The Grateful Dead and Friedrich Nietzsche: Transformation in Music and Consciousness

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This text was published in *Countercultures & Popular Music* (Farnham, Ashgate, 2014), while its French translation appeared in this issue of *Volume!* in 2012.

- 1 WHEN THE ORIGINAL five members of the Grateful Dead first started playing together, they performed from April 1965 until December 1965 as the Warlocks. They then discovered that there was already another band called the Warlocks, so they changed their name and played as the Grateful Dead for the first time on 4 December 1965, at the San Jose Acid Test at Big Nig's house. From their first gig as the Grateful Dead, they were already in the centre of a counterculture, sharing space with Neal Cassady, Allen Ginsburg and Ken Kesey. While Kesey and the Pranksters were experimenting with

different forms of art, the Grateful Dead were experimenting with different forms of music, primarily a new genre of music, 'psychedelic' or 'acid' rock, and a unique style of playing, 'jamming' or 'collective improvisation'. The Grateful Dead clearly were successful. The band played 2,314 concerts over 30 years at over 500 different venues, all the while integrating elements of folk, bluegrass, blues, rhythm and blues, jazz, classical and rock and roll into their distinctive sound and way of playing. A much larger project than what is appropriate here would be to show the dynamic interrelationship among all of these factors: the band's success at musical experimentation, their commercial success in terms of their fan base, the kind of consciousness required by the band members to play the way they did, and the kind of consciousness presupposed by the legions of fans who have been incredibly receptive, encouraging and forgiving of the band as together they continually took new chances musically. My goal here is more modest. After differentiating modes of improvisation and delineating Grateful Dead psychedelic explorations from Grateful Dead jamming, I conclude by suggesting that the mode of consciousness presupposed by Grateful Dead jamming exemplifies Nietzsche's emphasis on the 'present moment' as he formulated it in the principle of the Eternal Return of the Same.

- 2 Bill Graham, the San Francisco rock promoter, expressed the sentiment that many Grateful Dead fans have when he put on the Winterland Marquee: 'They are not the best at what they do; they're the only ones that do what they do' (Hunter et al. 2003: 253). Graham was not alone in his assessment that the Grateful Dead were offering something no one else was. Consider this comment by Kesey:

Anybody who's been on acid and has felt Garcia reach in there and touch them, all of a sudden they realize, 'He's not only moving my mind. My mind is moving him!' You'd look up there and see Garcia's face light up as he felt that come back from somebody. It was a rare and marvelous thing. Whereas the Doors were playing at you. John Fogerty was singing at you. When the Dead had a real good audience and the audience began to know it, they were playing the Dead. Which meant the Dead didn't have to be the leaders. They could let the audience play them. (Greenfield 1996: 76)

- 3 No one else was playing this way. Other bands were not encouraging the same kind of audience participation; Grateful Dead audiences were participating, and by virtue of their participation, they were encouraging the band to continue with its free form

improvisational musical explorations. The band would often explore various musical possibilities within the context of a chord, or a time signature, or even a single note, always improvising spontaneously during a performance, listening to the ideas of their band-mates, responding and introducing ideas of their own. Collective musical explorations would often result in a musical climax, and in the case of the Grateful Dead, that climax is the moment of collective improvisation, the same style of improvisation that characterises the jams that occur in the middle of fairly structured tunes.

