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ESSAY

Representations of the USSR/Russia in David Bowie's Imagined Travelogue

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ABSTRACT
For many in the Western creative community, the image of the USSR has long carried an air of mystery and menace—it was perceived as dangerous, though simultaneously intriguing and alluring. Those Western intellectuals who had the rare opportunity to visit the Soviet Union often recounted their experiences in highly stylized, mythologized narratives, where glimpses of everyday life were interwoven with stereotypes, clichés, and ideological tropes about the Soviet past. One notable example of a Western artist with firsthand experience of Soviet life is British musician David Bowie (1947–2016). Building on the earlier research into the mythologization of time and the construction of post-truth in Bowie's life and art, this article examines Bowie's impressions of the USSR during his 1970s visit and the visual and conceptual world of one of his most enigmatic albums, *1.Outside* (1995), which he presented at his only concert in Russia. The study also explores the Russian motifs in one of his darkest albums, *The Next Day* (2013a), and considers how themes of waiting, surveillance, and espionage link Bowie's experiences in the USSR/Russia to the narratives embedded in his 1995 and 2013 albums. Together, all parts of Bowie's imagined travel diary paint a rather bleak view of the country—marked by anticipation, surveillance, espionage, and the oppressive atmosphere of totalitarian control.

KEYWORDS
travelogue, imaginaries of the Soviet Union, the work of David Bowie, hauntology, espionage, allusions to the Soviet past

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> I'm perturbed by the idea of morality, of good and bad. I'm much more comfortable with the idea of illusion and reality. I get such moral drift—I've seen people killed with f***ing kindness and I've seen some negative situations actually turn out in a positive way and I find it all very confusing (David Bowie in an interview to *New Musical Express*; Egan, 2015).

In the eyes of the West, particularly among certain members of the artistic and intellectual circles, the image of the USSR was often cast as both mysterious and menacing. This sense of danger made it appear simultaneously intriguing and alluring. The impressions of those Western intellectuals who had the chance to visit the Soviet Union were shaped by highly mythologized narratives in which everyday life was interwoven with entrenched stereotypes, ideological tropes, and familiar clichés about the Soviet past. The nature of these myths and preconceived notions is evident in the kinds of questions typically asked by tourists from capitalist countries.

Foremost among the concerns were questions about human rights and civil liberties in the USSR: "Do Soviet citizens attend demonstrations and community labor events voluntarily?", "Why do you believe that freedom of the press exists here?", and "Why is it impossible to purchase non-communist newspapers and magazines in the Soviet Union?" Additionally, many questions addressed the Soviet political system more broadly—its ideological foundations, the dominant role of the Communist Party, and the nature of electoral procedures for state institutions. Examples include: "Why are there so many slogans and portraits of party and government leaders?" and "Is Lenin a kind of god for you?" (Orlov & Popov, 2018).

In order to grasp how Soviet reality was perceived and evaluated, we need to keep in mind that there were at least three distinct types of tourists who traveled to the USSR in the 1930s: curiosity seekers, who typically limited their stay to brief visits to Moscow and Leningrad; students and educators, who arrived in organized groups to study Soviet life; and transit travelers drawn to make a stopover in the Soviet Union by following the slogan "Visit the most interesting country in the world!" (Orlov & Popov, 2018).

A number of additional factors should also be considered, as they likely shaped foreign tourists' impressions of the Land of the Soviets. These include the suspicion factor, linked to Cold War tensions, and the ideological briefings many foreigners received before visiting; the information factor, referring to the lack of alternative media in the USSR; and the tradition factor, reflecting visitors' tendency to stick to familiar habits despite local restrictions (Khripun, 2011).

Some Western visitors recorded their impressions upon return in travel diaries or "travelogues"[1]. Scholarly studies have explored the recurring themes and narrative patterns in these texts (Golubtsova, 2023). It should be noted, however, that the concept of travelogue or travel diary is not confined to rigid genre boundaries; it can always be expanded by incorporating imagined, mythologized elements inspired both by the circumstances of the journey and by texts such as interviews or literary works.

