



**DIALOGUE**

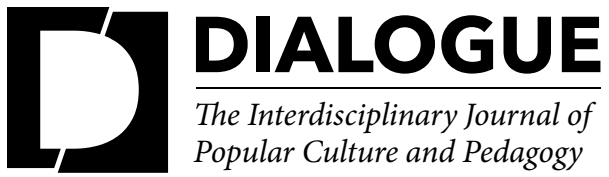
*The Interdisciplinary Journal of  
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*



## Teaching and Learning with the Grateful Dead

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*Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*  
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**DIALOGUE**

*The Interdisciplinary Journal of  
Popular Culture and Pedagogy*



## INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

*Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy* is an open-access, peer-reviewed journal focused on the intersection of popular culture and pedagogy. *Dialogue* is committed to creating and maintaining a scholarly journal accessible to all—meaning that there is no charge for either the author or the reader.

The Journal is interested in contributions offering theoretical, practical, pedagogical, and historical examinations of popular culture and pedagogy, including interdisciplinary discussions and those which examine the connections between American and international cultures. In addition to analyses provided by contributed articles, the Journal also encourages submissions for guest editions, interviews, and reviews of books, films, conferences, music, and technology.

For more information, please visit [www.journaldialogue.org](http://www.journaldialogue.org) or email Dr. Anna CohenMiller, Editor in Chief, at [editors@journaldialogue.org](mailto:editors@journaldialogue.org).



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# Editorial Team

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**Editor in Chief, Founding Editor**

Anna CohenMiller is an innovative pedagogue and methodologist who addresses systemic issues of equity and inclusion in education. She has a long-standing interest in the intersection of popular culture and pedagogy, in particular, related to how young audiences learn informally from media representations. As an international specialist, Dr. CohenMiller has spent the past six years in Kazakhstan leading research and initiatives to facilitate success for all students (e.g., in online learning environments, for mothers in academia, for students with varied learning needs). She received her PhD in *Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching* and MA in *Bicultural-Bilingual Studies* from the University of Texas at San Antonio. Since 2011, she has been involved with SWPACA in developing *Dialogue* and then as an Executive Team member. Dr. CohenMiller is one of the founding faculty of the Graduate School of Education at Nazarbayev University, the Co-Founding Director of The Consortium of Gender Scholars ([www.gen-con.org](http://www.gen-con.org)), Founder of The Motherscholar Project ([www.motherscholar.org](http://www.motherscholar.org)), and founding member of the Higher Ed Learning Collective. Her contributions can regularly be seen in popular outlets such as InsideHigherEd, [Medium.com](https://www.medium.com), as well as in various international research and educational journals. Dr. CohenMiller's recent textbook (with Nettie Boivin) was recently published by Routledge, *Questions in Qualitative Social Justice Research in Multicultural Contexts* (2022).

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# Teaching and Learning with the Grateful Dead

***Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy***  
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## Transformational Learning (and Teaching) in Popular Culture and Pedagogy

When I begin writing editorials, I immerse myself in the articles, going into a mode of research. The articles become data and I start analyzing the data, looking for similarities across the texts. For this special issue, beyond the broad strokes of teaching and learning with the Grateful Dead, I was curious to see what other themes might reveal themselves.

As I read, I found myself immersed in the Grateful Dead, from seeing an overview of the work (Brian Felix) to thinking about the depth of which teaching can lead to pivotal changes (Rebecca Adams) and epiphanies (Ryan Slessinger). I was transfixed by following along with going “on tour” with Adam’s class and the spontaneous pedagogy of Slessinger’s class, then thinking about how it all *plays* in teaching non-traditional students, such as with senior citizens in Robert Trudeau’s work. These articles, along with others about looking back on teaching (Rob Weiner) through pedagogical practice (Natalie Dollar), connecting the Grateful Dead to Nietzsche (Stanley Spector) by looking at the years of the Grateful Dead caucus at SWPACA (Nicholas Meriweather), and a book review (Christopher Coffman), bring the issue together. Across the articles, the authors ask rhetorical questions to engage and help us to consider what is home, how it can evolve over time and place, and how often rigid definitions of us/them, teacher/student can vary and be reinvented.

Through improvising and considering the term “play,” I am reminded of taking capoeira classes - a Brazilian martial art which developed from Africans enslaved in Brazil. The sparring in capoeira is practiced in a circle, and people are invited to come and *play*. The play takes place while music is played live, drums and song. It is an improvised dance, a performance.

I came to read these articles as part of the special double issue of *Dialogue* (9.1-9.2) and felt myself being pulled into the experience of the Grateful Dead and what they could mean for pedagogy, whether as someone considering themselves Deadheads or someone intrigued by teaching and learning. While I have spent almost twenty years teaching along the educational trajectory, I still get intrigued to discover a new way to engage with students and to foster learning. In this issue, it has been a joy to read about novel interactions with students that echo the importance of building trusting relationships and developing encouraging and supportive spaces for empowered learning (see CohenMiller et al., 2021; Freire, 2000).

In *Teaching and Learning with the Dead*, I have learned something new in reading these texts. Improvisation and playing with “conventional” pedagogical directions is one such epiphany. Echoed across these texts is an interplay between teacher and student, and how those roles, so often scripted as one thing or another, could be part of the flexibility and beautiful development of a class. It will interest readers to notice how throughout these works, many authors point to an academic world where freedom was provided (and encouraged) for designing and implementing courses playing with the system of conventional teaching and learning, to great results. When instructors had the agency to develop themselves and their work, their students also began to shine and grow in profound ways.

Such growth and epiphanies relate well to concepts of transformational learning. In adult education, transformational learning was notably articulated by Jack Mezirow (2000) as often resulting from a dramatic

learning experience for students leading to a change in worldview. Later transformational learning was extended by Patricia Cranton (1996) to include teachers. The articles in this issue point to a depth of learning and also teaching, new awareness, and potential transformational learning for both students and instructors. While transformative learning often happens outside formal learning environments (Taylor & Snyder, 2012), the articles show that there are ways to embed and create an environment where students thrive and are supported to grow and learn in ways unprescribed.

It is my pleasure to share our latest double issue, 9.1-9.2 of *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, a special double issue guest edited by Timothy Ray and Juliet DeLong. We would like to also thank the rest of our robust team to make *Dialogue* issues a fruitful endeavor including our authors, peer reviewers, Karina Vado as Managing Editor and Book Review Editor; Miriam Sciala as Managing Editor and Copy Editor; Douglas CohenMiller as Production Editor and Creative Director; Robert Gordyn and Arlyce Menzies as Copy Editors; Joseph Yapp, April Manabat, and Yelizaveta Kamiloa as Reference Editors. In *Teaching and Learning with the Dead*, readers will be immersed in the history and future ways in which the Grateful Dead can be incorporated into pedagogy and the ways these ideas can be applied in other contexts. We hope that you enjoy the flow of understanding and insights gathered in these texts and look forward to hearing from you.

**Anna S. CohenMiller**

Editor in Chief

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## RECOMMENDED REFERENCE

### APA

CohenMiller, A. S. (2022). Transformational learning (and teaching) in popular culture and pedagogy. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 9(1 & 2). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v9-issue-1-and-2/transformational-learning-and-teaching-in-popular-culture-and-pedagogy/>

### MLA

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## **"Bound to Cover Just a Little More Ground": Teaching and Learning with the Grateful Dead**

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Teaching is endemic to the Grateful Dead experience. While most of us have always known of the band from a few songs on the radio, you don't really "know" the Dead from what makes it onto the radio. No, you don't really "know" the Dead until you've been "*properly introduced*" to the Dead and the Grateful Dead subculture.

For many of us, that introduction occurred at some point in the past and may have come by way of several different sources. It may have been that stoner dude you met in high school or college who introduced you to the Dead. It may have been an older brother or sister. It may have been a boyfriend or girlfriend or may simply have been someone you became friends with and discovered you both loved the Dead and they were able to further extend your knowledge of the Dead scene. It may have been a teacher or college professor.

Indeed, even Jerry benefited from having a mentor. For Jerry, it was Wally Hedrick, an art teacher at the California School of Fine Arts (Jackson 23). Jerry's interest in art had actually been spawned a bit earlier by a teacher at Balboa High School in San Francisco (Jackson 22), who referred the young Garcia to CSFA. Even though Garcia never officially became a student at the school, he met Hedrick, who became his mentor artistically at that point in his life and heavily influenced his creative urge.

Given the longevity of the Grateful Dead phenomenon, the introduction could well have been made by one of our parents or an aunt or uncle or even grandparent. Because it's been more than 25 years since Jerry's passing, many fans who "got on the bus" after Jerry's passing have no first-hand knowledge of what it was like seeing Jerry on stage, other than what they've seen and heard in videos and taped performances, so older Deadheads are known to engage in the process of passing down their experiences to younger Deadheads in somewhat of an oral pedagogical tradition.

Regardless of who it was, that introduction was by way of someone we might think of as a mentor or teacher.

For those of us who call ourselves Deadheads, we all have memories of friends and others who served as mentors and teachers in the Grateful Dead experience. No one comes into it alone; we're all led in in some way. "*Introduced*," as it were.

There has always been much to negotiate in learning about the Grateful Dead experience. For one thing, because the Grateful Dead are a countercultural phenomenon existing outside mainstream popular culture and popular music, it takes more of a willful effort on behalf of the listener to seek out their music and to become more involved in the countercultural lifestyle that includes different forms of music, art, fashion, expression, living, enjoying, and continued seeking, discovery, and mindfulness. It's a fairly well-defined subculture that consists not simply of the famous legion of "Deadheads," but many others as well, and has all the rituals and practices and cultural codes that are necessarily entailed in such a cultural movement. The act of assimilating into such a subculture involves learning on multiple levels, not simply on the level of the music and the band. Having a guide, mentor, or teacher along for the journey was and still is part of the undertaking, more often than not.

When meeting another Deadhead, one might ask the other the ways and means by which they became a Deadhead. The act of teaching and the transmission of that culture to another is an important ritual in the Deadhead community; therefore, Deadheads soon brought that teaching into the formal setting of the classroom and into formal pedagogy.

Pedagogical scholarship has been a regular part of the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus sessions at SWPACA for most of the Caucus' 25-year existence. The first pedagogically oriented paper was presented by Kay Alexander in 2001. Titled "Teaching the Dead: Process, Problems, Perspectives," the paper detailed Alexander's experience in and insights on teaching a class on the Dead. The following year included a roundtable discussion on "Teaching with the Grateful Dead." The panel was moderated by Rob Weiner, and panelists were Melinda Belleville, Gary Barnett, Natalie Dollar, and Alan Lehman. That roundtable was followed the next year by a "Teaching the Grateful Dead" roundtable, moderated by Nick Meriwether and consisting of panelists Kay Alexander, Barry Barnes, Gary Barnett, Alan Lehman, and Revell Carr.

While not every Caucus gathering at SWPACA has featured pedagogical presentations, pedagogy has almost always been a topic for discussion during conference sessions, in hallway conversations and also in after-hours discussions. And, as has hopefully already been established, in a sense, every exploration of the Dead is a pedagogical experience.

That said, here is a list of specifically pedagogical papers and sessions that have been presented during the first 25 years of the Caucus at SWPACA:

Table 1: Sources included conference programs available on the SWPACA web site and *Studying the Dead: The Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus — An Informal History*, edited by Nicholas G. Meriwether, Scarecrow Press, 2013.

Year	Author	Title	Panelists
2001	Kay Alexander	"Teaching the Dead: Process, Problems, Perspectives"	
2002	Roundtable	"Teaching with the Grateful Dead"	Rob Weiner (moderator), Melinda Belleville, Gary Burnett, Natalie J. Dollar, Alan R. Lehman
2003	Roundtable	"Teaching the Grateful Dead"	Nicholas G. Meriwether (moderator), Kay Alexander, Barry Barnes, Gary Burnett, Alan R. Lehman, Revell Carr
2007	Barry Barnes	"Teaching with the Grateful Dead"	
2010	Natalie J. Dollar	"A Pedagogical Experiment: Using Cultural Communication Theory to Explore Musical Speech Communities and American Culture"	
2011	Ryan Slesinger	""To Learn and Love and Grow': Improvisation and Inspiration in the Grateful Dead Classroom"	
2012	Ryan Slesinger	""The Forces Tear Lose from the Axis': Teaching the Dead through Geoffrey Sirc and the Pedagogy of the Happening"	
2013	Ryan Slesinger	""Please Help Them to Learn As Well As to See': Ethics, Pedagogy, and Extending the Grateful Dead Classroom."	
2014	Roundtable	"Teaching the Dead"	Bob Trudeau (moderator), Timothy Ray, Natalie Dollar, Ryan Slesinger, Pyra Intihar
2016	Timothy Ray	""Think This Through with Me': Reflections on Teaching a Senior Seminar on the Grateful Dead to English Majors"	
2017	Bob Trudeau	"Teaching the Dead: A Report"	
2018	Susan Peterson	"Teaching the Dead"	
2021	Rebecca Adams	"Collaborative Pedagogy: Teaching (with) the Grateful Dead on Tour, on Campus, and Online" (interdisciplinary roundtable)	



The contributions to this volume bolster that scholarship considerably and we hope will spur even more contributions to the growing scholarship in Dead pedagogy.

## THE ARTICLES

While the articles included in this collection focus primarily on the college classroom, there is a broad range of disciplines addressed in the articles presented here.

- The volume opens with music theorist Brian Felix's perspective on the "why" and "how" of teaching the Dead in his contribution "Teaching (and Studying) the Music of the Grateful Dead." Felix discusses the complexities of teaching about the Dead and the challenge of working all of that into a semester. He shares his thoughts on approaching the complexities from a musical perspective, focusing particularly on the change in keyboard players over the years, since those changes mark different eras of the band.
- Next is sociologist and longtime Dead scholar Rebecca Adams' article "Collaborative Pedagogy: Teaching (with) the Grateful Dead on Tour, on Campus, and Online," in which she discusses a form of cooperative pedagogy she calls "collaborative pedagogy" that she used with her students in three different iterations of courses she taught on the Grateful Dead and how those three approaches reflected on each other pedagogically. She also addresses the pedagogical problems that she encountered in various learning environments.
- Historian, archivist, and curator Nicholas Meriwether follows with his contribution, "The Discourse Communities of the Grateful Dead: The Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association," in which he discusses how the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus annual gathering at SWPACA reflects a learning and discourse community of scholars engaged in a synergistic act of learning and teaching as they bring their diverse disciplinary backgrounds to the conversation each year and in ongoing online discussions throughout the year. In doing so, he reflects on both the benefits and problems of this dynamic.
- Philosopher Stanley Specter's contribution, "Teaching the Grateful Dead with Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*," shifts the conversation from teaching about the Grateful Dead to using the Dead to teach Frederick Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy Out of the Spirit of Music*. Specter discusses how Nietzsche's emphasis on the idea of life affirmation and vitality is similar to the Grateful Dead experience and explores the Apollonian-Dionysian duality that, he argues, is inherent in both. Specter discusses his approach to teaching Nietzsche and the Grateful Dead together and the adjustments he has made, depending on students' familiarity with either subject.
- Communications scholar Natalie Dollar discusses how the Grateful Dead can be used to teach cultural communications and vice versa in her contribution "Teaching Cultural Communication and the Grateful Dead Phenomenon." In her essay, Dollar discusses how the multidisciplinary nature of Grateful Dead studies lends itself well to teaching cultural communication and how students from various disciplines can use their unique perspectives to shed new light on the Grateful Dead phenomenon.
- American literature specialist Ryan Slesinger explores the application of "happening" pedagogy (in the spirit of Charles Deemer's landmark 1967 *College English* essay "English Composition as a Happening" and Geoffrey Sirc's 2002 book *English Composition as a Happening*) in his teaching of the Dead as literature, music, and poetry in his contribution "Teaching the Grateful Dead and Happening Pedagogy." Slesinger describes how he arrived at a pedagogical approach that he calls "spontaneous pedagogy" that depends on a collaborative effort between students and the pedagogue as practitioner and how that aligns with the collaborative nature of a Dead/Deadhead (band/audience) relationship and the spontaneity (and teachable moments) that arise therein.

- Rob Weiner, founding area chair for the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus and a longtime participant in SWPACA, offers a reflective practitioner's view on teaching the Grateful Dead as a popular culture phenomenon and offers a possible model syllabus in his contribution "Teaching the Dead: A Short Personal Remembrance."
- Professor emeritus Robert Trudeau offers a unique perspective on teaching about the Grateful Dead to senior citizens in his contribution "A Touch of Grey: Reflections on Teaching the Dead."
- We wrap up the issue with Christopher Coffman's insightful review of Brent Wood's 2020 monograph *The Tragic Odes of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead*.

In keeping with the pedagogical focus of this special issue, we believe these essays provide an impressive array of pedagogical scholarship in popular culture/counterculture studies.

Putting together an issue such as this involves the efforts of a considerable number of people, and we are deeply indebted to everyone who helped to bring this issue to fruition.

Firstly, we would like to thank the contributors themselves. They not only responded to the call for submissions, they also did so with outstanding examples of scholarship in general and pedagogical scholarship in popular culture more specifically. When considered collectively, we feel these examples of Dead-related scholarship are critically important. We would also like to thank the authors for their patience with the publication process during Covid.

We would like to thank the readers that we worked with along the way. They did not have to give of their time, but they did so because they feel strongly about the field of Grateful Dead studies. They also provided excellent critical feedback to our contributors. Their insights were particularly helpful and extremely thoughtful, and for that, we are grateful. Those readers were Susan Balter-Reitz, Barry Barnes, Jeremy Berg, Geoffrey V. Carter, Justin Everett, Horace "Bud" Fairlamb, Jimmy Guignard, Clayton "Scott" Garthwait, Brent House, Richard Monture, Deirdre Pettipiece, Daniel Pinti, Peter Richardson, and Timothy Rupert.

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We hope you find these contributions as thought-provoking and insightful as we have and hope you will take them into consideration in terms of teaching about the Grateful Dead or using the Dead as a vehicle to teach about a topic in your field, be that in pop culture or any other field. For those of you not familiar with Grateful Dead studies or the band itself, we hope this has been an eye-opener of sorts. One of the underlying goals of Dead studies seems to be not just discussing the field among ourselves, but also initiating the conversation in other disciplines by bringing the Grateful Dead into those conversations. In the Graffian sense, Dead scholars are generally inclined toward "teaching the contact zones"--the areas of disciplinary overlap. We hope these essays inspire you to find "contact zones" between your own field and Dead studies.

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Julie DeLong is an independent scholar who has been both a presenter and an invited speaker at the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus at SWPACA over the years. Her research interests include thematic analysis of the lyrics of the Grateful Dead, memento mori art, and the English sonnet tradition. She has used this research to develop pedagogy for English literature courses in her former career as a community college professor. Her research on how the Deadhead community has historically used the internet for subcultural recruitment has been featured on the official podcast of the Grateful Dead, the Good Ol' Grateful Deadcast. She is the creator and host of the So Many Reads Grateful Dead Book Club, hosted on Zoom monthly.

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## Teaching (and Studying) the Music of the Grateful Dead

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to provide answers to two questions: *why* teach about the music of the Grateful Dead, and *how* to do so? In an effort to engage the former, this article examines the ways that the Grateful Dead provides a rich and unique case study towards a deeper understanding of American popular music. The contributing factors are their distinct brand of eclecticism, career-long commitment to extended musical improvisations, and the depth and durability of their songbook. In order to answer the latter question (*how?*), I provide a framework for approaching the Grateful Dead's voluminous output from a musical perspective, using their shifting personnel (primarily the keyboardists) as markers for understanding the distinct musical attributes of different eras. My hope is that the argument and framework provided here will assist anyone who is looking to teach or study the music of the Grateful Dead.

**Keywords:** Grateful Dead, eclecticism, improvisation, songbook, jazz, rock, ontology



## INTRODUCTION: WHY TEACH (AND STUDY) THE MUSIC OF THE GRATEFUL DEAD?

I have been teaching a class entitled *The Grateful Dead: Music, Counterculture and Society* at the University of North Carolina at Asheville for the better part of a decade now, and while the curriculum touches on many aspects of the Grateful Dead phenomenon, the course is centered around music. This idea—teaching about the band’s music—begs the question: why teach about the music of the Grateful Dead? Cultural and societal factors are certainly important to their legacy, and I agree with the generally accepted notion that the music of the Grateful Dead can serve as a window into an understanding of the 1960s San Francisco counterculture. But my assertion is that there is more than this here, and that the corpus of the Grateful Dead is an art object in and of itself and demands close consideration as an important component of 20th century popular music. While the worthwhileness of this endeavor will be a foregone conclusion to many, there are others who will view the Grateful Dead as aimless, noodling hippies performing for spun-out, indiscriminate audiences. What follows here are *some* of the reasons that support the teaching (and studying) of the music of the Grateful Dead.

This introductory section is divided into three subheadings—eclecticism, improvisation, and original music—all representative of the musical commitments that were core at the band’s inception in 1965 and served as essential components of the Grateful Dead’s approach until Jerry Garcia’s death in 1995. These three musical commitments are central to the band’s unique place in 20th century musical culture and speak directly to the importance of teaching about the Grateful Dead’s music.

### Eclecticism

The Grateful Dead was a rock band, and although “rock” as a genre delineator is nebulous and perpetually porous with regards to other genres, the band’s musical achievements should be viewed in reference to this genre, with which they are typically associated. As such, they were a particularly eclectic rock band, and one that was committed to a type of democratic eclecticism that pulled from many corners of the American musical landscape. This penchant for representing a multiplicity of musical styles under a single umbrella was evident from the group’s inception and a result of the varying musical spheres in which the musicians had operated in their pre-Grateful Dead years. All of the founding members developed a keen interest in music at a young age. In their teens and, in some cases, early twenties, they participated from within their own corners of the Bay Area music scene—overlapping, yet still discrete. Before the Grateful Dead, Jerry Garcia had established roots in the folk and bluegrass scenes and was recognized as an accomplished banjo player. Phil Lesh was a jazz trumpeter and avant-garde classical composer, who worked with other modern classically-oriented composers Luciano Berio and Steve Reich. Ron “Pigpen” McKernan was a versatile blues musician who played gritty harmonica and excelled at improvising lyrics. Bill Kreutzmann was a well-practiced rock and roll drummer who was known for his solid chops, and Bob Weir was an enthusiastic up-and-coming guitarist with an interest in acoustic and electric rock and roll, rhythm and blues, and folk music. The different skills and sensibilities that each player brought from his respective musical “camp” formed the pillars on which the band was built. These same pillars continued to define the band throughout their 30-year tenure.

Other musicians joined the Grateful Dead and played important roles in further expanding the group’s eclecticism throughout their career. Drummer Mickey Hart joined as a second drummer in 1967 and served in that capacity throughout the remainder of the band’s career, save a three-and-a-half year period between February 1971 and October 1974. Hart’s background was as an accomplished rudimental drummer with a particular interest in complex rhythms that were often derived from a variety of African and Asian musics. The Grateful Dead included several keyboardists over the years, including McKernan, Tom Constanten, Keith Godchaux, Brent Mydland, Vince Welnick, and Bruce Hornsby. Although I will expound on the musical contributions of these musicians later in this article, it is important to note that each keyboardist brought his

own unique perspective to the mix. Donna Jean Godchaux, who joined the group as a vocalist from 1972-1979, had the experience of being a studio singer in Muscle Shoals, AL.

The Grateful Dead was a place where these disparate influences could be expressed in a democratic way, both in the studio and in concert. As such, a close listen to the band's music can serve as a gateway to understanding these distinct musical traditions. For example, songwriting partners Robert Hunter and Jerry Garcia were obsessed with and heavily influenced by Harry Smith's *Anthology of American Folk Music*, the 1952 Folkways compilation that proved so influential in the folk revival movement of the early 1960s. The 84 songs on that compilation had a profound effect on Garcia and Hunter's songwriting sensibilities, and the pedagogical benefits here are twofold: students that discover the *Anthology* through the Grateful Dead can firstly use it as a key to understanding Garcia and Hunter's songwriting approach, and, secondly, as a window into America's musical past.

### Improvisation

The Grateful Dead's interest in and commitment to improvisation was a product of their collective influences. One will note that many of the genres mentioned above—jazz, bluegrass, blues, various African and Asian musics—contain substantial improvisational components. Their musical and philosophical approach to improvisation was developed experientially through their participation as the house band during the Acid Tests, which Garcia described as “one of the truly democratic art forms of this century” (qtd. in *Classic Albums* 11:22-11:27). The Acid Tests were, after all, communal efforts—the band wasn't “performing” in the conventional sense. Lesh noted that the Acid Tests were “the only time our music has had a real sense of proportion in an event” (qtd. in Gans 206). Garcia elaborated on their approach: “When we were playing, we were playing. When we weren't, we'd be doing other stuff. There were no sets; sometimes we'd get up and play for two hours, three hours. Sometimes we'd play for ten minutes and then freak out and split. We'd just do it however it would happen. It wasn't a *gig*—it was the Acid Test, where anything was okay” (qtd. in Jackson 92). Indeed, the entire ethos of the Acid Tests, emanating from Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, was based in the improvisational tradition passed down by Beat Generation writers, most particularly the work of Jack Kerouac and the presence of Neal Cassady, the human connection between the Beats, Pranksters, and Grateful Dead.

The Grateful Dead is known for two broad types of improvisation, one where a soloist plays lines over the chord changes of a particular song, and another where there is an extended improvisation within a relatively static tonal environment, usually one or two chords (Malvinni 169). It is this second type of improvisation that is perhaps most unique to the Grateful Dead, at least in the realm of rock music. Jazz, John Coltrane's in particular, was an important reference point for the development of their improvisational approach. Lesh, the most experienced of the group members in the area of jazz, served as the Coltrane apostle for the band at the outset. The bassist recalls, “In pursuit of this ideal, I urged the other band members to listen closely to the music of John Coltrane, especially his classic quartet, in which the band would take fairly simple structures (the show tune “My Favorite Things,” for example) and extend them far beyond their original length with fantastical variations, frequently based on only one chord” (Lesh 59). In keeping with their bent towards eclecticism, their inspirational models for improvisation extended beyond a single influence—the music of Ornette Coleman and Ravi Shankar (whom they saw at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967) also inspired the group (Watrous 42). The music of Miles Davis was also particularly influential, and the band was both honored and intimidated to have Davis *open* for them in April of 1970 at the Fillmore West. Davis' group was performing electric music in the style of *Bitches Brew* at the time, and it was a synergistic experience for all involved: the Grateful Dead were able to perform on the same bill with one of the musicians they most admired, and Davis was able to build his San Francisco fanbase and “hit it off” with the band, particularly Garcia (Davis and Troupe 301-302, McNally 365).

If the sheer fact that the Grateful Dead incorporated extended improvisations in a rock context was not necessarily unique, the resulting sound was. Any improvisational music is an expression of the individual personalities and contributions of the musicians involved. Given the Grateful Dead's commitment to democratic ideals, their approach to improvisation was governed by a collectivism that went beyond a conventional soloist-with-backing-group model. From the early stages, the band was committed to learning to improvise together, as a unit, not as a group of free-lancers developing their own individual skills. Lesh reflected, "we all learned how to play together, and that's why we play well together" (qtd. in Gans 109). Furthermore, the group worked tirelessly to establish a connectedness. Lesh noted that, "For more than two months we played together every day, and I can't exaggerate the importance of this experience. The unique organicity of our music reflects the fact that each of us consciously personalized his playing: to fit with what others were playing and to fit with who each man was as an individual, allowing us to meld our consciousnesses together in the unity of a group mind" (Lesh 56). This concept of the "group mind" was something the band explicitly articulated and referred to as "bleshing," a term borrowed from Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*, that describes an intense interconnectedness, a cross between "blend" and "mesh." In describing this concept as related to the Grateful Dead, Lesh referred to himself as a "finger on a hand" (qtd. in *Classic Albums* 14:10-14:25).

The collective and democratic nature of their improvisational development gave the musicians freedom to explore non-traditional roles for their instruments within the group context. As such, the Grateful Dead developed a type of collective improvisation that was inspired by jazz but unique in the genre of rock. Lesh, for example, did not play the role of a traditional bassist. Rather, he was free to play an exploratory type of melodic counterpoint, frequently intertwining with other instruments and abdicating the bottom end. It was this approach, where multiple instruments were essentially "soloing" at the same time, that led David Crosby to say that the Grateful Dead's music was akin to "electronic Dixieland" (Paumgarten). Overall, this democratic approach led each member of the band to develop a distinct musical voice.

It is because of their commitment to the improvisational ethos, the different-ness of every song performance and every concert, that the Grateful Dead were worth taping, following around, and now worth studying. This commitment to constant change permeated their concerts and led to wide variation in their setlists on a nightly basis. Songs were reordered, might be played often or not at all, and connected to other songs via improvisatory passages. This variety led fans to keep track of the performance details in a fashion similar to those who obsessively pore over baseball statistics. This aesthetic for a concert experience, which was defined by the Grateful Dead, gave birth to the "jamband" movement, one where touring is the essential component, and every show is a markedly different experience through a relentless commitment to improvisation. Through the now easily accessible trove of Grateful Dead recordings that are available online, one can get a picture of exactly *how* the band developed over the course of days, months, or years. Students can thus utilize these recordings to understand how a working band can develop from night to night. As such, in today's musical culture, where the importance of live performance has further *increased* due largely to the overall *decrease* in physical media sales, studying the Grateful Dead's performance practice can be foundational in understanding our contemporary musical milieu.

### Original Music

The Grateful Dead's original songs, of which there are over 100, have become an integral part of the fabric of American popular music, as evidenced by the sheer amount of Grateful Dead cover bands in existence. On the compilation *Day of the Dead* (2016), over fifty bands paid tribute to the Dead, reimagining their songs in ways that are often quite different from the original versions. This compilation is striking for the lack of jambands—the project was cultivated by members of the indie-rock band The National—which shows that the Dead's music continues to spread beyond the genre-specific confines often attached to it.

The songs that make up the Grateful Dead's oeuvre were composed by several songwriters, mostly in pairs. The most prominent and (generally) highly-regarded pair is lyricist Robert Hunter and Jerry Garcia. So important were Hunter's lyrics that he was considered to be a full member of the band from his first contribution in 1967 through the rest of their career. Hunter composed a wide variety of highly regarded poetic texts for the group, ranging from "baroque, fanciful evocations of psychedelic or dream landscapes all the way to simple, plain-language imitations of blues and other traditional styles" (Wood 47). Nick Paumgarten described Hunter's lyrics as "elliptical, by turns vivid and gnomic. Garcia did not like to sing anything that was too on the nose. He and Hunter composed phantasmagoric reworkings of folk songs, recasting American mythologies in a way that often seemed to suggest that Garcia was singing about himself and his mates, or about our experience of following along" (Paumgarten). Bob Weir, who also wrote a few tunes with Robert Hunter, composed most of his songs for the band with lyricist John Perry Barlow. Weir/Barlow songs, which comprise the second largest segment of the Grateful Dead's catalog, provide important counterpoints to those from Hunter/Garcia, both lyrically and musically. Lesh also contributed several compositions, including a notable batch co-written with Robert Peterson. Later on, keyboardist Brent Mydland wrote several songs for the group, many composed with John Perry Barlow. Overall, the Grateful Dead's body of composed songs comprises a unique corner of the Great American Songbook, one that intersects with many eras and genres, yet is also a fully contained world.

In order to study the songs of the Grateful Dead, it is necessary to have a different approach than there is with most rock music, where song identity is intimately connected to studio recordings that are then released on albums or singles. To use Theodore Gracyk's argument, the relationship between the song/recording and audience is ontologically thick, and thus worthy of study (Gracyk 1-21). The music of the Beatles is a good example of ontological thickness—with the band retreating from touring in mid-1966, many of their songs did not have a performance history. Without other versions of the songs to reference, the studio recording essentially comprises the entire identity of the song.

This is not the case for the music of the Grateful Dead, whose songs have more complex identities than typical rock songs. While the band did record thirteen studio albums spanning the years 1967-1989, it is generally accepted that those recordings do not define the songs. In 1981, Garcia famously commented that "our records...have always been neither here nor there" (Gans 44). The Grateful Dead played roughly 2300 shows over the course of their career, and most of those concerts were recorded and are currently available for listening by the general public. Improvisation was at the core of the Grateful Dead's ethos, which drove the band to interpret the same tune differently from night to night. As such, many of their songs have hundreds of different surviving versions that contribute to their complex history. Song identity can thus be triangulated from a multiplicity of places: when the band was actively performing, the concert itself was the ontologically thick moment between band/song and audience, but when *studying* the Grateful Dead today, the identity of a song lies in *all* the recordings of that song, which includes the studio version (if there is one) and every live recording that exists. Although there are other songs by rock artists that have developed the same kind of relational multiplicity, the Grateful Dead's music is a particularly salient example of this phenomenon. It certainly complicates Andrew Kania's assertion that "the work of art in rock is a track constructed in the studio" (Kania 412). This can also support the notion that the Grateful Dead did not participate in a musical practice that was typical to rock music, and that their approach was more akin to jazz.

## **TEACHING (AND STUDYING) THE MUSIC OF THE GRATEFUL DEAD: A STRUCTURED, CHRONOLOGICAL APPROACH**

The Grateful Dead's sound and style went through myriad changes over the course of the group's thirty years as a performing musical unit. From the acid drenched improv-rock band of 1968 to the acoustic-leaning

outfit of 1970 to the nimble improvisational juggernaut of 1974 to the crisp and propulsive unit of 1977 to the arena and then stadium rock group of the 1980s and 1990s, flux was constant. This evolution was driven by many factors: contemporary developments in popular music, emerging technologies of performance, the band's own changing personnel, and the group's commitments to improvisation and eclecticism. Background information can be obtained by consulting the plethora of resources that are available to contextualize the band's music. Although, at this time, there is not a musicologically-focused biography of the band, there are many reliable volumes that contain ample context and some musical details. Dennis McNally's *A Long Strange Trip*, Blair Jackson's *Garcia: An American Life*, Peter Richardson's *No Simple Highway*, David Browne's *So Many Roads*, and Blair Jackson and David Gans' *This Is All A Dream We Dreamed* are all essential volumes and, taken together, provide a strong biographical foundation. David Gans' *Conversations With The Dead* is a seminal work comprised of valuable interviews that, along with memoirs by Phil Lesh, Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart, help elucidate the musical visions of the band members. Barry Barnes and Bob Trudeau's recent volume *The Grateful Dead's 100 Essential Songs: The Music Never Stops*, is an insightful guide to exploring the Grateful Dead's catalog, one song at a time. There is an expanding body of musicological writings by authors such as Graeme Boone, Shaughn O'Donnell, Walter Everett, Michael Kaler, David Malvinni, Brent Wood, James Revell Carr, Melvin Backstrom, and others. The *Deadbase* and *Deadhead Taper's Companion* volumes also contain valuable information that is useful in exploring the Grateful Dead phenomenon, and recent liner notes by Nicholas Meriwether, Jesse Jarnow, and others have brought new historical clarity and insight.

The purpose of this section of the paper is to provide a framework for teaching and learning about the Grateful Dead's expansive musical career. The organizing principle is based around changes in personnel and, perhaps ironically, focuses the lens on its least hallowed members, the keyboardists. Despite their oftentimes-supporting roles, the musicians occupying the keyboard chair(s) had a profound influence on the overall aesthetic of the group, articulated through differing keyboard styles, technological choices, and personality traits. Indeed, changes in the keyboard personnel can serve as signposts in the Grateful Dead's career, bringing clarity to distinct eras and the overarch of the band's musical output. Founding drummer Bill Kreutzmann highlights the centrality of the keyboardists in defining the group's sound in his 2015 memoir: "You can really divide Grateful Dead eras by who was on keys—Pigpen represented the '60s, Keith represented the '70s, Brent represented the '80s..." (Kreutzmann and Eisen 253). In addition to this distinction based on the keyboardists, the sections are further defined based on which drummers were active during each period. The Grateful Dead had two drummers, Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart, and the sections marked with "1 drummer" feature Kreutzmann, while the sections marked with "2 drummers" feature both.

In addition to a summary of each era, I include references to the Grateful Dead's major recordings and stylistic developments through suggested focus on particular songs. In order to encompass the band's evolving improvisational approach, I include a separate category for "durable songs"—those that have appeared in multiple incarnations across multiple eras. Specific live recordings of these durable songs can be found amongst the archival release series *Dick's Picks*, *Dave's Picks*, the *Download Series*, various box sets, and the unofficial recordings available at the Internet Archive ([www.archive.org](http://www.archive.org)).

## **A Structure for Understanding the Music of the Grateful Dead**

### **1. Musical Background**

This section establishes the Grateful Dead as a quintessentially American band: a melting pot where disparate musical styles merged and were expressed. Highlighted here are the different musical cultures in which the band members participated before forming or joining the Grateful Dead, mentioned above. The different skills and sensibilities that each player brought from his respective musical "camp" explain how the merging of these styles formed the backbone for a distinctive group voice. Band members' pre-Dead work plays an



important role in this analysis, showing how recordings of Mother McRee's Uptown Jug Champions—which featured Garcia, Weir, and McKernan—demonstrate the early, inchoate vision of this unique amalgam.

## 2. January 1965 – September 1967 (Pigpen + 1 drummer)

This section begins with the formation of the electric group the Warlocks in January 1965. This group can be seen as an electric version of Mother McCree's Uptown Jug Champions that similarly featured Garcia, Weir, and McKernan, but also added drummer Bill Kreutzmann and, later, bassist Phil Lesh. Set against the backdrop of the musical culture of the South Bay during this time, this section explores the band's first experiences together, from their residency at the In Room in Belmont, CA, during the fall of 1965 to the critical period in which they served as the "house band" of the Acid Tests in late 1965. This provides a framework for analyzing early examples of Grateful Dead music and the stylistic tendencies they illustrate, including their early studio recordings and debut LP, *The Grateful Dead* (1967). Live recordings from the band's early days in San Francisco trace the rapid development of their approach, including seminal early performances at the Fillmore and Avalon Ballrooms and Winterland Auditorium. The inclusion of the Grateful Dead's version Sonny Boy Williamson's "Good Morning Little School Girl" in this section provides an opportunity to engage with issues regarding the perpetuation of sexism in the music of many 1960s rock groups, even during the era of "sexual liberation" (Gallaher).

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *Grateful Dead*
    - a. Song 1: "The Golden Road (To Unlimited Devotion)"
    - b. Song 2: "Cream Puff War"
- ii. Improvisational Approach
  - 1. Durable Song 1: "Viola Lee Blues"
  - 2. Durable Song 2: "Good Morning Little School Girl"

## 3. September 1967 – November 1968 (Pigpen + 2 drummers)

The sound and style of the band's music on *The Grateful Dead* gave way to a time of sonic experimentation, both in the studio and on stage. This section is comprised of that fertile and challenging period, defined by Mickey Hart's joining the band as a second drummer in September 1967 until Tom Constanten's debut as the Dead's second keyboardist in November 1968. The innovations of their early two-drummer style and musical experimentalism accompanied their move from San Francisco to Marin County, fueled by dissatisfaction with the decline of the Haight-Ashbury scene. This era was defined by the recording and release of their landmark LP *Anthem of the Sun* (1968) and their maturation as a touring band, expanding their reach beyond California and New York to develop audiences regionally throughout the US. Importantly, this period is marked by lyricist Robert Hunter's first official collaborations with the group.

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *Anthem of the Sun*
    - a. Song 1: "That's It For The Other One"
    - b. Song 2: "Alligator"
- ii. Improvisational Approach
  - a. Durable Song 1: "Viola Lee Blues"
  - b. Durable Song 2: "Dark Star"

## 4. November 1968 – January 1970 (Pigpen + Constanten + 2 drummers)

The Grateful Dead's (particularly Garcia and Lesh's) experimental leanings led to the hiring of Lesh's friend and fellow avant-gardist Tom Constanten as second keyboardist. Though Constanten's influence is

perhaps most distinct on *Anthem of the Sun* (1968), the best representation of his voice as a keyboardist is on the Dead's third LP, *Aoxomoxoa* (1969). Though underappreciated, this album marks a number of vital developments in the band's work, including a prolific outpouring of songs from Garcia and Hunter. The band's growing studio prowess—and its costs— fueled their deepening commitment to live performance, and this era included the recording of the band's first official live release, *Live Dead* (1969), one of their finest achievements. Underscoring that accomplishment were their problematic appearance at Woodstock and sobering involvement with Altamont, festivals that defined the extremes of the hippie movement and cemented the band's association with it.

