**Football, fashion and unpopular culture: David Bowie’s inﬂuence on Liverpool Football Club casuals 1976-79**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the inﬂuence of an outﬁt worn by David Bowie in The Man Who Fell to Earth and on the cover of Low, upon the earliest football casuals – those of Liverpool FC from 1976–79. The signiﬁcance of this outﬁt, a seemingly unremarkable duﬄe coat, is drawn out in order to demonstrate the nuanced rituals, acts and structures that make fashion a set of practices and social relations as well as a culturally loaded object. This case study demonstrates Bowie’s transmedial ﬂow between ﬁlm, music, sporting arenas, ﬁction and television interviews and his related contribution to the transference and creation of fashion cultures in a pre-digital age. It considers the value and shortcomings of subcultural studies when trying to understand a culture that is not one’s own, as well as the marginalization of casuals within analyses of subcultures generally. This article builds a methodological framework that draws upon theories of costume in ﬁlm, fashion in ﬁction and existing research on working class dandyism and football culture. Representations of this outﬁt in the work of author Kevin Sampson – an ‘active participant’ in these new cultures – are analysed to demonstrate the role that clothing and emulation play in the relationship between a performer and their audience.

**KEYWORDS**

Fashion history; David Bowie; Bowie studies; Liverpool F.C.; football culture; casuals; subcultures; fashion in ﬁction; Kevin Sampson; Steve Redhead

There is no real need to reiterate that David Bowie was a fashion icon. We already know this because, to paraphrase Tina Brown (1975), all stories about David Bowie must reference the way he looks. Read any Bowie book or article, watch any Bowie documentary and almost without exception, they make mention of his style. His greatest looks, his talent for sartorial (as well as musical) reinvention, his ability to draw upon and reconﬁgure the aesthetics of his own and other cultures, and the inﬂuence he continues to exert upon contemporary designers has all been extensively documented. Even so, despite the sustained scrutiny placed upon Bowie’s appearance, analyses of his fashion within biographies tend toward the descriptive rather than the critical, his inﬂuence taken for granted. There are some scholars within fashion history and subcultural studies whose work goes some way towards amending this (for example, Hebdige 1979, Breward 2013, Rees-Roberts 2013, Mills 2015, Thian 2015, 2017), however a lot of work remains to be done to fully unpick his sartorial inﬂuences and inﬂuence. Beyond this, and perhaps more surprisingly, many stories concerned with Bowie’s style remain hidden from or untold in both the mainstream and the nascent ﬁeld of Bowie Studies (Devereux et al. 1997, Cinque et al. 2015, Waldrep 2015, Ammon 2016, Critchley 2016). This article addresses these issues by drawing attention to and analysing one such story: the inﬂuence David Bowie had upon the earliest football casuals1 in Liverpool, England. It will take one of Bowie’s looks – the workaday, somberly-coloured duﬄe coat he wore with a bright orange wedge-haircut in the The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976; henceforth TMWFTE) and again on the cover of his album Low (1977) – and consider the appropriation of this style by a group of young Liverpool FC fans in the period between 1976 and 1979.

The role that clothing plays in the relationship between a performer and their audience is an important one but particularly so for Bowie and his fans. However, the focus of this article will not simply be on the mechanics of replication in the name of fandom – that is a phenomenon amply analysed elsewhere (McRobbie and Garber 1977, Frith and Horne 1987, Fiske 1992, McLaughlin 2000, Hills 2002, Miller 2011, Duﬀet 2013). Nor will it attempt to classify or ‘ﬁx’ a deﬁnition of this subculture (Evans 1997, p. 170). Instead the cultural signiﬁcance of this garment within and beyond TMWFTE, Low, and Liverpool will be drawn out in order to demonstrate the nuanced rituals, acts, and structures that make fashion a set of practices and social relations as well as a culturally loaded object.

The duﬄe coat worn in TMWFTE and upon the cover of Low is not a dazzling garment and a sustained analysis of it within the context of Bowie Studies may seem, at ﬁrst, to be incongruous: he was, after all, a man renowned for the extraordinary. Similarly, its role as a plot or character device is immediately at odds with the usual focus of ﬁlm and fashion historians. It is not spectacular, or glamourous. Its aspirational value is not obvious. However, this duﬄe coat, to borrow the parlance of Igor Kopytoﬀ (1986, p. 68) ‘has many biographies’ and thus has ‘an ability to manifest an excess of meaning both visually and textually, beyond [its] allotted position within the ﬁlm’s plot and mise- en-scene’ (Faiers 2013, p. 6).

The sources considered and the methods used to extrapolate an ‘excess of meaning’ from this unassuming duﬄe coat are diverse, exploratory and go beyond straightforward forms of documentary, but they are all used with the same aim: to demonstrate the inﬂuence of that one outﬁt as a medium on the evolution of casual style. The research draws upon layers of representation in ﬁlm, music, ﬁction and television interviews; a historical account of the duﬄe coat in culture; its resultant semiotic value; and a methodological approach that draws upon Marxist theories of production and consumption, oral testimony and the use of ﬁctionalised representations of subcultures as equivalent to primary sources. The experiences and ﬁction writing of the author Kevin Sampson are used as central evidence. Interviews with Sampson, an active participant in this scene and a fan of Bowie, provide insight into the evolution, consumption and dissemination of the trend as well as the transference and creation of fashion cultures in a pre-digital age. His writing provides an opportunity to test out Steve Redhead’s theory that ﬁctive representations of the scene be used as a study of the simulacrum of hooliganism in order to develop ‘better informed ethnographies of contemporary foot- ball … subcultures’ (Redhead 2007, p. 4).

