

MUSIC, SYMBOLIC INTERACTION, AND STUDY ABROAD

J. Patrick Williams

ABSTRACT

Musical experiences play a formative role in shaping individuals, culture and society. This chapter descriptively analyzes a six-week study abroad program based in Budapest, Hungary that focuses on music, popular culture, and the politics of everyday life. I begin by describing the program's rationale, goals, and objectives. I then provide insight into the program's content as it relates to music's formative role in sociology and learning. Lastly, I discuss the usefulness of Kotarba and Vannini's (2006) special issue of Symbolic Interaction to assist student learning about music in everyday life. I show how the study abroad program focused on the conceptual, methodological, and substantive significance of music practices in everyday life. I also show how including the special issue of Symbolic Interaction with more general scholarship on music, culture, and society, allowed students and me to share an in-depth, collaborative focus on interactionism that would not be so easily achieved in a normal classroom setting. I close by commenting on the program's impact on students' conceptions of self.

INTRODUCTION

For students and scholars alike, one of the greatest appeals of symbolic interactionism as a coherent theoretical and methodological perspective – and arguably one of its greatest strengths – is the collective emphasis that its practitioners give to popular, everyday culture. Since its formative years at the University of Chicago, interactionists have studied a myriad of popular cultural phenomena, music always having been salient among them. Music stood as a backdrop for early ethnographic work, such as Paul Cressey's (1932) *The Taxi-Dance Hall*; it was a focal concern in much of Howard Becker's work on deviance as seen in *Outsiders* (1963); and it has developed into a diversified substantive research area today, as exemplified in this special issue of *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*.

As an addition to the substantive research on music presented in other articles, I want to show how such research can be used to foster a total learning experience for students engaged in the study of music, popular culture, and the politics of everyday life. In this chapter, I provide a descriptive analysis of a six-week study abroad program that focused on the sociological study of music, popular culture, and the politics of everyday life. My analysis proceeds from the rationale, goals, and content of the curriculum, through to the everyday, music-based routines of participants. I then consider the role symbolic interactionism plays in the program, paying special attention to Kotarba and Vannini's (2006) special issue of *Symbolic Interaction*, entitled "Symbolic Interaction and Popular Music." I look briefly at how the students and I used the special issue to contextualize and assist our study of music by emphasizing the conceptual, methodological, and substantive significance of the symbolic interactionist perspectives used by contributors in their research. I conclude by discussing the program's impact on students' conceptions of self and by relating symbolic interactionism and study abroad to a total learning experience.

THE STUDY ABROAD PROGRAM: MUSIC, CULTURE, AND THE POLITICS OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Rationale and Site

The symbolic and cultural aspects of music have been an important part of my life, both personally and academically. Much of my adolescent and adult

life has been grounded in music subcultures and I have studied the significance of music and other media for subcultural participation (see e.g., Williams, 2006). The critical politics of 1970s and 1980s punk music, especially bands like Seven Seconds, Dead Kennedys, Crass, and Subhumans, were instrumental in leading me to sociology, a field of study that often engages in critical critiques of the politics of social life. From the 1980s till the mid-2000s, I was an active musician in youth subcultural scenes and have relied on music as a source of community, identity, and emotional release. It is because of music's continual importance to me that I developed a study abroad program centered on music, culture, and the politics of everyday life. The rationale behind the program was to give students the opportunity to focus their attention for an extended period of time on music as an object of sociological inquiry. I instructed them to reflect on their preferences and dislikes, consumption habits, and emotional experiences around music. I also asked them to open up to new opportunities for music participation as we attended various types of music events during a tour of seven European countries.¹

The base for the program was Budapest, Hungary, which I chose for several reasons: first, I had previously worked with a colleague on a study abroad program in the country. While that program was not related to music, it enabled me to learn quite a bit about the Hungarian bureaucracies with which I would have to deal; second, I had spent more than 24 months total over the previous six years in-country and possessed basic fluency in the Hungarian language, thus allowing me to move around with relative ease and handle problems that we might encounter; third, and perhaps most important in terms of how I set the program up, Hungary stood at the crossroads between "western" and "eastern" Europe. As a former socialist country, its infrastructure was not as polished as Germany's or Switzerland's for example, yet it was a less expensive country than either of those, which allowed me to keep students' costs under control. There are many different kinds of music festivals, concerts, and other events occurring across eastern and western Europe every summer, and Hungary was therefore a convenient point from which to go in any number of directions.

