Miranda

Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone /
Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-speaking world

17 | 2018

Paysages et héritages de David Bowie

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Electronic version

URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/13401>

DOI: 10.4000/miranda.13401

ISSN: 2108-6559

Publisher

Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

Electronic reference

Jean Du Verger, "David Bowie's urban landscapes and nightscapes: A reading of the Bowiean text", *Miranda* [Online], 17 | 2018, Online since 20 September 2018, connection on 16 February 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/13401> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/miranda.13401>

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David Bowie's urban landscapes and nightscapes: A reading of the Bowiean text

Jean Du Verger

"The Word is devided into units which be all in one piece
and should be so taken, but the pieces can be had in any order being
tied up back and forth, in and out fore and aft like an innaresting
sex arrangement. This book spill off the page in all directions,
kaleidoscope of vistas, medley of tunes and street noises [...]"
William Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch*, 1959.

Introduction

- 1 The urban landscape occupies a specific position in Bowie's works. His lyrics are fraught with references to "city landscape[s]"⁵ and urban nightscapes. The metropolis provides not only the object of a diegetic and spectatorial gaze but it also enables the author to further a discourse on his own inner fragmented self as the nexus, lyrics—music—city, offers an extremely rich avenue for investigating and addressing key issues such as alienation, loneliness, nostalgia and death in a postmodern cultural context. Bowie noted how "vulnerable"⁶ he was to the environment in which he lived in and, when it came to music, his "environment and circumstances affect[ed] [his] writing tremendously"⁷. The importance of urban surroundings in his works is so significantly critical that he remarked: "you can [even] tell more or less which street in the city I was in"⁸.
- 2 In "The Jean Genie" (1973), for example ("Talking about Monroe and walking on Snow White"⁹), Bowie pictures the narrator in Philadelphia, probably referring to the Theatre of the Living Arts on Monroe Street as he is walking to the old city's famous Snow White Diner on 19th Street, where businessmen, students and panhandlers would gather to eat. Bowie maps an urban space which is clearly inscribed in the cultural context of postmodernity with its peculiar combination of high and popular culture,

which the singer-songwriter cleverly summed up in a nutshell when describing Ziggy Stardust as a mixture of “Woolworth and Nijinsky”¹⁰. Thus, Bowie’s songs may well be viewed as the expression of postmodernism—“Guess I’ll put all my eggs in a postmodern song” (“Lucy Can’t Dance”, *Black Tie White Noise* 1993)—in which the lyrics subtly blend both forms of culture, thus conveying a fragmented view of the world.

- 3 The Bowiean townscape is structured spatially according to a core-periphery model which rests on a labyrinth of streets in which the songwriter’s persona wanders. The postmodern cities are characterized by the anonymity they provide the city-dwellers. This is highlighted by the oscillation between private—the recurrent room motif as in “Queen Bitch” (“And I look at my hotel wall”, *Hunky Dory*, 1971) or in “Kingdom Come” (“The face of doom was shining in my room”, *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps*, 1980)¹¹—and public spaces (the streets) in which Bowie’s personæ often drift alone and invisible to others, entrapped in a maze of streets. The city’s palimpsestic nature becomes all the more obvious at night. Sitting in the back of a limousine as he was being driven slowly through the streets of Los Angeles at night, Bowie remarked:

There’s an underlying unease here, definitely. You can feel it in every avenue. It’s very calm and it’s a kind of superficial calmness that they have developed to underplay the fact that there’s a lot of high pressure here¹².

- 4 Yet, in his lyrics, the night appears as a harbinger of new forms, transforming the urban space into a rather friendly environment while offering an accurate portrayal of urban nightscapes in our postmodern cities.

Pop music and postmodernism

- 5 This essay presents a textual and musical analysis of the urban landscapes and nightscapes which inform Bowie’s lyrical *œuvre*. Pop music being both a commodity and a work of art¹³, the text of popular music is anchored in the contemporary world. Thus, as Peter Winkler argues, a pop song does not exist in isolation but is clearly the product of its own times¹⁴, and needs to be analysed within the context in which it was produced. Chris O’Leary contends that “to get a grip on Bowie, you have to have a sense of his times”¹⁵. Indeed, Bowie inserts, within the texture of his songs, numerous historical and cultural references. These references contribute to the sense of realism conveyed in his songs. The subtle way in which elements from the real world are woven within the fictional realm elides the boundaries between fiction and reality. The seventh track of *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and The Spiders From Mars*, “Star”, is informed with references to the situation in Northern Ireland and British politics (“Tony went to fight in Belfast [...] / Bevan tried to change the nation”). The allusions to pop culture are endemic in his lyrics. In “All The Young Dudes” for example, a song Bowie wrote for the Glam rock group Mott the Hoople, he mentions rock bands such as T. Rex, the Beatles and the Stones. He also slips in a remark about “Marks & Sparks”¹⁶, a mainstay anchor of numerous streets in Britain at the time.
- 6 A song is a composite object which comprises voice, melody, instrumental arrangements and lyrics. Although, according to B. Lee Cooper¹⁷, lyrics only offer a partial vision of the artist’s work as the various listening audiences may ignore or be unaware of the lyrical commentary which is being made by the singer songwriter, they nevertheless help us shape our understanding of the singer’s identity. In popular music, song lyrics are no longer entrusted to memory or oral tradition since they are

printed on record inside covers or sleeves and are therefore available to the listener. Consequently, they play an important part in popular music, as Simon Frith astutely notes in his pioneering article: "Popular music is a song form; words are a reason why people buy records"¹⁸. They express "what a singer really means"¹⁹, endowing words with a new resonance which enables the singer-songwriter to express significant things. Richard Middleton claims that pop lyrics do not only function as verbal texts but "as sung words, linguistically marked vocal-sequences mediated by musical conventions"²⁰ which makes it therefore quite challenging to consider the text independently from the music. Nevertheless, the lyrics form a body of texts that deserve to undergo textual analysis, an area, as Middleton remarks, often neglected in the study of popular music. A pop song is "a multiple text"²¹ which produces a variety of meanings and provides the reader-listener with a vast array of replications, intertextual echoes and "ubiquitous dissemination"²². Bowie noted: "There is no authoritative text. There are only multiple readings"²³. It is however not my intent to detach the musical meaning from the discursive architecture of the various texts examined in this essay. Owing to the fact that music itself functions as a discourse and the relationship between words and music offers multiple layers of meaning, I will be therefore considering the interaction between the lyrics and the music. However, the interpretative slant of this paper rests mainly on the text and on an intertextual approach of the Bowiean canon. As Cameron Crowe deftly put it, Bowie was "a sensational quote machine"²⁴. Consequently, I believe that an intertextual approach can provide a key to understanding the Bowiean text. The nature of the pop song itself implies, as Philip Tagg notes, an interdisciplinary approach²⁵—a statement which is all the more relevant when one is about to examine the works of a chameleon figure like Bowie.

- 7 Indeed, Bowie shifted through a dizzying array of theatrical identities, which enabled him to venture into new areas, leading the audience to question who he really was. These multiple characters (Ziggy Stardust, Aladdin Sane, the Thin White Duke...) were a means of projecting self-expression while focusing on his ability to constantly reinvent himself. This is of course reflected in his writing process as he said in an interview: "my writing is based on the idea of transience"²⁶. However—as we winnow through the lyrics—I hope to uncover the relationships the songs entertain with one another. This paper will show through the permutation of texts pertaining to the Bowiean canon, the way in which the songs' lyrics inform one another, thus revealing an internal consistency which is rooted in an elaborate personal vision of urban landscapes and nightscapes while they also display Bowie's own inner-world. As he remarked during an interview on MTV News in 1995: "when you're using yourself as the image it's never quite as simple, because aspects of your own life get mixed into the image that you're trying to project as a character, so it becomes a hybrid of reality and fantasy"²⁷.

Collage and plagiarism

- 8 Before delving any further into the singer-songwriter's work, let me briefly examine Bowie's writing technique. His writing was heavily influenced by visual arts and he often compared making music with painting ("It's like painting really"²⁸), which explains why the text works like a canvas at times. In "Unwashed and Somewhat Slightly Dazed" (*Space Oddity*, 1969), paintings are pictured as living beings ("And the

Braque on the wall/Slides down your front/And eats through your belly/It's very catching"). It is interesting to see the way in which the fictional realm of art ("Braque on the wall") swallows up reality ("eats through your belly") in this particular song.

- 9 Probably one of the major influences on his writing technique was the cut-and-paste approach of Beat writer William Burroughs and painter and poet Brian Gysin. To a journalist who compared his songs to windows, Bowie explained:

A cracked window, which splits the face up [...] like Cubism. A lot of what I really feel about things goes into the input of what I write [...]. As narrator you pick out sources from all over the place, whether you believe in them or not, because they are interesting and you can utilize them.²⁹

- 10 Alan Yentob's documentary entitled *Cracked Actor*, which was made for the BBC arts programme *Omnibus* and broadcast in January 1975³⁰, shows Bowie cutting up the sentences he has written down and shifting the pieces of paper on a table so as to obtain the two first verses of a song, namely "Moonage Daydream" (figure 1). Collages, in their contemporary form, were first introduced by the Cubist painters Georges Braque and Pablo Picasso in 1912 with the famous *La Nature morte à la chaise cannée*. The artists would use a great variety of material ranging from newspaper cuttings and photos to advertisements ("Getting my facts from a Benetton ad"³¹) and other paraphernalia. Subsequently, by inserting these foreign elements in their paintings the artists opened out a thereunto ostensibly closed surface which, as it expanded, resulted in a many-sided composition conveying what Herta Wescher terms an "unreal pictorial space"³². Accordingly, Bowie's songs and lyrics create a multiplicity of perspectives which open up his texts to a variety of meanings. This is best exemplified in "Bombers" ("But the soldier said 'Sir'/There's a crack in the World'/And the figures went 'squash',/And the bits flew far and wide", *Hunky Dory*, 1971), illustrating what Bowie once remarked about his writing technique: "I [...] purposely fracture everything"³³.

