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“Something Happened on the Day He Died”: How David Bowie Fans Transformed Brixton

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“SOMETHING HAPPENED ON THE DAY HE DIED”:

HOW DAVID BOWIE FANS TRANSFORMED BRIXTON

by

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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Following the death of David Bowie on January 10, 2016, his hometown of Brixton, South London, has become a pilgrimage and tourist destination for fans. On the 11th of January, the world discovered Bowie had succumbed to cancer and fans descended on Brixton to celebrate the life and legacy of their hometown hero, culminating in a spontaneous all-night street party attended by thousands. A mural of Bowie as his iconic character Aladdin Sane, originally painted in 2013, became the hub of memorialization in the wake of his passing and a crucial, enduring site for mourning fans seeking to connect with each other and their lost idol. The mural is located on the main road of the neighborhood; Brixton Road is directly opposite the Underground station, and is only a ten-minute walk from the house David Bowie was born in, at 40 Stansfield Road. This means a fan can arrive in Brixton and follow the entire trajectory of Bowie's life as it repeatedly turned back towards the area in an afternoon: from birth to where countless thousands mourned his death.

Using my own experiences in Bowie's Brixton as an aca/fan and data sourced from qualitative research (including studying graffiti at the mural, observing material tributes left there, and reading

public blogs and social media posts about visiting the mural), I describe how the spontaneous memorial created by fans has shaped Brixton as a place of pop culture tourism. Through their ongoing attention to Brixton, fans have encouraged the local government, the Lambeth Council, to preserve the mural turned memorial. They have also inspired new economic ventures from walking tours to specialty coffees. Remarkably, Bowie's fans dictated what and where his memorial would be and, in doing so, have become authors of the legacy of "Bowie-in-Brixton," in addition to creating a new narrative of "Bowie-fans-in-Brixton."

Keywords: Brixton, David Bowie, Fan Studies, Fandom, Graffiti, Memorial, Mourning, Participatory Culture, Pilgrimage, Tourism

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I woke up on the morning of January 11, 2016, to the news David Bowie had died. Despite not considering myself to be a massive fan of his, I found myself affected by the loss of a figure that had cast such a massive shadow on popular culture. I spent the day listening to Bowie's vast catalog of music on Spotify and interacting with other mourners on social media, going so far as to even tweet my own vague memorial to him and the impact he had on many like me; writing "we mourn musicians we didn't know personally because they were there for us when no one else was. Their music kept us company in the dark." In the early evening of the 11th, I began following the activities of fans in David Bowie's hometown of Brixton, who were out in the streets of London singing his songs. Thanks to social media, it was almost like I was there amongst the crowd in front of a giant mural of David Bowie, even though I was at home in New York City. I was able to track the events through the photos and video clips that popped-up on Twitter and watched live video streams on the app Periscope. This spontaneous memorial was known as the Bowie Brixton Street Party and through the live-coverage, I was able to have a symbolic pilgrimage and travel-without-moving to Brixton to join the celebration of Bowie's life. Everything I did on January 11, 2016, would culminate in an actual pilgrimage to Brixton on June 30, 2016. As my friend and I approached the mural that I had seen online six months earlier, I was surprised to see the artist, Jimmy C., updating it with his spray paints even though there was still a small pile of flowers and cards along the ground.

David Bowie was a force to be reckoned with, having a career that spanned multiple decades and forms of media, including music, film, theatre, and visual art. Bowie tried for years to break into music throughout the 1960s, but he found a spark in 1967 when he spent time working with dancer Lindsay Kemp, where he developed an interest in persona and movement. Following

this, he first saw major commercial success with his music in July 1969 with his single "Space Oddity," released days before the Apollo 11 launch. These early days of Bowie's rise to fame were critical. David Bowie was different; his music never entirely fit into one genre, he performed as a mime on stage in concert, he dressed androgynously, and he said he was bisexual in an era when the UK and USA were both in the midst of their LGBTQ+ rights movements (in England, being gay was decriminalized in 1967 and in America, the Stonewall Riots occurred in 1969). Bowie embraced otherness and, in doing so, he made it okay for his fans to also be different. He provided a positive LGBTQ+ representation in the mainstream during a time when the subject of gender and sexuality was still taboo in many countries. Bowie's privilege as a white man in a heterosexual-presenting relationship with catchy songs afforded him the ability to play with his gender and sexuality on stage and off.

By standing apart from the crowd, but still retaining his own corner of mainstream, Bowie inspired love and devotion in his fans and allowed them to assume the personas he put on, as well. This is a practice David Bowie would repeat throughout the rest of his life; embracing identity and allowing fans to embrace it, too, then shifting gears to potentially pick up new identities and new fans. Bowie's continued image rebirth and work in music and acting kept him relevant and allowed him to become an enduring figure in popular culture. There was life before and after David Bowie, and in between were many other lives he lived that touched his fans in infinite ways. To this casual fan with only a passing knowledge of his top career hits, Bowie was a larger-than-life figure that, in hindsight, I see that I took for granted. His work was always there for me to enjoy and he was kind of weird, just like me. Then, suddenly, in January 2016, he wasn't there anymore. And while his work will always be there, coming to terms with the loss of something as massive as David Bowie has been a journey for me that has spanned three years and thousands of frequent flyer miles.

The affective, one-sided relationship fans like myself form with celebrities is known as a parasocial interaction, a term coined by Horton and Wohl in 1956, and it is a result of celebrities being part of our daily lives through the media. These parasocial relationships can develop in the same way as any other interpersonal interactions they have, and, while imaginary, the relationships can be influential in the shaping of "audience members' identities, lifestyles, attitude, and behavior . . . thus the parasocial interaction with the celebrity can be felt as particularly intense" (Courbet and Fourquet-Courbet 275). David Bowie was pervasive, which is why I felt like he would always be there, and why his loss affected me in such a profound way. Depending on the fan and how strong the parasocial relationship is when a celebrity dies the grief can feel as strong, if not stronger, than the grief they might feel for a friend or family member. This grief is what motivates fans to commemorate celebrities after they pass, many seeking physical locations where they can connect not just to the celebrity but to other fans who understand what they are feeling. In doing so, fans can create sites of history where mourning, celebrating, learning, touring, and more can take place. However, Marita Sturken argues that memorials and "public commemoration is a form of history-making" that could "also be a contested form of remembrance in which cultural memories slide through and into each other, merging and then disengaging in a tangle of narratives" (357). Memorials are messy because grief is messy—perhaps, even more so when one did not have the chance to personally know who they are mourning.

The experiences I had in 2016 after David Bowie died have shaped the following three years of my life. I wanted to understand why I felt the way I did, and why fans insist upon participating in mourning rituals for celebrities, like posting online about them and visiting physical memorial sites in person. Here, I follow in Henry Jenkins' footsteps as an "aca/fan," which he describes as "a hybrid identity that straddles two very different ways of relating to media cultures" (*Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* 3). In this position, I am able to "merge the roles of fan and

academic, to be explicit about the sources of [my] knowledge and about the passion that drives [my] research, and to seek collaborations between two groups that both assert some degree of expertise over popular culture" (Jenkins, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers* 3). Since Bowie's death, I have visited Brixton six times in three years to collect data through observation and participation, and when not in Brixton I have observed and contributed to the social media coverage of the area as it relates to him. By going through the various modes of public mourning rituals for Bowie, I am perfectly situated in Jenkins' aca/fan identity and can rely on both ethnographic and autoethnographic information to understand how fans cope with the loss of a celebrity and shape historical narratives. The way Bowie's fans have mourned him in his hometown of Brixton, specifically, has mediated and transformed not just the history of Bowie-in-Brixton, but also created a new narrative of the power and persistence of Bowie-fans-in-Brixton.

Bowie and Brixton on January 11, 2016

On January 10, 2016, David Bowie died from a fight with cancer he had been battling in secret, making news of his death shocking—especially as two days prior, on his 69th birthday, he released a new album, *Blackstar*. When his fans learned about this news, many turned to social media to mourn and eulogize the icon with those who understood their loss. This digital memorialization and the engagement that follows it between friends and strangers reassures fans "that their affective and cognitive reactions are normal by comparing them to those of other members of the group they belong to" (Courbet and Fourquet-Courbet 283). His fan's digital eulogies also contribute to the "collective memory and history of the worldwide event," since their posts are permanently saved in web archives and search engines, next to similar posts from celebrities, organizations like NASA, and even the Vatican's cultural advisor, Gianfranco Ravasi (Courbet and Fourquet-Courbet 284). One tweet amongst the 4.3 million that were sent about

Bowie on January 11, 2016, per the *DailyMail*, suggested taking action in his honor and was met with an overwhelming response. David Bowie fan @maddydeliqette tweeted at 9:21 AM GMT that anyone mourning should meet up outside The Ritzy, a cinema in Brixton; David Bowie's hometown in the borough of Lambeth, South London.

@maddydeliqette's tweet circulated modestly and it was seen by another Bowie fan, H. Louise, who was inspired to create a Facebook event page to promote the "Bowie Tribute Brixton Street Party." Soon after, news outlets picked up on the street party, including *The Line of Best Fit, NME,* and *The Independent*—with Louise telling Christopher Hooton of *The Independent,* the street party is "about the connectedness, the experience of people getting together with a shared cause and the emotion behind it. I'm taking my guitar and I hope others do the same." In the end, it did not seem to matter whose idea the party was, but rather that as many people as possible could join on short notice. This is an example of "'support-through-action,' which enables fans to write, exchange, and meet up physically at 'real-life' events" (Courbet and Fourquet-Courbet 285). In participating in flash-mob style events like the street party, mourning fans gain direct social interaction with their community, which validates their emotions and reaffirms their identity as David Bowie fans (Courbet and Fourquet-Courbet 285).

The location for the street party could not have been more convenient for London-based Bowie fans. The Ritzy is next to Windrush Square, a large open public space at the intersection of Coldharbour Lane and Brixton Road, and it is just down the street from a tube station. Directly across the street from the tube is Tunstall Road, a small alley with some shops and a larger than life mural of David Bowie. The close proximity of these key points of interest in Brixton made the street party easily accessible for the thousands of fans who traveled on the London Underground to join the spontaneous celebration of Bowie's life (fig. 1). In addition to the step-free access available on the Underground, this neighborhood is also serviced by the London Overground and

numerous bus routes—affording fans a variety of physically accessible transportation options to Brixton.

Support-through-action in the form of flash-mob style gatherings can also be considered spontaneous memorials. In Bowie and Brixton's case, the spontaneous memorial occurred at a mural of David Bowie as his character Aladdin Sane, from the 1973 eponymous album, that was painted on the side of the Morleys department store on Tunstall Road by Australian street artist Jimmy C. in 2013. Since the mural was already a well-known spot in Brixton, and located directly across from the London Underground station, it makes sense why fans who visited Brixton on January 11, 2016, would gravitate to it for their revelry. Spontaneous memorials have spontaneous materiality, which "help to mediate the psychic crisis of sudden and often inexplicable loss" (Doss, "Spontaneous Memorials" 298). Despite being a sudden gathering, they are "highly orchestrated performances of mourning, codifying, and ultimately managing grief. Their spontaneity is only in their origination, in their swift response to the sudden and unexpected events of tragic and traumatic death. Their materiality and meaning, however, are highly scripted" (Doss, "Spontaneous Memorials" 298). The materiality Erika Doss writes of are the tributes that get left behind at events like the Bowie Brixton Street Party; flowers, candles, photos, letters, and usually items specific to the person(s) being mourned. For example, outside musician Amy Winehouse's home in Camden, UK, fans leave the material tributes one would expect in addition to whiskey bottles, festival wristbands, and hair-ties, and have done since her death in 2011.

The Bowie Brixton Street Party was cathartic for those who attended and it allowed fans to re-focus on David Bowie's life and influence rather than his death. One fan posted a video to the "Bowie Tribute Brixton Street Party" Facebook event webpage of a seemingly unending sea of fans singing Bowie's "Space Oddity" in front of the mural on Tunstall Road with the caption "This is not death, THIS is life" (author emphasis). While the masses who descended upon Brixton were

clearly grieving, fans like this one decided to center their reflection on the people who were with them, communally celebrating the life of another rather than silently and solemnly mourning a death. Another fan shared to the Facebook event the following day on January 12, 2016, concluding that "it didn't matter how you gathered, what's important is that you smiled to the person next to you and knew that there were others who felt the same way yesterday." Those who gathered for the Bowie Brixton Street Party, and subsequent large memorial gatherings in Bowie's honor, experienced "communitas," a term from anthropologist Victor Turner that suggests "individuals at live mass public events can feel blissfully united and are thrilled to realize that they are at one with the assembled community" (Duffett, *Understanding Fandom* 144). Large gatherings like concerts or the street party can be a spiritual experience for fans that leaves them feeling closer to the celebrity in question, in addition to their fellow fans.

