

Review

Shelton Waldrep. 2016. *Future Nostalgia: Performing David Bowie*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Academic. ISBN 978-1-50132-522-9 (pbk). 219 pp.

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Scholarship exploring the work of David Bowie has intensified in recent years, and Waldrep's *Future Nostalgia: Performing David Bowie* is a welcome addition to the diverse terrain of 'Bowie Studies', which includes significant publications by Chapman (2015) and Cinque, Moore and Redmond's (2015) edited collection, to name just a couple. Waldrep's is now one of the major works in the field, acknowledging Bowie's significance not only as a music artist, but also a visual artist who embraced eclectic, interdisciplinary influences.

Future Nostalgia extends some of Waldrep's earlier discussion of Bowie, included in his own *The Aesthetics of Self-Invention: Oscar Wilde to David Bowie* (Waldrep 2004) and places it in dialogue with other work such as *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives* (Devereaux, Dillane and Power 2015), and in *Global Glam and Popular Music: Style and Spectacle from the 1970s to the 2000s* (Chapman and Johnson 2016). Theoretically comprehensive, Waldrep's book encompasses subcultural studies, theories of gender and sexuality, the study of sound, postcolonial theory, and performance studies. Through these perspectives, Waldrep considers Bowie's performances as not only musical, but aesthetic performances inspired by an array of cultural and media influences. Although it is no surprise that this is so, a key strength of Waldrep's analysis is that he meticulously explores a select number of these influences, unpacking their intricacies and seeking to understand Bowie in light of them. In doing so, the discussion ventures into uncharted and genuinely fascinating realms. Bowie's 1980s period, for example, has always been ripe for scholarly interpretation—and Edward Said's theory of Orientalism is an appropriate and valuable approach to take here. It is exciting to see such attention paid to Bowie's often-maligned 1980s output (for what use is it to ignore a decade's worth of music and videos except to exercise a sort of 'selective memory?'). While Bowie may have been less avant-garde and less cool in the 1980s, it becomes evident that the period is, nonetheless, open for re-evaluation.

Waldrep considers various facets of Bowie's performances, beginning with an exploration of the performance of the self, and the shift in art towards the merging of art and life. Aspects of Bowie's performance personae have previously been examined by Auslander (2006), and Waldrep profitably continues the discussion. One of the most striking elements of the book is the incisive way that Bowie is placed within the gender and sexual politics of the time, and most usefully, that in this regard, 'Bowie becomes a rhizome, a line linking different versions of gender and sexuality together to form one complex, ever-changing matrix' (31). This Deleuzian reading is a productive one, as we further unpack Bowie's engagement with, and expression of, gender and sexuality beyond the binary and the linear. From here, Waldrep considers Bowie's link with the subcultural, particularly in relation to the dandy—deftly placing key Bowie performances in the context of historical dandyism. The analyses of selected television performances offer insight into the ways that Bowie tapped the visuality of this medium to communicate an alternative expression of the self.

Following this, Waldrep discusses the structure of Bowie's music, cultivating some worthy insights. After interrogating Adorno's theory of popular music and considering in which ways Adorno may or may not be useful for discussing Bowie, he places Bowie's music within its historical, musical and artistic context, and these detailed contextualizations open the way to a fuller understanding of how Bowie fits into a wider cultural milieu. Drawing upon Frith and Barthes in particular, Waldrep then moves on to consider Bowie's voice in relation to the notions of autobiography, the self-conscious and embodiment, and queerness and race—naturally, then, highlighting the many 'voices' heard across Bowie's work: 'Bowie writes with his voice, externalising the internal and creating no difference between the two, creating a magnification of the body in song' (108), and further to this, that '[he] is able to fully render himself as both self and other—familiar and alien, local and global—by defining music as both the estrangement and reconciliation of multiple identities' (109).

It is within this sphere of 'identities' that we find the most compelling dialogue on Bowie. As I mentioned previously, the chapter engaging with his 1980s work presents some of the most absorbing analysis, the discussion of the music video for 'China Girl' (Mallett, dir. 1983) in particular. When viewed together with the *Serious Moonlight* tour (1983) and the film *Merry Christmas, Mr. Lawrence* (Oshima, dir. 1983), Waldrep demonstrates that the videos for 'China Girl' and 'Let's Dance' (Mallett, dir. 1983) may be seen not as discrete 'events' but as parts of a whole that communicate Bowie's engagement with racial politics—that is, aiming for greater engagement with the politics of the Other than is acknowledged, yet unintentionally complicating the ways in which these videos would be received.

Extending this discussion of Bowie and the Other into the field of differently-abled identities, Waldrep then elucidates the links between Bowie, Burroughs and J.G. Ballard, particularly in relation to *Diamond Dogs* (1974), and to Bowie's engagement with the idea of 'brokenness' both physical and mental, as well as the murder-themed narrative of *Outside* (1995). Bodies here are not only non-normative, but disturbingly disassembled, in a way that recalls Ballard's *Crash* (1973). In much the same way as the previous chapters, Waldrep analyses not only Bowie, but also the texts that connect with and inform Bowie's own assemblage and interpretation of the body.

Given that *Future Nostalgia* was written prior to the release of *Blackstar* (2016) and Bowie's subsequent death, it now seems portentous that Waldrep notes that with the slowing or possible ending of Bowie's musical career, a need had arisen to examine previously neglected aspects of his catalogue and performances (that is, beyond the canon of the 1970s). Waldrep achieves this, as others have done since, and this is one of the book's major strengths, along with its detailed analysis drawing upon key theorists and significant cultural influences. In doing so, *Future Nostalgia* imparts numerous critically-informed insights that are an exciting and valuable addition to the field of Bowie Studies.

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