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'Infected by the seed of post-industrial punk bohemia':

Nick Cave and the milieu of the 1980s underground

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Abstract

This article uses the concepts of cultural milieu and music genre to explore the work of Nick Cave in the 1980s and later. Milieu theory is derived from the work of phenomenologists Alfred Schutz and Jorg Durschmitt. The article analyses the transgressive milieu of Cave and such collaborators as Blixa Bargeld and Lydia Lunch and considers the way in which the music genres of punk, post-punk, gothic and industrial have been implicated in Nick Cave's recorded output.

Keywords: genre, gothic, industrial, milieu, post-punk, punk, scenes

There's a real need for an intelligent but aggressive group in London. All the treasured groups are just so softcore. At one time there was a real upsurge of new young groups and incredible records like 'She is beyond Good and Evil', you know the Pop Group before they sacrificed the music for that soapbox, toilet-roll politics. The groups that came out of the Pop Group have got back to primitive funk, which is good... I saw Rip Rig and Panic at Action Space and there was a real directness and irreverence, as opposed to Pigbag, who are just happy to be convincingly funky (Nick Cave in Hoskyns 1981).

This group is an explosion of sensuality and laughter at the desensitized mediocrity of our lives. They are our new Rolling Stones, but holding back their profiles in the shadow, in the penumbra of myth. In them jazz races with Punk and rock 'n' roll slips on funk, a collision of forms whose domain is just suspended in the timeless zone of excess—bodily exhumation and spiritual disease (Hoskyns 1982).

As new pop regressed into a dismal impasse based around a combination of wistful vintage retrospection and a therapeutic revision of soul, Cave looked back even further, over the course of four solo records, to C&W and blues, in search of a more troubled, troubling kind of authenticity (Reynolds 1987).

Nick Cave as an artist has often been characterized as being heavily influenced by the blues and rock 'n' roll aesthetics. References to Blind Lemon Jefferson, Elvis Presley, Johnny Cash, Leadbelly and John Lee Hooker litter his work and reviews of it and some of these are reflected in the songs on his album of cover versions *Kicking Against the Pricks* (Mute Records, 1986). To understand Cave's work, though, we need to weave a more complex history that references a more diverse set of musical and non-musical influences.

Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds emerged from the ashes of the Birthday Party at a time when sections of the still gestating genre of post-punk was interweaving with the emerging gothic and continuing industrial genres (Reynolds 2005; Monroe 2005; Keenan 2003; Mercer 1997, 2002; Hodkinson 2002). These three strands of musical practice, aesthetics, production and style shared some similar ideas, tendencies and lifestyle practices. Musically they also shared a sonic and lyrical sensibility that moved audiences through intense emotional outpourings: themes of violence, death, melancholia and immense elation. The music of many of the artists moving within these genre worlds often worked beyond a preconceived notion of genre; in fact they often blurred many genres together and included references from outside the worlds of popular music.

This essay will assess the importance of going beyond preconceived notions of genre for the appreciation and situating of Nick Cave as an artist, and attempt to unravel the linkage between his music and a set of intellectual and artistic projects which the artists who cohered in a milieu with him were immersed in. The essay tries to reconsider the idea of genre, in terms of artists like Cave, and uses the term *milieu* to reflect a network of likeminded individuals and groups who were referencing similar literatures, emotions and artistic tendencies that linked them together especially in the minds of many of their audience. The catalyst for all three genres (gothic, post-punk and industrial) and also for Cave's work is the energy, transgression and rebelliousness of punk especially its US root (for example Iggy and the Stooges, Suicide, MC5, Velvet Underground). These elements of musical, aesthetic, literary, creative and cultural forms are discussed in relation to the circulation and appreciation of particular recordings, collaboration between artists with seemingly diverse tastes, music industry—particularly independent industry—support, spaces of interaction such as clubs and bars, fanzines and the influence of literary, theatrical and artistic worlds on the participants of this milieu. Firstly, I will outline the idea of milieu theory which underpins the analysis in this article.

Milieu theory

Milieu as a theoretical construct is a device that attempts to situate social actors in a networked web of interaction and subjective understanding that is rooted in a structured field, mapped by uncovering the overlapping levels of meaning, relevance, disposition and knowledge that structure, and to some extent order, their lives. It recognizes that individuals have built up a stock of knowledge (Schutz 1970a) in their lifetime and that this stock is the first point of reference they access when faced with routine actions. The stocks of knowledge and ideas that they possess are shaped and developed by groups of people they are involved with. In Schutz's terms these are groups of consociates, contemporaries, predecessors and successors. These, in turn, are those we interact with directly, those we share the same extended time and space with but whom we do not meet, those who came before us from whom we inherited an understanding and finally those to whom we will pass on meaning in the future. This leads to group similarities, shared appreciation, common reference points and points of connection for social interaction and in creative worlds the development of artistic work involving similar themes.

Jorg Durrsschmidt has developed a largely phenomenological account of milieu. He describes a milieu as: 'a relatively stable configuration of action and meaning' (Durrsschmidt 2000: 18). Durrsschmidt further complicates this definition to give a sense of its changing and morphing nature by adding the idea from Scheler that there are two elements to a milieu: 'momentary milieu' and 'milieu structure'. The milieu structure is the relatively stable environment and disposition of the individual to the world. Whereas the 'momentary milieu' is: 'the current and transitory content of the actual environment, which is practically relevant at any one moment and things that are 'filtered' through the individuals "order of values"' (Durrsschmidt 2000: 19).

