#### Scary Monsters: the Hopeful Undecidability of David Bowie (1947-2016)

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

#### David Bowie has always been special, more than special, other-worldly. A starman, who came to deliver us from the emptiness, the dreariness, the heteronormative fetters of English suburban life. However, attempts, especially after his death, to canonise or deify him, are misplaced. Because he wasn’t a Saint or a God, not even a rock God (Gasp). He was so much more than that. He was a monster, and what a monster he was. And, it is monsters, not Gods, who point the way: artistically, ethically, spiritually. This article is about three things: monsters, hope and David Bowie. Monsters, because the monster is the outsider template *par excellence.* Hope, because monsters are quintessentially hopeful. Bowie, because he is the monster writ large. Of all the figures within popular culture, few embody the monster quite like David Bowie. Monsters then, will be our object, hope our reason, and Bowie our guide and delight. Through Bowie, we will journey through the territory of sex, gender and sexuality, human/animal hybridity, and the sacred and profane and, in the process, consider some key categorical distinctions that the monster brings to crisis. Through Bowie, the article will render the monster, and an understanding of its intrinsic hopefulness, more accessible. In contrast to the usual protocols of academic writing, the article will adopt an informal style. In flouting conventions of genre, it becomes alive to its subject-matter. That is, it becomes monstrous and, which is the same thing, Bowiesque. I begin with *Sweet Thing*, taken from Bowie's 1974 album, *Diamond Dogs.*

#### AUDIO - *Sweet Thing*[[1]](#footnote-1)

#### *Sweet Thing* is one of my favourite Bowie songs. I love the melancholic mood. The sensitive way it explores isolation and loneliness through an imagined, perhaps real, encounter with an older sex worker. At first, it seems like an emotionless fuck, but as the song develops so does tenderness. Crucially, the song produces longing. Through musical tone and lyrical opacity it effects ‘a kind of *deworlding* of the world,’ whereby one becomes aware that all in the world is not in sync with the self.[[2]](#footnote-2) In such moments our out of kilter selves sense something more, something different, something richer. It is the arousal of this feeling which helps explain why our relationship to Bowie is one of such deep resonance. As Simon Critchley puts it, Bowie’s music ‘is a discord with the world that can allow a certain demundanization, a withdrawal that might permit us to see things in a utopian light.’[[3]](#footnote-3) In other words, there is something hopeful about David Bowie. And hope is something that connects him to the monster, though, as we shall see, it is not the only thing.

#### Before turning to Bowie however, I will first present a framework for thinking about the structure of the monster. The monster is both a legal category and a contemporary template within social theory through which the production and regulation of outsiders, especially perhaps those most threatening to the social and legal order, might be understood.[[4]](#footnote-4) The category of the monster first entered English law through Bracton and the partial reception of Roman law in the mid-thirteenth century[[5]](#footnote-5) and persisted, in one incarnation or another, through Coke[[6]](#footnote-6) and Blackstone[[7]](#footnote-7) and beyond, at least into the mid-nineteenth century.[[8]](#footnote-8) At the core of English legal understandings of the monster, lay the Roman law distinction between monstrosity and deformity, whereby the latter set the limits to what counted as human. In other words, the deformity side of the distinction served to highlight corporeal forms of human difference that law proved able to accommodate.[[9]](#footnote-9) In articulating a monster framework, I will draw in particular on the work of Michel Foucault and George Canguilhem, work which I find particularly helpful, especially in terms of its analytical precision. Canguilhem essentially adopts a Roman law understanding of the monster, with its fixation on bodies. We will see that Foucault moves beyond this understanding in order to extend the concept of the monster to include the psyche. However, the article will also tease out what Foucault and Canguilhem neglect, that is, the monster’s intrinsic hopefulness.

#### II. A MONSTER FRAMEWORK

#### In laying this theoretical ground, I will provide some examples of monsters that might have been covered in this article as alternatives to Bowie, and some examples that ought *not* to be treated as monsters at all. In proceeding in this way, I aim to delineate the proper object of our inquiry, for not all scary creatures are monsters. In choosing a monster topic, there are many directions one could take. Thus, we could, in preference to Bowie, have considered physical monsters of the past, ones that have preoccupied us since antiquity. This would be a story of how science has sought to kill off monsters, or at least, has tested our willingness to suspend our disbelief in them. Such a history would include consideration of the social and legal treatment of bestial humans, conjoined twins and hermaphrodites, three figures which, according to Foucault, preoccupied the West during the late Middle Ages, the Renaissance and the Classical period respectively.[[10]](#footnote-10)

#### Alternatively, we could focus on science as the creator, rather than the destroyer of monsters. One contemporary example that might be explored here is the creation of human/animal admixed embryos.[[11]](#footnote-11) Or perhaps, we might venture beyond reality into the territory of fiction, that is, if to invoke the monster is not already to have made that journey. Thus, we might have considered werewolfs, vampires, the creature in Frankenstein, or perhaps Stevenson’s Jekyll and Hyde or Marvel Comics’ the Incredible Hulk. In choosing these examples of fiction, I have deliberately avoided King Kong, Godzilla and Cookie Monster. The reason for such exclusions is that I want to distinguish between monsters, on the one hand, and beasts or creatures, on the other. While some scholars might want to define monsters more broadly, I think a key thing about monsters is that they are at least part human, though never completely so. That is, hybridity is a condition of their constitution, but *not* any kind of hybridity. It is for this reason that Dolly the Sheep also fails to make the cut.

#### Another type of figure that I wish to exclude from my definition of monster includes examples like Gort, the robot in the 1951 film, The Day the Earth Stood Still, Schwarzenegger’s Terminator,[[12]](#footnote-12) and the Stepford Wives. These figures are excluded not only because they lack the quality of human/non-human hybridity, but also because they are inorganic. As Canguilhem notes: ‘the qualification of monster must be reserved for organic beings.’[[13]](#footnote-13) There is, he insists, no such thing as ‘a mechanical monster.’[[14]](#footnote-14) Rather, the monster presupposes departure or deviation from some morphological norm. This can be thought of in terms of physical lack or, more often, excess.[[15]](#footnote-15) It is therefore, at least for Canguilhem, a high degree of physical human difference that leads to a conclusion of *monstrosity*.