- 4 Taking their cue from John Coltrane, who often played improvised solos within a context established by his rhythm section and who also might have responded to musical suggestions made by the other members of his quartet, the Grateful Dead's innovation was to take the possibility of a single musician's soloing within an ensemble and transform it into a new musical space which both allowed and encouraged each musician in the band to solo simultaneously. By playing this way, the Grateful Dead pioneered a new type of music – 'psychedelic' or 'acid' rock. Neither ballad, blues nor traditional rhythm and blues, and certainly not jazz, folk or bluegrass either, some of the songs the Grateful Dead introduced into the musical expression of the mid-1960s could be described as attempts to explore musically both the inner and outer spaces of the musical structures themselves, as the band members along with the audience explored new dimensions of consciousness. It seemed a natural development for the band to play this type of music as it afforded them the maximum freedom for improvisation.
- 5 Two salient features of most musical improvisation are the spontaneous creation of something that had not been played before and the primal element of conversation inherent in the structure of all music. Both elements are evident in Grateful Dead music. The Grateful Dead's music was also highly structured, and it was in the context of that structure that they were free to play extemporaneously. That is, while they did in fact make something up on the spot, they always played within a context provided by the musical structure they were exploring. Even when they were exploring musical ideas in between actual songs, they were still playing together as an ensemble within a structure.
- 6 Most improvisation, while both spontaneous and conversational, is also usually a blend of both hierarchical and associative modes (Pressing 1988). Hierarchical improvisation occurs whenever musicians play spontaneously in the context of the structural framework of the composition. This framework is often held in place by the rhythm section as it expresses the established boundaries of a song while allowing for intermittent spontaneous explorations of the soloist. On the other hand, when the dominant song structure is largely abandoned, associative improvisation occurs as the musicians in the band each suggest new ideas. They listen to each other and respond, all the while building a new collective framework for their free-form musical conversations.
- 7 To be sure, the Grateful Dead improvised in both hierarchical and associative ways. They were improvising hierarchically any time a single musician played a solo within a song framework established by other musicians in the band. Traditional blues tunes, cowboy songs and numerous 'cover' tunes allowed the various band members to improvise independently. At other times, the band's extended jams or segues between structured tunes brought out an associative dynamic, with each musician suggesting

and responding to musical ideas in conversation with other members of the band. But in addition to these two modes of improvisation, the Grateful Dead also performed a third style of improvisation, manifesting what David Malvini termed a 'transformational' quality, which he traces to 'the space and tension' between the hierarchical and associative (forms of improvisation) (2007: 5).

- 8 All musical improvisation requires a certain level of musicianship and skill, not just in the individual but also within the ensemble. Players need to be proficient with their instruments, but they also need to be able to participate in a musical conversation with their band mates. They need to listen to the statements of the other players and then respond with a musical statement of their own. Grateful Dead performances presupposed both hierarchical and associative modes of improvising, but also an additional skill: each musician performed spontaneously without having to track consciously or respond to what the others were playing.
- 9 The band recognised the tremendous effort it takes to play this way. As Jerry Garcia once remarked in conversation with David Gans, 'you can't play the way the Grateful Dead plays without working at it. It's not something that just happened to us' (Gans 2002: 68). They had to practice: first to learn the structure of the songs; then to learn how each player could solo within the structure of the song (hierarchical improvisation); then to learn how each instrument and player could participate in a free flowing musical conversation no longer tethered to the structural framework of the song (associative improvisation); and finally, to make a musical statement not so much in *response* to another player's statement as in *relation* with it – that is, musically dancing within the phase space of the improvisational journey.
- 10 Phil Lesh has described this phase in the band's development as a lesson learned by going 'back the woodshed'. The goal, in his words, was:
... to learn, above all, how to play together, to entrain, to become, as we described it then, 'fingers on a hand'. [In the process,] 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 mold our consciousness together in the unity of a group mind. (Lesh 2005: 56)
- 11 In other words, each band member while transforming his own individual consciousness to allow for a group consciousness was simultaneously developing a new mode of playing making it possible for the band as a whole to improvise transformationally.
- 12 In Michael Kaler's analysis of the band's music from 1966 to 1967, he described how they were learning to improvise. He argued that as the band was developing its own jamming sound, their:
... real innovation, their distinctive approach, (was) in their determination to show the potentialities that lie hidden within the structures and codes that make up normal lived experience. What the Grateful Dead do is not so much to change these codes and structures – the song remains a song, the band remains a band – but rather to crack them open and show the freedom at their heart. (Kaler 2011: 97)
- 13 The Grateful Dead did not abandon structure and form. The first stage of their transformative innovation in jamming, Kaler explained:
... can be likened to that of a jazz rhythm. The parameters (tonal, rhythmic, melodic, etc.) of the piece are understood, the feel is broadly expressed, but within that context the players are free to play as they see fit, continually adjusting their lines and phrasings to express their take on what is happening at any given

moment or to respond to what the other players are doing – and also, potentially, to aspects of the song's harmony or rhythm. (ibid.: 101)