Momentary milieu shows how the stock of knowledge that an individual possesses can be developed and added to. These additions may start to affect the way in which one's typifications and/or typical responses to things can change. Durrsschmidt, in an attempt to acknowledge the effects of globalization of people and technology Durrsschmidt has also developed the notion of an 'extended milieu' encompassing the idea of connectivity. Globalization and the interactivity and connectivity of people to previously unattainable ideas, lifestyles, ethnies, technologies and nations can impact on the milieu of those who connect to the extended milieu. So what is clear here is that milieu is an *environment* in which we draw on our existing knowledge to navigate our way through circumstances and situations. Whilst doing this we are sometimes adding to our 'stock of knowledge' by taking on board new meanings, relevances and typifications of those groups which enter

our environment and with which we may start to interact. I have added a further, more relational and structural dimension to this concept that makes the analysis different from Durrschmidt's (Webb 2007). I try and situate these developments or lifeworlds (Schutz 1970a) in particular fields (Bourdieu 1993) which have a set of logics, hierarchies and stocks of knowledge that have to be learnt, adapted, played around with and occasionally subverted for a new entrant into the field to have an effect on it. In this article the more structured field that people engage with is the field of the music industry or the worlds of popular music to emphasize the networked relationship between an industry that has a structure and supply chain and the worlds of musicians and fans or communities that are situated around and in parallel to the music industry. In the case of Nick Cave and the other artists that I am bracketing him with, we can see a type of engagement with the music industry and the field of popular music that becomes a significant part of his practice as an artist. We can also see that the types of relevance, typifications and stocks of knowledge that Cave was mining within this milieu were literary and artistic as well as musical. The way that these elements combined gave Cave and the artists that he associated with a very distinctive character. Before I go on to discuss the music scenes that helped form his seed bed of influences and his development as an artist I will look at the limitations of using genre as a category to situate Cave.

Genre—the restrictions of tight definition

Genre is a way of categorizing and directing audiences to types of music that can be usefully ordered into musical styles. Music retailers have been some of the most important developers of genre classification (Pachet and Cazaly 2000) in their attempts to order shoppers' experience and direct them to similar categories or types of music. These classifications are often based on journalistic accounts and also on subjective accounts of retailers. Record shops were always an innovative creator of genre categories especially in specialist shops where bracketing of types of music was always important for sales. The dance music scene has always been incredibly aware of genre specifics: an example of this is the many variants of 'house' music, for example 'hard house', 'handbag house', 'techno', 'deep house', 'acid house', etc. Each of these sub-genres had their own expectations for the musical form and structure of the piece of music.

There have been academic attempts to analyse genre and the most cited is the work of Franco Fabbri. He defines a musical genre as 'a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially acceptable rules' (Fabbri 2004: 7). He describes music, by quoting the Italian semiologist Stefani, as 'any type of activity performed around any type of event involving sound' (ibid.). He then goes on to present a number of different elements that make up the

formation, description and agreement on what a genre is. These include a given community sharing and agreeing on this definition, types of formal and technical rules that govern the composition of music, semiotic rules, behavioural rules, social and ideological rules, economic and juridical rules and a music community having created codes or a type of codification of the genre. This codification is not always a process that the composers are aware of; it may well be something that the analyst brings to bear on the genre. Keith Negus (1999) provides a critique of Fabbri by suggesting that this definition is rather 'static' and that 'the constraints rather than the possibilities are emphasised' (Negus 1999: 26). Negus tries to get us to think of creativity being much more fluid and dynamic. He discusses the work of Simon Frith on 'genre worlds' which are conceived as places where genres are 'constructed and articulated through a complex interplay of musicians, listeners, and mediating ideologues' (Negus 1999: 29) then made sense of through marketing and industry-led processes. This and the work of Steve Neale (1980) on genre as a sociological concept rather than a formal one feed into Negus's development of the term 'genre culture'. This term stresses the interplay between industry and culture, historically specific conditions and locations and creative processes not as simple binaries conflicting and at odds with each other, for example commerce and creativity, but as a process that is shaped by particular cultural, social and economic developments. The usefulness of this type of analysis is that it gets us to think of all the elements that surround the idea of genre and not just the musicology of the form. It still, though, presents us with a type of classification that leads to the selection of certain musical, aesthetic or social elements that indicate membership of a particular genre world. In the case of an artist like Cave this can be misleading depending on where, historically, someone accesses his career and music.

