Enchanting
David Bowie
Space/Time/Body/Memory

EDITED BY TOIJA CINQUE,
CHRISTOPHER MOORE AND
SEAN REDMOND
TC: She'll come, she'll go. She'll lay belief on you. I hope [he'll] live forever.

CM: You remind me of the Babe.

SR: I am only dancing. Give me more than one caress, satisfy this hunger. The cop knelt and kissed the feet of a priest. You, you will be Queen...
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Helene Marie Thian, a New Orleans native, graduated with distinction from the University of the Arts London/College of Fashion Postgraduate Programme, UK. She is a Passold Research Fund grant recipient. She spoke at London’s Costume Society on Bowie and Japanism and at the V&A Museum during the ‘David Bowie is’ exhibition, as mentioned in the acknowledgements of the eponymous book. Her work appears in Kyoto Costume Institute’s Dressstudy journal and in the book David Bowie: Critical Perspectives. She welcomes enquiries on collaborative projects at helene.thian@gmail.com.
David Bowie is one of the most influential artists of the last forty years and yet until recently has garnered minimal attention in terms of academic scholarship. This despite his incredibly dedicated fan base; mainstream and global success; major influence in numerous cultural and artistic affairs; and the fact that he straddles the avant-garde and commercial nexus. His cultural and artistic currency is presently at an all-time high with his first album in almost a decade, The Next Day (2013), reviewed as one of the greatest rock comebacks ever (Gill, 2013); the release of a series of portentous music videos that recall and reflect upon his artistic career; the record-breaking David Bowie Is exhibition tour; and the recently released ‘‘Does Your Full of Crime’’ from his compilation album spanning fifty years of recorded work on Nothing Has Changed (November, 2014).

Against this shimmering background, the editors of this volume regard this to be a perfect moment to consider and reflect upon the cultural and artistic significance of ‘David Bowie’. As such, this edited collection attempts to do justice to his considerable oeuvre, to fill that gap in scholarship on Bowie, at a time when he is again highly visible, releasing new music and continuing to raise complex and interesting questions about identity, stardom, nostalgia, and belonging.

The question that has led and organized this edited collection on David Bowie draws provocative attention to the way his career has been narrated by the constant transformation and recasting of his star image and performative self. By asking the question, who is he now? the edition recognizes that Bowie is a chameleon-like figure, one who reinvents himself in and across the media and art platforms in which he is found.

This process of renewal means that Bowie constantly ‘kills’ himself, an artistic suicide that allows for dramatic event moments to populate his music, and for a rebirth to emerge at the same time or shortly after he expires. Bowie has killed Major Tom, Zippy Stardust, Halloween Jack, Aladdin Sane, and Thin White Duke to name but a few of his alter-egos. In this environment of
death and resurrection, Bowie becomes a heightened, exaggerated enigma, a figure who seems to be artificial or constructed and yet whose work consistently asks us to look for his real self behind the mask and to ask the question: is this now the real Bowie that faces us? Of course, the answer is always 'no' because Bowie is a contradictory constellation of images, stories and sounds whose star image rests on remaining an enigma, and like all stars in our midst, exists as a representation. Nonetheless, with Bowie — with this hyper-egoistic, hyper-confessional artist — the fan desire to get to know him, to immerse oneself in his worlds, fantasies and projections — is particularly acute, observable and most assuredly real in the experiential sense.

With the unexpected release of *The Next Day* on 8 January 2013, the day of his sixty-sixth birthday, Bowie was resurrected again. The album and subsequent music videos drew explicitly on the question of who Bowie was and had been, creating a media frenzy around his past work, fan nostalgia for previous Bowie incarnations, and a pleasurable negotiation with his new output. In this edited collection we seek to find Bowie in the fragments and remains of what once was, and in the new enchantments of his latest work.

The collected essays herein are both inter- and cross-disciplinary in approach, exploring David Bowie through four interlinking themes: (1) how he creates and exists in certain types of spaces — urban, alien, tourist and inter-galactic; (2) how he subverts and renegotiates time and the temporal, through anti-linearity, resurrection motifs, nostalgia and longing; (3) how he embodies gender, race and sexuality, opening up liminal and transgressive capacities of identification, and, (4) how his work generates, reproduces and calls upon memory and memorializes through sound, vision, illusion, remembering and forgetting. The selected chapters consider all aspects of David Bowie's oeuvre, from film, television, music video to live performance, including his early foray in theatre, and music output, to discuss his meanings and registers through gender, race, sexuality, song lyrics, music composition, memory and nostalgia, performance, commodity relations and the media industries that help promote him.

The title of the collection, *Enchanting David Bowie*, is meant to play out the numerous ways his work draws upon enchantment, fantasy, alter-egos and intensified forms of alienation. The authors all suggest, in different and sometimes contradictory ways, that Bowie enchants contemporary social and cultural life.

