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The singer and the song: Nick Cave and the archetypal function of the cover version

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A small proscenium arch of red light bulbs framing draped crimson curtains fills the screen. It is hard to tell whether the ramshackle stage is inside or outside but it appears to be set up against a wall made of corrugated metal. All else is black. The camera cuts to a close-up of the curtains, which are parted to reveal a pale young man with crow's nest hair wearing a sequined tuxedo and a skewed bow tie. The man holds a lit cigarette and behind him, overseeing proceedings, is a large statue of the Virgin Mary. As the man with the crow's nest hair walks fully through the arch he opens his mouth and sings the words 'As the snow flies, on a cold and grey Chicago morn another little baby child is born...'. The song continues with the singer alternately shuffling as if embarrassed by the attention of the camera and then holding his arms aloft in declamation or fixing the viewer with a steely gaze. His miming is less than perfect, but something about his performance suggests that this is not entirely without deliberation. Half way through the song the man removes his jacket, revealing a waistcoat. As he completes his performance the man moves backwards, drawing the curtains before him, and the song ends.

The pale young man with the crow's nest hair is Nick Cave and the song is 'In the Ghetto', written by Mac David and released by Elvis Presley in 1969. Presley's version of David's song is notable for a number of reasons. It was the first Presley release to make it on to the Billboard Top Ten in four years, boosted by Presley's public resurrection via his televised 'Comeback Special' *Elvis* (Binder, 1968) the year before. It also stands out in Presley's canon as the closest he gets to overt social commentary, chronicling as it does the brief and violent life of a disenfranchised young man growing up in the projects, culminating in his death and the birth of another child who is bound to follow the same path.

Cave's version of the 'In the Ghetto' is similarly notable but for different reasons. Released in 1984 on Mute Records, it was the debut single by Cave's new band Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, and it marks a radical departure from Cave's previous band The Birthday Party. Where The Birthday Party trod a line between violent post punk alienation and bluesy swagger, Cave's first release with The Bad Seeds is a remarkably faithful rendition of the Presley version, albeit with some minor changes. The strings remain, giving a mournful but soft backing to the martial drumbeat, but the backing chorus of 'in the ghetto' from Presley's release is replaced by a heavily affected upwards glissando played with what sounds like a slide on electric guitar. Similarly, Cave's vocal performance is far less polished than Presley's and betrays a slight snarl in places. The video also seems to hark back to the showmanship associated with Presley, yet its amateurish look suggests something much more related to the DIY aesthetic of punk, shot as it is in the garage of the video director Evan English. One might be reminded of Sid Vicious's demolition of 'My Way' (1978), which culminates in Vicious pulling a revolver on the unwitting audience from a Vegas-style stage. However, where Vicious's performance is deliberately ironic and confrontational, challenging not only how one might read the song and its previous incarnations but also the relationship between performer (most notably Frank Sinatra) and audience, Cave's performance is more difficult to decode. It is at once both subtly ironic and reverential, interpretive yet faithful. Cave's reading of 'In the Ghetto' challenges the Presley version with the aesthetics of post punk practice, yet it succeeds also in incorporating an older, more problematic tradition, that of the 'crooner', into post punk's own lexicon. It seems to be the first visible incarnation of Cave as an artist who has subsequently positioned himself in a dialectical relationship between the traditions of (primarily) American popular song, and avant rock.

Why cover?

That Cave's first release with The Bad Seeds should be a cover version seems prophetic. Not only does it mark out a break in what was expected of Cave based upon his previous career with The Birthday Party, but it also heralds a continuing fascination with other people's songs that has been visible throughout his subsequent output. In 1986 Nick Cave and The Bad Seeds released *Kicking Against the Pricks*, an album of cover versions that included songs by Johnny Cash, John Lee Hooker,

Roy Orbison and The Alex Harvey Band, amongst others. While *Kicking Against the Pricks* and 'In the Ghetto' stand out as notable engagements with the cover version for Cave, his entire career illustrates an ongoing connection to the cover with over sixty songs by other artists recorded and released by Cave in various incarnations since 1977 and countless live performances not committed to tape, perhaps the most intriguing of which is a cover of Destiny's Child's 'Bootylicious' (2001) performed at a charity auction in London in 2007 (Maes, 2010).