Figure 1

Cracked Actor, Alan Yentob
BBC, 1975

- 11 Bowie's lyrics are also the result of subtle and intricate plagiarism as he confessed to himself: "I do nick a lot of things from other people. I am a plagiarist"³⁴. Collage and plagiarism are not only characteristic of his lyrics but also of the album covers. For instance, the cover of Bowie's fifth album, *Ziggy Stardust* (1972) pictures the character in a phone booth reflecting the "eerie [...] glow of a wet London night"³⁵ subverting here the traditional collage process by inserting a fictional character into real urban surroundings thus blurring once more the boundaries between reality and fiction. It was also probably a way of reverberating Bowie's own predicament as he was being progressively cannibalised by his *alter-ego*: Ziggy Stardust ("Making love with his ego Ziggy sucked up into his mind/Like a leper messiah", in "Ziggy Stardust").
- 12 For Bowie, writing symbolized the only means at hand to capture the transient nature of life. Bowie's attempt to withstand oblivion lies beneath the fragmented veneer of his songs. By recording the events of the world, by expressing his inner self, the singer-songwriter was also hoping to inscribe his own existence into history ("Ain't there a pen that will write before they die?", in "Young Americans", 1975). The scriptural traces, which are contained within the threads of the text, elude oblivion as they reify the author's thoughts and memories: "Cold tired fingers/Tapping out your memories" ("Strangers When We Meet", 1993)³⁶. His urge to write grows almost obsessive at times as in "Fantastic Voyage"³⁷:
- But any sudden movement I've got to write it down
They wipe out an entire race and I've got to write it down
But I'm still getting educated but I've still got to write down.
- 13 Consequently, the act of writing appears as the only means the artist has of keeping a certain form of control over his own existence, which he has woven within the texts of his songs:
- If I can't control the web we weave
My life will be lost in the fallen leaves.³⁸
- 14 Moreover, the filmic quality of his writing and music bestows a visual quality upon his lyrics, conferring a truly aesthetic texture to his urban landscapes and giving them at times a *noirish* overtone.

Post-war landscapes

- 15 Bowie's early songs, notably those contained in his self-titled album, depict a post-war Britain with its urban wilderness of grey roads and ruins, reflecting the universe in which the young David Jones spent the early years of his life. A universe "bounded by the bomb sites on Chantrey Road and the far side of Stockwell Road"³⁹ in Brixton, where he lived before moving to Plaistow Grove in Bromley. The opening lines of "Please Mr Gravedigger"⁴⁰ offer a rather quaint and melancholic snapshot of post-war London:
- There's a little churchyard just along the way
It used to be Lambeth's finest array
Of tombstones, epitaphs, wreaths, flowers all that jazz
Till the war came along and someone dropped a bomb on the lot.
- 16 The song opens with bells ringing in the rain, while explosions are heard in the distance and we hear muffled footsteps approaching as they move forward on the grass. The "little churchyard" is a reference to St Mary's Church which was damaged by

bombs during the war and was characterized, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, by its derelict and gloomy aspect. Bowie's "vocal melody [is] removed from any harmonic framing"⁴¹ thus enhancing the sense of gloom and coldness which hovers over the lyrics. On the same album, "Uncle Arthur"⁴² provides glimpses of an English suburban town:

- 17 Climbs across his bike and he's away
Cycles past the gasworks, past the river, down the high street
Back to mother, it's another empty day
- 18 The lyrics bear the seeds of Bowie's filmic writing which will permeate his later songs. The sequence of the verbs "climb" and "cycle" gives an impression of movement which is enhanced by the "narrow-scoped phrases"⁴³ ("past the gasworks, past the river, down the high street"), as the song's overall atmosphere evokes, in an almost cinematic way, the faded charm of the 1950s.

Crowded cities

- 19 But Bowie's vision of urban landscapes grows swiftly dismal. The track "We Are Hungry Men"⁴⁴ (1967) announces the dystopian urban landscape which will soon be portrayed in *Diamond Dogs* (1973). The song opens with the news speaker (Gus Dudgeon) announcing with a tone of panic in his voice, which rapidly shifts to hysteria, the figures of cities overpopulating by the hour:

Here is the news
According to the latest population survey
The figures have reached danger point, my god
London 15 million 75 thousand
New York 80 million
Paris 15 million and 30
China 1000 million
Billington-Spa: lots [...]

- 20 We move from London, New York and Paris to China and finally end up in the small town of Billington in Lancashire. If the megalopolises are overcrowded, not to mention countries, the town of Billington itself has "lots", giving the reader-listener the impression that cities and towns are being literally overwhelmed by human waves. Let us briefly examine the structure of the opening lines. The cities of London and Paris and their 15 million inhabitants or so work as a sort of frame for New York's 80 million, conveying the impression that the city of New York is bursting under the pressure of its inhabitants while Paris and London seem unable to contain the growth of New York's population. As the reader-listener leaps to China and its "1000 million", one realizes that things are actually completely out of control. The bold figures give a concrete vision to the process. Human population is reproducing at an uncanny speed as things are veering toward total chaos and destruction. Even the small town of Billington is not preserved. If some critics viewed the song as a rant promoting eugenics, the bleak vision of Bowie's songs was probably influenced, as Chris O'Leary contends, by British science-fiction literature⁴⁵ which offered a rather pessimistic view of the future, a vision of post-apocalyptic shattered worlds that Bowie will explore in greater detail in *Diamond Dogs* (1973).

- 21 If Bowie's early songs contain already certain recurrent urban motifs, they also show how the singer-songwriter maps the urban space. The first track of *The Man Who Sold the World* (1970), "The Width of a Circle", emphasizes the geometrical pattern of the urban space in which "All the roads were straight and narrow". The rigid grid could stand metaphorically for the conventional social mores displayed in cities at the time. In "Watch that Man"⁴⁶, the street becomes more attractive as it represents a space where one can hope to find a taste of real life: "[...] I ran to the street, looking for information". The urban landscape has an addictive effect on the narrator. His urge for street life works on him like a drug of sorts: "It's a street with a deal, and a taste/It's got claws, it's got me, it's got you". In "Changes"⁴⁷ (1971) however, the Bowiean urban streetscape stands as a metaphor for the false hopes that the city may hold for a young artist. The song was viewed, according to Chris O'Reilly, as an early musical autobiography⁴⁸. In "I Feel Free"⁴⁹, Bowie depicts the paradoxical nature of the city street:

I can walk down the street
There's no one there
The pavement is one huge crowd

- 22 The way in which the narrator perceives the street, a place which is both empty and crowded at the same time, underpins the feeling of non-being ("A person who loses a name/Feels anxiety descending"⁵⁰) and invisibility, while casting light on the street as a symbol of urban power which oppresses and silences pedestrians. The city streets are also a place of unsolved quandaries, as the closing line of "Sweet Thing" (1974) attests to: "And turn to the crossroads [...]". The "crossroads" may well stand for the uncertain future of the city-dweller as they picture him wondering about the direction he will take next. In his later albums, space morphs into time as the bustling city streets are compared to life ("And I'm running down the street of life", in "Never Get Old", *Reality*, 2003), while time itself suddenly accelerates under the hectic urban pressure: "But I lost God in a New York minute" ("Looking for Water", *Reality*, 2003).

On the city outskirts

- 23 As mentioned earlier, Bowie structures his urban landscape according to a core-periphery model. In "All the Madmen"⁵¹ (1970), the misfits, outcasts and insane are living on the city's outskirts:

Day after day
They send my friends away
To mansions cold and gray
To the far side of town
Where the thin men stalk the streets
While the sane stay underground [...]
To the far side of town
Where it's pointless to be high
'Cause it's such a long way down [...]

- 24 The song is probably referring to David's half-brother, Terry Burns, who was "the source of many of his key musical and literary interests"⁵². Terry suffered from schizophrenia and spent most of his adult life in psychiatric institutions. The "mansions cold and grey" refer here to Cane Hill asylum, where Terry spent some time soothing his troubled mind. Bowie's approach casts light on the way the edge, the limit,

the periphery is used as a space apart where the insane, the contesting and marginalized are grouped, keeping them at bay from the supposedly respectable bourgeois citizens. The theme will resurface in "Sons of the Silent Age" (*Heroes*, 1977), who "Stand on platforms, blank looks and note books/Sit in the back rows, of city limits". The disorientating experiences erupting from the margins of the city encourage the "normal" people to remain "underground", out of sight. Bowie subverts here the traditional paradigm according to which the drug addicts haunt the undergrounds while the "sane" citizens live in the open air. The jumble of alliterative words which inform the lyrics, strongly contribute to the song's rhythm. The words "stalk", "stay", "streets", and "sane" create a sibilant sound which has a smeared and distorted effect, while the terms "day", "cold", "grey" and "underground" have, by contrast, a sharp percussive effect creating tension within the song. Bowie's lyrics may also reverberate what the youths felt like in the 1970s, as he noted himself: "in the seventies, people in my age group felt disinclined to be part of a society"⁵³.