In this paper, I intend to examine episodes from the biography and creative work of the English performer David Bowie (1947–2016), one of the pop icons who serves as a striking example of a well-known Western artist with first-hand experience of Soviet everyday life. In addition, it should be noted that existing studies of the images of Russia/Russians (USSR/Soviet people) in the songs of British pop musicians have completely ignored this topic to date. Examples of this include the studies "Music vs. Politics: The Image of Russia in the Songs by British Pop Singers of the 1960s and 2010s" (Zhurkova, 2019) and "14 British Songs About Russia" (Parogni, 2013).

Although, of course, the visits of Western pop stars have happened. So, about a year before the Moscow Olympics, Elton John became one of the first Western pop stars to visit the Soviet Union. In May 1979, the musician gave eight concerts in Moscow and Leningrad, which at that time was a landmark event amid tensions between the USSR and the West. Moreover, following the tour, the Soviet authorities permitted the state-owned Melodiya record company to issue the last numbered album by Elton John at that time, which became the first record of Western pop album to be officially released in the Soviet Union.

However, Bowie and John's visits to the Soviet Union were radically different. While Elton John was officially invited and his visit was carefully organized and planned—concerts, cultural program, including, for example, attending a football match between CSKA Moscow and Dinamo Minsk, David Bowie carried out his trips almost incognito. Although Bowie did come to Russia with a concert in 1996, that was a completely different country. And Bowie's ideas about Russia developed in much the same way as John's about the Soviet Union: a warm welcome, excessive pomp did their job. In any case, Bowie's experience of visiting the Soviet Union is unique. Other Western artists (e.g., The Beatles, Sting, Iron Maiden, etc.), who had never come to the USSR, could only broadcast images of an "imaginary Soviet Union" in their songs, similar to what Yurchak (2005) called the "imaginary West" for Soviet citizens. Moreover, individual examples had impressive popularity. First of all, the case of The Beatles. For example, from 1999 to 2023 *The Guardian* published more than a hundred articles containing the lexeme *USSR*, and the following circumstance immediately catches the eye: the cluster "music" is being held hostage by the song "Back in the USSR" by The Beatles

[1] A travelogue is a book shaped by the traveler's personal impressions, reflections, and experiences, recounting what was seen and heard. It blends elements of various genres and includes observations about culture, language, geography, and the people inhabiting a place—their tastes, customs, manners, and traditions. To engage the reader and encourage an active perception of the text, the author must incorporate stimulating elements into the narrative, addressing serious issues while also capturing satirical or humorous nuances. Often, the narrative in a travelogue is enriched with legends or anecdotes from everyday life. Despite its seemingly unpretentious form, the travelogue typically portrays the traveler as both resourceful and intellectually curious (Efimovskii, 2021, p. 88).

(1968). More than a quarter of articles (27 out of 102) refer to this famous composition, the title track on the double *White Album* by the British cult band. Such a frequent presentation of the song, which contains delight from an imaginary return to the Soviet Union, rather speaks to the popularity of The Beatles group itself.

To expand my previous studies on the mythologization of temporal modes and the production of post-truth in Bowie's life and work (see, e.g., Ivanov, 2022), this study will shed light on the following: (a) the artist's impressions from his visits to the USSR in the 1970s; (b) the context around one of his most enigmatic albums, *1. Outside* (1995), particularly considering that Bowie's only concert in our country took place in 1996 as part of the Outside Summer Festivals Tour; and (c) the "Soviet trace" found in the last two numbered studio albums released during Bowie's lifetime, *The Next Day* (2013a) and *Blackstar* (2016). Therefore, Bowie's brief travel notes and musical works are treated here as a kind of imagined travelogue across the USSR and Russia, forming the focus of this study. To carry out the presented comparative analysis, I used semantic analysis in the case of referring to song lyrics and the hermeneutic method in assessing the impact on the images of the USSR/Russia of Bowie's experience of observing the everyday life of local residents.