- 14 At this point in their transformation as musicians they were still playing predominately in the hierarchical and associative improvisational modes. As they became more comfortable playing this way, they pushed themselves in different directions and began consciously working in the transformational mode. With this next phase in their development as musicians and members of a band, they began to abandon dominant structures and forms, while also beginning to play what would become the quintessential 'psychedelic' composition of their songbook – 'Dark Star'.
- 15 This stage in their musical development also saw the addition of two new band members, Mickey Hart and Tom Constanten. During the three years that the original Grateful Dead musicians, Jerry Garcia, Phil Lesh, Bob Weir, Bill Kreutzman, and Ron McKernan, played together before Hart sat in with them in September 1967, they had become a seasoned performing band, having played 102 concerts in 1966 and another 101 thus far in 1967. Also, they were still exploring musical modes and styles just as they had been during the Acid Tests, and so by September 1967, they had written songs whose lyrics suggested a psychedelic world-view while simultaneously allowing places for improvisational experimentation. They also rearranged standard tunes to open possibilities for jamming. The songs they performed in 1966 were all covers, and the band played both 'Viola Lee Blues' and 'Cold Rain and Snow' eight times each. In 1967, in addition to these two tunes ('Viola Lee Blues' 10 times and 'Cold Rain and Snow' eight times), they composed and performed two new tunes: 'Alligator' and 'Caution: Do Not Stop on the Tracks', playing the former 12 times and the latter seven times while adding 'Good Morning Little Schoolgirl' also at seven shows. Grateful Dead concerts were still not as structured as they came to be post-1978, but they still included fairly short songs that had places for solos or jams and longer exploratory pieces. Three weeks after Hart joined the band, they played the 'Cryptical' 'Other One' suite and just less than two months later, they debuted 'Dark Star'. Clearly the moment that Hart joined the band, he added another dimension to their playing, but it was not until two months later, after his meeting with the Indian tabla player Alla Rakha in New York, that Hart's contribution to the band's psychedelic musical exploration in terms of polyrhythmic rock and roll took place. Hart introduced the rhythm games he had learned with Alla Rakha to the rest of the band, and 'For months', Hart remembered, the band 'spent all day, every day, except when there was a show, practicing, just laying sevens over fives and elevens over nines ... It was during these months of experimentation that we ceased being a blues band and began mutating into our present form' (Hart, Stevens and Libermann 1990: 143).
- 16 Phil Lesh claimed that 'Dark Star' was the band's 'signature space-out tune'. It was, significantly, the only tune crediting every band member in its composition. When Lesh reflected on the development of the song, he wrote:

As we played around with it, it started expanding itself into a flood of endless melody, and from there into some scarifying, chaotic feedback, and back to the original theme, almost of its own accord – as if the music wanted to be expanded far beyond any concept of song. (Lesh 2005: 191)
- 17 With the addition of Tom Constanten on keyboards in November 1968, the 'Dark Star' unit was in place. Blair Jackson described the band during the 'Dark Star' period this way:

This is the Dead at the height of their improvisational powers, with Garcia and Lesh alternately charging through fantastic musical worlds, sometimes following a similar course, at other times trying to lead the jam in two different directions at once. The addition of Tom Constanten's organ to the fray provided a new texture to the Dead's extended pieces during this period: on 'Dark Star' he manages to weave in and out of the other musicians perfectly, working simultaneously as a lead and rhythm player. Also notable ... was Weir's new maturity as a guitarist. He had never been a conventional rhythm guitar player, but (during this period) he opened up his playing in a hundred new directions, unleashing glistening series of odd chords, or attacking a jam with quicknote filigrees that resembles mini leads. Hart and Kreutzman helped keep it moving, following the leads of the other players or making insistent statements with their drums that would drive the music in another direction. (Jackson 1983: 97)