**Unpopular culture**

In order to understand the approach taken it is necessary to ﬁrst underline the hidden, or ‘unpopular’ nature of this subject. In Hugo Wilcken’s detailed book, Low, the only reference he makes to Bowie’s choice of attire on the cover of that album is to say that he is wearing a ‘less than stylish English duﬄe coat’ (2017, p. 127). The comment is amusingly underwhelming when considered within the context of this article. Of course, Wilcken has no obligation to consider the clothing Bowie wore upon the cover of Low or those whom it inﬂuenced – that is not the purpose of his work. However, the cursory mention of Bowie’s image in a piece of work dedicated to detailed analysis of the album serves as a neat representation of the gaps that this paper seeks to ﬁll.

Correspondingly, the academic study of casual fashion is hugely under-researched. No British museums have holdings of casual clothing from this particular period and there is a related dearth of documentary evidence in the public domain. There is a strong body of scholarship on football hooliganism (Dunning et al. 1988, 1991, Giulianotti 1994, Robson 2000, Armstrong 1998, Slaughter 2004, Spaaij 2007, 2008, Hopkins and Treadwell 2014, with a notable mention for the work of Steve Redhead 2004, 2007, 2009, 2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2017) but less so on the other practices of casuals. There is sometimes a section devoted to the subject of casual fashions in general publications on subcultures (de la Haye and Dingwall 1997) or histories of fashion (MacKenzie 2009), but to date there has been no major academic study of casual fashion. Instead, the best accounts of the fashions come from journalists, such as Phil Thornton in his excellent survey, Casuals – Football, Fighting and Fashion: The Story of a Terrace Cult (2012), or from memoirs written by active participants in the scene such as Dave Hewitson’s brilliantly detailed account of Liverpool terrace fashions in The Liverpool Boys Are In Town (2008).

To some degree this is understandable given that the genesis of the casual movement took place beyond the location of, and was at odds with the values of, middle-class metropolitan journalists, cultural commentators, and academics. Also, the extremely fast moving, amorphous and fragmented nature of casual culture presents problems for fashion historians who might wish to document the movement, particularly those who have no relationship to the subject. Added to this are the tensions that exist between stereotypical portrayals of casuals, most notably within reductive, hysterical media accounts of football hooliganism (for a discussion of this see Hall 1978, Whannel 1979, Poulton 2005); and the equally as reductive, but ostensibly more ‘authentic’, insider hooligan memoirs, a genre referred to by Steve Redhead as ‘hit and tell’ (Redhead 2004, p. 392). Instead greater attention has been given to subcultures that were more visually ostentatious, or had less violent associations than that of the football casuals. However, the study of something is not an endorsement of its more nefarious practices, simply an acknowledgement of their importance.

**Football and fashion**

Fashion has long been an element of football culture. Players, from George Best – who owned eponymous fashion boutiques with Manchester City footballer Mike Summerbee – and Bobby Moore in the 1960s, to the metrosexual and media-friendly David Beckham since the late 1990s, have acted as fashion bellwethers to football fans and the general public alike. The fashion industry, always keen to capitalise on credibility and mass appeal, often uses football stars in advertisements and for brand tie-ins. The terraces, as well as oﬀering a site for the expression of team partisanship, have also provided a promenade for fans to display their sartorial and cultural allegiances be that Teddy Boy, mod, skinhead or boot boy – but the late 1970s saw the evolution of a fashion and culture that football could claim entirely as its own; the casual.

**Casuals**

Emerging in Liverpool in late 1976, and in Manchester shortly afterwards,2 casuals pioneered a style that came to dominate British (predominantly) white, male, working- class fashion during the 1980s, and it persists to this day. A strong case could be made for saying that it is the most important and pervasive development in British menswear since World War Two.3 The look was hybrid, a form of bricolage that drew upon, reconﬁgured and created fresh meanings from a wide variety of sources (Levi-Strauss 1966).4 At the outset it was a coming together of heritage style, European sports casual labels and popular culture and music references, in particular Bowie, early electronic music, the soul-boy scene and punk. The casuals operated an accelerated form of distinction (Bourdieu 1979) whereby the inherent elitism of the culture meant that there was a remarkable rapidity with which styles and labels came and went. Also, beﬁtting for a fashion tied to the strongly partisan game of football, regional and team- based characteristics occurred. Consequently, it is diﬃcult to provide a complete inventory of the styles worn, but it is instructive to give some idea of the types of clothing favoured by the early casuals. These included European sportswear labels such as Fila, Ellesse, Sergio Tacchini, Diadora, Kappa and Lacoste; British Heritage labels Slazenger, Fred Perry, Pringle, and Lyle and Scott; straight-leg jeans (or cords) by Lois and some- times Levis, Wrangler, Inega or Jesus Jeans; navy-blue snorkel parkas, Adidas ST2 cagoules, Peter Storm cagoules, Harrington jackets or duﬄe coats; and yacht shoes, canvas deck shoes, Pod, College, Kickers, plimsolls and trainers, in particular Adidas trainers which exploded in popularity amongst match going lads in Liverpool in the late 1970s (Hewitson 2008, Thornton 2012).

What did unite Casuals was an extreme attention to detail. Clothing choices were

approached with rigour and there was a true appreciation of quality and style evident in their look. They were part of strong vestimentary tradition: a particular form of British working-class dandyism, rooted in proletariat deﬁance, that can be traced back to the costermongers, Hooligans and Scuttlers of Victorian England (Mayhew 1861, Pearson 1983, Davies 2011), through to the pristine, subcultural expressions of the Teddy Boy, mod and skinhead movements (Fyvel 1963, Jeﬀerson 1975, Hebdige 1979, Cohen 1980).