Goals

I had several goals in mind as I developed the program. One goal was to provide students with an opportunity to visit different countries and cultures and to experience different ways of producing and consuming popular music.

The desire to do so is part of a critical pedagogy grounded in the development of understanding, reflection, analysis, and social action within different cultural milieu (see Kaufman, 2002). During the six weeks, I took students to relatively expensive and comfortable destinations, such as Montreux, Switzerland, as well as to economically deprived destinations, including isolated minority (Hungarian and Gypsy) villages in Serbia and Transylvania where, through homestays with families that do not have air conditioning, cable television, or even indoor plumbing in many cases, they could experience firsthand how “the other half” lives. Music aside, the homestay aspect of the program put students in a unique situation where they spent two days and two nights with families that did not speak English, thus compelling a reliance on role-taking and self-reflexivity that many teachers of sociology have called for in the past (Fobes, 2005). Thus, I organized the program as an antidote to the more typical summer-abroad program in which students often engage in relatively superficial interactions with the host culture and bring home rather stereotypical images of other countries/peoples (Tusting, Crawshaw, & Callen, 2002). More generally, traveling to and experiencing music in such a broad spectrum of social settings addressed some of the American Sociological Association’s (1991) suggestions for building active learning experiences, producing practical learning communities, and increasing students’ exposure to multiple cultures. Critical to this essay is that the structure of the program was such that music became an integral part of student’s lives, thereby acting as primary force for experiential socialization and learning.

A second goal of the program was to give students an opportunity to spend an extended amount of time focusing on one social medium – in this case, music – and to experience it in many different ways. To this end, I focused on three components of the music experience: (a) we attended seven music festivals and concerts over a total of 16 nights; (b) we had discussions about music and culture during the many hours spent traveling by van in and between cities; (c) we used university classroom space in Budapest, Hungary, to meet for approximately 30 hours of formal lectures and seminars. Over the six weeks, we spent approximately half our time in Budapest and the other half on the road. I gave students daily reading assignments and writing assignments while in Budapest and weekly assignments while traveling. I provided them with copies of Kotarba and Vannini’s (2006) special issue as well as Bennett’s (2001) textbook and a collection of other articles and book chapters to read (see appendix for reading list). In order for students to benefit from the combination of in-class coursework and participation in live music events, I mixed them

together, spending several days in Budapest in class, then traveling for a week and a half before returning to Budapest for class time, and so on. I will describe the day-to-day details in the next section.

A third goal of the program was to give students the opportunity to spend an extended amount of time interacting with their teacher. Like any university professor, I treated teaching as an opportunity to introduce students to my own epistemological and theoretical preferences. My own sociological interests are in symbolic interaction and (sub)cultural sociology and so I had students read texts in those areas. However, unlike a typical semester, where students enroll in a hodgepodge of courses and thus have limited time for each subject, the study abroad program enabled students to deal with only one professor for an extended period with relatively few distractions. All the participants were undergraduate students; just over half were sociology majors, while most of the rest came from the journalism/mass communications. Several wanted to become music-reporters, a couple played in local bands, and a few others were scenesters, dedicated members of local music cultures who welcomed any opportunity to build and share their music knowledge. They represented a wide variety of music tastes, about three-fourths being music “omnivores” (Peterson & Kern, 1996), while a few explicitly preferred one or few genres, such as Top-40 or Alternative to the exclusion of other genres. This diversity in itself gave added life to the program as students debated and even argued over the relative value of music genres and their cultures.

Throughout the six-week program, students were immersed in a close relationship with me as well as with music. The group was always less than eight students, therefore I rented a van and did all the driving myself. We shared our MP3 players in the van and talked about our musical likes and dislikes. Students often compared types of music they heard on different radio stations in the countries we visited and discussed what was hot and what was not, and why they thought so. Our collaborative journey into/with music was thus sociological in DeNora’s (2003) sense by bringing together two sides of a musical dialectic. On one side is the scientific study of music as an object, or as a field of practice in which we could apply specialized knowledge. On the other is an artistic approach to music as subjective, as a form of knowledge or a way of activating consciousness. By bringing both dialectic halves together in an intensive program, I intended for students to increase their sociological understanding of how music, “in so far as [it evinces] particular modes of praxis could, for example, heighten or suppress human critical, perceptual, and expressive faculties” (p. 10).