It is undeniable that David Bowie has influenced many aspects of cultural and artistic life including fashion, music, hair, and the politics and poetics of sexuality. In his art, he has long demonstrated an avid curiosity for the enduring patterns of modern life and Bowie's opus reflects the elements of ideological narratives around sexual (mis)adventure, expressivity and resistance to...
might understand the world around us not simply through visual and sonic representations but also via the space in between. Space then comes to represent the means by which we might understand what we see and hear, sometimes by what we do not see. In this context, space becomes the place of tension and the collapse of meaning.

Section two, ‘Time’, takes not a realist’s view of temporality but considers its circularity wherein time folds back upon itself, allowing for the reinterpretation of memories, feelings and experiences, and all the intervals in between. Time is what we have, what we lose, a point we might look forward to or backward upon so the illusion is made that it is simultaneously all and nothing, neither an event nor a thing. Bowie will be explored then through time and the temporal, as an artist who is futuristic and nostalgic, who draws upon resurrection and memorial motifs, and who ‘bends’ time so that an anti-linearity emerges in and through his work.

In Section three, ‘Body’, we consider Bowie through the carnal cartography of star embodiment. Bowie’s charged and challenging body emerges in biography and autobiography; song lyrics and music videos; film, theatre and television roles; in publicity and promotions; and in and across the threads and knots of his chameleon-coloured star trajectory. Bowie’s body is its own meaty, sonic metronome; its movement and metric beat casting a glamorous shadow over much of the trends and fashions of contemporary rock and pop music. There are few others in the pantheon of higher-order iconicity that have done so much with their bodies to challenge the normative and bordered ways in which we are asked to survey and regulate ourselves.

In Section four, ‘Memory’, we explore the memorial as a bewitching site of remembering and forgetting, found in Bowie’s work and in our own responses to his art, entangled as they are in the ghostly plasma of the personal. The personal memories one might have of Bowie, whether they be from a special performance, a key record, a heightened conversation or a pilgrimage to one of Bowie’s sites of representation, are written into the shared and increasingly global histories of popular and subaltern cultures. Personal memories are very often collectivised and shared. Bowie becomes central to the way his fans story their lives: he is a metronome found in the beat of crisis, becoming, maturation, which are recalled in and through his lyrics, songs, performances and musings. These callings from the past are the sentient membranes that divide and memorialize both figuratively and literally; the specters of half truths and semi-fictional contributions of Bowie as the subject of the celebrity biopic; and the experience of Low (1977) and its haunted figures of composer, performer and listener. This section also considers new memories shared online as the music industry becomes increasingly oriented around iTunes downloads and YouTube views.

Summaries of each chapter in the collection can be found in the section Introductions. In preparing the manuscript, we also asked our contributors to reflect back upon their very thoughts and responses to our call for contributions, summarizing these for inclusion in the volume. We have included these personal accounts as part of the respective sections herein. This volume is a labour of love and our authors demonstrate this through the way they personally reflect upon the reasons they individually felt inspired to write about the enchantment of David Bowie.

References


"This scintillating collection considers David Bowie’s contemporaneity, showing how the star looks very different today—and how different Bowie is a hero, if just for one day. With each chapter like a crystal ball ricocheting around a multi-leveled labyrinth, Enchanting David Bowie is full of surprises and delights for the fan and scholar alike."

—CHRISTOPHER SCHABERG,
Associate Professor of English, Loyola University New Orleans, USA, and author of *The Visual Life of Airports* and *Deconstructing Brad Pitt*

"Consider for a moment, David Bowie’s extraordinary body of work, not just the music, but also his assimilation of different media practices: writing, painting, performance, film and video. This volume coheres around four thematic vectors—space, time, body and memory—to interrogate Bowie’s remarkable corpus of cultural production. In the process, *Enchanting David Bowie*—itself a standout work—not only illuminates but also constructs "Bowie" or versions of Bowie that are at once compelling and fascinating."

—CONSTANTINE VEREVIS,
Associate Professor of Film & Screen Studies, Monash University, Australia

"A comprehensive critical study of the enigma that is David Bowie has been a long time coming—and now it’s finally here! *Enchanting David Bowie: Space/Time/Body/Memory* offers a rich, thoughtful and intellectually challenging set of essays that paint a picture of the complex chameleon that is Bowie. The charismatic array of alter egos, the fascination with cosmic travel, the groundbreaking music that sang its way into the souls of many generations, the transformation of music performance into an art form, the transgressive play with gendered identity—this and so much more makes this collection a must have for anyone serious about Bowie, his identity, his music, and his iconic status, which continues to spellbind into the twenty-first century.

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