

**“Look Up Here, I’m in Heaven”:
How visual and performance artist David Jones called attention to his
physical death.**

Abstract: Death constitutes an end to consciousness for the departed, while for the living it represents an event out there in a world of objects. The memory of David Bowie as a celebrity was certain to live on via documented images, music and performances, irrespective of the cessation of the acting subject David Jones. When reviewing the single *Lazarus* upon its release, British journalist Kitty Empire (2016a) expressed an unwillingness to interpret it as Bowie’s swansong. Her rationale - “the starting point for analysis [of Bowie] has never been lived experience.” Yet, this paper considers how, had Bowie not served as an agent of his prospective memory (Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2011) and addressed his death directly in his final musical iteration, he may not have died at all in socially networked society flooded with boundless media content. This paper explores how the assured endurance of Bowie’s oeuvre and his standing as a revered cultural icon almost necessitated a reorientation of public engagement with his death in the modern age in order to acknowledge death as an end state that stands in contrast to ‘being.’

post-self, symbolic immortality, extended self, physical death

Introduction

It is apt how death constituted a definitive subject matter for a transmutative fantasist such as David Bowie (D'Adamo, 2015). Yet, the manner in which Bowie tackled the subject on his twenty-fifth and final album *Blackstar*, released two days before his death, had the effect of orchestrating a quite different public response to his passing compared with the shock associated with the passing of other celebrities such as Prince or Michael Jackson (Hollander, 2010; Courbet & Fourquet-Courbet, 2014). This paper argues that nostalgia and public fascination with symbolic embodiments of Bowie's celebrity in the wake of his death were partially re-directed by the artist himself with the release of *Blackstar*. It is argued that the album, and its preceding single (and accompanying video) *Lazarus*, served to draw attention to both what constitutes death in the modern age, but also what constitutes the end of a person's life. While Bowie represents an extraordinary individual, whose artistic accomplishments have transformed and shaped popular culture, his final artistic actions and contemplations confronted human finitude in the face of death. In doing so, Bowie's final work provided insights into a personal identity facing psychological discontinuity, an existential consideration and version of the artist that was very likely to be masked by his post self after death. The concept of post self, as it was introduced by Edwin Shneidman (1973), relates to "the concerns of living individuals with their own reputation, impact and influence after death – those personal aspects that still live when the person does not" (p. 45). A relevant consideration of the thesis presented in this paper, deals with the manner in which a post-self typically assumes an identity of its own. That is, despite individuals' actions, whilst alive, that might determine the manner of the continuity of their self-identity, it is never guaranteed. Bowie's final works appear to delight in this lack of certainty, with Bowie taking a final opportunity to append and disrupt his assured public standing, unsettling his celebrity reputation via his authentic existence.

David Joselit (2000) outlines the existence of two models of identity: "one in which subjectivity is immanent to the body, and one in which the architecture of selfhood is imposed from without" (p. 27). Such a distinction functions well to divorce individual desire for symbolic immortality from an externally executed post self, which still allows for both to be socially informed and constructed. With respect to symbolic immortality, Robert Jay Lifton (1979) examined the "place of death in the human imagination, and its bearing on our sense of endings, changes, and beginnings" (p. 7). He argued that individuals proceed through life exercising something akin to a 'middle knowledge' - a knowledge that sits between a tendency to repress the reality of death as individuals engage in the pursuit of living, alongside an understanding of the inevitability of death. The nature of this kind of knowledge manifests itself in a "fundamental and universal need to preserve and develop a personal sense of continuity and lastingness" (Drolet, 1990, p. 149). While we accept the eventual

inevitability of physical death, it is possible to suspend and alleviate this thought with the notion that our personal influence and contributions will live on. Lifton identifies several modes of symbolic immortality that constitute an adaptive 'anticipatory response' to the inevitability of death. One of these Lifton termed the 'creative mode' that permits individuals to foster a sense that their actions and influence are meaningful and will live on after they die.