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *Aoxomoxoa*
    - a. Song 1: "St. Stephen"
    - b. Song 2: "China Cat Sunflower"
    - c. Song 3: "Dupree's Diamond Blues"
  - 2. *Live/Dead*
- ii. Improvisational Approach
  - 1. Durable Song 1: "Dark Star"
  - 2. Durable Song 2: "That's It For The Other One"

#### 5. January 1970 – February 1971 (Pigpen + 2 drummers)

The transition that occurred between 1969-70 is well documented and often celebrated: the band, still in debt to Warner Brothers despite the relative success of *Live Dead*, reigned in its experimental side (in the studio) and created the acoustic leaning *Workingman's Dead* (1970) and *American Beauty* (1970). The seismic shift represented by the sound and style of these records was fueled by the band's collective background in acoustic folk traditions and current trends in popular music, particularly those propagated by their cohorts Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. The radio-friendly tunes and lush multi-part vocal harmonies fueled a shift in public perception of the group from a niche San Francisco band to one with widespread popular appeal. The band capitalized on this burgeoning audience through relentless touring during this period, furthering their reputation as an adventurous performing act par excellence.

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *Workingman's Dead*
    - a. Song 1: "Uncle John's Band"
    - b. Song 2: "Dire Wolf"
    - c. Song 3: "Cumberland Blues"
  - 2. *American Beauty*
    - a. Song 4: "Box of Rain"
    - b. Song 5: "Brokedown Palace"
    - c. Song 6: "Truckin'"
- ii. Improvisational Approach
  - 1. Durable Song 1: "Dark Star"
  - 2. Durable Song 2: "That's It For The Other One"

#### 6. February 1971 – August 1971 (Pigpen + 1 drummer)

Mickey Hart left the group in early 1971, thus marking the beginning of a new single-drummer era and a return to the original quintet configuration of the Grateful Dead. This change in personnel created a more nimble outfit that could shift improvisational directions easily, a musical trend that is well documented on officially released live recordings, most notably *Grateful Dead* ("Skull & Roses") and *Ladies and Gentlemen...*

*The Grateful Dead*. Despite Pigpen's increasing health problems, he was featured prominently as a keyboardist, vocalist, and harmonica player during this period. The group continued to tour relentlessly and it became increasingly evident that the surge in popularity fueled by *Workingman's Dead* and *American Beauty* also brought challenges—as the band continued to perform at small and mid-sized theaters, the ticketless hordes outside grew and, at times, became unruly. The band ultimately decided to accommodate the growing throngs by playing larger venues, thus diluting the intimate concert experience they had cultivated throughout their early years.

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *Grateful Dead*
    - a. Song 1: "Playing in the Band"
    - b. Song 2: "Wharf Rat"
- ii. Improvisational Approach
  - a. Durable Song 1: "Bird Song"
  - b. Durable Song 2: "The Other One"

#### 7. **October 1971 – June 1972** (Pigpen + Godchaux + 1 drummer)

Pigpen's declining health led to the hiring of Keith Godchaux on keyboards in 1971 and his wife Donna Jean Godchaux on vocals in 1972. This change in keyboardists marked a distinct shift in styles, with Godchaux favoring the acoustic piano over Pigpen's Hammond B3 organ. Although Pigpen left the road briefly in October 1971, he soon resumed touring as a vocalist, second keyboardist, harmonica player, and auxiliary percussionist. Godchaux's skill as a pianist fueled the band's confidence during this period that culminated in the celebrated *Europe '72* tour, where Pigpen also played an important role. His health forced him to leave the road again in mid-1972, and he tragically passed away on March 8, 1973. Garcia and Hunter were prolific in the early '70s; the songwriting duo produced a staggering number of tunes that are considered Grateful Dead classics. Even though there was no studio album recorded during this era, live recordings show the group exploring this new body of material. Inspired largely by the American West, these tunes helped shape a Grateful Dead universe of songs that is populated by outlaws, gamblers and psychedelic aphorisms.

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *Europe '72*
    - a. Song 1: "Tennessee Jed"
    - b. Song 2: "Ramble On Rose"
    - c. Song 3: "Jackstraw"
    - d. Song 4: "He's Gone"
- ii. Improvisational Approach
  - a. Durable Song 1: "Playing in the Band"
  - b. Durable Song 2: "Dark Star"

#### 8. **June 1972 – October 1974** (Godchaux + 1 drummer)

After Pigpen left the touring unit in June 1972, the Grateful Dead's personnel remained stable for the next two-and-a-half years. During this period, the band left Warner Bros. and formed Grateful Dead Records, the label on which they released the studio albums *Wake of the Flood* (1973) and *From the Mars Hotel* (1974). In addition to the continued Herculean output from the Garcia-Hunter partnership, Weir's songwriting volume increased during this period, highlighted by frequent collaboration with lyricist John Perry Barlow. This is a celebrated time in Grateful Dead history, one that featured particular variety and experimentation in live performance. The band's increasing popularity led to performances in larger venues. In an effort to make the concert experience as intimate as possible, the band developed the Wall of Sound system that, while

unparalleled in musical clarity, was rather costly to utilize. The bloated payroll required to transport the Wall of Sound would, in part, lead to the decision to take an indefinite hiatus beginning in October 1974.

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *Wake of the Flood*
    - a. Song 1 – “Eyes of the World”
    - b. Song 2 – “Weather Report Suite”
    - c. Song 3 – “Stella Blue”
  - 2. *From the Mars Hotel*
    - a. Song 4 – “Scarlet Begonias”
    - b. Song 5 – “Unbroken Chain”
- ii. Improvisational Approach
  - a. Durable Song 1: “Playing in the Band”
  - b. Durable Song 2: “Dark Star”
  - c. Durable Song 3: “Eyes of the World”
  - d. Durable Song 4: “Scarlet Begonias”

#### **9. March 1975 – February 1979 (Godchaux + 2 drummers)**

This section begins with the hiatus period of 1975-1976 and ends with the departure of Keith and Donna Godchaux in 1979. *Blues For Allah*, released while the band was on hiatus from touring in 1975, shows the increased influence of jazz-rock on the band’s evolving sound. Mickey Hart officially rejoined the touring unit in 1976, thus transitioning the band back into a two-drummer format. The large overhead associated with running a record label led to the ultimate dissolution of Grateful Dead Records in 1976. The group then signed with Arista and employed two influential producers to oversee their first releases for that label. Producer Keith Olsen’s influence can be heard in the polished sound of *Terrapin Station* (1977) and in the overall refinement of the band’s live sound in early 1977. Little Feat’s Lowell George, who produced *Shakedown Street* (1978), was more in line with the Dead’s improvisational ethos, but those sessions were largely unfocused; the band was forced to finish the album in George’s absence. This is the era of “Disco-Dead,” represented most obviously by the recordings of “Dancing in the Streets” (from *Terrapin Station*) and “Shakedown Street.” Even though some fans decried this change in musical direction, recordings of live performances from this era are celebrated for the aforementioned refinement of the band’s sound and creative extemporizations.

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *Blues for Allah*
    - a. Song 1: “Help on the Way/Slipknot!”
    - b. Song 2: “Franklin’s Tower”
  - 2. *Steal Your Face*
  - 3. *Terrapin Station*
    - a. Song 3: “Terrapin Station”
    - b. Song 4: “Estimated Prophet”
  - 4. *Shakedown Street*
    - a. Song 5: “Shakedown Street”
    - b. Song 6: “Fire On The Mountain”
- ii. Improvisational Approach
  - 1. Durable Song 1: “Eyes of the World”
  - 2. Durable Song 2: “Playing in the Band”
  - 3. Durable Song 3: “Uncle John’s Band”

**10. April 1979 – August 1986 (Mydland + 2 drummers)**

Following the departure of Keith and Donna Godchaux, keyboardist Brent Mydland's approach and personality injected new energy into the group, now a decade and a half into their touring career. While Godchaux favored the acoustic piano, Mydland brought with him a variety of keyboards, including Hammond organ, electric piano, and synthesizers, creating a sonic diversity that inspired the other band members. Mydland's keyboard style and distinctively gruff voice brought new colors to recordings from this time period: the studio album *Go To Heaven* (1980) and the live releases *Reckoning* (1981) and *Dead Set* (1981). Even though the band released only one studio album during this seven-year span, they continued to perform steadily in theaters, arenas, and stadiums throughout the US. This is an often-overlooked time period in the performance history of the band, largely due to the decreased output of new songs and inconsistent quality of live performances, a development that was tied to Garcia's drug use and deteriorating health. The guitarist went into a diabetic coma in July of 1986, triggering an unplanned hiatus of five months before touring resumed later that year.

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *Go To Heaven*
    - a. Song 1: "Althea"
    - b. Song 2: "Lost Sailor"
  - 2. *Reckoning*
  - 3. *Dead Set*
- ii. Improvisational Approach
  - 1. Durable Song 1: "Eyes of the World"
  - 2. Durable Song 2: "Playing in the Band"

**11. December 1986 – July 1990 (Mydland + 2 drummers)**

The coma was a wakeup call for Garcia, and for the next few years, he lived a much healthier lifestyle. This was a highly productive era for the band that featured two studio releases, *In the Dark* (1987) and *Built to Last* (1989), and many acclaimed live performances. The self-produced *In the Dark* was the Dead's biggest selling album and contained their highest charting single, "Touch of Grey." This success caused an unprecedented number of people to flock to the Dead's shows, some wanting to see the band, others simply wanting to participate in the scene outside the stadium. Despite these potential distractions, live shows from this era were of consistently high quality, the results of which are well documented on several officially-released live recordings and videos. The introduction of MIDI technology allowed for the musicians to create wildly different sounds with their instruments, which expanded the sonic palette in live performances. While the Hunter-Garcia partnership continued to produce songs for the group, there was increased output from Weir-Barlow and Mydland-Barlow. This shift is particularly evident on *Built to Last*. Mydland, who had ongoing drug difficulties, tragically died of an overdose on July 26, 1990.

- i. Recordings and Stylistic Developments
  - 1. *In The Dark*
    - a. Song 1: "Touch of Grey"
    - b. Song 2: "Black Muddy River"
    - c. Song 3: "Hell in a Bucket"
  - 2. *Built to Last*
    - a. Song 4: "Foolish Heart"
    - b. Song 5: "Victim or the Crime"
    - c. Song 6: "Standing on the Moon"
  - 3. *Without a Net*



ii. Improvisational Approach

1. Durable Song 1: "Eyes of the World"
2. Durable Song 2: "Playing in the Band"
3. Durable Song 3: "Uncle John's Band"

**12. September 1990 – March 1992 (Welnick + Hornsby + 2 drummers)**

Mydland's death haunted the band, particularly Garcia. Even though the band moved quickly to replace the keyboardist, his absence would loom large over the remainder of the group's performing career. Bruce Hornsby and Vince Welnick joined the Dead as touring keyboardists in the fall of 1990, with the virtuosic Hornsby proving a worthy foil for Garcia. Ultimately the band failed to regain the momentum that was lost after Mydland's death. Garcia's drug use became an increased issue during this time, contributing to the inconsistency of live performances. This vacillation in quality led Hornsby to confront Garcia in 1991 and then leave the group in March 1992.

i. Stylistic Developments

1. Song 1: "So Many Roads"

ii. Improvisational Approach

1. Durable Song 1: "Dark Star"
2. Durable Song 2: "Playing in the Band"
3. Durable Song 3: "Eyes of the World"

**13. March 1992 – July 1995 (Welnick + 2 drummers)**

Vince Welnick assumed the sole remaining keyboard chair in the wake of Hornsby's departure. Even though Welnick was a fine musician and diligent student of the Dead's music, he failed to provide the impetus for a band renaissance. Garcia's continued isolation from the rest of the group was evident on and off stage, which would seem to be the antithesis of the "group mind" philosophy cultivated by the band in their early years. This led to further inconsistency of live performances, marred, at times, by Garcia's physical deterioration. Despite this, the Dead continued to tour steadily, performing for massive crowds throughout the US. The final "tour from hell" concluded in July 1995, one month before Garcia's death.

i. Stylistic Developments

1. Song 1: "Days Between"

ii. Improvisational Approach

1. Durable Song 1: "Dark Star"
2. Durable Song 2: "Playing in the Band"
3. Durable Song 3: "Eyes of the World"

**14. Post-Grateful Dead**

The Grateful Dead's music and ethos has lived on in the decades following Garcia's death. The band has continued to release official live recordings via *Dick's Picks*, *Dave's Picks*, the *Download Series*, and various box sets. The surviving Grateful Dead members have continued to tour in different incarnations, still performing much of the Grateful Dead songbook. These groups have included The Other Ones, The Dead, Furthur, Ratdog, Phil and Friends, the Rhythm Devils, and Dead and Co. The "Core Four" (Lesh, Weir, Hart, Kreutzmann) reunited for five shows titled "Fare Thee Well: Celebrating 50 Years of the Grateful Dead" in June and July 2015 in Santa Clara, CA and Chicago, IL. These shows featured Hornsby, Jeff Chimenti, and, notably, Trey Anastasio of Phish, marking a moment of particular synergy for fans of those two iconic jambands. There are also myriad Grateful Dead cover bands that continue to perform this music, two of the most noteworthy national acts being Dark Star Orchestra and Joe Russo's Almost Dead.

## CONCLUSION

The music of the Grateful Dead provides a rich case study in 20th Century American popular music. The group is noteworthy for their unique brand of eclecticism, their career-long commitment to extended improvisation, and their deep and varied songbook. The music is also very much *alive*, both through the myriad recordings that the band has produced (live and studio) and the many groups that continue to perform their music, night after night. There are some reliable musicological resources about the band's music, and that pool of scholarship is growing. Although I have made a concerted effort here to focus specifically on musical aspects that warrant study, no music exists in a vacuum: it is intimately intertwined with the time and place in which it was created. This is true of the Grateful Dead, and appropriately the group has seen sustained study from a multiplicity of disciplinary perspectives that focus on their cultural, social, business, and other contributions. My hope is that this essay provides a coherent argument for the importance of foregrounding the band's music and a tenable framework for teaching (and studying) that music. When supplemented with the varied and excellent interdisciplinary work that has been done on this subject, it forms a robust learning experience that can elucidate American musical culture of the past and present.

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*Interactive Listening: A New Approach to Music*. Felix is also a professional keyboardist—he was co-leader of OM Trio, an acclaimed jazz-rock group that toured internationally between 1999-2004. He continues to perform professionally in Western North Carolina with his Fly Casual organ jazz group and others. Website: [www.brianfelix.com](http://www.brianfelix.com).

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## **Collaborative Pedagogy: Teaching (with) the Grateful Dead On Tour, On Campus, and Online<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This essay describes my experiences teaching with the Grateful Dead “on tour” in 1989, on campus in the early 2000s, and online in 2019. Using a life course framework, I discuss how my own development as a teacher, Deadhead, and Grateful Dead scholar and the changing context over time shaped these experiences and how teaching with the Grateful Dead opened a pedagogical space for experimentation that allowed the students and me to take risks and to collaborate despite status differences. Rather than unpacking these experiences entirely, my goal here is to focus on how these three experiences of teaching with the Grateful Dead allowed me to develop and informed my pedagogical approach, particularly my use of technology in teaching.

**Keywords:** Grateful Dead, popular culture, pedagogy, online teaching, technology

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I have taught (with) the Grateful Dead since the summer of 1987 when I supervised four independent study students who distributed a questionnaire to Deadheads while on the East Coast Summer Tour. Those independent studies led to me teaching my infamous pair of 1989 “Deadhead Sociology” classes. The rumor at the time, both in the mainstream press and among Deadheads, was that the students were “getting credit” for going on Summer Tour. As discussed below, there was more to these classes than that (Adams, 1991b; Adams & Edwards, 1990). Two years ago, as part of the University of North Carolina Greensboro’s (UNCG’s) celebration of the 1960s and a subseries of events known as “Another Year of the Dead at UNCG,” these students, whom I have always thought of as “The Class,” held a reunion. During the same semester as this reunion, Spring 2019, I offered a fully online class, *The Grateful Dead Legacy*. The 1989 and 2019 classes, which for different reasons both brought a lot of attention to my university and to me personally, serve as public bookends to my career as a Deadhead professor.

Between those two experiences, however, I have taught with the Grateful Dead in many ways. In addition to teaching a course on campus in 2000 and 2001 about the Deadhead community, I supervised subsequent independent study students and undergraduate and graduate research assistants. A high school student, completing a course requirement, and a recent college graduate, wishing to develop research skills, relocated to Greensboro to study with me. I presented as a guest lecturer to classes and student audiences at my own university and at many other universities. I worked with students conducting research, for example, analyzing audience-development data Grateful Dead Productions collected during Furthur Festival in 1998 and contracted my university to summarize (Adams, 2010/2012). I supervised master’s thesis students who were writing about Deadheads (e.g., Paterline, 2000; Sardiello, 1994). When Jerry Garcia passed away in 1995, a graduate assistant collected as much of the relevant media she could find at the time and an undergraduate research assistant coded the letters I received from Deadheads in mourning (Adams, Ernstes, & Lucey, 2014). During this thirty-year period, more than 400 scholars, mainly students at other universities, have contacted me to discuss their own research on the Grateful Dead. Reviewing the list of my collaborators makes me “smile, smile, smile” because many of these former students are now close friends.

My experience teaching with the Grateful Dead really pre-dates 1987 a bit; a sociology major I never had in class convinced me to think about studying Deadheads when he saw me at the 1986 Box of Rain bust out at Hampton Coliseum. The conversation this student, Matt Russ, and I had in my office the Monday after those shows was really my first experience teaching and learning with the Grateful Dead (or at least with Deadheads). Matt convinced me that studying Deadheads would satisfy my theoretical interest in migrating communities and interest students more than the population I had planned to study (book editors who traveled around the country to attend professional academic conferences). When I asked, “Do Deadheads comprise a community?,” he pulled out photographs of a wedding that had taken place during a set break at a Grateful Dead concert. In that moment, when I realized this student understood my theoretical agenda and that it might be possible to combine my interests in research and teaching, my life was changed forever.

Despite my plans to retire my status as Deadhead professor after spring 2019, my teaching with the Grateful Dead now post-dates 2019 as well. In 2020 and also in 2022, I visited online classes focused on the Grateful Dead at other universities. I was sponsored by another university in August 2021 to present during “the days between” the anniversary of Jerry Garcia’s birth and death. I have met several times with a second-generation Deadhead, Zachariah Brackett, who is interested in young Deadheads; he is not a student at my university but at the University of North Carolina at Asheville. Ryan Waide, now a former UNCG student, has been working not only with me, but with two UNCG librarians, Rachel Olsen and Sarah Dorsey, to develop a Grateful Dead Library Guide (Walter Clinton Jackson Library, 2022) and, in the process, to identify books to order for our collection. Building on the work Olsen, Dorsey, and I had started, his contributions to the Library Guide began as his final project for the Grateful Dead Legacy course; scholarship is after all a legacy

of the Grateful Dead. Not surprisingly, given my previous experience teaching with the Grateful Dead, he has continued this work beyond his graduation.

The focus of this essay, however, is not on my experiences teaching with the Grateful Dead between my 1989 and 2019 classes, but mainly on these courses and one other formal course preparation for a writing intensive freshman seminar on the Grateful Dead Community, offered in Fall 2000 and again in Fall 2001. These classes in 1989, the early 2000s, and 2019 were rich experiences, and much about each of them was notable. Describing them fully would fill up much more than one article. Rather than unpacking them entirely, my goal here is to focus on how these three experiences teaching with the Grateful Dead allowed me to develop and informed my pedagogical approach, particularly my use of technology in teaching. The 1989 class met for five weeks on campus but then went “on tour.” The 2019 class was online, but students had the opportunity at the end of the semester to attend an on-campus conference, UNCG Dead Scholars Unite! The Deadhead Community class, the least known but the only one I taught twice, took place primarily on campus, but included some online interaction. Hence the subtitle of this chapter: “Teaching (with) the Grateful Dead On Tour, On Campus, and Online.”

## TEACHING WITH THE GRATEFUL DEAD OVER THE LIFE COURSE

Much of my research and teaching relies on a life course perspective as an organizational framework, and it seems relevant here. Recognizing a connection between history and biography (Mills, 1959) and that our lives are structured by age-related role expectations, a life course perspective reminds us that the timing of our birth shapes our experiences, the opportunities we have, and the constraints we face (Stoller & Gibson, 2000). Each birth cohort -- those born during the same time interval -- faces different historical circumstances as its members age and its “cohort personality” is shaped by sharing these experiences simultaneously. From this perspective then, one could argue that my use of technology was shaped by the state of its development and availability in each of the years I taught, my own level of development as a teacher at various ages, and my propensity to apply the technology as determined by the “personality” of my birth cohort (Strauss & Howe, 1991). Despite my cohort’s propensity to like their jobs and see them as opportunities for adventure, however, not all baby boomer college professors like myself have embraced the use of technology in teaching. Furthermore, this general life course perspective does not explain why, when I looked back on my more than 40 years of teaching, it was obvious that I had experimented more with new technology when I was teaching with the Grateful Dead than when I was teaching without them. Deadheads, such as me, form what Mannheim (1952) called a “generational unit,” a sub-cohort in other words, existing vaguely within the boundaries of the baby boomer cohort. I say *vaguely* within the confines of the baby boomer cohort (born between 1946 and 1964) because most of the members of the band and many of their original fans were members of the previous cohort and, of course, many fans joined baby boomers as Deadheads later. The point here is that Deadheads were shaped specifically by the Grateful Dead experience in ways that other people born at approximately the same time were not.

So, what was it about the Grateful Dead experience, their music, and the Deadhead community that led to my propensity to experiment more when I was teaching with the Grateful Dead than when I was not? Although I did not consciously set out each time I taught with the Grateful Dead to experiment pedagogically or to use technology in innovative ways, I nonetheless ended up doing so, sometimes in advance of teaching the course and described in the syllabus and sometimes spontaneously during the semester. Reflecting on my teaching career, as old professors often do, I have realized that teaching with the Dead opened a pedagogical space for experimentation where I, and my students, felt empowered to take risks and to collaborate despite status differences and the ultimate necessity that a grade be assigned. As Deadheads have advised me since I began studying this community, it is impossible to understand Deadheads, and thus in this case to answer this

question, without referencing the Grateful Dead's music. Grateful Dead shows were improvisations within structures; the structure of shows, first and foremost the trajectory of the music but also the social organization of the community, was comforting to Deadheads and allowed them to be adventurous (Adams, 1991a). Others have also noted that the improvisational musical ethos of the band filters down into the everyday praxis of Deadheads (Backstrom, 2013; Cohen, 2020; Kaler, 2013; Tuedio & Spector, 2010). For example, Barnes (2007, 2011) has described how improvisation is important to successful team building and logistics. My point here, resonating with Barnes' approach to business as well as to his teaching, is that when a course focuses on the Grateful Dead, it seems culturally appropriate to develop a plan (i.e., a syllabus) but to remain open to its modification.

Furthermore, as others (e.g., Sardiello, 1994) have noted, a Grateful Dead show is an example of a secular ritual (Turner, 1969). During a show, which is experienced in between what precedes it and what follows it, external statuses become irrelevant. This liminality provides an opportunity for magic to happen and for personal and cultural transformation. Applying this same Deadhead philosophy to teaching allows for what I have previously described as "collaborative research and learning" (Adams, 2000). Reflecting on my experience on tour with students in summer 1989, which is described in more detail subsequently in this chapter, I wrote:

... [I]n the process of our collaboration, the roles of student and teacher and of researcher and subject began to blur. Although many educators now view teachers as people who help students discover for themselves, teachers have traditionally been perceived as those who share knowledge with others. In contrast, social science researchers want to learn from others. It follows, then, that researchers are students, and research subjects are teachers. Social scientists have typically called subjects who served as their teachers "informants." In the Deadhead project, I refer to people who fill this role as "guides," because informant is a term Deadheads reserve for narcotics agents. My students were thus my guides and therefore were my teachers. Similarly, I was a researcher and thus their student. (Adams, 2000, pp. 18-19)

One might initially think that the phrase "collaborative research and learning" is inclusive of collaborative pedagogy, but it is clear from this passage and the text that follows it (not included here), that I meant learning about what I was studying from students as I taught them how to do research and other skills. I had realized that by teaching on the topic I was researching and by attracting students who were interested and knowledgeable about the topic, I no longer had to neglect my teaching while focusing on my research or vice versa. By "collaborative pedagogy," which is the focus of this chapter, however, I mean something slightly different: that students can also teach their instructors how to teach. Although one of my original motivations for agreeing to supervise the independent study students in 1987 was to learn about the Deadhead community from them, it is only after reflecting on a lifetime of teaching with the Grateful Dead that I have realized how doing so has contributed to my pedagogical development, especially my use of technology, and has empowered students to encourage me to do so.

## **TEACHING ON 1989 SUMMER TOUR: DEADHEAD SOCIOLOGY**

Building on the success of the independent studies, which confirmed my interest in studying Deadheads further, my department chair, James Skipper, who studied blues musicians, and the Dean of the Division of Continual Learning (DCL) John Young Sr. offered me an opportunity to pursue my new interest by offering a class as part of what they hoped would become UNCG's American Institute of Popular Culture. This idea, in and of itself, was innovative, as popular culture was not yet accepted widely as an appropriate topic for serious

study. One course became a pair (SOC 501/502: Qualitative Research Methods and Applied Social Theory), and enrolled students were required to take both simultaneously. Twenty-one students, two graduate assistants (Robert Sardiello and Jon Epstein), five members of a video crew, a photographer, a bus driver, and for the second leg of Summer Tour, my husband and daughter comprised “The Class.” The earliest description of this pair of courses that has survived is dated February 2, 1989 and, as the first class was on June 12, it must have been a draft of a passage used to advertise them. It pretty much accurately summarizes how they unfolded:

The students in this class will act together to explore the social world of [D]eadheads. In so doing, they will learn how to think sociologically and how to discuss the Dead, some background on the 60s and early 70s, some ways of thinking about [D]eadheads, how sociologists look at the world, and how to do sociology. Then we will go on Tour for a couple of weeks to observe and learn by participating in [D]eadhead subculture. At concert sites, we'll separate, each of us having our own experience. On the bus, we'll write about these experiences, discuss and interpret what we've seen and heard, and make plans. After we get home, each student will write a paper about the social world of [D]eadheads based on their own observations, conversations, and experiences.

These courses have been discussed extensively elsewhere (e.g., Adams 1991b, 1998, 2000; Adams & Edwards, 1990; Meriwether, 2009), but the role of technology in this class has only been discussed in passing. Although computer technology played a minor role in planning the course and subsequently in coding and analyzing the data collected that summer, recording and transportation technology were central to class pedagogy. I did already own a personal computer, though the University provided computer access only in laboratories. Later that summer of 1989 I subscribed to *rec.music.gdead*, the Usenet group for Deadheads, and began using email primarily to communicate with them. If this pair of courses had been offered a year later, it is possible I would have required students to engage with Deadhead subculture electronically. The required text, however, was available in print only; according to the syllabus (June 10, 1989), it consisted of a “Two Volume Collection Prepared for this Course and available at Kinko's (401 Tate Street) for \$40.20.” Students were instructed to “Ask for Packet #23.” The syllabus alludes to the use of copying machines rather than printers, encouraging students to operate as a research team and “to xerox copies of . . . observational reports and interview transcripts,” including “those of your classmates to use as data for your own research papers.” I provided students with both my office and home phone number, asking them to call the latter only before 9 pm.

Recording technology, both audio and visual, was, however, central to “The Class” experience. It was of course common practice in sociology to audio record interviews, and I had become interested in visual sociology in the early 1970s while taking an undergraduate course in research methods myself. Because the students paid higher-than-usual tuition for this course, the Dean of the DCL provided me with an ample budget, making it possible to incorporate technology into pedagogy.

Each student was issued a microcassette recorder primarily to use to record research interviews. The instructions for the practice interview the students completed before going on tour started with a suggestion from one of the students, Robert Freeman, to “make sure your tape recorder is on before you do anything!” I added to this document, validating his contribution to class pedagogy: “It sounds like a good idea to me” (June 14, 1989). The syllabus also warns that although class attendance and participation will be ungraded: “you will never survive in this class if you aren't there and ready to discuss the material almost every day. If, for any reason, you miss a class, be sure to arrange to have someone tape the session and listen to it before class the next day.” As it turns out, one of the students in “The Class,” Kristen Huff, recorded the sessions every day. I doubt any of the students ever listened to these recordings and, quite frankly, I do not remember any of the students ever missing class though surely some of them must have.



Emily Edwards, then UNCG Assistant Professor of Broadcasting and Cinema, and her video crew, including two independent study students of her own, taped many of the class meetings on campus and subsequently went with us on tour. This idea was not mine, but the brainchild of Bolton Anthony, a member of the DCL staff. Although the video crew's primary goal was to produce a documentary about Deadheads (Adams & Edwards, 1990/1995), a secondary goal was to do a video about the class itself (Adams & Edwards, 1990). Edwards also provided each student with a souvenir, a 6½-minute VHS recording, *Deadbeat* (Adams & Edwards 1989). Much of this footage of class meetings, along with the rest taken on tour, was destroyed by a roof leak on campus. What remains documents a highly engaged and empowered class. The first day, which I remembered clearly before reviewing the video recordings, the students raised ethical questions as part of their introductions. I went home that night and obsessed over my notes for the next day. I had never had students who were this engaged, and I was terrified I was not prepared to teach them. It is only in retrospect I have realized that what really terrified me is that they were prepared to teach me. It is interesting with this hindsight that the class, once again at Robert Freeman's suggestion, subsequently adopted a lyric from the Grateful Dead song, Black Throated Wind, as its tagline: "You Ain't Gonna Learn What You Don't Want to Know." Another student, Alyce Wimbish (now Gray) arranged to have class t-shirts made with that quote on the back. And thus, the students began their work.

The University contracted with Lloyd Wolf, a photographer friend from my days as a student at Trinity College, to take photographs relevant to my research. Based on their growing understanding of my theory-based methodological approach (Adams, 2010), the class collaborated on creating a "shoot list" (June 29, 1989) for him, and he joined us on the bus. Some of his still images were incorporated into the video about the subculture that Edwards produced, and he also ended up serving as a member of the video crew. I have used his photographs to illustrate my presentations on Deadheads over the years, and some of them are included in the book I subsequently co-edited with one of the two class graduate assistants, Robert Sardiello (Adams & Sardiello 2000) and in other publications as well. See the UNCG Lloyd Wolf Photographic Collection, which he named Acid Reign; he donated the photographs he took while on tour with the 1989 class to UNCG and a curated collection is available digitally (University Libraries of UNC Greensboro, n.d.)

In addition to conducting interviews, recording their observations, and keeping a diary while on tour, students took turns collecting different types of data. These "rotating observational tasks" included noting the states of license plates and sayings on bumper stickers, interviewing stadium staff, and collecting local newspaper coverage. While we were on tour the students suggested we monitor the environmental impact of Deadheads, so a report on recycling and "keeping the scene clean" was added to the list. All these tasks would have been easier had smart phones existed at the time.

In retrospect, however, transportation technology, not recording technology, was the most important technology used in the class. Deadheads say you are either "on the bus, or off the bus." On July 1, 1989, we got on the bus. Rented from Morgan & Sons Tours, it unexpectedly arrived pre-equipped with a destination sign leftover from a previous client, "On the Road Again." The students saw this as a good omen because the Grateful Dead had performed a song with the same name as the Willie Nelson tune the previous client had been quoting. While we were on tour, the bus "alternated between looking like a flop-house and a study hall" (Adams, 1991b). Each morning as the bus left the hotel, the class taper, Robert Wright, the only one of the original independent study students who enrolled in the class, played a recording of the previous night's concert while we slept or worked or danced in the aisles (Adams & Edwards, 1990). We became a research team, and we learned together.

At the time this class was offered, most instruction took place in classroom settings, bounded not only by physical walls but by metaphorical walls (Goldsmid & Wilson, 1980) such as "our national context, professionalism, the characteristics of the students, and role requirements" (Adams, 1991b). As I wrote soon after teaching this class (Adams, 1991b):

Although we might lament these constraints, they make us feel safe. Leaving the protection of the classroom eliminated more of these constraints than just the physical walls.

Before teaching these courses, my contact with students outside of class was mainly limited to discussions during my office hours with the ambitious and the troubled. On the bus, I was always available to all [sic] the students. One night I stayed up with a student who was in despair for lack of a topic until 2:30 am, and four hours later, I was awakened by another who could not sleep because of his excitement over a great idea. . . Their excitement about their research projects grew. Their competence as researchers quickly developed in response to immediate and virtually limitless feedback. I was teaching around the clock and it was working . . . (pp. 2-3)

Later (Adams, 1998), I reflected that I had:

...learned that not all students are at their best during normal classroom hours. Some students are brilliant at odd times of the day or night. I remember at the time thinking that there was nothing I could do about acting on this insight when I returned to Greensboro; I would be back to teaching on a normal schedule. Since that time, however, this experience has led me to be an advocate of Internet courses and other types of asynchronous learning. (p. 8)

Subsequently, after writing this reflection, and resulting from the good relationship I had developed with the Dean of the DCL who sponsored "The Class," I served as Assistant to the Dean of DCL, assigned to encourage faculty to teach online. My graduate assistant and I developed a bibliography of online pedagogy and conducted focus groups with faculty about their perspectives on its potential (Adams & Ammons, 2000). Teaching on the bus also foreshadowed my own current experience teaching online, where students often email me in the middle of the night or ask me to Zoom (zoom.us) into their personal environments at various times outside of my regular "drop-in Zoom room office hours." Teaching on the bus taught me to knock down as many of the metaphorical classroom walls as is professionally responsible and prepared me to teach around the clock, which is now common online if not on a bus.

### **TEACHING ON CAMPUS: THE DEADHEAD COMMUNITY IN THE EARLY 2000S**

During the early 2000s, freshmen in the College of Arts and Sciences at UNCG were required to enroll in a writing-intensive seminar. Writing-intensive courses required students to revise and resubmit at least one assignment and to conduct peer reviews. The content varied across these courses and was intended to be especially interesting to students. At the request of David Pratto, my department chair, I developed a course on The Deadhead Community (FMS108W) to be offered as part of this program. The proposal for this course stated that "[t]hrough an examination of the foundations of the Deadhead community, this course will introduce basic sociological concepts, theoretical concepts, and methodologies." The course description used to advertise the course further detailed that the students would examine "how it was possible for a community to form and persist without a permanent shared territory." This course not only counted as a writing-intensive course; it also "carried" general education credit, satisfying a Behavioral and Social Science requirement under the All University Learning Education Requirements. For this reason, students were expected to "learn the value of research" and "how to think analytically about the forces shaping their lives."

This course was taught for the first time during the second year that I "web-enhanced" my classes. "Web-enhanced" meant that materials could be accessed from my webpage. For example, one of my graduate assistants, Matthew Hembree, identified web addresses for as many jam bands as he could, starting with the

list that was included in Dean Budnick's then recently published 1998 book on this topic. Students could click on the links and visit the webpages for these bands. They were amazed.

Furthermore, for years, my research assistants, almost 20 Deadheads and non-Deadheads, paid and unpaid alike, downloaded the conversations from the Usenet group, rec.music.gdead, known as "Dead-Flames-Digests" (Kraitch, 1993). Eventually, I received a \$3300 instructional grant from UNCG's DCL to develop a searchable database of more than a decade of these online discussions among Deadheads. UNCG's Instructional and Research Computing staff developed the search engine. The students used this database to do primary research for their term papers. Ironically, all this work was rendered moot when Google search engines were developed and all the original posts became accessible publicly. During the two semesters this class was offered, however, my students were privileged in a way that most Deadhead researchers were not.

For the second year in a row, I was also requiring the students in this class and others to participate in threaded discussions using the learning management software, Top Class. Although now similar software is used in almost every course, both online and on campus, it was new then, and most students had no experience with it. Other technological highlights included a requirement that the students develop a "webliography" for their research papers (a list of relevant websites), that they purchase two computer diskettes formatted for a PC (these would have been 5 ¼" floppy discs), and a class period was scheduled to meet in the computer lab in the building where my office was to complete a practice writing prompt, to participate in an online discussion, and (here is the funniest goal for this class meeting) to "send an email message to Rebecca Adams." The following fall, the second and last time this course was offered, the only real change to the technology available itself was that UNCG had already switched learning management platforms and was using Blackboard instead of TopClass.

This course was designed to complement and support my research on the Deadhead community. The course syllabus echoes the then current working outline of my still-as-yet-unpublished monograph about its foundations. As the course evolved over the course of the first semester, it also provided a context for collaborative pedagogy. The most striking example from this course occurred the first time it was offered, Fall 2000. The students were required to attend a Dead-related concert. Furthur Festival, with the anchor band The Other Ones, consisting of most of the remaining members of the Grateful Dead, was scheduled to play at the Greensboro Coliseum on September 21 (coincidentally my 48th birthday). Dark Star Orchestra (DSO), the leading Grateful Dead cover band, was scheduled to play earlier at Ziggy's in Winston-Salem on August 29.

Many of the students opted to attend this earlier concert, which at first I found disappointing because many of them had never heard any of the original members of the Grateful Dead perform. What I did not anticipate was how attending this cover band concert would energize the students. One of them (I so wish I could remember which one) suggested that we invite a member of DSO to participate in our online discussions. At a subsequent concert, I left a note at the band merchandise table asking if anyone in the band would be interested. Much to my surprise, Scott Larned, DSO's keyboard player who has since passed away, responded enthusiastically. He had been a high school teacher before he joined the band and was interested in participating in a class using new online technology. The students posted questions to him online through Top Class, and he responded asynchronously. I recently realized I had saved a copy of the transcript to my hard drive (September 20, 2000).

This approach was such a success that the students wanted to invite more guests. *Deadhead Social Science: "You Ain't Gonna Learn What You Don't Want to Know"* (Adams & Sardiello, 2000), an anthology co-edited with one of my Summer 1989 graduate assistants, had just been published and was the main textbook for the course. This anthology was a collection of master's theses and other student research, hence the course description stated "[r]eadings include publications authored by Deadhead students." Although none of the chapters was based on work completed as part of the Summer of 1989 class as has been stated elsewhere

(e.g., Meriwether, 2009, Szatmary, 2000), I did know all the authors, was still in touch with them, and was able to arrange for many of them to “visit” the class by responding asynchronously to questions the students posed via the class management software. It was surprising to me how enthusiastically the students read the material and participated in these asynchronous class discussions. Realizing that virtual guests were a possibility and prompted students to prepare more extensively for class discussions changed my teaching forever. Furthermore, their enthusiasm seemed to energize and empower them to engage with the materials more extensively than was typical of my students otherwise. My first conversation with Sarah Dorsey, now the Director of the Music Library and one of the contributors to the Grateful Dead Library Guide, was when she called me to tell me that “my Deadheads” were sitting all over the floor of the Music Library reading material I had placed on closed reserve to supplement the materials on electronic reserve, a then new option. She wanted me to “come over right away and see what was going on.” I thought she was angry, so I jumped up from my desk and ran across campus to do her bidding. When I arrived, she was far from angry; she was excited, happy, and enthusiastic. She said, “Look. They are learning! Isn’t it wonderful?” And in the process, they had taught me how to be a better teacher and had introduced me to a librarian who has supported my teaching and research since.

### TEACHING ONLINE IN SPRING 2019: THE GRATEFUL DEAD LEGACY

Fast forward to 2019. UNCG had decided to host a series of events celebrating the 1960s, and a committee was accepting proposals. When I heard the Chair of Religious Studies, Greg Grieve, was planning to submit a proposal to invite Amir Bar-Lev, Producer of *The Long Strange Trip*, an Amazon Prime video on the history of the Grateful Dead, to discuss his film, I decided to build on that proposal. I proposed to be released to teach a class on The Grateful Dead Legacy, requesting \$4000 to have my time bought out, which was what my department chair, Melissa Floyd-Pickard, said would be required. I wrote that I realized this request was “above the \$3000 limit for the proposals.” I added, “If it is impossible to fund my buyout fully, but there is otherwise enthusiasm for this proposal, I would like the opportunity to seek supplemental funding rather than having it rejected.” I promised nothing specific but said that if the course were funded, I would work with other faculty and alumni to organize other events focused on the Grateful Dead as part of the 1960s series. I concluded, “This proposal is flexible; so am I. I will look forward to hearing if and how I can help. If the proposal to teach the class is not funded, I will put it back on my to-do list for the future. Elsewhere I have described the Grateful Dead’s music and community as improvisation within a structure. That is how I view this proposal as well.”