Although Bowie's work has never lacked attention from researchers in various fields, interest in the artist has grown particularly strong in recent years. Various scientific conferences and exhibitions were held, for example, *David Bowie Is*, a touring museum exhibition on the history, artifacts, and background of Bowie's life, music, films, tours, and creative work (Broackes & Marsh, 2013). Moreover, numerous biographies (Egan, 2017; Leigh, 2014; Trynka, 2011), thematic issues of journals (*Celebrity Studies*, 2019), and even original proceedings (Devereux et al., 2015; Mendes & Perrott, 2020) have been published. It is also worth highlighting the fundamental work of Pegg (2016) where the author manages to achieve the necessary balance between the descriptive and analytical parts. In addition, Bowie has repeatedly become the object of attention in the context of postcolonialism studies, criticism of British everyday life of the 1960s and 1970s, images of Others, criticism of futurism and British rock criticism culture.

In 1973 and 1976, Bowie made two unofficial (tourist) trips to the Soviet Union. In late April 1973, after finishing a successful leg of the Ziggy Stardust Tour in Japan, he arrived in the Soviet Union by ship. From there, he took a week-long trip on the Trans-Siberian Railway from the Far East to Moscow, where he saw the May Day demonstration. Three years later, also in spring, Bowie took advantage of a break in his Isolar–1976 Tour to take a train to Moscow, accompanied by his friend, the well-known musician Iggy Pop, whom he showed around Red Square and a famous shopping center GUM. A celebration of Pop's 29th birthday also took place at the restaurant of the Metropol Hotel.

Notably that David Bowie was virtually unknown to Soviet audiences, unlike in the West (including Japan), where by the mid-1970s—particularly after his 1972–1973 Ziggy Stardust Tour—he had risen to global stardom. This lack of popularity in the USSR explains why even the relevant Soviet authorities showed little interest in the musician. At the same time, the context of Bowie's travels through the USSR and Moscow in the 1970s aligns well with the motif of a ruler (a tsar or deity; and Bowie was none other than a pop idol) mingling with the people in disguise:

> The ancient tale of Harun al-Rashid, who wandered Baghdad in disguise to learn what ordinary people thought of him, embodies mythological ideas of a beggar as a disguised god or ruler traveling the land to test its inhabitants. Over time, this story accumulated numerous new details and acquired various modifications and branches. (Shomova, 2016, p. 14; Trans. by Andrey Ivanov—A. I.)

In 1973, David Bowie published a series of notes in *Mirabelle* magazine:

> 11th August 1973
> Siberia itself was incredibly impressive. We rode for days and days across relatively untouched wilderness—great forests, sweeping plains, and glimpses of people living a very simple, peasant life, getting a living from the land. I could never have imagined such expanses of unspoilt, natural country without actually seeing it myself, it was like a glimpse into another age, another world, and it made a very strong impression on me. It was strange to be sitting in a train, which is the product of technology—the invention of mankind, and travelling through land so untouched and unspoilt by man and his inventions.
>
> 18th August 1973
> I really love travelling by train, I find it very relaxing, and it gives me a chance to see the world and the people that live in it, and how they live. As I do a lot of my song-writing during my train journeys, naturally enough the atmosphere of the country I am passing through, the way of life and what I observe in the people, comes out in my songs. I wrote several songs about Russia, so I hope that one day you will be able to experience my impressions of Russia (and Japan), through my letters.
>
> On April 30th we finally pulled into Moscow. We stayed that night in the Intourist Hotel, and the next day we were lucky enough to see the impressive May Day Parade in the streets of the city. May Day is Moscow's (or rather Russia's) biggest holiday—commemoration in honour of the founding of the communist party. All party members march in the streets carrying red flags and singing patriotic songs—it's really quite a sight. It's very impressive to see such enormous numbers of people marching together like that, with a sense of harmony and purpose. (Bowie, 1998)

Despite his generally enthusiastic descriptions of what he saw in the Soviet Union, Bowie later confided to his wife Angie that the experience had left him more deeply shaken than anything he had encountered before (Linskey, 2016).

Russian journalists who covered Bowie's 1996 concert in Moscow also recalled details of his earlier visits to the USSR. Reflecting on his trip in the 1970s—when he went unrecognized in the streets of Moscow, in stark contrast to the overwhelming fan attention he would have received in London—Bowie reportedly described seeing intoxicated people lying on the sidewalks as one of his greatest disappointments. The

experience, marked by the atmosphere of rigid control, left a strong impression and soon after inspired him to create the dystopian-themed album *Diamond Dogs* (1974), shaped in part by the Soviet environment and Orwellian imagery (Safonova, 1996).