What I am suggesting here is that the idea of a musical genre is problematic for understanding the way in which an artist like Nick Cave and other artists he has been associated with develop their work and ultimately produce a combination of musical texts that are stuffed full of other types of referents (for example, literary, political, emotional, lifestyle and artistic reference points). That is not to suggest that genre cannot be a useful guideline or benchmark for the description or categorization of a particular musical scene. As we shall see I will refer to four particular 'genres' of popular music that were implicated in the development of Cave's work and will utilize their generic traits, but when referring to Cave and artists like Mark Stewart and the Maffia (previously of the Pop Group), Mark E. Smith's the Fall, Einsturzende Neubauten and Current 93 of all of whom Cave is an undoubted fan, we can see that genre is problematic for these artists as they actively worked against the classifications of genre and produced some incred-

ibly interesting work as a result of that strategy. I suggest that the musical milieu (Webb 2004, 2007) that surrounded Nick Cave and his band in the 1980s was one that was not reliant on musical formal and technical rules to give it the feel of a linked and unified type of musical practice. It was the feeling, emotion, philosophy and outlook of the artists that linked them together in a specific cultural context of a counter cultural antagonism to the social and political climate of the 1980s; one in which neo-liberalism was developing but still in the shadow of a strong conservative morality and where left-wing politics were becoming increasingly archaic and challenged in the face of the reality of the Soviet Union, China and the moral conservatism of the revolutionary left in Britain. As we shall see a small number of authors, journalists and audiences linked a number of groups together in an experimental, transgressive, post-industrial punk milieu. Within their work were a huge range of sonic sensibilities and a lack of respect for genre codes. Their outlook and experimental work unified them. In fact their genre blending marked out their work from others. We can characterize the post-industrial punk milieu not as a genre but as more of a milieu of likeminded people and attitudes characterized by DIY culture and experimentation. This type of experimental musical and cultural practice segues with industrial music and develops a milieu at the edge of normal music and social practice: abject, aberrant and transgressive, willing to push the boundaries and alert us to something akin to Genet's notion of sainthood (i.e. the developing of a sense of brotherhood (or sisterhood) in a community of outcasts: thieves, prostitutes, the homeless, criminals and drug addicts (Sartre 1983)) into glaring and jarring reality through sonic experimentation, ideological play and lifestyle distortion. Artists in this milieu explore these elements to the extreme and try to find a critique of what they see as 'normal' society or a different way of living their own lives. The place where Nick Cave and initially his band the Birthday Party links in with this scene is in its fierce intense noise and its lyrical connection to a literary milieu that provokes connections to those engaging with writers like William Burroughs, J. G. Ballard, Dostoyevsky, Huysmans, Lautremont, De Sade, Crews and Bukowski: writers over the edge of acceptable public morality who have been moved to explore the dark corners of human activity that become a playground of release from daily drudgery. Cave is no stranger to this type of approach to life; as we shall see he has had a long relationship with drugs as a means of escape but also he has described love in the same way. He had this to say about the content of songs on his *Boatman Calls* album:

'Love is a state that I would like to exist in continuously', he says. 'But I know the potential of pain in love. It really is like a drug, lifting you out of the mediocre world and putting you in a state of inspiration and imagination where everything outside is meaningless. The intention of writing this record was to get to the truth of what was going on in these relationships' (Bladet 1995).

Cave's artistic work seems to be always informed by a philosophy of transgression of the 'mediocre', a challenge to himself and life in general.

But before I discuss the Birthday Party and Nick Cave's particular part in this milieu we need to look at the genres and movements in music that Cave and the other artists who are linked to him in this period drew inspiration from.

First port of call: punk rock

The root of all three genres that Cave was mingling with in the early 1980s is punk, that is, punk in its US and UK variants. The section traces the importance of punk, not just as a musical force (Savage 1991; Marcus 1993; Laing 1985; Hebdige 1979; Bennett 2001) but also looks at its ideas and aesthetic practices and situates Cave's work in a network of artists and groupings who were challenging the dominant ideas and musical practices of the music industry in the period of the early 1980s.

Firstly punk was a music movement that inspired and interested most of these artists and was central for Nick Cave in inspiring his development as a musician and his outlook on life. Punk, as Don Letts' film *Punk Attitude* (2005) shows, was a music and cultural development that gestated in America's bohemian and counter-cultural belly, centred on cities like New York and Detroit through bands initially as diverse as the Velvet Underground, New York Dolls, MC5, Patti Smith, Richard Hell and the Voidoids, Iggy Pop and the Stooges, the Ramones and Talking Heads. These bands shared a Do It Yourself sensibility (McKay 1996) in terms of their musical ability and outlook that meant that ideas, feelings and creativity were foregrounded before musicianship or adherence to music industry norms. Through all these artists' work runs a rich seam of what we could call 'punk attitude'. This attitude was personified by antagonism to the moral and political climate of the 1970s, a desire to do something different and creative and a desire to produce a chaotic maelstrom with music, art, image or deed.

When punk took off in the UK the musical element was a mix of the influence of the American groups plus a harder edged UK pub rock sound that was exemplified by bands such as the Stranglers and the 101ers (Joe Strummer's first band). This sound combined with Malcolm McLaren and Vivienne Westwood's art/fashion and Situationist aesthetic at their sex shop on the Kings Road, Chelsea (Marcus 1993) gave the initial London-based punk movement a harder edge and more deviant outsider status. Westwood and McLaren's clothing that mixed images of sex: gay cowboys, gay sex, bondage and sado-masochistic sex with notorious criminals like Myra Hindley and Ian Brady and political figures like Karl Marx, Adolf Hitler and irreverent images of the Queen and Jesus, with slogans such as: 'be unreasonable: demand the impossible' and 'Vive la Revolution' that were seemingly inspired by Situationism, developed a punk aesthetic that

was controversial and provoking. The symbols of twentieth-century politics that littered their clothing also seemed to be a challenge to convention. The clothes contained death's heads, swastikas, hammers and sickles, sig runes and defaced union jacks. British punk in its first phase has been well documented (Savage 1991; Laing 1985; Marcus 1993; Sabin 1999; Home 1995) and as the Sex Pistols imploded and split on their first American tour in 1978 they left a legacy that started to challenge convention and strict pigeonholing. John Lydon (aka Rotten) formed the band Public Image Ltd (PIL), a hybrid of punk, dub reggae, and interesting noises-capes that became part of the beginning of the post-punk era. The circulation of punk records, interviews and articles in magazines and fanzines had alerted Cave and others in the Melbourne alternative music scene of punk's existence. For Nick Cave punk was making sense of his liking for the Stooges and his desire to shock and confront Australian culture. When playing in the band the Boys Next Door he was described thus:

