

‘Spinning Straw Into Gold’: Nacho Video and the Exquisite Corpse of Fan-editing

Lisa Perrott



*‘Nacho is a magician, pulling Bowie gems from the vault for all of us to enjoy,’*¹

‘Doing it, doing it right,’ croons David Bowie.² That distinctive voice, the familiar sound of soul music, grainy black-and-white film footage – all combine to trigger a massive dose of nostalgia. Sucked into the vortex of YouTube, I’m transported to a rehearsal at a Los Angeles Studio in 1974. But this is not a typical video of an American soul band rehearsing. Ava Cherry, Robin Clark and Luther Vandross are grooving alongside a skeletal figure with blonde hair and translucent skin. This unlikely image looks wrong, yet it feels so right. Singing ‘taking it all the right way, keeping it in the back,’ Bowie’s voice slides effortlessly from baritone to falsetto and somewhere in-between. Notoriously establishing himself as the artist who invented ‘plastic soul,’ Bowie may look like a white alien, but his vocal and lyrics fit seamlessly with the sound and feel of 1970s African-American soul music.³

Watching this video on Nacho Video’s YouTube channel only a few months after Bowie’s death in 2016, I wondered if someone had unearthed a long-lost official video for a song that was shamefully omitted from Bowie’s audiovisual catalogue. Or was I watching a remnant of *cinéma vérité*, stitched together by a

¹ Comment from YouTube user Pleasant Valley Picker CA to Nacho Video, ‘David Bowie | John, I’m Only Dancing | Promo | Unreleased Mick Rock Outtake Footage Re-edit | 1972,’ *YouTube video*, 00:02:54, 5 March 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adhFZr6VDes>.

² See the YouTube playlist for this chapter.

³ For more on this, see: Simon Mashaun, “‘Plastic Soul’: David Bowie’s Legacy and Impact on Black Artists,” *NBCNews*, 12 January 2016, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/plastic-soul-david-bowie-s-legacy-impact-black-artists-n494241>.

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fan who'd stumbled across a secret vault filled with archive footage? Seemingly rekindled out of Bowie's ashes, Nacho's fan-made video for 'Right' (1975) fills a gap in the **oeuvre** of publicly available Bowie videos.⁴ Although the online collection of videos is extensive, there's never been an officially released music video to accompany any of the songs on Bowie's 1975 studio album, *Young Americans*. Generating the satisfaction of stumbling upon a freshly excavated relic, Nacho's archive video for 'Right' provides fans with a privileged peek behind the scenes of a momentous recording session. It also reveals a unique process of collaboration and the birth of a new form of soul music. Although Bowie fans may have seen fragments of this footage in the documentaries *Cracked Actor* (1975) or *David Bowie: Five Years* (2013), this footage had not previously been available in the form of a coherent music video.⁵ Nacho's video for 'Right' was received by grieving Bowie fans as a magical gift from the vault. Inspired by my first experience of a Nacho video, I became an instant YouTube fan of this Bowie fan.

This story of my discovery and appreciation for Nacho's videos is incomplete without acknowledging that not only am I a fan of Nacho, I am a long-term Bowie fan who accidentally became an 'aca-fan' – an academic whose research includes examining the artistic and cultural contributions of Bowie, along with other subjects of my fandom.⁶ Although academics have debated the legitimacy and value of researching from the subjective position of fandom, I argue that such a position can contribute a unique perspective and a richness of engagement. As we shall see, this is similar to the type of unique contribution that Nacho is also able to make as a fan with integrity, commitment and connections. But his repurposing projects are not without challenges, and they raise questions about the role of fans in relation to creative integrity and authorship. This chapter examines how such processes play out across a selection of Nacho's videos, while allowing his words to open a window in to the broader issues related to 're-presenting' the work of dead musicians, music video directors and filmmakers on YouTube.⁷

⁴ Nacho Video, 'David Bowie . Right . Promo [Take Four] . 1975,' *Nachovideos.com*, 00:04:38 (n.d), <https://www.nachosvideos.com/bowie-videos>.

⁵ *Cracked Actor* (1975) [documentary film]. Director Alan Yentob, United Kingdom: BBC; *David Bowie: Five Years* (2013) [documentary film]. Director Francis Whately, London: BBC.

⁶ The term 'aca-fan' refers to an academic who is undertaking scholarly research focused on the object of their fandom. For more on this, see: Henry Jenkins, 'Confessions of an aca-fan,' *Henry Jenkins*, 22 October 2011, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2011/10/acafandom_and_beyond_will_broo_1.html.

⁷ Nacho, Interview by Lisa Perrott, 23 September 2022. I would not have been able to write this chapter without the generous input of Nacho.

By 2022, Nacho had established a popular YouTube channel exhibiting numerous remastered and re-edited Bowie videos, along with several videos featuring the work of other musicians. Although the YouTube channel description says he's 'just a fan, making videos for other fans', his playlists are titled 'Bunnymen Chronology' and 'A Batch of My Best Bowie's'. Apart from these artists, his channel features repurposed videos for his favourite bands, such as Roxy Music, Joy Division, The Clash, Iggy Pop, Kraftwerk, Wilco, Simple Minds and The Verve.