Turning to the manner in which individuals strive to achieve symbolic immortality, symbolic interactionism has affirmed that life is lived in the symbolic domain, that is, culturally derived symbols provide the means by which reality is constructed. Likewise, multi-modality theory is dedicated to the notion that meaning arises in "social environments and social interaction" which makes social actions the "source, the origin and the generator of meaning" (Kress, 2010, p. 54). To this effect, symbolic interactionism serves to describe how attempts to extend the self beyond death are deeply social. Whether achieved via creative activity or time and care spent giving moral guidance to one's progeny, a post self emerges via the "manipulation of language, symbols and signs in communicative praxis with others" (Vigilant & Williamson, 2003, p. 178). A sense of symbolic immortality is therefore conditional on the function of what George Herbert Mead (1934) termed 'generalized others,' the social reference group whose existence reinforce and shape an individual's sense of self and therefore also a sense of the reputation they hold. The cultivation of a particular kind of remembrance therefore constitutes an investment in how others potentially see us. Indeed, William James (1890) notably posited that "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind" (p. 294). As an aside, but pertinent to a discussion of the concept of post-self, Mead's considerable scholarly influence in this area is attributable to the communication of his ideas in *Mind, Self, and Society*, a book that was published after his death and constitutes a compilation of student notes and selections from unpublished works.

While much of the conceptual work associated with the nomenclature of symbolic interactionism focuses on construction of personal knowledge, Schmitt and Leonard (1986) extend the thinking to consider the notion of an occupationally grounded post-self, which is evidenced by studies conducted on classical composers (Simonton, 1997) and performers (Holcman, 2000). While the individual is considered "agentic, autonomous, and integral" (Carter & Fuller, 2015, p. 1) in the creation of their social world, thus providing the substance of what can be recollected, after death control is very much yielded to the other. Indeed, Kamerman (2003) documents the example of how, upon the death of a conductor, "music reviewers in fact describe the conductor's last recording of a work as the way in which he or she wanted to be remembered" (p. 304). He then cites the example of Austrian conductor Herbert von Karajan, who, presumably with foresight of how his post-self might be determined, attempted to manage his posthumous reputation by re-recording some of his major works prior to

his death. Likewise, it is stated that Brahms destroyed as many works as he kept (Davis, 1983; Kamerman, 2003), as firstly, they did not match his exacting standards, but secondly, such actions have been interpreted as a desire to avoid (perceived) substandard work from being commemorated alongside other more significant works.

◆★▼▲◆ as a Shattered Star

The examples provided above lead to the proposition that Bowie's last release, *Blackstar*, may also have functioned to disrupt and alter the course and direction of his post-self, as the album brought public attention to one final adaptation of his public persona, to append other well-known and celebrated early-career Bowie alter egos and roles (such as Ziggy Stardust, the Thin White Duke, Aladdin Sane, Thomas Jerome Newton and the Goblin King). In Bowie's final musical iteration, his last "other I" constituted a more grounded version of the artist, in which he lowered the mask of protection and degree of separation that alter egos had previously offered the performance artist. The album artwork representing his final release constituted a bold yet impersonal symbol of a black star on a white background. D'Adamo (2015) has stated that Bowie's "lyrical, performative and contextual tactics all throw light on how performance can enchant or disenchant an audience in ways that form and shape social identity" (p. 120). In this instance, Bowie worked with collaborator and designer Jonathon Barnbrook (2013) to produce album artwork that conveyed finality, darkness, and simplicity. In this respect, the personae-driven Bowie finally disappeared from the cover of his albums, yet on the record contained within he becomes more visible than before. Indeed, Barnbrook confirmed that the artist "understood the value of the image on a record cover, when other people had forgotten about it" (Howarth, 2016). In order to understand how the cover art for *Blackstar* operated on its audience, it is possibly best understood as an advancement of the artwork of Bowie's 2013 unexpected hiatus-breaking album release *The Next Day*. On that album, the cover art began the process of fractionally obscuring Bowie's past, and his tendency for overt image manipulation, in order to distinguish a new chapter in his musical excursions.