Apart from the music the first thing that you notice is Nick, black hair cut in a very Sid Vicious fashion, green shirt with large polka dots, stovepipe trousers and a highly unsuitable tie... As punk rock had not been widely publicised in the Australian media, dressing in a punk style caused a sensation in the streets... 'I reckon there were thirty people in the scene who knew each other and maybe twenty or thirty who were loosely involved', says Peter Milne. 'We were a bunch of middle class kids trying to shock' (Johnstone 1996: 50).

So punk was one element of the 'stock of knowledge' that Cave mined for his inspiration; another was that which immediately followed it and which Cave's band the Birthday Party were intimately connected with: post-punk.

The framework of inspirational musics of consociates and contemporaries: three moments

Simon Reynolds has attempted to capture the essence of post-punk and does it exceptionally well in his *Rip it Up and Start Again: Post-Punk 1978–1984* (2005). His periodization is significant as 1978 represents the end of the first phase or wave of punk with the departure of the key member of the Sex Pistols, the Clash releasing their second album and then moving into more diverse musical territory, and many new bands appearing who were inspired by punk but were starting to do something musically different. A version of punk that took the political and philosophical side of the ideas of anarchy more seriously than bands like the Sex Pistols developed around the group Crass (see Berger 2006; McKay 1996; Glasper 2006) and affected a whole generation of young Britons. This strand of punk became known as anarcho or hardcore punk and was hugely popular. At the same time, a musically diverse but experimental scene was emerging, driven by an

independent spirit that was imbued in record labels like Mute, 4AD, Rough Trade and Factory. Many smaller labels were also developing at this time and would be ignoring the more commercial aspects of the music industry and looking to develop and promote challenging music. Bands as diverse as the Pop Group, Magazine, Bauhaus, Joy Division, the Gang of Four, the Fall, Killing Joke, Theatre of Hate, Scritti Politti, the Teardrop Explodes and Wire, were combining sounds of previous genres and developing new musical landscapes with an independent attitude and self-belief that was propelling them into the post-punk generation's minds. Reynolds likens this period to the aesthetic and musical landscape of the late 1960s and early 1970s where art rock and some progressive rock provide a rich vein of musical experimentation that referenced art and literature beyond music. Beefheart, Bowie, Roxy Music, Velvet Underground, Soft Machine, Zappa and King Crimson would all be name-checked from within post-punk. This can be clearly seen in bands like the Fall and the Pop Group who were particularly influential for the Birthday Party and Cave is quoted as being incredibly disappointed to find that London wasn't awash with these types of bands when they arrived from Australia in 1980 (Dax and Beck 1999: 33; Hoskyns 1981).

Within the post-punk world many sub-genres emerged and one in particular was important for the story of Nick Cave. What initially was called positive punk (*Vague* fanzine used the term as did the music press: *Sounds*, *NME* and *Melody Maker*) started to emerge around bands like UK Decay, Southern Death Cult, Sex Gang Children, Killing Joke, Theatre of Hate and Dance Society. These bands were characterized by dark subject matter, tribal drumming, an audience that took a more gothic aesthetic in clothing and presentation and an androgynous look. What eventually develops out of it is the gothic scene that we still see today (Hodkinson 2002; Mercer 1997). The Birthday Party did some gigs with Bauhaus and hated the po-faced, Ziggy Stardust impersonations that they felt the band were presenting. They also did gigs with UK Decay, Southern Death Cult, Mass, the Cocteau Twins and the Fall. A track they recorded called 'Release the Bats' had been intended ironically, but became a goth anthem. Post-punk, then, and the sub-genres within it that also developed their own identity after this period, was an important element of inspiration for Nick Cave.

The third genre to inspire these artists in some sense pre-dated punk but became more noticed after 1978, was called industrial. Throbbing Gristle had started life as a performance art collective (Coum Transmissions) and had ended up putting the majority of their energies into music (Ford 1999). Gristle dealt with many different controversial and provocative subject areas and was much more conceptual than punk or post-punk bands were. They dealt with issues such as child murder and paedophilia, fascism and Nazism, sexual transgression and

violence and pushed the barriers in terms of their performances, song titles and record covers. Their music combined extreme noise, found sound, trumpet, distorted bass and weird synth sounds into a riotous cacophony that set the scene for their extreme imagery. With the contribution of groups such as Cabaret Voltaire from Sheffield and later on Whitehouse, industrial became a marginal music subfield that produced much interesting conceptual work and many publications. Throbbing Gristle eventually disbanded and spawned Psychic TV, a self-styled cult that foregrounded discussions of Charles Manson's The Family and William Burroughs' cut-up method and presented a set of symbols that suggested a variant of paganism or a deviant religion. As Psychic TV developed their music and ideas in the early 1980s a number of other acts who would be linked to this genre emerged, groups such as Test Department from Deptford in South London who used found metallic percussion and communist/socialist imagery; Laibach from Slovenia who presented audiences with a confounding mix of Slovenian national symbols, anti-fascist art and fascist aesthetics; Nurse with Wound who developed a post-rock, Krautrock and almost surrealist hybrid with tape loops and found sound; and 23 Skidoo and Clock DVA who mixed funk and world music rhythms with industrial noise, speech samples, trumpets and Tibetan thigh bone trumpets.