At the time of writing this chapter, Brett Morgen's newly released film, *Moonage Daydream* (2022) was triggering vigorous debate among the most ardent of Bowie fans, and some suggested that Nacho could have done a better job if he had directed such a film. After contributing a comment about this on social media, I was fortunate to secure an interview with the enigmatic 'magician' known as Nacho Video.⁸ Looking at the photo on his website, I was wrong to assume I'd be zooming with a hooded and secretive Banksy-esque figure.⁹ With a warm smile and humble demeanour, Nacho explained the story behind his pseudonym. His mysterious online persona creates intrigue and maintains separation from his private life. Out of respect for his privacy I won't divulge his real name, but will note that Nacho is a British video editor and yoga teacher living in Hong Kong. After teaching his early morning yoga class, Nacho spends the remainder of his day working on video-editing projects, described by him as 'research and restoration and creation of archive music videos'.¹⁰ Although a small portion of these projects are commissioned projects, much of Nacho's time is spent working on his own fan-made video-editing projects for which he receives no payment. He's now a well-respected figure within a community of fans who re-purpose, restore and re-edit videos and other archive materials pertaining to the musicians they admire. Despite uploading their videos to a variety of Internet platforms, websites and social media pages, many of these fan video editors rely predominantly on YouTube as a platform to share their videos. Those who share their re-edited videos using footage of dead musicians face

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Banksy is an elusive street art activist who had become an international icon because of the subversive and secretive nature of his public art works. For more on this, see: Will Ellsworth-Jones, 'The Story Behind Banksy', *Smithsonian Magazine* 2013, <http://www.ribar.com/UserFiles/2m-2015.pdf>.

¹⁰ Nacho Video, correspondence with Chuck Braverman. Nacho Video, 'David Bowie | Young Americans | Remastered U.S. TV Ad | 1975', *YouTube video*, 00:00:44, 25 September 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjh25cgnpFk>.

particular challenges, such as accessing archive materials, ethics around assemblage processes and perceived copyright infringements. In the face of such challenges, some editors have responded collaboratively and creatively in order to keep their practice alive. For Nacho, keeping his practice alive is entangled with the process of reinvigorating the buried and neglected archival footage of various artists. Bowie is a key inspiration in terms of collaborative assemblage, and the sense I get from Nacho's work is that life emerges from death. This chapter examines how such processes play out in Nacho's videos, while allowing his words to open a window in to the broader issues related to 're-presenting' (as he describes it) the work of dead musicians, music video directors and filmmakers on YouTube.¹¹

Out of the ashes

After Bowie died. I was just sort of dabbling, I discovered a love for video editing ... In the beginning it was part tribute. It was a desperate need to join the worldwide suffering or whatever we were going through ... I don't think I set out to make a tribute video.¹²

Though he'd been a Bowie fan since he was a child, Nacho had lost interest during the eighties and hadn't listened to his music for a long time. Seemingly, by some force of divine intervention or 'the universe that gave me this blessing', Bowie's death in 2016 triggered a chain of events that led to Nacho becoming a video editor with his own YouTube channel.¹³ Out of the ashes of Bowie, his fandom was rekindled, and he was about to find his calling. Finding himself mesmerized by the 1974 section of the documentary *David Bowie: Five Years* (2013), Nacho recalls 'when I saw that footage it was that Eureka moment, oh f---, this could *be* something':

It was like, they're singing 'Right' and that's one of my favourites ... I chucked it into iMovie, erased the sound, got the album track, started moving things around. And I was like wow, I could almost make a promo video! At the end of the day I'd made quite a respectable video. The ideas had somehow come *to* me rather than *from* me. So that's how it started, it was just a kind of accident. It was

¹¹ Nacho, Interview by Lisa Perrott.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

that grief pouring through me, but it was an accident. When that 'Right' video kind of rolled itself out, especially at the end, and that beautiful thing when Bowie's singing 'never need no', you know it's so beautiful, and then I found a way that I could . . . although he's not saying those words, you know he's, you feel that he's kind of thinking them or directing the session.¹⁴

This concluding section of his video for 'Right' exemplifies what Nacho does really well. The inserted footage creates the impression that Bowie is processing the lyrics and directing the band from the side-line as they rehearse (Figure 11.1). A closer look reveals that, although eclipsed by Luther Vandross, Bowie is there in the footage of the rehearsing band, so he couldn't have been in two places at once (Figure 11.2). Despite this potential to rupture verisimilitude, the cross-cut footage works remarkably well. Bowie had once described this aspect of the song as a type of 'mantra'.¹⁵ According to Nicholas Pegg, the sonic call-and-response between the backing singers and Bowie 'lends an air of immaculate sophistication to the lyric's paeon to positive thinking'.¹⁶ Nacho's cross-cutting method of editing visually mimics the vocal call-and-response that underpins the song. But the video is also extraordinary for the way it merges music video aesthetics with a *vérité* documentary style to create a hybrid audiovisual form with a time travelling dimension. Nacho's video achieves something akin to Peter Jackson's TV mini-series *The Beatles: Get Back* (2021), an officially recognized, award-winning example of a fan re-edit of archive footage.¹⁷ Although differing in terms of length, status, monetization and platform, both of these examples offer an experience of being transported back in time, to be immersed in the intimacy and spontaneity of the rehearsal process.

Although partly triggered by his response to Bowie's death, Nacho's first accidental YouTube video for 'Right' was also prompted by a frustrating experience while on a date. Nacho and his new friend were getting to know each other by trawling through YouTube and sharing their 'musical loves'. He was trying to communicate his appreciation of Bowie's less-known material and became frustrated at the dearth of quality videos available on YouTube:

That got me thinking and I realized, there's a massive deficit . . . most artists there's a massive deficit in their video legacy. It's shameful actually. You've got

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Bowie, cited in Nicholas Pegg, *The Complete David Bowie* (London: Titan Books, 2016), 226.

¹⁶ Pegg, *Ibid.*, 226.

¹⁷ For more on this, see: The Beatles, 'Peter Jackson Gives an Inside Look at Making The Beatles: Get Back', YouTube video, 00:02:18, 28 November 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YBtxzVWD7sY>.



Figure 11.2 Bowie is there in the footage of the rehearsing band, so he couldn't have been in two places at once, 'NACHO'S 45th ANNIVERSARY RIGHT REDUX' (25 September 2020).