Most of these cover versions seem to illustrate Cave's own musical influences. Amongst the list of artists covered by Cave are a sizable proportion of blues and country artists and notable singer songwriters such as Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, Neil Young and Johnny Cash. While these songs might go some way to flesh out Cave's own musical inspiration, they also serve another purpose. Cave's covers help to place him within certain musical and cultural traditions, often traditions that compete with each other, that grant his own music legitimacy and authenticity. Cave's covers act as a framework by which to understand his complete output within certain discourses. It is not the intention of this article to suggest that Cave is self-consciously aligning himself with certain musical traditions to bolster his own critical reception, but it does seem clear that his choice of cover versions provides a way of understanding Cave as an artist and his own compositions within a historical and aesthetic context for the audience.

Dai Griffiths (2002) illustrates how the performance of cover versions can have significant ramifications for the articulation of gender, race, place and other aspects of identity formation. Griffiths suggests that 'covers illustrate identity in motion' (51) and this is certainly the case with Cave's choice of songs. However, while Griffiths is illustrating the fluidity of identity formation across covers as the performer or performance shifts across gender, race or class lines, Cave's covers often maintain an uneasy allegiance with the originals. If the significance of the cover version is manifest in its difference or similarity to an original then Cave's choices say much about how we might perceive his canon as a whole, offering the opportunity to shape interpretive strategies that extend beyond the individual cover version in question.

Griffiths identifies two types of cover version, the 'rendition' and the 'transformation'. The rendition is a 'straightforwardly faithful version of the original, carrying with it some of the connotation of performance in classical music' (52). A prime example of this is Ride's cover of 'The Model' (1992), which almost perfectly replicates the instrumentation of the Kraftwerk original, with only the noticeable difference in vocal timbre marking it out as another performance. A transformation, however, suggests a more radical interpretation of the source material, often involving changes to instrumentation, arrangement and even lyrics. The lines between these two categories are often far from clear. Cave's reading of 'By the Time I Get to Phoenix' (*Kicking Against the Pricks*: 1986) shows how both strategies manifest themselves within a single performance. Immediately we are challenged by the problem of what constitutes the 'original' by which Cave's performance might be judged. Jimmy Webb originally wrote the song and its first release was by Johnny Rivers in 1965. However, the most famous version of the song is Glenn Campbell's release two years later. Furthermore, the song has been recorded by Isaac Hayes, Harry Belafonte (the source for another Cave cover, 'Did you Hear About Jerry?' performed at a few dates in Melbourne in November 1985 and considered for inclusion on *Kicking Against the Pricks*), Pat Boone, John Denver, Frank Sinatra, Roger Whittaker, Andy Williams, Liberace and Thelma Houston amongst others. Cave's performance bears the closest similarity to the Campbell version and in many ways is a faithful rendition; however, it is slower (and therefore almost a minute longer), lacks the string arrangement of Campbell's version and Cave's vocal performance elaborates on the lyrics in a number of ways. However, compared to Cave's version of Pulp's 'Disco 2000', 'By the Time I Get to Phoenix' seems a relatively faithful rendition rather than a transformation. 'Disco 2000', recorded as a B-side for Pulp's 'Bad Cover Version' single (2002) turns an upbeat chart hit (originally released by Pulp in 1995) into a lilting waltz with arpeggiated guitars and ethereal backing vocals. Cave's performance explicitly transforms Pulp's original into something that fits within his own recognizable aesthetic in an overt manner.

These two examples, and there are many others throughout Cave's career so far, point towards the motivations for covering songs in the first instance. Many bands in their early years will participate in song-getting (Shehan Campbell: 1995), gathering songs to cover both as a means to build on performance and song writing skills and as a