The Next Day cover subverts and appropriates Bowie's album cover for his 1977 album *Heroes*. The original title is crossed out and a white box containing the words *The Next Day*, in a contemporary sans-serif typeface (Doctrine), is placed over the top of the image of the artist. The adaptation of *Heroes* functions as a form of partial detachment from the past, whilst not being able to completely conceal it or refute the longevity achieved by a particular set of, otherwise, disposable pop or rock songs. As a precursor to *Blackstar*, *The Next Day* album cover serves as an acknowledgment of how unfeasible it was for Bowie to repudiate or completely obliterate the past, whilst also being able to employ the image as an aide-mémoire, giving it a significant role in determining the meaning and intent of a new set of works.

On the one hand, the cover of *Heroes* possesses a certain fixity, associated with the now familiar multimodal textual couplings of Bowie rendered in stark black and

white, dressed in leather (a fabric culturally associated with durability, rebellion and unconventionality) whilst adopting a pose inspired by Erich Heckel's painting *Roquairol*. The rationale provided for the selection and utilisation of the *Heroes* cover on *The Next Day* cover by Barnbrook (2013) was its "youthful image of Bowie looking forward into the future." These conceptual time-space conjunctions serve to semiotically fix elements of a young Bowie's identity to particular spatio-temporal frames. Indeed, the album is firmly connected to Bowie's time in Berlin, an immensely productive period that resulted in three of the most creative and challenging albums of his career (*Low*, *Heroes*, and *Lodger*). On the other hand, fluidity is achieved from way *The Next Day* cover addresses *Heroes* in relation to Bowie in 2013. Insights from designer Barnbrook (2013) describes how the work explicitly sought to denote how the past "always looms large and people will judge you always in relation to your history, no matter how much you try to escape it. The obscuring of an image from the past is also about the wider human condition; we move on relentlessly in our lives to the next day, leaving the past because we have no choice but to." However, as Usher and Fremaux (2013) noted: "Even with the release of new material [*The Next Day*], *Q* [magazine] were clearly still more engaged by previous personae, releasing a 30-page special in April 2013 that covered each decade of Bowie's career." (p. 393). It is also worth noting that with the release of *The Next Day*, Bowie, "one of art's great communicators" (James, 2013, p. 387) remained silent. Furthermore, with *The Next Day*, the album cover was no longer routinely being employed as a visual gateway to one of Bowie's transformations, or David Bowie 'as performance' (James, 2013). Indeed, those who collaborated with Bowie on *The Next Day* describe it as having a deliberate autobiographic and nostalgic undertone. Indeed, multimedia and instillation artist Tony Oursler, who directed the "Where are We Now?" single (released on Bowie's 66th birthday in January 2013), likens the transparency associated with the projection of Bowie's face onto a cloth bag-head puppet, as plain signalling of the revelatory nature of the material (together with overt references to Berlin in the song's lyrics).

From obscuring his otherwise preserved image, to his eventual absence, the *Blackstar* album cover marked the first time in Bowie's career that his image did not feature in any way on an album cover. With this work Barnbrook stated that: "The idea of mortality is in there, and of course the idea of a black hole sucking in everything, the Big Bang, the start of the universe, if there is an end of the universe." In second single *Lazarus*, fans are certainly primed for both Bowie's death and his subsequent cultural rebirth in the form of an intensification of public attraction after death (Radford & Bloch, 2012). Will Brooker (2017) has already interpreted Bowie's second bandage wrapped appearance as "button head" in the *Lazarus* video (for he also appeared in lead single and video for the song "Blackstar"), as indicating preparation for a "new life in the next world" (p. 189). He recognizes how, in the video, Bowie occupies a space between life and death. Indeed, Bowie utters the now familiar line "Look up here, I'm in Heaven" whilst still alive on his (performance) deathbed. Yet, as a document watched/played back post-death we hear the line as if delivered from the

afterlife. Despite the germane nature of *Lazarus*' subject matter, it still remains an "allusive, restless piece of art" (Empire, 2016a) as it is an apposite contemplation of death that wrestles with the impossibility of capturing the experience of death.