Figure 11.1 The inserted footage creates the impression that Bowie is directing the band from the side-line as they rehearse, 'NACHO'S 45th ANNIVERSARY RIGHT REDUX' (25 September 2020).

these crappy 360 pixels, 480 pixels at best, low definition video, terrible sound, they've been transferred at the wrong speed . . . then I began to notice that some fans were already trying to remedy that, so I joined those ranks . . . I just felt like – somebody needs to remedy this. Somebody needs to represent these things better. So that was another starting point.¹⁸

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Although Nacho may be describing a familiar experience, his recollection of this **as a** starting point as an archive video editor is instructive. Not only did he experience frustration over the difficulty in adequately communicating his love for music, he perceived the poor quality of the videos to be shameful. YouTube was full of gaps and he wanted to fill those gaps for other fans. Nacho was not alone.

The world-building role of fan-creators

The phenomenon of fans re-editing the archives of dead musicians is not entirely new, but it raises new questions around creative process, authorship and representation. The advent of the Internet and the proliferation of file sharing platforms such as YouTube has led to the emergence of niche communities,

¹⁸ Nacho, Interview by Lisa Perrott.

participatory cultures and fan-creators. Individual participants within these communities experience the benefits of heightened connectivity and access to materials collected by similarly interested fans. Those who are creatively inclined and technically adept are using the latest technological advancements to capture and manipulate archive materials in ways not previously possible. Platforms such as YouTube have given rise to a proliferation of 'behind the scenes' networks comprised of savvy fan-creators and collectors whose videos are produced from archival footage. Scholars express differing perspectives about the functions of these videos and the authorial status of their creators. They provoke a range of perspectives about auteurism, collaborative authorship, participatory culture, assemblage and intertextuality. These issues of fan participation and dispersed authorship have been explored by Henry Jenkins, who has explained how the process of 'media convergence' has enabled fans to participate in creating and disseminating spreadable media and engaging in world-building activities.¹⁹ On one hand, Jenkins uses a pejorative phrase to describe fans as 'poachers who get to keep what they take and use their plundered goods as the foundations for the construction of an alternative cultural community'.²⁰ On the other hand, he emphasizes the creative processes involved in cultural borrowing, arguing that fan-generated texts:

cannot simply be interpreted as the material traces of interpretive acts, but need to be understood within their own terms as cultural artifacts. They are aesthetic objects that draw on the artistic traditions of the fan community, as well as on the personal creativity and insights of individual consumers/artists. If there is an art of 'making do' . . . that art lies in transforming 'borrowed materials' from mass culture into new texts. A fan aesthetic centres on the selection, inflection, juxtaposition, and recirculation of ready-made images and discourses. In short, a poached culture requires a conception of aesthetics emphasizing borrowing and recombination as much or more as original creation and artistic innovation.²¹

Although writing in 2012 about the 'ready-made images and discourses' of television series that preceded YouTube, Jenkins provokes a useful consideration of assemblage as creative process. His subsequent writing on fandom explores

¹⁹ Henry Jenkins, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2018), 39.

²⁰ Henry Jenkins, ed., *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 223.

²¹ *Ibid.*

how fans engage in creative activities that elaborate canonical transmedia worlds.²² As we shall see, Nacho provides a pertinent example of an elaborationist fan whose creative process exemplifies Jenkins's view of 'an alternative model of authorship . . . one where authorship is collective rather than individual, and one where artworks are appropriative and transformative rather than original'.²³ I use this alternative model of authorship as a springboard for considering how a fan might borrow from the ready-made sonic forms, images and discourses of a musician, who may in many instances serve as the primary object of a fan's admiration.

The exquisite corpse of fan re-editors

Before interviewing Nacho, I had imagined he worked in isolation and that he may not wish to share information about his process. To the contrary, I discovered that he is driven by a desire to communicate, and by the sense of community and comradeship at the heart of his practice as a video editor. Soon after he posted his first few videos on YouTube, Nacho was embraced by various fan-communities devoted to Bowie and other artists. As an off-shoot of his video uploads and fan-networking, he also became part of a community of likeminded practitioners:

I got some of these deep fans wanting to correspond with me. And some of them were collectors. They'd say 'I've got much better quality versions than you, you shouldn't be doing your work based on these crappy things you've downloaded from YouTube, they're all really crappy. I've got a copy of the master, and I'm going to send it to you.'²⁴

These 'deep fans' were devoted collectors who were interested in archiving and trading their materials. This particular subset of the fan community was not only drawn together by their shared fandom of Bowie, but by a desire to collect and preserve Bowie's work in the highest possible quality; some of them wanted to redress what they perceived as a paucity of quality videos on YouTube. Those who had access to quality materials such as master tapes were also driven by a

²² Henry Jenkins, 'The Aesthetics of Transmedia: in Response to David Bordwell (Part One)', *Henry Jenkins*, 10 September 2009, http://henryjenkins.org/blog/2009/09/the_aesthetics_of_transmedia_i.html.

²³ Henry Jenkins, "Art Happens Not in Isolation, But in Community": the Collective Literacies of Media Fandom, *Cultural Science Journal* 11, no.1 (2019): 78.

