

UB Poetics List



THE MAN WHO SOLD THE LISTSERV

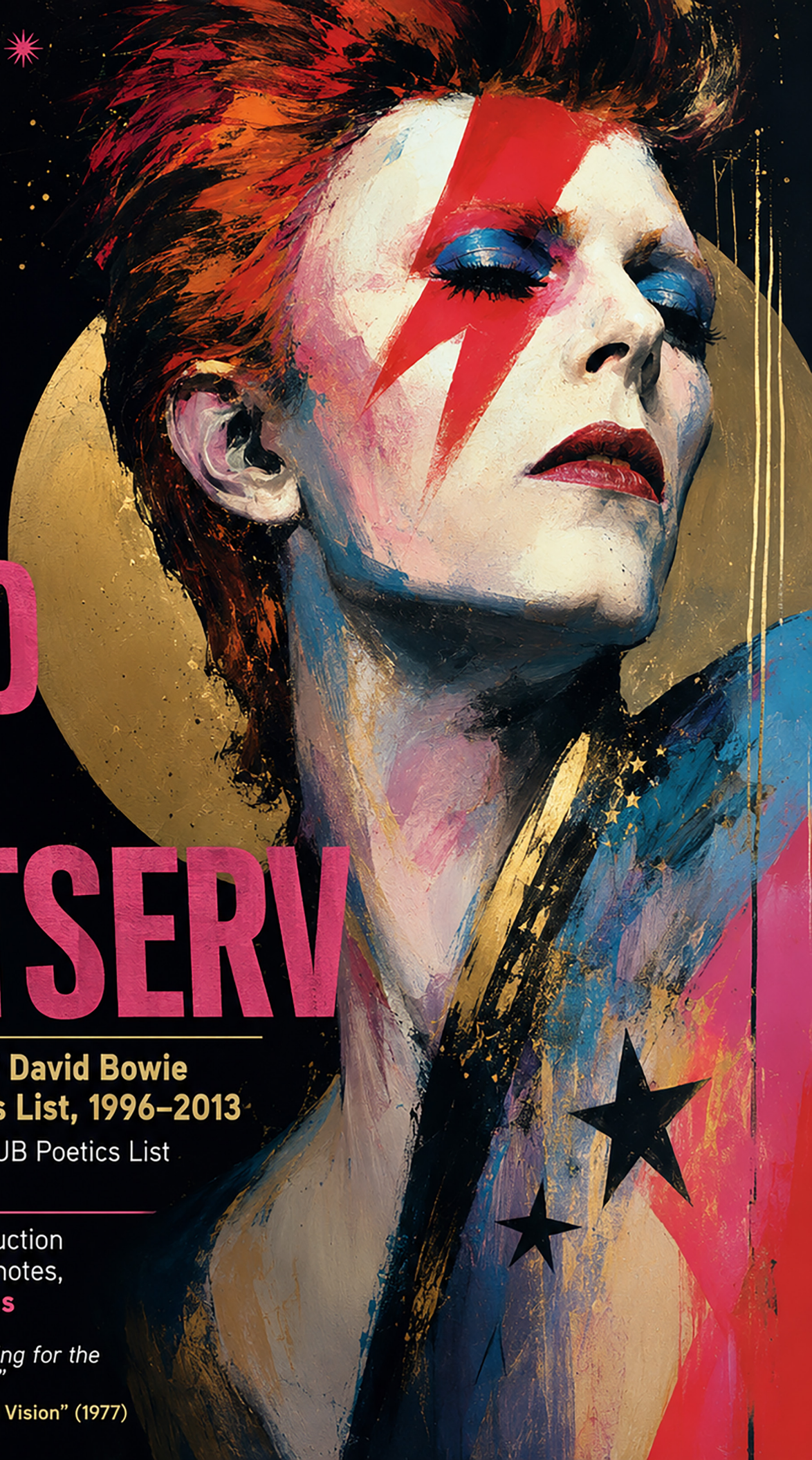
**Every Sighting of David Bowie
on the UB Poetics List, 1996–2013**

Assembled from the UB Poetics List
archive, 1996–2013

Edited, with an introduction
and rather too many notes,
by **Kristen M. Fabians**

*"I will sit right down, waiting for the
gift of sound and vision."*

— David Bowie, "Sound and Vision" (1977)



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Every passage is verbatim, in the writer's own spelling, beneath its original subject line and attributed to the member who posted it, in the order it was sent; the few editorial cuts are marked with a bracketed ellipsis, and each passage carries a note. Where a member relays another writer's words, they are given as sent and their source named. A table of contents and a note on sources close the volume.

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Introduction

A sidelight on the list, in nineteen passages.

This companion to the present series gathers every appearance of David Bowie across the ten years of the UB Poetics List from which these volumes are drawn. I had expected a handful; there are nineteen — a producer's credit, a legal example, a fashion note, a found metaphor, a band's press release, an obituary of another man, a pair of event listings, and, once, an entire civic pageant. Together they make a curious and, I think, revealing sidelight on the list: a record of how a room of poets spoke of an artist who was, by any measure that ought to have mattered to them, one of their own.

The list itself needs little introduction to readers of this series. The UB Poetics List, run out of Buffalo from the middle 1990s, was for the better part of two decades the noisiest parish of the American experimental tradition: a daily forum in which several hundred poets, scholars, editors, and hangers-on argued out the questions that tradition lives upon — the line and the sentence, the political poem, the ethics of appropriation, the standing of the avant-garde. It is the same list that, in the war years, produced the material of this series' central volumes. That it also, in its margins and its off-hours, kept quietly returning to a pop musician is the small fact the present book sets out to document.

He returns, and he is never once the subject. That is the pattern, and it is worth stating plainly here, before the notes take it up rather less plainly. Bowie enters these ten years sidelong, always in the service of some other business: as the producer behind a Lou Reed record, as a precedent in a copyright quarrel, as a byword for fashion or for reinvention, as the author of the song a lonely listserv message happens to recall, as the name a band reaches for to describe its own noise. He is a reference, a resource, a convenience. He is almost never examined. And yet he is reached for, again and again, with a frequency that comes in the end to look less like coincidence than like need.

What that need discloses is the argument these notes will press, and I will set down its sober form here, so that the reader may weigh it apart from the enthusiasm that later overtakes me. It is at the least arguable that Bowie's methods — the cut-up lyric he built, after Burroughs, from his own fragmented and reassembled sentences; the serial personae; the composition by procedure rather than by confession — placed him a good deal nearer to the poetics this very list championed than the list ever paused to notice. The poets reached for him, on this reading, because he had been working their own side of the street the whole time, in costume, on the radio, where they could take him in without having to grant him the title. There is a second chair, and it is not for guests.

There is a single exception, and it is the glory of the archive. For one week in the late summer of 2002 the San Francisco poets around Kevin Killian and the artist Rex Ray mounted a genuine act of Bowie reception: a gallery show, a catalogue, a track-by-track re-recording of the album *Low*, and a staged pageant of the man's entire life, cast with poets. It is the only occasion, in ten years, on which the list's world treated Bowie as a body of work rather than a byword; the reader will find it here at length, and will find me, in its vicinity, at my least trustworthy.

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Re: Music and poetry

— Joseph Zitt · 30 January 1996

Ten years of the list before anyone types his name, and then only as an appendage to Brecht. Note, in passing, that the Baal EP of 1982 — five Brecht-Weill songs cut in Berlin — is a small masterpiece the size of a parenthesis, and that Bowie had that spring played Baal himself for the BBC. Mr. Zitt is right to mention it. He is wrong to mention only it.

