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Doctor, I'm Damaged: Medical and Cultural Mythologies of Nicky Hopkins and the Rolling Stones

'We are deeply indebted to Nicky Hopkins and to many friends', ends the list of acknowledgements on the Rolling Stones' 1968 album *Beggars banquet*. Unlike producer Jimmy Miller or engineers 'Glyn Johns, Eddie and Gene', Hopkins' actual contribution—as session pianist on seven of the album's ten tracks—is unspecified. Nor is his position in relation to 'friends' clear. In the playful third verse of side one's 'Jigsaw puzzle', as 'the boys in the band' are introduced, there is no lyrical allusion to the pianist playing on the track. Although vital to the Rolling Stones' studio work of 1966-75, plus their 1971-73 tours, Hopkins never would become a member of the band. Yet while the singer, bassist, drummer and guitar players take turns in the lyrical spotlight in 'Jigsaw puzzle', *instrumentally*, Hopkins' piano part—which, as in many of his performances, varies significantly across successive verses—enters double time and establishes equal prominence to the slide guitar in the mix. A comparable pattern defines Hopkins' legacy in relation to the Stones: he does not always receive the nominal recognition (nor credit) he may have deserved, yet as *Beggars banquet* audibly and gloriously testifies, Nicky Hopkins was there throughout the album's most enduring songs, and was—as Brian Jones receded from the band—indispensable to the Stones in 1968.

Hopkins, who died age 50 on 6 September 1994, sits as an extraordinarily recurrent yet invariably marginal figure in popular music history. He worked as a session pianist on releases by over 300 different artists, including the Who, the Andrew Oldham Orchestra, the Kinks, the Yardbirds, David Bowie, the Beatles, Marianne Faithfull, Steve Miller, Jefferson Airplane (with whom he also performed at Woodstock), Ella Fitzgerald, John Lennon, George Harrison, Harry Nilsson, Ringo Starr, Art Garfunkel, Meat Loaf, and Paul

McCartney. In 1968, Hopkins refused an invitation to join the New Yardbirds (about to rename themselves Led Zeppelin). But that should not automatically be read as a regrettable decision; Hopkins also declined to join the Who in 1971. However, his position within the Rolling Stones' personnel was more complex—and his work for and with the Stones from 1966-75 that most compellingly illustrates Hopkins' versatility at the peak of his (and their) achievements. This essay explores Hopkins' eventful, sometimes contentious relationship with the Rolling Stones as both band and brand. To do this, it is essential to foreground a decidedly marginalised area in rock mythology, which is only gradually being discussed in popular music studies: disability. Hopkins' role as a session musician began, in 1965, because a serious and lifelong gastrointestinal illness prevented him from touring for several years, thus making him less eligible for full-time membership of any band (which in turn left him reliant on work for which, he later pointed out, 'you don't get paid if you're off sick': Dawson, 2011, p.80). The essay therefore considers Hopkins' legacy with the Stones in the context of in disability studies, exploring interaction between impairment (as bodily—including mental—condition, illness or injury) and 'disability' (as social responses, or the lack thereof, to bodily 'difference'). By contrasting the late 1960s lifestyles of Hopkins as an introverted, teetotal musician against the much-publicized chemical adventures of Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and Brian Jones, I wish to illustrate and then question some underlying attitudes to substance-usage as a form of agency celebrated in cultural mythologies, and to 'disability' as a comparatively taboo physical, mental and social experience. However, the relationship between medical and cultural mythologies discussed here is continually *interactive*. And though, at the time of *Beggars banquet*, the 24 year old Hopkins had abstained from alcohol and recreational drugs throughout his life, he would experience serious addictions to both in the 1970s, especially when facing the pressures of

recording and playing live as a briefly well-paid but ultimately obscure solo artist (on top of his prolific session work).

JIGSAW PUZZLE:

Documenting Nicky Hopkins' work

The most fascinating documents of Hopkins' role in the Stones work are also the most empirical: they are, of course, the songs. *Beggars banquet* is pivotal here. Hopkins' piano would later contribute to the chill of 'Gimme shelter' and recur on various *Let it bleed* tracks (1969). While the Stones completed *Sticky fingers* (1971), Hopkins was working as a member of the Quicksilver Messenger Service, although he did play on the album's 'Sway'. *Exile on Main Street* (1972) features several of his most distinguished performances. Hopkins was present through much of the mayhem and decadence that took place at Keith Richards' Nellcôte home in France, and reportedly found the four-month period 'enormously boring' (Dawson, 2011, p.139). Hopkins also appears sporadically on *Goats head soup* (1973), *It's only rock and roll* (1974) and *Black & blue* (1976); unreleased recordings from his last sessions for the Stones also surface on *Emotional rescue* (1980) and *Tattoo you* (1981). However, from *Let it bleed* onwards, these works differ from *Beggars banquet* because most subsequent tracks feature two guitarists (Ry Cooder guested on the 1969 sessions before Mick Taylor was brought in).