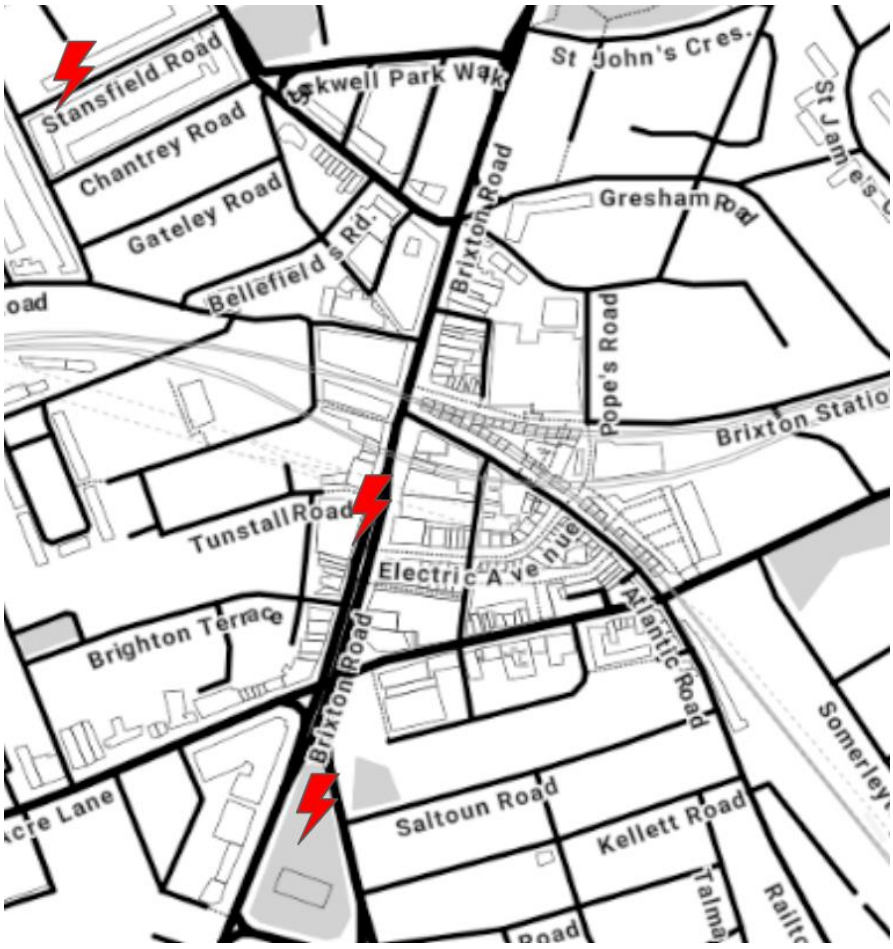

Figure 1: Map of Brixton. Highlighting 40 Stansfield Road (David Bowie's birthplace), the intersection of Tunstall Road and Brixton Road (where the Jimmy C. mural and Underground station are), and Windrush Square/The Ritzy Cinema off Brixton Road (the public square where mourners gathered on January 11, 2016). It would take roughly 11 minutes to walk from Stansfield Road to Windrush Square. This map was created by the author for this project.

From Symbolic to An Actual Pilgrimage

Revelers on Brixton Road shared their experiences on social media on January 11, 2016, through photo and video uploads, live-streams, or text. This allowed anyone, anywhere in the world with internet access to join in and feel like they were part of the collective memory and history of the event—including me. I was not able to say, "I was there, singing along on Tunstall Road" but I am able to say, "I watched it happen live while I was thousands of miles away." This digital documentation of the night contributed to the growing narrative around Bowie's death and allowed fans like me to make a symbolic pilgrimage to the site, which is a way for fans to travel-without-moving. I went on a virtual journey to Brixton on January 11, 2016. Being at home in New York City prevented me from making a "real" geographical, physical journey to Brixton for the street party, but I was still able to bear witness and experience it.

Symbolic pilgrimages can happen from wherever fans have access to the media surrounding the site in question; their home, car, school, work, etc. Even now, fans can still have a symbolic pilgrimage to the Bowie Brixton Street Party by watching, and thus (re)living, the action captured and uploaded to Facebook and YouTube. New bonds are created and deeper meanings are evoked when symbolic pilgrimages occur within fan communities. "By 'experiencing' the same thing with others around the world, a new definition and form of participation is forged . . . here fans from across the world can share a pilgrimage to the same place at the same time which may have the same profound meaning to their lives as a visit to the actual place" (Bickerdike, *Secular Religion* 25). For me, experiencing the street party through social media made me want to visit the mural, and Brixton in general, when I was in London six months after Bowie's death.

While visiting my friend Melinda Kelly in London over June and July 2016, she decided to show me the new neighborhood she would be moving to later that year: Brixton. Our personal mourning of Bowie led us on June 30, 2016, to Tunstall Road, to see the now-famous mural of

David Bowie on the side of Morleys. The two of us talked about Bowie's music and the spontaneous memorial that had occurred there in his honor in January. By pure luck of timing, we were able to watch Jimmy C. update the mural with his vibrant collection of spray paints as he touched up the piece, even when it required painting over graffitied messages to Bowie. He was deliberate in his actions, and careful when stepping over and around the pile of tributes that sat at the base of the mural, under Bowie's chin (fig. 2). As we stood there, an elderly man, dressed smartly in a suit with a black mourning band featuring Bowie's face, joined us in watching the artist at work. He told us how he fell in love with David Bowie, but never told us his name, as he clutched a few flowers he intended to leave at the site. After exploring the neighborhood, we visited the mural once more before leaving Brixton. The evening rush hour was beginning to start as many locals walked by the freshly painted mural, unaware that we were able to witness a special moment in that same spot earlier in the day. We walked up to touch the walls and read the messages others had written on them.

By the end of 2016, Melinda and her husband Ben moved into a former council-built home near Coldharbour Lane and the council-built apartment building, Southwyck House—locally known as the Barrier Block. By chance, I ended up visiting them in Brixton at least twice a year since their move, and repeatedly found myself standing in front of the mural on Tunstall Road. Each time, I would start farther away from the mural to take it all in, then approach it to read through as much graffiti and tributes as I could. When I was not in Brixton, I found myself wondering how the mural-turned-memorial site looked. I would check the geo-tag of the area on Instagram to see updates through the eyes of other visitors to the site, who would post selfies in front of the mural or photos of their own tributes and graffiti. I would check *Brixton Buzz*, a local blog for the area, that provided photos of tributes they saw at the site on a monthly basis. Melinda would even message me if she passed by the mural and saw something particularly interesting and

thought I'd want to know about it or see a photo. Considering how the mural and landscape of Brixton was changing slowly occupied my curiosity more and more. I was able to watch the landscape evolve in almost real-time, despite not living in the area, through social media, blogs, my friends, and the occasional visit. When it came time to begin research after I entered graduate school in August 2017, Brixton and Bowie felt like the obvious choice.

Figure 2: Jimmy C. updates his painting of David Bowie as Aladdin Sane on the wall of Morleys Brixton, on June 30, 2016. Unless otherwise noted, all photographs were taken by the author.

I'm a Blackstar!

It is speculated that David Bowie used the first single from *Blackstar*, the eponymous song, to hint at his imminent death. "Blackstar" was released on November 19, 2015, and as time continues to pass, this collection of lyrics stands out to me more and more as I explore Bowie's Brixton virtually and in person:

> Something happened on the day he died, spirit rose a metre and stepped aside.
>
> Somebody else took his place, and bravely cried:
>
> I'm a Blackstar, I'm a Blackstar!
>
> How many times does an angel fall? How many people lie instead of talking tall?
>
> He trod on sacred ground, he cried loud into the crowd:
>
> I'm a Blackstar, I'm a Blackstar!

This section of the song "Blackstar" seems to touch upon the quasi-religious-like quality Bowie himself embodied, which is further reinforced with a lyric from the following verse, "you're a flash in the pan (I'm not a marvel star), I'm the Great I Am (I'm a Blackstar)". In the process, the song also acknowledges the community Bowie has built around him. The song and subsequent music video braced his fans for his untimely death, with imagery featuring a dead astronaut (speculated to be Major Tom, one of his earliest characters) drifting off into space, but let us know there would be other people and things who would keep Bowie alive: his fans.

As Bowie's fans visit Brixton, they are following in his footsteps and inhabiting the lives he lived. Fans "trod on sacred ground" as we tour the neighborhood, visiting his birthplace, primary school, and the mural on Tunstall Road. Some people seek out organized religion for a community of likeminded individuals and something that can fulfill them spiritually, although for many music fans—myself included—music, and the fandom around it, fills that role. We can draw comparisons to figures like David Bowie to totems, which Emile Durkheim defines in *The Elementary Forms of*

the Religious Life as material objects or people that embody the essence of the sacred, with each totem holding the attention of a group and inspiring feelings in its' members. It is important to note that David Bowie did not obtain this totem-like level of reverence in death, he had this strange cosmic power from the very beginning of his career.

We can watch D.A. Pennebaker's film *Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* and clearly see David Bowie's totemic power at work during his performance at the Hammersmith Odeon in London on July 3, 1973. Throughout the film, we see the devotion and love fans had for Bowie; how they would wait around the venue for a chance glimpse, dress like him, sing along to every song, be moved to tears during his concert, and reach out towards him to touch the physical embodiment of their faith. Of totems, Durkheim writes "the feelings provoked by his speech return to him inflated and amplified, reinforcing his own. The passionate energies he arouses echo back to him and increases his vitality. He is no longer a simple individual speaking, he is a group incarnate and personified" (158). Between Bowie and his fans, at this documented concert and beyond, there was always an exchange of energies between the two, that pushed each other to greater heights.

Mark Duffett argues that the totems' connection to the congregation, or fandom, can be a "means of empowering ordinary individuals" and that "in a key moment that Durkheim calls 'effervescence,' each emotionally heightened crowd member is given attention by the totem and experiences a life-changing jolt of electricity as they subconsciously recognize a one-to-one connection with such a valued individual" ("Fan Words" 152). This moment of effervescence certainly appeared to be achieved in Pennebaker's film. Duffett emphasizes that comparisons between religion and fandom can cast fans in a particular, sometimes negative, light, especially since most popular commercial music is not inherently sacred. However, using the comparison and terminology associated with religion allows us to focus on "the emotional intensities (affect) experienced in a specific cultural field" (Duffett, "Fan Words" 152).

David Bowie inspired adoration from his fans, not because he was reflecting humanity back to them, precisely because he was different. It was what drew me to him and his music throughout my life. Bowie felt like an eternal being, which was why I felt he would always be there, like I'm sure many other of his fans did, too. He empowered us and made us feel seen, or less alone, even if we never got to experience a live performance of his, just by existing and creating his art. I believe that these strong feelings obtained through Bowie's totemic aura and the parasocial relationship fans form through it are what caused so many people to have such a visceral response to his passing on January 10, 2016. "Something happened on the day he died," indeed, and that something is what this paper examines.

Chapter 2: Brixton as the Unique Bowie Memorial Destination

In addition to the shrine at the mural on Tunstall Road, fans also left tributes at various Bowie-related points of interest, including his Brixton birthplace on Stansfield Road that is a convenient ten-minute walk from the Jimmy C. mural and London Underground station. Spontaneous memorials also appeared at his former residences in New York City and Berlin, at 23 Heddon Street, London (the SoHo location used as the backdrop for *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars),* and the Beckenham Bandstand (also known as the Bowie Bandstand) in the South London borough of Bromley (where a young Bowie first performed). The media covered these tributes and more in the days after his death with photos and videos, but perhaps it was the sheer size and scope of the Bowie Brixton Street Party that drew global attention to Brixton, linking it subconsciously in the minds of fans as *the* place to connect with Bowie. Coupled with the fact Brixton was where he was born, it is also the *original* place to connect with him.

David Bowie was born as David Robert Jones in Brixton on January 8, 1947, at 40 Stansfield Road, a nondescript house that still stands on an otherwise quiet street. Bowie spent the first six years of his life there, attending the nearby Stockwell Primary School before his family moved to Bromley, UK. Yet, Bowie never forgot his Brixton roots. Many fans and locals alike still talk of the times Bowie returned to the community; visiting his old house, performing at the famous O2 Brixton Academy, and donating money towards a community arts center on Tunstall Road. Perhaps, it is because his birthplace was a center of multiculturalism throughout his lifetime that his musical career was so varied. His influences spanned cultures and genres, and as his career progressed he would experiment, in addition to working with musicians of different cultures and genres. Bowie did not seem shy away from something that was different to the norm, he reveled in

it. The only time in his life when this was not the case appeared to be in the mid-1970s, when a cocaine-fueled David Bowie, who was embedded in his character The Thin White Duke, made pro-fascist and racist remarks, which he later denounced in 1977. He would go on to make very direct and pointed statements, songs, and music videos against racism for the rest of his career.

Brixton has a rich and sometimes tumultuous history that began before Bowie's lifetime. To understand his connection to the area and how his fans have transformed it, one must understand Brixton's past. Prior to the nineteenth century, Brixton largely remained an undeveloped agricultural area. The Vauxhall Bridge opened in 1816, which improved access from South London to Central London. In turn, the Victorian middle class began settling into the area. Once railways extended to Brixton, residents could commute to Central London. Over time, Brixton became a vibrant and thriving shopping center in South London with markets, shops, cinema, theatre, and department stores—including Morleys, where the famous Bowie mural painted by Jimmy C. now resides. The first shopping street to have electricity in London was Brixton's famous Electric Avenue in 1888, musically immortalized in Eddy Grant's 1982 eponymous song; which, incidentally, was also inspired by the 1981 Brixton Riot, (I discuss this in a forthcoming section).