The 1960s Mini-Grants Committee allocated \$1000 to fund my proposal. Much to my surprise, the Dean of Health and Human Services, with the approval of my department chair, also provided the release time for me to teach the course. (Later, during my annual review meeting I noticed my chair had a portrait of Jerry Garcia in her office, and when I commented on it, she expressed an interest in singing vocals for the cover band which she ended up doing). I pulled together a committee of most of the Deadheads I knew from across campus, and we began planning a series of events that became known as Another Year of the Dead at UNCG (<https://www.facebook.com/UNCGDead>). Together, we secured additional funding from the Office of Alumni Affairs, departments across campus, including my assigned department, Social Work, and alumni. We held live auditions for a UNCG Grateful Dead cover band, which became known as Spartans Play Dead (organized by Robert Anemone, who was chair of Anthropology, and Charles Frank, an alumnus who was a local music producer); screened *The Long Strange Trip* in three parts, with Bar-Lev presenting at the last gathering; held a psychedelic art exhibition (co-curated by Emily Edwards, the same faculty member who filmed the class in 1989, and Lisa Goble, a staff member who coincidentally had encountered the 1989 class at a

restaurant while we were on tour in Massachusetts long before she came to UNCG; and hosted a photography exhibition, *Images of the Grateful Dead and Deadheads*, which I co-curated with Lena Dominique-Rodriguez, a recent alumna, and featuring photographs by Lloyd Wolf, the 1989 class photographer, and North Carolina Grateful Dead photographers Robbi Cohn, Chris Nelson, and John Rottet. The photography exhibition and its closing reception took place at Tate Street Coffee House, owned by Matt Russ, the alumnus who had originally talked me into studying Deadheads, and featured music by Jon Walters, who I had met through the Grateful Dead Caucus of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association (SWPACA), and David Gans, who also participates in the Caucus. That same night, Spartans Play Dead played what was supposed to be their second and final performance; they performed two more times at the request of UNCG administrators later that summer.

The day of this reception, we hosted a mini-academic conference, UNCG Dead Scholars Unite!, which I co-organized with Justin Harmon, who had participated in SWPACA and co-authored about Deadheads with me before joining the UNCG faculty, and Kristen Huff, an alumna who had been in “The Class.” Timothy Cripes, a member of the UNCG staff who had edited a local Deadhead newsletter, *The Lonely Goat* (1998-2002), designed and produced the program, with cover art by Lena Dominique-Rodriguez and approved by Rhino Records. With a few exceptions (e.g., David Gans, Jesse Jarnow, and Mark Mattson), the presenters had connections to UNCG or were from North Carolina. UNCG Chancellor Gilliam gave opening remarks, discussing his experience attending a Dead and Company concert the previous summer.

Of relevance to the discussion of teaching with the Grateful Dead, this conference provided an opportunity for the students from my 1989 class to hold a reunion and for the students from the fully online 2019 Grateful Dead Legacy class to present their final projects on campus in addition to the requirement that they do so online. While the 1989 class presented a panel on their experiences, some of my current students presented at the roundtable session on topics including: Two- and Multigenerational Deadhead Families, Online Communication, Children of the Grateful Dead, and Fashion. This conference was the only structured opportunity these students had to meet each other face-to-face, and interestingly, only a small portion of them opted to attend the conference.

The Grateful Dead Legacy class was asynchronous and fully online, offered via Canvas, the online learning software platform UNCG currently uses. According to the last version of the evolving syllabus (March 27, 2019), the course was divided into three sections, “the formation of the Grateful Dead community, the [Grateful] Dead’s music and their fans, and finally the legacy of the Grateful Dead, including their impact on music, business, art, and technology and ultimately on the lives and aging experiences of their million plus fans. Students will explore the band’s direct legacy (through their creative, business, and charitable activities) and their indirect legacy (through their family and fans).”

Like the syllabi for all courses now offered by UNCG are required to do, this one included extensive discussion of UNCG policies and stated formal student learning outcomes. In this case, the learning outcomes reflected the goals of the gerontology curriculum, as do those of a course I teach on baby boomers, similarly designed to provide insight into the culture of older adults. According to the syllabus for GRO 589, after completing this course, undergraduates (graduate students) were to be able to depict the Deadhead community as an example of the lifestyle diversity of baby boomers incubated in the 1960s, (and evaluate its significance); discuss Deadhead identity (across cohorts and the life course); interpret the music and lyrics of the Grateful Dead (and explain their meaning to Deadheads); describe Deadhead culture (and compare it to mainstream culture), including what they value, believe, think, and feel and do, use, and produce; outline the social organization of the Deadhead community (and examine the ways Deadhead identity intersects with other identities); portray the Deadhead community after Jerry’s death (and give reasons for its continued importance to aging Deadheads); identify sources of information on the Grateful Dead and Deadheads,

(demonstrating an understanding the of the difference between facts and myths); and document (synthesize) information on the legacy of the Grateful Dead and Deadheads (and demonstrate an appreciation of how this community has contributed to and created challenges for society).

Each week, for the first eight weeks of the class, students participated in discussion threads and completed a more formal assignment related to the week's topic. For the remainder of the course, discussion threads focused on their own research on various aspects of the Grateful Dead legacy and provided students opportunities to provide input into their classmates' projects. Their final project was to produce a Canvas page much like those I had provided for each topic addressed earlier in the course, linking to information on their topic and published so their classmates could learn from their research.

The course was offered as an "experimental course," meaning that it was not listed in the catalog as part of the regular curriculum. On the Canvas page for the first week of the course, I wrote: "this is an experimental course, and we are going to experiment" and noted that the students would "affect the course just as Deadheads influenced the band's music. The syllabus and Canvas prep will continue to evolve and be developed over the semester. The list of resources on the library guide for the course will continue to grow as the librarians, instructors, and students identify more resources." The course did evolve as the semester unfolded. For example, when Dennis McNally, the Grateful Dead's former publicist, and I could not locate a publication in which he discussed cohorts of Deadheads, I considered inviting him to visit the class as I had Scott Larned do in the class I taught in the 2000s, but I needed the material quickly. In a moment of inspiration, I realized that McNally could leave a message on my voice mail, and I could save it as an MP3 and upload it to Canvas to create an "instant guest lecture." Another way the course evolved was by the addition of student-identified resources to an ongoing discussion thread created to capture them. When Ryan Waide began his work with the librarians on the Grateful Dead Library Guide as an extension of his final project for this class, he started by harvesting the resources his classmates had identified as part of this ongoing discussion thread and noted they were almost all electronic. This led me to realize that even though students could have scanned in print resources to link from their final project pages, they had rarely included resources that were not already available electronically. As a result, realizing that print resources would be of limited value to students if we offered this class again, we instructed Waide to identify electronic versions of any additional publications he discovered whenever possible. For those with a UNCG library account, the Library Guide, which is still growing, includes live links to resources our library owns or those that are available electronically otherwise. The current version is also available publicly, but without live links (Walter Clinton Jackson Library, 2022). This experience will continue to inform my teaching, both on campus and online; I will not require that students consult printed resources unless I require them to purchase them. My realization that electronic resources were more likely to be assigned and read also led me to contact Rowman Littlefield, the company that now owns the copyright to Adams and Sardiello (2000), to request this book be re-released as an e-book, as an ibook, and via print-on-demand. Thanks to my original AltaMira editor, Mitchell Allen, who came out of retirement to advocate for this re-release, this process was completed in Fall 2021.

## CONCLUSIONS

What have I learned from teaching with the Grateful Dead across my life course? How have my aging, the changes in the students as successive cohorts took classes with me, and the periods of history in which I have taught with the Grateful Dead affected my pedagogy?

Certainly, my maturity as an instructor has grown over the years, not only from teaching with the Grateful Dead, but from teaching myriad other sociology and gerontology courses and in contexts outside of courses as well. I received UNCG's Senior Alumni Teaching Excellence Award in 2003 and have continued to

experiment and grow as a teacher since. I have also matured as a Deadhead, learning more about the music and the influences on it, and as a Grateful Dead scholar, attending the SWPACA Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus meetings most years and reading much of the increasing body of scholarship in this area. I still remember Kristen Huff in the Spring of 1989, curled up in a chair in my office, challenging my credentials. She was right to do so, and I was right to be terrified after the first day of class that I was not adequately prepared as a teacher, a Deadhead, or a Deadhead scholar.

The band members have also aged since 1989, with Brent Mydland and Jerry Garcia passing away since then, in 1990 and 1995, respectively. When I took “The Class” on tour in 1989, Jerry Garcia was still alive and the band was still billing itself as the Grateful Dead. By the time I taught the class on campus in Fall 2000, Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, Bill Kreutzmann, Bruce Hornsby, Mark Karan, and Alphonso Johnson comprised the band and were billed as The Other Ones. Finally, when I taught the class online in 2019, Dead and Company was on tour and consisted of Bob Weir, Mickey Hart, Bill Kreutzmann, John Mayer, Oteil Burbridge, and Jeff Chimenti. The aging of the band and its changing composition helped define cohorts of students marked by their own experience with the Grateful Dead as I have been by mine. All but three members of the original class had seen the band play before and identified as Deadheads. In the classes offered in the 2000s, some of the students had seen the Grateful Dead, The Other Ones, or at least members of the Grateful Dead perform, and quite a few of them identified as Deadheads or as the children of Deadheads. Although many of the students in the 2019 class were very familiar with the Grateful Dead’s music (including Ryan Waide who was one of the drummers for Spartans Play Dead), only a few had heard some version of the band play live or identified as Deadheads or children of Deadheads. While many of my 1989 students knew more about the Grateful Dead and Deadheads than I did, I was the expert in the 2019 class until the students developed their own expertise in areas where the Grateful Dead have a legacy.

The broader historical context also framed my experiences teaching with the Grateful Dead. It is interesting to me that all three of these adventures teaching classes with the Grateful Dead were embedded in larger university initiatives and that in all three time periods my department chairs encouraged me to teach them. Some changes have occurred since 1989, however, and some of the metaphorical walls I felt we had escaped by boarding the bus have been removed. Popular culture is now an accepted focus for research and teaching, and the Grateful Dead and Deadheads are far less stigmatized than they were when I taught with them for the first time. Grateful Dead Studies has emerged as a serious field of study; when I taught the course in 1989, I assigned almost everything that had been written about the Grateful Dead. In 2019, the librarians and I were not even able to identify all that had been written on the topic. During my time teaching with the Grateful Dead, instruction has shifted from being mainly on campus to often online, with even on-campus courses requiring students to access at least some electronic resources and to submit or share their work electronically. New technological developments have allowed for pedagogical innovation and made a much wider variety of resources available to students.

Other historical changes in bureaucratic requirements relevant to teaching have limited possibilities, and it is much more difficult to be spontaneous. Approval needs to be obtained for offering courses off-campus or via different delivery modalities. Syllabi are lengthy and are required to include myriad bureaucratic policies. Learning outcomes must be stated in advance and assessed via specifically identified assignments. Nonetheless, creative advanced planning of assignments, such as requiring the students to contribute to the evolution of the syllabus and to share their research electronically, can mediate the constraints imposed by these bureaucratic changes and support collaborative pedagogy.

Ironically, though some of these changes opened new possibilities and encouraged creative workarounds, they also seemed to reduce feelings of solidarity among the students. While teaching the fully online class in Spring 2019, the elimination of required synchronous class meetings and the ease with which

students could access materials without interacting with me or their classmates made me miss the old days and the sense of group identity students developed. Although I still believe it is an advantage to be available to students “around the clock” or at least frequently between class meetings, I now see the value of synchronous meetings as well. When COVID-19 hit in Spring 2020, I was not teaching with the Grateful Dead, but I was teaching online and asynchronously as I had done for the Grateful Dead Legacy course a year earlier. In response to campus closing due to the virus, other faculty moved their on-campus courses online quickly, transferring instruction from physical rooms to Zoom rooms, preserving synchronous interaction. As I have become familiar with Zoom technology, conducting both individual and group meetings with students and others using the platform, it has made me want to set up a course allowing for improvisation within the Zoom structure (e.g. by inviting guests in response to student requests or merely by letting discussion move to unplanned topics). By doing so, the goals would be to preserve the new freedom the historical changes in context have allowed and to encourage solidarity among students who will then hopefully spontaneously teach me to teach. Doing guest “lectures” on Deadheads via Zoom for classes at other universities (i.e., Natalie Dollar’s class at Oregon State University-Cascades and Larry Bitensky’s class at Centre College) has confirmed my interest in undertaking another pedagogical adventure while teaching with the Grateful Dead.

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## AUTHOR BIO

Rebecca G. Adams, PhD, Professor of Sociology and gerontologist in the School of Health and Social Sciences at University North Carolina Greensboro, has published 5 books and more than 70 scholarly articles and chapters, including more than 15 on Deadheads. *Deadhead Social Science: You Ain't Gonna Learn What You Don't Want to Know*, co-edited with Robert Sardiello in 2000, was released by Roman Littlefield (rowman).

com) as an e-book and print-on-demand in Fall 2021. She has taught about Deadheads on tour (1989), on campus, (2000s), and online (2019); presented at the SWPACA Grateful Dead Caucus, at other professional meetings, and to student audiences; written popular press articles about Deadheads, published a fictional piece situated on Dead tour, conducted audience research for Grateful Dead Productions, and narrated *Deadheads an American Subculture* (1990). She attended her first Dead show in 1970.

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## Teaching the Grateful Dead Phenomenon and Cultural Communication

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### ABSTRACT

Communication studies is particularly well-situated for teaching a course about the Grateful Dead phenomenon and using the phenomenon to teach discipline-specific content. This combination, teaching “the” Grateful Dead and teaching “with” the Grateful Dead, rather than one or the other, is what produces such an engaging course for students, guests, and instructor. I argue that musical speech communities warrant rigorous study and discuss the role of academic publications, professional organizations, and library archives in this process. Developing a pedagogy grounded in cultural communication and treating the course as a communication event allowed for collaboration with students and guest scholars, and illustrates that a multidisciplinary perspective is necessary to understand the significance and complexity of the Grateful Dead phenomenon. Through reflexive analysis of fieldnotes, personal communication with students, and course materials I located the following themes as important to student learning. First, allowing students to choose their topic of study provided familiarity based on personal interests, enhanced comprehension, provided the space for student voice fostering student agency, and increased motivation to prepare and attend class. Second, for students, guest presentations demonstrated new ways of thinking and helped them understand how their personal interests could be academically researched. Third, teaching the Grateful Dead phenomenon with a cultural communication-informed pedagogy necessarily includes teaching methodology and students report improved understanding of the relationship between theory and research. The most common feedback from students was that the level of engagement with the topic facilitated motivation to attend, participate, and increased their learning. Students identified course organization, guest speakers and the multidisciplinary nature of the course as significant to their motivation and success.

**Keywords:** communication studies discipline, Grateful Dead phenomenon, cultural communication, speech community, Grateful Dead studies, cultural communication pedagogy, student agency, student motivation, student preparation

Why would someone want to enroll in a university course about the Grateful Dead phenomenon? Why would a faculty member want to teach a course on this phenomenon? While these are intriguing questions, answering them elicits additional questions, such as, why is the Grateful Dead phenomenon such a compelling topic for students and scholars in 2022, almost twenty-seven years after Jerry Garcia's death? Why do young people continue to discover the Grateful Dead (GD), declare themselves "Deadheads" (DHs), and passionately embrace the Grateful Dead phenomenon (GDP)? Answers are evident in the contributions made from studying the Grateful Dead phenomenon as a topic of inquiry in and of itself, what this special issue refers to as teaching "the" Grateful Dead. Consider Grateful Dead music—what genres it includes, what constitutes a "jam," how improvisation informs its performance, and how the innovative sound technologies being used are just a few of the areas GD studies has contributed to the discipline of music (Flory, 2019). In communication studies the GDP is studied as a dispersed speech community with much to teach us about sustaining, negotiating, and growing a community without a physical place members call "home" (Dollar, 2010). More common, though, is what has been learned from teaching "with" the Grateful Dead, using the phenomenon as a means of teaching disciplinary-specific content, such as presidential politics, brain psychology, leadership styles, and statistics, to name a few. My contribution to this special issue "Teaching the Grateful Dead" is to demonstrate how communication studies is particularly well-situated as a discipline to create a pedagogy focused on teaching the GD with the GD, not one or the other.

## A "THICK DESCRIPTION"<sup>1</sup>: THE GRATEFUL DEAD AND CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

I have taught three courses on the GDP in the past seventeen years<sup>2</sup>. The course has evolved in response to student feedback, its place in the curriculum, and the growth of Grateful Dead studies. The most recent version, taught spring 2020, serves as an elective for our social science degree with an option in community development and leadership. It is also an elective in the communication minor and both American studies and liberal studies majors. The syllabus course description follows:

In this course we'll explore the Grateful Dead phenomenon within the context of American culture beginning with an introduction to the band through clips from [The Grateful Dead Movie](#), followed by a discussion of why one would want to study the Grateful Dead phenomenon. We'll survey the social science literature and consider a developing model of jam band community identity. Then we'll move into the study of the Grateful Dead—historically and musically—before studying the band and fan base (Deadheads) relationship (the Grateful Dead phenomenon), looking into fan archival work, tape trading, and liveness. We'll read, listen to, and discuss journalistic accounts including books, radio, and streaming, then turn to a consideration of cultural communication as a means of creating and nourishing a dispersed identity. Finally, we'll ponder the sociological and musical theory dimensions of this phenomenon before wrapping up our course in the context of communicating American culture (Dollar, 2020).

Topics for our 10-week term included, in the following order: the Grateful Dead as an American band; the GD, Deadheads, and jam-band identities; a historical perspective of the GD in American culture; documenting the GD and taping "shows"; the GDP and writing American culture; cultural geography, the GDP, and DH

1 Thick description was promoted by Geertz (1973) as a methodology focusing on the rigorous observation and reporting of the cultural context and social processes in detail, including participant's meanings.

2 As this article goes to print I am teaching my fourth course on the GDP in the past eighteen years. Students have requested the course be taught more often. I am working on a proposal to convert from special topics to a permanent course offered every other year.

cultural communication; musical histories and the GD; a sociological perspective to explain the continual growth of GDP; and situating the GD in musical theory and American culture.

Twenty-one students registered, and eighteen completed the course. Prior to the course students had limited exposure to the GD phenomenon; one self-identified as “kind of a Deadhead” and a few had family members who listened to the music. Three students played instruments; none were involved with a musical project at the time. Most reported enjoying music as a part of their daily lived experiences.

Initially planned as an in-person course meeting twice a week for three hours and 50 minutes for ten weeks, I transformed the course to be delivered via Zoom due to the COVID pandemic. We spent our class time live on Zoom; there were no recorded lectures for students to view in place of meeting as a class with an instructor. Students stressed that live class meetings were one of the most valuable aspects of the class, allowing them to get comfortable with their peers and interact with guests (fieldnotes, May 29, 2020). In our second class meeting of the third week, students and I were joined by our first guest. In subsequent classes, we would welcome eight more guests. Students reported this to be equally important to using Zoom live because it allowed them to interact with the authors of required class readings and meet scholars for the first time (fieldnotes, June 5, 2020).

I played GD music as I admitted students from the Zoom waiting room, introducing the music chronologically across the term. Students came to expect me to share the “show” date, venue, and any tidbits about what makes this a show worth listening to, asking for this information when I forgot to share. During these opening moments, we casually discussed what we were listening to—students sharing if it was what they expected the band to sound like, what they liked, what they had questions about, and how it related to our ongoing readings, guests, and their course research about a fan community.<sup>3</sup> These experiences provided me with an opportunity to introduce GD music, for students to get “warmed up” for class, and to segue into the daily topic and guest. There was a palpable air of excitement, engagement, and interest during what became our class introductory ritual. I introduced a second ritual for each class, presenting a GD or related sticker to one or two students who participated in a meaningful way. At the end of the term, each student received a class sticker (Figure 1) as the final enactment of the sticker ritual.

Our course was part of an informal theme across social science and American studies—American culture in the 1960s and 1970s—that included fall term courses in American studies and in communication focusing on the Vietnam War era, and two spring courses, a literature course on the American novel post-WWII and our communication course on the GDP. Of the eighteen students who completed our GD course, five also completed at least one of these theme courses. The fall courses included segments on music and American culture as well as a joint listening session of Marvin Gaye and the Flying Burrito Brothers hosted by myself and a colleague teaching the American studies course. This provided students from two courses an



Figure 1

3 Students chose the following musician/fan communities to study as the topic of their assignments: ABBA, Beatles, Bob Marley, Broadway musicals, Bruce Springsteen, Dolly Parton, Electronic Dance music, Insane Clown Posse, K-Pop, Lady Gaga, Luke Combs, Paul Simon's Graceland, Queen, Red Hot Chili Peppers, REM, Taylor Swift, and Zeal & Ardor. Two students chose different forms of popular culture fan communities, namely the Chicago Cubs baseball and “Steven's Universe” television show fans.

opportunity to come together in person, discuss a common topic—music and war—and to make connections across the two courses, facilitating their ability to draw on concepts from multiple disciplines to explore a common text. Students today are used to listening to digitally downloaded music, often targeting individual songs of their own choosing, thereby missing the artistic quality of an album where songs were painstakingly sequenced by the artist. My colleague and I wanted students to grasp how people used to listen to music, often as a group activity in which we listened to entire albums rather than to digital song lists composed of individually selected singles.

The Grateful Dead and Cultural Communication is both a course about the Grateful Dead phenomenon and a means of teaching about “cultural communication” and American culture. Many instructors using popular culture as a pedagogical strategy use it to teach discipline-specific course content, such as economic trending, statistical calculations, and politics. This is an aspect of our course, too. Specifically, as a communication studies course in cultural communication, our content focuses on how members of speech communities<sup>4</sup> use communication to create, enact, and negotiate their shared identity; how cultural codes of communication can and do conflict; the diversity and multiplicity of cultural codes within a given speech community; and comparison with localized communication codes. However, the GDP is not just a pedagogical strategy for teaching about cultural communication. It is a rich example of what a speech community is, how these communities develop and refine their communication codes, and a source of comparison with other musical speech communities. It is this combination—teaching “the” GD and teaching “with” the GD—that produces such an engaging course for the students, guests, and instructor.

Students were actively involved in shaping the flow of discussion from the first week of class. For their first assignment, an ungraded assignment, they watched “The Grateful Dead and American Culture” (Dollar, 2011) and identified at least five reasons to study the Grateful Dead phenomenon. Their lists directed our introductory discussions. For the second assignment, students selected a musical fan community of personal interest, located a relevant peer-reviewed article, summarized the article, and concluded with a discussion of how the fan community is similar to and/or different from Deadheads. The assignment provided the foundation for achieving SLO 1: explaining and discussing the uniqueness of the GDP, and was followed by an assignment to write the musician and fan community history including the social and political contexts in which the band/artist and their fan community emerged and is currently situated. This assignment allowed students to progress in their display of SLO 1 and to begin working on SLO 2: applying multiple social scientific perspectives to situate the GDP in American culture. Their fourth assignment focused on identifying and examining community artifacts, primary sources such as liner notes, online websites, and LP reviews, using the Hymesian (1972) SPEAKING framework.<sup>5</sup> The assignment was a culmination of the second and third assignments as students analyzed their artifacts as understood by the fans and compared them to the GDP. This assignment provided students with the opportunity to display their progress on all three SLOs, a topic I return to in the “So What Did We Learn” section below.

Having formulated a thick description of the course, I turn now to setting forth my argument that communication studies is particularly well-suited for teaching a course about the Grateful Dead phenomenon, as well as using the GDP to teach discipline-specific concepts and theories. I begin with a review of popular culture, music, and pedagogy, then comment on my pedagogical approach in this course. I follow with a reflexive account of how I make sense of both student success and a communication studies pedagogy for teaching the GDP including the challenges encountered. I conclude with students’ observations about the course.

4 A speech community is organized by a code of communication that includes a historically transmitted system of symbols and their meanings and rules for interpreting and enacting this code (Philipsen & Coutu, 2005).

5 The SPEAKING framework is a heuristic for discovering “cultural communication” which is deeply felt, mutually intelligible, and widely accessible communication within a community such as the fan communities students are studying.

## POPULAR CULTURE, MUSIC AND PEDAGOGY

Pedagogical scholarship makes a convincing case for using popular culture to teach disciplinary content across interpretive, social science, and objective fields of study. Scholars teaching science have taken seriously the relationship between memory and musical texts, specifically that they aid one another in recall, and discovered additional benefits, such as summarizing information, consolidating information, increased attention in class, and higher attendance (Calvert & Tart, 1993; Ginsborg & Sloboda, 2007; McLachlin, 2009). For example, Pye (2004) combines traditional lectures with music in his engineer's general chemistry course, using chemical lyrics to facilitate students' ability to summarize and consolidate information. Students recorded higher attendance and reported increased attention than when this novel approach was not used. Test scores for these students were slightly higher from "pre-song" semesters to "post-song" semesters. Kevin Ahern (n.d.) uses songs and limericks to teach university microbiology, and students report his songs help them learn and recall the content. McLachlin (2009) has adopted this technique of writing his own songs after learning of Ahern's success using music as part of his pedagogy. Each of these are examples of teaching discipline-specific content "with" popular culture music.

Social scientists, too, are using music to teach disciplinary content, albeit differently than scientists. Instead of using popular culture as a means of memory and recall, these faculty members are using actual instances of popular culture, often music, to provide examples of disciplinary concepts and theories. For example, Wilson (2020) employs TV/Film, music, meme and cartoons to teach government in political science courses. Wendland (2020) calls upon television shows to facilitate student's understanding of the 25th Amendment and presidential succession. And, Rousu (2018) uses "show tunes" to teach the principles of free markets in undergraduate economic course,s illustrating how show tune examples resonate with students in ways that textbook examples do not.

Communication scholars are also employing music to teach humanistic/interpretive and social scientific theories and concepts. Cruz (2020), for instance, uses rap and hip-hop to teach the Johari Window, an interpersonal model that seeks to explain how sharing and hiding information influences relationships between people. Hall (2020) has students analyze songs to identify and explain attachment styles and family communication patterns, two foundational concepts in interpersonal and family communication courses. In this way, students work with tangible examples of these concepts in song lyrics, learn how complex communication is, and grasp how much investment is required to analyze communication processes. Sciuillo (2014) uses hip-hop to teach Aristotle's three proofs—ethos, pathos, and logos—in argumentation, rhetorical theory, public speaking, and persuasion. Undergraduate students report these courses to be some of their most challenging and responded favorably to using hip-hop and other forms of popular music to facilitate understanding and relevance of rhetorical concepts (Sciuillo) and as an analogy for powerful speech as an approach to teaching public speaking (Cohen & Wei, 2010).

Other studies have extended an understanding of the nuances of using popular culture as a teaching strategy, specifically in terms of how music is selected. Student agency is difficult to achieve in most college and university classrooms, especially those prioritizing an expert (instructor)/student relationship through traditional lectures. Combining lectures with discussions of popular culture situates teacher/student relationships differently by acknowledging something ubiquitous in most students' lives—music—while course content is abstract and more remote from students' lives. Allowing students to choose the popular culture texts for class assignments and discussions creates an opportunity for student voice in their learning process and facilitates student agency. For example, instructors who explain and model how they expect students to use selected learning materials observe an increase in student agency that then produces additional positive outcomes, such as increased comprehension and ability to apply concepts and theories (Soper, 2010; Uhrmacher, 2013; Zoffel, 2010). As recall is part of the comprehension and application, I surmise that using familiar music potentially enhances these processes as well.

Using music also provides a structured environment for class discussions, both small and large groups that is often missing from lecture-based and more traditional classroom pedagogy. Tinari and Khandke (2000) explain how they use music in their economics courses for small group discussions in conjunction with their lectures. These small groups provide students with well-defined opportunities to apply course concepts and theories to their lived experiences, thus increasing student understanding of content that at times seem abstract and/or irrelevant.

Clearly music is an effective pedagogy being used across scientific, social scientific, and humanities disciplines. Whether using music to enhance memory and recall, translate and understand discipline-specific theory, increase student agency, or provide structure for discussions, these university faculty understand the importance of music in student's lives, domestically and abroad (Fanari et al., 2022). Growing internet accessibility, online platforms and social media have resulted in the highest global music consumption to date with Latin American and Asia-Pacific regions currently experiencing the most growth (Market Research, 2022). In their review of music consumption research, Montoro-Pons et al. (2021) explain that "no other cultural manifestation has a wider appeal [than music]" (p. 3) and this ubiquity is not limited by age, race, ethnicity. As such, I argue that music and the speech communities that emerge around the music warrant rigorous studies on their own. My academic home, communication studies, has embraced the study of popular culture and fan communities. Some examples include sports (Aden et al., 2009; Haridakis, 2010; Haugh & Watkins, 2016); literature (Booth, 2013; Tian & Adorjan, 2016); celebrities (Darling-Wolf, 2004; Soukup, 2006); film and television (Hutchison, 2018; Oh, 2013); and music fans (Baker, 2012; Blau, 2010; Dollar, 1999a, 2007; Erdely & Breede, 2017; Lull, 1987; Theberge, 2005).

The emergence and growth of Grateful Dead studies—academic publications, areas/caucuses, and associations—is another sort of evidence that the GD warrants careful study of its musical, communication, social, and historical aspects. The 1972 Gay, Elsenbaumer, & Newmeyer study comparing emergency medical tent staff experiences at Grateful Dead and Led Zeppelin Kezar Stadium concerts was the first of three academic articles that analyzed psychedelic experiences at GD concerts. In 1987, Pearson published a phenomenological study of the youth dimension of the "Deadhead subculture," marking a shift in research to include the study of Deadheads as a musical taste culture (Dollar, 1988), a speech community (Dollar, 1999a, b), and a sociological phenomenon (Adams, 1998). Dodd and Weiner (1997) collected the growing body of Grateful Dead research, recordings and reviews, band newsletters, and fan magazines in an annotated bibliography as part of Greenwood Press' *Music Reference Collection*. Their publication marks a significant point in the growth of Grateful Dead studies and becomes a valued reference for Grateful Dead scholarship. Weiner (1999) followed with a collection of essays exploring the "rich musical and cultural legacy of the Grateful Dead" (xxii). Dodd and Spaulding's (2000) *The Grateful Dead Reader* was published as part of Oxford's Readers on American Musicians series the same year Adams and Sardiello (2000) published *Deadhead Social Science: "You Ain't Gonna Learn What You Don't Want to Know,"* the first collection of social scientific GD scholarship. Meriwether's (2007) *All Graceful Instruments: The Contexts of the Grateful Dead Phenomenon*, constitutes another significant place in Grateful Dead studies focusing our attention on the music, musicians, Deadheads, and American culture—the Grateful Dead phenomenon.

The Grateful Dead area has been part of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association since 1998, providing GD scholars an affiliation with a professional association. However, there was no research archive where scholars could examine and study primary data sources illustrating the significance of Pymm's (1993) argument for more institutional commitment within research libraries to cultivating musical archives and holdings as both the means for teaching and as the object of study. Over ten years later, in 2008, the GD donated their archives to the University of Santa Cruz McHenry Library. Unfortunately, the band did not donate the funds to curate the archive or digitize artifacts, such as papers, decorated envelopes, backstage



passes, correspondence, and posters. Nevertheless, the archive has grown, now including an online version (Grateful Dead Archive Online), and has become an important resource for researching the GDP. Deadheads have and continue to contribute to documenting the Grateful Dead phenomenon, providing students and scholars with a vast array of archival data. Wallace's (2009) detailed analysis of Deadhead's tape trading and technology history exemplifies how archives can be used to understand community values as they relate to legal concerns, such as "non-commercialized sharing and cooperation and the reconfiguring of traditional intellectual property configurations" (p. 187). Interest in these archives stretches beyond the university campus as demonstrated by the success of Huntington Beach Art Center's 1996 exhibit "Dead on the Wall: Grateful Dead and Deadhead Iconography from Thirty Years on the Bus" and the 2010 Grateful Dead exhibit at the New York Historical Museum. Clearly, the GDP is a topic worthy of academic study including research and university classes devoted to the topic.

### **A CULTURAL COMMUNICATION PEDAGOGY: TEACHING THE GRATEFUL DEAD**

My pedagogy has been strongly influenced by studying cultural communication (Carbaugh, 1993; Philipsen, 1992), a field that requires close examination of localized communication using ethnography of communication (Hymes, 1972; Philipsen & Coutu, 2005), interviews (Briggs, 1993), "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), and additional methods prioritizing participants' meaning. The use of a framework to guide data collection and analysis is essential to this enterprise. Hymes' SPEAKING heuristic (Daas & McBride, 2014; Hymes, 1972) and fantasy theme analysis (Waite, 2008) are prominent communication research methods tapped as teaching frameworks. I utilize these, both in teaching and researching the Grateful Dead phenomenon, providing a model for students to understand and apply concepts and theories in their own fan community research. In this article, I treat the course as a speech event and applied the SPEAKING framework to inform my thick description above, as well as to interpret and organize my discussion of student learning outcomes below.

Collaboration with students and guest scholars is another important component of my pedagogy. I share the course syllabus and assignments with guests at least three months before our class, we discuss how their expertise fits into the course, and we create a pre-course plan with the agreement that the plan will be revisited a few weeks prior to teaching and adjusted for where the course is "at this moment." For instance, changing assigned readings, changing the order of our guests, and fine-tuning the topic were part of this in the moment planning. Our guests included an oral historian; a long-time GD show taper and trader; a co-author/researcher of DeadBase and poster artist; a journalist who published books about three musical groups as well as magazine articles and liner notes; an American studies and English professor who published critically acclaimed books about the Grateful Dead and *Ramparts* magazine, a sociologist who took students on "tour," published a book of their studies, and has made a convincing argument for how experiential preferences during GD shows explain part of the uniqueness of the GDP; and two music theorists and a musicologist all of whom study the Grateful Dead phenomenon. As the official instructor I designed and implemented the course, collaborated with guest speakers, and taught three specific topics—Deadheads' cultural communication, liveness and cultural geography—lines of research I draw on in my cultural communication landscape studies of jam bands (Dollar, 1999a, 2007, 2010; Dollar et al., 2019).

When musicians attract a following that transcends historical, social, and generational boundaries, multidisciplinary approaches are essential to understanding the complexity of the phenomenon, a lesson I learned when I embarked on my initial study of the GDP (Dollar, 1988). Combining musical taste cultures with fantasy theme analysis, I argued that spiritual and communal themes, both products and outcomes of communication, provide motivation for belonging to musical taste cultures in contrast to the status

quo demographic explanations. My studies have become more focused on cultural communication and dispersed communities to understand how communication is essential to the maintenance and growth of the GDP speech community (Dollar 1999a,b, 2007, 2010; Dollar et al. 2019). Multidisciplinary inquiries often “constitute synergistic momentum, creating new forms of knowledge discovery that may appear to consecrated disciplines as amorphous, if not decentered epistemically” (Hérubel, 2020, p. 24). This is certainly the case with the GDP as a topic of research and the subject of university courses across the curriculum and continues to be strengthened through this multidisciplinary approach, including but not limited to sociology (Adams, 1998, Adams & Sardiello, 2000), literature (Richards, 2014), rhetoric (Carroll, 2007), history (Meriwether, 2007, 2012, 2013), philosophy (Gimbel, 2007; Tueido & Spector, 2010), legal issues (Balter-Reitz, 2015/2016), music (Wood, 2020), and business (Barnes, 2011).

### **SO WHAT DID WE LEARN?**

Student learning outcomes (SLO) facilitate instructor’s understanding of students’ experiences as well as about their own teaching practices. There are many assessment options along the quantitative/qualitative research continuum, SLOs are but one of these. Common quantitative methods include student evaluations of teachers and courses and statistical analyses of assignment scores. Qualitative assessments include students’ written comments within student assessments of courses, instructors’ written assessment of assignments, and focus groups with students conducted by someone other than the instructor. As with all methodologies, each has their strengths and weaknesses, which is beyond the scope of this article. I am concerned here with making sense of this pedagogical experience through the frame of reflective analysis rather than a scientific analysis of student evaluations and assignments as assessment tools. I organize my observations with regard to course student learning outcomes.

### **Situating the GDP in Communication Fan Studies**

Within the discipline of communication studies, fan community studies tend to investigate literature, sports, and film/television communities more than music fan communities. Much of this research prioritizes cultural and critical studies approaches. A review of communication studies professional organizations publications illustrates this trend: *Communication & Sport* (International Communication Association), *Critical Studies in Media Communication* (National Communication Association), *Text and Performance Studies* (National Communication Association), and *Feminist Media Studies* (Taylor & Francis). This was not lost on students as they struggled to locate music fan community studies published in communication studies. At first frustrated, students came to see this as an advantage for demonstrating their proficiency with SLO 1: explaining and discussing the uniqueness of the GDP.

Across assignments students discussed the depth and complexity of the Grateful Dead, Deadheads, and their shared community as a significant difference with the fan communities they were studying. Instead of overstating claims of similarity and differences, the student’s discussions demonstrated the rigorous demands of a cultural communication perspective and resulted in thick descriptions. Using their thick descriptions students were able to better understand how communication fan studies differ in methodology and theoretical framing yet have commonalities in what is being studied, such as fan-fan communication, fan-artist/musician/celebrity/sports stars communication, and fan archiving.

### **Situating the Grateful Dead Phenomenon in American Culture**

Two sources of data, weekly quizzes and written assignments, inform my comments regarding SLO 2: applying multiple disciplinary perspectives to situate the GDP in American culture. Weekly quizzes were completed online using Canvas. Each quiz concentrated on the materials and perspectives covered that week in class and included multiple choice, true/false, short answers, and essay questions. Quizzes focused on

comprehension and application. Students averaged the following scores for our eight weekly quizzes: one A, five Bs and two Cs. These preliminary data suggest that students were able to apply multidisciplinary approaches to understanding the GDP.

Short answer and essay questions allowed students to demonstrate their comprehension and application with more detail than close-ended questions. Consider this essay question from our Week 3 quiz: *According to this week's guest, the Grateful Dead phenomenon differs from that of other musical fan communities in multiple ways that explain the phenomenon's continuing relevance. Identify, explain and discuss 1 of these. Make sure you draw on concepts/terms our guest brought to our awareness through assigned readings and/or presentation and interaction with your peers.* Responses included discussions of the international history of bohemian movements, how the GD took very seriously the role of art and music in society, and democratic bohemianism. Others commented on their piqued interest in happening theory as a way of explaining the GD's willingness to make mistakes on stage, lack of fear of losing fans over imperfect musicianship, and their eschewing the music industry norm for making money from studio albums instead of tours, especially those that did not promote a studio release. The theme of amateur historians, a role that Deadheads took on and the GD embraced, was yet another conceptual idea that students found meaningful. These students clearly comprehended how a historical perspective facilitated their understanding of GDP and its longevity. Similar levels of comprehension and application were evidenced across the range of disciplinary approaches presented by our other guests throughout the course.

### **Situating Student Research as Unique**

Students explicitly demonstrated their use of primary and secondary sources to research and write a unique study, SLO 3, in Assignment 4. This assignment required students to select a text or an artifact of significance among their chosen fan community and to use Hymes' (1972) SPEAKING framework to describe, discuss, and explain these primary sources. A prominent theme in our class discussion about this assignment was that frameworks and heuristics are secondary sources. Additional secondary sources were called up to situate student's studies in academic perspectives. For example, students treated song lyrics as their primary source, and fan's responses to, interpretation of, and blogging about the lyrics as secondary sources. Others studied posters and promotional artifacts (primary) and the social, historical, and political climate of the time as presented in news publications (secondary).

Allowing students to choose their research topic provided a familiarity and personal interest in this and previous assignments. This combination proved beneficial as is clear when we consider the following unsolicited comment:

I loved taking this class. Having a focus on a community that was familiar to me helped me grasp the concepts and relate them to my own life and the communities I was in. I especially loved our final assignment, which allowed me to focus on a fan community of my choice and analyze the way the community members communicated with each other (student, personal correspondence, fall 2020).