#### However, he does not equate mere monstrosity with the term monster, though such conflations abound in the monster literature.[[16]](#footnote-16) This is because, as Canguilhem stresses, the monster is a double-effect. Though it requires *monstrosity*, this proves to be a necessary rather than a sufficient condition of monster production. The other condition is *monstrousness*. By *monstrousness*, Canguilhem is referring to a body’s relationship to the Law. He is pointing to a requirement that a body contravene or transgress Law. As he puts it, monstrosity and monstrousness ‘are a duality of concepts with the same etymological root’ and are ‘at the service of two forms of normative judgment, the medical and the legal.’[[17]](#footnote-17) In other words, the monster is to be understood as the effect of a particular law/nature nexus. For Canguilhem, the monster is the effect of a breach of nature (understood as morphological irregularity) and a breach of law (understood as a crisis of classification).

#### Foucault also understands the monster to be ‘a juridico-natural complex.’[[18]](#footnote-18) As he points out, it appears ‘only when [the] confusion [of nature] comes up against, overturns, or disturbs civil, canon or religious law.’[[19]](#footnote-19) Thus, for Foucault, like Canguilhem, the monster is not simply an outlaw. It not only refuses and escapes the law, it renders it unintelligible. However, Foucault reworks the idea of a breach of nature to take account of the historical shift in the regulatory preoccupations of the state from the body to the ‘soul’ or psyche.[[20]](#footnote-20) This reworking is important because it enables the idea of the monster to extend beyond the physical body to include, a truly modern figure, the monster within. While Canguilhem took the view that the natural sciences had killed off monsters,[[21]](#footnote-21) Foucault points to the social sciences as spawning, in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, a multiplicity of new, albeit ‘diluted’ monsters,[[22]](#footnote-22) which he termed ‘abnormal individuals.’[[23]](#footnote-23)

#### It is then this idea of the monster, as a human/non-human hybrid, existing in nature but confounding law, that I want to take up. This is because it is this understanding of the monster, whether understood in terms of the body and/or the psyche, that produces in us the greatest anxiety. And what produces the greatest anxiety is the simultaneous distance and proximity we bear to monsters. In one sense, they prop us up through creating the fantasy of stable ground beneath our feet. They do this through providing an outside to our human outline. Yet, we can never keep them at arms length. We are full of doubts. Wherever we draw the line, monsters highlight permeability.[[24]](#footnote-24)

#### III. THE HOPEFULNESS OF MONSTERS

#### Having made these preliminary remarks, and before proceeding to Bowie, I want to say something about hope, about the hopefulness of monsters.[[25]](#footnote-25) Foucault and Canguilhem provide us with a structure for understanding *how* monsters appear and how they fade away. They say little, if anything, about their hopefulness, though Foucault perhaps alludes to their promise in his somewhat problematic description of Herculine Barbin’s life as ‘a happy limbo of non-identity.’[[26]](#footnote-26) It might seem counter-intuitive to think of monsters as hopeful. After all, monsters, both of the flesh, as well as those within literature and popular culture, have often been imagined and portrayed as portents of dystopia, as figures that lie in wait over the horizon. Yet, they have also been viewed as hopeful signs. Certainly, the Latin word *monstrare,* meaning to show forth or demonstrate, rather than to warn,[[27]](#footnote-27) placed the emphasis on hope. And after Saint Augustine, monsters were read increasingly as signs of the power and glory of God to come.[[28]](#footnote-28) In any event, monsters are intrinsically hopeful for at least two reasons.

#### First, they guarantee us a tomorrow. Second, and relatedly, they point to the place of the sacred in a world without God. Let me explain. In relation to ensuring a future, Derrida reminds us that:

#### the future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared … is heralded by species of monsters. A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would already be a predictable, calculable, and programmable tomorrow.[[29]](#footnote-29)

#### Turning to the place of the sacred, monsters point to it, and they do so irrespective of whether they are considered good or bad, the sacred being indifferent to such moral distinctions.[[30]](#footnote-30) Whatever else it might be, the sacred is that which holds value.[[31]](#footnote-31) In Levinasian terms, what gives something value is ‘its inability to be adequately reduced to our own preexisting terms. Value is what is left over,’ when ‘our efforts to know, define, and to commodify’[[32]](#footnote-32) have been exhausted. It is because monsters represent an excess of signification, of language itself, being simultaneously human and non-human, that gives them value. It is precisely their irreducibility that speaks to each of us, and to our collective parts. In contrast to commodification, they call for solidarity, connection and love. While transgression may provide access to the sacred, as Bataille contends,[[33]](#footnote-33) and while monsters are, on such an account, necessarily its storm troopers, love is its content, or at least, a content I wish to emphasise. While religion claims the sacred as its own, I am identifying love, rather than myth,[[34]](#footnote-34) as a source of the sacred to which the monster points. And so, we ought to embrace monsters. By embrace, I mean, not only the differences that mark others and lie within ourselves, but also what the monster concept represents more broadly: change, ambiguity, instability, complexity, openness. Because we want a future, and because we want both to love and to be loved, embrace the monster we must.

#### IV. BOWIE AS MONSTER

#### Having placed the concept of the monster within a theoretical frame, and having emphasised its intrinsic hopefulness, I now turn to our vehicle for rendering monsters more accessible: the countercultural icon, auto-didact, sublime anti-hero and provocateur, David Bowie. I have selected Bowie for three reasons. First, I like Bowie. Second, and while Bowie is so much more than the music, an example from the world of music is instructive because music is, as Jacques Attali contends, prophecy. It ‘makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible,’[[35]](#footnote-35) or as Bowie has put it: ‘[t]omorrow belongs to those who hear it coming.’[[36]](#footnote-36) In this sense, music, much like the monster, heralds the future. Third, and most importantly for our purposes, Bowie, perhaps more than any other figure within popular culture, captures the idea and promise of the monster. According to Devereux, Dillane and Power, there has never been ‘an artist as intellectually, musically and visually compelling, as David Bowie.’[[37]](#footnote-37)

