. To remedy this he suggested that the historian might recover the appropriate knowledge and cultural context through appropriate, targeted research.24 This method is employed throughout the thesis.

Outline of the thesis

As will become evident through the course of the wide-ranging investigation, three overarching concerns will come to the fore as a result of my analysis. In no privileged order, these are:

24 See Baxandall (1972) Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 29-36.
a) the presentation of alienation
b) the diminution of Bowie’s personal identity
c) the promotion of artifice

These components will then be drawn together in the conclusion of the study and ultimately postulated as the foremost constituent parts of Bowie’s overall performance identity.

In practice, each analytical chapter examines one album cover, with both front and rear sides of the cover included in the analysis. Following brief but essential discographical data about the particular album in question each chapter proceeds with a description of the visual contents of the album cover. From this collected raw data the main themes will be identified for the analysis to follow at levels two and three, although not necessarily organised that fixedly. With the method being applied eight times in total, each chapter is quite different in terms of what it encompasses from that which might precede or follow it, the lines of required investigation at times varying greatly. However, the summary of findings given at the conclusion of each chapter includes, where appropriate, identification of ongoing threads and thematic similarities that accumulate increasing weight and significance as each investigation is concluded. These common findings build into a body of evidence that is then drawn together in the conclusion to the thesis.

While the pictures on the two sides of each cover at all times provide the primary analytical data for each album, additional written subsidiary data is frequently admitted, such as song titles, biographical information, acknowledgements etc. In order to frame this admission of related but separate material I borrow from literary theory the notion of paratexts. Janine Barchas, in her examination of frontispiece portraits from eighteenth century English novels, suggests that components extra to the book covers themselves, such as tables of contents, dedications, laudatory poems and prefacing etc, function as “paratexts” (1998, p. 260). Genette, meanwhile, employs a very wide definition of the term, suggesting it relates to all elements to do with “the external presentation of a book” (1997, p. 3). For my purposes, I consider a paratext to be anything appearing on an album cover that is external to the main pictures. I admit these additional elements to my analysis because paratexts offer visual information that lies on the fringes of the main text, providing a subsidiary “zone not only of

25 I have not forgotten the spine of the cover, however as there is no room upon the spine for pictorial content it does not feature in my primary analysis. With that said, written information on the spine is certainly admissible as a paratext. NB) The subject of paratexts is discussed shortly in this introduction.

transition but of transaction” (Genette, 1997, p. 1). Such paratexts have the potential to support, or indeed contradict, the primary message contained on an album cover, because “these devices help persuade us of a text’s contextual affiliation . . . [possessing] persuasive, rhetorical qualities” (Paling, 2002, p. 141). Further highlighting the potential power of the paratext, and in this case usefully widening the term’s usage to other forms of media beyond books, Stanitzek suggests they can “guide the reader’s attention, influence how a text is read . . . give a text its first contours, its manageable identity . . . [influencing] the process of textual reception” (Stanitzek, 2005, p. 32). It is for these reasons then that such non-pictorial elements are included in my analysis of Bowie’s album covers.

Where appropriate, I undertake lyric analysis. As previously discussed, while the initial viewing of an album cover may be a purely visual experience with aural expectations, a second stage of engagement occurs when the recording is played and additional thematic information is made aurally available to the viewer/listener. At this point the imagery of the album cover undergoes something of a test, as there exists the potential for it to be expanded upon, informed upon or - at best and worst scenarios - supported or contradicted by the lyrics heard on the recording. Of course, this process may be bypassed partially or even completely if some or all of the lyrics are reproduced on an inner sleeve or perhaps inside a gatefold cover. Thus, knowledge of an album’s lyrics can be obtained either visually, aurally, or both. Regardless, it would be a grave error to ignore lyrics in their entirety, so, while never constituting the primary focus of my investigation, they nevertheless will be considered where deemed valid.

From time to time I will also undertake discussion of the basic stylistic parameters of the music itself. In stressing the importance of the cover art in a symbiotic context of listening/looking then some account of the actual music can be a useful and important consideration while never challenging the primacy of the visual artefact which at all times remains my primary concern. Such admissions will not consist of in-depth formal analysis of melodic, harmonic, rhythmic complexities, etc., but instead will comprise more a contextual overview and identification of style/genre, particularly useful when comparisons are being drawn between the work in question and contemporaneous releases by other rock artists of the day.

While remaining wary of meta-narrative, Bowie’s album covers are discussed in chronological order, an approach I see as both simple and logical. As a direct reflection of the
primacy of the object, further methodologies beyond the singular, overarching art historical framework outlined in this current introduction are introduced and explained according to need wherever appropriate during the course of the investigation, rather than all being included in an exhaustive overview at the beginning. The highly interdisciplinary nature of the undertaking deems this a sensible approach. For instance, gender issues become evident from chapter three onwards when, as evidenced by the cover of his third album, The Man Who Sold The World, Bowie began utilising the blurring of gender signifiers as a cornerstone of his work. My approach is to situate Bowie’s imagery within a performative context, and in the first instance this acknowledges the gender-as-performance foundational work of Erving Goffman (1979), from a sociological perspective, and Judith Butler (1990) from a gender studies perspective. Beyond this, however, I place Bowie’s work within a performing arts framework by drawing upon models provided by Philip Auslander, Laurence Senelick and Stan Hawkins in particular, who argue that gender representations occurring within a performing arts context should be regarded differently to those that occur in everyday situations because they are effectively multi-layered, constituting a performance within a performance. This example is indicative of the longitudinal approach I take to introducing methodology in this study, amounting to what one might call method-on-demand.

The thorny question of intention plays a part in this study. Intention is a slippery eel of a topic, a fact highlighted by Michael Baxandall who warns, “once we start inferring causes and intention in a picture we are doing something that is obviously very precarious indeed” (1985, p. vi). The reason for Baxandall’s reticence is well-founded. Richard Leppert quite rightly points out that whatever an artist intended at the time that a work of art was created “in no sense circumscribes what the image means, either to its original audience or to people living long afterward” (1996, p. 10). Nevertheless statements relating to intention uttered by Bowie, whether at the time in question or retrospectively, may potentially constitute valuable clues that might lead the researcher to clarifying valid threads of inquiry. Leppert goes on to state that his primary goal is to understand “the functions of imagery within culture and society - in essence, what images were (and are) made to mean on the basis of how they were (and are) used” (1996, p. 10). I seek these same insights as they pertain to Bowie but my work will perhaps allow more admission of stated intention than does Leppert’s. My approach to the question of intention has resonance with that of Baxandall who defines intention as being the relation between the specific art object and its circumstances (1985, p. 41). I consider Bowie, the artist, to be as much a part of those circumstances as is the wider culture of his time. That is, he is an agent located within the very same broad notion of zeitgeist in which Leppert
seeks to position his investigations and, as such, his statements of intent are both valid and worthy of being taken into consideration. Baxandall further makes the poignant observation that, “One assumes purposefulness - or intent, as it were, ‘inventiveness’ - in the historical actor but even more in the historical objects themselves (1985, pp. 41-42). Thus, while I reiterate that the primary data utilised in this research remains that gleaned from the work itself - the ‘historical object’ - the intention of the ‘historical actor’ will be considered wherever deemed appropriate as an aid to contextualisation.

Another reason to deem questions of intention more admissible in this circumstance lies in the very uniqueness of the album cover as a genre. As discussed earlier, a large portion of the function of an album cover is related to advertising the product it houses - the advertisement that one takes home. Thus, given the existence of such an intertwined, inseparable, consumerist relationship between the two entities, if we are to successfully discuss function, then we must take intention into account at least to some degree because intention will almost certainly mirror and/or predict that function.27 Bowie wanted to sell albums on a large scale and this distinguishes the covers from the works of art that Leppert addresses, those singular/one-off objects for which his analytical approach is both logical and sensible. Bowie, like other commercial artists, wanted thousands upon thousands of popular music consumers to pull his album out of a music shop rack, a rack containing numerous similar products competing with his own, and to then be sufficiently enthused about what they held in their hands to take it up to the counter and purchase it. He both wanted and needed his album packages to be attractive and meaningful to his target market. We might, therefore, reasonably expect visual manifestations of his stated intentions to be clearly evident in our analysis and, if that appears not to be the case, then that too is highly worthy of uncovering. In summary I regard the question of intention as being non-immutable in terms of being an aid to the analytical process. Simply, its relevance varies.

Chapter Overview

Chapter one analyses the cover of Bowie’s debut album, David Bowie, released in 1967. In the midst of the excitement and youth-oriented cultural atmosphere of ‘Swinging London’, with the Beatles and the Rolling Stones leading the way and the worlds of fashion and music

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27 This is not intended to reduce the individuality of any given album cover to mere function. As works of art, they may well transcend their function.
intersecting like never before, the virtually unknown artist, with several failed singles and aborted band liaisons behind him, here had his first chance to lay claim to a stylistic home; to meld image and music. With the aid of a highly significant paratext – a biography on the rear cover written by his then-manager, Kenneth Pitt - the cover photograph presented Bowie’s image to the record-buying public for the first time. This chapter situates the cover amid the cultural maelstrom within which it was released, comparing Bowie’s image and the contents of the record to the prevailing musical styles of the day, ultimately attempting to reconcile these components.

Chapter two considers Bowie’s second album, recorded for a different record company but also titled *David Bowie*. The most significant line of investigation required by this cover is its clear debt to pop art, most particularly the specific technique of op (optical) art. In addition, symbolism that relates to the cold war and the implications of unchecked technological advancement is much in evidence. Alienation is intrinsically linked to these themes, being clearly identified within the imagery and subsequently explored in depth.

*The Man Who Sold the World* is Bowie’s third album and the subject of the third chapter. A parody of pre-Raphaelite art that saw Bowie wearing a dress and reclining on a chaise longue, Bowie claimed the image was influenced by the work of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Much of this chapter, therefore, focuses upon aligning the work to the conventions of Pre-Raphaelite art in order to test out this allusion, while also exploring both the historical and contemporary significance of such gender-play. The highly performative, affected nature of the image also raises issues of authenticity and artifice in popular music, and this too is addressed in the analysis.

The influence of film provides a major thrust in the investigation into the *Hunky Dory* album, undertaken in chapter four. Once again the blurring of gender is also pre-eminent, as Bowie mimics the image of Hollywood silver screen actresses such as Marlene Dietrich and Greta Garbo. Such an allusion contains inherent inferences of artifice and alienation, and each of these qualities is accordingly investigated, along with issues relating to the nature of star construction in both film and popular music.

*The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, universally regarded as Bowie’s breakthrough album, was a significant departure for the artist in terms of the composition of the cover image, with his presence much diminished in the frame. With
reference and comparison to images from other art forms, most particularly film, an investigation into urban alienation forms the major thrust of chapter five. At the same time, by presenting himself in the guise of an invented alter-ego, on this album Bowie privileged the critique of star construction, allied to notions of hero and anti-hero, and this too provides a major investigative thread.

Artifice and the visual depiction of alienation and mental instability dominate the cover of *Aladdin Sane*, the subject of chapter six. Using popular symbolism traceable through many centuries, this cover owes much to theatrical traditions, most especially Japan’s kabuki theatre. The back of this cover provides a significant departure from what has gone before with Bowie’s image reduced to a thin silhouette mirroring the front cover image, thereby igniting a considerable debate on the nature of creative authorship, an image of the album’s creator being for the first time ostensibly absent.

Unique among Bowie’s albums, *Pinups* is a collection of cover versions of songs written and performed by other artists. This factor, coupled with the appearance on the cover of top 1960s fashion model Twiggy, posing naked with Bowie, provides the main thrust of investigation in chapter seven. The highly constructed nature of their presentation ensures artifice and gender also remain at the forefront of the investigation, and the inferences of Twiggy’s presence coupled with the careful song choices on the album require that nostalgia is a central analytical component.

*Diamond Dogs* is the last album cover addressed in this study, and is the subject of chapter eight. Artifice is taken to an extreme here, with Bowie painted as a surreal part-man, part-dog therianthropic creature upon a wrap-around, gatefold cover. The iconography of the carnival freak show plays a very large part in the cover imagery and the inherent inferences of this theatrical tradition form the main thrust of the investigation. Other concerns, including gender, apocalypse, alienation and artifice are also to the fore, allied to the clear influence of George Orwell’s novel, *Nineteen Eighty-four*.

This brief chapter breakdown illustrates the mutability of the approach taken to this research, whereby each image has dictated the investigative direction to be followed. While I have here outlined the major thrust, or thrusts, of subjects investigated in relation to each of the eight
covers in turn, many more thematic topics are addressed in the analysis proper. Nevertheless, by the conclusion of the work it will be seen that Bowie’s overall manipulation of imagery through the course of the eight albums afforded him a unique canvas through which he visually communicated his position as an artist with remarkable clarity and depth. Intrinsic to this, it will also be seen that despite the broad-ranging and at times seemingly eclectic stylistic variation evident on the covers of these albums, the thematic messages conveyed can collectively be aligned to the three overarching concerns identified above: the presentation of alienation, the diminution of personal identity, and the promotion of artifice.

By way of concluding this introduction I turn to the thoughts of Roger Dean, one of the most widely renowned album cover designers in the history of popular music. With his career now it its fifth decade and a who’s who list of album credits behind him, in 1993 he offered the following observation of album cover art:

The relationship between art and music is . . . mysterious, fascinating but fugitive. The band can simply be pictured, the words can be interpreted, or ambient icons incorporated, street heraldry invented, the past plundered and the future planned . . . some of the most interesting art of our time has come from this uneasy symbiosis (Dean, 1993, p. 8).

Throughout the course of the following investigation all of the communicative possibilities Deans describes will become evident within the covers of David Bowie’s albums. Bringing to bear analysis of a depth and rigor that more traditionally focussed visual analysts might apply to a Renaissance painting or suchlike, it will be seen that an album cover is eminently capable of revealing equivalent depth, with many complex layers of communicative information waiting to be stripped back from its construction.

In addition, and beyond what such deep analysis might bring to light with regard to Bowie himself, I have no hesitation in suggesting that the covers in question should be regarded as art objects in their own right. That is, they should be afforded a status that elevates them far beyond any notion of being mere packaging, occupying a position that fully bears out the pleas of those scholars, publishers, authors and enthusiasts mentioned earlier who have collectively expressed the wish for album covers to be regarded as stand-alone works of art.

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28 It should be noted here also that sometimes a cover requires an investigative direction that is not returned to at any other stage in the research.
Chapter One - The debut album: *David Bowie*

Bowie’s eponymously titled debut album was released in 1967 in the midst of the socio-cultural maelstrom that existed in the UK during the late 1960s. The last three years of the decade, in particular, incorporated both the heyday and then the inexorable demise of the counter-culture, the peak of the ‘space race’ between the USA and USSR – a competition that held the world in thrall and effectively turned science fiction to fact – and the height of opposition to the Vietnam War (Harris, 2005, p. 13). In addition, this period continued a
lengthy term of sustained economic boom that had begun in the early 1950s and would not end until the oil crisis of the early 1970s (Laing, 2005). Furthermore, and crucially, these events occurred parallel to, and, at times, symbiotically with, the ever-increasing post World War II influence of youth culture.\footnote{See D. Hebdige (1979) \textit{Subculture: the meaning of style}, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. p. 78.}

The late sixties was a period during which mass communication via press, radio and television had developed to the point where the codification and widespread dissemination of this highly visible and contentious ‘new’ youth culture was made possible (Clark \textit{et al}, 1976, pp.18-19).\footnote{See also S. Laing (2005) ‘Economy, Society and Culture in 1960s Britain: Contexts and Conditions for Psychedelic Art’. In Grunenberg and Harris (eds). \textit{Summer of Love: Psychedelic Art, Social Crisis and Counterculture in the 1960s}, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 24-27.} The resultant focus and newfound visibility of youth and their attendant concerns meant a progressive, inescapable realignment of the hitherto highly structured generational strata that had existed during post-war Britain throughout the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s.\footnote{See D. Hebdige (1979) \textit{Subculture: the meaning of style}, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd. p. 78.} In short, teenagers and young adults dominated the socio-cultural landscape of the UK like never before, and the visible manifestations of their newfound status were inescapable. Harris addresses these links:

\begin{quote}
. . . the visual arts, rock music, drug taking, and fashions of that time – the ‘canonical’ psychedelic elements, as it were – were produced, articulated together and made meaningful within a conjecture of socio-political change and crisis . . . seen either as an opportunity for radical, even revolutionary re-organisation . . . or as a serial emergency of moral panics . . . (Harris, 2005, p. 9).
\end{quote}

Among these elements, pop music was the art form most widely regarded as being the primary rallying call for the sixties generation and for pop culture at large.\footnote{See, for instance, N. Whitely (1987) \textit{Pop Design: Modernism to Mod}, London: The Design Council, p. 91. Also G. Melly (1970) \textit{Revolt into Style: The pop arts in Britain}, London: Penguin Books Ltd, p. 4.} As social commentator George Melly noted at the decade’s close, “The pop artist is ideally a seismograph, and the division between pop life and pop art is, in intention at any rate, a difficult line to draw” (1970, pp. 11-12).

Bookending the decade, having formed in 1960 and disbanded in 1970, the Beatles, more-so than any other act, provided a focus and a soundtrack for sixties youth culture. Ultimately, they would leave as their legacy a body of work that stylistically, thematically, visually and
aurally mirrored the socio-cultural progression of the decade.³³ While the Beatles certainly provided the most concrete pop-cultural touchstone of the era, crucially the sixties also saw the progressive development of music subcultures - some new and some pre-existing from the fifties - with hippies, mods, rockers, teddy boys and skinheads all becoming established as discrete entities beneath the overarching term, ‘pop culture’.³⁴

As the decade progressed, pop music became increasingly politicized, and this was never more the case than during what is commonly termed the ‘psychedelic’ era during the second half of the sixties. The Beatle’s Sgt. Pepper album is widely held to be an exemplar of psychedelic visual and musical style (de Ville, 2003, p. 88). As Harris points out:

The Beatles, that is, along with many others in 1967, wished to remake the meaning of certain cultural and social codes, including those in fashion and product design and use . . . The lesson is partly subliminal; perhaps fashion and product design and use are usually particularly below the level of consciously thought-through meaning and value. But it is precisely in a time of radical social crisis or ‘emergency’ that virtually all practices, activities, values, forms and identities are consciously revalued . . . (Harris, 2005, p. 12).

This turbulent milieu, with pop music to the fore and the wider amalgam of youth and popular cultures both at its heart and in the ascendance within British society - along with all the trend-driven associative components that these descriptors encompass - was the environment into which twenty-year-old David Bowie launched his debut album.

This chapter will analyse the cover of David Bowie with the goal of determining what was conveyed by the nascent artist through this first attempt at visual communication. In addition, comparisons with the work of other artists of the day will be carried out in an attempt to situate it within the wider cultural and social contexts.

David Bowie was released on June 1st, 1967. The album did not reach the charts in either the UK or US, and remains the artist’s only non-charting work of the eight albums addressed in

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³³ For a month by month, year by year mapping of the Beatles’ career in direct relation to the sixties, see also I. MacDonald (1994) Revolution in the Head: The Beatles Records and the Sixties, London: Fourth Estate Ltd.
this research. Two singles were released from the album, ‘Rubber Band’ and ‘Love You Till Tuesday’, but these too failed with neither reaching the singles charts.

Side One

1. Uncle Arthur
2. Sell Me a Coat
3. Rubber Band
4. Love You Till Tuesday
5. There Is a Happy Land
6. We Are Hungry Men
7. When I Live My Dream

Side Two

1. Little Bombardier
2. Silly Boy Blue
3. Come and Buy My Toys
4. Join the Gang
5. She’s Got Medals
6. Maid of Bond Street
7. Please Mr. Gravedigger

The front cover comprises a borderless head-and-shoulders portrait of the artist who is situated not quite front-on to the camera, but nevertheless making direct eye contact with the viewer. Lit from front-right (viewer’s perspective), the resultant image is imbued with an air of moodiness, honesty and somewhat sombre earnestness. Bowie has a very serious expression and wears his longish, blonde hair in a ‘mop-top’ (also termed a ‘bob’) hairstyle that was very contemporaneous and largely attributed to The Beatles. He is dressed in a dark-coloured, high-neck, tunic-style garment constructed of a rough fabric, which may be wool, and which features a large gold button just below the neck. Closer inspection reveals that the button bears the insignia of a crown.

Although released four years earlier, in 1963, the closest referent for this style of cover is The Beatles second album, With The Beatles.

35 Other albums from the early part of Bowie’s career, such as The Man Who Sold The World (see chapter 3), also failed to chart upon release but were re-released once he had become established as a top-line artist and thus charted retrospectively.


This cover was in stark contrast to the visual style of the Beatles’ first album cover, *Please Please Me*, and their early publicity photographs, all of which featured the band as hale and hearty youth, smiling and happy, and fully conforming to de Ville’s definition of what he regards as the norm for the day, “the standard group photograph: jovial, jokey or casual, and certainly never sullen” (2003, p. 79).

The cover of *With The Beatles*, by comparison, is regarded by many critics as an innovation in album cover design, spawning a plethora of imitators. Melly described the cover as “a
genuine breakthrough” (1970, p. 139), while Whitely regards it as the first album cover to use fashion magazine design techniques (1987, p. 108). This is perhaps unsurprising given that the photograph was taken by photographer Robert Freeman who had previously worked for *Vogue* magazine and other fashion publications (de Ville 2003, p. 88). Dominy Hamilton provides a valuable insight into how this change of style in the Beatles’ covers resonated with the popular music audience, suggesting that the latter cover image worked by activating, “the record buyer’s recognition of and identification with a subtle matrix of visual signals, which were to become increasingly intricate and esoteric towards the end of the decade” (1987, p. 17). In short, the Beatles – in addition to other acts such as The Rolling Stones and The Who - were becoming more than simply a brand of entertainment. They were acquiring cultural depth as popular music increasingly became a primary rallying point for the counter cultural generation, and it was this depth that both artists and photographers were increasingly keen to capture and project in a visual sense. As Melly observed in 1969, regarding the increasing symbiosis between fashion and music:

> It is not an accident that that the photographer should have played so vital a role in pop cultural development. For a start he is in the position to move between two worlds, that of high fashion and the pop world, carrying the ideas and rage for the new from one to the other (Melly, 1970, p. 144).

Rather than its purpose being simply to identify the performer(s) featured on the record, the intention of the *With The Beatles* cover extended to conveying something of the band’s collective soul or personality, thus confirming them as serious artists with a message. As Ian Inglis suggests, by the time the Beatle’s second album was released the musicians were already well-established and highly recognisable, thus presenting the opportunity to bypass the necessity - as existed on their first album - to prioritise putting names to faces and showing who the Beatles were. The follow-up release allowed more scope for, and focus upon, fleshing out what they stood for, effectively showing a social significance beyond mere pop star veneer (Inglis, 2001, p. 85).

Not the least of the many imitations to follow *With The Beatles* was that of their biggest rivals, The Rolling Stones, whose own second album released just over a year later featured a similarly styled cover, albeit in colour rather than black and white.
When Bowie’s album was released in 1967, four and three years on respectively from the Beatles’ and The Rolling Stones’ works, he utilised the same stylistic visual approach. However, notably, both The Beatles and The Rolling Stones had moved significantly away from the style by this time, firmly aligning themselves with psychedelia, the musical and visual style that was by then prevalent within both hippy culture and the wider popular culture. As Melly suggests, “The hippy revolution of 1967 killed the Swinging London image of the pop dandy [Mod]” (1970, p. 154). Similarly, in his study of single (45rpm) record covers, Spencer Drate cites the Beatles as the prime example of how the style of pop music imagery changed as the decade went on, noting, “The Beatles’ singles progress from the "mod" look - with signature bowl haircuts - of She Loves You [1963] to the psychedelic I Am The Walrus [1967] – a shift that reflected a change in their musical style” (2002, p. 57). In the rapidly changing social and cultural landscape of the 1960s, four years was a very long time, thus the predominance of psychedelia in the year of Bowie’s debut album release necessitates discussion of the phenomenon in order to appraise his work in appropriate context.

Although psychedelic imagery began to appear on album covers from the mid sixties onwards, as Whitely points out, 1967 was the year in which psychedelia became established in mainstream album cover art (1987, p. 172). De Ville suggests, “Rock musicians were the major figureheads of the hippy movement – espousing its experimentation with mind altering drugs . . . and many commissioned album sleeves in the psychedelic style” (2003, p. 92). Specifically, psychedelia, was an attempt to visually recreate the experience of ‘tripping’ on
hallucinogenic drugs (de Ville, 2003, p. 92). Its growth across artistic mediums was rapid, and the style quickly became prevalent.

The creation of psychedelic art drew upon several twentieth century artistic traditions at once, including abstraction, surrealism, art nouveau and art deco, in addition to showing the influence of the Bauhaus school (Powers, 2001, p. 78). In practice, this resulted in art that combined, as de Ville puts it, “convoluted, lysergic illustrative material – sometimes multi-layered – and excessive biomorphic typographical forms into a seamless amalgam . . . often enhanced by the use of brilliant colour combinations and newly available Day-Glo inks” (2003, p. 92).

Still mining the same visual territory as each other, with the Beatles leading and the Rolling Stones following, the respective 1967 releases of these acts were visually located firmly within the psychedelic style.

Figure 5. Sgt Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band by The Beatles (1967)

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40 As it happened, The Beatles’ Sgt Pepper and Bowie’s album were both released on the same day, June 1st.
The Rolling Stones album cover even featured a three-dimensional cover insert designed to visually mimic the blurring of reality and fantasy and the heightening of sensibility to colour and pattern experienced during an LSD trip.

![Image of Their Satanic Majesties Request by The Rolling Stones (1967)](image6)

**Figure 6.** *Their Satanic Majesties Request* by The Rolling Stones (1967)

Many other releases by major artists in 1967 also exhibited this move towards the use of psychedelic artwork to convey the altered consciousness and countercultural thematic subject matter contained on the recordings they housed, such as the following examples by Jimi Hendrix and Cream:

![Image of Axis: Bold as Love by Jimi Hendrix (1967)](image7)

**Figure 7.** *Axis: Bold as Love* by Jimi Hendrix (1967)
Bob Dylan, certainly one of the most influential artists of the day, released his *Greatest Hits* album in 1967; however, the cover of this album did not follow suit in utilising psychedelic imagery on the cover. Nevertheless, the free poster given away as a part of the album package clearly displayed an alignment with psychedelia.
There is little in Bowie’s cover image that overtly acknowledges or references psychedelia; nevertheless, an influence can be observed in the stylised, hand-drawn font used to declaim the artist’s name on both sides of the cover, a technique also evident in the Cream album cover shown.\textsuperscript{41}

![Figure 10. Hand drawn font used on the cover of David Bowie](image)

As Kevin Edge suggests, central to psychedelic art was “the ‘customised’, hand-drawn nature of the letters which looked back to highly-stylised examples seen in the work of art nouveau, art deco, jugenstil and Vienna session artists” (1991, p. 59).\textsuperscript{42} This element, at least, goes some way to situating the album cover in its appropriate era, and it also lends credence to the opinion of Roger Crimlis and Alwyn W. Turner who suggest that Bowie’s formative primary visual influences lay in the psychedelic and mod subcultures (2006, p. 27).

Mod imagery too is indeed evident in the picture. As the sixties progressed, and the popular music mainstream began to fragment to a greater degree than ever before, it became increasingly important for acts to portray stylistic alignment on their album covers. This is a topic addressed by de Ville, who suggests that:

\[\ldots\text{as pop began to mutate into a whole range of rock genres \ldots the design of album sleeves began to matter to a new degree. The look of an album sleeve became an increasingly nuanced expression of the recording artist’s musical and cultural allegiances, and his/her claims to what was ambiguously referred to \ldots as street credibility (de Ville, 2003, p. 79).}\]

\textsuperscript{41} Evidence that the letters are hand-drawn can be seen in the differences between the two renditions of the letter i, particularly at the top and bottom parts of the stems. My thanks to graphic artist Manson Wright for pointing this out to me.

\textsuperscript{42} See also D. Hamilton (1987) ‘Introduction’ in Dean, R. and Howells, D. \textit{Album Cover Album 4}, Surrey, Dragon’s World Ltd., p. 18.
Some discussion of the term ‘mod’ is necessary at this point, because in addition to being a vital, formative music subculture of the era - and one for which there is quite some evidence for aligning Bowie - mod was also a generic term used to describe highly fashionable youth at the time. When a commentator such as Mablen Jones, for instance, suggests that Bowie’s image during the early part of his career was drawn “from trendy Mod fashion”, it is important to discern which of the two definitions she means, as this determination could potentially provide important information to help unpack stylistic allegiances within Bowie’s cover image (1987, p. 106).

As Christine Feldman purports, the term mod was originally used to describe a British youth subculture that came to prevalence in the late fifties and early sixties and which was based upon specific tastes within fashion and, later, music (2003, p. 10). Hebdige’s analysis of the original mod image is worth revisiting in full:

Unlike the defiantly obtrusive teddy boys, the mods were more subtle and subdued in appearance: they wore apparently conservative suits in respectable colours, they were fastidiously neat and tidy. Hair was generally short and clean, and the mods preferred to maintain the stylish contours of an impeccable ‘French crew’ with invisible lacquer rather than with the obvious grease favoured by the more overtly masculine rockers. The mods invented a style which enabled them to negotiate smoothly between school, work and leisure . . . Quietly disrupting the orderly sequence which leads from signifier to signified, the mods undermined the conventional meaning of a ‘collar, suit and tie’, pushing neatness to the point of absurdity (Hebdige, 1979, p. 52).

With its heavy emphasis upon fashion, a mod’s clothing was an inherent part of aligning oneself to the sub-culture where, as Christopher Breward suggests, “the designation of cut, line or detail as ‘Italian’, ‘French’, Roman’ or ‘Parisian’ was vital in a grammar of styles that marked out the fashion sophisticates and group insiders” (2006, p. 112).

These original sub-culture-aligned mods also had clearly defined musical tastes that lay in American jazz, soul and rhythm and blues, or in the transported rhythm and blues offerings of the harder edged British bands that formed from within their own ranks and who claimed black American-influenced stylistic roots. These latter acts, which included The Who, The Kinks, The Small Faces, Zoot Money, and Georgie Fame and the Blue Flames, often performed and released recordings of cover versions of soul classics in addition to their own original music (Hebdige, 1979, p. 152). However, as the sixties progressed and the Beatles grew to become both the figurehead of a generation and also a mainstream global success, the

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close similarities between their carefully contrived look - the iconic ‘Beatles suits’, their close attention to personal grooming etc - would prove very damaging to the distinctiveness of the mod subculture (Clarke, 1976, p. 187). Effectively, the original mod look became subsumed by mainstream fashion. As Clarke puts it:

The whole mid-sixties explosion of ‘Swinging London’ was based on the massive commercial diffusion of what were originally essentially Mod styles . . . the Beatles era is one of the most dramatic examples of the way what was in origin a sub-cultural style became transformed, through increasingly commercial organisation and fashionable expropriation, into a pure ‘market’ or ‘consumer’ style (Clarke, 1976, p. 187).

Melly, meanwhile, regarded this subsumption of mod as a prime example of what he terms “a cycle of obsolescence . . . what starts as revolt finishes as style - as mannerism” (1970, p. 53).

It is clear that Bowie had participated fully in the mod subculture in the years prior to the release of his first album, with many Bowie scholars and biographers unequivocal about this. Bowie chronologist Philip Cann titles a chapter ‘David as Mod’ when he addresses this early stage of his career (1983, pp. 29-33). Nick Stevenson suggests, “. . . the adopting of a mod subcultural identity was an important point in the making of ‘David Bowie’” (2006, p. 16). Auslander, meanwhile, observes, “From 1964, through 1966, Bowie played with a number of Mod groups, including The King Bees, the Manish Boys, and the Lower Third. He hung out, and sometimes played, at the Marquee Club in London, an important Mod haunt” (2006, pp. 59-60).

There are many photographs of Bowie that display his mod image, particularly those taken with his band, The Lower Third.

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47 These bands featured the artist under his real name, David Jones, prior to his adoption of Bowie as his surname.
In addition to the obvious mod image displayed in this publicity photograph from 1966, also of particular note are the ties the band members are wearing, which clearly show pre-emptive signs of the still embryonic influence of psychedelia.\textsuperscript{48} Still, Bowie’s sharply dressed image, along with that of his band-mates, is fully consistent with that of other bands regarded at the time as being mod, including, for instance, The Small Faces:

In the year prior to the above publicity photograph being taken of The Lower Third, seminal mod act The Who released their first album.

\textsuperscript{48} For an in depth summary of psychedelia in fashion, see Ettinger (1999) \textit{Psychedelic Chic}. 
The Who often imbued their images with iconic English or London references, as in this case where they pose in front of Big Ben. The studied seriousness of the band members and the composition of the shot stylistically aligns it to the earlier covers by The Beatles and The Rolling Stones, as well as to the later Bowie cover in question. But for their second album release the following year in 1966, and in what can now be seen as a very prescient move, The Who pre-empted both the Beatles and the Rolling Stones with a fully psychedelic cover.49

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49 Notwithstanding the fact that several critics regard The Beatles’ 1965 release, Rubber Soul, as the first album cover to offer a hint of psychedelia due to the use of a wide angle lens which slightly distorted the faces of the four band members, in addition to the stylised lettering used on the album title. See Hamilton (1987) ‘Introduction’, p. 18.
That The Who - Britain’s pre-eminent mod band - should be portrayed in this way upon their album cover fully bears out the notion that mod subculture and mainstream pop culture fashions were indeed merging into a single, far less clearly delineated, ‘Swinging London’/Psychedelia amalgam.  

A year later in 1967 then, when Bowie's album was released, the mod ‘look’ had been largely coopted by mass commercialism into what Cohen describes as “the general market in teenage consumer goods” (Cohen, 1980, p. 139). And meanwhile, beyond the UK, with the mod subculture having been a purely British phenomenon, American understanding of the term was solely and only ever on the basis of its subsequent far wider redefinition. As Breward suggests:

> When popularised and exported to America by the Beatles (never a Mod group proper), these fashions signified simply ‘London’, just as the term ‘Mod’ lost its particular meaning crossing the North Atlantic, becoming a catch phrase for all that was ‘modern’ about English popular culture (Breward, 2006, p. 74).

In the light of this softening of the term, it is useful to briefly consider the 1967 release by The Who, *The Who Sell Out*, surely the benchmark release for comparison’s sake if Bowie was indeed looking to align himself to the mod subculture, or whatever was left of it.

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50 As has been noted, many commentators have remarked upon how the Mod image became overrun by the mainstream. However, given the ties worn by Bowie and the other members of The Lower Third, and the fully psychedelic cover chosen for The Who album, it would seem that there may have been at least a degree of symbiosis. For a discussion on this, see C. J. Feldman (2003) *Making Time: The Retro-forward Logic of Mod Style*, unpublished PhD, MA: Georgetown University. pp. 67-68.
Here, however, psychedelia is abandoned on the cover in favour of images of each of the four band members (two on the front, as shown, and two on the rear) that illustrate the primary message of the album: an ironic representation of what they see as the encroachment of blatant commercialism into popular music.\textsuperscript{51} Complete with fake advertisements and commercialisation-themed lyrics, the album is highly witty and satirical about the very environment they are working in, bearing little resemblance to Bowie’s work.\textsuperscript{52}

On the front cover, then, Bowie’s image can be read as that of a serious young mod, but this description is best regarded in the wider, expanded meaning of the term. Nevertheless, further exploration of Bowie’s mod allusions will become necessary when we turn our attention to the rear cover of the album, which contains evidence that seemingly purposely and consciously aligns him with the original mod subculture.

\textsuperscript{51} Psychedelia is not totally absent however, with the inclusion inside the package of a psychedelic poster, as the sticker on the cover informs the buyer. Interestingly, The Who’s 1968 cover for the \textit{Magic Bus} album is fully psychedelic once more, with the band draping themselves over a double decker bus covered in brightly coloured, psychedelic art - a very deliberate British take on Psychedelia. It seems likely the band’s irony on \textit{The Who Sell Out} is multi-levelled and that there is an element of ‘in joke’ in the cover, with their own Mod image possibly having been calculatedly adopted from the beginning simply in order to meet an evident gap in the marketplace. See R. Barnes (1979) \textit{Mods!} London: Plexus, p. 14. Also see Feldman (2003) \textit{Making Time}, p. 68.

\textsuperscript{52} With the possible exception of \textit{Join the Gang}, which satirizes youth subcultures and, in particular, hippy culture. This song will be discussed shortly.
The rear cover is another head and shoulders portrait photograph of the artist, but printed in black and white rather than colour on this occasion. Positioned in the middle of the frame and looking straight at the viewer, Bowie presents himself as rather more casually dressed than on the front cover, his outer garment open at the neck, clearly displaying the hooks that held it closely together on the front cover image. Evident now that the garment is open at the neck is a light-coloured or white jumper or top with a ribbed neck, with a texture that suggests it is made of wool. In this more naturally lit photograph, it appears clearer than was the case on the front cover that the outer garment too is made of wool. Here, this outer garment looks less like a tunic and more a casual jacket, the absence of the gold button from the image adding to this impression. With his hair less coiffured, he looks rather less formal, and yet his expression is still sombre and serious. Unlike the front cover which, with its consistent green
background and careful lighting, appears to have been photographed indoors, here the out of focus, inconsistent light and shadow to the viewer’s left of the subject suggests an outdoor setting, and the wayward tufts of hair at the top of his head give the impression of being blown by a breeze. In all, it is a very naturalistic image.

The presence of such an unstaged, ostensibly ‘real’ photograph on the rear cover is standard practice in literature. This is most especially the case for contemporary fiction, with the image of the author serving to assuage the curiosity of the reader, because “writing cannot convey (and thus may be considered to censor) many of the messages the body conveys through voice and gesture about speaker’s gender, age, social class, regional origin, and so on. The photograph of the author on the book jacket . . . is an attempt to supply this lack” (Kendrick, 1999, p. 11.).

Crucially, and in seamless support of the candid photograph, biographical information written by Bowie’s manager, Ken Pitt, is printed on the rear of the cover beneath the track listing. These text elements are highly significant paratexts. Worth considering in its entirety, in particular Pitt’s written appraisal of Bowie’s purported style and raison d’être invites critique regarding how it might inform upon both the visual and musical content of the album:

Although he rarely strayed far beyond his own suburban London, David Bowie, at 19, has seen more of the world than many people do in a far longer life-time. For David’s keen sense of perception and unusual powers of observation enable him to view the world around him with the eye of an articulate eagle.

His line of vision is as straight and sharp as a laser beam. It cuts through hypocrisy, prejudice and cast. It sees the bitterness of humanity, but rarely bitterly. It sees the humour in our failings, the pathos of our virtues. David writes and sings of what he sees to be the truth, and the truth is rarely an ode to the moon, and to June. His moon is pock marked and grey. June is not for brides, it is for the birds - if it isn’t raining!

David is very much a product of the fast moving era in which he has spent his teens. An early desire to create took him to art school, but Little Richard discs turned him on to music as a more satisfying art form. At 13 he was playing good enough saxophone to be a credit to his teacher, Ronnie Ross. He formed one or two of Britain’s early R&B groups. Then somebody gave him a shove and he was out front singing.

He was immediately impatient with the songs there were to sing and began to write his own. Songs he believed in, songs that were part of him, songs he could sing with feeling. They spilled out all over the place in rapid labour. He moved so fast that everything he did was two years too soon. Why, he was even photographed in 1964 wearing a military jacket!

The world finally grabbed at him as he was rushing by and the result is this recorded collection of Bowiedotes.
Bowie sometimes chose different musicians for the various tracks, but throughout he used the same boys who so ardently believed in his talent that they have loyally supported him during the lean times. They are drummer John Eager, bassist Derek Fearnley and organist Derek Boyes.

Kenneth Pitt

This biographical information, and the track listing above it, both encroach upon the photograph of Bowie, covering the whole of the left side of his head, and therefore imbuing both paratexts with quite a degree of evident importance. There is much to consider in the content of Pitt’s column. Of the most immediate importance when looking to align comment to image on the cover is the comment, “His line of vision is as straight and sharp as a laser beam.” Bowie is indeed providing a visual representation of this in his fixed, direct gaze; in his unblinking eye-to-eye contact with the viewer. Pitt continues, “[Bowie’s vision] cuts through hypocrisy, prejudice and cast. It sees the bitterness of humanity, but rarely bitterly. It sees the humour in our failings, the pathos of our virtues.” Here, the viewer is being assured of Bowie’s integrity and the depth of his perceptive abilities, with both qualities being as ably demonstrated in the image as possible. Pitt then absolutely confirms the artist’s total honesty, with, “David writes and sings of what he sees to be the truth . . .” These lines of text, married to the manner in which Bowie is depicted in both of the cover images, leave no room for doubt about the artist’s honest, forthright intentions, and harbour the promise that what is contained in the music of the album will present the listener with perceptive, insightful and unabashed truths about the human condition. We expect bald truth in these insights rather than sanitised anecdotes because, as Pitt elaborates, Bowie’s style of telling the truth, “is rarely an ode to the moon, and to June. His moon is pock marked and grey. June is not for brides, it is for the birds - if it isn’t raining!” June, of course, is the height of the English summer, so the inference here is one of complete and utter soul-baring, a warts-and-all presentation.

The images on the front and rear covers differ considerably in terms of their composition, yet the constructed message of “truth” they convey is the same. The very formal sitting of the front cover image - precise, lighting-perfect, the suggestion that Bowie is wearing a military tunic or uniform – inevitably betrays an element of staging and a design hand behind the image, while the nature of the rear photograph has dispensed with such formality and any such allied, inherent artifice. Simply, here Bowie’s image appears to be natural and unstaged. In both cover images, however, front and back, Pitt’s words are exemplified.
The difference in the way that the message is carried by these images can be expanded and clarified by employing Schechner’s performance studies delineations of ‘being’, ‘doing’, and ‘showing doing’ (2002, p. 22). If ‘being’ is simply a state of existence, then that is how Bowie might well be regarded as appearing on the rear cover. ‘Doing’, meanwhile, pertains to evidence of purposeful activity, and in this case, Bowie’s sitting for a formal portrait on the front cover meets this criterion. Schechner’s third category, ‘showing doing’ (“to underline an action for those watching”) (2002, p. 22), however, constitutes a performance situation. The careful study of Bowie on the front cover is, in comparison to the rear, indeed a calculated performance and a considered replication of the qualities of truth and honesty that Pitt underlines in his text. The rear cover photograph, despite (or because of) its lack of formality and the suggestion that the artist is caught here simply ‘being’, nevertheless acts similarly. In the portrayal of truth and honesty Pitt and Bowie, manager and artist, are united in both words and image; they are in collusion.53

However, Bowie’s mode of dress is not so clearly delineated. Pitt suggests Bowie is a product of his time, effectively invoking contemporaneous associations of swinging London of the 1960s in the mind of the viewer: “David is very much a product of the fast moving era in which he has spent his teens.” The primary visual image the viewer is given to associate with this direct reference - the front cover ‘shop window’ - suggests mod by either definition of the term, moreso than any other pop-cultural allegiance. While stopping short of describing Bowie directly as a mod, Pitt nevertheless identifies him as being a rhythm and blues artist and cites Little Richard, an archetypal mod icon, as an influence. These references none too subtly align him with the original mod subculture more than they do the general, wider, fashion trend meaning of the term prevalent by 1967.

The fact that his attire on the front cover resembles a military tunic - a conclusion largely supported by the gold, crown insignia-bearing button and very high collar - warrants further attention, most especially in the light of Pitt’s seemingly allied and purposeful mention of Bowie wearing a military jacket: “Why, he was even photographed in 1964 wearing a military jacket!”

The Beatles and the Rolling Stones also wore militaristic costuming, as can be seen in the album covers displayed earlier in this chapter, as did as The Who, The Kinks and Jimi

Hendrix to name but a few others. Harris suggests of the Beatles usage, “. . . a kind of ‘bending’ or Situationist detourning takes place in the pastiche of military garb. . . Anti-authoritarian and anti-establishment . . . the Beatles wanted to associate these uniforms with music, play, lightness, ‘peace’ and ‘love’” (2005, p. 12). In referencing a clear visual alignment with these acts - even going so far as to infer that Bowie had begun the trend - Pitt creates an expectation that there may be further similarities between his relatively unknown charge and these well-established superstars of the day. If there are visual alliances, and if these are unequivocally backed up by Pitt’s biographical information on the rear cover, then surely thematic and stylistic musical alliances might also be expected - such as those suggested by Harris.

When taken overall, the cover, and most especially the front cover image and rear cover text largely portrays Bowie as an artist at one with the image and ethos of the prevailing popular music zeitgeist. He is mod. He is current.

Frith offers a useful observation that at once both aligns Bowie to original mod culture but also renders him discreet from the prevailing mainstream mod music of the late sixties:

Even as an ordinarily cocky, would-be R&B star, David Jones [Bowie] was, then, a committed ‘modernist’. . . very specifically, a grammar school mod. He was less interested in Pete Townshend’s ordinary kids or Mick Jagger’s hedonistic blues than in the modernist’s original French connections - the coffee-bar readings of Sartre, the celebration of private alienation, the dramaturgy of life as a series of lifestyles (Frith, 1988, p. 134).

As will be argued below, the songs on this first release do indeed display aspects of the “dramaturgy of life as a series of lifestyles”, and the early signs of what will develop into a career-long exploration of themes of alienation are also evident. However, these qualities are certainly not presented using the common-practice syntax of the prime popular music acts of the day, and the wide gap between what the cover promises and what the actual music delivers is a telling - perhaps damning, in a commercial sense - feature of the album.

As noted, popular music consumers discovering this release while thumbing through record racks at the time would have had no familiarity with the artist, thus it was Bowie’s first opportunity to inform an audience about his product, or, in more recent parlance, his brand. In Brands that Rock, Roger Blackwell and Tina Stephan’s perceptive study in which they examine the historical and current marketing strategies of some of the biggest names within
popular music, the authors provide a useful definition of ‘brand’ as it relates to the music industry:

It is a product or product line with an identifiable set of benefits, wrapped in a recognizable personality, carrying with it a connection between product and customers . . . A powerful brand creates an image and an identity for a product or a company; it is a promise to consumers, telling them what they can expect when they and their cash or plastic are separated (Blackwell and Stephan, 2004, p. 10).

Upon first impression, in a purely visual appraisal of the cover, David Bowie appears to be both fashionable and culturally relevant, and it was surely desirable that this impression should be backed up by the other components of the package. As Blackwell and Stephan suggest, the music industry “is dependent on perceived cultural relevance or the degree to which a brand is up to date. Few people want to be associated with a brand, style, fashion, or attitude that isn’t current” (2004, p. 220). Therefore it is problematic, as other critics too have noted, if the other components of this first Bowie album are not easily aligned to the information communicated visually by the album’s cover.

Whether mainstream in the wider sense of mod, or occupying closer stylistic territory to the original mod subculture, the pertinent music of the day dealt with themes of alienation and rebellion, what Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson would term “Resistance through Rituals.”

A very large and necessary component of this for artists was the self-conscious distancing of themselves from others, both personally and collectively. This required not only taking an oppositional stance from other co-existing youth subcultures, but most notably of all, a withdrawal or distancing from the previous generation, a defining ethos epitomised by The Who’s mod anthem, ‘My Generation’. The following excerpt conveys the central dictum:

```
People try to put us down
Just because we get around
Things they do look awful cold
Hope I die before I get old
This is my generation baby

Why don’t you all f-f-f-fade away?
Don’t try to dig what we all say
I’m not trying to cause a big sensation
I’m talking about my generation
This is my generation baby
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In addition to generational alienation, social stratification was also a much-utilised theme. Cagle suggests, “the rock and roll bands appropriated by the Mods (the Who, the Animals) often presented politically charged anthems concerning the problems posed by class subordination” (1995, p. 39). Stevenson compares Bowie’s album directly to the mood of this mod cornerstone, suggesting:

The album is less a celebration of what the Who called ‘My Generation’ and more a cynical commentary on new metropolitan lifestyles. Unlike many popular musicians and teenagers connected to subcultural movements, Bowie fails to evoke any sense of generational difference (Stevenson, 2006, p. 22).

The Who successfully delineate themselves and their generation as social outcasts, “People try to put us down”, and, in addition, they actively discourage the older generation from making any attempt to understand their stance, imploring: “Don’t try to dig what we all say”. In contrast, and as Stevenson rightly points out, Bowie does neither of these things. Yet, while he clearly failed to align himself successfully with a youth subculture and thereby did not achieve the necessary component of becoming meaningful, pertinent, even fashionable, to a specific group of consumers, his work is by no means devoid of a sense of ‘otherness’, of alienation.

At this point then, in order to talk about alienation in Bowie’s work it is necessary to discuss the concept itself in historical context in order to provide a working definition appropriate to the current task. Alienation within sociological theory was introduced by Karl Marx in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (1959). Originally employed as a term of economics, describing the process whereby production exploited workers under a capitalist system, Marx saw alienation existing in three variants: within the process of the production itself; from the actual objects produced; and from nature and humanity. The emphasis in this founding definition is placed on working conditions rather than personal psychological state. As Horowitz points out, the term has long since been the subject of much scholarly debate

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and has undergone many reinterpretations of meaning, ultimately becoming “part of the tool kit of social psychology and social stratification”.  

Despite Marx’ original definition having been considerably broadened, many theorists agree that his fundamental dictum of separation remains largely sound, and that alienation “in every variation suggests the loss or absence of a previous or desirable relationship”.  

A working definition of alienation that fluidly acknowledges this debt to Marx, that acknowledges the personal psychological effect of the condition, and is also fully contemporaneous with the time-span addressed by this study of Bowie’s album covers, is the proposition that industrialisation and increasing technological advancement within society can result in a lack of individual identity and responsibility. The common origins and the personal, psychological impact of the condition is described by Gergen as:

...the loss of the natural condition of selfhood, that is, alienation from one’s core being. Because this loss cannot be originated within the self – i.e. there is no reason for the human agent in his/her natural state to become self-alienated – the source of the deterioration is typically traced to the environment (e.g. defective economic or work conditions, urban life, consumerism, social influence) (Gergen, 1996, pp. 117-118).

Similarly, Israel suggests the effective analysis of alienation within its broadest, most common sociologic meaning, should consider “The individual’s experience of his own situation ... against the background of sociological phenomena.”

In further explanation of the condition’s manifestation within an alienated subject, Nevill believes, “The fundamental characteristics of alienation involve feelings of loss, powerlessness, meaninglessness and estrangement from self and society.” I consider this description of the primary characteristics of the condition to be entirely apt for my current investigation, with the causes of the condition described by Gergen above being equally pertinent.

Alienation within youth culture and its expression through rock music has been very well documented. Some critics have suggested that the names adopted by subcultures, such as mod or rocker, are in themselves labelling processes for alienation. Ken McLeod, meanwhile, cites David Bowie as one of the artists who has best evoked a sense of alienation in his work. As will be seen throughout this study, Bowie’s representations of alienation uniformly portray an individual somehow out of balance with both his personal and sociological surroundings.

In this regard with respect to the album in question, Stevenson correctly opines, “Rather than celebrating the modernity of London’s swinging sixties, Bowie’s first album articulates a number of outsiders (‘Uncle Arthur’, ‘She’s Got Medals’, ‘Little Bombardier’) who display an inability to fit into conventional roles and identities” (2006, p. 21). In the song ‘Uncle Arthur’, for instance, Bowie presents a vignette about a dependent thirty-two-year-old man who finally moves out of his mother’s house, against her wishes, after meeting a girl at last. However the experience proves to be more than he can cope with:

```
Round and round goes Arthur’s head
Hasn’t eaten well for days
Little Sally may be lovely
But cooking leaves her in a maze
Uncle Arthur packed his bags and fled
Back to mother; all’s forgiven
Serving in the family shop
He gets his pocket money
He’s well fed
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In its way, the song paints a picture of a character (albeit a rather pathetic one with whom it is hard to empathise) cast outside mainstream life, a socially inept outcast alienated from normalcy. But here, the protagonist, Uncle Arthur, is already a generation removed from Bowie’s. Thus, while the lyric does have a generational aspect central to it, it was hardly of any obvious relevance to the mainstream rock audience of 1967 who had, by this stage of the decade, so fully embraced the more directly applicable and blatant call-to-arms rallying cries of songs such as The Rolling Stone’s ‘Satisfaction’, Dylan’s ‘Like A Rolling Stone’, The Kink’s ‘See My Friend’, The Animal’s ‘We Gotta Get Out Of This Place’, and The Who’s

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‘The Kids Are Alright’ and ‘My Generation’. As MacDonald suggests, these songs, or, perhaps more correctly, anthems, presented social and sexual observations and opinions about matters uppermost in the minds of their audience (1994, p. 130). And as John Clarke et al. confirm, “Negotiation, resistance, struggle: the relations between a subordinate and a dominant culture, wherever they fall within this spectrum, are always intensely active, always oppositional” (1976, p. 44). The defeatist tone of ‘Uncle Arthur’, a failed, small-scale, personal revolution, of sorts, could not be more at odds with this ethos.

Similarly, the song ‘Little Bombardier’ concerns an old, lonely career soldier who has trouble resuming normal life after his active service ends: “War made him a soldier . . . peace made him a loser.” So once again Bowie is addressing a theme of estrangement from society. But once again the issue is not a topical one of teenagers against their parents or a ‘new breed’ standing against authority. Indeed, the theme instead develops rather darkly to become one of suspected paedophilia:

Two young children had changed his aims  
He gave them toffees and played their games  
He brought them presents with every coin he made

Then two gentlemen called on him  
Asked him for his name  
Why was he friends with the children?  
Were they just a game?