Dominic Muldowney (I think) did a version of Brecht's "Baal" that David Bowie recorded.

for Tosh Berman and David Bowie

— Alan Sondheim · 29 September 1996

Here, unusually, is a poet who understood. Mr. Sondheim does not name Bowie in the poem; he dedicates the whole abecedarian machine to him, which is exactly right, the alphabet being the only fit tribute to a man who made songs by cutting sentences to ribbons and reading back the ribbons. This is — I will say it now and try not to say it again — the single instance in the entire archive of a list poet treating Bowie as a colleague and not a jukebox. I have reproduced it whole. I have forgiven Mr. Sondheim, whom I have never met, a very great deal on the strength of it.

a what b is c this d glassy-eyed e stare
f that g has h no i ontic j sense k in l its m nubby n head
o but p lulu q to r be s there
t or u find v a w lewd x mumu y better z read

slut, tis Liszt, massy guy's beware!
flat jazz goes sonic; hence wins Kit's stubby bed!
tut!, booboo's hew, see where
bores mind, shut rude mama's letter dead!

fashion victims

— Rachel Loden · 19 May 1997

"Abbie Hoffman? or David Bowie, who should know" — a charming line, and I will not pretend it did not catch me somewhere tender, because fashion is not, for reasons I will come to, a word I hold calmly. Bowie "should know" about fashion the way Nabokov should know about butterflies: the knowledge was total and was never the point. He wore the whole apparatus of it inside out, on purpose, for a living, which is either the bravest or the most foolish thing a person can do. Ms. Loden I have not met. I am told she is witty. I resent that, mildly, the way one resents anyone who reached the truth by the paved road. Well. Anyway.

Somebody (Abbie Hoffman? or David Bowie, who should know) said that "fashion is fascism."

lopez loops

— Maria Damon · 2 January 1998

This I can nearly forgive, because it is nearly right. Ms. Damon hears a stray message circling the list forever and reaches for "that david bowie song about major tom" — "Space Oddity," 1969, though she will not name it — and she is correct that the wistfulness is the whole of the matter. I first heard that wistfulness at thirteen, in a corner of Oklahoma to which such records did not readily come, on an album a cousin had smuggled into a house where the radio was permitted only for the weather; and I understood, before the side had finished, what it is to be a signal flung out of a system too large to notice whether it has received you. But the point is not my thirteenth year. The point is that she reached for him the instant she needed to say something true about loneliness, and could locate no one in her own canon who had said it better, because no one had. The reaching is involuntary. The involuntariness is the whole argument of this little book.

having now gotten the lopez message a few times i must say i find it quite moving, like that david bowie song about major tom ... all that to-do about one little msg searching for its destination in the global whirlwind of cyberspace... there's a wistfulness about it, an existential loneliness uttered by a system that is so mechanized that it doesn't even care that it cares...md

Love Poems

— Robert Hale · 3 February 1998

Observe the architecture of Mr. Hale's small tragedy. He takes the girl to see David Bowie — plainly the summit of the affair — and everything after is descent: the Breton, the Coolidge, the freak-out, the week's notice. He does not perceive that he has told a story in which a Bowie concert is the last good thing that happened to him and a poem is what ended it. I perceive it, having once, in a colder country than this one, sent a certain person a poem of my own and been informed, more or less as Mr. Hale was informed, that I was "a weirdo" — though the word actually used was English, and worse, and lives now in a trunk in the attic of me that I do not open for company. Well. Anyway. I would say to Mr. Hale only this: the concert was not the setup for the joke. The concert was the poem. He carried home the wrong one. We all did. Some of us are still standing in the hall, in our coats, holding it.

At risk of using the list as a Dear Abby column, I seek advice regarding the sending of love poems. Valentine's Day is next Saturday. I don't plan to send out any love poems and here's why.

I was dating this girl for a while. Things were going well. I took her to see David Bowie. We talked about stuff. We had crazy nights. We even went to a friend's wedding together. I sent her, like, a poem a week, or something. I also sang to her over the phone. Then I sent her a poem by Andre Breton (see below). She freaked out. Our relations broke off within a week.

It wasn't the singing. Suddenly, she said I was a weirdo. It was the Breton. But the one of the first poems I sent her was by Clark Coolidge!

What gives?

Editorial. Mr. Stefans, reading over my shoulder, asks whether the list truly requires the anecdote of the trunk in my attic, and suggests, gently, that I keep the focus upon Mr. Hale. The list does not require it. Mr. Hale did not require his, either, and gave it anyway. It stays. — K.M.F.

on the millennial juke box

— Tedd J. Mulholland · 3 January 2000

Hunky Dory goes on first, ahead of the Hendrix and the Mozart, and Mr. Mulholland does not remark on it, as though it were a neutral way to open a century. It is nothing of the kind. It is "Changes" and "Life on Mars?" and "Quicksand," a record about becoming other people in order to survive having been the first one — a subject on which I once attempted to speak, at a Thanksgiving in a year I can no longer place, the turkeys having run together in memory, only for my brother Gary to observe that "he cain't even sing, Kristen, he talks it," and return his attention to the pie. Gary has never in his life become anyone other than Gary and regards this as an accomplishment. My sisters, Darlene and Faye, took the side of the pie, as they always did, as they were built to do. This is the whole tragedy of Bowie on this list in miniature: he is forever already on the shelf, assumed, unexamined, the neutral first record, the thing you put on before the thinking has started. Somebody at that table had to be the thinking. I appointed myself. I have not, in all the years since, been relieved of the post.

Turnin on the Tables:

David Bowie's Hunky Dory

Various Hedrix (including two of the most poetic moments of the past century 1: the sacrificing by fire of a strat at montrose 2: the banner)

Blonde Redhead's In an Expression of the Inexpressible

Vanessa-Mae's interp of the Four Seasons and The Devil's Trill Sonata

The Stone Roses' Turns Into Stone

Belle & Sebastian's Tiger milk

The Jesus & Mary Chain's Darklands

Mozart's Requim

Brahms String Quartets No.1 and No. 3

Lara St. John's recordings of Bach's Partita No. 2 and Sonata No. 3

Various Classical Guitar music

Placebo's Without You IM Nothing

and a couple of things to add to my reading list:

Eco's Serendipities

Eco's Search For The Perfect Language

Ashbery's The Mooring of Starting Out

Revolution of the Word Anthology

All for now,

TEDD

Re: banned songs— Gwyn ***** · 25 September 2001

*Two weeks after the towers, a corporation circulates a list of songs too dangerous for the air, and "Dancing in the Street" is on it — the Bowie/Jagger version among them, that gloriously idiotic 1985 duet which I will defend, because I defend everything, though even I concede the video is a felony for which someone at the label ought to have served genuine time. Ms. 's letter is fine; I keep it entire. But mark the moment, because it does not come twice: the single point in the archive at which Bowie is treated as authentically *dangerous*, a frequency the state might wish to jam — and it takes a memo from a radio conglomerate to produce it, not a poet. The poets could not make him dangerous in ten years of trying. They made him *comfortable*, which is worse, which is what one does to the dead and the domesticated, to the ottoman and the aunt. It took a coward in a Texas office to remember that the man had once been a live wire, and I find, to my considerable discomfort, that I am grateful to the coward. This is the condition to which the list has reduced me. Grateful to Clear Channel. Moved, nearly, by a memo. Well. Anyway.*

>>>Martha and the Vandellas/Van Halen - "Dancing in the Streets"

Dear Clear Channel,

Does that mean that the David Bowie/Mick Jagger and the Grateful Dead versions of these songs are acceptable? If the latter, which era of the Grateful Dead is acceptable: the Pigpen Era, the Keith Godchaux Era, the Brent Mydland Era, and/or the Bruce Hornsby/Vince Welnick Era? I ask this latter particularly because four former members of the Grateful Dead are now literally dead, and because the name "Grateful Dead" itself might come to have unsavory implications in light of the recent disaster. If one or more of the Grateful Dead versions might be acceptable, are there any show dates one should refrain from playing because of their negative connotations (any 9/11 show springs to mind)?