Representing Modern Death

According to Walter (1994) the twentieth century has witnessed a shift in individual expectations surrounding death, with the ideal of an emotionally satisfying death replacing a 'spiritually efficacious' death. In response to the increasing control and power exerted by the medicalization of death and the ritualized and professionalized nature of mourning, death and dying has become increasingly individualised and personal for many. Through such processes the dying and grieving have been required to relinquish control, are provided with an identity and not encouraged to create their own. As Ariés (1981) has stated: "The death of a patient in the hospital, covered with tubes, is becoming a popular image, more terrifying than the skeleton of macabre rhetoric" (p. 618). While the music video for *Lazarus* does not place Bowie's 'button head' in a contemporary hospital bed on a modern hospital ward, the video is certainly set in a room that creates the impression of a care facility or institution. Bowie performs the song in a single occupancy room that is sanitised, functional, and de-personalised. The space is finished with white tiles, on both the floor and walls, possesses a single window and is furnished modestly with a metal-framed bed, wooden wardrobe and writing desk. The room together with the design-eras of its furnishings evoke either a hospital or psychiatric institution of the 1940's. Certainly the metal-framed bed, conforms to the heavy static 'places of rest' that preceeded the contemporary hospital beds popularised in the 1960's that became more adjustable and more mobile. Lying in the bed, Bowie exhibits a vulnerability and enacts child-like gestures (as he grips and pulls the bed blanket up to his face) that suggest he has something to fear. However, significantly in the context of this article Bowie makes public what is otherwise contained in everyday life, in which the dying have so often become treated like 'medical embarrassments' that need to be concealed and managed.

The themes of containment and freedom permeate both the song *Lazarus* and its video. The juxtaposition of those themes is evident in the video's use of a Narnia-esq wardrobe as a gateway to another world that comes to meet and beckon 'button head.' From it, another Bowie appears, a Bowie who can "still pose, pout, pick up a pen and create. Inspiration hits him and he scrawls at speed in a notebook, while the other [button head] Bowie continues to convulse" (Cooper, 2016). At the conclusion of the song the 'performing' Bowie retreats, stepping backwards into a wooden wardrobe shutting the door on this world. The wardrobe also functions as a "fitting kind of coffin for an icon of style and fashion" (ibid.) such as Bowie. In this video (like others from this period) Bowie does not glamorise his appearance nor mask his age, it is on display for all to witness. As a final visual appearance, *Lazarus* serves to address the 'reserve' associated with ageing and dying in a modern era. An issue which Elias (1985) has argued "is often beyond people at the current stage of civilisation" (p. 26).

Bowie's final projects exhibit an acute awareness of the 'death denying' culture affecting modern (Western) society (McManus, 2013). The video directly draws attention to the loneliness and isolation often associated with dying under the supervision of doctors. The power of Bowie's final visual (performative) appearance also comes from its finality, that is, it was not subsequently eclipsed by a public, lavish (tradition and ritual contravening) funeral. Instead, Bowie's cremation was immediate, private and completed away from the public gaze. Thus, with *Lazarus* Bowie transformed customary ways of dying into a performance, in doing so, turning what has become an impersonal private medical process into a profoundly public spectacle.