Leave them alone or we’ll get sore  
We’ve had blokes like you in the station before  
The hand of authority said “no more”  
To the little bombardier

Packed his bags, his heart in pain  
Wiped a tear and caught a train  
Not to be seen in the town again  
The little bombardier

Such a lyric seems to bear little relation to prevailing thematic trends with the popular music of the late sixties.

Similarly obtuse, other lyrical themes on the album include the surreptitious observing of a grave-robbing grave-digger, in ‘Please Mr Grave Digger’, a song sung from the perspective of a watching man who is the unapprehended murderer of a ten year old girl; a toy-maker urging the children of rich parents to purchase his wares in ‘Come and Buy my Toys’; an appeal to a Tibetan child in ‘Silly Boy Blue’; and the travails of a cross-dressing soldier in ‘She’s Got
medals’. These topics too are far removed from prevailing thematic trends of the time in popular song-writing.

The song that arguably bears the closest relationship to contemporary youth culture of the era is ‘Join the Gang’. However, the mood reflected is one of ridicule, of a disdain for sub-cultural alliance:

Let me introduce you to the gang  
Johnny plays the sitar, he's an existentialist  
Once he had a name, now he plays our game  
You won't feel so good now that you've joined the gang

Molly is the model in the ads  
Crazy clothes and acid full of soul and crazy hip  
Someone switched her on, then her beam went wrong  
Cause she can't switch off, now that she's joined the gang

Arthur is a singer with a band  
Arthur drinks two bottles just before he goes on stage  
Look at Arthur rave, all the kids are paid  
They want to see the croaking man who joined the band

You won't be alone, we've all got beery grins  
It's a big illusion but at least you're in  
At least you're in

This club's called The Webb, it's this month's pick  
Next month we shall find a place where prices aren't so stiff  
15 bob a coke, 'fraid that's past a joke  
This is how to spend now that you've joined a gang

This is what to do now that you're here  
Sit round doing nothing all together very fast  
Psychedelic stars, throwing down cigars  
They're picking up the joints now that they've joined the gang

The lyrics reflect a general disenchantment with the hippy counter-culture and a clearly evident mocking of psychedelia, which, as we have seen, was achieving its peak of popularity in the very same year as this rather damning critique. And beyond the specificity of mocking hippy culture, the mood overall is one of scoffing at the very notion of belonging to any sort of ‘gang’. It is thus hardly the kind of unifying theme that might endear a teen audience to Bowie in the very decade when sub-cultural alliance was becoming almost *de rigueur*.

The problem, then, is not so much that Bowie did not imbue his work with a sense of alienation and opposition; it is more that his brand of alienation and opposition had no sense of an appropriate allied generational base. Furthermore and just as crucially, the album did not
adhere, beyond the visual components, to the central tenet of prevailing youth and pop

cultural sensibility. The songs are couched in a musical style that was inappropriate for the
time and highly unfashionable. With just a couple of exceptions, most notably on ‘Love You
Till Tuesday’ which utilised standard rock band instrumentation, the sound of the album was
well out of step with what was currently popular. The utilisation of solo tuba, full brass
sections and strings atop a basic combo of drums, bass and organ sounded nothing like the
music on the charts.\(^{67}\) The choice of instruments, the style of the compositions in which they
were played and, frequently, Bowie’s affected manner of vocal delivery, owed far more debt
to music hall than to contemporary popular music.\(^{68}\) Buckley addresses this issue of
appropriateness, suggesting that Bowie failed to utilise any relevant means of conveying his
message to the youth audience by ignoring the pre-eminent style of musical communication at
the time, describing the album as being blatantly “as un-rock’n’roll as one could imagine”
(1999, p. 35).

The music is nothing like that of, for instance, mod flagship, The Who. Manager of The Who,
Peter Meaden, described the mod sound as “new wave R&B, which is like a [mixture of] R&B, funk, fast soul, fast grooving off the walls” (Marsh, 1983, p. 90). The Who’s sound was
indeed high-energy, raw and electric, comprising a three-piece instrumental platform
consisting of drums, bass and guitar that Moore describes as being:

...founded on Townshend’s guitar style ... power chords (often played with a ferocious
attack achieved by propelling his right arm in a windmill fashion) and the control of
feedback which changed his instrument from an amplified guitar to something
quantitatively different. The absence of a rhythm guitar from the texture was
counterbalanced by Moon’s manic drumming, who seized more space and presence than
any rock drummer had done previously (Moore, 2001, p. 351).

‘High energy, raw and electric’, are not terms one could use in any discussion of Bowie’s
album.\(^{69}\) Mod specificity aside, the popular music of the 1960s is frequently regarded as
exuberant and celebratory, as Hanif Kureishi purports, “Pop was made for the moment, to
embody exhilaration ...” (1995, p. xix). Once again The Beatles can be rightly regarded as

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\(^{67}\) Whereas the Beatles used an even wider and more varied instrumental canvas on \textit{Sgt Pepper}, the entire album
was imbued with an exuberant irony and wit that made it clear these instruments were being used in this light.
This playful exuberance extended to the uplifting, celebratory style of the music, and even to the album
packaging that included badges, a false moustache and sergeant’s epaulettes for the listener to wear. See Whitely

\(^{68}\) For a discussion on this see D. Buckley (1999) \textit{Strange Fascination: David Bowie: the definitive story},

\(^{69}\) Interestingly, on \textit{Pinups}, Bowie’s 1973 album of selected cover versions, Bowie seemingly pays tribute to The
Who and other mod acts, with stylistically and instrumentally accurate renditions of their songs. See J. E. Perone
the benchmark, and as MacDonald relates, their work in 1967 epitomised the extraordinary loud, declamatory zeitgeist of the prevailing youth and popular cultures: “A distillation of the spirit of 1967. . . Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band may not have created the psychic atmosphere of the time but, as a near-perfect reflection of it, this record magnified and radiated it around the world (1994, p. 199). Paytress, too, has commented upon this stylistic distance between Bowie’s work and the popular music of the day, comparing the contents of this first album to the established styles of acid rock, blues rock and, at the other end of the spectrum, the bubblegum style of the Monkees and Tremeloes. Finding no common ground, he suggests Bowie’s work was “idiosyncratic to the point of self-immolation. The album . . . wasn’t consistent enough to tap into any established market” (Paytress, 1998, p. 10).

Given such deviation from the popular music mainstream then, does the music contained on David Bowie have a stylistic home? Buckley sums up the early stages of Bowie’s career, including this first album, thus: “His early work, influenced by Anthony Newley, had little in common with the dominant rock styles of the day and he was largely overlooked” (2001, p. 150). Indeed several critics have commented that this album was more aligned to musical theatre than to rock and roll, including Jerry Hopkins, who suggested, “The songs were a strange lot . . . [they] almost certainly did come as a result of David’s fascination at the time with Lionel Bart type musicals. In fact, nearly all fourteen songs which eventually appeared on the album fit that description” (1985, p. 32). This is perhaps not surprising in light of the fact that Bowie had previously been involved in writing a musical based upon Bart’s Oliver, titled Kids on the Roof, with his previous manager, Tony Hatch (Mathew-Walker, 1985, p. 8). Regarding this venture, Kevin Cann believes, “the musical became the spine of material included on his first LP” (1983, p. 25). Indeed, Bowie’s high regard for music hall and cabaret, and his admission of the influence upon him of music hall artist Anthony Newley, have been well documented. But this stylistic anomaly did not serve Bowie well. Nicholas Pegg, in suggesting that the album is the least well-regarded of all Bowie’s work, suggests it was, “Mercilessly mocked as music-hall piffle, derived from a passing Anthony Newley fad” (2002, p. 217).

Certainly, then, allusions to mod begin and end with the cover. Despite the style allegiance promised - if not specifically subcultural, then surely, at least, adhering to mainstream mod

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chic - neither the music nor the thematic alliances of the lyrics allow for anywhere near such a unified categorisation. Biographers Peter and Leni Gillman reflect on the problems presented by the work, suggesting, “perhaps the most noticeable was the difficulty in categorizing it at all.” (1986, p. 138). Paytress, meanwhile, ruminates more generally on the difficulty that Bowie’s succession of different record labels experienced in marketing him in these early years of his music career for this very same reason, stating, “Neither Decca nor Philips/Mercury . . . understood how to market a singer with no obvious commercial, or even subcultural, home” (1998, p. 10). So disparate are the myriad influences evident on the album, biographer David Buckley goes so far as to describe it as “the vinyl equivalent of the madwoman in the attic” (1999, p. 35).

It is clear, then, that the implications of popular music contemporaneity promised by the cover were not present to anywhere near the same extent in the music contained within.

In summation, the front cover of Bowie’s 1967 debut album displayed an earnest, honest, fresh-faced young mod, seemingly fully contemporaneous with his immediate environs within the ‘Swinging London’ of the day. The album cover strongly aligned him to the prevailing generalized mod culture, while the psychedelic-styled lettering used to write his name further added to the work’s contemporaneous nature. Because his clothing hinted at being militaristic there existed a link - made more overt by the words of Kenneth Pitt - to other major acts of the day, including The Beatles and The Rolling Stones.

Other than tapping in to the pre-existing and highly generalised quality of generational and class alienation associated with rock music and youth culture at large, the image had no particular sense of alienation unlike the album’s song lyrics which contained many specific references to marginalisation and to protagonists that were in some way separated from mainstream society.

Bowie’s pictures on both the front and rear covers, while more formal and slightly less formal respectively, were both highly natural with no hint of role-playing or artifice evident. Making frank and open eye contact with the viewer (“as straight and sharp as a laser-beam”), this visual quality of honesty was highly supported by the words of his manager. In terms of the relationship between front and rear covers, then, the two sides have a very high degree of unity.
David Bowie finds the artist depicted as a serious young contemporary musician, earnestly concerned with truth and honesty, with no evident division to be discerned between David Bowie the person and David Bowie the performer.
Chapter Two - David Bowie

Figure 17. David Bowie (Second album) Front cover (1969)

Bowie’s second album was released by Philips in the UK and titled David Bowie, a move that has led to considerable confusion over time, given that his first album bore the same name. In the US, the work was released by Mercury Records as Man of Words/Man of Music. The album was not a commercial success in either guise upon this initial release and failed to chart
on either continent.\textsuperscript{71} However, the single drawn from the album, ‘Space Oddity’, became a number five hit in the UK. This was Bowie’s first taste of commercial success and is a pivotal point in his career, aligning and establishing him thematically with science fiction in the public eye. Somewhat confusingly, this second \textit{David Bowie} album was subsequently reissued by RCA Records in 1972 under the title \textit{Space Oddity}, a title that has since been retained for all subsequent re-releases.\textsuperscript{72} This has ensured that \textit{Space Oddity} is now firmly established as the name by which this album is most commonly known.

The album consisted of ten tracks:

\textbf{Side One}

1. Space Oddity  
2. Unwashed and Somewhat Slightly Dazed  
3. Don’t Sit Down  
4. Letter to Hermione  
5. Cygnet Committee  

\textbf{Side Two}

1. Janine  
2. An Occasional Dream  
3. Wild Eyed Boy From Freecloud  
4. God Knows I’m Good  
5. Memory of a Free Festival  

This album was very different to Bowie’s first, both visually and musically. Just as the investigation of the first album was framed by an exploration of the prevailing popular music of the day, this chapter is framed by an examination of how this new work is situated within similarly contemporaneous concerns. The overarching theme of the work is one of technology-founded alienation; of human anxiety and concern about the rapid advancement of technology across a range of fronts. It is a theme largely drawn from the cold war and most

\textsuperscript{71} UK singles chart information sourced from Gambaccini, \textit{et al.}, eds., (1987) \textit{Guinness British Hot Singles-6\textsuperscript{th} Edition}, Middlesex: Guinness Publishing Ltd.  
\textsuperscript{72} Upon this re-release, the newly-titled \textit{Space Oddity} attained the much improved position of sixteen on the US Billboard album chart and seventeen on the UK chart. In addition, the single of the same name charted for the first time in the US, reaching number fifteen. Remarkably, the single was then reissued yet again in the UK in 1975 and attained the number one position. The change of name by the record company for the album’s rerelease was in order to take advantage both of the earlier success of the single of the same name and, more opportunistically, the wide acclaim that the artist was receiving for his then-current album, \textit{The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars} See N. Pegg (2002) \textit{The Complete David Bowie}, Surrey: Reynolds & Hearn Ltd, p. 223. Also Gillman and Gillman (1986) \textit{Alias David Bowie}, p. 315.
particularly pertaining to the space race between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This anxiety was represented within the arts at large in a variety of ways and Bowie’s album cover draws heavily from techniques highly popular at the time in the visual arts, techniques specifically intended to express such alienation. This dichotomy, then, a clash between human and machine, provides the primary thrust behind the analysis in this chapter.

The last year of the 1960s saw no decline in the political and social turbulence that had delineated the decade, with many landmark global events occurring. Richard Nixon defeated Lyndon Johnson and was elected as president of the United States of America; Charles Manson and his gang committed multiple murders, including that of top Hollywood actress Sharon Tate; super-sonic jet airliner Concorde made its inaugural flight; Ho Chi Minh, President of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, died; the death penalty was abolished in the United Kingdom; and Colonel Ghaddafi became premier of Libya. Within popular culture, the Woodstock music festival’s three days of peace, love, drugs and music provided the final, triumphant and iconic symbol of the counter-culture, only for the tragic events that followed at the Rolling Stone’s free concert at Altamont - including a murder carried out by Hell’s Angels gang members - to forever sully the image of the sixties music festival as the ultimate expression of the hippy dream.

All of these events, however, while each hugely significant in their own right, were dwarfed by what occurred on July 20th, 1969. On that day, the space race between the United States of America and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was effectively won by America when Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong and Edwin Aldrin became the first human beings to walk upon the surface of the moon. What had once been a technological dream was now reality.


Public interest in the space race reached its peak in 1969 as a worldwide audience followed the fortunes of the Apollo 11 mission, with the astronauts on that mission instantly becoming globally recognised public figures and, to many, heroes. As Marina Benjamin points out, the Apollo 11 astronauts “were amongst the most famous people on Earth, super-celebrities who shook hands with religious leaders and stood shoulder-to-shoulder beside the heads of state” (2003, p. 32). While this landmark event was the culmination of all that had gone before within the Cold War rivalry between the two superpowers and marked the peak of the space race *per se*, nevertheless public interest in space exploration had been burgeoning throughout the 1950s during the lengthy preparations that took place prior to the October 1957 Sputnik 1 launch, the event widely held to have begun the space race proper (Collins, 1999, p. 7). As McLeod points out, “Hand in hand with the advent of scientific space exploration was a rise in popular culture concerned with space and the future” (2003, p. 340).

Worldwide public interest steadily increased throughout the sixties, most especially in the wake of President John F. Kennedy’s 1961 speech in which he declared, “I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to the Earth. No single space project . . . will be more exciting, or more impressive to mankind” (John F. Kennedy quoted in Collins, 1999, p. 38). As the decade went on, the regularity, extent and clarity of news coverage with which the missions of both sides were reported in the media firmly established and even normalised the idea of human beings in space within the ongoing contemporary arts and culture of the age.

Robert Jones suggests, “by the mid-1960s the exploration of space had become a fact of everyday life for everybody in the world, and many people with no previous interest followed it avidly” (2004, p. 47). Whiteley singles out the global fascination with space as one of the primary influences on sixties popular culture, extrapolating further to suggest, “Inevitably, the imagery of space percolated through Pop design” (1987, p. 115). Jones, too, notes the growing public familiarity with space iconography brought about by the ever-increasing media coverage, particularly on television, suggesting that by the middle of the decade, “the look of space hardware was familiar to everybody” (2004, p. 47). And as Arthur Rosenblatt attests, as the sixties progressed and the pace of technological advancement increased, the

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world’s population was obliged to re-examine their previously held notions of what was possible and what was impossible; of what was realistically achievable and what was not: “What was visionary a decade ago is commonplace today. What we now think of as visionary is, more often than we know, not potentially but immediately feasible” (1968, p. 322).

The impact upon popular music of the increasing fascination with space exploration ranged from the simple - a reference within a band name, for instance - to the complex. As Michael C. Luckman points out, “At the dawn of the Space Age during the early 1960s, musical groups commonly adopted names that had a familiar outer-space ring such as Bill Haley and the Comets, the Telstars, the Zodiacs, the Starlets, and so forth” (2005, p. 29). Jones also comments on this trend, adding that song names too began to reflect “the excitement of space” (2004, p. 47). In some cases this theme was carried over into record cover imagery, such as the 1962 release, ‘Telstar’, by American band the Tornados:79

![Figure 18. Telstar by The Tornados (1962)](image)

By the late sixties, the influence of the space race was being felt throughout popular music, including psychedelia.80 As Sheila Whiteley purports, there was much homology between astronauts undertaking a journey into the unknown world of space and the artistic journeys

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79 This song referenced the successful launching, via rocket, of the Telstar, the first communication satellite capable of relaying television signals back to earth.

being undertaken by musicians also embarking upon a “musical voyage into the unknown . . . [experiencing] the effects of acid and the emphasis on being spaced out” (1992, p. 33).81

Of all the album releases in 1969, the one that, arguably, best exhibits upon its cover imagery drawn directly from the space race is *Blind Faith*, the self-titled debut album by Eric Clapton’s eagerly awaited new band, Blind Faith.82

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82 Upon release, *Blind Faith* reached number one on the album charts in both the UK and the US.
Despite the blue sky above and the green grass of the background, there is no attempt to portray the setting as natural. It is clear that the image of the girl has been planted or pasted upon the background, a cut-out effect that is particularly evident in the clean cutting around her hair. The juxtapositions of naivety (young girl) and knowledge (spaceship), of human (flesh) and technology (steel), are clear and telling components within this cover, which comprises a simple, yet concise, visual summation of the magnitude of the elements at play in the pursuit of, and then ultimate achievement of, putting men on the moon.

The 1969 release of *Brave New World* by The Steve Miller Band is also clearly imbued with themes of technology and space:

![The Steve Miller Band | Brave New World](image)

*Figure 20. Brave New World by The Steve Miller Band (1969)*

The use of a negative print for the front cover photograph presents the band members as alien, technologically constructed beings with human form, but what appears to be metal in place of skin. Meanwhile, the obvious homage to Aldous Huxley’s futurist novel of the same name - providing both the album title plus an eponymous title track - ensures a science fiction alignment, an element enhanced further by the song ‘Space Cowboy’.
Similarly, *Sailor*, the Steve Miller Band’s debut release from the previous year, clearly makes a visual commentary on humankind’s quest for exploring new frontiers, firstly on earth, as represented by the sailing ship, and then into space, as evidenced by the image of Earth taken from space:

![Sailor by The Steve Miller Band (1968)](image)

*Figure 21. Sailor by The Steve Miller Band (1968)*

Other releases by the major popular music acts of 1969 show little obvious evidence of space-related influence. However, Led Zeppelin’s debut album, highlighting as it does a notorious failure in the history of flight with the iconic image of the catastrophic demise of the airship, *Hindenburg*, can be seen as a comment upon the enormous risks associated with mankind’s continual quest for technological advancement.  

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83 Of course, in a simpler reading, the image is also a visual depiction of the band’s name, Le[a]d Zeppelin. The band’s second album, also released in 1969, continued this theme, featuring the band in period costume posing as aircrew in front of a zeppelin.
As will be seen, Bowie’s album cover - although very different in a stylistic sense - addresses the same issues related to the human/technological balance that is evident in these other works.

On the front cover, Bowie has abandoned the carefully coiffured and styled appearance evident on his first, and is pictured with scraggy, somewhat unkempt, long hair, and clean, unadorned face and neck. The photographic portrait featuring his head, neck and, faintly, the beginnings of his shoulders, is centralised within the cover and surrounded by a fixed pattern of repeating blue dots. The bottom of his neck and shoulders fades out to a thin layer of bright green, exacerbating the evident sense of disembodiment further. His disembodied head is directly face-on to the camera, he makes full and open eye-contact with the viewer, while the lighting reveals the right side of his face and neck from the viewer’s perspective, and shades the left. Unsmiling, his mouth is partially open and his teeth are visible. Closer inspection reveals that his lips are seemingly dry and lined, almost as if cracked, and he wears an expression that is calm, focussed yet alert.
The naturalism of Bowie’s image is completely subverted by the fact that the pattern of dots has been superimposed over the top of him. The background against which the dots are set lightens in hue line by line as they progress from the edges of the cover and move closer to Bowie, and at the sixth line in from the edge the background suddenly turns much lighter, almost white, providing a frame within a frame, of sorts, against which Bowie’s head stands out in clear relief. The dots continue right across his face and head, ever present, but some rendered more darkly than others. Those on the left side of the image are darker and in keeping with the shadow that falls upon that side of his face. Seemingly, the light source for the photograph has come from the right side of the image, and correspondingly the dots are lighter to this side.  

The manipulation of the photographic image undermines any possibility of traditional photographic realism. Barthes suggests that viewing a photograph is as closely aligned as possible to viewing the real image:

What does the photograph transmit? By definition, the scene itself, the literal reality... In order to move from the reality to its photograph it is in no way necessary to divide up this reality into units and to constitute these units as signs, substantially different from the object they communicate... Certainly the image is not the reality, but at least it is its perfect analogon... (Barthes, 1977, p. 17).

Because the blue dots are superimposed over Bowie’s face in the manner described above, the potential for anything near a perfect analogon is totally and purposely undermined. In spite of the unadorned, naturalistic pose and frank expression on the artist’s face, any sense of reality is absent from the image.

A paratext located upon the album cover provides vital information as to the origin and style of the superimposition that covers Bowie’s face and dominates the image. Inside the gatefold cover, that otherwise features only lyrics, the viewer is informed that the cover art is the work of Vernon Dewhurst, but is based upon the work of Victor Vasarely. Indeed, the formulaic, unrelenting repetition of the dots on the cover is a specific art technique called Op art - separate to, yet often associated with, Pop art - which grew in popularity throughout the 1960s and of which Vasarely was at the forefront.

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84 The cover of the cd album release, The Best of David Bowie, 2002, recapitulates and distorts this 1969 cover, with the blue dots surrounding his head now blurred squares, and his face and head comprising a montage of different photographic fragments taken from his many different images throughout his career.

Op art was designed to engage the viewer using optical effects that tricked the eye into seeing the illusion of movement, primarily through the use of repeated geometric patterns and syncopated rhythms.\textsuperscript{86} As Barrett puts it, “The work seems to expand and contract, advance and recede; parts appear to rotate, to leap about the canvas, to appear and disappear, etc.” (1981, p. 219). In effect, a successful Op art artwork should produce both a physiological and a psychological response in the viewer. As Rycroft puts it, “Op art was a generator of perceptual responses, possessing a dynamic quality which provoked illusory images and sensations . . . the viewer was required to be a partner in reciprocal perceptual experiences” (2005, p. 355). And as Reichardt suggests, specifically with regard to Vasarely’s work, the intention of the artist was to create, “ . . . optical ambiguity . . . [Vasarely] has applied the term cinetic art – an art form which is based on multi-dimensional illusion” (1981, p. 241).

One of Vasarely’s best known pieces is *Supernovae*:

Barrett believes that this work combines most of the optical effects inherent to Op art, resulting in an illusory, activated, moving surface that glows in parts, creates after-images as the eye moves around it, appears to move towards the viewer and, in parts, pulsates (1970, pp.63-64). He concludes that:

Supernovae obviously suggests the boundless dark of space and the great galaxies which inhabit it . . . looking at Supernovae is not like looking at an event as a detached observer but rather being drawn into this event and forming part of it. We – the stellar galaxies and ourselves – become elements in that vast, complex, energised system . . . (Barrett, 1970, p. 64).

Vasarely himself suggests of Supernovae, “Man is henceforth defined as a highly diversified summit of a material universe, in which every event, and therefore himself as well, proceeds from the wave-particle duality . . . drawn into the material whirlpool of energy and movement, time and waves” (Victor Vasarely quoted in Barrett, 1970, p. 64).

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Other examples of Vasarely’s work, more akin to Bowie’s album cover, include the following screen prints, *CTA102 no.4*, and *Quasart*:

![Figure 24. CTA102 no.4 by Victor Vasarely (1966)](image)

Although featuring ovals rather than dots, the manner in which they change hue, from light at the edges of the frame to darker in the centre, is similar to that evident in Bowie’s work. A similar technique can be seen in *Quasart*, which uses a repetition of squares with the order of fading reversed, and an X figure conveyed by the manipulation of the lighting:
These works illustrate the cornerstones of Op art, which Barrett summarises thus: “Op art must be (1) abstract, (2) devoid of surface interest, (3) geometrical and hard-edged, (4) of a certain optimum scale” (1970, p. 98).

Clearly, with the image of Bowie’s face intruding so overtly upon the Vasarely-derived Op art image, and thereby creating much surface interest, the potential for optical illusion on the album cover is extremely compromised. Similarly, because the canvas is a 12” x 12” album cover, the scale is fixed and thus viewing the work at any given optimum size is beyond the capability of the medium. Indeed, no matter how well Vernon Dewhurst might have imitated Vasarely’s work, the cover can never truly function as a piece of Op art per se. Yet, Op art is still the dominant stylistic influence and thus requires deeper investigation.

Comparable to Bowie’s album cover is the following advertising image from 1965 which also uses the look of Op art while abandoning the same two formal requirements; that is, the presence of surface interest and the ability to render the image at an optimum size:
While the images are comparable up to a point, the fact that the spots intrude upon Bowie’s face with no letting up of mechanical repetition is a crucial difference. In the Fresh-Start advertising image, the model’s face is to the forefront and firmly retains its position as the feature of the image. The spots appear in a secondary role. In Bowie’s case, the spots are the pre-eminent feature of the image. According to London graphic designer John Coulhart (2008), this Fresh-Start image was a parody of a well-known work, Metamorphosis, by another artist prominent in the establishment of Op art, Bridget Riley.  

88 NB) Coulthart himself parodied the Ponds advertisement in a cover he designed for a 2002 Rhino Records release, Hallucinations - a collection of 1960s pop and psychedelic songs. He has also designed album covers for internationally renowned acts including Hawkwind and Cradle of Filth.
In analyses of Op art, Vasarely and Riley are often discussed together, with a consensus being that the former was very influential in the work of the latter. Rycroft, in analysing Riley’s work, utilises Vasarely’s notion of wave-particle duality in order to situate his subject’s work in the environment of sixties art. Regarding wave-particle duality as a common motif in Op art and Pop art, he defines it thus:

There was an identifiable shift in the understanding of nature and the universe - in part brought on by advances in visual technologies - that finds expression in the everyday environment during this period . . . What was solid could easily become invisible as ‘energy’ and vice versa (Rycroft, 2005, p. 365).

This sentiment matches that of graphic artist Mike McInnerney who designed the album cover for *Tommy*, by The Who, which, in terms of its artistic stylistic alignment at least, is perhaps the most directly comparable to Bowie’s work of all the album releases by major artists in 1969:

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The *Tommy* album cover was a triptych that the viewer could fold out in order for it to be displayed in its entirety, utilising a purpose-created piece of Op art designed by the artist in conjunction with The Who songwriter and guitarist, Pete Townshend. As McInerney recalls:

I had been exploring ways of creating images that could picture my pre-occupation with spiritual ideas. I particularly liked the patterns and rhythms of Op art and its concerns with perception and illusion . . . not for its subversive qualities but rather its transcendental possibilities (McInerney, 2010).

In the story told on this concept album, Tommy is a deaf, dumb and blind boy. With the central protagonist thus deprived of sensory abilities, it seems entirely appropriate that the artist should use an artistic technique that draws attention to the senses through the creation of illusion for the eye of the viewer. As McInerney explains it, “The outer cover has its globe
(Earth/self) hanging in an endless infinite space that can never be touched - only imagined” (McInerney, 2010). The sensory isolation of Tommy is thus effectively visually rendered. 

Although clearly different from Bowie’s cover with regards to formal elements, the utilisation of Op art techniques nevertheless links the two covers in terms of artistic motivation. Each is concerned with visually disrupting, distorting or questioning that which we take for granted; in The Who’s case, our human sensory abilities and, in Bowie’s case, those certainties that were increasingly being questioned regarding human biological limitations and the rapid advancement of technology.

Critical to this discussion, during the period in question, “Op art was often portrayed as an art of high science and technology” (Rycroft, 2005, p. 358). Gaston Diehl summarises Vasarely’s underlying intention in his art, referring not only to the rigidity of his presentation of geometric shapes, but also in the serialisation of his art works: “In launching the idea of “multiples”, he adopts for his own, in favour of art, the principle of the “mass media” . . . He thus overturns the traditional idea of the unique work . . . keeping pace with the progress of industrialization” (1973, p. 92). Jasia Reichardt, too, regards this as central to the artist’s raison d’etre, “Vasarely is committed to the depersonalisation of the artist’s act – he feels that works of art should become available to all and discard their uniqueness” (1981, p. 241).

The text in the Fresh-Start advertising image, “Spots are in”, highlights the popularity at the time for works utilising series of dots and therefore further investigation into art techniques beyond Op art is necessary. There are important and pertinent connections between Op art and the wider field of Pop art in both practice and rationale that must be considered. Most especially, in the current context, this concerns the stated intention to replicate the signs of mass production. As Barrett puts it, “One final feature of Op art, though one which is not confined to Op, is the fact that Op works can be multiplied or mass-produced by mechanical processes” (1970, p. 106). In practice, specifically, the technique involves the simulation of mechanically rendered patterns (Reichardt, 1981, p. 241). Renowned Pop artist Roy Lichenstein, for instance, employed the mechanical repetition of dots at the heart of his methodology in a style derived from the Ben-day dots of comic book illustration. (Lobel, 2002, p. 107 & 155-156)

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Interviewed in 1981, Lichenstein explained that, for him, the utilisation of dots represented, “a comment on the fact that we see everything second or third hand and the way information is disseminated through television: reading dots or newspapers’ printed pictures of little dots” (Lobel, 2002, p. 108).

As was the case with Vasarely, the dots here represent mechanisation and, for Lichenstein, the role of technology in reproducing media (re)presentations of humanity. The primary notion of such art, by Lichenstein and by other Pop artists, is that in order to keep up with the demands brought about by the mass public consumption of celebrity, the mass production of multiple images is the only way to service such a need. Notably, even beyond Pop art and Op art, this

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92 Bowie has been enthusiastic about Pop art throughout his career, and particularly effusive in his praise of Andy Warhol. For Warhol, mechanically reproducing an image over and over upon a canvas was his method of portraying how art could be aligned to, and considered within, the mechanical, impersonal and automated world of commerce. His screen prints of Marilyn Monroe, Jackie Onasis and Elvis Presley, for instance, all exhibit this technique. David McCarthy, for instance, suggests that Warhol’s *Marilyn Diptych*, 1962, replicates “the heated run of a printing press.” See D. McCarthy (2000) *Movements in Modern Art: Pop Art*, London: Tate Gallery Publishing, p. 42. By reproducing starkly rendered images of such celebrities in a production-line simulation, impersonal and mechanical in the extreme, Warhol was suggesting that such stars were themselves transformed into commodities for large-scale public consumption through the process of attaining fame. In effect, they were as commodified as other everyday objects, including those produced by automated technological processes, such as Campbell’s soup cans.
technique was being utilised for exactly the same reason at this time, as the following painting by Niele Toroni demonstrates:

![Imprints of a no. 50 brush repeated at regular intervals of 30cm by Niele Toroni (1967)](image)

In summarising Toroni’s motivation, Anne Rorimer concludes the artist was concerned with reducing evidence of personality and individuality in his works, reasoning that the artist sought to

promote non-authoritarian, yet authoritative, aesthetic meaning free of authorial whim or manipulative virtuosity . . . Barely noticeable variations among the separate imprints preserve the singularity of each brushstroke, which, in their consistent repetition, mimic the mechanical aspect of reproduction (2001, pp. 44-45).

Visual and lyrical analysis suggests the album cover strongly supports the theme of its attendant single, ‘Space Oddity’, which is clearly the most important track as evidenced by its selection as the single release and placement in the all-important first position on the album.93

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93 See ex-manager Kenneth Pitt’s account of how the success of ‘Space Oddity’ dominated Bowie’s career at this time and how, it was hoped, the extra publicity the song had engendered might have afforded the artist further success upon the subsequent album release. K. Pitt (1985) *Bowie: The Pitt Report*, London: Omnibus Press, pp. 144-191.
One of many critics who regard it as such, Stuart Hoggard, terms it, “the showpiece cut of the album” (1980, p. 20).

In ‘Space Oddity’ Major Tom becomes cut-off and alone, not only physically parted from Earth and cut off from humankind but detached too from his spaceship, the last vestige of home, which he helplessly watches as it drifts away leaving him to his fate. He is therefore condemned to a solitary death ‘up there’, his body floating forever in the dark loneliness of space, as the narrative of these excerpts depicts:

Now it’s time to leave the capsule if you dare . . .

This is Major Tom to Ground Control
I’m stepping through the door, and I’m floating in a most peculiar way
And the stars look very different today . . .

Planet Earth is blue and there’s nothing I can do

Though I’m past one hundred thousand miles, I’m feeling very still
And I think my spaceship knows which way to go
Tell my wife I love her very much - she knows

Ground Control to Major Tom - Your circuit’s dead, there’s something wrong
Can you hear me Major Tom? - Can you hear me Major Tom?

It is Bowie’s most powerful expression of alienation on the album, a science fiction nightmare come-to-life. As Mark Rose puts it, such a scenario within “the vast emptiness of interstellar space . . . [creates a] radical sense of alienation, of unbridgeable difference between the human and the non-human worlds” (1981, p. 50).

Bowie’s image on the cover is similarly cut-off. We have no context for him, no evidence by which we might place him in any recognisable physical environment, just the unrelenting and unhuman geometric configuration of mathematically correct rows of dots. Yet, the depiction of ‘Space Oddity’ on the cover is not a literal one; an image along the lines of Telstar by the Tornados would have readily and easily fulfilled this function, had it been desired. Certainly, the encroaching, increasingly dark hues that surround him could perhaps be read as representing the infinite expanse of cold, dark space set to consume Major Tom as he drifts from his spaceship, but, given how easily a more literal depiction could have been achieved, a deeper allegorical interpretation seems much more likely.

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Instead, the cover offers a layered artistic visual representation of the interplay between human beings and science-fiction technology, a topic very much at the forefront of both global interest and the artist himself. Had human beings gone too far and overreached themselves in their thirst for technological advancement? As Bowie warned in the track ‘Memory of a Free Festival’, “Man has pushed beyond his brain”. In response to an interview question regarding the origins of ‘Space Oddity’, Bowie acknowledged:

. . . the publicity image of a spaceman at work is an automaton rather than a human being and my Major Tom is nothing if not a human being. It comes from a feeling of sadness about this aspect of the space thing. It has been dehumanised so I wrote a song-farce about it to try and relate science and human emotion. I suppose it’s an antidote to space-fever, really (David Bowie quoted in Miles [sic], 1980, p. 26).

Bowie effectively removes the sense of awe surrounding space technology by referring to Major Tom’s spaceship as a tin can, while also undercutting the widely-trumpeted, enormous technological triumph of putting a man in space by highlighting instead an all too human interest in the trivialities of celebrity, “And the papers want to know whose shirts you wear”.

The superimposition of dots over Bowie’s very individual, human, unadorned and unmade-up face strongly infers mechanical processing, constituting encroachment by a robotic, dehumanised, automated, technological authority that triumphs over Bowie’s all too fallible human presence. The image raises questions about whether the human component of space exploration, the astronaut, is really a feeling, thinking, emotional human being like any other of his kind, or simply another collection of wave particles configured to act as just another part of the machine that conveys him. Perhaps he is not even equal to, but subservient to, the technology that surrounds him? After all, in this image - so dominated by a representation of that technology - the human presence is relegated to the background, forced to give up the foreground. And this is despite the fact that the technology is of man-made origin. Such a dichotomy is at the thematic core of the song ‘Space Oddity’, and has been addressed by Welch, among others, who suggests:

Real-life American astronauts were about to make their first landing on the moon, and the song seemed to offer a welcome touch of humanity when people were secretly rather alarmed and confused . . . In an age where technology ruled, Bowie’s sad tale of Major Tom sending messages to his wife while sitting in a tin can” was something the public could understand (Welch, 1999, p. 16).
Similar enthusiasm for Bowie’s highlighting of such technological advancement is evident also in a review published at the time of the album’s release:

When he turns his eye to the absurdities of technological society, he is razor-sharp in his observations . . . at a time when we cling pathetically to every moonman’s dribbling joke, when we admire unquestioningly the so-called achievements of our helmeted heroes without wondering why they are there at all (Palmer, 1969, p. 29).

At its worst, the notion of technology ruling over humans threatened the ultimate destruction of humanity, with humans at the mercy of their own creations. In Stanley Kubrick’s 1968 film, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, for instance, from which Bowie has frequently acknowledged borrowing both title and thematic content, Hal the onboard computer calculatedly kills the astronauts that accompany him into space. In ‘Space Oddity’, the technology that bore Major Tom into space just as easily abandons him, as related in the line “And I think my spaceship knows which way to go”, sung as Major Tom and his ship drift apart.

Similarly, through the course of the song ‘Saviour Machine’, a fictitious “President Joe” rises to power, promising to save the world. Ultimately, however, he lets the populace down, handing power over to a supposed utopian super-computer that then proceeds to turn upon its human creators:

The world held his hand, gave their pledge
So he told them his scheme for a saviour machine
They called it the prayer, its answer was law
Its logic stopped war, gave them food
How they adored till it cried in its boredom

Please don’t believe in me, please disagree with me
Life is too easy, a plague seems quite feasible now
Or maybe a war, or I may kill you all

Don’t let me stay, don’t let me stay
My logic says burn so send me away
Your minds are too green, I despise all I’ve seen
You can’t stake your lives on a saviour machine

The fragility and vulnerability of human beings and of the Earth was a topic addressed by many in the arts, particularly in relation to space exploration and the nuclear arms race, the

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primary, technology-driven battlefields of competition during the Cold War. As David Crowley suggests in his summation of a photographic image of the Earth, titled *Earthrise*, taken in 1968 by the astronauts of Apollo 8:

The contrast between the luminous and indisputably living surface of the blue planet [Earth] swathed in clouds and the dusty surface of its satellite [the Moon] prompted a wave of sentiment, with commentators stressing the fragility of the Earth in an age when militarism and affluence, twin buttresses of the Cold War, prevailed. The protective atmospheric layer that supported life on Earth was evidently thin when compared with the dark vacuum of empty space (Crowley, 2008, p. 250).

In the lyrics of ‘The Cygnet Committee’, Bowie paints a frightening view of a technologically-driven conflict in the future, where technology-gone-wrong decimates the human population: “The silent guns of love will blast the sky . . . I see a child slain on the ground as a love machine lumbers through desolation rows ploughing down man, woman . . .” At the same time he acknowledges the failure of the very human-centric and idealistic *raison detre* of the counter culture: “[We] stoned the poor on slogans such as ‘Love Is All We Need’”.

This failure is revisited in ‘Wild-eyed Boy from Freecloud’: “And the missionary mystic of peace/love stumbled back to cry among the clouds”.

Elsewhere on the album Bowie reduces the theme of changes wrought by technology to an everyday, human level, expressing humankind’s growing alienation at even the most fundamental of levels. Of the song ‘God Knows I’m Good’, for instance, in which a woman shoplifter is apprehended while “the cash machines were shrieking on the counter”, Bowie has explained, “Communication has taken away so much from our lives that now it’s almost totally involved in machines rather than ordinary human beings” (David Bowie quoted in Pegg, 2002, p. 72).

Returning to the Marxist roots of alienation as we understand it today, it is a simple matter to literally align Bowie’s concerns directly against Marx’ caution:

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The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, assumes an external existence, but that it exists independently outside himself, and alien to him, and that it stands opposed to him as an autonomous power. The life which he has given to the object sets itself against him as an alien and hostile force (1964, pp. 122-123).

Technology on a grand scale was not solely perceived as a threat however, as such advancement also promised humankind hyper-awareness and intelligence through computers that were potentially more efficient than the biological human brains that had designed them. And so, too, the drugs of psychedelia offered sensory enhancement of sorts. Bowie’s cover can also be read in this light, as O’Brien purports,

The eye-popping geometrics of Bridget Riley and Victor Vaserely delighted trippers . . . who found in them analogues of the ‘visuals’, the abstract, geometric patterns and fractals that appeared in their field of vision during their trips. Something in acid inherently generated these visuals . . . (O’Brien, 2005, p. 352).

The album’s closing track, ‘Memory of a Free Festival’, in particular, suggested exactly this in the line, “Someone passed some bliss among the crowd”. But, in the same song, technology and space exploration themes are also very evident, with direct reference to the existence of aliens:

We scanned the skies with rainbow eyes
And saw machines of every shape and size
We talked with tall Venusians passing through
And Peter tried to climb aboard but the Captain shook his head
And away they soared, climbing through the ivory vibrant cloud

Stevenson holds a similar view with regard to the presence of psychedelia and drug allusions in ‘Space Oddity’, particularly in the line “And I’m floating in most peculiar way”. He concludes, “Viewed in the context of other songs of this period (like the Beatles’ ‘Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds’), the song undoubtedly also refers to the experience of drug taking” (Stevenson, 2006, p.35). Buckley elaborates still further, suggesting:

Heroin was the perfect metaphor for the abandoned, alienated astronaut in Bowie’s ‘Space Oddity’ (the orchestral swoop leading up to the euphoria of the ‘this is ground control to Major Tom/You’ve really made the grade’ section), then the floating ‘nod’ leading to resolution and ‘planet earth is blue and there’s nothing I can do’ (1999, p. 75).
Similarly, Elton John’s 1972 song, ‘Rocket Man’, is widely held to contain drug allusions, particularly in the line “And I’m gonna be high as a kite by then”.  

Despite such thematic threads being given visual life on the album cover, even if subtle rather than overt, Bowie’s manager, Kenneth Pitt, did not approve of Bowie’s choice:

> I had nothing to do with the album’s sleeve and when I saw the final product my heart sank... The blue polka-dot design over the entire front cover was in fact a reproduction of a design by Victor Vasarely... [Allowing] a cut-out picture of David to be superimposed on it suggested a disloyalty to Vasarely and a patronising tribute to David (Pitt, 1985, p. 179).

Presumably, Pitt’s summation of the cover as displaying “disloyalty” is due to the fact that the functionality of Vasarely’s Op art is so very compromised by the Bowie photograph. However, it is hard to discern how the usage of the artwork is “a patronising tribute” to Bowie himself.

In summary then, the dominant theme evident on the front cover is that of alienation. The picture exhibits the tension that existed at the time between technology and humanity, epitomised during the era by the space race but also represented by mechanisation and mass-production, ultimately expressing what Crowley regards as “The duality that was shot through Cold War modernity – the dialectics of progress and disaster and of utopia and dystopia” (2008, p. 251).

In addition, allusions to psychedelia and the hallucinogenic/illusory connotations inherent to the counter cultural are in evidence.

It is now appropriate to turn our attention to the rear cover to see if consistency exists between the music and the remaining album cover artwork.

The rear cover is of a very different style to the front, the sheer busyness of the fantasy image potentially offering a somewhat daunting wealth of visual information to the viewer. Titled inside the gatefold cover as ‘The Depth of the Circle’, the work is credited to Bowie’s friend, artist George Underwood:

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99 See Pegg (2002) The Complete David Bowie, p. 170. ‘Rocket Man’ is also notable for covering similar thematic ground to ‘Space Oddity’, exposing the astronaut as falliby human, and mirroring Bowie’s line, “Tell my wife I love her very much”, with “I miss the earth so much – I miss my wife”.

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The rear cover picture is a montage of fantasy scenes that, for the most part, pertain with varying degrees of directness to specific songs on the album or to specific concerns or experiences of Bowie’s, both past and current. Each of these vignettes will be addressed in turn shortly.

The style of the image bears a close resemblance to a cover created by Underwood a year earlier for Tyrannosaurus Rex, a duo featuring Bowie’s friend and rival Marc Bolan. Titled, *My people were fair and had sky in their hair . . . But now they’re content to wear stars on their brows*, this album was released in July 1968:
The different scenes that make up the overall image here are more intertwined and less clearly delineated than they are upon the Bowie album, where each has its own readily delineated space within the wider canvas. However, the seemingly ad hoc juxtapositions and lack of realistic perspective are clearly evident on each cover. Of the Tyrannosaurus Rex work, the artist recalls, “I tried to understand where he [Bolan] was coming from – the elfin presence, his fondness for Blake and Tolkien. I wanted to illustrate a pot pourri of everything the music was about” (George Underwood quoted in Aston, 2007, p. 40). With the artwork clearly evoking a Tolkien-esque fantasy world, Mark Paytress describes the cover thus:

George Underwood’s artwork for the album sleeve evoked the music perfectly. A netherworld in lilac, metallic blue and green, it roped in a cast of stock fantasy figures—winged masters, Greek gods, galloping horses, maidens with flowing, blonde hair and full breasts, flashes of bright light, serpents, even glimpses of a subterranean hell (Paytress, 2002, p. 108).

In addition to identifying Bolan’s favourite artist, William Blake, and seeking to create a work in that style, Underwood was also inspired by Gustave Doré’s Inferno and Purgatorio woodcuts (George Underwood quoted in Paytress, 2002, p. 109). The most obvious
immediate link between Underwood and these notable art-historical figures, in our current context at least, is that they too are interpreters of the texts of others.\footnote{Indeed, the obligation to adhere to the creative ideas of others is the reason given by Underwood for eventually abandoning album cover artwork: “I’ve always wanted to paint my own ideas rather than interpret other people’s, so I’m out of the game now” (George Underwood quoted in Aston, (2007) ‘Starman’, in \textit{Mojo Classic: The Greatest Album Covers}, London: EMAP Metro Ltd, p. 40).}

The following works by Blake and Doré illustrate similarities in thematic and formal elements present in Underwood’s work.

![Beatrice Addressing Dante from the Car, William Blake (1824-27)](image)

\textbf{Figure 34. Beatrice Addressing Dante from the Car, William Blake (1824-27)}

Robert N. Essick, believing that Blake’s paintings are located within a tradition of pictorial symbolism evoking values and psychological states rather than being simply illustrative, suggests, “Blake’s rejection of conventional perspective tends to emphasize the symbolic, at the expense of the representational, functions of his images – or at least to blur the differences between these functions. . . Blake was deeply concerned with the psychology of pictorial space” (1973, p. 3). Indeed, interpretation of Blake’s symbolism has been the subject of much art historical analysis.\footnote{For a reading of \textit{Beatrice Addressing Dante from the Car}, see R. Lister, (1986) \textit{The Paintings of William Blake}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, plate 59. See also C. Heppner (1995) \textit{Reading Bake’s designs}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.}
Meanwhile, in describing the work of Doré, Amira Zahid suggests that he “has not only captured the wrath of nature and the dramatic intensity of the Scriptures . . . he has also touched the child’s imagination with novel interpretations . . . a place where fiction and non-fiction alike appear real” (2007, p. 7). This merging of reality and fantasy is widely regarded as Doré’s artistic signature, and, as Lisa Small points out, it is why his influence is still felt today in comic and fantasy novel illustrations (2007, p. 9). The *Oxford Companion to Art* has it that, “His work is characterized by a rather naïve and childish love of the grotesque and represents a commercialization of the Romantic taste for the bizarre” (Osborne, 1970, p. 325).

These ingredients; the blurring of the lines between symbolism and realism, and fantasy with reality, are at the forefront of Underwood’s cover artwork. In addition, Underwood has cited as a major influence upon his work at the time the mix of fantasy and realism evident in the work of artists Ernst Fuchs, Rudolph Hausner and Eric Brauer of the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism, describing them as “contemporary visionaries”.

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102 The connection between Doré and modern-day comic illustration, and a description of the artist’s visionary style (here also referred to as “hallucinatory”), is also addressed in “DORE, Paul Gustave Louis Cristophe”, in *Benezit: Dictionary of Artists*, vol 4, p. 1077.

Otto Rapp suggests artists of The Vienna School of Fantastic Realism share commonalities with pop artists and offer, through their employment of boundless exaggeration,

. . . a blueprint to a poetic worldview. The worldview is not sharply bordered . . . but a free-floating organism, open on all sides. As such it is the attempt of a synthesis which combines within the mythos of fantasy the Micro and Macro Cosmos, the Outer and Inner, Light and Dark, Day and Night, Sun and Moon, Heaven and Hell, Religion and Magic (Rapp, 2010).\textsuperscript{104}

This same free-floating quality and abandonment of realistic perspective underpins Underwood’s work.

As he had done with the Tyrannosaurus Rex album, Underwood endeavoured to incorporate scenes from Bowie’s songs within his work, the resultant picture clearly evoking several aspects of the lyrics contained on the recording within.\textsuperscript{105} In addition, Bowie made specific

\textit{Ars Longa}, No.13, Valencia: University of Valencia, pp. 105-111.

\textsuperscript{105} See Pegg (2002) \textit{The Complete David Bowie}, p. 221.
requests of the artist during the commissioning of the work (Aston, 2007, p. 40). Evident in the top right corner are two astronauts seen to be either fighting over a giant pale yellow rose, or else combining their efforts in an attempt to wrest it from the ground. Their efforts are observed by a vast, densely packed crowd of identically attired, human-like, but evidently alien, beings, passively seated upon the bare ground. This part of the image, by virtue of its science fiction nature, creates non-specific thematic allusions to ‘Space Oddity’. Also, somewhat obliquely perhaps, there is relevance to the futuristic scenario of ‘The Cygnet Committee’, in which Bowie sings, “We planted seeds of rebirth and stabbed the backs of fathers, sons of dirt”. The rose may be representative of the seed of rebirth after nuclear war, the fact that it is being clutched by astronauts linking the two primary technological concerns of the Cold War. And once again, the science fiction imagery draws upon ‘Memory of a Free Festival’, where, as previously noted, Bowie describes “Tall Venusians passing through”.

Beneath the feet of the astronauts is a Buddha figure, sitting cross-legged in repose, hands clasped together in prayer. His outline has been literally cut out from the ground upon which he was seated and drawn back through the layer of earth that in turn exposes a portion of Vasarely’s artwork from the front cover. The connotation appears to be that this man, this symbol representing human religiosity and belief systems has been torn from his natural setting. Appropriate reference within Bowie’s lyrics might include, from ‘The Cygnet Committee’, “The thinker sits alone growing older and so bitter . . . We had a friend, a talking man who spoke of many powers that he had. Not of the best of men, but ours. We used him”. Similarly, on ‘Wild-eyed Boy from Freecloud’, Bowie’s assertion that “the missionary mystic of peace/love stumbled back to cry among the clouds”, is given visual support in the placement of the Buddha figure, cut adrift on Underwood’s rear cover. Given the popularity of Buddhism, Zen Buddhism in particular, with the counter culture during the sixties, the presence of this image within the scene seems entirely consistent with its time.

At the bottom right is a cartoon-like version of Bowie himself, the front-on portrait replete with curly golden hair a facsimile of his presence on the front cover, although his eyes here are trained slightly to the left and looking past the viewer rather than making direct contact. He appears wistful or dreamy. Pictured from the chest upwards, he is clad in a futuristic,
round-collared top bearing angular geometric designs upon it. Clothing and skin are both the same steel blue colour, and with just the palest tinge of red to his lips, he too appears alien-like, the single tone making the brightness of his golden hair all the more striking. Bowie’s placement within the frame is significant. He is clearly rendered in the extreme foreground of the picture, positioned in front of all of the other components that make up the overall image - an impression confirmed by the fact that his torso comes so close to that bottom edge of the picture that it cuts him off. This positioning in the foreground, coupled with his wistful, dream-like expression, combine to give the impression that the events taking place behind him are perhaps products of his imagination or his dreams, or that they are events of the past, not of the present or future.

To Bowie’s right, in a surrealist touch, a poached egg floats above the Vasarely-styled background, an incongruous every-day element amid the otherwise fantasy chaos evident all around. This fleeting image of normalcy is immediately countered by small planets floating above it and also to the left of Bowie, accompanied by a small stereotypical-design spaceship with tripod legs.

To Bowie’s left is a strange alien figure with pointed feet, a bright yellow leotard and a bulbous, oversized and bald head. In popular entertainment of the 1950s and 1960s, images of aliens, particularly Martians, were often depicted in these approximate dimensions, physical demonstrations of their evidently superior brain capacity and supreme intelligence (Moffitt, 2003, p. 42). This trading card from the *Mars Attacks* series of 1962 illustrates the point:

![Figure 37. Mars Attacks. Trading card. (1962)](image)
This alien figure on Bowie’s cover does not appear to represent any specific character from the lyrics, yet still contributes considerably to a strong, if indeterminate, science fiction thread. In addition, it contributes to the technological versus human conundrum because, as Moffitt suggests, the nature of the physiological makeup of this quintessential alien figure “is the “evolved” human of the future - all brains (and much “spirit”) and scarcely any body, since technology will (supposedly) release us from physical labor and the kind of usable carcass that goes with it” (2003, p. 42).

Bowie’s ex-girlfriend and co-performer at the Beckenham Arts Laboratory, Hermione Farthingale, is pictured at top left, clearly identifiable when one compares the image to photographs of Bowie and her taken during their lengthy relationship that ended prior to the album release.109

![Figure 38. Hermione Farthingale and David Bowie](image)

Hermione’s placement at the opposite diagonal corner to Bowie is symbolic, the two being estranged both emotionally and pictorially, as far apart as they can possibly be on the album cover. As Bowie clearly enunciates in the track ‘Letter to Hermoine’, “I care for no-one else but you. I tear my soul to ease the pain. . . You cry a little in the dark, well so do I”. Hermoine’s left hand, rendered disproportionately large, reaches out as if to bridge the huge gap between them, and this helps put in context, perhaps, Bowie’s far-off, wistful expression.