Shortly after his second visit to the USSR and the conclusion of the Isolar–1976 Tour, in August 1976, David Bowie moved to West Berlin in an attempt to escape public attention and overcome his drug addiction. There, he created the albums of the *Berlin Trilogy*, highly praised by critics. One of the most well-known compositions from this period is the song "Heroes," which tells the story of a couple from opposite sides of the divided city. The theme of the significant Other—represented here by a resident of socialist East Berlin—remains central to the narrative, indirectly pointing to Bowie's continued interest in the Soviet context.

In the years that followed, from the 1980s to the early 2000s, Bowie became involved in a kaleidoscope of projects: from the commercial success of his 1980s albums (most notably *Let's Dance*, 1983), to his experiments with the band Tin Machine (1988–1992), a turn to drum and bass in 1997, and his final tours Heathen Tour (2002) and A Reality Tour (2003–2004). During this period, he made no explicit references to his impressions of the Soviet Union.

The musician's 1995 album *1.Outside* is recognized by critics as a creative success. It was accompanied by Bowie's short story *The Diary of Nathan Adler*, which depicted dark visions of the near future, where murder and bodily disfigurement had become a new, fashionable underground form of art, and the government had established a special bureau for investigating artistic crimes.

In an interview to Ian Penman, Bowie commented on aspects of "ritual art" in *1.Outside* the following way:

> My input revolved around the idea of ritual art—what options were there open to that quasi-sacrificial blood—obsessed sort of art form? And the idea of a neo-paganism developing—especially in America—with the advent of the new cults of tattooing, scarification and piercings and all that ... people have a real need for some spiritual life and I think there's great spiritual starving going on. There's a hole that's been vacated by an authoritative religious body—the Judeo-Christian ethic doesn't seem to embrace all the things that people actually need to have deal with in that way—and it's sort of been left to popular culture to soak up the leftover bits like violence and sex. (Penman, 1995)

Building on the success of The Outside Tour, which accompanied the release of the album *1.Outside*, the Outside Summer Festivals Tour was organized. Following its Japanese leg, David Bowie gave his only concert in Russia on June 18, 1996.

In an interview given the day before the concert in Moscow to music critic and journalist Artemy Troitsky[2], Bowie emphasized the significance of the video for the song "The Hearts Filthy Lesson," which makes one of the gloomiest tracks on *1.Outside*. He noted that the video meant a great deal to him and was, in his view,

[2] Artemy Troitsky is officially recognized as a foreign agent in Russia. Артемий Троицкий официально признан иностранным агентом в России.

highly successful from an artistic standpoint. Bowie suggested that the clip conveys the spiritual context of *1.Outside*, reflecting a desperate need to create a ritualistic, quasi-pagan atmosphere—something that, according to him, lies at the heart of the album's concept (night_spell, 2008).

Interestingly, "The Hearts Filthy Lesson" plays over the end credits of David Fincher's film *Se7en* (1995), which tells the story of two detectives investigating a series of murders inspired by the seven deadly sins. The music video itself features a montage of eerie props and disturbing art objects, showing images of skulls, gallows, candles, and unsettling items preserved in jars. David Bowie explained that the song does not have a direct, coherent message—it is simply a flow of information, a montage of objects, newspaper clippings, storylines, dreams, and half-formed thoughts. The "filthy lesson," he said, is the realization of one's own mortality—a lesson most people do not grasp until old age. In the music video, Bowie uses montage once again, but instead of assembling textual fragments as in the cut-up technique inspired by William Burroughs—who in the early 1970s experimented with physically cutting and rearranging text to create surprising new combinations—he constructs the imagery from objects and even body parts (Brooker, 2019).

According to culture scholar Frank Kelleter,

> Bowie's best albums—and, consequently, his finest roles, personas, costumes, performances, and so on—capture him in a moment of stillness. At every level of the artistic process, the focus is on photographic identity, on reflecting (not only visually) the possibility of a pose—whether frozen or conveying tension. (Kelleter, 2022, p. 50; Trans. by A. I.)