²⁴ Nacho, Interview by Lisa Perrott.

desire to represent Bowie with integrity, and they were discerning about who they would share their materials with. According to Nacho's description of events, it appears that he was chosen as a 'safe pair of hands' – a person who they believed would handle their collected archive materials with integrity:

There's a network of fans in England, about seven of them, they've got loads of video. Between them they had everything. Those guys, they were all communicating. Because of me, one of them decided, 'I'm going to put all my stuff on an external hard-drive and send it to the next guy. He's going to put all of his stuff, and the next guy and the next guy and the next guy. And then, we're going to send it to you, and you'll have everything.' And so, after a couple of years of doing that stuff I got this hard drive . . . I haven't even finished going through it. That's an amazing collaboration.²⁵

Nacho's description of this strong communal aspect of fan collaboration shattered my preconceptions of a Banksy-esque 'lone wolf' video editor working in isolation, and of YouTube video editors being entirely competitive and protective of their materials and claims to authorship. I learnt from Nacho that behind the scenes there exists a lively community of practitioners who may be competitive, but are also able to collaborate to obtain materials, some of which may result in YouTube uploads; also, that such communal foraging and sharing of materials is at the very heart of Nacho's creative process. Such a process can be understood in terms of the collaborative authorship illustrated by the surrealist parlour game, the 'Exquisite Corpse'.²⁶ This game involves creating a collaborative poem or drawing, with each person adding their word or image and passing it on to the next person, until the multi-authored work forms a whole sentence or depiction of a 'body' that is then shared. Drawing attention to the collaborative authorship activated by variants of the Exquisite Corpse, Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren explains how 'the pastiche of images created' through the exquisite corpse:

... forms a living tissue of disparate bits and bodies in which politics and aesthetics are built into the process rather than as something added on to a previously established subject. In this sense, the various models of the Exquisite

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For more on this, see: Anne Kern, 'From One Exquisite Corpse (in)to Another: Influences and Transformations From Early to Late Surrealist Games,' in *The Exquisite Corpse: Chance and Collaboration in Surrealism's Parlor Game (Texts and Contexts)*, ed. Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, Davis Schneiderman and Tom Denlinger (Nebraska: University of Nebraska, 2009), 3–28.

Corpse are anti-Kantian and anti-Romantic, dispensing with the notion of artwork created by the individual genius that forms an enclosed and teleological whole.²⁷

In order to fully appreciate the role played by video editors such as Nacho, it's important to critique the notion of sole authorship as a romanticized view of an author with purely original ideas, working in isolation from social and cultural influences. Although authors tend to imbue their creations with something unique of themselves, they cannot help but inflect their creations with the influences, symbols and residues of the people, cultures, places and texts they come in contact with. In the case of Nacho's videos, the form of each fragment of archive material is altered during its transit from one collaborator to another, the passage through video editing technology and through the decisions of the various authors within the network. Such refracted authorship forms the interstices of the visual and sonic intertexts associated with Nacho's reassembled videos.

Before examining these videos, it's important to distinguish between the processes of collaboration, dispersal and 're-authorship'. The collaborative aspect is apparent by the way in which fan-editors share materials and ideas through various networks of fandom. There's also the collaborative act of each person altering the archive materials as they're passed along the chain in Exquisite Corpse fashion. The notion of dispersed authorship is more relevant when considering the way a specific text (video or piece of footage) travels through time, with several authors having represented it in different ways. The videos available on YouTube for different versions of Bowie's song 'Space Oddity' (1969, 1972, 1979) exemplify this dispersion of authorship across time and space, while showing how many fans have elaborated upon the storyworld of this song, which Bowie himself modified across his **oeuvre**. This extensive development of a transmedia storyworld can be traced across five decades, beginning with official videos directed by Malcolm J Thomson (1969), Mick Rock (1972) and David Mallet (1979).²⁸ This dispersal of authorship is extended further with fan-made

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²⁷ Kanta Kochhar-Lindgren, 'Towards A Communal Body Of Art: The Exquisite Corpse and Augusto Boal's Theatre,' *Angelaki: Journal of Theoretical Humanities* 7, no. 1 (2002): 219.

²⁸ David Bowie, 'David Bowie - Space Oddity,' *YouTube video*, 00:03:46, 10 March 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tRMZ_5WYmCg; David Bowie, 'David Bowie - Space Oddity (Official Video),' *YouTube video*, 00:05:04, 10 July 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYYRH4apXDo>; Nacho Video, 'David Bowie • Space Oddity • Will Kenny Everett Make It To 1980? Show • 31 December 1979,' *YouTube video*, 00:04:54, 1 January 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63qvJoQLumw>.

videos, including Commander Chris Hadfield’s performance of the song, which was shot on board the International Space Station (2013),²⁹ an acapella cover version directed by Soren Lundvall Danielsen (2017),³⁰ a tribute video directed by Tim Pope (2019),³¹ an interpretation of the song performed by the Kingston University Stylophone Orchestra (directed by Leah Kardos and Tony Visconti, 2019)³² and a digital youth chorale performance by the Silverlake Conservatory of Music Choir, where each performer contributed their vocal via video-link (2020).³³ To this dispersed collection of authors and inter-texts, Nacho contributed his own re-edited version of the ‘Space Oddity’ video, which was originally screened on Swiss television in 1969.³⁴ Aiming to address the poor sound quality of the existing video, Nacho re-edited the footage to **synch** up to the 2019 Tony Visconti album mix of the original 1969 version of ‘Space Oddity’, thereby creating what he describes as a ‘marriage of the two sources’.³⁵ Although this video exemplifies Nacho’s contribution to the dispersed authorship associated with re-editing and reinterpreting ‘Space Oddity’, his other videos are less indicative of such broadly dispersed authorship. Rather, they better exemplify processes of collaborative foraging and re-authorship, or what Nacho describes as ‘re-presentation’.

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From restoration to re-authorship

Nacho collaborated with another fan to come up with the idea to create a re-authored music video for Bowie’s promotional film ‘John I’m Only Dancing’, which was originally shot and directed by Mick Rock in 1972.³⁶ Nacho explains

²⁹ Rare Earth, ‘Space Oddity,’ *YouTube video*, 00:05:30, 13 May 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KaOC9danxNo>.