Next to the Martian figure, in the bottom-left corner, a figure in a clown costume comforts an old woman. There is no indication of a clown anywhere in Bowie’s lyrics to this album,

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although he had previously performed in a play titled ‘Pierrot in Turquoise’ with the Lindsay Kemp School of Mime, so this image may be a reference to that, with many commentators making much of the influence this experience had upon him.\footnote{See Buckley (1999) \textit{Strange Fascination}, pp. 51-52. Also Sandford (1996) \textit{Bowie}, p. 43. Later in his career, on the \textit{Scary Monsters} album of 1980, Bowie would fully adopt the image of the clown on his album cover art.}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.3\textwidth]{figure39.png}
\caption{David Bowie as mime.}
\end{figure}

As to the identity of the old lady being comforted by the clown, the closest, although fairly inconclusive, allusion is seemingly the lyric in ‘God Knows I’m Good’, in which, “A crowd of honest people rushed to help a tired old lady who had fainted to the whirling wooden floor”. More likely, however, perhaps this image is a symbolic reference to the fact that Bowie’s father had died just four months prior to the release of the album.\footnote{See Buckley (1999) \textit{Strange Fascination}, p. 77.} Given this event, the image may, therefore, be one of Bowie comforting his mother.

At the feet of the old lady a very small figure is evident, hunched over, brush in hand, caught in the act of painting the artwork of the rear cover. This is surely a self-representation of George Underwood himself.\footnote{This seems very likely given that he painted himself in a similar position on the Tyrannosaurus Rex album cover. See Aston (2007) ‘Starman’, p. 40.}

Above the figures of the clown and the old lady, in a sea or lake framed by soaring mountains, a giant fish lays stranded on its right side, the red stripe down its belly indicating a rainbow trout. Nowhere in the lyrics of the album is there any evident explanation for this.
At the centre top of the cover a huge cloud-flanked mountain rises up, extending beyond the limitations of the frame. At the base of this, given enormous prominence by its centrality within the picture overall, a rodent stares directly at the viewer while sitting at the head of a long wooden table, its paws resplendent with long and evidently sharp claws resting upon the tabletop. The rodent is anthropomorphised, wearing a yellow, sleeved robe adorned with a similarly coloured necklace. The clearest reference point to account for the presence of the rodent appears in the track ‘Unwashed and Somewhat Slightly Dazed’, most particularly where Bowie sings “I’m a phallus in pigtails and there’s blood on my nose. And my tissue is rotting where the rats chew my bones”. The inference goes further as the lyric continues, “And the Braque on the wall slides down your front and eats through your belly”. This has an obvious debt to Bowie’s enthusiasm for cubist art, referencing by name artist Georges Braque (1882-1963), but also juxtaposing this with George Orwell’s novel Nineteen Eighty Four. Specifically, the line addresses the scene in the novel where central character Winston Smith is tortured in Room 101 within the Ministry of Love, by having a rat placed in a container upon his bare stomach. Unless he betrays his lover, Julia, which he ultimately does, the rat will gnaw its way through his stomach to freedom.

Flanking the table on either side are opposing trios of long-haired, battle helmeted men staring intently yet passively across the table at each other. Aside from the fact that the men to the left are green and those to the right blue, the figures are almost mirror images of each other. The presence of a cannon upon the centre of the tabletop, still smoking as if having just been fired, lends the scene an air of conflict. The barrel appears to be a cigarette with ash at its tip rather than a true representation of a cannon barrel. Perhaps this is a marijuana cigarette (a joint)? If so, it may act as a symbol of the counter culture, lampooned in the song ‘The Cygnet Committee’: “Stoned the poor on slogans such as ‘Wish you could hear’, ‘Love is all we need’, ‘Kick out the Jams’, ‘Kick out your Mother’, ‘Cut up your friend’, ‘Screw up your brother or he’ll get you in the end’.” Equally the failed hippy ethos is mourned in ‘Memory of a Free Festival’: “Touch. We touched the very soul of holding each and every life. We claimed the very source of joy ran through. It didn’t, but it seemed that way.” Countercultural allusion or not, taken overall it is as if, in this centralised and therefore privileged portion of the wider image, the rodent is presiding over peace talks between two opposing factions engaged in some sort of war. Adding further to this impression, and with a direct similarity to the Doré Inferno image shown earlier, beneath the table are many tightly packed, naked, intertwined, seemingly dead and dying bodies in a haunting, hellish scene that evokes images of WWII holocaust victims and a more general air of cruelty, extreme suffering and
genocide. The inference of this grotesque touch is that they are the (unseen?) victims of the conflict, the little people caught up in the concerns and power struggles of the giant figures that flank them and dwarf them on either side. This sense of conflict is clearly evident in ‘The Cygnet Committee’, and the impression of the formal meeting of some sort of committee within the imagery is quite clear.

Sufficient evidence exists on both sides of the cover to conclude that significant effort has been made to align the visual components of the album to the themes of Bowie’s lyrics. However, as on the first album, the song style employed to carry these themes proved problematic, and herein perhaps lies the reason that it is not generally highly regarded by Bowie scholars and commentators. Jerry Hopkins, for instance, believed, “It was a strange album, showcasing several of David’s musical influences and styles and although the songs were well-written and produced, they seemed a carelessly thrown-together hotchpotch” (1985, p. 52). Other critics, such as Henry Edwards and Tony Zanetta, are damning in their appraisal:

David was still woefully out of touch. The Beatles had become cynical, Bob Dylan had renounced his saviour role and gone country, heavy-metal music was sprouting roots all over England, but there was David playing the role of earnest folk-singer in a hodge-podge of left-over pop-rock and moody Dylan copies (Edwards and Zanetta, 1986, p. 81).


Certainly, in a music stylistic sense, the album is a mix of several influences and lacks any central, unifying base. As many critics have pointed out, a Dylan-esque folk style is certainly discernible, with even Bowie’s manager admitting that he “had some misgivings about the album’s over-all Dylan flavour” (Pitt, 1985 p. 179). Epitomised by ‘Unwashed and Somewhat Slightly Dazed’ with its acoustic guitar and harmonica, the observation seems a salient one. Yet the album also contains a very un-Dylan-like highly personal ballad, in ‘Letter to Hermoine’, an intense appeal to Bowie’s former girlfriend who is also the subject of ‘An Occasional Dream’ (Pegg, 2002, p. 133). And while the story of the woman shoplifter in ‘God Knows I’m Good’ certainly contains thematic elements consistent with the technology theme that Bowie explores so thoroughly, the musical style that carries the theme is far more akin to the music theatre-type vignettes of the first album and thus not at all contemporaneous with Dylan or anyone else at the forefront of the popular music of the day. Even the artist himself
has concluded that the track is “more like my earlier songs” (David Bowie quoted in Pegg, 2002, p. 72).

Stevenson, somewhat more conciliatory in his appraisal, summarises the album thus: “Until the end of the sixties, Bowie was still searching for his own voice” (2006, p. 34).

In summary, in terms of the communicative power and thematic consistency of its cover, this second album is a considerable development from the first. Rather than being concerned with simply introducing the artist to the popular music marketplace and convincing the viewer of his integrity without identifying any specific thematic concerns beyond an implied, shared and generalised youth alienation, here Bowie borrows from contemporary art a means of visually expressing with a high degree of clarity a central, prioritised concern.

The artwork on the two sides of the cover is largely cohesive and thematically unified. The themes depicted are expressive of much of the recorded content housed within, in opposition to what Bowie’s manager, Pitt, suggested at the time when he stated, “Each cover, the front and back, was fairly good, but in style they were poles apart and the essential cohesive whole was ruined” (1985 p.179). Pitt is, of course, correct in pointing out that the two sides were poles apart in a stylistic sense, even despite the obvious unifying device of the continuation of the Vasarely dots from the front to the rear. But, nevertheless, stylistic considerations apart, there is much interrelation between front and back.

The Op art-inspired front cover with its attendant technological and mass production inferences plus destabilising illusory perspective - the functionality of the latter admittedly compromised by the presence of the photograph of Bowie that lies beneath it - is an effective visual critique of the technology versus human theme that underlies the album, as represented most particularly on the pre-eminent track, ‘Space Oddity’. The artwork by George Underwood on the rear cover displays an equally destabilised perspective and a blurring of fantasy and realism. While these qualities are achieved by very different means to those employed on the front, they are rendered in a manner fully consistent with the art historical precursors that influenced the artist, ultimately not only complementing the duality of the front cover but also bringing to visual life various other thematic threads of the recording not present in that other image.
The broader implications of this album cover are significant. Alienation in general, and in particular the theme of technological advancement and its attendant, perceived, threat to humankind, has become highly prioritised. In addition, the intentional blurring of fantasy and realism - an element completely absent on the first album cover - has here been emphatically introduced into Bowie’s work.
Chapter Three - The Man Who Sold the World

More than simply a bookend for a new decade, 1970 was something of an axis point within popular culture and nowhere was this reflected more than in rock music. Philip Ennis regards 1970 as a brief pause in rock’s development, “... marked by the absence of creative movement in rock’s central core” (1992, p. 360). The positivity and sense of youth solidarity - related either directly or indirectly to the counter-culture - that had so marked the 1960s, had largely dissolved. This state of affairs was graphically punctuated by the at times vitriolic and protracted breakup of the Beatles and also by the deaths of two preeminent heroes of the counter culture, Jimi Hendrix (September 18th) and Janis Joplin (October 4th). As Auslander suggests, “rock music could no longer serve as the soundtrack of the Vietnam era hippie counter-culture ... After 1970, rock would have to proceed on different economic, political, social and cultural bases” (2006, p. 9). Meanwhile, Hoskyns, regarding himself as a typical example of post-sixties British youth, describes a cultural climate in which a new youth audience was “screaming for a new musical wave ... to rival the one with which our older brothers and sisters and cousins had been blessed in that vanished swinging world” (1998, p. 5). Indeed, the history of popular music throughout the 1970s is characterised by the development of stylistic fragmentation, Frank Moriarty suggesting, “As the new decade began, the rock world was on the brink, about to tumble into ten long years of furious invention and reinvention” (2003, p. 2).113 During the seventies, many distinct popular music styles, including punk rock, new wave, disco, reggae, ska, and gothic rock, all found audiences within the wider popular music marketplace, while established styles such as progressive rock and heavy metal continued to flourish and develop their own derivations. And crucially, glam rock, the emergent style with which Bowie would soon become intrinsically associated, became established.114

The Man Who Sold The World, released in 1971, was the first of Bowie’s albums to engender widespread attention, even notoriety. However, the attention and controversy garnered was

not particularly reflected in record sales, which remained largely disappointing for both artist and record company. The controversy and notoriety surrounding this album was due almost entirely to the fact that Bowie is pictured on the cover wearing a dress. Pegg, for instance, described the reaction to Bowie’s cross-dressing as “a deeply provocative image, and the most brazen enactment of gender-confusion Bowie had yet undertaken” (2002, p. 226). Ross meanwhile, in an article published soon after the album’s release, described it as “characteristically outrageous” (Ross, 1972, p. 3). Analysis and discussion regarding Bowie’s gender performance(s) are introduced during this chapter, therefore, because this is the first of Bowie’s album covers to feature gender play as a core component. The conscious adoption of a ‘borrowed’ and judiciously constructed persona - a characteristic that would go on to become the cornerstone of Bowie’s methodology - is similarly critical, and exploration into this component co-frames the chapter. Specifically, this new quality within Bowie’s imagery is investigated within the context of the artist’s reference to a specific art historical stylistic precursor, Pre-Raphaelite art.

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115 The album would eventually achieve moderate success - moderate, at least, by the standards Bowie would set in the years to follow. This belated success, coming well after the album’s initial release, came about after it was subsequently re-issued on the coattails of more successful albums in the two years that followed its original inception. Upon that original release in 1971, The Man Who Sold the World was a commercial failure, not reaching the album charts in either the UK or US and having no single release from the work entering the singles chart in either country. Re-released in November 1972, on the back of the success of The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars and the attendant re-release in turn of that album’s predecessor, Hunky Dory, The Man Who Sold the World this time around achieved a placing of number 26 on the UK album chart and number 105 on the US Billboard chart. Tellingly, the cover of this re-release was changed to an obvious cash-in on the Ziggy Stardust success. Abandoning the original sleeve of Bowie in a dress, the cover instead showed a photograph of Bowie in concert in Ziggy Stardust costume and pose. Nevertheless, the Bowie-in-a-dress image from the original album cover has come to be regarded as the first truly defining image of his career and one that receives particular attention in academic and popular critiques of the artist.


No album released by any other major rock act during 1971, or in the previous year, bore a cover that resembled that of Bowie’s third album. However, while quite different in terms of
style and composition, there are covers imbued with singular qualities that are comparable to some degree. For instance, the feminisation of Bowie’s image does bear some relation to a 1971 album cover by US artist, Alice Cooper.\footnote{117 Notably, although not generally regarded as a glam rock act at this point, Alice Cooper would increasingly becoming associated with the style as the decade progressed, being frequently categorised alongside Bowie in both the general and music presses.}

![Image of Alice Cooper album cover](image)

\textbf{Figure 41. Love it to Death by Alice Cooper, 1971.}

Perhaps the most obvious synergy between this and Bowie’s cover lies in the item of clothing - evidently a woman’s thin-strapped top - worn by the musician at the top of the picture, as feminine a signifier as Bowie’s dress. In almost all other considerations, however, the two album covers are quite different.\footnote{118 For instance, the countenance of the Cooper band is one of aggression and defiance and what can best be described as an overtly macho threat complete with sexual suggestiveness; the latter conveyed in part by the lead singer’s finger poking through the material of his garment in simulation of his penis. Bowie’s countenance, in contrast, is one of relaxed, reserved passivity.}

Also inferring a similar disruption to stereotypical gender signifiers is the title of the album \textit{The Low Spark of High Heeled Boys}, by the band Traffic. However, the album cover imagery
did not in any way link with the gender disturbance suggested by the title, instead consisting of an Op-art styled transparent cube with a checker-board base and sky and clouds above.

Figure 42. The Low Spark of High Heeled Boys by Traffic, 1971.

Simply, the cover of Bowie’s third album bears very little resemblance to any other cover produced at the time.

An iconographic description of the image finds Bowie laying back upon a couch or chaise longue that is draped with a light blue covering made from shiny fabric, perhaps silk. He is positioned on his right side facing the viewer, his right arm and shoulder supporting him as he leans on the covered arm of the couch. Stretched out to his left, his leg is visible from just below the knee with his right one tucked in behind it. Bowie wears a silver-coloured dress made from shiny, shimmery material, perhaps silk or satin, that has blue floral designs upon it and extends down below his knees. The design is close fitting to the waist and then balloons out considerably below this. It is held together by two fastenings at the chest, which nevertheless leave quite a gap of skin visible from his neck down to almost his naval. He wears long black boots that seemingly reach as high as his knees. In his right hand he holds a playing card between his fingers, his wrist cocked and his hand angled toward the floor which is strewn with numerous other playing cards lying both face up and face down, scattered seemingly at random. His left arm is held above his head, angled at the elbow, and his fingers touch the crown of his head in what seems a contemplative, absent-minded and unconscious gesture. He wears a silver metal bangle on this arm, positioned at the forearm midway
between wrist and elbow. His hair is long, brown, and falls in curls either side of his face and down below his neck with a fringe swept over the right eye. With his eyes open and staring straight at the viewer, the expression on his face is serious, studied, and he is evidently deep in thought.

Compared to what had gone before, this highly theatrical and stylised cover is a radical departure. Certainly, in his recordings prior to *The Man Who Sold The World* Bowie had played theatrical roles within his musical performances. As discussed, the first two albums are full of examples, albeit confined to individual songs, of cameo appearances that portray a series of disparate characters all played in the first-person by the artist himself. But nothing resembling the adoption of a persona had been evident within his visual imagery. On *The Man Who Sold The World*, however, immediately obvious to the viewer is the fact that he is consciously and blatantly presenting an archetype, effectively imbuing his work with visual imagery borrowed from an influence well outside the norm for popular music of the time. In this case, and as will be discussed at some length, the influence is drawn from art history: Pre-Raphaelite art.119

The most startling initial observation upon viewing this cover is that Bowie blurs gender signification by wearing one of the primary female gender signifiers, a dress. As Elin Diamond reminds us, “Gender refers to the words, gestures, appearances, ideas and behaviour that dominant culture understands as indices of feminine or masculine identity”.120

The opinions of critics as to what might be gleaned from Bowie wearing a dress are wide-ranging. For instance, in commenting upon both this album cover and the next, Jon Savage suggested:

The sleeves of *The Man Who Sold the World* and *Hunky Dory* set the correct note of ambiguity . . . This really was news. Homosexuality, if not bisexuality, had always been a part of pop, but this was the first time, five years after legalization, that any star came right out and said it (Savage, 1980, pp. 172-173).


While Savage is initially correct in pointing out the note of ambiguity that the image presents, his lack of discernment between matters of gender signification and of sexuality is problematic. Some discussion is required in order to explore Bowie’s representations of gender. What might have been the ramifications for the viewer of Bowie’s cooption of female clothing? Regarding the implications of the manipulation of established gender signifiers, Laurence Senelick believes:

... gender tokens are magical, and to abuse them will transform and denature the abuser. It confuses signer with signified, in its belief that the clothes which betoken gender also constitute it. This is only natural, since the primary social role of clothing, distinct from its utilitarian functions of warmth and protection, is to render the gender of the wearer discernable at a glance (Senelick, 2000, pp. 1-2).

In choosing to dress in this manner for the album cover, Bowie immediately undermined and destabilised any such discernment. Anne Canny-Francis et al. warn, “What is clear about the definitions and discussions of gender and sex is that ideas about sexuality are so immediately tied up with gender, that it is sometimes difficult to see where one ends and the other begins” (2003, p. 7). Before delving deeper into the ramifications of Bowie’s gender play, therefore, it is necessary to clarify some terms of reference. As Marion Leonard points out, feminist theory has clearly differentiated the terms sex (male and female) and gender (masculinity and femininity) (2007, p. 1).121 With one’s sex being biological and gender determined by a process of social construction, it is gender alone that is pertinent to this discussion because Bowie is indisputably male. No-one, including the artist himself, has ever suggested otherwise. He is a male rock artist whose name is clearly visible upon his album covers so that viewers are left in no doubt as to whose image they hold before them. Also, and as will be discussed in relation to each cover where appropriate, regardless of the manner in which he visually blurs gender boundaries, his images still clearly retain evidence of his maleness.122

Similarly, questions regarding the artist’s sexual practices and sexual preferences are of limited relevance, despite such speculation having been a frequent point of interest in the popular and music presses. While these factors may well be as much a social construction as gender is,123 Bowie’s sexuality - actual or fabricated - is not a primary point of issue in this

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121 See also A. Oakley (1985) Sex, Gender and Society, Aldershot: Gower Publishing, p. 16.
122 In addition, the title of the album in question, The Man Who Sold the World, is a paratext that helps declaim the artist as male.
study. Rather, it is the gender signification evident in his imagery that remains the primary topic for discussion.124

Judith Butler has stated, “it becomes impossible to separate ‘gender’ from the political and cultural intersections in which it is invariably produced and maintained” (1990, p. 3). This is certainly the case, and each production - we might equally term it a performance - must therefore be considered in the light of its unique environment because, as Chris Brickell believes, [gender] “performances are always performed by some one(s), although those ones’ selves are reflexively constructed with reference to others and to the symbolic resources provided by the surrounding culture and social structures” (2005, p. 39).125 This is a view similar to that of sociologist Erving Goffman (1979), who suggested,

> What the human nature of males and females really consists of, then, is a capacity to learn to provide and read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting those pictures . . . One might just as well say there is no gender identity . . . only a schedule for the portrayal of gender (1979, p. 27).

This approach, a purposeful rebuttal of essentialism, is one taken also by Philip Auslander who has undertaken the deepest appraisal of gender presentation in theatrical rock music to date.126 Yet, approaching the analysis of Bowie’s gender displays requires still further refinement because not only is gender commonly held to be a performative construction per se, in this case the subject is operating in a clearly delineated performative situation within the performing arts.127 Within this distinct context then, Richard Schechner highlights the potential impact of gender play, suggesting,

> those who refuse to perform their assigned gender roles [become] . . . at least an oddball. Unorthodox gender performatives are not merely affronts to patriarchy; they challenge long-standing Western philosophical distinctions between appearance and reality (2002, p. 133).

While arguing the need to consider performances of gender that occur within the performing arts within a unique framework located outside the everyday, Laurence Senelick warns, “The performance of gender is doubly fraught with implication when it moves from the everyday sphere onto the stage, where presentation invariably entails representation” (1992, p. ix). It is within this heightened, theatrical performative context, then, that I will consider Bowie’s gender performances, a context perhaps best summed up by Millie Taylor who suggests, “What is revealed is a third space, a fantasy ‘other’ that erases the boundaries between the dualism of masculine and feminine, that is simultaneously neither and both” (2007, p. 116).

Further, however, a brief reminder of the commercial, advertising function of an album cover is prudent at this point, because, as Goffman reminds us, “Commercial pictures often link a product to a celebrity, selling them both” (1979, p. 11). The image in question is indeed a commercial picture, and one charged with selling a product - the album - in the first instance. However there also exists another, allied, what one might call a ‘parent-product’ present: Bowie himself - a rock artist looking to establish, or maintain, a fan (client) base. Bowie himself is the core ‘product’. So, while heeding Senelick’s caution and accordingly regarding Bowie’s performances of gender within a performing arts framework, yet a third element is simultaneously at play: commercialism and advertising. This further distances his performances from those of everyday life. Goffman draws a direct parallel between advertising and theatre, believing that in each environment the viewer is fully cognizant that the characters or protagonists on show belong to a make-believe, dramatised realm (1979, p. 13). Given this certainty, the following assertion by Senelick carries even more validity: “The actor is concerned with conveying not a personal code of gender but a set of signals that are at once more abstract and more graphic than those transmitted in standard social intercourse” (1992, p. ix). In both theatre and in advertising then, more-so than in everyday life, it is expected that gender performances are over-loaded to a degree; that is, exaggerated to ensure the successful conveyance of a predetermined message for whatever ends the advertiser/actor wishes. Or as Goffman puts it, employing a strategy that, taken to its absolute extreme, parallels “the obvious fact that an individual can fake an expression for what can be gained thereby” (1979, p. 7).

It should also be noted that the performing arts offer an environment in which gender performances can be embarked upon experimentally and in (relative) safety. Hawkins, for

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instance, suggests Bowie’s gender play was carried out within “a world of show business where it is relatively acceptable” (2007, p. 208). Senelick, meanwhile, believes, “the stage offers licence and liberty, not anxiety and crisis . . . Stage-gendered creatures are chimeras which elude the standard taxonomies and offer alternatives to the limited possibilities of lived reality” (2000, p. 11). While this is almost certainly the case, nevertheless Bowie’s field of endeavour, rock music, had its own prescriptive codes of gender normalcy in place and, as we shall see, placing himself at odds with these codes was not without both personal and professional risk.

On the cover of The Man Who Sold The World, Bowie engages in gender play by cross-dressing; that is, he wears a dress, a garment that is one of the most obvious female gender signifiers. In addition there is also a bangle evident on his right wrist and he wears long boots, neither of which is gender-conclusive in their own right, yet adding grist to the mill when taken into consideration along with the dress. Ruth Padel believes, “Cross dressing is ancient and sexy. When male rock stars borrow . . . from female illusion, some antique theatrical power is at work” (2000, p. 327). Yet Bowie is clearly not trying his utmost to convincingly impersonate a woman on the album cover. He is not trying to fool the viewer into thinking he is a woman because, had that been the case, the masquerade could have been taken much further, employing the use of makeup, for instance. The lengths to which Bowie did not go, therefore, constitute a very significant feature in the analysis of the image. The purposeful non-attempt at full female impersonation is a topic addressed by Marjorie Garber, who sees this variation on cross-dressing as a statement in its own right, suggesting, “entertainers who do not overtly claim to be ‘female impersonators’ . . . may in fact signal their cross gender identities onstage, and this quality of crossing . . . can be more powerful and seductive than explicit ‘female impersonation’” (1992, p. 354).

Senelick regards the act of cross-dressing as “the paradigm for acting since it directs the attention to the enigma of the actor’s body . . .” (2000, p. 8). Indeed, in looking at Bowie’s image on the cover, the dress in particular is seemingly so out of place on his otherwise clearly male form that it effectively draws attention towards his fundamental maleness rather than diverting attention away from it. This is a point made by Van M. Cagle, who describes Bowie’s garment as “a long floral velvet-gown that was tapered and simplified so as to show off his “manliness” (1995, p. 131). The presence of the dress, therefore, is the measure by which the masculine aspects of the image can more easily be discerned. We see that the open

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front of the dress shows no hint of breasts, and his male facial features, full, heavy eyebrows etc, are unadorned and unaltered. Simply, despite the initial ruse of both pose and clothing, it is clear after barely more than a glance that he is not a ‘real’ woman at all, and nor is he a convincing facsimile. Walser suggests, “Images of masculine display are available to be construed in a variety of ways” (1993, p. 115). In this case Bowie’s gender play renders him ultimately male in the eye of the viewer.

Bowie’s carefully compiled and monitored performance of gender has been critiqued to some extent by other critics, with several attributing it to the artist’s broad experience in theatre performance. It is certainly significant that Bowie’s arts background included performances with the Lindsay Kemp Mime Company, which drew upon elements of kabuki theatre in the construction of their performances (Buckley, 1999, pp. 51-54). The manner in which he purposely retained a central maleness despite outward female signification parallels the onnagata of Japanese kabuki theatre, where, as Katherine Mezur suggests, “Onnagata perform their gender roles by intersecting their male bodies with their stylized onnagata acts, producing an unstable composite” (2005, p. 137).

Stephenson, who similarly emphasises the influence of theatre upon Bowie’s performative style, offers a useful observation that takes into account the point that women are often regarded as passive recipients of the male gaze. He compares this to Bowie’s studied pose:

Had Bowie positioned his gaze away from the camera, this would have converted him into an object to be looked at. Hence the ambivalence of the image is that even while Bowie is pictured wearing a dress, he does so in a way that retains his masculinity (Stevenson, 2006, p. 44).

Situating the artist strictly within the rock music context of the day, Stan Hawkins provides a very useful summation of both the artist’s goal and method:

Bowie, at the beginning of his career, challenged gender norms . . . Resurrecting androgyny and transvestism through intellectual stylishness, Bowie not only rejected heteronormative constraints, but also heaped scorn on the machismo that typified the rock music of the day (Hawkins, 2009, p. 18).

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131 See also L. Senelick (2000) *The Changing Room: Sex, drag and theatre*, New York: Routledge, p. 11. NB Over the course of the next three years, the image Bowie would formulate for himself during his glam-rock work would incorporate an obvious and self-acknowledged debt to kabuki theatre, and this critical influence is discussed more fully at that point of the thesis.
Certainly, Bowie’s image is in direct opposition to the obvious, overt masculinity displayed by other rock performers of the day, especially those who have come to be termed ‘cock-rockers’, Led Zeppelin’s Robert Plant, or The Who’s Roger Daltry, for instance.

![Figure 43. Robert Plant](image1) ![Figure 44. Roger Daltrey](image2)

In 1978 Simon Frith and Angela McRobbie described the cock-rocker image as one that featured “male bodies on display, plunging shirts and tight trousers, a visual emphasis on chest hair and genitals . . .” (1978, p. 374). Such qualities can be commonly seen in many images from the day of Plant, Daltrey and other rock performers. Susan Fast provides a more detailed description of Plant exhibiting a pose that she describes as typical for cock-rock:

> . . . legs apart, straight, and firmly grounded, bare-chested, pelvis jutting outward, and right hand raised, bent at the elbow, finger pointed . . . a gesture that underscores his confident pose, the raised and pointed finger especially stressing the importance or urgency of what he has to say (“let me have your attention; listen to me; this is what’s important”). The eye is drawn to Plant’s genitals because his pelvis is thrust forward, he has on tight jeans that outline his sex . . . (Fast, 2001, p. 184).

While viewers fixing their gaze upon Daltrey, Plant or Bowie will ultimately almost certainly reach the same conclusion regarding the biological sex of each artist despite the vastly polarised gender signifiers evident, in Bowie’s case the conclusion is arrived at via rather more problematic means. Bowie requires that his audience work through a series of conundrums that allow them no easy assumptions. Rupert Till provides an apt explanation of
this difference: “Cock rock presents itself as a simple masculinity . . . a safe, ‘straight’-forward context in which they [the audience] are not presented with the complexities of real-life sexuality” (2010, p. 21). Bowie, then, problematises gender displays within rock music by presenting exactly such complexities.

Referring to the artist’s employment of borrowed feminine signifiers in place of stereotypical male ones, David Buckley suggests Bowie “replaced clichéd displays of masculinity with his own” (1999, p. 167). And as Butler points out, oppositional gender signification may be displayed in certain circumstances without upsetting the central stability of a subject’s gender image (1990, p. 186). Auslander also notes this phenomenon with specific regard to Bowie when he suggests that, “behaviours coded as feminine can be enacted by men as well as women” (2006, p. 140). Herein lies the key to Bowie’s gender play on this album cover: he blatantly went against the heteronormatively loaded, male gender image expected of a rock performer, but reinvented himself only to the extent whereby he could disturb the status quo without losing ownership of a, seemingly, inherently more authentic image of himself beneath the ‘act’. This position goes some way to bearing out Hawkin’s assertion that an artist can simultaneously appear as both a pop phenomenon and a ‘real’ person (2009, p. 11). Crucially, by recreating the style of a historical artwork, Bowie secured for himself a justifiable explanation for his seemingly transgressive act. Cross-dressing of such a context-specific nature, along with its attendant justification, is addressed by Dave King, who suggests:

The dividing line between normality and deviance is sometimes hard to draw . . . [cross-dressing may have] the effect of retaining the act or actor within the bounds of normality, without detracting from its news value. [It] may be explained by simply mentioning certain contexts . . . and the actor is thereby absolved from any implications of deviance (King, 1996, p. 40).

On one level, then, Bowie’s cross-dressing within this specific context need not be seen as deviant per se, because he is (perhaps) only playing, as such. But this explanation somewhat underestimates the potential ramifications of the act. If, and as I contend, he was offering a fluid model for gender representation based upon reinvention, then nevertheless this was still groundbreaking and new within the rock music context in which it occurred. That a rock

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132 Auslander also claims the opposite phenomenon is the case with glam rock artist Suzi Quatro. See Auslander (2006) Performing Glam Rock, p. 222.

133 Notwithstanding the fact that other artists flirted with feminising their images at times, including Mick Jagger in his performance with the Rolling Stones at Hyde Park in 1969 in which he wore a flowing, dress-like garment over his trousers. Similarly, for just one other example, The Who drummer Keith Moon would at times wear a dress. Yet never had a performer invested in such a guise in the wholehearted manner that Bowie did. Senelick regards the antics of Jagger and Moon, etc, as mere exhibitionism, carried out by established stars whose sexual
performer should present himself in a way that so obviously went against the codes of gender presentation of the day is highly significant. In effect, he is alienating himself, forging an element of uniqueness that he hitherto lacked.

Effectively, there is a context-within-a-context at play in the image, a situation that warrants significant evaluation because the Pre-Raphaelite parody accesses a code of conventions in its own right. Buckley addresses this in suggesting that the album cover “portrays Bowie with flowing golden locks and wearing a full-length dress (his Symbolist Gabriel Rossetti Pre-Raphaelite look, claimed Bowie)” (1999, p. 102). As Buckley further observes, Bowie was open in his acknowledgement of this influence for the cover, a point that has been noted by several other critics as well (1999, p. 102).134 Exactly which painting by Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828 - 1882) Bowie was attempting to parody is uncertain, if indeed there was any specific work at all. Arguably there are elements of several paintings to be found in the album cover, an appraisal of Rossetti’s works suggesting two in particular that may have been influential, Lady Lilith and Regina Cordium/The Queen of Hearts:

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Figure 45. *Lady Lilith*. Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1866-68.

Figure 46. *Regina Cordium (The Queen of Hearts)* Dante Gabriel Rossetti, 1860
Bowie is feminised by more than simply his cross-dressing; the setting in which he is observed feminises him to a large degree also. It is an intimate, private scene, a bedroom, lounge or parlour, perhaps, where the subject is seen to be relaxing while engaged in a manner not easily associated with being subjected to the observation of others. Such privacy, Leppert remind us, is the privilege of women, because, “men belong in the world; they are to be seen in public, not private” (2007, p. 63).

Bowie’s positioning feminises him further. Reclining, relaxing upon a luxurious, soft surface, he participates willingly in a historically objectified role that is almost exclusively reserved for representations of women. He is idle, doing nothing except toy with the playing cards, and even in this endeavour he is simply trifling with them and seemingly not playing a ‘proper’ game. This idleness, as Leppert observes, is a strongly feminine association, because “idleness is not a culturally sanctioned activity for men” (2007, p. 109). Moreover, and disturbingly, he looks out at the viewer confidently and knowingly, making full eye contact despite being observed in a markedly atypical position for a male, one that should, ostensibly, and particularly given his mode of dress, make him uncomfortable. Leppert makes a similar observation in his analysis of Lucian Freud’s Painter and Model (1986-87), a more extreme example, certainly, where the male subject of the work is seen unabashedly reclining naked on a couch, legs spreaedagled and genitals on show, before the gaze of the clothed female subject in the scene. The incongruity of the scene makes us search for a subtext, or, as Leppert puts it, “The discomfort this causes leads us to look carefully; doing so can lead to something more profound” (2007, p. 220). In Bowie’s case, noting the incongruity of clothing, pose and setting, we are indeed obliged to look further into the image to search for contextual justification. In this case, and as will be discussed shortly, ready justification can be found in the fact that the image is a parody.

Bowie’s image has the appearance of a femme fatale figure, if a rather inexact one. Camille Paglia believes a dreamy expression is central to Rossetti’s archetype femme fatale figure, an archetype also imbued with inherent gender instability, drawing upon, “the hermaphrodite remoteness of the beautiful boy, the cruel perfection of solipsistic beauty . . . the brooding girl-boy” (1991, pp. 492-493). Certainly, Bowie’s gender instability and evident remoteness is in keeping with this. Similarly, in assessing Rossetti’s depictions of the femme fatale stereotype with a particular emphasis on Lady Lileth, Virginia M. Allen regards the figure as embodying two qualities: eroticism and danger, the first represented by the facial expression - a dreamy promise of sexual pleasure - and the second by the entrapment potential of the long
Bowie’s expression, indeterminate and remote in spite of the full eye contact with the viewer, can hardly be said to be dreamy in the sense typical of the femme fatale, nor particularly does it carry any evident promise of sexual pleasure. But the emphasis upon his long hair, focussed by virtue of the positioning of his hand, is certainly in keeping with the ideal. Beyond Rossetti, a comparison of the image to representations of the femme fatale figure within the wider realm of Pre-Raphaelite art reveals pertinent synergies. Jan Marsh considers the stereotypical subject to be:

... set with large, lustrous eyes and surrounded by a mass of loose hair, looking soulfully out of the canvas. Neither sad nor cheerful, but somehow charged with an intense, internal passion, this face has a brooding, haunting quality that engages attention but remains distant, remote, impersonal (Marsh, 1985, p. 1).

This description fits the Bowie image rather better, although Marsh’ description of the eyes becomes problematic. Perhaps, then, and despite what Bowie himself and also the critics have said, the homage to Rossetti - at least in terms of the subject if not the setting - may be a more general Pre-Raphaelite stylistic influence rather than being aligned to a specific Rossetti painting.

The Pre-Raphaelite femme fatale figure carries an inherent quality of alienation that is clearly of thematic interest and value to Bowie. As noted above, Marsh describes the subjects as being distant, remote and impersonal, common hallmarks of alienated subjects. The Pre-Raphaelite artists’ depictions of the femme fatale called into question “normative and stereotypical understandings of women... by portraying an outcast and a virtuous person in one, blending and challenging the contemporary conventional binaries of the fallen woman and the Virgin Mary” (Andres, 2005, p. 46). The changing and dichotomous role of women in Victorian England has been widely examined, and it is held that the art of the Pre-Raphaelites has captured this tension, with “striking images[s] of the sensual but psychologically alienated relation between men and women explored by these painters and poets” (Helsinger, Lauterbach-Sheets and Veeder, 1983, p. 147).

Hedgecock has it that Rossetti in particular emphasised this uneasy relationship by painting his femme fatales “with masculine features, implying that the subject positions of women

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136 Bowie’s eyes could surely have been enhanced satisfactorily through the use of makeup, eye shadow, mascara etc, had a closer and more accurate parody been the goal. Possible reasons for this self-limitation within the parody are discussed shortly.
change from the frail domestic ideal commonly portrayed in early-mid-nineteenth-century fiction . . . to more decadently epic figures of women in art beginning in the 1860s” (2008, p. 9). Patrick Bade, meanwhile, suggests, “the curves of breasts, waist and hips are hidden or suppressed” (1979, p. 13).

Such components within Rossetti’s work have clear synergy with Bowie’s cover, and the in-built quality of alienation is clearly a valuable one to the artist. However, in terms of the picture’s composition it is possible that the cover owes a more direct debt to something other than a painting. Consider the following excerpt from one of Rossetti’s poems, The Card Dealer:

The gold that's heaped beside her hand
In truth rich prize it were
And rich the dreams that wreathe her brows
With magic stillness there
And he were rich who would unwind
That woven golden hair
Around her, where she sits, the dance
Now breathes its eager heat
And not more lightly or more true
Fall there the dancers’ feet
Than fall her cards on the bright board
As 'twere a heart that beat . . .

Her fingers let them softly through
Smooth polished silent things
And each one as it falls reflects
In swift light-shadowings
Blood-red and purple, green and blue
The great eyes of her rings . . .

Thou see’st the card that falls, she knows
The card that followeth
Her game in thy tongue is called Life
As ebbeth thy daily breath
When she shalt speak, thou’lt learn her tongue
And know she calls it death

The references to “her woven golden hair” and the description of the cards laying scattered upon the floor, each one falling from her hand in turn, are elements easily discerned in Bowie’s cover. Equally, three of the four colours that Rossetti names, “blood-red and purple, green and blue,” predominate in the cover; the red curtaining framing the upper left and right corners of the image, the purple and blue shiny silk/satin look of the material upon which Bowie lays, and the blue floral designs upon his dress. One might also discern significant association between poem and image in the fact that the card Bowie holds is identical to the
final card that Rossetti describes in his poem. Identified in the last line, “And know she calls it Death”, the card in question is the King of Diamonds.\textsuperscript{137}

There is another aspect of Pre-Raphaelite art practice that clearly does not fit with Bowie’s parody; that is, the degree of realism in the rendering. The clarity of the photographic image on the cover of \textit{The Man Who Sold the World} is far below that which the camera would have been capable of capturing during the photo session.\textsuperscript{138} The shot used on the cover is poorly defined and its soft-focus effectively projects a blurred, brush-stroke appearance, surely part of Bowie’s proclaimed parodistic intention and designed to give the impression that the cover was painted and not photographed. But in so doing, he actually renders the parody rather un-Pre-Raphaelite, because authentic Pre-Raphaelite paintings were renowned for their precise attention to detail in order to satisfy the intention of the painters to be so realistic that they could exceed the limitations of the medium. As Smith believes:

\begin{quote}
art critics could not help but compare the intense detail of Pre-Raphaelite paintings with that attained by photography . . . such excessive concentration on a particular detail created a sense of hyper-reality that went far beyond accepted notions of realism in art (Smith, 2004, p. 15).
\end{quote}

One result of this very high degree of realism in such paintings was that background detail was no longer subverted in order to minimise viewer distraction, a traditional technique designed to direct the viewer’s gaze upon the desired focal object(s) in the foreground, that would be rendered with far more precision.\textsuperscript{139} Smith describes this Pre-Raphaelite cornerstone as “a striking reversal of standard compositional procedures in painting by according natural details equality with the main figurative element” (2004, p. 15). In Bowie’s picture, while he is rendered with a reasonable degree of clarity, the objects behind him, such as the statuettes and empty vase to the viewer’s right or the vase of flowers to the left, are blurred and indistinct. Even the King of Diamonds that Bowie holds - a symbol that would have been presented with much attention to detail in a Pre-Raphaelite painting - is indistinct.

\textsuperscript{137} Traditionally, the King of Diamonds is known as the suicide, or death, King. The degree to which any of this loaded historical information might have been apparent to Bowie’s audience, however, is a wide-open question.  

\textsuperscript{138} The 1999 re-release of the album, digitally remastered on CD, includes in its accompanying booklet other images from this session, and it is very evident that the photographs taken were of a high resolution.  

\textsuperscript{139} Allen suggests that, in the case of Lady Lileth, the busy, carefully rendered detail of the background contributes much to the effectiveness of the work: “So intense and crowded is the background that the heat and boudoir scents seem to spill out of the canvas”; V. M. Allen (1984) ‘One Strangling Golden Hair: Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s Lady Lileth’ in \textit{The Art Bulletin}, 66(2), p. 291.
Instead of utilising the high degree of photographic realism that was available, and notwithstanding a likely level of dissolution of the image occurring as a natural part of the mass-printing process, Bowie’s picture is purposely transfigured in order to underline the impression that the cover is a painting. While the Pre-Raphaelites’ goal was to make their paintings not look like paintings, Bowie’s aim here was exactly the opposite, and the lack of definition in the image overall, despite being a photograph, is less than that achieved by Rossetti and his peers.

Perhaps his utilisation of the Pre-Raphaelite art style may be based more upon the wide-ranging, inherent paradoxes associated with the style than anything else. As Barringer states:

> the dynamic energy of Pre-Raphaelitism arises through the paradoxes - the internal polarities and conflicts - which can be detected in almost every work. Pre-Raphaelite styles combine past and present, historicism and modernity, symbolism and realism, while the works represent the tensions between city and country, men and women, worker and capitalist, coloniser and colonised which characterised the Victorian era (1999, p. 19).

Given Bowie’s obvious knowledge when speaking of matters pertaining to art history, it is almost certain he would have known what the Pre-Raphaelites stood for, what they were trying to communicate through their work, and the means by which this was achieved. Bowie was, both at this time and earlier, an interdisciplinary artist with a wide-ranging interest and active involvement in many forms of media. Simon Frith suggests, “By the start of the 1970s, Bowie was working as a self-conscious artist (a songwriter, a poet, a mime, and actor) on the fringes of the new world of the British rock elite” (1988, p. 134). Hoggard regards the cover of The Man Who Sold The World to be “a flash-back to Bowie’s art school training” (1980, p. 22). Although Bowie never formally attended an art school, Buckley believes, “the seriousness of his intent, and the interest in eliding cultural art forms, whether it be painting, music, dance, mime or whatever, came primarily from the art-school tradition” (1999, p. 28).

It is certain that Bowie identified with the art school graduates identified and explored by Frith and Horne in *Art into Pop*, in which the authors assert that “art school graduates are petit-bourgeois professionals who, as pop musicians, apply ‘high art’ skills and identities to a mass cultural form” (1987, p. 2). Bowie’s cooption of Pre-Raphaelite imagery can easily be seen in this light. In so doing, he is juxtaposing opposites in his work; the supposedly high art practice of fine painting with the common or low art practice of popular music. Aligning Bowie directly with the art school-trained rock musicians of the late sixties, Frith and Horne
further credit him with “revitalizing the idea of the Romantic artist in terms of media fame” (1987, p. 116), an observation that is pertinent.

In the two years leading up to the release of *The Man Who Sold The World*, Bowie had certainly been experimenting with other media, most notably *avant garde* theatre and mime. In partnership with a friend, Mary Finnigan, he formed the short-lived ‘Beckenham Arts Lab’ for the promotion of both his own work and the work of other artists from all disciplines. He also joined the Lindsay Kemp Mime Company where, under the tutelage of Kemp himself, Bowie was taught the rudiments of mime and dance. Kemp was one of the leading British proponents of an *avant garde* or ‘alternative’ theatre that mixed elements of burlesque, ballet, music hall, cabaret, improvisation and Japanese Noh and Kabuki theatre styles. Bowie would perform in heavy theatrical make up and costuming in some of these performances and was sometimes given the opportunity to perform his original songs as a part of the productions.¹⁴⁰

The photograph on the rear cover of *The Man Who Sold The World* provides crucial support to the gender play evident on the front.

The black and white photograph is a close-up and features only Bowie’s upper body and head. He is seemingly clad once again in clothing that markedly feminizes him, with the collarless jacket or top he wears having noticeably padded shoulders and a zipped v-neck. He wears a dark beret cocked toward his right eye, beneath which his long hair frames his downward-looking face. It is a pose of studious repose or contemplation, with just the faintest hint of a smile playing around his mouth as if secretly amused at something denied to the viewer. Unlike on the front cover, here there is no direct engagement with the viewer. Bowie’s eyes are open but averted from our gaze.

This rear cover image largely supports the gender play set up by the front, but with one very important difference. It is apparent that we are again witnesses to a private scene, in this case
the artist captured in a moment of personal reflection or contemplation, but unlike on the front cover there are no further props visible within the picture and therefore we are provided with no wider setting in which to contextualise the image. The historical Pre-Raphaelite parody that had been so carefully constructed on the front is no longer evident. This abandonment of the staged context is supported both by the shift from colour to black and white and the change of costume. There is no sense that the photograph has come from the same carefully rendered session that gave rise to the front cover image, and the only continuity between the two images is provided by the costuming.

Here then, Bowie is engaging in gender play without the borrowed context of the art historical parody, effectively casting off both the distancing device and justification that it had provided. Without this factor, the image brings the viewer firmly back to the here and now, and thus the gender signification in the picture has considerably more resonance because there is a sense that we are seeing the artist more as he really is; a feeling that we are seeing the ‘true’ hand behind the fantasy scenario presented on the front. But this ‘truer’ image does not allay tensions created by the staged gender disturbance of the front: it both confirms and fuels them further.

An examination of the lyrics of *The Man Who Sold the World* adds support to the gender play of the cover. The most obvious line is that taken from ‘All the Madmen’, when Bowie sings, “My libido’s split on me”. Elsewhere, most particularly in ‘Width of a Circle’, the theme of homosexuality is plainly evident, as this excerpt demonstrates:

Got laid by a young bordello  
I was vaguely half asleep  
For which my reputation swept back home in drag . . .

He swallowed his pride and puckered his lips  
And showed me the leather belt round his hips  
My knees were shaking my cheeks aflame  
He said “You'll never go down to the Gods again”

He struck the ground a cavern appeared  
And I smelt the burning pit of fear  
We crashed a thousand yards below  
I said “Do it again, do it again”

His nebulous body swayed above  
His tongue swollen with devil's love  
The snake and I, a venom high  
I said “Do it again, do it again”
Breathe, breathe, breathe deeply
And I was seething, breathing deeply
Spitting sentry, horned and tailed
Waiting for you

Other songs are clearly, thematically, heterosexual, particularly, ‘She Shook me Cold’:141

We met upon a hill, the night was cool and still
She sucked my dormant will
Mother, she blew my brain, I will go back again
My God, she shook me cold

I had no time to spare, I grabbed her golden hair
And threw her to the ground
Father, she craved my head, Oh Lord, the things she said
My God, she should be told

I was very smart, broke the gentle hearts
Of many young virgins
I was quick on the ball, left them so lonely
They'd just give up trying

Then she took my head, smashed it up
Kept my young blood rising
Crushed me mercilessly, kept me going around
So she didn't know I crave her so-o-o

I'll give my love in vain, to reach that peak again
We met upon a hill
Mother, she blew my brain, I will go back again
My God, she shook me cold

The title of the album provides a considerable paratext that, while not evidently supporting the image in any immediately obvious way, nevertheless provides a clear link to a major theme to be found in Bowie’s previous work. Just as the song ‘Space Oddity’ had been a play on Kubrick’s film, 2001: A Space Odyssey, here The Man Who Sold The World clearly invokes an association with Robert A Heinlein’s 1950 novel, The Man Who Sold the Moon. The plot of Heinlein’s work concerns the first successful moon landing and introduces a clear science fiction allusion to Bowie’s album. While The Man Who Sold The Moon was not a particularly notable commercial success upon its original publication in 1950, in 1960 Heinlein became the first science fiction author to appear on a best-seller’s list with the highly successful novel Stranger in a Strange Land. From this point onwards his work “commanded a vast readership” (Nichols, 1982, p. 185).142 Stranger in a Strange Land was particularly

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141 This song notably references the Rossetti-like femme fatale quality of the long, flowing golden hair, and is imbued with the danger/erotic attraction conundrum also central to the archetype.

popular with the counter-cultural generation and was published again in 1965, success that brought with it significant public interest in the author’s earlier works. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Bowie’s album title would have been readily associated by many with Heinlein’s earlier work.\textsuperscript{143}

In addition, the science fiction inference is enhanced by two further paratexts in the form of song titles that appear on the rear of the album. ‘Saviour Machine’ and ‘The Supermen’ feature on side two of the recording, and both feature lyrics that deal with popular science fiction themes. ‘Saviour Machine’ explores the notion of traditional faith in a god giving way to faith in an uncertain, technologically-driven future (Ross, 1972, p. 3). ‘The Supermen’, meanwhile, is Bowie’s response to Frederick Nietzsche’s concept of the Overman, as expressed in Nietzsche’s four-part book, \textit{Thus Spake Zarathustra} (1883-1885). “I was pretending that I understood Nietzsche . . . And I had tried to translate it into my own terms to understand it so ‘Supermen’ came out of that” (Bowie in Buckley, 1999, p. 267).\textsuperscript{144}

Bowie’s image on the cover of \textit{The Man Who Sold The World} can readily be seen as that of an artist forging a direction uniquely his own, and this is the single most important visual innovation of the work. Bowie presents himself in a manner that defies categorisation or ready comparisons with other artists of the day and in so doing positions himself totally at odds with the prevailing rock iconography. His primary means of achieving this was through the manipulation of long-established gender signification, set, for the most part, within his own version of a specific art-historical context that contained its own set of inherent complex meanings and inferences.

The cover shows considerable further development in Bowie’s use of visual imagery as a means of conveying information and themes central to his art. The images that appear on both sides of the cover combine to problematise gender to such a degree that it becomes the pre-eminent issue for the viewer. In so doing, related issues become apparent, most especially the overarching theme of alienation, and the blatant promotion of artifice.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[\textsuperscript{144}] As a noteworthy aside, and although it never actually transpired, Michael Watts reported in \textit{Melody Maker} that Bowie was to play the lead role in a movie adaptation of \textit{Stranger in a Strange Land} (Watts, February 1973, p. 3).
\item[\textsuperscript{144}] See also E. Stein-Frisby (1979) \textit{Nietzsche’s Influence on the Superman in Science Fiction Literature}, Florida: Florida State University.
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Alienation, represented on the previous album in the guise of the human versus technology conundrum and visually represented by Bowie’s disembodied head subsumed by the Vasarely-styled dots, is here given a new twist. In a generalised sense, the gender disturbances evident in the images raise questions about how both clothing and bodily poses are coded along clear lines of expectation within society. When such societal norms are deviated from, the perpetrator becomes difficult to categorise and risks alienation, becoming a disturbing ‘other’ figure, cut off from the safety and sanctuary offered by clear-cut, singular male or female categorisation. In the more specific performative context of Bowie’s own field of endeavour, rock music, his radical departure from the heteronormative male rock artist display critiqued - even attacked - equally firmly established codes of compliance for how a rock artist should look and behave. In putting himself in opposition to such prevailing conceptions of gender normalcy within rock, instead of compliance he offered a radical model for fluidity and instability seen neither in his own previous work nor in the work of his peers.

Because his adoption of feminine gender signification was purposefully and selectively incomplete, confined to cross-dressing and thereby allowing his essential maleness to prevail, Bowie made it clear that no attempt at realistic female impersonation was being made. This device most effectively drew the viewer’s attention to both of the cover’s primary messages of alienation (via gender) and artifice, simultaneously.

The presentation of this model was carried out with two layers of distancing that afforded the artist at least some degree of cushioning: a) the performance took place within a performing arts context, thus affording him a somewhat higher tolerance of deviance, and b) it was set within a specific, pre-existing artistic frame, the parody of Pre-Raphaelite art. That the rear cover image continued to prioritise gender instability despite having surrendered the in-built justification allowed by the front cover is a pivotal development, thereby cementing an underlying depth to the cover that would not have otherwise existed.

The nature of the rear cover, with its suggestion of an actor coming out of the role played on the front, also continues the strategy evident on the first album, where Bowie is shown less formally, simply ‘being’, and thereby claiming an authorial hand.

By introducing such an obvious, theatrical, role-play on the front cover, complete with costume, Bowie presented himself to his audience for the first time as something other than the unadorned, and thus ostensibly more authentic, David Bowie. His image is imbued with a
high degree of purposeful, knowing, artifice. In playing the role of a Pre-Raphaelite femme fatale-styled icon on the front, and then abandoning the ruse on the rear, he demonstrated his preparedness to treat his image as a construction; a performative falsity to be adopted and abandoned at will. Set within the wider context of rock performance in 1971, he raised significant questions about rock authenticity, particularly drawing attention to the prevailing, prescribed and narrow rules of image construction that applied to male rock stars of the time.
Chapter Four - *Hunky Dory*

*Hunky Dory* was released in December 1971, just six months after *The Man Who Sold The World*. In a manner reminiscent of its predecessor, *Hunky Dory* too was something of a protracted success story for the artist.\(^{145}\)

At least one commentator from the day provided a prescient and revealing opinion of both the work and its author in his review of the album:

David Bowie is a million different people and each one is a bit more lovely than the one before. But for Christ’s sake, don’t think he’s a gimmick or a hype! Instead, enjoy him as he is - a surreal cartoon character brought to life for us all to enjoy . . . It’s very possible that this will be the most important album from an emerging artist in 1972, because he’s not following trends – he’s setting them (Holloway, 1972, p. 13.).

