Introduction
In his lecture *The Secret Life of the Love Song*, Nick Cave explains how his creative impulse comes from the absence of a body – specifically the death of his father: ‘A great gaping hole was blasted out of my world by the unexpected death of my father when I was nineteen years old. The way I learned to fill this hole, this void, was to write ... [Writing allowed me direct access to my imagination, to inspiration and, ultimately, to God.] I found through the use of language, I was writing God into existence. Language became the blanket that I threw over the invisible man, that gave him shape and form. Actualising of God through the medium of the love song remains my prime motivation as an artist.’ (Cave 2007: 6). The physical loss of his father and Cave’s embodied description of God: ‘Language became the blanket that I threw over the invisible man, that gave him shape and form’ point towards the complex relationship between embodiment and creativity, the body and music.

It is instructive to place that statement within the context of Tia DeNora’s sociological analysis of the body and music which begins: ‘At once self-evident and mysterious, biologically “given” yet modifiable, the body is characterised through contradiction. Exploring these contradictions helps to open many deeper questions concerning the relationship between bodies and the multicultural settings of their existence’ (DeNora 2000: 75). Following DeNora’s lead this paper will examine how the approaches of David Brown and Nick Cave to some of the theological and metaphorical contradictions of the body can open up questions about the relationship between Christianity, embodiment and music. In *God & Grace of Body* Brown discusses some theological themes in Cave’s work, including the nature of God, prayer, divine love and religious experience. Separately he considers the nature of embodiment and its impact upon Christian theology but if we bring these two parts together there appears to be a fruitful conversation to be had between Brown’s theological analysis of embodiment and some of Nick Cave’s work. This paper focuses on one example, the title track to Cave’s last album *Dig!!! Lazarus Dig!!!* (released in 2008, the year after *God & Grace of Body* was published). In particular, we shall explore two aspects: (i) embodied encounters with Jesus; (ii) the carnival of the grotesque.
(i) Embodied Encounters with Jesus

In his discussion of the ‘Eucharistic Body’ Brown explores the theological significance of bodies as beautiful, sexual and ugly, which he says are: ‘three key ways of integrating body and mind’. Thus, the beautiful body offers a genuine reflection upon divine grace and beauty as ‘sheer gift’; the sexual body is a metaphor that ‘draws us into new ways of relating to our surroundings, as well as to other people’ particularly when it avoids selfishness; whilst the ugly body ‘can give us a deep affective life that enables our emotions and hearts to play as large a role in our religious life as our intellects’ (Brown 2007: 420). In his detailed exploration of the place that the ‘ugly’ body has within Christianity, Brown examines how embodied images of Jesus’ suffering (Brown 2007: 192) and tears (Brown 2007: 197) were used as a means of involving observers in the events of Jesus’ life. Within this context Brown notes the story-telling skills in Mark’s Gospel as the author draws us into the narrative with such devices as his use of the present tense and participles: ‘Such strategies parallel the resources employed by [visual] artists to the same effect. Our involvement is secured’ (Brown 2007: 196).

Nick Cave is also a great fan of the second evangelist. Not only did he write the introduction for The Gospel According to Mark in Cannongate’s published series of individual books of the Bible, but also Cave has said one of his own novels The Death of Bunny Munro is shaped by the same immediacy of Mark’s Gospel. On the publisher’s website the interviewer and Cave establish this link. The interviewer observes: ‘There is something Christ-like about the survival of Bunny Munro’s son, just as there is in Cormac McCarthy’s The Road (Cave is writing the soundtrack to [the] forthcoming film adaptation). But it was the literary template of Mark’s Gospel that was a direct influence.’ Quoting Cave: ‘Mark just wants to get to the death. It’s done with such urgency.’ For Cave this notion of using artistic means to effect an immediacy with aspects of Jesus’ life clearly extends beyond the second evangelist to other Gospel stories.