"Hunger City"

- 25 I shall now examine *Diamond Dogs* (1973), which, along with *Aladdin Sane* (1973), offers snapshots of both New York and Los Angeles. David Bowie defined America as a strange and odd world, an "alternative stage"⁵⁴. A stage on which his imagination gave birth to an apocalyptic vision of the future deeply influenced by George Orwell's novel 1984. The dystopic world of urban decay and decadence depicted in *Diamond Dogs*, through what David Buckley terms a "series of impressionistic snapshots", elicits a feeling of despair in Man's future as it envisions his witless capacity of destroying his own environment. The fictional post-nuclear holocaust Hunger City offers a nightmarish vision of urban decay:

And... in death—as the last few corpses lay rotting on the slimy thoroughfare—the shutters lifted in inches in Temperance Building—high on Poachers Hill and red mutant eyes gazed down on Hunger City—no more big wheels—fleas the size of rats sucked on rats the size of cats and ten thousand peoploids 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 re-wrapping mink and shiny silver fox—now leg warmers—family badge of sapphire and cracked emeralds—any day now the year of the Diamond Dogs. This ain't Rock'n'Roll—this is Genocide⁵⁵.

- 26 Although Bowie claimed that the expressionist films of Robert Wiene (*Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, 1920) and Fritz Lang (*Metropolis*, 1927) were forbears of Hunger City, the singer-songwriter offers a rather realistic vision of America through the prism of his urban landscapes. Bowie claimed that the lyrics of his songs "could be describing any city"⁵⁶ in America. The city is viewed as a dark and void space which is similar to Bowie's own sketch of Hunger City (figure 2)⁵⁷. It is also a highly mechanical place: the clicking noises heard between certain tracks provide the listener with the vision of machine-like society. This impression is enhanced musically by the mellotrons and moog synthesizers that provide a ghostly mechanical effect. However, if one peers through the post-apocalyptic veil of Hunger City, the reader-listener may well discover familiar snapshots of our own postmodern cities.

Figure 2

David Bowie – Hunger City

- 27 In both albums, the urban landscape is permeated with metaphors of prostitution and drug dealing, encapsulating the atmosphere of American inner-cities at the time. In “Sweet Thing” (*Diamond Dogs*, 1973) for example, Bowie depicts in an almost *in-situ* ethnographical style the life of male hustlers in the urban space. The character’s transactional job and the anonymity provided by the city makes it “safe in the City/To love in a doorway”. The scene evokes, as Chris O’Reily notes, the hustlers in John Rechy’s novel *City of Night* (1963), which portrays “seedy young knights” who “moved through [the] fallen cities”⁵⁸ of New York and Los Angeles. This obviously contravenes Bowie’s assertion according to which he had “never written about street people of such [...]”⁵⁹, unlike a singer songwriter like Lou Reed who was a social commentator of sorts. Yet, when one listens to “Candidate” and “Sweet Thing (Reprise)”, the blight reality of the urban city is depicted in an almost realistic manner with its olfactory features, its graffiti⁶⁰ and shops: “It even smells like a street/There’s a bar at the end”, “Someone scrawled on the wall”, “there’s a shop on the corner” (“The Candidate”). All these vignettes conjure up the familiar atmosphere of a New York neighbourhood in the early 1970s. The almost ethnographical scene depicted in “Queen Bitch” provides a convincing example of Bowie’s sense of social observation:

I’m up on the eleventh floor
 And I’m watching the cruisers below
 He’s down on the street
 And he’s trying hard to pull his sister Flo [...]
 ‘Cause she’s hoping to score [...]

- 28 His innate curiosity impelled him to go out and look at what was happening to the city-dwellers in the urban world—a topic which would continue to inform his later albums. On the first track of *Never Let Me Down* (1987), “Day in Day Out”, Bowie’s song hinges on the themes of solitude, disorientation and anonymity, which are characteristic of big cities, as he portrays a discarded young female junky wandering the city:

She’s got a ticket to nowhere
 she’s gonna take a train ride
 Nobody knows her, or knows her name⁶¹

- 29 Bowie conveys here the same type of urban realism, which is characteristic of Lou Reed's songs, as he records a momentary experience on the street. He is obviously trying "to give [us here] a shot of some of the street"⁶². When Bowie described Detroit, he defined it as a city in which "real people [were] trying to survive"⁶³. In other words, he was well aware of the social issues of his time. The song "Diamond Dogs" dwells on the "fallen city"⁶⁴ idea. The streets of Hunger City are crawling with street gangs led by Halloween Jack, who lives in a "post-holocaust skyscraper"⁶⁵ ("he lives on top of Manhattan Chase"). In one of his sketches, Bowie portrays Halloween Jack looting the "World Assembly Building" (figure 3), which evokes the United Nations building in New York, with his female companion Magge the Lion and their son⁶⁶. The bleak portrait of the city reflected the pessimistic vision of human evolution in which the city became the symbol of "the mongrelized, the polluted; it was a sewer, an open-air prison"⁶⁷. The demise of urban civilisation depicted in *Diamond Dogs* and the growing urban terror which is voiced by the chorus in "We Are Hungry Men"⁶⁸ testify to Bowie's rather bleak vision of the postmodern cityscape.

Figure 3

David Bowie – Riots in Hunger City

Behind city windows

- 30 The window metaphor suffuses Bowie's lyrics from *David Bowie* and *Space Oddity* ("See my eyes, my window pane", in "Sell Me a Coat", 1967 and "I see you see me through the window", in "Unwashed and Somewhat Slightly Dazed", 1969) to *Young Americans* ("Scanning life through the picture window", "Young Americans"). The opening lines of "Oh! You Pretty Things"⁶⁹ (1971) portray a man who awakens to a vision of

apocalypse: "I Look out my window and what do I see/A crack in the sky[...]/I think about a world to come". The fractured sky works as an opening into another dimension as well as a metaphor for the narrator's split persona. By turning his eyes skyward, the narrator considers the fissure which is opening up the sky while unveiling what is hidden. Like the narrator who gazes at the cracks and openings in the sky, the reader-listener is encouraged to go beyond the fractured textual surface of Bowie's songs. The window metaphor is grounded in Bowie's own experience and stands as the opening onto the outside world that lies beyond the room's enclosed space. It offers the reader-listener a perspective onto the world through the artist's eyes. In the course of the song "Starman" (1972), the hortatory tone of the narrator invites the reader-listener to "Look out [his] window" while, in "It Ain't Easy"⁷⁰ (1972), he is told to "Look out over the town/Think about all the strange things circulating round". We are therefore made to observe the city which stands before us from a height as the reader-listener becomes the spectator of the intricate and intriguing hustle and bustle of urban life. During an interview he gave in 1978, Bowie confessed, while standing at the window of his lofty suite in Manhattan's Mayfair House:

It was always so easy, especially in this city, to be able to stand behind a window, just like this, and look at things from about here. The city was built for that. If you weren't on the ground then your perspective was always at this level, always looking at somebody's business, something that needn't play a part in your life—but you still watch it. It's not just the weather. The mere way the city is structured, it seemed that violence would become the theatre of the streets. It had to happen in America, and now it's rampant in Europe as well. I'm utterly and thoroughly confused by city life and New York⁷¹.

Scary cities

- 31 Bowie felt however at home in New York ("It's the place that I know well", in "Shake It", *Let's Dance*, 1983). By contrast, the singer-songwriter's relationship to Los Angeles was a rather complicated one. He repeatedly said how much he loathed the place, comparing it to a movie script: "[A] movie so corrupt with a script that is so devious and insidious. It's the scariest movie ever written"⁷². Yet, he was fascinated by what biographer Paul Trynka terms the "mental wildlands"⁷³ of Los Angeles. As he drove through the city with writer Cameron Crowe in a "borrowed yellow VW bug"⁷⁴, Bowie's eyes scanned the streets while he thrilled "over the massage parlours, billboards and stumbling itinerants"⁷⁵. Driving round the city he quipped: "L.A. is my favourite museum"⁷⁶. Indeed, Bowie's lyrical *œuvre* undoubtedly conveys the impression of an archaeological pop museum of sorts, corroborating Jean Rook's claim that he was "[a] modern poet. A chronicler of his disturbed times"⁷⁷. The albums *Aladdin Sane*, *Diamond Dogs* and *Young Americans* stand as Bowie's own personal Americana. The numerous references contained in those albums—which depict streetscapes peopled with "Chicago moll[s]", "pimp[s]", "hustler[s]" who dwell in "the ghetto"—are documented with cultural, geographical, political and pop culture references such as "Tod Browning", "Benny Goodman", "Washington", "Detroit" "Chicago", "President Nixon", "Charlie Manson", "Cassius Clay" and "Barbie Doll". The use of *clichés* is of paramount importance in Bowie's writing technique. He noted in an interview that they "are very important [...] because they're something everyone understands, they're universal"⁷⁸.

They subsequently enhance the collage effect of the text as their visible seams reflect the fragmented nature of Bowie's impressions of America.