Familiarity enhanced interest that facilitated applying concepts and theories to this student's lived experiences and in their communication analysis of one fan community. Without using academic-speak, the student explains student agency, which Zoffel (2010) defines as "the action a student takes to adopt our field's concepts as their own and then uses those concepts to accomplish the learning objectives" ( p. 193).

Guests who shared a primary source, such as multiple live versions of the same GD song, and relevant secondary sources, social and cultural histories of the times, demonstrated how to use differing levels of sources in a manner accessible to students. Students shared that guest presentations allowed them to play with concepts in new ways, think critically, understand how their personal interests were part of academic

scholarship, and grasp how the GDP was so much more complex than imagined at the beginning of the course (fieldnotes, June 5, 2020). These comments illustrate students' ability to use primary and secondary sources.

### **Teaching the Grateful Dead Phenomenon as Communication Studies**

The Grateful Dead phenomenon, clearly a multi-perspective topic, provides a rich body of experiences suitable for teaching communication studies courses. As an academic discipline, communication studies' history is highly multidisciplinary, just as is the history of the GDP. The classical period of Aristotle, Plato, Quintilian, and others provides the foundation for current rhetorical studies of public speaking and communication. The early modern period, 1800-1990, was clearly grounded in English departments characterized by a focus on presentation and elocution. The focus was on the individual as a communicator. Early 20th century brought World War I and World War II, and speech communication began to take even more shape in response to such events. Drawing from psychology and rhetoric, communication studies shifted toward objective research into mass media effects, individual traits, and propaganda culminating in modern critical and rhetorical theories. Soon after, communication studies built on sociology and psychology in studying relationships, groups, attitudes, and socialization. Moving into the 1970s, communication studies manifested in distinct fields of study, including but not limited to mass communication, persuasion, intercultural, group, organization, gender, and critical communication. Today, the fields of study are even more expansive, and the Grateful Dead phenomenon can be understood from many of these.

Equally significant are the possibilities afforded by teaching methodology when studying the Grateful Dead phenomenon. In our class, we studied writing culture, documenting and archiving culture, ethnography of communication, and discourse analysis. Student-selected research topics facilitated interest, and guests had a tangible influence on students' understanding of and sense of efficacy conducting their research. Using cultural artifacts of particular interest to students helped them understand the relevance and rigor required to conduct academic research as illustrated in this student comment: 'the last thing I wanted to do was a crappy job analyzing my fan materials, I got to choose what I studied and so I wanted to do my best' (student, personal communication, June 6, 2020). Further, the connection between theory and methods guided our guests' presentations and modeled a relationship students often find incomprehensible. It was common to have students report to me that they finally understand theory and research as part of the same process, have learned not to be intimidated by theory and research, and that some are now considering a career that involves research (fieldnotes, April 24, May 15, and May 29, 2020).

There are limitations to the pedagogical approach set forth here with time consumption being the greatest challenge. Selecting and collaborating with appropriate guest speakers; working with individual students in the selection of their fan community, conducting their research, and completing their assignments; and assessing and providing constructive feedback for weekly quizzes and four written research assignments are time-intensive tasks. Offering the class as an upper-division course and limiting enrollment to thirty are a few ways to mitigate these challenges.

### **THE LAST WORD: STUDENT OBSERVATIONS**

I close by giving the final word to the students in The Grateful Dead and Cultural Communication course. Student-shared challenges coalesced around two themes, prioritizing classes and attending live music. Some students expressed a personal struggle with wanting to prioritize this course and recognizing that their other courses were also important even if they were less interested in and motivated to attend these classes (fieldnotes, June 5, 2020). The second challenge was that this was the first term our campus switched to remote learning due to the COVID pandemic and local venues canceled all live performances (fieldnotes, June 5, 2020). Given the relevance of "live" music in the course, not being able to attend such performances inhibited student's opportunity to experience and feel the live scene in the context of course discussion.

The most common feedback I received from students addressed engagement and motivation as part of their learning process. What surprised me most were those students who discussed the relationship between preparation, engagement, and learning. Students reported feeling more engaged in this course than any other course they have taken. Many of these students stated that the potential for learning increases with class preparation. Of course, instructor preparation is critical to a positive learning environment, and students tell us so in their teacher evaluations. Significantly less frequent is students' acknowledgement that *their* class preparation is just as important as the instructors:

When instructors and students are prepared for class, there is room for much more learning. When one or the other is unprepared, it undermines our learning. In this class, we were consistently prepared and it paid off (student, personal communication, June 9, 2020).

Preparation is enhanced through motivation, and students cited course organization, guest speakers, and the multidisciplinary nature of the course as key to their motivation to both prepare and attend class. It is the multidisciplinary aspect that rendered the most interest and feedback from students. Some commented on not wanting to miss a class because they were meeting and learning things from people they would otherwise not have an opportunity to meet, much less discuss their scholarship with (fieldnotes, May 29, 2020). Others noted how the diversity of guests led them to feel they learned something completely different each time, and that the guests opened them to new facets and sides to the Grateful Dead experience and culture each time we met (fieldnotes, May 29, 2020). One student reported to me months after the term,

Our assignments were so engaging, and I personally really enjoyed applying what we were learning in class about the Grateful Dead and cultural communication to different bands with completely different experiences. I got to apply so many other interests to the analysis: history, politics, music, pop culture, subcultures, etc. (personal communication, August 2020).

That students noticed the integration of a multidisciplinary focus in their written assignments was music to my ears, one sweet source of evidence that the Grateful Dead phenomenon is worthy of study, and that communication studies is particularly well-situated as a discipline in which to offer the study.

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## Teaching the Grateful Dead, Happenings, & Spontaneous Pedagogy

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### ABSTRACT

To teach a course on the Grateful Dead I developed a praxis I call “spontaneous pedagogy” that pairs academic rigor with flexible curriculum details to enable creativity and engagement among students in a truly student-centered classroom. The pairing of spontaneous pedagogy with the Grateful Dead course worked well because the subject emphasizes improvisation, which initially inspired and—during the course—paralleled my praxis. I had developed this praxis previously, implementing it each semester from 2007 to 2010 for one Composition II unit on definitional arguments entitled, “The Nature of Reality.” Students were asked to define what they consider as real and apply that definition to a mythological creature. Utilizing spontaneous pedagogy in this unit was successful: students gained agency in the classroom, guiding our activities towards important topics for them, and produced unique and excellent work. Following this success, I taught a topic-based intersession class (80 hours in three weeks) on the Grateful Dead in 2011, relying on spontaneous pedagogy and allowing students more agency to determine our curriculum. But something unusual happened: as the students determined the topics for class discussion, they also began assigning themselves additional homework and reading tasks, including their own essay assignments and their submission of their own oral and multimodal presentations on topics of their choosing. I found that spontaneous pedagogy in the Grateful Dead classroom achieved a truly student-centered learning experience as students willingly took over the roles of curriculum and assignment design, leaving me to prepare the classes and participate in them as a guide. In addition to the knowledge of the topic students gained in the class, they also gained a unique experience of a spontaneous atmosphere in an academic setting that paralleled a Grateful Dead improvisation or show experience.

**Keywords:** Grateful Dead, Geoffrey Sirc, Charles Deemer, happening, pedagogy, improvisation, epiphany, agency, spontaneous pedagogy, student-centered pedagogy

## A CRITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING “ENGLISH COMPOSITION AS A HAPPENING” AND ITS RELATION TO THE GRATEFUL DEAD

When I was an M.A. student in the English Department at the University of Oklahoma, I was a young educator developing my classroom identity in two writing courses per semester and departmental training programs. Since I have always been inclined towards experimentation, I was also seeking out ways to make my students’ educational experience unique. At that crucial moment, a faculty mentor recommended a book called *English Composition as a Happening* (2002) by Geoffrey Sirc. In his book, Sirc laments the passing of the days when incense was an atmosphere-setting pedagogical tool (alas, these were days I never knew). He notes that apparently “smoke is not supposed to be good for disc drives” (Sirc 1). The metaphor Sirc establishes using incense and disc-drives speaks to the tension he perceives in the field of composition and in higher education in general: soul searching vs. professionalization, free flowing discourse vs. imposed forms. This is a tension that I was becoming increasingly interested in addressing. To do so, I built on Sirc’s happening pedagogy to develop a praxis I call “spontaneous pedagogy” that pairs academic rigor with flexible curriculum details to allow for creativity and engagement among students in a truly student-centered classroom. Spontaneous pedagogy is my own brand of the wider trend in academia towards modes of student-centered pedagogy. This article will show the process by which I enacted a spontaneous pedagogy, or a more student-centric, improvisatory approach to curriculum development in the Grateful Dead classroom. It will argue that a greater level of student-led decision-making is needed in more curriculum-based areas that surpass class discussion and could involve students determining their own assignments, readings, submission requirements and schedules, grades, projects, and presentations. The optimum articulation of my spontaneous pedagogy was realized in a 2011 topic-based course on the Grateful Dead where the method of delivery matched the improvisatory, democratic ethos of the subject. This postmodern pedagogy, focused on student-centric decision-making and autonomy, can awaken humanistic ideals of criticality and creativity that are often stifled by more regimented and professionalized courses, particularly within non-humanities majors.

According to Geoffrey Sirc, our educational institutions have become too institutionalized and endanger the possibility of our students acquiring a meaningful education that focuses beyond the emphasis on professional training that is becoming increasingly dominant on our university campuses. He sees the current landscape of higher education leaning toward professionalization, focusing almost exclusively on preparing students for their careers to the neglect of a liberal education that would encourage students to develop their humanity, strive for self-actualization, and participate responsibly as citizens of the world.<sup>1</sup> Sirc’s analysis of higher education rang true for me as an M.A. student discovering the lay of the land for myself, and I was dissatisfied with what I was discovering. I identified the humanities and the arts as crucial aspects of an educational model that seeks to facilitate a meaningful life experience. To my mind—then, as now—fulfilled, enriched individuals are happier and more successful. As the emphasis on higher education has become disproportionately imbalanced towards professional training, English composition remains one area of requirement for all students regardless of their major. That makes composition an important realm for students to encounter the self-scrutiny and critical thinking that the English Department facilitates, which many students might not otherwise experience. For Sirc—and for me—a student’s experience of composition is a pivotal opportunity in the development of their humanity as well as their writing skills. If we overly professionalize composition, we might factor out the opportunity for self-actualization represented by this last resort of the liberal education.

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1 At my current institution, students in engineering and business major paths are only allowed electives as an honorary title. These majors build out the elective courses with “strongly recommended” additional courses in professional training, further disallowing the possibility of augmenting vocational training with any aspect of the humanities.

For Sirc, if a teacher can disrupt a student's conventional thought habits by whatever means necessary, that teacher offers the student an opportunity to step beyond their current state of being. As a result of their newfound heightened elegance of thought, a student might take to the task of professionalization and vocational training more easily. Sirc believes that instead of inundating uninterested students with rules and formulas, we, as teachers, should provide them with opportunities for cognitive growth. He calls for composition instructors to adopt the role of "the inspired shaman, not the pedestrian businessmen" (Sirc 74). Sirc's reconfiguration of the instructor figure from vocational trainer to shamanistic spirit guide was very appealing to me.<sup>2</sup>

Sirc is not alone in his judgment of the uninteresting and thus ineffective classroom procedures of business-style composition courses. Sirc's 2002 book harks back to Charles Deemer's late 1960's pedagogy manifesto: "English Composition as a Happening." Happenings, Deemer, and the Grateful Dead were all birthed out of the same primordial ooze of sixties countercultural heterogeneity. Deemer's short piece is instilled with the fiery anti-authoritarian passion of the activist-side of the 60's counterculture. It also follows the aesthetic of the Postmodern era that birthed it: Deemer presents his argument through a fragmented arrangement of original maxims juxtaposed with quotes on education from respected thinkers of the past as well as from Deemer's present. These quoted fragments include the likes of Susan Sontag, Archibald MacLeish, Marshall McLuhan, Bertrand Russell, and John Dewey. In an exemplary passage, Deemer mixes his original maxims with John Dewey quotations:

And the university should not be a factory molding students. Campuses should not be educational 'plants,' despite the current accuracy of popular jargon.

\*

*I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living.* (John Dewey, *Dewey on Education*)

\*

Neither should English Composition instruct in the pleasant phrasing of nonsense. It should actually instruct in nothing, in the sense that a "teacher" reveals and a class digests. What does a "teacher" know? He is merely human.

\*

*I believe finally, that education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience; that the process and the goal of education are one and the same thing.* (John Dewey, *Dewey on Education*). (Deemer 123, original emphasis)

The weight of Deemer's argument is in the interrelation of his original declarations and Dewey's quotations. Deemer draws readers to Dewey's conclusion that education should be process-based, not product-based. Since Deemer's era, the idea of process-based education has gained plenty of traction in composition studies, such

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<sup>2</sup> "Shaman" is a culturally specific word for an indigenous spiritual healer in Siberian tribes. Mircea Eliade adopted the term and applied it to other indigenous spiritual healers worldwide whose practices exhibited similar characteristics in his study, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (1951). The adjectival "shamanic" refers specifically to these indigenous shamans embedded in a lifestyle and tradition of Shamanism. I use the adjectival "Shamanistic" to denote a degree of separation: to describe a practice that evokes an affinity with, but is not related to indigenous Shamanism.

that this concept was foundational to my pedagogical training.<sup>3</sup> To this concept of process-based pedagogy, Deemer added the new (to me) idea of a spontaneous classroom. While reading Deemer, I followed my own running juxtaposition: I was understanding him through the Grateful Dead. In addition to the similarities between Deemer and The Grateful Dead's response to their countercultural milieu —consider the electric exploratory quality of the Grateful Dead's 1967 jams—The Grateful Dead exemplify a process-based ethos in their music. The best musical improvisations are about the final destination and the course navigated to reach it in equal measure. The adventure and the excitement of the journey strengthens the importance of that destination. Deemer's call for process-based pedagogy reads, to me, as a pedagogical equivalent to the adventurous, improvisatory ethos of the Grateful Dead. That exploratory ethos would lead the band to host thousands of shows that share many similarities with Deemer's Happenings.

In his manifesto, Deemer calls for the field of composition to remodel itself on the "happening". A happening is a performance art exhibition that blurs the lines between performer and audience member. These tend to be non-linear and multi-modal. Frequently, aspects of happenings are planned in advance but without integrating any specifics. The goal of the happening is to achieve insight in the spontaneous moments they afford. A happening might interrupt the monotonous decorum of a pre-scheduled daily routine to allow for the surfacing of the cosmic, organic, organizing principle: synchronicity. For Carl Jung, who developed the idea of synchronicity, "[s]ynchronistic events rest on the *simultaneous occurrence of two different psychic states*. One of them is the normal, probable state (i.e, the one that is causally explicable), and the other, the critical experience, is the one that cannot be derived causally from the first" (*Synchronicity* 28-9 original emphasis). For example, two people pondering the same thought at the same time is an instance of synchronicity. For one person to have the thought is ordinary, but the acausal occurrence of the same thought to both is inexplicable. In this instance then, the "different" psychic state is actually the same state arising simultaneously in two different people. Synchronicity would happen often at Grateful Dead shows. As the band improvised and the music and the show experience unfolded spontaneously, band and audience members alike might experience acausal connections between the music and their own thoughts, or the thoughts or actions of two individuals, or many individuals, or myriad other permutations. In fact, the above description of a happening might be applied verbatim to a Grateful Dead show. Remarkably, the Grateful Dead were able to create the conditions necessary for a new and different happening at each one of their shows. The blurring of lines between audience and performer, and the focus on improvisation that characterizes both Grateful Dead shows and happenings are documented methods of achieving synchronistic moments.

Synchronicities are often punctuated with epiphanies, and one epiphany can teach a student a life lesson that will stick with them for a lifetime. James Joyce defines an epiphany as "a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself" (qtd. in Abrams 421). Joyce's definition emphasizes a shift in perspective to view a common, "vulgar" occurrence in a new light. This idea is paralleled in the Grateful Dead's lyric for "Scarlet Begonias" (1974), written by lyricist Robert Hunter, "Once in a while/ you can get shown the light/ in the strangest of places/ if you look at it right" (197). Hunter's deceptively simple aphorism corresponds to Joyce's definition of epiphany. In Hunter's lyric, perceiving an ordinary object or occurrence in a new way might allow one to become illuminated; a metaphor

3 Far from revolutionary by the twenty-first century, the theories of process-based education were introduced to me during my initial pedagogical training, when faculty members and advanced graduate students challenged our cohort of incoming instructors to reframe education for ourselves and our students as process-based; a move that would open up the metacognitive level of considering our own "procedural knowledge" (Hillocks 27). George Hillocks, Jr. writes, "[when] students were actively engaged in investigations or in the construction of ideas, we classify the knowledge as procedural" (35). The challenge was for each instructor to think deeply about their own ethos and embodiment to develop our own original ways of engaging students in the procedures of knowledge creation in our classrooms. Deemer's idea of bringing improvisation into the classroom via Happenings provided the spark to this line of inquiry for me and led me to spontaneous pedagogy.

for epiphany. In higher education, a moment of illumination will stay with a student well beyond their college experience. As an M.A. student, I saw the benefit of adapting a happening mode into my courses because I wished to provide my students with such epiphanic moments, though not in a Socratic way, by leading students to pre-orchestrated moments of insight as Mark Jonas notices in the patterns of Socratic dialogues (Jonas 40). I sought instead to enact a pedagogy in a style reminiscent of the Grateful Dead's: by not crowding the curriculum—The Grateful Dead rarely wrote setlists—and allowing the space for differing psychic states to occur simultaneously, arising organically as an intentional component of my praxis. In short, I wanted to allow for the possibility of synchronicity and epiphany, in addition to achieving the knowledge and skill-based outcomes of my courses.

To integrate an improvisatory happening modality into the college classroom opens up the possibilities available in that classroom, including the possibility of illumination, or epiphany. In the preface to their edited volume *The Improvisation Studies Reader*, Rebecca Caines and Ajay Hebel suggest that “the social force of improvised performance practices resides, at least in part, in their capacity to trouble the assumptions (and the expectations of fixity) fostered by dominant systems of knowledge production” (Caines & Hebel 3). Appealing as this brand of “good trouble” might be to an irreverent instructor like myself, an educational approach that instigates synchronicity in the classroom to facilitate epiphanies is largely at odds with the *modus operandi* of twenty-first century higher education. “Epiphanies,” David R. Cole suggests, “have been systematically excluded from educational discourse, as they present an escape from the ‘trance of the present’ – and the blinkers [sic] that one dons when one constructs a scholarly argument with reference to what is already understood in a field of inquiry” (57). Yet, if we consider teaching to be an art—which I do—and we understand that the formula,

Improvisation => synchronicity => epiphany

works in spontaneous art—which it does—then it follows logically that the formula might be adapted successfully into spontaneous classroom practices. This adaptation became a goal for me in this early phase of my vocation.

The question for me thus became, how can we incorporate these two forms that seem to be very much at odds with one another: improvisational, synchronistic, epiphanic happenings and a college education of the current style that relies on a rigid structure of meticulously detailed lesson plans that sometimes stifles the very creativity and criticality we seek to engender in our students? I can only answer for myself. At the point when I encountered Sirc and Deemer, I was a few years into my vocation: a lifelong commitment to higher education. I had received unparalleled pedagogical training from one of the foremost composition programs in the country. I had the support of excellent mentors and colleagues, I had internalized the lessons I had learned about teaching, and I was interested in developing my own praxis. I had learned from my stellar mentors that the most successful educators match their praxis to their ethos, so that their lessons ring true and are reinforced by their own embodiment. The literature on college teaching I was reading corroborated these insights: “We must understand the thinking, attitudes, values, and concepts that lie behind pedagogical masterpieces, observe practices carefully but then begin to digest, transform, and individualize what we see,” Ken Bains reiterates, “teachers [must] adjust every idea to who they are and what they teach” (20-21). Indeed, I realized I was in search of an individualized praxis that matched my embodiment and that truly centered students within the classroom experience. The happening approach suggested by Sirc and Deemer provided me with a foundation to create such a praxis by adopting an improvisatory approach to the art of classroom teaching.

Personally—and in my studies of art and literature—I was interested in improvisation, gravitating towards the likes of Thelonious Monk, Gertrude Stein, Jackson Pollock, Jack Kerouac, and of course, The Grateful Dead. In fact, I had hit the road to see the country—and to see “the Dead” (as they were calling

themselves at the time, with Jeff Chementi on keyboards and Warren Haynes on lead guitar)—and the improvisatory, transitory nature of a road trip paralleled for me the same quality found in an improvisational performance, which also reflected the larger perpetually shifting, improvisatory journey through life. Philosophically and spiritually, I was drawn towards non-linear and paradoxical models of thought such as Taoism and Buddhism that teach the malleability of perception and the necessity of change. And then, when all of these aggregates coalesced—pedagogical, personal, professional, philosophical, spiritual—a faculty mentor introduced me to Sirc’s book. That was a fine moment of synchronicity. “There are moments,” David R. Cole writes,

as a teacher and learner when everything seems to come together. One’s knowledge area, the purpose of the teaching and learning and student responses seem to blend and unify in these moments. These are pedagogic epiphanies. Suddenly, the combined weight of social concern and professional endeavour appears to lift. The job of teaching becomes easier and one’s energy reserves are replenished. (Cole 57)

All of these aggregates coalesced into a pedagogic epiphany, which hit me like a lightning bolt to the forehead: “spontaneous pedagogy.” Just as the Grateful Dead did not invent improvisation, I was not inventing student-centered pedagogy, but rather, was shaping my own particular inflection of it. This praxis would shape my pedagogy, and even after its fullest, most experimental application in the Grateful Dead classroom proved successful—yet unsustainable—I would retain elements of it, synthesizing them with more conventional classroom practices.

## **SPONTANEOUS PEDAGOGY & COMPOSING THE NATURE OF REALITY**

My first undertaking in spontaneous pedagogy came at this point, and I developed a nebulous composition unit on definitional arguments. The topic was “The Nature of Reality.” The unit lasted three weeks with no pre-orchestrated lesson plans and a one-question entry point in our fluid class: “what is real?” The assignment was to choose a mythological creature, and then argue whether it is real or not, supporting that claim with a personalized set of criteria that had been developed in class.<sup>4</sup> We spent three weeks in organic class discussions, break-out groups, and individual journaling to develop multifaceted criteria that the students would then apply to their chosen creature to define it as either real or unreal; I distinguish between real/unreal and real/imaginary because many such sets described the imaginary as real. No two class’s criteria were ever the same. Some classes maintained a simple real vs. not-real dichotomy in their criteria, while others explored the shades of grey in up to seven or eight categories of reality. Each of these categories would be populated with criteria that students would use to determine the reality of their character. A few examples of criteria categories are as follows:

- Real/Not Real
- Physical Real/Imaginative Real/Not Real
- Ordinary Reality/Expanded Reality/Not Real
- Tangible Reality/Mental Reality/Cultural Reality/Not Real

Consequently, no two papers were the same. Successful students learned how to write a definitional argument as per the listed outcomes in accord with the first-year writing program.<sup>5</sup> Many students also learned about themselves and where they personally draw the line between what is real and what is not. I observed

<sup>4</sup> This idea came from a previous discussion with a group of students about whether or not jackalopes are real. As it turns out, they are.

<sup>5</sup> Academic success on this assignment—and each assignment—was measured by completion of required tasks as outlined on a rubric designed to assess students’ completion of course outcomes. See Appendix A for “Nature of Reality” Definitional Argument rubric.

many students marveling at the unanticipated variation in conceptions of reality among their peers. Though I cannot be completely certain, I did not catch any students plagiarizing this assignment. How could they? In this unit, we met the prescribed outcomes of the program and students had a meaningful, introspective experience while also having a very good time.<sup>6</sup> As you might assume, I instantly realized the value and possibility of this approach. My method would more fully develop in the Grateful Dead classroom, which I saw as the exemplary opportunity to conduct an entire class improvisationally.

Before continuing, I will add that a widespread adoption of spontaneous pedagogy in higher education seems unlikely. Happenings are difficult to plan, especially in advance, especially for those unused to planning, or rather, facilitating them. Many are rightly hesitant to enter a classroom “without a net,” so to speak. While the potential outcomes of an improvisatory method are synchronicities that lead to lasting moments of insight, inspiration, and individuation, the instructor shoulders a greater risk of falling on their face. The Grateful Dead were certainly aware of this risk in their own approach to improvisation and sometimes did fall on their faces. But their audiences were sympathetic, understanding that risk as part of the adventure. In my experience, students who are exhilarated by the adventurous classroom experience of spontaneous pedagogy are likewise sympathetic. Yet, I can imagine that the willingness to fall on one’s face is a quality that is rather peculiar to my own pedagogical ethos.

Also, happening pedagogy is rather unsustainable. As Deemer writes, “Happenings happen; they are not passed down from one to another. Spontaneity is essential. Each Teacher must inspire his own happening” (124). Because each happening is unique, extra effort is required of the instructor to set the stage and retain a fluid attitude, understanding that no two happenings will take the same course. That is, no two Happenings are the same, as no two Grateful Dead shows are the same, but when that insight is extrapolated to the higher education classroom, the potential chore of reinventing the wheel for every class is inescapably apparent. That said, Deemer provides a loose set of characteristics and lists the potential boons of undertaking such a perilous endeavor:

What I suggest is that the characteristics of the happening that reduce the distance between actor and audience, hence between ‘teacher’ and class; that feature shock and surprise as vehicles to raise the audience from comfort to insecurity; that result spontaneously from the ‘teacher’s’ own subtle influence, yet never occur without the student’s participation; these characteristics, I suggest, can lead to valuable educational consequences with important emphases. Unity over fragmentation; ‘thinking’ over ‘writing’; doubt over belief; questions over answers; present over future; impulse over plan; insecurity over comfort. Life over death. (124-5)

Deemer ends his piece on this open, heady note, opting to inspire educators to think individually about how to create their own happenings. But in his book, Sirc expounds on some of the possible methodologies available to the teacher. Such an elucidation presents certain pitfalls: by describing and prescribing methods, Sirc endangers Deemer’s initial point that happenings must be unique experiences that extend from the singular alignment of current conditions. Yet, suggesting illustrative precedents is helpful for those to whom improvisatory art is foreign. As potential precedents for developing our own styles, Sirc proposes the methods of artists from Marcel Duchamp to Jackson Pollock to Tupac Shakur. To this list I may add many others from my own lifetime of interest in improvisatory art, including most notably, the Grateful Dead. After my initial experiments with spontaneous pedagogy showed such favorable outcomes in the definitional argument unit, I sought out a more extended application of my developing praxis. I immediately realized the potential of offering an intersession class on the Grateful Dead, a subject where the content of the class would match the

6        Comments about the students’ experiences in the course are drawn from end of semester evaluations.



spontaneous method of teaching it. Because of the affinity between method and subject, this course saw the fullest application of my spontaneous method. Since then, I have lacked the opportunity to teach subjects that lend themselves to this method, but I have continued to integrate aspects of my spontaneous method into classroom activities.

### **SPONTANEOUS PEDAGOGY & THE GRATEFUL DEAD: RIDING THE WAVE OF STUDENT-CENTERED CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

When I developed my Grateful Dead class, I had previous experience with intersession classes held in the three weeks between semesters.<sup>7</sup> Despite the abbreviated timeframe, in-class time during intersessions is the same 80 hours that is taught during a semester. In this way, intersession courses are both short-form and long-form. The experience of a class can thus be intensive as in-class time on a given day is roughly five hours: a Grateful Dead conducive allotment. I tried to plan as little as possible beforehand. My intent for day one was to show *The Grateful Dead Movie* (1977)—an historical document of the Grateful Dead experience as a happening for its focus on the participation of fans, crew, promoters, and others, in addition to the band members—and provide the class with an overview of the American counterculture from Ralph Waldo Emerson to Ken Kesey. I planned to wrap up the course with *The End of The Road* (2005) and conversations about late Grateful Dead compositions like “So Many Roads” and “Days Between” on Day 15. I had faith that in between that time, the course would dictate its own course, which, it did. At first, it was a little unnerving to step in front of a room with as many as sixty people (forty-five enrolled and fifteen or so sitting in) with so little of our course’s path pre-charted, but the freedom was also exhilarating, and I was nonetheless very well prepared. In addition to my class preparation, I had been studying the Tao Te Ching, and a passage from Verse 27 had become a sort of mantra for my spontaneous pedagogy: “A good traveler has no fixed plan and is not intent on arriving” (Ivanhoe and Van Norden 127). The verse’s emphasis on process instead of product, journey rather than destination encapsulated my specialized version of the cultural recalibration to process-based learning that I sought in the Grateful Dead class. I wanted to provide students with an experience, not just a knowledge set represented by a grade on paper. No one can foresee all the events that may befall them during the course of a journey, and, indeed, we could not foresee the direction that this course might take. Though the shape of the class could not be predicted, a fair amount of work went into proposing and situating the course within the context of the university’s catalogue, departmental offerings, and required outcomes.

The Grateful Dead course was offered at the 3000 (junior) level through the University Studies Department. This and other intersession courses are offered *ad hoc* with the recommendation of a sponsoring department. In addition to intersession courses at all levels, this department also offers courses to help freshmen acclimate to college life, and courses for continuing education. Instructors at the professorial level may offer intersession courses listed within their sponsoring departments’ catalogues that fulfill degree requirements for students. However, as an M.A. student my course was offered through the University Studies department itself—assigned the designation “UNIV”—and counted as elective credit for students. I chose to offer the course at the 3000 level to increase its appeal to many students whose degree programs required upper-division electives. Whether for this reason or simply out of interest in the topic, I cannot say, but the Grateful Dead class quickly filled to its cap at thirty but continued to experience a surge in interest. Many students contacted me via email and—because of the *ad hoc* nature of the course, as well as my impending departure for a Ph.D. program—I chose to over-enroll the course so that all interested students would have an opportunity to take it. Eventually, I over-enrolled fifteen students to create a class of forty-five.

The Department of University Studies offered me the freedom to determine the parameters and

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7 I had taught intersession courses on The Beatles, and Star Wars & mythology several times.

outcomes of my course based on the malleable, diverse nature of intersession offerings. Though offered through University Studies, my intersession courses were sponsored by the English Department and exhibited the foci and methodology I was developing in my approach to cultural artifacts as a literary and cultural scholar in training. As I was looking forward to a career in literary studies, I was reading books about teaching literature at the collegiate level—including Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature* (2007) and Elaine Showalter's *Teaching Literature* (2002)—to acclimatize to my vocation. The latter provided an excellent set of outcomes for literary studies that appealed to me, and which I adapted for the course (Showalter 26-7). My list of outcomes for the Grateful Dead course was as follows:

**Skills we will develop in this course:**

1. How to recognize subtle and complex differences in language use and musical style.
2. How to read figurative language and distinguish literal and metaphorical meaning.
3. How to seek out further knowledge about an artistic work, its author, its content, or its interpretation.
4. How to detect the cultural assumptions underlying artistic works from a different time or society, and in the process, to become aware of one's own cultural assumptions.
5. How to relate apparently disparate works to one another, and to synthesize ideas that connect them into a tradition or an artistic period.
6. How to use artistic models as cultural references, either to communicate with others or to clarify one's own ideas.
7. How to think creatively about problems by using literature, art, and music as a broadening of one's own experience and practical knowledge.
8. How to read and listen closely, with attention to detailed use of diction, syntax, metaphor, and style, as well as tempo, key, instrumentation, dynamism, time signature, and other characteristics of musical performance.
9. How to create texts of one's own, whether imaginative or critical.
10. How to think creatively within and beyond literary and cultural studies, making some connections between the artwork and one's own life.
11. How to work and learn with others, taking art as a focus for discussion and analysis.
12. How to defend a critical judgement against the informed opinions of others.

These outcomes provided the class with a general direction and outlined the set of skills I hoped to engender in my students. Though I intended to experiment with improvisational pedagogy, adopting relatively traditional outcomes associated with literary and cultural studies ensured the rigor and direction of our study. Much work was involved with the preparatory process for this course, but relatively little of this attention was paid to determining the minutiae of day-to-day activities. The course calendar was fairly wide open to allow for our improvisational trajectory to plot our course.

Though my curriculum planning for the course was minimal, my preparation was extensive. A fallacy about improvisation is that it requires little preparation. However, I can attest to the fact that conducting a spontaneous course requires significantly more preparation than one that plots out the lessons ahead of time. This insight finds its musical equivalent in the Grateful Dead's legendarily relentless practice schedule. Hence, the type of preparation for a spontaneous course is different and more continual than for the traditionally pre-planned one. Instead of focusing on creating precise lessons before the course, and prepping for those lessons, I researched the subject in general and in depth. With no means of anticipating the topics of interest, I found that I drove myself to prepare more comprehensively than for other topic-based courses that I have taught in a more traditional mode. As the class ensued, and nodes of interest arose out of the matrix of our listening and interpreting sessions, contextual lessons, and class discussions, I would then focus more thoroughly on

those loci in my homework preparation. If a topic was raised with which I was unfamiliar or underprepared to discuss, that became my homework before the next class meeting. Because the format of the class required so much in-class time, I intentionally minimized homework for the students:

**Grade Distribution**

*Participation	20%
*Responses (choose 5 of 6)	40%
*Class Journal	40%
Total:	100%

The above grade distribution shows the emphasis placed on in-class work. Participation was determined by attention paid by students in class and an exit survey administered at the end of the final session. Each student was encouraged to participate in their own way. The open atmosphere of our class sessions emboldened otherwise quiet students to enter into the class conversation.<sup>8</sup> A large portion of the students (twenty-five to thirty) were outgoing and inquisitive, asking their questions as they arose and jotting down their thoughts in their class journals. The journal accounted for a major portion of the grade. But, requirements for the journals were loose. Some students doodled daydream visions while the music was playing, while others kept lists of facts, figures, and dates. Many were a combination of both.<sup>9</sup> The series of response papers were collected every couple of days, and were open-ended, informal assignments that allowed students to discuss their observations of the course material and pose any questions that they might not wish to ask in-class. As frequently happens in topic-based seminars, the insights and questions in these responses provided our in-class conversations with direction any time our discussion might hit a dead end (pun intended). Additionally, I instituted a rather draconian attendance policy to emphasize the importance of being present for the experience afforded by this class. Students were allowed one unexcused absence before their grades fell a letter. At fifteen days and five hours a day long, one absence would be the equivalent of missing five class periods on a MWF schedule. To excel in this class, one had only to have been present and engaged with the course material and their peers. Of the forty-five students in the class, one hundred percent of them passed the class. The overwhelming majority of students made A's. A handful of students made B's and C's because of absence penalties. Again, I knew that these requirements for success were minimal. But, they fit the context of marathon-length class sessions for elective credit, they facilitated the open nature of a course that would experiment in spontaneous pedagogy, and that would be approved by the sponsoring and hosting departments. What I did not and could not predict was that the majority of students (thirty to thirty-five of forty-five) would exceed these minimal requirements by a wide margin.

I brought about 120 gigabytes (roughly 55 days) of Grateful Dead music to class each day and plugged directly into the powerful sound system in our classroom: a medium capacity, oak-wainscot auditorium. At the start of each class, I would play a "warm-up" tune (chosen ahead of time) and ask the students to write independently in their journals. At the end of the song, I would ask about their writing, and as students would discuss their responses, an organic rapport would ensue that might lead us toward the topics that we had concluded with the previous day, or that might rocket us off into some aspect of Grateful Dead deep space.

We might start a discussion by analyzing song lyrics, musical compositions, historical positioning, analyzing Grateful Dead culture, and more. Each class was woven together out of guided listening sessions

<sup>8</sup> I base this observation on the demeanor of students with whom I had previously studied, in contrast to their participation in previous classes. This demographic accounted for roughly ten students in the course.

<sup>9</sup> These notebooks were collected for grading and then returned to the students.

(which organized themselves and happened at unscheduled but synchronistically appropriate times), impromptu class discussions, some small group conversations, break-out group time, and on-the-spot mini lectures covering far too many topics to list here, such as: allusions to myth and literature in Grateful Dead lyrics, the musicians' use of various improvisational methodologies, avant garde developments in style and technology, artistic and philosophical contexts, and sociological analyses of the Deadhead community. The topics covered were wide ranging and diverse. Literary analysis, cultural context, and analysis of musical form and approach took center stage in many of our conversations. Though the conversations were always wide ranging, tracing one robust thread might offer a glimpse into the way the class proceeded.

A recurring conversation that became a multi-week locus of our attention was the Grateful Dead's—and specifically lyricist Robert Hunter's—creation and population of a mythical neverland that hosted their roster of tales about misfits, cowboys, gamblers, monstrous creatures, and much more. As a useful shorthand, we came to call this land “Fennario.” Fennario is an imaginative land named in two Grateful Dead songs: “Dire Wolf,” and “Peggy-O” (Dodd 82, 217). The latter is a traditional folk tune arranged by the Grateful Dead, but with its roots in antiquity. The former is an original composition that references the place name given in Peggy-O. Locating Fennario—or even determining if Fennario is a place, state of mind, metaphor, or something else—captured this class's imagination. Because our guiding methodology was based in literary and cultural studies, we became very interested in delineating the borders of the region—which songs could be included in our sense of Fennario, and which could not? — and interpreting it. When we reached “Jack Straw” (1971), we had especially lively conversations about the characters' potential inclusion in Fennario that were complicated by the song's use of real place names: Texas, Santa Fe, Cheyenne, Wichita (Dodd 167-8).<sup>10</sup> Basing our observations on evidence from the text and negotiating the chorus of the differing opinions of students fulfilled many of the listed outcomes for the course. Students developed these aptitudes unconsciously during our organic conversations, and when we would hit a conversation lull, I would sometimes point out the developing sophistication of their thinking and conversation to help bring these advancements to their consciousness. This news was usually greeted with a round of warm smiles. The next wave of conversations would begin more deliberately than the last concluded ones.

Fennario often served as a touchstone for our conversations about cultural context, and the Grateful Dead's relationship to historical and artistic milieus. We also traced the Grateful Dead's relationship to their mythical landscape—Fennario in our shorthand—throughout their artistic development, e.g., in the third and final week of our class, our conversation turned to potentially oblique references to the mythical region created by the cartographer's persona in “When Push Comes to Shove” (1986). The phrasing, “Here there may be” is a refrain adopted from cartography to suggest the potential contents of unexplored regions (Dodd 334). When a student suggested that this unknown region might be the Grateful Dead's mythical region that we were calling Fennario, the class lit up like the cosmic pinball machine in the first minutes of *The Grateful Dead Movie*.<sup>11</sup> An observation like this is omnidirectional. Wrangling and channeling our conversation became strenuous enough to necessitate diagramming it on the board. Amid the numerous tendrils of conversation, three distinct directions became vital enough to warrant comment here: 1. The metatextual impulse of later

10 Six years later I took part in a complimentary study of imaginative geography in Grateful Dead songs with my colleagues and fellow Grateful Dead scholars Timothy Ray and Jeremy Berg via correspondence. Instead of Fennario, we adopted “Bigfoot County”—an imaginary locale from the song “Brown Eyed Women”—as the polestar of our study (Dodd 162). Our inquiry led us to imaginative locations in “Terrapin Station,” “Shakedown Street,” “Jack Straw,” and other songs in this correspondence that led to a roundtable session at the 2018 Grateful Dead Scholars' Caucus and several other conference presentations in its wake.

11 Again, Fennario served as a shorthand to reference the mythical region in question and the accrued observations the class had made about that region. We did not tie a causal link between the two songs, but instead sketched out the resemblance between the unknown land of many Grateful Dead songs and the persona's use of cartographic language to describe an unknown land in “When Push Comes to Shove.”

Grateful Dead songs to deliberately comment upon earlier ones, 2. The possibility of Fennario as an analogue for the shadowy unconscious/collective unconscious, 3. The intertextual connections in theme and imagery that bind disparate Grateful Dead songs together. All three of these themes permeated our class discussions and were, furthermore, not limited to the topic of Fennario.