While the image on the front cover is of a totally different style and composition to that of the earlier album, nevertheless there are critical synergies between the two works. Immediately evident to the viewer is the fact that Bowie retains the element of gender play that dominated the previous image by presenting himself again as highly feminised. In addition he once again locates his performance within a specific borrowed context, a context that is pre-loaded with meanings and associations, including alienation and gender ambiguity that he recontextualises for his own ends. On this occasion he parodies the stereotypical image of female ‘silver screen’ film icons of the first three decades of the twentieth century, while also incorporating visual signifiers consistent with archetypal Romantic imagery. Because of the dominance of

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\(^{145}\) Upon its initial release the album sold modestly for Bowie and the RCA Record Company, although better at least than the previous three albums had. However, following the unprecedented success of the following album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, released only six months after *Hunky Dory*, the album took on a new lease of life and eventually moved up to number three on the UK album chart. In an odd twist, *Hunky Dory* eventually achieved a higher chart placing than *Ziggy Stardust*, which peaked at number five. Such success was not mirrored in the US, however, with *Hunky Dory* stalling at number 93 on the Billboard album chart. The first single from the album, ‘Changes’, reached only a disappointing number 66 on the US singles chart, but in the UK, once again following on the back of the *Ziggy Stardust* success, a second single, ‘Life on Mars’ was released in early 1973 and achieved a number three placing on the chart. RCA Records then re-released ‘Changes’ in the US in the wake of this success and the song achieved a rather more respectable, although still modest, placing of 41.


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these elements within the picture, these components jointly frame the analysis of the album cover.

Figure 48. *Hunky Dory. Front cover.*

Side One

1. Changes
2. Oh! You Pretty Things
3. Eight Line Poem
4. Life on Mars?
5. Kooks
6. Quicksand
The cover of *Hunky Dory* bore little resemblance to the album releases of any major rock artists during 1971. There are, nevertheless, surface similarities evident when compared to the releases of several solo popular music artists. Examples of these include singer-songwriters Kris Kristofferson and Joni Mitchell, and crossover film and musical theatre artist Barbara Streisand:

![Kristofferson by Kris Kristofferson, 1971.](image)
Aside from the fact that they are all head, or head and shoulders, portraits, there are no significant stylistic links evident between these covers and Bowie’s, however. The cover of *Hunky Dory* remains quite distinct, primarily because of a) its lack of photographic realism due to heavy manipulation, and b) the style of the heavily affected, dramatic pose adopted by the artist. As was the case with *The Man Who Sold The World*, there is little with which to align *Hunky Dory* from Bowie’s contemporaneous artistic environs.
The cover of *Hunky Dory* is a picture of Bowie’s upper body, primarily face, head and hands, bordered by a broad black strip on all four sides that effectively frames the image. The unnaturally bright coloured picture is grainy and indistinct, so much so that some delineations between regions become unclear. For instance, the dark shading under his chin merges into both the background and his right collar-bone/shoulder area, making it unclear where each begins and ends. The artist is featured in three-quarter profile, face turned upward and toward the viewer’s left, with eyes fully open but making no contact with the viewer. Seemingly, his attention is focussed upon something distant, or at least well outside the frame, while his expression is one of slightly melancholic seriousness. Bowie’s right hand cradles his ear and right side of his head, while his left is placed behind his neck. His forearms are in the frame, but not so his elbows, while the black border at the bottom of the image limits viewing to his upper chest and above. He appears to be wearing a high-necked garment with full-length sleeves that is made from light blue and black patterned material. Also in evidence is what appears to be a thin scarf of a greenish-yellow hue, evident on the left side of his neck only. Bowie’s hair is a very bright yellow, particularly so at the crown of his head, while his eyes are blue and his lips pale red. His skin colour is very light, at its lightest a pale creamy-white evident upon his forehead. The background of the picture is a pale shade of yellow, lighter to the right while graduating to a slightly darker shade to the left. There is no written text at all on the cover, nothing to indicate the name of the artist or the title of the album.

Immediately obvious to the viewer is the fact that Bowie’s pose conveys considerable depth and gravitas. Within the history of portraiture, Richard Brilliant regards such a pose as typical of persons who occupy significant positions in the public eye - statesmen, intellectuals, creative artists, war heroes, and approved champions . . . they offer up images of serious men and women, worthy of respect, persons who should be taken seriously by the viewing audience (1991, p. 10).

Imbuing himself with such revered status on the cover of *Hunky Dory*, Bowie is knowingly caught in the midst of playing a theatrical role, his pose highly stylised and affected, and he makes obvious his overt pretentiousness in doing so. Elizabeth Burns provides a useful definition of what constitutes a ‘theatrical’ pose, suggesting the primary requirement is the obvious presence of what she terms the “special grammar of composed behaviour . . . We feel that we are in the presence of some action which has been devised to transmit beliefs, attitudes, and feelings of a kind that the ‘composer’ wishes us to have” (1972, p. 33).
That Bowie’s pose has been highly composed is clear to the viewer. In referencing the style of the composition to pre-existing models from entertainment and the arts, a clear synergy can be discerned between it and representations of silver screen movie stars.

Figure 52. Greta Garbo publicity image (artificially coloured).
Supporting this link, Bowie’s acknowledgement of silver-screen Hollywood icons of the first three decades of the twentieth century is expressed in the song ‘Quicksand’, the final song on side one of the album:

I’m living in a silent film . . .
I’m the twisted name on Garbo’s eyes

Further paratexts within the lyrics that support the validity of this historical allusion are references to the ‘silver screen’ and to the ‘cinema’, both of these appearing in the song ‘Andy Warhol’. It is clear that the synergy between Bowie’s cover and the images of historic Hollywood film icons is a conscious, purposeful move on Bowie’s part, and a link that warrants significant exploration. Pegg, for one, is in no doubt of this influence upon Bowie, regarding the cover image as “reflecting the album’s preoccupation with the silver screen . . . a close-up of Bowie living out his Bacall/Garbo fantasies, gazing wistfully into space as he pushes the flowing locks back from his forehead” (2002, p. 232). Cato believes “on the cover he came over like a low rent Lauren Bacall” (1997, p. 26), while Peter and Leni Gillman
suggest, “The photograph . . . showed David staring wistfully into space and looking for all the world like Greta Garbo” (1986, p. 273).

Bowie’s heavily stylised pose demonstrates strong parallels with the exaggerated, highly affected modes of gesture used most particularly in silent movies at the beginning of the twentieth century but also still evident in sound movies of the 1930s and 1940s. Featuring actresses long considered iconic, including Garbo, Dietrich, Joan Crawford, Mae West, Gloria Swanson and Lauren Bacall, these stars of the silver screen became larger-than-life media sensations during the era, with fluid identities that far transcended the individual movies in which they appeared. Christine Geraghty, for instance, believes that the successful attainment of their star quality required mastery both inter-textually (across different films) and extra-texturally (across different types of material) (2000, p. 185). As Sarah Berry puts it, they became, in effect, celebrations of “idealized self-invention” (2000, p. xxi).

The extreme, affected stylisation practiced by these luminaries is inextricably tied to the essential ingredient of overt artifice that Hollywood cinema of the era embraced at its core, an artifice that was to be made as obvious as possible to the viewer. Berry regards this quality as a “mythology of ‘bluff’, a celebration of symbolic over ‘real’, status” (2000, p. xvii). This underlying ethos had considerable historical depth because, as Berry further points out, the movie industry of the day was dominated by recent immigrants to America, all of whom saw the opportunity to reinvent and transform themselves as new citizens amid their new and exciting urban environment (Berry, 2000, p. xvii). Seeking ways to establish a social identity of considerable status but without the traditional impetus of birthright, they instead through their work sought to present notions of a newly constructed ‘ideal’, much in the manner of commercial advertising (Slater, 1997, pp. 29-30).

Roland Barthes has said of Garbo, specifically regarding her image in the movie Queen Christina (1933), “her face was not to have any reality, except that of her perfection . . .

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146 Such exaggerated methods of gesture were designed to ensure the successful conveyance of appropriate information, emotion, mood and attitude to an audience in the absence of the spoken word. A more naturalistic acting style had gradually begun emerging even before the advent of movies featuring the spoken word – approximately 1928 onwards – yet by today’s standards even this acting style seems highly stylised. For a discussion on this topic, see K. Hollinger (2006) The Actress: Hollywood acting and the female star, New York: Routledge, pp. 3-26.


Garbo’s singularity was of the order of the concept . . . The face of Garbo is an idea” (1975, pp. 56-57). In effect, this ‘idea’ was a symbolic and transferrable mask or template that, although being modelled by a movie star, nevertheless seemingly held the potential to be adopted by anybody in the audience who was so inclined. Such a construction on the part of the actress was in the place of any authentic, personalised image unique to the individual. It is a technique of absence and removal, and, as will be seen, of alienation. In a clear link to the previous album, this idea bears a striking resemblance to the Pre-Raphaelite femme fatale figure, with Marsh suggesting their images are elevated,

like Hollywood film stars above the level of ordinary mortals into a mythic realm of tragic heroines and fatal sirens, and paradoxically to diminish them, reducing their real, complex, contradictory personalities and lives to flat figures in a fantasy landscape (Marsh, 1985, p. 3).

Richard Dyer explores this quality in the work of Lana Turner, suggesting she appears “on show, performing, presenting a image, to be thought of neither as an essence (i.e. an inner human being expressing her self through presentation) nor as interacting with others and circumstances” (1991a, p. 234). Dyer further notes that the actress is often seemingly “visually detached” from her surroundings (1991a, p. 234). Carole Zucker, too, observes a similar element in the work of Dietrich, observing that her acting method and the manner in which she was directed was purposely designed to never “communicate an intimacy to the spectator” (1988, p. 94). As evidenced by the movie stars themselves through their constructed personas, social identity and social mobility were achievable for anyone who employed the tools of transformation, namely, makeup, clothing and affectation (Hanssen, 2009, p. 112).

Bowie’s borrowed affectations contain another highly theatrical element: camp. Such a quality to the Bowie image has also been noted by Andrew Ross who links the cover to publicity images of Greta Garbo, Joan Crawford and Mae West (1989, p. 164) Sontag, meanwhile, has located camp within “the haunting androgynous vacancy behind the perfect beauty of Greta Garbo” (1964, p. 279).

Clearly evident in the album cover picture and central to Bowie’s image is a strongly feminised quality. While this is the combined result of several components, foremost of these

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is his pose. Because of the imitative element of his borrowing from famous film actresses such as Garbo, the pose he has adopted is immediately feminine-loaded by association. As he did on *The Man Who Sold The World*, Bowie touches his hair, but this time with both hands and in a more forthright, less incidental manner than was the case previously. His hands virtually cradle his head in this image, a feminine-coded gesture identified by Goffman as being designed to draw attention to a subject’s (traditionally female) body as a “delicate and precious thing” (1979, p. 31).

The artificiality of filmic images during the silver screen era was often enhanced by the colour tinting of certain frames within the black and white film reels. Sometimes this was an operation carried out by hand-tinting, and sometimes pre-tinted film stock was used. Mark Paytress has noted the colour tinting of Bowie’s image during his appraisal of the cover, suggesting the artist was portrayed “in unashamedly iconic terms . . . Bowie’s tinted head was a suspended object of desire, his eyes languid, gazing out over his potential audience” (1998, p. 68). In the USA during the first three decades of the twentieth century the use of colour experienced a boom in the arts at large, as it also did in advertising, design and commerce, a phenomenon that was described by *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1928 as a “chromatic revolution” (Anonymous, ‘The New Age of Color’; reprinted in Eskilson, 2002, p. 17). Tom Gunning suggests that the widespread “invasion of colour [helped create a] culture of sensationalism, based in sensual and emotional intensity” (1994, p. 250). In film, colour was frequently seen as a disturbing element in what had traditionally been seen as a black and white medium. As Eirik Hanssen puts it, colour represented for many “a distraction or excess, an element that should not be noticed” (2009, p. 109). Harris suggests the colouring of film was received as “a threatening novelty by those who found safety in words or in older forms of visual representation” (1986, p. 8).

Extremely pertinent to this discussion is the fact that, historically, such tinting has had a feminine association. David Batchelor situates the reticence associated with the growing use of colour in films within a more generalised overall suspicion of colour in western culture.

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during the time in question. He suggests that the use of colour was reserved for, “some ‘foreign’ body – usually the feminine, the oriental, the primitive” (2000, p. 22f). Hanssen, extrapolating upon this notion, suggests this imbued the use of colour at the time with an element of danger associated with a fear of the unknown (2009, p. 109). Batchelor believes colour was also reserved for events occurring within “the realm of the superficial, the supplementary, the inessential or the cosmetic” (2000, p. 22f). Returning to the use of colour in film specifically, John Gage purports it was widely seen in this context as a “feminine province” (1993, p. 117), while Richard Abel described colour in film as a “feminized aesthetic of imitation” (1999, p. 40ff). That the use of colour in the films of the day should have been regarded in such a way adds a further, loaded, historical element to Bowie’s feminised image on the cover of *Hunky Dory*.\textsuperscript{154}

Of course while Bowie is presenting an image in the style of a silver screen film star, the image itself is not, in reality, a film image at all. It is not a still frame sourced from a film, but, rather, the image is a manipulated photograph. As Davenport observes, photographic manipulation has existed since the era of daguerreotypy (1839-1848), the very first widespread photographic process (1991, p. 162). She relates how, at this time, painters were employed by photographic studios to enhance photographs with the application of paint, particularly in the case of portraits, in order to add colour and vibrancy to subjects’ cheeks and lips (Davenport 1991, p. 162). With regard to *Hunky Dory*, Gillman and Gillman posit: “to accentuate its misty, dream-like quality, the original photograph had been hand-coloured” (1986, p. 272). This explains, for instance, the vibrancy of Bowie’s bright yellow hair and green scarf draped around the back of his neck and across his left shoulder. While not referring to colour specifically, Davison points out that the manipulation of painted portraits of musicians during the romantic era was done for similar reasons of accentuation, whereby, “the physical features of the face could be manipulated to create a more appropriate physical type” (2003, p. 154).

The appropriate, desired, physical type in this case is that of the archetypal silver screen icon. The inauthenticity of the image, however, is inherent from the outset because, to state the obvious, Bowie was not a silver screen icon at all. Stevenson is one of many critics to

\textsuperscript{154} Joshua Yumibe has also pointed out that the feminine association went a stage further with regard to the actual rendering of the colour frames as it was, primarily, lower paid female employees who undertook the laborious task of hand-colouring the frames. See J. Yumibe (2007) *Moving Color: An Aesthetic History of Applied Colour Technologies in Silent Cinema*, PhD. Dissertation, The University of Chicago, p. 177ff.
comment upon what he regards as the flagrant and intentional inauthenticity of the image, describing the cover thus:

Borrowing a pose from Hollywood in the 1920s-1930s, Bowie is pictured in soft focus, eyes to one side, brushing his hair back, with the viewer’s gaze being invited to fall on the side of his face . . . In more traditional rock terms the obviously constructed nature of the image simply indicates the inauthenticity of Bowie’s pose and image (Stevenson, 2006, p. 54).

That the construction of the image is indeed so obvious is central to how the image works. Carole Zucker explores the notion of such stylised imagery in relation to Josef von Sternberg’s Marlene Dietrich films, stating:

The performances in Sternberg’s films resist any claims to “naturalism” or “realism” . . . The regulation and coordination of the smallest detail of the performance and the resulting artificiality assist the removal of the actors from our world. They are located by the special nature of their actions and speech only within their own fiction (Zucker, 1988, p. 94).

Similarly, Bowie’s image, imbued with just such removal, begs that same question of the viewer as to what his fiction might be, or, at its simplest, “what is he thinking?” Certainly, the seriousness of expression suggests intense and private thought; lofty ruminations upon a subject of considerable gravity, presumably, rather than levity or anything superficial or trivial. Indeed, so deep in his own thoughts is he that Bowie appears alienated, psychologically removed and singularly unaware and uncaring of his physical surroundings. This evident removal from the moment can be seen historically as a feminine-coded element, the pose closely modelling Goffman’s notion of “licensed withdrawal” such as might be observed in female subjects within advertising images, a device which he suggests is sometimes protective and sometimes an indication of preoccupation (1979, p. 57). Certainly, Bowie gives every indication of being preoccupied, a point also made by Paytress, who suggests that the artist’s countenance sees him at once removed “from the travails of the earthly humdrum” (1998, p. 68).

Situating Bowie’s pose within a wider historical sense, the image can readily be seen as a carefully staged depiction of the archetypal Romantic artist, a Byronesque figure who seeks, as Atara Stein puts it, “to soar beyond earthly and fleshly constraints, to attain perfect love, to write perfect poetry, and to remain in an unlimited flight of the imagination” (2004, p. 76). Davison relates this style of pose to the portraiture of musicians during the Romantic era, believing that the intention was to display the artist as a tortured individual situated apart from
‘normal’ society and the general populace at large, to “show the dreamy, inspired gaze, the poet as an individual” (2003, p. 147). Adding yet further weight to this allusion, especially if one considers the artist’s nascent but by now tangible diametric positioning of himself against the prevailing heteronormative gender identity of the quintessential ‘rock star’, Stevenson suggests Bowie projects the ideal of the artist as “a special genius-like figure at odds with a predominantly utilitarian society” (2006, p. 54). Frith and Horne, meanwhile, credit Bowie with “revitalizing the idea of the Romantic artist” (1987, p. 116).155

Bowie typifies the dreamy, removed, un-earthly qualities of the Romantic artist engaged in a solitary search for enlightenment, such as that described by Byron in his poem *Childe Harold*, “I live not in myself, but I become Portion of that around me.” Davison too refers to this state of being, or, perhaps, a state of absence, pointing out that in paintings Byron was portrayed as a prototype or personification of an ideal romantic figure, “of the physically beautiful, brooding, inspired artist. He was a fallen angel, the personification of the tragic, self-destructive artist” (2003, p. 154). Certainly in the lyrics of the song ‘Quicksand’, for instance, Bowie portrays himself as a modern incarnation of the doomed Romantic, with lyrics such as:

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Should I kiss the viper's fang or herald loud the death of Man?
I'm sinking in the quicksand of my thought
And I ain't got the power anymore . . .

I'm torn between the light and dark . . .
Don't believe in yourself - Don't deceive with belief
Knowledge comes with death's release

I'm not a prophet or a stone-age man
Just a mortal with potential of a Superman . . .
I'm tethered to the logic of Homo Sapien
Can't take my eyes from the great salvation of bullshit faith
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‘Quicksand’ contains precisely the kind of musings attributed to Romantic artists, as Bowie ruminates and laments upon the state of being human, drawing attention to the conundrum between what is real and what is not, between what is light and what is dark, and between certain knowledge versus blind faith, all the while longing for the release afforded by either dream-state or death. The latter notion, of making the ultimate sacrifice in return for knowledge, is consistent with many incarnations of the Byronic hero figure, the final act in “a process that frequently demands the hero’s death” (Stein, 2004, p. 76). Just as the Byronic hero is situated in opposition to his surroundings and the society in which he must function,

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evidenced by the long-suffering gaze aloft, so too Bowie can be seen to be defying the governing rock ideology of the time. When Stein suggests, “The Byronic hero is an outlaw and an outsider who defines his own moral code, often defying oppressive institutional authority” (2004, p. 8), Bowie’s target for revolution in this case can be seen as either the cock-rockers who were so prevalent in the rock environs of the day, or a commentary/obituary on the sixties counter-culture that Bowie so knowingly and publicly set himself against. With regard to the former, this is most clearly expressed in ‘Changes’, in the lines:

And these children that you spit on as they try to change their world . . .
Ooh look out, you rock’n’rollers . . .

And with regard to the latter, in ‘Song for Bob Dylan,’ Bowie alludes to the demise of the counter-culture, suggesting in his lyrics that a new revolution is well under way - a revolution of which he is a part - while Dylan, the former-revolutionary figurehead, is now consigned to refugee status:

Now hear this Robert Zimmerman
Though I don’t suppose we’ll meet
Ask your good friend Dylan if he’d gaze down the old street
Tell him we’ve lost his poems
So they’re writing on the walls
Give us back our unity
Give us back our family
You’re every nation’s refugee . . .

The sense of alienation and isolation inherent to the Romantic artist is equally a quality attributed to silver screen movie stars. As Dyer points out, such stars provide a rallying point for alienated persons, including marginalised social groups such as adolescents, women and gays, who may suffer from intense identity/role conflicts and a sense of exclusion from the dominant adult male heterosexual culture (1991b, p. 59). This is closely aligned to the fact, as mentioned earlier, that many of those working in the Hollywood film industry were themselves immigrants seeking to establish themselves in their adopted country and overcoming their own sense of alienation.

In ‘Oh You Pretty Things’, Bowie explores generational alienation; in the first excerpt below, addressing the children:
Oh you pretty things
Don’t you know you’re driving your mothers and fathers insane?

In the second excerpt, he addresses the parents of the children, turning the sense of alienation back upon them by the threat of being usurped by the next generation:

Look out at your children
See their faces in golden rays
Don’t kid yourself they belong to you
They’re the start of the coming race

Similarly, in ‘Changes’ he rails against the notion of youth being condescended to by adults, clearly espousing an estrangement between the two. He also blames the older generation for the perceived poor state society is in, personalising his viewpoint and thus counting himself among the disenfranchised by switching perspective to the first person in the last line:

Ch-ch-changes
Don’t tell them to grow up and out of it
Ch-ch-ch-ch-changes . . .
Where’s your shame?
You’ve left us up to our necks in it

Elsewhere, in ‘Kooks’, he acknowledges his self-perceived status as an outsider while addressing his infant son, warning him that if he continues to keep company with his father he will inevitably get picked on by others:

I bought you a pair of shoes
A trumpet you can blow and a book of rules
Of what to say to people when they pick on you
Cos’ if you stay with us you’re gonna be pretty kooky too156

Critics have regarded Bowie’s image on this cover as a portrayal of gender alienation.157 Christopher Sandford, for instance, believes Bowie’s image was “emblematic of his bisexual alienation from the heterosexual male-dominated world of rock music” (1996, p. 107). Barney Hoskyns suggests that Bowie’s work during this part of his career helped ensure that “a generation of sexual misfits was able to accept itself” (1998, p. 8). While this may be so, the nature of Bowie’s feminisation on the cover has direct parallels to, and links with, the presentation of gender ambiguity among some of the silver screen icons. As was the case on

156 “Us” presumably refers to Bowie’s wife at the time and mother of Zowie, the flamboyant, bisexual Angie Bowie.
157 And once again it should be acknowledged that these views are frequently couched in terms that make little or no distinction between matters of sexuality and gender.
The Man Who Sold The World, Bowie’s gender play on Hunky Dory is not intended to mislead or trick an audience into thinking he is a woman, in the same way that Garbo’s signature adoption of men’s clothing was not intended to fool an audience into thinking her a man.\textsuperscript{158} While feminised in this instance by pose and colouring, Bowie is not pictured in drag and he has not utilised transformative makeup etc., lengths to which he would surely have gone in order to enact any such convincing ruse.\textsuperscript{159}

Similarly, Bowie’s image is not sexualised or eroticised to any extent. If anything, he adheres to a large degree to Barthe’s comments regarding Garbo, who suggested her face was “not drawn but sculpted in something smooth and fragile, that is at once perfect and ephemeral . . . a sort of Platonic idea of the human creature, which explains why her face is almost sexually undefined, without however leaving one in doubt” (1975, p. 56). James Wolcott, writing in Vogue magazine in 1981, made a direct comparison between the gender play of Bowie and Garbo, suggesting they both possess “a fine-boned androgyny – a flair for slipping in and out of gender without turning themselves into drag caricatures” (1981, p. 56). Zucker, meanwhile, explores Dietrich’s ability to avoid clichéd displays of sexuality and eroticism - an explanation equally pertinent to Bowie - believing “In order for Dietrich to truly obtain a quality of eroticism she would have to be presented as a more “real” being. Eroticism is a part of a condition of humanness from which Dietrich is excluded” (1988, p. 151). Bowie too is presented as unreal on the cover of Hunky Dory, with realism, personality and individuality largely undercut by affectation, colouring and a lack of definition in the resolution of the picture.

By their very nature, stars such as those that Bowie visually aligns himself to through his parody interrogate and problematise concepts of duality, incorporating simultaneously both the private person and the social construction. John Ellis addresses this notion, suggesting “[Star images] are composed of clues rather than complete meanings . . . The star image is also an incomplete image. It shows the star both as an ordinary person and as an extraordinary person” (1992, p. 93). Geraghty identifies this component as the defining element of stardom, believing, “It is this duality of image which is deemed to mark a star, a duality which emphasises a balance between the site of fictional performance and life outside” (2000, pp. 184-185). In Bowie’s tribute to Andy Warhol on Hunky Dory, several lyric lines deal directly with this conundrum of duality, including:

\textsuperscript{158} See Berry (2000) Screen Style, pp. 142-182.
\textsuperscript{159} We do not see enough of his clothing to be able to discern any clear gender attribution, although the loose cuff at his wrist and the, evidently, slightly billowed neckline do suggest a hint of femininity.
I’d like to take a cement fix – be a standing cinema

Taking a “cement fix” would result in the production of a stand-in figure, a simulacrum of reality that could, potentially, fill the role of the socially constructed public face, allowing the private face to remain absent or hidden. Just who someone really is, located beneath such a public construction, is then the focus of the following line:

Dress my friends up just for show – see them as they really are

Problematising duality further, this line introduces the notion that dressing up “just for show” - creating an image that is blatantly a social-construction - may in fact be indeterminable from one’s real, private, image. Simultaneously, therefore, the line also addresses the concept of artifice versus reality.

Similarly, in the chorus, Warhol is aligned directly against a construct of himself, Bowie suggesting that the two sides of the artist’s duality are so enmeshed they cannot be separately identified:

Andy Warhol – silver screen. Can’t tell them apart at all

This duality, then, borrowed from the concept of stardom, is a critical element that Bowie uses for his own ends on the cover of Hunky Dory. The album, both cover and recorded content, is highly imbued with its critique. Other lyric content deals with Bowie’s own constructed, and evidently false, face. In ‘Changes,’ for instance, he sings:

So I turned myself to face me
But I never caught a glimpse
Of how the others must see the faker
I’m much too fast to take that test

And then in the chorus,

Ch-ch-ch-Changes - Turn and face the stranger
Ch-ch-Changes - Just gonna have to be a different man

This song presents several possible interpretations, each one concerning the theme of a duplicitous, constructed personality. Firstly, he is a fraud but is unconscious of his deception.
Secondly, he is a fraud but he is fully conscious of his deception. Thirdly, he is a knowing fraud but is completely unaware of how others see him. Fourthly, he is a fraud and is fully aware that others are able to see through his disguise. References to being exposed as a fake are evident also in ‘The Bewlay Brothers’:

Real cool traders - We were so turned on you thought we were fakers

Such lines add significant weight to inferences consistent with the silver screen styled front cover, as we have seen. However, it is when one views the rear cover and considers its oppositional relationship to the front that the real depth of Bowie’s investment in the critiquing of duality becomes apparent.

Figure 54. *Hunky Dory*. Rear cover.
In black and white Bowie is pictured full-length in the very centre of the frame against a featureless white background with arms at his sides, staring directly at the viewer. He is dressed in a loose, white, long-sleeved shirt that is open at the neck and chest, and he wears a pair of very wide, baggy trousers that give the effect of emphasising his small waist. His long dark hair falling freely over his shoulders frames his face, upon which Bowie’s expression is serious and unsmiling. There is none of the theatricality of pose that is so prominent on the front cover. The photograph is presented seemingly unaltered; however, the grainy, soft-focus quality of the front cover image is largely retained. The photograph is taken from a low angle, giving the impression that Bowie is, to an extent, towering above the viewer. At the top left corner, the name of the artist and the title of the album appear together in upper case, in a highly stylised typographic font. Roughly following the contours of the artist’s body on both left and right sides, and even encroaching upon his torso at one point, is much handwritten text. To the viewer’s right this is written vertically on the page, while to the left the lines are written horizontally.

While the front cover offered a presentation of archetype or ideal, employing symbolism at the exclusion of individuality, personality and realism, the back cover is immediately intimate and personal. Bowie is ostensibly pictured here as himself, engaging the viewer with direct eye contact and suggesting the qualities of frankness and honesty. This is a radical departure from the means by which Bowie wished to communicate his message(s) on the front. As Arnheim suggests, “The more lifelike [an image] . . . the more difficult may the artist find it to make his point symbolically” (1970, p. 141). On the rear cover, Bowie’s point is made simply by appearing as himself, the duality writ large by the contrast between the two images on the front and rear. As Judith Mayne points out, the presentation of such opposites is the cornerstone of stardom, which she sees as being based upon “reinvention, the dissolution of contraries, the embrace of wildly opposing terms” (1993, p. 138).

The suggestion of emotional transparency on the rear cover, of seamless, unmitigated and open communication with the viewer by the ‘real’ David Bowie, is boosted greatly by both the presence and content of the accompanying handwritten text which comprises an untidy, inconsistent, but highly individualised, scrawl. As Kendrick suggests, there exists today the unabated continuation of a centuries old belief that “something of the person is preserved in

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160 This is the same tactic employed by Warhol, who would take people off the street, ostensibly nobodies, drug addicts, prostitutes, etc., proclaim them as self-styled ‘Superstars’ and feature them in his movies in that guise. See J. A. Suarez (1996) Bike Boys, Drag Queens and Superstars: avant-garde, mass culture, and gay identities in the 1960s underground cinema, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
the trace of his or her handwriting” (1999, p. 12). Similarly, “The writing on the surface of the page constitutes the trials and memory of a mental diction, mute or audible, it is the visible sound of thought” (Neefs, 2011, p. 130).

The fact that Bowie chose to communicate in such a clearly personal manner on his album cover can be seen as an attempt to imbue his work with authenticity and originality, in the same way that a maker of fine musical instruments might authenticate his/her work with a signature, or a wine-maker might include a facsimile signature or handwritten message on the labels of bottles. Amy Papaelias provides further useful insights into what it means to utilise handwritten text upon an artefact, suggesting that handwriting conveys several meanings to the reader: “personal, one-of-a-kind, derived from a human source, non-conformist, subjectivity, sincerity, authentic, expressive and urgency” (2007, p. 4). The style of Bowie’s handwriting is highly individual and intimate, seemingly spontaneous in its irregularity and unedited/uncorrected state. In addition to marked stylistic changes there are words crossed out here and there, dedications scrawled in brackets etc. Of this Papaelias further attests, “Jumpy, scrawl-like print expresses the character’s free-minded spirit” (2007, p. 4).

The style of Bowie’s writing, so highly personalised and idiosyncratic, declaims his authorship of the album clearly and unequivocally. As the following excerpt demonstrates, the writing is very informal, crucially couched in the first person, almost as if he were scribbling a note on a table napkin that he intended to be read by family or friends rather than writing the official credits on an album cover:

The musicians on my album are:- Michael Ronson who played guitar and did the arrangements marked thus *, Woody Woodmansy playing an excellent round of dr-drums and trumpets Trevor Bolder bass same, Richard Wakeman on piano. I played some guitar, the saxophones and the less complicated piano parts . . . art work by my good friends George Underwood and his partner Terry of Main Artery.

That the text to the viewer’s right is shaped around the contours of his body adds an unusual but deeply personal touch, as if the words he shares are so intrinsically his own that they even bear a likeness to his image. This brings to vivid, literal, life an observation made by Kendrick:

Although writing is a way of controlling one’s own physical disappearance, it also denies that disappearance by substituting for the body the continuity of the line in space, the line imagined as the trace of the body, the writer’s presence implicit in the liner trace (1999, p. 12).
The manner in which he writes out the list of album tracks to the viewer’s left is similarly highly personalised. He prefaces the titles of some of the tracks with bracketed messages that either dedicate songs to a specific individual (“for small Z.”, beside the song ‘Kooks’, side 1, tk 5) or that acknowledge an influence upon him (“V.U. white light returned with thanks” beside the song ‘Queen Bitch’, side 2, tk 4). Written in what amounts to a personal shorthand, it is not until these tracks are actually heard, however, with the additional lyrical and musical information subsequently imparted, that the listener/viewer might come to realise the significance of the abbreviated dedications; Z referring to Bowie’s son Zowie, and V.U. referring to the Velvet Underground (Buckley, 1999, pp. 113-115).

Clearly, on the rear cover, Bowie wishes to be seen as an individual rather than an archetype, to the extent that the personal details of his friends and family are offered as evidence of this other, down-to-earth, existence that we are unable to glean knowledge of from the front. Here is proof of his duality, evidence that despite his stardom he exists and functions within the same social and familial structures as any one of his audience. As Hollinger points out,

film stardom can be said to involve a mixture of fiction and reality, in the public spectacle of the on-screen performance and the private self of the off-screen image. . . star performance encompasses an uneasy relationship between the star’s portrayal of the character and a sense of the star’s personality hidden behind the role (2006, p. 29).

There is considerable significance in the fact that the greatly personalised rear cover is presented in black and white. This serves to make the highly colourised front cover with its larger than life filmic-style tinting much more alluring and attractive than the rear, which becomes inevitably drab by comparison. The strong inference resulting from this is that those qualities of realism, personality, and individuality displayed on the rear cannot possibly match the allure and excitement offered by artifice, affectation and image construction that are championed on the front. And yet, paradoxically, the rear cover also carries the biggest paratext of all in terms of support for the artifice-loaded qualities of the front cover. Underneath the song titles, and utilising three different handwriting styles within the passage of the six words that make up the message, Bowie writes: “This album was produced . . . Ken Scott”. Inserted inside brackets after these words, he has then added, “assisted by the actor”. As Bowie himself was the co-producer of the album, the reference to himself as “the actor” provides unmistakable proof that the qualities and allusions the viewer observes on the front cover are absolutely allied to the artist’s own view of himself. This single paratext acts as an
enormously effective thematic unifying device, and its location amid the intimate individualism to be observed everywhere else on the rear cover carries significance also. It is as if Bowie on the rear cover throws off the mask that he went to such trouble to adopt on the front cover, and shows his ‘real’ face, admitting something akin to “It was me all along!” Pegg provides a prescient appraisal, suggesting: “At a time when many album sleeves were locating the artist as a diminutive figure . . . Bowie tellingly chose to emphasize the notion of his own iconic, ironic star status” (2002, p. 232).

The thematic content of the songs on the album is consistent with Bowie’s duality in the imagery. While, as discussed, songs such as ‘Changes’, ‘Quicksand’ and ‘Andy Warhol’ address the issues instigated by the front cover’s historic allegiances, there are intensely personal songs also present, such as ‘Kooks’, which seemingly align naturally with the personal individual character of the rear cover.

One track title, ‘Life On Mars’, acts as a significant paratext that offers a linkage to the science fiction themes that were more clearly evident on the previous albums. One critic has suggested the song is “almost Bradburyian . . . in which the titular question ‘Is there life on Mars’ focuses the alienation and triviality of earthbound existence” (Roberts, 2006, p. 334.). In addition, Bowie’s upward gaze on the front cover might be seen as a literal depiction of such pondering. Beyond these factors, however, the science fiction thematic element is lessened on Hunky Dory.

In sum, to a large degree Bowie employed similar tactics on Hunky Dory to those he used on The Man Who Sold The World. As was the case with that predecessor just six months earlier, the front cover of Hunky Dory presented him playing the clearly discernable role of a historical, borrowed, female archetype. Similarly, on the rear of the cover he once again abandons the carefully contrived parody built up on the front in favour of a far more candid picture of himself, a tactic seemingly designed to expose, and indeed exploit, the fact that his star image is no more than a contrived and carefully controlled ruse.

While Bowie’s gender blurring is not quite as overt as it was on the cover of the previous album because he is not pictured wearing women’s clothing, nevertheless his image is once again significantly feminised, strengthening the impression that such gender play has developed into a defining artistic fingerprint of his work.
Self-conscious artifice is an integral component of the front cover, a quality primarily attained through the manipulation of pose, the historical allusions, the employment of camp and the use of external techniques, most especially the artificial colour tinting of the photograph. Building on the considerable investment in artifice evident on the previous two covers, it is by now becoming apparent that this is an ongoing and increasingly important aspect of Bowie’s album cover imagery.

The theme of alienation has once again been to the fore, in this case introduced as an integral part of the historic associations made with the archetypal silver screen film star imagery and also the Romantic artist ideal. Within Bowie’s own environment of popular music, his feminisation has served to emphatically estrange him from his peers. Although the means of Bowie’s conveyance of alienation has differed each time, it can be justifiably surmised that this theme is of pre-eminent concern to the artist.

Together these visual allusions to artifice and alienation are well supported in the lyrics of several songs on the album. Also, and equally critically, they are supported on the paratexts present on the cover, most especially, with regard to artifice at least, in Bowie’s reference to himself as “the actor”.

Because of the dichotomous relationship between the images of Bowie on the front and rear covers, it is clear that Bowie is presenting two faces: a constructed one, which is given more prominence by its presence on the front cover, and an ostensibly authentic one on the rear. As discussed, the latter is amply supported by paratexts such as the handwritten text, references to friends and family, and the little messages and drawn idiosyncracies scattered across the page. From this, it can be deduced that he is keen to demonstrate an author’s hand at work behind the image construction showcased on the front. Overall, this presentation of duality, having been observable also on *The Man Who Sold The World*, has been expanded on the cover of *Hunky Dory* to become an extremely powerful message within the album cover.
Chapter Five - *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*

Released in June 1972, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* was the album that elevated David Bowie to the level of a pre-eminent popular music artist.\(^{161}\) Nicholas Pegg’s appraisal is typical of historical summations, describing it as, “Bowie’s first hit album and his ticket to superstardom” (2002, p. 234).\(^{162}\) Reaction at the time was similarly enthusiastic, with *New Musical Express* reviewer James Johnson writing, “There’s nothing Bowie would like more than to be a glittery superstar, and it could come to pass . . . this latest chunk of fantasy can only enhance his reputation further” (1973, p.12).

Not only was it Bowie’s first commercially successful album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust* received widespread critical acclaim, dramatically increasing the size of his fan-base and providing the springboard to subsequent sold-out tours and unprecedented levels of media interest.\(^{163}\)

At the time of the album’s release, glam rock had become the pre-eminent popular music style in the UK and Bowie’s name was becoming increasingly associated with it. Therefore, examining the cover with reference to the characteristics of glam rock forms a critical part of the analysis within this chapter.

On the front cover of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, Bowie abandons the obvious historical parodies drawn from art history and cinema that he employed on the previous two albums. While many influences remain to be teased out from the image,

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\(^{161}\) The album reached number five on the UK album chart and remained on the chart for two years, constituting an enormous breakthrough for the artist. The US market proved far more reticent, with the album achieving a highest placing of only number 75, yet still representing a notable improvement on earlier efforts. The attendant single, ‘Starman’, reached number ten on the UK singles chart and number 65 on the US Billboard chart.


there no longer exists any singularly obvious source or inspiration. However, and intrinsically linking it to what has gone before, the primary quality communicated by the album cover is once again the theme of alienation. On this album though, a largely different manifestation of alienation is presented: urban alienation. This quality, therefore, one of the primary elements investigated in this chapter. Intrinsic to this depiction of urban alienation, the composition of the cover picture sees Bowie very much diminished within the frame and is therefore also quite different from anything that he had presented before - or indeed that he would produce subsequently. Bowie’s stance is comparable to heroic and frontier imagery - the hero about to set out on a great adventure or quest that will take him into dangerous, alien territory - and therefore the multi-faceted implications of such a composition form much of the framework for this chapter. Particularly, three transformations of the traditional American Western Frontier are explored: the city as frontier; night as frontier; and space as frontier.

Film is once again an evident, if more subtle, influence on Bowie’s album cover, and two threads of investigation in particular will be explored. Firstly, close alignment exists between the album’s cover picture and lyric narrative, and the visual conventions, geographical location, and thematic content of traditional film noir. Secondly, two films released near the time of Bowie’s album warrant close comparison. The first, Midnight Cowboy, exhibits similarities in that its thematic basis lies in urban alienation, and the role of its main character is that of an anti-hero embarking upon a doomed quest in a transferred American Western frontier. The second, Stanley Kubrick’s A Clockwork Orange, was a major influence upon Bowie, acknowledged as such by the artist on many occasions, and there are clear visual, geographical and thematic links between the film and the album.

Lyric analysis plays a larger role in this chapter than has been the case previously because the Ziggy Stardust album is a concept album with a thematically unified narrative. Therefore, as will be seen, the lyrics become an even more significant paratext to consider when unpacking the cover imagery.

While critics have long debated the coherence of this narrative, and Bowie himself has at times made contradictory statements regarding the intended cohesiveness of the storyline, nevertheless the album is almost universally regarded as one of rock music’s great concept albums. For a discussion of this, see Pegg (2002) The Complete David Bowie, pp. 234-244. Also see Lenig (2010) The Twisted Tale of Glam Rock, pp. 53-57. And Paytress, M. (1998) The Rise and Fall of Ziggy, pp. 77-79.
Figure 55. The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars. Front cover

Side one

1. Five Years
2. Soul Love
3. Moonage Daydream
4. Starman
5. It Ain't Easy (Davies)

Side two

1. Lady Stardust
2. Star
3. Hang on to Yourself
4. Ziggy Stardust
5. Suffragette City
6. Rock 'n' Roll Suicide

Facing the viewer front-on and positioned centrally and low within the frame, Bowie is pictured in an urban setting at night. Dwarfed by his surroundings, the Victorian architecture
of inner-city industrial brick buildings loom above him to his left, while cars parked closely together on the road frame him to the right. At the rear, buildings of a similar style reach high into the sky, their drab, dark appearance echoed by the dark, rain-heavy sky above them. Yellow lights glow brightly from windows at the side and the rear, while a large streetlight directly above the artist’s head appears to illuminate both him and the large green door to his immediate left. Above and slightly behind Bowie, and thus occupying the most centralised space on the cover, is a large rectangular yellow sign bearing the lettering K. WEST. The footpath upon which Bowie stands is wet and shiny, giving the viewer the impression that rain is, or has recently been, falling. Bowie, dressed in a light blue jump suit open at the front and exposing his chest, has his left leg raised and bent at the knee, upon which his right arm rests easily. His purple left boot rests upon a rubbish bin. The artist’s hair is cut above his ears and is of an unnaturally bright yellow hue. In his right hand he clasps the neck of an electric guitar that he holds against his side at waist height, supported by a wide black strap across his left shoulder. In front of him, and occupying the bottom right of the picture, is a collection of cardboard boxes, the front one of which is open at the top and bears the handwritten text, L. I. CO. LONDON No. 2003. At the extreme bottom right corner is what appears to be a large bundle of shredded or torn paper contained, perhaps, in a clear plastic bag, although identification of the latter is inconclusive. The bright colouring of Bowie’s costuming and hair set him apart in stark contrast to the dominant browns and greys of the bricks, concrete and sky that surround him. His exposed chest and light mode of dress seem incongruous in the obviously wet and presumably cold temperature of what we can justifiably contend to be a winter’s night in London. Inexplicably, a circle of light can be observed on the footpath at Bowie’s feet.

Of immediate impact to the viewer is the realisation that there is a marked incongruity between the subject and the environment in which he stands, an incongruity noted by some commentators. Moriarty alludes to this sense of disparity between subject and surroundings: “The album’s cover depicted Bowie, clad in a futuristic jumpsuit with guitar slung low, looking as though he had just beamed down from his mother ship to a dark London street” (2003, p. 99). Buckley too has commented upon this, suggesting that such is Bowie’s apparent displacement, that the scene might well be set in a parallel universe populated by aliens rather than in London (1999, p. 136). Auslander suggests “Bowie seems not to belong to the urban landscape in which he appears” (2006, p. 126), while Gillman and Gillman regard the scene as “an image of urban loneliness” (1986, p. 280).
Superimposed over the dull, menacing, grey/blue clouds at the top left of the cover are the words: David Bowie Ziggy Stardust: The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars. The names David Bowie and Ziggy Stardust are given equal status, being identical in both font size and style and very similar in colouring, while the other words are in a much smaller, red text. The two names mirror each other in that the bottom of the letters that make up David Bowie turn from yellow to red, while the tops of the letters that make up Ziggy Stardust do likewise, the latter also decorated with small white stars, an effective visual reinforcement of Stardust.

Bowie’s album cover bears little stylistic resemblance to the covers of other album releases during 1972, with the nearest example being the following self-titled debut release by Manfred Mann’s Earth Band:

![Manfred Mann's Earth Band album cover](image)

*Figure 56. Manfred Mann’s Earth Band debut album, 1972*

While the musicians on this cover are similarly diminished in the frame, any similarity between the two works begins and ends here. There is little particular incongruity to be observed between subject and surroundings. The location in which the members of Manfred Mann’s Earth Band are pictured appears to have been photographically manipulated in an Op-art manner, unlike the realistically rendered urban setting of the Bowie cover.\(^{165}\)

\(^{165}\) Notwithstanding the fact that parts of the Bowie image have been hand coloured, a feature that will be addressed shortly.
frames that make up the sides and top of the walkway reduce in size as they draw nearer to the subjects, giving the effect of a kind of kaleidoscopic, artificial depth to the image. The casually posed and unremarkably dressed band do not look as if they particularly belong elsewhere, being blended in to their surroundings by colour, whereas, situated beyond any recognisable, logical context, and standing out conspicuously from his surroundings, Bowie’s presence is considerably more jarring; he does not belong. It is an image of urban alienation.

As Fischer points out, alienation, in all of its widely understood meanings, has been linked to industrialisation, mass society and the erosion of community, “all forces seemingly epitomised by the city” (1973, p. 311). Because Bowie’s location is urban-industrial rather than suburban-residential and is clearly identified as being England’s capital city, London, inferences of both industrialisation and mass-society are clearly inherent to the image. The erosion of community here is more an absence of community given that Bowie is the only visible figure. Certainly the lights shining in the buildings suggest the unseen presence of others, yet, if anything, the fact that these hidden protagonists are indoors, warm, dry and safe on this dreary night, serves to further underline Bowie’s isolation within the scene.

The location for this image requires considerable discussion because, as Sara Cohen has pointed out, the city has been represented within popular music in many different ways (2007, p. 2). Of particular relevance to the discussion at hand is the city’s role as a site of alienation, the city and urban experience potentially acting to “separate the self from imagination and creativity. Alienation is estrangement . . . [and is] the experience for many urban dwellers” (Bridge and Watson, 2000, p. 9). At the centre of this condition is an inherent ambiguity or duality inherent to big cities. Cities can be seen as “the subjects of utopian imaginings and hopes for better futures. They have frequently been portrayed as the crucibles for potential enlightenment, democracy and freedom” (Pinder, 2005, p. vii). As Joachim Von Der Thesen points out, “The fact that utopias have often been given an architectural and urban form [suggests] . . . the city represents human existence in its most ideal form” (2005, p. 2). Equally, however,

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167 As will be seen in the lyric analysis to come, the very first song, ‘Five Years’, addresses the total breakdown of community.

168 For a history of the city, the reasons it came into being, and the tracing of associated advantages and disadvantages throughout its development, see B. O’Flaherty (2005) City Economics, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Anti-urban imaginaries have been forcefully in play in literary, art, and political texts for as long as there have been cities. Here the associations are with the city as a site of anomie, alienation, corruption, ill health, immorality, chaos, pollution, congestion, and a threat to social order (Bridge and Watson, 2000, pp. 15-16).

Bowie’s anomalous presence in such an otherwise highly unremarkable urban scene is disturbing; an opposite, a visual depiction of duality in keeping with Raymond Williams’ suggestion that the city offers the “excitements and challenges of its intricate processes of liberation and alienation, contact and strangeness, stimulation and standardisation” (1985, p. 23).

Silverstone suggests that some British pop music, and most particularly the work of Bowie, directly addresses the alienation felt by suburban youth. He suggests Bowie effectively offers deliverance through adventure, because “The young are trapped and bored. They dream complex media dreams that shudder between the mundane and the apocalyptic” (Silverstone, 1997, p. 24). Silverstone sees Bowie’s response to this as “the turning of suburban alienation into aesthetic objects and cultural commodities” (1997, p. 24), with the site for this transformation being primarily the inner city. At the time of the album’s release, Johnson noted, “With most of his material either dealing with the flashier style of city living or looking far into the future, Bowie must rate as our most futuristic song-writer. Sometimes what he sees is a little scary, and perhaps there’s more pessimism here than on previous releases” (1972, p. 12.). It is clear then, that Bowie’s choice of location for the cover image of the Ziggy Stardust album carries considerable significance and is a site loaded with potent historical inference.

Another critical element further refines the implications within the picture and also alters the context of the urban environment. The cover is a night scene. Cities possess a further duality in that their function undergoes a marked change after darkness falls. Throughout the daylight hours, or the ‘working day’, the city is the hub of industry and commerce, its streets bustling with workers who day after day carry out their myriad labour roles to ensure the city fulfils its

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primary reason for being. Indeed for a capital city such as London, a recognised global leader of capitalism, expectations of its performance on the stage of world commerce are as high as they can possibly be. As Alan Blum describes it, “The city which is at the centre of a civilization is the capital precisely because it can make the dissemination of the question of worldly desire its capital concern” (2003, p. 163). However, at night, those same city streets that during the day held industry and commerce sacrosanct become the playground for the workers who enabled that daytime function. The streets become sites for entertainment, for stress-release and the exploration of imagination, or as Blum puts it, public stages for the “nocturnal liberation” of the populace (2003, p. 160). While the daytime city is epitomised by order and control, the night offers uncertainty and possibility, a complete transformation of “a realm where ordering tendencies are often ascendant but various counter-processes erupt and are displaced to the night or the margins” (Edensor, 2000, p. 137). At night the city’s workers ostensibly become of equal status, both management and rank-and-file alike freed up from their prescribed daytime roles and imposed hierarchy to be suddenly, with the movement of a clock-hand, egalitarian. They have leisure time on their hands; time to do as they please. Night-time in the city offers them the opportunity to put into practice that which they may have imagined during the confines of their working day, because “even in the spaces of alienation, shackled to the production line, acts of the imagination like daydreams form sites of resistance” (Bridge and Watson, 2000, p. 9). In this guise then, although it may be perceived as drab and dreary, the city scene in which Bowie appears can be read less as a site of oppression and control than a site of transformation, excitement and unmitigated potential.

Further, while night-time in the city offers release from constraint through the entertainments and distractions that are available to all those with leisure time at their disposal, the lack of daytime order and control and the potential for concealment within the surrounding darkness in which these activities take place also creates the potential for danger. If actual danger itself is not present, then certainly the atmosphere of darkness still elicits the suggestion of danger (Melbin, 1978, p. 11). Blum believes that “night is typically talked about in terms of crime and security or deviance and governance . . . free time releases ‘destructive’ temptations as idleness exacerbates the natural vulnerabilities of people, exposing them to conditions that bring out their worst” (2003, p. 146). Individuals experiencing leisure time at night within inner city environments have historically enjoyed opportunities for unscripted, heightened experience outside the safety and control of the working day. Peter Bailey, drawing upon the

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work of sociologist and philosopher Georg Simmel, suggests that through a combination of chance, accident and necessity, leisure time in the big city has always offered adventure based upon, to varying degrees, the presence of an inherent risk (2004, p. 4).

In addition to workers adopting different roles when remaining in, or returning to, the city at night, the altered function of the central urban space attracts others from suburbia. This includes those who work outside the inner city, certainly, but also, and crucially, it draws a large contingent of youth seeking respite through adventure to relieve them from the mundane nature of life in suburbia. As Silverstone sees it, “The city is the lamp around which suburban moths flutter: camp, elegant, marginal and modestly dangerous, and in all of these things resolutely other than dully suburban” (1997, p. 23). Simon Frith regards Bowie as “the quintessential suburban star” (1997, p. 271), remarking that the artist conveys to his fans:

... the lure of the city – the metropolis at the end of the local railway line, a metropolis not to occupy but to visit ... at the weekend, for the occasion, in a gang. In pop terms London is a peculiar place ... Suburban sensibility here concerns the enactment of escape (rather than escape itself) and the domestication of decadence (Frith, 1997, p.272).

In this sense then, on the front cover of the Ziggy Stardust album Bowie can be seen to be providing a visual enactment of the night time flight of an alienated ‘other’, (Ziggy Stardust, or perhaps Bowie himself), to the inner city in search of, or already in the midst of, an adventure. Richard Lehan describes the presence of the ‘other’ in a major city as “a disturbing presence ... an urban element, usually a minority, deemed ‘outside’ the community ... the mysterious stranger – the Dionysus figure ... the mysterious man from nowhere who disrupts the city from within” (1998, p. 8). Clearly, such a description resonates with Bowie’s picture, as there is no evident explanation for his out-of-context presence; he is “a mysterious man from nowhere” indeed. Equally, there is a widely held perception that night is “the haunt of weirdos and strange characters” (Melbin, 1978, p. 10). This view is backed up by Deborah Thomas, who suggests the nocturnal environment of the city is “the preserve of ‘alien’ groups” (1992, p. 61).

