

QUEER VIBRANT MATTERS: REMARKS ON NICK CAVE'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

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Abstract

Nick Cave, African American performance artist, enlivens and engages the communities involved in his art practice. Cave attends to subaltern subject positions—as they pertain to power dynamics, media, class, consumerism, race, and sexuality in specific environments—through installations and community interventions that examine how racist and homophobic notions are (re)produced and frame Black *others*. In this essay, I explore his 2016-2017 epic community project, *Until*, through the lens of *new materialism* in order to reveal the pedagogical possibilities of including Cave's work in critical race and queer studies art curricula.

Keywords: Nick Cave, new materialism, agential realism, critical race theory, queer studies, performance art, art installations

Nick Cave Until (2016): A New Materialist Contestation of Materialism

Jane Bennet (2010) discusses U.S. materialism as that which “requires buying ever-increasing numbers of products purchased in ever-shorter cycles;” “[a] hyperconsumptiv[ity] that conceals the vitality of matter” (p. 5). Nick Cave's sculptural works, installations, and performances speak with great specificity and material selectivity about consumerist preoccupation with all that glitters. For more than a quarter century, Cave's signature *Soundsuits* have encouraged audiences to attend to both the composite materials constituting each sculptural form, and the sounds produced as these full-body coverings are set into motion. In this essay, I consider the vitality of Cave's works, its materiality and messages that can challenge audiences, arts educators, and students to recognize how they are complicit in reproducing racist and homophobic notions. Cave's mindfully selected and sutured material assemblages are pastiches that can be read as haunted by prior affiliations (e.g., Uncle Tom hitching posts, beaded ball gowns, sock monkey tails, etc.), historic uses, and symbolic purposes metaphorically conjuring a myriad of concepts the artist invites audiences to *tease out*. The highly skilled hand-work committed to each *Soundsuit* and meticulously curated installations honor non-digital technologies that today appear endangered in an age renowned for its pervasive digital advances, and a hastened pace of product obsolescence. Cave's works, by contrast, merges craft and popular culture, fuses fashion with the rarefied worlds of fine arts and folk-art skills, and deploys multiple arts disciplines such as dance; conceptual, applied, and performance art; and installation practices. The epic community interventions Cave has enacted between 2013 and 2017¹ have challenged participants to (re)consider the role(s) they play in constructing subaltern subjectivities, particularly as they pertain to power dynamics, media, class, consumerism, race, and sexuality in specific environments.

¹ Cave's extended arts interventions in recent years include *Here Hear* (2013-2014) in Detroit, Michigan, *Sojourn* (2014) in Denver, Colorado; *As Is* (2015-2016) in Shreveport, Louisiana; and *Until* (2016-17) in New Adams, Massachusetts.

Nick Cave's *Soundsuits*—his community collaborations in Denver, Colorado; Detroit, Michigan; and Shreveport, Louisiana—inform the immersive installation *Until* (2016-2017) at MASS MoCA in New Adams, Massachusetts. Cave's installation *Until* (2016-2017) resoundingly remarked on the pervasiveness of gun violence and senseless murders of young Black men in the United States of America.² I contend the artist, Nick Cave, constructs his agential realist narratives for their pedagogical potentials. According to feminist physics theorist, Karen Barad (2007), agential realism is an “epistemological, ontological, and ethical framework that make[s] explicit the integral nature of [knowledge, being, and ethics] concerns” in a given work (p. 32). Cave's community collaborations developed at installation site calls the realities lived by minoritized populations into question. His interventions and performances animate lines of questioning about whose construct of knowledge deserve considerations (i.e., epistemic inquiry). Participants are challenged to interrogate distributions of power and authority and the tools used to enforce such arrangements (e.g., guns used by police forces, and other forms of social control), which raise ethical concerns. Further, I draw on Barad's “diffractive methodology [that] provides a way of attending to the entanglements in reading important insights and approaches through one another” (Barad, 2007, p. 30). For example, her examinations of the Danish physicist Niels Bohr's (2007) concern with “the nature of words, including questions of the nature of meaning” explore “the conditions for the possibility of intelligibility, and the co-constitution of an excluded domain, a domain of unintelligibility” (pp. 31-32). Barad (2007) builds on Bohr's sense that word and world are inextricably linked (p. 32). Cave practices a diffractive methodology through inextricably linked artifacts, videos, and depictions burdened with painful histories. Orchestrating the collaborative labors of area artists and community residents at each site, Cave's work reverberates with participant experiences and expertise rather than singly reflecting the artist's ego, histories, or any predetermined vision.

² The installation is scheduled to travel to Carriage Works in Sydney, Australia, and subsequently to Crystal Bridges in Bentonville, Arkansas. If these installations are consistent with his earlier *Meet Me at the Center of the World* tour, the installations will likely include changing materials and installation approaches that unfold in distinctive fashion in response to the contexts and circumstances in which the works are situated.