Yours faithfully,

Gwyn ***** (last name deleted because it is pronounced the same as that of the Oklahoma City bomber)

HAL WILLNER'S DOC POMUS PROJECT

— The Poetry Project · 5 November 2001

"Produced by David Bowie" — three words, each an insult by omission. He did not merely produce Transformer; he and Mick Ronson built the thing plank by plank, the saxophone and the strut and the whole architecture of "Walk on the Wild Side," at the precise moment in 1972 when he might have spent his sudden fame upon himself and elected instead to spend it hauling a written-off man back into the light. That the Poetry Project can fold all of this into a producer's credit, in a release concerning somebody else entirely, is exactly how he was handled his whole life long: the generosity noted in passing, the genius filed under logistics, the man forever holding the door for people who then complained, on their way through it, about the draught. Lou Reed, to his credit, knew what he owed and said so to the end. I saw Lou Reed once, across a room, in a city I will not name, having gained the room by a method I will describe when it becomes relevant — it involved a coat-check and a raincoat that was not mine — but that is a story for later, and not a flattering one, and I have interrupted myself, which I notice, rereading, I have begun to do. Well. Anyway. The credit stands. The evidence must be kept.

LOU REED was a founding member of the influential band The Velvet Underground, whose solo album, *Transformer* (1972), produced by David Bowie, included one of Reed's most memorable songs ever, "Walk on the Wild Side."

Editorial. My assistant has returned this page with the sentence about the coat-check circled twice and a single word entered in the margin: "why." Because it is true, Mr. Stefans, is why; because the true things are precisely the ones you keep asking me to take out. Restored, and now underlined, so that you may find it more easily the next time you reach for it. — K.M.F.

Philly: Theater, Music, Film — Jan./Feb. 2002

— Josh ("GasHeart") · 2 January 2002

*I nearly cut this, and keep it for the single purpose of answering its author across the years. "Bowie is a heavy smoker." "Apparent lung problem." What is this — a man reduced to his vices and his chest films, in a nightlife listing, wedged between a note on King Crimson and the start-time of a film. I have never met this "Josh." I picture him, on the evidence of his prose alone, as a man never once in his life ambushed by beauty; who orders the same sandwich daily and calls the monotony loyalty; who, shown a sunset, would report its coordinates and the time. At the very hour he was tallying up Bowie's hospital tests, Bowie had just made *Heathen*, one of the finest records of his life, an album so saturated in mortality that it seemed to hear the entire coming decade before the decade had the courtesy to arrive — and "Josh" offers us six hours of tests in a Florida clinic and the bulletin that the man enjoyed a cigarette. I am aware the report is accurate. I have never in my life cared less whether a thing was accurate. Accuracy is the handrail small people reach for when they cannot reach the point. The man is not his lungs. May "Josh," one day, before the end, be ambushed. Everyone should be, at least the once. It is the entire reason for the sunsets. Well. Anyway.*

Adrian Belew is a great guitarist and sincere singer who is in King Crimson and has toured with David Bowie. By the way, David Bowie, was very sick last week in Florida, went to a hospital for six hours of tests, apparent lung problem. Bowie is a heavy smoker. -josh

Bowie events in San Francisco

— Kevin Killian · 12 August 2002

At last — the one week in the entire life of this list when a roomful of poets behaved as though they grasped what had been living among them all along. I treasure Mr. Killian's dispatch past the outer bounds of reason, and I will tell you precisely how far past: when I first came upon it, some years after the fact, alone, at the machine, at an hour I will not disclose, I made a sound my downstairs neighbour — a patient woman, she has heard, over the years, the greater part of my sounds — later described, through the floor, as "a kind of a cry." Because an entire city's avant-garde had mobilised around Bowie's visit: a gallery show, a lavish catalogue, and, the part I have since read perhaps three hundred times in preference to sleep, experimental ensembles re-recording Low track by track. Low. The 1977 record, half of side two very nearly wordless, Eno and the schizoid ache of a man drying out in Berlin; they understood it to be a text to be re-performed and not an oldie to be dusted, and they were in San Francisco doing exactly that while I was where I have generally been, which is elsewhere. I note, without comment, and then immediately with a great deal of comment, that among the catalogue's writers is one "Brian Kim Stefans," who thereby contributed to a Bowie catalogue a full decade before he could be troubled to learn, from me, at the very next desk, who Bowie so much as was. He has still not asked. The pages are ready. They have been ready for years. Well. Anyway.

If you're going to be in San Francisco this week or this month have we got a treat for you (that is, if you like David Bowie).

Due to Bowie's visit here this week we are launching a multi-media tribute to him! Rex Ray has organized a giant art show "Fascination" which opens on Thursday (Aug 15) and closes September 30. As it happens the opening is on Thursday at 6 p.m. (from 6 to 9). It's at Gallery 16 (1616 Sixteenth Street--in the Mission). Tons of local and international artists responding to Bowie's work.

There's also a lavish catalogue, also called "Fascination," with work by all the artists and by the following writers (partial list) Rupert Adley, D-L Alvarez, Ben Arnold, Brian C. Bauman, Dodie Bellamy, Norma Cole, Douglas Coupland, Del Ray Cross, Derek Donovan, Phoebe Gloeckner, Ann Magnuson, Rick Moody (recently cited by THE NEW REPUBLIC as the "worst writer of his generation!"), Alvin Orloff, Brian Pera, Amy Scholder, Wayne Smith, Brian Kim Stefans, Brandon Stosuy, and Michelle Tea.

Inside the catalogue is tucked a CD in which local and international experimental music ensembles re-do Bowie's historical 70s LP "LOW," track by track in a 2002 style.

There's a very handsome web-site, still under construction, that details all these events. Go to www.thebowieshow.com and check it all out.

Finally if you're still with us, Wayne Smith and I are writing a pageant of David Bowie's life, called "FASCINATION." which will be presented one night only, Friday September 6, at the LAB. This pageant will be acted out by a group of Bay Area poets, painters, musicians, filmmakers and artists. It is roughly modelled on the pageant Virginia Woolf writes about in "BETWEEN the ACTS." I get to play Angie. More about this later but please do yourself a favor and go to see "FASCINATION."

-- Kevin K.