- 18 As the song progressed into its 'scarifying, chaotic feedback', and moved 'beyond any concept of song', it abandoned its original structure and form. This movement from form to un-form, or chaos, was actually a liberating moment for the musicians and a reminder of their formative experiences with the Acid Tests. When asked about the effect of the inherent chaos of the Acid Tests, Jerry Garcia remarked:

Formlessness and chaos lead to new forms. And new order. Closer to, probably, what the real order is. When you break down the old orders and the old forms and leave them broken and shattered, you suddenly find yourself a new space with a new form and new order which are more like the way it is. More like the flow. And we just *found* ourselves in that place. We never decided on it, we never thought it out. None of it. (George-Warren 1995: 95)

- 19 In exploring the musical possibilities afforded by 'Dark Star', the band was actively breaking down the old forms and old orders of music simply by disregarding them. Nonetheless, the band never completely abandoned the overall structure of the song, even with its inherent musical ambiguity in what Graeme Boone called the basic 'Dark Star progression'. Moreover, Boone identified nine coordinated structural elements that make up the song and allow for separate musical explorations during the playing of the song:

- Beginning of song
- Beginning of the first instrumental episode
- Climax of the first instrumental episode
- Beginning of verse 1
- Text of verse 1
- Beginning of second instrumental episode
- Climax of second instrumental episode
- Beginning and text of verse 2
- Ending of song and segue into next tune. (Boone 1997: 173)

- 20 Within the structure of this song, we can easily identify the places where the entire band would improvise associatively, namely, during the instrumental episodes. Here the musicians were in conversation with each other while they were playing the song. Any one of the musicians could lead with the introduction of a new musical idea that the other band members could develop or ignore as the band ventured into new musical spaces. Most of these musicians, though, had already played together for almost three years; consequently, they already had an idea of what and how their bandmates would play, and they trusted their understanding. As the music transformed from the conversation and exploration of the musical episode to the climax, the band members were no longer in conversation with each other; they were not listening the way they did while they were exploring. Now each of them was independently

exploring the space and the tension between the two traditional modes of improvisation. At this point in the song, no one was stepping forward to play an associatively improvised solo against the background groove established by the rest of the band, nor were they exploring together the possibilities of new forms and structures as if they were in an hierarchical mode. The possibility of transformative improvisation emerges where the space and tension between these other modes occurs, and it is precisely that moment when the band has found its new groove together, allowing each musician to play in the context of listening to the implied and understood groove rather than to what each player was playing at that moment.

- 21 'Dark Star' became the Grateful Dead's signature 'psychedelic' tune, as they played it 29 times in 1968 and 65 times in 1969. It was not their only 'psychedelic' tune though, as songs like 'The Other One', 'The Eleven', 'Cryptical' and 'Caution' fulfilled the same function for them during this era. Later, tunes such as 'Playing in the Band' or 'Help on the Way > Slipknot' also had formal structures designed to open up spaces for explorations around and in those very structures. In addition to playing these other 'psychedelic' tunes, the Grateful Dead incorporated this style of playing with many of their other songs, even traditional ballads and blues, always first exploring musical possibilities associatively and eventually segueing into collective, transformative improvisation. As Lesh described the process of playing 'Viola Lee Blues':

we tried to take the music out further – first expanding on the groove, then on the tonality, and then both, finally pulling out all the stops in a giant accelerando, culminating in a whirlwind of dissonance that, out of nowhere, would slam back into the original groove for a repetition of the final verse. (Lesh 2005: 59)