Continuity of Self

Whereas albums are traditionally followed by promotional appearances and tours by the artist, in the wake of Bowie's death *Blackstar* served as an enigma redolent with evocative symbolism and encoded with a multitude of meanings and ambiguities that kept fans (and 'death hags,' Sottile, 2015) engaged. While nine albums from Bowie's back catalogue re-entered or debuted on the U.S. Billboard 200 chart following his death, *Blackstar* gave Bowie the first number 1 album of his career, earning 181,000 equivalent album units in the U.S., during the week ending Jan. 14, 2016 (Nielsen Music). The speculative and investigative nature of fandom went into overdrive as the album's artwork and lyrics were both deconstructed, not necessarily to confirm Bowie's engagement with his mortality, but what that means. Berman (2016) reflects on "the terror it registers" listening to someone who is not ready to die. Indeed, she states that *Blackstar* is "Bowie's attempt to grasp something no one can understand: what it would be like to stop existing." Indeed, Kitty Empire's (2016b) initial review of the album upon its release described it as 'urgent' and 'elliptical.' Yet, with knowledge of his death Tim Jonze (2016) was more assured in interpreting the album for its contemplation of death and dying. Jonze interpreted the album's title track for its "allusions to saviour myths and what we leave behind when we're gone," while *Lazarus* was understood as Bowie acknowledging that his celebrity would allow him to 'cheat mortality.' As Dorian Lynskey (2017) wrote a year later in a six-page special in *Q* magazine, entitled "Bowie at 70", "*Blackstar* was less a final summation of a lifetime's work than one last leap into the future" (p. 62).

What Bowie left behind, was a final release that continued his periodic career flirtations with death (referring to his recurrent artistic renewal that necessitated the need to kill off alter-egos), but in a way that the reality of his condition began to assume a more appropriate lens through which to consequently interpret his work. Articulations of the meaning attached to his final work by influential intellectual and professional cultural critics (Kristensens & From, 2015) followed a logic that "personal and authentic awareness of death allows life to be lived to the fullest and human potential to be reached" (Drolet, 1990). As Lynskey (2017) observes, "dying didn't slow Bowie down; it made him move at the speed of life" (p. 62). In doing so,

Bowie's output appeared to affirm his comments that he was "much more interested in the process of life, what it is we are uncovering with every move" (Whately, 2017).

In 2017 the BBC aired *The Last Five Years* (dir. Whately), a documentary used to mark the one-year anniversary of Bowie's death, which functioned to chronicle his working patterns leading up to his death. It shared the story of how both *Blackstar* and *The Next Day* were received as a surprise and unexpected release in an age where privacy and clandestine projects are extremely difficult to accomplish. Indeed, Will Brooker (2002) has chronicled the lengths to which Star Wars fans went to in order to be able to speculate (often correctly) on the plot of forthcoming film releases during the production of the prequel trilogy (1991-2005). Speculation on film plots were carefully collated and formed from the tiniest of insights and clues from a myriad of sources found online (e.g. leaked production images, registration of domain names). Likewise, Pullen (2006) describes how Lord of the Rings fans heightened 'traditional' fandom to be "more deeply imbricated with institutional processes" (p. 173) and again incorporate the processes of production alongside passion for the source text and films. Yet, such pleasures of fandom were denied by Bowie's careful planning, private, direct and personal instigation of new collaborations and new works during his final years. In *The Last Five Years* interviews with musicians that worked on *The Next Day* describe how they were asked to sign non-disclosure agreements for the first time. With no studio footage or documentation of the album recording sessions, director Francis Whately opted to reassemble the musicians who played on both *The Next Day* and *Blackstar* in order to perform the songs live to an isolated Bowie vocal track. This approach echoed the ghostly impression created by the line "Look up here, I'm in heaven" in the Lazarus video.

The discernable nature of *Blackstar*'s themes also emerge from its relational nature, as the album sits alongside the reflective nature of *The Next Day* that preceded it, and the appropriation and remediation of his musical back catalogue in the 2015 Off-Broadway musical *Lazarus*. Indeed, the musical not only constituted an opportune project for reflection but also satisfied Bowie's long-term personal goal of producing a musical. As an extension to the 1976 film *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (dir. Roeg), in which Bowie starred as the humanoid alien Thomas Jerome Newton, *Lazarus* also dealt with the torment of limbo between life and death. Actor Michael C. Hall (2017), who played Newton in the musical, stated that: "The catharsis [for Bowie] surrounding *Lazarus* [the musical] was unique with regarding its execution, requiring him to relinquish control and allow many other people to take it and make it happen." This mode of repurposing his own back-catalogue in this way, served as a post-self gesture that preceded any-subsequent music industry response or rekindled interest in Bowie's back catalogue post-death. A response that Bowie-fan Morrissey characterised in 1987 on The Smiths song 'Paint a Vulgar Picture' when he sang: "At the record company meeting / On their hands - a dead star / And oh, the plans they weave / And oh, the sickening greed ... Re-issue! Re-package! Re-package! / Re-evaluate the songs / Double-pack with a photograph / Extra track (and a tacky