In this context, Bowie’s alignment with glam rock is a critical factor in this investigation because in London at the time of the album’s release, glam rock artists and their fans were arguably the most visually alien large sub-cultural group existing within the popular culture of the day.\footnote{See Hebdige (1979) Subculture, p. 60.} By 1972 glam rock had become a firmly established style within popular music,
most especially in the UK. For approximately five years, 1971-1975, the style became a dominant force in the UK pop charts. While Bowie’s friend, contemporary and occasional collaborator, Marc Bolan, along with his band T Rex, are widely held to be the catalyst that started the glam rock movement, it is Bowie who is widely held to have taken the style to its creative peak. Acts including Roxy Music, Steve Harley and Cockney Rebel, Sweet, Slade, Elton John, Sparks, Alice Cooper, Lou Reed, Gary Glitter, Alvin Stardust, The New York Dolls, Wizard, Mud, The Rubettes, Suzi Quatro and - towards the end of the time in question, KISS - were also, at different times during the era, to the forefront of the style. However Bowie’s alignment with glam rock ran throughout the time-span of the style’s heyday.

Glam rock as a style is widely acknowledged as being rather problematic to define, with coherence between acts frequently located more within visual and thematic considerations than musical-stylistic ones. As Alan Moore attests, “with the music of glam rock ranging from the progressive-influenced Roxy Music to the bubblegum-esque teen pop of Gary Glitter, the boundaries were frequently confusingly fluid” (2001, pp. 922-923). Indeed Roy Shuker has gone so far as to suggest, “In glam the music was almost secondary to the act, as the image of the star became part of the musician’s creative presentation” (1998, p. 47). Most important to the current discussion, the imagery of glam rock remained its most cogent signifier throughout the era. Glam rock costuming featured brazen clashes of primary colours and bright, shiny, often man-made materials, with lurex, lamé, silk, satin, polyester and sequins all popular choices. In addition to mimicking the shiny quality of space-age, space-suit clothing - thus imbuing the wearer with a touch of the escapist ethos popularly associated with the notion of space-travel - the man-made quality of much of the clothing had the additional attraction of being a sub-cultural statement of independence, directly positioning the wearer against the natural fibre, get-back-to-nature affiliations of the preceding counter-cultural generation (Paytress, 1998, p. xi). Brightly coloured platform boots or shoes were obligatory, and the majority of glam exponents – musicians and fans, both male and female – wore makeup to varying degrees. Tight-fitting jump suits were one of the most commonly

177 Until he abandoned the style completely, with the release of his American soul music styled album, Young Americans, in March, 1975.
179 See also Hebdige (1979) Subculture, p. 62.
utilised garments worn by glam rock exponents, with almost all of the major proponents at one or another time adopting this hallmark costume.¹⁸⁰ Bowie’s costuming on the cover is thus consistent with prevailing glam rock costuming.

With escapism through reinvention of the self being a central theme of glam rock, perhaps the image that lies nearest to Bowie’s cover picture during 1972 is the following photograph that was taken, yet never used, for the cover of the 1972 single ‘All the Young Dudes’ by the band Mott the Hoople.

![Figure 57. Unused photograph by Mick Rock, intended for the cover of ‘All The Young Dudes’ by Mott The Hoople, 1972.](image)

Written by Bowie, who offered the song to Mott The Hoople to record, the single reached number three on the UK singles chart in August, 1972. Taken by well-known music

¹⁸⁰ It is also important to note, however, that during the period of glam rock’s peak popularity, mainstream artists, artists from other musical styles including progressive rock, and previously established pop/rock stars also at times adopted some of the visual signifiers of glam such as the jumpsuits, including such luminaries as Mick Jagger, The Who, Rod Stewart and Emerson Lake and Palmer.
photographer Mick Rock, this intended cover picture was passed over in favour of a standard photograph of the band members posing side by side. Nevertheless, the message in this unused picture seems entirely consistent with the lyrics of ‘All the Young Dudes’, as well as both the cover image of Bowie’s album and the sentiment expressed within. That is, that glam rock offers its followers an escape from the confinement, drudgery and physical, mental and emotional restrictions of the inner city and suburbia. This comprises one component of the wider reinventive promise of glam rock to its fans; that one could transcend one’s immediate actual physical, social and even sexual environment to construct a new idealised version of the self.¹⁸¹ This notion is in alignment with Dorothy Norman’s description of the heroic vision:

> Whereas man perennially trembles in the face of Paradise Lost – of chaos, uncertainty, destruction, alienation, night and death – but also of overwhelming ecstasy, life and day, what is of the highest concern is the possibility that a heroic vision may dawn within each of us, to be assimilated – beyond theory or intellectualization – into our everyday lives (Norman, 1990, p.7).

The everyday clothing the boy wears carries no hint of glam-esque transformation and serves to firmly locate him as belonging to the dreary urban landscape that surrounds him. The makeup around his eyes, however, is an emphatic glam signifier, with the distinctive perpendicular lines of black across the eyes most closely mimicking Alice Cooper. His homemade, pretend guitar is held in the pose of a guitar hero with his legs apart and arm pointed to the sky, with head tilted back in triumphant cry. This is the heroic vision of the glam rock-influenced suburban youth of London, 1972; illustrating the desire for transcendence from the world of the mundane through becoming a rock and roll hero, and fully in keeping with glam rock’s illustration of the “dream of common people promoted to stars” (Lenig, 2010, p. 11). The following lyric line from ‘Star’, the seventh track on the Ziggy Stardust album, sums this desire up perfectly: “I could make a transformation as a rock’n’roll star”.¹⁸²

In contrast to the realism of the Mick Rock photograph, the artificiality of both Bowie’s image and the overall scene on the Ziggy Stardust album has been enhanced beyond the standard glam-inherent qualities provided by the employment of non-natural fabrics and by faces artificialised through the use of makeup. The image has once again been hand-coloured,

¹⁸² More comprehensive lyric analysis follows later in the chapter.
as on the cover of *Hunky Dory*, and this adds a further layer of artificiality to the scene and “exaggerates the strangeness of his appearance” (Auslander, 2006, p. 239). Just as the colouring on the previous album imbued the cover with a filmic allusion, here too, “The unnatural, hand-tinted hue [gave] the impression of a noirish, Hollywood stage set” (Paytress, 1998, p. 91).

Indeed, the composition of the cover picture shows a marked similarity to one of the central visual characteristics of *film noir*, a filmic style that is primarily concerned with the expression of urban alienation (Dimendberg, 2004, p. 7). In *film noir*, “lonely characters in empty, urban spaces evoke a sense of urban alienation. The city is usually shown at night and in the rain” (Mennel, 2008, p. 47). Further outlining a typical city scene for *film noir*, Andrew Spicer suggests “Film noir’s iconography consists of images of the dark, night-time city, its streets damp with rain which reflects the flashing neon signs” (2002, p. 48). This is a scenario echoed by Ginette Vincendeau, who identifies the primary visual motif for *film noir* as a city scene at night, “illuminated by shiny cobblestones and pierced by gleaming neon signs” (1992, p. 54). The central vignette of the darkened city scene featured on the advertising poster for *Cry of the City*, 1948, exemplifies this stylistic hallmark:

![Cry of the City poster](image)

**Figure 58. Advertising poster for *Cry of the City*, 1948**

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183 See also Pegg (2002) *The Complete David Bowie*, p. 239.
While clearly constructed from a drawing rather than a photograph, the colouring on this poster nevertheless bears a close resemblance to the exaggerated, artificial hand colouring effect evident upon the Bowie cover.

A further example of this typical scene, rendered in black and white, is the following image from the movie, *I Walk Alone*, also from 1948:

![Figure 59. Scene from *I Walk Alone*, 1948](image)

While once again the protagonist is pictured walking away rather than facing the viewer, the domination of his small figure by the buildings that surround him, the absence of other people, and the centralised featuring of the street light all bear similarity to the Bowie album cover.

An underlying sense of threat or risk linked closely to notions of urban alienation, then, is a part of the inner city’s atmosphere at night. As frequently conveyed in *film noir*, this beneath-the-surface unease is a highly necessary component in the potential for adventure(s) to be found within the darkened city environs, a quality also intrinsically linked to the presence of ‘others’. This scenario is directly analogous to night in the city being regarded as a type of frontier. As Blum puts it, “night has evoked an aura of ferocity and unruliness, personified in the notion of ‘the last frontier’” (2003, p. 141). Melbin too has regarded night in the city as a frontier, suggesting “Both land frontier and the nighttime have reputations as regions of danger and outlawry” (1978, p. 10). As Bowie stands alone on the wet concrete of a

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185 In addition to these links between the cover and typical *film noir* imagery, considerable thematic links also exist between the story told through the songs of Bowie’s album and the quintessential *film noir* narrative, as will be discussed shortly.
nondescript, urban industrial London street, his countenance purposeful and alert despite a studied casualness, he might well be regarded as a kind of futuristic frontier hero. His diminution in the frame highlights the enormity of the task ahead of him; he is alone and small, pitted against both the daunting city and the challenges of the night.\textsuperscript{186}

In addition, implications of space and science fiction introduce yet a third frontier.

Space as a modern version of the American western frontier has been a commonly used analogy, in the arts, certainly, but also in politics. John F. Kennedy, for instance, in his presidential acceptance speech of 1960, incorporated it as a key element as he looked towards the decade to come, stating:

\begin{quote}
I stand tonight facing west on what was once the last frontier . . . and we stand today on the edge of a new frontier – the frontier of the 1960s. A frontier of unknown opportunities and perils; a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats . . . Beyond that frontier are the uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war . . . I am asking each of you to be pioneers on that frontier (Kennedy cited in Snowman and Bradbury, 1998, p. 272).
\end{quote}

Deudney suggests, “Space is humanity’s high frontier. Like all frontiers, space has produced unexpected treasures, generated strong enthusiasts, spawned wild speculations, and been enshrouded in myth and false promise” (1982, p. 5). In popular entertainment also, space has been trumpeted as the ultimate, modern frontier, epitomised most particularly perhaps through the well-known spoken voice-over from the theme of the popular US science fiction television series, \textit{Star Trek}: “Space – the Final Frontier”.

As noted in earlier chapters, space has figured previously among Bowie’s thematic concerns. Ruth Padel is just one of many commentators who have aligned Bowie to the space-as-frontier notion, regarding Bowie in his role of Ziggy Stardust to be a tragic hero and suggesting “[he] is the astronaut, who dares . . . ‘to boldly go where no man has gone before’. David Bowie turns this into a psychonaut, inventing a persona, Ziggy Stardust, an alien hermaphrodite messianic pop deity” (2000, pp. 238-239).\textsuperscript{187}

\begin{footnotesize}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{186} Mark Paytress is one of few critics to have discussed Bowie’s diminution within the frame on this album cover, but rather than considering it to be a representation of urban alienation or having any sort or heroic implication(s), he suggests it is an important device designed to dissolve the distinction between David Bowie and Ziggy Stardust, the performer and the role. See Paytress (1998) \textit{The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust}, p. 91. \textsuperscript{187} See also Cagle (1995) \textit{Restructuring Pop/Subculture}, pp. 146-147, and Paytress (1998) \textit{The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust}, p. XI.}
\end{footnotesize}
Space is not represented overtly within the cover image, as, notwithstanding the grey sky above, the picture is very much an earthbound scene. Yet Bowie’s jump suit and boots are to a degree similar in style, if not in colour, to clothing worn by astronauts in popular science fiction representations such as Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey*, and television series such as *Lost in Space* and *Buck Rogers*, thus providing a strong visual inference. Crucially, the album’s title and other written text on the cover are a strong paratext that significantly strengthens that inference. The words ‘Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars’ on the front, in conjunction with song titles on the rear cover including ‘Moonage Daydream’, ‘Starman’, ‘Lady Stardust’, ‘Ziggy Stardust’ and ‘Star’, ensure that space is a prominently highlighted element. These paratexts serve to (re)direct with more contextual focus the viewer’s eye towards Bowie’s unlikely presence within the scene. Providing yet further support, the rear cover picture of Bowie in a phone box is highly reminiscent of the peculiarly British form of space transport - a Police phone box called the Tardis - favoured by the time-lord, Doctor Who, the central character in the BBC science fiction television series, *Dr Who*.\(^{188}\) These factors can be seen as combining forces to fully bear out Pegg’s view that the cover conveyed the “adventitious impression that the guitar-clutching visitor to this unglamorous twilit backstreet has just touched down from another dimension altogether” (2002, p. 241). Bowie, or Ziggy, might well have materialised on the spot, much in the manner of the Star-Trek crew teleporting down to the surface of an alien planet, or Dr Who’s Tardis materialising amid who knows what or where. As Cato so candidly puts it, “Bowie looking like a stranger from an unknown land, leaning against the wall, Gibson hanging nonchalantly against hip, outside K. West furriers on a deserted and rain-swept London backstreet, was just so fuckin’ out of this world” (1997, p. 30).

Rather than an actual physical location, the American western frontier can be seen as a readily transferable “concept or hope” (Aquila, 1980, p. 415). As Helen McLure puts it in her contextualisation of the internet as the newest frontier, “The perceived virtues and heroic figures of the American West have always provided familiar, inspiring models for current conditions and problems, particularly during times of economic transition, rapid cultural changes, or social stress” (2000, p. 458).\(^{189}\) And as Aquila points out, “The new westerner might be a surfer, skier, hippie instead of a cowboy, miner or farmer, but he is still searching

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\(^{188}\) See Paytress (1998) *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust*, p. 91. This crucial element will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter, when analysing the rear cover in more detail.

\(^{189}\) Also see H. N. Smith (1970) *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
for the same thing. His West, like the mythic West of the nineteenth century, is a promised land of immediate, personal, physical enjoyment, fulfilment, or escape” (1980, p. 432).

With this in mind, Bowie’s image bears a strong thematic resemblance to advertising posters for the 1969 movie *Midnight Cowboy*, in their jointly inherent qualities of both modern frontier and urban alienation:

The plot of *Midnight Cowboy* tells the story of a young Texan man, Joe Buck, who leaves his home to find his fortune in New York City. Once there, however, the naïve adventurer, visually ill-fitting in his new environs due to the conspicuous cowboy clothing he wears, becomes swallowed up by the impersonality and street-savvy ways of the vast city, totally failing in his attempts to hustle for a living. During his quest, however, he finds friendship with another societal outcast, the physically handicapped Enrico Rizzo. When the attempts of the two misfits to succeed in New York ultimately fail, they escape the city by bus for Miami, but Rizzo dies en route. At the movie’s end Buck is left sitting with his arm around his dead friend and gazing out the bus window. The city is seen to have won the battle; the would-be heroes vanquished, their alienated status absolutely confirmed.
In the movie posters for *Midnight Cowboy*, as is the case throughout the movie itself, Joe Buck’s cowboy attire renders him completely out of place within the inner city New York surroundings that encircle him, whether framed by the steel girders of the Brooklyn Bridge under a heavy, oppressive and smog-laden sky, or surrounded by the bright lights of a vibrant night-time scene downtown. His western frontier image should rightly be located in rural, wide-open-spaces locales and not in the inner city, which accordingly takes on a sinister aura of a kind that a cowboy is not traditionally equipped to combat. Effectively, *Midnight Cowboy* takes the American western frontier legend and transports it to a new location, treating the city as frontier.

Like the traditional western hero, Joe sets out to conquer a daunting, dangerous frontier. But he faces, again, not a landscape of open, unsullied, “natural” possibility but the metropolis, a center of global capitalism, a well-trodden landscape of abundant riches and misery alike (Floyd, 2001, p. 109).

Rizzo too, limping badly from the effects of polio, dressed all in black with his long overcoat pressed tightly to his frame, projects a lonely figure that is similarly “alienated, uncertain, and agitated” (Bapis, 2008, p.100). Indeed, the two figures are as alienated by their surroundings as the blue jump-suited Bowie/Ziggy appears to be in his London scene.

That Buck and Rizzo’s quest as outsiders aspiring to make their fortune in New York city should fail so dismally and completely is in keeping with James A. Clapp’s observation that in movies addressing the theme of urban alienation, “It is a rarity that the city is conquered. Survival of self or one’s values is perhaps the best that can be achieved by those with conquest in mind” (2005, p. 9). As will be seen in the lyric analysis to come, Bowie/Ziggy’s quest to save the earth from destruction also fails, his redemptive zeal and transformative ardour blunted by the all too urban excesses of rock stardom, sex, substance abuse and ego. In this light, then, and as was the case with Buck and Rizzo, Bowie is far more anti-hero than hero, a flawed being who cannot measure up to the primary expectation of a true hero; that is, “The hero of legend always overcomes tremendous odds” (Steckmesser, 1963, p. 173).

A similar comparison might equally be drawn between *Ziggy Stardust* and the 1976 movie, *Taxi Driver*, in which a psychologically unstable ex-Vietnam War veteran struggles to cope with the challenges of being a night-time taxi driver in New York City.

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The taxi-driver, Travis Bickle, a survivor of the transferred Western frontier of the Vietnam War and thus a military hero of sorts, fails to cope with the new version of the frontier he faces in the city-at-night back in his home country, a challenge full of decadence, sleaze and corruption that he single-handedly attempts to right. The advertising poster for the movie, with the city rising up dark and foreboding behind him, epitomizes urban alienation and is reminiscent of the Bowie image from four years earlier.  

Bowie’s frontier is not just space, or the city, or the night, but a combination of all three. Crucially, alienation remains the central component, a quality strengthened threefold by virtue of these tripartite locations. Hero or anti-hero, the quest he faces, and yet ultimately fails in achieving, is his alone. He is alone in the city, alone as a spaceman/alien figure, and alone.

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192 A point made by several Bowie biographers is that the neon sign, K West, situated above Ziggy on the album cover, acts as a metaphor for his quest to save the earth. While I have not been able to find any evidence that this was at all intentional on Bowie’s part, and indeed it seems unlikely, it is certainly a tempting retrospective.
in the night. And as a heroic figure, his alienation is as it must be, for the hero “is often cast as a figure who lacks a place within the community for which he fights” (Tasker, 2002, p. 77).

While alienated, Bowie appears nevertheless largely self-assured, relaxed yet alert, perhaps even a little arrogant with his head held high, his legs wide apart, and engaging with the viewer front-on, a pose Paytress regards as “gently macho posturing” (1998, p. 91). While his small size within the frame coupled with the shadowing around his eyes make it unclear to the viewer whether his eyes are open or closed, the focussed directness evident upon his face gives the impression that his eyes are surely open and that he is fully present in the moment. Indeed, Bowie’s stance is similar to the manner in which British military heroes are often depicted in statues, such as can be observed in the following London statues of luminaries Lord Horatio Nelson, Major General Sir Henry Havelock, Major General Robert Clive (Clive of India) and General Charles James Napier:

![Figure 63. Sir Henry Havelock, London](image1)

![Figure 64. Nelson’s Column, London](image2)

As is the case with each of these depictions of a hero, Bowie too is positioned squared up and front on to the viewer, his gaze fixed and his expression serious and unsmiling as if in acknowledgment or contemplation of the enormity of the quest that lies before him. There are parallels to be drawn here with the tradition of the British swagger portrait, a theatrical style of portraiture that emphasises bravado and ostentation, implying “a degree of self-consciousness . . . which causes the portrait to transcend the private statement and address itself to the public at large. There is therefore an element of rhetoric in it, even of challenge [through] grand movements and gestures” (Wilton, 1992, p. 17). The military heroes that Bowie mimics are each positioned with one foot forward of the other, as if beginning the act of stepping into the frontier that awaits them, “implying past and future movement” (Summers, D. 1996, p. 783). Bowie’s pose, whereby the weight of the body is borne on one leg while the other bends, is termed contrapposto in art historical terminology, and has also been considered an ideal male heroic pose. While Bowie does not mirror this exactly, his highly raised left leg nevertheless imparts forward motion and movement to the image, while

his body weight remains on his right leg, characteristics consistent with the definition (Williams, 2009, p. 39). In addition, each of the military heroes is depicted carrying weapons or other tools of their trade at their side, with each of them carrying a sword and two of them carrying rolled up documents. Bowie’s guitar therefore becomes highly symbolic as the weapon with which he will tackle his quest; the pre-eminent symbol of rock’n’roll, the electric guitar or ‘axe’. Padel exemplifies this idea when describing Jimi Hendrix as, “A guitar hero, brandishing the magic weapon that turned him into a god” (2000, p. 81). The otherwise seemingly inexplicable circle of light at Bowie’s feet can readily be regarded as the spotlight into which the glam rock hero is about to step. Such a reading is consistent with Dawson’s description of Bowie as “a modern heroic figure” (Dawson, 1994, p. 276).

Further strengthening the influence of film upon the album cover, Bowie has always been very forthcoming and public in his admiration for the work of Stanley Kubrick, most particularly the movies *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), and *A Clockwork Orange* (1971):

> For me and several of my friends, the seventies were the start of the twenty-first century. It was Kubrick’s doing on the whole. With the release of two magnificent films, *2001* and *A Clockwork Orange*, within a short period, he pulled together all the unarticulated loose ends of the past five years into a desire of unstoppable momentum (Bowie, in Bowie and Rock, 2002, p.12).

Jerome Shapiro has suggested that Kubrick put into words and images the “not-so-latent fears” of the sixties generation (2002, p.150). Similarly, in considering these two films in conjunction with their predecessor, *Dr Strangelove* (1963), Kolker suggests:

> The films of his trilogy . . . were commercially successful and demonstrated an unerrring ability to seize upon major cultural concerns and obsessions - the cold war, space travel, the ambiguities of violence . . . The ‘youth culture’ of the late sixties and early seventies embraced *2001* and *A Clockwork Orange* for reasons of their immediacy and their spectacle (Kolker, 1980, p.79).

Given the references to science fiction evident on the *Ziggy Stardust* cover, some degree of influence from *2001: A Space Odyssey* seems likely once again. However, it is *A Clockwork Orange* that is most clearly influential upon Bowie’s *Ziggy Stardust* album. In his original review of the film, from 1971, Robert Hughes described the location as a “subtopia . . . [with] alienating décor” (2003 p. 131). As was Anthony Burgess’ original novel *A Clockwork Orange*, Kubrick’s movie too was set in London. As McDougal puts it, the

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195 As previously noted, this movie provided both the thematic text and the title, almost, for the successful single from the second album, ‘Space Oddity’. 

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location is a London “of the near future” (2003, p. 7). Stephen Farber, meanwhile, regarded the London setting for Kubrick’s work as “the nightmare city of tomorrow” (1972, p. 288). And, beyond the similarity in setting, the costuming worn by Bowie/Ziggy bears significant resemblance to costuming seen in the movie. Bowie has candidly admitted this influence in interviews: “I had just seen A Clockwork Orange and had been galvanised not only by Kubrick’s startling visualisation of Burgess’s novel but also his take on functional-chic youth outfits” (Bowie in Bowie and Rock, 2002, p. 17). Evidently the appropriation was made with considerable thought, however. As the following excerpt from an interview in which Bowie was asked about the Ziggy Stardust image attests, he was well aware of the connotations of violence that might come with such a direct allusion to the film, and so he made alterations accordingly in order to soften the connection:

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\text{The jumpsuits I thought were just wonderful, and I liked the malicious, malevolent, vicious quality of those four guys, although aspects of the violence themselves didn’t turn me on particularly. I wanted to put another spin on that, so . . . I picked out all these florid, bright, quilted kind of materials (David Bowie quoted in Paytress, 1998, p. 97).}
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In an effort to reflect, but not copy, the codpiece of the droog uniform, Bowie and his costume-designer Freddie Burretti utilised a front panel in his costumes (Bowie and Rock, 2002, p. 17). This would seem to similarly reflect Bowie’s desire to retain the basic components of the droog uniform but in a softened form to lessen any potential connotations of violence.\footnote{\text{197}}

Parts of A Clockwork Orange were filmed in a noirish style, as the following image shows:

\footnote{\text{196} And in this regard, the number 2003 appearing upon the cardboard box in the front right of the Bowie image perhaps takes on a more significant role that subtly suggests a future time.} \footnote{\text{197} Although not directly applicable to this visual analysis of the album cover, another clear appropriation from A Clockwork Orange was evident in Bowie’s live concerts during 1972, whereby he would use distinctive compositions from the soundtrack of Kubrick’s movie to both begin and end his performances. The use of Wendy Carlos’ electronic version of the fourth movement of Beethoven’s ninth symphony to open his concerts is particularly significant as, with no commercial release other than the movie soundtrack, a listener could only associate this highly stylised music with A Clockwork Orange. See Buckley (1999) Strange Fascination, p. 133. Also T. Hopkins (1985) Bowie, London: Elm Tree Books, p. 80. The other music that Bowie borrowed in these performances was ‘Land of Hope and Glory,’ March number One from Pomp and Circumstance by Edward Elgar. Bowie used the work to conclude his concerts, playing it as the house lights came on and the audience left the concert venue. In addition to the contemporaneous link with Kubrick’s film, given the popularity of Elgar’s work in British Proms concerts and in particular the theatricality associated with it as the entire audience would traditionally stand for the occasion, it seems likely that Bowie sought to imbue his own concerts with this peculiarly British tradition of pageantry and grandiosity.}
Aspects of the plot of the Kubrick film can also be gleaned in the Ziggy Stardust plot, a point noted at the time of the album’s release, with Michael Watts, for instance, suggesting the apocalyptic scenario outlined in the album’s opening track, ‘Five years’, was “exactly the sort of technological vision that Stanley Kubrick foresees in A Clockwork Orange” (Watts, January 1972, p. 19). The protagonist in ‘Star’ opts for reinvention as a rock star in outright rejection of the conventional career choices on offer for a young man in London, 1972, having earlier distanced himself from the world of parents/adults in ‘Starman’ through the line “Don’t tell your Papa or he’ll get us locked up in fright”, and from conventional faith in the belief systems of religion and politics during ‘Soul Love’. Similarly, in A Clockwork Orange, Alex too “has a cynical view of his parents, clearly rejecting their jobs, their care, and their aesthetics . . . The institutions of the family, industry, and politics are seen as corrupt and unsatisfying” (Gabbard and Sharma, 2003, p.89). Further, Gabbard and Sharma regard Alex, who chooses violence as his means of expressing this dissatisfaction, as an artist-as-hero figure, suggesting, “The artist-as-hero rejects older systems of belief . . . The arbiter’s consciousness functions as the arbiter of society and as the only index of change” (2003, p.89). Ziggy Stardust, while similarly disillusioned, chooses not violence but rock’n’roll as his agent of change. Unlike the weapons of violence borne so casually in the hands of the four droogs in the Clockwork Orange image, Bowie instead, equally casually, clasps his electric guitar.
On the rear cover of the Ziggy Stardust album, Bowie is pictured standing inside a public telephone box, with part of the dialling mechanism of the telephone itself visible under his left arm. He is still evidently playing the role of Ziggy Stardust in this photograph, sporting the same blue jumpsuit that he wears on the front cover; however, here his guitar is nowhere to be seen. Because the photograph is a relatively close-up one, the viewer is now able to distinguish black, seemingly random, geometric designs upon the costume. Bowie’s physical presence is markedly different from that of the front cover. Rather than being intimidatingly diminished by his surroundings and constituting just one part of a much wider mise en scene, here Bowie is very much to the forefront, totally dominating the picture. The continuity with
the front cover that is provided by his costuming, the darkness that surrounds the telephone box on either side, and the artificially coloured yellow brightness of the interior lighting, give the initial impression that this is likely a furthering of the film noir-like thematic and visual inferences conveyed by the front. His presence in the telephone booth might well be a development within a narrative flow relating to the front cover and documenting Ziggy’s night-time exploration of the city frontier, following his initial landing in the locale as seemingly portrayed on the front cover. Yet, were that the case, one would surely expect the hero to appear alert, on-edge, and at the very least mindful of potential danger. Instead, the expression on his face as he looks slightly down towards the viewer is almost haughty, partly bemused, and even a little arrogant and dismissive. With one hand on his hip and the other raised, his elbow resting nonchalantly upon the telephone, Bowie’s pose is highly stylised and performative. He could be a mannequin or a model that has been set in a fixed, predetermined pose. Certainly, he is not using the telephone box for the purpose for which it was designed; he displays no hint that he is involved in making a phone call and instead seems to be using the narrow confines of the location as a kind of frame within which he is knowingly putting himself on display for public viewing.

The gestural impression he conveys is consistent with camp, a point also noted by other critics, with Paytress believing it to be a “distinctly campy posture, hand on hip and lithe limbed” (1998, p. 91).198 Indeed, and as pre-empted on the previous album, Bowie’s posture and expression can be directly aligned to certain of Susan Sontag’s requirements for camp as outlined in her seminal essay, ‘Notes on Camp’, most especially in the qualities of detachment and disdain that are evident (1964, pp. 288-289). Bowie’s stance is overtly pretentious, possessing a knowing quality that signifies conscious, purposeful intent that is acted out for the viewing of others, another defining element of camp.199 And as Hawkins further suggests, an artist employing camp not only purposely reveals intention in his enactment, but the exact nature of that intention becomes understood by those who view it by nature of its specific context, because “context determines the perception of camp” (2009, p. 148).

Contextually, the image functions as an ironic but specific reference within popular science fiction of the day: science fiction of a peculiarly, localised, British variety. Unlike the sleek,

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state-of-the-art space ships to be seen in American television programmes such as Star Trek and Lost in Space, BBC television science fiction hero Dr Who, in the programme of the same name, travelled through both time and space in a Police telephone phone box named the Tardis. Other critics too have made this association with the Bowie picture, and as Paytress suggests, “The box had an added layer of significance for British audiences. An entire generation had been weaned on the Dr Who television series” (1998, p. 91).

The original incarnation of Dr Who ran for 26 series between 1963 and 1989. Widely discussed in both popular and scholarly presses both at the time and since, Matthew Sweet (2006) suggests, “Its concepts and metaphors have invaded our language. It has colonised the British consciousness more effectively than any race of rubber-skinned aliens. It is a monstrous, unstoppable, ever-growing discourse”. Substantiating such a claim, the programme remains the longest running and most successful British science fiction television series (Corna, 2007, p. 217). Film and cultural studies scholars frequently regard the Dr Who television series as one that responded “in imaginative ways to contemporary historical problems” (Charles, 2008, p. 450). Particularly, it is seen as a remarkably perceptive and consciously ironic commentary on the post-war decline of Great Britain’s international influence, its waning economic power and the troubled social reality of the day. As Lisa Allardice argues, “Every detail of Dr Who is infused with the wry self-mockery of a former champ who knows his finest hour has passed. This was Britain’s postwar position personified, and the contrast with American sci-fi serials, such as Star Trek, is stark” (2003, p. 26). Alec Charles, focusing particularly on the early Dr Who series of the late sixties and early seventies, suggests that the early years of the original series of Doctor Who (1963-1989) were often characterized by a yearning for British imperial dominance, as its elderly Edwardian hero turned back time to patrol the universe and the history of the world in his Metropolitan police telephone box (2008, pp. 452-453).

While it is debatable to what extent such allegorical insights were commonly recognised by viewers in the early seventies, the ways in which the programme playfully ‘sent-up’ the science fiction genre and incorporated humour and camp into its essence are of particular

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201 It was revived in 2005 and continues today.
pertinence when discussing Bowie’s parodistic homage. At the time of Bowie’s release, the role of the Doctor was being played by actor Jon Pertwee (1969-1974), who was frequently described as camp or, as Allardice puts it, as “a dandy [of] foppish allure” (2003, p. 27).  

While making no evident attempt to mimic the much older Pertwee in either costuming or personal characteristics, Bowie’s camp pose can certainly be seen as a conscious and careful borrowing of one of the programme’s defining characteristics. Crucially, the period in which Pertwee played the lead role coincided with the programme reaching its peak of popularity (Clute and Nicholls, 1993, p. 346). The central component of camp in the playing of the Dr Who role was subsequently maintained in the series by the actor who took over from Pertwee in 1974, Tom Baker: “Baker’s Dr Who was camp, irreverent and forever teetering on the brink of catastrophe” (Allardice, 2003, p. 27).

Camp requires a central component of self-conscious irony or disruptive humour (Brett and Wood, 2002). As Sontag puts it, “The whole point of camp is to dethrone the serious. Camp is playful, anti-serious” (1964, p. 288). In this light, the rear cover can be seen as playfully undercutting the ostensibly more serious implications of the front cover. In addition, however, Bowie is simultaneously critiquing the seriousness of intent and underlying authenticity supposedly inherent to rock music (Paytress, 1998, p. 98). With his ‘put on’ pose, he is playing the part of a rock star rather than being one, a message entirely consistent with the

204 See also Hawkins (2009) The British Pop Dandy, pp. 146-147.
lyrics of the song ‘Star’, as discussed previously, and also with the star construction implications of the *Hunky Dory* album cover. Bowie summed up his intention in a much-quoted interview with *Rolling Stone* magazine in April 1971, when he stated that rock music, “should not be taken so seriously. I think it should be tarted up, made into a prostitute, a parody of itself. It should be the clown, the Pierrot medium” (David Bowie quoted in Mendelsohn, 1971). In the rear cover picture then, Bowie makes clear that his Ziggy Stardust rock star figure is a construction through his employment of camp. Further, however, by borrowing the implications already embedded within the *Dr Who* ethos, he is also parodying science fiction and referencing the wider, still pertinent implications of the space race that ran through much of the science fiction of the day.205

As the above picture of Jon Pertwee’s Dr Who and the Tardis amid heavy foliage illustrates, another inherent aspect of the *Dr Who* series that has direct relevance to Bowie’s front cover image is the frequent incongruity between the Dr and his ship, and the locations in which they found themselves landing. Such was the lack of finesse and accuracy in plotting the Tardis’ time and space travel, the Police box would frequently land in the middle of completely incongruous surroundings. Among the many unlikely locations in which the Dr and the Tardis involuntarily landed are Asia Minor, near Troy, in 1184BC (Dr Who: The Myth Makers: Temple of Secrets 1965); a street in Tombstone, Arizona, in 1881 (Dr Who: The Gunfighters: A Holiday for the Doctor 1966); the South Pole, in 1986 (Dr Who: The Tenth Planet: Episode 4 1966); the front-line trenches of WWI, in France, 1917 (Dr Who: The War Games: Episode One 1969); and the hold of a ship in the middle of the Indian Ocean, in 1926 (Dr Who: Carnival of Monsters: Episode One 1973). Ziggy Stardust standing with his guitar in the urban London location on the front cover of Bowie’s album is an image that draws upon a similar disharmony between subject and geographical location.206

The *Dr Who* reference also strengthens the conveyance of alienation imbued in Bowie’s cover. Dr Who is, after all, an alien being, a Time Lord, and is thus someone who does not belong on earth.207 The similarity between Dr Who, an alien with a penchant for unexpectedly appearing in various incongruous locations of which none are his home, and Ziggy Stardust,


206 In addition, intentional or not, perhaps the number 2003 that is written on the cardboard box to the bottom right of the picture might be regarded as a further subtle nod to Dr Who’s ability as a Time Lord to travel backwards and forwards in time. Has Ziggy Stardust landed in London thirty years into the future?

an alien rock’n’roll star who materialises from nowhere onto a London street, is a very clear one.

After considering both sides of the album cover, at this point it is important to consider the content of the album’s songs in more detail in order to ascertain support or otherwise for the themes identified in the visual appraisal.

In the opening track, ‘Five Years’, an unnamed protagonist walks the city streets observing and describing scenes of panic and chaos that have followed the announcement on television that Earth is to suffer an unidentified apocalyptic event and that the inhabitants have only five years left to live.

Pushing through the market square, so many mothers sighing
News had just come over, we had five years left to cry in
News guy wept and told us, Earth was really dying
Cried so much his face was wet, then I knew he was not lying . . .

As the song develops, however, Bowie employs a Brechtian-like distancing device, stepping out of his first-hand description of the action to acknowledge the constructed nature of the songwriter’s medium, owning up to the fact that, whatever he is relating, it is just, after all, a song:

I think I saw you in an ice-cream parlour, drinking milkshakes cold and long
Smiling and waving and looking so fine,
I don’t think you knew you were in this song

Continuing with this distancing tactic, in the very next line he revisits the artificiality and constructedness of his own position as a performer in much the same manner as he did on the rear cover of Hunky Dory:

And it was cold and it rained so I felt like an actor . . .

In the second track, ‘Soul Love’, Bowie muses over the futility and pointless loss created by war, the nature of human love, and of faith in God, as portrayed in the following excerpts:

Stone love – she kneels before the grave
A brave son who gave his life to save the slogan . . .
New love – a boy and girl are talking . . .
Soul love – the priest that tastes the word
And told of love, and how my god on high is all love . . .
This can be seen as consistent with the kind of fears and concerns often addressed in science fiction, of war and conflict and of the existence or otherwise of god(s) and supreme-beings.  

The song that follows, ‘Moonage Daydream’, emphatically introduces the Ziggy Stardust character as an alien, rock’n’roll being:

I’m an alligator . . .  
I’m the space invader  
I’ll be a rock’n’rollin’ bitch for you

Elsewhere in this song, science fiction themes and phrases are to the fore, making it one of the most pivotal on the album in terms of backing up the front cover image. These include terms such as, “ray-gun”, “space-face”, “electric-eye”, and the frequently repeated song title, “Moonage Daydream”.

In the following song, ‘Starman’, Ziggy Stardust the alien makes contact with the youth of Earth through radio and television airwaves:

There’s a Starman waiting in the sky  
He’d like to come and meet us but he thinks he’d blow our minds . . .  
Switch on your tv we may pick him up on channel two . . .  
Look out your window I can see his light  
If we can sparkle he may land tonight  
Don’t tell your papa or he’ll get us locked up in fright . . .

The line “he may land tonight” is perhaps the clearest clue among all of the lyrics on the album to unpacking the cover picture. As other critics have said, Bowie has the appearance of having just landed in the spot he occupies on the cover; of having been beamed to his location. The space invader of ‘Moonage Daydream’ has now landed upon Earth – a ‘Starman’ now walking among humankind.

The fifth track, ‘It Ain’t Easy’, is the only cover song on the album. Written by little-known American songwriter Ron Davies, it is frequently regarded as the red herring in the song-

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208 And with more specific relevance, it may also have tapped into concerns existing at the time about both the Vietnam War and, closer to home, the conflict in Northern Ireland.  
209 This line also raises the issue of generational alienation, recapitulating one of the central themes of *Hunky Dory*.  

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set. However, parts of the lyric seem to be entirely consistent with the thematic content of the album, therefore the fact that Bowie did not write the words himself does not preclude the likelihood that he saw considerable value in the song’s inclusion:

When you climb to the top of the mountain - Look out over the sea
Think about the places perhaps, where a young man could be
Then you jump back down to the rooftops - Look out over the town
Think about all of the strange things circulating round . . .
It ain't easy to get to heaven when you're going down . . .

This lyric excerpt seems to encompass several of the album’s themes, including a young man dreaming of transformation; in the second line, this event takes place in an urban location. The “strange things circulating round” can easily be seen as science fiction oriented, while the last line might well be aligned to the notion of the rise and fall that the album’s title refers to; an oblique reference to Ziggy’s doomed quest, perhaps.

‘Lady Stardust’ once again deals with personal transformation, in this case clearly a reference to the glam rock-esque performance image staple of male performers wearing makeup:

People stared at the makeup on his face

Further, Bowie recapitulates his interest in the femme fatale figure, going on to imbue the lyric with gender confusion and sexual ambiguity:

The femme fatales emerged from shadows to watch this creature fair
Boys stood upon their chairs to make their point of view
I smiled sadly for a love I could not obey
And Lady Stardust sang his songs of darkness and dismay

Just what the reference to “a love I could not obey” means is not clear, but it may be a reference to the social stigma attached to same-sex relationships. Although still widely seen as immoral, homosexual law reform in the UK in 1967 meant that at this time it would not have been illegal for men over 21 years of age to have sex (Sexual Offences Act 1967). Perhaps, then, this is a reference to sexual or gender alienation? Clearly, the line that follows it, “Lady Stardust sings his songs”, makes evident the intentional blurring of gender signification.

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210 See, for instance, Mark Paytress, who in his analysis of the Ziggy Stardust songs dismisses the track as being virtually irrelevant. Paytress (1998) The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust, pp. 82-83.
As mentioned briefly in the discussion of the Mott the Hoople image, the next song, ‘Star’, exemplifies the reinventive ethos of glam rock; the promise of deliverance from conformity and oppression through becoming a rock star. The song begins with the central protagonist musing upon the failed efforts of his friends to transcend their environment, a situation he intends to avoid by transforming himself into a rock’n’roll star:

Tony went to fight in Belfast - Rudi stayed at home to starve
I could make it all worthwhile as a rock & roll star
Bevan tried to change the nation
Sonny wants to turn the world, well he can tell you that he tried
I could make a transformation as a rock & roll star
So inviting - so enticing to play the part
I could play the wild mutation as a rock & roll star . . .

That the protagonist in the song is aware of the constructed nature of stardom is made clear in the line that follows the above, implying that to simply act like a superstar is enough to complete the transformation:

I'd send my photograph to my honey - and I'd c'mon like a regular superstar

‘Hang on to Yourself’ explores one of the temptations of stardom, gratuitous sex with groupies.

Well she's a tongue-twisting storm, she will come to the show tonight
Praying to the light machine
She wants my honey not my money, she's a funky-thigh collector
Layin' on 'lectric dreams

In addition, the chorus of the song warns against indulging in such trappings of fame to excess, effectively acting as a premonition of Ziggy Stardust’s imminent downfall; the failure of his quest:

So come on, come on, we've really got a good thing going
Well come on, well come on, if you think we're gonna make it
You better hang on to yourself

The title track, ‘Ziggy Stardust’, is the moment on the album when Ziggy becomes irreparably consumed by his fame; the point where he fails in his quest to save the Earth. Written from the perspective of a jealous band-member, the lyrics document the rift that has developed between the star and his backing musicians:
But [he] made it too far - Became the special man, then we were Ziggy's band . . .
So we bitched about his fans and should we crush his sweet hands . . .
He took it all too far but boy could he play guitar . . .
Making love with his ego, Ziggy sucked up into his mind - Like a leper messiah
When the kids had killed the man I had to break up the band . . .

The “leper messiah” is a crucial term that brings to life in a single descriptor the rise and fall element of the album’s title, clearly laying out the triumphant and tragic extremities of the hero’s failed quest, and confirming his anti-hero status. With “messiah” representing the very essence of one who promises salvation and epitomising the very peak of fame and influence, and “leper” then instantly and completely undercutting it to the lowest possible level of societal hierarchy, the term is a compete juxtaposition of opposites.

The following track, ‘Suffragette City’, is problematic in terms of the ordering of information on the album and one of the primary reasons that some critics do not regard the work as having a true narrative flow. Despite what we learn of the star’s demise in the preceding track, here Ziggy Stardust is once again fully indulging in the sexual benefits provided by rock stardom. Paytress describes it as “a relentless slice of glammed up rock’n’roll, an urgent and streetwise companion to the bedroom fantasies of ‘Star’” (1998, p.86). Where verses one and two describe heterosexual encounters with the suffragettes of this imagined city, the third verse subtly revisits the sexual and gender blurring of ‘Lady Stardust’:

Hey man, Henry don't be unkind, go away
Hey man, I can't take you this time, no way
Hey man, droogie don't crash here
There's only room for one and here she comes

Further, the inclusion of the word “droogie” is a clear reference to A Clockwork Orange, the central protagonists in which were called droogs. Here Paytress makes a telling observation:

“It was impossible to listen to the urban rush of ‘Suffragette City’ in the summer of 1972, especially in the wake of the Clockwork Orange-inspired panic over mugging, without imagining that cities were places where only the strong could survive” (1998, p. 87).

The final track on the album is ‘Rock’n’Roll Suicide’, in which Ziggy’s fall from grace is completed. The song describes him burnt-out, alone and alienated from the urban environs in which the song is situated, stumbling through the early dawn light after walking aimlessly through the city night:
Time takes a cigarette, puts it in your mouth
You pull on your finger, then another finger, then cigarette
The wall-to-wall is calling, it lingers, then you forget
Ohhh oh oh oh, you're a rock 'n' roll suicide . . .

Chev brakes are snarling as you stumble across the road
But the day breaks instead so you hurry home
Don't let the sun blast your shadow . . .

Despite this ultimate depiction of the failed, pitiable, pathetic and disoriented hero, the lengthy coda of the song - and thus the final lines uttered on the album - takes on a surprisingly positive, empathetic air, suddenly and inexplicably sung from the perspective of an unidentified figure:

Oh no love, you're not alone. You're watching yourself but you're too unfair
You got your head all tangled up, but if I could only make you care
Oh no love, you're not alone. No matter what or who you've been
No matter when or where you've seen. All the knives seem to lacerate your brain
I've had my share, I'll help you with the pain. You're not alone
Just turn on with me and you're not alone Let's turn on with me and you're not alone
Give me your hands 'cause you're wonderful
Give me your hands 'cause you're wonderful
Oh give me your hands . . .

Clearly, the album is bookended by songs that frame the work. Regardless of one’s view regarding whether the story told on the album is presented with narrative flow or in an episodic manner during which the central thematic concerns have been presented erratically, the rise and fall promise of the album title has clearly been conveyed through the progression of the album. As well, the central protagonist, Ziggy Stardust, despite his flaws, has clearly been presented as a modern heroic figure in keeping with his image on the front cover.

Finally, and as mentioned briefly prior to conducting this lyric analysis of the album, the storyline of the album approximates those often told in film noir plots. Ginette Vincendeau outlines the essential characteristics of noir, suggesting the on-screen action was designed to match the off-screen emotions of the audience by “Mirroring anxiety . . . [a] sense of hopelessness, of destructive forces . . . The myth of escape, from country, identity or circumstances . . . [where] the dream of escape is thwarted. Endeavours are doomed and heroes will be destroyed” (1992, p. 55). Such a description is directly applicable to The Rise

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and Fall of Ziggy Stardust, where the hero, overcome by the destructive forces of all-too-human temptation and rock’n’roll excess, fails in his quest to deliver to the Earth and its inhabitants an escape from the doom predicted in the album’s opening track, ‘Five Years’. This also bears a close relationship to Eddie Muller’s observation that, “Film noir pointed toward the black core of corruption in our “civilized” society and our primitive essence. The struggle of the individual to transcend or escape provided the emotional tension” (Muller, 1998, p. 11).

In conclusion, upon the release of The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars, one critic observed “Now, after a series of progressions which might seem totally illogical . . . David has finally come upon a moment where all his selves can combine” (Kaye, 1973). This appraisal is a pertinent one as, particularly in comparison to the extraordinarily broad visual and musical scope of the four albums that preceded it, the Ziggy Stardust album finds Bowie unifying to a much greater degree the thematic content of his music with the visual messages contained on his album cover. In what was certainly his most coherent work to this point, Bowie’s concerns come together neatly. In so doing, and as another critic of the day noted, he was fast forging his reputation as a trend-setter rather than a follower: “He’s now become a performer who can’t be copied, unless by outright imitation” (Watts, August 1972, p.8.).

Providing crucial consistency with what has gone before, Bowie keeps to the forefront of the cover the overarching theme of alienation, the most cogent of all his concerns expressed to date. With alienation by now the established thematic cornerstone of his work, nevertheless here Bowie finds a new way of depicting it in an image of urban alienation. In another departure, his communication of the theme is provided via a more subtly constructed image largely of his own making rather than a reliance on pre-loaded art historical and filmic allusions such as was the case on the previous two covers that were based upon clearly evident parodies. Certainly, a direct parody of sorts still features as a part of the cover, but here it is relegated to the rear.

While alienation remains to the forefront of the image, Bowie also imbues the album cover with other allied sub-themes that have been equally evident in his previous albums, including science fiction, war, gender ambiguity and star construction.
Film has remained a clear influence upon Bowie in the Ziggy Stardust album cover. Yet, while the film noir aspects of the image continue in a sense the historical allusion introduced by the silver screen qualities of the Hunky Dory cover, the influence of Kubrick’s A Clockwork Orange adds an element of cultural contemporaneity that has been hitherto absent from Bowie’s work. The link between the Kubrick-styled costuming and glam rock fashion is an additional, and extremely cogent, culturally unifying factor. These components coupled with the fact that the urban London scene in which the artist is pictured is entirely consistent with both the time and place of the album’s release, means that the image overall has far more immediate relevance to the youth cultural climate of the day than was the case with any of his previous releases. At the same time, once again Bowie’s album cover owes no obvious debt to any other contemporary music artist. For the first time, then, his image can be seen as possessing both uniqueness and cultural relevance.

As on his previous albums, stylistic differences can still be discerned between the front and rear cover images. While on the rear cover of Ziggy Stardust Bowie does not quite metaphorically hold up his hands in the “it was me, David, all along” manner that he did on the previous two albums, his employment of the device of camp ensures that he still imbues his work with a degree of knowing admission; of authorship, and of humour. It is an element that peels back to an extent the impression of a total commitment to the work of art as displayed on the front cover; an acknowledgement of the constructedness of the product. However, the admission is more playful and subtle than previously. Dressed consistently on both sides of the cover as Ziggy Stardust, David Bowie as the architect is never quite revealed in the clear and frank manner that he has been in the past on the rear covers. Ziggy Stardust, the constructed alien rock star hero is not completely dispensed with. The presentation of an invented, adopted persona, outside Bowie’s own, retains precedence. This is a significant change.
Chapter Six - *Aladdin Sane*

*Aladdin Sane* was released in April 1973. Following the success of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* and the re-released *Hunky Dory*, it afforded Bowie the achievement of his first number one album, reaching the top position on the UK album chart. *Aladdin Sane* also marked a surge in popularity for the artist in the US, the market that had always proved to be significantly more difficult for him, with the album entering the top twenty and eventually peaking at number 17.$^{212}$

Noting Bowie’s by now enormous popularity and offering dry commentary on the visual impact of the album’s cover, *New Musical Express* reviewer Charles Shaar Murray began his appraisal thus: “Firstly, the cover, which will be a definite asset to any chic home. You’ll see it strewn on Axminster carpets in expensive colour supplement stereo ads, and carried with token attempts at unobtrusiveness under the arms of the fashionable” (1973, p. 10).

The style of the *Aladdin Sane* album cover to an extent harks back to the head and shoulders portrait style of the first, second and fourth albums. However, beyond this link there is little visual resemblance to Bowie’s previous covers despite the fact that, as will be seen, thematic similarities can be teased out. While in its entirety the cover also bears little visual relationship to other popular music album covers released during the same year, it does nevertheless contain singular elements that are comparable.

The image of the Ziggy Stardust character on the previous album cover is for the most part abandoned as a new character, Aladdin Sane, is presented. This new character exhibits more of the cosmetic hallmarks of the still ascendant glam rock visual style than has previously been seen in Bowie’s album cover imagery. The extreme artificial manipulation of Bowie’s face and upper torso renders the image by far the most artificial yet seen in Bowie’s canon.

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$^{212}$ This improvement was not matched in the US singles chart, however, with ‘The Jean Genie’ achieving a disappointing position of 71, in sharp contrast to the UK where the song reached number two on the singles chart, and where a second single release, ‘Drive-In Saturday’ reached number three.


Accordingly, this component of overt artificiality provides the initial thrust of the investigation in this chapter.

Aspects of Bowie’s makeup bear the hallmarks of traditional Japanese theatrical techniques, most especially those of Kabuki, and this forms a primary strand of enquiry given significant support by the artist’s own frequent admission of such an influence. Further, there are implications of mime and of pantomime both in the image and in the album’s paratexts, each requiring exploration. Of particular additional note is the fact that the artist is featured naked, a significant departure from previous albums.

The cornerstone of alienation as a primary concern is again a quality inherent to the cover, while Bowie’s method of conveying this differs markedly from previously. To unpack his methodology, a three-fold investigation into the depiction of alienation is undertaken. Firstly, Bowie is pictured in a manner far removed from the image of a normal human being; the sheer other-worldly quality of his visual image rendering him instantly alienated from humankind. Secondly, with Japanese culture being ostensibly alien to British culture, his borrowing from Japan imbues his work with a further quality of ethnicity-derived alienation. Thirdly, psychological alienation is suggested, firstly by the obvious pun of the album title, which suggests *Aladdin Sane* is, literally, A Lad Insane, but also by the literal splitting of the face through the use of makeup, a device that carries with it the suggestion of mental instability.

The central theme of star construction previously evident in Bowie’s work, and also inherent to glam rock, is particularly present on this album cover while, as will be seen, the image of the artist on the rear cover reveals a significant divergence from the pattern of displaying personal authorship that he had established over his career to this point.
The cover of *Aladdin Sane* is a heavily manipulated photographic portrait bordered only by the physical edge of the cover itself. Bowie is pictured with long orange hair, red lipstick on his slightly parted lips, red eye-shadow, no eyebrows, and long black eye-lashes. Dominating
and splitting his face from top left to lower right is a red, black and blue lightening flash symbol. His face is unnaturally pink and his high cheekbones are heavily accentuated. Contrasted against these bright colours is the metallic grey of his upper shoulders and neck that then blends to an overexposed, brilliant white for the remainder of his visible torso, a hue that closely mirrors the background that surrounds him. Bowie casts no shadow, which imbues the image with a lack of context. It is as if he is floating in nothingness; a vacuum. With his eyes fully closed and therefore eliminating any possibility of direct communication with the viewer, there is a neutrality of expression. Inexplicably, a pool of liquid lies collected at his left collarbone, following the contours of his body yet defying gravity, and contributing much to the overall unreal quality of the image.