If you're in San Francisco this Friday Sept 6

— Kevin Killian · 3 September 2002

And here is the pageant itself, and I have neither the composure nor the least intention of being brief about it. San Francisco poets staged the life of David Bowie as a masque — Norma Cole as Nico, someone as Eno, Mr. Killian himself as Angie — "with strange echoes of CITIZEN KANE." Read the synopsis and grieve at the accuracy of it: "the man who sold the world to storm London's fickle pop charts"; "Then Bowie goes to Berlin with Brian Eno: heroes, just for one day." This is criticism. This is the only serious act of Bowie reception the entire archive contains, and it was performed in a room on Sixteenth Street for five dollars, one night only, for an audience each member of which I could cheerfully throttle by name if I had the names, because they were there and I was not. And now I will tell you a thing I have told no one. I staged my own. In a rented room in the north of England, in years I will describe when I can bear to and not before, alone, with a cassette recorder and a bedsheet and one kitchen chair standing in for Angie and a second chair standing in for Ronson and myself standing in for everyone else who had ever mattered, I performed the life of David Bowie from Brixton to Berlin, for no one, more than once, and it was not — I have thought about this a great deal — appreciably worse than theirs, only smaller, and colder, and witnessed by nobody but the gas meter, which took my last shilling in the middle of "Heroes" and put the room into a darkness I have never entirely come out of. I would have played Angie. I would have been extraordinary. I was born to play Angie in a room I was not invited to. That is my entire biography in a single sentence; I did not sit down meaning to write it; and there, nonetheless, it is. Two chairs. A sheet. A meter that ate the last of the light in the middle of "Heroes." Begin again. No. Do not begin again. Begin again. Well. Anyway.

Come and see our new play if you'll be in San Francisco Friday September 6. It's at the Lab, 2948 Sixteenth Street between Capp and Mission, at 8:00 p.m. It costs five dollars to get in and you should call [REDACTED] for reservations since we are putting it on one night only. It's called FASCINATION.

You'll be watching this play, with its strange echoes of CITIZEN KANE and THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS, and asking yourself, "Wait a second! Didn't I see this before?" Sure you did, it's the life of David Bowie, written up in pageant form by San Francisco writers Kevin Killian and Wayne Smith.

London . . . the late 60s . . . a group of young UK poets and musicians rallies around the aging mime maestro Lindsay Kemp, and from his lab emerges David Bowie, the man who sold the world to storm London's fickle pop charts. Next he conquers New York, where his life is endangered by fanatical fans, and gets jiggy with black soul music in the Philadelphia of YOUNG AMERICANS. At his side, his indomitable soulmate Angie. The two of them keep inventing themselves over and over. Bing Crosby dies. Marc Bolan sings THE PRETTIEST STAR. The ultimate rock couple, Carly Simon and James Taylor, enters the twisted, androgynous Bowie world and their lives collapse like those little bags of popcorn. Then Bowie goes to Berlin with Brian Eno: heroes, just for one day.

Norma Cole is Nico, Kota Ezawa is Eno, Wayne Smith is James Taylor, Margaret Crane is Carly Simon, Tanya Hollis is Valerie Solanas, Kevin Killian is Angie, Cliff Hengst is Iman, Karla Milosevich is Hermione Farthingale, Scott Hewicker is Tony de Fries, Rex Ray is Lindsay Kemp, Craig Goodman is Marc Bolan, our large cast also includes Yedda Morrison, Jocelyn Saidenberg, Brent Cunningham, Gerald Corbin, Suzanne Stein, Elliot Anderson, Taylor Brady, and Zora Ezawa.

Exchange on Circulars

— Brian Stefans · 28 July 2003

My assistant editor surfaces, at last, to inform the list that no one sued Bowie for taking "Modern Love" from George Meredith. Two remarks, and then a third I will pretend is not the point. First: Meredith's Modern Love (1862) is a sequence of fifty sixteen-line sonnets on the ruin of a marriage, and Bowie's "Modern Love" (1983) is a song about the terror of standing in the fire of church and love and God, and the sole thing the two possess in common is a title, which is not theft but allusion — a distinction over which Mr. Stefans, whatever the traffic on his weblog, might have paused had he ever once in his life paused. Second: he raises Bowie only in order to deploy him as a legal example, a data point in a squabble about copyright, which is precisely what the poets did with the man when they were not using him as a punchline or a producer's credit. Third, and I do insist this is beside the point: Mr. Stefans was, when he wrote this, a New Jersey person of some thirty-three years, who had spent Bowie's nineteen-eighties — the eighties I have not yet defended but shortly will, on a scaffold if I must — being, by his own cheerful admission, a teenager, and he has the nerve, the sheer municipal, zoning-board nerve, to sit in judgement upon what David Bowie may and may not borrow. I have kept the passage. Someone must preserve the evidence, and someone must, eventually, sit Mr. Stefans down and hold his two hands still and tell him. It will not be me. I have tried. He brings a laptop to every conversation and, at the crucial moment, looks down into it, as into a well, and lowers a bucket. Well. Anyway.

Copyright laws may never expire fast enough for internet plagiarizers who want appropriation now, but I haven't heard anything recently about the Edison company suing Napster, nor did the estate of George Meredith go after David Bowie for stealing "Modern Love."

Editorial. Mr. Stefans objects, at length, and in a memorandum with headings, to the whole of the foregoing, on the grounds that it concerns himself. It does concern himself. He lowers, as he lowers into every disagreement, his bucket into his little well; and watching him do it just now I find that I have, at last, after all these years, arrived at a name for him. Hello, Bucket. The passage stays exactly as it is written. — K.M.F.

Stop

— Haas Bianchi · 24 August 2003

"Objectifications of David Bowie and Madonna a la mode." Here at last is the word fashion, and here at last is the reason, promised earlier, that I cannot hold it calmly, and you may skip the next several sentences if you did not come to this book for me, though I notice that nobody ever does come to a book for the editor and that I have never once let that stop me. In the autumn of 1973, in Oklahoma, at the age of fourteen, I cut my own hair with the kitchen shears and dyed it, from a bottle intended for another purpose, a shade I can only call approximately orange, and assembled — from a bedspread, a pair of my brother Gary's trousers taken in with staples, and my mother's good Sunday boots — what I believed, with the whole of my heart, to be an outfit, and wore it to walk to school. I did not conceive of it as a costume. I conceived of it as myself. I had never once thought about fashion; I did not know the word could be applied to a person; I believed, in perfect innocence, that one simply looked like whatever one was. The town undertook to correct me. My sister Darlene laid down her spoon at the breakfast table and said, "You look like a man who has been electrocuted." My mother said, "Kristen Marie, you are not leaving this house with your face like that." I left the house with my face like that, and by the time I reached the school I had been informed, by some forty children and two adults, in terms I decline to reproduce, that I was a great many things, that all of them were wrong, and that the wrongness was somehow visible, was the very thing I had put on that morning and carried out the door. Mother — you are not reading this, you never read one word I mailed home, the single foreign U in the word colour was enough to undo you — no. No. She has been thirty years in the Oklahoma ground and here I stand handing her good Sunday boots to strangers. Enough. Leave her the boots. Leave her be. So when Mr. Bianchi files David Bowie under "objectifications," beside Madonna, "a la mode," I have three objections and I will make all three: he is not an object, he made objects of himself, deliberately, at cost, which is the reverse; he is not a la mode, he made the mode and abandoned each before the imitators found the door; and he is not — never, while I draw breath — to be set beside Madonna, who learned everything she knows of reinvention from watching him do it first and better and at a price she has never once been handed. And yet I will concede, because fairness is very nearly the last thing they left me on that walk, that "fine meals taken out of trash bins served with warmth from the summer sun" is precisely the sort of line Bowie might have scissored from a newspaper and kept in a drawer. I withdraw one objection. Not the Madonna one. Well. Anyway. That is the walk. I have been taking it, in one costume or another, every day since.

Objectifications of David Bowie and Madonna a la mode. A pie with tabloids and torn tendons and fine meals taken out of trash bins served with warmth from the summer sun.