**Duffle/coat**

The duﬄe coat has a long history with assorted cultural associations. Duﬄe, or duﬀel, was, from the mid seventeenth century, the name given to a coarse woollen cloth with a thick nap and high lanolin content produced in the small Belgian town of the same name. It was widely exported (with manufacture later developing in other countries) and references to its use were made from the mid-seventeenth century, throughout Western Europe as well as the French, Dutch, and British colonies, particularly in America, where plantation owners and fur traders purposed the textile to make coats of the same name and used the cloth as a bargaining tool with Native Americans. From the correspondence of plantation owners and traders in America we know that the texture was rough, and the quality varied, but that the roughest of the imports, according to the Colonial Documents of New York, ‘cannot be called cloth, it is worse than a sort called “wadmoll”, and not ever worn by Christians, only by the Indians’ to whom they were sold as winter wear, sometimes supplanting fur garments and thus disrupting the fur trade (Morse Earl 1894, Johnson 2009). In Europe, particularly Britain, it was used as a material for blankets and warm winter garments (Ewing 1984), a practice noted in the writings of Daniel Defoe (1724–1727), David Booth (1835) and Thomas Carlyle (1886). The earliest duﬄe coat, in a form that we would recognise today, was a product of the Ideal Clothing Company5 in the 1890s (Butchart 2015). Commissioned by the British Royal Navy it was a loose garment, designed to be easily thrown over the naval uniform, providing warmth and protection on long expeditions. During World War II the coat was made to British Ministry of War speciﬁcations and became a general issue item for men in the Royal Navy.

The duﬄe coat that Bowie wears in TMWFTE is by Gloverall. Previously a supplier of chainmail gloves and overalls under the name of M. & F. Morris Industrial Clothing, Gloverall was founded in 1951, a year after the owners, Harold and Freda Morris, were oﬀered a large quantity of surplus military duﬄe coats by the Ministry of Defence. These were sold on to outdoor, camping and leisure shops with such success that by 1954 the military surplus was running low. However, the demand for duﬄe coats remained and, with intentions of supplying a more mainstream market, Gloverall designed and manufactured their own version. The undyed wool was replaced with double faced woollen cloth in navy or tan; the silhouette was reﬁned; the large, bucket hood was scaled down; an Italian checked lining and ﬂap pockets were added; and the thick, hard-to-close rope and wood toggles were replaced with a much more manageable leather and horn version. (Sims 2011, Butchart 2015).

**Duffle in culture and film**

The duﬄe coat is a culturally loaded garment. For some it speaks of a little bear from Peru (Bond 1958), for others it was the campus coat of mid-century Ivy Leaguers (Mears 2012). Beyond the American universities were the beatniks, Greenwich Village hipsters and bohemian radicals whose preferred music was jazz (Bruce Boyer 2012). In the UK it still has naval associations, but the huge surplus of duﬄe coats post-World War II meant that they found wearers beyond the military and were adopted by, amongst others, anti-nuclear campaigners (Taylor 2002). It also became a workaday garment worn in a workaday way. The duﬄe coat as costume in ﬁlm has been used as a cloaking device that variously denotes ordinariness, bohemianism and outsider status. Derek Jarman’s Edward II (1991) based on the Christopher Marlowe play and costumed by Sandy Powell, wears, amongst other everyday items, a duﬄe coat which serves ‘to undermine the displays associated with historical dramas’ (Landy 2010); Oliver and Jordana the protagonists in Submarine (2011), both awkward characters out of synch with their environments, hide inside their duﬄe coats; and Connie (played by Jane Fonda) in Barefoot in the Park (1967) wears a duﬄe coat, as a means of connoting her looseness and radicalism, in opposition to her husband Paul (played by Robert Redford) in his immaculately cut Navy Chesterﬁeld (Faiers 2013).

**The duffle in *The Man Who Fell to Earth***

The Man Who Fell to Earth (1976) was adapted from the Walter Tevis book of the same name (1963). It stars Bowie as Thomas Jerome Newton, the titular man who fell to Earth, who lands in America from the drought-ravaged planet, Anthea. He becomes very rich and then an alienated alcoholic, obsessed by television and imprisoned by government agents in a luxury apartment, unable to return to those that he loves. The costume designer on TMWFTE, May Routh, worked closely with David Bowie and Nicolas Roeg on the outﬁts to be worn by Newton. The everyday look Routh developed was intended to be unsettling in its normality, and that the strangeness required of the character was to come from Bowie (Webb 2013). She recalls: ‘David wanted a look that was very simple – as a man coming from another planet, he thought he should wear things that wouldn’t stand out or attract attention to him. So he had to look really quite ordinary – until you realise he has orange hair, at least!’ (Woodward 2016). The Gloverall duﬄe coat was chosen at the suggestion of Roeg, which Routh says was ‘weird, because funnily enough in America they don’t really wear them’ (Hatfull 2016), but the slight unfamiliarity added to the feeling that as a viewer you were thrown by Newton’s outﬁts. Routh ‘found the duﬄe coat in a Beverly Hills men’s shop that stocked older, not trendy, sportswear’ (Webb 2013).