Curator Denise Markonish's (2016) acknowledgements in Cave's exhibition catalog includes the follow remarks, “It took three and a half years ... to assemble *Until*, an extraordinary cadre of people assisted with design, building, material sourcing, fundraising problem solving and more” (p. 38). Cave recalls his earliest conversations with Markonish in which she stipulated, NO SOUNDSUITS, to which he replied “I wanted to put the visitor into the belly of a *Soundsuit*, and with that said *Until* was conceived” (2016, p. 140). Cave, also, names and thanks the many assistants working on the installation, and precisely specifies their labors and the dispositions each brought to the collective endeavor. The *Nick Cave Until* catalog (2016) is not merely a polite recognition of those laboring to produce *Until*, but a publication that calls attention to the import of *Until's* new materiality that speaks to audiences in unexpected ways.

Cave's earlier community-based workshops in Denver, Detroit, and Shreveport involved LGBTQ youth, HIV/AIDS service agencies, and Battered Women's safe house residents. At each site, collaborating artists, mentored by Cave, encouraged and guided participants to share their life-stories and to imaginatively speculate on possible trajectories, which were subsequently recounted in public performances, thus, making visible the values, insights, and voices of the participants. These enactments further reinforced Cave's artistic practice of constructing speculative agential realities as narratives that encourage audiences to interpret multiple meanings.

Cave's community interventions have unfolded internationally and in 48 states in the US. These broad-based demonstrations confirm his dedication to extending access to challenging art experiences in both rural and urban contexts. In each site, Cave introduced diverse populations to his work, and engaged them in art education through dialogue with Cave, local artists, and leaders from museum and community contexts. *Until's* entry into the belly of a *Soundsuit* is consistent with these earlier art practices.

Pedagogical Potentials of Cave's New Materialist Agential Realism

Cave's innovative practices share responsibility for communicating the materialist insights he relays to his clients, professionals, underwriters, and spectators at each venue—practices that art educators can consider enacting within

their own communities and classrooms. The new materialist realities that Cave constructs are those that trace consumerism and attend to meanings connected to the historic objects he re-deploys and repurposes in his work. (See Figure 1.) His are gestures that produce new meanings and challenge new understandings of consumptive practices; and how consumption produces particular race, class, gender, and sexual meanings, which, in turn, define people and their social realities. Students can be encouraged to explore how Cave's materials have agency to counter histories, provoke consumer behavior, and form subjectivities.



Figure 1. Installation view of *Nick Cave Until* (2016) as one enters the prismatic forest of twirling lawn ornaments and metallic cut-outs depicting handguns, ammunition and targets.³

In observing receptions of *Nick Cave Until* during the two opening days of the installation, my ethnographic research approach of participatory observation

³. All Figures are photographs by the author and published with the artist's and author's permission.

affirmed that my submergion in the work was comparably to others' experiences. For example, a middle-aged White male and female couple meandered through a glistening forest of common yard ornaments, and having noticed the metallic cut-outs of hand guns, bullets, and targets interspersed throughout, they looked at each other and commented: "we too are targets in this installation."

An artist quote emblazoned on the first interior wall of the exhibit recounts a narrative I've heard the artist describe before—one explaining how and why Cave works with discarded materials as a symbolic performative refutation of disregard for Black (men's) lives. The artist quote on the wall stated:

Until began with a question Cave asked himself. Is there racism in heaven? Instead of providing a direct answer, Cave offers us an experience. Across this space, visitors traverse a sculptural forest of metallic lawn ornaments punctuated by cut-outs of guns, bullets and targets, a gesture that positions us all as culpable, vulnerable, and potentially under attack. After meandering through the twirling signifiers[,] one arrives at a crystal cloud topped with a garden of found ceramic birds, metal flowers, and black faced lawn jockeys. By removing the lawn jockeys (cast iron figurines and racist remnants) from circulation, Cave transforms them into agents for change, placing beaded nets in their hands as dream catchers. Our journey through it continues to a cliff wall constructed of millions of woven plastic beads, an immersive video, and a metaphoric cleansing in a Mylar waterfall [on an upper level]. (*Nick Cave Until Exhibition Statement, MASS MoCA 2016-2017*) [See Figure 2 of the entry marquee and Figure 3 for the installation facing west.]



Figure 2. MASS MoCA marquee identifying *Nick Cave UNTIL* includes Seminole icons, mobile cut-outs of handguns, and ammunition and targets interspersed with yard ornaments in Building #5.