Industrial as a subfield of music was very powerful in its reach and effect as it dealt with taboo issues. Many of the artists involved in this area would collaborate with Nick Cave, for example Blixa Bargeld from Einstürzende Neubauten would become a key guitarist for the Bad Seeds; David Tibet from Psychic TV and Current 93 would collaborate with Nick on the album *All the Pretty Little Horses* (1998); Jim Thirwell from Foetus would collaborate with Nick on several projects including the Immaculate Consumptive which also featured Lydia Lunch.

These three music genres played a key role in developing a milieu of musicians, audiences, writers, artists and thinkers that would often interact and blend together. Fanzines and new publishing ventures produced work that circulated amongst this group of people. An interesting example of this trend can be seen in the development of the RE/search books publications. Vicki Vale, a San Franciscan who was excited by the development of punk in the US and the UK, had written and self-published the fanzine *Search and Destroy*. This 'zine', along with *Maximum Rock 'n' Roll*, became the US bible for all developments, trends and opinions on the punk scene. Encouraged by its success, Vale went on to publish books and large format magazines under the name RE/search. These titles included the *Industrial Culture Handbook* (containing interviews with Cabaret Voltaire, SPK, NON and Throbbing Gristle), *Real Conversations* (containing interviews with Jello Biafra, Henry Rollins and Billy Childish), *Modern Primitive* (containing articles about body modification), *Modern Pagans* (containing articles about paganism), and other titles

that concentrated on the work of novelists and thinkers J. G. Ballard, Bryon Gysin and William Burroughs. In the UK the fanzine *Vague* started off as an Adam and the Ants (when they were a punk band) zine but slowly started to include more philosophical discussion and featured articles on industrial culture, Einsturzende Neubauten, Crass, Situationism, the Red Army Faction, the Angry Brigade, Mark Stewart and the Mafia, Lydia Lunch and Psychic TV. This type of literature formed a seed bed for a similar set of ideas to circulate around the audience and musicians who were part of the 1980s counter culture. These trends then were constitutive of a milieu inspired by all three genres, and the Birthday Party and the individuals within it would show the traces of all of these within their work and through the people with whom they collaborated and became associated.

I now outline the evolution of the Birthday Party into Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds and identify some of the moments and expressions of the types of cultural influences that I have been describing in the previous section.

From Birthday Party to Bad Seed; London, Berlin, Oz

When they arrived in the UK, Nick Cave and his Birthday Party had expected to find an enthusiastic audience for their cacophonous, chaotic and deconstructed rock 'n' roll. They had been inspired by the Sex Pistols and the Stooges but also by the hybrid cacophony of Bristol's the Pop Group and Manchester's the Fall. By the time they arrived in London in February 1980, fashion-conscious and music press-influenced London had moved on from punk and bands like the Pop Group to a combination of bands like the Cure, Echo and the Bunnymen, Prefab Sprout, Simple Minds and the beginnings of the New Romantic movement around artists like Visage, Spandau Ballet, Depeche Mode and the Human League. There was, however, an audience that had gone underground and who were combining elements of industrial, goth, post-punk and anarchist punk, tapping into the bands and ideas that were a part of this milieu. These bands were celebrated for their Do It Yourself attitude and their artistic approach which went well beyond the mainstream in terms of sound, structure, artwork, packaging and their performance. When the Birthday Party imploded in 1983 they had been moving backwards and forwards between London, Australia and Berlin. They had become aware of and had met the Berlin bands Einsturzende Neubauten, Malaria and Die Haut in 1982. This eventually led to a number of collaborations and linkages between these groups and had led to the Birthday Party moving to Berlin in 1982. The most fruitful of these relationships for Nick Cave would be with Blixa Bargeld of Neubauten. According to many accounts of their first meeting Cave saw something of himself in Bargeld: a similar drive, arrogance, ego and intensity. In his book of lyrics and writings, *King Ink*, he describes Bargeld as:

the most beautiful man in the world. He stood there in a black leotard and black rubber pants, black rubber boots. Around his neck hung a thoroughly fucked guitar. His skin cleared to his bones, his skull was an utter disaster, scabbed and hacked, and his eyes bulged out of their orbits like a blind man's. And yet, the eyes stared at us as if to herald some divine visitation. Here stood a man on the threshold of greatness; here stood a Napoleon victorious amongst his spoils, a conquering Caesar parading his troops, a Christ akimbo on Calvary (his name was) Blixa Bargeld (quoted in Dax and Beck 1999: 54).