badge)". Morrissey ends the song with the line, "sadly this was your life." Instead, Bowie instigated his own retrospective matching the example provided earlier of composers' attempts to directly influence their post-self (Kamerman, 2003). While the musical did not challenge or prevent 'death effects' (Radford & Bloch, 2012), such as a renewed interest in Bowie's back catalogue and thus increased album sales, it did allow the artist to confront nostalgia via reclamation and re-appropriation of his own material.

Radford and Bloch (2012) employ Belk *et al.*'s (1989) adoption of the concept of 'sacralisation', extended to the way products (and celebrities) become revered, in order to argue that: "As with saints and martyrs, death represents a common route to increased sacralisation for celebrities and their related products" (p. 140). Indeed, while it was reported that pop-star Michael Jackson was experiencing financial issues prior to his death in 2009, his estate subsequently went on to earn \$US 140 million in 2014 from takings of his back-catalogue, in addition to two posthumously-released albums, holographic appearances with Cirque du Soleil with the 'Immortal' World Tour, and 'One' a permanent performance in Las Vegas. Radford and Bloch argue that increased sacralisation for celebrities and their products comes from the way consumers "imbue a material good with added meaning as a surrogate for the relationship with the lost individual" (p. 141). Leading the tributes to Bowie on social media, collaborator, musician and producer Visconti stated: "He always did what he wanted to do. And he wanted to do it his way and he wanted to do it the best way. His death was no different from his life – a work of Art. He made 'Blackstar' for us, his parting gift." Furthermore, Under a Creative Commons Non Commercial Share Alike license, Bowie fans were also given the power to create merchandise for non-commercial use to celebrate his life and music. On Facebook designer Barnbrook explained: "in the spirit of openness and in remembrance of David we are releasing the artwork elements of his last album ★ (Blackstar) to download here free." Through both these tactics, fans and interested parties were invited to engage with Bowie and the manner in which he was attached to life in his final years.

Death of the Acting Subject

As a subject matter, ultimately death is unknowable thus making it an imaginative topic for an artist and fantasist such as Bowie, as it is unrepresentative therefore open to interpretation and construction. Yet, while death has proved inherently fascinating for art and artists as an objective subject matter, dying intensifies the anticipation or trepidation attached to the moment of death and the prospect of the continuance of life in absentia. The possibility that death is a moment of finitude characterised by a loss of consciousness and the cessation of human experience looms heavily. As Simon Critchley states, "[death] is that in the face of which the subject is not able to be able" (cited in Townsend, 2008). Bowie both eludes to this, and artistically contests it, in the song 'No Place' that again reinforces the relational nature of his final projects, as the song was both performed in the musical *Lazarus*, but also recorded during

sessions for *Blackstar* but only released posthumously as part of an EP on what would have been Bowie's 70th birthday. In the song Bowie sings:

No Plan
Here, there's no music here
I'm lost in streams of sound
Here, am I nowhere now?
No plan
Wherever I may go
Just where
Just there I am

All of the things that are my life
My desires, my beliefs, my moods
Here is my place without a plan

The lyrics embody notions of death as a departure to nothingness - a nothingness experienced as residing in another state cut off from physical presence in the living world. In doing so, it constitutes an interpretation of death from the perspective of an experiencing acting subject, presenting it as an undesirable state for the individual facing the impermanence of 'this life' and inviting the listener to contemplate the fate of their idol. Bowie's lyrics for 'No Place' articulate death as the absence of life but then suggest 'another' form of existence in a "dark, impenetrable abode" (Edwards, 1969, p. 5).