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Study abroad is about much more than reading and discussing sociological theories, methods, and research findings, which is just what occurs in most college classrooms. In addition to that, study abroad gives students opportunities to engage in their own investigations of some of the phenomena just mentioned through experiential learning. Here, I want to describe students' programmatic experiences with music and their relation to sociological learning.

Heading West

Approximately two months before the trip, I gave each student a copy of Bennett's (2001) *Cultures of Popular Music* and assigned the entire book for reading before the trip began. Upon arrival in Budapest, Hungary, students were given some time to get over their jetlag and get familiar with the city. For two-thirds of the students, this was their first time in Europe; only one had been to central or eastern Europe previously. On Day 3, we began our western road trip, driving first to Sopron, Hungary, for two full days at the annual Volt festival.² Volt is an open-air venue featuring a wide variety of artists and genres. I asked students to attend specific acts each night, but left most of their day free so that they could explore the festival as they saw fit. I gave each a small journal notebook and asked them to write about their expectations and experiences at Volt before leaving Sopron. On the main stage, we saw major international acts, including Petshop Boys, Stereo MCs, Thievery Corporation, as well as one of Hungary's most popular vocalists, Ákos. Students knew more or less about the first three bands, but nothing about the latter. Thus, Ákos's performance represented the first noteworthy experience for several of them who wrote about experiencing a live performance with no knowledge of the songs and no understanding of the lyrics. They reported feeling out of place, unable to anticipate changes in tempo or rhythm, and unaware of the meaning of the words. As one student explained it, "The music style and more importantly the lyrics are how a musician relates to his/her audience" (GM). She and others felt unable to connect fully with the audience around them.

The next day, we discussed the significance of recording and player technologies – from the phonograph to the MP3 player – which enable people to delve into a song or album as many times as they want. When I asked them to imagine life without CDs or MP3s, most agreed it was a

frightening prospect. Knowledge of music *before* a performance allows for participants to connect in a more meaningful way, they argued. These ideas however were called into question upon seeing Karl Bartos's performance on the smaller dance-music stage. Bartos is an icon of the EDM (electronic dance music) scene. As a founding member of Kraftwerk, he has spent three decades creating digital music performances that cross cultural, technological, and ontological boundaries. Bartos's show was as much visual as aural – he and two fellow musicians commanded sets of electronic devices (no “instruments” in the traditional sense were to be found), while computer-generated videos played on a massive screen behind them. Bartos's songs focused on various aspects of late-modernity and global popular culture, most having to do with new modes of communication and transportation. Some songs were in English, some in German, while others were in two or more languages. Yet the presence of visual imagery and a steady, monotonous beat served to symbolically connect the audience members despite a lack of shared language. Several students (and I) ended the program feeling that his performance was the most significant in terms of forcing us to reevaluate the nature and communicative potential of live musical performances.

From Sopron, we drove west to Switzerland for three days at the annual Montreux Jazz festival. Its location on the shores of Lake Geneva and its now rich history of top-ranked musical acts have made it one of the premier music festivals in Europe each summer. Unlike open music festivals, Montreux's major acts perform in concert halls around town, while many regional and up-and-coming acts perform on small outdoor stages that are free to the public. Having already experienced pop and EDM performances at Volt, I bought tickets for what I told students would be “heavy metal” night. It was a night that students talked about the rest of the summer. When I had told students in the van leaving Sopron that they would be required to watch a heavy metal performance in Montreux, there was immediate resistance. Most everyone claimed to hate heavy metal and to find it a worthless genre. Few could recite any heavy metal lyrics or offer a cogent reason for their dislike of the genre. I asked students to review Bennett's (2001) chapter on heavy metal in preparation for the event and then discussed issues of class, gender, and sexuality (see also Martinez, 1994). The two bands that performed were Apocalyptica (a Finnish band consisting of four cellists and a drummer) and Alice Cooper – still doing his infamous stage routine involving blood, gore, and his own death and resurrection. Students noted that, on the one hand, their stereotypes of heavy metal culture were not overly threatened. A large majority of the