The most immediately striking feature of the image is its obvious artifice; Bowie does not look at all like a real human being. This quality places him at odds with one of the few album covers arguably comparable from that same year: *The Joker*, by The Steve Miller Band. Released six months after *Aladdin Sane*, in October 1973, this album invites comparison due to the artist appearing masked on the cover.

![Figure 71. The Joker, by The Steve Miller Band, October 1973.](image)

As the album’s title track suggests, American artist Steve Miller’s use of a joker mask drew attention to the fact that he at times wrote songs from the perspective of alternative personas like the Space Cowboy and the Gangster of Love, themes “that dotted his earlier music . . . a series of references to his past” (Scoppa, 1973).
While the Miller cover features the artist wearing a mask, the rest of his body, with its natural skin tone and orthodox clothing, renders him clearly a human being; simply a human being with a mask on his face. There is none of the alien, ambiguous quality that the image of *Aladdin Sane* is imbued with.

Bowie’s appearance is “the archetype of artificiality – glittered, painted, dyed, decorated with a lightning flash, its flesh marble-cold and deformed with a silver teardrop, sculpted, emaciated, haughty, vulnerable and ultimately alien” (Doggett, 2011, p. 175). Further, such is the nature of the heavily theatricalised image, it is not even clear to the viewer if he is alive or dead. This has resonance with the findings of Roland Barthes, who observes,

> We know the original relation of the theater and the cult of the Dead . . . to make oneself up was to designate oneself as a body simultaneously living and dead; the whitened bust of the totemic theatre, the man with the painted face in Chinese theater, the rice-paste makeup of the Indian KathaKali, the Japanese Noh mask . . . (1981, p. 31).

A brief summary of critical views confirms this dichotomy. For instance, Buckley has suggested, “Bowie didn’t look like anything resembling a human being at all. The shot turned his physiognomy into a sort of tribal death mask” (1999, p.188). Stevenson, offering a deeper level of analysis, suggests:

> Bowie is pictured facing the camera with his eyes closed. His red, carrot-top haircut and the bolt of red and blue lightning across his face make this a striking pose. . . . it has a plastic and unreal quality. It is as if the image is asking you to guess where the ‘real’ Bowie begins and where the fabricated image ends. . . . What is striking is the definite nature of this image: it has no background or context, instead focussing the viewer’s eyes intensely upon Bowie’s creation. . . . Aladdin Sane acts as a postmodern image floating free of surrounding context (Stevenson, 2006, p. 65).

Matthew-Walker, meanwhile, suggests that this is the most remarkable of all Bowie’s album covers, because “David had subjected himself to some extraordinary multi-coloured make-up; not as was used at the time (and still is) to enhance his physical appearance but using his body in a Warhol-like manner almost as a canvas on which the makeup artist could draw” (1985, p. 31). With Bowie’s body the canvas, the picture requires of us that we must discern the identity of Aladdin Sane by what we have been selectively shown - by what has been painted on - a task consistent with the findings of Richard Leppert, who suggests:

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Identity . . . commonly misunderstood in terms of personal character, is profoundly abstract, even quasi-spiritual. It is not located in the physical body as such. Challenged to make identity visible - in essence, objectively concrete - portraits must “employ” the physical body as . . . the only available terrain onto which the non-physical can be visualized (Leppert, 1996, p. 153).

The unreal quality of Bowie’s appearance and the allied difficulty involved in reading him is exacerbated significantly by the fact that we are denied access to his eyes. “The eye remains the paramount organ of non-verbal communication” (Synnott, 1993, p. 224). In this case, with such agency denied to the viewer, several possibilities are nevertheless opened up. Bowie, whether he is human or alien, could be awake, asleep, or dead.

Historically, the open, seeing, eye is an active entity and an indicator of the presence of life: “it searches, peers, seeks and watches” (Synnott, 1993, p. 227). But in its absence, nevertheless, Bowie could still be fully awake and inwardly ruminating because “closed eyes connote a reflexive and meditative concentration on one’s own experience” (Frosh, 2003, p. 123). Or, he could simply be asleep.

Buckley’s suggestion of a death mask seems viable to a point, given that death masks traditionally performed the function of being a replacement for the natural body; that is, a “replication in wax of the face or the hands so that a convincing replica of the natural body might be displayed at the funeral” (Llewellyn, 1991, pp. 54-55). With this in mind, an album released in January 1973, just three months before Aladdin Sane, invites comparison:

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Harper recorded *Lifemask* believing it could be his last ever album, due to his poor state of health (Alexander, 2008).\(^{216}\) The cover complies with the accepted visual hallmarks of a death mask; “The effigies were intended to achieve the most striking realism possible” (Llewellyn, 1991, p. 55). Bowie’s image, in contrast, is heavily altered both by the application of makeup and by the obvious airbrushing of the photograph, and therefore it can hardly be claimed that the image acts as a realistic replication of Bowie’s natural body. However, if we regard the image as being not of Bowie at all, but of the potentially alien *Aladdin Sane* character he is playing, then the death mask possibility remains plausible. The difference in colour between face and torso is a loaded juxtaposition, however, because while the whiteness of the latter suggests death, or an alien other-worldliness, the pinkness of the former is suggestive of life despite its unrealistically bright hue.\(^{217}\)

Overall, the figure appears so unreal that it could be a stand-in for a human being; a mannequin or dummy perhaps. Heidi Gilpin has explored the notion of the lifeless form in theatre; how a once-living body may be reduced to the equivalent of a mannequin, and


\(^{217}\) See also the cover of *Byrdmaniax*, the 1971 release by the Byrds that featured the four band members pictured similarly to Roy Harper.
concludes that such a mannequin figure “is capable of taking on many meaning-bearing codes” (1996, p. 120).

On the cover of *Aladdin Sane*, for the first time Bowie is featured without clothing, albeit his exposed body is visible only from mid-chest upwards. This departure is significant because “Nakedness was, and still is, always something special. It can signify divinity, or show human helplessness” (Bonfante, 1989, p. 569). Before determining the implications of this departure, it is critical to note that Bowie is not just naked, however. Rather than the cover being simply a picture of David Bowie without clothing, the image is instead a heavily artistically manipulated one that renders him far removed from his natural, naked human state. Ruth Barcan, drawing upon the work of Kenneth Clark, suggests, “nakedness is the “raw” human body, the human body without clothes. Nudity results when the artist works on that raw material” (2004, p. 33).218 Clearly, much work has been done on Bowie’s body. Nude therefore rather than naked, he is a canvas upon which an artist has laboured, his body becoming a potential site for whatever symbolism the artist wishes to convey (Hudson, 1982, p. 41).

It should be noted that our expectations as an audience when confronted by such nudity are mediated because the image appears on an album cover, an artistic medium, and art is the medium in which nudity is arguably most acceptable (Grosz, 1998, p. 6). This is a crucial reminder that “The meanings and experiences of nudity differ markedly between contexts” (Barcan 2004, p. 3).219 Here, this artistic effort wrought upon Bowie’s body, ripe with communicative potential, may even be seen as a form of clothing: “Surely nudity, as distinguished from nakedness, is our most subtle and sophisticated sort of clothing . . . which reflects an ego-preferred imago . . . nudity serves as an aestheticizing gloss, a product of will” (Howard, 1986, p. 292).220

Bowie’s appearance is troubling because the revealed skin of his neck and upper torso does not look human in either colour or texture. His body is clearly not that of a normal, healthy human being despite the familiarity of his body shape, and this therefore serves only to further emphasise his otherness. His well-defined collarbones and strong, broad shoulders border on

the masculine erotic. Certainly his neck, shoulders and chest give the impression of inherent power or strength and suggest a well-proportioned ideal masculine body type. This quality invites comparisons to statues of Greek or Roman gods, with the smooth, unblemished, cold white marble of such statues certainly bearing similarities to Bowie’s flawless and equally cold appearance. Although only Bowie’s upper body is visible, this lifeless perfection bears, for instance, a resemblance to Michelangelo’s statue of David, about which Leppert suggests, “[viewers] take pleasure in confronting David’s body. Enormous, heroic, physically perfect, a technical tour de force to be sure, and - most of all - powerfully sexual” (2007, p. 163). The picture is disturbing also because the classically-chiselled, potentially erotic masculinity of the upper torso merges with a head and face that is very different, to the point where it seems scarcely to belong to the body beneath it. With his full, pink lips, carefully coiffured hair, heavy makeup and long, dark eyelashes, his face has sexually alluring characteristics far more consistent with female gender signification than male. These two regions, above the neck and below the neck, proffer an overall combined eroticism that offers disturbance in its unlikely union. The viewer is presented with a disturbing juxtaposition of familiarity and unfamiliarity, reality and artifice and of male and female gender signification.

While the form of his shoulders and upper chest is familiar and consistent with that of a strong male human being, the colour and composition suggest non-human, non-organic origins. Such hybridity has long been explored in the arts, as “Contemporary culture is fascinated by the borders of humanness, as evident by the explosion of belief or interest in such borderline or hybrid forms as cyborgs, artificial intelligence, aliens, angels, spirits or fairies” (Barcan, 2004, p. 163). Perhaps he is indeed a hybrid of organic and technological origins; a cyborg, perhaps? “The term ‘cyborg’ is a contraction of ‘cybernetic organism’ and refers to the product of human/machine hybridization” (Clute and Nicholls, 1993, p. 290). Bowie’s skin, if death cannot account for its unusual pale, bloodless hue, may well be synthetic. In the cyborgs of science fiction, real human skin - the organically occurring yet fragile protective cover for our natural physical bodies - is often replaced by a much stronger synthetic facsimile. This is but one component of the many ways in which the human form is


improved by cybernetics, part of an overall creative manifesto designed to achieve considerable gains in efficiency of both physicality and intelligence, resulting in a being that far exceeds the limitations of the fully organic human body (Levidow and Robins, 1989, p. 168). To this end, in delineating the point where human gives way to mechanical - where a human makes the transition to becoming a cyborg - the composition of the skin may be considered the deciding factor; “the final frontier” (Virilio, 2000 p. 11). In this image, the skin of Bowie’s upper torso looks anything but human.

By this stage of Bowie’s career, science fiction had become one of his most frequently utilised themes, so there is a clear synergy with the fact that cyborgs are one of the most commonly found non-human figures within contemporary science fiction (Haraway, 1985, p. 149). Undoubtedly this human/machine duality was an appealing quality for Bowie, for whom the exploration of the impact upon humanity of relentless technological advancement, as discussed in previous chapters, was of much interest. This too is a cornerstone of the rationale behind the cyborgs of science fiction, who “embody our culture’s fear and love of technology, producing a conflicted vision that intersects in a central issue of contemporary science fiction narratives: our problematic attitude towards both gender and technology” (George, 2008, p. 160). In summation, all of the dualities of the cyborg are consistent with those of Bowie’s concerns in that they cross “the culture/nature, mind/body and male/female divides” (Giblett, 2008, p. 142).

Bowie’s half-man/half-machine appearance is a clear expression of both technological and gender alienation,

The aspect of alienation that has deepened, as industrialism was followed by postindustrialism and modernism by postmodernism, is the fact that beyond the loss of agency and consciousness of causation and control, there has been a loss of organic sensation, of feeling, and of the perception of being a living creature . . . the petrification of life energy and the inducement of a certain inertness . . . mechanical petrification (Wexler, 1996, p. 160).

A precursor to this theme in Bowie’s work can be found in the track ‘Oh You Pretty Things’ from the Hunky Dory album, most especially in the following lyrics:

Look out at your children - See their faces in golden rays
Don't kid yourself they belong to you - They're the start of a coming race
The earth is a bitch - We've finished our news
Homo Sapiens have outgrown their use,
All the strangers came today - And it looks as though they're here to stay

Examined in the light of this description, Bowie’s image is indeed one of inertness, devoid of feeling, mechanical and petrified. He is not a ‘real’ human being’.

Adding to the sense of unreality of the image, the space surrounding Bowie is both featureless and borderless, effectively creating a visual portrayal of nothingness that simply fades away and does not serve to contextualise the subject in any way. There is nothing in the background at all to aid the viewer in locating the image, being plain, unbroken white, and although Bowie’s vividly coloured head and hair stands out in stark contrast, at the point where his torso meets the bottom of the cover the white background bleeds into his body. This creates a disconcerting blurring of the distinction between the front and the rear of the picture, a strange liaison between foreground and background. The hue of the lower part of his chest and arms becomes indistinguishable from the rest of the background. Tom Fraser and Adam Banks have analysed a similar phenomenon in an early 1960s poster by Andy Warhol that features a multi-coloured Campbell’s Soup can. In this image, the green of the background bleeds over into both the label and the top of the can. The authors believe that this “generates disorienting color constancy effects; not just the can but its surroundings begin to look false” (2004, p. 110). Certainly, this blurring of background and foreground contribute to a similar inherent falseness in Bowie’s image.

Allied to this, and as Maureen O’Sullivan suggests, “It is impossible to present people without a context . . . facial expressions are labelled differently depending on the background color against which they are shown” (1982, p. 300). In this case, the unbroken white clearly focuses attention on Bowie’s face. The colours and facial details stand out in a manner that they would not have done against any other hue, because “Pure white is the symbol of absolute minimalism, the ‘clean slate’ against which all other colors may contrast . . . [It] can create a starkness that will lack any sense of welcome or warmth” (Eisman, 2000, p. 56).

The overall effect of the front cover is one of dehumanisation, an impression exacerbated by the silver/grey metallic quality of his upper shoulders and neck that then fades to a stark white beneath his shoulder blades, and the unnatural yellowish brown colouring around the armpits. As Buckley has pointed out, the impression given can indeed be read as death-like. Dead skin, without the nourishment of blood beneath its surface, is white, like much of Bowie’s torso. Richard Leppert, in his critique of A Reviere, Edward Samuel Harper’s watercolour of a woman at a piano, comments upon her unnaturally white skin thus: “The absence of colour
gives our gaze a clinical as well as a psychological tinge; it invites association with pathology and the corpse” (1995, p. 139). From the neck down, Bowie’s body indeed appears corpse-like, a husk or shell, drained of life. But this is not to suggest the image is devoid of appeal, as “Death, as that which is most alien, almost unconscionable, can also be alluring” (Barcan, 2004, p. 119).

A notable feature that contributes much to the unnaturalness of Bowie’s facial image is the exaggerated nasal philtrum (the two lines that run vertically between nostrils and top lip) that appears to have been artificially whitened, thereby highlighting and drawing attention to it. This unsettling quality is further enhanced by the presence at the left collar-bone of a pool of clear liquid that follows the contours of the bone structure yet is clearly out of place in the natural, human, order of things. Brian Duffy, the graphic artist responsible for creating the cover, has stated that the liquid was airbrushed onto the image to give the impression “of a statue that’s wet” (Brian Duffy in Gillman and Gillman, 1986, p. 340). Pegg, and others, suggest instead that it represents a tear (2002, p. 244). If read as the latter, its presence can be seen as an indicator of emotion in an otherwise emotionless scene; the tear representing a predominantly feminine “spectacle of emotion” (Williams, 1991, p. 9). Equally, however, it might just as likely be alien blood, or a liquid remnant of the substance from which the rest of Bowie’s cyborg-like body, in solidified form, is made. Regardless, and in opposition to any of these explanations, the liquid remains poised unnaturally in place rather than running down his chest, something that no type of liquid would do given the effects of gravitational pull. The only other explanation for its unnatural adhesion is that the picture is actually one of Bowie reclining rather than upright, and the lack of any background information seemingly makes this a possibility. Yet, while this would add credence to the idea that he is in repose or dead, it seems unlikely especially given the way his hair falls seemingly naturally to his shoulders. Thus the liquid adds much to the overall air of unreality.

Beyond the general impression of alien-ness and artificiality, the dominant feature of Bowie’s face is the lightning flash symbol that effectively splits it. The presence of this symbol necessitates significant investigation due to its very common and extensive historical usage, both in the arts and elsewhere. Its popularity is a reflection of “The fascination that lightning has always had for the human race” (Shipley, 2007, p. 135). As will be seen, the meanings associated with lightning symbols vary; yet each has an underlying basic

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connotation that involves dramatic events of some sort; of imminent change and the potential for danger. For example,

The lightning bolt or thunder bolt as a divine manifestation has been a powerful symbol throughout history and appears in many mythologies . . . The lightning bolt or thunderbolt image can be found in many cultures as an unsurpassed symbol of dramatic and instantaneous retributive destruction (Hamilton, 2007, pp. 4-5). 227

Deena Weinstein and others have explored the prevalence of what she terms “the thunderbolt motif” in heavy metal music, its utilisation intended as a symbol of immense power (2000, p. 28). 228 This is consistent with the wider iconographic palette associated with heavy metal, that consists of “Images that disorient and unsettle, that evoke destruction and power” (Wiebe Taylor, 2009, p. 29). 229

The lightning bolt symbol is recognized by the International Organization for Standardization as a warning of electrical hazard; specifically, “To indicate hazards resulting from dangerous voltages” (Peckham, 2001). Of pertinence to this investigation specifically, the graphic designer of the Aladdin Sane cover, Brian Duffy, has said that the actual template for the lightning flash symbol that Bowie approved came from a National Panasonic toaster that he had in his photographic studio (Brian Duffy in Gillman and Gillman, 1986, p. 340).

The lightning flash has also been used as “a metaphor for ideas and creativity since ancient times. Ideas and artistic inspiration were seen as arriving in a thunderbolt of white-hot intensity to generate a moment of creative daring and insight” (Hamilton, 2007, p.5). 230 Frederick Nietzsche, for instance, in his definition of the phenomenon of inspiration, suggests such sudden enlightenment is seen as “a philosophy flashed down from heaven like a ray of divine grace” (1986, p. 83). Similarly, he suggests “a thought flashes up like lightning” (Nietzsche, 1979, pp. 72-73). In Zen Buddhism too, the lightning flash is used as an analogy for inspiration: “When you know everything, you are like a dark sky. Sometimes a flashing will come through the dark sky . . . And when the lightning does flash, a wonderful sight may be seen” (Shunryu, 1970, pp. 118-119). At least one critic considers the concept of sudden discovery as a primary message in Aladdin Sane: “the album is a fusion of two states. The

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first is that of derangement, and the second that of discovery” (Matthew-Walker, 1985, p. 90). As will be seen shortly, the connotation of derangement is a particularly compelling one.

The lightning flash symbol has been used fairly extensively on album cover art. This is demonstrated by the following selection of albums released both before and after Aladdin Sane, which use the symbol in varying ways. The first of these, by blues artist Lightnin’ Hopkins, clearly uses the symbol as a literal depiction of his name:

![Figure 73. “Lightnin”: The blues of Lightnin’ Hopkins, by Lightnin’ Hopkins, 1960](image-url)

The second example uses the symbol similarly, incorporating stylised lettering to depict the band’s name, Lightning, as well as incorporating a hand-held, lit neon version:

![Figure 74. Disco Symphony, by Lightning, (12” single), 1979](image-url)
On the cover of Nancy Sinatra’s album, *Lightning’s Girl*, the superimposed, dominating symbol provides clear visual support to the album’s title:

![Figure 75. Lightning’s Girl, by Nancy Sinatra, 1967](image)

This literal usage in support of an album’s title is similar to that present on the cover of the Thin Lizzy album, *thunder and lightning*, although here it appears in a more realistic rendering:

![Figure 76. thunder and lightning by Thin Lizzy, 1983](image)

In the following two examples the lightning symbol takes the place of the letter S, a device used in these instances by both Black Sabbath and KISS:
Similarly, on Metallica’s debut album, the first and last letters of the band’s name are elongated to resemble lightning flashes:
Whether it is a feature of the artist or band name, or is present in support of an album title, in all of these examples the symbol carries with it implications of excitement, danger and dynamism. Indeed Bowie himself would utilise the lightning flash symbol in this way during his live concerts during the Ziggy Stardust tours:

There is more to Bowie’s use of the lightning flash symbol on the *Aladdin Sane* album cover than this, however, and it is necessary to examine in more depth the historical symbolism of lightning flashes and thunderbolts to uncover further potential meanings.
Of particular validity to our current context, lightning has also become a symbol of duality, a representation of twins; of the splitting into two of a single entity (Shipley, 2007, p.146). With this in mind, Peter Doggett’s observation pertaining to the cover text seems particularly relevant: “‘David Bowie Aladdin Sane’, read the lettering, as if the two personae were interchangeable” (2011, pp. 175-176).

Bowie has spoken of the duality of the Aladdin Sane character, frequently describing him in psychological terms, including: “Aladdin Sane was a schizophrenic” (Bowie in Doggett, 2011, p.176). More specifically, he has claimed that the album reflected a point in his career where the boundaries between his private life and his performative life were particularly difficult to discern, resulting in the artistic manifestation of “this kind of schizophrenia that I was going through . . . Aladdin Sane was split down the middle” (Pegg, 2002, p. 243). As John Herdman points out, the presentation of a double, in whatever form, be it duplication, twins, or the division of a single personality into two, is a “device for articulating the experience of self-division” (1990, p. 1).

While contentious within the fields of medicine and psychiatry, split personality is frequently regarded in the public eye as a primary, and even defining, symptom of schizophrenia (Borsche et al., 2007, p. 384). My analysis does not enter into this debate per se, as, simply, the truth or otherwise of such a belief is unimportant next to acknowledging the existence of this common and widespread public perception.

It is clear that such dualism may be brought to life in visual depictions of schizophrenia, with some examples occurring even from within the medical and psychiatric fields. Consider the front cover of following textbook:
The book cover for *Soul Murder*; the study of Daniel Paul Schreber (1842-1911), an eminent German judge and celebrated case study of schizophrenia, also exhibits a split face (Schatzmann, 1973).\textsuperscript{231}

\textsuperscript{231} NB) Schreber's case was one much examined by Sigmund Freud and many leading physicians of the twentieth century.
Within Bowie’s own medium, Mott the Hoople - a band with whom he enjoyed a close association - released an album, *Mott*, three months after *Aladdin Sane*. This album cover too featured a split face. In addition the image also tapped into Roman Emperor-style historical imagery with its depiction of a marble bust inviting comparisons to the smooth whiteness of Bowie’s white shoulders and upper torso, as noted earlier.
While neither these book cover images nor the Mott the Hoople album cover incorporate a lightning flash symbol to divide the face, a connection between these divided faces and the inherent implications contained therein, and the image of *Aladdin Sane*, remains evident.

Certainly, several critics have commented on the lightening flash figure featured upon Bowie’s face, usually regarding the associated meaning as just such an expression of self-division. For example, “On a magenta and pink base, David carefully painted a red-and-blue lightning bolt, which bisected his face from left forehead to right cheek, a symbol of schizophrenia” (Hopkins, 1985, p. 92). Buckley, describing *Aladdin Sane* as a “schizoid”, further regards the cover as “one of the most eye-catching and alarming ever made. The divine thunderbolt . . . split the face, and by implication the psyche, in two” (1999 p. 135 & p. 138).

In the art of Paul Klee (1879-1940) we can see the close similarities to Bowie’s *Aladdin Sane* image, most particularly in *Physiognomic Flash* (1927), but also in *The Clown* (1929).

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Klee’s art was frequently concerned with expressing mental illness, particularly the paranoid-schizoid condition (Schneider Brody, 2001, p. 374). Klee’s splitting of the face in both *Physiognomic Flash* and *The Clown* was based upon the beliefs of Johann Kaspar Lavater, “who believed that dualities, including madness and genius, were antithetical and could be
physiognomically detectable in the human face” (Gilman, 1982). Bowie’s *Aladdin Sane* image, with the album title backing it up in an obviously related paratext (A Lad Insane), clearly mirrors this notion.

If we read Bowie’s image as that of an actor playing a role - the character *Aladdin Sane* with madness implied in his very name - then one of the song titles printed on the rear cover becomes an extremely potent paratext. Song five on side one is titled ‘Cracked Actor’, a clear reference both to some kind of mental division or split, and to Bowie’s theatrical approach to rock performance personae. It should be acknowledged that the very act of playing a role in the theatre implies a fundamental splitting of the self because the craft of acting involves putting one’s ‘real’ self out of view in order to enter the skin of the fictitious other; that is, the role one is to play. “One could even say that the actor’s ability to distinguish himself from the mask or character possessing him is possible, in other words, because of his state of capacity for entering a schizophrenic-like state” (Hitchcock and Bates, 1991, p. 22). In addition, masking, a theatrical device that Bowie’s heavily made-up face strongly evinces, lends itself greatly to a performative self-division since the very presence of a masked actor suggests “insights into the experience of multiplicity and fragmentation” (Hitchcock and Bates, 1991, p. 19). Further, and as Hamblin suggests, the ability to convey a “split personality’ figure is one of the primary skills required of a mime (1978, p. 126).

It is clear that Bowie had a keen interest in mental illness, a factor that most critics attribute to a history of schizophrenia and other psychological disorders in his family history (Rujbin 2006, p. 266). Perhaps most crucially his older half-brother, Terry, was diagnosed with the condition and committed to a psychiatric hospital, from which he would ultimately escape and commit suicide. Beyond this personal motivation for the exploration of mental illness, however, a wider significance exists when one considers the presentation of psychological disorder within the wider context of Bowie’s most frequently visited thematic topics:

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234 This connection with mime will shortly be examined in more depth.


alienation. Indeed, the visual allusion to psychological disorder on the album cover is inherently loaded with both historical and contemporary implications of extreme alienation.

Mental illness, and most particularly the fear associated with suffering from it, has long been a preoccupation of humankind. Considered in visual terms, “the face of madness has haunted the imagination of Western man” (Foucault, 1973, p. 15). This deep-seated fear is due to the fact that the mentally ill are always at odds within any mainstream human society. As Gilman puts it, “The madman is that individual seen as ‘other’ by a culture” (1982, p. xiii). Similarly, “madness [is] a symbol of alienation from the goals and values of mechanized society” (Feder, 1980, p. 285).

Feder points out that when madness is depicted in literature, “the literary artist employs structures – myth, metaphor, symbol – which continually mediate between [the] unconscious and conscious processes . . . of the schizophrenic” (1980, p. 7). This observation sheds further light on Bowie’s album cover image as, with the lightning flash dividing his face in a most effective symbol of his psychological disturbance, his closed eyes can now be read as taking the inference further, to the very scenario Feder highlights. That is, Bowie - or Aladdin Sane - is neither obviously conscious nor unconscious but is instead caught in that unsettling state of psychological mediation.

Bowie’s method of constructing the image requires consideration. His heavily painted face with its pinkish hue, coupled with the bleached white quality of his upper torso, is in part suggestive of the style of makeup used in mime, a suggestion given considerable support by the studied stillness of his pose.237 This suggestion is furthered by the inference contained in Aladdin’s close association with pantomime. While Bowie’s face is not white, the bare, featureless white background that frames his head and shoulders helps to create an image that is comparable to the typical mime performance situation of “a solitary white-faced individual on a bare stage” (Hamblin, 1978, p. 16). More specifically, given that Bowie’s eyes are closed and he appears to be completely stationary, the scene resembles either the very beginning or the end of a mime play, where the actor adopts a frozen position that signals the commencement or conclusion of the action. As MacKay points out, “Most mimes begin with the lights coming up on a still figure . . . this creates a stillness on stage that frames the

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mime’s initial motion and gives it meaning” (2008, p. 23).238 Here, it is as if Bowie is caught with the stage lights up but just before his eyes flick open to begin communication, or perhaps just seconds after they have closed again at the conclusion of the piece. Either way the viewer is not privy to what the nature of that action is. “The first place where the mood of the character or performer is seen, is, of course, the face, the eyes especially” (Sayre, 1959, p. 81).239 Bowie denies his audience this most vital of communicative devices.

With regard to facial expression and the importance of the eyes in mime, “practice in the simulation of feeling is very important” (Sayre, 1959, p. 81). Because mimes need to be a virtual blank canvas at the beginning of their performances, it is just as important to their craft that they are able to divest themselves of all evident feeling, so that the contrast is a marked one once they begin the performance proper. This erasure of feeling is what Bowie appears to have done, not simply through the closing of his eyes but by the complete relaxation of his facial muscles.

Bowie was a skilled mime artist, having trained with one of Europe’s most highly renowned mime masters, Lindsay Kemp, and then worked with Kemp’s troupe of artists in performances throughout the UK.240

In 1969 Bowie wrote and performed a short mime play that he had written himself titled, ‘The Mask’, for a promotional film titled *Love You Till Tuesday* (Gillman and Gillman, 1986, pp. 161-163). During 1971 and 1972, he performed a mime routine as a part of his Ziggy Stardust concerts.\(^{241}\)

Mime offered Bowie techniques that seem to be consistent with the very core of his method. For instance, an inherent quality of mime is transformation, whereby “You can be one character, then turn around, change your face and body, and come back as a different one” (Hamblin, 1978, p. 111).\(^{242}\) Perhaps even more pertinently, such transformations allow visual progression from the highly personalised face of an individual to the depersonalised face of the typecast, or stylised, figure (Willems, 2008, p. 68). In this regard, the technique is equable to wider theatrical methodology, in particular to Antonin Artaud’s methods of portraying psychological conflict in the theatre. Via the devices of shock, stylisation and externalisation, such internal conflict is presented as type rather than as individual, personalised expression: “Artaud’s most direct effect has been on the modern theatre, especially on the theatre of the sixties . . . Masks, distortion of speech through intonation, rituals, the human body elevated to the dignity of signs, gestures” (Feder, 1980, p. 262).\(^{243}\) Bowie, as Aladdin Sane, presents a figure devoid of individuality, consisting entirely of a collage of loaded signs.

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\(^{243}\) See also A. Artaud (1958), *The Theatre and its Double*, translated by M. C. Richards New York: Grove Press.
Critics have acknowledged to varying degrees Bowie’s mime training and the influence it has had upon his wider performative work. Karen Jaehne, for instance, has regarded it as integral to his approach to movie acting, noting, “the synthesis of a character’s form and function into mime-like elegance . . . Bowie does not embody or act; he represents. His powerful presence renders him a cipher or hieroglyphic distillation of whatever it is he is meant to portray” (1984, p. 44). Christiaan Willems, meanwhile, has analysed Bowie’s stagecraft in the live performance situation, pointing out that, “Bowie uses stillness, together with minimal, selective movement, exceptionally well. By doing this, Bowie literally makes the audience look at him” (2008, p. 38). Indeed so convinced of Bowie’s prowess in the fundamentals of mime, he states, “If one ever needed evidence of the remarkable and positive influence of Mime in other performance contexts, Bowie provides it” (Willems, 2008, p. 40). Willems is discussing Bowie in a situation that does not include static images, nevertheless his suggestion that the artist employs stillness and ‘makes’ an audience look at him seems particularly pertinent in the case of the Aladdin Sane album cover.

In a 1971 article in Rolling Stone magazine, titled ‘David Bowie: Pantomime Rock?’, Bowie himself stated, “I’d like to bring mime into a traditional Western setting, to focus the attention of the audience with a very stylized, a very Japanese style of movement” (Bowie in Mendelsohn, 1971, p. 16). This statement, proffered prior to his career reaching the heights of success that he would achieve with Ziggy Stardust and beyond, clearly shows the importance of mime practice to his burgeoning methodology. In addition, it gives a clear clue as to the origins of his penchant for stylisation: Japanese theatre.

Bowie has frequently acknowledged his admiration for Japanese Kabuki theatre. In 2002 he summarised the influence with the following acknowledgement: “Ever since forming my fascination with kabuki (and indeed all things Japanese) it had occurred to me that the nearest Western form was rock. Like a rock song list, kabuki actors viewed the play purely as a vehicle for their own performance” (Bowie in Bowie and Rock, 2002, p. 86).

Several qualities inherent to Kabuki theatre are clearly consistent with Bowie’s method. Of particular value to Bowie, however, must have been the fact that the visual imagery of the

244 The influence of Japanese theatre will be addressed later in the chapter.
245 The title of the article, ‘David Bowie: Pantomime Rock?’ is also particularly noteworthy because, and as will be explored shortly, the obvious pantomime association in the ‘Aladdin’ portion of the album title warrants further investigation.
Orient represented to Western eyes an exotic depiction of alien culture (Sardar, 1999, p. 105). The effect of Bowie’s borrowing from Kabuki theatre “was to signify the codes of another culture, one alien to Western society” (Buckley, 1999, p. 134). This was a thematic thread that was merely hinted at in the title track of the previous album, in the lyrics, “Ziggy really sang – screwed up eyes and screwed down hair-do like some cat from Japan”. However, in live performances at this time Bowie was showing a very clear visual influence in his costuming and makeup. It has often been noted that in the early 1970s Bowie worked closely with fashion designer and Kabuki costume designer, Kansai Yamamoto, who designed several of the costumes he would use during the glam rock era (Sandford, 1996, p. 108).246 Bowie himself described them as “everything I wanted them to be and more . . . outrageous and provocative” (Bowie in Bowie and Rock, 2002, p. 86).

![Figure 87. Bowie in a Kansai Yamamoto costume, 1972.](image)

Another important characteristic of Kabuki that clearly resonates with Bowie’s work is the intentional emphasis placed upon artifice and its allied stylisation, being “striking for its breathtaking, stylized beauty: its deeply felt artificiality” (Mezur, 2005, p. 239).247 This purposeful emphasis “denies the truth of the flesh and promotes a transcendence of the actor’s


personality and gender to create an artificially constructed ideal” (Senelick, 2000, p. 89). This observation is consistent with other appraisals of Bowie’s approach, his “snow-white skin and powdered face...a mask on which to paint “emotion” (Waldrep, 2004, p. 112).

At least one critic, New Musical Express staff writer Nick Kent, was frequently vitriolic during this period, taking exception to what he considered Bowie’s overt artificiality, suggesting in his conclusion to a highly unfavourable article in April 1973, that “David Bowie was last year’s Ziggy Stardust, this year’s Aladdin Sane and probably next year’s Pinocchio. That’s showbiz in the Twilight Zone” (1973, p. 18). This appraisal highlights the fact that Bowie’s blatant artifice was a polarising force in the rock environment, attracting the wrath of critics as well as admiration. More importantly in the current context however, the comment also subtly, and yet with some degree of derision, raises the topic of pantomime in its reference to Pinnochio.

Buckley suggests:

Even before a note of the music on the album has been heard, we are confronted with another Bowie paradox. On the one hand, we hear “a lad insane” meaning quite clearly a mad young man; on the other hand read of a pantomime figure — Aladdin — who is perfectly sane (Buckley, 1999, pp. 88-89).

Few critics have explored, or indeed even mentioned, the potential significance of the word ‘Aladdin’ in the album’s title. Yet, given that it references one of the most well known children’s stories and most often performed pantomimes in history, the Aladdin association surely has highly impactful references. As Buckley (2003) has further pointed out, the reference imbues the title with what he terms a “pantomime-mystical” element. The already strong link to the story of Aladdin afforded by the presence of the word in the album title is given an emphatic boost by the flame-like dot that appears over the ‘i’ in the word ‘Aladdin’. This otherwise inexplicable feature is surely a representation of the magic lamp that features in the story, and positive proof that the intention to emphasise the reference to Aladdin is overt on Bowie’s part. In addition, perusal of the track listing on the rear cover reveals a further highly supportive paratext in the form of the track titled ‘The Jean Genie’, “a shamanistic pun on the genie of the lamp” (Buckley, 2004, p. 27). Thus, three of the main components of the story of Aladdin are seen to be easily discernable on the album cover: Aladdin himself (albeit with the unfamiliar accompanying word, Sane), the lamp, and the genie.
Aladdin is one of the most widely known stories drawn from the enormously popular book that is today commonly called *The Arabian Nights*, but was previously titled *Thousand and One Nights*. Originally a collection of stories orally disseminated throughout the Islamic Middle East, the book was published in its first Western translation in 1704, in France (Yamanaka and Nishio, 2006, p. xv). Long since regarded as a literary milestone, many critics believe the book has had a very significant impact upon both Western literature and Western attitudes and beliefs regarding the East, even rivalling the Bible in terms of global influence (Irwin, 1994, p. 237). As Yuriko Yamanaka and Tetsuo Nishio attest, “No other single work of Oriental literature (besides the Bible) has had such a long-lasting and deep impact on world culture” (2006, p. 3).

As is arguably also the case with the Bible, *The Arabian Nights* is by now such a widely disseminated and well-established literary work that knowledge of its most popular stories can transcend even the requirement for having personally read the book: “People who have never sat down to read the [Arabian] Nights may know, or at least know of, the stories of Ali Baba, Aladdin and Sinbad” (Irwin, 1994, p. 237).

*The Arabian Nights* became particularly popular in Europe, which quickly embraced the exoticism and excitement to be found in the depictions of a culture highly alien to that of the European readership: “The translation of the *Thousand and One Nights* . . . was an epochal event which triggered off the European fascination for orientalia, and consequently the phenomenon of what is now termed ‘Orientalism’” (Yamanaka and Nishio, 2006, p. xv). That the work sparked unprecedented Western interest in the East, is a view shared by many.

The primary attraction of the anthology is widely held to be located in the recognition of otherness engendered in the mind of the Western reader, who, finding him or herself exploring upon the written page a very different culture to their own, would find within

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250 See also Makdisi and Nussbaum (2008) *The Arabian Nights in Historical Context*, p. 4

themselves a sense of liberated imagination (Sardar, 1999, p. 1). Drawing upon the work of Ernst Bloch, Jack Zipes has examined the ways in which such fairy tales stimulate the imagination and how they function to help the reader make sense of his or her own culture in addition to presenting images of the alien culture, concluding:

The fairy tale is the most vital artistic expression of ordinary people – their projection of how they want themselves to change and transform society. It plays upon the imagination not to open it up to escape into a never-never land but to make greater contact with reality. The escape is estrangement or separation from a defeating situation which induces a possible feeling of liberation (Zipes, 1979, p. 161).

By the nineteenth century the perceived exoticism of the Arabian Nights stories, coupled with the elaborate illustrations to be found in many of the editions, had codified to such an extent in the Western imagination that the Orient became less a real, geographical place than “a topos, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics” (Said, 1979, p. 177). This engagement with the reader’s imagination in turn influenced Western writers, for whom “Familiarity with the oriental storytelling tradition had a liberating effect . . . freeing them from the constraints of plausibility and encouraging them to experiment with supernatural effects” (Irwin, 1994, p. 254). Among this expansion within western literature of thematic material credited to the influence of The Arabian Nights’ are topics exploring magic and sorcery (Kabbani, 2008, p. 74). Notions of reinvention and change-at-will are closely allied to Bowie’s most popular thematic concerns.

While largely considered to be children’s literature today, a situation that has come about in part because of the adoption of several of the main stories as pantomime plays, the fantasy world of The Arabian Nights that the Western reader in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was drawn into was not so obviously child-oriented. “[Arabian Nights] offered a particularly powerful vision of an Asiatic culture seemingly saturated with references to sensuality, extravagance, indulgence, violence, supernaturalism, and eroticism” (Makdisi and Nussbaum, 2008, p. 4). And as Rana Kabbani points out, “The Orient of the Western imagination provided respite from Victorian sexual repressiveness. It was used to express for the age the erotic longings that would have otherwise remained suppressed” (2008, p. 68).

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It is certain that by the time of the release of *Aladdin Sane* in 1973, much of the mysticism and imaginative wonder associated with *Arabian Nights*-fed Orientalism had waned (Irwin, 1994, p. 291). This is due to several reasons, but most especially the demystifying of the region due to the ever-increasing ease by which westerners in the twentieth century could travel to the east, thereby taking such first-hand experiences away from the exclusive realm of explorers, adventurers and sailors, and making them available to the general population. In addition, fantasy literature developed to become an extraordinarily broad-ranging genre, highly competitive, and facing direct competition with other media, most especially film and television (Irwin, 1994, p. 291). This had the effect of rendering as passé the more traditional, historic fantasy themes, such as *The Arabian Nights*. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to surmise that two centuries of *Arabian Nights*-type stylisation planted in the Western imagination had left at least some degree of residual connotation.\(^{255}\) Addressing this legacy, Irwin summarises the global impact of *The Arabian Nights*, suggesting:

> The book of *The Arabian Nights* has become a synonym for the fabulous and the exotic. Every child is familiar with the stories of Aladdin, Sinbad the Sailor and Ali Baba... to the extent that the story collection must be considered a key work in Western literature (Irwin, 1994, inside dust jacket).\(^{256}\)

Of more specific relevance to Bowie’s direct reference to a story from *The Arabian Nights* is the fact that following the first English translations of the anthology at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the work quickly became both widely circulated and highly popular in England (Irwin, 1994, p. 291). As elsewhere in Europe, English readers embraced the opportunity to transcend the familiar and enter a world of exotic fantasy and imagination: “...the *Arabian Nights* offered its readers a marvellous world for which there could be no British analogy... To the English reader, the minute detailing of manners and customs offered not automatic recognition... but a constant reminder of the otherness of the subject matter” (Schacker, 2003, p. 115).

Of all the stories in the anthology, it is *Aladdin* that is frequently singled out as being of particular literary significance and historical influence, regarded as “one of the most popular stories of the *Arabian Nights*, both in the West and in the Arab world. It has served as a source of inspiration for numerous stories, novels, films and other reworkings... the story has become the prototype of the Oriental fairy tale” (Marzolph and van Leeuwen, 2004, p.

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\(^{255}\) A contemporary Western incarnation that should be noted was the highly popular US television comedy, *I Dream of Genie* (1965-1970).

In addition, the central characters from the story, namely Aladdin and the genie, feature among the most iconic and recognisable fictional literary characters in Western history: “Characters such as the bottled genie (from the tale of Aladdin) . . . have become proverbial in many European languages” (Yamanaka and Nishio, 2006, p. 6).

While the book of *The Arabian Nights*, and the story of *Aladdin* specifically, have become long-established within the English consciousness, the very popular pantomime play version of the story is of equal importance to our discussion. Even today, *Aladdin* is consistently one of the four most popular and frequently performed pantomime plays in Britain (Paul Elliot in Millie Taylor, 2007, p. 24). It is reasonable to assume that both Bowie and his audience were entirely familiar with ‘Aladdin’ in this theatricalised context, since “Pantomime is the most popular form of theatre entertainment in Britain, with the widest audience constituency, so . . . there is a common understanding of the genre” (Taylor, 2007, p. 73).257 This widespread popularity in the twentieth century is a continuation of the pantomime’s popularity throughout the preceding century, as “Throughout the nineteenth century pantomime was one of the most successful and commercially viable forms of popular entertainment . . . Moreover, pantomime as we know it today, is very much the legacy of developments that occurred in the late-Victorian period” (Davis, 2010, p. 1).258

Given this likelihood that both Bowie and his audience possessed a level of appreciation for pantomime, or at least a probable basic awareness of the form, and the fact that *Aladdin* was intrinsically associated with it, it is crucial to this investigation that certain defining characteristics of pantomime are considered.

Millie Taylor suggests that the most popular pantomime stories are utopian, “because of the possibilities they suggest for individual transformation” (2007, p. 85). She further attests that this transformation occurs via “The idea of adventure, a quest or a journey . . . the journey represents the development of the psyche . . . the audience identifies with the hero in the action and can learn the importance of growth, change and development” (Taylor, 2007, p. 85). This message of transformation, as discussed in the previous chapter regarding Ziggy Stardust, is a primary component of glam rock.259

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259 And as found in the previous chapter, Bowie as Ziggy Stardust presented a heroic figure on a quest, therefore this theme can be seen as a continuation.
The cumulative effect upon an audience member of familiarity with the most popular fairy tales is “an exoticization of the mundane and a naturalization of the fantastic” (Schacker, 2003, p. 116). This, too, has direct links to the glam rock ethos. Similarly, an essential component of how pantomime works is the voluntary suspension on the part of the audience of “The everyday reality behind the glitter and glamour (Davis, 2010, p. 11). This is a point also made by Mayer who, while focussing upon the iconography of pantomime, believes “The costumes also suggest distance from everyday cares” (1969, p. 1).

This escapist quality - the imagination-stimulating element inherent to the Aladdin story, to fairy tales in general, and to pantomime - is a collective effect that the Aladdin Sane album cover clearly taps into. However, the cover’s pantomime connection has additional synergies that go beyond this, the most pertinent to the current context being the gender-play that is a central component of pantomime.

In pantomime, the leading role of a young man or a teenage boy is often played by a woman, while it is equally likely that the role of an older women will in turn be played by a man. Using the character of Aladdin as a specific example of the former, Taylor observes, “Boyish pantomime heroes . . . are often played by women, which highlights their youthful, androgynous lack of physical power” (2007, p. 86). Ann Thompson also comments on this tradition of cross-dressing but believes that, rather than being designed to portray androgyny, the device is intended to more overtly display the true gender of the performer who lies behind the role, as “there is no attempt for a principal boy who is Aladdin, say, to pretend to be a man. The whole point is to display the female body, her legs and so on . . . There is no intention for the men playing the ugly sisters and the Widow Twanky to conceal the fact that they are men” (Thompson in Kishi, 2007, p. 200).

The cross-gender play inherent to pantomime extends to the portrayal of gesture and mannerism, because

When a Principal Boy swings one shapely leg forward . . . she is imitating some lost vision of man; when she adopts a resolute - and deliberately unladylike - stance, feet

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260 Visually epitomised in the previous chapter by the Ziggy Stardust album cover and the unused Mott the Hoople image that each depict unexpected exoticism amid the urban mundane.

firmly planted apart . . . she is assuming postures which are meant to be recognized as manly, but she is not trying to create an illusion of manhood (Ward in Frow, 1985, p. 183).

The cross-dressing tradition of pantomime is designed to show transformation within a character: “Such transpositions were acceptable only when the age represented was transitional . . . young women might play prepubescent lads – the Peter Pan motif – and men might play post-menopausal matrons – the Charley’s Aunt motif” (Senelick, 1993, p. 81). Given the age of glam rock fans, this transitional quality would seem to have comparative relevance.

In further explanation for this carefully contrived treatment of gender in pantomime, it is also apparent that the device is one of the ways in which a sense of distance is purposely created within the performance. That is, realism is consciously eschewed in favour of purposeful artifice in order to expose to the audience the performative nature of the medium:

One of the areas where the play with distance, or the lack of pretence at ‘realism’ is most clearly apparent is in the presence of cross-dressed characters . . . men dressed as women who make no attempt to create an illusion of womanhood . . . an ironic statement that contradicts the facts that are plain for the audience to see (Taylor, 2007, p. 105).

The traditional, purposely-confused, presentation of gender identity in pantomime bears a remarkably close resemblance not only to Bowie’s highly performative presentation on the front cover of Aladdin Sane, in the current instance, but also to previous albums discussed, most especially The Man Who Sold the World and Hunky Dory. In each of these instances, he is not trying to fool the viewer into believing he is a woman by creating an illusion of womanhood. Rather, he retains his maleness while at the same time adopting various visual signifiers, whether in clothing, posture or makeup, to what society deems to be the domain of female gender. A point discussed in the introduction, Bowie’s image is not male, nor is it female, but rather it is one of gender-as-performance; Buckley’s appraisal being that Bowie on Aladdin Sane is a “war-painted, sex-change harlequin” (2004, p .24). As Taylor puts it, in relation to pantomime, “The fact that gender identity is infinitely variable and complex and that it is culturally performed can be exposed by these representations that tend to extreme characterizations of both male and female” (2007, p. 106).

A distinctive feature of pantomime performance that has parallels with Bowie’s methodology is the manner in which the artificiality of the theatrical act is purposely laid bare; “The performance is repeatedly exposed as constructed” (Taylor, 2007, p. 14). In pantomime, the
performance framework is intentionally laid bare by characters who exist not only in the on-stage world of the play but also in the real world of the audience, thus purposely sabotaging the distance between the two. A pantomime performer’s behind-the-hand aside to the audience, for instance, can be seen in the same light as Bowie temporarily stepping out of the frame in the manner that he did on the *Ziggy Stardust* album in the song ‘Five Years’ (“Don’t think you knew you were in this song”, and “So I felt like an actor”).

To an extent, there are also parallels with the way that, on his rear covers, Bowie has repeatedly held his hands up to admit authorship of the stylised role he has played on the front covers, effectively stepping out of the performance frame. Yet, on *Aladdin Sane*, Bowie all but abandons this carefully established technique.

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262 For an in-depth study of the ways in which pantomime makes a feature of its own artifice, see M. Taylor ‘Playing with Distance in Pantoland’ in Taylor (2007) *British Pantomime*, pp. 91-103.
The rear cover of *Aladdin Sane* features a thinly outlined silhouette of the front cover photograph, of identical size and located in the same position within the frame. Bowie’s head is outlined in red, while his torso is rendered in blue. The encroachment by the white background that began upon the lower part of Bowie’s visible torso on the front cover has now progressed greatly to the point where it has eliminated all but his barest outline. Background and foreground are now seamlessly merged. All of Bowie’s facial features are absent and the viewer is confronted by what is effectively a faceless, empty shell, a bare framework completely devoid of all defining personal characteristics. As Stevenson puts it, “Bowie has evaporated” (2006, p. 65).
His absence raises significant questions on the part of the viewer, because disappearance is “a powerful source of compositional and hermeneutic information . . . to not only let the body go, but also to revel in its absence, and in the traces engendered by its passage from presence to absence” (Gilpin, 1996, p. 106). Although a suggestion of past presence remains in the thinly rendered outline, we are wont to ask what lies behind his obfuscation.

The outline that remains of Bowie on the rear cover is a silhouette in its simplest form; that is, the simple tracing around the edges of a figure’s profile with the interior space filled in by a solid colour (McKechnie, 1978, p. xix). Silhouettes most commonly feature black as the fill-in colour, which gives a sense, at least, of corporeal occupation when juxtaposed against a contrasting background, frequently white. Here, however, because the fill-in colour is a continuation of the white background, the impression given is one of almost complete absence.

By its very nature, a silhouette both conceals and reveals, “[it] is both something and nothing, a negative and a positive” (Rutherford, 2009, p. 8). In this case such qualities of duality go even further, however. While a comparison of the fullness of the front cover with the sparseness of the rear suggests that Bowie has all but disappeared in the simple act of turning the cover over, were we to begin to draw his image from scratch on a blank canvas we would start with just such an outline as displayed on the back cover. Progressing in our task, we would then proceed to fill in the interior space with facial features, an expression, etc., much like colouring an image from a child’s colouring-in book. Therefore, the silhouette can be seen as either the end or the beginning of Bowie’s image being present on the album.

When contemplating a silhouette, much is required of the viewer to use imagination and creativity to supply in their mind’s eye that which the artist has not provided: “There is no play of light and shade upon the sitter’s face to describe the subtleties of age and expression as in other forms of portraiture – where is the personality, the eyes that are the windows to the soul?” (Rutherford, 2009, p. 8). Frequently, the obliteration of such details is the fully intended aim of those who create such silhouettes. For instance, physiognomist Johann Kaspar Lavater, mentioned earlier in this chapter as an influence on Paul Klee, utilised silhouettes of his subjects as part of his research into cataloguing personality types. When sketching silhouettes of his sitters Lavater would at times use the same technique of simple

un-filled in outline, in either front or side-on profile, that is evident on the rear cover of *Aladdin Sane*, because “He was not interested in silhouettes with added colour or embellishment of any kind but simply in the ‘true’ recording of a profile” (Rutherford, 2009, p. 39).  

Lavater stated, “I have collected more physiognomical knowledge from shades [silhouettes] alone than from every other kind of portrait” (Lavater in Rutherford, 2009, p. 39). This observation recognises the ability of the silhouette to convey a type, instead of the kind of highly individualised image of a sitter that other art forms might deliver. As on previous albums where he has concerned himself with conveying type over individuality, it is left to Bowie’s audience to imbue the image with anything more personal. In effect, by reducing his presence in this way on the rear cover – greatly diluting an image already compromised in terms of personal detail by virtue of the photographic manipulation and cosmetic modification on the front cover – the viewer is left with a visual manifestation of Bowie’s stated approach to his art: “All I try to do in my writing is assemble points that interest me and puzzle through it and that becomes a song and other people who listen to that song must take what they can from it and see if information that they’ve assembled fits in with anything I’ve assembled”

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264 See also Rivers (1994) *Face Value*, pp. 66-103.
(Bowie in Miles, 1980, pp. 69-70). Bowie is purposely depersonalising his picture, reducing it to type and then requiring that the viewer interpret and attribute further detail themselves.

Lines of text overlay the blank regions of his hair and torso on the rear cover image, comprising song titles and publication information respectively. Such encroachment upon these areas serves to diminish Bowie’s presence even further as if the commercial workings of the album are of more value than acknowledgement of the album’s creator.

The paratexts represented by the song titles on the rear cover do not reveal as much overall as was the case on the previous album, although four carry particular significance. As mentioned previously, the song ‘Cracked Actor’ stands out as a potent literal statement on the album cover imagery – Aladdin Sane is a cracked actor indeed – while ‘The Jean Genie’ clearly strengthens the Aladdin/pantomime allusion. ‘The Prettiest Star’ has clear resonance with Bowie’s established exploration of the mechanics of star-construction as well as alluding to science fiction.

There is certainly significance to be found in the bracketed dates (1913-1938-197?) that accompany the title track, ‘Aladdin Sane’, with the revisitation of a theme from earlier in Bowie’s work; war and apocalypse. The first two dates indicate the years immediately prior to World War I and World War II, and thus the 197? is surely an invitation to the viewer to speculate as to just when the world will once again be at war. A single line in the song, in particular, supports this theme, “Passionate bright young things, takes him away to war”.

Further lyrics on the album that directly support this theme are sparse; however, during ‘Watch that Man’, Bowie sings “the bodies on the screen stopped bleeding”.