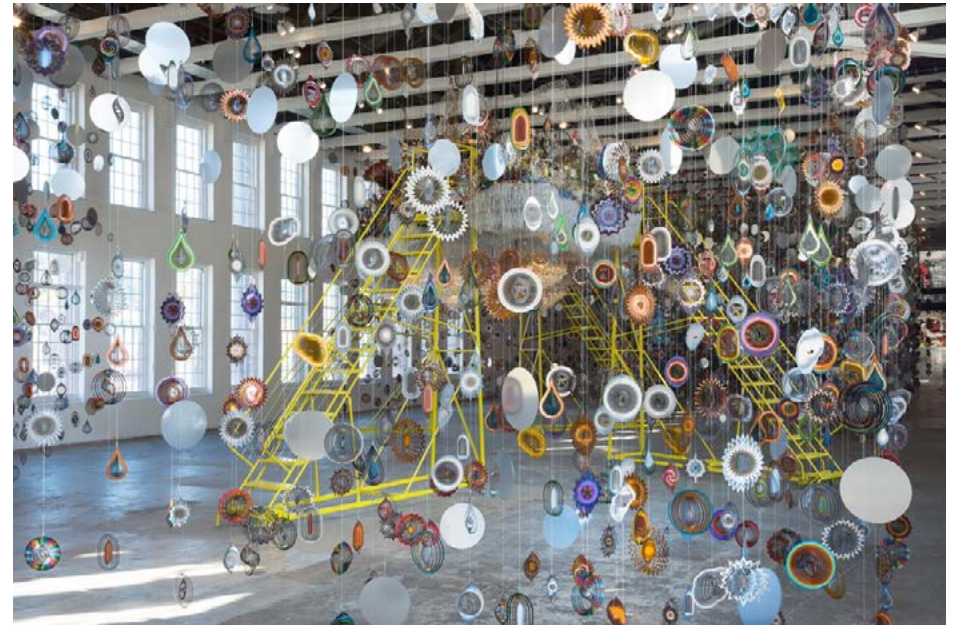


Figure 3. *Nick Cave Until* (2016), an installation viewed facing west with sunlight beaming through the wall of windows in Building #5.

Nick Cave's Until installation at MASS MoCA (2016), and the impact of signs and signifiers he kinesthetically invigorates, dazzle audiences moving through the football-field sized space of Building #5. (See Figure 1.) Motors turn the three-story strands of assembled yard ornaments in which were interspersed metallic cut-outs of bullets, targets, and handgun silhouettes (emblems of gun violence), all swirling from ceiling to floor. This kaleidoscopic, kinetic field appeared to hypnotize audience participants navigating the winding path that Cave had created for them to travel. Attending to potential narrative elements embodied by these thin metallic totems, I could hear viewers commenting that by entering the work they too had become implicated as targets. Such remarks suggest that the installation shifted viewers' subject positions so they could recognize their percarity in Cave's critique of a society infused with mass murder weaponry.

In *Assemblage Theory*, Manuel Delanda (2016) considers "objective articulatory processes that yield a molar whole from a population of molecular

parts” (p. 23). He links the ‘objective stratum’ to a process Deleuze and Guattari refer to as a ‘double articulation’ (Delanda, 2016, p. 23). In Cave’s MASS MoCA assemblage, the double articulation relayed is rendered through material messages that attend to dehumanized subjects produced by bombardments of representational narratives, patterned representations, and unquestioned recirculation of denigrating depictions frequently circulated by broadcast media hyperbole (See Figure 4).

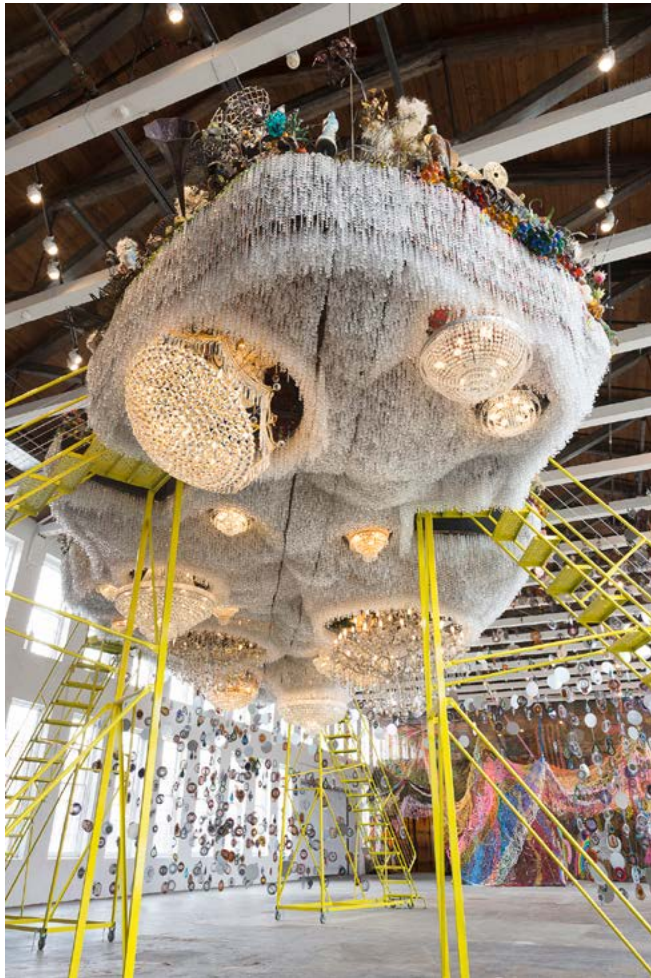


Figure 4. *Nick Cave Until* (2016). Crystalline cloud, viewed from beneath the accumulation of found materials and historic artifacts.

The repetitive productions of matter in U.S. politics today materialize in reawakened crisis discourses framing super-predators and dangerous immigrants; discourses that repeatedly recirculate to support policies that deny immigration rights and human dignity, predominantly to Latinx and Muslim populations seeking entry into the United States. Arts educators can tackle inhumane framings and assist students in developing mindfulness of entanglements of matter and meaning, in beginning by examining how populations framed as ‘others’ are produced. These are lessons that can be readily taught through Nick Cave’s work, and by studying how his extended metaphors and material associations speak to contexts and experiences endured by marginalized populations.