Brian Jones features clearly on *Beggars banquet*'s 'No expectations' (slide guitar), 'Street fighting man' (sitar) and 'Stray cat blues' (Mellotron). However, on four more of the ten tracks—'Sympathy for the Devil', 'Parachute woman', 'Jigsaw puzzle' and 'Prodigal son'—Jones' presence (if he was indeed in the studio) is so indistinct as to be listed against question marks in Philippe Margotin and Jean-Michel Guesdon's *The Rolling Stones: all the*

Songs (2016). Jones' performances on *Beggars banquet* are thus far less defining to the album than those of Hopkins.

Filmed in May 1968 and released that November, Jean-Luc Godard's *One plus one* (1968) captures a transitional period not just in the recording of *Beggars banquet*, but in the Rolling Stones' career. Godard's film of the 'Sympathy for the Devil' sessions documents that Jones was in the studio and playing an acoustic guitar, yet even in the earlier takes (he is absent from later ones), he is musically silent (or silenced). The nearest microphones appear to be switched off. Meanwhile, Hopkins—who, after the transformative entry of Rocky Dijon on congas half way through the sessions, moves from organ to his favoured instrument, piano—gains and gains in vitality as 'Sympathy for the Devil' nears completion.

Hopkins is mentioned extensively in Margotin and Guesdon's study, especially in reference to *Beggars banquet*. Yet Margotin and Guesdon's book has a significantly documentary component, listing dates, locations and personnel of sessions for every Stones release, and provides commentary on each. Elsewhere in the relevant publications however, the 'boys in the band' pattern of the 'Jigsaw puzzle' lyric persists: Hopkins is instrumentally prominent on many of the Stones' best-known songs, but remains absent from the attendant narratives. Although Bill Wyman's *Stone alone* (1990) periodically acknowledges Hopkins, Richards' *Life* names him only momentarily as one of the band's 'supersidemen' (Richards, 2010, p.317). The official, mostly photographic *Rolling Stones 50* (2012) contains no images of the 'late, great Nicky Hopkins', though he is mentioned as such in relation to the London 1971 Marquee performance (Jagger et al, 2012, Kindle location 104). However, one intriguing reason suggests itself for Hopkins' disproportionate slightness in the Stones' own narratives compared to his prolific role in their music. When *asked* about this pianist, the Stones and dozens of musicians with whom he worked remember his musicianship with the highest esteem. Yet, almost as frequent as the praise for Hopkins' talents are the recollections

of him as a very ‘quiet’ and ‘shy’ personality ‘who spoke happily when spoken to but rarely volunteered’ (Dawson, 2011, p.140; see also p.74-6, p.85). Meanwhile, the source for these quotations is a superbly informative biography of the musician himself.

Julian Dawson’s *And on piano… Nicky Hopkins* (2011) takes its title from Jagger’s onstage introductions to the additional musicians during the 1971 shows at London’s Marquee and Leeds University (both included on the 2015 deluxe *Sticky fingers*). Dawson is a successful musician, and recorded with Hopkins in 1994. That he was able to interview so many major figures who worked with Hopkins (including Richards, Wyman, Mick Taylor and Andrew Loog Oldham) reflects Dawson’s own credentials, but also the regard so many had for Hopkins as a musician and person. Dawson also interviews members of Hopkins’ family including his ex-wife and his widow. It is a mark of Hopkins’ highly prolific work that Dawson’s chapters are organized according to the artists with whom he played (including three chapters on the Rolling Stones) rather than by chronology. It is as if Hopkins’ life defies neat or linear narrative. Additionally, Dawson—heroically for researchers of Hopkins’ work—compiles a 22-page discography of releases on which the pianist featured.

COMPROMISE, SOLUTION:

Hopkins’ health and the studio

In 1960, aged sixteen, Hopkins began working as a professional musician and toured for three years as keyboardist for Screaming Lord Sutch and the Savages; Cliff Bennett and the Rebel Rousers; and Cyril Davis and his R&B All Stars. The Stones first encountered Hopkins at London’s Marquee Club on 10 January 1963, when they appeared second on the bill to Cyril Davis’s six-piece band, one of their favourite live acts (Wyman, 1990, Kindle location 7193). In May that year, during a British tour as one of Davis’s R&B All Stars, Hopkins was

hospitalised (age nineteen) with severe stomach pains. He underwent extensive gastrointestinal surgery, but no conclusive diagnosis was reached. His mother later stated: 'they took [out] so much of his intestine that he had very little left at all'—leading to 'terrible cramps' in the musician's stomach for the rest of his life (Dawson, 2011 p.55; see also p.56). Following the surgery, Hopkins survived a long coma. He remained in hospital until Christmas 1964.