audience were males, many of whom had long hair, tattoos, and body piercings and were dressed in black; and there was “aggressive” dancing (though Montreux’s organizers had a strong security presence to eliminate moshing and stage diving) and lots of head-banging. On the other hand, both acts surprised the students. For their part, Apocalyptica relied exclusively on cellos instead of guitars, adding a certain legitimacy to the music through students’ assumptions about the cello as a high-culture instrument and thus enabling them to hear *music* where they had assumed they would only find *noise* (Hebdige, 1979). Alice Cooper’s performance was equally as surprising for them, but this time because of the lyrical content, which the students were able to pick up on throughout the show. Reflecting on the experiences after the show, two students wrote:

Some of the songs like “Lost in America” were angry but also smart ... Those aren’t lyrics I would expect from a heavy metal artist [EL].

That was the first metal show I’ve ever been to. ... Thank God for the earplugs! ... I wasn’t sure exactly what to expect. I was surprised, however at ... how much sense a lot of the lyrics made. It was very working-class and some of the songs really showed the structure of American capitalism [KM].

The day after the show, we looked together at lyrics from other Alice Cooper songs, “School’s Out for Summer,” “I’m Eighteen,” and “Welcome to My Nightmare” to further unpack their significance for music listeners. Alice Cooper’s songs represented dimensions of classed, generational, gendered, and intrapersonal conflicts that the students recognized and (to various extents) could relate to. Everyone agreed that, regardless of their own tastes, the concert had given them new respect for the genre.

After Montreux, we stopped in Graz, Austria, for one night of the Jazz Sommer Graz festival. Unlike Montreux, Graz focuses solely on jazz. Given the event and its location, I asked students to read Wallace and Alt’s (2001) sociohistorical study of swing music in Nazi Germany. I used the study as a way to get students thinking about the value of particular music genres in particular times and places. African-American jazz/blues had moved from being outlawed in Germany and Austria in the 1940s to being considered very “authentic” music in the 2000s. The venue for the night’s concert (the Schlossberg) was beautiful and expensive, and we watched a couple of hours of The Stanley Clarke & George Duke Project. Interestingly, the students quickly tired of the music and we ended up leaving before the show was over. On the walk back to our hotel, the students reported feeling that Clarke’s and Duke’s performance had a degree of irony embedded under its surface, as if the musicians were sharing an inside joke as they played. To be

sure, the atmosphere was very different from Montreux. Whereas there were stylistic similarities between the heavy metal performers and their audience, the Graz audience could not have been more different: they were almost entirely white, very well-dressed, and sophisticated in their demeanor, while the musicians, all African-Americans, were almost too casual in comparison, both in terms of dress and in how they progressed through their set. We discussed the notion of identity and authenticity in music cultures, specifically as they related to Howard Becker's (1963) research on jazz culture, Sarah Thornton's (1996) research on club cultures, and the distinction between insiders and outsiders, "hip" and "square."

The next day, we arrived back in Budapest and began intensive classroom work. We used university classroom space to meet for three hours each weekday – one hour of lecture and writing, two hours of seminar. During this time students (re)read and discussed research that was relevant to the western road trip. We covered topics related to youth cultures and subcultures, consumption, identity and selfhood, as well as various methods for studying music and society. I relied on a variety of readings to provide musical examples for class discussion (see the reading list in appendix in addition to the references).

Heading East

After two weeks of classroom study, we began our eastern road trip, which was quite different from the western. The main difference was one of comfort. Previous studies have suggested the benefits that come with taking American students to developing countries for study (Wagenaar & Subedi, 1996). I too wanted students to see more than tourist destinations and to experience music outside of either a large festival-type or standard concert atmosphere. Therefore, we started by driving south into Serbia for a small music festival, "Domfesztivál," in an ethnic-Hungarian village. For two days we stayed in a small house nestled among farm plots. The sounds of chickens and pigs filled the air, as did flies and the smell of manure. The festival itself, held in a field along one edge of the village, focused on celebrating the multiethnicity of surrounding communities. Youth and adult groups representing Croats, Gypsies, Hungarians, Serbs, Slovaks, Montenegrins, and possibly more played traditional instruments and sang and danced. The stage was 3 feet high, the sound system resembled something toted around in a van by a garage band, and there was no English language apparent to the students. They seemed a bit uneasy and