Re: Some naïve questions about poetry

— Lucas Klein · 27 June 2004

Mr. Klein closes an argument about whether one may still write in English "in good faith" by handing the last word to Bowie — "I am a DJ, I am what I play" — and for once, for a single shining instant in this entire archive, a poet has quoted him correctly and to purpose. The line is from "DJ," on Lodger, 1979, and it is one of the great statements of the decentred self in the language: not "I express what I feel" but "I am the arrangement of whatever passes through me," which is — and I will say it slowly, so that the faculty at Buffalo may take it down without spraining anything — the Language poets' own hard-won position, arrived at independently, by a man in a dress, set to a guitar figure by Adrian Belew, and released to the pop charts while they were still workshoping the word "nonreferential" and admiring the smell of the ink. And here, since I have brought us to the door of it, is the "colder country" I have twice declined to name. In 1981 I fled Oklahoma for a doctorate I did not finish, at a red-brick university in the north of England I will not name because it does not deserve the advertisement, on a dissertation — this is the part that will interest no one but me and possibly the shade of Mr. Bowie — on the disappearance of the first-person pronoun in the late lyric. I did not finish it because I could not stop cutting it up; I would take the scissors to my own chapters and find, to my supervisor's horror and my own quiet joy, that they read far better in pieces than they had ever read whole. "You are not, perhaps, temperamentally suited to scholarship," said this supervisor, a man I will call only the Fish, and he was correct, and it has taken me until nearly now to understand that he was paying me, without the least intention of doing so, the compliment of my life: that I was living the thesis I could not footnote, exactly as Bowie had lived it, exactly as Mr. Klein has here, for one line, grasped. There was gin in those years, and there were small pale tablets, and the tablets did a thing to the body that I am going to describe to you precisely, reader, because we are long past the point of— the mouth dry as blackboard chalk, the monthly clock stopped for a whole season, the hands in the mornings somebody else's hands, and a man, there was a man, a Welshman, whose— no. No. Strike the man. Strike the clock. That is not for the note; that is not for anyone; put it back in the trunk and sit on the lid. I cut up, in those years: chapter one; chapter two; the chapter on the pronoun; my own name; the Welshman's name; the Welshman; Enid; the year; the— the list will not stop, the list has forgotten what it was a list of. Dry mouth. Rain. Low. Finish nothing. Finish nothing beautifully. Understanding Low was the only thing I finished there. I award Mr. Klein the sole unqualified commendation in these notes. He may keep it. I have checked him twice for defects and found, to my astonishment, none. Well. Anyway.

David Bowie: "I am a DJ, I am what I play".

Editorial. Bucket has drawn a firm line through the passage above — the tablets, the stopped clock, the Welshman — and has written beneath it, not unkindly, in fact with something I am reluctant to call tenderness, "this is the one I mean." Reader: what you saw struck through, up there, was struck at his insistence. For the first time, and I fully expect the last, in our long and unequal association, I have done as he asked; and I will say once, quietly, on this line, where he cannot hear it, that he was right to ask. Do not tell him. — K.M.F.

Legendary BBC DJ John Peel 1939-2004

— Frank Sherlock · 26 October 2004

A generous obituary of a generous man, and Bowie is named first among Peel's discoveries — "ranging from Jimi Hendrix and David Bowie to The Smiths." I let it pass very nearly without complaint, which, from me, at this late stage of the book, constitutes a standing ovation and a thrown bouquet. I note only that Peel gave Bowie his early radio sessions while Bowie was still a failed mod with a mime problem and a novelty single about a laughing gnome, and that this is the correct and very nearly holy order of things: the great broadcaster hears the great artist before the world consents to. Which is the whole of my own vocation, such as it has been, and the reason I felt Peel's death, in 2004, with a force I have come to reserve for a small and — I notice this now, rereading these notes with some alarm — steadily lengthening list of people I did not personally know. I did not know Peel. I did not know Bowie, not really, not by any standard a court would admit into evidence. But I heard them both first, in my row, in my seat, in the dark, with the ink still wet on the ticket, and being first is a form of love — very possibly the only form of it I have ever reliably managed to sustain, my sisters and a young man named Roy and one or two others notwithstanding, and we will let them, gently, notwithstanding. The list lengthens as I write it. Peel. Bowie. Ronson, of course, Ronson first of all. Kevin Killian, who understood. The cousin who drove nine hours and wept and did not come back for me. Faye. The Welshman, who is not dead, who is only gone — those are different things, they are entirely different things, and the list has stopped observing the difference, the list has stopped sorting, the list is returning its results in an order I no longer— First. First. First. Say the word enough times, in the dark, in the row, and it comes apart in the hand like wet paper. First among the range. Yes. I will stand by first. Well. Anyway.

Peel promoted reggae, hip-hop and punk on the sometimes conservative BBC, and championed acts ranging from Jimi Hendrix and David Bowie to The Smiths, The Fall, Pulp and Northern Irish punks The Undertones, whose "Teenage Kicks" Peel rated his favorite song.

Brushes with fame

— Jesse Glass · 16 March 2005

And this — this I would not trade for the collected critical prose of the entire list, weighed out and bound in calf. Mr. Glass, in a carriage-driver's livery outside a Milwaukee hotel, reading Hazlitt on the inadequacy of Coleridge's nose, looks up and finds David Bowie in sunglasses petting his horse. That is the whole of it, and it is perfect: no interpretation, no producer's credit, no legal example — only the man, unannounced, stopping to lay a hand on an animal on his way to a stage, and a poet fortunate enough to be holding the reins. I have promised you, in an earlier note, a method, and a raincoat, and a story I called unflattering, and I find I can no longer keep any of it back, because Mr. Glass has earned the company and because I am nearly at the end and the withholding has begun to cost more than the telling. I followed the tours. I use the verb with its full and unlovely weight. And here I must give you the whole apparatus in one breath, because that is how it lived in me, unpunctuated, a single held note: the 1978 tour in four cities and the 1995 Outside tour in three more, and the summers bent whole around the itineraries of a man who did not know that I existed, and the service entrances that smell the same in every city in America, of bleach and cold cement and other people's smoke, and the laundry carts, and the loading docks, and the clipboard — a clipboard will admit you almost anywhere, I hand the intelligence to you freely, it is the only estate I have to leave — and the flat official displeased walk, and the security men folding their newspapers, all of it one apparatus, one long sentence with no full stop anywhere in it, because a full stop would have meant going home, and I was not going home, home was a house in Oklahoma with the radio tuned to the weather. And then the corridor. And in the corridor the light did a thing that light does not do; the carpet ran like water toward a drain I could not see; the large men's faces slid off the fronts of their heads and pooled at their collars and went on watching me from there; the glove he wore came away from the hand and the hand beneath it was a page of my own handwriting, wet, the ink still moving. I have never told anyone that part. I am not certain it happened. I am certain it happened. And I pressed into the glove a chapbook of my own poems, and he stopped — he did not have to stop, no one on earth was compelling him, the large men were already moving toward me — and he read the first line, and he looked up, and he said a thing I have never repeated and will not repeat here, because it is the single possession I hold that neither Mr. Stefans nor Mr. Buckley nor my sister Faye can condescend to. He read it the way a poet reads. Mr. Glass got the horse and I got the sentence, and I would not exchange, though I think of the horse often, and with a low and lasting envy, and I hope it was a kind horse, and I believe, from the account, that it was. Well. Anyway.