³⁰ DunkelDirks, ‘Space Oddity acapella cover,’ *YouTube video*, 00:03:59, 23 August 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gLA5URPoWN0>.

³¹ David Bowie, ‘David Bowie – Space Oddity (2019 Mix) [Official Video],’ *YouTube video*, 00:04:43, 21 July 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptVbk7r4lcA>.

³² KUSO, ‘Space Oddity (Cover) – Kingston University Stylophone Orchestra,’ *YouTube video*, 00:04:54, 17 December 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzejkiK64A>.

³³ Silverlake Conservatory of Music, ‘Silverlake Conservatory Youth and Master Youth . . . still bringing on the music!,’ *YouTube video*, 00:04:35, 22 April 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMtMkZOoRQE>.

³⁴ Nacho Video, ‘David Bowie, Space Oddity (2019 Tony Visconti Full Length Mix), 1969,’ *YouTube video*, 00:05:19, 19 November 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PbNsWll5ufw>.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ David Bowie, ‘David Bowie – John, I’m Only Dancing (Official Video),’ *YouTube video*, 00:03:02, 10 July 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lmVVyhpufRc>.

how a fellow collaborator from the fan-network proposed, ‘I’ve got a copy of the master reel of the “John, I’m Only Dancing” outtakes from Mick Rock . . . so there’s twenty minutes of outtakes never seen. You could make your own alternate version,’³⁷ Nacho explains how this sharing of archive materials and ideas eventually led to a process of restoration and re-editing, in which he had an opportunity to have a go at re-authoring Rock’s music video:

Why that appealed to me is because I remember seeing that video when I was a kid and I remember being horrified by those hideous dancers in this fishnet green . . . you get to the chorus and then you’ve got these creepy dancers. I don’t want to see this creepy stuff, I want to see *my* Bowie. And so what appealed to me was, I could make the ‘John, I’m Only Dancing’ video that *I* would like to see. So that idea kind of came from him and I invested my thing in it, and of course by the time its finished, its mine, I made it.³⁸

Although acknowledging the collaborative aspect of accessing archive materials and generating the impulse for this video, Nacho confidently claims authorship of the new video he has created by editing together the outtakes shot by Rock for ‘John, I’m Only Dancing.’ Nacho explained that whenever he uploads one of his re-edited videos, he’s careful to acknowledge all his sources, including the original director of the music video. This is evident on his YouTube channel; for each video uploaded, he acknowledges his sources in a respectful and accurate manner. The act of creating a new version of this video and publishing it on YouTube may potentially trigger debate about authorship and the integrity of fans engaged in re-assembly of archive materials perceived by some as sacrosanct. It is therefore helpful to evaluate the extent of Nacho’s creative contribution to the inter-texts that exist for ‘John, I’m Only Dancing.’

Unlike his other videos, Nacho has created a coherent music video comprised of footage not used in a prior video or seen by the public. As he explains, his video is comprised entirely of outtake footage that had been shot by Rock for the purpose of the 1972 video, but had not been used in that video:

The silent 30 minute, 16 mm reel of ‘John, I’m Only Dancing’ outtakes was transferred to video by Mainman in 1995. It has been in the hand of collectors since then . . . Having acquired a copy of the transfer myself . . . I started investigating it, checking out the different silent scenes of Bowie and the boys miming and pouting, and in Bowie’s case, profusely smoking. I saw so many

³⁷ Nacho, Interview by Lisa Perrott.

³⁸ Ibid.

gorgeous moments that were not used in the original 'John, I'm Only Dancing' promo, and I became attracted to the idea of creating my own video for the song.³⁹

Nacho's transitions make use of shot overlays, which create texture and depth within the frame. One salient example of this is an extreme close-up of Bowie's eye, including the anchor tattoo high on his cheekbone. This is overlaid with an image of Bowie clapping his hands in the foreground and the band playing in the background (Figure 11.3: timecode: 00:01:30). This audio-visual synchronization of the clapping triggers a moment of revelation; since Rock's video had not included this shot, it wasn't previously obvious that this repeated rhythmic motif was created by human handclaps. To accentuate the third handclap, Nacho aligns each cut to



Figure 11.3 An extreme close-up of Bowie's cheekbone is overlaid with an image of Bowie clapping his hands in the foreground and the band playing in the background, 'David Bowie | John, I'm Only Dancing | Promo | Unreleased Mick Rock Outtake Footage Re-edit | 1972' *YouTube video*, 00:02:54, 5 March 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adhFZr6VDes>.

³⁹ Nacho Video, 'David Bowie | John, I'm Only Dancing | Promo | Unreleased Mick Rock Outtake Footage Re-edit | 1972' *YouTube video*, 00:02:54, 5 March 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adhFZr6VDes>.

create a visual analogue with each of the sonic claps (timecode: 00:01.44), resulting in a sequence of fast cuts that portray a strong sense of rhythmic editing and audio-visual correlation. With the benefit of hindsight, Nacho's emphasis on handclapping draws attention to Bowie's innovative use of handclapping as a percussive instrument in several of his songs.⁴⁰ In this light, Nacho's video could be interpreted as a celebration of Bowie's broader use of the instrumental handclap.

Aside from the revelation around the source of the clapping sounds, Nacho's edit is also notable for the absence of the green-lit, fishnet-clad dancers that he found so creepy as a child. Devoid of these cut-away shots, Nacho gives much more screen time to Bowie's band members, The Spiders. As the video winds up, each band member is featured with a lingering image comprised of a foreground close-up and a background long-shot. A particularly glamorous close-up of Mick Ronson lingers as we see his face spontaneously burst into a radiant smile (Figure 11.4). The shot gradually dissolves, morphing into a close-up of Bowie's face (Figure 11.5). This foreground shot then dissolves to reveal a bust-shot of Bowie in the mid-ground and a long-shot of Ronson in the background. Ronson appears in strobe effect, which mimics the repetitive beeping sound of the electric guitar. He raises his guitar above his head as we hear the penultimate note. In unison with the final lingering note, the guitarist lowers his instrument to the floor, just as Bowie raises his middle finger in the foreground (Figure 11.6).