- 32 Bowie's sixth album, *Aladdin Sane*, was composed as he toured America providing the reader-listener with a series of snapshots of the country. The recurrent car metaphors or allusions to the automobile industry, whether in the lyrics or in the title of the songs themselves, such as "Drive-In Saturday" or "Panic in Detroit", convey a concrete vision of one of America's strongest symbols: the automobile. Cars are so omnipresent ("Motor sensational", "Clutches of sad remains", "Ford Mustang", "a beetle car"...) that feelings themselves are described in mechanical terms ("Motor sensational, Paris or maybe hell – (I'm waiting)/Clutches of sad remains"). Bowie even pictures them as living creatures ("I screamed and ran to smash my favourite slot machine/And jumped the silent cars that slept at traffic lights", in "Panic in Detroit").
- 33 The album's fifth track, "Cracked Actor", which was written during David Bowie's stay in Los Angeles in October 1972, was inspired by what he saw "on a tour of Hollywood Boulevard and at Rodney's—barely-teenage girls in Shirley Temple and dominatrix outfits, popping Quaaludes; people shooting heroin in the bathrooms"⁷⁹. The song also presents the reader-listener with a fragmentary map of Los Angeles:

I've come on a few years from my Hollywood Highs
 The best of the last, the cleanest star they ever had [...]
 [CHORUS]
 Crack, baby, crack, show me you're real
 Smack, baby, smack, is that all that you feel
 Suck, baby, suck,
 give me your head
 Before you start professing that you're knocking me dead
 You caught yourself a trick down on Sunset and Vine [...]
 You sold me illusions for a sack full of cheques
 You've made a bad connection 'cause I just want your sex

- 34 The lyrics blend geographical references such as "Hollywood Highs" (Heights) or "on Sunset and Vine" (Sunset Boulevard and Vine Street lie at the intersection with Hollywood Boulevard) with drug and sex slang ("Crack, baby, crack", "give me your head"), while shedding light on the superficiality of one's existence ("show me you're real" and "You sold me illusions") in Hollywood. For Bowie, Los Angeles was a "fabrication in real life"⁸⁰. This probably explains why, when describing his life in Los Angeles, he claimed: "I have no emotional geography"⁸¹, a statement which does not apply, as we shall see, to his so-called Berlin trilogy.

Cocaine Station

- 35 In the course of Yentob's documentary, Bowie describes himself as "a foreign body"⁸² in America. Like the alien character of Thomas Jerome Newton, which he impersonates in Nicholas Roeg's fourth film *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1975), Bowie seeks his place in this strange land⁸³; in similar fashion he inserts various foreign fragments into his songs. Bowie's early albums relied on small narrative structures which became his trademark. He told Michael Watts: "Narrating stories, or doing little vignettes of what, at the time, I thought was happening in America and putting on my albums in convoluted fashion"⁸⁴, a characteristic feat of his songs. Bowie's life in Los Angeles had become one of seclusion, a period during which he suffered from severe bouts of psychosis induced

by his heavy intake of cocaine, which blurred his perception of reality at times⁸⁵. He recorded *Station to Station* (1976)⁸⁶ in the closing months of 1975. The album's complex texture reveals the artist's inner turmoil and sense of alienation through the controversial persona of the Thin White Duke, who personified what the Germans call *Kalte Pracht* (cold splendour) and whose Aryan looks underpinned the fascistic nature of the character. The album is described by Paul Trynka as a "journey into sound"⁸⁷. The texts were being progressively replaced by the musical texture of sculpted sounds which were described by German writer and rock singer Heinz Rudolf Kunze as "claustrofunk"⁸⁸. Bowie sought to create "[s]ound as texture, rather than sound as music"⁸⁹. While the title song of the album announces "The return of the Thin White Duke", it also unveils the singer's desire to return to Europe ("The European canon is here [...]")⁹⁰. Leaving Los Angeles and moving to Berlin was not only a solution for renewing his inspiration, it was also the way for him to end his addiction to cocaine. The singer-songwriter was getting bored with his writing technique and he "wanted to move out of the area of narrative and character"⁹¹. In terms of artistic creation, he was less interested in the storytelling part of his work and had no intention of making another concept album like *Ziggy Stardust*, *Aladdin Sane* or *Diamond Dogs*. His quest for new musical experimentation would lead him to create what critics view as the "most daring music of his career"⁹².

The Wall

- 36 When Bowie fled the "City of Lost Angels"⁹³ and arrived in Berlin ("I was attracted to the city"⁹⁴), he discovered, as the city's reconstruction was taking place before his eyes, a torn landscape peppered with gaunt remains of buildings. He was seeking, through his Berlin Triptych (*Low*, "*Heroes*" and *Lodger*), a new musical vocabulary which would be able to reverberate "the pervasive mood of despair and pessimism that ha[d]divined in contemporary society"⁹⁵. At the time, Berlin was the ideal city to carry out such a project. Bowie described the city as one which was "made up of bars for sad disillusioned people to get drunk in". Berlin's divided status, a city which had been cut off from the Western world, enhanced the atmosphere of isolation which pervades *Low*. *Tonmeister* Eduard Meyer notes that Berlin "felt like an island"⁹⁶ at the time.
- 37 The city could probably be compared with the Burroughsian Interzone⁹⁷. An international zone peopled with outcasts, artists and Turkish immigrants, who were caught in a sort of time warp⁹⁸. David Buckley argues that "Berlin was in-between: neither wholly East nor West, a city of minorities, ethnic, cultural and sexual"⁹⁹. While in Berlin, Bowie's mood was highly introspective as he wandered within the city's boundaries amongst the shadows of a bygone world¹⁰⁰ hoping to discover a little more about himself. His reaction to the city "was something [he] couldn't express in words"¹⁰¹, which is why he developed a new musical style¹⁰² in which atmosphere and texture would prevail over lyrics.
- 38 Musically speaking, Bowie was growing less interested in lyrics and more concerned with music *per se*. He remarked that "the lyrics taken on their own are nothing without the secondary sub-text of what the musical arrangement has to say which is so important in popular music"¹⁰³. The Berlin trilogy represents a rupture—although not a brutal one if we consider *Station to Station*—with his previous work. It bears the imprint and influence from the German experimental scene, notably the so-called "krautrock"

bands such as Kraftwerk and NEU! These bands influenced his work, not to mention the considerable influence exerted on him by Brian Eno. The monotonous rhythms and endless repetition which characterized the music produced by those bands convey a sense of “total disembodiment”¹⁰⁴. According to Eno, lyrics impose “a non-musical structure into music”¹⁰⁵. Eno, who envisioned music in terms of space, taught Bowie how to create music according to a pattern using his oblique strategy cards, which he had created with painter Peter Schmidt. These cards offered Bowie a random writing technique based on juxtapositions and disorientation. The cards contained instructions to solve tricky situations during the creative musical process.

- 39 The album *Low* (1977) stands as a perfect example of the artist's new approach. The *Low* sessions began at the Château d'Hérouville studios in the Paris region. Sound engineer Laurent Thibault “relished the experimentation, crafting long tape loops into electronic collages”¹⁰⁶ as the album highlights once more Bowie's talent for musical collage¹⁰⁷. The first side of the album contains “rock and roll”¹⁰⁸ songs while the second side displays instrumental pieces which could be described as “landscapes, soundscapes”¹⁰⁹ of sorts. The songs' lyrics are extremely short and tend to disappear completely on the instrumental pieces, although they reappear fragmentarily, as in “Subterranean” where the fractured language resembles “a death rattle”¹¹⁰. The lyrics on “Warszawa” belong to an imaginary language¹¹¹. The subdued fever beat on “Warszawa”, the pregnant pauses between bars, the subtle mixture of tone, melody and mood convey a hypnotic impression which opens up a melancholic space for the reader-listener. The bleak and haunting atmosphere of “Warszawa” reverberated what Bowie had felt when his train pulled up alongside a goods train in Warsaw as he travelled through Eastern Europe¹¹².

“Urban claustrophobia”

- 40 Bowie had created an “atmospheric “mood” music”¹¹³ that progressively erased the lyrical aspect of his work. Nevertheless, *Low*'s sparse lyrics also reverberate Bowie's feeling of solitude and claustrophobia. The song “What In The World”, which had originally been entitled “Isolation”¹¹⁴, pictures a recluse: “Deep in your room you never leave your room”. The loneliness described in “Be My Wife” expresses a growing feeling of despair:

Sometimes you get so lonely
Sometimes you get nowhere
I've lived all over the world
I've left every place

- 41 It conveys, as Cynthia Rose puts it, a “clinical fascination for urban claustrophobia”¹¹⁵ while reflecting the artist's inner personal angst.
- 42 With “*Heroes*”—the only album of the trilogy to have been entirely recorded in Berlin's Hansa-by-the-wall studios—released in the German Autumn of 1977, Bowie continued exploring Berlin and the jagged atmosphere which emanated from the city. Side two of the album was, as Bowie claims, “more an observation in musical terms: my reaction to seeing the East bloc, how West Berlin survives in the midst of it, which was something I couldn't express in words”¹¹⁶. Bowie and Eno continued using startling methods of writing, ranging from random selection of books to chord changes. Bowie described in detail his new writing technique¹¹⁷. Each song hinges on two or three themes

intertwined in such a way that they produce a different atmosphere within each line. As a result, the city of Berlin (although never once mentioned in the three albums) “permeated both the sound and ambience of the album”¹¹⁸, notably through the recurrent motif of the Wall: “I, I remember/Standing, by the wall by the wall/The guns shot above our heads/And we kissed as though nothing could fall/And the shame was on the other side” (“Heroes”). The penultimate track, “Neuköln” [Neukölln] shows how music mirrors the sense of estrangement felt by the Turkish immigrants illustrating Eno’s vision of music, who claims music should be “as much as possible a continuous condition to the environment”¹¹⁹. The superficial description of the urban landscape conjures up the way in which the German Expressionist painters of *Die Brücke* (*The Bridge*) and *Neue Sachlichkeit* (*New Objectivity*) painted landscapes. The latter were simplified “to broad brush strokes [in which] colours [were] abstracted until they [broke] free of the object”¹²⁰, much in the same way Bowie’s music portrayed his impressionistic visions of the town. In a letter written to Karl Osthaus in December 1917, Ernst Kirchner, one of the founders of *Die Brücke*, states that the aim of his work was “to be able to totally dissolve one’s person into the sensations of the surroundings in order to be able to transform this into a united painterly form”¹²¹. Thus, while in Berlin, Bowie had become his environment¹²².