The music video for "The Hearts Filthy Lesson," in my view, reinforces this idea, presenting a series of seemingly frozen images of the performer and enriching the artist's work with new visual elements.

In a series of interviews given to magazines *Time Out* and *Ikon* between August and October 1995, David Bowie clarified the context behind this and other concepts featured on the *1.Outside* album:

> I come from almost a traditional school now of deconstructing phrases and constructing them again in what is considered a random way. But in that randomness there's something that we perceive as a reality—that in fact our lives aren't tidy, that we don't have tidy beginnings and endings.
>
> I've always had an orientation toward combining contradictory information. And just seeing what happens. Messing about with structures, taking them apart. Dismantling toys and putting the wrong bits back together.
>
> I am now old enough—hurray!—to have a body of work, which is great. It means that I can dip in and pull out symbols and atmospheres and even processes and techniques that I've utilise before, and re-apply them in new situations. It's the basic maxim that if you take something out of one context and put it

> in another, it takes on a whole different set of meanings. So, with Outside, placing the eerie environment of Diamond Dogs city now in the Nineties gives it an entirely different spin. It was important for this town, this locale, to have a populous, a number of characters. I tried to diversify these really eccentric types as much as possible. Overall, a long-term ambition is to make it a series of albums extending to 1999—to try to capture, using this device, what the last five years of this millennium feel like. It's a diary within a diary. The narrative and the stories are not the content—the content is the spaces in between the linear bits. The queasy, strange, textures.
>
> Oh, I've got the fondest hopes for the fin de siècle. I see it as a symbolic sacrificial rite. I see it as a deviance, a pagan wish to appease gods, so we can move on. There's a real spiritual starvation out there being filled by these mutations of what are barely-remembered rites and rituals. To take the place of the void left by a non-authoritative church. (Egan, 2015)

Commenting further on the circumstances of the Moscow concert held at the State Kremlin Palace, it should be noted that the musician himself regarded the concert as one of his less successful performances, despite efforts by the Russian side to employ "hospitality techniques." The latter term was used by American sociologist Paul Hollander (1998) to describe various methods employed by organizations like Intourist Hotel and others to mask the negative aspects of life and to try to gloss over Soviet reality for foreign tourists.

Hollander (1998) identified two main components of these hospitality techniques, which he primarily studied in the context of twentieth-century totalitarian states: the courting of the guest, where it becomes difficult for the visitor to feel negative about the country because it is hard to dislike people who go out of their way to please and ensure their comfort; and selective presentation of reality, in which the guest is deliberately shown only the best aspects of life in the host country (good food, excellent housing, and the most interesting sights) while being kept from seeing the country's shortcomings and instances of injustice toward local residents (Orlov & Popov, 2018).

During David Bowie's stay in Moscow, he was welcomed with a traditional bread-and-salt ceremony at the airport, invited to attend an event on a boat on the Moscow River. Moreover, he was asked provocative questions about the outcome of the second round of the Russian presidential election. However, the overall experience was spoiled by the concert atmosphere, where the front rows were occupied by affluent attendees who showed little interest in Bowie's music, especially the experimental sound of the *1.Outside* album.

Bowie did not show much curiosity about the specifics of life in Russia during the 1990s, a period that might have offered more room for imagination compared to the imagined events described in the *1.Outside* album booklet, which reveal a certain obsession with the Millennium. After his unsuccessful interaction with the audience at the State Kremlin Palace concert, Bowie promised not to return to Russia and kept his word.

Nonetheless, Soviet themes would still appear in Bowie's imagined travelogue later on, towards the end of his career and shortly before his tragic passing.