Not only does this outrageous finale provide an appropriate visual analogue to the music, it also ends with a gesture reinforcing Bowie's performance of a proto-punk attitude and a reminder of his subversive humour. The effect of the final sequence is aptly expressed by a YouTube user:

What a great f---n' video Nacho, that final scene – where Ronno smiles and then Bowie's face appears underneath – is probably one of the best things I've seen on your channel yet mate. If it was part of the original promo then that's cool, but if you cut that in yerself then massive kudo to you mate. And the attitude at the end . . . absolute genius!⁴¹

Such applaud for Nacho's videos is abundant in the comments sections of his YouTube channel. This is not only because he exhumes previously unseen footage,

⁴⁰ Bowie uses handclapping as a percussive instrument in several of his songs, including: 'Uncle Arthur' (1967), 'All the Madmen' (1970), 'Andy Warhol' (1971), 'Starman' (1972), 'Soul Love' (1972), 'The Prettiest Star' (1973), 'Golden Years' (1975), 'Fashion' (1980), 'Under Pressure' (1981) and 'Love is Lost' (2013).

⁴¹ Nacho Video, 'David Bowie | John, I'm Only Dancing | Promo | Unreleased Mick Rock Outtake Footage Re-edit | 1972,' *YouTube video*, 00:02:54, 5 March 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=adhFZr6VDes>.



Figure 11.4 Mick Ronson is featured in a background long-shot overlaid with a foreground close-up, 'David Bowie | John, I'm Only Dancing | Promo | Unreleased Mick Rock Outtake Footage Re-edit | 1972' (4 March 2017).



Figure 11.5 Mick Ronson's smiling face gradually morphs into a close-up of Bowie's face, 'David Bowie | John, I'm Only Dancing | Promo | Unreleased Mick Rock Outtake Footage Re-edit | 1972' (4 March 2017).



Figure 11.6 In unison with the final lingering note, Mick Ronson lowers his guitar to the floor, just as Bowie raises his middle finger in the foreground, 'David Bowie | John, I'm Only Dancing | Promo | Unreleased Mick Rock Outtake Footage Re-edit | 1972' (4 March 2017).

but also because of the creative manner with which he re-presents previously seen video materials. Although Nacho's video for 'John, I'm Only Dancing' presents us with an example of re-authoring, it might also be considered as a form of collaborative authorship. Rock directed the performance and shot the footage that Nacho later edited. This was not collaboration in the sense of knowingly working together and communicating about creative decisions, as Nacho and Rock never met or communicated with one another. But the final product is the result of creative decisions made by Rock, Bowie and eventually Nacho, with footage and ideas provided by Nacho's colleagues. In this sense, there's an element of collaboration in the creative process, even if it is unsolicited – and if two of the authors are no longer alive to share that sense of collaborative authorship. Rock and Bowie may have been interested to see that the final shot of Nacho's video revealed a long-forgotten piece of footage that perfectly expresses the protopunk attitude and subversive humour they shared.⁴²

⁴² For more on this, see: Lisa Perrott, *David Bowie and the Art of Music Video* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023).



Figure 11.7 Nacho's remastered version includes outtake footage, showing Bowie expressing his disappointment of the prospect that the recording had been ruined by the sound of the phone ringing in the back of the recording studio, 'David Bowie – Life On Mars? (Original Unedited Version, Remastered by Nacho)' (??? 2021).

In a similar vein, these transgressive artists may have been fascinated to see Nacho's re-edit of the original unbleached version of Rock's promo for Bowie's song 'Life on Mars?' (1973).⁴³ Nacho's remastered video has revelatory impact for fans, since it includes previously unseen outtakes, along with the accidental ending that had only existed on the original recording of the song.⁴⁴ In Nacho's video, this epic song concludes, only to be followed by Bowie gesturing disappointment (Figure 11.7) and Ronson verbally cursing; both expressing frustration by the prospect that the recording had been ruined by the sound of the phone ringing in the back of the recording studio. Nacho's inclusion of these

⁴³ David Bowie, 'David Bowie – Life On Mars? (Official Video)', *YouTube video*, 00:04:09, 10 July 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AZKcl4-tcuo>.

⁴⁴ Nacho Video, 'David Bowie | Life On Mars | Original Unedited Version | Unbleached Original Promo | Remastered by Nacho', *Nachosvideos.com*, 00:03:57 (n.d), <https://www.nachosvideos.com/bowie-videos>.

audio and visual outtakes reveals moments of spontaneity – ‘flickers of authenticity’ that rupture the artifice of both Bowie’s performance and the overall visual style, thus giving the video a *vérité* feel that was not present in Rock’s original 1972 video for ‘Life on Mars?’.⁴⁵ In this way, Nacho’s re-edited video not only re-presents the original footage, it exemplifies a form of re-authorship that portrays his interest in blending the codes and conventions of music video and documentary.