- 22 One philosophical issue that emerges from this analysis is that of consciousness and its possible states. To improvise in any mode at all presupposes a different kind of consciousness than one who does not improvise. That the Grateful Dead band members improvised in a new transformative mode indicates that they were already open to the possibilities of different kinds or states of consciousness than what is required for mainstream and traditional musical forms. Similarly, their fans, simply by participating with the music, likewise presupposed such open possibilities. Too often, LSD and other psychoactive substances are given sole credit for this transformation in consciousness, and while it may be true in many cases these substances might be a sufficient cause for this shift in consciousness, they are not a necessary cause, for it is possible to experience the shift in consciousness without the drugs. Of course, even though we know that the Grateful Dead were immersed in the LSD culture, this particular problem of consciousness remains centred around the element of conversation in musical improvisation.
- 23 Whether it is composing, uttering, bringing about or performing, improvisation is an activity that takes place 'on the spur of the moment' or 'extemporaneously', as the spontaneous aspect of the activity always takes place in a context. In traditional jazz improvisation, the spontaneous expression takes place within a structural tension at work in the ensemble, usually between the rhythm section and the soloist. Ingrid Monson describes this structural tension in terms of the individual and the group:
- ... there are two levels on which the individual-versus-group tension operates: the relationship of the soloist (who may be a rhythm section member), and the relationship of each individual to the remainder of the rhythm section. (1967: 67)
- 24 Her general argument in *Saying Something: Jazz Improvisation and Interaction* is that it is not only the soloist who improvises against the groove of the rhythm section, but that

it is the rhythm section as well which is improvising in establishing that groove. In either case, it is essential that each of the players has something to say and that the music played and heard is in fact an extemporaneous conversation that they are having with each other.

- 25 This conversational aspect of improvising music was also emphasised by Bruce Ellis Benson in *The Improvisation of Musical Dialogue: A Phenomenology of Music*. Arguing from a perspective informed by twentieth-century Continental philosophy, he claimed that all music is improvisational in so far as it 'depicts composers, performers, and listeners as partners in a dialogue. From this perspective, music is a conversation in which no one partner has exclusive control' (2003: x). Benson's argument and examples are not specifically about the Grateful Dead, although they could be. His primary emphasis was on classical music where the roles of composers, performers and listeners are clearly delineated. He also applied his analysis to jazz music with just a brief comment about rock and roll. Nonetheless, his analysis is germane to our discussion of the Grateful Dead, who, while on stage, both composed and performed their music. For Benson, their dialogue is not so much between different sets of composers and performers as it is a conversation among themselves as they composed and performed.
- 26 As the band learned to play together, the musical conversation of improvisation took place during rehearsals when they were learning to play as a band. It was during rehearsals that each musician listened to what the other was playing and adjusted his playing to fit in the whole. Garcia echoed this thought when he said 'when you're working in a band, you have to try to let everybody have his own voice the way he best sees it' (Gans 2002: 39). In that interview, Garcia emphasised the art of listening to the other players in order to have a meaningful conversation in a band. But when the Grateful Dead performed, there were times when they did not alternate solos, first hearing what the other players were playing and then responding. The jazz model of improvisational conversation, both hierarchical and associative, does not explain how the Grateful Dead played collectively in a jam, if we maintain, as that model would suggest, that the members of the band were conversing with each other. In performance, when exploring musical spaces between structured songs or when exploring musical possibilities within the song space itself, once all of them were committed to the same tune or fell into the same groove, they were no longer in a listen-respond mode of conversation anymore, even though, according to Monson and Benson, they were still in conversation and dialogue; now the dialogue was just not with each other. I have argued elsewhere that they were in conversation with the unplayed song itself (Spector 2009: 195–205).
- 27 What kind of a conversation that could be still needs to be articulated. Before looking at the details of that conversation though, it might be useful to consider a theoretical framework formulated by Friedrich Nietzsche where he suggested possible strategies for overcoming the cultural malaise of his contemporary culture. Nietzsche argued that one of the primary problems with the Western intellectual tradition that has contributed to the cultural malaise has been its incredible emphasis on rational consciousness, even though, as Nietzsche observed, consciousness is not only our most recently developed organ but also our most fallible one as well. Philosophically, consciousness is defined in terms of intentionality, which is to say that it always intends an object, that is, thoughts and beliefs are always about something. For example, if you pay attention to it, you can be conscious that you are reading the words