South London was one of the locations that bore the brunt of the London Blitz's bombing during World War II, resulting in a housing crisis and urban decay in neighborhoods like Brixton. It was this environment that Bowie spent his early formative years in, which Wendy Leigh explains in *Bowie: The Biography*:

> [The devastations] were in evidence within a few miles' radius of David's home and would remain there well into the early fifties, when most of the houses were replaced with prefabricated reinforced bungalows, known as 'prefabs.' Hurriedly thrown together eyesores with seemingly paper-thin walls, pre-fabs rose up from bombsites that resembled the desolate craters on the surface of the moon:

forbidding, barren, like some bleak mysterious planet—all gist for David's creativity. (15-16)

Many of these new constructions were council housing, which were low-cost public housing provided by the government. The primary residents of council housing were working-class people, who, in Brixton's case, were also immigrants encouraged to come to Britain from the nation's colonies to work after the World War II labor shortages.

On June 22, 1948, a little over a year after David Bowie was born, the British passenger liner, *HMT Empire Windrush* made port just outside London with migrants from Jamaica. The 1,027 passengers were temporarily housed in the Clapham South deep shelter, about two miles from the main road, Coldharbour Lane, in Brixton. Later, many of those aboard the *Windrush* settled in the area around South London and took up jobs with London Transport and the National Health Service. Their arrival, according to Mike Phillips for the *BBC*, symbolized the beginning of Britain's modern multicultural society. Though the African-Caribbean migrants were there to help with the labor shortage and were citizens of the UK, many faced culture clashes and outright racism. Despite the eventual restriction on immigration in the 1960s that largely ended the migration from the West Indies to the UK, an entire generation of Londoners with African-Caribbean heritage was created.

In the 1970s and 1980s, widespread unemployment and a recession affected the already strained African-Caribbean community in London. The lack of opportunity, in conjunction with racism, discrimination, crime and gangs, oppressive over-policing and more, created high tensions between residents and police. In 1979, David Bowie's contemporaries, the English punk band The Clash, released their iconic album *London Calling* that featured the song "The Guns of Brixton," which was written and sung by Paul Simonon, the bassist who had also grown up in Brixton. The lyrics of "The Guns of Brixton" sum up the stresses caused by the recession and the local police.

The song almost predicted what came next, as African-Caribbean communities in the UK felt the strain of managing everyday life in a precarious socio-economic situation. As racial tensions escalated, they ignited a series of riots in areas of the country with high African-Caribbean populations—including Brixton, most notably in 1981 and 1985. Both riots were violent with many civilians and police officers hurt, destruction of property, and looting. Many in the Brixton community believed the police to be institutionally racist and this tension contributed to the follow-up riot in 1985, which occurred after the police forcibly entered a woman's house and wrongly shot her. These riots helped mark Brixton as a dangerous and unruly area, that is still sometimes feared today.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* and the positive impact and contributions the African-Caribbean community has made to Brixton, the public square in front of the Brixton Tate Library, formerly known as the Brixton Oval, was renamed Windrush Square in 1998 by a popular vote. The Black Cultural Archives (BCA), founded in 1981 by Len Garrison, has been located at 1 Windrush Square since 2014. The BCA is a national institution whose mission is to collect, preserve, and celebrate the history of people of African and Caribbean descent in Britain. In 2017, the African and Caribbean War Memorial was unveiled at Windrush Square to honor African and Caribbean service personnel who fought in the First and Second World Wars.

In recent years, this "Windrush Generation," as the African-Caribbean migrants and their descendants have become known, have been making headlines—particularly since November 2017, when the Home Office threatened to deport immigrants who arrived in the UK before 1973 if they could not prove their right to remain in the country. The total number of those affected by this policy from the Home Office is not known; however, it is known that many people were wrongly detained, lost their jobs or homes, denied legal rights, denied benefits they were entitled to,

threatened with deportation, and, in at least 83 cases, wrongly deported from the UK. Social affairs correspondent for *The Independent*, May Bulman, linked this "Windrush scandal" directly to Theresa May's "hostile environment policy" during her tenure as Home Secretary.

The timing of this scandal came at a time when neighborhood life in Brixton was experiencing regeneration and gentrification. Many long-standing shops owned by members of the African-Caribbean community that had been in business for decades were being pushed out with high rents and development plans. Chain retail shops and artisanal pop-ups moved in in their wake. Some David Bowie fans proposed renaming Windrush Square after him, as that is where everyone congregated after his death. Thankfully, this idea failed to gain much traction.

"David Bowie - Our Brixton Boy - RIP"

Yet, throughout everything, Brixton embraced their hometown hero and never forgot the love David Bowie gave back to the area. Famously, after he died in 2016, The Ritzy cinema changed their marquee to say, "David Bowie - Our Brixton Boy - RIP." And going further back, in 2011, when it came time for the community in Brixton to vote on which local legends they wanted to feature on their local currency, known as the Brixton Pound, Bowie won a spot (fig. 3). The Brixton Pound is legal tender with a 1:1 transfer with sterling and many shops in Brixton will accept these notes as a way to keep money within the community, as theirs is money that sticks to Brixton. The iconic photo of Bowie as Aladdin Sane, shot by Brian Duffy in 1973, is featured on the B£10 note—which is the same image that would later be painted on the wall of Morleys on Tunstall Road. The Brixton Pound received Bowie's blessing for the note design and an art print of it in December 2015, weeks before his death, which designer Charlie Waterhouse wrote in a March 2016 blog was like "his parting gift to Brixton."

The Brixton Pound tenner featuring David Bowie is a tangible material object that sticks to Brixton. Following his death and the subsequent street party, Charlie Waterhouse posted on the *Brixton Pound* blog about the Bowie and Brixton connection, writing on January 13, 2016:

> Could the Man Who Fell to Earth have landed *anywhere* other than SW9? . . . as thousands of people have made their way to party and to pay respects, Brixton has become the most pertinent of pilgrimages. More meaningful than Kurt's Seattle Center or Diana's Kensington Palace Gates—Brixton stands as perfect metaphor for Bowie and his unique importance . . . Like the place of his birth, Bowie's an enigmatic flame attracting all manner of moths. Rooted like Brixton in the grand traditions of music hall and theatre; emblematic of the seismic post-war societal shifts. At once transporting and utterly down-to-earth. So as the flowers on Brixton Road pile ever-higher, the Brixton Pound calls for a permanent tribute to SW9's prettiest star. A monumental piece of public art in a prominent Brixton location. ("London Bye Ta-Ta..." author emphasis)

Charlie Waterhouse acted on the call for a permanent Bowie memorial in 2017, launching an online crowdfunding campaign with other local Brixton leaders. They attempted to raise nearly £990,000 towards a three-story steel lightning flash monument á la *Aladdin Sane* to be placed at the intersection of Tunstall Road and Brixton Road—right by the Jimmy C. mural and nicknamed the "ZiggyZag" (fig. 4). The "Brixton Memorial to David Bowie" project had the blessings of both the Lambeth Council and Bowie's estate, and appealed to "the international David Bowie community to come together to deliver a heartfelt thank you" to him, "a thank you not from government, nor from industry, but from *us.* The people. *The fans*" (author emphasis, original also underlined). One of the reasons Waterhouse felt compelled to erect a permanent monument to Bowie was to avoid the memorial that befell the musician Bob Marley, who was honored in Brixton by having a street

renamed after him. However, 'Bob Marley Way' is a dead-end and the street sign is frequently surrounded by trash, which Waterhouse did not feel was a fitting tribute to Marley (Waterhouse, personal interview). Giving themselves just a month to raise the funds, the group of Brixton leaders, unfortunately, fell short of their target and, as of this writing, have not announced any further plans for a Bowie monument—or any other tribute.

Figure 3: The David Bowie Brixton Pound B£10 note. It features Brian Duffy's photograph of Bowie as Aladdin Sane on the front, and holographic detail from the local mural on Brixton's Coldharbour Lane, "Nuclear Dawn," on the reverse. It also includes a blue and orange zigzag design on the back, which is reminiscent of the Southwyck House, or Barrier Block, on Coldharbour Lane. Designed by This Ain't Rock'n'Roll for *Brixton Pound*.

Figure 4: The ZiggyZag. The proposed monument that would have stood at Tunstall Road and Brixton Road, across from the Underground station and next to Morleys (to the left of the monument) and Jimmy C.'s mural. Designed by This Ain't Rock'n'Roll for "A Brixton Memorial to David Bowie."

Despite not having a permanent monument to Bowie, Brixton still attracts devoted fans. The Jimmy C. mural on Tunstall Road continues to be the main focal point of fan activity. In a blog posted on *Lambeth News* on January 20, 2016, councilor Lib Peck wrote that the council "would like to commemorate Bowie . . . but the first instance we are working to preserve the impromptu memorial in front of the Tunstall Road mural . . . The mural itself could be locally listed to ensure it remains a lasting tribute." As the weeks turned into months after Bowie's passing, fans continued to graffiti the wall with messages to Bowie, resorting to writing directly over his face and other messages due to lack of space. By late 2016, just before the first anniversary of Bowie's death, the Lambeth Council installed Plexiglas sheets over the mural to protect it from the elements and from visitors' graffiti. Fans took the sectional sheets in stride, sliding their notes to Bowie and each other, artwork, and more behind the glass. By April 2018, as reported by Mike Urban in *Brixton Buzz*, the council replaced the sheets of Plexiglas with one massive piece of glass, firmly secured to the wall to protect the mural and the graffiti immediately around it forever.

By protecting the mural on Tunstall Road, the Lambeth Council proved they were committed to protecting the memory of Bowie and Bowie-in-Brixton. This protection nurtures Brixton as a cultural site and destination for fans to travel to in their Bowie pursuits. The Lambeth Council and other local leaders have not ruled out further memorialization efforts (such as statues, plaques, renamed streets, etc.), but in making the mural a priority for preservation, Brixton gained a permanent memorial that came together purely because of Bowie's fans. It is fascinating that, in the end, his fans decided what memorial Brixton would have, not with their pounds, euros, or dollars but with their persistence and activities around the mural. Fans forced action from the Lambeth Council, which reinforces Brixton as a place to think about Bowie's fandom as much as it is a place to think about Bowie. His legacy is visible to all who pass by the mural in the town center, they only need to look up at the wall and read the countless messages left there.

Commodified Brixton

Once in Brixton, tourists and fans alike only need to enter one of the shops near the mural on Tunstall Road to find some of the ways Brixton has embraced Bowie and his fans. Directly across from the mural is an independent coffee shop, Brixton Blend, which sells a specialty espresso coffee called "Stardust"—after Ziggy, of course. The mural is painted on the wall of a Morleys department store, and one only needs to step inside to find officially licensed Bowie merchandise for sale. Morleys places their Bowie items alongside typical tourist-themed gifts and knick-knacks, in addition to selling their own mural-themed goods (fig. 5). The Jimmy C. mural that is just outside the doors of the shop is plastered all over tote bags, mint tins, buttons, magnets and more. Morleys also sells official Bowie calendars, vinyl, jewelry, notebooks. The Bowie items for sale are mixed in with some of the more classic tourist merchandise that is widely available around London, like coffee mugs that read "I Heart London" and mock road signs with "Brixton SW9."

As I browsed the items for sale at Morleys during one of my visits to Brixton, I wondered who was profiting off the mural themed merchandise. Did Jimmy C. get a cut for painting the mural, or the gallery who hired Jimmy C. to paint it in 2013? Did Bowie's estate get a cut, or was this considered bootleg merchandise? Crucially, Bowie's fandom was not getting a cut of profits, not that it is possible to, though they should. Bowie's fans were the ones who made the mural on the side of Morleys an image with value, worth turning into merchandise, to begin with.

Even the Brixton Pound commodifies Bowie, beyond just printing his face directly on money. Anyone in the area can stop into the Brixton Pound Café, visit a vending machine in Brixton's Market Row, or a number of retail shops to swap a £10 note for a B£10 note. Those not able to visit Brixton can purchase an uncirculated, mint condition Bowie note for £16.70, and up,

depending on where you live, through their website at brixtonpound.org/shop. Also available for sale online is a "Brixton Pound B£10 A3 David Bowie Print," an offset lithograph print with fluorescent ink and gold and silver foil. These prints are limited to just 300, were put into production in December 2015 with Bowie's approval, and cost £300 plus fees. This stands out to me, as even though there are collectors' packs available for sale of the first and second run of Brixton Pound note sets that range from B£1 to B£20, the David Bowie note is the only one available for sale as a high quality, limited edition art print. While all these sales obviously commodify Bowie, the proceeds from their sales support the Brixton Fund, which is a grant awarding program managed by the Brixton Pound to grow community initiatives in the neighborhood. I suspect it is this reason that David Bowie gave his approval for the prints to be made and sold before he died, as their sale would be supporting his hometown.

Figure 5: Bowie merchandise in Morleys. Mint tins, coffee mugs, and tote bags featuring the Jimmy C. mural can be seen on the top and bottom shelves, alongside official Bowie merchandise, art prints, and more traditional tourist wares.

This mediation and selling of Brixton and Bowie would, theoretically, clash with the idea of it being a sacred site for pilgrims, but it seems to only amplify the message that Brixton is the ultimate destination for them. The mediation through coverage by news outlets and fans alike, coupled with the actions of the Lambeth Council, allows Brixton—with specific attention paid to the mural on Tunstall Road—to become a secularized holy site worthy of paying respect. It simultaneously marks Brixton as a pilgrimage site *and* rebrands it as a tourist destination. In instances like Bowie's Berlin and Brixton, Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk suggest the "rigid distinctions between pilgrimage and tourism have become much harder to define; indeed, some would argue that as such these distinctions do not exist at all. It is not impossible to suggest there must inevitably exist a close interaction between people and places that ultimately work together to socially construct the landscape as sacred" (50).