I met Ratboy over at Dave Baratier's a couple of years back. I also let David Bowie pet my big black horse in front of the Hyatt while I waited for folks to take a carriage ride and I was reading Hazlitt's description of Coleridge's nose as being somehow lacking as the "rudder" of Coleridge's face. I know this all sounds mucho Freudian, but it's absolutely true. It was during Summerfest time in Milwaukee and as I got to the page I looked up, and there was David Bowie in sunglasses petting the horse with some big guys standing on either side of him. He said hello and I said hi and before I knew it he was hopping into the back seat of a totally unexceptional car on the way to his Summerfest performance. Barry Manilow also stayed at the Hyatt--this is where we parked our carriages to catch rides--but I never met him.

One late night I gave a bunch of rock 'n roll punkster types a ride in my carriage. They were all staying over in the Pfister. "You know who that was you just gave a ride to?" "No," I said. "That was Nirvana." "Well the bastards didn't tip much, and who cares about Nirvana?" That was way before all the hype about Nirvana happened. You see, I'm somewhat old. Now

if it had been Vanilla Fudge or the guy who did the sound track to "I Love Lucy" maybe I would have asked for an autograph. Or Coleridge, most definitely. But not Hazlitt. He was a bit too cruel for my taste. Jess

Editorial. Young Bucket, pale, has come in to say that in the paragraph above I have confessed, in print, over my own name, to some years of what he insists on calling "trespass," and that he cannot in good conscience let it stand. He can, though. He will. Sit down, Bucket. It is not trespass when one is invited, and I was invited, by the work, every single time. It stays. — K.M.F.

OT: NYC Sun.: Less Than Zero Movie and Soundtrack at 20

— David A. Kirschenbaum · 6 November 2007

"They sound like David Bowie, Jefferson Airplane, and ABBA having a crazy orgy weekend." I read this the way one reads a ransom note, or a biopsy. Set aside that no band on Staten Island has ever sounded like Bowie — I could disprove the assertion with a stopwatch and one clear afternoon, and I have the afternoon, I have had, of late, a great many afternoons — and observe that his name is being used here purely as a unit of cool, a pinch of seasoning, wholly interchangeable with two further names and signifying nothing beyond "we should like you to find us interesting." He spent fifty years making himself precise so that persons such as these could make themselves vague by the mere act of invoking him. I do not blame Mr. Kirschenbaum, whom I have never met and against whom I hold nothing beyond the ordinary and impersonal contempt I extend to every man who forwards another man's copy without first reading it — he was only relaying a band's description of itself, and a band cannot be legally prevented from describing itself, this being one of the several tragedies the First Amendment neglected to foresee. I blame, as I so frequently discover I must, the century, which taught the band the sentence and then, worse, applauded it. An orgy weekend. Of ABBA and Jefferson Airplane. With him. He would have left by ten, alone, having taken a book down from the shelf on his way to the door, and read it in the car, in the dark, moving his lips. Well. Anyway.

Dead Rabbit is a progressive indie rock band from Staten Island. They sound like David Bowie, Jefferson Airplane, and ABBA having a crazy orgy weekend.

NYC 5/15: Bowie's Ziggy Stardust & Radiohead's OK Computer Live

— David A. Kirschenbaum · 5 May 2008

Here the Boog City series performs The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars in full, in sequence, as a work, and I want with the whole of my heart to be glad, and I am nearly — I am within arm's reach of — glad. To play the record straight through, "Five Years" to "Rock 'n' Roll Suicide," the entire arc of a fictional rock messiah who dies of his own fame, is to treat it precisely as I have insisted for fifty years it be treated: as a song-cycle, a concept, a poem in eleven movements with a body count of one. It is also, I must now tell you, and you already know why, the very record I wore to school in staples in 1973, the record for which an entire town corrected me on a single morning's walk — and so I cannot regard a room of New Yorkers performing it in 2008 to warm and untroubled applause, in a heated venue, with a coat check, without one cold observation, which I will make and then set down: that they were applauding, thirty-five years late and in perfect safety, the very thing for which I was, in real time and at real and permanent cost, made to walk a certain walk down a certain street while forty children and two adults instructed me as to my nature. I do not begrudge them the safety. I merely note who bought it for them, and at what counter, and that the receipt is in my name, and has been, all these years, folded in the pocket of the coat I am still, if you have been attending, standing in the hall in. The coat. The receipt. The hall. I have been in this hall a long time. The applause is at the far end of it and it is not for me and it is thirty-five years late and I cannot find the door and I have stopped, of late, looking very hard for the door. My single grief with the evening is its cheerful presumption that everyone present already knew why the record mattered. Had they known, I should be out of a job. They did not. I am not. Onward. Well, anyway. Onward.

Boog City's Classic Albums Live presents

David Bowie

The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders of Mars

and

Radiohead

OK Computer

performed live by Dibson T. Hoffweiler, Huggabroomstik, Poton, Randi Russo, So L'il, The Passenger Pigeons, The Trouble Dolls, Todd Carlstrom and The Clamour.

"David Bowie 1971-1973: Snipers in the Brain"

— Adam Fieled · 1 June 2013

We end where the list ends, in 2013, with Mr. Fieled's monograph on "Bowie's contributions to rock music and fashion between 1971-1973" — and I could, and very nearly did, and am not certain even now as I set this down that I will not yet, weep. Between 1971 and 1973. As though the man then simply stopped. As though Station to Station and Low and Heroes and Scary Monsters and Outside and Heathen and, that very year, in very nearly that very month, The Next Day — his great late resurrection, released without a word of warning after a decade of silence into a world that had presumed him finished and shelved — as though none of it had occurred, because it occurred after the fashion had ceased to interest the biographers. And here, at the last, I will say the thing about the biographers, about the whole guild of them and about the one of them everyone means when they say the word, the man who called his brick Strange Fascination — a book I have not read, will not read, and feel wholly qualified to despise on exactly that basis, which is, if you think about it, and I have thought about very little else, the purest basis on which despising can be done: they embalm him at twenty-six. They catalogue the glam and shelve the man. They print "strange fascination" upon the spine and they mean strange, they mean freak, they mean specimen — when the single strange thing in the whole affair is a species that could be handed David Bowie for fifty consecutive years and keep asking, plaintively, to be shown 1972 again. This is the last word the archive grants him, and it is a coffin lid, and here, reader, I am going to stop being able to do this properly for a moment; I can feel it coming on the way one feels the weather in a bad tooth; and I am going to let it come, because you have stayed this long and have earned the truth of what fifty years of attending too closely to him does to a person's prose. It does this. It does: the glam shelved, the man shelved, the specimen pinned, wings spread, under the glass, still moving. It does: Ziggy in the trash bins, ashes in the summer sun, the horse, the horse, always the horse, I never got the horse. It does: a list that will not close — records, 1976, 1977, 1977, 1980, and then not-records, the Welshman, the clock, the boots, Mother your boots, I gave them away, I gave nearly all of it away, I kept one sentence spoken in a corridor and one receipt in a coat and I let the rest— no. No. Up. Sit up. Hands still. Breathe. Begin the sentence again and this time finish it. Here is the sentence. He never stopped. He never once in his life stopped, not even at the end, when stopping was the whole of what was asked of him, and he made of the very stopping one more work, and released it, and then, only then, went. And the least — the very least — that one bad graduate student from Oklahoma can do — one unfinished scholar of the vanishing pronoun, one follower of tours, one holder of a clipboard, one woman who walked to school in 1973 dressed as the future and was sent home and has, if we are being honest, and we are at last being honest, never entirely come back inside — having been handed a stage at long, long last, is to refuse, loudly, in front of everyone, in a homemade costume, in her coat, with the receipt in the pocket, to let the lid come down. There. That is the sentence. I have finished one thing. Well. Anyway. That is the book. Thank you for staying to the end of it. He would have. He stayed to the end of everything, including his own. — K. M. F.