Awakening from Hypnotized States of Inattention

Cave fuses matters of sociopolitical content and entertainment technologies in disconcerting ways, provoking lulled populations stupefied by media oversaturation to awaken from their states of unconsciousness. Cave’s work challenges viewers to think about collective hypnotized states of inattentiveness. In attending to the materials assembled in *Until* and creating the maze of shimmering symbols, viewers are immersed and challenged to detect the disquieting contents of the prismatic twirling forms through which they stroll. Observing audiences from sunrise to sunset, I heard remarks of co-viewers such as: “this work can be seen as a stage for social interaction and contemplation” (2016, anonymous personal communication). For many participants, the messages Cave interweaves into this awe-inspiring immersive space were indeed detected, and, thereby, enabled viewers to develop greater sensitivities to impacts of the surrounding visual culture of news media, social media, entertainment media, and advertisements.

At the far end of *Until*’s whirling field of rainbow lawn ornaments, participants, immersed in the installation, reach a crystalline cloud that can only be fully encountered by climbing one of four, multistoried ladders (see Figures 3, 4 and 5). Embedded in a hovering crystalline cloud are numerous signifiers, from beaded tree stumps and racist kitsch like Black lawn jockeys, to metallic funerary flora, porcelain birds, and other curiosities that the artist assembled into a heteroglossic cacophony. Through this accumulated conceptual heft, Cave’s work haunts those inside *Until*. As remarks exchanged between audience participants

inside of *Until* confirmed, each noticed different details from the accumulated clusters of stuff, materials, and representations. Through dialogical engagements with the installation's iconography, and between viewers, participants enter into Cave's material expressions and begin to contemplate the concerns his works confront.



Figure 5. Author's panoramic snapshot of *Nick Cave Until* (2016). Crystalline cloud content (from a platform atop of one of four yellow ladders seen in Figure 4), objects include found materials, historic artifacts, and beaded sculptures.

Art educators can support students in engaging with Cave's work by challenging students to consider how an artist's materials and assemblages powerfully convey messages. Consider discussing MASS MoCA's *Until* installation, and how it defies viewers to break through habituated consumptive practices to ponder the accumulated weight of stuff and media representations to which one may pay little attention. Consider if inattentiveness to one's daily existence might in-part be produced by bombardments of media coverage, like police shootings of unarmed Black youth, sensational spin concerning terrorist attacks, or tragic drownings of African and Middle-Eastern refugees seeking asylum in Europe. Cave, as an artist, incites audiences to slow down and attend to such coverage and imagine possibilities anew. He simultaneously dazzles audiences with works of enormous scale that concurrently interject disturbing

challenges concerning social consciousness, ecological matters, and power relations. In these ways, he performs—through and with the agency of materials—the merging of ethical concern with epistemological and ontological musings (i.e., agential realism).

***Until* Vibrant Matter Performance**

As a sculptor, artist, and fashion designer, Cave works through materials to which he has listened intently for decades, mindfully mining and recontextualizing them to disclose the insightful tales of the materials. Cave's works contemplate social, ethical, historical, and aesthetic dimensions in ways that reframe populations he portrays, as well as those who observe his installations, and those who witness or don a *Soundsuit*. For both those performing in the suits

and for audiences interpreting the materials' agential realism, Cave's works move viewers toward constructions of speculative realities that can proliferate according to an individual's attentiveness, consciousness, sociopolitical commitments, and imaginations. Such diverging understandings in dialogue with people and materials, may surpass singular notions and evoke indeterminant messages. Through spaces that Cave constructs, viewers are situated in ways that incite contemplation and potential construction of new understandings.

Similar to Barad's (2007) descriptions of Niels Bohr, recognizing links between words and worlds, Cave contemplates productions of subjectivities constructed from historic material substances, and spatial (re)framings about which observers are challenged to consider. Unavoidably, meanings constructed through materials and mediated technologies (see Figure 6) (re)produce social understandings of subaltern Black and queer subjects, with their constructs differing according to each viewer's perspectives. Not dissimilar to social activists' consciousness-raising campaigns, like *Black Lives Matter*, Cave's *Until* addresses material and media framings of Black queer subjectivity produced through proliferations of racist kitsch and homophobic media, and in resistance to such depictions.