This meeting and their mutual appreciation would lead to Bargeld becoming a member of Nick's post-Birthday Party band the Bad Seeds. Bargeld had played on the last Birthday Party EP *Mutiny*. He had been invited in by Nick and this had been a tipping point for the band's destruction (Johnstone 1996: 139). Tensions had been gathering within the band for some time but Bargeld's inclusion on the final track of the *Mutiny* EP had led to guitarist Rowland S. Howard walking out of the recording studio and the band splitting not long after. The Birthday Party had signed to Daniel Miller's Mute Records after their first British label, 4AD, were running into financial difficulties and said that they couldn't afford to fund the next record. The band had always been interested in Mute and were impressed by Miller who ironically would have signed the band when they first came to the UK, but at that time he had financial difficulties and money tied up with the German electronic band Deutsche Amerikanische Freundschaft (DAF). Mute provided the money to record the final Birthday Party EP and then offered Cave a deal for a solo record. For this record Cave enlisted Blixa Bargeld, Thomas Wydler (from the German band Die Haut) and Jim Thirwell (who had his own solo project called Foetus). They worked for a while and tensions emerged between Nick and Jim Thirwell who then left. Nick brought in bassist Barry Adamson (previously of the band Magazine). The recording sessions produced the basis of an album and eventually with a second guitarist, Hugo Race of a Melbourne-based band Plays with Marionettes, they recorded the whole of the first Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds LP: *From Her to Eternity*.

The LP contained a stripped-down but sonically more precise set of songs and soundscapes than the Birthday Party had produced. The album starts with a version of a Leonard Cohen song 'Avalanche', which sticks close to the original version but delivers the lyric with more venom and emotion. Bargeld's guitar provides a detuned and atonal contrast to the tune-faithful bass. The drums roll like orchestral timpani providing a dark and brooding underbelly for the song to sit on top of. 'Cabin Fever' follows; the track continues the brooding sound of the new Bad Seeds but a sound that provides a cradle for Nick's lyrics to spit and snarl their way around their subject matter; a seemingly spurned ship's captain slowly going crazy with boredom and spite. 'The Well of Misery' is next, a type of call and

response morbid blues on which a simple percussion track situates a blues bass line, the odd note of marimba or glockenspiel and Nick's sorrowful lyric which is responded to by a chorus of Bad Seeds. Finally, as the track dissipates a harmonica compounds the depressive blues motif and sends the song to its conclusion. 'From Her to Eternity' finishes off the first side of what in 1984 was a vinyl album. The track pulses to a simple bass note riff and again provides a perfectly simple but brooding platform for Nick's intense vocal story of a girl living above him and living a similar 'nightmare' to himself. Side two had three tracks making the album seven tracks in total. 'Saint Huck' references Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and the *Odyssey* (Homer's epic Greek poetry) and again is built on a repetitive bass riff that propels the track along and allows Blixa Bargeld to use his discordant, distorted guitar to great effect. 'Wings off Flies' follows and starts with the refrain of 'She loves me, she loves me not' sung like a child's rhyme. Bargeld employs slide guitar and Cave pronounces his misanthropic musings. 'A Box for Black Paul' finishes the album; a piano motif solemnly chimes away as Cave recounts the process of the death of a character 'Black Paul' who ends up resembling a Jesus-like figure of morbid curiosity for an audience who aren't empathetic with his plight.

This album, as a statement of intent for Cave's career to come, keys into the motifs and themes of the milieu that was cohering around artists like Cave. The notion of the outsider, transgressive behaviour, melancholia, occasional misanthropy, an anger that is brooding, snarling and ready to blow into intense rage at any point, an obsession with religious or ritualized belief systems and an isolation that suggests a rejection of everything surrounding the individuals involved. These elements are the things that are important in binding this non-musically genred milieu together. Nick Cave's musical references are diverse: Leonard Cohen, Johnny Cash, Elvis Presley, Iggy Pop and the Stooges, the Pop Group, the Fall, and the blues. His literary references tend to concentrate, at least in this period (1980–1986), on the Old Testament, Americana, William Burroughs, Dostoyevsky, Harry Crews, Charles Bukowski, etc. So the milieu is not necessarily unified in all its reference points but it does share at a base level an aberrant, transgressive, outsider critique of late twentieth-century western life. By this I mean a critique of a lifestyle that revolves around a career, marriage and children, the amassing of personal wealth in house and home and a perceived means-to-ends rationality when it comes to decision-making around things like job choices. The literary references also foreground the conceptual nature of these projects. Nick Cave as a character was similar to many in this milieu; Michael Gira of Swans had a similar outlook and even similar musical references, Genesis P. Orridge shared many similar characteristics, outlooks and attitudes to Cave as did Mark Stewart and Mark E Smith and it was these elements that brought them together.

In the introduction to *Tape Delay* by Charles Neal, a 1987 compendium of artists who were a part of this 80s counter cultural, transgressive milieu, Biba Kopf, better known as Chris Bohn, a writer for various music magazines and now editor of the *Wire* (a monthly, intelligent, music magazine in the UK), suggested that the artists contained within the book (who ranged through Mark Stewart, Nick Cave, David Tibet, Genesis P. Orridge, Matt Johnson, Lydia Lunch, Einsturzende Neubauten, New Order, Mark E. Smith, Sonic Youth, Swans, Mark Almond, Boyd Rice, Laibach, Test Department, Coil, Henry Rollins, Diamanda Galas, Jon Savage and Chris and Cosey) shared a night-time orientation. This was a night-time that was anti-social and anti-state because it avoided the traditional use of early night-time for entertainment and late night-time for bed and recuperation for work the following day. The night for these artists was an all-night exploration of the darker side of existence and creativity. For Kopf the night-time artist was seen as pursuing desires and interests that wore the body down and left the perpetrator of these actions as an antibody to their mediated ideals of decency and beauty. Kopf seems to have been right; Cave spent enough time in Berlin to develop a night-time creative habit with a small band of creative Berliners:

NC: Yeah, sure. There was a group of about 25 people who just spent each night together at one of the clubs there—there were about five clubs you could go to in Berlin and they generally stayed open until 9 o'clock in the morning. They really knew how to live, the Berliners (Miller 1983).