In 2013, after nearly a decade without new music, many critics had understandably begun to speculate that Bowie's creative career was over. Then, on January 8—his birthday—he unexpectedly released the single "Where Are We Now?" The song is a reflection on modern-day Berlin and on how the city has changed since the late 1970s, when Bowie lived there. Frank Kelleter quotes journalist Chris O'Leary, who writes the following: "Berlin was the last place where Bowie was young" (as cited in Kelleter, 2022, p. 110; Trans. by A. I.). Bowie's albums from the 2010s, filled with reminiscences of the author's youth, also begin with a song about Berlin. Critchley (2014) describes this song as

> a sudden flash of memory, a scattering of synecdoches, fragments of recollection tied together by place names—Potsdamer Platz, the Jungle Club, the KaDeWe department store, and the Bösebrücke bridge, a former checkpoint between East and West Berlin. Bowie is "a man lost in time," who is "walking the deads." (Critchley, 2014)

Two months later, David Bowie released a new album, *The Next Day* (2013a), which had been recorded in complete secrecy. Those involved in the recording were only allowed to comment publicly after the album's release. Producer Tony Visconti described the album's underlying concept as follows: "He's been obsessed with medieval English history, which, believe it or not, makes great material for a rock song. And contemporary Russian history, too, which also makes a great rock song" (Petridis, 2013).

Critics generally praised the album, recognizing it as the strongest work since the early 1980s, though some negative reviews also appeared. One of the few critical voices in the UK came from *The Wire*. Mark Fisher, an English music critic, cultural theorist, author of the k-punk blog, who coined the terms "capitalist realism" and "acid communism," criticized the album, calling it mediocre and undeserving of the widespread recognition and publicity it received. According to Fisher (2013), this reflects a broader malaise in contemporary music, demonstrating that anything lacking artistic merit can achieve success through skillfully orchestrated promotion.

In my view, Mark Fisher's hauntological ideas offer useful insight into his intention, especially regarding his negative response to *The Next Day*. For Fisher, hauntology characterizes the current state of popular culture, which, due to the pervasiveness of capitalist realism (the widespread sense of capitalism's inevitability), is obsessed with ideas and images of the past. Hauntological culture reflects what Fisher calls capitalist realism—the mass feeling of political and economic inevitability of neoliberal capitalism. According to Fisher (2009), in such a culture, creativity as the production of something new and innovative is inhibited, since in the absence of political alternatives, all revolutionary creativity becomes dulled:

> This is especially evident in popular music, which over several decades has undergone an unimaginable number of transformations—from the Mississippi Delta blues to the British rave scene of the 1990s—but by the new century seems to have run out of steam. Hauntological music is torn in its desire to create something revolutionary: on one hand, it is deeply gripped by nostalgic longing for the revolutionary nature of past music, and on the other, it is heavily weighed down by the inability to reproduce that unique experience. The new 21st century is obsessed with the residual images of the departed 20th century but neither wants nor is able to replicate the innovative, radical experiments of the previous century. (Fisher, 2009)

Mark Fisher might have agreed with the opening lines of David Bowie's 1980 album *Scary Monsters (and Super Creeps)*: "Silhouettes and shadows watch the revolution. No more free steps to heaven! It's no game ... No more free steps to heaven! It's no game" (Bowie, 1992). However, the songs from 2013, filled with melancholy, nostalgia, and a sense of passing time, led Fisher to harshly criticize the new material. He called it mediocre and argued that any experimentation was purely a marketing tactic disguised as secrecy (Fisher, 2013).

As for the Russian—or more precisely, Soviet—references on *The Next Day*, producer Tony Visconti once again offers some insight into their meaning. His comment to the song "You Feel So Lonely You Could Die" is quoted in an interview with *The Times* newspaper: "It's about Russian history, from the time of the Cold War and espionage and about an ugly demise. It sounds like an R&B song" (Teeman, 2016).

The Genius[3] website, a database of lyrics, news, sources, poetry, and documents, provides additional curious details that shed light on the song "You Feel So Lonely You Could Die."

> Tony Visconti who produced the album said he believed that this song concerned the fall of the Soviet Union. Some of the references later (an assassins needle on a crowded train etc.) suggest that it's either about a very specific individual—perhaps the assassin who killed Georgi Markov—or more generally about the people who were informants in the Stasi in Germany or in the USSR who informed on their friends and family. If this is true, then this is a very strongly worded attack on that type of person—someone who did terrible things, possibly believing it was for the right reasons, who finds themselves roaming a world in which they've become disconnected from everyone around them. (TomCoates, 2015)

The song's lyrics accurately convey an atmosphere of anticipation, surveillance, espionage, and despair.