#### How true. But the reasons why Bowie is so compelling are inextricably tied up with the fact that he is the daddy-o of late twentieth century monsters of popular culture and the mother of others as well as those to come. Who better than Bowie to exemplify the monster? Bowie, a figure who, due to permament anisocoria (a dilated pupil) in his left eye appeared to have eyes of different form and colour and therefore, had the appearance of being an alien before he even got going, and who would later play that role in film (Nick Roeg’s The Man Who Fell to Earth)[[38]](#footnote-38) television (Bertolt Brecht’s Baal on the BBC),[[39]](#footnote-39) and theatre (the Elephant Man on Broadway).[[40]](#footnote-40) Bowie, who had stated: ‘I always had a repulsive need to be something more than human.’[[41]](#footnote-41) So, with an eye to the promise of monsters, let us turn to this *outre* figure extraordinaire. I will focus on the period 1969-1980. However, in privileging this period, I do not mean to reduce his subsequent work to mere retrospective, something which the music press did endlessly after 1980.[[42]](#footnote-42) Bowie cannot be frozen in time. Like the monster he embodied, a recognition of transience guided everything he did.

#### In the chorus to his 1980 song, *Scary Monsters*,[[43]](#footnote-43) Bowie alludes to at least three things that are central to thinking about monsters. One, monsters can scare the shit out of us and two, we like it. Or, to put it another way, the monster is an amalgam of fear and desire. We look away, but we always look back. We are spellbound, transfixed. And the reason for this is that there is something tantalising about monsters. They are strange, awesome in fact, yet strangely familiar. This produces in us a sense of the uncanny (*unheimlich*).[[44]](#footnote-44) Third, through the encounter, monsters, as Bowie says, ‘keep us running,’[[45]](#footnote-45) they urge us forward into the unknown. They call us to be greater than we are, to move beyond ourselves, our current predicament, our trivialities. In this sense, monsters, while perhaps terrifying, represent hope.

#### Unlike most artists, and especially rock stars, who tend to subject us to an endless repetition of the same, Bowie, himself a fiction destined to become more real than his creator,[[46]](#footnote-46) invented and inhabited a series of personas, each with its own aesthetic and musical particularity. Moreover, he always insisted, usually in the very moment of musical and artistic triumph, on killing off objects of fan-love. While other rock stars, like the Who’s Pete Townshend, confined auto-destructive art[[47]](#footnote-47) to smashing up guitars on stage,[[48]](#footnote-48) Bowie, with much less fanfare, always turned it on himself. That is, he committed serial ritual suicide.[[49]](#footnote-49) Like a Gustav Metzger acid painting, Bowie dissolved before our eyes, only to be reconstituted elsewhere. To be a Bowie fan was to mourn, to let go and to learn to love again, and to become increasingly aware that this process would be repeated without end, or at least till the end, by which time, of course, it had inspired countless new beginnings. That is, Bowie would spawn a monstrous progeny: musically, artistically, culturally. The journey would be painful, but as Bowie himself pointed out, it would never be dull.[[50]](#footnote-50)

#### Having soaked up ‘art’s filthy lesson,’[[51]](#footnote-51) he refused to present himself other than through the guise of the mask. As a child of Burroughs and Warhol, Bowie attended to surface, not depth. Preferring the cut-up technique[[52]](#footnote-52) and ‘planned accidents’[[53]](#footnote-53) to a false and limiting ‘authenticity’ that so dogged rock in the 60s, he ‘moved relentlessly from illusion to illusion,’[[54]](#footnote-54) though always getting closer to reality, to ‘a felt, corporeal truth,’[[55]](#footnote-55) than those who accused him of fakery. Bowie’s direction then, was one of continual reinvention, death and rebirth. A kind of protean creature who gestured toward the monster at every turn. And yet, Bowie’s gaze was not unproblematically forward. He always looked back. Back in the sense of an internal dialogue. For example, and perhaps most notably, on his 1980 song, ‘Ashes to Ashes,’[[56]](#footnote-56) Bowie reflects back on his earlier and perhaps most enigmatic character, Major Tom, asking the listener whether she remembers him and providing an update on his space travelling/drug-taking fortunes. Bowie would continue, if infrequently, to check in on the Major[[57]](#footnote-57) and he appears for the final time in the video for the song, *Blackstar*,[[58]](#footnote-58) where his death coincides with Bowie’s own. In this sense, Bowie understood identity as shifting and complex, but also the importance of pathos, the need to attend to earlier selves.

#### In terms of his artistic presentations and developing aesthetic, he exchanged the alien messiah and proto-punk Ziggy for the paranoid and corrupted Aladdin Sane*,[[59]](#footnote-59)* only to morph into Halloween Jack, a dystopian figure who ushered in the year of the Diamond Dogs, who in turn succumbed to the plastic soul-boy of *Young Americans,*[[60]](#footnote-60) only to be sacrificed on the slab of the emotionally distant Thin White Duke,[[61]](#footnote-61) an *uberman[[62]](#footnote-62)* character who gestured aesthetically toward German modernism and the avant-garde,[[63]](#footnote-63) and finally to Pierrot, the tragi-comic fool-clown of *Scary monsters*. In other words, throughout the 70s, and with corpses piling up behind him,[[64]](#footnote-64) the dance went on and on, and on.

#### In other words, Bowie understood what is true in art as it is in life: stasis equals death. In refusing the tyranny of fixed identity, as well as the purity of genre, Bowie, like the monster he so eloquently symbolised and embodied, made possible, ushered in the new. However, Bowie aimed not merely to change. He was not simply a chameleon. Rather, he always sought to ‘fuck things up.’ That is, he was not concerned only with motion, but with challenging the taken-for-granted, the axiomatic, the self-evident. As he stated in 1998, ‘[o]nce something is categorised and accepted, it becomes part of the tyranny of the mainstream, and it loses all potency.’[[65]](#footnote-65) Like Foucault, he seemed to understand such an approach to be absolutely necessary as a ground-clearing exercise. No respector of tradition, his MO was perpetual reinvention or as Bowie himself has characterised it, perhaps with an emphasis on mischief: ‘hit and run.’[[66]](#footnote-66)

#### And in his creative endeavours Bowie was monster-like, both in the sense of being incredibly prolific (gargantuan)[[67]](#footnote-67) and in his promiscuity (his mixing of genres).[[68]](#footnote-68) Indeed, Bowie’s originality lies precisely in this practice. He embraced derivation. Or we might say, he liked to borrow, or perhaps, given Picasso’s distinction between talent and genius,[[69]](#footnote-69) steal. He liked to steal and he liked to mix. In the face of musical and other artistic genres, Bowie was incapable of fidelity. In terms of music, he flirted with folk and the whimsy of English musical hall (think Anthony Newley and Lionel Bart),[[70]](#footnote-70) then looked to black America (rock & roll/soul/funk), before turning to the minimalism and discordant notes of Krautrock. The Berlin years[[71]](#footnote-71) ended with the album, *Lodger* - Bowie could never stick around for long. In terms of imagery, he moved through mod, hippy, a period as a mime, androgynous space invader, amoral aristocrat, clown and so forth.