The duﬄe coat is worn in the ﬁlm’s opening sequence. Newton, a waiﬁsh ﬁgure in the oversized duﬄe, stumbles down an arid hill towards an abandoned mine and a small, unfamiliar town. The environment and the scene both recall the tropes of the Hollywood Western, positioning Bowie’s character as the outsider coming to town who meets with equally strange locals, each party eyeing the other with suspicion. His hair, a shock of bright orange,6 glows against the washed-out vistas of New Mexico, where the ﬁlm was shot. His heavy, woollen duﬄe coat jars with the dusty, desert-like environment. It hangs from his shoulders and drowns his frame giving the appearance of a man who is wearing clothing not intended for him. Within the ﬁlm Bowie’s otherness is signiﬁed not just by this coat but also by his Britishness – reﬂecting his own self-imposed exile in the States – his trepidatious and gentle manner, his queerness and the shock of bright red hair. Although the coat is not as extreme or as obviously ‘alien’ as some of Bowie’s previous incarnations, the viewer is left in no doubt as to the alien qualities of Bowie as Newton. His otherness had already been established long before he took on this part and Roeg cast him fully recognising that he could use Bowie’s existing alien quality as a form of visual shorthand for the strangeness and otherness he wished the character in his ﬁlm to convey.7

**Bowie, Harty and the cultural context**

An interview conducted with Bowie in November 1975 by Russell Harty provides context for Bowie’s forthcoming inﬂuence on Liverpool FC fans. The exchange takes place ‘live by satellite from beautiful downtown Burbank in Los Angeles’ (Harty 1975) in advance of the release of TMWFTE. In it they discuss Bowie’s plans to return to the UK after an extended period in the United States, his stage persona and style, as well as the changes that have taken place in British popular culture since Bowie last lived in England. Setting the tone for the rest of the interview, Harty’s introduction – which focusses upon Bowie’s massive cultural impact, his style and the inﬂuence that he had upon his fans – manages to be simultaneously rude and reverential, asinine and astute. He begins:

His admirers called him a prophet, a demi-god, and a superman. His critics said he was simply a hoaxer and a charlatan. But his fans adored him, and copied his outrageous dress. And some of them to the extent of dyeing their hair orange… just like his. (Harty 1975)

Harty ﬁxates upon Bowie’s appearance and persists in picking apart the way that he looks, prodding him to reveal how he plans to dress upon his return to live performance. Following a short discussion within which Bowie announces that he has missed England and plans to return to play some shows in May 1976, Harty muses that, ‘you’re not presumably coming back with the glamoury [sic] glittery Ziggy Stardust thing, are you?’ (Harty 1975) Bowie says that he has not thought about it yet, but Harty, warming to his theme, continues:

RH: ‘You haven’t planned your wardrobe? You haven’t planned a ﬁgure? You haven’t planned an image, whatever that may mean?’

DB: ‘I think the image I may well adopt may well be me …’

RH: ‘You really have no simple idea about what you’re going to wear? Are you going to wear a little suit? A straight suit? Or are you going to be ﬂamboyant?’ (Harty 1975)

Bowie, once again, demurs to comment on his proposed wardrobe, preferring instead to discuss his musical plans. Harty turns to the related topic of audience and questions if Bowie realises that, ‘the pop world has changed somewhat since you left … have you heard of the Bay City Rollers?’ Bowie conﬁrms that he has indeed heard of the Bay City Rollers. Ignoring Bowie’s lack of engagement, Harty questions him on ‘what kind of audience you’re going to come back to face?’ and goes on to boldly state ‘…I’m thinking in a kind of way you may have to create a whole new scene for yourself’ (Harty 1975). Bowie is quite rightly irked by Harty’s line of questioning, but the exchange does raise an important point about the role that artists play in producing, or creating, their audience. Frith and Horne note that Marx, in his Introduction to a Critique of Political Economy (1857–59), already made the point about art and artists as a formative force, not just a reﬂective one, when he said:

‘An objet d’art creates a public that has artistic taste and is able to enjoy beauty – and the same can be said of any other product. Production accordingly produces not only an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object.’ (Marx cited Frith and Horne 1987, p. 18)

Or, to put it more prosaically, ‘this idea that consumers are produced is one of the operational rules of pop music … and the biggest and most inﬂuential stars … are precisely the ones who design their own fans’ (Frith and Horne 1987, p. 18).

In the statement that Harty made about the Bay City Rollers and the possible need for Bowie to create a new audience, he was being impertinent and crass and I do not believe for one moment he was giving consideration to Marxist theories of production in the interview. However, Harty’s questions about Bowie’s image and his potential need to ‘create a whole new scene’ (Harty 1975) for himself, were, unwittingly, prescient, particularly within the context of Liverpool in 1976.

**The boot boys**

In 1976, the year that TMWFTE was released, the dominant look on the football terraces of Liverpool FC (and other football grounds throughout Britain) was that of the boot boy.8 Boot boys had existed before the skinhead movement took oﬀ in the mid-1960s, but in the early 70s they enjoyed a revival and became a highly visible part of British terrace culture and related hooliganism. Closely related to glam rock in the way they looked and the music they listened to – their resurrection had coincided with the explosion of glam between 1971–73 – and less closely, but still tangibly, to soul boys, the boot boys had a distinct appearance. Boots, as the name of the movement suggest, were of importance, in particular brown Doc Martens. Practical, good looking, and useful in a ﬁght, they were also worn, according to Phil Cohen (1997, p. 83) ‘as a symbol of physical hardness associated with costers and dockers’. Hair was grown out and worn to the shoulders; trousers were voluminous, and favour was found with Oxford or Birmingham bags, or wide jeans known as Parallels, Flemings or Skinners. Button- downs were rejected as shirt collars lengthened, and denim jackets or Crombies were the chosen cover-ups (Marshall cited Allen 1994, Cohen 1972, 1997, The Ballroom Blitz 2012, Thornton 2012, Bestley 2013, Bushell 2013, Vague 2013). To an outsider in 1976, the year that Harty interviewed Bowie, these boot boys would have shared elements of their image with those of the more cartoonish Bay City Rollers. This is conﬁrmed by Kevin Sampson who recalls the shift taking place from the Bay City Roller look to a more pared-back image.