strategy of identity formation. This might work through covering songs that are direct stylistic inspirations for the band- which would tend to be done relatively faithfully as renditions - or they might be transformations of songs that would sit incongruously within the band's own repertoire without significant stylistic revision. A band that I have long since left performed a cover version of Danielle Dax's 'Cat House' (1988) as a faithful rendition, signalling our own position within a certain discourse of alternative rock music, yet we also covered Atomic Kitten's 'Whole Again' (2001) as a metal song. Here the transformation acts as a means of articulating power and difference over the original and, by implication, the pop genre from whence it comes. It therefore becomes an act of 'authentication'. It is clear to see how Cave's renditions, however faithful, connect him to past discourses of popular music, not just as inspiration, but as a way of reading him as an artist. The influence of the blues, for example, might be evident in his own work but the covers of John Lee Hooker and Leadbelly songs mark him out as part of that tradition (albeit problematically in terms of ethnicity and nationality), often legitimizing his other songs and himself as an artist. 'Disco 2000', however, works to transform the original away from a pop discourse towards something less immediately commercial and more 'grounded'. That is not to say that this particular example is not dripping with irony but Cave's straight-faced performance provides the space to read the song in new ways that connect with other facets of popular music history than simply indie pop. Where Cave has arguably succeeded in his use of cover versions is in incorporating competing discourses, primarily post punk rock music, American roots music and the Tin Pan Alley tradition, to define a space for his own work that exists between the different positions. As such Cave marks out both similarity and difference in a network of affiliations that listeners have the opportunity to interpret.

Locating an 'original'

At this point the issue of exactly what Cave is connecting to through his cover versions needs to be addressed. When I hear 'By the Time I Get to Phoenix' I compare it to the Glenn Campbell version, the version that I heard before all others, as suggested above, the most commercially successful and widely consumed, which becomes my 'original'. That it is not the first recording of that particular song is of no relevance to me, although upon coming across Johnny Rivers's version I might

choose to change my mind. Anteriority and precedence are an issue to an extent - I know the Campbell version before I know the Cave version - but I also know that Campbell did not write the song, and that in this case it was written by Jimmy Webb, not an anonymous Brill Building hack but a much feted American songwriter responsible for a range of what are usually referred to as 'standards' such as 'Wichita Lineman' (1968) and 'McArthur Park' (1968). Therefore my interpretation of Cave's cover is shaped by its relationship to a soft country sound and a more commercial yet critically appreciated form of song writing craft. The fact that it is a song that is almost entirely performed by people other than the man who wrote it does provide a space for any artist to transform it to their own ends, but the shadow of Campbell's version hangs over every other version that I have ever come across. Of course such a valuation is highly subjective, but if Cave has proven anything over the long course of his career it is that he is a consummate scholar of popular music, and it seems unlikely that he is totally unaware of the connections that he is making to other artists and genres. Therefore the archetypes of the genius songwriter and the commercial country crossover artist are evoked.

A more clearly defined example can be seen through Cave's connection to the pantheon of elder statesmen singer songwriters such as Leonard Cohen, Bob Dylan, Neil Young and Johnny Cash. Of the covers that Cave has recorded or performed throughout his career, Cohen looms larger than most with at least nine recordings or performances by Cave; 'Avalanche' (*From Her to Eternity*, 1984), 'Tower of Song' (*I'm Your Fan*, 1991), 'I'm Your Man', 'Suzanne' (Lunson, 2005), 'There is a War', 'Diamonds in the Mine', 'Don't go Home with your Hard-on', 'Memories' and 'Dress Rehearsal Rag' (all performed as part of the *Came So Far For Beauty* Cohen tribute concerts between 2004 and 2006). While Cave's interpretations of Cohen's work might be wildly transformative (see 'Tower of Song' as an example), the connections that they make to an artist who is widely understood to have produced a strong body of work that has maintained its artistic integrity through the commercial pressures of the popular music industry have ramifications for Cave's own work. Similarly Dylan, Young and Cash function both as touchstones for Cave's influences but also as aesthetic or artistic archetypes. Here the quantity of covers performed by Cave and his various musicians helps to delineate how we might perceive Cave. The wealth of cover versions coalesce to provide a network of meaning that gives context to Cave.

The singer songwriter connections allow him to occupy a position within contemporary popular music that shows Cave to be a new manifestation of artists whose careers, whilst still ongoing in most cases, have secured them a place within the critical pantheon (and I use the word deliberately) of popular music history.