Intertextual connections were drawn often, and were not limited to a single songwriter, so students gained insight from reading Hunter's lyric for "Mountains of the Moon" (1969) in tandem with John Perry Barlow's 1973 composition, "Weather Report Suite" (Dodd 74/211). This is a connection I would not have drawn myself, but it is one of the plentiful examples of the connections that we made as a class: some that I led towards, and even more that arose unexpectedly. Intertextuality extended beyond the Dead's corpus as well and became the focus of many conversations and several students' impromptu projects. As an example, the HBO series *Game of Thrones* (2011) had just begun the month before and was very popular with these students. Well-known deadhead George R.R. Martin—the author of the show's source text, *A Song of Ice and Fire* (1996)—populated the iconography and plotlines of his fictional Westeros with images and allusions to the Grateful Dead. Students enjoyed teasing out these references and analyzing them. One such thematic analysis project connected the shocking beheading of the Stark family patriarch—whose sigil is the Dire Wolf—with that song's chorus: "Don't murder me/ I beg of you, don't murder me/ Please/ don't murder me" (Dodd 82). Other students were interested in a variety of other intertextual topics, and I will comment on a few more when discussing their impromptu projects.

The metaphor of consciousness exploration, noted in our conversations about the Fennario region, did not begin there. While the eventual metaphor of a mythical landscape representing the collective unconscious occurred late in the class, the exploration of consciousness relative to the countercultural milieu that spawned the Grateful Dead and integral to their exploratory ethos was a common theme from the beginning: two topics that occupied many hours of discussion in the first week of the course. Conversations about "Dark Star" (1967), for instance, steered easily into metaphorical interpretations of the imagery, key, tenor, and timbre of the music towards a reflection of and catalyst for an interior journey. This set the tone for students to continue looking for this vital theme as we continued our study, and they identified the theme in many places throughout the Grateful Dead's corpus.

That final vital thread of the Fennario conversations—metatextual commentary—did not permeate the class from the beginning like the topics of intertextuality and consciousness exploration. By its nature, this aspect of our study intensified as the course progressed, and the tendency towards metatextual commentary increased in our source texts. We began by noticing song lyrics that the band and its fans could pluck out-of-context and then apply to the music and experience. But, as we observed, this became a full-fledged deluge of metatextual songs by the end of their career. Early on, we noticed that the "Doin' that Rag" (1969) line, "Hipsters, tripsters,/ real cook chicks, sir,/ everyone's doin' that rag" could be a comment on the Grateful Dead's scene (Dodd 78). Then, students responded to hearing the Loose Lucy (1973) lyric, "Thank you for a real good time," receiving cheers from the audience—as representative of a message from the band to the fans, and fans to the band—on concert recordings from 1973 (Dodd 206). By the time we reached recordings from 1976, our reading of "The Music Never Stopped" (written 1975) interpreted the song as entirely metatextual commentary on the band, the fans, and the experience of the show which included: "It's a rainbow full of sound;" "They're a band beyond description/ like Jehovah's favorite choir;" "The music plays the band/ Lord, they're settin' us on fire" (Dodd 249). Later compositions like "So Many Roads" (1992), and "Days Between" (1993), are embedded with a retrospective pathos that students found very appealing. At this point—unexpectedly, at the suggestion of a student—we created a classification of Grateful Dead songs that we called, "The Wisdom of the Ages," and populated that category with later compositions that the students deemed appropriate. In contrast, we determined earlier songs that constituted another category, "The Wisdom of Youth." After the

next class session, a student brought me two burned CD compilations: one for each category. Though student attention to this thread started with a comment passed here and there about the Grateful Dead's reflexivity, by the time we concluded our study, it was the most dominant aspect of our conversation.<sup>12</sup>

I have attempted to iron out a few—but significant—threads of conversation topics that surfaced multiple times throughout our three weeks together. These conversations evolved organically and rather unexpectedly. For instance, I for one did not expect “When Push Comes to Shove” to be a significant turning point in our class's understanding of intertextuality in Grateful Dead songs. When considering their shape now, a decade after the fact, I can trace the conversation patterns more clearly than I could while in the midst of a marathon of five-hour class sessions. The shape of these conversations is much nearer to the spiral motif of a fractal than it is to a Euclidean straight line. These many spirals are all threaded together and mutually referent to each other in a way that appears simple, yet intricate; chaotic, yet organized; raucous, yet harmonious. Any person who has seen the Grateful Dead (or The Dead) perform is aware of this type of spontaneous atmosphere imbued with creative tension and never-ending possibilities pertaining to what lies around each corner. The course was thrilling in a similar way.

The class was held ten years ago and covered far too much ground far too quickly to outline all of the topics we covered. I am more interested in conveying how the spontaneous pedagogy practice facilitated an experience of the class that transcended an ordinary topic-based seminar. The class paralleled the adventurous, improvisatory experience that one encounters at a Grateful Dead show, or while listening to a Grateful Dead song, and so the method of delivery for the course and the course material itself synced up and provided the opportunity for a sustained aesthetic experience, if not an even more profound experience.<sup>13</sup> The line between performer (teacher) and audience (students) was blended, unforeseen multimodal elements were integrated, and no one in the classroom knew what lay around each corner. The experience was riveting, and even though the class time was an exhausting five hours, we often stayed a half hour or more after our scheduled end time. The students did not just learn about the Grateful Dead via dry and distant course material; instead they encountered the feeling of the subject and felt the flow of momentum and energy to which the Grateful Dead were so famously attuned. And, as I had hypothesized, the improvisations led to synchronicities, and the synchronicities led to epiphanies.

The exhilarating, experimental, and improvisational quality of the course was a function of our lack of a predetermined curriculum to use as a road map for exploring the multifaceted subjects that Grateful Dead studies encompass. So, we charted our own course through the multivalent source material including diverse topics, the study of which defies disciplinary boundaries. But our free-flowing explorations were engendered by the rigorous approaches of traditional scholarly exegesis. The Grateful Dead demands to be addressed through scholarly approaches from academic disciplines as diverse as sociology, ethnomusicology, music theory, religious studies, philosophy, literary studies, and more. Though the variety of lenses we adopted to study the subject matter differed in their particulars, we did not stray far from the traditional conventions of critical analysis. Once we would land on a particular topic, our method of exegesis would exemplify the three-step approach to critical inquiry that Granville Ganter traces back to William Perkins' late 1500's manual for crafting better sermons, *The Art of Prophecy*. Ganter elicits from Perkins' recommendations a three-step model of critical inquiry and analysis. “[A]nalysis,” Ganter writes,

refers to the technique of critically interpreting an idea or problem by breaking it into

12 In 2011, I hired an off-duty notetaker (from the University of Oklahoma Athletics Office) to sit in on the course and document its proceedings. She had her work cut out for her as our conversations were frequently lively, but she did a good job of documenting the direction of class sessions and the gist of what was being said. The details of class proceedings related here are drawn from those notes.

13 Between ten and fifteen students reported such experiences in their course evaluations. More have done so in conversation and private correspondence.

meaningful parts. I emphasize *meaningful* parts because the skill is not simply defined by expertise in division and classification: it's about explaining why those parts are important in respect to different contexts and circumstances. Interpretive analysis is both a *habit of thought* (a cognitive trick) and a *rhetorical protocol* (an expressive structure in speech or writing). In either case, it's the intellectual machinery of conceptual exegesis (Ganter 64 original emphasis).

The combination of traditional approaches to critical analysis with our experimental method of curriculum development allowed us the freedom to address any topic that interested us at the time it arose without sacrificing the rigor of our scholarly inquiry. In effect, the course realized the solution to the problem posed above in this narrative: how to blend the spontaneous happening method and its—unlisted on the syllabus but nonetheless desired—epiphanic outcomes with the priorities and outcomes approved by the university and its sponsoring departments. I came to realize that, for me, spontaneous pedagogy meant relinquishing curriculum planning (or overplanning) while retaining traditional modes of scholarly inquiry and analysis. Students quickly became comfortable with this pairing, and relaxed visibly in the classroom. As they relaxed, many more engaged in class discussions than they ordinarily would, and on the whole, they seemed to feel emboldened by the return of their agency to determine the direction of the class.<sup>14</sup> To support their choices, I found that students would engage in additional work. Though perhaps unconscious on their part, I found this trend remarkable. It validated my choice to rely on their decision making.

The pairing of traditional modes of analysis with free-flowing curriculum design lent itself to an unforeseen and truly unique aspect of the course: student's assigning and completing their own non-assigned (by me) assignments. Again, the in-class time was an intensive five hours, so at the outset of the class, I opted to minimize the homework I assigned in the course. I brought a small library of scholarly and historical works focusing on the Grateful Dead and students checked them out daily. Please note, these were not assigned readings, but readings that the students assigned to themselves. The trend started gradually, but as more topics were discussed in class, more students found some aspects of the Grateful Dead interesting enough to assign themselves readings. The spirit became infectious and overtook the entire class. No one student read all of them, but each found their own interests and pursued them throughout the class. Of their own accord, in the absence of assigned homework, students wrote research papers, created multimedia research and art projects, and gave presentations about the material that they researched. These projects took on many diverse formats.

Previously, I mentioned the tendency among these students towards analyzing *Game of Thrones* in connection with the Grateful Dead. Several students completed projects on this topic. Another vein of student interest was the connection between the Grateful Dead, Western culture, and country music; after all, this course was held in central Oklahoma. A few projects fell within this trend: students alternately excavated the Grateful Dead's musical relationship to country music, and the proximity of Hunter and Barlow's lyrics to the imagery of Sergio Leone's spaghetti westerns. One paper created an evaluative argument (learned during their composition II course) in which the student argued that the Grateful Dead's country music was more legitimately "country" than much of the music played on country radio according to criteria they had created for what makes music "country." An environmental science major wrote an essay about the ecological vision of the Grateful Dead in "Box of Rain," "Let it Grow," and "We Can Run," analyzing them according to what they were learning in their major courses. Multiple presentations were held about projects where the students had investigated the Grateful Dead in relation to the context of the psychedelic 1960's counterculture, including applications of Timothy Leary and Terence McKenna's writing to the Grateful Dead's approach to music, and an investigation into the status of Neal Cassady as countercultural hero. A music major performed

14 I base this observation on two factors: 1. The in-class conduct of roughly ten repeat students and my observations of the general dynamic of the classroom as the course progressed. 2. Course evaluations

a complicated piece for us inspired by the irregular time signatures and key changes that we observed in songs like “Unbroken Chain,” “Estimated Prophet,” “The Eleven,” and others. A contemporary dance major performed a dance to a medley of Grateful Dead songs. Even more memorably, an art major created a live painting experience during one of our concert-video viewing sessions. This was lively, to say the least. The projects and presentations were eclectic and entertaining, and yet, were entirely unnecessary for success in the class. Because our schedule was fluid, we could easily accommodate the inclusion of these presentations at any point a student finished one. And these presentations organically offered direction to our curriculum. Additionally, students turned in well-written research papers, and they encouraged me to provide substantial feedback on their works. In response I encouraged them to share their findings with the class via presentations, which many of them did. Again, because this is unique in my fifteen-year experience as an educator, it bears repeating that in the absence of assignments, the students in this class created their own assignments and produced their own projects. This amazed me. I have never experienced anything like it, and probably will not again.

Throughout the course, the students’ thirst for more knowledge was palpable. They devoured historical and scholarly works on the Grateful Dead, they stayed late to listen, watch, and analyze sprawling half-hour improvisations that I started five minutes before class ended, and they poured their energy into their projects and presented masterfully on diverse topics utilizing eclectic methods, each indicative of students’ interests and personality. The best part is that all of this was unessential. They asked relevant questions, and we had many lofty conversations. Many days they brought in friends, and some days we had fifteen or more visitors sitting in. Some people that had never enrolled came to every class session. The class transcended its classification as three hours of upper division elective credit. The students showed up to learn and to be pushed—and push themselves—forward and upward.<sup>15</sup> This experience galvanized us as a group in a way that is atypical in my experience as an educator. A disproportionately high number of these students have kept in touch with me in the intervening years. I have since run into these same students at Furthur, Phil Lesh & Friends, Bobby Weir, and Dead & Company shows, and I have gone to see their own bands perform. Some of these bands began after class ended and have incorporated what they learned of the Grateful Dead into their improvisation techniques. I keep in pretty regular touch with some of them, and I even directed the course online through a Facebook chat with a student that was out of the country for our class meetings (not for credit).<sup>16</sup>

Two days after the class ended, 40 of the 45 students were set to attend a music festival: that cultural mainstay in the new millennium that was spawned from the Grateful Dead themselves. Intriguingly, Dark Star Orchestra, a prominent Grateful Dead “re-creation” act, was scheduled for a show at this particular festival. But unfortunately, Dark Star Orchestra was scheduled at the same time as Bassnectar and Pretty Lights: two very popular acts among these students at the time. Throughout the class, I would jokingly suggest that the students attend the Dark Star Orchestra show instead of Bassnectar and Pretty Lights. Our banter on this subject became a sort of refrain punctuating the end of our class sessions. They agreed, but I was skeptical. Of course, they were not liable to me in any way. When class was over and grades were entered, they were obligated to me only in good faith. Interestingly, that night I received a photo text of about twenty of them at the Dark Star Orchestra show. This was a happy teaching moment.

In conclusion, I would like to leave you with an anecdote that speaks to me of the importance such a spontaneous class experience held to a single student in the grand scheme of the over-institutionalized

15 I offer this comment as an observation, on my part, of the earnestness with which students engaged in the proceedings of this class.

16 I have run into more than twenty of these students at concerts. Two bands have formed out of this group of students. One of those bands continues to play a decade later. I am in regular communication with about fifteen of these students. A smaller portion (five or six) have become close friends. I officiated the wedding ceremony for one student in 2016.



education monolith against which Deemer and Sirc write. Later in the year after the class [2011], I happened upon a student in public with their family. Their older brother pulled me aside and told me that this student had been barely maintaining a 2.0 average before the Grateful Dead class and had been battling with their parents about dropping out (all news to me). The brother thanked me because, after the Grateful Dead class, this semester, the student had straight A's, no longer wanted to drop out, and had rekindled his interest in the passion he initially went to college to pursue: cinematography. This student graduated the next year with a degree in cinematography. This one instance is indicative of several more similar conversations I have had with both students and their families - a testament to the importance of the epiphany, produced by the spontaneity of the moment, in the individual student's overly professionalized path through higher education. The importance of self-actualization is practical and directly benefits a student's ability to excel in the rest of their studies, and onward throughout their lifetime. In this most radical application of my spontaneous pedagogy, my students and I discovered its transformative potential. As the Grateful Dead is much more than the sum of its parts, so too was our experience of our Grateful Dead class. That is-ness or thus-ness remains ineffable, indescribable. But the experience of it, and the memory of that experience remains with me and with the students. When I reconnect with some of them—as happens often—our conversation includes the knowledge that they gained in the class and have built on since, the experience of the ineffability that spontaneous methodology afforded them, and our wondrous remembrance of how that experience paralleled the adventurous improvisatory spirit of the Grateful Dead.

### **BEYOND SPONTANEITY: LET THE STUDENTS TEACH THEMSELVES**

The university experience that a student receives should include more than rote vocational training because people are more than their professions; people are spiritual beings. Sean Gehrke and Darnell Cole affirm that,

Spirituality is fundamental to students' development. College students, in fact, are often preoccupied throughout their university experience with the "big questions" in life, which are essentially spiritual in nature—"Who am I?," "What are my most deeply felt values?," "Why am I in college?," and "What kind of world do I want to help create?" (225)

Though these questions are on students' minds in college, the majority of their education is geared towards professionalization. Aside from English composition and a required gen-ed course in philosophy or psychology, students are rarely afforded the opportunities to address these "big questions." I found that addressing these issues became a part of the process for students in my Grateful Dead class as a result of the implementation of my spontaneous pedagogy, which is ultimately just my own particular brand of a student-centered learning model, inspired by my attention to the improvisational artists I love, including and exemplified by the Grateful Dead. Gehrke and Cole chart out the characteristics of student-centered learning models, suggesting that they "emphasize students' active pursuit toward discovery, group work, self-assessment, complex problem solving, and student-faculty interaction outside of class, as well as faculty pedagogical goals pertaining to spiritual development of their students" (227). All of these characteristics apply to the method I developed based on my attention to Sirc, Deemer, their happening pedagogy, and my lifelong love of improvisatory art. But even more, spontaneous pedagogy—paired with the students' extreme interest in the subject matter—afforded them an opportunity for curriculum development and, as a surprise to me, the creation and completion of unassigned assignments. In this way, the actualized outcomes that I observed in my Grateful Dead class went far beyond my intended course outcomes.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The students who were involved have expressed the value of this learning experience to me in many different ways over

Through this process I observed many students achieving ineffable moments of epiphany<sup>18</sup>: those types of intangible moments that allow students insight into their own answers to the “big questions” they are asking themselves. And because they were able to achieve these moments of self-actualization, they became more successful in their academic training for their chosen professions. My experience with the Grateful Dead class cemented for me a commitment to student-centered learning models and reinforced my firm belief in the ultimately practical impact that humanities education has on a non-humanities student’s professional development. Writing about the shifting landscape of higher education in the twenty-first century, Carol Bliss challenges college educators to adapt to the new challenges and benefits of the information age:

In historical models of education, the professor was master, and students were receptive learners, dependent upon absorbing advanced degrees of knowledge that, typically, only professors could impart. With the advent of the Internet and the Information Age... The role of teacher is becoming fundamentally different. A professor is no longer simply a repository of knowledge, but rather a gatekeeper, pointing students toward areas of exploration, encouraging the connection of ideas, synthesizing information, and turning new learners on to the discovery of deeper meaning and larger questions. Education has changed, and these changes present important opportunities. (1)

Enacting personalized practices of student-centered pedagogy praxis—like spontaneous pedagogy—reframes the educational experience for our students, challenging them to chart their own course. Students may very well be their own best teachers, as long as a caring guide journeys along with them on their path to discovery.

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the course of this decade. First and foremost, I am relying on responses to the exit poll I handed out on the last day of class and on the students’ responses to the institution course evaluations. After that, I am relying on anecdotes related to me directly by students and their friends, and direct communications from students who have sought out a way to express the importance of the experience to them. Perhaps it’s a synchronicity: most recently, while working on this article, a student emailed me last week (July 2021) to express his gratitude and the impact the class made on his life.

18 Between ten and fifteen students confirmed epiphanic experiences in their course evaluations and correspondence with me.

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## APPENDIX A: "THE NATURE OF REALITY" DEFINITIONAL ARGUMENT RUBRIC

### How I will grade your Definitional Argument:

**An appropriate amount of summary:** Your essay requires you to summarize the cultural and personal context of your mythological creature to give the reader a better understanding, but it should not be the majority of your essay. This might include origin stories from myth, popular culture, or personal anecdotes. A good summation is concise and focused on context more than information: \_\_\_\_/15

**Judgment:** Your essay should have an overall judgment of your creature as real or not. This judgment is then broken down by individual criteria to show how you came to form your overall judgment. This judgment is your informed opinion about the reality of your creature. It should be balanced and fair: \_\_\_\_/15

**Criteria:** Your judgment needs to be based on the criteria you have developed to evaluate the reality of your creature. You may use our class-wide criteria or a more personalized set of criteria. These criteria should be stated and commented on throughout your paper. Criteria and evidence form the majority of your evaluation: \_\_\_\_/15

**Evidence:** For each criterion, you will need specific evidence to back up what you are saying. This means grounding your observations and judgment in evidence which supports each criterion. This should be exact and formulated for each and every criterion: \_\_\_\_/20

**Effective Structure:** The paper is organized in a clear, logical way. Paragraphs stay focused on singular topics and transition from one idea to the next throughout the paper: \_\_\_\_/15

**Images:** Images and captions work as examples to help further the essay's main claims: \_\_\_\_/10

**Editing and Proofreading:** The paper adheres to MLA format and is relatively free of grammar errors and typos: \_\_\_\_/10

Total: \_\_\_\_/100 Additional Comments:

### AUTHOR BIO

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Narratives,” “Literature of the American Counterculture,” and “Race, Borders, & Intersectional American Identities.” He has published articles on John Steinbeck, Jack Kerouac, and the Grateful Dead, and his current book project addresses the importance of mysticism in the works of twentieth century American novelists Steinbeck, Kerouac, Anaya, Silko, and Morrison.

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## Teaching the Grateful Dead with Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*

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Friedrich Nietzsche published his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* in 1872 and his last work, *Ecce Homo* in 1888. In not only these two works, but also in his other writings as well, one of the ideas that he consistently emphasized was the idea of life affirmation and vitality: first, how they were expressed in Ancient Greece and then how they had been neglected in Western culture from the fifth century BC to the end of the nineteenth century and finally how regaining life affirmation and vitality might occur in a post nineteenth century world. To start at the end of his trajectory, an initial observation is that chronologically the Grateful Dead (1965-1995) was a post nineteenth century band, and in order to justify a claim that the Grateful Dead expressed Nietzsche's ideas of life affirmation and vitality, we need first to understand Nietzsche's characterizations of the Greek period to contrast with what was lost in the middle period when life affirmation and vitality were underemphasized and replaced with an over-emphasis on reason, and then grasp how life affirmation and vitality can come to the forefront again in the twentieth century. Then, we can confidently demonstrate how closely the Grateful Dead exemplify some of what Nietzsche projected for the future.

Nietzsche introduced the idea of life affirmation in his first work, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872). Even though this early work is somewhat flawed in its metaphysical claims and framework, it still resonates with me for three reasons. The first is that Nietzsche was the first philosopher I encountered who emphasized vitality over knowledge and shifted the emphasis away from abstract and absolute truth to a celebration of living a life. The second is that he initiated a new sense of philosophy as he not only saw himself standing at the end of a philosophical tradition begun by Socrates, but also projected a new beginning in philosophy. The third reason is that his analysis of art and life before the time of Socrates, that is, an analysis which articulated the development of the Dionysian impulse of life, as well as his projection of life and art in the future, again, also in terms of the Dionysian, speaks directly to the Grateful Dead experience.

Nietzsche, through his demonstration of the development of Greek art, showed that Greek art achieved its greatest expression in the tragedies of Aeschylus, and to some extent Sophocles, but not, as is commonly thought, in the tragedies of Euripides. In fact, it is Euripides, often considered the best of the ancient tragedians, who, Nietzsche asserted, actually killed tragedy in the fifth century BC. Through the first part of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche traced the histories of the development of the Dionysian and Apollonian principles as they were expressed in Greek art and showed that what made the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles the highpoint of Greek art was the harmonious balance between these two impulses. Nietzsche then argued that

with Euripides, the Dionysian impulse disappeared, and with it the Apollonian as well, thereby eliminating the Apollonian-Dionysian duality and destroying what was great about Greek tragedy. Nietzsche ended *The Birth of Tragedy* by arguing that it was not until Modern German music, specifically the music of Wagner, that what was great in Greek tragedy was again realized. Although he later wondered if he was wrong about Wagner, he never wavered about the centrality of the Dionysian, in life or in his philosophy. The new music in a new age would have to recapture the Dionysian impulse in life. In terms of the Grateful Dead, we can show how their music is indeed a modern expression of art expressing what made great the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles; we can identify both the Dionysian and the Apollonian tendencies in their music and then show how songs like "Dark Star," for example, express the harmonious balance of the duality.

Besides the idea of the Dionysian, another idea which pertains to the Grateful Dead that Nietzsche introduced in *The Birth of Tragedy* delineates an historical timeline. Nietzsche argued that the intellectual and philosophical tradition of Western culture began with Socrates. For Nietzsche, there is pre-tradition history, one which allowed for the great art that celebrated Dionysus. That Socrates and Euripides were contemporaries was no accident; Nietzsche actually claimed that it was Socrates' influence on Euripides that allowed Euripides to destroy tragedy, for by eliminating the chorus and having the protagonists in his plays explain themselves rationally, Euripides broke from a tradition in art that celebrated the Dionysian element in life. Nietzsche thought of himself as a thinker who recognized the mistake of the last 2,500 years or so, and believed that just as he was a new beginning in philosophy, so, too, was Wagner a new beginning in music. Fifteen years after the publication of *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche questioned his assessment of Wagner; however, he did not offer a musical alternative. Christof Cox has rightly pointed out that Nietzsche, in his "Attempt at Self-Criticism," rejected his earlier claim that Wagner's music was Dionysian music of the future and asked anew "what would a music have to be like that would no longer be of romantic origin, like German music— but Dionysian?" (BT, "Self-Criticism," 6). Cox argued that the avant garde and electronic music of the twentieth century accomplished this feat. The Grateful Dead emerged in the mid-twentieth century, were influenced in part by the avant garde and electronic music, and instantiated the necessary shift away from the Socratic theoretical framework in both their lyrics and their music. The Grateful Dead's music also answers Nietzsche's query: it, too, is Dionysian.

I have taught two different classes using the Grateful Dead and Nietzsche. One of these classes was specifically designed to examine the interface of philosophy and the Grateful Dead. In that class, students were already familiar with the Grateful Dead's music, they were conversant with some of the history of the band and the musicians, they already had a sense of the band's emphasis on live improvisation, and they resonated with the idea that "There is nothing like a Grateful Dead concert." In that class, the focus was on showing how different aspects of the Grateful Dead phenomenon(a) illustrate some of Nietzsche's ideas in not only *The Birth of Tragedy*, but also in passages throughout his corpus.

The other class I taught was a *Philosophy of Art* class. Here the challenge was to find examples that illustrate the philosophical ideas. I used the Grateful Dead in relation to *The Birth of Tragedy* and had the dual task of helping students navigate through Nietzsche's ideas as well as helping them understand how and why the Grateful Dead were a useful example. So, since students were unfamiliar with the band, then besides reading and learning Nietzsche, we had to spend time listening and learning the Grateful Dead as well.

For the purposes of this paper, I limit the discussion to only the first two thirds of a single Nietzsche text, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music*, and I highlight those passages that relate specifically to the Grateful Dead.

There are twenty-five sections in *The Birth of Tragedy* which are organized into three major parts, each with a central theme. The first part, Sections 1-10, introduces the ideas of the Dionysian and the Apollonian as tendencies in the production of art and traces the development of Greek art from its beginnings to its

culmination in Greek Tragedy, the highest form of art. The second part, Sections 11-15, examines the decline of Greek art by demonstrating how tragedy was destroyed by Euripides, under the influence of his contemporary, Socrates, whose optimism and over emphasis on rationality replaced the healthier Dionysian-Apollonian tensions that initially gave rise to art, philosophy and life. The third part, Sections 16-25, focuses on Wagner and modern German music as approximating earlier Greek art and tragedy. Also included in the volume is an "Attempt at Self Criticism" published in 1886, fifteen years after the *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* first appeared in which Nietzsche criticized, among other things, his earlier acceptance of the metaphysical dualism of Schopenhauer.

Nietzsche began Section 1 with a general claim about art and an introduction to the concepts of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. He wrote:

...that the continuous development of art is bound up with the *Apollonian* and *Dionysian* duality...The terms Dionysian and Apollonian we borrow from the Greeks, who disclose to the discerning mind the profound mysteries of their art...in the intensely clear figures of their gods. Through Apollo and Dionysus, the two art deities of the Greeks, we come to recognize that in the Greek world there existed a tremendous opposition, in origin and aims, between the Apollonian art of sculpture, and the nonimagistic, Dionysian art of music. These two different tendencies...eventually...appear coupled with each other, and through this coupling ultimately generate an equally Dionysian and Apollonian form of art—Attic tragedy (*BT* 35).

In this first paragraph, Nietzsche marked the difference between two kinds of arts, each generated by different artistic tendencies—one giving rise to the plastic arts of images represented by the god Apollo and one driving the nonimagistic art of music represented by the god Dionysus. It's important to note that Nietzsche's descriptions and understanding of the figures of the gods and what they represent differs from the standard view that has dominated the literature since the dissolution of the Golden Age of Greece which was the time of Attic tragedy. After the collapse of ancient Greece, the meanings of the gods shifted and Apollo became the god of music as well as poetry and sculpture. Before the collapse of Greece, Dionysus was the god of music. Also, after the collapse, Dionysus was relegated to an almost comic and incidental figure, the god of wine and drunken intoxication. In the earlier Greek period, Dionysus was the god of life's destruction and generation, whose sense of intoxication was in the service of the annihilation and recreation of life and not just simple revelry.

After introducing the figure of the gods and identifying them with the tendencies in art, he also claimed that although these are definably different tendencies, historically in the development of art, they have come together in different proportions, until finally, they achieved an equal balance and produced the greatest achievement in art with the Greek tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles.

In this paragraph, Nietzsche focused on the object of art, namely, sculptures, music, and plays. A full account of art must also take into account the artist and the spectator, and through the following sections in the first part of the text, Nietzsche primarily considers the objects of art along with the spectators, without fully treating the artist himself, except through analogy and extrapolation. Tragedies were staged and performed in theaters filled with the spectator audience. In terms of the Grateful Dead, we can identify the audience/spectator. The object of art in relation to the Grateful Dead is problematic since the band no longer performs. What is available now as objects are recordings and film, but during the time they were active, the object of the art was the live performance itself, that is, the concert, which actually included the artist and the music as it was performed and the audience.

The clue to understanding the difference between the Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies, Nietzsche

continued, is to "conceive of them as the separate art worlds of *dreams* and *intoxication*" (BT 35). Leaving aside Nietzsche's analysis of Apollo and dreams for the moment, his analysis of the Dionysian in this beginning section captures the experience of the audience as they dance to the music. The physiological clue to the Dionysian, for Nietzsche, is intoxication, but not in the ordinary sense of the word. The first definition offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary* is to poison. The second entry is closer to what Nietzsche described:

To stupefy, render unconscious or delirious, to madden or deprive of the ordinary use of the senses or reason, with a drug or alcoholic liquor; to inebriate, make drunk (OED 1471).

This definition though still does not capture what is more fundamental for Nietzsche. For him, intoxication is not merely being inebriated. He wrote:

Either under the influence of the narcotic draught, of which the songs of all primitive men and peoples speak, or with the potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy, these Dionysian emotions awake, and as they grow in intensity everything subjective vanishes into complete self-forgetfulness (BT 36).

In the Dionysian state, Nietzsche argued, what collapses is the *principium individuationis*, that is the principle of individuation. And so:

Now, with the gospel of universal harmony, each one feels himself not only united, reconciled, and fused with his neighbor, but as one with him. In song and in dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way toward flying into the air, dancing. His very gestures express enchantment (BT 37).

In terms of the Grateful Dead there are two points to be made here. The first is that these descriptions seem accurately to describe the images of the audience that we see in concert footage: how they shared a physical space, how they danced, and how they expressed enchantment. Consider this description from a seasoned concert goer:

The music started and everybody was dancing. Nobody was dancing with each other; they were all just kind of dancing. Everybody's up and down. I looked at all these freaks and thought, "What the hell is goin' on?" Then I looked down and all of sudden I'm dancing. All these heads are going this way and that way, but pretty soon there's a groove going and all of a sudden everybody's dancing together. Everybody's like one, and the crowd gets excited. Then the band starts getting excited, and then the crowd gets more excited. Everyone just starts feeding on everything and then this magical thing just happens. It's just so beautiful. You see, when you listen to music, it comes in, but when you listen to Dead music, it comes out (Johnston 51).

Unfortunately, not all concert footage shows the audience's interacting with the music, nor does any of it really show the energetic dynamic between the audience and the band. However, there is enough footage to show how the audience moved with the music. By showing videos, students not only get to see the band as it performs, but they also begin to hear the music and listen to the songs. Again, not all concert videos show the audience. Usually concerts filmed indoors or at night focus on the stage and rarely scan the audience. The classic concert film that does show the audience and simultaneously serves as an introduction to the Grateful Dead phenomenon(a) is *The Grateful Dead Movie*, recorded in 1974 and released in 1976. Unlike later concert videos which focus primarily on the band with occasional shots of the audience, *The Grateful Dead Movie* filmed the entire Grateful Dead scene from fans waiting in line to enter the venue, to the crew setting up the



stage, to activity in the halls and concession stands, all against the backdrop of the band's playing on stage and the audience dancing on the floor.

It is important to note that just as not all of Nietzsche's philosophy is contained in a single text, the entire Grateful Dead phenomenon(a) is also not contained in a single concert or concert video. The band played for thirty years, from the 1965 Acid Tests to the summer of 1995 when Jerry Garcia died. During that time, they played 2,318 shows, performing 420 different tunes. The original quintet (Garcia, Lesh, Weir, Kreutzmann and Pigpen) played for two years before adding a second drummer (Hart) in 1967 (until 1971) and another keyboard player (T.C.) in 1968 (until 1970). They played as the original quintet again for a year in 1971 before adding another keyboard player (Godchaux). The band stopped touring for a year and a half after the 1974 concerts filmed for *The Grateful Dead Movie*, and there is not nearly as much concert video from before the break as there is after, primarily because of the technology that became available in the 1980's. Some of what is available does chronicle the Grateful Dead's playing and the audience's dancing. The "Hard to Handle" and "New Speedway Boogie" from *Festival Express* and the entire "Sunshine Daydream" video from the 1972 concert in Veneta, OR, are excellent examples, although, be advised that the concert in Veneta was on its hottest day ever on record, and it was 1972, so, be prepared for total nudity by some of the audience.

Unfortunately, even in these examples, there is little video of the audience's dancing during slower tunes and during tunes with space-like psychedelic jams. This is not because people were not dancing, but rather than show the audience, the videos during these segments simulated the early light shows of the mid 1960's or used new technology to depict a stream of kaleidoscopic psychedelic images. In a few places in *The Grateful Dead Movie*, for example in the jam of "Playing in the Band," or the ballad of "Stella Blue," or the jam before "Morning Dew," the camera does catch the audience in different kinds of movements, unlike those of hard driving rhythmic tempo. In these tunes, the audience danced differently: slower, more fluidic, and in a more melodic swaying way than the heavy rhythm driven standard rock n' roll tunes.

The second point to emphasize at this stage is Nietzsche's description of how the Dionysian relates to intoxication, and here it is important not to diminish the role of LSD (acid) in the formation of the band when the drug was still legal. That LSD is a different "narcotic draught" from alcohol, other depressants, stimulants, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine and heroin is clear. In terms of its effects, it belongs in a class of its own with similar compounds, colloquially called psychedelics. Prior to becoming the Grateful Dead, all of the band members, except Pigpen, had taken LSD. So, in 1965, when they connected with Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, it was an easy transition for them to be involved in the Acid Tests, the acid fueled parties that the Pranksters staged in the winter of 1966. Except for Pigpen who never said anything about that experience, the other members of the band were in agreement about the freedom they had at the tests to play if and when they wanted to as well as what to play and for how long. They were not the main attraction; the Acid Test itself was, and so, they felt no professional pressure to perform. All of the participants at the Tests were equally "intoxicated" with LSD, and as the research has shown, they, too, "were expressing themselves in song and dance," as Nietzsche put it. Now it is true that the Grateful Dead from then on, even after LSD was declared illegal in October 1966, were associated with the drug. They used it, and many members of the audience did as well. Eventually, the band stopped performing under the influence of LSD, and more and more audience members stopped as well. It turns out that LSD was neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the band's playing as they did nor was it either necessary or sufficient for the audience's dancing. Nonetheless, it is an historical fact that cannot be overlooked nor downplayed about how prevalent the use of LSD was in the formation of the band with its audience and the music they played.

Of the Dionysian tendency, what is of primary importance for Nietzsche is not the fact of an actual narcotic draught, for after all, as Nietzsche recognized, "the potent coming of spring" is as powerful a causal agent as any drug. What is of primary importance, at least with this provisional account in Section 1, is the

effect that is produced, namely, the shattering of the principle of individuation in consciousness. When the band first began playing, LSD helped achieve the state of conscious non-individuation, for both the band and the audience. As the band continued performing, they manifested the Dionysian tendency through the collective improvisational dimension of their music which simultaneously allowed the audience to express that tendency as well through movement. Michael Kaler, in his analysis of how the band learned to jam, described the relationship between Grateful Dead improvisation and the psychedelic consciousness this way:

Interviews with band members and insider accounts suggest that the impetus to create and develop the band's improvisational approach to rock music derives from what can only be described as the revelation of a new mode of consciousness for the band. My argument is that the Grateful Dead's early career can only be understood fully when it is seen at least in part as the attempt to recreate and represent their experiences of this new mode of consciousness... (Kaler 11-12).

Nietzsche continued to add to his description of the Dionysian tendency in Section 2. There, he not only reinforced what he had set up in the previous section, but also added that the Dionysian artistic impulse of non-individuation is more primordial than the Apollonian impulse of clarity afforded by dreams indicating figures and objects. In a Dionysian state, Nietzsche wrote:

The very element which forms the essence of Dionysian music (and hence of music in general) is carefully excluded as un-Apollonian—namely the emotional power of the tone, the uniform flow of the melody, and the utterly incomparable world of harmony. In the Dionysian dithyramb man is incited to the greatest exhalation of all his symbolic faculties... The essence of nature is now to be expressed symbolically; we need a new world of symbols; and the entire symbolism of the body is called into play, not the mere symbolism of the lips, face and speech but the whole pantomime of dancing, forcing every member into rhythmic movement. Then the other symbolic powers suddenly press forward, particularly those of music, in rhythmic, dynamics, and harmony (BT 40).

The way the audience danced at shows exemplified Nietzsche's description of the way music allows listeners to move freely and rhythmically.

One of the themes Nietzsche developed in the rest of this section and in the following two is one of the youthful errors he referred to in his "Attempt at Self Criticism." His still being under the influence of Schopenhauer's metaphysical dualism led him to present a picture of human experience in three distinct realms: the non-individuated Dionysian state of intoxication, the individuated Apollonian state of dreams, and the ordinary, everyday waking state. He showed in the next three sections of the text how the foundation for Apollonian dreams was the undifferentiated Dionysian state, which for him was, in fact, the primordial unity of existence. The clarity of individuation in dreams are illusions whose foundation was the more primal experience of non-individuation. Our ordinary, waking state, driven by the logic of space, time and causality is also a derivative for Nietzsche. It, too, is an illusion of the direct, primary experience of the non-individuated Dionysian state. The illusions of the dream state, then, are illusions of the illusions of the waking state, still fundamentally grounded in the Dionysian. Nietzsche recognized this problem of hierarchical levels of existence, and in spite of the importance of the Dionysian tendency for his discussion of life affirmation, he did not refer to Dionysus again until he resolved the metaphysical issue and brought Dionysus back into his philosophical thinking at the end of *Beyond Good and Evil* in 1886. Nonetheless, even if we bracket the problem of hierarchical levels of existence, the Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies in art and life can still be useful in understanding the Grateful Dead experience.

Turning to the Apollonian in contrast to the non-individuated world of intoxication, Nietzsche wrote

that the Apollonian world is:

The beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is truly an artist, is [also] the prerequisite of all plastic art, and, as we shall see, of an important part of poetry also. In our dreams we delight in the immediate understanding of figures; all forms speak to us; there is nothing unimportant or superfluous (*BT* 34).

It is in the figure of Apollo, the god of light and clarity and individual form, that we find the impulse for the arts of painting, sculpture and poetry, and therefore also the impulse for the lyrics to the songs of the Grateful Dead. Before focusing on poetry (Sections 5 & 6), Nietzsche again re-articulated his central contention, namely, that in art, and it will turn out in life as well, the two tendencies of expressing either non-individuation or clarity are present in every form of art in some degree or another: there are no purely Dionysian or Apollonian arts as all objects of art have elements of both tendencies, sometimes more Apollonian and sometimes more Dionysian. So even though poetry is primarily Apollonian, it at least includes the Dionysian elements of rhythm and melody. Also then, music, which is primarily Dionysian includes the Apollonian element of a chord structure. Nietzsche also reiterated his contention that although the ordinary, waking state is derivative of the Dionysian ground of existence, it is more deceptive than the dream state which also is derivative of the Dionysian ground of existence.

As he turned to an analysis of the historical development of Greek Tragedy in Sections 5 & 6, Nietzsche identified two distinct forms of Greek poetry: the epic poetry of Homer and the lyric poetry of Archilochus, and he marked their difference both in terms of content and in terms of their respective modes of delivery. The adventures of the gods and heroes was the subject matter of epic poetry, a poetry whose verses were composed to be recited, sometimes in a sing-song voice by rhapsodes. On the other hand, subjective states reflecting the pain, joy and contradictions of life make up the subject matter of lyric poetry whose recitation was always sung, usually with the accompaniment of the lyre. Of the two, epic poetry is more Apollonian since its figures and images are clearly individuated. Conversely, lyric poetry is more Dionysian precisely because of its direct relationship to music and its subject matter's attempt to articulate that which cannot actually be articulated, namely, the suffering and joy of the primal unity of life and non-individuation.