#### As both monsters and artists do, he pointed to some of our deepest anxieties concerning sex, gender and sexuality; human/animal hybridity; and the relationship between the human and the divine or, at least, between the sacred and profane. And, in the main, he did so, not through denunciation or the satirising of social norms (the ‘fuck you’ of punk and oppositional politics), but, and more gently, through parody, holding up, through his characters and lyrics, ‘absurdist mirrors’[[72]](#footnote-72) that served to suspend the world, at least temporarily. And in these moments, these wonderful moments, he enabled us to see things, and of course ourselves, anew, more keenly, and to glimpse, as Richard Fitch observes, the reality that ambivalence ‘trump[s] moral and political certainties.’[[73]](#footnote-73)

#### V. BOWIE AS GENDER/SEXUALLY AMBIGUOUS

#### In relation to gender, Bowie struck an androgynous pose. On the original *The Man Who Sold the World* album cover,[[74]](#footnote-74) we see Bowie reclining on a *chaise longue*, in full pre-Raphaelite transvestic splendor.[[75]](#footnote-75) On *Hunky Dory*, we see his likeness to Dietrich, or perhaps Greta Garbo.[[76]](#footnote-76) With the arrival of Ziggy and Aladdin Sane, his androgyny morphed into more highly sexualised camp. Think ‘Jean Genie’ or Jean Genet.[[77]](#footnote-77) Bowie’s gender undecidability can be contrasted with ‘the prevailing masculinist subculture that dominated British Rock in the mid to late 1960s.’[[78]](#footnote-78) While Ziggy played guitar, Bowie rarely did. In opposition to the *Cock Rock[[79]](#footnote-79)* of the period, and the compulsory heterosexuality to which it spoke,[[80]](#footnote-80) Bowie inserted the feminine, but not in a shy way. Through fakery he highlighted the artificiality of rock[[81]](#footnote-81) but also the constructedness of gender.[[82]](#footnote-82) Later, and inspired by the Berlin drag scene, he would challenge male privilege and heteronormativity through the classic song and video, ‘Boys Keep Swinging.’

#### In relation to sexuality, and at a time when homophobia remained pervasive both in the US and the UK, Bowie, though married to Angie, came out as gay,[[83]](#footnote-83) the first really major star to just come right out and say it.[[84]](#footnote-84) Later he repositioned as bi,[[85]](#footnote-85) then as a ‘closet heterosexual.’[[86]](#footnote-86) Moreover, during his travels across the hetero-homo divide, and perhaps beyond it, Bowie’s object choices transcended cis-sexuality.[[87]](#footnote-87) That is, during his Berlin period, he had a lengthy relationship with muse and famous transgender cabaret star, Romy Haag.[[88]](#footnote-88) Ultimately, when asked the sexual identity question, Bowie expressed only boredom. Yawn.

#### Moreover, he openly shunned gay politics. He did not want to lead a movement. As Michael Watts has noted: Bowie ‘despise[d] … tribal qualities.’[[89]](#footnote-89) In this respect, he was more like Oscar Wilde than Andre Gide.[[90]](#footnote-90) That is, more queer, than gay or bi, or not. Exactly. Bowie’s refusal of fixed sexual identity produces a crisis of classification. In contrast to the relatively muted threat posed by homosexuality, which after all, serves to bolster heterosexuality as ‘abnormal’ mirror image, a queer sensibility throws the cat among the pigeons. In Foucault’s terms, Bowie’s fleshy and interior sexual monstrosity align with monstrousness.

#### In terms of Bowie’s sexual playfulness, we can situate him on both sides of Noel Carroll’s dyad for conceptualising monsters, namely *fusion* and *fisson*.[[91]](#footnote-91) Fusion refers to mixture in point of time whereas fisson refers to the occupation of the body by different entities at different times. Thus we might contrast the mythic figure of the *Minotaur[[92]](#footnote-92)* (fusion) with *Jekyll and Hyde* or the *Incredible Hulk* (fisson). However, drawing on Foucault, and thereby shifting the focus from the body to the soul or psyche, we might recognise Bowie’s bisexual *fusion* while at the same time recognising fisson, that is, his apparent shift from gay to straight. Ultimately, Bowie eludes the distinction, refusing to take a position in a move that is both queer and pre-queer.

#### VI. BOWIE AND HUMAN/ANIMAL HYBRIDITY

#### Turning to human/animal hybridity, on the *Diamond Dogs* album gatefold cover,[[93]](#footnote-93) Bowie appears as half-man, half-dog.[[94]](#footnote-94) The original version showed full genitalia, but was later air-brushed for mass release. The airbrushed version however, served only to neuter the creature,[[95]](#footnote-95) thereby producing a crisis of sex as well as species. The image is striking. While the two human, perhaps demonic, bitches that squat behind Bowie might be described as grotesque,[[96]](#footnote-96) it is more difficult to characterise Bowie in this way. Certainly, his intense fixed gaze, his knowingness, is unlikely to illicit pity. Rather, he appears powerful and defiant, delighting in the celebration of hybridity, in being one of ‘the strangest living curiosities,’ as the accompanying text declares. If there is disgust, there is also recognition and desire. We are never far from animality, despite the best efforts of the superego.