From town to town

- 43 As the decade drew to an end, the last album of the Berlin period, *Lodger* (1979), was viewed by the critics as a “transitional album”¹²³ in Bowie’s career. The German city sashayed away, and Bowie himself admitted it: “Berlin was over [...]. I had not intended to leave Berlin, I just drifted away”¹²⁴. It explains, as Rüther remarks, why the album had rather little to do with the city itself.
- 44 “Yassassin”, which Paul Trynka refers to a travelogue, a sketchbook¹²⁵, sheds light on Bowie’s nomadic nature which had already been depicted in “Don’t Bring Me Down”¹²⁶:
- I’m on my own, nowhere to roam
I tell you baby, don’t want no home
I wander round, feet off the ground
I even go from town to town
- 45 Bowie dwells on the complicated living conditions of the Turkish immigrants (“We came from the farmlands/To live in this city [...]/ In this resonant world”), throwing light on what will become a leitmotiv in later albums. But there seems to be no true satisfaction as the narrator wanders from town to town: “There’s been many others, so many times/Sixty new cities, and what do I, what do I, what do I find?”¹²⁷ The repeated questions find no echoes, no answers. Overall, the album conveys a sense of despair and was defined by Bowie as the “snapshot collage of journeyman melancholy”¹²⁸.
- 46 The Berlin period drew therefore to a close, leaving Bowie seeking other cities, new horizons to explore as he gazed toward the Eastern World¹²⁹. However, Bowie would return to Berlin in his penultimate album, *Next Day* (2013). The fifth track of the album, “Where Are We Now?”¹³⁰, which is rife with nostalgia, offers the reader-listener a journey down memory lane. In the first part of the song, the vibrato effect and the arpeggiated seventh chords on a barely moving bass line impart a slightly wobbly atmosphere that matches the nostalgic tonality of the lyrics¹³¹. As we move from Potsdamer Platz further into the city, Bowie reminisces the days gone by (“walking the

dead”), while the lyrics work in an almost cinematic way as the reader-listener visualises the cityscape and the streets of Berlin that telescope into a series of quick flashes (“Sitting in the Dschungel/On Nürnberger Strasse/A man lost in time/Near KaDeWe”). We finally reach the bridge which housed the Bornholmerstrasse border crossing between the East and the West (“Cross Böse Brücke”). As the song ends with “Twenty thousand people” crossing the bridge, time and space seem to merge leaving the narrator (“Where are we now?/Where are we now?/The moment you know/You know, you know”) with a rather dismal echo to his repeated question. Nicholas Pegg suggests that Bowie “is shifting between timelines, comparing and contrasting the divided Berlin of the Cold War days with the modern city of post-reunification Germany”¹³². While evoking Bowie’s time in Berlin, the song deploys a map of various places which had obviously left a deep imprint on him, revealing his own personal landscape of the city.

Journey into darkness

- 47 The last aspect I wish to explore concerns the way in which Bowie depicts urban nightscapes (figure 4). In the second half of the nineteenth century, the French poet Charles Baudelaire depicted the ephemerality of the modern urban life and portrayed the dislocated individual psyche in his prose poems (1869)¹³³. While exploring the urban nightscape¹³⁴, he shaped new strategies of sketching night scenes. The scenes request the reader to reconsider his daytime certainties. As William Chapman Sharpe writes, “night is a window that opens into the self and on to the world”¹³⁵. Conversely, the urban nightscape provides Bowie with the object of a diegetic and spectatorial gaze. His lyrics are blanketed with significant visual imagery that convey an almost cinematic dimension to his songs, offering the reader-listener both a visual and musical experience as the night enchants the city with vibrant and continuous activity. The singer’s persona’s nocturnal odyssey through the city streets offers constant changes of perspective, reflecting a world in a constant state of flux.
- 48 A number of Bowie’s songs lurk into the nocturnal city life shedding light on the conviviality and intimacy fostered in the dark. The aesthetics of darkness and shadow suffuse many of his songs. The experience displayed in them throws light on the singer-songwriter’s profound ambivalence on the subject: “I’m torn between the light and dark”¹³⁶. Dark and light subtly interpenetrate each other transforming the city into a phantasmagorical realm. A place in which “[d]istances are difficult to fathom, illuminated buildings appear to float, areas of darkness are impregnable to sense-making and scale and proportion may be deceptive”¹³⁷.

Figure 4

The Bowiean Nightscape
Cracked Actor, Alan Yentob
 BBC, 1975

- 49 The night appears to be a friendly world for the narrator, a realm in which the lonely character feels at ease at last (“And the day will end for some/As the night begins for one” in “Wild Eyed Boy from Freecloud”, *Space Oddity*, 1969). Darkness and shadow transform the urban space and generate a variety of atmospheres linked to various activities. They also transform individuals as the night offers them the opportunity to be someone else, or just reveal themselves, an aspect the narrator depicts in “Let’s Spend the Night Together”¹³⁸ (“I feel so strong that I can’t disguise [...]”). In “The Bewlay Brothers”, darkness (“The world was asleep”, “it was midnight”, “The Bewlay Brothers [...] Standing tall in the dark”) provides also a cloak for transgressive sexualities (“Oh, We were Gone/Real Cool Traders”) and prostitution as it does in “Queen Bitch” (“She’s an old time ambassador/Of sweet talking, night walking games/ Oh, and she’s known in the darkest clubs”)¹³⁹, shaping an alternative experience of urban space. In “New York’s in Love”¹⁴⁰, the city progressively frees itself at night (“New York’s in love/The city grew wings in the back of the night”) and the nocturnal urban space unveils the night life of the rich (“She sees the rich trash having all the fun/Makes her wonder where they get their energy from”). The experience of darkness sharpens the senses as the buildings are carved out of the dark recesses of the night, focusing on their verticality. Their shapes appear in monumental relief, although not in a threatening way (“Buildings they rise to the skies [...] / But we’ll have a hot time on the town tonight [...] / Rise buildings/ Rise to the sky”), leaving the *Wandersmänner* time to “wander lonely to the sea” (“Bang Bang”, *Never Let Me Down*, 1987)¹⁴¹. However, the passage from dark to light is hectic and not without risk for those who live by night:

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 shadow¹⁴²

- 50 The “forlorn soul”¹⁴³ who has wandered through the streets at night is urged by the narrator to shelter from daylight. The narrator’s hortatory tone redirects the listener’s attention as to the dangers of daylight. In his 1987 album *Never Let Me Down*, Bowie dwells again on the feeling of safety emanating from darkness (“Sweet is the night, bright light destroys me”)¹⁴⁴. The night provides the listener-reader with visions of people fluttering in and out of the shadows into the dim lights along the city street ledges. The shadow metaphor stands as a recurrent motif in Bowie’s lyrics and symbolises the author’s fascination with the *doppelgänger* motif as portrayed in “Shadow Man”:

But the Shadow Man is really you
 Look in his eyes and see your reflection
 Look to the stars and see his eyes
 He’ll show you tomorrow, he’ll show you the sorrows¹⁴⁵

- 51 However, the shadow also signals anonymity within the urban space:

And the street overflows
 With the folk who understand
 But for the guy who can’t be seen
 He’s the Shadow Man
 And the Shadow Man is close at hand
 Take a turn and see his smile
 Made of nothing but loneliness
 Just take a walk and be a friend
 To the Shadow Man
 You can call him Joe, you can call him Sam
 You should call and see who answers [...]

- 52 It seems safe to assume that the nocturnal urban landscape was, for Bowie, a refuge from daytime. The sounds are muffled, as if there were a quietness which could not be found during the day:

In the street a man shouts out loud
 A wallet drops and money flies
 Into the midday sun
 With the sound, with the sound,
 With the sound of the ground [...]
 Oh I get a little bit
 Afraid sometimes¹⁴⁶

City nightscape

- 53 It is worth noting that Bowie wrote a lot of his songs at night¹⁴⁷, not to mention the recording sessions which also took place at night. Eno recalls that most of the sessions on *Low*, for example, would start late: “It was all overnight, so I was in a kind of daze a lot of the time, days drifting into one another”¹⁴⁸. Moreover, Bowie would, as Carlos Alomar recalls, “always turn off the lights and listen to music in the dark”¹⁴⁹ to focus on his emotions.
- 54 The city nightscape was therefore a means for the artist to express a growing feeling of melancholic nostalgia, which suffuses *Heathen* (2002). The album thematically links back to earlier albums such as *Pin Ups* (1973), notably the record’s last track: “Where

Have All the Good Times Gone" ("Let it be like yesterday/Please let me have happy days").