Nietzsche, in the context of *The Birth of Tragedy*, first considered epic and lyric poetry in isolation from each other and did not really consider a blending of the two. Grateful Dead lyrics do not easily organize in one category or another. One reason is that their poetry might be considered epic, that is, those songs that tell a story usually include a subjective reflection about those details. For example, while telling the story of the train ride in 1970 in "Might as Well," the narrator sings "Never had such a good time, in my life before..." (Dodd 253). Another example is "Truckin," an informal history of the band. After reflecting on these events, the singer sings "Sometimes the light's all shining on me/Other times I can barely see/Lately it occurs to me/ what a long strange trip it's been" (Dodd 132). Or, consider "Scarlet Begonias," a tale of a chance meeting between the narrator and a girl, and as their interaction ended, the narrator "...had one of those flashes that [he'd] been there before," and he reflects that "I ain't often right but I've never been wrong... [and that] once in a while you get shown the light in the strangest of places if you look at it right" (Dodd 229-230).

Not all of their tunes followed this epic-lyric dynamic. Some tunes expressed subjective reflection about life within the context of an epic tale. For example, "The Music Never Stopped," a tune about a band coming to town and the excitement it generated. "Say, it might have been a fiddle, or it could have been the wind./But there seems to be a beat, now, I can feel it in my feet now/Listen, here it comes again." But then "No one's noticed that the band's all packed and gone [and the narrator wondered] Was it ever here at all [and nonetheless] But they kept on dancing" (Dodd 250). The dancing motif and the idea of rhythms in the world all around us figure prominently in Nietzsche's celebration of the Dionysian. Still other Grateful Dead

tunes seem to be purely lyric, such as "Ripple" (Dodd 126-127) and "The Wheel" (Dodd 256-257). The lyrical element in all of these tunes reflect the psychedelic consciousness that came out of the psychedelic experience.

By 1967, when Robert Hunter, the band's primary lyricist came to San Francisco, the band had already established for themselves what we can call a psychedelic worldview. They had used LSD frequently and their insight into the Dionysian state of non-individuation permeated their music and their lives. Hunter, too, was steeped in a psychedelic world view, having participated in LSD experiments at Stanford in 1962. In his discussion of Hunter's poetry, Brent Wood wrote of the psychedelic experience:

...the psychedelic experience ought not to be seen as a distortion of reality, but rather as an alternative experience of the universe in which the compartmentalization of reality endemic to our rational, everyday mind-set begins to break down and the ability to see connections between one sphere of experience and another is set free (Wood 41).

Put another way, the psychedelic experience breaks down the principle of individuation and focuses on the connections which presents fewer and fewer individual objects and more and more a sense of a non-differentiated whole, always getting closer to a primal unity. Hunter's lyrics reflected this Dionysian/psychedelic insight while incorporating elements of both epic and lyric poetry as Nietzsche described them.

When introducing an interview with Hunter, Blair Jackson put it this way:

But take a moment and think about the incredible range of this man's work: the nearly Taoist simplicity of "Ripple" and "Attics of My Life"; the fractured psychedelia of "China Cat Sunflower" and "The Eleven"; the playful metaphors of "Deal" and "Run for the Roses"; the colorful portraits of working stiffs in "Cumberland Blues" and "Easy Wind"; the dreamy disconnectedness of "Row Jimmy"; mythological journeys throughout the psyche by way of "Terrapin Station" and "Franklin's Tower"; straightforward declarations of love like "To Lay Me Down" and "If I Had the World to Give"; the cartoonish whimsy of "Tennessee Jed" and "When Push Comes to Shove"; the world-weary existentialism of "Stella Blue" and "Black Muddy River"; and the steadfast stoicism of "Playing in the Band" and "The Wheel." There are hundreds of songs in the Hunter canon, most of them widely different from each other, but all of them shoot points of light into humanity's mirror to give us fleeting glances of our inner selves (Jackson 29).

Many of these tunes' lyrics, albeit inspired by the Apollonian impulse for individuation, have a Dionysian foundation, as Hunter's tunes give us a glimpse of our inner self in relation to the world and others. Nietzsche's point is that all poetry, in spite of the fact that it uses language which by its very nature individuates, is still driven by the Dionysian sense of non-individuated primal unity of existence. So, if even purely epic poetry, which is an extreme case of the Apollonian tendency, rests on a Dionysian foundation, then surely lyric poetry, which comes closer to the Dionysian impulse reflecting suffering, pain, joy and the contradictions of life which arise from a non-individuated state of nature and psyche, similarly rests on a Dionysian foundation. The poetry of the Grateful Dead, by incorporating the insights from the intoxicant LSD, has transcended the two categories of purely epic and lyric poetry. Now, no matter whether the tune is whimsical, mythological, stoic or playful, every tune will express some dimension of the psychedelic/Dionysian experience.

Having provisionally described both the Dionysian and Apollonian tendencies, Nietzsche then turned in Sections 7-9 to the interplay between the two tendencies in the development of Greek art, shedding more light, not only how the object of art reflects a fundamental Dionysian dimension, but also how the Dionysian impulse is expressed through the spectator's engagement with the object. It was through Dionysian tragedy, Nietzsche claimed, "that...the gulfs between man and man give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity leading back to the very heart of nature" (BT 59). And so it is with the audience at a Grateful Dead concert.

The gulf between person and person is lessened as everyone is focused together to listen and dance.

Dancing at Grateful Dead concerts was different from other kinds of dancing though. First of all, most audience members did not dance with a partner nor did they follow a particular choreography. The music of the Grateful Dead was polyrhythmic, polytemporal and polymelodic, and so audience members could not simply just stand there; they “had to move/ “really had to move” (Dodds 141). And people generally moved in the space they had. Folks packed in close to the stage and could not twirl as those in the back of the venue. Everyone, though, according to Nietzsche, expressed the music through the “the entire symbolism of the body... not the mere symbolism of the lips, face and speech but the whole pantomime of dancing, forcing every member into rhythmic movement (*BT* 40).

Grateful Dead music was almost always an interplay between Apollonian and Dionysian tendencies. Certainly, the instrumental interludes—be they brief solos or jams in the middle of a song or the more musical explorations that often happened between songs—were more Dionysian, even though there was always an element of the Apollonian. Songs have chord structures and a beginning, middle and end, and, in the extreme case when the band jammed out on one note, there was always a place to return and call home. If the music got too far out, anyone in the band could call the “and one,” returning the music to a semblance of structure. And songs with lyrics, although more Apollonian, still had a Dionysian component, both in the music of the song and in the poetry. Michael Kaler described the process of Grateful Dead improvisation within a fabric of structure this way:

Overall, the Grateful Dead’s approach to improvisation can be described as the group’s spontaneous creation and manipulation of, and progression between, musical structures. Only extremely rarely do they approach “free” or unstructured improvisation; there is almost always a pulse in their music, usually a rhythm, and the tonal center is rarely in question. What we find in the Grateful Dead’s music is not the rejection of structure, but rather the freedom to work with structure, moving from form to form, either directly or with periods of liminal formlessness in between. This motion through forms is not soloistic or individualistic, but rather is guided and cued by the spontaneous interplay between band members and their commitment to group solidarity. (Kaler 12).

For Nietzsche, what made Greek tragedy the apex in the development of art was the perfect blending of the Apollonian and the Dionysian; that is, when Apollo spoke through Dionysus, and Dionysus spoke through Apollo. In the case of Greek drama, there was perfect blending of the actor’s speeches with the role of the chorus. The chorus was delivered in song, and the content of their words rarely spoke to the plot or character of the play.

At this point in the text, Nietzsche has described both the Dionysian and the Apollonian in isolation from each other and then showed how the interplay between these dual impulses can account for the development of art in ancient Greece, be it sculpture, painting, poetry or music. With the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles the tensional interplay of these two impulses expressed a balance, when the dreams of the Apollonian and the intoxications of the Dionysian express themselves through each other. These tragedies were performed, and so the spectator’s response also reflected these dual tendencies. The spectator, through the performances of the tragedies, experienced the interplay of the individuation of dream states with non-individuation states of intoxication. In this way, the spectator affirmed life along with its vitality. Following Nietzsche’s order, with the Grateful Dead, we began by looking at the audience in a Dionysian state, then briefly sketched the band’s improvisational method of playing music, and finally considered the poetry of the songs which revealed an Apollonian-Dionysian duality within the lyrics.

The one classic example of a Grateful Dead song, which like the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles

incorporates the music and the lyrics together in such a way as the complete tensional balance of the Apollonian-Dionysian duality expresses itself within a single song is "Dark Star."

The composing and first performance of "Dark Star" occurred in December 1967, two years after the band had formed. They had already developed a distinctive style of playing that reflected both their personalities and musical sensibilities. Blending folk, bluegrass, jazz, jug band, rhythm and blues, jazz, the avant garde, and electronic musical influences, they did not sound like an ensemble in any one category. Elements from each genre found their way into the music as they played it. The band's early history then is analogous to Nietzsche's history of the development of Greek tragedy. They were learning to play their instruments at the same time that they were learning how to play together and how to play songs, all primarily Apollonian. However, when they began to learn how to improvise a jam, either in the middle of the tune or in the space between tunes, their music was becoming more Dionysian. When they explored the genre of psychedelic music, they and their music became even more Dionysian in the sense that the improvisations were primarily free form, shattering the principle of individuation. During the song, the jam often bore no relationship to the melody and structures of the verses. In addition, they were innovative within an already complicated framework of influences. As Lesh explained:

I don't want people to play lead guitar or rhythm guitar or keyboard. I want everybody to play lead and rhythm. I'll do the same thing, and so will the drummer. What you then have...is a web of melodic and rhythmic ideas. (Coryat 45)

Or, what you have is music that is polyrhythmic, polymelodic and polytemporal.

In September 1965, the band played multiple sets a night at the In Room in Belmont, CA, for six weeks during which time they began to develop their unique style of improvisation while playing cover tunes—more Apollonian than Dionysian. It was during this time that they learned how to jam improvisationally—more Dionysian than Apollonian. Again, according to Lesh:

We had started out by expanding tunes through extended solos, mainly make them last longer since there are so few of them. However, the longer the solo, the less interesting it became to play the same material as background, so those of us who weren't soloing began to vary and differentiate our "background" material, almost as if we were also soloists... (SS 59)

It was also at the In Room where they experimented with feedback and started to write songs designed to open up into a musical explorative space, for example "Caution (Do Not Stop on Tracks)." This was followed by tunes that spoke directly to and about the psychedelic experience, namely, "The Other One" and some of the other tunes released on the *Anthem of the Sun* record—each tune becoming progressively more Dionysian as the jams opened up an aural space not tethered to a particular rhythm, tempo or melody. Finally in December 1967 they debuted "Dark Star," their signature space out tune. Dennis McNally put it this way:

The Dead had found their fulcrumatic song; "Dark Star" was to be their magic carpet, a vehicle that allowed them to approach music as an unfolding dance. "Caution" had been that sort of song, but "Dark Star" was simply much better and more beautiful. The Dead had also found their voice (McNally 221).

There is no doubt that "Dark Star" expressed the band's psychedelic experience and vision, both musically and lyrically. Musically, as Phil Lesh wrote: "This theme, because of its infinite mutability, became our signature space-out tune, consciously designed to be opened up into alternate universes" (Lesh 101-102). Lyrically also, in so far as the song is filled with psychedelic imagery opening up into alternate universes, it is similarly more Dionysian. Yet, as Dionysian as the music of "Dark Star" is, it still has an Apollonian

form—chord structure. No matter how far they went out in jamming, there was always a root note to return to. Their lyrics, although ostensibly Apollonian, have a Dionysian twist in so far as they reflect a psychedelic experience. The images in the song interrupt our ordinary understanding of the words and are filled with images that suggest, as Wood put it, “an alternative experience of the universe” (Wood 41). A dark star pouring light after it crashes and mirrors shattering into formless reflections of matter are just two examples of juxtaposing words and concepts in a way that interrupts our ordinary understanding. “Dark Star,” then, satisfies the criteria Nietzsche laid out for the apex of Greek tragedy. Apollo speaks through Dionysus, and Dionysus speaks through Apollo; form through chaos and chaos through form. David Malvinni, echoing Michael Kaler’s assessment (Kaler 12), summarized the dual nature of “Dark Star” this way:

...it is precisely because of its active non direction, its call to the chaos of the unknown as a doing. Insofar as “Dark Star” resists the song narrative and becomes “a new space” for seeing, it still attempts to engage with chaos paradoxically via predefined structural means (Malvinni 79).

And both for the band and the audience the possibility of life affirmation and vitality shows itself in every performance.

After completing the first of the three sections of the text, Nietzsche then turned to how what was great in Greece suddenly disappeared, both in the plays of Euripides and the philosophical practice of Socrates. By becoming extremely rational, tragedy not only no longer had need of the chorus, that is the Dionysian element, but also presented its characters as rational, now explaining and giving reasons for what earlier had been regarded as dream illusions. This turn in art and life away from the Dionysian and towards the rational also meant that the Apollonian impulse disappeared along with the Dionysian. Nietzsche believed that this new tradition, lasting for over two millennia, had finally come to the end, and that a new possibility for the future, one which would recapture the Dionysian, was imminent. The Grateful Dead emerged almost a century after Nietzsche first identified the shift and heralded a new era, and the band’s music and performances clearly expressed Nietzsche’s hope for the future. In fact, they said so themselves in a lyric of “Dark Star.” “Reason tatters,” the singer sings, “the forces tear loose from the axis” (Dodd 49). Nietzsche had characterized the philosophical tradition as being rational no matter what the cost, and that strategy was successful for some problems, but not for all; it cannot explain the mystery of Dionysian non-individuation, and the experience of vital life affirmation in a deep and fundamental way.

Ideally, in a teaching situation one can use parts of Nietzsche to help explain aspects of the Grateful Dead phenomenon(a) or use aspects of the Grateful Dead to help explain parts of Nietzsche; in either case, there is heuristic back and forth between the text and the phenomenon(a). Both Nietzsche and the Grateful Dead speak to the subjective experience of life affirmation, not as mere cognitive recognition, but rather as a physiological state of being. For both Nietzsche and the Grateful Dead, the Dionysian dimension of life comes to the forefront through the body, whether experiencing the unity of nature and others through the intoxications resulting from participating in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles or through dancing with the music of the Grateful Dead.

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## AUTHOR BIO

Stan Spector is Professor Emeritus of Philosophy. He has written on the Grateful Dead phenomenon(a) in light of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Buber and others. A frequent presenter to the Grateful Dead Scholar's Caucus, he has published his work on the Grateful Dead phenomenon(a) in *All Grateful Instruments: The Contexts of the Grateful Dead Phenomenon* (Cambridge Scholars, 2007) and *Countercultures and Popular Music* (Ashgate, 2014). His co-edited volume, *The Grateful Dead in Concert: Essays on Live Improvisation*, was published by McFarland in 2010. His current research focuses on the interface between the Grateful Dead phenomenon(a), specifically dancing at shows, and the body, specifically in terms of Merleau-Ponty's analysis of perception.

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## **Discoursing the Grateful Dead: Scholars, Fans, and the 2020 Meeting of Southwest Popular/ American Culture Association**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Academic conferences serve many functions but at heart they are pedagogical enterprises, designed to teach, share, and refine knowledge. This paper uses the 2020 meeting of the Grateful Dead area of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association to explore some of the issues and challenges that define the pedagogical and scholarly work of a conference section. The 2020 meeting offers a useful lens for discussing the area's contributions and problems within the larger framework and history of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association and the broader field of Grateful Dead studies. The experience of the Dead area illustrates issues in conference dynamics and organization as well as in the development of discourse communities, especially those with popular constituencies.

**Keywords:** Conference organization; popular culture studies; media fandom; Grateful Dead studies; discourse communities.

In 2020, the Grateful Dead area of the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association held its twenty-third meeting, part of the larger organization's forty-first conference. Both events represented achievements, given the swiftly changing currents of academe and popular culture. This themed issue of *Dialogue* offers an opportunity to reflect on the area's meeting and assess its contributions to and relationships with the communities it serves, from the informal group it represents to the larger conference that hosts it. As an interdisciplinary scholarly conference area, the group's scholarship is fundamentally pedagogical, not only teaching its participants and spectators about its subject but also developing a praxis that facilitates the daunting challenge of communicating across diverse disciplinary divides. That challenge extends more broadly as well: as an area defined by the larger conference's focus on popular culture, the area has also had to address the divide between professional and nonprofessional, and scholar and fan. While conference assessments usually do not focus on a single area, the Dead area has a sufficiently well-defined focus and established history to merit discussion. The 2020 meeting was noteworthy for two additional reasons: it was the last to feature a printed program, a rarity for any conference area, as well as the last one held prior to the incorporation of the Grateful Dead Studies Association, an organization established by area participants to address issues the area could not address. Those events also make the forty-first SWPACA conference a useful lens for surveying the work of the area and the issues it has faced.

Although earlier meetings of the Dead area have been reviewed, primarily in various publications associated with the area, no review has appeared since 2014, and none have appeared in a mainstream academic journal.<sup>1</sup> Rather than provide a typical conference review, focused on papers and sessions, this essay approaches the area pedagogically, discussing its contributions and problems as a conference area and scholarly community. My perspective is subjective, as someone who has presented papers to the Caucus regularly since its second meeting and served as chair or co-chair of the area for fifteen meetings, though my thoughts have benefitted from oral histories conducted with four other chairs, an email survey of area participants in 2019, and extensive feedback from presenters and guests over the years, both at the conference and via email and telephone afterwards. While the area has grown and evolved during its perhaps surprisingly long tenure, the problems it has faced have been recurrent and in many ways emblematic, ranging from interdisciplinarity and rigor to diversity and inclusion, issues complicated by its appeal to fans. More broadly, the experience of the Dead area usefully raises issues in conference dynamics and organization as well as in the development of scholarly discourse communities, especially those with popular constituencies.

## CONFERENCES AS RESEARCH SITES

Assessments of conference areas are rare, but that lacuna is part of a larger void. Conference reviews are common but closer analyses remain challenging, as one recent study observed. "Conferences are actually so self-evident that very little research exists analysing what takes place at conferences, why people attend them in the first place, and essentially what the conference does to delegates as participants" (Edelheim et al., "What Do Conferences Do?" 94)

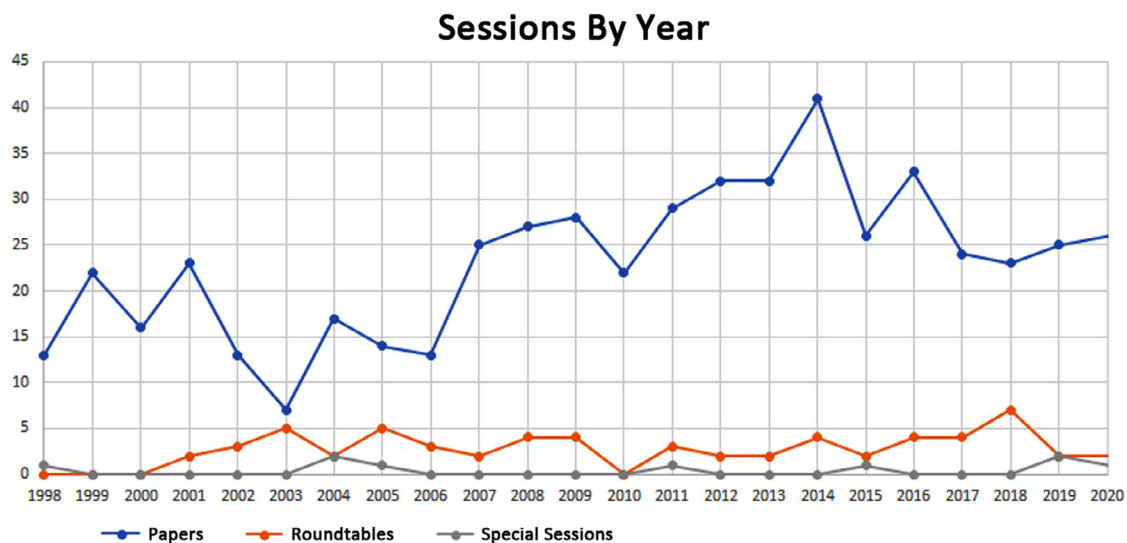
Researchers cite "the well-recognised emotional and social processes of conferences" (Henderson, "Academic Conferences" 914), but note that the work to understand those processes remains in its infancy. That complaint is not new. Fifteen years ago, researchers pointed out that "Little attention has been paid either to developing a theoretically informed understanding of conference practice as knowledge building, or to assessing the extent to which conferences are successful" (Jacobs and McFarlane, "Conferences As Learning Communities" 317). This essay suggests that areas or subject-themed sections of conferences offer fertile subjects for developing that understanding by linking the work of areas to the larger conference, acknowledging "the importance of recognising the connection between micro and macro-scale analyses of higher education" (Henderson, "Academic Conferences" 914).

Assessing specific areas can also contribute to the discussion of how to improve conferences in general, a need scholars throughout the academy cite (Glassberg, Pritchard, and Gunter, “Public Discussion”). But areas can also usefully clarify how the broader mission and domain of a conference translates into discourse—after all, both area and conference are scholarly discourse communities, served by the same event, and that common ground defines both. As one researcher explained, “Planned events can be considered as texts, conveying and interpreting the social order of a community. Academic conferences and conventions also represent a community; they convey and interpret the *academic* community’s social order” (Walters, “Gender Equality”). The idea of social order is a useful way of approaching the Grateful Dead area, as the 2020 meeting shows. That meeting, and the history of the area, showcases how these two discourse communities navigate broadly shared pedagogical missions and events.

## THE GRATEFUL DEAD AREA

The Grateful Dead area first convened at the 1998 meeting of the Southwest/Texas Popular/American Culture Association, as it was then called, and remains one of the major areas comprising the SWPACA conference today. That status owes as much to individuals as it does to any scholarly foundation, although the establishment of the area did fit broadly into the mission of the regional popular culture associations. After the formation of the Popular Culture Association in 1969, regional associations followed in the 1970s. These were “an integral part” of the larger push to make a place for popular culture studies in the academy, as founder Ray Browne believed: “The thinking behind the regional associations is a kind of grass-roots, or near grass-roots approach” (Browne, *Mission Underway* 100). The Midwest Popular Culture Association was the first regional organization, launched in 1973; the Southwest/Texas organization held its first meeting in 1979. Providing forums for regional topics with narrower constituencies was one goal of the regional organizations, but their proliferation also allowed niche subjects with no discernible ties to any one region to flourish as well. That explains how a topic like the Grateful Dead could find support among the officers of the Southwest/Texas PACA, despite the band’s tenuous connections to the region. The area waxed and waned over the years, but since 2003, it has been one of the larger areas; Fig. 1 documents the papers, roundtables, and special sessions from the first meeting through 2020, showing an increase over time of papers that spiked in 2014.

Fig. 1. Grateful Dead Area Papers, Roundtables and Special Sessions, 1998–2020



The 2020 meeting continued that trend. There are a maximum of 16 sessions in the SWPACA schedule and the Dead area filled 13; that number does not include two evening sessions that could have been slotted as regular sessions, given their topics, a listening session and a hootenanny, which other areas host as regular sessions. The size of the SWPACA and of the Dead section makes comparing areas difficult. That is true of other areas as well: several of the older areas have their own characters, and one of the largest, “Game Studies, Culture, Play, and Practice,” even devotes its final session to a business meeting. The Dead area’s character and size tend to make its conference experience both all-consuming and self-contained, which also tends to isolate it from the rest of the conference.

Broad metrics provide some context. The SWPACA has 71 areas, 69 of which met at the 2020 meeting. These ranged from single sessions with only two papers to the two largest areas, with 16 sessions and 54 papers, respectively. The majority were far smaller: 42 areas held between 1 and 3 sessions. The Grateful Dead area hosted 27 papers in 13 sessions, including one roundtable and one special session, making it one of the largest. Only three areas hosted more sessions, and only four featured more papers: “Esotericism and Occultism” with 16 sessions and 23 papers; “Creative Writing (Poetry, Fiction, Non-Fiction)” with 8 sessions and 29 papers; “Game Studies, Culture, Play, and Practice” with 15 sessions and 54 papers; “Pedagogy and Popular Culture” with 15 sessions and 31 papers; and “Women, Gender, and Sexuality” with nine sessions and 30 papers. Of single-themed areas, the Dead is the largest: “Harry Potter Studies” fielded five sessions and eleven papers, and “Whedonverses: Creators and Texts,” devoted to the works of Joss Whedon, hosted only three papers and two sessions, one of which was a singalong. The Dead area was also larger than the other music area, “Music: Traditional, Political, Popular,” which, despite its more general purview, had just 5 sessions and 15 papers.

Presentations in the Dead area tend to fall into two overarching categories: microcosmic analyses that focus on themes, elements, and individual songs, recordings, and concerts, and broader treatments that link the band’s music and its reception to larger issues or frame them in broader contexts. While most work presented to the Caucus frames Dead studies in larger disciplinary terms, the group also recognizes the importance of microcosmic efforts. These can be scholarly, but they also tend to be where amateurs can make substantive contributions. Musicologists have long recognized the potentially valuable role that fan efforts can provide, for example (Harker, “Taking Fun Seriously”), but the area’s recognition of such efforts, and their origins outside of the academy, have also hampered recognition of the area and contributed to the dismissal of its work (Weir, “Tie-Dye and Flannel Shirts” 138). More thoughtful assessments disagree, even if they admit that the discourse remains largely isolated from popular music and cultural studies scholarship (Flory, “Liveness” 124).

That status—and those relationships—provide the ultimate context for judging the area and its work, but the area is also self-critical, a quality honed by its longevity and continuity. Feedback on the 2020 meeting indicated that most participants found the majority of papers to be thoughtful and useful, reactions that dovetailed with the results of the 2019 survey. That survey codified the informal feedback process that chairs had developed over the years, with questions that directly assessed the caliber of presentations (“Overall, how strong (well prepared and rigorous) do you think the papers and presentations were?”), and their utility (“How useful were the papers, presentations, and sessions to your understanding of Dead studies?”; “If you are an academic professional, how useful was the Dead area for your work?”). For the 2019 meeting, those results skewed high: respondents ranked papers highly, all from 7 to 10 (on a 1 to 10 scale) with most ranked 8; likewise, all were deemed useful for their work and understanding of the discourse, almost half of respondents ranking the papers as a 10, or highly useful, with a 77.5% response rate.

Scholars saw a greater range in rigor in the papers for the 2020 meeting. These critiques were pointed, though most scholars take the variability of contributions in stride, viewing it as a function of the conference: the study of popular culture has always been an uneven field. The Dead area reflects that explicitly: indeed, it grapples with some of the larger definitional and methodological issues that have bedeviled popular culture

studies since the 1960s. Those can also be seen in the conference as a whole. Some papers and sessions, even entire areas, could easily fit into more discipline-specific or more narrowly defined conferences, such as film studies, folklore, or gender studies. For the Dead area, some literary and musicological papers could have easily fit discipline-specific conferences, and two were in fact better suited for other areas.

That ambiguity is also a function of the group's multidisciplinary nature, itself a function of the broader conference domain as well as a distinctive quality of the discourse of Grateful Dead studies. Indeed, from a wider professional standpoint, the group's approach to the challenge of interdisciplinary conversation is one of the area's real achievements. Most area participants share the belief that the nature of the subject itself requires many disciplines to effectively study it. That democratic view has produced some remarkable examples of interdisciplinarity, conversations that participants have singled out as rare or even impossible in other venues. Discussions at past conferences have candidly addressed disciplinary divides that in other forums would likely devolve into rancor; this year, a clash between how historians and religious studies scholars view aspects of new religious movements could easily have produced acrimony, given the debate's roots in foundational tenets and core disciplinary values. Instead, these differences were resolved in informal conversation after sessions and at social events, and the scholars involved have gone on to work together on a joint project.

That kind of difficult but ultimately fruitful cross-disciplinary conversation represents the group's discussion at its best, often called the highlight of the conference by academic professionals. Not all of that discussion is as productive, especially when it involves participants who are not academic professionals. A frequent complaint this year and in years past was the distraction of irrelevant commentary by attendees who are not scholars; this year, one sought to interject irrelevant remarks at every single session, exasperating most participants and all but destroying the discussion for many.

Sessions were not the only aspect of the conference that unprofessional behavior affected. An integral aspect of the conference is its social dimension, a vital component of all conferences as well as an organic aspect of the subject: the Dead phenomenon was in many ways defined by the concert experience, a social occasion. That attitude also stemmed from the larger understanding of popular music studies, which scholars have suggested should be leavened by a sense of fun (Harker, "Taking Fun Seriously"). For many area participants, the social aspects of the meeting provided a critical part of their conference experience; that was deliberate—indeed, the effort required to plan those events is comparable to work for the more formal academic component of the conference. For planners, that has been an organic response to the needs of the area, but it also addresses what planners and theorists have decried as the limitations of the traditional, "passive" model of academic conferences, a format criticized for its lack of meaningful interaction (Verbeke, "Designing Academic Conferences"). The Dead area's social functions are part of an informal but deliberate strategy of breaking down those passive, typical aspects of conference organization in order to allow for exactly the kind of meaningful interaction that theorists have called for, requiring "different methods of stimulating the construction of knowledge by conference participants" that scholars consider "very valuable for consolidating knowledge and envisioning future developments in a discipline" (Verbeke, "Designing Academic Conferences" 98).

That strategy has included other efforts as well, some academic, some Deadhead. At the second meeting, the idea of proceedings emerged, and in time, the area program took on those qualities. The program for the 2020 meeting was 118 pages, documenting the presentations, sessions and schedule as well as providing several essays and features. Starting with the area's tenth meeting, posters commemorating the conference emerged as a popular keepsake for participants, not only advertising the area but connecting the group's work to the Deadhead appreciation for concert posters. Both projects proved ultimately unsustainable, however, due to the group's inability to organize a way to fund them. Both efforts were appreciated, even prized, yet the burden for them exceeded the ability of an area to sustain, and 2020 marked their conclusion.

To a large extent, this was a function of the group's status as an area: even the nickname of the group, the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus, is a nod to that lack of organization, but that characteristic produced a dynamic that precluded the establishment of even an informal organization to share expenses, provide administration, or ensuring continuity. Indeed, when the idea of creating a more formal structure was discussed at one meeting, it was dropped at the insistence of two participants, neither of whom contributed to the area's administration or expenses. Although a few generous participants usually made donations, and some costs were recouped by charging for posters and eventually for programs, the area never covered its expenses, leaving the chair responsible for the deficit. In early years, that rarely amounted to more than a few hundred dollars, but in later years, it could exceed several thousand. This is a common problem in smaller conferences; the same issue damaged the Midwest PCA in its formative years (Browne, *Mission Underway* 104).

The Midwest PCA's experience highlights the greater challenge that organization presents for areas that operate within larger conferences. For small groups, that challenge is not just to establish practices that promote their own discourse but ones that also support and extend the goals of the larger conference. The Dead area's efforts worked well when it came to social events such as the group's hootenanny, which reflected the inherent democratic musicality of the subject of the group's work as well as the inclusivity the SWPACA prized. But the group's efforts to create an organizational structure were unsuccessful. That failure was not necessarily fatal: many areas of the SWPACA are active, long-running groups with their own distinctive histories and character. But the Dead area's inability to organize itself went beyond a failure to fund and sustain activities, it also produced fissures and problems, some of which proved intractable.

## DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Conference organizations work hard to avoid such issues, especially when they point to larger problems with diversity. Inclusion and diversity are prominent parts of the research on conferences (Walters, "A Tripartite Approach"). Scholars have identified the academic conference setting as "an important site for understanding the implications of outsider-ness" (Oliver and Morris, "(Dis-)Belonging Bodies" 765), and that work has singled out conferences, especially large ones, for failing to create inclusive environments. "The academy frequently claims that it is a champion of social justice and diversity," two scholars observed in 2017. "But the academic conference business underscores the hypocrisy of this claim" (Kirchherr and Biswas, "Expensive Academic Conferences"). Some of this can be traced to the tendency of conference environments to reinforce homophily; while that can reinforce a sense of community, it can also exclude, hampering diversity (AtzmueLLer and Lemmerich, "Homophily at Academic Conferences"). The broader lessons, however, are critical.

Researchers have found that academic conferences tend to reflect the norms and values of their sponsoring organizations, in both structure and dynamics (Egri, "Academic Conferences as Ceremonials"). Here the SWPACA deserves credit: its commitment to equity is reflected in its mission statement and reified by its code of conduct ("About"; "Code"). The 2020 meeting reflected those ideals: "Women, Gender, and Sexuality" was one of the largest areas and at least seven other areas had papers and sessions that represented women's studies, from "Computer Culture" to "Religion." The Dead area reflected this as well, fielding a session on "Feminist Studies and the Grateful Dead," one of several it has hosted over the years. Conference governance also demonstrates that commitment: all of the executive staff of the SWPACA are women, several of whom also serve as area chairs. In all, 35 area chairs are women, or more than half of the areas in 2020 (although that number includes a few areas that also have assistant chairs as well as a few small areas that share chairs).

The SWPACA also strives to be racially and ethnically inclusive. Three subject areas explicitly address race: "African American/Black Studies," which hosted two sessions and four papers at the 2020 meeting; "Chicano/a Literature, Film, and Culture," with five sessions and 18 papers; and "Native American / Indigenous Studies," with four sessions and 14 papers. Race was a theme in several other areas as well, such as "Rap and

Hip-Hop Culture” with four sessions and nine papers, and nine other areas hosted papers in which race was an explicit focus of a session.

One reason for that diversity is the conference’s strategy for preventing bias. Area chairs are instructed not to reject proposals but to alert the program director, who arranges for an alternate session. While that eliminates rejection rate as a metric for the conference’s exclusivity, this policy can be defended as integral to the SWPACA’s mission: popular culture is holistic, and issues of inclusivity, diversity, and equity are fundamental to its formulation. Open acceptance offers a defense against bias that selection metrics might incur. That is especially critical if participant demographics are less than representative.

It is more difficult for areas to reflect the larger organization’s diversity and the Dead area’s record reflects that. Women have presented at the Dead area every year since its inception and are among the most frequent participants. At the 2020 meeting, women gave one-third of the papers. Area leadership consists of a chair with two informal standing committees, for the program and the events; one woman has served as co-chair, and in committee representation, women and men serve equally and have since the committees were first convened. While the area has addressed race directly in a few presentations, only two Native American scholars have presented, and only one other presenter of color. To some extent this reflects the predominately white male demographic of the Dead’s audience, but it is a critical issue for the discourse and the health of the scholarly community devoted to it.<sup>2</sup> The larger lesson for the area and the field is that however welcoming the group may be socially, and however open the acceptance policy for proposals, those qualities are not enough to ensure a diverse presenter pool. Worse, those characteristics can produce unintended consequences.

## FANS AND SCHOLARS

A striking feature of the Dead area is the number of non-presenters who attend. This is unusual: the cost of the conference tends to discourage those without a stake in the professional discussion, but the conference’s open acceptance policy encourages participation from independent scholars and even those who lack professional training entirely. The area’s commitment to interdisciplinarity underscores that inclusivity, and recognizes that independent scholars have made useful contributions to conference meetings. But that ethos, along with the area’s social activities, have made the area a welcoming site for fans. Fan interest in the subject of the group’s inquiry has meant that many presenters appreciate the challenge of communicating with non-academic spectators as well. That ecumenical quality has been both a strength and a hindrance, as it has in popular culture studies more generally, and the issues that has raised have played a major role in the area’s meetings.

The roots of those issues are both historical and theoretical. As the study of popular culture gained professional standing in the 1960s, scholars recognized the role that fans play in defining the phenomena they studied. Ray Browne explicitly formulated his view of the push for popular culture studies as larger than the academy, calling it “One of the most innovative, far reaching and tradition-shattering of academic—and non-academic—movements in the Humanities and social sciences of the last half century” (Browne, *Against Academia* 1. *Italics mine*). Fans are not the only foundation of popular culture, in this view, but they also exercise power: “the only real authority concerning the ‘beauty’ or ‘excellence’ of a work of Popular Culture is the people” (Rolling, “Against Evaluation” 234).

Scholars have also pointed out that the deep interest that fandom connotes can provide “cultural expertise” in a subject (Hertog and McCloud, 2003), and that interest and expertise can be effective prompts for undertaking serious work on a topic dismissed or denigrated by the academy, as several scholars have pointed out is the case with Grateful Dead studies (Meriwether, “Introduction”; Gimbel, “Foreword”). Passion can also provide a buffer against or even a corrective for the condescension that prolonged, deep engagement with a subject, especially an artistic one, can bring, as scholars have long recognized.

Yet the passion that may spur good work can also clash with scholarly detachment. When the Dead area formed in the late nineties, scholars were revising the depiction and understanding of fans and fan culture. Cultural studies reassessed fandom as “an important test site for ideas about active consumption and grassroots creativity,” as one theorist explained. “We were drawn to the idea of ‘fan culture’ as operating in the shadows of, and in response to, as well as an alternative to commercial culture” (Jenkins, Fans, Bloggers, Gamers 257). This idea had implication for popular culture scholarship as well, allowing scholars to assert that “Older ideas about the authority of an elite minority of qualified critics have given way to more seemingly democratic ideals of audience sovereignty” (Duffett, Understanding Fandom 16). As a result, academic professionals could bridge the divide between fans and scholars (Jenkins 2006, 4). “Since the 1990s it has become possible for scholars to be both fans and academics at the same time,” Mark Duffett believes (Understanding Fandom 16).

Yet that obscures or elides the very real obligations that professionals must meet. While scholars of media fan studies may be increasingly comfortable with a hybrid identity that embraces their fandom, their professional engagement still provides the ultimate arbiter of their work. Fans have no such framework. Researchers note that “fan discourse works to create a specific kind of community that becomes more important than the object of fandom itself. Fans are also motivated by self-invention, in which fandom provides an opportunity to live in and through a set of symbols that are expressive of one’s aspirations rather than ‘reality’” (Harris, Theorizing Fandom 6). Fans seek to validate their experiences and affirm their identity as fans; these motives and readings have no stake in the ideals and standards of professional scholarship. However sincere their devotion, fans are not motivated by a scholar’s commitment to an ethical, critical reading of the object of their fandom.

This explains the problems caused by the unprofessional conduct of some fans at area meetings. Behaviors that made sense to fans conflicted with the norms of professional conduct— even the most basic requirement of paying registration. Deadheads prized the practice of giving tickets away, “miracles” for those less fortunate. This benevolence could shade into less ethical practices, such as “stubbing down” within venues, allowing fans with seats in one area to migrate to another, or even fence-jumping or otherwise finding a way inside without paying admission. Several participants cited this as justification for not paying registration or else paying only a reduced, one-day fee although they attended the entire time, made possible by the sheer size of the conference and its location in a publicly accessible hotel. Those behaviors created friction within the group and between the group and conference administrators, who were not accustomed to attendees attempting to skirt registration fees.

More difficult was the challenge posed by serial presenters whose papers lacked basic familiarity with the subject as well as the rudiments of scholarship. This was not a case of fans providing at least the semblance of academic trappings to their musings, a complaint that described some amateur efforts. For several papers, this amounted to academic fraud, in which clearly factually inaccurate claims advanced were later defended by their presenters as vetted and substantiated, both by their “membership” in the area and specifically as “peer-reviewed” presentations. None of these allegations were true. The SWPACA’s open acceptance policy precluded peer review and neither the SWPACA nor the Dead area were membership organizations. The waste of the area’s time was a concern, but more troubling was the publicity these presenters courted, which contributed to the dismissals of the field as amateurish and the area as lacking rigor. While this did result in the extraordinary step of the chair receiving permission to reject such papers, prompting the creation of a program committee to vet proposals, the negative publicity was damaging. Aside from the waste of the group’s time that these presentations represented, the misuse of the conference setting and abuse of the open acceptance policy posed grave problems for the group’s integrity and highlighted its fragility.