on this page right now. This kind of awareness forms the baseline understanding of consciousness as we have ordinarily objectified the world. The subject-object structure of consciousness is also an expression of a temporal horizon. To think of something is both to impose a temporal structure on the act and a gap between the thinker and the object thought about. When the members of the Grateful Dead jammed and played solos simultaneously, that temporal horizon had to disappear as they were all playing in the same present moment. Garcia once described the times when transformational improvisation really worked as ‘those moments when you’re playing and the whole room becomes one being – precious moments, man. But you can’t look for them and they can’t be repeated’ (George-Warren 1995: 64). As the whole room is one being, there is no gap between subject and object, and you cannot look for those special moments, for if you try, you will firmly situate yourself in a subject-intended object structure of consciousness, and those special unified moments will elude you. To experience those moments, you have to be present for them; if you try to think them, you will not find them. Lesh said something similar when discussing the way the band played: ‘If you’re playing along, all of a sudden you find yourself thinking about what you’re doing, thinking the notes as you ... play them. In my experience, when I do that, it means I’m not listening’ (Gans 2002: 162). If he is thinking about the notes that he or the others are playing, then he is not listening to the song as he plays but what the other players are playing. In those thinking moments he is an active subject intending the objects of the notes and sounds. As such, the kind of listening that Lesh has described is an awareness of what the other musicians are playing in the context of his own playing and in the sense of allowing the sounds to be heard as a complete relational whole rather than actively trying to hear them particularly or individually. To listen this way means that each musician is in an independent conversation with the song, while simultaneously hearing each other’s conversation, none of which can happen within the temporal framework of consciousness’ intending an object; they must be present, and presence presupposes a consciousness predisposed to a non-dualistic, non-intentional structure.

- 28 Nietzsche is a useful philosopher to invoke here. He was the first in the Western philosophical tradition to recognise that the framework driving this tradition that has so valued reason to the exclusion of other human drives and passions is fraught with difficulty. In his delineation of some of the elements of what he called the Western cultural malaise, Nietzsche uncovered fundamental structures of mainstream culture that members of the 1960s counterculture were trying to transform, and in his projection for the future of humanity, he indicated possible strategies for bringing about that transformation.
- 29 Already in Nietzsche’s first work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, he identified the temporal boundaries of Western culture and indicated its internal contradiction. Beginning after the fall of Athens with the ascendancy of Socrates and Plato as cultural forefathers and continuing through the end of the nineteenth century with Nietzsche himself proclaiming the end of that tradition and the possible beginning of a new one, Nietzsche indicated that the legacy left by Socrates and Plato was the elevation of reason as a function of consciousness as the dominant drive in human experience to the exclusion of other more natural drives and instincts situated in our bodies. What has held this tradition together through its various permutations of Rome, Christianity, the Scientific Revolution and the Enlightenment is precisely what is problematic for Nietzsche, namely, the tenacious grip that rationality as a function of consciousness,

along with its presupposed metaphysical dualism, has had for two millennia. Nietzsche argued that by emphasising reason, the intellectual and religious traditions had essentially not only denied the reality of lived experience but also shown that lived experience stood in contradiction to the supposed 'truths' discovered by reason. In *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche described the consequences of being overly rational. As human beings neglected or subordinated natural drives and impulses, Nietzsche observed:

They felt unable to cope with the simplest undertakings; in this new world they no longer possessed their former guides, their regulating, unconscious and infallible drives. They were reduced to thinking, inferring, reckoning, coordinating cause and effect, these unfortunate creatures; they were reduced to their 'consciousness', their weakest and most fallible organ. (1967: 84)

