

# From George Orwell to David Bowie: Performing Dystopian Narratives in the *Diamond Dogs* Album and Show

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## *Abstract*

This paper discusses David Bowie's album *Diamond Dogs* (1974) in terms of a multimodal performance involving different artistic performances, in which music interrogates other media and where images, sounds and words (Barthes 1977) constantly redefine themselves. With *Diamond Dogs* Bowie gave body to a dystopian work (Critchley 2016) deeply influenced by Orwell's iconic novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. If the album stands as a fascinating and dissonant aural performance in which Orwell's vision and words powerfully emerge in tracks such as *We are the dead, 1984* and *Big Brother*, the live show (with which Bowie tours the United States in the spring and summer of that year) could be regarded as approximating and exceeding theatre, through Bowie's futuristic intuitions, in which the artist creates a complex narrative where avant-garde and directness combine in a glamorous mix. What seems particularly relevant about the *Diamond Dogs* album and show is Bowie's ability to create an art experience which expands the literary in performative terms into a multidimensional narrative in which the very idea of dystopia (Gottlieb 2001) is both performed and deconstructed.

*Key-words:* Bowie, Orwell, dystopia.

## **1. Introduction**

Approaching David Bowie's *oeuvre* in narrative terms means translating his work into a sort of dialogue between dialogues<sup>1</sup> and into a performance involving different performances, in which

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<sup>1</sup> We refer here to Bakhtin ([1975] 1981), in particular to his idea that each subject, or text involved in a dialogic process is in itself a space in which different voices resound. Our approach to multimodality is nourished instead by Barthes's *discursive* approach to image, music and text (1977) and by research on multimodal performance by Sindoni, Wildfeuer, O' Halloran (2017).

music interrogates other media and where images, sounds and words constantly redefine themselves. Bowie's songs are themselves powerful performances, their very lyrics are characterised by a fascinating theatrical dimension (Critchley 2016), inhabited, as they are, by many different masks – *constructed* by the author during his career to problematise the notion of a natural, stable and *authentic* identity which was dominant in 1960s popular music – but also by different voices resonating in the author's words<sup>2</sup>. Bowie's work is indeed nourished by a profound dialogical relationship with writers such as Shakespeare, Wilde, Orwell, MacInnes, Burroughs and Kureishi (just to name a few)<sup>3</sup>.

A key concept in approaching Bowie in performative terms is that of "persona" which connects with literature and the very idea of identity as a theatrical space. Auslander (2006: 4) sees "the performer in popular music as defined by three layers: the real persona (the performer as human being), the performance persona (the performer's self-presentation) and the character (a figure portrayed in a song text)". In a more recent study, Moore (2012) conflates the first two of these, while further subdividing the third introducing his own categories, that is performer, persona

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<sup>2</sup> According to novelist Jake Arnott (2016): "Bowie was a furious reader", so much that in 2013 he issued on his website a "wonderfully eclectic" reading list, embracing everything from *The Beano* to *Transcendental Magic* by Lévi. Orwell is of course included, as are Burgess, Braine, Waterhouse and Spark. His own contemporaries are well represented: Ackroyd, Amis, Chatwin, McEwan, Carter. Of Arnott's generation there are Waters and Rupert Thompson, "something of a Thin White Duke of British fiction, sustaining a long career by constantly changing the way he writes".

<sup>3</sup> Shakespeare seems particularly relevant in order to investigate the many complexities of a singer who thought of himself *as* theatre; Bowie's 1975 persona The Thin White Duke interestingly relates to Shakespeare's Prospero. At a different level, in his practice of identity in terms of performance, Bowie became a sort of postmodern Oscar Wilde, who acknowledged the 'truth of masks' not only in art but also in everyday life. Bowie paid a direct tribute to Wilde with the *Dorian Gray*-inspired video for his song *Look Back in Anger*. The two writers who nevertheless seem to be more strictly connected with Bowie are Colin MacInnes and Hanif Kureishi who interestingly were able, respectively in the 1950s and in the 1980s, to investigate the complex dialogism which connects music, youth culture and multiculturalism. Bowie wrote his song *Absolute Beginners* as a tribute to MacInnes' cult novel of the same title (1959) while the album *The Buddha of Suburbia* was written for the BBC adaptation of Kureishi's 1990 cult novel.

and protagonist; in short, for Moore in a song we're faced with a complex dialogism involving persona and protagonist, the last one being very often quite different from both persona and performer<sup>4</sup>.