Derek Alderman experienced something similar at Graceland, noting of the sacralizing and sanitizing of Elvis Presley: the clashing of narratives and fight for control around these landscapes demonstrate the meeting of official and vernacular images of the celebrities to whom fans pay tribute. Despite the merchandise and experiences for sale in Brixton, fans and tourists continue to focus on the mural as the main way to connect with Bowie. Alderman argues that the act of visiting landscapes like the walls in Brixton and Graceland, and taking photographs near them, leaving items at them, writing on them, and reading them signifies the importance of these ritual performances. The emphasis shifts based on what fans decide to do, which narrative they embrace and create—which to Alderman means the pilgrimages are about "being an *author* of [Elvis'] memory rather than simply a consumer of it" (29, author emphasis).

Erika Doss, writing of Elvis Presley in her book *Elvis Culture: Fans, Faith, and Image,* argues "fans do not simply derive meaning from Elvis' image, but actually 'make' Elvis in

dramatic and deeply emotional ways" (31). This emphasizes fans' agency and power at sites like Graceland, and Brixton, in regard to Bowie, as they sustain and shape the image of the celebrity in question. These fan-created images are "a model of hybridity," where different versions of Bowie, or indeed different Bowies all together, "hold different meanings to different viewers" (Doss, *Elvis Culture* 16). Since Bowie fans are ultimately the ones mediating and writing his image in Brixton, they are able to portray him in the ways that mean the most to them: other-worldly, comforting, iconic, a sex symbol, a friend. Every persona Bowie embodied throughout his career can be featured and remembered at the mural in Brixton, as long as a fan wants them there.

Chapter 3: Participatory Authorship and a Mediated Brixton

Fans do not seem to just go to the mural, leave their tributes, and leave. They linger. They read the messages other fans have left behind, take photos and videos, and share them online—thus expanding the reach and power of the mural as a Bowie pilgrimage site. In doing so, fans and locals, like those behind the blog *Brixton Buzz,* are creating a digital archive of the Bowie memorial mural and the tributes left there with a far larger reach than the Lambeth Archives and their collection of eighteen non-digitized tributes. The mural and its online archive, through social media, blogs, and travel sites becomes a form of participatory memory. Liza Potts in her digital book *Participatory Memory: Fandom Experiences Across Time and Space* defines participatory memory as "the ways in which people memorialize, celebrate, and reflect across physical and digital spaces."

Participatory memory sits at the intersection of participatory culture and collective memory. To Henry Jenkins, participatory culture can describe "what are sometimes very ordinary aspects of our lives in the digital age. A participatory culture is one which embraces the values of diversity and democracy through every aspect of our interactions with each other—one which assumes that we are capable of making decisions, collectively and individually, and that we should have the capacity to express ourselves through a broad range of different forms and practices" (Jenkins, Ito and boyd, *Participatory Culture* 2). Grieving and commemorating someone we have lost, even if they are a celebrity, is a normal and ordinary part of everyday life, that happens to be documented digitally more often than not in the twenty-first century. Through individual motivations and actions off-line in Brixton, fans clash and engage with one another in a physical space that then gets transferred online through social media and blog posts. The individual actions fuse together to become collective actions, and these become the rituals that are being transmitted out to other fans.

By engaging with a site like the mural, fans influence the memory of the celebrity's life and fame, in addition to influencing what commemorative rituals other fans will enact in Brixton.

The participatory memory of Brixton can be taken one step further, as an act of "mass collaboration," a term popularized by Don Tapscott and Anthony D. Williams. Mass collaboration refers to the "practice by which many loosely organized individuals work independently but collective on a single project" (Miller 139). Examples include sites like Wikipedia or YouTube, however, the use of hashtags and geo-tags on Instagram could also be acts of mass collaboration as Bowie fans feed into the "rogue archive," to use Abigail DeKosnik's term, of Bowie-in-Brixton and Bowie-fans-in-Brixton. While the participatory, collaborative authorship of the site can be, and is, exploited by those seeking to profit off of Bowie-fans-in-Brixton, these efforts can "erase the division between producer and consumer" (Miller 139). Edward D. Miller writes that "this 'prosumption' is one of the primary dynamos of mass collaboration, empowering as it does the conversion of the consumer into the producer" (139). Through mass collaboration and participatory memory, Bowie's fans are the ones taking charge of the narrative and the legacies at stake.

Participatory memorials can become a teaching tool and a "pilgrimage landscape," a term used by Derek Alderman in his study of Elvis Presley fans' interaction with the exterior wall of Graceland, as a site that hosts a "cultural religious heritage" and fosters "the interrelationships between people and place" (28). Landscapes like Graceland, and the mural on Tunstall Road, show "the visible articulation of multiple, sometimes competing discourses about religious heritage" which shows the "versatile way in which Elvis"—and Bowie—"[are] made socially important and meaningful to visitors" (Alderman 28). Alderman writes that he uses the term "pilgrimage landscape . . . to stress the interrelationships between people and place" (28).

In *Understanding Fandom*, Mark Duffett writes that after William Shakespeare's death in 1616, he "became the centre of one of the most enduring cultural phenomena" (5). Shakespeare's

birthplace in Stratford-Upon-Avon, UK, was opened to the public in the mid-eighteenth century and has been attracting visitors ever since, around 400,000 per year. It had become tradition for visitors to "scratch their names on the window panes or scrawl them on the inner walls of the cottage" (Duffett, *Understanding Fandom* 5). According to Jennifer Reid, an archivist with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust who wrote a blog in 2016 on its' graffiti, visitor diaries from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were "full of anecdotes about leaving their mark or cutting bits of the furniture—or even the building!—to take away as souvenirs." Modern-day notions about graffiti may see this as vandalism but it was instead seen as a mark of pilgrimage or veneration. Even American founding fathers John Adams and Thomas Jefferson visited Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1786 and chipped off pieces of wood from a chair that was allegedly where the Bard himself used to sit within the birthplace house, with Adams journaling in his diary that the chip was cut off "according to the Custom." Today, one of these chips is preserved at Jefferson's Virginian home, Monticello.

Visitors to Shakespeare's birthplace found creative ways to leave their mark. They would use their diamond rings to engrave their names on the window panes of the birthroom, sometimes with the date and where they were from—with some making the pilgrimage from North America to be there (fig. 6). The walls of the room "were a visitors' book in themselves, as the walls were not only marked with people's names but with poems and dedications, often written on paper and stuck to the walls," per Jennifer Reid with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust. This is not unlike Morleys wall and David Bowie's fans, who tape their notes on paper to the wall or protective glass of the mural and graffiti their names, eulogies and epitaphs, the date, and where they are from in marker or paint all around the wall—some who even write on the protective glass itself. Similar to Shakespeare's birthplace window, Bowie's fans write over one another in a palimpsestic fashion, with names and messages layered so many times that in certain places it is difficult to read any one

thing. Reid writes that a number of the notes that were originally stuck to the wall in Shakespeare's birthplace still survive in their archive, just like the eighteen notes archived by the Lambeth Archives from January 2016 after Bowie's death.

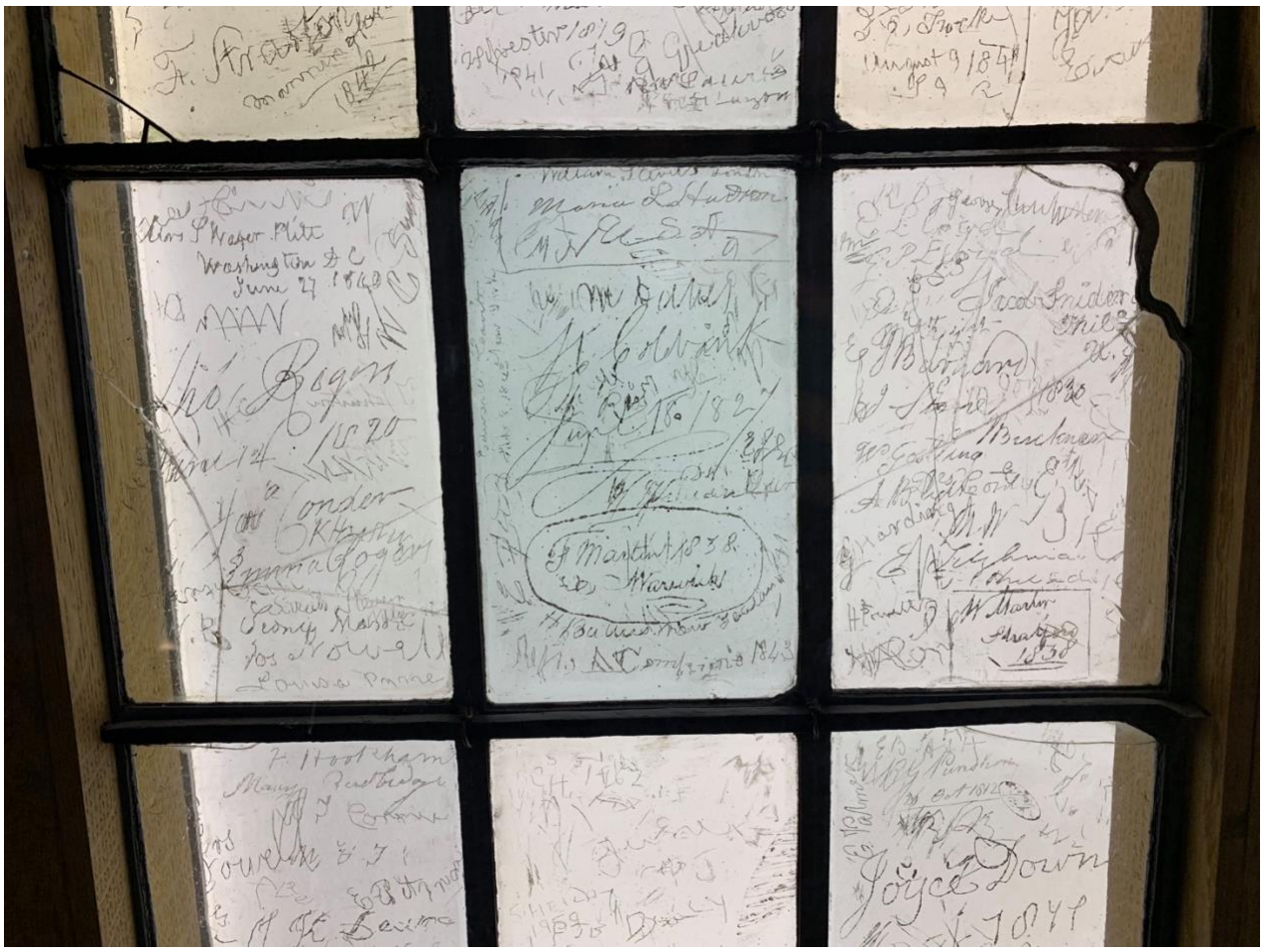

Figure 6: Shakespeare's birthroom window. Three panels of the original windows are currently on display at the home in Stratford-Upon-Avon, UK. The earliest recorded date on these is 1806. As space ran out on the glass, visitors graffitied over other names and eventually spread out to the walls and ceilings of the room—before the Victorians white-washed the room, per Jennifer Reid with the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

Graffitiing a site related to a deceased celebrity is a popular activity that dates back hundreds of years, and it appears to be another crucial way for fans to connect with the physical space and the object of their fandom. It is no different in this way to the fans who take selfies in

front of the site to post on Instagram or Facebook with the message of "we were there." In making this claim, fans are not only attaching their identity to David Bowie but to the collective memory and history of the event, too. Fans are able to discuss being there and point to their name on the wall as proof of their participation and pilgrimage, even if what they are pointing at is only a photo of their graffiti after it has already been covered by someone else. Graffitiing is just another way fans not only become part of the archived mourning event but take charge of the narrative legacy being presented of the celebrity in question.

Beyond just writing one's name, fans in Brixton have left behind notes to David Bowie, written like fan mail. The notes are written directly on the wall or printed on paper and left behind. Some messages feature simple sentiments or are lyrics from Bowie's most popular songs. They are often repeated in various tags from different people and are not always signed by the author. Seemingly, to some fans the importance of their graffiti lies not with attaching their own name and an original message to the archive and memory but instead with the simple act of participating. It may not matter who wrote these messages then, as Bowie's fans are numerous, it matters that the messages were written, full stop. Some examples of these graffitied notes that I've seen are: "RIP Starman," "My Hero Forever and Ever," "You will Live Forever," and "Hot tramp, I love you so" (the latter being a lyric from Bowie's song "Suffragette City").

Other messages graffitied around the mural read as letters and personal eulogies for Bowie and, unlike the others, are often signed with the authors' name(s) and where they are from; thus, attaching their identity as a fan to the physical location of Brixton. Examples of these that I've read include: "This is not working for me, I still cannot believe you're not here and I doubt I ever will," "My, the stars shine bright as you have now joined them. Trish & Karen," "You told me I was not alone and you brought me back to life. Eternal love and gratitude, Freak Daddy from Boston, MA, USA," and "Dear Mister Bowie, we hope you are feeling fine and wish you the best of trips across

the universe. You are missed beyond words, this planet sucks without you . . . from Earth with love" (fig. 7).