As obvious as it sounds, the ﬁrst big move toward a Bowie-inﬂuenced Liverpool look came with the adoption of side partings over the summer of 1976. I always map these moments via football matches. I was at Wolverhampton for the last game of the 1976 season. There was something like 25,000 Liverpool fans there, expecting to see our team win the League. The pitch invasion at the end was a mass of hair and denim. The ‘parallel’ Flemings were ludicrously wide and made a ﬂapping sound as you ran. Most of the lads who went had Bay City Roller style hair, quite long and parted in the middle. I was still sporting this look in August ‘76. I remember sitting outside Wembley stadium for the Charity Shield match, Liverpool v Southampton, and seeing this group of Liverpool kids – all aged about 16, 17; side-partings, Adidas t-shirts with the thick, embossed stripes on the shoulder, narrow jeans. I was knocked out. I thought they looked amazing and by the following Monday my locks had gone! (Sampson 2013)

He continues:

We’re talking about maybe eighty to one hundred kids at the Anﬁeld Road end of the Liverpool ground – physically and stylistically distancing themselves from the boot boys on The Kop. By the end of 1976 that little mob of 80 all had wedge haircuts. (Sampson 2013)

**Low and the dissemination of the style**

*Low* was released in January 1977. Sonically and visually, it marked a shift in Bowie’s aesthetic. Distinctly more atmospheric, moody and electronic than his previous releases, this album contains instrumental tracks – for the ﬁrst time in Bowie’s career – and those that do contain lyrics are often delivered in a ﬂatter more insular tone than he had employed in previous work.[9](#_bookmark69)

The cover of *Low* was designed by George Underwood and the image of Bowie upon  it is lifted directly from *TMWFTE*.[10](#_bookmark70) It shows Bowie in proﬁle against a foreboding, swirling orange background, reminiscent of Goya’s The *Dog* (1819–23). It presents him as if in a mugshot, sombre and close enough to provide the viewer with details of his orange wedge and the Gloverall duﬄe coat with its raised collar.

Sampson recalls that the release of *Low* acted as ‘a massive catalyst in taking this nascent subculture overground’, Bowie’s look becoming ‘the reference item for match- going lads throughout 1977ʹ (Sampson 2013).

The reasons for this are probably twofold. Firstly, although Bowie did little to promote it (Pegg 2016, p. 228) *Low* was widely reviewed (Wilcken [2017](#_bookmark171), pp. 127–128) – if not always favourably – and reached number 2 in the UK Album Charts and number 11 on the US Billboard Albums chart. Two singles from the album were released in 1977, *Be My Wife* and *Sound and Vision*, the latter charting at number 3 in the UK Singles Charts. Although *Low* was not a massive hit compared to some of Bowie’s earlier work these chart positions demonstrate a sustained level of cultural impact throughout the ﬁrst few months of 1977. By extension it can be posited that the cover of *Low* enjoyed relatively high visibility, given that it would be on display in record shops. Unlike the ﬁlm which was shown in selected cinemas, one would not need to seek it out in order to have seen it. For those seeing the image for the ﬁrst time, the diﬀerence between this stylish but practical duﬄe coat and his more theatrical outﬁts of previous years oﬀered them a more attainable means to identify their fandom via emulation. Secondly, for those whose aesthetic interest had been piqued by the ﬁlm, the moving image only provided momentary glimpses of Bowie/Newton, forcing the viewer to commit the style to memory. Instead the album cover gave fans a stable resource that could be pored over, studied, revered and a visual that could be used to mimic the look.

Sampson conﬁrms the increased prevalence of the outﬁt in the period after the release of *Low*. He observes:

I can vividly remember Graeme Souness making his debut for Liverpool at West Bromwich Albion in January 1978 and it seemed like EVERY Liverpool fan had a wedge, a pair of Pod and a duﬀel coat. It was like that until the 78–79 season. For about 18 months we were the only team that dressed that way. You’d go to places like Derby and Middlesbrough and they’d die laughing, calling you queers[11](#_bookmark72) for the way you dressed. (Sampson [2013](#_bookmark154))

**The use of ﬁction: Stars are Stars**

Steve Redhead sets out a methodological approach for the study of football casuals that, in the absence of traditional documentary evidence or more formal quantitative surveys, draws upon accounts of casual culture in populist, ‘insider’, hooligan memoirs and in novelistic representations of the scene (Redhead 2007). The use of these latter sources mirrors a well-established method used by fashion historians to glean information about hidden histories via the use of ﬁction (Hughes 2006, McNeil et al. 2009). Redhead cites the work of authors John King, Irvine Welsh and Kevin Sampson as being exemplars of this genre and of particular use to academic researchers (Redhead 2004, 2007).

Sampson draws upon his own experiences as a Liverpool FC fan and scally in the late 1970s and early 80s, to provide detailed accounts of similar scenes and the fashions worn, in his books Awaydays (1998) and – in reference to the Bowie look – Stars are Stars (2007). Stars are Stars is a beautifully-told, romantic and tragic tale with themes of longing, escape, thwarted dreams, economic instability and social unrest set against the backdrop of the post-punk, electronic music scene in Liverpool. Ostensibly it has little to do with football, but it is instructive with regards to the cultural context of football and fashion in Liverpool in the late 1970s as well as the speciﬁcs of the outﬁts worn.12 The protagonist, ﬁfteen-year-old Danny May, used to follow football avidly, but is now only interested in the clothes the football fans wear, and harbours a strong desire to attend art school. Sampson’s prose details the reverential quest for the right clothing that characterised a certain strand of fashion in Liverpool in the late 1970s as well as the inﬂuence that Bowie had upon the clothing worn.