Whilst it might seem obvious to say that Cave's work is inspired by artists such as Cohen, Cash, Dylan or others and that therefore it makes sense that he should cover their work, such a claim fails to account for the remarkable ways in which such covers are used to define Cave as an artist himself. Returning to 'In the Ghetto', it becomes obvious that Cave is pushing against his own status in the early eighties as a post-punk firebrand 'who plays with madness' (Reynolds and Press, 1995: 269). As Ian Johnston puts it in his biography of Cave, 'In the Ghetto' was,

[T]he beginning of Cave's long retreat from the kinetic style of stage performance that he had presented in The Birthday Party, which he felt was all too often dictated by the audience. He told Richard Guillart: "You'd be looking at the audience, they're all leering back at you, and you know they want you to do a back-flip. So you do one and feel like an idiot...All the great works of art, it seems to me, are the ones that have a total disregard for anything else; just a total egotistical self-indulgence". (1995: 146)

Similarly, Amy Hanson describes Cave's first single with The Bad Seeds as,

[L]ess a cover song, than a plea – for retribution, for justice, for humanity. And it certainly couldn't have been farther from Cave's in-your-face spit and bite that fans were surely expecting. It was a brilliant choice for a break in sound. (2005: 55)

That 'break in sound' has been vital to Cave's career subsequently, providing a space for him to redefine not only what his records sound like, or his performance style, but the very aesthetic of what he represents. Elvis Presley surely represented everything that British post punk railed against, and as such it made some sense that Cave covering The King would provide an escape route from the scene that Cave felt increasingly alienated from in the latter years of The Birthday Party. But Cave's

performance of the song seems to transcend mere irony, and while it fits easily into his own usage of the Presley mythos through the 1980s (see Wiseman-Trowse, 2009), perhaps Mac David's status as a songwriter and craftsman redefines Cave more radically than any Elvis connotations. It is from this point on that Cave ceases merely to be a perceived psychotic Aussie Jim Morrison wannabe, garnering acclaim instead for his status as a songwriter of worth - however that might be defined - a transformation that would continue through the eighties and reach its culmination with *The Good Son* in 1990.

The cover as archetypal image

How might such engagements between Cave and his source material be understood? My suggestion above that Cave's link to David might be more significant than the Presley connection is further indicated by Cave's choice to cover the work of other significant songwriters (Jimmy Webb, Jacques Brel and a plethora of singer songwriters such as those mentioned above). Yet it also requires an appreciation of those songwriters as significant on the part of the audience, something that might be problematic if the listener does not know David or Webb's work, or if they might understand their significance in other ways. The punk audience who first engaged with Cave's work might well have found such associations with certain aspects of popular music history troubling. What is perhaps more important is Cave's positioning, through the use of cover versions, as a significant songwriter himself. Such aesthetic reflection can be seen in other aspects of his choice of covers. American roots music (encompassing blues, country and folk) has always been an important resource for Cave from his earliest recordings and a cursory glance at his choice of covers shows a wealth of American traditional compositions ('Stagger Lee', 'Oh Happy Day', 'Jesus Met the Woman at the Well', 'Black Betty' and others). Again, and this seems particularly important for an Australian performer who has lived in a variety of countries at various times, Cave's interpretations make links both to his own compositions and his other work in the fields of literature and film making. They act as authenticating devices that, through Cave's own interpretations, reflect back upon himself as an artist. This is not to suggest that Cave is an authentic bluesman, but his work becomes placed within specific lineages, an effect illustrated by the release of the *Original Seeds* albums in 1998 and 2004 (Rubber Records)

which collected prior versions of songs covered by Cave, and Mojo magazine's *Bad Seeds Nick Cave: Roots and Collaborations* CD issued free with the magazine in the United Kingdom in 2009 which charted a similar course. The very act of these releases shows how Cave's work connects with a history of popular music that shapes our perceptions of him in the present, as a significant singer songwriter, as a contemporary manifestation of folk idioms, as a connection between punk and more archaic forms.