For Bowie literature was not only a source of leisure and pleasure, or a resource nourishing his performance strategies, but also and most importantly a lens through which to read and respond to his own time; in this sense – after giving body to his science-fiction inspired *personae* Major Tom (the protagonist of his 1969 single *Space Oddity*) and Ziggy Stardust – in 1974 he gave body to a dystopian work (Critchley 2016: 69), his album *Diamond Dogs*, informed by the disturbing vision developed by Orwell in his iconic novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).

First of all, it is worth noting how Orwell's novel has had a very strong impact on contemporary popular culture and in particular, as we will see, on popular music. This is particularly interesting if we consider that much criticism on *Nineteen Eighty-Four* insists on the importance of considering the novel in its own context and not as a kind of prophecy. In a chapter of the 1984 edition of his monograph on Orwell – also published in *Marxism Today* that same year – Raymond Williams himself affirms: "It was never at all likely that any actual society, in 1984, would much resemble the hellhole of Orwell's novel. He was in any case not making that kind of prediction" (Williams 1984: 12); and yet then he quotes Orwell who had written: "I do not believe that the kind of society I describe necessarily *will* arrive, but I believe (allowing of course for the fact that the book is a satire) that something resembling it *could* arrive" (p.12). Besides Orwell affirmed: "This is a novel about the future – that is, it is in a sense a fantasy, but in the form of a naturalistic novel" (p. 12).

As is known, the novel investigates the limitations imposed on human freedom by a totalitarian regime. The author illustrated how such a regime can impose its will on its people by a sophisticated system of supervision and terror, involving the secret police, planted microphones, and telescreens in public places and private homes;

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<sup>4</sup> To provide an example of his theory Moore makes reference to Bowie's song *Five Years*, whose protagonist cannot be identified with Bowie or the Ziggy persona (the rock 'n' roll Messiah coming from Mars, protagonist of the 1972 album *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*).

but the novel also shows how the state has an even greater potential for imposing its authority by means of control of the media and manipulation of language: the past is rewritten by the efforts of the workers of the Ministry of Truth and Newspeak is designed as a means to limit the possibilities of revolt against accepted ideas. In truth, “what is being described is not only a universal danger but a universal process. That is the true source of Orwell’s horror” (Williams 1984: 12). The author’s enemy was not a particular ideology but a “prevailing cast of mind. The mind as it functions on the basis of conformity and habit” (Cain 2007: 83).

In our time, nevertheless, Orwell’s issues of media control and language manipulation (Hitchens 2002) have become central especially in order *to read* some of the strategies at the core of Trump’s politics<sup>5</sup>; it makes sense that today readers would heed the novel’s forecast as is witnessed by a spike in sales in 2017. But before Orwell’s dark vision was emblazoned across social media, the book’s themes became central in rock ’n’ roll throughout the last decades from punk-rock to rap, from indie to jazz. This is particularly relevant if we consider that music is a space of resistance to communication control and of subversion of the order of discourse (During 2005). In this sense in 1973 Stevie Wonder published a song entitled *Big Brother* while Eurhythmics composed and performed in 1984 the soundtrack album for Redford’s film *Orwell 1984*. In the context of the avant-garde it is worth mentioning jazz bassist Hugh Hopper’s *1984* (1973), Zappa’s *Joe’s Garage* (1979) and Radiohead’s 2003 album *Hail to the Thief* (the thief being G.W. Bush who notoriously stole votes during the Presidential campaign) whose opening track is entitled, after Orwell’s famous equation,  $2+2=5$ .