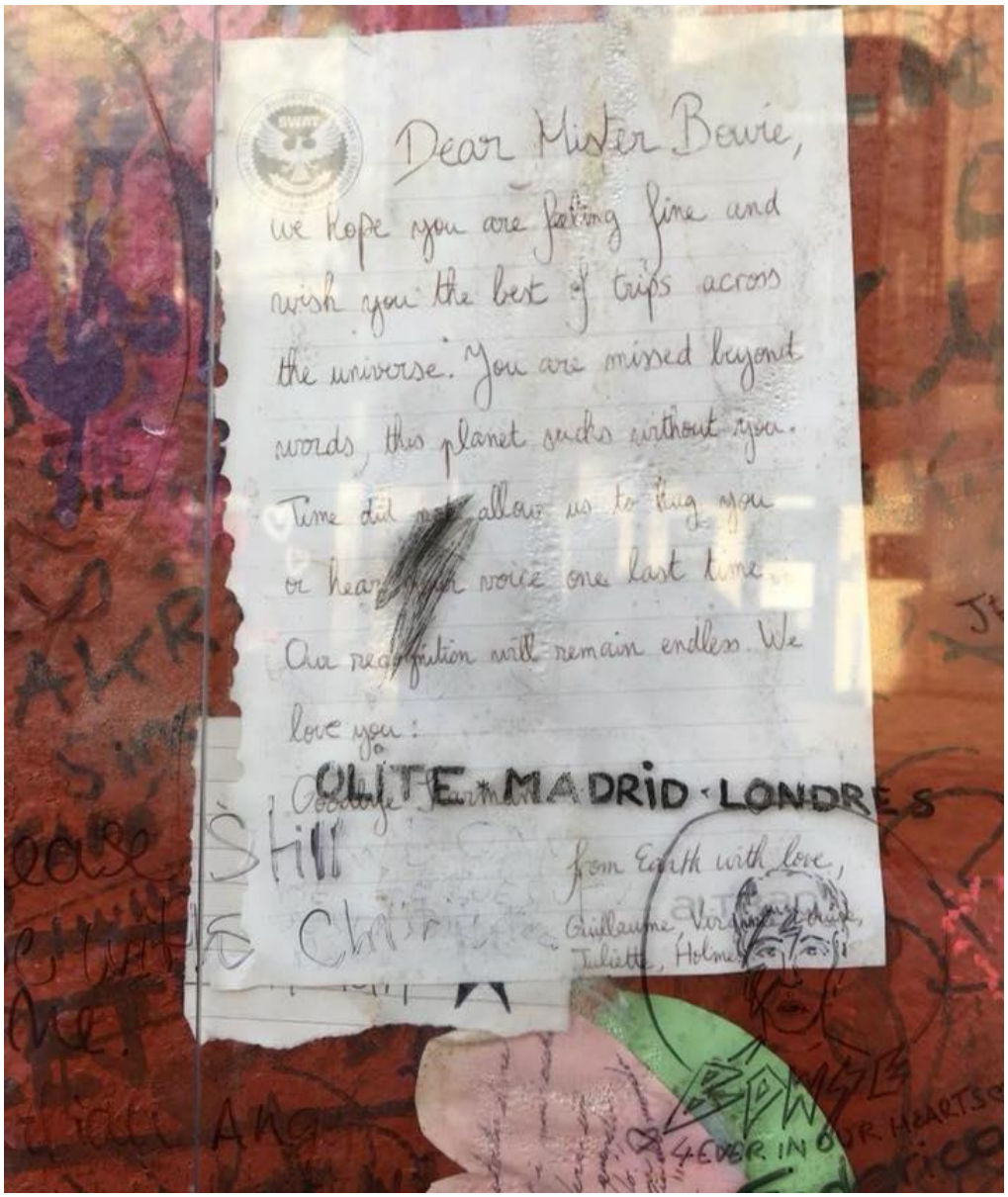

Figure 7: "Dear Mister Bowie," a memorial note written to Bowie by a handful of fans; seen in May 2017. This was slid behind the protective plastic that the Lambeth Council put up in late 2016, covering layers of graffiti and other paper notes, with new graffitied messages written on top of the plastic. As we can see, Morleys' wall is similar to Shakespeare's window as both are palimpsestic constructions from fans and pilgrims.

Not only are fans writing to David Bowie when they do this, but they are also writing to each other and are further expanding the narrative of Bowie-in-Brixton while simultaneously creating and contributing to the narrative of Bowie-fans-in-Brixton. Locals and Bowie fans alike stop at the wall to read the graffitied messages and see what new tributes people have left behind. The local blog *Brixton Buzz* frequently documents the site as it evolves, and based on just a small number of photos featured on their website in addition to my personal observations at the site, we can see that fans have traveled from multiple locations to visit Brixton and pay tribute to David Bowie; including but not limited to America, Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Italy, Scotland, and Wales. When photos of the graffiti are shared online by other fans or bloggers, it allows fans to have a symbolic pilgrimage to the mural. By reading the messages in the photographs, fans who are not in Brixton can imagine that they are there, mourning and celebrating Bowie with the global "imagined community," a term originally coined by Benedict Anderson in his study of nationalism as a community that is not, and cannot be, based on face-to-face interactions of its' members.

Since the mural lacks official interpretation and an official up-to-date public and digital archive, the authorship and archiving done by unofficial means, like photos of graffiti, becomes even more important. It allows anyone who knows what search terms or geo-tags to use access to the mural and surrounding wall, and they are able to track how the memorial evolves, which Bowie personas are focused on, and what rituals are expected of them should they ever find themselves in Brixton. As we will see, these narratives can become tangled and contested, both by other fans and invested parties, as they struggle for control and agency at the sites.

This is all to say that the Bowie mural on Tunstall Road has become a site of history-making and fan authorship, as much as it is a site of pilgrimage and tourism. Similar to Marita Sturken's study of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington D.C. where she found that

memorials can be contested sites of remembrance, in an article on the travel website *Atlas Obscura* focusing on London's Bowie shrines, archaeologist Paul Graves-Brown argues that shrines "are the product of collective and democratic popular activity." This is true in Brixton's case. Despite the protection the Lambeth Council has now given the mural, there is no official interpretation of it, or of the graffiti that surrounds it. It is open to anyone's interpretation and anyone can take a photo, share it online, and create their own narrative of what is happening there in relation to Bowie, and why. Using the framework provided by Alderman, Jenkins, and Potts, we can then call Brixton a site of participatory authorship, as fans and unofficial outlets not tied to the Lambeth Council or Morleys are the ones ultimately dictating what happens at the site, and are responsible for preserving its' near-constant state of flux.

If a fan searched on Google for "David Bowie Memorial," they would be instantly directed to countless web-pages, photos, and YouTube videos about Bowie that are predominantly focused on the mural in Brixton, from social media posts by average people, to *TripAdvisor* and *Google Maps* listings, to other features on *Atlas Obscura*. This directs even further fan attention to Brixton, but fails to give them any instructions on what fans should do once they arrive there beyond mimic the behavior already documented by those not officially tied to the protection and preservation of the site. As Erika Doss writes, behaviors at memorials are highly orchestrated performances, and fans are just following the script the internet, namely, other fans, has given them. Similar to what Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk suggest in their study of Bowie's Berlin, through mass collaboration, "it is often the actions of fans themselves who create, maintain and evolve the meaning of specific spaces, underscoring and often validating the same behavior in others" (50).

Since protecting the mural, the extent of the Lambeth Council's interaction with the site appears to be the clearing away of material tributes that gather on the ground below—something that seems to be done on a near-daily basis since November 2017, per a blog on *Brixton Buzz* from

December 13, 2017. The trashing of material tributes like flowers, cards, candles, and more, is a way for the council to maintain control of the area and keep it clear for foot traffic. Yet it does not seem to matter to fans that their tributes are not collected or preserved. What matters to them is the act of visiting the site, leaving a tribute—perhaps a piece of themselves—behind in memory of David Bowie. Participating in mourning rituals like these are what is important to fans, because that engagement is what attaches their identity to the site, to Bowie, and to other fans. It is a way to become authors of not just Bowie's legacy but their own identity, as well.

I experienced what felt like a perfect example of the scripted yet contested performance of memorialization on Saturday, January 12, 2019, at the mural in Brixton. A Bowie-themed walking tour, Bowie Tour London, came upon the mural and temporarily blocked it as the guide began performing Bowie covers, while other nearby fans sold homemade Bowie-inspired art and wares, next to a pop-up booth blasting David Bowie's music that sold vintage records. The crowd on Tunstall Road was predominantly made up of white, adult Bowie fans, who wore Bowie merchandise as they browsed items for sale, watched buskers, left their tributes, wrote on the wall, or chatted with other fans, while the more multicultural locals of Brixton pushed through the crowds to get on with their day. Seemingly, the only universal narrative formed from the previous three years of history-making and participatory authorship was for fans to show up in Brixton, specifically at the mural on Tunstall Road, during the week of Bowie's death to pay respects and celebrate his life. We can assume this behavior and pilgrimage can be traced back to 2016 with the Bowie Brixton Street Party and the mural's repeated appearances in media coverage. Places can become sacred through their mediation—Brixton did.

Liza Potts, in her chapter on 'Remembering the People's Princess,' argues that as sites like Brixton's mural on Tunstall Road grow older, memorials like it contribute to the continuation "of cultural memory and, in the case of participatory culture, allows for the expression of grief and loss

in these spaces." Mourners who engage with the site shape the narrative being presented, and educate visitors on the life, death, and legacy of the celebrity being commemorated. The lack of official interpretation can leave the layperson confused, but they still might take a photo to post online just because they've learned from the mediation of the site that they should. Ideally, fans who visit the area are able to see the duality of a place, the varied meanings one location can have, and are able to connect with the site on an emotional level that non-fans can't experience. Either way, as long as the visitor to Tunstall Road maintains the ritual of taking and posting a photo online they are contributing to the mediation of Bowie's Brixton.

Bowie's Brixton is Mediated

The media fuels tourist behavior and their motivations. The act of visiting a memorial is a ritual, and most things people do at memorials are rituals as well—remember, they are scripted behaviors. Johanna Sumiala writes the "rituals of death are by definition *mediatized"* (97, author emphasis). The media shapes these rituals of death in various ways, and they circulate from one media to another and often overlap—like from TV to magazines to Instagram photos to YouTube videos. In this mediation, viewers are drawn into the drama and the "catastrophe via ritualization taking place in and via the media" (Sumiala 97). For example, Bowie's memorialization was originally mediated through news reports on TV, the radio, social media, magazines and newspapers, which transformed the mural and surrounding area of Brixton "into a location that is both mystical and spiritual for the diehard Bowie fan" (Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk 53). In the years since, his memorial has been further mediated through travel-themed blogs and videos showcasing things to do in London or the neighborhood of Brixton specifically, or it was featured in listicles of the top Bowie pilgrimage spots in London and the UK. The combination of news, fan coverage, and "tourist literature," as sociologist Chris Rojek calls it, sitting in the back of

someone's mind may motivate them to schedule an afternoon in Brixton in order to follow in Bowie's footsteps the next time they find themselves in London (138).

Similar to Occupy Wall Street, a movement that used human microphones and livestreams, those participating in a moment are able to broadcast their activities online through live web coverage and social media websites, which digitizes and makes the site accessible to internet audiences (Miller 182). Edward D. Miller argues that since the Occupy movement did not wait for news media coverage—they were able to adjoin "to the mediascape from the get-go through their use of Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and Livestream, as well as their own websites" (182). In both Occupy Wall Street and Brixton's cases, through the use of new media and livestreams (the latter of which were heavily used during the Bowie Brixton Street Party on January 11, 2016) those broadcasting connected directly with the public and transmitted their messages unimpeded. For Brixton, it certainly helped that major entertainment and tourism outlets picked up on the continuous fan activities that followed but even if they hadn't, the countless fans visiting the neighborhood and documenting their own journeys to Bowie's hometown would have been enough to spread virally online. After all, when I sat at home on January 11, 2016, watching the street party unfold in real-time, I was not watching streams from *NME* or *The Independent*, but from random revelers who were there and were being retweeted onto my timeline. It cannot be overstated that fans created, and continue to create, their own branch of tourist literature that persists in many Bowie fans' memories.

Brixton's tourist literature is further amplified through online articles and videos created specifically to promote tourism to the area. Features from organizations like the *Londonist* or *Visit London* are keen to mention Brixton as the birthplace of Bowie and include photos of the Jimmy C. mural. *The Culture Trip*'s video of "The Best Things To Do in Brixton" is just over two minutes long but features the host at the mural on Tunstall Road: taking a photo of it, reading the cards fans

left there and writing on the wall with a felt-tip pen next to all the other messages from Bowie fans (fig. 8). The budget hotel chain Premier Inn in Brixton features a reproduction of the mural in their hotel lobby, in front of which guests can take their photo. A photo of their lobby with the mural reproduction is featured prominently on the hotel website, even though the actual mural is just a two-minute walk down the road. Brixton takes on Bowie's aura through these mediations.

Figure 8: A screengrab from *The Culture Trip*'s 'The Best Things To Do in Brixton' promotional video. From the looks of Morleys' wall, this was filmed before spring 2018 because the mural still has protective sheets that papers could be tucked behind. Interestingly, the corresponding article on *The Culture Trip*'s website makes no mention of the mural.

The otherwise average neighborhood into which Bowie was born becomes sacred through the mediation of tourist literature and web-postings. Similar to the study Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk conducted on Bowie's Berlin, the "'sacralization' process" occurring in Brixton is "compounded and further reinforced by the unstoppable force that is the rise of Web 2.0, E-Word of Mouth and the growth of networked communities and blogs in general which augment existing narratives about sacred places and peoples experience of them" (53). The combined mediated literature around Bowie's Brixton shapes the expectations fans have when they finally arrive, meaning "the myths, narratives and folklore surrounding Bowie's time in Berlin"—or Brixton—"form the basis of a collective imagination . . . that is shared by the anticipating tourists"

(Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk 53). Through the media content and stories shared online about Bowie's Brixton, the importance of each site is strengthened and further reaffirmed with each new post on the subject.