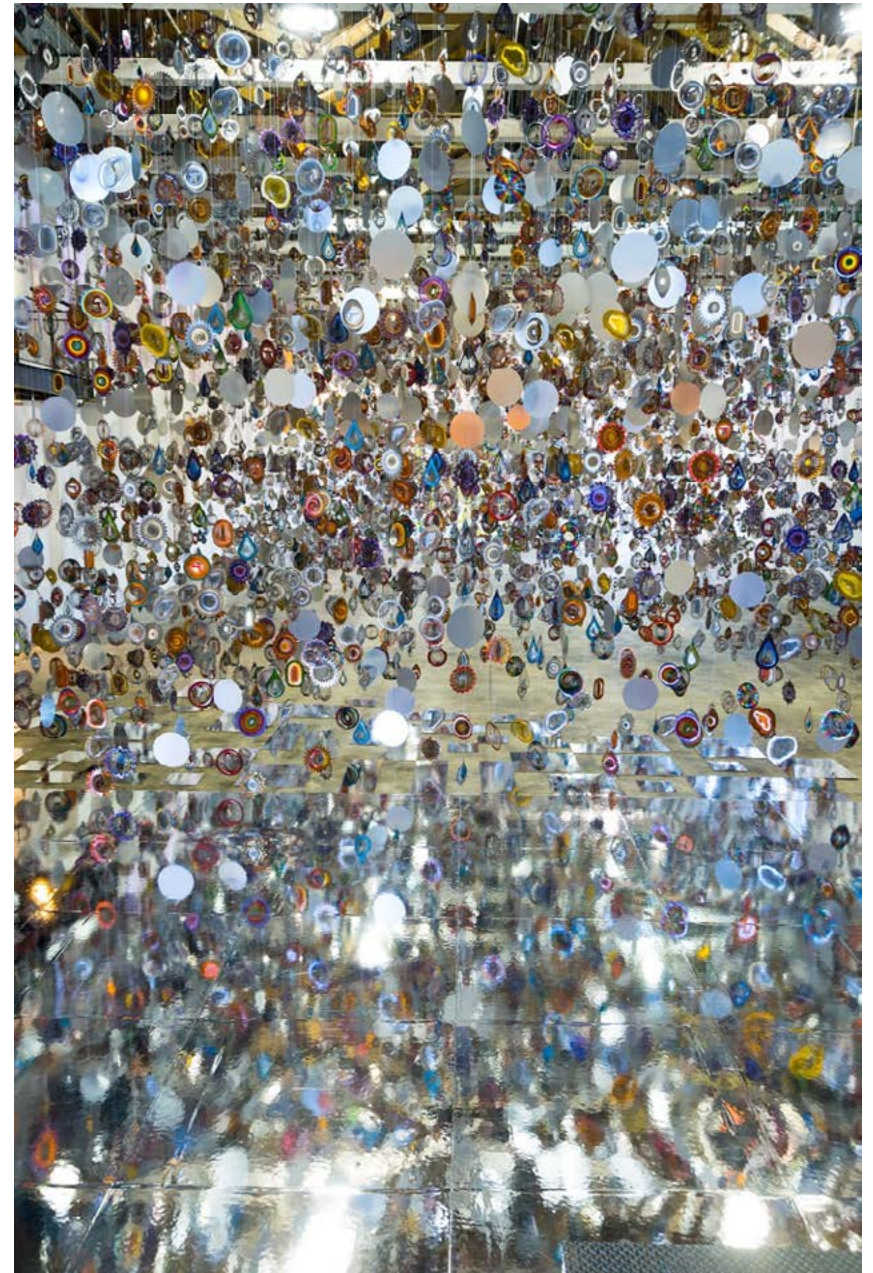


Figure 6. *Nick Cave Until* (2016) installation view at the entrance from ceiling to floor.

Chad Alligood (year), Curator of the Crystal Bridges Museum remarks on how *Nick Cave Until* (un)intelligibility acts as an invitation to closely inspect the work in order to grasp its message.

Nick's work sets the stage for collective compassion and mutual understanding, it also underscores the reality that may inhibit such futures. Among the effusive accumulation of the installation, visitors will encounter embedded images of guns, bullets, and targets—signs of the historical and contemporary violence against African Americans in this country. This experience extends a critique in Nick's work that reaches back to the earliest *Soundsuits*. Like the United States itself, *Until* presents a constantly shifting fields of possibility and promise, shot through with the very real threats that haunt the American experience today. (p. 11)

Recontextualizing discarded artifacts that Cave collects in thrift stores, flea markets, and surplus houses, his mind-boggling assemblages of material substances make messages hidden in plain sight, visible. *Until*'s collections of visual culture create alternate vehicles for social speculations that are extended in call and response form as dancer/choreographers Sandra Burton and Bill T. Jones; singer/songwriter, Solange Knowles; vocalist Brenda Wimberly; and spoken word artist, POETIC X, among others, contribute to the experience of *Until* and to the examination of subjects Cave broaches (Rux, 2016). Cave's installed assemblages, community interventions, and public dialogue are commingled toward reclaiming lost lives and doing so in unexpected ways.

In *Vibrant Matter*, Jane Bennet (2010) considers Spinoza's revelations that "every nonhuman body shares with every human body a conative nature (and thus a 'virtue' appropriate to its material configuration)" (p. 2). Bennet ponders 'thing-power' in ways reminiscent of those Nick Cave takes up—focusing on effects that things yield, including formation of public imaginaries concerning subaltern populations across race, sexualities, and other social subjectivities. Cave's thing power in *Until* has to do with material productions of Black lives and reproductions of racist stereotypes. Installations, such as *Until*, un-naturalize ever-present repetitions in ways enabling that matter's exorcism, accomplished, in part, by repurposing Building #5 as a space for public discourse. Extraordinary

performing women contribute to these discourses and call attention to the ways gender intersect with concerns of race, class, and power. Collaborating women artists include soprano Brenda Wimberly, organist Sereca Henderson, pop star Solange Knowles, and vocalist Helga Davis.