followed me around until I made an excuse to disappear. A while later, after dark, I found them standing in a circle talking with a few local teenagers who spoke English. They were learning about the festival, the music, and the performers, but also about life in Serbia – what local kids did for fun, their likes and dislikes, their thoughts about the United States and the “war on terror,” and more. Through active participation in a music festival, the students expanded their global knowledge and became more self-reflexive through their interactions with youths who had grown up in very different circumstances (Wilson, 1993).

From Serbia, we traveled east into Romania, where we spent another week. This part of the trip included more intercultural experiences not directly related to music, including a two-day hike in the Carpathian Mountains and a two-day homestay in a remote Hungarian village in western Romania.³ Our music destination in Romania was the Félisziget (Hungarian for “Peninsula”) festival in Târgu Mures, a city comprised more or less equally of ethnic Hungarians and Romanians and known for past violence between them. Likewise, the festival had a good mixture of Hungarian and Romanian musicians performing on multiple stages. Unlike the other festivals we had attended so far, Félisziget was predominantly attended by young people in their teens and twenties, with an overrepresentation of heavy-metal fans. Hungarian and Romanian flags and colors could be seen among the thousands of attendees, and I had heard that isolated fights and brawls had occurred in previous years. Prior to arrival, students read a few articles related to music and the politics of identity and nationalism (e.g., Kürti, 2001; Saldanha, 2002; Steinberg, 2004), and thus were prepared to keep an eye on one another and their surroundings. I invited two young ethnic Hungarians from Romania to attend the festival with us; they knew the city and people and agreed to hang out with the students, who were still feeling a bit outside their comfort zone with so few people speaking English around them.

There were some western musicians, including *Apocalyptica* again, but most were from Hungary and Romania. The music seemed to be as much about building community as it did building boundaries. Students noticed how our Hungarian “guides” tended to migrate toward certain parts of the festival while avoiding others. There seemed to be geographical zones in which more Hungarians or Romanians could be found, though as far as I saw people were mixing together without any problems. There were a few occasions when performers shouted national slogans or sentiments on stage, drawing cheers and boos simultaneously from the crowds, yet nothing ever came of it. Still, students had a lot to talk about on the drive back to Budapest. Some were particularly shocked at the nationalistic spirit of the

festival, which provided an opportunity to talk about banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) and how the self is often rooted in ideas about pride and the nation that are circulated through media in many countries including the United States. The almost universal presence of Lee Greenwood's "Proud to Be an American" and other patriotic symbols (flags, eagles, stars and stripes, and so on) in public spaces in the United States were examples we discussed.

Upon return to Budapest, students attended four days of Sziget (Hungarian for "Island") festival, which draws internationally known artists from many genres. There were more than a dozen "zones" on the festival grounds (the entire festival is held on an island in the middle of the Danube River) and students were able to see pop performers, metal, hip-hop, EDM, and any other number of music genres. This festival was more a closing ceremony to the study abroad than an academic exercise; I did not assign any readings during this time but did ask students to write essays reflecting on the program as a whole.

USING A SPECIAL ISSUE OF *SYMBOLIC INTERACTION* TO FACILITATE LEARNING

As previously mentioned, part of the program involved regular class meetings in Budapest. For each class, students were assigned one or two sociological readings on music, which we discussed in depth. I also often asked students to write reflectively about the readings before class to facilitate discussion. As the reading list (see appendix) indicates, I included a mixture of interactionist and noninteractionist readings on music and society. Through my own reflections as a teacher and co-coordinator of another study abroad program, I decided that students would benefit from an emphasis on three areas of sociological knowledge: theoretical and conceptual, methodological, and substantive. As this might relate to the interactionist study of music, my ideas were supported by Kotarba's (2006) claim that "the most important, lasting, and influential contribution symbolic interactionism can make is the power of both its concepts and its procedures for creating concepts" (p. 2). With this idea in mind, students from the 2006 cohort engaged in seminar-style discussions of the relevance of each article in Kotarba and Vannini's (2006) special issue of *Symbolic Interaction* for bettering our understanding of music in everyday life. In this section, I want to briefly summarize students' experiences with the special issue.