The opening of the chapter ‘Reason for Living’ sets the scene, describing the feverish anticipation that Danny experiences in the build-up to a long-planned day out in town:

Clothes, records, drinks cigarettes – he’d planned this one for weeks now, plotted it hour by hour. And here it was at last, Big Saturday – a Saturday, in town, with money. He knew how good this was going to be; it couldn’t be anything but good. For Danny, this was it. This was living. This was what the whole thing was all about … The mad hours, the no sleep, the running around after his bone idle sisters, the never having time to himself – it was all fucking worth it when Saturday came. (Sampson 2007, p. 8)

As Danny leaves his home to walk into town he stops for a moment to talk to two boys at the bus stop, the Tremarco brothers, and notes that all three of them are dressed similarly, in outﬁts he describes as ‘the uniform’ typical of Liverpool football lads; ‘Pod shoes, Lois jeans, Fred Perry worn underneath a big, ﬂuﬀy black mohair. Black mittens with the ﬁngertips cut out. Hair cut short over one ear with the fringe left long enough to sweep across one eye and cover the other ear. The Wedge’ (Sampson 2007, p. 9).

Danny’s focus though is on his next clothing purchase – the one that will allow him to emulate Bowie – a ‘Beautiful, fawn Gloverall with marbled brown horn toggles and a padded check lining’ that he describes as ‘pure Man Who Fell to Earth, pure Danny May’ (Sampson 2007, p. 13). This is not an impulse buy. He has saved up for months to purchase it, ‘he’d lived that duﬀel, dreamt it, worn it down the Casa and had girls queuing up to stroke it every night, every day since he’d ﬁrst spotted it. He must have been in there ﬁfty times, tried it on a dozen or more, obsessed over it, wanted it, coveted it more than just about any of the thousand other things he saw in the shops or on the street and wanted’ (Sampson 2007, p. 13).

Danny knew that this look was not exclusively his. Bowie’s style in The Man Who Fell to Earth had already inﬂuenced those ‘who knew the score’ (Sampson 2007, p. 13) but most of their duﬄes were purchased from British Home Stores13 and paled in compar- ison to the real thing, the ‘svelte, gaunt, beautiful’ Gloverall. No substitutes would do. His pride would not allow it, ‘No way was he walking past the art school in a cheapo chain- store eﬀort’ (Sampson 2007, p. 14). With mounting excitement Danny weaves through the streets of Liverpool, eager to ensure that ‘The moment Mann’s doors opened he’d be in there, twenty pounds sterling at the ready. They could keep their plazzy bag. That coat was going straight on …’ (Sampson 2007, p. 16).

**Fashion and ﬁction**

Sampson’s direct experience of this garment and its cultural context legitimises the use of his ﬁction as a primary source in this study. It not only lends a ‘reality eﬀect’ to the text (Hughes 2006, p. 2) but his insider knowledge circumvents the usual layers that an author needs to negotiate in order to transpose the material form to the semantic. He has not had to turn to interviews, photographs or other books for his information, acts that can ‘make the writing of fashion a repeated act of translation, akin to a [game of Telephone] …whereby an expression is ﬁltered and transformed through the staging posts of its communication’ (Lehmann 2015, pp. 168–169). The written expression of clothing found in Sampson’s work is based upon the author’s own experiences, thus it lends a tangible authenticity to his ﬁction and it oﬀers us, the reader, a way in to his world. He has perfectly captured the challenge involved in the pursuit of the coat, and the act of longing that accompanies it. Through this written representation of the garment we can also glean important information about the dissemination and con- sumption of menswear at this time: the relatively slow movement of goods and fashion – the duﬄe coat had, after all, been in the window for a number of months – the socio- cultural context of Danny’s life, and the huge ﬁnancial endeavour he undertook.

However, this does not mean that the story of Danny May and his duﬄe coat is an act of pure documentary. Sampson, in his role as an author necessarily reconstructs and creates mythologies in the telling of his novel. His text demonstrates the rich signiﬁcation of the ﬁctive overcoat, able to ‘cloak existing identities … or assist in the assumption of new ones’ (Faiers 2013, p. 24) acting as marker of ‘truth, between how individuals wish to be seen and how they “really are”’ (Wilson 2010, p. 546). The longing for a piece of outerwear that promises transformative properties is a familiar trope, one most famously and explicitly told in Nikolai Gogol’s The Overcoat (1842). Coats in novels and ﬁlm oﬀer the wearer an opportunity to obfuscate their identity, protect themselves from detection, or pass for another.

Danny is undoubtedly a consumer, both as a subject in thrall to the commercial structures of clothing as industry and as a fanatic negotiating his identity within the cultures of modernity. However, his longing for this coat moves beyond simple commodity fetishism, or passive, subjective and ultimately futile contemplation. The duﬄe coat and his pursuit of it is bound up with his ambitions and his sense of self, not simply in the way that he looks but in how he wants to relate to the world. That coat is his aspirations made cloth.

**Bowie and Danny May**

Bowie/Newton’s duﬄe coat formed a template for Danny to emulate but, as we have seen, this transaction between star and fan goes beyond the aesthetic. The garment, via Bowie’s iconicity, takes on talismanic properties and is able to confer status upon the wearer. When Danny muses upon how perfect the Gloverall is, for him, he is in no doubt that it will lift him beyond his current situation. This is conﬁrmed when he refers to the duﬄe coat wearing version of himself in the third person (‘pure Danny May’ Sampson 2007, p. 13) and presents his own identity in equivalent terms to that of Bowie (‘pure Man Who Fell to Earth’ Sampson 2007, p. 13). Danny is emboldened, anticipating the world of possibilities that this material link between him and Bowie will engender. To paraphrase the hackneyed expression, Danny is dressing for the life he wants and not the life he has – a strategy noted by Balzac (cited Hughes 2009, p. 11) some 170 years earlier, when he pointed out that what one wears ‘is of enormous importance for those who wish to appear to have what they do not have, because that is often the best way of getting it later on’.