Until Vibrant Matter Installation

In *Until*, Cave's heavenly shimmering crystalline cloud containing a condensation of ephemeral images embedded across its upper reaches opens a space to ponder racial matters historically and in a contemporary context. Cave's speculations and renderings of multiple raced tales challenges viewers to consider life and death concerns. Embedded in the cloud were delicate shaped larger-than-life dandelion blooms, anemone spiked metallic spheres reminiscent of a Spanish inquisitor's *cat o' nine tails*, and porcelain song birds perched. There were sweet beaded and sequined fawns nestled amidst assorted furry creatures, and black-faced jockeys near fallen beaded tree trunks that could be read as either uprooted, or cut down long before it had fully matured. The tree trunks, in particular, appear to be explicit references to the young Black men gunned down in the 21st century by US police forces. The saccharine artifacts accompanying the tree trunks speak to the innocence and formative years during which these male children lost their lives. Students, studying Cave's work, can be encouraged to consider how they too might speak through vibrant materials and multiple mediums that serve as vehicles advancing their fervent explorations, and commitments to social justice and human rights.

Until's Digital Assemblage

Beyond a wall of beaded webbing marking the far end of MASS MoCA's Building #5 (see Figure 7) is an intimate darkened space that Nick Cave fashioned into an immersive environment in which the floor and all walls move in a vortex of animated digital projections. This environment persistently bombards viewers with a moving digital wall-paper that challenges the public imaginary through audio and visual medias, myriad material forms, and enactments described in subsequent paragraphs (see Figure 8). The accumulated impact of the swirling vortex of digital projections moving clockwise across the walls and undulating beneath immersed participants' feet, ultimately produces disorientation. Thankfully, I found a central

column to lean against, and there I could combat a nauseating disequilibrium that set-in after remaining in the room for more than a half-hour.

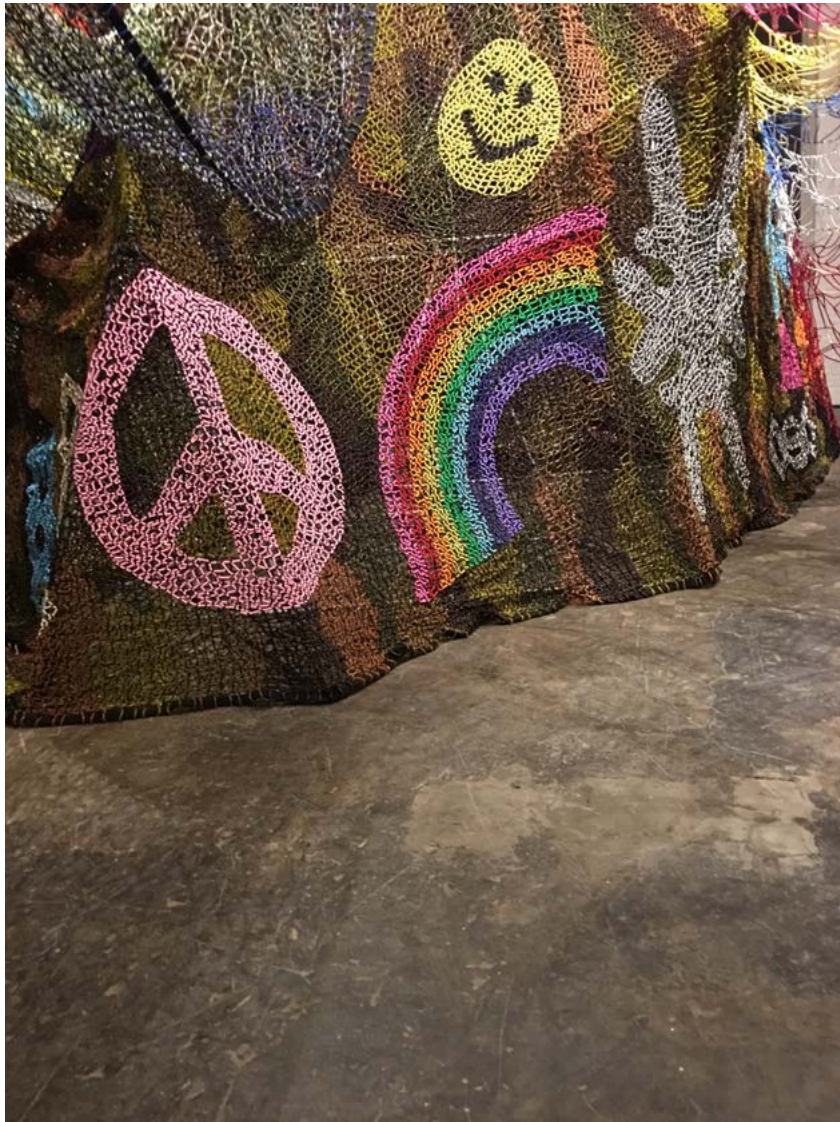


Figure 7. Photograph by the author passing beneath a beaded wall south of the crystalline cloud at the far end of Building #5 before entering the immersive video installation illustrated in Figure 8.



Figure 8. *Nick Cave Until* (2016) immersive video installation (a 28-minute loop) depicts through sounds and images: a Black dancing doll, a cock mask, and swirling *Soundsuit*.