From promotional video to documentary

Nacho often experiments with the aesthetics and conventions of different genres, sometimes creating unexpected fusions from disparate materials. In 2020 he uploaded a thirty-seven minute documentary along with an explanation about the convoluted process behind its inception. He describes how the project emerged from the initial idea of re-purposing a 1980 radio advertisement for *The Elephant Man* theatrical performance, but then developed into a much bigger, hybrid documentary that was ‘culled from over fifty sources’:⁴⁶

The idea for this film originated in 2016 out of desperation to see / create a video for the Bowie ‘80 era. I toyed with using *Elephant Man* footage to make a video for the track ‘Scary Monsters’. Those experiments proved fruitless. But when telling a Bowie collector mate about them, he suggested making a ‘fake’ TV ad, based on the real 1980 radio ad for Bowie in the *Elephant Man* play. Whilst working on that, it occurred to me that there should be a documentary about Bowie in the play. And then the ‘fake’ ad morphed into a hybrid of ad and trailer for an imaginary forthcoming documentary, then called: ‘David Bowie is The Elephant Man.’ Well, four years and about 500 editing hours later, here is the documentary.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ ‘Flickers of authenticity’ is a term coined by Jane Roscoe to describe a moment in Reality TV shows when participants unexpectedly let down their guard to show rare moments of emotional authenticity. This momentary ‘flicker’ breaks their coded performance, which often involves acting as though they are unaware of the presence of camera. For more on this, see: Derek Paget and Jane Roscoe, ‘Giving Voice: Performance and Authenticity in the Documentary Musical,’ *Jump Cut: A Review of Contemporary Media* No. 48 (2006): <https://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/jc48.2006/MusicalDocy/>.

⁴⁶ Nacho Video, ‘David Bowie in New York 1980 The Elephant Man, Scary Monsters & Other Strange People | 2020,’ *YouTube video*, 00:37:48, 5 December 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F1fTtwGqdQw&t=46s>.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

Although the completed documentary portrays Nacho's skill as a documentary editor, his explanation of his creative process shows how many of his projects are triggered by a desire to fill a gap, and then stumbling upon a piece of archive material. Once he had begun experimenting with sonic and visual relationships, the project would often take on an organic life of its own.

David Bowie is The Man Who Fell To Earth

The experimentation with audio-visual materials and genre conventions described above is also apparent in Nacho's 2017 documentary titled *David Bowie is The Man Who Fell To Earth*, which he revised and re-published on his YouTube channel in 2021.⁴⁸ Describing this project as an exploration of Nicolas Roeg's 1976 film *The Man Who Fell to Earth*, Nacho adds that his documentary also contemplates Bowie's involvement in this film, and the enduring impact this experience had on him and his music.⁴⁹ The documentary provides context about Roeg's directorial intentions while allowing Bowie and Candy Clarke to voice their reflections about the film and its impact on them personally. By drawing together these diverse perspectives, the documentary fills gaps in the publicly available knowledge about this film. Going beyond the gap-filling role that Jenkins ascribed to fandom, Nacho's editing creatively elaborates on the canon of *The Man Who Fell to Earth*.⁵⁰ By stitching together found fragments from multiple authors and sources, Nacho has experimented with the artistic strategy of bricolage to create a coherent feature-length documentary that is greater than the sum of its parts. Although multiple authors can be attributed to each part, Nacho's authorship as director and editor of this documentary is indicated by his signature at the lower right corner of the frame, much like a painter would sign their canvas. Given this artisanal approach to indicating authorship, it's interesting that Nacho says his documentary 'tries to paint a small portrait of Bowie and his music during the era – from 1974 up to the 1977 album, **Low**. The film also ruminates on Bowie's missing soundtrack for *The Man Who Fell To Earth*.'⁵¹ The mythology around this missing soundtrack indicates that

Please
italicise
the album
title
'Low'

⁴⁸ Nacho Video, 'David Bowie is The Man Who Fell To Earth . Redux . Documentary . 2021,' *Nachosvieos.com*, 01:04:02, 18 March 2021, <https://www.nachosvideos.com/db-is-tmwfte>.

⁴⁹ *The Man Who Fell to Earth* (1976) [film] dir. Nicolas Roeg, United Kingdom: British Lion Film Corporation.

⁵⁰ Jenkins, *Textual Poachers*, 165.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

after the film had been shot, Bowie worked on music that he intended to be used for the soundtrack. Although that music was not used, Bowie later incorporated elements of the unused music into his subsequent albums. According to legend, Bowie sent a copy of his album *Low* (1977) to Roeg, with a message saying ‘this is what I wanted to do for the film.’⁵² Nacho explains that ‘as part of the story telling’ in his documentary, ‘some of Bowie’s music from the era is used with re-edits of scenes from the movie, worked in with the interviews and commentary.’⁵³ The missing soundtrack presented a gap-filling opportunity for Nacho, who responded by taking the creative liberty of removing the original music from sections of Roeg’s film and editing these shots together with pieces of Bowie’s music. This is a significant act of creative liberty on Nacho’s part, which may have started as an experiment with audio-visual relations, but eventuated in a fan playing with the notion of revising history and re-authoring a cult film. By doing so, Nacho is giving the audience a sense of how this film could have been experienced if Roeg had chosen to use Bowie’s music. The result is much like the revelatory impact of his re-edited music videos, since sections of the film are re-contextualized with an entirely different tone. To emphasize Bowie’s comment that acting in the film had influenced the music on *Station to Station*, Nacho has overlaid the song ‘Station to Station’ (1976) with the scene from Roeg’s film that inspired the album cover (Figure 11.8). In the middle of the



Figure 11.8 Nacho has overlaid the song ‘Station to Station’ (1976) with the scene from Roeg’s film that inspired the *Station to Station* album cover, ‘David Bowie is The Man Who Fell To Earth (Redux – A Nacho Documentary – 2021)’ (? 2021).

⁵² Sean Doyle, ‘Video Essay: The Soundtracks of the Man Who Fell to Earth,’ *Film Comment*, n.d., <https://www.filmcomment.com/video-essay-the-soundtracks-of-the-man-who-fell-to-earth/>.