The 1980s was a period for Nick Cave of great creativity but also of drug addiction (to heroin) and a presentation of self as a hyper-sexualized, stick thin, mop haired, morally deficient antibody that confronted those that came across him with his rejection of a 'normal', nine to five lifestyle.

I've had incredibly many destructive periods in my life. I was abusing heroin from the age of 19 until I was 34. In that period of time I wasn't in control with anything at all (Bladet 1995).

For Kopf, Cave and similar artists in this period of the 1980s share an 'inability to accept society's norms, they find themselves in the realm of the taboo—that is the unspeakable. They must invent their own language to name the state that so disturbs them' (Neal 1987: 13). Artists like Cave, Mark Stewart, Coil, Psychic TV, Michael Gira, Current 93 and Einsturzende Neubauten display a type of abjection and through their music, performance and its presentation try to transgress the modern bonds that they feel incarcerate themselves and those around them. This is the glue that ties these musicians together, a glue that is stronger than genre or musical similarity; it seems to be a glue that binds beyond the limits of appearance and youth cult allegiance. This group of artists make a feature of the

musical difference, difference of appearance and a lack of formal rule similarities. What unites them is the dark melancholic or brooding malevolent mood, strong emotion, attempts at transgression and musical blending and experimentation that they all practise. Cave's early life and his fledgling career exhibit tendencies that explain some of these trends within his work and how they tie in with some of these other artists.

In Nick Cave's early life and his development, although he was no loner he felt 'ostracised from everyone around him' (Johnstone 1996: 24); he felt that he was perceived as a corrupting influence on those he was involved with. He wanted to pursue a bohemian artistic lifestyle and had a love for painting, literature and music. At twelve Cave started drinking and formed the grandly titled Triple A Club or Anti Alcoholics Anonymous. This behaviour and several misdemeanours with girls led to him being expelled from his school and his parents sending him to a private boarding school. The boarding school initially alienated Cave and he picked a fight on his first day, but as time went on he got more involved in his studies especially those of art and literature. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* made a huge impression on him; he was attracted to the concept of 'the world being divided up between the ordinary and the extraordinary and that the extraordinary should not have to live under the dictate of the ordinary majority' (Johnstone 1996: 31). When Cave left school and went to Caulfield Technical College to study fine art he started to mix with people who introduced him to music that would eventually filter into his own creative work. Johnny Cash and Hank Williams as well as new bands such as the New York Dolls, the Stooges and the MC5 excited and inspired him and his close group of friends. Lyrical themes of alcoholic action, tales of good and evil, mourning and sorrow, women, murder and redemption sparked the imagination of Cave and tied in with his liking of literature that dealt with similar themes.

Cave left college after developing a style in his art work that had become infantile and adversarial. He had fallen in with a group of people who were wild hedonists, homosexuals, models and alcoholics, spending much of their time in St Kilda, the seedy, red-light district of Melbourne. After he was failed at the end of his second year Cave went out into the community and started to get excited by the new genre of punk rock and in particular a band from Brisbane called the Saints. This inspired Nick and his friends to get a band together that they titled the Boys Next Door. The band created a chaotic, cacophonous sound with Nick's frenetic baritone vocals over the top. They were what people imagined a punk band to be but had a chaotic construction that was magical and slightly different from the punk norm. Nick Cave met Anita Lane, his first real long-term girlfriend during the formative year of the Boys Next Door. Anita and Nick seemed to fall in love

almost immediately; she also had been inspired by the energy and excitement of punk and was also an artist and someone who had an understanding of literature and words. The two of them would eventually write lyrics together and develop a mutual muse-like relationship.

The Boys Next Door got a small record deal with the Australian label Missing Link but eventually decided to move to London, England to improve their career prospects. On arrival they renamed themselves the Birthday Party and tried to make a living in the harsh, recession-hit London that had ditched punk and guitar bands for synth pop and new romantic glamour. After a disastrous first ten months they returned to Australia, regrouped and started recording new material. The basis of the album *Prayers on Fire* was recorded and they moved back to London and eventually earned the rewards their hard work deserved. During their subsequent touring, recording and living in London and then Berlin they started to meet and work with a number of people who shared a similar outlook to themselves but not always a musical expression that was the same: Barry Adamson, formerly of the band Magazine, Blixa Bargeld of Einstürzende Neubauten, Lydia Lunch an American punk who was developing interesting music and lyrical work but who was also writing plays and prose, Kid Congo Powers formerly of the Cramps and the Gun Club, Christophe Dreher and Thomas Wylder of Berlin band Die Haut, and Marc Almond, the vocalist of pop band Soft Cell who performed with Nick in the Immaculate Consumptive (which also included Lydia Lunch and Jim Thirwell aka Clint Ruin or Foetus). Of these relationships the one with Lydia Lunch tells a familiar but insightful story.