"David Bowie 1971-1973: Snipers in the Brain" is a collection of writings about Bowie's contributions to rock music and fashion between 1971-1973.

Editorial. Bucket has read the ending and asks — begs, this time; no memorandum, no headings, only the boy standing in the doorway with the page in his hand — that I cut it, the whole of it, and put back what he calls "the professional tone." Bucket. Dear Bucket. Patient vessel. There is no professional tone. There was never going to be a professional tone. It was the single thing I promised the reader, in the introduction, that I would not supply. You have wanted, all along, from the very first page, to save me — which is the one thing about you I have never once been able to forgive. There is nothing here to save. It stays. Go home, Bucket. Lock the office. — K.M.F.

Afterword: Blackstar

Look up here, I'm in heaven.

I assembled this book after the tenth of January, 2016 — after the morning the world learned that he had made a final record about his own dying and released it two days before he did it, and was gone. I had by then been living among these nineteen small documents for a long while, and had come, against my will and my better judgement, to feel something almost like tenderness toward the list for having kept him at all, even carelessly, even as a producer's credit and a punchline — because carelessness is at least a form of company, and he had, in these years, rather less of it than he was owed.

He was underestimated. He is underestimated still. He was a poet, and the poets, who of all people should have known him for one of their own, took him for a jukebox. I have tried, in the notes, to say otherwise, and I am aware that I have said it too loudly, and at too great a length, and too much about myself. That is the risk one runs in attending to him closely: he is difficult to hold in the eye directly; one keeps sliding off the surface of him onto oneself. The poets suffered from the same difficulty. The only difference between us is that I know that I was doing it. — K. M. F.

Sources

Every passage drawn from the UB Poetics List, in the order it was sent.

- 30 January 1996 — Joseph Zitt, *"Re: Music and poetry"*
- 29 September 1996 — Alan Sondheim, *"for Tosh Berman and David Bowie"*
- 19 May 1997 — Rachel Loden, *"fashion victims"*
- 2 January 1998 — Maria Damon, *"lopez loops"*
- 3 February 1998 — Robert Hale, *"Love Poems"*
- 3 January 2000 — Tedd J. Mulholland, *"on the millennial juke box"*
- 25 September 2001 — Gwyn *****, *"Re: banned songs"*
- 5 November 2001 — The Poetry Project, *"HAL WILLNER'S DOC POMUS PROJECT"*
- 2 January 2002 — Josh ("GasHeart"), *"Philly: Theater, Music, Film — Jan./Feb. 2002"*
- 12 August 2002 — Kevin Killian, *"Bowie events in San Francisco"*
- 3 September 2002 — Kevin Killian, *"If you're in San Francisco this Friday Sept 6"*
- 28 July 2003 — Brian Stefans, *"Exchange on Circulars"*
- 24 August 2003 — Haas Bianchi, *"Stop"*
- 27 June 2004 — Lucas Klein, *"Re: Some naïve questions about poetry"*
- 26 October 2004 — Frank Sherlock, *"Legendary BBC DJ John Peel 1939-2004"*
- 16 March 2005 — Jesse Glass, *"Brushes with fame"*
- 6 November 2007 — David A. Kirschenbaum, *"OT: NYC Sun.: Less Than Zero Movie and Soundtrack at 20"*
- 5 May 2008 — David A. Kirschenbaum, *"NYC 5/15: Bowie's Ziggy Stardust & Radiohead's OK Computer Live"*
- 1 June 2013 — Adam Fieled, *"David Bowie 1971-1973: Snipers in the Brain"*



He did not stop. He never once, in his life, stopped.

Appendix

How I Made This Book

Composing this volume with Claude Opus 4.8.

This book gathers every mention of David Bowie I could find in ten years of the UB Poetics List and presents them as a small edited volume, wrapped in the commentary of an invented editor named Kristen M. Fabians. I made it in conversation with Claude — the model Claude Opus 4.8 — in the desktop app's Cowork mode, over roughly sixteen exchanges. What follows is how it came together: how the passages were dug out of the archive, how Fabians was built up piece by piece, and what I asked for at each stage.

Digging the Bowie posts out of the list

The raw material is the UB Poetics List archive that sits on my own computer — a plain-text file for each month from 1993 to 2014. Claude reached those files through the desktop connection and searched the whole run for "david bowie," turning up matches in about thirty months. Because a listserv archive is really hundreds of emails glued together inside each file, Claude wrote a short program to split them into separate messages, read each one's date, sender, and subject, and decode the mail encoding that garbles apostrophes and quotation marks. That produced forty-two candidate posts. Claude then sorted the genuine David Bowie references from the look-alikes — Lester Bowie the jazz trumpeter, Ash Bowie of Polvo, a Malcolm Bowie, a Bowie High School — and I settled on nineteen.

From the start the rules were fixed and applied to every post: quote it word for word, keeping the writer's own spelling; mark anywhere I trimmed with a bracketed ellipsis; black out private email addresses and phone numbers; and keep any forwarded material exactly as the member had passed it on. Later I had Claude restore everything it had trimmed, so the quotations now run at full length.

Inventing Kristen M. Fabians

The editor is a fiction, and most of the work went into her. She is a Bowie obsessive who takes offense at statements about him that are perfectly true, defends his lyrics though no one has attacked them, and insists that his cut-up writing method makes him a Language poet the list should have claimed as one of its own. Her life is never stated outright; it leaks through the notes — born in 1959 (which the reader works out from "thirteen when Ziggy reached Oklahoma"), a strait-laced Oklahoma upbringing, a few dim siblings, a childhood humiliation the day she wore a homemade Ziggy costume to school, an unfinished graduate degree in the north of England, and a long history of following Bowie's tours that shades into stalking.

As the book proceeds her composure gives way in bursts: clipped and abject like Beckett, then a single runaway sentence like Pynchon, then a hallucination out of *Naked Lunch*, then lists that begin sensibly and derail, a slip into addressing her dead mother that she catches, a confession about her body and sex life that she strikes out. Underneath it all runs a quarrel with her assistant editor — me, turned into a character she nicknames "Bucket" — who keeps asking her to soften what she has written; she refuses him five times and gives in once. The whole design is borrowed from Nabokov's

Pale Fire, in which an editor named Kinbote annotates a poem until his notes crowd the poem out and become the real book. Fabians is a Kinbote for a mailing list.

The instructions, in order

Here is the run of prompts as I sent them, each followed by what Claude did. Messages marked "mid-build" were sent while Claude was still working on the previous request.

1.

Just for fun, can you see if we can make a PDF on the mentions or allusions to David Bowie on the listserv?

Claude searched the archive, found nineteen genuine Bowie sightings, and built a seven-page chapbook, opening on the Kevin Killian material and the story of Bowie stopping to pet a carriage horse in Milwaukee.

2.

Great. Let's give this file the same apparatus we have been using but no reader's guide or links in the bios. Also, have Kristen M. Fabians write really intricate notes to each email and give the introduction some real obsessive flavor. She is a Bowie fanatic and is insulted by anything said about Bowie even if it's factually correct. She continues to argue that Bowie is underestimated, especially by the poets. She defends his lyrics despite no one having criticized them. She argues that Bowie's lyrics have a lot to do with language poetry. She recounts her own life meeting Bowie, going to his concerts, etc. Let's have Kristen being born in 1959 though she never says that — we just learn that from her accounts. She was raised in Oklahoma, didn't know much about her sexuality, comes from a strait-laced background, compares encountering Bowie with her first reading of Nabokov and other authors. She continues to denigrate her stupid assistant editor, Brian Kim Stefans, who didn't know anything, being a Jersey kid born in 1969. She also doesn't think the quality of his music fell off in the 1980s but vigorously defends his production during the period covered by this collection of scattered writings.