Those problems were brought home when these behaviors were challenged. Faced with censure, these participants attacked the area and several participants, alleging serious violations of professional ethics



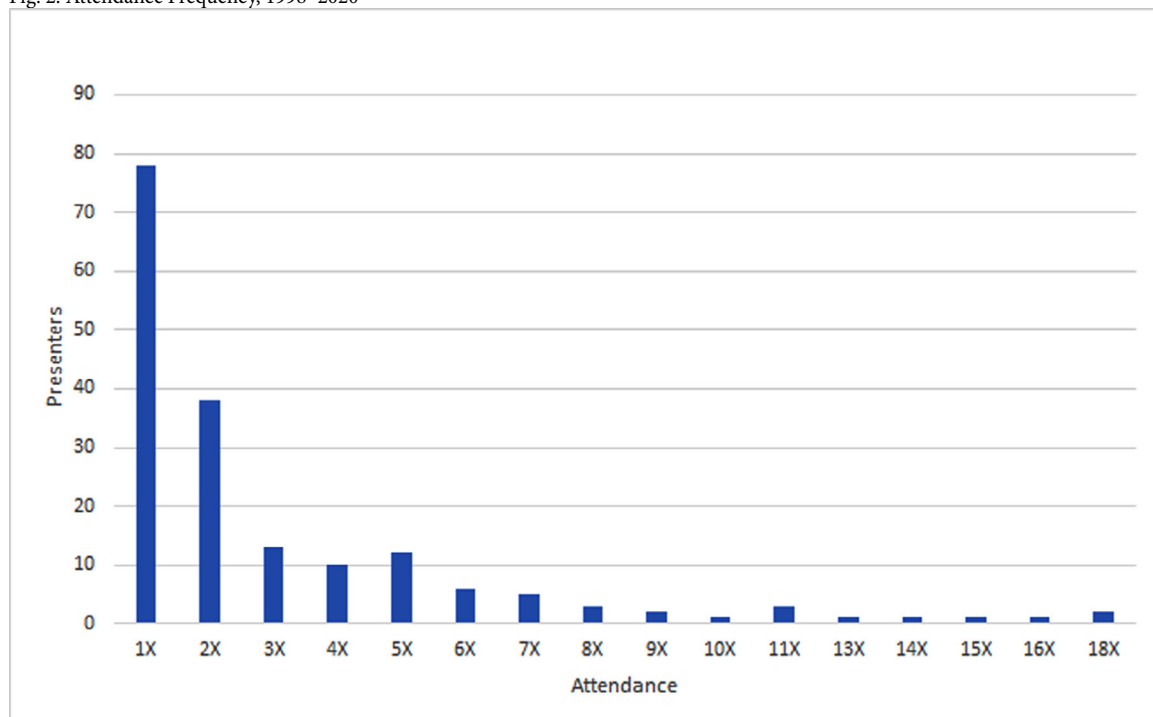
and personal misconduct. While the professional attacks were dismissed, the personal ones were more consequential, alienating many scholars and sullyng the reputations of others. These consequences illustrate the damage caused by what might otherwise be dismissed as simple boorishness and unprofessionalism, and its prevalence, though largely the work of only three troubled attendees, caused many scholars to write off the area as worse than merely amateurish.

The larger lesson is that these individuals were approaching scholarship in the way they approached their fandom. Like all fans, Deadheads value knowledge of the subject of their fandom, but fan identity frames that knowledge in personal terms. Fan culture prizes passionate pontification, not reasoned, self-critical, dispassionate analysis. When fans sought to participate in the area's conversation, it could help scholars refine their arguments to reach a wider audience, but in conference sessions it often simply distracted from the hard work of interdisciplinary discourse. At worst, fan participation conflicted absolutely with the area's goals, alienating professionals who trusted it to provide a reputable, rigorous, and ethical site to refine their arguments.

These behaviors derailed session discussions but exercised their most destructive potential in social settings, both at conference meetings and after. In time, some participants chose to avoid area social events in order to avoid encounters with these individuals, but even that was part of the larger pattern of the friction between fan identity and scholarship. A hallmark of the area's conference meetings is civility: the most serious critiques, and often the most constructive criticism, tend to take place outside of sessions. Yet for fans, any insinuation that their work could be improved was a personal attack that threatened their fan identity. The broader lesson is that what may look laudable, even critical, from a fan perspective collides painfully with the world of professional scholarship.

Significantly, in the twenty-three year history of the area, unprofessional behavior was the single largest category of complaints, and the major reason cited by those who did not return. This also explains why, despite the generally deep engagement of presenters with the subject, the overwhelming majority of presenters only came once, as seen in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. Attendance Frequency, 1998–2020



This corroborates studies that have found that incivility exercised a defining and destructive impact on conference satisfaction (Settles and O'Connor, "Incivility"). For a niche area such as the Grateful Dead, that dissatisfaction removes the only reason for attendance, given the high cost of conference attendance and the fact that Grateful Dead studies is viewed with skepticism in most departments and disciplines, the two most prominent barriers to conference attendance (Stevens, Bressler, and Silver, "Challenges in Marketing"). The fact that misbehavior by a very few attendees continued for many years marked the greatest failure in the group, which was unable to censure the offenders. Area chairs have very limited power; the creation of a program committee enabled the area to reject papers, successfully discouraging several chronic offenders, but not all. Even the establishment of a conference Code of Ethics, prompted specifically by one attendee's behavior, did not curtail the problem, although it did produce a formal disciplinary warning by SWPACA administration.

The failure of that warning speaks to the problem, and even that disciplinary step was rare. When this same individual had threatened SWPACA officers with (baseless) legal action at an earlier meeting, they considered dropping the area entirely, finally opting instead to relegating the area's sessions to a satellite hotel at the next meeting (Weiner "The Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus" 13). Chairs cannot censure or ban individuals: although complaints made to the chair were conveyed to conference officials, second-hand information is not actionable, regardless of the egregiousness of the violations and the distress of the complainants.<sup>3</sup> This, too, speaks to the gulf between the standards governing professionals and their behavior and those of fans: professionals were reluctant to bring complaints directly to conference administration, which would compel participation in disciplinary proceedings that at the least are time-consuming and distasteful, and at worst could damage their professional standing. Fans have no such compunction: their amateur status provides immunity from any professional repercussions. The area's inability to censure those individuals and their behavior proved to be its Achilles' Heel; the larger lesson is that unchecked, unprofessional behavior undercuts scholarly communication and undermines academic communities.

## CONCLUSION

For most participants, the Grateful Dead area's achievements are noteworthy and significant, perhaps especially in the light of the challenges it has weathered. From the vantage of 2021, the Grateful Dead may not be an established or accepted topic for scholarly study in the most rigorous or conservative redoubts of the academy, but it has made a place for itself in the larger landscape of popular culture studies. Whether that umbrella best suits the discourse can be debated, but it is natural, given the role played by the SWPACA in the establishment of the community of scholars responsible for much of the conversation. Indeed, the scholarly conversation about the Grateful Dead owes substantially to the forum that the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association has provided. Papers presented at the SWPACA have contributed to a substantial body of published work, including articles, chapters, anthologies, and monographs; presenters have also contributed to journalism, radio broadcasts, and podcasts. By those standards, the Dead area has been a success. If that work is uneven, that, too, reflects popular culture studies as a whole. It is also moot: popular culture studies has produced seminal work, just as well-established fields have witnessed their fair share of weak and flawed efforts. And Grateful Dead studies is a young field; the struggle to establish standards is part of the development of all discourses. Its place within popular culture studies refines that process: sloughing off non-scholarly fandom is critical if the discourse is to advance.

The 2020 meeting represented that process in microcosm, mirroring the trajectory of popular culture studies more generally and several of the issues it struggles with still. In his history of the Popular Culture Association, Ray Browne saw the progress of the field as driven by the kind of work that the Caucus has done:

Various academic individuals and groups in several ways have been building out-fires for years in efforts to explore the fringes of our knowledge, discover new fields

of inquiry and new ways of looking at the familiar, with the hope and expectation that many new insights and conclusions can result which can be not only rewarding to the individuals immediately involved but also society at large. (Browne, *Against Academia* 1)

The story of the Dead area, more broadly and especially at this most recent meeting, is part of that effort. Conferences and conference areas are vital to their scholarly communities, “a part of the metastory of their field,” as one scholar put it (Nicolson, *Academic Conferences* 66). That metastory is necessarily professional, a context that frames the area’s struggles in productive ways.

The question that the Caucus raises is more than just a question of who owns the discourse, or how scholarly discourse communities contend with fans. When the area began, the challenge for the group was how to apply high standards and scholarly rigor to the study of this recent and ongoing popular culture phenomenon. Over time, however, the principal question the group’s experience raised was not scholarly but political: what are the obligations of scholars to fans, and what are the obligations of fans to scholars?

The establishment of the Grateful Dead Studies Association by scholars frustrated by the intractability of the problems of the area provides an answer, one that represents a positive resolution to that impasse. At the conclusion of the 2019 SWPACA conference, 30 participants of the Dead area convened and voted to proceed with the incorporation of a professional academic organization (Meriwether, “Organizing”; Meriwether, “Mysteries Dark and Vast”). Interestingly, that response echoes the establishment of the PCA: it arose to fulfill the needs of scholars unable to effectively present their work within the confines of other established conferences and organizations, although here it was academic professionals who felt frustrated by fans, not colleagues.

Conferences are sites that reify the abstractions of scholarly philosophy and professional ethics and reveal how those play out in the messy realities of pedagogy, discourse, and community. The history of the Grateful Dead area at the SWPACA provides a case study of how those processes play out in a conference setting, just as the area’s 2020 meeting provided a distillation of the issues they raise. Fittingly, that conference concluded one of the more colorful and interesting chapters in the metasatory of the discourse of Grateful Dead studies, even as it launched another.

## NOTES

1. The last review was of the 2013 meeting; see Meriwether, “‘A Hundred Verses.’ Reviews of the first fifteen meetings comprise Part II of Meriwether, *Studying the Dead*.
2. No scientifically accurate survey of Grateful Dead fan demographics was undertaken, but a number of surveys reached this conclusion; see, for example, Scott, Dolgushkin, Nixon, “Deadhead Survey” 348. For a summary of many of these surveys, see Adams, “Terrapin Station Demographics.”
3. These complaints ranged from minor to serious, such as theft of area material (programs and posters), sexual harassment, libel, and slander.

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## AUTHOR BIO

Nicholas G. Meriwether's work has appeared in *Popular Music and Society*, *The Sixties*, *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, *Provenance*, and others. He is Curator at the Haight Street Art Center in San Francisco and Executive Director of the Grateful Dead Studies Association.

## RECOMMENDED REFERENCE

### APA

Meriwether, N. G. (2022). Discoursing the grateful dead: Scholars, fans, and the 2020 meeting of Southwest Popular/American Culture Association. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 9(1 & 2). <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v9-issue-1-and-2/discoursing-the-grateful-dead-scholars-fans-and-the-2020-meeting-of-southwest-popular-american-culture-association/>

### MLA

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## Teaching with the Dead: A Short Personal Remembrance

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### ABSTRACT

This essay is a personal remembrance of teaching an Honors course related to the Grateful Dead, the Beat Generation, and the Counterculture at Texas Tech University during the Spring of 2019. It describes the readings, assignments, techniques, and overall class response to the material. The goals of the course are explained and the syllabus is added as an appendix.

**Keywords:** Grateful Dead, Beat Generation, Counterculture, Teaching Techniques, American experience, United States History, San Francisco Music.

## INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2019, I taught an honors course titled, “The Beat Generation, the Counterculture, the Grateful Dead and the American Experience” at Texas Tech University. Hence, this article provides a narrative of how the class was taught, the materials used, and the assignments given. This is a personal memory of how the course was taught, the material and assignments given as well as how the students responded. I have also included the syllabus as an appendix so readers can get an idea of the intense amount of reading required as well as the course goals and objectives. I had only eight students from a wide variety of majors, including engineering, business, art, and computer science. This was more than just a Grateful Dead class as its goal was for the students to understand how the Beat Generation, the Counterculture, and the Grateful Dead have affected our culture. To this end, I did not lecture very much as the course was discussion-based, reading intensive, and included a wide variety of guest speakers. I generally teach my classes using the Socratic method whereby pointed questions related to course content (readings) and their presentations are posed to the students. I did, however, deliver two separate lectures—one on San Francisco music and one on the Grateful Dead—just to give students background information to help them put the course in perspective. I had only two students who were already familiar with the Grateful Dead. The goal of the course was not to convert any of the students to Deadheads or Social Justice Warriors, but rather to show the historic influence of The Beat Generation, Counterculture and the Grateful Dead. I did not expect the students to necessarily like all the music played or studied; they were merely used as teaching tools. In my view the purpose of education is to become a more enlightened person through knowledge and understanding so ultimately that was my hope for the students in teaching this course.

## FIRST DAY OF CLASS

During the first class, I introduced the band by screening a *YouTube* video of “So Many Roads” (Grateful Dead 1) from Soldier Field performed at the band’s last concert in Chicago. I also screened a version of “Little Red Rooster” (Grateful Dead 2) that I had found on *YouTube*. In fact, the importance of *YouTube* videos for teaching the Dead cannot be overstated. Given that the Grateful Dead was known for their live performances over their studio albums, being able to play a live clip for each class proved to be a highlight of the class. For their final project, in groups of four, students were required to create a soundscape. To provide some examples on the first day of class, I played “Space” (Space) from *Dead Set* and Roger Waters/Pink Floyd’s difficult “Several Small Species of Furry Animals Gathered Together in a Cave and Grooving with a Pict” (Several Species Of Small....) from the album *Ummaguma* for the students. This was done to illustrate the concept of the soundscape.

## PLAYING THE GRATEFUL DEAD

Every class, I played at least one Grateful Dead song from *YouTube*—usually with live concert video. Sometimes, however, we would just listen to the song and try to analyze it. In one class, we listened to “Wharf Rat” (Grateful Dead 3) (from *Grateful Dead/Skull and Roses*) and tried to analyze the story in the song together as a class. I must say that playing the Grateful Dead in a classroom setting and discussing lyrical and musical ideas was a very surreal experience for me. I even got to play my favorite song “Unbroken Chain” (Unbroken Chain/Grateful Dead 4) in both studio and live versions for comparison.



## THE BEAT GENERATION

To introduce students to the Beat Generation, I had them read Allen Ginsberg's "Howl," and we went over and discussed various passages in class. They read Christopher Gair's *The Beat Generation*, which they found slightly too theoretical and *The Beats: A Graphic History*, edited by Paul Buhle, which they enjoyed. The students appreciated the Beats' talents but saw most of them as tragic figures due to their alcoholism and drug use. Using Rhino's *Beat Generation* box set, students heard various beat poems and jazz pieces where I explained how jazz impacted the Beats. In addition, I played the Keroauc clip from the Steve Allen show ("JACK KEROUAC"). To illustrate what jazz entails, Ken Nordine's original "Flibberty Jib" ("Fillberty Jib") was played alongside his performance during "Space" with the Grateful Dead at Rosemont Horizon in Rosemont, Ill., on Nov. 3, 1993 ("Grateful Dead w/Ken Nordine"). In attempting to explain the importance of Neal Cassidy, I played a YouTube clip of Jerry Garcia discussing Cassidy and how Cassidy himself was the art ("Jerry Garcia"). The students had a hard time grasping the idea of a person being a work of art, but I think it was eventually conveyed sufficiently for them to understand. I also showed them the documentary *Furthur: Ken Kesey's American Dreams*, which helped to cement the connection between the Beats and the Merry Pranksters. They found the story of Ken Kesey to be honest and, while not exactly always admirable (e.g. drug use), they saw Kesey as very human and thus gained a greater appreciation for him.

## ASSIGNMENTS AND PRESENTATIONS

Pedagogy-wise, I had the students give several presentations and write several papers on various aspects covered in the course. First, the students had to give a presentation on Beat Generation figures (e.g., Gregory Corso, Diane DiPrima, LeRoi Jones, Carolyn Cassidy, Gary Snyder, John Clellon Holmes, Michael McClure, and Jack Kerouac). They were tasked with putting together a slide presentation and then discussing the background importance and work of these figures. I would add my commentary to theirs about each one. We would talk about why works such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* (Kerouac) were so important in impacting the Grateful Dead and the Deadheads who followed the band around.

Second, the students had to write a review essay and do a slide presentation on a Grateful Dead album which they were required to listen to as well. The albums I assigned were *Live Dead*, *Anthem of the Sun*, *Europe 72'*, *Working Man's Dead*, *Mars Hotel*, *Blues for Allah*, and *In the Dark*. In addition to the student's personal analysis, they had to find reviews from the time of the album's release to punctuate their own opinions about the album. They also had to present their views of the record. For the most part, everybody seemed to enjoy this assignment as well as the music. However, one student hated the "Blues for Allah Suite" and Bob Weir's "Money" on *Mars Hotel*. I was very proud of the students' work on this project—they discussed not just the music, but the lyrics and how the album was received positively or negatively.

Third, students created a slide presentation about and presented a counterculture individual or movement (e.g., Timothy Leary, the Black Panthers, American Indian Movement, Betty Friedan, Gay Rights Movement/Stonewall, and the White Panthers among others). The students seem to enjoy this as well and this assignment garnered much discussion.

Fourth, the students had to present and write about a San Francisco band (e.g., The Charlatans, Jefferson Airplane, Great Society, Santana, and Big Brother and the Holding Company among others; I considered adding Journey and the Dead Kennedys, but decided to keep it within the timeframe of when the Grateful Dead formed). Students were required to write a short paper discussing why the band is important and how they impacted popular culture in general. This proved to be one of the more popular assignments because students felt like they had the context and an understanding of where the Grateful Dead had come from.

## END OF SEMESTER PROJECT

Finally, for their end of semester project, the students put together a soundscape in groups of four. In addition to the previously mentioned music played to illustrate a soundscape, I also played the last part of *Backstage Pass*, directed by Justin Kruetzmann (son of Grateful Dead drummer Bill Kruetzmann) (Backstage), which has selections from *Infrared Roses* (an album of just GD soundscapes from “Drums” and “Space”) and early computer animation. The students felt that animation still held up and that showing this helped them codify what it was I was looking for in their soundscape. One of the students had a home studio, so they were able to put together a soundscape with various beats and musical interludes. The other group used their phones to create a soundscape which represented a day in the life of a human being from sunup to sundown. This was a very fulfilling project for them, and I believe it represented a part of the Grateful Dead that is often missed; The improvisational soundscapes that the GD performed during “Drums” and “Space” created some of the most adventurous and thrilling music the band ever performed; it could be compared to the experimental *musique concrete* of composers like Varese, Cage, Stockhausen and others who were part of that movement. I was very proud of the work the students did on their soundscape project.

## GUEST SPEAKERS

In addition, I had guest speakers come in and talk about the various musical influences which impacted the Grateful Dead. Guest speakers included Dr. Christopher Smith talking about folk and protest music; Dr. Mark Morton talking about the Beatles and their impact; Dr. Joe Hodes talking about Bob Dylan and his influence; Dr. Roger Landis discussing the blues and the roots and beginnings of rock ‘n’ roll; Prof. Steve Stallings discussing the Rolling Stones and Altamont and its infamy; Dr. W. D. Phillips also came in and discussed the movie *Easy Rider* and its importance as a countercultural artifact; and world-renowned poster artist Dirk Fowler discussed rock poster art and the psychedelic artist (e.g., Wes Wilson, Stanley Mouse, Victor Moscoso, and Rick Griffin among others). For the students, these speakers helped contextualize musical and artistic inspirations for the Grateful Dead.

## BOOKS

As far as books go, students read Dennis McNally’s *Long Strange Trip* (McNally), which they found a bit too dense. They read Phil Lesh’s *Searching for the Sound* (Lesh) and enjoyed having the perspective of a band member. Through Barry Barnes’ *Everything I Know about Business I Learned from the Grateful Dead* (Barnes), students found the idea that one band could be a lesson in how to run a business fascinating. By far, the most popular book was John Perry Barlow’s *Mother American Night* (Barlow). They found the writing style to be engaging and appreciated Barlow’s honesty in not sugarcoating the life that he lived. Because of the intense amount of reading we never did get to read Brian Hassett’s partial memoir *How the Beat Generation Begat the Pranksters and other Adventure Tales* (Hassett).

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND FUTURE IDEAS

I do not know whether I will teach this course again; I would certainly like to, but we would need more students to sign up for the class. If I did teach it again, I would want to incorporate Kerouac’s *On the Road* somehow. Given the importance of *On the Road* on the American cultural landscape and its influence on Jerry Garcia and the rest of the band, it would be a critical reading for this course. The traveling Deadhead lifestyle was certainly influenced by Kerouac’s work. Following the Grateful Dead was one of the last American adventures one could have in a culture that is sometimes stifling. I would also probably use Tom Wolfe’s

*Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* (Wolfe) because of its historical impact. Yet, I am concerned that Wolfe's stream of consciousness prose might be slightly challenging for students, but the volume's historical relevance cannot be understated. I do not know whether I would use the *Gair Beat Generation* volume or the *The Beats: A Graphic History* again because students seemed to gain a good amount of knowledge through completing their projects on a particular Beat Generation figure. To introduce them to the Grateful Dead, I would use *Why The Grateful Dead Matter* by Mike Benson (Benson). I would like to keep Barnes and Barlow's book, but I might substitute Billy Kruetzmann's *Deal* (Kruetzmann) for Lesh's volume just to switch things around and keep it interesting.

I would continue to use guest speakers, but use them sparingly. I would also keep the projects and presentations the same because students seemed to really enjoy them and learned a great deal from them. By far my favorite project in the class was the paper/presentation on a particular Grateful Dead album. Students wrote very thoughtful and honest essays and deemed this project worthwhile. These essays were a joy for me to read (and a surreal experience as I couldn't believe I was actually teaching about the Grateful Dead at Texas Tech). It was also great to witness students talking about countercultural figures and groups, which gave them a deeper sense of American history and civil rights. The San Francisco music presentation and paper introduced them to bands they hadn't known of before and helped solidify the idea that San Francisco was a place with such a diverse musical history and import. I would keep the final "Soundscape" group project because it allows students to express themselves creatively. Furthermore, it's vital that students learn to work and create something in groups. When they graduate from college and step out into the world, they may be in teams or groups, and they have to be able to get along with team members and learn to work together within groups.

In addition to playing and discussing Grateful Dead songs, I played music that has a socially conscious message (e.g. Chicago's "Dialogue," (Chicago) Sly the Family Stone's "Everyday People," (Sly....) and the Youngbloods "Get Together." (The Youngbloods) I also played Robert Hunter's "Rum Runners" (Robert Hunter....) to illustrate the solo work of the Grateful Dead lyricist—which the students found to be unlike anything they had ever heard before. In short, the Grateful Dead offers a wide range of pedagogical material for students to digest both musically and, of course, lyrically. The Americanness of all the material was indeed emphasized. I found that teaching with the Dead to be a rather unique experience. I am not under the illusion that I convinced any one of my students to become Deadheads, but if they have a greater appreciation and understanding of not only the Grateful Dead, but also of the Beats and the Counterculture, and came away from the class enriched as a human being, then my goal was achieved.

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## APPENDIX A: SYLLABUS



### HONORS COLLEGE

Honors Seminar 3304-H02 | Spring 2019

Icons of Popular Culture-The Beat Generation, The Grateful Dead, The Counterculture and the American Experience

Time: 6-8:50 p.m., Mondays, Media and Communications 155

Instructor: Professor Rob Weiner

Office hours: By appointment or before/after class

Library -132

[rob.weiner@ttu.edu](mailto:rob.weiner@ttu.edu)

(806) 834-5126

#### **Catalog Description:**

Icons of Popular Culture is a course designed to look at various icons in music, film, literature, art, video games, or sequential art that have in some way made a distinctive mark on our popular culture. We will study the historical, social, and cultural impact these icons made on the world and the role they play in our lives. We will analyze issues related to technology, politics, gender, fashion, and race and how these specific icons have affected our world views and understanding of ourselves.

#### **Course Description:**

In 2015, the remaining four living members of the Grateful Dead came together for their Fare Thee Well Concerts 50th anniversary concerts. Tickets for the five concerts sold out immediately and as much as \$100,000 was being asked for them on the scalper's market. What it is about this band with roots in bluegrass, American folk, and basic rock n' roll that created a whole subculture known as Deadheads? The Grateful Dead (1965-1995) became one of the biggest selling attractions in the history of American Popular Culture. Yet, the band only had one top ten hit and rarely had singles or albums on the charts. Their concerts could be four hours long. One song could last 30-plus minutes where they would just jam. Yet, their music is now a part of American songbook and some argue they were one of the greatest American bands. Critics, however, are divided as the Grateful Dead are both the most loved and one of the most hated bands in history. With roots in the literature of the Beat Generation, the Grateful Dead fostered a unique community that continues to this day. Through the lens of American history and culture, this course examines the impact of the Grateful Dead, the Beat Generation, the Counterculture, the Merry Pranksters on the American Experience. This course contains mature content and is reading intensive.

#### **Learning Outcomes & Assessments:**

- 1) Students will show evidence of assessing how the Beat Generation, The Grateful Dead and the Counterculture impacted American Life.

- a. **Assessments:** Paper 1/Presentation 2, Presentation 1, Presentation 3, Presentation 4, Class dialogue
- 2) Students will assess how a unique subculture The Deadheads grew around the Grateful Dead. Students will apply critical analysis demonstrated by their successful participation in class discussions.
  - a. **Assessments:** Paper 1 and Presentation 2, Final Project, Presentation 3, Class Dialogue
- 3) Students will learn the different musical and literary influences on the Grateful Dead, the Counterculture and how this impacted the world and the artistic leanings of the various parties involved.
  - a. **Assessments:** Paper 1/Presentation 2, Presentation 1, Presentation 3, Paper 2/Presentation 4, Final Project. Class Dialogue
- 4) Students will effectively communicate both verbally in class discussion and through their writing and their understanding of the various written and musical texts required. Students will seriously analyze assigned texts applying principles of critical thinking and aesthetic judgment.
  - a. **Assessments:** Paper 1/Presentation 2, Presentation 1, Presentation 3, Paper 2/Presentation 4, Class dialogue
- 5) Students will work together in teams and present their sound creation in class to a group of their peers.
  - a. **Assessments:** Final Project/Presentation 5
- 6) Students will critically analyze and cognize the history of the Beat Generation, The Grateful Dead, and the Counterculture. They will verbally and through the written word describe their importance to American Culture.
  - a. **Assessment:** Presentation 1, Paper 1 and Presentation 2, Class Dialogue
- 7) Students will understand and verbally discuss the importance of San Francisco on the history of popular music and culture.
  - a. **Assessment:** Paper 2/Presentation 4, Class Dialogue

### **Textbooks:**

**Please note E-VERSIONS are fine. Many, but not all, are available as Kindle and other e-sources. All of them are on reserve at the Library under Weiner.**

**I don't care if you buy the textbooks, but what I do care about is you reading all the material. I'll be asking specific questions related to each reading, so please be prepared. Please note the Professor RESERVES the right to give a pop quiz at any time on the readings.**

*The Beat Generation: A Beginner's Guide* by Christopher Gair. ISBN: 978-1851685424

*The Beats: A Graphic History* by Harvey Pekar. ISBN: 978-0809016495

*Mother American Night* by John Perry Barlow. ISBN: 978-1524760199

*Searching for the Sound* by Phil Lesh. ISBN: 978-0316154499

*Long Strange Trip* by Dennis McNally. ISBN: 978-0767911863

*Everything I learned in Business I learned from the Grateful Dead* by Barry Barnes. ISBN: 978-0446583800

*How the Beat Generation Begat the Pranksters and other Adventure Tales* by Brian Hassett. ISBN: 978-0994726216

***Recommended but NOT required:***

*Jerry on Jerry* by Dennis McNally. ISBN: 978-0316389594

*Electric Kool Aid Acid Test* by Tom Wolfe. ISBN: 978-0312427597

*On the Road* by Jack Kerouac. ISBN: 978-0140283297

And selected assigned readings and films.

**Please note:** The above books are on reserve at the library, and I don't mind if you use e-versions, used copies, etc., whatever is most convenient for you. **You don't have to buy them if you choose not to.**

**Please note:** You are expected to do all the readings before class. The instructor will call upon members of the class at random to discuss the readings during each class session. This is a seminar class and will be conducted as such. Some of the readings and documentary films have mature content and language and may not be "politically correct" by today's standards.

**Assignments:**

**Presentation 1:**

You are to do a presentation on an assigned Beat Generation figure and talk about them to the class in a short 5-10-minute presentation. Talk about their literary artistic style. What are some of their major works? Who were/are they as individuals. You can do a PowerPoint, Prezi etc. Please do not cite Wikipedia in your references page. Please upload your presentation to Blackboard.

**Paper 1 / Presentation 2:**

You are going to be assigned a Grateful Dead album to listen to and review. Be sure and listen to the record and record your thoughts. Did you like the music? What about the songs struck you as particularly engaging or not? Then using Dodd and Weiner's *The Grateful Dead and the Deadheads: An Annotated Bibliography* on reserve at the TTU Library, find two reviews (using document delivery/interlibrary loan) from the time period that the album was released. What did the reviews say? Was the assessment positive or negative? Write about what the reviewers say as well as your own analysis of the album. You can also use reviews from the Internet too, but only from reputable review sites i.e., NOT Amazon or Wikipedia. Good style, grammar, and train of thought are important. Please note points will be taken off for grammar and style. Your professor wants to know what you think in a 600-1,000-word review. Make sure and cite all sources. Please upload into Blackboard.

In a short 5-10-minute presentation present your findings about the album to the class and talk about your own view of the record as you listened to it. You can do a PowerPoint, Prezi etc. Please do not cite Wikipedia in your references page. Each person will upload their own paper to Blackboard.

**Presentation 3:**

You will be assigned a prominent Countercultural figure/political group. Who were they? What was their importance on American culture and society at the time? Did they accomplish anything useful in your estimation? Present your findings to the class in a short 10-minute presentation. You can do a PowerPoint, Prezi, Lecture, or even film yourself. Please do not cite Wikipedia in references page. Please upload your presentation to Blackboard.

**Paper 2 / Presentation 4:**

You are to research an assigned San Francisco musical artist/group present it to the class in a short 5-10-minute presentation. Listen to some of their music. What are your impressions? Why or why not were they important to the history of popular music? Did they have any chart hits? What was their musical style? Did they have any political message they tried to get across? You can do a PowerPoint, Prezi etc. Please do not cite Wikipedia in your references page. Please upload into Blackboard your presentation and write a short synopsis 300-600 words of what you learned about the artist.

**Final Project / Presentation 5:** Soundscape; Sound Sculpture; Sound College; Song

In assigned groups, you are to create a sound sculpture using sounds that are all around us. Notice that rhythm is everywhere. Capture some of that rhythm and create a new musical piece based around it. You can even include an original song if you wish. You are responsible for finding sound equipment and editing- the library has cameras and equipment you can check out, but you can also use the sound capture on your phone. The library also has a sound studio you could use. Create a whole new musical piece with your group together. Everyone in the group MUST contribute something to your sound piece. Everyone writes a short synopsis of what this experience taught you and turns it into Blackboard a week before finals. On the day of the final you will present your 5-10-min piece to the class.

**Late Work and Make-ups:**

Late assignments due to unexcused absences can be only one week late, with 10% credit taken off for each day.

**Citation of sources used:**



I don't care what citation style you use — MLA, APA, Chicago — JUST BE CONSISTENT!  
**Please do NOT cite Wikipedia. I will take points off if I see it cited.**

Purdue-Owl Writing Lab-<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>  
Duke University Style Guide <http://library.duke.edu/research/citing/index.html>

**Grading Rubric:**

Attendance and Participation:	20 points	
Presentation 1:	10 points	
Paper 1 / Presentation 2:	20 points	
Presentation 3:	10 points	
Paper 2 / Presentation 4:	10 points	
Final Project / Presentation 5:	30 points	
	Total: 100 points	
		90-100 — A
		80-89 — B
		70-79 — C
		60-69 — D
		59 or below — F

**Content Disclosure:**

Content at the University level can sometimes include works, situations, actions, and language that can be offensive to some students on the grounds of sexual explicitness, violence, gender stereotypes, religion, ethnic caricature, profanity, or blasphemy. As TTU is devoted to, the principle of freedom of expression, artistic and otherwise, and it is not the common practice to censor these works or ideas on any of these grounds, students who might feel unduly distressed or made uncomfortable by such expressions should withdraw at the start of the term and seek another course. It is important to acknowledge that sometimes content does make one uncomfortable and the reasons why. The course readings and classroom discussions may challenge you on ethical, ideological, political, religious, intellectual, and personal levels. Please be respectful to the professor and your class colleagues. When we disagree, we can do so with civility. As pointed out above, some of the readings/films have mature content and language and may not be “politically correct” by today’s standards. Please note, however, that material in the course is for informational purposes and does not necessarily include the views of the instructor, the Honors College, or TTU.

**Note on Field Trips:**

The Alamo Drafthouse may schedule several screenings of a documentary or film. These films will enhance your class experience greatly. Please make every effort to come to as many screenings as you can which will be announced in class. Films and times TBA if any.

**Statement of Attendance:**

Attending class is mandatory. Failure to attend a class meeting will result in a participation grade of zero for that particular class period. Just showing up for class does not ensure full attendance/participation credit— you must be actively participating in class. Excessive absences constitute cause for dropping a student from class (See *TTU Undergraduate and Graduate catalog* p. 48). It is the student's responsibility to show up. If you are absent, you need to find out what you missed and turn in all assignments on time. **Keep in mind that you signed up for this class knowing the time and day.** Unless you have a school-related or religious holiday function and can provide documentation, please don't miss class. You could lose as much as a letter grade for each class missed. **The only university-recognized excused absences are for participation in official university business or religious holy days. Job interviews and fraternity/sorority meetings do not count as an excused absence. You have to come to class.** If you are ill, you should make every effort to contact the instructor prior to class. Documentation of a doctor's visit will be required at the next class meeting in order to get attendance credit. Please note that missing more than class could result in your grade dropping a whole letter.

If you must miss class to observe a religious holiday, you will be allowed to take any exams or complete any assignments scheduled for that day within one week of the absence (see *TTU Undergraduate and Graduate catalog* p. 49). Let the instructor know ahead of time if you plan to miss a class due to religious observation so proper arrangements can be made. <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.19.pdf> . "Religious holy day" means a holy day observed by a religion whose places of worship are exempt from property taxation under Texas Tax Code §11.20. A student who intends to observe a religious holy day should make that intention known in writing to the instructor prior to the absence. A student who is absent from classes for the observance of a religious holy day shall be allowed to take an examination or complete an assignment scheduled for that day within a reasonable time after the absence.

### **Statement on Tolerance and Class Civility:**

Students are expected to assist in maintaining a classroom environment that is conducive to learning. To this end, students will respect their peers' ideas, opinions, and beliefs. Further, students will not discriminate against their peers based on race, religion, gender, color, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or disability. Discrimination of this kind will not be tolerated in this class.

### **Note on Cell Phone Use and Other Wireless Communications:**

Ringling cell phones and phone conversations are disruptive to the learning environment and inappropriate in the class. The class policy on cell phone use and other wireless communication: *Cell phones and other wireless devices must be turned off or put on silent or vibrate mode upon entering the classroom.* Please also put your computers under your desk. Excessive cell phone or computer use in class could result in your grade dropping a letter. If we have a class guest, or even general speaking and someone continues to pull out a phone, fall asleep etc., the whole class may lose five points off final grade. **Please be courteous to the instructor, guest speakers, and to your classmates.**

### **Academic Integrity:**

The attempt of students to present as their own any work what they have not honestly performed is regarded by the faculty and administration as a serious offense and renders the offenders liable

to serious consequences and possible suspension. Dishonesty and plagiarism will not be tolerated in this class. Assignments that are plagiarized in any way, both totally or in part, from published sources or other writers, outside of the assistance of a writing coach or similar professional, are dishonest and will receive grades of F (0.0). Plagiarism may merit failing a student for the entire course. The following is the definition of plagiarism followed in this course:

Plagiarism is present when a writer:

- (1) Copies verbatim or paraphrases from an author without using quotation marks or without naming the source in the text of the paper, in a parenthetical note, or in a bibliography or reference list.
- (2) Turns in a paper which has been written wholly or partially by someone else (*Borrowed from Dr. Coogan's Syllabus*).

If you borrow ideas, give the source. It is not cheating to get help and suggestions from others, but everything you do not give a source for must be your own work. Please refer to the university catalog for more information. (See <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.12.pdf>)

### **TTU Resources for Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Violence**

Texas Tech University is committed to providing and strengthening an educational, working, and living environment where students, faculty, staff, and visitors are free from gender and/or sex discrimination of any kind. Sexual assault, discrimination, harassment, and other Title IX violations are not tolerated by the University. Report any incidents to the *Office for Student Rights & Resolution*, (806)-742-SAFE (7233) or file a report online at [titleix.ttu.edu/students](http://titleix.ttu.edu/students). Faculty and staff members at TTU are committed to connecting you to resources on campus. Some of these available resources are: **TTU Student Counseling Center**, 806-742-3674, <https://www.depts.ttu.edu/scc/> (*Provides confidential support on campus.*) **TTU Student Counseling Center 24-hour Helpline**, 806-742-5555, (*Assists students who are experiencing a mental health or interpersonal violence crisis. If you call the helpline, you will speak with a mental health counselor.*) **Voice of Hope Lubbock Rape Crisis Center**, 806-763-7273, [voiceofhopelubbock.org](http://voiceofhopelubbock.org) (*24-hour hotline that provides support for survivors of sexual violence.*) **The Risk, Intervention, Safety and Education (RISE) Office**, 806-742-2110, [rise.ttu.edu](http://rise.ttu.edu) (*Provides a range of resources and support options focused on prevention education and student wellness.*) **Texas Tech Police Department**, 806-742-3931, <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/ttpd/> (*To report criminal activity that occurs on or near Texas Tech campus.*)

### **Students with Disabilities:**

Any student who, because of a disability, may require special arrangements in order to meet the course requirements should contact the instructor as possible to make necessary arrangements. Students must present appropriate verification from Student Disability Services during the instructor's office hours. Please note that instructors are not allowed to provide classroom accommodation to a student until appropriate verification from Student Disability Services has been provided. For additional information, please contact Student Disability Services office in 335 West Hall or call 806-742-2405. See OP: <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP34.22.pdf>; <http://www.depts.ttu.edu/opmanual/OP10.08.pdf>

### **LGBTQIA Support Statement:**

I identify as an ally to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) community, and I am available to listen and support you in an affirming manner. I can assist in connecting you with resources on campus to address problems you may face pertaining to sexual orientation and/or gender identity that could interfere with your success at Texas Tech. Please note that additional resources are available through the Office of LGBTQIA within the Center for Campus Life, Student Union Building Room 201, [www.lgbtqia.ttu.edu](http://www.lgbtqia.ttu.edu), 806.742.5433.” Office of LGBTQIA, Student Union Building Room 201, [www.lgbtqia.ttu.edu](http://www.lgbtqia.ttu.edu), 806.742.5433 Within the Center for Campus Life, the Office serves the Texas Tech community through facilitation and leadership of programming and advocacy efforts. This work is aimed at strengthening the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and asexual (LGBTQIA) community and sustaining an inclusive campus that welcomes people of all sexual orientations, gender identities, and gender expression

**Class Schedule:** Subject to change if need be. From time to time we may have guest speakers. Guest speakers may change as well.