Orwell’s cult novel holds a very specific space and meaning in Bowie’s work and biography. Doggett (2012: 196) reports how, deeply impressed by a train journey across the Russian Continent in 1973 – in which “the grim bureaucracy and acute poverty of the fabled Communist paradise stoked his prevailing sense of

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<sup>5</sup> In January 2017, Trump’s counsellor Kellyanne Conway made an embarrassing remark about Sean Spicer giving “alternative facts” in relation to the number of people who attended Trump’s inauguration day. Social media likened Conway’s distortion of language to expressions from *Nineteen Eighty-Four* such as “doublethink” and “newspeak”.

panic and claustrophobia in the run-up of his final tour as Ziggy Stardust” – Bowie chose to design a rock musical around Orwell’s fictional recreation of a Stalinesque society in his novel. Orwell’s widow, however, refused to let Bowie have the rights, hence the artist was left to mould his Orwell-inspired rock show in a work equally apocalyptic which in the end escaped the conventional physiognomy of the musical to turn into the complex hyper-textual space composed by both the album *Diamond Dogs* and the show aimed at promoting the album.

## 2. *Diamond Dogs*

Published in May 1974 the *Diamond Dogs* album was “Bowie’s attempt to stick to the pop-rock songbook while emphasizing its literary credentials” (Sandford 1996: 124). Indeed, the work which was finally published had moved beyond the margins of Orwell’s novel. With its echoes of Burgess’ *A Clockwork Orange* (1962) and Burroughs’ *The Wild Boys* (1971) Bowie called the songs on the album part of a “glitter apocalypse” and described its conceptual scenario as “the breakdown of a city, featuring a disaffected youth that no longer had home-unit situations, but lived as gangs on roofs and really had the city to themselves” (Pegg 2011: 331).

It is worth here making reference to Bowie’s *political* position and to his complex way of addressing the discontent and the sense of alienation of British youth in the mid 1970s. According to Hebdige:

Bowie’s meta-message was escape – from class, from sex, from personality, from obvious commitment – into a fantasy past [...] or a science-fiction future. When the contemporary ‘crisis’ was addressed, it was done so obliquely, represented in transmogrified form as a dead world of humanoids, ambiguously relished and reviled. [...] and yet Bowie was responsible for opening up questions of sexual identity which had previously been repressed, ignored or merely hinted at in rock and youth culture. (Hebdige 1979: 61)

In other words, Bowie’s commitment was in showing young people *creative* ways of reacting to the dystopic, “rigorous climate of the Heath administration (1970-74) and [its] tightening of moral belts” (Chambers 1985: 134). Bowie and the glam subculture offered young people the possibility to write and *perform* their own identity

through gender bending, irony and a theatrical approach to life, which questioned, at different levels, an *order of discourse* based on the idea of a stable, authentic social self. It is interesting to note how glam's "primary audience was made up of white, working-class teenagers" (p. 135), who found in glam, as a commodity and a fascinating commercial sound, expressive and imaginative potentials exceeding the boundaries of their own class culture.

"The cold dramaticity of a dehumanised future" (p. 131) which characterised a very influential trait of Bowie, not only for British but also for American artists and audiences, found in *Diamond Dogs* the shape and meaning of an artistic creation, which stood as a warning for young people in relation to the very possibility of emergence of such a desolating social scenario.

In the album context Bowie replaced "Orwell's Oceania with his own future urban nightmare environment, Hunger City, a sort of post-nuclear, technologically primitive hell" (Buckley 2005: 183). The album's fragmented lyrics and the portrait of urban America's sordid meltdown "were clearly indebted to Burroughs" (Pegg 2011: 331), and indeed much of the album's literary inventions were the outcome of Bowie's recourse to Burroughs' cut-up techniques<sup>6</sup>. In a sense, if the overall subject of the album was inspired by Orwell, Bowie tried to translate the novel's sense of alienation and fragmentation, into verbal narratives capable of exceeding Orwell's "naturalistic" style to embrace Burroughs' experimentalism.