- 55 I shall now examine the song which, I believe, encapsulates some of the major themes Bowie developed in *Heathen* (2002). The third track, "Slip Away"¹⁵⁰, had been recorded on the unreleased album *Toy*, which leaked on the Internet in 2011. It was an homage to New Jersey's celebrity "Uncle" Floyd Vivino¹⁵¹, a vaudeville comedian and musician who hosted, from the mid-1970s to the late nineties, the *Uncle Floyd Show*. The emotionally compelling song dwells on the passing of time. As the image of the two puppets of the show, Oogie and Bones Boy, drift out of sight, the words spring to life, and the picture of the city's nightscape appears progressively in the reader-listener's imagination. The narrator's persona escapes from the city's grasp and, as the song drifts along its elegiac arc, one has the impression he is crossing the vast sky with aerial views of the urban landscape stretching out before his eyes at night ("Twinkle twinkle Uncle Floyd/Watching all the world [...] Sailing over/Coney Island"). The lyrics sweep across the scene from a vantage point and the twinkling effects of the lights convey the impression one is sailing over the amusement parks (Luna Park...), which are disseminated over Coney Island, imparting an impression of nostalgia. The impression is all the more enhanced by the way the narrator distances himself from the scene he depicts. The iconicity of the descriptions is devoted to the visual, cinematic aspect of the song, and the filmic aspect of the lyrics echoes the lines in "The Prettiest Star" ("Staying back in your memory/Are the movies in the past", *Aladdin Sane*). The urban nighttime is depicted here via a divine point of view, conveying the impression of an almost disembodied gaze.
- 56 Moreover, Bowie inserts a fragment of one of the best-known poems in the English language—"The Star"—which had been written by Jane Taylor ("Twinkle, twinkle, little star,/How I wonder what you are!")¹⁵² in 1806. The lullaby's emotional intensity and slow rhythmic tempo offer a poeticized and idealized vision of the past which helps foster a form of identification between Bowie and his audience. The doubling of the cradling words ("Twinkle, twinkle") lulls the listener into the singer's own dreamscape, while the song's lyrics convey a feeling of nostalgia in the singer-subject. The supposed interlocutor could probably be Bowie's half-brother Terry, as the following lyrics tend to indicate: "Watching all the world/and war torn/How I wonder where you are [...] you were fun, boy"; "Some of us will always stay behind/Down in space it's always 1982". The year 1982 may indeed refer to the last time David paid Terry a visit at Cane Hill before the latter committed suicide in 1985. Thus reverberating the continuous, yet complex, interpersonal relationship which existed between Bowie and his half-brother. Lullabies are also, as Lomax Hawes notes, "about separation and space and going far away"¹⁵³. The city nightscape is used here as an evocation of the days gone by, and the song recreates a warm atmosphere which enfolds the reader-listener as it projects him into the past. The Bowiean nocturnal cityscape, which may well stand as the deposit of Bowie's memory, appears to be a rather melancholic one. Yet, I believe the song also reverberates echoes of Lou Reed's "Coney Island Baby", which was described by Paul Nelson as "an anthem about [...] loss and the high price an outsider pays"¹⁵⁴, a meaning which had obviously not escaped Bowie. The references to American football ("to see the Yankees play") and Coney Island ("Sailing over/Coney Island") could therefore be read as echoes of one of Lou Reed's most emotionally compelling songs.

Conclusion

- 57 The aim of this paper has not been to stake out the entire territory of Bowie's works, and I tend to agree with Sean Cubitt when he contends that "[n]o straight textual analysis will capture that play which most attracts us to the popular song"¹⁵⁵. However, it appears relevant to pinpoint that the listening subject also constructs the song's meaning through what Lou Reed deftly termed the "naked" lyrics¹⁵⁶. The Bowiean text seems together a variety of formulaic fragments from both high and popular culture. In turn, these shards explode into fragments which open up the text, constantly reshaping it into a new pattern.
- 58 The urban landscapes and nightscapes in Bowie's songs reflect the artist's own mindscape, while the reverberation of the lyrics turns the reader-listener into a sort of voyeur. The cityscapes and nightscapes coalesce throughout the lyrics of his songs progressively transforming the city into a complex text. The "immense texturology [which] spreads out before one's eyes"¹⁵⁷ offers beneath its readable surface not only a mirror of Bowie's inner turmoil but also reveals his true fascination for the urban and nocturnal realms. Hence, if for the young suburban teenager David Jones the "metropolis represented an escape"¹⁵⁸ the cities, or what Oswald Spengler terms the "world-cities"¹⁵⁹, came to represent for the grown up artist a dark and claustrophobic space in which he staged his own mindscape. As for the portrayal of the urban landscapes, Bowie is—like the character of Christopher Isherwood in John Van Druten's play, *I Am A Camera* (1951)—"the one who sees it all. [who] do[esn't] take part. [...]. [who] just sort of photograph[s] it"¹⁶⁰. He provides the reader-listener with a chronicle of our postmodern cities as the Bowiean canon assembles a prosaically realistic and symbolically disturbing collage of the postmodern cityscape and nightscape. A world imbued with nostalgia and angst in which the reader-listener is left "walking the dead".

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NOTES

1. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, London: Virgin Books, 2005, p. 180.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
3. Giovanni Maciocco, "The City as an Intermediate World between Global and Local", in Giovanni Maciocco and Silvano Tagliamonte (eds), *People and Space. New Forms of Interaction in the City Project*, Alghero: Springer, 2011, p. 189-202, p. 198.
4. Richard Middleton, "Introduction", in Richard Middleton (ed.), *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 4.
5. David Bowie, "Thru' These Architects Eyes", *1.Outside* (1995), BMG BVCA-677, CD. A quick glance at the titles of Bowie songs clearly shows the importance of urban themes: "The London Boys", "London Bye Ta-Ta" (available on the bootleg album *Rare and Well Done*, Pirate Records, Japan, 1999), "Panic in Detroit", "Warszawa", "New York's In Love" and "I Have Not Been To Oxford Town", not to mention one of his favourite cover songs "The Port of Amsterdam". His lyrics are suffused with references to the cities of London, Paris, Kyoto, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Berlin and Mombassa.
6. Chris Welch, "Bowie and Bolan Get It On", *Melody Maker*, 17 September, 1977. All the newspaper and magazine articles cited in this paper can be found at www.bowiegoldenyears.com, accessed 31 July 2016.
7. Allan Jones, "Goodbye To Ziggy And All That", *Melody Maker*, 29 October 1977. Tobias Rther interestingly notes that Bowie "is in search of himself in the city. He sees himself in relation to it", Tobias Rther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, London: Reaktion Books, 2014, p. 98.
8. John Tobler, "12 Minutes with David Bowie", *Zigzag*, January 1978.
9. David Bowie, *Aladdin Sane* (1973), 30th Anniversary 2 CD Edition, EMI 7243 5830122, 2003.
10. Tobias Rther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
11. The bedroom is, as Hugo Wilcken argues, the place where one retreats to "shut the world out", Hugo Wilcken, *Low* (2005), London: Bloomsbury, 2016, p. 76.
12. *Cracked Actor*, Alan Yentob, BBC, 1975. The documentary is available on YouTube at the following address: <https://youtu.be/FsPVrsZcbZU>, accessed 7 September 2016.
13. Tobias Rther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, *op. cit.*, p. 91.
14. Peter Winkler, "Randy Newman's Americana", in Richard Middleton (ed.), *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 31-32.
15. Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, Alresford, Zero Books, 2015, p. 2.
16. The reference to Marks and Spencer's is heard on the version of "All The Young Dudes" recorded by Bowie on the bootleg album *David Bowie with Mott The Hoople, Lou Reed & The Spiders From Mars. The Legendary Lost Tapes*, Not On Label, Spain, 1998. It differs from the official version released on David Bowie, *Nothing Has Changed*, Parlophone, 825646205769, 2014.
17. B. Lee Cooper, *Popular Music Perspectives: Ideas, Themes, and Patterns in Contemporary Lyrics*, Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1991, p. 4.
18. Simon Frith, "Why do songs have words?", *The Sociological Review* 34.1_suppl. (1986), p. 77-106, p. 97.
19. *Ibid.*
20. Richard Middleton, "Introduction", in Richard Middleton (ed.), *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
21. *Ibid.*
22. *Ibid.*
23. David Bowie, *The Little Black Book*, San Luis Obispo: Red Pocket Book Publishing, 2016, \$ 73.
24. Cameron Crowe, "Candid Conversation: An Outrageous Conversation with actor, rock singer and sexual switch-hitter", *Playboy*, September 1976.

25. Philip Tagg, "Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method, and Practice", in Richard Middleton (ed.), *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Culture*, op. cit., p. 74.
26. Mick Brown, "David Bowie interview from 1996: 'I have done just about everything that it's possible to do'", *The Telegraph*, 10 January 2016.
27. David Bowie, *Full Interview* (1995), MTV News, available on YouTube, <https://youtu.be/zri74q3HDDY>, accessed, 16 June 2017.
28. John Tobler, "12 Minutes with David Bowie", op. cit. See also David Buckley, who quotes Bowie: "I wanted to do something that looked a little like a painting", in David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 163.
29. Jonathan Mantle, "David Bowie", *Vogue*, September 1 1978.
30. The programme has been described by David Buckley as "a masterpiece and landmark piece of television journalism", David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 205.
31. "Black Tie White Noise", David Bowie, *Black Tie White Noise*, BMG BVCA-612, CD, 1993.
32. Herta Wescher, *Collage* (1968), Translated by Robert E. Wolf, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1971, p. 21.
33. Michael Watts, "Confessions of an Elitist. For what is a man like David Bowie profited, if he shall sell the whole world and lose his own mind?", *Melody Maker*, February 1978.
34. Ben Edwards, "Bowie Meets the Press: Plastic Man or Godhead of the Seventies?", *Circus*, 27 April 1976.
35. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 115.
36. *The Buddha of Suburbia*, op. cit., track 6.
37. *Lodger* (1979), EMI 7243 5219090, 1999.
38. "No Control", *1.Outside*, op. cit.
39. Paul Trynka, *Starman: David Bowie*, London: Sphere, 2011, p. 13.
40. David Bowie, *David Bowie* (1967), CD, Deram 532 908-6, 2010.
41. Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, op. cit., 2015, p. 65.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
44. David Bowie, *David Bowie*, op. cit., track 6.
45. Chris O'Leary mentions John Christopher's novel *The Death of Grass* and John Wyndham's *Day of the Triffids*, Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, op. cit., p. 55.
46. David Bowie, *Aladdin Sane* (1973), track 1.
47. David Bowie, *Hunky Dory* (1971), CD, Parlophone 724 3 521899 0 8, 1999.
48. Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, op. cit., p. 201.
49. David Bowie, *Black Tie White Noise* (1993), op. cit., track 3.
50. "Ramona A. Stone/I Am With a Name", *1. Outside*, op. cit., track 12, 1995.
51. David Bowie, *The Man Who Sold the World* (1970), CD, Virgin 7243 521901 0 2, 1999.
52. Paul Trynka, *Starman: David Bowie*, op. cit., p. 110.
53. Stephen Fried, "What David Bowie Meant to Philly—and What Philly meant to David Bowie", *Philadelphia*, January 12 2016, accessed 19 November 2016 at www.phillymag.com/news/2016/01/12/david-bowie-philadelphia-gia/.
54. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 157.
55. A parallel may be drawn here with Burroughs' Leopard Men who "tear people to pieces with their iron claws", William Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch*, Paris: Olympia Press, 1959, p. 42.
56. "Diamond David", *Rock*, June 1974.
57. Bowie's sketch clearly mirrors the sense of emptiness which pervades Hunger City.
58. Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, op. cit., p. 343.
59. Mike McGrath, "Bowie Meets Springsteen", *The Drummer*, 26 November 1974.
60. See also "Red Sails": "graffiti on the wall", *Lodger* (1979), CD, Parlophone, 1999.