Through the mediation of Brixton by Bowie's fans who have been there, those that are elsewhere are able to make a symbolic pilgrimage to the area. As discussed in the Introduction, a symbolic pilgrimage is a virtual journey that can be deeply important to fan communities. When fans undertake a symbolic pilgrimage, they are able to virtually visit the streets of Brixton and visit the memorial on Tunstall Road, meaning that "even before the tourist visits the site, he or she will have an imagined set of imprinted expectations of the place before they arrive" (Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk 53). This mediation of physical locations allows fans to enter Brixton with a wealth of knowledge and information on the area, which can have two effects: fans can become desensitized to the scene and find themselves underwhelmed as the sites do not live up to the hype created around them, or the mediation can make Brixton feel "familiar, safe, places of communion and reassurance" to fans upon their arrival (Brooker 171). Personally, due to the symbolic pilgrimages I took to Brixton, when I finally visited in real life I felt comfortable with the area and was able to easily see the duality of each Bowie-related site.

The influence of Brixton's mediation cannot be overstated. It is a key reason why Bowie's hometown stood apart, and continues to do so, as other cities or neighborhoods seek to stake a claim to Bowie-mania. While tours related to Bowie's time spent in Berlin, New York City, and Beckenham (UK) exist, and Aylesbury (UK) has erected the first statue in his honor, none of these locations saw the turn out Brixton did in January 2016. At the time of his death, Bowie had lived in New York City longer than any other place and considered himself a New Yorker. In the later years of his life, Bowie lived at 285 Lafayette Street and it was here that his fellow New Yorkers came out to memorialize him after he passed away he passed away with a small spontaneous

memorial. However, Bowie's apartment building sat at a busy intersection in Lower Manhattan with only an active sidewalk for the grieving public to gather on, so, his final residence in the city *he* claimed would not be where thousands would gather simultaneously to remember him. Understandably, while alive Bowie did not go out of his way to advertise where he lived, and this could have also contributed to the lack of a public, physical response from New Yorkers.

Brixton, on the other hand, had nearly seventy years to lay claim to David Bowie, to promote itself as his birthplace, as where the man who fell to earth, fell to earth. Bowie made it no secret that he was fond of his hometown through his own mediation of the area while alive. This is yet another reason why it was Brixton, where he was born, that was able to stand out in fans minds when they learned he died. The thousands congregating in Brixton's various public spaces allowed an instantaneous explosion of content that connected the ideas of "Bowie" and "remembrance" together. In this way, David Bowie and Brixton can be further related to William Shakespeare and his hometown of Stratford-Upon-Avon (which was touched upon in Chapter 2). The latter being where Shakespeare was born, in a National Trust protected home that remarkably still stands today, and where he was buried, inside Holy Trinity Church at Stratford-Upon-Avon. Both birth and death related sites for Bowie and Shakespeare are within walking distance of each other, meaning pilgrims can visit both locations in one day. Coincidentally, both Bowie and Shakespeare are considered artistic geniuses, and both of their hometowns allow you to consider their lives from birth to death.

Chapter 4: Brixton Pilgrims on a Journey from Birth to Death

Embarking on a pilgrimage is like setting foot on *Doctor Who*'s T.A.R.D.I.S., one is never quite certain where they might end up but they are definitely traveling across time and space. The appeal of pilgrimage to fans of Bowie is simple, as it allows them to trace his "spectral footsteps in the familiar locales and be actively confronted with feelings of wonder while roaming the liminal spaces" that Bowie once lived and worked in (Cinque and Redmond 180). In their study of David Bowie's fandom, Toija Cinque and Sean Redmond discuss how fans they interviewed were "often driven by 'a myth' and nostalgia" to seek out the ephemeral specter of Bowie, who haunts locations like Brixton (178). Cinque and Redmond go on to write that "Bowie 'myths' of performance and the man himself have, over many decades, contributed to certain expectations preceding the fans' travel to notable sites" (184). By inhabiting where he once was, fans are able to reflect on not only Bowie's experiences but their own as well, in those spaces. Much like when The Doctor brings their human companions back to a historical, fixed moment, yet while inhabiting that space they simultaneously experience something completely new. In locations like Brixton, fans are able to stand in the past while creating multiple new narratives; for Bowie, for Bowie-in-Brixton, for Bowie-fans-in-Brixton, and themselves.

The ability to stand in the past while creating new narratives of what is occurring at the site is not something many historical sites lend themselves to. Most museums, historic homes, and sites are protected by organizations like the National Park Service in the United States or the National Trust in the United Kingdom, and do not allow or encourage exploration of new stories by their visitors. Designers and directors of historical sites tend to be certain of what narratives they want to focus on, which are the ones they emphasize to educate the public. Visitors cannot transform most historical sites, but Brixton is one of the unique sites that allow space for transformation. The

vacuum created by a lack of official interpretation at Bowie-related sites in Brixton embraces the fan-authored narratives that they unknowingly create through collaboration across graffitied walls, social media, blogs, and YouTube videos. Perhaps this is another reason Brixton calls to Bowie pilgrims, it is a site where they can transform it as much as it may transform them.

David Bowie embarked on his own pilgrimage when he moved to Berlin in the 1970s. Cinque and Redmond suggest that Bowie "was always questioning how ordinary places are themselves transformed as culturally important whereby he goes as a pilgrim to Berlin in an attempt to try to reclaim that which he interprets is lost through the search for what is/was authentic" (189). In instances like Bowies', the journey is as sacred as the final destination. His journey to Berlin was to detox from drugs and live an authentic life, where he could explore and create music more freely than he could in the United States. Bowie searched for "something more 'real'" in Berlin, "for the authentic" (Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk 50). Likewise, Bowie's fans would follow his footsteps to locations like Berlin, and later Brixton, on pilgrimages of their own in search of the real, authentic Bowie.

Pilgrimage, according to Reader and Walter—editors of *Pilgrimage in Popular Culture*, "is one of the most common phenomena found in religious culture," with occurrences found in most major religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Islam (3). Some pilgrimages may be considered a duty of faith, while others are voluntary journeys to honor saints or martyrs. Depending on the fan and their personal relationship to David Bowie, visiting Brixton could feel like a duty—something one must do to connect with their beloved "Starman" and the fandom at large. Cinque and Redmond emphasize the power of David Bowie's myths, relating to "Roland Barthes' epistemology of [myths] being structures that are greater and more enduring than 'reality,' replicas of sorts, as opposed to notions of complete falsehoods" (184). Fans put their faith into his

myth, “to the extent that David Bowie becomes someone ‘known’ to them in different ways and is one they expect to find; a special presence they seek in their travels” (Cinque and Redmond 185).

It is in this way that Bowies’ myths are perpetuated by the media and feed into his totemic power, that was discussed in the Introduction, becoming like a quasi-religion for fans. Mark Duffett defines myth as “a popular and satisfying way of telling a story. This suggests that as well as the affective dimension of legend, myth also has an ideological dimension; its social meaning appears to make it a ‘natural’ focus of attention” (*Understanding Fandom* 210). Duffett asserts that myths are the cause of stardom *and* the result of it, and that only an immensely popular figure or performance “can cause mythic narratives to multiply and compete with each other in a bid to unlock the thrill of their subject matter” (*Understanding Fandom* 210). Myths create a space where we, as fans, can project our identities alongside those at the center of it, and as the popularity and relevance of myths grow, they become a site of intersections that additional myths and narratives can branch off from. Duffett writes that “the most resonant myths—the ones that appeal most—are characteristically unfinalized (open in content) and ongoing (open in authorship)” (*Understanding Fandom* 211). Since David Bowie’s life and career spanned a vast array of different genres and conventions, fans are given a veritable cornucopia for different readings and extensions of his personal identity, his characters’ identities, and his works.

Fans follow the myths of David Bowie all the way back to Brixton, to the place where the Lambeth Town Hall clock allegedly struck thirteen times at midnight the night he was born from the freezing conditions of January 1947, and the midwife allegedly said: “this child has been on Earth before” (Cinque and Redmond 178). The mythology of Bowie drove fans to this space, where they are simultaneously seeking out the real and true individual behind the myth and lightning bolt face-paint. As Brixton continues to embrace Bowie and his fandom since his passing,

they are engaging with his mythologies to link in fans' minds as a highbrow cultural destination worth visiting, rather than as his lowbrow and unsafe hometown of the 1970s and 80s.

Duffett writes in *Understanding Fandom* that "icons are stars who have acquired their own myths and mythologies," meaning we can call David Bowie an icon (213). He argues that "images of figures like Elvis and Marilyn"—and Bowie—"are not only part of the cultural furniture (always there to be used) but they also represent points of intervention in the broadest moral discourses that define society . . . at such points, the star transcends myth and becomes the focus of a mythos: a kind of black hole reconstituting popular culture in their own image, stamping their mark on everything because they seem to set the boundaries within which it appears" (*Understanding Fandom* 214). This would explain why Bowie's *Aladdin Sane* lightning bolt appears seemingly everywhere in Brixton, from the mural on Tunstall Road, to the Brixton Pound, to art for sale in pop-up shops, and smaller graffiti found around the neighborhood. Bowie's red and blue lightning bolt is iconic, allowing anyone to recognize it as a symbol of David Bowie, which is precisely why it can feel inescapable in his hometown—it is another way for Brixton to associate itself with his mythology and iconography.

Icons like David Bowie are widely recognizable, and that is why places like Brixton embrace them. Duffett, citing Matt Hills' work on icons, argues it is "a mark of their iconicity to say that they have transcended their origins, moved beyond their first audience, intrigued everybody and become a stake in a wider discussion . . . the emergence of iconicity is based on mystery" (*Understanding Fandom* 214). Bowie constantly reinvented himself throughout his nearly fifty-year career, and this not only contributed to the mythologies around him but also to the mysteries. Who was the real David Bowie? The general public, and fans, still are not totally sure. So, it makes sense that in their search for answers, they often find themselves getting off the Underground on the Victoria line at the last stop: Brixton.

We can then rightfully call this journey to Brixton a pilgrimage because it has become a place that was "made sacred by the media" (Sumiala 73). Johanna Sumiala writes that sites of pilgrimage are "where community members can experience the existence of their community and its cohesive force," noting that in religion, sites of pilgrimage are places of special importance and are sometimes considered holy sites. In journeying to these sacred locations, it is believed that "pilgrims can gain contact with the center of faith, with God or Allah"—or Bowie—"but also with other pilgrims," or fans (73).

Sumiala, referencing the celebrity studies of Chris Rojek, Erika Doss, and Mihai Coman, writes that celebrities similar to Bowie "should be perceived as having iconic abilities and, thus, the potential to satisfy spiritual needs and respond to personal notions of what we could call contemporary piety" (75). By holding a celebrity like Bowie in such regard, when fans make the journey to Brixton, they are getting the same emotional and spiritual reward one might gain from a trip to a holy site. It can bring fans understanding and peace, and aids in constructing their "imagined community via mediatized rituals" (Sumiala 75). When it comes to Bowie and his fans, they are following the path that many other fans have taken before by going on a ritualized mediated pilgrimage, and in doing so individually, they situate themselves within the David Bowie fan community. Thus, Brixton becomes a crucial location in popular culture landscapes.

It is also important to remember that "no place is intrinsically sacred" and journeys to pilgrimage sites are social constructions (Alderman 28). The sacralization that sites like Brixton undergo, according to Alderman, is a "process by which tourism attractions are 'marked' as meaningful, quasi-religious shrines" (28). The reverence Brixton gains from Bowie fans comes from the ritualized behaviors of fans and tourists alike. Writing of Graceland, Alderman, and Rodman, argue that its' cultural significance serves as a "physical point of articulation, where a global community of Elvis' fans regularly congregate and acquire a true sense of themselves as a

self-defined community" (Alderman 28, 103). Tony Walter argues that as religious importance declines, secular tourism becomes "the vehicle by which modern people seek authenticity and the sacred, retaining essentially the shape of pilgrimage while shedding the officially religious aura" (87). Because Bowie was born there, Brixton becomes the authentic, original, and sacred location to relate to him and his fandom.

With this religious framework being applied to cultural sites like Bowie's Brixton, pilgrims are seeking a relationship with the man behind the myth, the real and true David Bowie. The gray streets of Brixton are transformed by the mythologies into hallowed spaces where Bowie once lived, studied, and walked. Like in Bowie's Berlin, in Brixton "the modern traveler tries to capture the same 'authenticity' which has become at once central [to] and intertwined" with the artist and the area (Bickerdike and Sparrowhead 54). In this search, through the mediation of Brixton as a tourist and pilgrimage destination, fans develop a faux sense of nostalgia for Bowie's Brixton. Their need to visit is a manifestation of the "wish to be near the essence of a person they never knew, to celebrate and reminisce a time not personally experienced, to feel" (Bickerdike, *Fandom, Image, and Authenticity* 129). When fans act on this desire and find themselves in Brixton they may find that Brixton and Bowie's Brixton are actually two separate places, creating a sense of disconnect or confusion; sometimes fans, pilgrims, and tourists need to hire a guide to interpret the landscape for them.