Interestingly, Burroughs interviewed Bowie for *Rolling Stone* magazine in 1974. Discussing the parallels between Burroughs' novel *Nova Express* (1964) and his album *Ziggy Stardust* Bowie affirmed:

I must have the total image of a stage show. It has to be total with me. I'm just not content writing songs, I want to make it three-dimensional. Songwriting as an art is a bit archaic now. Just writing a song is not good enough. [...] A song has to take on character, shape, body and influence people to an extent that they use it for their own devices. It must affect them not just as a song, but as a lifestyle. The rock stars have assimilated all kinds of philosophies, styles, histories, writings, and they throw out what they have gleaned from that. (Burroughs 1974)

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<sup>6</sup> In this technique words and phrases are cut from newspapers and other written sources and the fragments re-arranged at random. An early example in Bowie's canon is provided by the song *Moonage Daydream* (1971).

During the interview Burroughs seems to share Bowie's view of music as a "whole performance", pointing to the idea that music is not "like somebody sitting down at the piano and just playing a piece" (Burroughs 1974). This of course shows the strong influence of Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total work of art; Bowie himself can be thought of as a composer and director of his own peculiar multimodal *oeuvres*.

The musical aspect of *Diamond Dogs* is in itself extremely rich and multifaceted; as Pegg puts it (2011: 331), the album's music is "a four-way tussle between the receding sounds of glam, the rising influence of black soul, the synthesised nightmares of *The Man Who Sold the World*, and the ubiquitous rock'n'roll swagger of Jagger". The *Diamond Dogs* album was, as Doggett (2012: 10) brilliantly summarises, "a dark study of cultural disintegration"; to recount and *perform* this very idea of fragmentation Bowie had to employ different discourse modes and rethink music into a multiplicity of *languages* speaking to each other.

It is possible, in this perspective, to consider the album cover itself in terms of a complex visual performance by Bowie himself. The cover art by Dutch surrealist Guy Pellaert, indeed, perfectly captures the album's focus on mutation, decadence and decay. As Chapman observes:

The cover of *Diamond Dogs* is a gatefold painting of Bowie lying propped up on his elbows on a wooden floor, a stage or boardwalk perhaps, partially concealing a billboard behind. Visible from the waist up, his head is positioned at centre-left, his face front-on and his eyes wide and staring straight at the viewer [...]. When the cover is opened to reveal his body in its entirety, it is clear that the lower part of his body is that of a dog, complete with canine paws. A gold bangle adorns the wrist of his left arm, while a large round gold earring hangs from his left earlobe and long red hair hangs over his shoulders. His face is heavily made-up, with dark eye-shadow, bright red lipstick and rouge on his cheeks. Although his pose is relaxed, the expression is alert [...] giving the impression that he might yet spring into action. Behind Bowie, the billboard features two highly anthropomorphic female cartoon figures with paws instead of hands, flaming red hair, silver/grey flesh and red lipstick upon their smiling mouths. Behind them, at top left, lies the dark silhouette of a city skyline beneath a dark grey cloudy sky. The impression given is of a bleak, uninviting and abandoned urban landscape. (Chapman 2015: 207)

In this desolating landscape, the *real* Bowie is “completely absent, his identity masked emphatically. His name is again reduced to Bowie [...]. For the first time ‘David Bowie’ does not appear anywhere” (p. 208). In truth, it was not the first time and even in the future Bowie always appears as a multiplicity, as a space of contradictions questioning the very notion of a stable, reliable identity; as Critchley (2016: 69) observes with *Diamond Dogs* Bowie “finally rids himself of the ghost of Ziggy and begins the rich and speedy series of aesthetic transformations that will carry through until *Scary Monsters* in 1980”.