I suggested above that if one is not aware of Cave's sources that it might be difficult to extrapolate such effects from the musical and cultural connections that he makes. However, what stands out when looking back and taking a holistic view of Cave's covers is the articulation of what might be understood as popular music archetypes. Popular music is one of the few cultural forms where one artist might take another artist's work and re-perform it. Writers rarely rewrite other authors' work, although there are examples, and visual artists rarely 'cover' other artists, although again there are exceptions. Cinema might come closer, with reworkings of older films being particularly prevalent. However, what might be considered as an actual cover version, at least in terms of rendition, is still relatively rare, with Gus Van Sant's shot-for-shot recreation of Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1998) or John Badham's remake of Besson's *Nikita* (1990) as *Point of no Return* (1993) being notable exceptions. Griffiths's exploration of cover versions shows how popular musicians use the cover to engage with changing contexts of the same source material, both invoking a past text and creating something else out of its new context. Cave's position as a musician, performer and songwriter over the last three decades has been overshadowed by his connections to punk and post punk, and whether he would find this desirable or not (countless interviews with him have suggested that he finds such connections increasingly irksome, for example see Barron 1988), it has reshaped the covers that he performs, whether that be through the resurrection of folk forms such as the murder ballad or the recontextualization of the crooner tradition that his covers of Presley, Campbell and Pitney have achieved. In most cases Cave is connecting with recognizable archetypes of popular music history that are re-presented through his own archetypal imagery.

In an interview with Simon Reynolds in *New Musical Express* magazine (1989) Cave, in conversation with Mark E Smith of The Fall and Shane MacGowan of The Pogues, expressed concern at the mythologization of his music:

NME: You must be aware that, consciously or otherwise, you've each created a particular myth that has arisen, in part, from your songs.

SM: "Nobody created my mythology, I certainly didn't."

NC: "No, you (the press) created it."

SM: "The media has a lot to answer for, you're all a bunch of bastards however friendly you are."

NC: "Let's not talk about the media. Why the hell are you talking about mythologies? That tends to suggest it's somehow unreal."

SM: "It seems to me that in your songs, Nick, you're doing a Jung-style trip of examining your shadow, all the dark things you don't want to be. A lot of your songs are like trips into the subconscious and are therefore nightmarish."

NC: "Possibly."

Cave's reticent response points to the connection to the real, to the 'authentic' that he wants his music to have, and while 'mythologization' might be an appropriate way to understand his work and his place within discourses of popular music archetypes, the very function of archetypes transcends the cursory role of myth and reconnects his work (and, by implication, his covers within that body of work) through the social and the cultural back to the body. Carl Jung understood archetypes as aspects of the collective unconscious that shape or give form to one's engagement with the external world (Jung, 2002). Archetypes themselves are unknowable, yet their manifestations as archetypal images in the conscious realm point to the connection between the interior psyche and the body, manifesting instinctual modes of behaviour and response. For Jung, archetypes are latent in the collective unconscious, awaiting actualization within the personal unconscious in the individual. The element that initiates and articulates actualization can be understood as the archetypal image.

Using this understanding of the cover version the song transcends its materiality and acts as a fulcrum between the collective and personal unconscious to articulate

discourses that give shape and meaning to Cave's actions in the real world. Archetypal images (and here I mean not only the songs themselves but the performers, performances, writers and even genres associated with them) instigate connections for the audience, and one would suspect Cave himself, that shape how we read his performances. The bluesman, the country singer, the Tin Pan Alley songwriter, the French chanteur and the rock and roller all assume significance as archetypes that stretch beyond their incarnations as popular musicians. They instead connect with unconscious responses to the world through the body in performance. Hence Cave's uncomfortable response to the mythification of his own work. He is right that in many ways the media plays a significant role in slanting what he does as a musician in certain ways, but it is difficult to approach Cave's work without exploring the role that myth has to play. Here the myths, not only about his own work but the sources that he gets from elsewhere, are real, telling stories about the individual within the world. As such, unconscious archetypes are connected to the body through performance and materiality in a way that grants Cave's work authenticity. David Pattie explores similar territory when he deconstructs the self-mutilation of Richey James from Welsh band Manic Street Preachers as he cuts '4REAL' into his arm after a gig in front of *New Musical Express* journalist Steve Lamacq:

James' gesture conforms to accepted rock iconography: but it also exceeds it, moves beyond it into rather more troubling territory...James' act, it would seem, is directed first of all at himself. It takes a public concern – the authenticity or otherwise of the Manics as a group – and turns it into a private, desperate act of self confirmation, as though the only way that James has to convince himself that he is not, ultimately, a charade, is to inscribe his authenticity, slowly and painfully, on his own skin. (Pattie, 1999)