Medical circumstances thus coincided with a drastic change in the nature of Hopkins' work as a musician. After his 1963-64 hospitalization, he would not tour again until 1968, as a member of the Rod Stewart-fronted Jeff Beck Group. As a studio pianist however, Hopkins swiftly found himself in high demand. He played on the Who's *My generation* album and the Kinks' *Kink kontroversy* (both 1965); he also featured on singles by over two dozen different artists in the same year. However, continuing health problems obliged Hopkins to decline an invitation to join The Kinks' for their hectic autumn 1965 schedule of European dates. The following year, his first (instrumental) album, *The revolutionary piano of Nicky Hopkins*, was released on CBS but failed to chart; he also maintained his prolific session work and, in November 1966, began recording with the Rolling Stones.

Hopkins first worked with the Stones on *Between the buttons* (January 1967). With *Their Satanic Majesties' request* (December 1967), Hopkins becomes a defining feature of the band's sound; his piano is the first and last instrument heard on the album. Hopkins is effectively the Stones' lead instrumentalist on the August 1967 single 'We love you'. John Lennon and Paul McCartney, later to work with Hopkins on the Beatles' 'Revolution' and then as solo artists, met him when they attended the Stones' 19 July session on 'We love you' at Olympia Studios. (Lennon's piano riff on the Beatles' 'Hey bulldog', recorded February 1968, seems to owe to Hopkins' example on the Stones' single). Yet despite Hopkins' musical presence on 'We love you', he is—like another pianist before him, Ian Stewart—kept

absent from the Stones' public image of the time. Hopkins is absent from both versions of Peter Whitehead's promotional film for the single. Instead, Richards is shown at the piano—hands not seen within the shot—as Hopkins' work is heard.

However, it was *Beggars banquet* that most pertinently marked Hopkins being, in Wyman's words, 'brought in to augment the band' (Wyman, 1990, Kindle location 8995). The core change here was Brian Jones' declining presence. Hopkins later commented:

> Jones was in very bad shape […] on *Beggars banquet*, he'd come in with his guitar and half an hour later he'd keel over and be out cold. There's a lot of very prominent piano on that album and that's the reason—essentially [the Stones] were short one guitarist' (Dawson, 2011, p.100).

On the opening 'Sympathy for the Devil', the lyrical logic of Jagger's 'heads is tails' motifs receives musical illustration via the track's arrangement. While Charlie Watts initiates a then-unfamiliar mambo pattern in the Stones' work—bolstered by the conga-playing of guest percussionist Rocky Dijon—the guitar, a hitherto definitive feature of the band's sound, remains almost entirely absent from the mix, until Richards' solo begins (2:51). Instead, for most of 'Sympathy for the Devil', the melody is instrumentally driven by Hopkins' piano—so prominent that it sonically eclipses the bass guitar (played here by Richards, while Wyman handled maracas).

As Godard's *One plus one* juxtaposes the Stones in the studio with scripted scenes featuring actors (and heavy with overtly political dialogue), Jones' presence recedes. The lengthy last scene to feature the Stones—after the final take of 'Sympathy for the Devil'—shows Jagger, Richards, Watts and Wyman jamming on a new instrumental piece in progress. Jones is now absent, but Hopkins remains. Godard shows Hopkins as (literally) a sideman.

Nonetheless, conversing with Jagger, the session pianist appears free from deference towards the singer.

As one of Jones' last and most sensitive performances, with resigned lyrics of time, loss and music itself, 'No expectations' has become synonymous with the late musician, whose steel guitar here marks the closest he comes to a lead part on *Beggars banquet.* Yet before his death, the song was heard differently. Naming 'No expectations' as 'probably' the album's best song, Jann Wenner in August 1968 made no mention of Jones in relation to the track, observing: 'Nicky Hopkins on piano dominates the cut with a Floyd Cramer style' (Wenner, 1968). 'Dominates' is the apt word for much of Hopkins' presence in the arrangements and mixing of *Beggars banquet*, in ways that would rarely be applicable to his later work with the Stones. Often on the 1968 album, Hopkins' playing is second only to the vocal in the mix and, more adventurously than those of the Stones themselves, his parts vary both within and between almost every verse. On the closing 'Salt of the earth', Hopkins is virtually the lead instrumentalist, driving the gospel coda as Jagger and Richards ' vocals fade from the mix and thus the album.