61. The reader will have probably noticed here the reference to the Beatles's 1965 hit song "Ticket to Ride", illustrating once more Bowie's use of collage.
62. Lou Reed interviewed in 1986 in the documentary entitled *The Sacred Triangle-Bowie, Iggy & Lou 1971-1973*, Sexy Intellectual, DVD, 2010. This confirms what Mick Rock said of himself, Bowie and Reed: "We're city people" in David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 511.
63. David Bowie, *The Little Black Book*, op. cit., § 58.
64. Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, op. cit., p. 336.
65. *Ibid.*, p. 337.
66. A scene reminiscent of the one depicted by Burroughs in *The Naked Lunch*: "Rock and Roll adolescent hoodlums storm the streets of all nations. They rush into the Louvre and throw acid in the Mona Lisa's face", William Burroughs, *The Naked Lunch*, op. cit., p. 46.
67. Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, op. cit., p. 337. The film industry also echoed this dystopian vision of societal collapse with films such as *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) or *Soylent Green* (1973).
68. "Achtung, achtung, these are your orders/Anyone found guilty of consuming more than their/allotted amount of air/Will be slaughtered and cremated", David Bowie, *David Bowie*, op. cit., track 6.
69. David Bowie, *Hunky Dory*, op. cit., track 2.
70. David Bowie, *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And The Spiders From Mars*, (1972), CD, EMI CDP 79 4400 2, 1990.
71. Timothy White, "Turn and Face the Strange", *Crawdaddy*, February 1978.
72. Tobias Rther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, op. cit., p. 25. Charles Shaar Murray, "Who Was That (Un)Masked Man?", *New Musical Express*, November 12, 1977. In an interview he had made a couple of years earlier, Bowie told the interviewers: "I'm enjoying it here", Steve Shroyer and John Lifflander, "Spaced Out in the Desert", *Creem*, December 1975.
73. Paul Trynka, *Starman: David Bowie*, op. cit., p. 234.
74. *Ibid.* A scene reminiscent of the one in "Lady Grinning Soul", in which the lady is pictured as she "drive[s] a beetle car", David Bowie, *Aladdin Sane* (1973), op. cit., track 10.
75. Cameron Crowe, "Ground Control to Davy Jones", *Rolling Stone*, 12 February 1976.
76. *Ibid.*
77. Jean Rook, "Bowie Reborn", *Daily Express*, February 14 1979.
78. Steve Stronger and John Lifflander, "Spaced Out in The Desert", *Creem*, December 1975.
79. Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, op. cit., p. 263. In his novel *City of Night*, John Rechy describes Hollywood Boulevard as "the heart of the heartless Hollywood legend", John Rechy, *City of Night* (1963), London: Souvenir Press, 2016, p. 165.
80. David Bowie, *The Little Black Book*, op. cit., § 58.
81. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 234.
82. *Cracked Actor*, Alan Yentob, op. cit.
83. A concern which carried religious overtones at times, as in "Word on a Wing": "[...] I'm trying hard to fit among your scheme of things", David Bowie, *Station to Station* (1976), CD, EMI 5099964758329, 2010.
84. Michael Watts, "Confessions of an Elitist. For what is a man like David Bowie profited, if he shall sell the whole world and lose his own mind?", op. cit. Bowie also inserted micro-narratives within the main narrative of his songs so as to flummox the reader-listener: "I would use straight forward narrative for maybe two lines then go back to disorientation", *ibid.*
85. See Paul Trynka, *Starman. David Bowie*, op. cit., chapters 14 and 15.
86. Hugo Wilcken describes it as "the cocaine album *par excellence*" because of its slow, hypnotic rhythms and its disturbing themes, Hugo Wilcken, *Low*, op. cit., p. 12.
87. Paul Trynka, *Starman: David Bowie*, op. cit., p. 242.

88. Heinz Rudolf Kunze, "David Bowie : Der Favorit oder : Die vielen Gesichter im leeren Spiegel", *Idole 8*, Ullstein, 1986, cited in Tobias Rüther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, op. cit., p. 24.
89. Cameron Crowe, "Candid Conversation: An Outrageous Conversation with actor, rock singer and sexual switch-hitter", op. cit.
90. Bowie declared that *Station to Station* was "like a plea to come back to Europe", Allan Jones, "Goodbye To Ziggy And All That", op. cit.
91. *Ibid.*
92. Tobias Rüther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, op. cit., p. 7.
93. John Rechy, *City of Night*, op. cit., p. 84.
94. Allan Jones, "Goodbye To Ziggy And All That", op. cit.
95. *Ibid.*
96. Tobias Rüther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, op. cit., p. 107.
97. In the short story entitled "International Zone", Burroughs describes the place as follows: "Tangier seems to exist on several dimensions. You are always finding streets, squares, parks you never saw before. Here fact merges into dream, and dreams erupt into the real world", William Burroughs, *Interzone*, ed. by James Grauerholz, London: Penguin Books, 1990, p. 47-59, p. 58.
98. Bowie noted at the time that Berlin was "such an ambiguous place it's hard to distinguish between the ghosts and the living", Jonathan Mantle, "David Bowie", *Vogue*, September 1 1978.
99. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 269.
100. Bowie insisted on how he tried to capture "the feeling of the city", Allan Jones, "Goodbye To Ziggy And All That", op. cit.
101. Charles Shaar Murray, "Who Was That (Un)Masked Man?", op. cit.
102. Timothy White, "Turn and Face the Strange", op. cit.
103. Angus MacKinnon, "The Future Isn't What It Used To Be: David Bowie Talks About Loneliness, Insecurity, and Myth, and The Dangers of Messing With Major Tom", *NME*, 13 September 1980.
104. Tobias Rüther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, op. cit., p. 28. Examples of these monotonous rhythms and endless repetition can be found on Kraftwerk's fourth album entitled *Autobahn* (1974) and on NEU's third album, '75 (1975), especially track 5 entitled "E-Musik".
105. *Ibid.*, p. 50.
106. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 257. Thibault, who co-produced *Low* with Tony Visconti, was former bassist with the French prog rock group Magma.
107. Andrew Belew recalls that "they would take my three guitar tracks and do something called compositing. That's when you take the best bits of each guitar track and edit them together, to make the guitar track", David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 299.
108. Carlos Alomar, "He Was So Damn Curious", *Rolling Stone*, 11 January 2016, accessed 14 November 2016 at <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/david-bowie-guitarist-carlos-alomar-he-was-so-damn-curious-20160111>.
109. *Ibid.*
110. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
111. A possible influence from the French prog rock group Magma who sung in an imaginary tongue (kobaïan) invented by the band's founder and drummer Christian Vander. I refer the reader to the group's first album *Magma* recorded in 1970.
112. Paul Trynka, *Starman: David Bowie*, op. cit., p. 251.
113. Hugo Wilcken, *Low*, op. cit., p. 17.
114. *Ibid.*, p. 44.
115. Cynthia Rose, "Oblique Strategies", *Harpers & Queen*, 1979.
116. Charles Shaar Murray, "Who Was That (Un)Masked Man?", op. cit.
117. Michael Watts, "Confessions of an Elitist. For what is a man like David Bowie profited, if he shall sell the whole world and lose his own mind?", op. cit.

118. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 272.
119. Tobias Rther, *Heroes: David Bowie and Berlin*, op. cit., p. 50-51.
120. Hugo Wilcken, *Low*, op. cit., p. 108.
121. Sherwin Simmons, "Ernst Kirchner's Streetwalkers: Art, Luxury, and Immortality in Berlin, 1913-16", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 1 (March, 2000), p. 123.
122. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, op. cit., p. 269.
123. *Ibid.*, p. 162.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 165.
125. Paul Trynka, *Starman: David Bowie*, op. cit., p. 303.
126. David Bowie, *Pin Ups* (1973), CD, Parlophone 0825646283385, 1999.
127. "Can you hear me", *Young Americans* (1975), CD, Parlophone, 1999. The recent box set *David Bowie - Who Can I Be Now? (1974-1976)* features the previously unreleased album *The Gouster* recorded in 1974, which is an early draft of *Young Americans*. David Bowie, *David Bowie - Who Can I Be Now? (1974-1976)*, CD 9, Parlophone 556 299, 2016.
128. Angus MacKinnon, "The Future Isn't What It Used To Be", *NME*, 13 September 1980.
129. I am of course thinking of Japan, which is one of the major influences in *Scary Monsters and Super Creeps* (1980) which was produced at the dawn of the new decade.
130. The song was the first single from Bowie's twenty-fourth album after a decade of silence, and was released on his birthday, 8 January 2013. For a detailed analysis of the song see Nicholas Pegg, *The Complete David Bowie*, London: Titan Books, 2016, p. 308-311.
131. I should like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my friend Marc Bonini for his help and for his explanations on the musical subtleties of this song.
132. Nicholas Pegg, *The Complete David Bowie*, op. cit., p. 309.
133. Charles Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris. Petits pomes en prose*, Robert Kopp (ed.), with an introduction by Georges Blin, Paris: Gallimard, 2006. See " une heure du matin" and "Le Crpuscule du soir", p. 122-123 and p. 155-157.
134. Pierre Sansot notes in his study on the cityscape that urban nightscape is a relatively new concept: "La nuit des villes, est, en fin de compte, une « invention » rcente", *Potique de la ville* (1996), Paris: ditions Payot & Rivages, 2007, p. 234.
135. William Chapman Sharpe, *New York Nocturne: The City After Dark In Literature, painting, and photography, 1850-1950*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 32.
136. "Quicksand", *Hunky Dory* (1971), op. cit.
137. Tim Edensor, "The gloomy city: Rethinking the relationship between light and dark", *Urban Studies*, 52 (3) February 2015, p. 422-438, p. 430.
138. *Aladdin Sane* (1973), op. cit., track 8.
139. In the opening lines of his novel, John Rechy notes: "Later I would think of America as one vast City of Night stretching gaudily from Times Square to Hollywood Boulevard—jukebox-winking, rock-n-roll-moaning: America at night fusing its dark cities into the unmistakable shape of loneliness", *City of Night*, op. cit., p. 3.
140. *Never Let Me Down* (1987), CD, Parlophone 7243 521894 0 3, 1999, track 8.
141. *Ibid.*, track 10.
142. "Rock'n'Roll Suicide", *The Rise And Fall Of Ziggy Stardust And the Spiders From Mars* (1972), op. cit., track 11. The song is, as Chris O'Leary notes, a subtle collage of Jacques Brel's "Jef" ("oh no, love! You're not alone"/"Non, Jef, t'es pas tout seul") and "Les Vieux" with the clock "waiting so patiently when you've lived too long". Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, op. cit., p. 231-232.
143. *Ibid.*, p. 232.
144. "Beat of Your Drum", *Never Let Me Down*, op. cit., track 3.
145. The song "Shadow Man" is available on the bootleg record *The Shadow Man. 1971 Studio Outtakes*, Past Master On Gold Disc, PM 8901, 1989. The song was recorded on 15 November 1971 during the *Ziggy Stardust* sessions. In 1989 Bowie noted: "it's a reference to one's own shadow

self", Chris O'Leary, *Rebel Rebel*, *op. cit.*, p. 210. There is also another recording of the song on the aborted *Toy* (2000) album. One of the most interesting references to Bowie's fascination for split personalities can be found in "Width of a Circle" (*The Man Who Sold The World*) in which the reader-listener witnesses the actual splitting process. The sentence's structure works as an equation adding up two personalities ("I said hello and I said hello") moving into a segment in which the two subjects mirror one another ("I asked "Why not?" and I replied "I don't know") before being finally reunited in a plural subject ("So we asked a simple black bird [...]").

146. "Law (Earthling On Fire)", *Earthling* (1997), CD, Parlophone 0825646507535, 2016.

147. Paul Trynka refers to "David's nocturnal song writing activities", in Paul Trynka, *Starman: David Bowie*, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

148. Hugo Wilcken, *Low*, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

149. Carlos Alomar, "He Was So Damn Curious", *op. cit.* This confirms also what Tony Newman noted about the recording sessions of *Diamond Dogs*: "the studio was very dark", in David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, *op. cit.*, p. 185.

150. Nicholas Pegg offers another interpretation of the song's lyrics. Nicholas Pegg, *The Complete David Bowie*, *op. cit.*, p. 246-247. Before performing the song in Paris on 1 July 2002 at the Olympia, Bowie quipped: "This is a song for me who could slip away", David Bowie, *A L'Olympia*, Roach Records, CR 3651/66, track 5, CD 1. The following September he hinted at the childhood nostalgia expressed in the song ("Now, I'm a little white boy from London"), David Bowie, *Heroes Never Die*, Live concert recorded at Le Zenith Arena, Paris, France, September 25, 2002, Stardust Records, DBZENITH 20020925, 2002, track 11, CD 1.

151. Interestingly, while interviewed after Bowie's death on Steve Trevelise's radio show on *New Jersey 101.5*, Floyd recalled that Bowie had told him the show reminded him of the old school English musical comedians who played music, wore costumes and performed parodies. The first version of "Slip Away", which had originally been recorded in 2000 for the *Toy* album under the title "Uncle Floyd", offers a different introduction in which one can hear the voices of the characters of the *Uncle Floyd Show*, while the phrasing and arrangements differ from the version on *Heathen* (2002). The song is notable, as Pegg remarks, for "once again featuring the Stylophone, the electronic toy famously employed on 'Space Oddity'", Nicholas Pegg, *The Complete David Bowie*, *op. cit.*, p. 247.

152. *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes* (1951), edited by Iona and Peter Opie, Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1952, p. 397.

153. Bess Lomax Hawes, "Folksongs and Function: Some Thoughts on the American Lullaby", *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 87, No. 344 (Apr.-Jun., 1974), p. 148.

154. Paul Nelson, "Lou Reed's Forward Pass: It's How You Play the Game", *Rolling Stone*, March 25, 1976.

155. Sean Cubitt, "'Maybellene': Meaning and the Listening Subject" in Richard Middleton (ed.), *Reading Pop: Approaches to Textual Analysis in Popular Culture*, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

156. Lou Reed, *Between Thought and Expression. Selected Lyrics of Lou Reed*, New York: Hyperion, 1991, p. ix.

157. Michel de Certeau, "Walking in the City", in Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980), translated by Steven F. Rendall, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988, p. 92.

158. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: Bowie: The Definitive Story*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

159. Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West. Perspective of World-History*, Volume 2, authorized translation with notes by Charles Frances Atkinson, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1950, p. 99.

160. John Van Druten, *I Am A Camera* (1951), adapted from *The Berlin Stories* of Christopher Isherwood with a Preface by the Author, New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc., 1983, p. 24.

ABSTRACTS

David Bowie's songs are peppered with images of urban landscapes and nightscapes. When discussing *Aladdin Sane* (1973) in 1976, Bowie explained: "I want[ed] to write about the cities Ziggy [came] from"¹. Bowie's urban landscapes and nightscapes mirror a rather sombre vision of the world—notably through what David Buckley terms a "bleak soundscape"²—while giving the listener an insight into the artist's own inner turmoil, thus emphasising the self-reflective aspect of his music. The visual quality of Bowie's lyrics and music convey simultaneously a sense of the real and unreal, which clearly anchor the Bowiean cityscapes and nightscapes in the postmodern world.

The present paper will explore the way in which Bowie depicts our "contemporary post-cities"³, before trying to unveil the significance of the images and metaphors of the metropolis and its nocturnal shades in his songs. My study will consider Bowie's works from the late sixties (*David Bowie, Space Oddity*) through the seventies and the nineties (*Aladdin Sane, Diamond Dogs...*) to the early noughties (*Heathen*). My approach will assess what Richard Middleton terms the "textual moment"⁴ of the musician's cleverly crafted songs. My methodological approach, which rests on a textual analysis of Bowie's songs, will also consider the intratextual and intertextual features of his lyrical texts. The latter should help me shed light on his technique as collagist, while a series of close readings of his lyrics will provide me with a detailed insight into the subtle intricacy of his *œuvre*, helping me uncover the threads which are woven throughout the vast body of the Bowiean texts.

Les chansons de David Bowie sont ponctuées de références et d'images de paysages urbains à la fois diurnes et nocturnes. En 1976, alors qu'il discutait de l'album *Aladdin Sane* (1973), Bowie déclara : « je voulais écrire à propos des villes d'où venait Ziggy ». Les paysages urbains dépeints par Bowie reflètent une vision plutôt pessimiste du monde – à travers notamment ce que David Buckley appelle « un environnement sonore sombre » – tout en proposant à l'auditeur un aperçu des tourments intérieurs de l'artiste, soulignant ainsi le caractère intimiste de sa musique. Par ailleurs, paroles et musique transmettent chez Bowie une impression où réel et irréel se mêlent étroitement, inscrivant ainsi l'univers urbain de Bowie dans le monde postmoderne.

La présente étude se propose d'explorer tout d'abord la manière dont Bowie dépeint nos « villes post-urbaines » contemporaines, avant de déchiffrer dans les chansons de l'artiste les images et les métaphores de la métropole (post)moderne ainsi que les aspects nocturnes de cet espace urbain. Notre étude repose essentiellement sur les textes des chansons de Bowie, qui couvrent une période allant de la fin des années 1960 (*David Bowie, Space Oddity*) en passant par les années 1970 et 1990 (*Aladdin Sane, Diamond Dogs...*) jusqu'au début des années 2000. Notre travail vise à évaluer ces chansons sous l'angle de ce que Richard Middleton nomme « le moment textuel », le contexte dans lequel ces chansons ont vu le jour. Notre approche méthodologique, qui repose sur une analyse textuelle des chansons, mettra l'accent sur les dimensions inter- et intra-textuelles du corpus. Nous espérons ainsi pouvoir mettre en lumière le procédé de collage propre à l'écriture de David Bowie au travers d'une série de micro-lectures, qui doivent nous permettre de mettre au jour les principaux fils qui tissent le texte du corpus, afin de rendre compte de la subtilité et de la complexité de l'œuvre mais également d'examiner la signification de la thématique récurrente de la ville dans ses chansons.

INDEX

Keywords: collage, intertextuality, intratextuality, lyrics, postmodern, urban landscape, urban nightscape.

Mots-clés: collage, intertextualité, intra-textualité, paroles, paysage urbain, paysage urbain nocturne, postmoderne

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