While an extreme example, the body here acts as the last bastion of authenticity, the site of a perceived reality beyond which it might be difficult to move. Cave's early, visceral onstage persona is largely abandoned in the mid eighties but the figure in the sequined tuxedo who steps through the curtains is no less physical and the connections that he makes to the body become articulated, not through the extremities of his own physicality, but through, in the case of 'In the Ghetto', Presley in 'an

advanced state of disintegration, finally present[ing] the truth about himself...with such passion that his performance was totally uncontrived' (Johnston, 1996: 146). As such, Cave's own pseudo-shambolic performance in the video rearticulates the archetype inherent in Presley's own rendition in a manner that reminds us of the physicality of the function of the archetype itself.

The cover as assemblage

There is, however, a problem with such a reading of Cave's covers. While archetypal imagery engages with the collective unconscious, the cover version does suggest a certain amount of cultural competence from the listener. As David Brackett puts it:

If musical meaning is conveyed through a code that is sent or produced by somebody then it also must be received or consumed by somebody. This raises the question of "competence": what is the relationship between sender and receiver, and how does this affect the interpretation of musical messages? (2000: 12)

In the case of the cover version, responses will vary wildly dependent upon one's knowledge of previous incarnations of the song. Leonard Cohen's 'Hallelujah' provides an appropriate example here. Originally released on the *Various Positions* album in 1984, Cohen's composition has had a tortuous route through other interpreters. The song was first covered by John Cale on *I'm Your Fan* in 1991, then, most famously, by Jeff Buckley on *Grace* in 1994. Buckley based his own version primarily around Cale's interpretation rather than the Cohen original (Browne, 2001: 166). Alexandra Burke reached the British number one spot with her cover of 'Hallelujah' in 2008, a song chosen for her as winner of the British television talent show *The X Factor* (Buckley's version went in at number two behind Burke, following renewed interest in his interpretation). This version was in turn inspired by a performance of the song on the American version of the show *American Idol* by Jason Castro in 2008, which directly links back to Buckley's version. In this sense Cohen's version becomes increasingly irrelevant as each successive version effectively covers the last. Wherever one might choose to place the original, the point

here is that the original is not necessarily the archetypal image that is specifically engaged with to create meaning in relation to the cover version.

How then to judge the cover and its articulation of archetypes that shape the way in which we see Cave? As the case of 'By the Time I Get to Phoenix' shows, it is not always the significance of the original recording which has the most bearing on the cover version. Rather one might best understand Cave's use of covers as a way of constructing meaning through various engagements (with the variety of versions of the song, some more culturally significant than others, and his own semiology at any given time) that he might direct but has little ultimate control over once the song reaches the ear of the listener. In this sense the cover acts, as Gilles Deleuze might put it, as an assemblage, as a conjunction of aesthetic ideas and experiences that gives form to Cave as we experience him. While Deleuze's radical epistemology might seem at odds with the analytical psychology of Jung, the cover version (like certain other cultural forms) illustrates how experiences assemble to provide new forms of manifestation and interpretation. As Semetsky puts it,

The Deleuzian level of analysis is "not a question of intellectual understanding...but of intensity, resonance and musical harmony" (Deleuze, 1995: 86). It is guided by the "logic of affects" (Guattari, 1995: 9) and as such is different from a rational consensus or solely intellectual reasoning. Its rationale is pragmatic and the thinking it produces, over the background of affects – Jung would've said, feeling tones – is experimental and experiential. (2003: 4)

In this way Cave's covers are constantly unfolding new possibilities, read via the experiences of listeners around the loci of previous song-versions, writers, life experiences. The connection to archetypal images evoked by the cover version is multiple and often contradictory, proposing a self (combining Cave as artist, the listening subject and previous performers and writers) that manifests new connections to the archetype that might give Cave some form of power or meaning. Semetsky points to the multiplicity of our perception of an artist like Cave when she suggests that 'the Self, defined by Jung as a collective noun, expresses itself via enunciation, which is always already, as Deleuze says, collective, that is plurivocal' (2003: 7). In

listening to Cave's covers we focus on one assemblage of collective experiences that connect via the psyche back to the body.

