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"How Do the Grateful Dead and Deadheads 'Mean'?"
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What exactly *is* a work of music? Is it the sounds we hear? Is it the sounds we are intended to hear? Is a musical work something that can only be defined using metaphors? Must it be *organized* sound? Is it beyond definition? About the only acceptable answer to these ontological questions is that the nature of a musical work is not universally understood. Nevertheless, by phrasing questions of musical identity differently, some popular music scholars find answers that are more rewarding. Richard Middleton, a well-respected popular music scholar, points out, "popular music analysis has insisted . . . on the priority of *meaning*."[1] One method for discussing meaning is to foreground questions of process, thereby avoiding questions of product. Simon Frith, another doyen of popular music studies, writes, "too often attempts to relate musical forms *to* social processes ignore the ways in which music is *itself* a social process."[2] By concentrating on social processes, one can more easily address such issues as musical meaning and social significance. This variety of analysis is sometimes described as *process philosophy*.[3]

Christopher Small's advocation of process philosophy is perhaps the most resonant. Small is concerned with questions that address how musical activities are interconnected. In his 1998 book, *Musicking*, Christopher Small challenges the dominant Western idea of music as a thing and explores the idea of music *as an activity*. In fact, he creates a new word specifically for

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[1] Middleton, *Reading Pop*, 104.

[2] Simon Firth, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 270.

[3] See Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought* (New York: Free Press, 1968).

the discussion of musical activities: *musicking*. To music, according to Small, is to take part in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance or by dancing. In his study, Small explores the relationship of activities that contribute to a symphony concert and their influence on individual and social identity. Using Small's theory of musicking as a point of departure, I will be in a position to discuss a different kind of musicking, the musicking associated with the Grateful Dead.

To explore questions of meaning and the Grateful Dead, I will use a new term: "Grateful Dead musicking," or G--D--M. I will offer an interpretation, or "deconstruction," of the so-called Grateful Dead experience and posit a metaphorical arrangement of activities in one space: activities that can be described both collectively and individually as Grateful Dead musicking. Although I avoid discussions of musical works, I admit to their existence as heteronomous objects - such as a recording, dependent on *real* and *autonomous* objects. This theory is, of course, a direct reaction to Small's book *Musicking* and is a manifest example of process philosophy. As Small's theory draws largely from his readings of the English anthropologist Gregory Bateson, Bateson's theory of the "pattern that connects" has an obvious presence in *Musicking* as well as in my analysis. In *Musicking*, which is largely about relationships, Small writes:

> "Each individual mind, each set of processes of giving and receiving information as it goes on within each individual living creature, may in itself be simple or complex, but it is at the same time a component of the larger and more complex network. Bateson calls this vast network the pattern which connects because it unites every living creature with every other, *some intimately*, some remotely, but not one excluded from the pattern."

Although an infinite number of activities can be described as GDM, I am interested in this *intimate* network. Thus, I will explain GDM, as it pertains to the multiplicities and contingencies

of relationships, by dividing it into three different genres: first-set GDM, second-set GDM, and supplementary GDM. My goal is not to explain *what* the so-called Grateful Dead experience means. Rather, I explore two broad questions: *How* does the so-called Grateful Dead experience mean? *How* does meaning change?

Although Grateful Dead songs did not have an archetypal model, songs performed in the first set were generally shorter, more "conventional," and less "exploratory" than songs in the second set. Small notes, "Performance does not exist in order to perform musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform." In the first set, the Dead often followed the musical "work" ("score") more closely. We could hear examples of first-set musicking on albums such as *Skeletons from the Closet* and *American Beauty*. Although these songs might have been simple from a harmonic point-of-view, first-set GDM was by no means an unadorned process.

Small states, "performance is the primary process of musicking." The Grateful Dead were performing, but they were not *the only ones* musicking, even in first set. For example, the people dancing in the audience were part of the process. The person running the lights, for example, was part of the GDM. The drummers and dancers assembled in "drum circles" in the halls of the convert venue were musicking. The meetings held by the Wharf Rats contributed to the musicking. Each person was allowed to take part in the process. All of these activities contributed to the pattern that connects, a space . . . that I call Grateful Dead musicking.

Another section of this "de-centered" space, which included activities unlike "traditional" Western musicking, was second-set GDM. In the liner notes to the album *Infrared Roses*, producer Bob BREY-love writes:

> Somewhere in the middle of the second set of every Grateful Dead show the band turns a corner. They enter a musical environment without walls or structure. The song form is

> abandoned, and the very element of music may be called into question. The only mandate is to explore new territory. It is . . . a musical adventure where composition and performance are one.[4]

BREY-love's description is an accurate summary of the second set, which normally contained longer jams, a wider harmonic vocabulary, and exploratory sections called "Drums" and "Space." Shank and Silberman's *Dictionary for Deadheads* says Drums is "[an] opportunity to explore the Zone . . . a state of being to which band members and the audience *travel together* when the music is most intense, exploratory, and collective." Shank and Simon suggest that the band members were not making music alone, they were traveling with the audience, *together*.