An All-Encompassing Journey from Birth to Death

Guides are a typical fixture at or around pilgrimage sites. Some will create fully guided tours that include transportation to far off lands, as in Tony Walter's study of tourism at war graves, and some focus on meeting pilgrims once they arrive at the site, as in Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk's study of Bowie's Berlin. Guides can offer interpretation of sites that have

contested meanings and multiple identities; for example, Windrush Square in Brixton is an otherwise large public space in front of The Ritzy cinema to the layperson, but to a Bowie fan or a pilgrim with a guide, it is where the Bowie Street Party occurred after he died. Sumiala, discussing New Age tours in Sedona, writes that tours are "a mode of ritualized practice," which include buying "goods and services to reinforce the spiritual magnetism of Sedona" and the "possibility of meeting like-minded tourists and experiencing a sense of belonging" (74).

With the creation of Bowie Tour London, a guided musical walking tour around Brixton, Sumiala's observations of Sedona are even more applicable to Bowie. Tourists and fans are led from location to location, given opportunities to purchase Bowie/Brixton merchandise and connect with other fans on the tour. Before, fans could only hope for chance encounters at the mural or reading the graffiti left behind there, yet with the creation of the tour they are able to physically inhabit the same space at the same time for the same reasons as one another. Previously, pilgrimages to Brixton were "folk events, initiated from low in the social hierarchy"—meaning fans controlled when and where they went on their journey with no guides, interpretation, or assistance from anyone else at the site (Walter 86). The persistent fan attention given to Brixton is what inspires commercial tours, like Bowie Tour London, to come into being. Like the war grave tours of which Tony Walter writes, the government and "commercial tours are responding to a latent demand; they are not creating it out of nothing, even if by offering tours and pilgrimages they stimulate it" (86).

In 2017, the Lambeth Council approved the new David Bowie-themed venture that would become Bowie Tour London. Also known as the David Bowie Musical Walking Tour, it is a two-and-a-half hour guided tour through Brixton, that is, per their website, "an all-encompassing journey from birth to death" of about ten locations, mainly situated near Brixton Road. Guided by musician and Bowie fan Nick Stephenson, for £20 fans are led from the Underground station to

locations such as: Bowie's childhood home, Stockwell Primary School, Brixton Academy, The Ritzy and Windrush Square, and the Jimmy C. mural on Tunstall Road. As a musical tour, Stephenson brandishes an acoustic guitar and, at stops along the way, performs lively covers of beloved Bowie songs, like "Rebel Rebel" at Stockwell Primary School and "Starman" at The Ritzy. The tour also includes an opportunity for fans to buy their very own Bowie Brixton Pound note, a souvenir that can capture the unique memory of both Bowie and Brixton. At every stop along the tour, Stephenson shares brief but informative stories from Brixton's local history, details on the numerous public art installations seen along the tour, and anecdotes of Bowie's life.

The Bowie Tour London emphasizes that their tour will allow you to follow Bowie from birth to death, and it does. Brixton naturally lends itself to this story arc. One can start at Stansfield Road where he was born (which is actually the third stop on Bowie Tour London; fig. 9) and follow the entire trajectory of David Bowie's life as it kept turning back towards Brixton, ending at Windrush Square and Tunstall Road, where mourners came out in droves after his death (fig. 10, 11). Like fans on tours of Bowie's Berlin, fans who tour Brixton "not only justify and add to the importance placed on the Bowie myth and the specific sites included on the excursion, but normalize and rationalize the transformation of the spaces from overlooked to revered" (Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk 57).

The act of making these journeys and constructing the narratives around Bowie and Brixton "illustrates once again how it is the traveler/pilgrim who makes the space of interest, not necessarily the location itself; necessary are the symbols and cultural connotations that act as the conduit for keeping fans returning to specific destinations" (Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk 57). The symbols and cultural connotations in Brixton come from David Bowie and his fans, which is evident through the lack of landscape interpretation like heritage plaques or posthumously erected monuments, but it has still become the place to spend an afternoon with David Bowie's life and

death in a physical way. Similar to those who tour Bowie's Berlin, fans who join an outing with Bowie Tour London not only interact with "other members of the tour group, but with the myths and ideas surrounding the singer's time in the city" (Bickerdike and Sparrowhawk 58). Participants of Cinque and Redmond's study of Bowie fans noted the importance of visiting "touchstones grounded in memories and shared, communal experiences of their fandom" and the two scholars emphasize that "emotion will always be in motion as fans recall overlapping events related to their experiences from different eras as memorial moments from *then* are pulled into the *now* of their pilgrimage" (181, 183 author emphasis). For fans turned pilgrims, spending time at shrines allowed their individual mourning to become a communal experience that validated and supported their emotions and actions.

Figure 9: Fans at 40 Stansfield Road, David Bowie's birthplace, pose with *Aladdin Sane* bunting while other members of Bowie Tour London stand in the street to photograph them. This tour of Brixton took place on January 12, 2019.

Figures 10, 11: Bowie Tour London on Tunstall Road on January 12, 2019.
Above (fig 10): Tour guide Nick Stephenson ends his tour of Bowie's Brixton at the Jimmy C. mural, where he performs cover songs that fans sing along to and record.
Below (fig. 11): After every tour of Brixton, Stephenson has the group pose in front of the mural.

A Search for Healing?

Pilgrimage inspired by death and memorialization can "draw people out of their ordinary routines into acts of religious nature"—even if the figure, place, and pilgrims are secularized (Reader and Walter 222). Reader and Walter write that pilgrimage "involves restoring the incomplete and painful ruptures of the past, healing the wounds of bereavement, loss and disruption, and making the participant(s) whole" (222). This is what happens in Brixton. David Bowie fans reaffirm their identity as such, they participate in their community, they shape a narrative that is constantly being edited and are able to cope with the loss of Bowie by going to his birthplace. Brixton can heal Bowie fans.

In this search for healing, for "wholeness and completion," pilgrims embrace the parasocial relationship they have "with a potent, heroic or saintly figure, who acts as a guide along the way, or as a channel through which the pilgrim's emotions are expressed" (Reader and Walter 222). The journey to Brixton "plays the role of pure feelings such that fans are able to (re)build themselves through Bowie—from the inside out" (Cinque and Redmond 185). While alive, David Bowie allowed fans to express themselves through his music, films, and art; now, in death, he guides them through Brixton, a place that allows them to demonstrate how instrumental he was in their life.

Brixton, the Lambeth Council, and services like Bowie Tour London "encourages the tourist and the fan to project themselves into the personalities, events, and ways of life which have disappeared" (Rojek 144). However, the projections into these spaces could not be done without the mediation of the celebrities' life and death, through the news, museum exhibits, tourist literature, and, perhaps most importantly, through other Bowie fans' social media posts. With help from the mediated fan behavior in Brixton, pilgrims are also able to project themselves into the personalities of the fans who came before. They only need to observe the tributes and read the graffiti around the mural to know how previous visitors felt about David Bowie, and they can do

this virtually or in person. These layers of mediation cement the identity of Brixton as *the* place to think about David Bowie and his fans. The unfortunate flip side is that these mediations of Bowie and Brixton are eclipsing the neighborhood's rich African-Caribbean history and culture while signaling gentrification and safety to would-be pilgrims—an in-depth exploration of Bowie pilgrimage and gentrification is beyond the scope of this thesis.

Bowie's fans are engaging with "imagined memories" when they journey to Brixton. According to Mark Duffett, "imagined memories are the spaces of imagination and desire constructed from fan estimations of the pleasure of experiencing key moments in popular music history" ("Fan Words" 158). For example, only a relatively small number of fans actually saw him perform at the Brixton Academy in 1991, and even less would remember his time as a child growing up in the area, yet, when contemporary fans imagine what it would have been like to be in Brixton with Bowie at those times, they are experiencing "envy, desire, and 'nostalgia'" for a time they did not personally experience (fig. 12). Duffett asserts that the imagined memories are really "*desires for a past experience* that draws upon recollections of an early career performance"—or, in Bowie's case, his early life—"to authenticate itself . . . Imagined memories are spaces of emotional investment that consequently function as commodity templates" ("Fan Worlds" 158, author emphasis).

Imagined memories are then one of the first steps in a pilgrimage and search for healing, as it can bring fans a sense of closeness with their favorite celebrity and, through the memories and mediations of the space, inspire them to finally take a trip to the destination they have dreamed of. Duffett further writes that imagined memories can "become starting points for further heritage commodities . . . fan love, therefore, has the capacity to shape social and historical understanding," which is something I have witnessed happening in Brixton ("Fan Words" 158). Guided tours, fan gatherings, and Bowie-themed merchandise in Brixton all would not exist without these imagined

memories of Bowie-in-Brixton, however, they also contribute to fans' healing before, during, and after they set foot in the area.

Figure 12: David Bowie at 40 Stansfield Road, likely taken November 11, 1991, when he returned to Brixton to play the famous music venue Brixton Academy—located around the corner from his birthplace. Fans engage in "imagined memories" when they visit the house themselves. This photo was shared by @BowieTourLondon on Instagram on December 28, 2019.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As the mediation and buying-and-selling of Brixton continues to grow, and David Bowie becomes even more of a romanticized figure as the years pass, we can see it is not just his fans who are coming to the neighborhood he grew up in, but tourists, too. These tourists may not have a personal, emotional connection to Bowie; there is nothing at stake for them and nothing spiritual that they hope to leave the area with. They are simply visiting Brixton because it has become a thing to do. Perhaps the better term for these visitors to Brixton is voyeur, as they are prying observers.

While Jennifer Otter Bickerdike was researching Kurt Cobain, front-man of the grunge band Nirvana, she met a fan named Gwen at "Kurt's Benches"—a pilgrimage site related to the premature death of Cobain in 1994. They met on the seventeenth anniversary of Cobain's death and when Bickerdike asked why she chose to come to his benches, which reside in Viretta Park, Seattle right next to the home where he was found dead, Gwen replied ". . . it's a key thing that every Nirvana fan should do . . . it's a checklist of things to do . . . it's a major site" (*Fandom, Image and Authenticity* 162). Bickerdike notes the interesting choice of phrase that Gwen used, "a checklist," of places to go, "referring to Cobain's old home and the park as 'major sites,' as if reading from a tour guide of macabre rock spots" (163). The theoretical checklist people may have makes even more sense when one realizes an actual checklist of rock and roll, or, more specifically in our case, David Bowie points of interest are just a Google search away. As in the case of Bowie Tour London, there are an array of companies that offer guided tours of iconic rock spots that range in price from free to $50+, blurring the line of tourist and fan even more.

The encounter with Gwen reminded Bickerdike of her visit to Jim Morrison's grave at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, France, where she witnessed unexpected behavior. Of the seventy or

so people around the grave, she noted "few seemed intent on actually paying respects to Morrison," going on to write; "in fact, I overheard several of them asking each other, 'Who was Jim Morrison?' followed by speculation of his cultural/historical importance" (Bickerdike, *Fandom, Image and Authenticity* 136). We can assume these visitors in Paris were not fans of the Doors, Morrison's band, since they did not know who he was as they stood over his final resting place. Despite not knowing who he was, they saw his grave as a site of some significance, given the 24-hour security personnel, CCTV, and the metal fence the cemetery has put around his grave to deter undesirable behavior (135). Even if it is just curiosity that leads those visitors to his grave, they still failed to engage respectfully with the site once they were there, so it remains as just "another tourist attraction from the visitor bucket list" to cross off (163). Personally, this reminded me of some graffiti I saw at the David Bowie mural on Tunstall Road in May 2017 that read "never heard you but RIP fam."

Through David Bowie, we can see how Brixton is heading down this path to becoming a tourist destination not just for the faithful but for the bumbling tourist. Yet, I wonder how the neighborhood might continue to change as the years go by. In the cases of musicians Elvis Presley and Prince, after they both died, their estates were turned into museums that fans and tourists alike could visit—for a hefty price. At both these locations, Graceland and Paisley Park, respectively, visitors are able to view the final resting places of the former inhabitants; Presley's family plot is located on the property and Prince's ashes are kept on display in an urn on the tour.

The commercialization of sites like Paisley Park or Graceland encourages visitors to project themselves into celebrities' ways of life (Rojek 144). This is encouraged by Paisley Park, who promote their tours online by promising that "fans have the unprecedented opportunity to experience first-hand what it was like for Prince to create, produce and perform inside this private sanctuary and remarkable production complex." However, the fans' (or tourists') projections into

the space could not be done without the mediation of the celebrities' life and death, through the news, "bio-pics, drama documentaries, mini-soaps, repacked recordings and re-released movies" (Rojek 144). It is just like how Bowie Tour London promotes itself as the all-encompassing journey from birth to death. I would argue that in the twenty-first century, social media and blog posts are their own form of tourist literature that allows fans to project themselves into the lives and spaces of others—both through celebrities' own social media channels, and that of their fans.

However, a place like Graceland or Paisley Park does not exist for David Bowie. He had no great estate that could be turned into a museum, and his ashes were scattered in an undisclosed location. While Bowie spent the majority of his life living in New York City, his last place of residence, an apartment building in the Lower Manhattan neighborhood known as Nolita (derived from North of Little Italy), is still inhabited by his family. So where do fans and tourists turn to? Brixton. Because that is where thousands of people turned to the night he died, and where thousands more keep turning to. And although Bowie's childhood home is not a museum, either, it appears that fans accept standing outside of it as the next best thing to project themselves into Bowie's way of life—and, hey, at least it's free to stand on the sidewalk. Although, I must confess it did feel slightly strange to stand outside 40 Stansfield Road in Brixton with thirty other Bowie fans who were so preoccupied with getting the perfect photo, they blocked not only the sidewalks but the street, too. That still was not nearly as strange of a feeling to get over as singing along to cover songs during Bowie Tour London, as Brixton locals peered at us through their windows.