Cave's immersive video projection constructs a defamiliarizing effect not dissimilar to Bertolt Brecht's staged dramatic distantiating devices (see *The Three Penny Opera*, 1994). Cave's accumulations of sound and moving material, in an intimate darkened space, extend his examinations of Black lives in popular culture. The media portrayals, he repetitively presents, disturb subliminal messages that simultaneously can seem harmless as decorative wallpaper, and concurrently confront public perceptions and prejudices. These are the social repetitions that Cave's work calls viewers to interrogate. Art educators can encourage and guide students to engage with Cave's art installations in ways that heighten sensitivity to Cave's cultural sensibilities. Students may need assistance in deeply reading Cave's artworks and contemplating his agential realist concerns as the following discussion of *Until's* immersive video explores.

Cave's Video Iconography

Cave, also, includes video in the *Until* installation. In one image, a disembodied red, *papier maché* rooster's head, its eye sockets filled with Cave's human eyes looks out at viewers gazing at the video (see Figure 8). Repeating patterns of the rooster head appear in varying sizes that precisely mirror features of the repurposed space. Some of the gridded repetitions moving across the room include particularly small patterns that were projected on painted windows, and larger cock grids that moved clockwise at the same pace around the room. Nick described to me that over an intense period of weeks, a collaborator had precisely measured and mapped the space and then digitally entered that data, subsequently subjecting it to algorithms through which Cave's iconography was adapted to create the results in the video. This gesture metaphorically appeared to reaffirm how otherness is produced through fixed repetition and sets rules. Wall projections of cascading cocks (dis/re)appeared, while details of a *Soundsuits* swirled in patterns on the floor as an audio track of that materials' rustling rumbled through the room.

This immersive video space invited viewers to ponder myriad literary references—from narratives concerning 'killing the old red rooster when she comes' (referencing the folk tune, *She'll Be Coming 'Round the Mountain*) to stereotypes concerning Black folk loving to eat fried chicken. One could further speculate the cock image could refer to 'Henny Penny' pronouncing 'the sky is falling; the sky is falling' among other crisis discourses the artist could be inviting viewers to disrupt. Many will associate the rooster (cock) reference to masculinity and the euphemism for penis. Regardless of how one makes meaning of the accumulated video impact, the effect produced vibrant disquiet.

Cave's digital depiction further infers a self-examination of his critique of racist renderings, given his blood-shot eyes gazing at viewers from within the Red Rooster headdress, and knowing viewers would be gazing back at him. This doubled gesture affirms that one is always/already implicated both by the gestures one creates, and in ways those interpreting the work become inscribed by the rendering. In his immersive digital examination, Cave seems to wrestle with racist representations and messages submerged in even children's stories and

songs; those embodied in toys, and disturbingly revealed in the patterned beauty of the spiraling video he creates. Through the multiple embodiments and disturbing repetitions, Cave creates seductive beauty of patterns that unfold through a new materialist gestures that distract viewers from recognizing the biases embedded his works' materials. His digital installation utilize repetitions of representations that are seductive and, at times, aesthetically pleasing and hypnotizing, while riddled with racist implications that must intentionally be tease out if racist indecencies are to be brought to light.

Cave constructs assemblages not dissimilar to those Delanda (2016) theoretically proposes. The artist, however, moves beyond mere sedimentary depictions, to explicate the impacts of accumulated repetitive racist patterns, and by attending to the seductions of aesthetic beauty and the ethically numbing affect they produce. Cave's dancing doll section of the immersive video enacts a decorative blurring of meaning and matter as the twirling arm of a dancing doll turns into mere dots of light swinging too quickly to even begin to detect what's actually going on. Situating the viewer in a swirling vortex of violently percussive staccato and undulating patterns, more than a few spectators commented on the physically nauseating impact the immersive experience produced. I failed to ask them whether nausea was produced by the ceaseless movements of the Black dancing doll's animation, or as a result of the upsetting realization that the relentless racist depictions projected were the product of a seemingly innocent child's toy.

The increasing intensity and speed of patterns unfurling across the duration of this 28-minute video are based in live-action movements reproduced with varying speed and repetitions, as undulating waves of raffia swirl beneath viewer's feet. The accumulated effect; spectators can find no solid ground on which to stand, and may be disoriented by repetitions of visual data they likely had never previously deconstructed. Through the layering of recorded movements that include a raffia rustling *Soundsuit* that sounds like ocean waves beneath one's feet, the incessant clicking of a dancing doll's feet clacking on a hard surface (not to mention mysterious soundscapes accompanying the disembodied red rooster's head), the collective impact is to call-out racist matters produced by accumulated repetitions redoubled, folding again and again until an almost indistinguishable

mash up of matter becomes impossible to readily grasp or decode. The accumulated impact of relentless repetitive (re)productions, over-determinations, and over-exposure risk dullening sensitivities to the means through which such assemblages are fused and become undifferentiated. These repetitions, like the hypnotizing prismatic twirling yard ornaments interspersed with handguns, bullets, and targets twirling across *Until*'s two-story football field length gallery become an audiences' responsibility to deconstruct, and through that process perhaps engage in speculations of the realities Cave's representations might reveal.

While Cave's comforting patterns can feel familiar, they also sustain dangerously embedded and entangled assemblages of affect that may take a semiotician to unpack. Students can encounter this challenge if reminded of how implicit biases (i.e., seemingly undetectable racist notions) are repeatedly recycled and reenacted through visual media becoming so habituated that such racism may appear almost indecipherable. Art educators can bravely lead such detection efforts and support students in developing greater intercultural sensitivities, and consciousness of how subalternity is produced. Educators and students can also consider this as a challenge that feminists confronted in the 20th century, contending personal is always political.