Drums often led to Space, which is another part of second-set GDM. Again, I cite Shank and Silberman:

> "Though the inspiration for the Dead's extraterrestrial excursions is usually traced to free jazz (like Ornette Coleman and Sun Ra), the Dead's ventures into the swirl were also inspired by the tape music experiments of Steve ReiCCH, moo-ZEEK kon-KRET, the compositions of SCHTockhausen, Bartok, and, Ives."

This part of the show was clearly influenced by the band members' relationship with numerous 20th-century musicians. For example, when Mickey Hart was asked in a 1996 interview if John Cage was an influence on Space, Hart replied, "Absolutely. He was the influence on everything." Jerry Garcia and Mickey Hart sent Cage a tape of their music for his 75th birthday. Cage wrote back and said, "Thank you very much, I took your two minute tape and played it back at half-speed. It was beautiful, it was marvelous, thank you so much." Mickey said, "Jerry, he just cut up our work and played it back at half-speed." Jerry smiled and said, "Yeeaahhh ... John Cage!" Clearly, the Dead's relationship with these people influenced their performance.

However, we must not forget the audience. During Space, musicking in the audience regularly affected the musicking on stage. Small says,

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[4] Grateful Dead, *Infrared Roses* (Grateful Dead ® Productions, Inc., 1991) GD CD4014.

> "Musicking is about relationships, not so much about those which actually exist in our lives as about those that we desire to exist and long to experience: relationships among people, as well as those between people in the rest of the cosmos, and also perhaps with ourselves and with our bodies and even with the supernatural, if our conception of the world has room for the supernatural."

The extent to which the audience physically or spiritually affected the musicking on stage is not clear, but during this part of the show, we start to see why many Deadheads see themselves as *the 7th band member*. However, the normal analytical tools of musicology are not usually designed to explain the role of the audience.

Even more difficult to explicate is the first work on the album *Infrared Roses*, entitled *Crowd Sculpture*. **[Play "Crowd Sculpture" [0:00-0:30]** These sounds are not coming from the stage, they are coming from the parking lot. We could ask, what does "Crowd Sculpture" mean? However, there are no clear answers to this question. I am sure that "Crowd Sculpture" means many things to many people. For some it is noise. For others, it might be an annoying first track a really cool album. So, can we learn more by asking, *how* does it mean? How does it strengthen the relationship between the Dead and the Deadheads? I see "Crowd Sculpture" as a musical *event*, generated by audience musicking, but intimately related to the *events* generated by the band's musicking. Both of these events were both burned onto this CD. Both of these events are musical products generated from Grateful Dead musicking - they extend GDM, make GDM socially significant, and interact with *our* GDM.

There are many kinds of supplementary GDM, some more *intimately* related than others. I use the word "supplementary" as a play on the Derridian idea of supplement. Consequently, supplementary GDM is both an *addition to* and a *part of* GDM. When bands, like the Dark Star Orchestra, *recreate* actual Dead shows they are involved in a kind of GDM. Sitting around a campfire with friends and family is a kind of supplementary GDM. Even singing *Row Jimmy* in

the bathtub is GDM, whether you are by yourself *or with someone else*. The possibilities are virtually endless. By now, this should be bringing up questions regarding the *limits* of GDM: What activities are *not* GDM? Was there Grateful Dead musicking before the Dead? Can listening to Mozart be GDM? Although one could probably make the case that any of these activities are GDM, my focus is on what Bateson calls the *intimate pattern*.

There is, coincidentally, a relationship between Gregory Bateson and the Grateful Dead. Bateson was a pivotal player in secret government experiments with mind-altering drugs, such as LSD. In the 1960s, Bateson introduced various figures in the Dead's history, such as Beat poet Alan Ginsburg, to cybernetic experiments in California where they were given drugs free of charge. Correspondingly, original members of the Grateful Dead were *turned on* to various psychedelic drugs courtesy of the C.I.A and, in part, Bateson. I do not know if Small is aware of this relationship - it is not relevant to his study. Nevertheless, I point this out not only because Bateson's philosophy informs this inquiry, but because it is possible that the Grateful Dead influenced Bateson's way of thinking. One can only speculate the limit to these *intimate relationships*.

Musicking is not just a theory, however. Grateful Dead musicking is about more than simply borrowing philosophical, anthropological, or sociological ideas and simply looking *at music* for a different perspective. Musicking is about redefining the *word music* and changing how we use it. Nevertheless, a *world* in which people only speak of GDM and not of the Dead's music is a chimera I have tried to resist. Furthermore, it is not always appropriate to focus on the activities that contribute to a musical experience and ignore scores, recordings, transcriptions, or traditional tools such as harmonic analysis. However, in the case of the Grateful Dead, musicking works well. Perhaps one of the best reasons for this is that members of the band often

spoke about the importance of the processes and avoided discussions of the products. One example of this is “Dark Star.”