- 30 For Nietzsche, the cultural malaise infecting Western culture resulted from an overemphasis on reason and reliance on thinking, or consciousness, to the exclusion of lived experience and instinct. In other words, thought had trumped life. That is, thinking about life became more important than living a life. Or put another way, life was to be lived rationally, or according to how consciousness determined it should be lived, and if consciousness determined that there was more reality in an unchanging form than in our experience of change, then we were mistaken about our experience. As philosophers have been reflecting on the nature of consciousness, they eventually agreed that the defining characteristic of consciousness is *intentionality*. To say that consciousness is *intentionality* is to say that consciousness always *intends* an object, that is, it is always directed to an object in that consciousness is always about something. Thus, one essential characteristic of consciousness is a metaphysical dualism of subjects and objects. Nietzsche's critique can now be reformulated in terms of what the 1960s counterculture was trying to overcome: mainstream culture accepted the faith in reason promoted so successfully by Plato, and so those living in accord with mainstream culture lived their lives and understood their experience as if there exists a static grid of truth that can be discovered by a thinking subject who stands in opposition to the grid. Most music has been exempt from this charge because it is in the very nature of music to indicate the edges of order rather than the order itself. But the history of music is rife with examples of innovations that challenged the status quo. The Grateful Dead appropriated the innovations of Coltrane and Ives, for example, applied it to rock and roll, and gave it a special Grateful Dead psychedelic twist.
- 31 Playing the way the Grateful Dead did cannot be accounted for in terms of this culture of reason and dualism, just as the music of John Coltrane defies categorisation through the grid established by that culture. Nietzsche's critique identified two interrelated problems of the role of consciousness in that grid: the overemphasis of rational consciousness in the living of a life and the defining of consciousness in such a way that it excludes certain experiences. As we return to 'Dark Star' we can see how even lyrically, the role of reason is being challenged.
- 32 The first verse of 'Dark Star' expresses poetically what Nietzsche expressed philosophically about the first problem of rational consciousness, that is, the supremacy of reason at the expense of other drives and impulses. Robert Hunter, the Grateful Dead's primary lyricist wrote:

Dark star crashes, pouring its light into ashes
Reason tatters, the forces tear loose from the axis
Searchlight casting, for faults in the clouds of delusion. (Hunter 1990: 54)

- 33 When the supremacy of reason is reduced ('reason tatters'), the grid determined by axis is shown to be an illusion ('forces tear loose from the axis'), or in the language Garcia used to describe 'Dark Star', reason had imposed an arbitrary form on the underlying dynamic un-form, or chaos. Once the forces are torn asunder and the grid is shown to be arbitrary, the human endeavour shifts from discovering predetermined truths to navigating through the openings that shift in the un-form ('searchlight casting, for faults in the clouds of delusion').
- 34 The second problem of consciousness, that is, defining it in terms of intentionality is brought to the forefront when we try to explain how the musicians were conscious, but not of an object, when they jammed. Put another way, if improvisational music is understood in terms of conversation, what kind of conversation is the band having when it jams, since the conversation is no longer of a listen-response mode, for clearly in the jam, they are not playing in response to what their band mates are playing. In other words, the temporal horizon allowing for a succession of listening and then responding has been abandoned. Here again, Nietzsche can be helpful, for his concept of the eternal recurrence of the same, which for him is the fundamental aspect of a strategy for overcoming the current cultural malaise with its super-emphasis on rational consciousness, can account for the experience of presence in the context of jamming.
- 35 The idea of the eternal recurrence is unique to Nietzsche, but it is also problematic since Nietzsche formulated the principle differently in different contexts. Even so, as he himself noted, this insight into human experience is central to his philosophy. He wrote in *Ecce Homo*: 'The idea of the eternal recurrence ... the highest formula of affirmation that is at all attainable' (1966b: Z1). A full interpretation of the concept of the eternal recurrence requires that it be situated in the context of a discussion of the will to power and self-overcoming, a task that is beyond the scope of this chapter. Nonetheless, we can gain a preliminary understanding of what Nietzsche may have meant and its relationship to the experience of the presence required to improvise transformationally through a reading of the following passage from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. In the speech, 'On the Vision and the Riddle', Nietzsche wrote:
- Behold this gateway, dwarf! ... it has two aspects. Two paths come together here: no one has ever reached their end. This long lane behind us: it goes on for an eternity. And that long lane ahead of us – that is another eternity. They are in opposition to one another, these paths; they abut on one another: and it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is written above it. (1954a: III.2)
- With each event, action, or moment, the horizon of temporality with its structures of past and future disappears as we live each of those moments in the present. It is this sense of the eternal recurrence that speaks to the presence required for Grateful Dead improvisation.
- 36 The formula of the concept 'eternal recurrence' itself is problematic; the juxtaposition of the two words could express a contradiction. Clearly the word recurrence is indicative of a process in time; however, it is not so clear what the term eternal signifies. In the passage above, the paths stretch beyond in both directions for eternity, and we understand eternity there in the sense of an everlasting duration. But there is another sense to the word eternal, one that is the opposite of temporal. In this sense, to say something is eternal is to say that it is not in time at all. It has no beginning, middle or end; it just is. It does not stretch across time, and it has no duration. So, the concept of the eternal recurrence could mean that we return to a state of a-temporality; that is,