With no tangible damage to fans' social fabric as a result of (Bowie's) death (Llewellyn, 2013), the subject matter of *Blackstar* and *No Place EP* serve to disrupt the mourning process whilst at the same time serve to bring death into the public sphere (Sumiala & Hakola, 2013). That is, Campbell and Smith (2015) argue that in Western cultures "mourning is seen as a means of separation from the deceased so that the living can recover" (p. 2). Indeed responses to celebrity deaths on social and networked media promote "a sense of collectivism" that "affirms common sacred values" (Pantti & Sumiala, 2009, p. 121) associated with the foundation of their fandom. Without *Blackstar*, it is likely that public mourning for Bowie would have followed the same patterns seen for other celebrities, nostalgically celebrating the life of the star, in doing so, successfully suppressing the ontological nature of the artist's death. In *No Plan* and *Blackstar*, Bowie appears to be grappling with the idea that 'he must die himself alone,' for it is not an experience that can be experienced vicariously (Macquarrie, 1965), whilst communicating that prospect and outlook to his audience. Indeed, Tillich (1952) emphasises how fear of a definite object can be "faced, analyzed, attacked, endured" (p. 36) allowing the individual to participate in the process. Yet, Mora (1966) argues "we do not seem to be able to experience death in the same way as we do other 'events' such as pleasure, pain, good health, illness, senility" (p. 176). In his memoir *You've Had Your Time*, novelist Anthony Burgess (1990) wrote: "If there is only darkness after death, then that darkness is the ultimate

reality and that love of life that I intermittently possess is no preparation for it,” (p. 927). Likewise, Macquarrie (1965) argues: “Anyone who undergoes death seems by the very fact to be robbed of any possibility of understanding and analyzing what it was to undergo death” (p. 51). Typically, all we can ‘see’ of death, when it comes for those close to us, is its ‘residue’ - a corpse. Yet, in the song No Plan, Bowie’s post-self permits him to re-engage his audience a year later, and paradoxically remind them of his absence.

Conclusion

During *The Last Five Years* documentary, audio is played of Bowie stating: “I always remember that the reason you initially started working was something inside yourself, that if you could manifest it in someway, you’d understand more about yourself and how you can encourage it in the rest of society.” A contemporary notion of a ‘good death’ is forming that is defined as, one in which the individual is permitted and empowered to “live fully until he dies as himself” (Saunders, 1965, cited in Walter, p. 29). Bowie not only achieved this by his productivity in working up until the end, but on projects that allowed him to address the existential isolation that so many individuals experience as they prepare for death. Scholars in the field of sociology of death and dying acknowledge that: “dying seems so difficult today” (Hawkins, 1990, p. 303). Bowie addressed that difficulty via an evaluation of his life and work, fulfilling life long ambitions and providing the world with a final musical iteration that once again moved his experimentation and creativity forward. The album *Blackstar* not only concluded a productive and successful career, with a relevant body of songs, it reflected an artist, performer, musician, celebrity and individual “dying the way that an individual wants” (Lichter, 1991). As a “collection of masks, images, or personae under which it can no longer be taken for granted that a single actor exists” (Shields, 1991, p. 274), Bowie defined and perfected the postmodern individual throughout his career evading explanation, categorisation and expectation. While his last songs were not free of allusion, indeed the album’s closing track is titled ‘I Can’t Give Everything Away,’ it reflected a much more concise album than its predecessor, *The Next Day*, as it leaves listeners with a very clear sense that Bowie is unlikely to rise again with a new guise. Indeed, Lazarus was his resurrection in which he overcame the stasis of a decade of silence. Bowie’s final work functioned to bring his physical death to the forefront, drawing it to the attention of the world, knowing that as an artist his existence is likely to be perpetual.

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