In an 1972 interview for *Rolling Stone*, Jerrry Garcia said, “Dark Star has meant, while I’m playing it, almost as many things as I can sit here and imagine, so all I can do is talk about Dark Star as a playing experience.” As I keep saying, many activities together are part of this larger *meaningful* experience. To illustrate this idea, I have two analyses of “Dark Star” - the first will approach “Dark Star,” the song, and what it means; the second essay will discuss *how* “Dark Star musicking” means. First, “Dark Star,” the song:

> Dark Star is one of the most popular songs played by the Grateful Dead. Many Deadheads describe a significant fondness for the song. “Dark Stars” means a lot to them. It is difficult to characterize the song because it changed, sometimes drastically, with each performance. The tonal character of Dark Star is ambiguous and there is no score available. Graeme Boone has deftly discussed one version of this song in print, although he found the traditional terminology of music theory to be of little use. There have been 15 recordings of the work released by Grateful Dead. The song has also been recorded by the Merl Saunders, Dead Ringers, David Murry, and other musical groups. The recording on the album Live/Dead is the considered the most popular. On this 1969 recording, the length is 23:15, twice the length of some examples from 1968. Etc. Etc. [You get the idea]

Now, “Dark Star Musicking”:

> Dark Star musicking (or “DSM”) is a social process. It is an activity with no clear beginning or ending. It might take place at a concert, while driving in the car, or sitting around a campfire. Sometimes DSM is combined with reading, eating, dancing, or sex. While the band was together, many Deadheads loved this type of Grateful Dead musicking and the band loved to *join them* in this experience. Although many Heads are white, middle-class males, DSM is available for nearly everyone. Despite the fact that the Grateful Dead disbanded in 1995, Dark Star musicking is still a central part of the lives of many Deadheads. For some, it starts all over again when they see a bumper sticker like “D is for Darkstar,” “Happiness is Wishing Upon a Dark Star,” or “DARKSTARVERGNUGEN - The please of the experience!” For others, DSM commences before they know it as one song on a live tape blends into the next. Etc. Etc.

The difference between these two analyses is more than the difference between a musicological and sociological perspective. “Dark Star,” the song, is difficult to characterize because terms like

beginning and ending have little meaning. Consequently, describing "Dark Star" as a musical object in today's world is quite difficult. We could *adapt* traditional musicological tools. However, these tools are usually best suited for analysis of European "art music." On the other hand, it was much more easy to discuss how "DSM" means. The second discussion did not require me to compare and define two disparate objects – that is, a song and a Deadhead. The connections between the musical, cultural, and linguistic processes rarely stand as homology theories. As Middleton reminds us, "[C]ircular arguments are characteristic of many theories of homology. A style is described as 'typical' of a culture, but the culture has already been identified and delineated through an awareness of this and other 'typical' traits; the homology is pre-formed in the analyst's mind."[5] Thus, in this study, I have eschewed not only a definition of music, I have also avoided defining a Deadhead. When focusing on actions - that is musicking - homologies are not necessary.

Critics of this study might suggest that the relationship between the Grateful Dead and the Deadheads was not different from the relationship between *any* band and its most devoted fans. Nevertheless, how many scholars discuss the legal connection between a band and the actions of their fans? On the final page of his extensive *legal* examination of the relationship between the Grateful Dead and Deadheads, Adam Kanzer concludes, "The Dead Heads, in fact, may be considered part of the band's expression itself. Without the Dead Heads, there would be no Grateful Dead." What Kanzer goes to great lengths to *prove*, is something that Deadheads and the Grateful Dead have known for a long time, that the Dead and the Deadheads needed each other, and that they were both part of a *larger symbiotic pattern that connects*.

In conclusion, I want to stress that although Grateful Dead musicking <u>is</u> a new term, it is <u>not</u> a new concept. Numerous writers have suggested that the audience is more than a group of

[5] Middleton, *Studying Popular Music*, 150.

observers. Susan Suntree, for example, believes that "a Grateful Dead concert unfolds in the mind of Deadheads. It is not really anyone's event, not even the band's."[6] Jerry Garcia often spoke of a connection between the Grateful Dead and Deadheads such as the often-quoted statement, "Let's have faith in this form that has no form. Let's have faith in this structure that has no structure."[7] Borrowing from process philosophy, the term "musicking" challenges traditional ideas about music. It is a useful tool for bringing together the many activities that contribute to of the Grateful Dead experience and help us understand *how* the Grateful Dead and Deadheads mean.

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[6] Suntree, 540.

[7] David Gans, *Conversations with the Dead* (New York: Citadel Press, 1991).