If we shift our attention from the cover image to the fascinating soundscape inhabiting the vinyl itself we are immediately attracted by the theatrical quality of the first sounds we hear. The opening track *Future Legend* is a surreal collage of altered and distorted sounds that make up a rich intertextual web, where the melody of a famous jazz standard *Bewitched, Bothered and Bewildered* (‘performed’ by Bowie on guitar) is rearranged for a dystopic context. The dark tones of the album’s narrative are also set through the voice-over by Bowie announcing the arrival of the “year of the Diamond Dogs” specifying that “this ain’t Rock ’n ’Roll this is Genocide”. Interestingly, these are the only lyrics we find in the inner sleeve, and they seem to suggest that the apocalypse is on the verge of happening.

Side A of the album includes three key tracks: the title track, the suite *Sweet Thing/Candidate/Sweet Thing* and the single *Rebel Rebel*. *Diamond Dogs* is a powerful song nourished by a glam sound aesthetic which introduces the Burroughs-inspired characters, the half-dogs, half-men mutants Diamond Dogs and Halloween Jack “a real cool cat” who lives “on top of Manhattan Chase”, another mask (Buckley 2005: 199) Bowie would adopt during the tour after his performances as Ziggy and Aladdin Sane. The song’s light and grotesquely happy tone, introduced by audience applause, seems to suggest that for a real sense of civilisation collapsing, the music was a more reliable guide.

The suite *Sweet Thing/Candidate/Sweet Thing* is an exercise in romantic image-mongering characterised by beautiful melodies, moving crescendos and memorable piano figures. *Sweet Thing* introduces what Pegg (2011: 331) defines as the “sonorous basso profundo” voice of Bowie, something which translates the human voice into another theatrical aspect of Bowie’s pop aesthetics. The



album's most famous track is of course *Rebel, Rebel*, a Rolling Stones-inspired piece including lines such as "you've got your mother in a whirl / she's not sure if you're a boy or a girl" (Bowie 1974) which powerfully connect with Bowie's eulogy of gender ambiguity in the glam context. The very idea of rebellion can however indirectly be connected with Orwell and more specifically with Winston's failed attempt at being a rebel in the Big Brother-dominated society depicted in the novel.

Interestingly, the Orwell-related tracks are (unlike, as we will see, in the show) the last four of the album, almost as if to suggest the idea that Orwell's novel represents not only a source of inspiration but also a point of arrival, a fundamental narrative, requiring an intelligent and responsive listening. That is, we can start perceiving and, in a way, deconstructing our dystopian present only when we start approaching reality through sound and listening as well, embracing music's ambiguity and semantic complexity as a perspective from which to read and respond to what surrounds us.

*We Are the Dead* is the first of the Orwellian songs in the album. Introduced by a beautiful electric piano, the song takes its title directly from the novel. The lyrics eavesdrop on when lovers Winston and Julia repeat "we are the dead" (Orwell 1949: 176) to one another as the Thought Police approach to arrest Winston; interestingly Bowie's vocal performance here perfectly translates the dominant sense of loss and desolation.

The sound of *1984* anticipates Bowie's 1974 tribute to Philly soul. Its powerful 4/4 tempo conveys the idea of a machine-like society characterised by strict and predictable rhythms, in which however the social actors are capable of creative and unpredictable intonations and variations. The lyrics seem to refer to Winston's arrest and his interrogation by O'Brien and include such memorable lines as "They'll split your pretty cranium, and fill it full of air / And tell that you're eighty, but brother, you won't care / You'll be shooting up on anything, tomorrow's never there / Beware the savage jaw of 1984" (Bowie 1974).

The more serene and *choral* tone of *Big Brother* seems to convey the idea that after the brainwashing Winston has found someone to believe in. In truth, the song's theme is "the dangerous charisma of absolute power, and the facility with which societies succumb to totalitarianism's final solutions. Big Brother is 'someone to claim us,

someone to follow', but also 'someone to fool us, someone like you': the glamour of dictatorship is balanced with the banality, reminding us that anyone with a mind to it could be a Hitler" (Pegg 2011: 39-40).