The *Beggars banquet* sessions at Olympia Sound from March to July 1968 started at 7pm and often lasted until dawn (Wenner, 1968). At this time, amid further sessions for other artists, Hopkins was also working during the days as pianist for the Jeff Beck Group, recording the album *Truth* (1968). An undated list in Hopkins' diaries, headed 'Happiness At A Recording Session Is', focuses predominantly on the musical role of the pianist, but also includes the couplet: '* A paper cup of coffee and a wooden spoon/ * A cigarette thrown from the other side of the room' (Dawson, 2011, p.71). In addition to providing extensive research, Dawson's biography reflects on the unusualness of Hopkins' lifestyle in this period, given his role as an extremely busy session musician. Baptized a Christian in 1965 after leaving hospital, Hopkins' use of stimulants extended no further than tea and tobacco. He

lived with his parents until age 25 in 1969, and is not known to have had a sexual relationship before this time.

Dawson points out how, in media conventions that celebrate 'sex, drugs and rock'n'roll', Hopkins' life may seem uncontroversial and 'unsexy' (2011, p.68). However, Dawson continues, Hopkins' musical credentials (and reliability) 'made him the most sought after piano player on the scene' (2011, p.68). Thus, while Hopkins' role as a studio-based musician from 1965-68 was partly a consequence of his illness, the question of the degree to which his condition was actually *disabling* remains—like much in considerations of disability as a social position—debatable. Yet since illness was a recurrent feature of Hopkins' life, and since it is a topic rarely addressed directly in rock culture, such a debate is worth having—particularly when what is known of Hopkins' medical experiences is considered alongside cultural mythologies surrounding the Rolling Stones as both victims (Jones) and survivors (Richards) of recreational drug use, in which, unlike many illnesses, some degree of agency may be involved.

From childhood onwards, Hopkins endured serious, recurrent gastrointestinal illness (as had his father). As an infant, Nicky also suffered serious burns after pulling a teapot onto himself, severely scalding his abdomen. It is indicative of the frequency with which he was hospitalised during childhood that his contraction of polio—an illness also endured by Neil Young, Joni Mitchell and Ian Dury—is summarised only as a vague memory by Hopkins' older sister (Dawson, 2011, p.24; on polio and popular musicians, see McKay, 2013). Hopkins had at least fourteen operations in his life, including surgery on his heart, kidneys and, most extensively, his intestines.

The cause (and name) for the gastro-intestinal condition affecting Hopkins remains a matter of speculation; this will likely remain the case. Such uncertainty is a consequence and reflection of medical knowledge in the age in which he lived and died. Eventually, doctors

diagnosed Hopkins with Crohn's disease, but his sister, his niece and his mother questioned this (Dawson, 2011, p.56). Medical research indicates that (in addition to environmental causal factors) there is a significant hereditary component in Crohn's disease (Liu and Anderson, 2014). Dawson's interviews yield no suggestion that other members of Hopkins' family have been diagnosed with Crohn's. However, since his death (1994), the musician's sister and niece have suggested that his broader symptoms more closely resembled those of a different hereditary condition, with forms of which they themselves were diagnosed: Ehlers-Danlos syndrome (Dawson, 2011, p.56). The name given to a group of disorders affecting connective tissues, Ehlers-Danlos syndrome is associated with 'increased risk of organ rupture, including tearing of the intestine' (U.S. National Library of Medicine, 2018).

With the musician's family, Dawson requested access to his subject's medical records from hospitals where Hopkins was treated (see Dawson, 2011, p.55). Rules of patient confidentiality made this impossible. Dawson's clearly well-intentioned aim was to provide greater insight into Hopkins' life, shaped significantly by illness. Such a gesture from a biographer is nonetheless ethically controversial, even with the co-operation of a person's surviving family members. But it does at least spark a pertinent, highly complex question: to what degree can knowledge or (more often) *theories* of another person's medical ontology enhance our understandings of their experiences? Moreover, how might such insight contribute to knowledge (or theories) regarding the physical or mental conditions possibly involved? In terms of another condition raised in relation to Hopkins by one of Dawson's interviewees—autism—such dilemmas also face the present author. First though, let us consider the relationship between culture and disability.