The experiences fans and tourists are having at commercialized sites are heavily controlled, scripted and mediated—and this includes Brixton. I wonder if this removes a sense of authenticity, or does it add to it? Does it matter to the fan, pilgrim, or tourist? We would have to question their motivations for visiting to know for certain. In Bowie's case, do they only want to view his

childhood house and the mural turned memorial, to snap a photo of it to prove they were there, and check one more item off their checklist of rock and roll hotspots?

Feelings are a huge part of what we have explored in this paper. Memorials would not be built, pilgrims would stay home, and money would not be made if not for the feelings of the fans and tourists. There seems to be a grasp for the lives not able to continue living, tied to the loss of potential, and nostalgia which are recurrent themes. Bickerdike expands on Rojek's writing about nostalgia and memorial sites, saying "faux nostalgia draws visitors in, and is an integral reason for participating in dark tourism, a wish to be near the essence of a person they never knew, to celebrate and reminisce a time usually not personally experienced, to feel, even if it is the most gruesome of sites" (*Fandom, Image and Authenticity* 129). This returns us to the parasocial relationships we, as fans, have with celebrities. Through watching their mediated lives play out, we form an investment that needs a conclusion, closure (fig. 13). Unfortunately, these feelings can be easily manipulated, and they are, often (fig. 14).

There is no doubting that there is money to be made off of fans and tourists. The commodification of dead celebrities is nothing new—it is why Shakespeare's birthplace opened to the public in the eighteenth century. Their deaths are not a period, they are a semi-colon that allows them to live on as a product. Some cities dig deep into their history, desperate to make a connection to a celebrity so they can erect a memorial and boost their tourism—the city of Aylesbury, UK did this in 2018 with their own crowdfunded David Bowie statue (Aylesbury being an early site of where the character Ziggy Stardust was debuted). Perhaps this is the darker side of dark tourism: the exploitation of people's feelings, curiosity, grief, and their need for closure. The cost does not seem to matter, and people are willing to pay up for the chance to visit these places, a point no better illustrated by the fact that Graceland is the second most-visited house in the United States, only topped by the White House. I wonder, how expensive will visiting Bowie's Brixton become?

Figure 13: Above, some graffiti that was written directly on the bricks of Morleys on Tunstall Road, photographed January 10, 2019. This section of graffiti is further away from Brixton Road and the mural itself, so it is often overlooked. Many of the messages are badly faded, suggesting they were written shortly after Bowie's death in 2016. Some of the messages have also been carved into the bricks. We can assume these messages are from fans seeking closure.

Figure 14: Below, the Morleys' stairwell, which has lightboxes with trivia about Brixton. The most prominent fact being ". . . a star man was born. David Bowie, Stansfield Road, Brixton . . .". This feature attaches Bowie's narrative history to Morleys, which has been a fixture of the area in one form or another, in that exact location on Brixton Road and Tunstall Road, since 1880.

Deceased celebrities like Bowie are not just a product, they are a product that offers an experience. “Experiences are a distinct economic offering” that have come forth, in what B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore call the “experience economy” (97). They argue: as goods and services become more commodified, experiences created by companies will matter more as “consumers unquestionably desire experiences” (Pine II and Gilmore 97). While memorialization efforts in Brixton began as folk events, most notably when fans would wander the neighborhood on their own to see Bowie’s birthplace and the Jimmy C. mural, the act of visiting Bowie’s Brixton has become packaged and sold as an experience.

For example, now fans in Brixton can be guided through the area on a paid walking tour, which is an experience that “occurs when a company intentionally uses services as the stage, and goods as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a memorable event” (Pine II and Gilmore 98). These tours become memorable through the interpretation of each site from guides, from busking at various points, and showing where fans can purchase Bowie-themed merchandise along the way. Again, while theoretically this commodification of Bowie should clash with fans’ idea of a sacred and healing Brixton, it actually only reaffirms their search for authenticity. Experiences speak directly to the individual, even if it is speaking to numerous individuals at once, “on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level. Thus, no two people can have the same experience, because each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event and the individual’s state of mind” (Pine II and Gilmore 99). Consuming and experiencing Bowie’s Brixton in this way feels real, authentic, and—most importantly—deeply personal.

For fans, the desire to visit these sites is “integral to the history of each of these icons, regardless of how miserable and dark,” and “allows the fan to ‘follow’ them, feel closer to them,

if only for a few minutes. It happened *here*" (Bickerdike, *Fandom, Image and Authenticity* 129, author emphasis). It also allows fans and tourists to become part of the history of that celebrity, because they have engaged with and shaped their narrative through acts of participatory authorship. This is especially evident in cases in which there is no official memorial or public burial site. Take, for instance, Freddie Mercury of Queen, who died in 1991 from complications due to AIDS. He was cremated and does not have a grave marker, or a memorial/monument in London. This does not deter fans, though, who for years visited his South Kensington home to pay their respects, leave flowers, notes, candles and graffiti his property walls and front door. Even in recent years, when the current homeowner has put up many deterrents towards this behavior, fans still make an effort to connect with Mercury at this former home and get their closure. This could very well become the reality for Brixton, with fans not caring what the local council or homeowners want, so long as they can visit Bowie and engage with him in their desired way.

Memorials keep memory alive while creating possibilities of new narratives and experiences. They are a living form of history that nearly anyone can engage with, even if they have questionable motivations. While Bowie's estate seems hands-off, at the moment, at least, in regard to memorializing him in Brixton officially, the Lambeth Council, local businesses, organizations like Bowie Tour London, and more, are all competing to control and shape the narrative of Bowie's life and death. When visitors come into spaces like these, they further develop history and cultural memory in what they choose to do. Are they taking a paid, guided, musical tour, wandering by themselves, visiting just the mural and not his birthplace? Whichever option and interpretation visitors choose reinforces that narrative, validating the memory and history they are presenting. And this becomes further reinforced by the acts of authorship happening at the mural, as fans and tourists aren't graffitiing negative sentiments to/about Bowie but are overwhelmingly sending love out to their "Starman." We must remember that memorials are

nothing without people to visit them. Memorials facilitate the countless ways people choose to engage with celebrities, cultural memory, history, and other fans/tourists—both online and in the real world.

Brixton is integral to the history of David Bowie, and visiting the area has become integral to many of his fans as they search for a way to connect with him. Fans, pilgrims, and tourists are able to briefly become part of the history of David Bowie, as well, because they have engaged with him and the sites in Brixton in an emotional, spiritual, and tangible way. They have claimed authorship of his legacy by literally writing it on the wall of Morleys and forcing the Lambeth Council to protect the mural and their messages through their sustained engagement. The history-making continues as fans bring their David Bowie authorship onto social media, allowing their fandom and interpretations of Bowie and Brixton to be accessible forever—even if their tributes are thrown out or their graffiti is written or painted over.

Yes, "something happened on the day he died," to use David Bowie's lyrics from his song "Blackstar," again. The three separate entities of Bowie, Brixton, and fandom became intertwined, inseparable, and enduring. Bowie's fandom is now part of the fabric of the area, whether the locals like it or not, and it remains to be seen just how severe the transformation will be based on their repeated visits to the neighborhood as time goes on. "Something happened on the day he died," indeed, David Bowie's fans forever left their mark on his hometown.

"Look up Here, I'm in Heaven"

The third track on *Blackstar* is "Lazarus," a song that opens with the line "look up here, I'm in heaven." In retrospect, it is comforting to hear David Bowie say this—especially since I have spent the last three years focused on his afterlife. In witnessing and researching Brixton's transformation, I have been moved emotionally in more ways than I ever could have anticipated. I

have held private notes fans have written to Bowie in my hands and felt like crying for the deep loss they felt, and laughed while reading outlandish graffiti on the wall of Morleys. It is truly a special feeling to read the private thoughts and emotions Bowie's fans had, shared, and then effectively discarded in an alley (fig. 15). They wrote of the hope he gave them and the way he enriched their lives. There was always a number of cards from fans who refused to accept Bowie had actually died, insisting instead that their beloved Starman has just gone home—back to outer space.

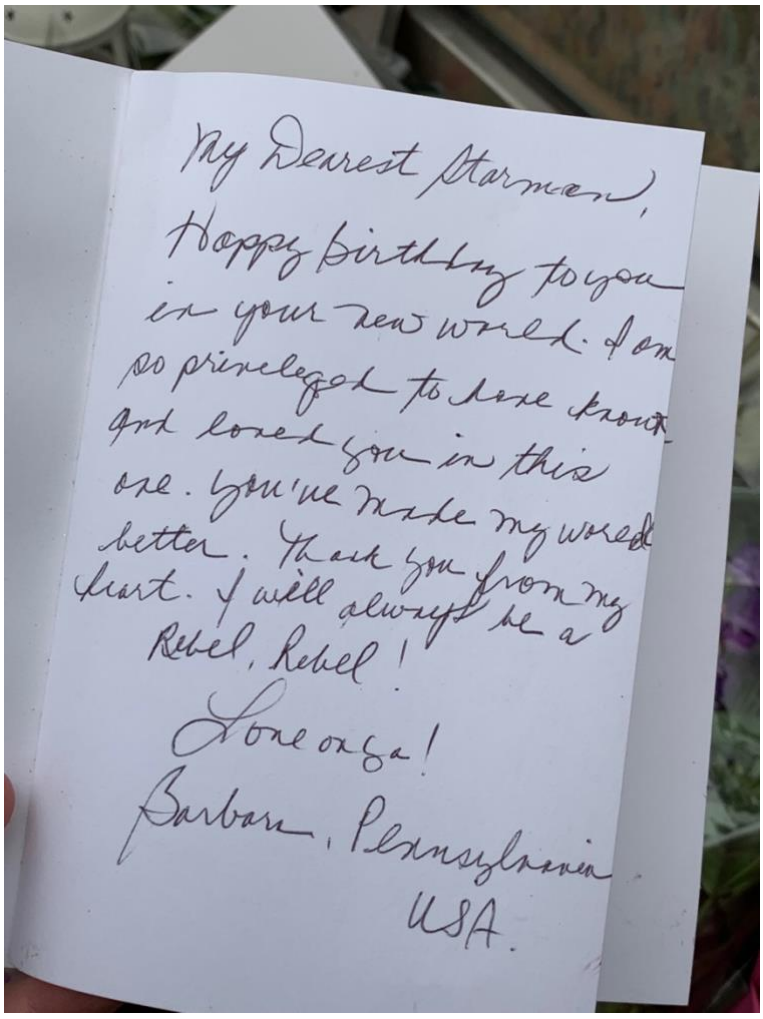

Figure 15: "My Dearest Starman." One of the many birthday cards that were left at the mural for what would have been David Bowie's 72nd birthday during the week of January 8, 2019. Reading sentiments like this was a distinct privilege, even though it sometimes felt like an invasion of privacy. I would ask the crowds in the area if someone collected cards from fans who weren't local for the anniversaries, and no one seemed to know for certain.

I have mourned, and continue to mourn, the loss of the material tributes fans left at the mural on Tunstall Road. Over the week of January 10, 2019, as I visited the mural daily to correspond with the third anniversary of Bowie's death, I watched the shrine grow larger right in front of my eyes and, at the same time, wilt away. Papers became damaged under the occasional English winter rainfall. I desperately wanted to shake someone, anyone, and beg them to take in the photos, artwork, cards, and more, so those items would not end up in landfill. It is such a pity that there is not a greater archival movement happening in Brixton for these tributes, but it makes the digital archiving fans and locals are doing all the more important.

Pursuing this research is what made me a full-fledged David Bowie fan. I no longer consider myself a causal fan of his, and have acquired quite a bit of Bowie merchandise that I picked up in Brixton and beyond—telling myself, "this is research!" as I would hand over my credit card for whatever thing I did not *really* need but wanted, anyway. Like before, Bowie still feels omnipresent in my life, however, I finally stopped taking him for granted like the cultural furniture Mark Duffett writes of. I have a greater appreciation of Bowie's life and, most importantly, a fuller understanding of his impact as an artist.

Even more so, this project has made me a fan of Brixton itself. It is such a vibrant area that is still marred by a questionable reputation it was given decades ago from economic struggles and over-policing. In exploring it, I have had the immense pleasure to meet so many warm and welcoming locals, like Carol who ran the absolutely delicious breakfast spot in the Brixton Village Market, Burnt Toast, or designer of the Bowie Brixton Pound himself, Charlie Waterhouse. They were all too happy to make this New Yorker feel at home on the other side of an ocean, and to talk about David Bowie and the neighborhood with me.

In autumn 2019, my friends Melinda and Ben moved out of Brixton, which prompted me to revisit all the photos we have taken together there (fig. 16). The next time I visit them I will not be

spending my days in the heart of Bowie's Brixton, able to walk by the mural I have grown to adore whenever I please. This feels almost fitting, if bittersweet, as their move to the seaside has coincided with the conclusion of my thesis. Still, I mourn David Bowie, Brixton, and the moments I have witnessed between the two and Bowie's fans over the last few years. I am not sure if I will ever stop mourning them now that I have started; yet, exploring it through this thesis has illuminated my experience and my relationship to a place, a time, and a cultural giant that has become more dear to me than I would have ever imagined.

Figure 16: The first pilgrimage Melinda Kelly and I took to Brixton on June 30, 2016. This was the first time I saw the mural in person.

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