The argument above might immediately suggest that there is no inherent truth or baseline to judge Cave's covers against, yet the cover version has clearly proved an invaluable tool for audiences looking to gain meaning from his career and his place within a canon of popular musicians. Each song marks a point (or multiple points) of becoming, a leap into new perspectives on Cave that have little to ground them on close inspection other than archetypal connections that he is choosing to make by each song that he picks to perform or record. Cave reinvents himself through each performance: 'there is no return to the subject, to the old self, but invention and creation of new possibilities of life by means of going beyond the play of forces' (Semetsky, 2003: 9). This is as true of his choice of cover versions as it is of each song written by himself or The Bad Seeds. The cover merely shows the extent to which Cave as performer transforms with each new engagement, each new assemblage into something both new and something deeply recognisable. As such, we are left with a position where the man in the sequined tuxedo and the crow's nest hair is not only ironic but sincere, himself and someone else, transient yet deeply authentic.

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Abstract

Throughout his career, from *The Boys Next Door*, through *The Birthday Party*, and with *The Bad Seeds*, Australian singer / songwriter Nick Cave has balanced his own set of creative voices alongside those of others through his choice of cover versions. Cave's 1986 album with *The Bad Seeds*, *'Kicking Against the Pricks'*, is a collection of cover versions that spans American folk idioms ('*Black Betty*', '*Hey Joe*', '*The Singer*'), Tin-Pan-Alley balladeering ('*Something's Gotten Hold of my Heart*', '*By the Time I Get to Phoenix*') and left-field alt-rock ('*All Tomorrow's Parties*', '*The Hammer Song*'). Cave's first single as a solo artist beyond the confines of *The Birthday Party* was a cover of '*In The Ghetto*', made famous by Elvis Presley, and the cover version has been a noticeable presence in Cave's work both in his live and recorded output ever since.

This article seeks to understand the uses of Cave's choices of cover versions, both in terms of the idiosyncrasies of his own interpretations, and the context within which Cave places himself as part of a wider musical community. Cave's relationship to a pantheon of elder statesmen figures (Johnny Cash, Bob Dylan or Leonard Cohen for example) is understood as not only one of recognising influences, but also of placing Cave within a specific tradition or lineage. Equally, certain song forms such as the folk ballad or the blues lament are utilized to give shape and form to Cave's wider concerns outside of the specific cover version. Cave's reimagining of John Lee Hooker's '*Tupelo*', or Dylan's '*Wanted Man*' from *The Firstborn is Dead* (1985) provide clues to the uses of the cover to both articulate the individual interpreting the song, thus placing it within a personalized lexicon, and to connect the singer to traditions, or archetypes of performance that resonate in specific ways. Cave's covers are never wholly reproductions, at times they are reworkings that might be seen to reconnect a song to a potential 'lost truth', at others they may be seen as parodies or homages that have more transparent aims. However at all times, the connections between Cave the singer and the latent archetypes inherent in the song provide provocative and loaded connections and values. This article seeks to understand how Cave's choices of cover versions, and his approaches to interpretation, shape not only the musical moment, but also our perceptions of Cave as an artist in a broader sense.

Biography

Nathan Wiseman-Trowse is Senior Lecturer in Popular Culture at the University of Northampton. He has taught at the University for twelve years over a range of media related courses and is currently Course Leader for the University's BA Popular Music degree. Nathan's research has covered the multiple Blade Runner narratives, discourses of identity in British indie music, the guitar solo and symbolic disruption and shamanism in the music of Julian Cope. His doctoral thesis, *Performing Class in British Popular Music* was published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2008. He has subsequently published 'Oedipus Wrecks: Nick Cave and the Presley Myth' in *Cultural Seeds* (Ashgate, 2009) and 'Marvel or Miracle: (Re)placing the Original in Alan Moore's Marvelman' in the journal *Critical Engagements* (2010). Nathan has also organized the Magus: Transdisciplinary Approaches to the Work of Alan Moore conference at the University of Northampton (May 2010). He is currently writing a monograph for Reaktion books, *Nick Drake: Dreaming England* (2012). Nathan is a member of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music.

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