#### Nevertheless, the image on the *Diamond Dogs* cover points to a (perhaps *the*) central taboo in western culture: thou shall not mix species, which, of course, is a prohibition against bestiality. The image is provocative however, not primarily because of bestial possibilities, but because it serves to remind us of our inability to distinguish between human and animal, and because it points to our own animality and therefore, perhaps, the possibility of unknown pleasures. The human/animal hybrid is a powerful monster archetype, one that has preoccupied us since antiquity. The distinction between human and animal has been important in defining the contours of humanity, in rendering us human. Yet, anxiety concerning the distinction is longstanding.

#### According to Joyce Salisbury, it can, in the West, be dated to the late Middle Ages.[[97]](#footnote-97) Moreover, it was precisely during this period that the monster, and the monster in human/animal form, first entered English law, where it served both to constitute and delimit humanness, and therefore rights-bearing subjects.[[98]](#footnote-98) Anxiety over perceived porousness between human and animal became more pronounced with the passage of time and the discomforting findings of science.[[99]](#footnote-99) Certainly, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Western worldview, resting on the idea of the ‘Great Chain of Being,’ was under enormous pressure from the scientific community.[[100]](#footnote-100) And, as Donna Haraway notes, by the end of the twentieth century: ‘the boundary between human and animal [was] thoroughly breached.’[[101]](#footnote-101) The specialness of *homo sapiens* at the biological level has become even more suspect since the findings of the Human Genome Project[[102]](#footnote-102) which push an already fragile idea of human close to breaking point.

#### And yet, in the face of this ‘crisis’ of the human, we should not be alarmed. The human was always already a construct that not only divided us from other species, but from each other and ourselves. In other words, behind the lie of ontological purity, whose logical end is always disturbing and sometimes leads to the death camp, lies the beautiful truth of hybridity, of the monster. Metaphorically and artistically, Bowie points the way. In the face of taboo, the royal ‘No,’ he always seemed to say ‘Yes.’ Yes to difference, yes to mixture, yes to connection. As Simon Critchley notes, what Bowie seemed to offer was ‘an absolute and unconditional affirmation of life in all of its chaotic complexity, but also its moments of transport and delight.’[[103]](#footnote-103) And, after all, if we can embrace the hybrid, the monster, the most reviled of creatures, do we not guarantee the liveability of, and create pleasurable possibilities for, every life?

#### VII. BOWIE AND THE SACRED & PROFANE

#### And so to my final theme concerning Bowie and monsters, distinguishing between the human and the divine, or, at least, between the sacred and profane. While religious themes run through Bowie’s lyrics,[[104]](#footnote-104) Bowie had no time for organised religion.[[105]](#footnote-105) However, spirituality in some sense, informs much of his work, a searching for some kind of meta-connection. As Critchley observes, Bowie’s obsession with, and opposition to, the Church appears to be founded on the view that it has ‘fraudulently co-opted, branded, marketed, and moralized the experience of transcendence.’[[106]](#footnote-106)

#### In Berlin, in 2002, on the *Heathen* tour, Bowie, introduced the song, *Heathen*, with the following heartfelt plea: ‘God bless us. Please, God bless us.’[[107]](#footnote-107) Of course, he was not literally referring to a God.[[108]](#footnote-108) Rather, he was speaking to outsiders with whom he identified and who identify with him, and expressing the hope that *we* are not *Heathen.* By *Heathen*, he is referring both to the substitution of ‘the God who has died’ with ourselves,[[109]](#footnote-109) and to the embrace of the ordinary or banal. Thus Bowie’s *Heathen* is hubristic, but also materially consumptive and happiness directed.[[110]](#footnote-110) In musical terms, think Coldplay[[111]](#footnote-111)or ‘the dreadful Bono.’[[112]](#footnote-112) In the face of such profanity, Bowie yearns[[113]](#footnote-113) for connection, for love, and ultimately, for the sacred. And, of course, we yearn with him. Bowie always strikes this chord.

#### What stands in the way, apart from human arrogance, are accrued social meanings, tradition, fixed identities.[[114]](#footnote-114) It is, as if, like Nietzsche, and more recently, Foucault, Bowie seeks to throw off the weight of history. Certainly, he sought to undo the self, to pare it back, or as Critchley puts it, Bowie ‘disciplined himself into becoming a nothing.’[[115]](#footnote-115) In doing so, he negates the fantasy of ontological purity, a fantasy that divides us from ourselves and others. This fantasy must be destroyed in order that the monster might live, so that we might be free in the Foucauldian sense, that is, to be otherwise.[[116]](#footnote-116) In preference to the default position of ‘all too human,’[[117]](#footnote-117) the monster, and Bowie as monster, provide a bridge between where we are now (‘Where Are We Now’)[[118]](#footnote-118) and where or who we would like to be. Ultimately, the monster points to transcendence of self and communion with others, to the creation of spaces ‘large enough for love to enter.’[[119]](#footnote-119)

#### VIII. CONCLUSION

#### To conclude then, Bowie, both in flesh and as a series of artistic and musical representations, can be viewed as occupying, nay celebrating, the position of the monster. In contrast to the certainty of Law, he offers undecidability, ambiguity, hybridity, impurity, metamorphosis. In relation to nature, he introduces and celebrates morphological and psychic irregularity. He is a creature both of and for our postmodern age, enbracing ‘the destruction and rearticulation of the human in the name of [something] more capacious.’[[120]](#footnote-120) So let us embrace monsters, so much better than Gods, with their tragic immortal lives. Not a God, repetition without end, but perpetual mutability.

#### I remember when Elvis died. It was kinda sad, but I didn’t cry. It was the same with John Lennon three years later and countless others since. But on 10th January last year I did cry. Partly because Bowie was the soundtrack to much of my life, especially my youth. But to foreground nostalgia would be to misrepresent the experience and its temporality. For in mourning Bowie’s passing the sense of loss is palpable, as it must be when a true monster dies. What we feel, we who are not heathen, is not nostalgia for the past, but rather what Bowie has described as ‘nostalgia for the future,’[[121]](#footnote-121) that is, a deep longing for connection, for love, and for an experience of the sacred in the here and now and in the future.

#### And yet, even in death, something Bowie styled, as he had life, he left us with hope, a parting caress. I refer here to his final album and requiem, *Blackstar*, released only 2 days before his death and which instantly went viral. Through the song ‘Lazarus,’ Bowie points to resurrection, to a return.[[122]](#footnote-122) Of course, there will be no more Bowie, other than in celluloid and forever. But there will be other hopeful monsters. How could it be otherwise? A life without monsters would be unimaginable and unbearable. I leave you with Bowie, and therefore with vitality, defiance and hope.