Theoretically, Vannini and Waskul's article was the most ambitious and the most challenging for undergraduates. Rather than delve too deeply into

some of the finer conceptual points the authors make, we spent most of our time developing the idea that melody, harmony, rhythm, tone, color, and form “structure a musical metaphor for understanding the nuances of interaction in everyday life” (p. 6; see also p. 16). This article was not *substantively* about music, yet spending time talking about a musical metaphor for everyday life was a satisfying exercise for the group. It also provided me with an opportunity to give a basic introduction to symbolic interactionism for the students who had not taken my course in social psychology. Similarly, Bessett’s article facilitated a discussion of the relationship between mundane embodied experience and music. Expanding from Bessett’s focus on rock, the students and I each talked about our own listening practices – what we listened to and how; the emotions that music could either stave off or heighten, our preferred listening locations, moods, and associated behaviors. Together, these two readings helped set the tone for “cultivating a musical and sociological imagination” (Kotarba & Vannini, 2009, p. 13).

Two other articles provided engaging group discussion about conceptual framing. Halnon’s utilization of Bakhtin’s *carnival* offered insight into how heavy metal fans build in-group solidarity and identity via scene participation. The students found both *carnival* and *spectacle* problematic concepts however, because their use seemed to reduce heavy metal fandom to something that was special or that only occurred in a ritualistic manner. While everyone agreed that music cultures provided a sense of disalienation, students argued that the heavy metal scene remained somewhat caricatured in the article, at least based on their own recent experiences with the genre. To paraphrase, there was little sense of the music’s importance in the *everyday* practices of those involved. Likewise, they found Davis’ article useful for thinking about growing *old in* or growing *out of* music scenes and yet problematic in terms of her critique of the subculture concept. Much of their critique came no doubt from my own teaching, which emphasized the continued relevance of the subculture concept (see Williams, 2006, 2007).

The special issue was also useful as a teaching tool from a methodological perspective. One strength of symbolic interactionism is its plasticity when it comes to researching meaning, as the various methodological approaches in the special issue demonstrated. Halnon, Renshaw, and Aldredge each used an ethnographic method in their research. Aldredge’s article was a straightforward example of how a basic, situated ethnography can provide sociological insight. His insider status in the club was clear to students through his writing, and they remarked on how his analysis seemed both inductive and believable. In Aldredge’s article, more than any other, the

students came away feeling as if they, too, could engage in sociological research on music. Renshaw undertook a longer, more in-depth study of a local music scene, and his analysis showed students how to make use of many different data sources: participant observation, interviews, audio recordings, e-mail, and other researchers' notes. Comparing the articles, we discussed how sociological research could occur on many different geographic, social, and temporal scales.

Working outside of traditional ethnographic practices, the Bakkers' article demonstrated to the students the complementary strengths of an insider perspective and a coherent analytical frame. Working together, son and father constructed an insightful analysis of technology and the beat as semiotic resources. Similarly, Rafolovich's research relocated the students' focus from the individuals and groups making and consuming music toward lyrics as yet another semiotic resource worthy of analysis. Rofolovich's article also gave the students insight into the process of ethnographic content analysis, where the cultural object is given preference over the social action that surrounds it. Finally, Martin's work brought together several studies from various time periods and locations. Several of the students at first reported that Martin did not seem to "do anything; he just talked about other research" [fieldnotes on class discussion]. Through in-depth discussion about the relationship among the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels of society, however, they came to see how Martin's secondary-data analysis approach resulted in the illumination of more generic social processes that occur among music-makers.

The third area of interest I wanted to highlight for students was substantive. The study-abroad program had introduced students to a variety of music spaces before we began reading the special issue: from rigidly organized concerts to large open-air festivals, to a public street festival and local D.I.Y. folk festivals. It also expanded their knowledge of various music styles: Top 40 Euro pop, classic rock, instrumental folk, heavy metal, hip-hop, and beyond, through different genre mixtures. The special issue's broad coverage of substantive topics therefore matched the students' daily experiences by covering such diverse music genres as contemporary rock, heavy/extreme metal, punk, club/house, and swing. It also included data from lyrics, clubs, festivals, and so on. Bringing this to the students' attention provided me with the chance to talk about other aspects of everyday life in which music was important: listening to MP3 players between classes; singing in the car or at a karaoke bar; learning to play an instrument; making or mixing songs and compilations, and talking about music with others.