*Chant of the Ever Circling Skeletal Family* is *Big Brother's* outro, closing as it does on the machine repetition of the word "bro". This repetition interrupts the order of discourse, something which through pure chance – it was intended as repetition of the unconstructed word "brother" – turns a machine into a creative force and a space of subversion of an ideology which is based on the ideal of a perfect, controllable automated society.

Bowie's vocal performance in *Diamond Dogs* turns singing into *acting*; through *Diamond Dogs* we are, in a sense, listening to (and watching) a *play within the play*. *Diamond Dogs* is a truly carnivalesque and polyphonic album, in which we have a multiple Bowie, singing in different voices, playing guitars, tenor and alto saxophones, moog and mellotron. This translates the very act of playing into a source of fun and joy, into a dissonant, elusive, almost amateurish performance, which connects with the idea of Bowie's music as an inclusive, open space, questioning the stereotype of the (professional) musical performance as an exercise in perfection and technical virtuosity.

### 3. The *Diamond Dogs* Show

If the 1974 album stands as a fascinating and dissonant aural performance in which Orwell's vision and words powerfully emerge, as we have seen, in the final tracks of Side B, the live show at the same time approximates and exceeds theatre, through Bowie's futuristic intuitions, in which the artist creates a multimodal narrative where avant-garde and directness combine in a glamorous mix.

The *Diamond Dogs* show was choreographed by Toni Basil (a cult choreographer who had worked for Lucas' *American Graffiti*) while the set, which was based on work by German artist George Grosz and on the expressionist designs of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, was conceived by Bowie and designed by Michael Bennett, John Dexter and light designer Jules Fisher. The stage set was built to resemble the album's Hunger City: four skyscrapers on stage, with bridges that went backwards and forwards and up and down.

The scenery weighed six tons and incorporated over 20,000 moving parts, including a variety of props, including streetlamps, chairs and catwalks. The cityscape, a powerful visual translation of the soundscapes *designed* by Bowie in his 1974 album, then became the stage for his extraordinary performance, in a show and tour which “in its daring and visual audacity has probably never been rivalled since” (Buckley 2005: 198).

Unveiling his Halloween Jack persona (something of a shock for an audience waiting to *meet* their hero Ziggy Stardust) Bowie kicked off the show performing *1984* to Broadway-like dance moves, with the two backing vocalists, Gui Andrisano and Geoffrey MacCormack, the show’s *dogs*, dancing with him. Choosing this track to open the show is significant in that, unlike on the album (where *1984* was one of the last tracks), it seems to convey a straightforward, *live* centrality to the Orwellian dimension of the *Diamond Dogs* narrative. The show had multiple set changes and dance routines. Bowie’s education in theatre and dance famously owes much to Lindsay Kemp (Martino 2016) and indeed during the performance of *Aladdin Sane* Bowie would do a Kabuki stick mask mime “showing the character’s trademark lightning-bolt, which also flashed from the skyscrapers above” (Pegg 2011: 506). Similarly, Bowie would sing *Cracked Actor* in sunglasses and Shakespearean doublet, holding and kissing a skull. Here, of course, the theatrical dimension of Bowie’s music comes to the fore; the very idea of a Bowian musical performance necessarily includes both sound and vision.