#### AUDIO - *Queen Bitch*[[123]](#footnote-123)

1. \* School of Law, Keele University, UK

   ‘Sweet Thing’ (*Diamond Dogs* album 1974) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Simon Critchley, *Bowie* (OR Books, 2014) 38. Critchley draws here on the philosophical language of Martin Heidegger. Our longing is heightened by the opacity of Bowie’s lyrics. As Critchley notes, ‘[w]e fill in the gaps with our imagination, with our longing’ (144). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *ibid*, 38-39. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Other templates within social theory include Renee Girard’s *scapegoat* (*Violence and the Sacred* (John Hopkins University, 1977); *The Scapegoat* (John Hopkins University, 1986)) and Zygmunt Bauman’s *stranger* (*Modernity and Ambivalence* (Polity Press, 1991); *Postmodern Ethics* (Blackwell, 1993)). For a discussion of the advantages the monster offers over these templates, see Alex Sharpe, *Foucault’s Monsters and the Challenge of Law* (Cavendish, 2010) 24-29. In relation to law, other outsider templates include the leper, the idiot, the lunatic and the deformed or disabled (Henry de Bracton, *On the Laws and Customs of England* 1240-1260 vols 1-4 (Harvard University Press, 1968), vol 2, 51, 308-09; vol 4, 209; Sir William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* 1765-1769 vols 1-4 (University of Chicago Press, 1979), vol 1, 292-94). It is the figure of the monster however, that most haunted English common law for it not only transgressed the law, but brought its taxonomical structure to crisis. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See Bracton (n 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Sir Edward Coke, *The Institutes of the Laws of England* 1628-1644, vols 1-4 (Garland Publishing, 1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Blackstone (n 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. After Blackstone’s death, over twenty editions of his *Commentaries* were published, each of which replicates his monster category, the most recent being published in 1876 (Wayne Morrison, *Introduction to Commentaries on the Laws of England* vol 1 (Cavendish, 2001) cxiv-cxviii). Moreover, it was not until the case of *Re A (Children) (Conjoined Twins: Surgical Separation)* [2000] 4 All ER 961 that the Court of Appeal formally killed off the category of the monster, insisting that it was no longer part of English law. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See Sharpe (n 4) Chp 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Michel Foucault, *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France* 1974-1975 (Verso, 2003) 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Some jurisdictions allow the creation of human/animal admixed embyros for non-reproductive research purposes. For example, s. 4A(4) Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 (UK). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Terminators are androids, rather than cyborgs. While they having living tissue, they are not living organisms with robotic body parts. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. George Canguilhem, ‘Monstrosity and the Monstrous’ (1964) 40 *Diogenes* 27-42, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *ibid.* As Canguilhem notes, ‘[t]hat which has no rule of internal cohesion, whose form and dimensions have no variations from one end of the spectrum that can be called a measure, mold, or model - that cannot be called monstrous’ (28). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Amit S. Rai, ‘Of Monsters: Biopower, Terrorism and Excess in Genealogies of Monstrosity’ (2004) 18(4) *Cultural Studies* 538-70, 551; Noel Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror: Paradoxes of the Heart* (Routledge, 1990). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For example, Margrit Shildrick, *Embodying the Monster: Encounters with the Vulnerable Self* (Sage, 2002); Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (Routledge, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Canguilhem (n 13) 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Foucault (n 10) 65. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See Foucault (n 10) 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (Penguin, 1977). Accordingly, Foucault does not insist on a causal relationship between monstrosity and monstrousness. Conversely, Canguilhem views the former term as an effect of the latter, that is, a result of ‘an animal’s carnival’ ((n13) 30-31). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. See Canguilhem (n 13) 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. See Foucault (n 10) 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. See Foucault (n 10) 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Jeffrey J. Cohen, ‘Monster Culture: Seven Theses’ in Jeffrey J. Cohen (ed) *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1996) 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In linking the word monster with hope, I am drawing on social theory rather than the work of Stephen Jay Gould in the field of evolutionary biology (‘The Return of Hopeful Monsters’ (1980) 86 *Natural History* 22-30). However, Gould’s account of change as occasionally sudden and dramatic, rather than always gradual, might be viewed as apposite in relation to Bowie, at least if we exchange biology for culture. That is, Bowie might be viewed as a catalyst, accelerating culture exponentially. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Michel Foucault, *Herculine Barbin: Being the Recently Discovered Memoirs of a Nineteenth Century French Hermaphrodite (*Pantheon Books, 1980) Introduction xiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Julia Epstein, *Altered Conditions: Disease, Medicine, and Storytelling* (Routledge, 1995) 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Lorraine Daston, ‘Marvelous Facts and Miraculous Evidence in Early Modern Europe’ (1991) 18 *Critical* *Inquiry* 93-124, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Jacques Derrida, ‘Passages – From Traumatism to Promise’ in E. Weber (ed) *Points … Interviews*, 1974-1994 (Stanford University Press, 1995) 372-95, 386-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) (The Free Press, 1965). Durkheim does not equate the sacred with the divine. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Indeed, anything we consider inherently valuable might be a candidate, including ‘some supreme principle of life such as love, freedom, equality or justice’ (Veikko Anttonen, ‘Sacred’ in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds), *Guide to the Study of Religion* (Cassell, 2000) 281). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Desmond Manderson, ‘Leftovers: The End of Private Law’ (2006) 29 *Vendredi* 23-144, 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Georges Bataille, *Eroticism: Death and Sensuality* (City Lights Books, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Yaser Mirdamadi, ‘The Plurality of the Sacred - Critical Remarks on Mircea Eliade’s Conception of the Sacred’ (2015) 5 *Open Journal of Philosophy* 397-402, 401. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (University of Minnesota Press, 1985) 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. This phrase was the slogan Bowie used to advertise the *Heroes* Album, 1977. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Eoin Devereux, Aileen Dillane and Martin J. Power (eds) *David Bowie: Critical Perspectives* (Routledge, 2015) Preface xv. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. The film, *The Man Who fell to Earth* (1976) is a British science fiction drama directed by Nicholas Roeg. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Bowie played the part of Baal in a 1982 BBC television production of Bertolt Brecht’s 1918 play. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. In 1980 Bowie played the part, including on Broadway, without any cosmetic enhancements, using only his body to convey John Merrick’s monstrosity. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Interview with David Bowie in *Rolling Stone Magazine*, 12 February 1976. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. ##### Will Brooker, ‘Look Back at that Man: David Bowie in Retrospect’ (2013) *Celebrity Studies* 4(3) 390-92.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. ‘Scary Monsters’ (*Scary Monsters* album 1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. ##### Sigmund Freud, *The Uncanny* (originally published in 1919) (Penguin, 2003).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. ‘Scary Monsters’ (*Scary Monsters* album 1980). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Bowie is a name he assumed in 1969. Bowie’s legal name was David Jones. The change of name was to avoid confusion with Davy Jones, the English lead singer of the US band, the *Monkees*. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Auto-destructive art is a term invented by artist, Gustav Metzger (*Damaged Nature, Auto Destructive Art* (Coracle Press, 1999)). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. See Critchley (n 2) 115-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Bowie perhaps set the template for this approach with his character Ziggy. The 1972 concept album, *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* tells the story of Ziggy’s rise and fall and ends with the song, ‘Rock ’n' Roll Suicide.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. ‘I don’t know where I’m going from here, but I promise it won’t be boring,’ Madison Square Gardens concert, 8 January 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. As Critchley notes, ‘[a]rt’s filthy lesson is inauthenticity all the way down, a series of repetitions and reenactments: fakes that strip away the illusion of reality in which we live and confront us with the reality of illusion’ ((n 2) 26). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. The technique, which can perhaps be traced to the Dadaists, was developed explicitly by Brion Gysin and popularised by his friend William Burroughs in the late 1950s and 1960s. It involves cutting up a text and rearranging it to create a new text. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. The idea of ‘planned accidents’ was an approach to musical composition relying on the element of chance. It is most associated with the work of Brian Eno and was adopted by Bowie during his period of collaboration with Eno (1977-1979). [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. See Critchley (n 2) 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. *ibid*, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. ##### ‘Ashes to Ashes’ (*Scary Monsters* album 1980).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. For example, see ‘Hello Spaceboy’ (*Outside* album 1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. ‘Blackstar’ (*Blackstar* album 2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. *Aladdin Sane* album 1973. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. *Young Americans* album 1975. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Bowie’s *Thin White Duke* phase traversed albums, but was most associated with the 1976 album, *Station to Station*. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (Penguin, 1974). [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. After years of theatricality, Bowie pared back his performance so that his only prop was a cigarette. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Tanja Stark, ‘Confronting Bowie’s Mysterious Corpses’ in Toija Cinque, Christopher Moore and Sean Redmond (eds), *Enchanting David Bowie: Space, Time, Body, Memory* (Bloomsbury, 2015) 61-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Michael Kimmelman, ‘David Bowie on his Favorite Artists’ Interview with David Bowie, *New York Times*, 14 Jan 1998. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. MTV Interview with David Bowie 1995 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zri74q3HDDY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zri74q3HDDY) (accessed: 20/1/17). [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Bowie produced 27 studio albums, numerous live albums, as well as a body of films, theatre work and art. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. ##### Bowie has described himself as “aesthetically promiscuous,” (n 66).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Paul Trynka, *David Bowie - the Definitive Biography* (Hachette Digital, 2011) Introduction ‘Genius Steals.’ [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Anthony Newley was an actor, singer and songwriter. Lionel Bart was a writer and composer of pop music and musicals, most notably, *Oliver* in 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. During this period (1977-1979) Bowie was influenced by the android-like *Kraftwerk* and *Neu*. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Richard Fitch, ‘In This Age of Grand Allusion: Bowie, Nihilism and Meaning’ in Devereux et al (n 37) 19-34, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. *ibid*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. *The Man Who Sold the World* album 1970. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. David Buckley, *Strange Fascination: David Bowie: The Definitive Story* (Virgin Publishing, 2010) 102. For more detailed discussion of some of Bowie’s album covers, see Ian Chapman, ‘Authorship, Agency and Visual Analysis: Reading (some) Bowie Album Covers’ in Devereux et al (n 37) 196-214. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Nicholas Pegg, *The Complete David Bowie* (Reynolds & Hearn, 2002) 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. ‘Jean Genie’ was released as a single in 1972, and subsequently on the *Aladdin Sane* album 1973. The title of the song is an allusion to Jean Genet, the famous French novelist and playwright. Many of his novels deal with themes of transgressive homosexuality. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Judith, A. Peraino, ‘Plumbing the Surface of Sound and Vision: David Bowie, Andy Warhol and the Art of Posing’ (2012) *Qui Parle* 21(1) 151-179, 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. *Cock Rock* is a genre of rock music, which commenced in the late 1960s. It emphasises an aggressive form of male sexuality (Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock ‘n’ Roll* (Pantheon, 1981) 227). [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Adrienne Rich, ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’ (1980) 5 *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 631-60. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. As Ken McLeod notes, ‘Bowie’s conscious construction of an alien rock star was certainly meant to shed light on the artificiality of rock in general’ (‘Space Oddities: Aliens, Futurism and Meaning in Popular Music’ (2003) 22(3) *Popular Music* 337-355, 341). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Routledge, 1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Michael Watts, ‘Oh You Pretty Things’ Interview with David Bowie, *Melody Maker* 22 January 1972. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Jon Savage, ‘David Bowie: Gender Bender’ *The Face* November 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Interview in *Playboy*, September 1976 [www.playboy.com/articles/playboy-interview-david-bowie](http://www.playboy.com/articles/playboy-interview-david-bowie) (accessed 21/1/17). [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Interview in *Rolling Stone* 1983. See Maya Oppenheim, ‘David Bowie: How the Glam Rock Artist became an LGBT Icon,’ *The Independent* 11 January 2016 [www.independent.co.uk/news/people/how-david-bowie-became-a-gay-icon-a6806041.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/how-david-bowie-became-a-gay-icon-a6806041.html) (accessed 21/1/17). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. *Cissexual* is a term coined by Julia Serano (*Whipping Girl: A Transsexual Woman on Sexism and the Scapegoating of Femininity* (Seal Press, 2007)). It refers to people whose gender identities align with their birth designated sex. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Sally Kohn, ‘David Bowie’s Mind-Blowing Queer Legacy,’ *Refinery*, 11 January 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See Watts (n 84). In a 1977 interview Bowie stated: ‘I can't stand sets of people in any way, shape or form; politically, artistically or socially, a set of people has the most devastating effect on one's chances of producing anything’ (Charles Shaar Murray, ‘244 Words on Punk from David Bowie’ *New Musical Express* 29 October 1977). [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Jonathan Dollimore, ‘Different Desires: Subjectivity and Transgression in Wilde and Gide (1987) 1(1) *Textual Practice* 48-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. See Carroll (n 15) 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. The Minotaur is a creature from Greek mythology possessing a bull’s head and a man’s body. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. *Diamond Dogs* album 1974. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. ##### In terms of religious symbolism, the dog has been associated with the devil, especially in medieval and early modern Europe (Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism* (Allen & Unwin, 1974) 26).