This unremarkable duﬄe coat via a process of transmedial semiosis, takes on mytho- logical qualities. It becomes a facsimile of Bowie (or Bowie-ness) and serves as a conduit between the star and the material world. By donning the cloak of his hero, Danny May is able to imagine that he takes on some of Bowie’s properties. Sampson’s prose makes this connection, between Bowie, the duﬄe coat and Danny’s imagined future explicit, reﬂecting not only the discourse of fandom but also a fundamental concern of fashion scholars. As Faiers (2013, p. 29) observes:

The representation of a garment as the embodiment of its owner is the source of the corporeal discourse that typiﬁes much of the literature of dress: metaphorical descriptions of clothing as a second skin are understandable given that clothing is the barrier between our naked selves and the external world …

As a barrier, the coat is contradictory. Yes, it forms an outer ‘second skin’, oﬀering both physical and metaphorical protection, but, in taking on the properties of the wearer, cloaking devices provide a glimpse into inner worlds, ‘the implication of depth below surfaces’ (Hughes 2009, p. 11). As Roland Barthes noted in The Fashion System (1990, p.236), the ‘poetics’ of dress are hugely revealing, ‘because touching the body and functioning simultaneously as its substitute and mask, it is certainly the object of a very important investment’. There is, however, a corollary to the trope of the coat as aspirational, one which reinforces the link between our two protagonists. Reﬂecting the unsatisfactory demise of Thomas Jerome Newton, Danny’s life does not turn out as hoped. In the ﬁctive worlds they inhabit, the duﬄe coat, which at one point oﬀers protection and hope, becomes a portent of things to come, fulﬁlling its role as a harbinger of the sorrows that often become literary ﬁgures wanting for a coat (again, see Gogol 2004 (1842)).

**A love of the music**

Although the focus of this article has been on the impact of the visual upon casuals in Liverpool, this cannot be understood without noting a related love for Bowie’s music. The inﬂuence of music on the original terrace fashions is often underplayed but for these young men their sartorial choices were not divorced from what they were listening to. With reference to Bowie, Sampson conﬁrms:

… Bowie was cool. He was diﬀerent. He was always distinctive, always ahead of the pack. Even when city centre clubs started doing Roxy/Bowie nights, it was always (I’m speaking for teenage Liverpool males here) the Bowie tracks that we got up for.

The music that Bowie championed in 1977 – a melange of Krautrock, electronic, robotic, instrumental and sequenced sound – spoke to a particular sensibility that was growing away from punk. There was something esoteric, romantic and beguiling about this very impersonal, computerised music that seemed to evoke Bowie’s Berlin and enhanced our teenage dreams of getting away … There was a DJ called Steve Proctor who did an electronic night at a club called Cagney’s, just oﬀ London Road. He always ended the night with *A New Career in A New Town* and the place went mad – in a controlled, robotic sort of way. (Sampson [2013](#_bookmark154))

For some, this thorough and nuanced appreciation of Bowie's style *and* music by the casuals may be the most surprising part of the story. Indeed, the audience reactions to the lectures and conference presentations that formed the development of this paper have been instructive.[14](#_bookmark75) The details have been met with curious incredulity by some (‘I had no idea!’), and downright anger by others. These reactions came from those who considered themselves to be, and could practicably be described as, Bowie aﬁcionados. Fully conversant with his work, and subjects themselves to his aesthetic inﬂuence, this small but important and fascinating detail in the narrative of Bowie’s inﬂuence had passed them by. For some this was unsettling, and the very idea that young men stereotypically associated with hooliganism had this sort of relationship with ‘their’ Bowie, transgressed a sacred space.

However, Bowie did not ‘belong’ to any particular group and, as we have seen, a true appreciation of his output was not limited to the (stereotypical) middle-class, metropolitan rock critic or academic. The impact that his music had amongst match going lads in Liverpool at this time is entirely representative of Bowie’s cultural reach and importance. In countless locales and to countless people, Bowie meant a great deal and impacted upon them accordingly, a sentiment summed up by Danny, the ﬁctive voice of *Stars are Stars*:

… punk had been and gone as far as Danny was concerned. The Pistols and The Clash, amazing highs, brilliant bits and pieces. But none of them had really done it for him, nothing punk had thrown up came close to the clinical joy he got from Kraftwerk or the nervy and caustic elation of the new industrial bands: The Normal, the Human League, Clock DVA. And none of it yet matched up to the majestic grey symphonies of the Thin White Duke, who just blew him away with each new phase. The Berlin stuﬀ, the heroin hymns, the weird and twisted electronica of Low and Heroes. For Danny, there was no case to answer: Sound and Vision or New Rose: Moss Garden or Bodies? No contest, The New Wave was here, but Bowie was still God. (Sampson [2007](#_bookmark153), pp. 18–19)

**Conclusion**

This case study could be accused of contributing to what Gelder and Thornton refer to as, the tendency within subcultural studies to follow ‘an anatomizing logic, by which scholars dissect and analyse ever smaller segments of the world’ (1997, p. 3). However, the devil lies in the detail, and in analysing the cultural transit of this duﬄe coat our understanding of both Bowie’s cultural impact and the casual subculture have been signiﬁcantly advanced. As Jonathan Faiers notes in the introduction to Dressing Dangerously: Dysfunctional Fashion in Film (2013, p. 3):

Character and plot development are clothing’s accepted functions within the narrative of mainstream ﬁlm. As soon as these clothing related moments have been precisely cut from their individual narratives … and set alongside other moments from other narratives, following Walter Benjamin’s ‘principle of montage’, they are then free to reﬂect and illumine other spaces both within ﬁlm and beyond the conﬁnes of cinematic representation.