[3] https://genius.com

You Feel So Lonely You Could Die

No-one ever saw you
Moving through the dark
Leaving slips of paper
Somewhere in the park

Hidden from your friends
Stealing all they knew
Lovers thrown in airless rooms
Then vile rewards for you

But I'm gonna tell
Yes, I've gotta tell
Gotta tell the things you've said

When you're talking in the dark
And I'm gonna tell the things you've done
When you're walking through the park

Some night on a thriller's street
Will come the silent gun
You've got a dangerous heart
You stole their trust, their Moon, their Sun

There'll come assassin's needle
On a crowded train
I'll bet you feel so lonely
You could die

Buildings crammed with people
Landscape filled with wrath
Grey concrete city
Rain has wet the street

I want to see you clearly
Before you close the door
A room of bloody history
You made sure of that

I can see you as a corpse
Hanging from a beam
I can read you like a book
I can feel you falling

I hear you moaning in your room
Oh see if I care
Oh please please make it soon

Walls have got you cornered
You've got the blues my friend
And people don't like you
But you will leave without a sound, without an end

Oblivion shall own you
Death alone shall love you
I hope you feel so lonely
You could die

Feel so lonely
You could die

You feel so lonely
You could die. (Bowie, 2013b)

From a musical standpoint, the song "You Feel So Lonely You Could Die" also contains allusions to David Bowie's early 1970s work: it references Ziggy Stardust by incorporating the drum pattern from "Five Years" in the outro, the guitar part from "Rock 'n' Roll Suicide," and the vocal arrangement from "The Supermen." As a result, the lyrics of the song seamlessly fit into the future world of Ziggy—a world of indifferent, spoiled youth, five years before the end of humanity. This points to the fact that in his later work, Bowie tends to evoke earlier musical techniques and images, as if bidding farewell to his youthful era.

The final reference to the Soviet past appears in the song "Girl Loves Me" from the album *Blackstar*, released on January 8, 2016—just two days before Bowie's death. Bowie's attention to language and wordplay, already clear in *The Next Day*, is notable here as well. During *The Next Day*'s secretive production, Bowie sent writer Rick Moody a list of 42 words to help decode the album's themes. Each song was linked to three keywords—for example, "You Feel So Lonely You Could Die" was associated with "traitor," "urban," and "comeuppance." In "Girl Loves Me," this linguistic creativity continues through the use of two hybrid slangs: Nadsat and Polari. Nadsat is the fictional slang from Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* (1962), while Polari is a British slang historically used by gay men and performers to communicate discreetly, blending elements from Italian, Romani, Cockney rhyming slang, and other sources. The lyrics in Bowie's song include words like "cheena," "ded," "malchick," "viddy," "litso-fitso," "devotchka," and "deng deng," drawn from Anthony Burgess's dystopian vocabulary in *A Clockwork Orange*. The slang invented by Burgess combined Russian and simplified English, inspired by the speech of Leningrad *stilyagi*[4] and black-market

[4] Stilyagi were a Soviet youth subculture known for their flashy Western-inspired fashion and love of jazz and rock'n'roll.

traders he encountered during a summer visit to Leningrad. This blend is significant both in Burgess's and Bowie's work as Russian and English were the two dominant political languages of the mid-20th century.

Although Bowie mostly passed through the USSR/Russia in transit—making him a typical tourist in that sense—his time living in West Berlin in the late 1970s, near the Eastern Bloc, along with his interest in Russian history, left a clear mark on his creative work. Songs like "You Feel So Lonely You Could Die" and "Girl Loves Me," along with conceptual ideas for *Diamond Dogs* and possibly *1.Outside*, were not free from Soviet or Russian influence.

Thus, in an imaginary travel diary by David Bowie, there would be space for three brief chapters on the USSR/Russia: his visits to the USSR in the 1970s; his sole concert in Russia in 1996, marred by the audience's behavior; and Cold War-era Soviet references in the lyrics of several 2010s songs. It is noticeable that the images of the country generated in Bowie's diary are rather bleak—marked by anticipation, surveillance, espionage, and the oppressive atmosphere of totalitarian control.

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