DOCTOR, PLEASE, SOME MORE OF THESE:

Disability studies on cultural mythologies

Adding insult to injury: this metaphor serves as a microcosm of social models of 'disability', in which this term is distinguished from 'impairment'. While impairment is a condition, illness or injury, *disability* is the process by which society marginalizes those who face impairment. If uncritically accepted, social models risk trivialising the realities of pain and mortality (Shakespeare and Watson, 2002). Thus, scholars emphasise the *interactive* relationship between impairment and disability (Hacking, 1999). Symptoms endured by Hopkins and others illustrate this process. The musician's numerous interviews seldom mentioned his Crohn's-like illness. However, in a newspaper article titled 'Crohn's disease: not a very rock and roll illness', singer Rick Parfitt Jr discussed his own experience with Crohn's, including the pain and social anxiety caused by inflamed bowels and the unpredictable urgency of needing to relieve them, remarking: 'You don't want to discuss it with anyone because the symptoms are so bloody embarrassing' (Hoult, 2011). Parfitt's comment exemplifies the harsh interactions of impairment as a bodily condition made more burdensome by *social* factors.

In popular music studies—unlike literature studies as another area in researching cultural representation—work on disability remains marginal, despite interventions from Alex Lubet (2011) and George McKay (2013). Perhaps this is because, more overtly than literature, popular music celebrates physical distinction: in the voice, in instrumental dexterity, and the spectacle of the (usually young, idealised) body. However, as if in some metamorphosis, or even fearful parody of its own aversion to disability as a human reality, 'rock culture' traditionally reveres another form of physical and mental difference: 'excess', via alcohol and drugs. McKay terms this the 'destructive economy of pop' (2013, p.170). And, to paraphrase Theodor Adorno, a 'scandalous private life' is in effect 'part of the

entertainment' for which we pay artists (1981, p.130-31). Rock 'n' Roll 'circus', indeed. A google search for 'the rolling stones rock 'n' roll excess' delivers 'about 1,570,000 results' (1 March 2018).

Differences between excess and disability respectively involve (to borrow from 'Jigsaw Puzzle') the distinction between the 'outlaw' and the 'outcast'. While excess connotes hedonism, disability suggests suffering. If excess invokes pleasure, disability entails pain. Excess can be a badge of liberation; disability, one of restriction. Excess is a form of agency, while disability conventionally implies a kind of victimhood. But disability and excess are not mutually exclusive; the one may lead to the other. And either—and both—might lead to 'early' death.

In *Illness as metaphor* (1978), Susan Sontag critiques how cancer is more acceptably acknowledged via metaphor than open discussion. Sontag asserts:

> 'illness is *not* a metaphor, and that the most truthful way of regarding illness – and the healthiest way of being ill – is one […] most resistant to, metaphoric thinking' (1978, p.3)

Jagger's lyrics for 'Salt of the earth' exemplify the process Sontag challenges. Recorded in the run-up to 1968's U.S. Election, the song envisions a 'stay-at-home voter' disillusioned with 'strange beauty shows' of 'grey-suited' politicians posing as 'grafters'. This 'parade' of rich men campaigning for votes is dismissed as offering no hope. The difference between one leader and the other is, Jagger's verse concludes, a 'choice of cancer or polio'.

Jagger's metaphors of illness to convey equal corruption between established politicians exemplifies what disability studies terms 'narrative prosthesis': dependence on ideas of impairment (or disability) to make a rhetorical point (Mitchell and Snyder, 2000). In

such processes, the actualities of illness or disability are largely ignored. Yet, to identify narrative prosthesis is not necessarily to make a moral judgement on authors: it is more enlightening to consider what such rhetoric reveals of how illness and disability are talked about—and not talked about—in society and culture more broadly.

As they age, the Rolling Stones have been subjected to periodic media attention concerning many of their own medical situations. Charlie Watts was diagnosed with throat cancer in 2004; Bill Wyman with prostate cancer in 2016; and Ronnie Wood with lung cancer in 2017. The resultant media coverage in each case noticeably employs a habit criticized by Sontag four decades earlier: the use of war metaphors in relation to cancer (1978, p.67-8). *The Guardian* reported that Watts was 'fighting' cancer (Jones, 2004). When Wyman told journalists that his doctors 'think I'm going to get through it alright', *The Mirror* declared: 'Bill Wyman promises he will get through his cancer battle' (Watts, 2016). Sky News described how Wood has 'beat' [sic] cancer—which the news channel equates with (again) a 'battle' (Garrido, 2018). Although such rhetoric can be intended as encouraging, Sontag examines how such metaphors enhance the notion that diseases 'can be cured by will-power' (1978, p.56). Problematically, the same logic implies the worsening of an illness—and death itself—as forms of *self*-defeat (see Sontag, 1978, p.50).