Overall, and as noted by many critics, the album displays the lack of a clear concept in the song titles and lyrics, particularly in comparison to the album’s predecessor, Ziggy Stardust. Its sheer disjointedness, however, might well be seen as a further manifestation psychological disturbance, and is therefore in complete collusion with the album cover art.

In summary, the Aladdin Sane album continues many of the thematic threads of earlier works. Above all, Bowie’s usage and exploration of alienation as both a primary concern and an

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266 Bowie has acknowledged this track is based upon the novel ‘Vile Bodies’ by Evelyn Waugh, which concerns young people living for the day prior to the outbreak of the First World War. See D. Bowie (1973) Aladdin Sane compact disc liner notes, (EMI, 2003 (16)). See also Doggett (2011) The Man Who Sold The World, pp. 167-168.
overriding focal point for his art has hit a new peak of complexity and dramatic unification. Still tapping in to the visual associations pertaining to the musical zeitgeist of the times, primarily glam rock, he has taken that style’s emphasis on image and constructedness and used it to present an image of the rock star as the ultimate alien; an inherently split, dichotomous, mentally unsettled personality. In visually presenting this theme he has utilised historical symbolism in the form of the lightning flash symbol, a referent that is well-imbued with such meaning. In addition to alienation, he has continued to explore the theme of gender signification, and to a lesser extent, war and apocalypse.

The album cover presents his most artificial image to date. Simply, there is no evidence of the ‘real’ David Bowie on either side, the result of the utilisation of techniques that in combination hugely diminish his authentic presence. In particular, it is clear that on the rear cover Bowie has for the first time broken with his established pattern of admitting a degree of authorship on the back of his albums. While the tactic of presenting type and affected stylisation on the front cover is retained here, on the rear of previous covers Bowie-as-author could be observed claiming creative ownership of the work; to varying degrees, yet always evident. On Aladdin Sane, for the first time this quality is totally absent.

The clear underlying inference to be gleaned following consideration of both sides of the cover, and the nature of their interaction, is that on Aladdin Sane, the stylised, artificially rendered performance persona of the front cover is all there is. There is no ‘real’ artist seen to be directing proceedings from behind the scenes or, literally, behind the front cover. Instead of David Bowie seen ‘playing’ a role yet again, here there is just the role of Aladdin Sane and nothing more. The performance has taken over the performer and left nothing behind.

The tactic of appearing without clothing does not imbue the work with any sense of ‘bare all’ honesty in the manner that other performers of the day utilised the tactic. Instead, through the careful theatrical construction of his nudity, Bowie is provided with a new, potent type of mask and costume, the most effective that he has utilised in his career thus far.

Whereas previously Bowie has taken care to visually present the inherent duality of the performer/role dichotomy - necessarily problematising notions of artifice and reality - here, finally, the constructedness of the rock star, as a progression from the initial Ziggy Stardust persona of the previous album, has triumphed. In so doing, the schizophrenic nature of the
transformation has been laid bare through references to and borrowings from the domains of world theatre, art history, and psychology.
Chapter Seven - Pinups

*Pinups* was released in October, 1973, and was a considerable commercial success for Bowie. In the UK it reached number one on the album charts, while in the US it reached a rather more modest 23. The single selected for release from the album, ‘Sorrow’, reached number three in the UK but did not chart in the US.267

*Pinups* is a very different album from the others examined in this study because of several factors. Uniquely among Bowie’s albums the songs are a collection of cover versions of the work of other artists and contains not a single track written by the artist himself. The implications of releasing an album of cover versions therefore forms a central investigative thrust for the chapter. Closely allied to this is consideration of the psycho-geographic nature of the songs chosen and the manner in which the artist created visual support for the carefully limited nostalgic nuances of the album’s contents.

Alienation remains to the forefront of the investigation into the album, with a clear and logical continuation of his ongoing critique evident within the highly artificialised front cover image. Allied to this, previously identified concerns including star/image construction, the malleability of identity, and gender ambiguity, all provide potent investigative threads.

While building upon previous themes, the front cover of *Pinups* nevertheless presents a significant visual departure for the artist, most especially because he is, for the first and only time in his career to date, pictured with another person instead of alone. The presence on the cover of internationally-renowned sixties fashion model Twiggy is therefore examined at length. The *Pinups* album title carries significant resonance because it suggests a relationship with the long-established genre of the celebrity pinup; therefore an examination into the ways in which the image meets, or fails to meet, recognised conventions for the pinup is undertaken.

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Side One

1. Rosalyn (Duncan, Farley)
2. Here Comes the Night (Berns)
3. I Wish You Would (Arnold)
4. See Emily Play (Barrett)
5. Everything's Alright (Crouch, Konrad, Stavely, James, Karlson)
6. I Can't Explain (Townshend)

Side Two

1. Friday on My Mind (Young, Vanda)
2. Sorrow (Feldman, Goldstein, Gottehrer)
3. Don't Bring Me Down (Dee)
4. Shapes of Things (Samwell-Smith, McCarty, Relf)
5. Anyway, Anyhow, Anywhere (Townshend, Daltrey)
6. Where Have All the Good Times Gone (Davies)
The front cover of *Pinups* is a close-up photographic portrait of Bowie pictured with sixties fashion model Twiggy. Positioned lower in the frame, in front and to his right, Twiggy rests her head against the side of Bowie’s neck. Set before a featureless light blue background both subjects are naked, at least to the extent that can be seen of their bodies, and they both make full eye contact with the viewer while possessing very different expressions.

There is again little with which to directly compare the cover of *Pinups* to from the popular music of the day. Certainly there were albums released around the same time that featured a man and a woman on the cover, and some with surface similarities to the Bowie cover. *Full Moon* by Kris Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge, for instance, featured the subjects positioned similarly to Bowie and Twiggy against an ostensibly comparable light blue background.

![Figure 91. Full Moon by Kris Kristofferson and Rita Coolidge, 1973](image)

However the similarity between the two images goes no deeper. There is clear harmonious unity to be observed between the naturally presented Kristofferson and Coolidge who jointly direct their gaze above and beyond the camera. They are both fully clothed, while the tree branches evident to Kristofferson’s left indicate a natural outdoor setting and give the work a situational context that the Bowie cover lacks. These factors jointly remove from the image
the ambiguity created in the mind of the viewer of the Bowie picture, most obviously regarding why the subjects might be experiencing such clearly different emotions.

The cover of another release from the same year by American duo Lindsay Buckingham and Stevie Nicks pictured the artists naked and staring directly at the viewer, factors that suggest an initial linkage.

![Figure 92. Buckingham Nicks, by Lindsay Buckingham and Stevie Nicks, 1973](image)

Once again, however, beyond these broad compositional elements there is little to compare with *Pinups*. The black and white picture shows the couple unified by the mutuality of their expressions, their long naturalistic hairstyles, and their - comparatively at least - cosmetically untouched faces. There is none of the artifice and emotional intrigue of *Pinups* to engage the imagination of the viewer.

Another release from 1973 is noteworthy for several reasons. Brian Ferry, lead singer of English band Roxy Music - variously described as a glam or progressive rock band by critics
both of the day and since - recorded a solo album of cover versions titled *These Foolish Things* that was released on the same day as *Pinups.*

Far more so than were Kristofferson and Coolidge or Buckingham and Nicks, Ferry was a contemporary of Bowie’s and the only other comparable act to release an album of cover versions during that year. In addition, aspects of the image invite close comparative scrutiny. The light blue background is of almost the same hue as Bowie’s, while Ferry’s name is written in a purple-pink colour that bears moderate comparison to the pink handwritten text on the rear cover of *Pinups.* An element of artifice is introduced to the Ferry cover by virtue of the intrusion of patches of a brighter blue colour that can be observed clearly in the subject’s hair and over the outline of his shoulders. Ferry’s expression however carries none of the intensity that can be seen on the faces of Bowie or Twiggy. Similarly, Ferry’s face bears no mask-like characteristics; there is no suggestion that he is presenting himself as anything other than his true self. The songs that Ferry covers on his album are also very different from Bowie’s, comprising a very broad-ranging selection drawn from popular music.

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268 The simultaneous release was no coincidence but rather the result of collusion between both artists and their record companies. See C. Sandford (1996) *Bowie*, p. 114.
with none of the specificity of style, era or location that, as will be seen, is a telling hallmark of the Bowie work.

Although quite different in overall appearance from the previous album, *Aladdin Sane*, continuity exists in that Bowie’s face once again appears highly stylised and unnatural, as does Twiggy’s, and this component is immediately impactful upon the viewer. This artificiality is a quality noted by critics, with Buckley for instance suggesting that the two subjects “look more like wind-up dolls than beings made of human flesh. The overall effect was that of a startling piece of artifice” (1999, p. 198). The primary component in this impression of artificiality is the precisely applied heavy makeup that renders the faces of Bowie and Twiggy as mask-like.269 It is clear that conveying such an impression was fully intended as, on the two-sided single-page insert that came with the album cover upon which he lists the album acknowledgements, Bowie writes that makeup artist Pierre Laroche “made the masks”. While on the cover of *Aladdin Sane*, Bowie’s makeup had featured no obvious demarcation lines and had covered all of his visible skin; here both he and Twiggy sport clearly evident darkened borders that surround the heavily made-up centralised areas of their faces, incorporating eyes, nose, cheeks and mouth. This border gives the strong impression that masks have been placed upon the heads of the subjects, obscuring their real faces and thus depersonalising them, as the face is “the most distinctive and widely used key to a person’s identity” (Bruce and Young 1986, p.305).270 The impression that the subjects are wearing masks is further enhanced by the fact that the area of skin visible outside the more heavily made-up region - that is, the remaining area of face that lies beyond the darkened border - is of a notably different hue to that which lies within; in Bowie’s case this is lighter, and in Twiggy’s case darker. These contrasting shades of skin colour are maintained for the remainder of each subject’s visible body, with the colouring of Bowie’s chest, shoulders and neck being very pale in comparison to Twiggy who is much darker. With their respective masks each shaded in opposition to the skin colouring of their bodies, a curious juxtaposed reversal between the two of them results. The photographer responsible for the *Pinups* cover, Justin de Villeneuve, recalls that the reason for this disparity was initially to balance the clash of skin colours between the two, but the result was an image that was, as he puts it, “enigmatic and strange” (Justin de Villeneuve quoted in Cann 2010, p. 313). Indeed it is as if

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the faces of the two subjects have been switched from one body to the other, with Twiggy wearing the mask that would more logically befit Bowie and vice versa.

In addition to Twiggy’s mask being of a lighter hue than Bowie’s, other small differences between the two are evident, primarily located in the region around the eyes. Firstly, Bowie has no eyebrows, an alien feature retained from the previous album cover, while Twiggy’s are thin and immaculately manicured. Bowie’s eye-shadow is a soft brown colour, matching his hair, while Twiggy’s is a shiny metallic blue, closely approximating her eyes and also the tight-fitting blue cap she wears. Lastly, with the photograph being a close-up and given Bowie’s wide-eyed stare, the difference in both size and colour of Bowie’s pupils is clearly evident, far more-so than has been the case on any previous album cover and a feature that adds significantly to the unreal, alien, quality of the image. But Bowie’s image is not as overtly alien as was the case on _Aladdin Sane_. Although the disparities discussed above play a part in distancing him from a normal human appearance, the predominance of natural skin-tones renders him far removed from the overt android-like artificiality of the _Aladdin Sane_ image with its total absence of human-coloured skin on either face or body. On _Pinups_, the viewer sees more a human being wearing a mask rather than an absence of humanness altogether. This does not, however, remove from the image an underlying quality of alienation, because Bowie still appears very strange; very different.271

In addition to the depersonalising effect of the masks, for the first time on a Bowie album cover he is identified simply as ‘Bowie’. This absence of his first name further depersonalises and estranges him because, “the first name not only grants one a specific identity . . . but also directs who that person is and will be through the name’s physiognomy and reference to the world” (Tschaeppe 2003, pp. 68-69). The absence of David reduces the precision of the artist’s identity, a step towards Barthe’s notion that a lack of specificity in the act of naming “is a good symptom of disturbance” (1981, p. 51). Of course Bowie’s audience would know full well that the album was by David Bowie, but in omitting his first name he has deleted from the cover a firmly established and universal visual symbol of individuality. Given that Bowie was an adopted name anyway it is highly significant that on this album, for the first time in

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271 And, as will be discussed, the expression on both his and Twiggy’s faces emphatically support the psychological alienation so potently displayed, though by different means, on _Aladdin Sane_.


his career, there exists the total absence of any given name. In a sense, *Pinups* is an album performed by a totally fabricated and fictitious artist.

Both subjects display androgynous elements while stopping short of the more overt androgyny of *Aladdin Sane*. Bowie’s chest, with his left nipple half exposed, shows a slight darkening at the centre that is subtly suggestive of chest-hair, and thereby hints at his gender signification as most likely male. However his carefully coiffured, long, brown-red coloured hair coupled with his elaborate makeup are more feminine. The absence of hair on Twiggy’s head - she appears bald or her hair is hidden beneath her tight blue, gold-medallion skull-cap - weakens a potentially powerful gender signifier and thus introduces a further androgynous element. Because she is situated below Bowie in the photograph not as much of her body beneath shoulder level is exposed and there is no hint of breasts or cleavage to clearly delineate her as female. Arguably, the most obvious female characteristics are constructed rather than natural: the heavy eye shadow, lipstick, blusher on her cheeks - all of these features shared to the same degree by Bowie. The strongest evocation of androgyny in the image however comes from the mutability suggested by the curious swapping of skin colours between the two. This exchanging of light and dark complexions contains deeper implications concerning gender-associated beliefs and customs. Many studies point out the existence of long-held associations that align fair skin to femininity (the ‘fair sex’) and darker skin tones to masculinity. Shyon Baumann, for instance, after comparing 260 advertising images from popular magazines published in 1970 found when comparing men and women of the same race that, “White men have darker average skin tone, hair colour and overall complexion than white women” (2008, p. 10). Richard Dyer (1997) has suggested that pure white skin portrays a kind of idealized white womanhood. And beyond the skin itself various kinds of symbolism can at times stand in its place; the prevailing custom in Western weddings, for instance, is for the bride to wear a white dress and the groom a black suit, while in a children’s fairy-tale feminine purity is symbolised by (Snow) white. Here, Bowie and Twiggy’s transposed skin tones reverse the perceived natural order of things.

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273 And as will be discussed shortly, in addition to how they are presented in this specific image, each subject brings to the picture a reputation for gender play.

The overall message portrayed by this aspect of the image is one of interchangeability between the two subjects and thus, by extrapolation, between male and female gender classifications. The androgynous elements in the picture have eroded any sense of gender absolutism. Each could take the mask worn by the other and place it upon their own head but, because of the hue of their bodies visible beyond the masks, even then their gender images would not conform. Bowie should be darker and Twiggy lighter, not vice-versa. Once again, then, gender may be seen as an artificial construction and a site for play and experimentation rather than a fixed entity, because “Androgynous models... naturally lend themselves to greater personal interpretation” (Soldow, 2006, p.321).

Additional information pertaining to gender lies in a significant paratext located elsewhere on the cover. To the upper left, and mirroring the 45° angle of Twiggy’s head as she rests upon Bowie’s shoulder, the words ‘BOWIE PINUPS’ are written over the blue background in colours of red and yellow. The ‘0’ in ‘BOWIE’ features the upward-arrow symbol denoting male, drawn from astrology and representing the Shield of Mars.\textsuperscript{275} The prominent presence of this well-established gender symbol seems to state emphatically that despite the interplay and ambiguity in the physical appearance of the two subjects, Bowie is, after all, to be seen as essentially male.

Aside from the implied interchangeability of the two subjects created by the interplay between masks and skin tones, the most unsettling aspect of the picture is the contrasting expressions they bear. Bowie, eyes wide and mouth slightly open, gives the appearance of experiencing anxiety; the kind of alarm or shock that evinces a fight-or-flight state of imminent action in response to some unseen stimulus. His body language, shoulders thrust back as he holds himself erect and seemingly tense, supports this notion. With the pupils of his eyes being different sizes and given the obvious disparity in his eye colourings, as noted, his face overall is a site of tension. Twiggy’s countenance sits in contrast to the heightened sense of anxiety evident in Bowie. Her mouth is closed, eyelids heavy and partially covering her pupils, and her head is relaxedly at rest upon Bowie’s neck. She is oddly absent, bored or tired perhaps, in comparison to her very present partner.

There is no readily evident explanation to be seen in the picture for either of the contrasting emotions the subjects convey, with the plain, unbroken, pale-blue background offering no

contextual information to the viewer. Fraser and Banks, in their belief that the perception of colour is often loaded by our experience of natural phenomenon, posit that any expanse of light blue, such as is in evidence here, engenders a universally held invocation of the sky and, accordingly, traditional associations with freedom, introspection, wisdom, solitude, space, truth, beauty and serenity (2004, p. 20). In this regard, then, Twiggy’s calmer expression perhaps seems more consistent with the genial ambiance set up by the background, mirrored by the closely matched colour of her cap and eye-shadow. Bowie’s evidently alarmed, disturbed facial expression, however, seems totally at odds with any such inference. The combined message is a mixed one; a disturbing juxtaposition of opposites.

The nakedness of the two subjects on the cover invites speculation. There is no discernable impression of eroticism present, as might be expected from the sight of a top fashion model appearing naked alongside one of the world’s most popular and photogenic rock stars, also naked. Leppert, drawing on the work of Laura Mulvey, discusses scopophilia (pleasure in looking) and, given that both Twiggy and Bowie are prime physical examples of desirable, celebrity woman and man, it is reasonable to expect that a significant component of the scopophilia found in viewing this image might lay in our “attention focussed on the human form itself, upon which the spectator may project his own desires” (2007, p. 11). Indeed this notion is consistent with the manner in which the quintessential, non-pornographic mainstream pin-up communicates, whereby non-graphic nudity and direct, engaging eye contact imply “mutual recognition between viewer and model, [giving] the pinup its characteristic allure and sexual content” (Kadoudaki, 2004, p. 339). Such erotic potential as may have existed in the nakedness of Twiggy and Bowie is instead undermined by their facial expressions and body language and weakened still further by the way in which they look at the viewer. In seeming respectively wearily resigned or totally alarmed, neither possesses any notion of tease, any hint of sexual come-on, either to each other or to the viewer. They do not appear to be remotely happy, evidently preferring that they were elsewhere, with romantic thought the furthest thing from their minds.

With no hint of sexual interest or intimacy between them beyond the fact that Twiggy’s head rests upon Bowie’s shoulder, the image could not be less erotically charged, despite the nakedness of the parties. It is as if their nakedness is entirely incidental to their circumstance. Sir Kenneth Clark has suggested that nakedness is concerned with simply being unclothed, whereas nudity is a categorisation, a descriptive term denoting artistic intention (1956, p. 23). He also suggests that nakedness often carries with it a sense of embarrassment, a type of
defencelessness, whereas nudity is far more empowering, denoting pride and confidence and a celebration, perhaps, in the power - sexual or otherwise - inherent to the human form. The *Pinups* cover seems to fall between the two definitions. There is certainly no sense of embarrassment evident in the two subjects; they appear totally immune to their lack of clothing. Yet neither is there any sense of celebration, of pride or, indeed, of directorship of their situation, qualities which might be expected in the nude as artistic representation. The indolence and fear exuded respectively by the subjects appears to have little to do with their nakedness; it is evidently not a lack of clothing that has engendered such emotions. The viewer is thus inclined to speculate elsewhere in pondering what might have caused them, and in so doing becomes as immune to their nakedness as the subjects themselves appear.

The image does not support a romantic interpretation despite inviting such scrutiny. Frosh has studied how romantic lovers are portrayed in visual imagery, believing:

> The most commonplace scenario is for them to be gazing at one another, but they may be facing each other (or kissing) with their eyes closed, or gazing together into the distance. One may be looking at the other while the latter gazes wistfully away. These different manifestations of semantic ‘eye-work’ express, above all, the intimacy and absorbed mutuality of the romantic couple (Frosh, 2003, p. 123).

Pictured face-on and gazing directly at the camera, neither Bowie nor Twiggy look at the other, and thus the conveyance of a shared intimacy between them is absent. The image is thus excluded from the category of “the large majority of romantic images which disavow the presence of the camera” (Frosh, 2003, p. 123). On *Pinups*, the viewer is not granted voyeuristic access to look in upon the private world of two romantic lovers. Rather, the subjects confront the viewer directly and intently, but each remarkably separately and differently, and there is a marked lack of overall intimacy communicated between them as a result. Further, and as discussed earlier, their expressions are such that they are clearly in contrasting emotional states. Although Frosh has determined that there is a small minority of romantic imagery in which the lovers do look at the viewer rather than toward each other or into the distance, nevertheless even this sub-category requires that the subjects display “the expression of mutuality . . . [leaving] nothing in reserve, no surplus of self or undiminished interiority that is not transformed into, and consumed by, the free and open play of mutuality” (2003, p. 128). Such a quality is absent from the image.

The album title warrants particular attention because a pin-up, by its very nature as a visual artefact, is “meant for display and concentrated observation” (Buszek, 2006, p. 8). The viewer
of the *Pinups* album cover is invited, even expected, therefore, to subject the cover and its protagonists to significant, focussed scrutiny. In addition, the word ‘pin-up’ carries dual meanings as identified in the following dictionary definition:

Of a photograph or other picture, designed to be fixed to a wall, etc. Also applied to a favourite or sexually attractive young person, the typical subject of such a photograph; also in extended use. Also pertaining to or characteristic of such a picture or person (Simpson and Weiner, 1989, p. 882).

A pin-up then refers to the physical article, the actual picture itself. But the term also acts as a descriptor of the subject(s) featured in that picture; subjects that, in the most commonly understood definitions of pin-up, are of sexual interest to the viewer (Epley, 2007, p. 45).

In addition to being a functioning album cover, the *Pinups* cover then can be regarded as a pin-up in its own right, while the two subjects, Bowie and Twiggy, are pinups within that object. But the latter is problematic. Twiggy’s expression in particular does not adhere to conventions for a female pin-up model because, “When the female pin-up returns the viewer’s gaze, it is usually some kind of smile, inviting” (Dyer, 1982, p. 66). Bowie is posed perhaps more conventionally according to Dyer’s observation that male pinups are almost always shown in the act of doing something rather than being idle (1982, p.66). Here Bowie is not seen actually doing something, but he nevertheless appears poised for action: “Even when not actually caught in an act, the male image still promises activity by the way the body is posed. . . More often than not, the male pin-up is not supine . . . but standing taut ready for action” (Dyer, 1982, p. 67). This observation is certainly applicable to Bowie’s visage. Also, when male pin-up subjects make eye contact with the viewer, as is the case here, the convention is that “his look suggests an interest in something else that the viewer cannot see – it certainly doesn’t suggest any interest in the viewer” (Dyer, 1982, p. 63). However this device is designed to maintain an air of control of the situation, to denote power, and a rebuttal of the dichotomy created when a male image is intended to be looked at; an act considered far more the traditional role of the female (Dyer, 1982, p. 66). Bowie’s alarmed expression undermines any such illusion of power and authority. He is not in control at all but is reacting to something unseen that is seemingly threatening to him. Because of this vulnerability, Bowie’s image too breaches the conventions of the pin-up.

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276 This convention holds true for representations of the male throughout the arts. See also Leppert (2007) *The Nude*, p.109.
Although the juxtaposition of Bowie and Twiggy pictured together was new, each was already an established identity as the subject of numerous pin-ups in their own right due to their respective statuses as music and fashion icons. Individual images of the two stars were at the time, and had been previously, widely available to their fans in the form of posters, magazine centre-folds and other ephemera. To see them described as pin-ups on the album cover was not, therefore, in itself problematic. Because of the medium within which they were pictured, however - a popular music album cover - Twiggy’s presence immediately begged questions of the viewer. Twiggy was known as an internationally successful fashion model, not a musician. And besides this, Bowie was a firmly established solo artist who had never before appeared with anybody else on one of his album covers. Despite her prominent position on the cover, ostensibly receiving equal status to Bowie apart from the additional presence of his surname, Twiggy did not feature in any other way on the recording and was not mentioned in the lyrics, nor in the song-writing credits etc. What, then, was the significance of her presence?

Twiggy was a fashion icon of Swinging London in the 1960s. Therefore, and as other critics have suggested, her presence acted as an obvious representation of that recently passed era. Further, Twiggy was synonymous with a uniquely generalised popular culture celebrity set, because during the mid-late sixties, “the worlds of fashion, advertising, fine art and popular music became inextricably involved with each other. An elite formed of photographers, models, designers, film-makers, artists and performers, and they collectively became arbiters of taste” (Dean and Howells, 1987, p. 17). Charlotte Seeling describes Twiggy’s place within this elite as follows:

The face of the 1960s, Twiggy was the unrivalled queen of fashion modelling for several years. She was also the first model to attract the adoration of the masses, thereby triggering the trend for fashion models to join the exalted group of musicians and actors at the heart of popular culture (Seeling, 2000, p. 337).

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277 Notwithstanding the fact that throughout her career she has released singles and albums sporadically as a sideline to her modelling. Prior to the release of Pinups, she had released five singles, none of which had reached the charts.

278 She had previously featured in the lyrics of the song ‘Drive in Saturday’ from the Aladdin Sane album – specifically in the line, “She’d sigh like Twig the Wonder-kid and turn her face away”. And on the single page insert that came with the Pinups album, on which Bowie acknowledged all those involved, her name was similarly credited as “Twig the Wonderkid”. This is her only mention anywhere on the Pinups album.


With the fashion and music of the era intrinsically linked, Miller suggests that one of the most important factors in this linkage was the common terminology used between the two (J. Miller, 2011, p. 1). As noted in the analysis of the first album, the term ‘mod’ had become a largely ubiquitous term for youth culture of the era and was used as much in fashion as it was in music. An example of this interchange can be seen in the following Twiggy magazine cover from 1967:

![Twiggy magazine cover, 1967](image)

Figure 94. Twiggy magazine cover, 1967

Critics of the day also noted the fashion/music synergies at work: “Twiggy is the first child star in the history of high fashion, crowned queen of the mod by the same adolescent army of teen-spenders that has already seized and conquered pop music” (Twiggy: Click! Click!, 1967, p. 62). In a similar way, because Bowie’s image and costuming have always been such a pivotal aspect of his craft, he is seen as “one of the few performers who has been discussed in terms of fashioned image” (J. Miller, 2011, p. 137).

Clearly, Twiggy’s appearance imbued the cover with a sense of nostalgia for the popular culture of London in the 1960s. Because of the nature of her celebrity however, it was a
generalised nostalgia that went far beyond her primary role as a top fashion model to evoke a strong revisitation of the music, certainly, but also the wider cultural climate of the era.  

Several aspects of Twiggy’s approach to her career, and the widespread attraction she garnered within the public, bear direct comparison to Bowie’s approach and appeal, and therefore there is more to Twiggy’s presence on the cover of Pinups than just an evocation of nostalgia. As a model, Twiggy was considered to have an androgynous image (Breward et al., 2006, p. 91). Her body was thin and boyish and, “like the anorexic’s body, accrued to itself a certain power by virtue of its sexlessness” (Benn DeLibero, 1994, p. 54). Her hair was frequently cut short and styled with a parting, much like a man’s, and she would at times wear clothing, including business suits, that had primarily masculine associations:

![Figure 95. Photograph from Look magazine, 1967. Reprinted in On Fashion, p48.](image)

A headline from Look magazine, 1967, encapsulates this quality: “Is it a girl? Is it a boy? No, it’s Twiggy!” (Benn DeLibero, 1994, p. 54). With Bowie having firmly established androgyny as a central part of his own style, it is clear that he would have valued the same clearly evident quality in Twiggy. Thus, “The portrait of Twiggy and Bowie on the Pin Ups album cover invokes an era of androgynous chic for an entire generation” (Lutyens, 2002, p. 10).

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281 And as will be addressed shortly, this inference is fully backed up by the songs chosen for inclusion on the album.

Similarly, and in keeping once again with Bowie’s own ideas on the malleability and constructedness of stardom and celebrity - notions firmly established on the albums that preceded *Pinups* - Twiggy was widely seen as a constructed identity; an every-day girl playing the role of a fashion model celebrity. “She is a magic child of the media. Where there are no cameras, she ceases to exist” (Twiggy: Click! Click!, 1967, p. 62). Such a notion sits easily against, for instance, Hamilton’s appraisal of the covers of *Aladdin Sane* and *Pinups*, believing they show Bowie’s “magical transformation from working class waif to airbrushed superhero” (1987, p. 23).

Twiggy’s real name was Lesley Hornby, a cockney born in a poor area of North London who had a working class upbringing. Much credit for Twiggy’s success is attributed to her boyfriend, mentor and photographer, Justin de Villeneuve, who shot the *Pinups* cover photograph. Villeneuve was the invented alter-ego of Nigel Davies, also a cockney, who assumed several different names during his career. “He was one of the many cocky, cockney, working class characters who helped erode Britain’s rigid class system in the still stuffy early Sixties. Ironically, he did so by assuming new personae, each with a pseudo-aristo name” (Lutyens, 2002, p. 10). For Davies, Villeneuve was “a great name to be famous in” (Anonymous, 1967 p. 77). As was the case with Twiggy and Bowie, acknowledgment of the construction of one’s identity was a hallmark of Davies’ approach to his career, “The working class bounder dressed up in dandy’s clothing made the transparency of his charlatanism an inextricable part of the phenomenon” (Benn DeLibero, 1994, p. 45). Twiggy gave frequent credit to Davies for her re-invention and elevation to the status of a supermodel, asserting “Twiggy isn’t just me, it’s me and Justin. Honestly, sometimes I think Justin invented me” (Hornby, 1968, p. 154). Such critiques on the nature of stardom would clearly have resonated with Bowie. Indeed were one to replace the word ‘femininity’ with ‘masculinity’ in the following appraisal of Twiggy’s underlying message to her fans, the line could as easily have been written of Bowie: “Not only could you transcend your class and be a star, you could transcend the limitations of femininity itself” (Benn DeLibero, 1994, pp. 55-56). Twiggy is, in a sense, a female version of Bowie’s performance persona: androgynous, constructed, supremely image-conscious and media-savvy. It is clear, then, that Twiggy’s presence on the cover of *Pinups* incorporates significant, layered, meaning.

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The circumstances surrounding the taking of the cover photograph warrant noting for the influence they may have had on the image and the resulting distance evident between it and the conventional pin-up image. The photograph was originally intended, though never used, as a cover shot for *Vogue* magazine, with de Villeneuve and Twiggy having successfully supplied photographs for that purpose on several previous occasions. One might assume therefore that with the photograph intended for a fashion magazine audience rather than destined for a Bowie album cover, Bowie might have had less directorship of the session than did de Villeneuve and Twiggy. Despite the fact, as previously noted, that at this time the worlds of fashion and music were coalescing - a point surely underlined by Bowie and Twiggy appearing in this collaboration at all - nevertheless certain fashion conventions must have been at the forefront during the session, particularly in the mind of de Villeneuve. For instance, the expressions of the two subjects, while atypical for pin-ups, make more sense considered against the conventions and traditions of *Vogue* magazine fashion photography, where facial expressions conveying “boredom and anxiety are two of the earliest components of glamour” (Harris, 1993, p. 130).

In addition to the visual evidence of the album title that Bowie and Twiggy are pin-ups, the *Pinups* title also suggests that the songs Bowie has chosen for the album are musical pin-ups of sorts; pin-ups that represent the sixties, the time of his own musical fermentation.

In the hand-written text on the rear cover, Bowie made it very clear that the songs on *Pinups* were cover versions; that is, songs that had been previously recorded by other artists (Cusic, 2005, p. 174). Although previous Bowie albums had contained a solitary cover song, an entire album dedicated to the work of others and containing no original compositions was an obvious and significant departure. Specifically, he informed his audience in the written text on the rear cover, “These songs are among my favourites from the ’64-67’ period of London”. Refining the territory further, he then went on to outline a specific geographical environment by naming three iconic music locations synonymous with the London music scene of the day: the Ricky Tick Club, Eel Pie Island, and the Marquee Club. Further, he identified by name the

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artists responsible for the songs that he had covered, including Pretty Things, Them, Pink Floyd, Kinks, Easybeats, Who, Yardbirds, Mojos, and the Merseys.

Don Cusic has suggested that there are three main motivations for an artist to cover the songs of others: a) if the songs are already proven hits, then their quality and commercial appeal are pre-assured, b) they can serve to publicly acknowledge an important influence upon the artist, c) they can help launch a new act by providing something familiar to an audience (2005, p. 174). In the case of *Pinups* the third of these motivations is easily dismissed as Bowie was clearly by this time a well-established artist; indeed an artist whose reputation was founded upon his own original compositions. While it can be claimed that the selection of songs chosen for the album reflected music of proven quality, either by the chart success of the individual songs themselves or by the pedigree of the artists who wrote them, or both, nevertheless there is more to Bowie’s selections than any simple classification as ‘safe bets’. As Steve Bailey points out in comparison to cover albums released by other artists in the early-mid seventies, including those by The Band, John Lennon, Brian Ferry and the Isley Brothers, the songs on *Pinups* were quintessentially British both in origin and in terms of their chart success (2003, p. 143). They were also, unusually for cover selections, very recent songs, a point that Bowie made a somewhat oblique reference to in his handwritten text on the rear cover when he wrote of the bands concerned, “Some are still with us”. Bailey suggests Bowie’s choices were “less canonical” for this reason than the songs covered by the other artists he examined (2003, p. 143). Another critic has posed the question, “These were hardly oldies, let alone classics, so why revive them?” (Lenig, 2011, p. 131). Such lukewarm sentiment is in keeping with reaction at the time of *Pinups* release, with reviewer Greg Shaw of *Rolling Stone* magazine concluding,

> Although many of the tracks are excellent, none stands up to the originals . . . The songs were originally conceived as trashy, instant pop fodder . . . Bowie's vocals float carelessly above the music, and his excessively mannered voice is a ridiculously weak mismatch for the material (Shaw, 1973).

Critical appraisals from the day are far less favourable about *Pinups* than they were about Bowie’s original albums released both before and after. *New Musical Express* reviewer Ian MacDonald was even more damming in his appraisal stating that Bowie had “failed to live up to the essence of those times ['64-67] convincingly. . . *Pin-Ups* slowly, but surely, dies a death . . . [it] fails to live up to its promise” (1973, p. 20).
While reviews at the time certainly suggested Bowie’s versions paled in comparison to the originals, in terms of arrangement, instrumentation and production the songs on *Pinups* were recorded in a style remarkably close to those originals. They were presented in “a reverent and reasonably straight-forward manner. There are few, if any, drastic alterations to the material, and the performances suggest aesthetic validation . . . rather than critique” (Bailey, 2003, p. 143).

It is clear that Bowie’s motivation in choosing which songs to cover is more easily aligned to the second of Cusic’s categories; that is, he wished to acknowledge his influences. The album thereby has an “autobiographical resonance” (Bailey, 2003, p. 143), fully in keeping with his claim on the rear cover that the tracks were all personal favourites. Backing this up, Bowie has further stated, “They’re all very dear to me . . . it’s my London of the time” (David Bowie quoted in Gillman and Gillman, 1986, p. 353). Further, the fact that Bowie handwrites the song titles and also his explanation for their inclusion can be seen as a kind of defacto ownership; he might not have written these works but he has somehow claimed them for his own usage.

Such validation by Bowie of both the quality and importance of the selected songs during his formative musical years carries significance that goes beyond simple acknowledgement and homage, however. Michael Coyle has observed that artists who release cover songs may do so as part of a wider tactical strategy designed to communicate and further build upon aspects of their own existing performative identity; effectively projecting “their identity precisely by singing songs associated with another voice or style” (2002, p. 134).

Even today *Pinups* garners criticism in some quarters, with Clinton Heylin recently dismissing it as Bowie’s “stopgap” album (2012, p. 272). Nevertheless, it seems certain that Bowie’s song choices were not *ad hoc* or made without due consideration, as “the self conscious artist didn’t waste space on an album just recording any old song, popular or otherwise. Fans and critics paid attention . . . Any cover version had to contribute to the overall concept” (R. Miller, 2011, p. 232). The concept here would seem to be two-fold. In selecting songs geographically located in London, identifying performance venues in the rear cover text to underline the point, and by providing strict parameters in terms of a short and specific time frame, Bowie creates a theatrical, psycho-geographic context for his work in...
much the same way that he did so visually with his drab urban London scene on the cover of *Ziggy Stardust*.

Creating a cameo of the London scene of 1964-1967 - the very height of ‘Swinging London’ - on *Pinups*, he re-presented the sense of excitement, danger, and youth euphoria synonymous with that scene through his carefully chosen collection of “odes to mod good times” (Trynka, 2011, p. 195). While that era had clearly passed - comparatively recently, certainly, but also most emphatically - Bowie nevertheless repackaged aspects of the era for his new glam rock audience of the early seventies. Lenig has suggested that “Pin-Ups operated in a visual sense, conjuring up 1960s images that Bowie wished to appropriate” (2011, p. 130). As he further points out, the bands that Bowie referenced on the album were, in their own time, renown for being immaculately costumed, most particularly the mod bands (2011, p. 130). They were something to see as well as to hear, and thus the album title, in conjunction with the recorded content, acted very much as a dual prompt.

In creating this Swinging London context for the album it is clear that both sides contribute, with the front cover and particularly Twiggy’s presence, making significantly more sense when the written paratext on the rear is considered. Yet, on a purely visual level, the rear cover sits in stark contrast to the front, with the only obvious linkage being the pale blue background common to both sides.
Consisting of six rectangular panels, three contain handwritten text over the blue background and the other three comprise images of the artist, rendered in vibrant colour. The top, centralised image is an off-front head-shot of the artist seemingly taken in-concert, with stage lights reflecting on his hair as he gazes out above the viewer in thoughtful reflection. He sports the Ziggy Stardust era rooster haircut and the circle painted upon his forehead that he adopted during Ziggy Stardust concerts. The image at bottom right is also a live shot, the beam of a spotlight shining down toward him as he stands singing into a microphone with one leg thrust out behind the other, while two backing musicians can be seen performing alongside him to the rear of the picture. It is a high-energy shot, his face contorting with the effort of his performance. His glam-styled costuming once again confirms that it is a

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287 Of this circle, Bowie has written it represented a kind of third eye, “of the type that my friend Calvin Lee used to wear in the Sixties” (Bowie in Bowie and Rock (2002) Moonage Daydream, p. 262).
photograph taken at a Ziggy-era concert. The remaining photograph is something new. Here
the artist is seen in a highly posed stance, legs apart, the fingers of his right hand spread out
upon his suit jacket and his left hand tucked into his pocket. He gazes directly at the viewer
with a serious, intense expression. The orange-red background suggests the location is a
carefully lit studio. He wears a brown suit that gives the image a more formal quality than the
other pictures, and holds a saxophone in the crook of his bent right arm. The only obvious
linkage between this image and the others is his orange rooster-style haircut.

The utilisation of handwriting is a significant paratext that indicates a return to the personal,
artist-as-individual approach as discussed in relation to the rear cover of Hunky Dory.
Suggesting authenticity and originality, the return of this tactic mirrors that predecessor even
to the appearance of similarly messy corrected errors. For instance Bowie mistakenly lists
track three on side two as ‘Shapes of Things’, crossing the word ‘three’ out and inserting a
‘four’ next to it, before scrawling the title of the actual third track, ‘Don’t Bring Me Down’,
above. He does likewise with track five. Once again, as on Hunky Dory, the impression given
is one of somebody informally writing on a napkin or pad or suchlike rather than on a formal
album cover.

In addition to handwriting the track titles for each side of the album, Bowie personalises the
rear cover to an even greater extent than he did on Hunky Dory by providing a first-hand
explanation for his song selections. Confirming this as an intimate, first-hand message from
Bowie himself, he then signs off with the concluding line, ‘Love-on ya!’ , a highly informal
and familiar sentiment such as one might use to a close friend, family member or lover. As an
emphatic stamp of authorship, he then signs his work with a heavily stylised but easily legible
‘Bowie’, underlined and with a heart shape instead of a dot above the ‘i’. It is an intensely
personal statement yet at the same time the absence of his first name supports the similar
absence on the front cover.

Bowie hand-writes his text in vivid pink ink. This comes at the expense of readability, to an
extent, as the bright pink against the light blue background makes for a somewhat difficult
reading experience. Indeed a hallucinatory, three-dimensional psychedelic effect can be seen
if one focuses hard upon the lettering, with the pink seeming to lift off the blue. This clash of
vivid colours and eschewing of formal typesetting on the cover is a practice associated with
psychedelia, as noted in the discussion of previous albums, whereby the transference of
written information to the reader was willingly compromised in order to create visual effect:
“Legibility and information were lost and the use of bright complementary colours increased the pulsating, rhythmic effect” (Hamilton, 1987, p. 18). The colouring and handwriting style of the rear cover contribute, therefore, another aspect to Bowie’s nostalgic 1960s agenda for the album.

While his name is reduced on both sides of the cover to just Bowie, on the spine of the album it is still written as David Bowie, therefore retaining at least a small link to the nomenclature used on the previous six albums.

In summary, as a covers album and therefore by its very nature a quite different record to what Bowie had released previously, the cover of Pinups nevertheless exhibited a clear continuation of Bowie’s visual presentation of his most eminent concerns. Alienation, image construction, the malleability of identity, and gender ambiguity are at the forefront of the front cover image. While built on a now familiar platform of artifice, on this occasion he also employed a new and highly original way to enhance his conveyance of these concerns, abandoning his established pattern of appearing alone on his record covers and employing the help of a top internationally-recognisable female model. Crucially, Twiggy brought to the image critical inferences located within her own widely celebrated history; inferences that were highly consistent with Bowie’s own.

Pinups was a carefully compiled work in that it primarily addressed a very specific time and location: Swinging London of the mid-1960s. Appropriate song choices and paratexts such as the inclusion of the names of the venues who had hosted the bands concerned ensured a strong psycho-geographic element. To support this in a visual sense and ensure clear linkage between front and rear, once again Twiggy was a crucial ally given that her name and face were synonymous with that era. In the widest sense of the term ‘mod’, this was Bowie’s retrospective mod album.

Commentators of the day, and since, have frequently described Pinups as a work of nostalgia, more often than not in a derisory tone. Yet, had a nostalgic homage been the sole agenda, Bowie and Twiggy might surely have appeared on the cover costumed in sixties mod style, a style each of them had comfortably embraced in the past. Instead, the way that they looked distanced them greatly from this. The visual component to the album - both front and back covers - located it squarely in the glam rock-influenced musical environs of 1973, of which

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Bowie himself was firmly established as a, arguably the, leading player. This rendered the work far less a one-dimensional evocation of nostalgia and far more a re-contextualisation of popular culture drawn from the previous decade and re-presented for consumption by a new audience. The depiction of masking - Bowie’s most overt to this point - in addition to abetting his joint critiques of alienation, identity, image and gender, served to imply that such appropriations and re-presentations from the past were part and parcel of the act of creative reinvention. This is a clear example of Bowie’s retrospective contention that he had sought to take the past “and restructure it in a way that we felt we had authorship of” (David Bowie quoted in Roberts, 2003, p. 56).

Alienation as a central tenet was presented in a largely similar way to the previous album, *Aladdin Sane*. The artificiality of Bowie’s appearance, while less extreme than on that predecessor, still rendered him as ‘other’, locating him outside the mainstream of both everyday society at large and within popular music rendering him automatically marginalised. The reduction of his name to simply ‘Bowie’ further enhanced this distance, most especially when one considers its inherent fictionality. The gender ambiguity in the picture, created by both subjects acting in unison, ensured a continuation of the gender alienation theme, while Bowie’s expression of alarm constituted a clear revisitation of the psychological disturbance, and thus psychological alienation, of *Aladdin Sane*. Twiggy’s expression too implied some undetermined mental conflict within.

The contrasting expressions on the faces of both subjects, the single most unsettling aspect of the picture, act in opposition to the inferences of the album title. Bowie and Twiggy are not simply celebrity objects of romantic and sexual desire, as is the most commonly understood function of a pin-up. They appear far too uncomfortable for that. They have therefore destabilised notions of what it is to be looked upon and revered as music and fashion celebrities, further building upon the nature-of-stardom critique that has by this time become a Bowie cornerstone.

On *Pinups*, as had earlier been the case with *Hunky Dory*, the front and rear covers are seemingly at odds with each other in that the front cover image conveys messages of depersonalisation, whereas the back offers direct personal communication with the viewer. As was the case with the earlier album this was largely achieved through the employment of personal handwriting and the first-person nature of the written message. There is therefore still a sense of acknowledged authorship - of the visible hand behind the artistic product - but
only through this paratext and not through Bowie’s image because, differing from that earlier example, all three photographs of the artist on the rear of *Pinups* show him in performance guise rather than depicting the artist as he ‘really is’, off stage. Overall, on this album there has been a partial return to the practice of admission of authorship on his rear covers, something that was totally absent on *Aladdin Sane*. However, mitigating this apparent reversal, such admission of authorship is here attributable to a totally fictitious entity: Bowie.

While *Pinups* stands alone in the Bowie canon by virtue of it being a covers album, it should nevertheless be seen as thematically unified within itself and, most particularly in a visual sense, as an album that further cements his established creative direction and overriding concerns rather than compromising them.
Chapter Eight - *Diamond Dogs*

Released in April 1974, the *Diamond Dogs* album was an immediate and significant commercial success. Reaching the highest position of any album in the US thus far in Bowie’s career, *Diamond Dogs* peaked at number five on the Billboard chart, while in the UK the album went straight to number one. Of the singles released from the album, ‘Rebel Rebel’ reached number five in the UK but only 64 in the US. The title track of the album, ‘Diamond Dogs’, attained number 21 in the US.289

The cover of *Diamond Dogs* sees Bowie represented in the most artificial manner of all the albums examined in this study. A half-man half-dog therianthropic hybrid, the fantasy image is photo-realistic in style and is presented on a gatefold cover; the single rectangular image folded in half and wrapped around both the front and rear sides of the album cover, requiring that the viewer simply opens up the gatefold sleeve to view the picture in its entirety. Because of this design factor, a feature unique among Bowie’s albums to this point of his career, the *Diamond Dogs* cover will in the main be considered in the singular fullness of its opened-out state.

On *Diamond Dogs* all of Bowie’s major concerns are given their most potent voice. The overriding concern is yet again that of alienation, and once again the artist finds a new way to bring this concern to the forefront of his imagery. On this occasion, and highly supported by relevant paratexts, he invokes the extreme otherness and estrangement of the carnival freak show performer as his primary communicative vehicle, an investigative thread that will be explored at length. In addition, there is a revisitation of the urban alienation theme so prevalent on the *Ziggy Stardust* album two years earlier, and in part this lies within the clear allusions on the album to George Orwell’s novel, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Aspects of Bowie’s hybridised man-dog appearance, along with certain well-established gender-related cultural implications inherent to freakery, maintain the critique of gender as an issue central to his

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work. In addition, now-familiar themes including image construction, the illusory nature of stardom, and apocalypse, continue to be problematised.

Figure 97. Diamond Dogs. Front cover, 1974

Side One

1. Future Legend
2. Diamond Dogs
3. Sweet Thing
4. Candidate
5. Sweet Thing (Reprise)
6. Rebel Rebel
Side Two

1. Rock 'n' Roll With Me
2. We Are the Dead
3. 1984
4. Big Brother
5. Chant of the Ever Circling Skeletal Family

Figure 98. Diamond Dogs. Rear cover
The cover is a painting of Bowie lying propped up on his elbows on a wooden floor, a stage or boardwalk perhaps, partially concealing a billboard situated immediately behind him. Visible from the waist up on the front cover, his head is positioned to the centre-left of the picture, his face front-on and his eyes wide staring straight at the viewer. The muscles and sinews of his naked body are highly accentuated by shadowing, and his hands are crossed on the floor in front of him with fingers splayed. When the cover is opened to reveal his body in its entirety, it is clear that the lower part of his body is that of a dog, a transformation so complete that Bowie no longer has human feet but rather canine paws. A gold bangle adorns the wrist of his left arm, while a large round gold earring hangs from his left earlobe and long red hair hangs down over his shoulders. A carefully back-combed crown of hair also sweeps back from the centre-front of his head. His face is heavily made-up, with dark eye-shadow, bright red lipstick and rouge on his cheeks. Although his pose is relaxed, the expression on Bowie’s face is watchful and alert, his eyes wide and focussed and his head erect, giving the impression that he might yet spring into action.

Behind Bowie, the billboard features two highly anthropomorphic female cartoon figures who have paws instead of hands, flaming red hair, silver/grey flesh and red lipstick upon their smiling mouths. Each has a small remnant of green clothing, consisting of a strip around the waist of the one on the left, and a narrow strip across the breasts of the one on the right. The hair on the right-hand figure is teased straight upwards, while that of the figure on the left hangs downwards. Behind them, to the top left of the cover, lies the dark silhouette of a city skyline beneath a dark grey cloudy sky. The buildings are grey and featureless with no light.
emanating from the windows. A couple of trees can be seen, leafless and stark, and possibly dead. The impression engendered is that of a bleak, uninviting and perhaps abandoned urban landscape.

At the viewer’s top left corner lies an orange circle ringed in red that features the word ‘Bowie’ in red lettering. The letter B is highly stylised, seemingly fashioned from a twisted lightning bolt, and another lightning bolt underlines the entire word. The only other text on the cover is the words ‘Diamond Dogs’ located at the base of the billboard and next to the Bowie’s crossed hands, and the record company name, *RCA Victor*, at the top right.

The cover was painted by Belgian artist Guy Peellaert under Bowie’s commission. Peellaert was an artist very much riding the crest of a wave of popularity at the time of the album’s release, due to the extraordinary international success of his book of fantasy paintings of top rock artists, including Bowie, titled *Rock Dreams*, published in 1973. The book was aptly named as all of the subjects were pictured in totally fictitious situations and locations drawn from Peellaert’s own imagination, to which rock journalist Nic Cohn added a short and equally fictitious written commentary. Pellaert specialised in photo-realism, a specific style of painting that used photography as its starting point and that was at the peak of its popularity during the mid 1970s after having originated within the pop art movement of the 1960s. As one critic put it at the time, the book portrayed “its heroes from Elvis to David Bowie in the photo-realist, allusive style that now dominates hip magazine illustration” (Clemons, 1974, p. 94D). Giving more specific details on Peellaert’s method, Steven Gaines noted, “*Rock Dreams* is constructed of thousands of photographs, clipped and trimmed from hundreds of sources, then melded into a series of photo-montages and airbrushed with acrylic paint” (1974, p. 1). The goal of the photo-realist artists was to produce images that married the colourful vibrancy of painting to the accuracy and attention to detail possible only in photographic images, resulting in “tension between authenticity and artifice [and thus creating] the central visual paradox that governs the photorealist project” (D’Amico, 2011, p. 9).

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The photographs of Bowie from which Peellaert would create his image on the *Diamond Dogs* cover were shot by photographer Terry O’Neil. In preparation for the therianthropic nature of the cover, O’Neil also took photographs of a large dog that was hired for the photo-shoot for the purpose of securing a photograph that would then serve as the rear portion of Bowie’s body.²⁹³

While there is little with which to directly compare Bowie’s cover in terms of either subject matter or the obvious fantasy element of the work, the photo-realism style of the painting can be seen in other album covers from 1974. For instance, the technique is clearly evident on the cover of the album *Desolation Boulevard* by English glam rock act Sweet, most particularly in the rendering of the buildings located behind the band-members:

![Figure 100. Desolation Boulevard, by Sweet, 1974](image)

While once again very different in terms of subject matter, the album cover that is stylistically the most comparable to Bowie’s is *It’s Only Rock’n’Roll* by The Rolling Stones, a cover also created by Peellaert and released later in the same year:

Painted in Peellaert’s photo-realistic style and thereby occupying a middle ground between reality and fantasy, photography and painting, the image is very reminiscent of the *Rock Dreams* pictures. With the members of the Rolling Stones pictured at a fictitious, evidently deifying, reception and surrounded by scores of swooning nubiles, the image is in keeping with Peellaert’s recollection of his work during this period of his career, “We were playing with mythology” (Guy Peelaert quoted in Rambali, 1995).

Although the Bowie cover is equally fictitious, several aspects of the work have clearly discernable historical origins. When one considers the gatefold sleeve in its entirety, it is clear that Bowie is positioned before a freak show advertising banner. Two features of the cover in particular make this clear: the anthropomorphic women caricatures on the front, and the presence on the rear of the banner proclaiming ‘The Strangest Living Curiosities’.294

The traditional carnival freak show came to prominence as a highly popular form of public entertainment both in Europe and America between approximately 1840 -1940, and was a constant presence at carnivals, fairs, circuses, amusement parks and exhibitions.295 The typical freak show consisted of the grouping together of collections of unusual objects, artefacts and

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294 A very important paratext that adds much support to the cover’s freak show allusions also exists on the recording within. In the lyrics to the title track, ‘Diamond Dogs’, Bowie sings the line “Tod Browning’s *Freak* you was”. This line directly references the movie *Freaks* from 1932, directed by Tod Browning and set in a freak show. This is a significant influence that will be examined later in the chapter.

creatures, including fetuses in jars, exotic or deformed animals, and “Living humans with bodies that were perceived to deviate significantly from an understood norm” (Chemers, 2008, p. 6). Devised for the financial gain of both organisers and performers, any such display was “collectively known as the freak show. In this context freak became an odious way of referring to humans with disabilities” (Chemers, 2008, p. 6).