    [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Sean Redmond, ‘Who Am I Know? Remembering the Enchanted Dogs of David Bowie’ (2013) 4(3) *Celebrity Studies* 380-83, 381. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. See Mikhail Bahktin, *Rabelais and His World* (originally published in 1965) (John Wiley & Sons, 1984). [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Joyce. E. Salisbury, *The Beast Within: Animals in the Middle Ages* (Routledge, 1994) 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. See Sharpe (n 4) Chp 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. See Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of Modern Sensibility* (Lane, 1983) 122. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. ##### According to this view, the world was believed to be ordered and hierarchical. God sat at the apex, below him sat the angels, then human beings, followed by various classes of non-human animals, and finally other lesser living matter (see Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Harvard University Press, 1970)).

     [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Donna Haraway, ‘Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism’ (1985) 86 *Socialist Review* 65-107, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Most significantly, while ‘human beings might share 99.9% commonality at the genetic level, there is nothing as yet identifiable as absolutely common to all human beings. That is, there is no genetic lowest common denominator, no genetic essence’ (Jason S. Robert and Francoise Baylis, ‘Crossing Species Boundaries’ (2003) 3 *American Journal of Bioethics* 1-13, 4). [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Simon Critchley, *On Bowie* (Serpents Tail, 2016) 170. This book is an updated version of Critchley’s *Bowie* (n 2), written after Bowie’s death and the release of his final album, *Blackstar*. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. For examples, see Critchley (n 2) 161-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Elsewhere, Bowie stated that he had ‘no empathy for organised religion’ (David Cavanagh, ‘ChangesFiftyBowie’ *Q Magazine*, February 1997, 52-59, 52). And, in a 2002 interview with Maria Karchilaki for Greek TV, he stated, in response to a question as to whether he was religious, ‘I’m probably the least religious person you’ve met’ [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohb3IAWt4cs&t=549s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohb3IAWt4cs&t=549s) (accessed: 20/1/17). [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Critchley (n 2) 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8NBpfkpyZw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a8NBpfkpyZw) (accessed: 20/1/17). [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. In an interview at the time, Bowie explained that he used the term *Heathen* as ‘an address from a man to life, not from man to a God, but to life itself’ (see Karchilaki (n 106)). In another interview in 2002, he explained that *Heathen* referred to the ‘unilluminated mind,’ to ‘somebody who has lowered his standards, spiritually, intellectually, morally … someone whose not even bothered searching for a spiritual life anymore, who completely exists on a materialistic plain’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PmVRFEfjiwM> (accessed: 20/1/17). [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. See Critchley (n 2) 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Simon Critchley, ‘Nothing Remains: David Bowie’s Vision of Love,’ *New York Times,* 11 January 2016 <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2016/01/11/nothing-remains-david-bowies-vision-of-love/?_r=2> (accessed: 20/1/17). The banal pursuit of happiness has become increasingly ubiquitous and mandated institutionally and by the market (see Pascal Bruckner, *Perpetual Euphoria: On the Duty to be Happy* (Princeton University Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Bowie famously turned down the ‘opportunity’ to work with *Coldplay* when they invited him to perform with them one of their songs. As he put it: ‘[i]t’s not a very good song, is it?’ [www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jan/20/how-david-bowie-turned-down-coldplay-its-not-a-very-good-song-is-it](http://www.theguardian.com/music/2016/jan/20/how-david-bowie-turned-down-coldplay-its-not-a-very-good-song-is-it) (accessed: 20/1/17). [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. See Critchley (n 2) 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Yearning, as Critchley notes, is such a strong element in Bowie’s work (n 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. *ibid*. See also Alain Badiou, who notes that the enemy of love ‘is myself, the “myself” that prefers identity to difference, that prefers to impose its world against the world re-constructed through the filter of difference’ (*In Praise of Love* (Serpent’s Tail, 2012) 60). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See Critchley (n 2) 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Johanna Oksala, *Foucault on Freedom* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Frederich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits* (originally published in 1878)(Penguin, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. ‘Where Are We Now’ (*The Next Day* album 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Marguerite Porete, a thirteenth century female mystic, and author of *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, quoted by Simon Critchley at a BAM talk exploring his 2012 book, *The Faith of the Faithless* (Verso) [www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ra\_1z6vnKo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ra_1z6vnKo) (accessed: 20/1/17). For more detail about Porete and her religious ideas see Critchley 122-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Routledge, 2004) 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Shelton Waldrep, *Future Nostalgia: Performing David Bowie* (Bloomsbury, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Though whether a ‘return’ is desired is much more ambiguous, as Critchley notes in referring to the Biblical story of Lazarus: ‘[n]obody asked Lazarus if he actually wanted to come back from the grave and he does seem particularly happy to be back … Maybe Lazarus isn’t so much the story of a heroic resurrection that proves Jesus’s messianic credentials, but a sad tale of someone being pulled back to life without really wanting it at all’ ((n 104) 192-93). [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. ‘Queen Bitch’ (*Hunky Dory* 1971). [↑](#footnote-ref-123)