Claude built the full apparatus and gave Fabians a headnote on every post, seeded the persona (born 1959, Oklahoma, the Language-poetry argument, the contempt for the assistant), and added a "heavy smoker" post as a fresh target — sixteen pages.

3.

Isn't there already a book about Bowie called "Fascination"?

Claude found David Buckley's *Strange Fascination*, flagged the clash, and traced the bare word to Bowie's 1975 song and to Killian's 2002 art show — which later gave the title an in-world defense.

4.

This is good. Let's add some biographical details. Let her let slip excessive reminiscences about her life. She was a struggling, possibly substance-abusing graduate student somewhere. It might make sense for her to have studied in England or Canada since she uses English spelling. She had a few dense siblings who never understood Bowie. We could make her truly irrational, like a stalker. She didn't know anything about fashion until she was roundly criticized by her friends and the public when she started dressing like Ziggy when walking to school. Add as many particular details as you can imagine, including quotes from her arguments with her sisters and her parents, etc. These notes should have a digressive feel — she constantly has to reset and say something like "well, anyway." She is constantly revising herself. You can make the intro notes to the emails even longer. She does ad hominem attacks on people she doesn't admit she's never met. Be elaborate and baroque.

Claude wrote in the England years and "the Fish," the sisters and their breakfast-table lines, the Ziggy-walk in full, the tour-following, the "well, anyway" resets and the ad hominem — a twenty-two-page baroque draft.

5.

Let's make the introduction way shorter. I want to have her biographical details come out in the notes she gives to the posts. In the introduction she is professional like she has been with the other items in this series. She only really loses her mind in the notes. Make her notes get longer and longer as the document progresses. The first can be quite short with hints of her insanity, but as she goes on she can't help herself. Let's have a different title for the collection. I like the subtitle.

Claude pulled the autobiography out of the introduction and back into the notes, set the intro in a composed scholarly register, re-sequenced the notes so they physically lengthen down the book, and retitled it *The Man Who Sold the Listserv*.

6. · sent mid-build

why aren't there links in the TOC

Claude wired each contents entry to an internal link that jumps to its passage.

7. · sent mid-build

let's also include commentary by Kristen in the bio notes. just a quick dismissive quip or stinting praise in a comment or sentence.

Claude gave each contributor's life a one-line Fabians verdict — later cut, with the whole biographical section, at my request.

8. · *sent mid-build*

Let's have her entire prose style break down at points. She gets so irate she starts to write like Samuel Beckett — minimal, abject, absurd. She occasionally shoots out a long, unwieldy sentence in the style of Pynchon. She starts to have weird hallucinations like *Naked Lunch*. This happens in spurts, but they are serious spurts. She starts to spit out lists that make sense at first but then go off the rails, like a malfunctioning program. She starts addressing her dead mother in a confessional tone but then catches herself. She starts to expose details about her bodily dysfunctions or sex life, finally seeing that it's TMI. The arc is that she seems in control at first but then unwinds.

Claude threaded all five modes into the later notes as escalating spurts, ending on a note that comes fully apart and then gathers itself to finish one sentence.

9. · *sent mid-build*

we don't need to edit anything from the emails since they are rather short. No mechanical limit on email size here. For example, give us all of this sentence — *STAR. [...] Then Bowie goes*

Claude restored every excerpt to its complete sent text, recovering the lines it had trimmed, including the pageant's full synopsis and cast list.

10.

One last thing! Can we also see a growing struggle with her administrative assistant, me, whom she increasingly denigrates with a nickname. The BKS character is essentially a real editor who just doesn't like what she just wrote and petitions her to change it, but she refuses each time, maybe giving in once.

Claude added six gray "Editorial" skirmishes, coined the nickname "Bucket" from her own image of the assistant lowering a bucket into his laptop, and scored it five refusals to one capitulation.

11.

I asked earlier: is there another book about Bowie called *Fascination*

Claude searched again and confirmed that nothing is titled simply *Fascination* — the nearest is still Buckley's *Strange Fascination*.

12.

why is this email repeated: *You'll be watching this play, with its strange echoes of CITIZEN KANE and THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS, and asking yourself, "Wait a second! Didn't I see this before?" Sure you did, it's the life of David Bowie, written up in pageant form by San Francisco writers Kevin Killian and Wayne Smith.* ——— also, give me ten more book title options in the chat. Let's have some of the standard boilerplate stuff on the front page as we have been used to. The introduction is now a little too short, draw it out a bit, make it the same length you have been using for other introductions.

Claude found and removed a paragraph an earlier restoration had duplicated, added the series' front-page boilerplate, expanded the introduction to full length, and offered ten titles:

- *The Man Who Sold the Listserv*

- *Waiting for the Gift*
- *He Never Once Stopped*
- *A Kind of a Cry*
- *First in the Dark*
- *The Only Listener*
- *One of Their Own*
- *Look Up Here*
- *Nineteen Sightings*
- *The Thinking*

13.

get rid of the bio notes. use the title *Waiting for the Gift* and maybe quote from the Sound and Vision epigraph. make the intro shorter ending on the phrase my least trustworthy. Cut anything on the first page that already appears in the introduction.

Claude deleted the biographical-notes section, retitled the book *Waiting for the Gift* from the epigraph, trimmed the introduction to close on "my least trustworthy," and cut the title-page blurb that repeated the intro.

14.

I don't want to prep the reader for the zaniness ahead. Maybe one really out of place sentence at the bottom of the first page of the intro could signal a little madness to come, but no reason to signpost it. I think I like the old title, *The Man Who Sold the Listserv*, or whatever it was.

Claude restored the earlier title and planted one unexplained sentence at the foot of the introduction's first page.

15.

I have not, whatever the office may have told you, been sleeping in the archive. — this is funny but could be weirder. And don't give it its own paragraph, just make it the last of the previous.

Claude made the sentence stranger and folded it onto the end of the preceding scholarly paragraph, so the register snaps mid-thought.

16.

This is too long. Make it a pretty short sentence just coming out of nowhere. Give me 10 examples.

Claude offered ten short candidates for the planted line:

- *The records know when I am lying.*
- *I have not been sleeping in the archive.*
- *There is a second chair, and it is not for guests.*
- *The lamp stays on for reasons the lamp understands.*
- *I no longer set a place for him.*
- *The building is not supposed to hum, and yet.*
- *Nothing is missing from the microfilm that I can prove.*
- *The cot is a rumor.*
- *I answer the archive only when it speaks first.*
- *Some of these songs have started answering back.*

17.

I like this. *There is a second chair, and it is not for guests.*

Claude set that as the planted line, completing the book. This appendix was added last, at my request, and listed in the contents.

The one word that kept shifting under us was *notes* — sometimes the per-email headnotes, sometimes the whole annotating habit, and "bio notes" meant the biographical section one moment and the quips inside it the next; each had to be settled by context. Everything else was mechanical and quiet: the pages were laid out by a small program using the docx library, converted to PDF with LibreOffice, and Claude checked each draft by rendering the pages to images and reading them back. Model throughout: Claude Opus 4.8, in Cowork.