Several aspects of the freak show provide significant support to Bowie’s favoured thematic concerns. Firstly, freaks were alienated in the extreme from normal society. Unlike psychological disability, which is potentially able to be hidden beneath outward normality, the physically disabled are visually easily discernable, particularly those with severe conditions such as those favoured for freak show display, conditions that constitute “the master trope of human disqualification” (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000, p.3). Subsequently, the alienation of carnival freak show performers was widespread: “The history [of freaks] is one of a marginalised community of performers: targeted, isolated, disenfranchised, tortured, abused and murdered” (Chemers, 2008, p. 9).

The appeal of such shows to their audience is widely held to have lain in the realisation that but for a chance occurrence at conception or birth any member of the audience could have been similarly afflicted because, “Disability is a stark example of the fragility of human existence and generates a great deal of social and personal anxiety” (Chemers, 2008, p. 19). Therefore, “part of the sideshow’s frission arises from the audience’s recognition of the ease with which freak and normal may slide unstably into one another” (Adams, 2001, p. 9).

Freak shows were ethically contentious and problematic, to an extent at the time but especially since their heyday, because of questions regarding the debasement and exploitation of the performers. Nevertheless some scholars consider that “freak shows performed important cultural work by allowing ordinary people to confront, and master, the most extreme and terrifying forms of Otherness they could imagine, from exotic dark-skinned people, to victims of war and disease, to ambiguously sexed bodies” (Adams, 2001, p. 2).

Clearly, in this investigation of Bowie’s use of freak show imagery, aspects such as otherness and sexual ambiguity are of relevance due to their clear alliance with Bowie’s identical concerns.

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297 See also Bogdan (1988) Freak Show, p. 10.
Peellaert had used freak show imagery in his work prior to working with Bowie. One of the pictures in *Rock Dreams*, for instance, featured Jim Morrison, Brian Jones, Janis Joplin and Jimi Hendrix caught in anguished poses above the entrance to a freak show-styled sideshow exhibit titled ‘The Greatest Show On Earth’. A white-singleted ticket-collector sits in his booth ready to admit the curious, while the text written to the viewer’s upper right of the stage proclaims, ‘Congress of the World’s Strangest Curiosities’.

![Image of 'The Greatest Show on Earth' from Rock Dreams](image)

**Figure 102. ‘The Greatest Show on Earth’ from Rock Dreams (Peellaert and Cohn, 1974, pp. 160-161)**

Clearly, then, the idea of presenting rock stars as contemporary incarnations of traditional carnival freaks was not Bowie’s innovation. It should also be noted at this point that the word ‘freaks’ had re-entered public consciousness and experienced widespread usage during the 1960s, becoming associated with the hippy counterculture and rock music “as a marker of life-style and identity” (Russo, 1994, p.76). Appropriated as a means of distancing or estranging themselves from mainstream society through self-imposed nomenclature, as Fielder puts it, during this time the word ‘freak’ was:

claimed as an honorific title by the kind of physiologically normal but dissident young people who use hallucinogenic drugs and are otherwise known as ‘hippies,’ ‘long-hairs’, and ‘heads’ . . . they speak of ‘freaking out’ and, indeed, urge others to emulate them by means of drugs, music, diet, or the excitement of gathering in crowds. ‘Join the United

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299 The *Rock Dreams* book has no printed page numbers, but counting the title page as no 1, the image is on pages 160 & 161.
Mutations,’ reads the legend on the sleeve of the first album of the Mothers of Invention (Fiedler, 1978, p. 14).

Fiedler is here referring to the 1966 debut album of Frank Zappa’s band, The Mothers of Invention, titled *Freak Out*. Indeed Bowie himself used the word in this context on his *Ziggy Stardust* album, in the song ‘Moonage Daydream’, singing “Freak out in a Moonage Daydream, oh yeah”. Further, Jimi Hendrix was another popular musician who helped introduce the word to the forefront of the counter cultural generation, most particularly in his lyric “I’m gonna wave my freak flag high”, from the song ‘If 6 was 9’. Although such usage largely displaced the association with the carnival freak show during the 1960s, it is significant that the meaning of the word still alluded primarily to alienation, as, even in this transferred context, “The freak ethos required an identification with otherness” (Russo, 1994, p. 76).

Dave Thompson has ascertained that the billboard Peellaert used on *Diamond Dogs* incorporated “imagery inspired by an old Coney Island freak show banner he had” (1987, p. 96). Similarly, it seems likely given the similarities between the Bowie cover and historical photographs that the two women featured on the front cover banner behind Bowie are caricatures of actual Coney Island freak show performers. Appearing together billed as ‘Alzoria and Johanna: The World’s Strangest Family’, Alzoria Lewis (also spelt Alzora) and Johanna Dickens were freak show performers from approximately 1930-1950.

![Figure 103. Alzoria Lewis and Johanna Dickens](image)

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300 This song appeared on the album *Axis: Bold as Love*, 1967, by The Jimi Hendrix Experience.

301 See also Cann (2010) *Any Day Now*, p. 325.
In addition to appearing together these women were known during their individual careers by various different names including ‘The Turtle Girl’, ‘The Pig Woman’, ‘The Walrus Girl’ (Lewis), and ‘The Bear Girl’ or ‘The Double-Jointed Girl’ (Dickens).\textsuperscript{302} Given the wide variety of freaks afflicted by many different types of physical disabilities that could have been featured on the Bowie cover, it is clear that the perceived anthropomorphic qualities of these particular performers was valued by Peellaert and Bowie, almost certainly because of the strong support they gave to Bowie’s own dog-man hybrid appearance.

The supposed coalescence between human and animal worlds to be purportedly observable in freaks such as Alzoria Lewis and Johanna Dickens was a mainstay of freak shows.\textsuperscript{303} The painted advertising banners designed to attract audiences to the shows featured stylised representations of the freaks being exhibited, with the artwork displaying highly exaggerated features that left no doubt as to the intended juxtaposition.

Exhibits with certain physical anomalies, for example, were often promoted as being part human and part beast: male exhibits with poorly formed arms were billed as ‘The Seal Man’; with poorly formed legs, ‘The Frog Man’; with excesses of hair, ‘The Lion Man or ‘Dog Boy’. . . Banners advertising these exhibits showed the body of an animal with a human head (Bogdan, 1988, p. 100).

Evidence of such artistic exaggeration can be seen in the following advertising banner for Alzoria Lewis during the period when she was performing as Turtle Girl.

\textsuperscript{302} For a comprehensive list, including personal histories and biographical details, of these and many other freak show performers, see M. Hartzman (2006) \textit{American Sideshow: an encyclopedia of history’s most wondrous and curiously strange performers}, New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher and Penguin. See also L. Fiedler (1978) \textit{Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self}, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Clearly, the image of Bowie with a human head and a dog’s body conforms closely to this style of freak show advertising, notwithstanding the fact that the cover image shows Bowie positioned in front of the advertising banner rather than on it.\(^\text{304}\)

Of further relevance to Bowie in his employment of freak show imagery was the inherent duality, manifested in many different guises, that was also a hallmark of freakery:

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\ldots\text{the freak could be both male and female, white and black, adult and child, and/or human and animal at the same time. Indeed, this ability to inhabit two categories at once, and thus to challenge the distinction between them, was the hallmark of the nineteenth and early twentieth century freak show performer (Durbach, 2010, pp. 3-4).}
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Such oppositions breached culturally accepted norms of appearance and behaviour, problematizing the very parameters of what it is to be human and of the fixedness of identity: “The figures of the half man-half woman, the dog-faced boy, or conjoined twins confront us with their refusal of the apparently primal distinctions between man and woman, human and animal, self and other” (Adams, 2001, p. 7).

The most obvious of the dualities evident in the Bowie album cover image is his hybridised body, appearing to be half-man and half-animal. In the world of the freak show, such

\(^{304}\) The correct term for images such as these that combine animal and human parts is therianthropic. See P. Wells (2009) The Animated Bestiary: Animals, Cartoons, and Culture, New Brunswick: New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, p. 71.
hybridised figures were de rigeur. In addition to the stage-names mentioned above in relation
to Alzoria Lewis and Johanna Dickens, other popular performers included ‘Lionel the Lion-
faceted Boy’.305

Images of such fabricated human-animal juxtapositions can carry a wide range of meanings,
implying behavioural and psychological qualities not readily implied by the purely human
form.306 Such amalgamations “are able to able to carry a diversity of representational positions
. . . such characters can be beasts and humans . . . can prompt issues about gender, race and
ethnicity, generation, and identity . . . the illusionism providing exaggeration and fabricated
emphasis, throwing the ideas and issues into relief (Wells, 2009, pp.3-4).307 One of the
simplest connotations that might be drawn from any imbuing of the human form with animal
characteristics pertains to the liberation of the subject from human-imposed constraints; a
wild-beast quality, with such imagery providing “a very powerful source for the meaning of
freedom” (Bullock, 2002, p.114). The subject matter contained on the Diamond Dogs
recording, as will shortly be explored in depth, deals with a post-apocalyptic world inhabited
by packs of mutant survivors roaming a ruined cityscape at will, so the self-governing, wild
animal inference of Bowie’s hybridisation at this most basic of readings is a logical one.
Further, anthropomorphising the human figure can also imbue it with a sense of alienation,
removing the absolutism and relative predictability of the human being and introducing the
potentially dangerous “animal other . . . [to] experience the world from an estranged point of
view” (Vint, 2010, p. 15). Such interrogations of otherness are, of course, a Bowie
cornerstone, and here once again he is accessing this by a well-established means, as

One of the chief tropes by which approaches to this forbidden territory are negotiated is
by animal metamorphosis: confronting or defining the outlawed and alien . . . [whereby]
the beastly or less than human becomes an index of alienation, and often one’s own
otherness (Warner, 1993, pp. 315-316).

The notion of beastliness warrants some further discussion. Although Bowie’s clearly
hybridised naked body shows little evidence of body hair, the inference remains that if he is

305 See R.C. Allen (1991) Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture, Chapel Hill, North Carolina:
The University of North Carolina Press, p. 234.
part-animal then he is allied to a species generally regarded as more hirsute than the human being. As Barcan points out, “hair has served as a marker in the Darwinian graduation of animal-savage-man” (2004, p. 152). The lack of visible hair on Bowie then, apart from upon his clearly human head, to an extent softens the implications of his animal body, as, “The association between hairiness and bestiality has meant that a lack of hair has been able to signify greater humanness . . . hairiness has often been associated with ‘barbarity’” (Barcan, 2004, p. 153). Nevertheless, the bestial implications of his part-dog form remain.

Bowie was clearly set on the idea of merging human with canine in his image, confirming, “The blended dog was my idea. I had waivered back and forth over the minotaur or the dog-man, and dog-man won” (David Bowie quoted in ‘The 100 Best Record Covers’, 2001). Given that the animal in question in Bowie’s hybridised image is indeed a dog, it is useful to consider historical examples of linkages between human and canine.

Referring to somebody as a dog has been a term of abuse with a long history in Europe (Leach, 1964). To do so is a means of reducing the victim’s human status, because “To call a human being a dog is to deny his humanity in a particular way” (White, 1991, p. 205). Equally, however, the dog is frequently referred to as man’s best friend, the most compatible partner for the human being because it is “a reflection of both human culture and animal savagery . . . the animal pivot of the human universe, lurking at the threshold between wildness and domestication and all of the valences that these two ideal poles of experience hold” (White, 1991, p. 15). For such reasons of familiarity, apparent harmony, safety, and trust, when a dog does ‘turn’, “it is especially dangerous to humans because it attacks from the very heart of the domesticated world – the family hearth, the main street of our town – from within the social sphere rather than from the wilderness without” (White, 1991, p. 206). The dog, therefore, living on the periphery of the human world as it does but never becoming a fully accepted part of it, can be seen as possessing an inherent and ultimately dangerous duality.

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308 To illustrate his point, White points out that in recent history President Reagan referred to Colonel Qaddafi as a mad dog in justification that he might be hunted down. See White (1991) Myths of the Dog-Man, p. 206.

309 White reasons that this is why dog-man figures have enduring popularity in the history of horror, myth and folklore; figures such as the werewolf. See White (2001) Myths of the Dog-Man, pp. 15-18.
In freak shows, the dog-man was a common animal role among more hirsute freak performers, the most famous of these was ‘Jo-Jo the Dog-faced Man’ (1870-1903), also known as ‘Jo-Jo the Dog-faced Boy’.\textsuperscript{310}

Figure 105. Jo-Jo the Dog-faced Man, late 1880s

Consistent with the findings of White, Fiedler believes freak show performers that were purported to be part human and part dog represented to audiences “a symbol of sexuality and aggression, domesticated but unsubdued” (1978, p. 76).

Certainly, Peellaert’s emphasis on Bowie’s canine musculature suggests an underlying savage strength, with the legs, thighs and torso seemingly glowing in the peak of canine fitness. Allied closely to this is Bowie’s nakedness, which conveys a sense of primitivism and wildness, eschewing human domestication, because “humans wear clothes, animals do not” (Bonfante, 1989, p. 544).\textsuperscript{311}

The figure’s nakedness also raises questions regarding gender. Gender instability is a hallmark of freak performance, comprising one of the incumbent dualities, as mentioned


above (Durbach, 2010, pp. 3-4). While the most obviously gender-ambiguous freak show performers were the hermaphrodites, the boy and girl Siamese twins, and the bearded ladies, the freak show itself was a rare site in which presentations of gender ambiguity were socially acceptable and even valued within the public domain. On Bowie’s album cover his face is feminised by his carefully coiffured hair, his red glossy lipstick-covered lips and heavy mascara. His body is, however, largely gender-indeterminate and tellingly the area between his back legs is heavily shaded, betraying no evidence of genitalia. However, this ambiguity was not by design, as Peellaert’s original artwork for the cover showed a male dog’s penis and testicles quite explicitly. Bowie’s record company, however, deemed the artwork potentially offensive and ordered the offending region be blacked out before the cover printing began.

Figure 106. Original Diamond Dogs album cover artwork by Guy Peellaert

314 See Cann (2010) *Any Day Now*, p. 325. Also Doggett. (2011) *The Man Who Sold the World*, p. 212. Note, this original artwork also features a further departure from the published cover, with the word ‘Alive’ occupying the space where the word ‘Bowie’ features in the final version. Many original freak show banners featured ‘Alive’ as an enticement to potential customers, delineating the advertised exhibit from static displays such as fetuses in jars, etc. See Durbach (2010) *Spectacle of Deformity*, p. 1.
In terms of the album’s lyrics, strong support of gender ambiguity is provided on the track ‘Rebel Rebel’, most particularly in the line, “You've got your mother in a whirl – she’s not sure if you’re a boy or a girl”.

Other lyrics on the album that have direct relevance to the cover centre on the obvious artificiality of Bowie’s image, therefore recapitulating in particular upon the highly constructed and manipulated nature of the Aladdin Sane and Pinups covers that so removed the ‘real’ David Bowie from the frame. Here, on ‘Sweet Thing’, for instance, he refers to himself as “a portrait in flesh”, while on the ‘Diamond Dogs’ track, he sings of “mannequins with kill-appeal”. Such distancing techniques highlight once again the removed, ‘performed’ nature of his work and in so doing also align it to a central component of the freak show.

The quintessential freak show was highly performative on the part of the freak exhibits. Indeed, this aspect of performativity is the demarcation line used in freak studies between disabled persons per se, and freaks (Angell, 2008, p. 132). As Gerber puts it, “The role of freak is certainly not inherent in having a disfiguring condition” (1992, p. 62). Freak show performers were not simply passive exhibits but, rather, active participants in a theatrical experience in which they acted out carefully constructed and choreographed roles that were designed to exaggerate their otherness. ‘Jo-Jo the Dog Faced Man’, for instance, would snap, bark and growl during his performances, while Lionel the Lion-faced Man’ would “roar convincingly enough to frighten his more tender-minded beholders half out of their wits” (Fiedler, 1978, p. 166). Exotic and exciting fictitious narratives would often be invented in order to build both plot and scenario around the performers, most often with the full complicity and involvement of the performer concerned. “The actual life and circumstances of those being exhibited were replaced by purposeful distortions designed to market the exhibit, to produce a more appealing freak” (Bogdan, 1988, p. 95). The performers were, in effect, manufacturing and performing largely fictitious identities that went well beyond their own true identities.

Freakery acknowledges that the manufacture of identity is a collaborative process composed of many encounters . . . using theatrical techniques such as rhetoric, costume, sets, and staging . . . in order to do so the freak must cater to the dominant image of him or herself as stigmatized and, in fact, exacerbate that image (Chemers, 2008, p. 17).


There is also a rich tradition of fakery in the history of the freak show, with many exhibits having no disability or physical abnormality at all, “the armless wonder who tucked his arms under a tight-fitting shirt, or the four-legged woman whose extra legs really belonged to a person hidden from the audience” (Bogdan, 1996, p. 24).

The freak show tradition, therefore, is one that blatantly blurs the lines between truth and fiction, reality and artifice, in a manner not dissimilar to Bowie’s own presentation of himself as extra-terrestrial rock star Ziggy Stardust, exemplified in the lyric line from the song ‘Star’: “I could play the wild mutation as a rock’n’roll star”. As Fiedler puts it, “the true Freak challenges the conventional boundaries . . . between reality and illusion, experience and fantasy, fact and myth” (1978, p. 24).

Perhaps only in the world of the freak show might disability be viewed as an asset, so in this sense Bowie can be seen to be tapping into a type of alienation that also possesses a rare component of empowerment, of sorts. “During its prime, the freak show was a place where human deviance was valuable, and in that sense valued . . . in the culture of the amusement world most human oddities were accepted as showmen. They were congratulated for parlaying into an occupation what, in another context, might have been a burden” (Bogdan, 1988, p. 268). This is a thread also explored by Chemers, who sees the freak show as potentially providing a rallying point - a site of acceptance and unifying strength in the face of a hostile, alienating normal society - for those disabled persons who adopt freak performance. “While many persons with disabilities languish in attics and asylums, freaks gain exposure. While many persons with disabilities suffer extreme poverty, freaks make money. While many persons with disabilities remain isolated, freaks build communities. Those communities become sites of resistance” (Chemers, 2008, p. 17). Certainly, this notion is consistent with Bowie’s facial expression and demeanour on the cover, appearing relaxed yet strong and in command, with the expressions on the faces of his two smiling cohorts also conveying an impression of strength.

Also treating the freak show as a site where the alienated might find respite is Tod Browning’s 1932 movie, *Freaks*, which Bowie directly references in the lyrics of the title

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track, ‘Diamond Dogs’. A very powerful paratext in support of the cover imagery, specifically Bowie sings the following lines in verse one:

With your silicone hump and your ten-inch stump  
Dressed like a priest you was  
Tod Browning’s Freak you was  
Crawling down the alley on your hands and knee . . .

Upon its release in 1932 *Freaks* was a failure in terms of box-office success and was generally found to be too offensive by critics and the film-going public alike because of Browning’s employment of real carnival freaks in all of the leading roles. However, in the 1960s the film was re-released and found limited success as a cult movie. Critics in both film studies and disability studies have come to regard *Freaks* as a movie that takes a very different position from most in dealing with such subject matter, regarding it as one of the very few films that “treats the Other as one of us” (Hawkins, 1996, p. 267 & 274). Of Browning’s wider ouvre, it has been suggested that he specialised in “performances of racial, cultural, and bodily difference that explore the experience of social deviance” (Bombaci, 2006, p. 87).

In addition, and aligned to the afore-mentioned quality of gender-ambiguity associated with freak shows *per se*, Browning’s *Freaks* is widely held to feature the problematisation of gender identity as a core theme: “The film repeatedly raises gender issues and questions the basis of gender assignment and identity . . . Freakishness in this film seems inevitably to involve gender duality or confusion” (Hawkins, 1996, pp. 272-273). More specifically, the film critiques male gender identity, with Nancy Bombaci suggesting that “Browning’s central concern in *Freaks* is not so much the presentation of freakish bodies, but the representation of malleable masculine identity. . . *Freaks* frequently uses physical disability to represent a similarly unstable male identity” (1996, p. 97).

In addition to Bowie’s reference to Tod Browning’s *Freaks*, the lyrics of the *Diamond Dogs* album contain other filmic references that echo those observed on previous albums. For instance on ‘Candidate’ Bowie sings, “My set is amazing it even smells like a street”, thereby acknowledging the artificiality of his work in much the same way he did on the track ‘Five Years’ from the *Ziggy Stardust* album where he sang “I don’t think you knew you were in this

song”. Also in ‘1984’, he includes the line, “We played out an all-night movie role”, while in ‘We are The Dead’, he sings of being “locked in tomorrow’s double feature”.

The latter two of these tracks, ‘1984’ and ‘We are the Dead’, also contribute to a powerful additional paratext on the album. The rear cover contains three obvious references to George Orwell’s 1949 novel, Nineteen Eighty-Four. The second, third and fourth tracks on side two have song titles drawn directly from the work, respectively, ‘We are the Dead’, ‘1984’, and ‘Big Brother’. The first of these, ‘We are the Dead’, is a line taken verbatim from the pivotal point in the novel where Winston Smith and Julia are captured; ‘1984’ is clearly the title of the novel itself, while ‘Big Brother’ refers to the party leader of the totalitarian state, Oceania, in which the events of Orwell’s story take place.

Nineteen Eighty-Four was a highly significant critical and commercial success for Orwell and, although a work of science fiction, it was nevertheless seen by many to be thematically analogous to real world events of the twentieth century: “Few novels written in this generation have obtained a popularity as great as that of George Orwell’s 1984. . . The novel has served as a sort of an ideological super-weapon in the cold war” (Deutscher, 1974, p. 119). The book is widely regarded to have a central theme of conflict between superpowers and an allied potential for apocalypse, offering its own fictional portrayal of a cold war between immensely powerful protagonists and thus mirroring the prevailing climate of mutual distrust and political hostility between The United States of America and The Soviet Union. As Scott Lucas has it, “this was a case of a text being in the right Cold War place at the right Cold War time” (2003, p. 122). Certainly, such tension as existed in the middle decades of the twentieth century ensured the theme of Orwell’s novel was a topical subject:

At the onset of the atomic age, the world is living in a mood of Apocalyptic horror. That is why millions of people respond so passionately to the Apocalyptic vision of a novelist.

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322 These filmic allusions are also mentioned by other critics. For example see M. Sinker (1995) “Music as Film,” in Celluloid Jukebox, J. Romney and A. Wootton, eds., London: British Film Institute, p. 110.

323 Prior to the Diamond Dogs album, Bowie had sought permission to use the title of Orwell’s Nineteen Eighty-Four for an episode of the American late night rock concert television programme The Midnight Special, an episode in which the entire show had been dedicated to him. Filmed at London’s Marquee Club over the 18th, 19th & 20th October 1973, before an audience made up of members of his fan club, it was Bowie’s intention that the show be titled The 1984 Show. However, Sonia Orwell, the writer’s widow, refused to allow this usage and so the programme was renamed by Bowie as The Nineteen Eighty Floor Show. Included in the repertoire for this event was the debut performance of the song ‘1984’. Further, Bowie had been intending to create a larger work of musical theatre based on the Orwell book, but this did not eventuate due to Sonia Orwell’s continuing refusal to grant Bowie the rights. As a result, Bowie decided to “go off on a tangent and produce ‘my own idea of the story without infringing Orwell’s too much.” David Bowie quoted in Hopkins (1985) Bowie, p. 114. See also Bowie and Rock (2002) Moonage Daydream, p. 320. Also Cann (2010) Any Day Now, p. 323, Sandford (1996) Bowie, p. 121, and Pegg (2002) The Complete David Bowie, p. 248.
The chief predicament of contemporary society is that it has not yet succeeded in adjusting its way of life and its social and political institutions to the prodigious advance of its technical knowledge. We do not know what has been the impact of the atomic and hydrogen bombs on the thoughts of millions . . . (Deutscher, 1974, p. 132)

Such dire results stemming from unchecked technological advancement were, of course, themes visited by Bowie previously.

Other critics have also pointed out the influence of the Orwell novel on *Diamond Dogs*, with Barney Hoskyns describing the album as “an overwrought Orwellian song cycle” (1998, p. 98). Similarly, it has been described as “a catalogue of Orwellian themes” (Sandford, 1996, p. 121). While the paratexts provided by the song titles on the cover certainly evoke a strong association with Orwell’s novel in the mind of the viewer, analysis of the song lyrics on the *Diamond Dogs* album reveals that the work does not follow Orwell’s story-line. Nevertheless, the presence on the album of central themes also found at the heart of *Nineteen Eighty-four* ensures that the perceivable influence of the book goes beyond the appearance of the three song titles on the cover. As one critic put it, Bowie “created his own future urban nightmare environment, Hunger City, a sort of post-nuclear, technologically primitive hell” (Buckley, 2004, p. 31).

Introduced to the listener in the lyrics of ‘Future Legend’ - the first track on the album - Hunger City can indeed be read as Bowie’s version of Oceania, and literal glimpses of its decaying cityscape are evident on the front cover at top right and top left. More emphatically, the image on the inside of the gatefold cover confronts the viewer with exactly this “urban wilderness . . . where his Orwellian compositions would form the basis of the dystopian post-apocalypse nightmare” (Pegg, 2002, p. 248).
With the lyrics of the first track, ‘Future Legend’ - a song spoken rather than sung - written upon the image at top left, Bowie’s visual evocation of the geographical location is an extraordinarily strong one, with both picture and text acting together:

And in the death, as the last few corpses lay rotting on the slimy thoroughfare
The shutters lifted in inches in Temperance Building high on Poacher's Hill
And red, mutant eyes gaze down on Hunger City
No more big wheels
Fleas the size of rats sucked on rats the size of cats
And ten thousand peopleoids split into small tribes
Coveting 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 Dogs
This ain't Rock'n'Roll - This is genocide

An excerpt from a promotional advertisement issued by Bowie’s management and publishing company, MainMan, at the time of the album’s release, confirms the work’s apocalyptic nature, stating that it “conceptualises the vision of a future world with images of urban decadence and collapse” (Reproduced in Doggett, 2011, p. 211).

Such a vision was noted also by critics at the time of the album’s release: “The ‘mood’ is the ultimate in punk SF post-atomic doom – where ‘after dark’ is forever, rock’n’roll mutants are real mutants, and the glitter won’t come off your face because it is your face” (McDonald, I. 1974, p. 5).
The imagery of ‘Future Legend’ is easily compared to the publicity material issued by Bowie’s management, as the following description of Orwell’s Oceania demonstrates:

Out in the street the loudspeakers bellow, the flags flutter from the rooftops, the police with their tommy guns prowl to and fro, the face of the Leader, four feet wide, glares from every hoarding; but up in the attics the secret enemies of the regime can record their thoughts in perfect freedom . . . (Bowker, 2003, p. 369).

Another central theme of Nineteen Eighty-four is alienation, with the main protagonist, Winston Smith, regarded by some critics as one of the quintessential alienated anti-heroes of science fiction (Easterbrook, 2005, p. 254). While alienation as it pertains to the carnival freak performer comprises the main visual manifestation of alienation on the cover of Diamond Dogs, as discussed, the link to Orwell’s work inevitably revisits to some extent the theme of urban alienation that had been previously evident on the Ziggy Stardust album. As Bowie himself has since put it, the Diamond Dogs album “implied the idea of the breakdown of a city . . . a disaffected youth that no longer had home-unit situations, but lived as gangs on roofs and really had the city to themselves” (Bowie quoted in Pegg, 2002, p.248).

While the image of Bowie as a half-man half-dog freak show performer strongly dominates the cover, the implication that this state of affairs has come about as the result of some Orwellian cataclysmic event such as a nuclear war sits comfortably when one considers the cover in its entirety. Matthew-Walker offers an insightful reading of the album cover that links these themes:

Even without listening to the album . . . it is possible to discern in the album’s presentation a clear indication of temporality . . . the cover for this album depicts David’s face and upper torso as part of an animal, joined to the bottom half of a dog’s body. Even the shape of the hands and fingers have the appearance of paws, whilst close behind this monstrous figure are two female shapes, echoing the human-canine aspect of the front. This may not be quite as irrelevant as possibly it first appears. No one needs reminding of the warnings given to mankind of the likely effects on survivors of a nuclear war. Mutations might be among them. With the album’s glimpse into the future, Bowie has taken this mutant nightmare to a logical if frightening conclusion (1985, p. 36).

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As on the previous album, the rear cover of *Diamond Dogs* offers no evidence of an author’s hand at work. The only image the viewer has of the artist is the therianthropic one. The ‘real’ David Bowie is absent, his identity once again masked and his name again reduced to the singular ‘Bowie’. On the cover of *Diamond Dogs*, there exists only the role he is playing. Clearly, in this case the gatefold nature of the cover plays a hand in disallowing a separate rear cover image, but here even the album’s internal sleeve does nothing to communicate information about the artist, serving only to further the thematic scenario.

Finally, and adding most significantly to the dilution of the artist’s authorial hand to the point where it is ostensibly absent from the album cover, his name on the spine of the cover has for the first time also been reduced to ‘Bowie’. Now, the artist’s first name is nowhere to be seen. For the first time in his career, the words ‘David Bowie’ do not appear anywhere.

On *Diamond Dogs*, all of Bowie’s established major thematic concerns are presented. The cover of *Diamond Dogs* saw Bowie achieve his most overt depiction of both alienation and artifice to this point in his career. Continuing his pattern of borrowing and developing for his own use existing, highly recognisable, historical associations, his drawing heavily on the iconography of the carnival freak show here afforded him his most inherently alien image of all those he had thus far presented. Portrayed as a highly artificial therianthropic man-dog creature, he is transformed into one of the world’s strangest living curiosities – fulfilling the traditional sensationalist claim of freak shows and of the freak show advertisement on the rear cover – and for the first time totally eschewing his humanness beyond all doubt and becoming unquestionably other. It is the fulfillment of a thematic direction that has built with increasing clarity over the course of his previous works and, as such, was completely consistent with “the public perception of Bowie at this point in his career” (Hunt, 2009). While previous albums, most particularly *Aladdin Sane* and *Pinups* had very strongly suggested such a quality, here it is absolutely inescapable; Bowie is not human, but alien. Further, and as was the case on *Aladdin Sane*, there is no presentation of Bowie as his real self – the author’s hand behind the work is nowhere to be seen; no image, no first name, and no personal handwriting. There remains only the role he is playing.

The freak show allusions also bring to the work a high realisation of conscious performativity, in keeping with Bowie’s previously expressed notions of rock music, and rock stardom, as a highly constructed activity. Similarly, and borrowing to an extent from Peellaert’s previous

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325 This is also the case on the label of the record itself.
work in *Rock Dreams*, the notion of the rock star as a modern version of the freak show performer is a clear inference.

The by now familiar juxtaposition of reality and artifice is at its strongest on this cover, a factor inherent to the photo-realist painting style of Peellaert, certainly, but also strongly embedded in the therianthropic nature of Bowie’s body and in the tradition of invented identity on the part of the historical freak show performer.

The strong association with George Orwell’s novel *Nineteen Eighty-four* keeps apocalypse and the potential repercussions of unchecked technological advancement as central concerns. It also ensures a revisiting of notions of urban alienation, thus reigniting issues previously raised most particularly on the *Ziggy Stardust* album two years earlier.

Gender continues to be problematised on *Diamond Dogs*. Most particularly this occurs through the historical implications associated with both the freak show proper and also Tod Browning’s film, and this duality is joined by others; most notably the dangerous duality inherent to the human-dog liaison.

Film has again played a part in Bowie’s work, both in the strong association with Tod Browning’s *Freaks*, but also in other lyric references, as noted.

In summary, the cover of *Diamond Dogs* presents a powerful visual enactment of everything that the artist has to this point prioritised in his work. Most tellingly of all, he has now made complete the transition from David Bowie - the author, to simply Bowie - the role.
Conclusion

The goal of this study was to uncover how David Bowie was represented on his first eight album covers and also to determine what information these covers might have communicated to those who viewed them. This task was undertaken utilising a highly interdisciplinary approach, but with Erwin Panofsky’s three-tiered method of visual analysis as a governing, if not rigidly applied, foundation within art history.

Each chapter has dealt with one album cover only, and these investigations have been fixedly stand-alone in keeping with the overarching methodological edict of maintaining the primacy of the visual object above all else. Nevertheless, when drawn together it is clear that there are findings common to these ostensibly separate investigations, showing conclusively that much unity exists between the works. The identification of this unity is both the first and largest conclusion to be drawn from the research.

The conclusions drawn in this final chapter pull together the main threads explored during the analysis at large and allow informed interpretations to be made regarding the development of Bowie’s album cover imagery while also identifying the qualities within this imagery that, by their primacy and repetition, can justifiably be regarded as primary components of his artistic raison detre.

Bowie’s image changed frequently and dramatically over the progressive course of the release of his first eight albums. The front cover of his 1967 debut album displayed an earnest, honest, fresh-faced young mod, seemingly fully contemporaneous with his immediate environs within the ‘Swinging London’ of the day. This image of the nascent artist was an impression carefully and convincingly backed by the well-chosen words of then-manager Kenneth Pitt written on the rear cover. Yet just eight years later with the release of his eighth album, Diamond Dogs, every last visual sign of that original David Bowie had been obliterated and the image offered of the artist was instead one of an unsettling, unreal, anthropomorphic cartoon-esque freak-show exhibit. Even his name had changed along the way, with David Bowie becoming truncated to, simply, Bowie.
As has become evident, this new-look Bowie was the latest in a series of incarnations and no cover released during this period presented the artist in close likeness to any other cover of the period. On the surface of it, such inconsistency might have been potentially damaging in terms of building his brand, to borrow a term from the world of commerce. Yet, in Bowie’s case, such change became a quintessential component of his brand and his popularity and commercial success rose concomitantly during this progression. The adoption and subsequent discarding of successive incarnations progressively came to define the artist’s performative method, comprising the chameleon-like quality that has often been commented on in critical appraisals of the artist. While not a goal of this research, Bowie should rightly be seen as the precursor to the modern pop star; fabricated, supremely image-conscious, and with fluid, non-fixed identity. Artists such as Madonna, Prince, and Michael Jackson, have followed Bowie’s lead and the implications of this study for future research into even more recent exponents of fabricated and constantly re-inventing pop idols, such a Lady Gaga, is clear.

As this investigation progressed it became clear that each individual cover possessed much underlying information not readily obvious to the uninformed eye, and not necessarily discernable through a surface reading only. On each occasion this deeper communicative level was loaded with specific and carefully chosen historical nuances, providing each cover with a foundation through which the images accrued a depth and resonance of meaning that might otherwise have been absent. Crucially, this deeper level of information gathered impetus cumulatively, compounding with the release of each new album and ultimately serving to progressively unify and to make more concrete Bowie’s primary concerns.

**Alienation**

Alienation has been found to be the primary concern expressed through Bowie’s album covers. From his second album onwards the broad theme of alienation was a constant and powerful presence in the album cover imagery. This finding provides an emphatic answer to the query posed at the beginning of this thesis as to whether Bowie’s image was to any extent thematically consistent during this stage of his career. Although the covers were stylistically extremely varied, alienation was nevertheless presented in a variety of forms that served not only to signal it as a primary concern but also to marry visual content to recorded content. Sometimes a particular representation of alienation was observable on several covers while sometimes such a representation would appear on a single cover only. Having spent
considerable time in the thesis exploring threads of investigation that relate to gender ambiguity, science fiction, urban alienation, psychological alienation, ethnicity-derived alienation and the alienation of the freak, it has become clear that these should not be regarded as stand-alone concerns. Rather, they should be viewed as subgroups of the single overarching theme of alienation. While these variations frequently overlap, the following is a summary of their primary employment in Bowie’s work.

**Gender Ambiguity**

Gender ambiguity as an expression of alienation was considered widely in this analysis, necessarily framed within a performing arts context. The problematising of gender in Bowie’s visual imagery, a quality absent on the covers of the first two albums, became a consistently important element in his album covers from the release of his third album, *The Man Who Sold the World*, onwards. On this album, Bowie was pictured wearing a dress and was further feminised by both his pose and the historical context. Overt in its presence on that album cover, gender ambiguity was also a highly discernable quality on the cover of the following album, *Hunky Dory*, on which he presented himself in the role of the quintessential female silver screen star. As noted during the respective analyses, both of these historical re-enactments came loaded with their own pre-existing inherent gender implications that were well attuned to Bowie’s usage. Both of these albums, but particularly the former, showed the artist in complete opposition to the prevailing gendered image of male rock stars of the day. Gender alienation was lessened to an extent on *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*; nevertheless, a clearly discernable element remained in the artist’s camp pose on the rear cover, and also in the wider glam rock inferences of his costuming. The subsequent *Aladdin Sane* album pictured Bowie in a highly androgynous manner with his face very heavily adorned with make up, the first time this tactic had been employed on one of his album covers. The visual resemblance to kabuki theatre carried with it the implications of gender play inherent to that theatrical form. In addition, the album title’s obvious connection to the highly popular pantomime, *Aladdin* - a connection made explicit by the small flame shaped dot over the ‘I’ that acted as a representation of the flame of a lamp - also brought with it the gender play element of pantomime theatre. *PinUps* provided arguably his most blatant critique of the transferable, constructionist nature of gender signification in the mix-and-match quality suggested by his heavily masked pairing with the female model, Twiggy, a figure who was also considered to have an established androgynous image. *Diamond Dogs* then continued to keep gender ambiguity at the forefront of Bowie’s concerns, being
presented as a central component within that cover’s complete and graphic rejection of all aspects of human essentialism in its anthropomorphism and freak associations.

**Science Fiction**

Alienation aligned to science fiction was convincingly represented on the album covers. At times this was most clearly aligned to the fear of unchecked technological advancement, a concern central to science fiction, and this was most especially evident on the second album, *David Bowie*. The front cover, with the mechanically repeating dots dominating and triumphing over Bowie’s very naturally presented human image, can be seen as an artistic interpretation of the story told in that album’s prime track, ‘Space Oddity’, that saw Major Tom lost in space, drifting and doomed by the technological failure of his space-ship. Bowie/Ziggy’s inexplicable presence in an urban London street on the front cover of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* suggested that he was an alien being who had been beamed down to his unlikely urban location, an impression very solidly supported by the *Dr Who* implications of the rear cover, the song titles, and the lyric content of the songs on the recording. On *Aladdin Sane* and also *PinUps*, Bowie’s appearance was inhuman and thus literally alien - to an extreme on the former where he resembled a cyborg-type being - while on *Diamond Dogs* his countenance was that of a post-apocalyptic, Orwellian, mutant figure, a scenario and a type of being common to science fiction. This Orwellian link was confirmed through the paratext provided by the song titles.

**Urban alienation**

Urban alienation was very effectively portrayed on the cover of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*. Bowie’s unprecedented and extreme diminution within the frame contributed greatly to this impression. The small, solitary figure surrounded by the dark, wet, cityscape borrowed heavily from *film noir*, a film style primarily concerned with urban alienation and thus highly appropriate to Bowie’s usage. Also from *film noir* came the notion of the alienated, flawed, fallible anti-hero; the very nature of Ziggy Stardust himself as relayed through the album’s narrative, which ultimately found him defeated, burnt out, and wandering the city streets aimlessly in the harsh light of early morning.
Psychological alienation
Because alienation is a psychological condition, all variants carry the certainty of psychological disturbance. Therefore, it is certain that, with the exception of the debut album, all of the covers in this study communicate psychological alienation as an inherent component. Nevertheless, psychological alienation as a stand-alone condition was most blatantly portrayed on the cover of *Aladdin Sane*, primarily by the use of the artistic, symbolic representation of schizophrenia that at the same time conveyed generic messages of danger. To a degree, psychological alienation was also heavily located in the inexplicably startled expression borne by Bowie on *PinUps*, a feature made all the more potent when considered beside Twiggy’s totally contrasting expression for which there was similarly no explanation.

Ethnicity-derived alienation
The allusion to *Aladdin* and its wider link to *The Arabian Nights* imbued the cover of *Aladdin Sane* with further nuances centred upon geographical and ethnicity-derived alienation, primarily regarding the Orient as a historical site of alien-ness to Westerners. This quality was aided by the visual references to Japanese kabuki theatre on the covers of both this album and *Pinups*.

The alienation of the freak
On the cover of *Diamond Dogs* Bowie presented the most graphic representation of alienation upon any of the covers examined in this study. His bodily disfigurement and the accompanying certitude of societal marginalisation, such as had historically been afforded to the freak show exhibits with which he here clearly aligned himself, saw him absolutely ostracised from humankind. At the same time, the image provided a telling analogy in its suggestion that the rock star figure was a new version of the traditional sideshow freak, a notion presented in collusion with artist Guy Peelaert who had explored the same idea previously.

The constancy and extent of the broad overarching theme of alienation in all of these forms across the body of work examined in this study confirms alienation as Bowie’s primary thematic concern. In addition, it has become clear that in order to convey alienation in its various forms Bowie increasingly employed artifice in his work, and this factor is another major finding of the thesis.
Artifice

Bowie’s image became increasingly artificial during the time period examined in this thesis. His image on the first album cover was one predicated upon absolute realism, with the visual depiction of him staring frankly and openly at the camera in the photographs on both the front and rear covers being fully consistent with the earnest, mirror-of-society description painted by his manager’s words in accompaniment to the rear cover picture. While Vasarely-styled Op-art dots were superimposed over his face on the second album cover, the image of Bowie on this cover too was fundamentally naturalistic. From this point onwards, the ‘real’ David Bowie would never again be present on the front of his album covers. Albums three and four, *The Man Who Sold the World*, and *Hunky Dory*, saw him highly artificialised and borrowing from art history and film respectively, recreating the prescribed historical roles of a pre-Raphaelite femme fatale and a Hollywood silver-screen actress. On *Hunky Dory*, Bowie’s portrait was hand-coloured, giving it a filmic quality that significantly enhanced the artifice of the image. The cover of album five, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, received similar hand-colouring, and this album was also a major stylistic departure from what Bowie had presented before, seeing him uncharacteristically dwarfed by his surroundings as he appeared completely out of place and out of context; an unreal presence caught in an unlikely environment. On this album cover, too, for the first time Bowie was seen playing a fully developed theatrical role of his own making in the invented character of Ziggy Stardust instead of utilising the more obvious, pre-existing templates that he had employed on *The Man Who Sold the World*, and *Hunky Dory*. This was a highly significant development. The *Aladdin Sane* and *PinUps* albums that followed saw him increasingly artificialised, appearing mannequin or cyborg-like on the former, and wearing a painted-on mask alongside the similarly adorned Twiggy on the latter. Finally, with *Diamond Dogs*, Bowie took this process of ever-increasing artificiality to its ultimate extreme by eschewing the last vestiges of humanness and anthropomorphising himself into a cartoon-esque part man/part dog figure. On this album and also on *Aladdin Sane*, in particular, the role being played was the only entity to be seen in the cover imagery. David Bowie, the man and the artist, was absent.
The increasing dominance of persona

As Bowie’s image developed over the course of the eight covers, his investment in artificiality and the presentation of personas other than his true self began to dominate. As a result of this it became clearly observable that he progressively began to waive the visual representations of authorship that were carefully incorporated upon the rear covers of his early works. While not a perfectly linear process, nevertheless this trend towards eschewing the visual evidence of authorship was observed running in a concomitant relationship to the increasing prioritisation of artifice in the artist’s image.

On the first album there was little to discern between Bowie’s image on the two sides bar a slightly more formal quality to the front cover picture, and admission of authorship here was clear. Due to the great care taken to position the nascent artist as comprehensively truthful and real, with seamless interaction between Pitt’s biographical critique and the images that accompanied it, authorship could never really be in question. Album two was an anomaly in terms of the style of Bowie’s rear covers, whereby rather than presenting a single, dominant image of the artist, a montage of fantasy scenes drawn by George Underwood illustrated the pre-eminent themes contained in the songs. Clear admission of authorship resumed on The Man Who Sold the World where, although he remained in a dress on the rear cover, Bowie conclusively broke with the extreme theatrical performativity evident in the Pre-Raphaelite period parody of the front cover, creating a clear front/rear separation between role and author. ‘The actor’ was then introduced emphatically as a paratext on the rear cover of Hunky Dory, accompanying a photograph possessing the same ‘this is the real me’ quality as was evident on the first album, and supported further by the presence of the intensely personal handwritten liner notes. Here too, then, there was a clear division to be observed between the theatrical role being presented on the front cover - in this case a silver screen star - and the author behind that role being shown on the rear. On The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars, Bowie’s admission of authorship was blurred by virtue of the fact that not only did he stay in costume on the rear cover, but he also continued to evince the science fiction allusions of the front cover by being shown standing in a phone box and thus inviting comparisons to the Dr Who television series. Nevertheless, the camp element of his pose imbued him with a certain knowingness - the static equivalent of a nod and a wink, perhaps - that implied authorship lay behind the role.

It was on the sixth album, Aladdin Sane, when a mere thin outline of the front cover character remained visible on the rear cover, that authorship was for the first time emphatically denied.
The interplay between the two sides conveyed the message that only the character of Aladdin Sane existed and that there was no author behind it at all. The empty silhouette of the rear cover suggested that when one looked deeper into the Aladdin Sane character, there was nothing further to be found there. *PinUps* saw a partial return to an admission of authorship, with none of the three disparate images on the rear cover easily reconcilable with the highly theatrical front cover image. While having clearly shed the role shown on the front cover, nevertheless all three photographs on the rear were of the artist in performance guise and each had qualities of theatricality of their own, allowing no convincing sense of any “this is me, the author behind the performance” relaxation to prevail. Also on this album, with the exception of the spine, the artist’s name was for the first time truncated simply to Bowie; a depersonalising tactic. Nevertheless, the return of the handwritten liner notes on the rear cover of this album re-enacted an authorship strategy previously seen on *Hunky Dory*, and overall the rear cover of this album constituted at least a partial return to an admission of authorship.

The cover of the next album, *Diamond Dogs*, was Bowie’s most emphatic denial of authorship. No sense of a ‘real’ David Bowie existed anywhere in the album cover imagery, and the rear of the gatefold cover simply continued the image of the cartoon-styled man-dog figure seen on the front. This cover displayed a comprehensive defection of self, even moreso than had been the case on *Aladdin Sane*, which had at least still cited David Bowie as the artist responsible for the work.

By this point of his career then, in 1974, both the name and the image of David Bowie, the debut artist who had been so keen to claim authorship of his debut album, were now in absentia, dissolved during the passage of eight albums and eight years.

**Outside influences**

Bowie’s tactic of borrowing images, styles, nuances and meanings from influences located well outside popular music became very evident during the investigation. These influences were also at times historical in nature. While this was a quality ostensibly absent from his first album cover, where he mimicked prevailing popular music iconography by aligning himself to mod and psychedelic visual styles, from this point onwards influences from outside popular music were a feature of every other album cover in this study. Pop art, and more specifically, Op art, with its fundamental concerns regarding technological advancement and a broader science fiction nuance, dominated the second album. Pre-Raphaelite art and poetry, and
historic film iconography, respectively, were the defining features of albums three, *The Man Who Sold the World*, and four, *Hunky Dory*. Film noir and the iconography of the frontier hero informed album five, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, while Bowie also drew upon contemporaneous popular culture influences including glam rock, Stanley Kubrick’s *A Clockwork Orange*, and the highly popular television series *Dr Who* on this cover. Following this, Kabuki theatre and historical iconographical depictions of psychological disturbance provided the visual foundation for the *Aladdin Sane* cover. The world of high fashion quite literally provided the defining component of the *PinUps* album cover, with the presence of Twiggy alongside Bowie automatically evoking nostalgic associations with the still-recent ‘Swinging London’ culture, while the masking elements on this cover retained an element of Kabuki theatre from the previous album. *Diamond Dogs* drew heavily from historical sociological and physiological sources, while simultaneously invoking the performative and theatrical qualities of the traditional carnival freak-show.

It is clear from these myriad carefully chosen and utilised influences, therefore, that once Bowie’s recording career was underway he very quickly established a highly interdisciplinary approach to assembling his album cover imagery.

**Comparison to the album covers of other popular music artists**

While not a primary aim of this research, I nevertheless also wished to discern to what degree Bowie’s covers resembled those of other artists during this period. It is clear that his first album cover was very conventional for its time and was stylistically aligned to albums released in the latter years of the 1960s by far more established popular music acts. This was almost certainly a tactic designed to imbue the unknown artist with iconography familiar to the mainstream popular music audience, and the remarkable biographical information on the rear cover can be seen in the same light. The second album was a departure from the norm for album cover design of the time. Certainly, and as was shown, other covers utilised Op art; however, the style of the Bowie cover, with the dots encroaching upon Bowie’s image, was unique. The difficulty encountered in aligning Bowie’s remaining covers to others of the era makes it clear that he continued in this stand-alone manner, with the following six covers all being highly unusual for their time. *The Man Who Sold the World* and *Hunky Dory*, with their obvious debt to art history and film respectively, clearly championed artifice and role-playing at a time when such deviation from supposed rock authenticity was rare. *The Rise and Fall of*
Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars encapsulated, more effectively than any other image of the era, glam rock’s transformative promise to youth of deliverance from the urban mundane. Aladdin Sane and PinUps, with their allusions to Kabuki theatre and to fashion, resembled nothing else released at the time either from within the then burgeoning glam rock style with which Bowie was most closely associated, or the wider popular music milieu. Diamond Dogs meanwhile, although not unique in terms of the employment of photo-realism, stood alone by virtue of its freak show subject matter and its extreme anthropomorphism. Simply, no major artist or act had been presented in that way before.

It is evident, therefore, that except for his debut album, Bowie’s album covers consistently exhibited uniqueness during the period addressed by this research.

Bowie and glam rock

As noted, glam rock was the popular music style with which Bowie was most closely associated, certainly from the release of The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars in 1972 until the end of the period examined in this study. The cover of that album, along with the subsequent Aladdin Sane, PinUps and Diamond Dogs covers, was highly consistent with the themes of personal reinvention, image construction and gender ambiguity that are widely held to be cornerstones of this popular music style. Yet, the dissimilarity between Bowie’s work and the album covers of other major artists associated with the style is a notable finding in this research and one that confirms the artist as the epitome of glam rock’s visual representations within album cover art during the style’s pre-eminent era. Certainly, this finding is in keeping with the prevailing view within both scholarly and popular presses that Bowie is glam rock’s pre-eminent artist. By privileging the act of star construction in his album cover art - exhibiting the succession of ever-changing images that varied so greatly between albums - he showed that, just as was the case in film, the star was a constructed figure. This notion is the epitome of the glam rock ethos.

The timeframe of this study was inarguably also the pivotal period of David Bowie’s career, with his journey from obscurity to fame being a matter of public record and very much celebrated. Indeed, even today widespread scholarly and popular recognition of Bowie’s
achievements is as prevalent as it has been at any time during his lengthy career.\textsuperscript{326} As others have done before me, this research too has attempted to track the unique journey he negotiated. Similarly, I am not the first commentator to explore qualities within Bowie’s work such as alienation and artificiality. While these qualities are often poorly defined in discourses on the artist, they are nevertheless widely and rightly recognised as his hallmark. What makes this current research unique, however, is the tracking of the artist’s journey specifically through his album covers. Visual analysis of these extraordinary yet highly undervalued artefacts has, I contend, brought new findings to the field of Bowie scholarship. In addition to confirming and tracing the development of his increasingly heavy investment in artifice, and unpacking the outwardly varied yet focussed and thematically consistent nature of his representations of alienation, this research has uncovered concomitant development in the eschewing of his individuality and personality.

While stopping short of apportioning the credit for Bowie’s rise in fortunes to his changing imagery - without a similarly comprehensive critique of the development of his music, such a claim would clearly be contestable at best - nevertheless a high degree of probability might well be reasoned along such lines. In a purely stylistic sense the album covers investigated in this study vary remarkably, yet the underlying unity found through thorough iconographical analysis shows that the central components of David Bowie’s artistic \textit{raison detre} were extraordinarily fixed and stable. The theme of alienation he visually projected might also be seen as a direct reflection of his own estrangement within the rock music medium in which he worked.

While the focus of this research has not been Bowie’s music, enough evidence has been admitted to show that within his songs too this theme is a constant presence. It is clear, therefore, that between the years 1967 to 1974 David Bowie delivered a highly cohesive and remarkably focussed message through the visual and musical alliance to be found in his albums.

The personal goal I disclosed at the beginning of this study was that I might somehow come to understand how, and indeed what, Bowie communicated to me as a teenaged fan during the early 1970s. I believe I have reached this new level of understanding. The approach taken in this research - interdisciplinary, flexible, wide-ranging and free of borders but with a crucial

\textsuperscript{326} The April 2012 issue of \textit{Uncut} magazine features as its lead article the story of Ziggy Stardust, with Bowie’s breakthrough album now forty years old. A full-page picture of the Ziggy-era David Bowie is on the cover.
fundamental grounding within art history - has proven both appropriate and effective for the task of tackling the still nascent but exciting field of album cover analysis.
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Discography


*The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars.* David Bowie. RCA SF 8287. 1972.
Image Sources

10. Hand drawn font used on the cover of *David Bowie* (first album)


33. *My people were fair and had sky in their hair . . . But now they’re content to wear stars on their brows* album cover by Tyrannosaurus Rex, 1968. Author’s collection.


41. *Love it to Death* by Alice Cooper, 1971. Author’s collection.


55. *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* front cover, 1971. Author’s collection.


68. *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* rear cover, 1972. Author’s collection.


70. *Aladdin Sane* front cover, 1973. Author’s collection.


76. *thunder and lightning* by Thin Lizzy, 1983. Author’s collection.


78. *Alive!* by KISS, 1975. Author’s collection.


101. *It’s Only Rock’n’Roll* by the Rolling Stones, 1974. Author’s collection.