In Cave’s own reflections about the song Dig!!! Lazarus Dig!!! he articulates his own ambiguous feelings regarding the story of Jesus raising the physical body of Lazarus from the dead (John 11: 1-44), which is the basis for the track. On his website Cave explains some of the background to the lyrics: ‘Ever since I can remember hearing the Lazarus story, when I was a kid, you know, back in church, I was disturbed and worried by it. Traumatized, actually. We are all, of course, in awe of the greatest of Christ’s miracles – raising a man from the dead – but I couldn’t help but wonder how Lazarus felt about it. As a child it gave me the creeps, to be honest. I’ve taken Lazarus and stuck him in New York City, in order to give the song, a hip, contemporary feel.’ In this track we appear to be taken into the mind of Lazarus and are being asked to imagine what it must feel like to be on the point of being raised from the dead. This embodied artistic encounter with Jesus is highly ambiguous in that at this point Lazarus can be regarded as being on the edge of having and not having a body, and the sense of contradiction extends further into Cave’s use of motifs from the world of carnival.
(ii) Carnival of the Grotesque  
As we turn towards Nick Cave’s use of carnival we should continue to keep in mind David Brown’s discussion about Jesus’ ‘ugly’ body in which he notes: ‘As a religion Christianity sometimes comes across as taking an almost perverted delight in suffering, whether it be of Christ or of his saints’ (Brown 2007: 185). This sense of embracing the extremes of embodied human experience also undergirds the culture of carnival. In his work on ritual Tom F. Driver comments: ‘Often aggression is doubly motivated by love and hostility at once, producing a situation of volatile ambivalence, as can sometimes be experienced during carnival’ (Driver 2006: 155).

That *Dig!!! Lazarus Dig!!!* is an active attempt to draw listeners into a recorded event in Jesus’ life is supported by some further reflections on the song offered in an interview, in which Cave makes a connection with ideas of carnival when he observes that the song ‘reminds me of this painting James Ensor did called *Christ’s Entry Into Brussels* (1889) where Christ is on a donkey entering contemporary Brussels, and it’s a very kind of grotesque overview of humanity. That’s what it feels like to me, and the record needs to be seen as a whole in that way. To me the record’s all about these threads tying together in some way; it becomes a kind of grotesque tapestry of sorts, there’s all this stuff going on, and once the songs have found a logical trajectory they change so you never know what’s going on with them, they’re digressing all over the place so it becomes this carnival of the grotesque. And there’s all the kind of clamour and upbeat music that goes with a carnival.’

![Figure 1: Christ’s Entry Into Brussels (1889) by James Ensor](image)

In John’s Gospel Christ’s triumphant entry in chapter 12 follows on from the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11 and both events are depicted as sources of conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities centred on the symbolic city of Jerusalem. In *Dig!!! Lazarus*
Dig!!! the song is located in the iconic cities of New York and San Francisco and the conflict is between Lazarus and the heightened sensory overload that he experiences.

It is interesting to place Ensor’s painting alongside Domenico Tiepolo’s Carnival Scene or The Minuet (1750) which has been called ‘perhaps the most famous single evocation of the Venice Carnival’ (Morris 2004). Here in the centre of the painting a group of five Domenico-style Punchinelo characters with their tall white hats make their way through the jostling crowd in a picture which mixes festivity and joy with sadness and melancholy. In some ways this summarises Domenico’s work which one art historian has described as: ‘By turns ironic, tragic, foolish, brutal, silly, whimsical, mysterious, dramatic, satirical or earnest, Domenico’s stories are never cynical or depressing. His religious subjects remain vital by virtue of their sincere conviction; his mythologies endearing because of their wistful recreation of an unreal world. His scenes of daily life are occasionally mocking but they remain, for the most part, neutral or lightly comic’ (Gealt 1996: 104). Here is another example of carnival embracing some of the paradoxes of human culture.