Illness is not a metaphor, but metaphor can nonetheless help us to articulate pain. *Beggars banquet*'s country blues 'Dear doctor' (one of Hopkins' lighter performances on the album) utilizes the familiar metaphor in pop (and poetry) of the heart as the emotional organ. The pain and defeat of the heart in this song are tempered by the singer 'soaking up drink like a sponge'. In that small detail of this ominously comical and (typically for the sixties Stones) misogynistic song, a defining feature of this band's cultural image is apparent: the notion of self-medication as—up to an uncertain point—a form of choice. Self-medication is of course a constituent element of 'rock 'n' roll excess' and, fifty years on from *Beggars banquet*, the

legacy of no band embodies it more literally and extensively than the Rolling Stones—led in this sense by Richards. Yet in 1968, chemical ingestion was taking another Rolling Stone towards the frontiers of ultimate fatality.

At the time of *Beggars Banquet,* it was Brian Jones who most embodied 'excess': his problems were such that he was no longer reliably attending recording sessions. When he mysteriously drowned on 3 July 1969, Jones became the first major rock personality to die aged 27. Five days later, British newspapers made much of the coroner's report that, as *The Daily Mail* put it, Jones 'drowned while he was under the influence of drink and drugs' (Cameron, 1969, p.1).

Impairment, as bodily illness or injury, is inevitable for every one of us. Impairment is the condition of mortality itself. Thus, culture as *entertainment* often serves as distraction from such realities. Paradoxically, the untimely death of a rock musician becomes a matter of narrative fixation. As also with Kurt Cobain, there are more publications concerning Jones's death than there are regarding his music. It is as if mortality becomes easier (even grimly appealing) to talk about when the person's lifestyle—their agency and choices—have contributed to their death. Speculations that both Jones and Cobain may have been murdered present variants on such contemplations of mortality. If they were killed by others, their departures from this world were *unnatural*: another distraction from the mundane likelihood that impairment awaits each one of us in some form or another.

Untimely death is a tenet of classic rock mythology, but also accentuates an older, wider cultural pattern. Sontag reflects on how tuberculosis was sanitized in literature and literary culture as the disease of 'born victims, of sensitive, passive people who are not quite life-loving enough to survive' (Sontag, 1978, p.26). But in a cultural age when the unexpected death of an artist is more often a consequence of 'substance' consumption than airborne infection, dying young has itself become associated with exceptional, even mortal

levels of sensitivity. Such cultural continuity was bolstered by Jagger at the commencement of the Stones 5 July 1969 Hyde Park concert, within 48 hours after Jones's death.

When Jagger read two separate verses from Percy Bysshe Shelley's 'Adonias' (1821) onstage at Hyde Park, Jones became the appropriated subject of this poem to John Keats (who died age 25 from tuberculosis in 1821). Simultaneously, this recital invoked the long-haired, sartorially androgynous Jagger as a figure closer to a poet than a typical musician. In prison in July 1967, Jagger (and Richards) were made synonymous with a line from Alexander Pope—'Who breaks a butterfly on a wheel?' (*The Times*, p.11)—and weeks later, Jagger posed as Oscar Wilde in Whitehead's promotional film for 'We love you' (1967). At Hyde Park, introducing 'something that was written by Shelley and I think it goes with what happened to Brian', Jagger started with verse 39, beginning: 'Peace, peace! he is not dead, he doth not sleep,/ He hath awaken'd from the dream of life'. Shelley's verse as read by Jagger goes on to emphasize:

> *We* decay
> Like corpses in a charnel; fear and grief
> Convulse us and consume us day by day,
> And cold hopes swarm like worms within our living clay.
>
> (Shelley, Kindle location 34406)

We decay: the living, not the dead. Such a notion would of course later express itself in the Who's 'My generation' in 1965 ('Hope I die before I get old') plus the Stones' 'Mother's little helper' in 1966 ('What a drag it is getting old'). However, the remaining Rolling Stones, increasingly, embody *endurance*. Decay, too—certainly—but this has gained its own kind of glamour.

Unlike the fates of Buddy Holly, Eddie Cochrane and Otis Redding before him, Jones's death was publically attributable to intoxication. In 1969, substance abuse had not yet become closely associated with mainstream pop musicians. Indeed, from 1967 until Jones' death, the chemical misdemeanours and attendant drug charges faced by himself, Richards and Jagger endowed the band with an image of *survivors*: hounded, but victorious, outlaws. Jones's death dramatically darkened the Stones' mythology, but in doing so, it helped bestow upon Richards the contrasting aura of an allegedly indestructible individual. Even back in 1976, Charles Shaar Murray noted that the phrase 'elegantly wasted' to describe Richards had become clichéd (Murray, 1991, p.153). Now in his mid-seventies, Richards—both as working musician and widely celebrated cultural personality—embodies the allure of a defiant survivor, and with authority that continues to increase in accordance with his very age.