Pegg’s detailed account of the show in his 2011 monograph is a precious resource to investigate the sense and shape of a show of which we have very few (and fragmentary) visual records. Describing the central act of Bowie’s show, or better *play* he writes:

A hydraulic cherry-picker supported a chair set into an office window near the top of the stage-right sky scraper. Appearing in the chair, David sang “Space Oddity” into a mike disguised as a telephone, and as the song reached ‘lift-off’ the cherry-picker began to extend over the first six rows of the audience. (Pegg 2011: 506)

This very scene, besides introducing an unprecedented technical complexity for a rock show, suggests a fascinating convergence of

private and public dimensions, through the idea of a powerful rock enunciation which is also incredibly intimate and personal, conveyed by the use of a microphone *masked* as a telephone. Then the song, which recounts the story of Major Tom's alienation in space, is sung with or better *within* the audience's space, suggesting again an idea of a fascinating closeness and intimacy between singer and fans. Later in Pegg's report we learn how the following song,

"Diamond Dogs" began with Bowie up on the catwalk, holding two trailing leashes to restrain the Dogs, who prowled the stage as the bridge descended to floor level. By the end of the song the Dogs themselves had taken over and tied Bowie up with the ropes. Then it was straight into "Panic in Detroit" for which the ropes were unravelled to form a boxing ring in which David, now in red boxing gloves and fanned down by his bodyguard Stuey George, shadow boxed an imaginary opponent and lost. For "Big Brother" he sprawled atop a glittering ten-foot diamond while the dogs savaged and scrabbled at it from beneath. The diamond rolled downstage before opening up to consume him; the sides fell away revealing a giant jewelled hand, whose fingers unfurled to show David crouching in the palm from where he sang "Time" [...], during ["The Width of a Circle"] Bowie began to tear down the skyscrapers of Hunger City. [...] After "The Width of a Circle" Bowie was dragged to his feet by the Dogs for a wrestling bout and street fight to the strains of "The Jean Genie", before singing a final, defeated "Rock 'n 'Roll Suicide" alone on a chair. (pp. 506-507)

Different songs, different scenes, conveying the idea of Bowie's multiplicity: from Bowie the defiant loser, to a critical translation of the *Diamond Dogs*' imagery, in which the diamond becomes precious not in itself but for the voice it physically contains, a critique, we might argue, of American materialism, of a context dominated by the power of the capital and with which, nevertheless, Bowie, the inside-outsider, cleverly played. Then we have the very act of destruction of the dystopian space represented by *Hunger City* followed by the *constructive* performance of *Rock 'n 'roll Suicide*, whose key line "you're not alone" transfers Bowie to an inclusive space in which to think and share alternatives to the dystopian present evoked in the show.

As we have anticipated, there are very few videos or films of the tour, *Cracked Actor* (Yentob 1975) being the only exception and

yet album and tour seem, thanks to Pegg's, but also to Trynka and Buckley's accounts, to stand somehow together in today's perception and re-collection of 1974 Bowie. This can also be explained in terms of the possibility of accessing and juxtaposing different performances through the web and through events such as *David Bowie is...* – an exhibition on Bowie premiered at the V&A Museum in 2013 – in which the fan becomes the real *performer*, the one able to give a new life (especially after Bowie's death) to his multimodal texts in a space resembling a concert venue. The exhibition features photos, videos, recordings, but also dresses, instruments and props used by Bowie during his career and of course the *Diamond Dogs*-related materials (Johnson 2015: 13). It is interesting to note how in the many inflections of the concept "David Bowie is..." we also have, "David Bowie is watching you" (Hunt 2015: 175) printed in red on the back of the exhibition T-shirt; an indirect reference to Orwell's novel which ironically subverts Big Brother's power, pointing to Bowie's iconicity and saint-like status in contemporary popular culture, creating a *powerful* connection between star and fans (Stevenson 2006).

We might conclude the present analysis noting how what today seems particularly relevant about *Diamond Dogs* is Bowie's ability to create – through both his concept album and his multimodal show – an art-experience which not only seems to be nourished at different levels by literature, that is by *echoes* of Orwell, Burroughs and Burgess or even Shakespeare, but expands the literary in performative terms into a multimodal narrative in which the very idea of dystopia (Gottlieb 2001) is both performed and deconstructed. Bowie, in short, considered artistic creativity as the only resource we have to recover a sense of the human in a highly dehumanised and dystopian age.

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