**Figure 2: Carnival Scene (1750) by Domenico Tiepolo**

It is this tradition of carnival that Nick Cave is drawing upon to heighten the garish, grotesque and gaudy atmosphere of Dig!!! Lazarus Dig!!! Not only is this use of the ugly and grotesque a well-established part of western artistic tradition, it also has a well-established place in the canon of Cave’s songs. For instance, a sympathetic discussion of Cave’s body of work Robert Cousland has described it as an ‘aesthetic of the grotesque’ (Cousland 2005: 129) with particular reference to ‘its fusion of the sacred and profane’ (Cousland 2005: 141). That characteristic mixing of apparent opposites continues on the track Dig!!! Lazarus Dig!!! and on the album more generally. Cave has acknowledged there are a number of references to dreams and dreamlike experience on this album and has observed: ‘What I fell into through the writing of this record was that the characters seemed to be in a state of inactivity or intense apathy, they were kind of comatose, repeating endlessly the same kind of movement without any effect. They’re completely absent from the event in some way, and that seems to me to echo a genuine malaise in the western world.’ Yet despite these frequent references to ‘out of body’ experiences they almost always remain located within an embodied context.

Some resolution of these ‘out of body’ and embodied experiences arrives in the theme of carnival. As noted earlier Cave himself says: ‘To me the record’s all about these threads tying together in some way; it becomes a kind of grotesque tapestry of sorts, there’s all
this stuff going on, and once the songs have found a logical trajectory they change so you never know what’s going on with them, they’re digressing all over the place so it becomes this carnival of the grotesque. And there’s all the kind of clamour and upbeat music that goes with a carnival.39 The image of carnival is itself a means of holding together tensions and contradictions.

Summary & Conclusion
This paper observes that within Brown’s theological ideas on the body, there is an embrace of opposites. Thus, he argues that within Christianity: “self-imposed suffering was in no way regarded as a denial of the body. On the contrary, it was seen as a means of affirming its central importance. Christ’s body through its suffering had brought new life to others. So the suffering bodies of his followers must have a similar potential” (Brown 2007: 205). I have argued that similar dynamics are in play with the work of Nick Cave, particularly through his attempts to use some songs in the longstanding artistic tradition as a way of enabling people to enter into events of Jesus’ life and his use of carnival motifs to explore some of the extremes of embodied human behaviour, culture and faith.

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References


Morris, Roderick C (2004) ‘Those wacky Tiepolos, father and son’ in the International Herald Tribune 9th October 2004 and online:

Eugene F Roger has observed some of the different ways that the metaphor of Christ’s body functions within Christianity: ‘The body of Christ is at once the body assumed by the second person of the Triune God, and thus God’s body. The body of Christ was also a specifically identifiable, historical human body. The body of Christ is the Church, and the body of Christ is the consecrated bread of the Eucharist. Christ’s body, to sum up, names a place where God locates God’s own self, a place where God has chosen to become vulnerable to human touch and taste and hurt, “God with us.”’ (Rogers 1999: 240)

2 www.harpercollins.ca/author/authorExtra.aspx?authorID=60085663&isbn13=9781554685400&displayType=bookinterview
3 www.harpercollins.ca/author/authorExtra.aspx?authorID=60085663&isbn13=9781554685400&displayType=bookinterview
5 http://drownedinsound.com/in_depth/3011806-carnivals-of-the-grotesque--nick-cave-on-dig-lazarus-dig
6 e.g. Today’s Lesson references ‘Mr Sandman’ – a mythical creature and bringer of dreams; Night of the Lotus Eaters alludes to the classical myth about a people who lived in sedated stupor and We Call Upon the Author mentions American poet John Berryman a writer of dream sequences.
8 A refrain in Today’s Lesson suggests a party atmosphere (‘we’re gonna have a real cool/good time tonight’) and refers directly to embodiment (‘he digs her pretty knees & that she is completely naked underneath all her cloths’); Night of the Lotus Eaters begins with an embodied description of lost consciousness (‘I lie upon the stones and I swoons’) and concludes with a call for embodied action (‘Now hit the streets, Now hit the streets’); and We Call Upon the Author mixes references to embodied experience (‘myxomatoid kids’, ‘he died with tubes up his nose’, ‘they ignite the powder trail straight to my father’s heart’, ‘the holocaust’) in what appears to be a detached stream of conscious from something like a dream, a near death experience or a highly emotional rant.