YOU CAN'T ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT:
Hopkins, the Stones and the Seventies

If his working record is something to go by, 1968 marked improvements in Hopkins' health. As well as maintaining his role as a session musician (playing the Kinks' *Village Green Preservation Society* and the Beatles' 'Revolution'), Hopkins became a formal member of *two* bands: the misleadingly-named Poet and the One Man Band (Albert Lee's six-piece instrumental project) and the Jeff Beck Group. Moreover, with Beck's Rod Stewart-fronted group in 1968, Hopkins began touring again. However, his commitment to the Stones remained; he flew in from the Beck Group's Fillmore West date on 8 December to join the Stones for *Rock and roll circus* three days later.

Illness and recovery may have been factors in the studio-based, mostly UK-based nature of Hopkins' work from 1965-68, but it remains vital to acknowledge and consider his

own agency—and that of others—when discussing his complex professional relationship with the Rolling Stones. Confusion and dispute surround the question of whether he was ever officially asked to become a member of the band. According to his mother, his brother, and his first wife, Dolly (whom he met in 1969), the Stones asked Hopkins to formally join the band more than once, but he declined (see Dawson, 2011, p.135-6). Although Wyman denied this, Richards imprecisely tells Dawson that the idea 'probably was mooted around' and that such an offer to Hopkins 'was close. Obviously it didn't happen and I can't really remember why, but at the same time I know we wouldn't have turned him down' (Dawson, 2011, p.136). In one of his final interviews, Hopkins commented on the matter:

> 'We never really got into details about it. I had discussed it with Mick and Keith and I wanted to be (a member), and it really only got as far as, 'Oh, you want to join up with us Nicky? I s'pose you'll *want* a lot!' (Dawson, 2011, p.136).

A fracture in Hopkins' relationship with the Stones occurred with the Hyde Park concert, which saw the public inauguration of Taylor as a new guitarist in Jones's place—but no pianist. Hopkins, who had moved to San Francisco, turned down the Stones' repeated requests that he join them for the event. Sources suggest that Hopkins later regretted turning down the invitation, believing he had forfeited his chance of full membership of the band (see Dawson, 2011, p.118, 135). The Stones' demands that Hopkins play with them at Hyde Park indicates how valuable a presence they deemed him to be both during and following *Beggars banquet*. We can only wonder how Hopkins (or even Taylor) might have been introduced had the pianist relinquished. On the autumn 1969 American tour, the Stones were accompanied by their faithful original pianist, Ian Stewart. Hopkins therefore missed attention or acknowledgement in Stanley Booth's celebrated live-in chronicle of the band in this period, *The true adventures of the Rolling Stones* (first published 1985). However, it is a mark of the

two pianists' different abilities that, on the 1969 shows preserved on the resulting live album *Get yer ya-ya's out!* (1970), Stewart did not play on the tracks on which Hopkins had featured as a studio musician.

By the mid-1970s, and in contrast with his earlier abstinent lifestyle, Hopkins had developed chronic dependencies on alcohol, cocaine and heroin, as well as Valium and his prescription painkillers. These changes coincided with mounting pressures he faced in balancing session work with recording and touring as a solo artist. He joined the Stones' 1972 tour days after hospital treatment for a collapsed lung and also surgery on his gallbladder; by the tour's end, he had reportedly lost 25 pounds in weight (Dawson, 2011, p.144; Sandford, 2012, p.250). He still proceeded to play on albums by John Lennon, George Harrison, Ringo Starr and Harry Nilsson. Hopkins also released two more (commercially unsuccessful) albums, *The tin man was a dreamer* (1973) and *No more changes* (1975), this time featuring his vocals. However, as he moved closer to the spotlight—or it moved closer to him—Hopkins began experiening serious anxiety before performances, further raising his self-medicating habits. Such troubled aspects of his lifestyle—along, in different ways, with those of Richards and Jones—elicit significant questions concerning the relationships between impairment, disability, and substance abuse.

In popular music mythology, physical illness is usually addressed only as though a side effect of the more alluring notion of excess. Conversely, in disability studies, the matter of substance abuse remains highly sensitive and is addressed less often than one might expect. Addiction to recreational drugs involves degrees—though wildly varying degrees—of agency metamorphosing into *dependency*. Thus, notions of both impairment and disability become complicated here. And, while wealthy rock personalities are an elite minority of people facing drug addictions, they are also some of the most publicly visible. The

association, then, of addiction with privilege (including wealth) is not necessarily helpful to the much vaster numbers of individuals who may be affected.