**Be prepared to discuss ALL OF THE READINGS - You will be called upon individually discuss them. The professor reserves the right to administer a pop quiz on the readings if necessary.**

Dates	Topics	To Do <i>NOTE: Complete reading by the date listed.</i>
January 28th	<b>Week 1 –</b> <i>Introduction:</i>	
February 4th	<b>Week 2 –</b> The Importance of San Francisco Music and Why the Grateful Dead?  Discuss Marks, Gair, Pekar McNally, Ginsberg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Marks article <a href="https://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/did-the-cias-experiments-with-psychedelic-drugs-unwittingly-create-the-grateful-dead/">https://www.collectorsweekly.com/articles/did-the-cias-experiments-with-psychedelic-drugs-unwittingly-create-the-grateful-dead/</a></li> <li>• <i>Read</i> Allen Ginsberg <i>Howl</i> <a href="https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl">https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49303/howl</a></li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> McNally chapter 1-5 pp. 1-61</li> <li>• <i>Read</i> Gair Introduction-Chapter 2 pp.1-56</li> <li>• <i>Read</i> Pekar pp. 3-77</li> <li>• <b><i>Presentations Assigned</i></b></li> </ul>
February 11 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 3 –</b> <i>Discuss:</i> Mondalek & and other readings  Folk Music Roots and Protest music with Dr. Christopher Smith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Mondalek <a href="https://fashionista.com/2018/09/grateful-dead-merch-tie-dye-fashion-trend-2018">https://fashionista.com/2018/09/grateful-dead-merch-tie-dye-fashion-trend-2018</a></li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> McNally chapter 6-15 pp. 62-195</li> <li>• <i>Read</i> Pekar pp. 78-113</li> <li>• <i>Read</i> Gair Chapters 3-pp.57-118</li> </ul>

February 18 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 4 –</b> <i>Discuss:</i> McNally, Gair, Pekar  <i>The Magic Bus</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Presentation 1</b></li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> McNally Chapter 16-20 pp.196-246</li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Gair Chapters 5-conclusion pp.119-147</li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Pekar pp. 114-153</li> </ul>
February 25 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 5 –</b> <i>Discuss:</i> McNally, Pekar, Barnes Blues and the Birth of Rock n’ Roll with Dr. Roger Landes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Read:</i> McNally chapters 21-38pp 267-460</li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Pekar pp. 160-193</li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Barnes “Foreword-Chapter 2 pp. Xvii-45</li> </ul>
March 4 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 6 –</b>  <i>NOTE: Spring Break is 3/9-3/17</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due: Paper1/Presentation 2</b></li> </ul>
March 18 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 7 –</b> <i>Discuss:</i> Lesh  The importance of the Beatles with Dr. Mark Morton	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Lesh <i>Searching for the Sound</i> yes the whole book. Don’t worry it’s a quick read.</li> </ul>
March 25 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 8 –</b> <i>Discuss</i> McNally and Barnes The Importance of Bob Dylan with Dr. Joe Hodes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due: Presentation 3</b></li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> McNally Chapters 39-46 pp. 461-540</li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Barnes Chapters 3-5 pp.49-103</li> </ul>
April 1 <sup>st</sup>	<b>Week 9 –</b> <i>Discuss</i> McNally and Barnes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Read:</i> McNally chapters 47-53 pp/ ters 47-53 pp 541-620</li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Barnes chapter 6-8 pp. 107-159</li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Meriwether in Blackboard</li> </ul>
April 8 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 10 –</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Due: Paper 2/Presentation 4</b></li> </ul>
April 15 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 11 –</b> <i>Discuss</i> Barnes, Barlow, and Hassett  The Importance of the Rolling Stones with Professor Steve Stallings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Barnes chapters 9-Epilogue pp. 163-204</li> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Barlow Prologue-Chapter 11 pp. 1-68</li> <li>• <i>Read</i> Hassett Introduction-chapter -8 pp i-118</li> </ul>
April 22 <sup>nd</sup> NO CLASS	<b>Week 12 –</b> NO Class on April 22 <sup>nd</sup>	
April 29 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 13 –</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Read:</i> Barlow Chapters 12-Epilogue pp. 69-268</li> <li>• <i>Read</i> Hassett Chapters 9-14 pp. 119-166</li> </ul>

	Discuss Barlow and Hassett	
May 6 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Week 14</b> – Rock Poster art with Professor Dirk Fowler	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b><u>Due: Summary of Sound Sculpture Project due in Blackboard</u></b></li> </ul>
May 13 <sup>th</sup> 7:30-10 PM	<b>Week 15</b> – <b>Final Exam-</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Present your final project Soundscape/Presentation 5</b></li> </ul>

Remember you can always ask me for help while here at TTU  
or you can find your subject librarian at: <http://guides.library.ttu.edu/>

#### **AUTHOR BIO:**

Robert G. Weiner is Popular Culture Librarian at Texas Tech University. He started the Grateful Dead area at the Southwest Popular Culture Association in 1998. For years, Ray Browne, the founder of the Popular Culture movement in academia, asked Weiner to bring the Grateful Dead area to the National Popular Culture Association. Now with the Grateful Dead Studies Association that is happening. Weiner was an area chair for SWPCA from 1996-2019 covering a wide variety of areas from Popular Music, Zombies, Mystery Science Theater 3000, James Bond, Transgressive Film, Silent Film, to founding The Graphic Novel and Comics Area. He is the co-author of *The Grateful Dead: An Annotated Bibliography* (with David Dodd) and editor of *Perspectives on the Grateful Dead*. He wrote about the Grateful Dead, Jerry Garcia, and Sequential Art (Comics) in the edited collection *If the Head Fits, Wear It, Contemporary Art and the Grateful Dead* and has published other articles about the band. In addition, he has authored/edited/co-edited numerous books related to popular culture, sequential art, and film and has published book chapters and journal articles. His most recent co-edited volumes include *The Super Villain Reader* (with Robert Moses Peaslee) and *Judge, Jury, and Executioner: Essays on the Punisher in Print and Screen* (with Alicia Goodman, Matthew McEniry, and Ryan Cassidy).

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## **A Touch of Grey: Personal Reflections on Teaching the Grateful Dead to Seniors<sup>1</sup>**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This essay reflects on several occasions in which I was a facilitator introducing the music of the Grateful Dead to groups of senior citizens. Several themes emerge: First, there is the need to separate the facilitator's feelings as a convinced Deadhead from the inclinations of older individuals who know little about the Grateful Dead. Second, an indirect approach that emphasizes lyrics and accessible songs seems to have the best impact, if the goal is to encourage individuals to want to learn more about, and listen to, the Grateful Dead's music. Third, one should let students construct the framework of the information that they themselves feel they need. Finally, it takes a lot of preparation to be able to improvise in and around the structures students develop.

**Keywords:** Grateful Dead, popular culture, pedagogy

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<sup>1</sup> Many thanks to Timothy Ray for editorial assistance.

## INTRODUCTION

The Grateful Dead left an impressive corpus of music when they stopped performing in 1995 after the death of lead guitarist Jerry Garcia. There is literature on the pedagogy of teaching about the Grateful Dead, and the purpose of this reflective essay is to contribute to that literature. Kay Robin Alexander's 2003 essay on "Teaching the Dead: Process, Problems, Perspectives" (*Dead Letters*) is a good example of what does exist. Many recent annual meetings of the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus, an area within the Southwest Popular/American Culture Association, have included panels and presentations focusing on pedagogical questions concerning how best to teach about the Grateful Dead: Ray (2016), Petersen (2018), Trudeau (2014; 2017) and Adams (2019)

Most of the teaching experiences about the Dead in that literature were college or secondary school attempts by faculty to use the Dead as a motif in the study of some academic subject area – English or musicology, for example – often in a credit-earning situation. What is not addressed is student audiences that exist outside the academy and how that might differ from traditional academic audiences and the challenges and insights that arise in such non-academic teaching settings.

This paper offers a set of personal reflections on an area not covered by that literature: my experience has centered on teaching about the Grateful Dead to senior citizens. With the broad legitimacy of the Grateful Dead that we are witnessing in recent years, there will likely be more such efforts. Hopefully my reflections, while anecdotal, will help in that process.

My teaching about the Grateful Dead has never been in a credit-earning situation. I have taught short courses for adults, mostly senior citizens, in "life-long" learning programs, specifically in Providence, Rhode Island, and Athens, Georgia.. Both venues were happy to have a course proposal that differed somewhat from the usual list of senior-oriented courses. There were no serious academic overseers, in other words.

My goals in teaching what I like to call "Grateful Dead 101" was to introduce – or re-introduce in some cases – my students to the Grateful Dead phenomenon, particularly the music, as opposed to focusing on biographies of the personnel, the social scene during the rise of the Grateful Dead, drug use, etc. (I discuss this in more detail below.) Seniors in my courses ranged in age from sixty-something up to the early nineties, which means they were all more or less contemporary to the Grateful Dead while the Dead were still touring. My thinking has been that this course would attract individuals who might have heard about the Dead "back in the day" and who would enjoy being reconnected to their past experiences. The main questions in designing this course centered:

- first on how to achieve this (re)connection on each student's own terms, and
- second, how to accomplish this by means other than simply playing music I love for the duration while unconsciously assuming that the music would speak for itself.

As readers will see, the specific methods I used to achieve these objectives changed over several iterations of the course. For me, it's still an ongoing learning process.

## BEGINNINGS

It turns out the seniors in Grateful Dead 101 had experiences all over the board. Yet it's important to note that most of these individuals were at least young adults by the 1960s, and were alive during the entire thirty year period the Grateful Dead performed. Relatively few had actually attended a show, and most of those who had were vague about the date, if not the place. So these seniors, the ones with the most direct experience with the Dead, were not Deadheads in any sense of the word. They maybe had seen a show and then gone their separate ways. Full stop.

Other seniors ranged from those who knew a song or two, through those who had heard the music back in the day but had forgotten about it, through those who had heard of the Dead – mostly newspaper



accounts about the scene, the camping, drug arrests, and the like – and finally to those who had never heard of the Grateful Dead but came to Grateful Dead 101 simply out of curiosity. I found that these loose categories of participants in Grateful Dead 101 brought different expectations to the course. These ranged from individuals, a small minority, who were happy to talk about their concert memories, to people who wanted to request specific songs to people who knew little or nothing and were open, albeit cautiously, to whatever I could provide.

I thought about the course as one of creating opportunities. My objective was to provide enough information so that participants could, if they wished, pursue the music on their own when the course was over. This meant more than simply providing web links to Internet Archives or other such doorways into our world. And because I wanted the students to leave the course with their own expectations met, the initial pedagogical question became, in effect, where to begin. If “the band,” that is, personnel, lifestyles, the overall social scene, etc., did not turn out to be appealing, I hypothesized that maybe at least the music would provide the students with a good vehicle for more learning after the course finished.

So I planned to emphasize the music, with only brief passing glances at personnel, iconography, drug use, or the concert scene itself. I felt there would be time for any or all of those topics, and others as well, if interest warranted. If a senior, after hearing and enjoying a particular song were to ask, “Who are these guys?,” I could answer with slides, anecdotes, and the rest of it. But no need to start that way. The initial emphasis would be on music. To repeat the objectives in different words, I wanted to use Grateful Dead music as the vehicle to stimulate senior citizens, to let them become motivated to look more closely at the Grateful Dead and to have some skills to use when they did that,

I had little vested interest in the outcomes; I was not worried about tenure or being re-hired – none of it. And if none of the seniors turned into Deadheads after Grateful Dead 101, so be it. I meant to give it my best shot, once I could figure out where to aim.

As I approached delivery day for Grateful Dead 101, I recalled reading that the members of the Grateful Dead felt on many concert occasions that they needed to make a strong effort to engage the audience. I felt exactly the same. The topic deserves nothing less. So even though there was nothing at stake – in terms of tenure or promotion, for example -- I did want to provide an engaging experience, to awaken the interest of seniors who had little or no prior exposure to the Dead.

How to design a course to achieve these modest goals? One can detect here the traditional academic approach we professors live within our subject areas. I went back and forth on a few course outlines, without much confidence in any of them. Eventually I was rescued by some wise colleagues in the Grateful Dead Scholars Caucus who suggested I emulate the band: rehearse a lot of material and then be flexible once on stage. Improvise if appropriate. In fact, improvisation within a loose overall pragmatic approach would become my *modus operandi*.

But as with the Dead on stage, there needs to be structure within that looser approach. “Wharf Rat” may have had improvised sections throughout, but there’s a basic structure to the song. Dead shows, at least after 1971, tended to have two sets with a break, and over the years, certain songs migrated to either the first or the second set, with a few songs that could appear in either set, like the “China>Rider” combination, “Playing in the Band,” or “Uncle John’s Band.” In other words, there is ample room for flexibility, but within an overall design aimed at opening doors for the Seniors.

To put those thoughts differently, it’s all well and good to adopt, *a priori*, an improvisational approach to introducing students to the music of the Dead, but there is still a fair amount of work to be done to make this something more than simply playing a dozen songs and letting the seniors digest the music on their own. In other words, I needed to make some decisions about how to proceed through this material, while at the same time remaining flexible, very flexible, in case improvisation was called for.

I really want to stress the flexibility dimension: introducing seniors to the music of the Dead is very different from any course I taught during my career as a college professor. Very different. To put this succinctly, as a college professor, I rarely made any substantive changes in a course syllabus once the term had begun. Moreover, my college students were essentially being taught what was important, based on my professional decisions. For Grateful Dead 101, there was basically no syllabus *per se*. Instead, there was a lot of material and an approach based on flexibility.

## DECISIONS

I made several decisions before starting the earliest iterations of Grateful Dead 101, and these changed over time with the success, or questionable impact, of the course. Decisions ranged from logistical – how many sessions to schedule, what was the upper limit of participants I would allow to register, for example – to content and organization. I will focus more on the latter, the meat of the course.

First of all, as mentioned above, I decided early on I would stress the music, not the personnel, not the social, cultural, or political scenes of the Sixties and Seventies. I intuited early on that my seniors would be less interested in those aspects of the scene. My objectives for the course did *not* include re-creating those kinds of experiences or scenes. Yet I'm as nostalgic as the next Deadhead, so I had to draw on my professorial professionalism in order to prevent myself from turning Grateful Dead 101 into a trip – no pun intended – down memory lane.

At the same time, parenthetically, I noticed that when I did present that kind of anecdotal information to classes, always in response to a student question or observation, those few students who had seen a show live usually got a gleam in their eye as they recalled the scene, the crowd, and the rest of it. But that was definitely a minority reaction. I therefore didn't reject this nostalgic information out of hand. It was available, as all our stories are, should a situation call for it. I mention this as an illustration of what an improvisational approach can look like.

A second early decision was less about raw material and more about my interpretation, or treatment of my students' responses. I opted for a very subjective pedagogical approach, one that assumes there is meaning behind the observations my students made. I would make no attempt to systematically collect data about what was behind their observations, but I would, on the other hand, explore them in at least a little depth. This subjective approach is the basis of q-methodology, which seeks to operationalize the subjective responses of individuals.<sup>2</sup> To put this differently, the conscious pedagogical approach did not include very much "objective truth" at all. Instead, my goal was to let seniors construct their own sense of the meaning of, and their reactions to, the music. Once that was done, or while the process was ongoing, I'd try to provide some tools, such as web links, photos, and listening highlights.

## CHOOSING MUSIC

How then to choose the music? I began with a rational calculation. Those seniors in Grateful Dead 101 who had attended a show might have been open to any individual song in the Dead's repertoire, but these individuals were relatively few in my courses. And moreover, I reckoned, the fact that they attended one or two shows and didn't go back might well mean that they in fact did not enjoy every song they heard. Seniors with very little or no exposure to the band were far more typical in my classes, so I decided to craft things for those people, not the experienced few. The experienced few would likely enjoy anything I did anyhow.

One of the great characteristics of Grateful Dead music is the variety of roots and genres one hears. There is folk, country, western, blues, gospel, jazz, bluegrass, psychedelic space music, old-timey and vaudeville

<sup>2</sup> For a more formal illustration of this methodology in the context of Grateful Dead Studies, see Deetz and Trudeau (2014)

tunes, avant garde, and world music, and probably more. I decided to begin with something seniors could relate to as people who had lived through the '60s and '70s, namely folk music. Everyone knows folk music: Baez; Dylan, sort of; Peter, Paul, and Mary; and so on. Even "pop-folk," like the Kingston Trio.

So early on, after the first one or two iterations of Grateful Dead 101, I learned to start with "Ripple" or "Peggy-O" –non-threatening, more conventional songs in terms of the musical structure, as opposed to extended jamming. There were, legend has it, lots of Deadheads who got off the bus around 1970 because the Dead were spending less concert time on free-form improvisations and more time on songs with beginnings and ends. Most people who got on the bus after 1970 appreciate the jams, but also like most of the songs. Even though most of those Deadheads would likely enjoy the second set of a typical show more than the first, the fact is that the first set is the first set, the opening set.

I decided I needed to go with the first set type of music first, or I would lose my audience. The Grateful Dead are famous for their jams and the way they extended songs with elaborate improvisation. For Deadheads, this is the magic of a concert. But for newbies, perhaps particularly for seniors, the jams might not work at first. By first set music I simply mean relatively shorter songs structured with a clear beginning and ending, a manageable set of stimuli. As much as I enjoy "Caution: Do Not Stop on Tracks," I reasoned it, or other songs like it, might not be the best song to start with, in a room of seniors with little or no prior exposure to the band. Better to start with "Peggy-O" or "Ripple."

Turning back to "Peggy-O," I could relate background about the song, its British roots, "Fennario" as an alternate title and fictional place, and the Dead's appropriation of the song by having Sweet William buried in Louisiana, as opposed to Scotland. I turned up the volume on the song – I had my iPod and my Bose Dock handy or played music directly off my laptop. I put the lyrics up on the screen and sat back to enjoy the song. When it was over, I would ask for comments. This is where the feedback loop comes into play. Their questions and observations became the grist for the flexibility I mentioned above.

Comments from the participants became an important part of each class meeting. There are stories to the effect that the Dead always fed on the audience, listened to feedback, and the rest of it. I can attest that it was absolutely essential for my attempt to get seniors to appreciate the Dead's music. Among other things, there was surprise: "I thought the Grateful Dead were screaming rockers." But when the music was non-threatening, other avenues opened up. I realized how many things I was taking for granted when musically inexperienced seniors asked me questions like: "What's a jam?" "What's a cover song?" "What is 'lead bass'?"

## USING POWERPOINT

I used PowerPoint slides on many occasions to show pictures of the band personnel, as well as logos and iconography. I had learned from years as a college professor that PowerPoint slides need to be succinct: Concise bullet points should appear one at a time, not all at once. Never put lengthy text segments on the screen: for no matter what one is saying, people will look at the screen and will not hear what is being said.. Use graphics, not text. All that said, I know, as most fans of rock music know, that understanding the lyrics of live rock music is difficult. So I decided early on that I would show lyrics of songs on the screen while any song was played, which meant developing several dozen slides that could be called on at any moment, depending on how we were improvising in a particular class meeting.

In other words, I may seem to have violated my own prescriptions about PowerPoint slides, first by using them and second by filling them with the text of lyrics. On the one hand, this is improvisation in action. But keep in mind that these slides, other than the lyrics, were offered in response to student questions. I did not "lecture" from a prepared set of PowerPoint slides.

## ACHIEVING BALANCE

To further illustrate the pragmatic, flexible approach I used in these courses, two strands of improvisation need to be covered simultaneously at this point. On the one hand, I realized I needed to make more things more explicit before they heard a song. Reinforcing this thought was the following experience, which occurred more than once: Seniors would ask this or that question about a song I played, say “Peggy-O,” and then after some discussion would ask to hear the song again. I was happy to comply, even if it meant we would not cover all I had wanted to cover in this early session on folk music. But the fact remained that some basic information needed to be imparted before they could listen to music with appreciation for what was going on. I resisted lecturing, but had to do a little of it, sometimes with PowerPoint, sometimes not.

Second, at the same time, I faced a quandary. Seniors who heard “Peggy-O” as a folk song often wanted to hear more folk songs by the Dead. The first time I faced this, I wasn’t as prepared as I would like to have been. I could think of “Jack-A-Roe,” but not many others off the top of my head. It wasn’t easy to act as improvisationally as I had expected subconsciously. I soon learned to add “Beat It On Down the Line,” or “Candyman,” “Going Down the Road Feeling Bad,” and other “old-timey” music, which allowed for discussions of the many American roots of Grateful Dead music. I did not, however, include in this “Viola Lee Blues,” a song I love, since I wanted to stay with accessible music for at least the first few class sessions. At this point, I can almost hear Deadheads grumbling “What’s wrong with “Viola Lee Blues”? The short answer: for me, nothing. But grumblers have to do what I managed to do: separate one’s Deadhead self from the needs of the task at hand, which is to get seniors to want to listen to more Grateful Dead music.

One of the things that fascinated many of my seniors was the degree to which the Dead were surrounded by statistics. This is probably due to me providing some data tidbit or other as I responded to their questions. It is said that there are more statistics about the Grateful Dead than about anything else except baseball. For “show and tell,” I offered a hands-on look at a volume of DeadBase, that magnificent compendium of information. I showed the seniors, just to illustrate how far this can go/has gone, by noting that “Beat It On Down the Line” begins with a different number of beats, sometimes four, sometimes five, etc., which is easy enough to illustrate with the first few seconds of three or four versions of “BIODTL.” More impressive is the table in DeadBase that shows the eleven versions of the song with the most opening beats, up to the record holder at forty-five beats (9/11/1985: Oakland, CA, Kaiser Convention Center) (Scott, 1995). Seeing this, not a few seniors must have thought followers of the Dead were strange creatures. Fair enough.

Being prepared with a lot of information about the topic at hand allowed for some interesting improvisation. The trick was always to use these diversions to reinforce a major point, namely that this was interesting music, with interesting roots, and with whimsical and outstanding musicality that was fun to listen to.

## LYRICS<sup>3</sup>

In my experience, as I noted earlier, one of the most frustrating aspects of the whole genre of rock and roll music is the difficulty we often faced when trying to figure out the lyrics while listening to a song. I vowed early on to show the lyrics on a screen, as mentioned above, and rarely, if ever, played a Grateful Dead song without the lyrics being visible. This led to some interesting aspects of teaching Grateful Dead 101. The first and most obvious is that I had to have a roster of lyrics at hand for a lot of songs, just in case someone wanted to go down a particular road. In these days of Internet wonders, one can find the lyrics to any song pretty quickly, but I personally don’t like searching for stuff while I’m live in a classroom. So I prepped several dozen songs, just in case.

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<sup>3</sup> Lyrics for all Grateful Dead songs are accessible via several sources, including Trist and Dodd (2005), Hunter (1990), and on the Internet at [Dead.net/song/song title](http://Dead.net/song/song%20title) and several other websites.

A second consequence of playing the songs with the lyrics showing is that I found that many of the seniors listened less intensively to the music because they were reading the screen. But it turns out that for me, at least, the real way to appreciate the performances of the Grateful Dead's music is to already know the lyrics so one can focus on the music as well as the lyrics. For the most part we did not have that luxury in Grateful Dead 101, so I learned to highlight one or more aspects of the music before playing a song. For example, I could tell them to listen to the bass playing lead, or to listen to how Garcia sings the word "love" in "Peggy-O," or to try to focus on the rhythm guitar at one point in the song, or to listen for the "Mind Left Body Jam" during the jam between "China Cat Sunflower" and "I Know You Rider." I'm not sure if the seniors were able to listen that attentively while they read the lyrics on a screen, but sometimes it worked, based on their comments. And it's relatively easy to add little hints like these to a lyrics slide, to help them become more active listeners while they read lyrics.

The third result of showing the lyrics was a pedagogical breakthrough. As was often the case with Grateful Dead performances, "Once in a while you can get shown the light, in the strangest of places if you look at it right," ("Scarlet Begonias"). Probably the best way to describe this is once again to use the analogy of a college professor: in spite of much of what I have said in these reflections up to this point, I realized I was still coming to the senior Grateful Dead course as "the expert."

The first couple of times I got "shown the light," I was surprised but chalked it up to the predispositions of the person making the comment. The comment was, in effect, that the lyrics they had seen in that day's class session were beautiful poetry. I heard this from retired English teachers and published writers, but as I say I ignored this pedagogically, for a while, until it hit me that if the way to get newcomers to appreciate the Grateful Dead was to start with music/songs, then the way to get seniors to appreciate the songs was to start with lyrics. And so by the time of what would have been the most recent iteration of Grateful Dead 101, canceled by the COVID-19 pandemic, I planned to put the lyrics on the screen and ask people to discuss what they meant to them, *before* listening to the song. (Try that yourself with "Ripple" or "Attics of My Life." The latter song, especially, has brought great emotion from many of my senior students, just as it has for me.)

## GENRES AND JAMS

The different genres in Grateful Dead music weighed heavily in my approach to Grateful Dead 101. I tried to start with folk music, a genre I assumed would be familiar to the seniors enrolled in the exercise. It's difficult to imagine opening a course for seniors by playing for them "Viola Lee Blues" or "Alligator," or "Caution: Do Not Stop on Tracks." "Feedback" and psychedelic jams – such as "Dark Star" – are an acquired taste. And so instead of providing a chronological survey of essential Grateful Dead songs, I opted for basing the course on genres and started with the easiest to assimilate. Maybe with a younger audience these days, someone teaching Grateful Dead 101 might be able to start with something closer to hip-hop, for example, given the success of *Hamilton*. But for me, as mentioned earlier, it was folk music.

As far as jams, there are jams and then there are *jams*. Some jams are relatively structured and appear in segments within a song. Other jams are more free-form and might extend beyond any song. I didn't want to start Grateful Dead 101 with psychedelically inspired jams like those characteristic of the Dead in the 1960s. But as Deadheads know, improvisation is a major part of the Dead's music. I found after some iterations of Grateful Dead 101 that the way to bring the Dead's musical improvisation into the course – and thus show that jams were essential to appreciating the Dead – was to focus on jazz as a genre that seniors could relate to. My impression is that seniors are much more likely to be familiar with jazz forms than younger people are in the twenty-first century, so it seemed like a reasonable gambit.

Talking about improvisation in the Dead's music was fairly straightforward: I could point out different intros to songs, different solos most times the songs were played, different tempos for some songs, etc. It's

fairly easy, for example, to put together the first minute or so of, say, three versions of “Row Jimmy.” That song lets one riff about reggae influences and the ticky-ticky contrapuntal syncopation of its musical intro, while noting that a lot of what the band was doing was improvised on the spot after rehearsing the song off stage. And, of course, the lyrics to “Row Jimmy” offer a fascinating story of poor, working class people struggling to make it in this world. One can even explain that a juke box, back in the day, was a joint where people drank and listened to – or played – music. In other words, it’s easy to dress up the song and show the lyrics, prior to having the seniors listen to it.

With those kinds of introductory examples of musical improvisation in place, I then normally moved to longer examples. Two good songs for that purpose: “Playing in the Band,” and “Eyes of the World.” Anyone well versed in the Dead’s music would add others – “Estimated Prophet” or “Fire on the Mountain,” say – and I wouldn’t object. “Playing in the Band” usually has the one long jazz segment while “Eyes of the World” offers both varying guitar solos by Jerry Garcia but also, in the early years of its performance, a great outro that often featured Phil Lesh playing lead on the bass guitar.

Note two things here: One is that these songs are (more or less) contained songs with a structure around the improvised segments. And second, each is longer than most of my introductory students would likely tolerate early in the course. So I edited – heresy to some but necessary for pedagogical purposes here. For example, I started discussing “Playing in the Band,” with a focus on the metacantic nature of those lyrics: when Bob Weir sings “You just keep a turning while I’m playing in the band,” they sing about playing in the band while they are playing in the band (Trist and Dodd, 2005). Then I would then play the opening section of the song, having told the students to listen as the main motif of the song is carried over into the jazz segment in the middle of the song. Then I’d cut – I can hear readers groaning at this point – most of that jazz segment and pick up the song as the final verse and chorus reappeared, again showing them in advance how the motif starts to reappear in the late stage of the jazz segment of the song. I always stress that every version of “Playing” is different. If anybody challenges that, I urge them to listen to other versions: there are at least some 560 to choose from (Scott, 1995, p.182).<sup>4</sup> Here’s the point: if one likes jazz, one can appreciate the Grateful Dead. If one thinks musically in jazz terms, one might well appreciate the Grateful Dead, even if the songs are longer than the folk songs we started with.

From that point on, it’s easy. We use folk music and jazz as two “metaphors” to get things started. Doing so allows us to introduce both the lyrics and the improvisational nature of the music. Each of these two facets reinforces the competence and skill of the musicians. Then it’s a question of picking songs and following similar paths, depending on the song. There are many genres to choose from, as mentioned earlier, plus country-outlaw music, maybe even Dixieland: to illustrate the Dead’s musical talent, not much can beat “Big River” from 8/13/75 (*One From the Vault*). Disco? It’s there if one must. Love ballads? Absolutely, and I refer the reader again to “Attics of My Life”. Even political songs: “Ship of Fools,” obviously, and perhaps the more aggressive “Throwing Stones.”

## CONCLUSION

Several key points emerge from these reflections on teaching Grateful Dead 101 to seniors. First, to teach the Dead to inexperienced listeners, one must separate one’s Deadhead self from one’s role as a facilitator. In my career as a college professor I knew colleagues who were steeped in their chosen field of research who found it difficult to teach introductory courses. It takes a conscious decision to leave the intricacies behind, at least at the outset, in order to meet the needs of introductory students. An experienced Deadhead trying to introduce a group of people to the music of the Grateful Dead is in that exact situation. The pedagogical

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<sup>4</sup> Some of the earlier version of “Playing In the Band” did not include a jazz segment, but any version after 1972 will include some jazz.

objective should be to provide entry points so that interested students can develop their own skills after the course is over. The approach that worked best for me was to begin with the goal of letting students define their expectations and then provide material, and skills, to help them realize those expectations. Lead the horses to water, but also show them how to drink.

Second, one should focus on songs, which means focusing on lyrics and stories, doing this as much as possible before students listen to the song (with the lyrics visible as they listen to the music). The Dead's songs tell fascinating stories, and the band's musical talents were marvelous and worth appreciating. The objective here is to prepare students *before* they hear the song. As an instructor, it takes some preparation to think like this, but it's worth the effort. Again, to use the analogy of a college professor, we want students to be prepared, but often don't take active steps to help them learn how to prepare. I used lyrics, stories, and thoughts about musical genres to help students appreciate what they then listened to in our class meetings, or even outside of the classroom.

Third, a convinced Deadhead is likely to come to the course as the expert in the classroom, but in teaching Grateful Dead 101 to seniors, I have learned that being the expert means having a lot of material prepared while at the same time waiting for student initiatives, in the form of questions or observations, before providing any of the detailed knowledge one might bring to the course. Let the students structure the presentation of material they want, then provide the material.

Finally, these points illustrate one of the great paradoxes in teaching Grateful Dead 101. On the one hand, there should be a lot of preparation. Preparing a few dozen slides with lyrics and hints takes some effort. The great temptation is to use what's prepared, come hell or high water. But the other side of the paradox is this: being flexible and willing to improvise provide the best return in terms of what students need. I learned to prepare, including preparing to not use all that I prepared.

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## **Review of *The Tragic Odes of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead: Mystery Dances in the Magic Theater*, by Brent Wood, Routledge, 2020.**

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Brent Wood's *The Tragic Odes of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead: Mystery Dances in the Magic Theater* is the latest volume in the Ashgate Popular and Folk Music Series. Like other texts in the series, it undertakes musicological analysis of its subject in the context of interpretations that draw on a wide variety of socio-cultural considerations and scholarly fields. For those who teach with the Grateful Dead, Wood's text offers much on a number of fronts: its interdisciplinary scope provides fresh insights about the Grateful Dead in relation to topics in literary studies, classics, philosophy, musicology, and history, among other disciplines.

*The Tragic Odes of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead* launches its arguments by drawing together several different strands. One is the influence of British Romantic poetry on neo-Romantic figures whose work and thought informed the early Grateful Dead, such as Hermann Hesse and the Beats. Another element Wood brings into play early in the text is the motif of the Magic Theater, which derives from Hesse's novel *Steppenwolf* and is used by Wood as an entrance into discussion of the theatrical roots of the band's aesthetic. Finally, and perhaps most centrally, Wood presents framing remarks on the term "tragedy," which are informed by Friedrich Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*. Contributing to a sense of unity among all these components, beyond the force of Wood's arguments regarding them, are the striking similarities he identifies between Nietzsche's life and Garcia's, from the early deaths of their fathers and their shared love of music to an overarching biographical pattern of early fame followed by serious health problems. Building on Stan Spector's work on Nietzsche and the Grateful Dead, although curiously not touching on David MacGregor Johnston's essay on the subject, Wood's Introduction comprises remarks on an impressively diverse array of topics, including the Fare Thee Well concerts of 2015, the band's identity as a specifically American phenomenon, the Mime Troupe and the Merry Pranksters, psychedelic experience, science fiction of the 1960s, and the American reception of Nietzsche. The Introduction also makes evident a particular value of Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* to Wood's analysis: it opens the door to explorations of both Garcia's personal responses to loss and to the theatricalities of 1960s Haight-Ashbury. Of the many happy surprises one encounters in Wood's work, perhaps the most pleasing is his emphasis in the opening pages on the role of music to Nietzsche's conception of tragedy, a move that is quite persuasive in terms of justifying interpretations of the band's songs in light of the philosopher.

Wood's first chapter, "'Morning Dew' and the Greek Theatre," illustrates many of the best qualities of his project. After entering into his subject with a *narratio* focusing on the 14 June 1985 performance of "Morning Dew" at the Greek Theatre at University of California–Berkeley, Wood brings the discussion, via remarks on a history of the venue, to consideration of Wagner's *Ring* cycle in relation to the Grateful Dead's setlist choices during their summer 1985 run at the Greek. Several pages are also devoted to the band's rethinking of earlier versions of "Morning Dew," including especially the ways the Grateful Dead's version meaningfully revised chord progressions, displayed Garcia's innovative melodic strategies, and added an exceptionally poignant final line, all of which contributed to a profound change in the general contours of the song. Easing the transitions among these topics is the running through-line of "Morning Dew" as comment on mortality, which serves for Wood as evidence of its nature as a "tragic ode." Overall, the brief chapter covers a fair bit of ground, and not only makes sense as an opening piece for the book as a whole, but very much highlights Wood's ability to articulate the power of certain arrangements and historical contexts to the reception of song lyrics.

Each of the succeeding chapters tackles several pieces from later in the Grateful Dead's career in relation to the topic of mortality and to the ways Garcia's experiences may have informed his performance and compositional decisions. In the case of Chapter 2, the songs considered include "Death Don't Have No Mercy," "He Was a Friend of Mine," "Cryptical Envelopment," "Brokedown Palace," "Bird Song," and "He's Gone." Dedicated fans will recognize that many of these are informed by well-documented losses (Neal Cassady, Ruth Garcia, Janis Joplin), while others took on particular significances over time as fellow-travelers and members of the band died (Pigpen, Bobby Sands, Bob Marley). Still others were likely shaped by especially affecting deaths in Garcia's early life and young adulthood (Joe Garcia, Paul Speegle). Wood approaches these songs on the terms of classical tragedy, focusing especially on the nature of *katharsis*, which allows a reading of them as Garcia's means to find joy in the shadow of death.

While space limitations preclude anything here like an extended consideration of the seven following chapters of Wood's book, some highlights are worth mentioning: "Dark Star" discussed on the terms of the ego loss of the Dionysian festivals, Nietzsche, and LSD in Chapter 3; the recognition in Chapter 4 of compositional connections between "China Cat Sunflower," "Cold Rain and Snow," and "Dancing in the Street"; a remarkably enlightening situation of several Grateful Dead songs in relation to Jerome Kern's musical *Show Boat* and Joe Garcia's career, also in Chapter 4; and, frequent and illuminating recognitions of the Biblical sources for lyrics, as is evident, for one example, in the discussion of "Black Muddy River" in relation to Genesis 28.18. Scattered throughout are additional displays of Wood's comfort with and capable understanding of the many ways that composition and performance provide a context for interpretation of pieces like those under consideration.

In spite of its many strengths, there are a few aspects of Wood's book that could be sharpened. This is perhaps especially the case for his treatment of "tragedy": the term is directly approached early in the text, but Wood then proceeds in much of the remainder to vacillate between, on one hand, using tragedy in the colloquial sense of a less than uplifting narrative or event, and, on the other, using it in a more rigorous manner, one strongly informed by classical models and Nietzsche's discussion of the topic in *The Birth of Tragedy*. A related point is that, while Wood's remarks on Nietzsche and tragedy are reliably on-target, a reader ignorant of Nietzsche and his thought might be forgiven for thinking the secondary literature on this titan of nineteenth-century philosophy was rather sparse or that he can be reliably understood without engaging the German originals of his texts at any length. The sparing contextualization of Nietzsche can to some degree be ascribed to Wood's reliance early in the text on Morse Peckham's *Beyond the Tragic Vision*, a study of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche that influenced Phil Lesh. It is certainly wonderful to see that connection explored, but Peckham's book is only one instance of commentary on Nietzsche's thought, and its influence on the largely autodidactic Lesh doubtless idiosyncratic. In any case, the upshot of the light treatment of Nietzsche prior to the final chapter, where readers are led through a much more rigorous and illuminating elaboration of Wood's

understanding of the philosopher's relevance to the Grateful Dead, is the aforementioned ambiguity in the book's use of the term "tragedy." This ambiguity sometimes gives Wood room to maneuver, to welcome to the fold concepts that might otherwise be difficult to incorporate, although it also occasionally comes across as too loose for incisive scholarly inquiry. Similar problems emerge when the text becomes too speculative, as when Wood asserts (with no evidence) that Garcia was particularly drawn to pieces by Hunter in which he could see his own struggles with addiction, or, perhaps, the broadly sketched claim that audience members found in their own weaknesses cause to sympathize with August West, of "Wharf Rat" (144, 136). These kinds of points may be accurate, and the group of Grateful Dead fans in recovery who self-identify as "Wharf Rats" suggests that Wood may be correct in at least the second case, but he neglects to proffer evidence in support of that possibility. So, while these assertions may be sound, the reader might recognize that they also may not, and the latter possibility can make for some rough spots in the book's argumentation.

Other disappointments that may arise for some readers are less a matter of faults with Wood's argument than issues deriving from his volume's somewhat misleading title. While he does focus on Garcia most of the time, in preference to the Grateful Dead as a whole, the guitarist's solo work and participation in other musical outfits is given rather short shrift. Looking more at Garcia's work outside of the Grateful Dead would fill some holes in the image of his career as presented in *The Tragic Odes of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead*. Too, Wood refrains from discussing at much length what he intends by identifying certain songs as instances of "tragic odes." The ode has a particular place in tragic drama, and a life outside of it, and while Wood touches on some of its generic history in passing, more consolidated and early remarks on this topic would be a salutary addition to delineations of his book's governing terminology; as is, readers may be left wondering how and to what degree the songs Wood discusses satisfy the category.

Some final concerns pertain to proofing, something one always hesitates to address in a review, unless the gaffes are striking enough to distract. A few here are. There is a misquote of a lyric from "Loser" (the queen of diamonds "smiles" rather than "shines"); the album *Cats under the Stars* is discussed as *Cats Down Under the Stars*; the title of the song "I Know You Rider" appears throughout without its initial pronoun, as "Know You Rider"; and, there is an indication that a recording of the 17 June 1975 concert at Winterland Arena was officially released as the album *One from the Vault* (which album is actually a recording of the 13 August 1975 concert at The Great American Music Hall, while no part of the 17 June 1975 concert has been officially distributed). Grateful Dead fans interested in generating a correct history of the band's performances have undertaken extraordinary levels of detective work over the years in order to clarify longstanding confusion about such details as venues, setlists, lyrics, song titles, recording sources, and dates. Consequently, the sort of relatively minor inaccuracies described in this paragraph's preceding sentences are not only instances of problematic fact-checking, but the potential introduction into the scholarly literature of errors many have worked long and hard to eliminate.

In the end, the reservations expressed above are best regarded as minor qualifications of the praise Wood's book warrants. It offers those interested in twentieth-century popular music insight into how a certain corner of American song took shape in relation to several currents in other cultural spheres. Further, it provides much, and from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, to those wanting incisive and fresh assessments of the Grateful Dead and is generally well-written in terms of both overall structure and sentence-level expression. For teachers who recognize the value such a work may have as a reference for ideas useful in the classroom, or for demonstrating to students how to think about popular culture on the terms of scholarly inquiry more generally, Wood's book is a valuable and highly recommended contribution to the literature.

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## RECOMMENDED CITATION

### APA

Coffman, C. K. (2022). [Review of *The Tragic Odes of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead: Mystery Dances in the Magic Theater* by Brent Wood]. *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, 9(1 & 2), <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v9-issue-1-and-2/review-of-the-tragic-odes-of-jerry-garcia-and-the-grateful-dead-mystery-dances-in-the-magic-theater-by-brent-wood-routledge-2020/>.

### MLA

Coffman, Christopher K. "Review of *The Tragic Odes of Jerry Garcia and the Grateful Dead: Mystery Dances in the Magic Theater* by Brent Wood." *Dialogue: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Popular Culture and Pedagogy*, vol. 9, no. 1 & 2, 2022. <http://journaldialogue.org/issues/v9-issue-1-and-2/review-of-the-tragic-odes-of-jerry-garcia-and-the-grateful-dead-mystery-dances-in-the-magic-theater-by-brent-wood-routledge-2020/>.



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