By ‘cutting’ the duﬄe coat from its allotted position within *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and upon the cover of *Low*, and demonstrating its use as a template for the casuals to emulate, this case study illuminates a number of spaces far beyond the parameters of their original narratives.

The journey taken by the duﬄe via the European textile industry, colonial traders, the Royal Navy, Greenwich Village, Paddington Bear, ﬁlms, an album cover, ﬁction, and the football terraces of Liverpool, and the semiotic signiﬁcance it develops along the way, is complex and fascinating. The duﬄe coat under examination carries the weight of this history but also is imbued with new meaning via Bowie’s iconicity: it becomes simultaneously practical and ‘other’, every day and alluring. It embodies both the aspirational and the relational, revealing Danny May’s ambitions whilst acting as a material link between himself and Bowie. Bowie reconﬁgured and advanced the meanings inherent in this material object, transcending the weight of its history, and activating a process of transmedial cultural transit.

The lack of sustained academic interest in the practices of football casuals (beyond hooliganism) is highlighted and, implicitly, a case is made for much closer inspection. Casuals are responsible for one of the most persistent and pervasive fashions in Britain over the past 40 years. The dearth of traditional documentary sources has already been identiﬁed as an issue by Steve Redhead ([2004](#_bookmark144), [2007](#_bookmark145)). However, this article draws upon one of his suggested strategies – the use of ﬁction to ﬁll in the gaps in knowledge – and makes a strong case for the further development of methodologies that treat ﬁctionalised accounts of subcultures as equivalent to more ‘oﬃcial’ or traditional documentary evidence.

By foregrounding a hitherto little known example of Bowie’s transmedial signiﬁcance and an academically marginalised subculture it opens up and demonstrates the breadth of academic work that is possible in this emerging ﬁeld associated with Bowie, as well as the more established ﬁelds of fashion history and subcultures. It is hoped that the approaches used and the evidence uncovered in this article moves scholarly discussions of Bowie and casuals into new terrains, ones that provide a more rounded account and understanding of these mercurial and elusive subjects.

**Notes**

1. ‘Casual’ is a catch-all term and is not how many early pioneers and adopters of this movement would refer to themselves. It was conceived and applied retrospectively when the culture came to the attention of the mainstream (read London-centric) press. Prior to this (and indeed afterwards) the titles used were various. Some were specific to a ‘mob’ or ‘crew’, such as scallies or scals in Liverpool or Perry Boys in Manchester. Others were terms used more generally, for example ‘dressers’ and ‘trendies’. And added to this were the plethora of crew or firm names specific to each club (for a comprehensive list of these see

Redhead 2007). Whilst I acknowledge the difficulties that come with the use of the term ‘casual’, I shall continue to use it for the rest of this article because it is now a commonly understood form of shorthand.

2. It took London a number of years to develop their own version of casual style.

3. A cursory glance around the streets of my home town of Glasgow would be enough to convince most of this statement.

4. Of course, Bowie’s entire career could be considered an act of bricolage.

5. This company is now known as the Original Montgomery, after Field Marshal Montgomery, and still manufactures duﬄe coats, albeit a modiﬁed version of those originally commissioned.

6. The hairdresser responsible for Bowie’s haircut on the set TMWFT was Martin Samuel. However, the wedge style Bowie sports was not particularly ground-breaking. Versions of this haircut had been popular since the early twentieth century and, contemporaneous to Bowie, soul-boys and the American gymnast Dorothy Hamill had similar styles. Typical of Bowie’s cultural inﬂuence, for a period of time at the end of the 70s, the style became known as the Bowie wedge (York 1980).

7. The inspiration to cast Bowie came when Roeg saw him in the Alan Yentob documentary Cracked Actor (1975) which follows the musician on his Diamond Dogs Tour (Pegg 2016,1975). In it Bowie is charming and witty but also whip thin, fragile and not of this earth.

8. The origins of the term ‘boot boy’ lie in the late Victorian period when it was used to describe young boys from London’s East End, orphaned or destitute – and rescued by missions such as Dr Barnardo’s of Stepney Green – who were put to use, polishing and mending the boots of West End gentlemen (Cohen 1997). It was also used in reference to low ranking servants, who were expected to polish and care for a household’s footwear.

9. For a thorough biography of Low please see Wilcken 2017.

10. The cover for Station to Station (1976) and a number of singles also feature stills from the

ﬁlm.

11. It is beyond the remit of this article, but the ﬂuid notions of masculinity demonstrated by Bowie, the boot boys and the casuals are worthy of further consideration.

12. Thus subverting and conﬂating Virginia Wolf’s assertion in A Room of One’s Own that the values reﬂected in novels reﬂects those found in life. that ‘it is the masculine values that prevail. Speaking crudely, football and sport are “important”; the worship of fashion, the buying of clothes “trivial”. And these values are inevitably transferred from life to ﬁction’ (Woolf cited Hughes 2006, p. 2).

13. A defunct British department store.

14. The conference presentations took place at Fashion, the 84th Anglo-American Conference of Historians, 2–3 July 2015, Senate House, University of London; Textual Fashion, 8–10 July 2015, University of Brighton; and the David Bowie Interart/Text/Media, 22–24 September 2016, University of Lisbon. The lectures took place between 2013 and 2018 at Glasgow School of Art as part of various courses delivered to both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

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