it is not the events that recur over and over again, but rather it is we who return to those moments when the horizon of temporality has disappeared.

- 37 We are not normally aware of this experience in our everyday lives, since so much of our experience is marked by beginnings, middles, ends and the intentionality of consciousness with its subject-object structure. But, it is not impossible for us to have experience that is a-temporal, and I think we have them more often than we realise. My suggestion here is that there is the possibility of human experience that is conscious but non-intentional. An experience in which we are aware of being conscious, but are not conscious of any object. When the Grateful Dead jammed, they were playing music in the moment; they were also aware that they were playing music in an ensemble. In terms of the Gestalt theory of perception, there were no figures emerging from the ground, not themselves, not their bandmates, not the stage and equipment and not the audience. Everything constituted ground, or as Garcia described it, 'the whole room becomes one being' (George-Warren 1995: 64). Their goal as musicians was to be conscious of what Garcia called the flow. Or as Lesh characterised it: 'Those moments when you're not even human anymore – you're not a musician, you're not even a person – you're just there' (Gans 2002: 110). It is not just in playing that both the subject-object structure of consciousness with its accompanying temporal horizon can be replaced by a consciousness in presence, but in listening as well. There are moments when we are with the jam, when it is possible for us to experience consciousness in presence as well – when we are not listening to the music in a subject-object mode, but when we are also in conversation with the song as we dance with the band who also is in conversation with the song. In playing and listening to Grateful Dead music, both the musicians and the audience have been transformed musically and consciously.

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ABSTRACTS

More than any other of the San Francisco bands from the mid 1960's, the Grateful Dead have been identified as the quintessential psychedelic rock band. In this paper, I discuss how their mode of improvising, what has been called jamming, while incorporating the traditional jazz modes of improvisation is actually a transformation in a style of playing music. Playing in this new style eventually led the band to compose a new kind of music—psychedelic rock. Underlying the

transformation in the way they played and in the songs they composed is a shift in consciousness with a corresponding shift in ontology that is one of the markers of the 1960's counterculture.

Plus que tout autre groupe de San Francisco au milieu des années 1960, les Grateful Dead représentent la quintessence du rock psychédélique. Dans cet article, j'analyse la manière dont leur type d'improvisation, qu'on a appelé « jamming » – quoiqu'il incorpore des techniques typiques du jazz – se révèle être une transformation des façons de jouer de la musique. Ce style amena le groupe à composer un nouveau genre de musique, le rock psychédélique. Un changement dans la conscience sous-tend cette mutation du jeu et de la composition, auquel correspond un changement ontologique qui est l'un des traits distinctifs de la contre-culture des années 1960.

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Geographical index: États-Unis / USA, San Francisco

nomsmotscles Grateful Dead (the)

Keywords: improvisation, call and response / antiphony, collective creation / interaction, consciousness, drugs / alcohol, experience, counterculture / resistance

Mots-clés: improvisation, appel et réponse / antiphonie, création collective / interaction, conscience, drogues / alcool, expérience, contre-culture / résistance

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