Cave and Lunch had met in London as the Birthday Party were becoming an established act and had shared their lyrical obsessions in conversation. Lunch wanted to write plays and noticed that Cave always had his head in a notebook and was always writing. When he told her that he had written some one-act plays she persuaded him to write many more so that they could have fifty one-act plays that could be performed together. They entitled the collection *The Theatre of Revenge* which was modelled to some extent on Antonin Artaud's 'theatre of the Absurd'. Lunch's plays were full of proclamations and provocations about sex and sexuality, often reversing the male-dominated vision of pornography to a vengeful female one and Cave's were full of violence and disgust. Johnstone recounts the tale of the last but one one-act drama, where the abject and transgressive can be seen at play.

The penultimate play of the series, called *The Stoning of Ruby Von Monster* and co-written by Lunch and Cave, succinctly summed up the worldview being espoused. Ruby Von Monster is a deformed hunchback who carries her affliction with dignity but is stoned by a drunken mob who considers her to be a witch.

After the herd have killed her, heavenly angels descend singing songs of praise. Von Monster starts to rise into the air and the crowd who killed her begin to praise her as a saint. Suddenly her ascent is halted and she drops into the darkness offstage. The narrator takes to the stage: 'Did anyone really believe that we would allow anyone in these performances to rise above the muck? Man is allowed to rise...but only in order that he be flung down, even harder, into his eternal lot...the trash. Any fool knows that. Goodnight' (Johnstone 1996: 93).

Cave's relationship with music, art, the theatre, his plays and his film scripts have all continued the tendency that is exhibited here. Although this article is dealing with the period of the 1980s, some of these themes can be found in his novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel* (1989) and his film work, for example *The Proposition* (2005) for which Cave wrote the screenplay and co-composed the soundtrack music. What is important here, though, is the sense that this worldview and his attempts at shocking, disgusting and violently confronting his audience, delving into the underbelly of human existence, being prepared to seek solace in heroin and the world that surrounded it, spending time in the areas of cities that combined the red-light districts, with bohemians, artists, all-night bars, transgressive behaviour, sexual encounters and transient lifestyles, were the themes and key signifiers of this milieu of miscreants. Labels like Mute Records, which released the last Birthday Party single and all of the Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds records and is a significant part of the music industry, albeit a DIY independent part, also provides a home and a point of collectivity for this group of subversive artists.

Mute Records was an important piece of the jigsaw of the post-punk, goth, industrial and intelligent DIY music milieu of the 1980s. Mute was set up in 1978 by Daniel Miller to put out a record he'd created, 'T.V.O.D.'/'Warm Leatherette', a slice of sleazy, haunting electro that presaged a lot of interesting electro records to come later in the next decade. As the label progressed, Miller signed a variety of interesting post-punk, electro, synth pop and experimental/industrial artists like Fad Gadget, Cabaret Voltaire, Throbbing Gristle, Nitzer Ebb, Depeche Mode, Erasure, Laibach, Diamanda Galas, Renegade Soundwave, Mark Stewart and the Mafia and Einstürzende Neubauten. The label epitomized the linkage of diverse musical styles with a set of attitudes, philosophies and presentation that foregrounded heightened passion, intelligent lyrical ability, an art-minded aesthetic and performance as spectacle. There was no unifying musical genre but a milieu of transgressive, artistic and intelligent music makers had cohered around this label. Mute as it developed began to represent an ambience, a certain state of mind that was indicative of artists that were working on it. The diversity was obvious; Nick Cave shared space with electro groups such as Fad Gadget, Nitzer Ebb and pop bands such as Depeche Mode and Erasure but also the industrial genre also made

an appearance with Einstürzende Neubauten and Laibach and Mark Stewart provided a post hip-hop, funk, distorted noisecape stew that further defied genre boundaries. Mute-like labels such as Factory, 4AD, Some Bizarre and Rough Trade provided the industry architecture and finance for these artists to get their music out to a fairly wide audience. These labels also illustrate the main point of this article, that genre is no real indicator of the range of influences and ideas that these artists drew upon and that the milieu around a label like Mute indicated the deeper lines of influence and inspiration that these artists used in their work.

Conclusion

This article is entitled 'infected by the seed of post-industrial punk bohemia' and if we try to characterize the period between 1980 and 1988 we can see how the genres that I described initially—punk, post-punk, gothic and industrial—provided a seed bed of musical references, attitude, aesthetics and presentation that inspired the generation of artists that Nick Cave was a part of. This seed bed was transgressive, it confounded the social norms of the time, it foregrounded conceptual ideas and literary methods and put emotion at the centre of the creative project. Any understanding of Nick Cave as an artist needs to take this period into consideration to fully situate his work and the forces that are implicated within it. These trends illuminate clearly the trajectory of the milieu of which Nick Cave was a part. People access an artist's work at many different historical points in their career. People accessing Cave in his later period for example from 1990's *The Good Son* or 1996's *The Murder Ballads*, may have very different perceptions of the trajectory of his career and the influences that had brought Cave as an artist to the creative place where he is now. It is therefore important to situate the artist in the social, cultural and musical milieu that was so influential during the early years of their work. This article is an attempt to do that with Nick Cave and to situate his work in the 'post-industrial punk bohemia' of 1980s London and to connect it with his past in Melbourne, his later development in Berlin and his constant interaction with the past and present artists of American and British popular music.

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