Vibrant Conclusions

Describing my experience of the animated features in the immersive environment is a challenge I elected to seriously pursue in order to better understand how the loop, when repeatedly screened worked on my own body. As with the repetition of signifying forms in the crystal clouds, or the layered guns, bullets, and targets interspersed within the forest of lawn ornaments, I began to confront the ways repetitive messages result in an accumulated impact that materialize and reshape perceptions of those lives on which such matters remark. Teasing out the disturbing messages embedded in an *innocent looking* child's toys—like a black dancing doll, or a bodiless rooster's head—affirm how repeated patterns and gestures construct stubbornly resistant racist depictions that of necessity art educators need to discuss with students in school settings if such patterns are ever to be disrupted.

In Cave's work, the affective end is what counts; if audiences aren't

moved or fail to be awakened to the injustices and denigrations in which they are implicated, then the work wouldn't be successful. Cave's matters are vibrant and recount narratives aimed at disturbing meaning and offering viewers opportunities to be enchanted, amazed, bedazzled, and then shaken loose from drunken stupors of that exhilaration. Reckoning with the artist's address of contemporary social challenges, Cave invites audiences to unpack alluring repetitions of racist representation; work that unpacks why and how repurposed junk and cast-offs can serve as elemental foundations for his work. Art educators and students too can repurpose materials once oppressively used and reconstruct them for differing ends.

The MASS MoCA *Until* installation has been incited to speak to many audiences, from MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology) Media Lab graduate students contemplating 'The Opera of the Future' to Rev. Mark Longhurst's first Congregational Church worshipers' responding to his query,

How will we tell the truth to each other?

How will we move our bodies?

How will we process pain?

How will we pray?

How will we create beauty, especially when so much terror surrounds us?⁴

In Carl Hancock Rex's short essay "Cave of Sound & Silence," a call and response account recognize the many artists who have shared their skills with Cave in *Until*. Scores of others have further contributed to Nick's projects in other cities, and he now has restaged significant acts of earlier works in new contexts; in short recognizing he can extend public dialogue effectively by creating speculative realities through that shared work.⁵ The designer/artist, Bob Faust discusses the billboards he designed for mounting concurrent with *Until*, and the word play it

⁴ Rev. Longhurst's queries precede Brad Wells 'Community Church' October 30, 2016, commentary in *Until* (2016, pp. 188-189).

⁵ The Rux essay in the *Until* (2016) catalog appears on pages 182-185 and includes a joyous group picture of artists performing in and responding to Cave's work, these include both dancer/choreographers Sandra Burton and Bill T. Jones, vocalist Brenda Wimberly, Solange Knowles, Helga Davis, and Sereca Henderson, and artists employing a broad range of technologies and materials, from spoken word artist Poetic X, to sculptor/designer Bjorn Amelan, and more.

embodies, “a double play on the phrase ‘innocent until proven guilty’ or ‘guilty until proven innocent.’”⁶

Beyond binary notions like guilty/innocent, gay/straight, black/white, or pass/fail, arts educators and their students may be better served by studying works like those Cave conceptualizes. His are productions of spectacles call attention to historic consumer fascinations, and how many of those have co-produced legacies of racism, sexism, classism, and ableism; violence leveled against populations imagined as powerless and without voice or presence in their communities, or the powerful worlds of arts, industry, entertainment, and aesthetic inquiry. Working through carefully crafted and imaginatively produced speculative realities about multiple populations, Cave’s work supports arts educators and their students in illustrating how they are empowered to refute denigrating representations and imagine alternative constructs that forego sole authority, authorship, and the comforts of modernist sureties, fixity, and final solutions.

Students and educators must grow confident and productive living in worlds where increasingly they are asked to work through indeterminacy, ambiguity, and unease with diversity; finding new ways of exploring ontologies, ethnographies, epistemologies, and ethical queries by mucking through new materialist examinations such as those that I discussed in this article. Beyond any patrimony/matrimony binary, Cave’s work offers a queer *fratrimoniality* that lovingly embraces discomforts, questioning and thinking through the detritus that unthinking populations have cast aside as abject properties (like the Black lives Nick’s work inspirationally explores). Cave reclaims the composted repetitions of the previously cast-offs. Cave helps participants in his performances and installations to imagine futures anew, and with great joy and rapture.

Cave calls for a queer valuing of the abject—the refuse of consumerist rituals, and the silly, satisfying, and sometimes dangerously devaluing depictions of those rendered powerless—and to re-shape the future by building of new worlds and fashioning brilliant new possibilities. Supporting students in working through unexpected challenges that are likely to beset them, guiding them in meeting

⁶ Bob Faust’s ‘GUILTY / INNOCENT’ billboard sited just outside of North Adams is a colorful two-page spread in the *Until* exhibit catalog that can be found on pages 184-185.

those head-on by repurposing formerly fixed categories, and questioning elitist hierarchies of creative nomenclatures, Cave invites learners to work through time honored craft skills, with a Zen-like concentration on craft that can constitute a journey that empowers students to create new material expressions, and offer transformative imaginings of (in)humane alternative possibilities.

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