⁵³ Nacho Video, ‘David Bowie is The Man Who Fell To Earth . Redux . Documentary . 2021,’ *ibid*.

documentary, Nacho includes an imaginative audio-visual re-coupling that appears as a re-authored video for Bowie's version of 'Wild is the Wind' (timecode 00:38:57–00:41:25). By overlaying this song with the love-making scene in the film, both the sex scene and the song take on a completely new tone. Throughout Nacho's documentary, similar instances of audio-visual re-coupling produce a combined sense of nostalgia and defamiliarization, but the result feels eerily right. Perhaps because Bowie's performance is wrapped in his own music, which was partially generated from his experience of acting in the film. For many Bowie fans, Nacho has filled the gap of the missing soundtrack by reuniting it with its rightful partner.

Artistic integrity

There's a large dose of creative liberty undertaken in such acts of re-assemblage. Not all Bowie fans find such creative re-assemblage and re-authorship acceptable, as has been expressed in reviews of Morgen's film *Moonage Daydream*.⁵⁴ In contrast to some of the responses to Morgen's approach as a fan re-editor, fans have praised Nacho for being a 'magician' who pulls 'Bowie gems from the vault for all of us to enjoy'.⁵⁵ Such plaudits come from recognition among fan communities that Nacho re-assembles from a place of integrity and therefore is a 'safe pair of hands' with which to entrust with access to 'the vault'. Such trust has been earned over time through the building of relationships and through demonstrating representational integrity. Although taking care to credit his sources and the owners of copyright, Nacho assures us that he does not monetize the videos he uploads on his YouTube channel: 'I don't monetize them . . . I don't know if there's revenue I'm missing, it's irrelevant to me actually. And my conscience is clean because I don't get anything from that channel'.⁵⁶ Despite the liberation that goes with having a clean conscience, Nacho expressed an awareness of inadvertently being part of something he despises:

⁵⁴ For instance, see these contrasting reviews: Carl Wilson, 'The David Bowie Documentary Makes a Mess of a Velvet Goldmine,' *Slate*, 19 September 2022, https://slate.com/culture/2022/09/david-bowie-moonage-daydream-2022-documentary-movie-review.html?fbclid=IwAR2cyzLaXepQhS3OFMrIUhLsLYu6E_GJSZ5zmDfzosb5k-9NA3zgrAj12AU; Lisa Perrott 'Moonage Daydream: Brilliant Bowie Film Takes Big Risks to Create Something New,' *The Conversation*, 14 September 2022, <https://theconversation.com/moonage-daydream-brilliant-bowie-film-takes-big-risks-to-create-something-truly-new-190347>.

⁵⁵ Pleasant Valley Picker CA, YouTube User, *ibid*.

⁵⁶ Nacho, Interview by Lisa Perrott.

I'm part of what I call the 'dead Bowie industry', which is for the most part very tacky. It's kind of offensive to me. You know, Bowie Barbie-doll, Monopoly set, trainers, the endless unnecessary reissues, picture disc, coloured vinyl, not anything of any real value, doesn't add to the canon in any way that's desirable. I'm part of that industry. Except of course, I haven't made a penny from that industry, there's that big difference . . . as the 'dead Bowie industry' gets ever more offensive to me and ever more tacky and gross, I feel that some of us are trying to hold up the other end of things, and say this is the *art* . . . that's where I think I fit in it, I'm trying to present what I really like about Bowie.⁵⁷

At this point in the interview, I had to acknowledge that as an 'aca-fan', I too cannot escape being unintentionally part of the 'dead Bowie industry'. I too share Nacho's impetus to try and 'hold up the other end of things' by exploring the art of Bowie from a place of integrity. Nacho's response to this dilemma indicates a level of awareness that is not always articulated by video re-editors on YouTube or by directors of official projects.

When considering issues of artistic integrity and authorship, it's important to critique the notion of sole authorship and consider the collaborative authorship that occurs among fans, often behind the scenes. By examining Nacho's videos, and listening to him describe his creative process, I was most surprised to learn of the Exquisite Corpse-like collaborative process that includes a string of foragers and assemblage artists. Bowie too, reassembled the work of artists he admired. He was a rampant forager who wove together strands of what I call 'loose continuity' across time and mediums.⁵⁸ Through a process of recontextualizing and re-authoring the work of other artists, the trope of alienation, the strategy of masking and the figure of Pierrot are loosely woven across five decades of sonic and visual art forms. Rather than tying these strands into sacrosanct knots of singular authorship, Bowie left them dangling so they could be picked up and extended by fans, artists and future generations.⁵⁹ By untangling and re-weaving these strands, Nacho serves as a transmedia elaborator who unintentionally mimics Bowie's penchant for foraging, re-assemblage and the alchemy of 'spinning straw into gold'.⁶⁰ To be accepted by

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Lisa Perrott, 'The Alchemical Union of David Bowie and Floria Sigismondi: "Transmedia surrealism" and "loose continuity"', in *Transmedia Directors: Artistry, Industry and New Audiovisual Aesthetics*, ed. Carol Vernallis, Holly Rogers and Lisa Perrott (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 196.

⁵⁹ For more on this, see: Lisa Perrott, *David Bowie and the Transformation of Music Video: 1984–2016 (and Beyond)* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2023).

⁶⁰ The Brothers Grimm, 'Rumpelstiltskin' [fairy tale], *Children's and Household Tales*, 1812.

fans as a descendent of Bowie's lineage requires a high level of artistic integrity. But does Nacho see himself as an artist?

I'm an artisan I guess . . . I don't know if it's art, but it's how I'm expressing myself, if that's art. I don't want to make any false claims about myself. To me it's just a blessing that just came to me. I mean I'm a yoga-hippie man, it was the universe that gave me this blessing. It just came to me. I didn't apparently do anything.⁶¹

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⁶¹ Nacho, Interview by Lisa Perrott.

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