In 1977, Hopkins was wealthy enough to enter the controversial, Scientology-endorsing Narconon programme for addiction recovery. He credited these organisations with enabling him to become, and stay, sober and free of recreational drugs once again. Thereon however, his employment rate slowed down. Dave Laing's obituary of Hopkins in *The Guardian* observes that in 'determinedly' favouring acoustic piano, demand for his skills waned in the 1980s, as electric piano and especially synthesizers grew dominant (1994, p.30). Laing implies a steadfast position on Hopkins' part, echoing his refusal to appear with the Stones at Hyde Park, and even his decisions not to join the New Yardbirds or the Who. Yet numerous figures who knew the pianist seem to have been exasperated at times by what they viewed in him as an indecisive, passive attitude to professional work (Dawson, 2011, p.154, 177, 192), despite his prolific work-rate and occasional stubbornness.

THE TIN MAN WAS A DREAMER

Hopkins and cultural myths of autism

As fans, we inevitably imagine our own versions of the stars to whom we are drawn. Even the most academic or documentary writings on an artist may still be driven by elements of fan fiction. Like much work in the medical humanities, this essay is a double disability study, albeit asymmetrical. My medical situation is different from Hopkins'. But contrary to clichés that autistic people are somehow uninterested in 'other people', the lives of various individuals—usually, 'outsiders'—present enlightening fascinations to me. Ever since reading Chris Welch's *Independent* newspaper obituary of Hopkins in my school library, this pianist and personality has incited profound intrigue within my imagination. Something to do,

perhaps, with how a man whose demeanour was continually described as 'quiet' in conversational settings could so express and distinguish himself through another medium. It was therefore arresting to see this remark from Mike Kennedy, a guitarist who worked on Hopkins' solo recordings:

> 'Nicky was a lot like 'Rain Man'—almost autistic. Whether it was just easier for him to deal with things that way, I don't know, but he deferred to everyone on all matters and lived in his own very childlike world' (Dawson, 2011, p.191).

To anyone acquainted with works on autism by autistic people—key authors here including Murray (2005), Milton (2012) and Loomes (2017)—the quoted comment is nonsensical. Autism is not some kind of choice that makes life 'easier'. It is *a way of being* (Sinclair, 1993), inseparable from a person's subjectivity and identity. Autism is caused by unidentified genetic factors. What primarily renders it disabling is the inability of societies to accommodate neurological diversity (see McGrath, 2017). Yet Hopkins joins Syd Barrett and Martin Hannett as a musician briefly speculated in biographies to have been autistic.

Unlike Willis on Barrett (2002, p.140, 143) and Sharp on Hannett (2008, p.11), Dawson as Hopkins' biographer does not himself raise the name of autism. Instead, Kennedy's comment is inconspicuously woven in with other accounts of Hopkins' solo work. Yet while such momentary references may seem superficial (autism is a lifelong condition) their occurrences in biography as a cultural form depend on a core feature of how autism is diagnosed: via *narrative*. Psychiatrists assessing whether a person is autistic rely substantially on reports from authority figures (parents, teachers, other medics). A well-researched biography provides detail that could be relevant in such scenarios; and, unless an author seeks to frame a subject's life in psychiatric terms, the accounts may be freer from leading

questions and bias (see McGrath, 2007). However, while details of Hopkins' remarkable musical abilities plus his social eccentricities could be aligned with notions of autism, the condition is diagnosed only if the person's autistic tendencies are deemed to be impairing their wellbeing. Lubet's study *Music, disability & society* (2011) conjectures that 'Blindness may not be an impairment at all when the musician is most intensely engaging in […] making music' (Lubet, Kindle location 530; cf McKay, 2013, p.14). On a similar spectrum of logic, while illness restricted Hopkins' musical opportunities, perhaps only he himself could have reliably commented on whether, or how, autistic traits may have done so.

Laing and Dawson both liken Hopkins to the eponymous character in Woody Allen's 1983 film *Zelig* (2011, p.113; Laing, 1994, p.30). Like Zelig, Hopkins appeared at seminal cultural moments alongside iconic figures. The analogy is misleading, though. Zelig was a something like a human chameleon: an impostor who positioned himself in high places. Hopkins, by contrast, was a uniquely skilled individual who was present at pivotal moments in popular music history. But he was there because more famous others wanted him to be. No recording artists seem to have needed him more often, and more vitally, than the Rolling Stones at the troubled heights of their creativity. *Beggars banquet* is the greatest testimony to this.

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