MUSIC, PEDAGOGY, AND THE SELF

Through time spent in the classroom and in the field, students engaged in a lot of reflection on the intersection between music, culture, and the politics of everyday life. Such reflections were crucial aspects of the study abroad program; they are also crucial in the development of self. In her ethnographic study of music listeners, DeNora (2000, p. 46) argued that a “focus on intimate musical practice, on the private or one-one forms of human-music interaction, offers an ideal vantage point for viewing music ‘in action,’ for observing music as it comes to be implicated in the construction of the self” The study abroad program took a similar, but larger, view on music and selfhood. Its intensive pedagogical structure, with a constant focus on interacting with music as a subjective experience and sociological object, helped students foster an understanding of the relations between music and self. Self is a process through which individuals come to know who they are in terms of the social worlds in which they exist. Following Mead (1934), selves are not “things.” Rather, selves are always in the process of becoming. The program impacted this process, changing the musical selves that could be described even before the study abroad began. Indeed, student-applicants articulated their musical selves to me during the interview process before being accepted into the program. Some were quick to talk about music’s significance in defining them as agents in the world (e.g., musicians or connoisseurs), while others linked music to past emotional experiences or to epiphanies that instigated personal or social change. As they told it, listening to music provided opportunities to focus inward, turning away from the larger world. Alternatively, music was a symbolic structure through which crucial social bonds were formed and maintained.

What I have described in this chapter is a string of examples through which participants’ selves were shaped by music as one dimension of the politics of everyday life. Music, as object and art, is simultaneously agentic and social. It can facilitate reflexivity and empower its user. It exists as a medium for socialization, a source of identification, and a backdrop to coordinated action. Each of these processes is key to a symbolic interactionist conception of self and society. The off-tempo feelings at Volt, for example, required that students and I deal with the significance of music vis-à-vis our sense of comfort and place. Student’s exposure to the vast material gulf between the Montreux Jazz Festival and Domfesztyval led to appreciation of the latter’s D.I.Y. ethic as a form of coordinated action, while their concern with “foreign” national spirit at Felsziget demanded introspection of music’s role in social identity. Music and study abroad are

powerful media that impact the self, functioning for many as agents of change in their lives (e.g., Farrell & Suvedi, 2003; Sloboda, 1992). As one student wrote near the end of our trip:

What is most significant to me about [the program] is discovering how significant music actually is (from an academic standpoint especially). I have always personally felt a strong connection to music and have placed much importance on it in my own life, but was never fully aware of the importance it has on nearly everybody. Regardless of the differences in style and sound, music is a part of everyone's life in every corner of the Earth. That's pretty amazing! [JH]

In these and other examples, students were able to frame music as “a living dynamic medium,” something “to think with,” and something that could “transform consciousness” (DeNora, 2003, p. 3). In other words, they came to articulate music's reflexive role in self-formation. The self “is aware, knows, feels, decides, and so forth. Self is both a source and site of the agentic self-referential conduct that anchors a sense of substantivity for the subject” (Weigert & Gecas, 2003, p. 268). Throughout the program, music's role in the process of becoming became more and more obvious.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I analyzed a study abroad program based in Budapest, Hungary, that focused on music, popular culture, and the politics of everyday life. Over a six-week period, program participants were given the opportunity to spend an extended amount of time studying, as a small group, a topic that was interesting and/or important to them. Students had the opportunity to learn more about themselves and to develop self-efficacy and grow emotionally (Farrell & Suvedi, 2003). Part of this was achieved by becoming responsible team members on an extended road trip. By negotiating various identities daily – student, sojourner, American, music fan – participants were able to develop strategies for maintaining a positive self-concept in the face of intercultural and interpersonal “stumbling blocks” (Williams, 2001). Another part had to do with experiencing music as a sociology student rather than just as a fan. One student wrote about being “surprised” by his new music experiences, while another was happy to report feeling that “it is good to be a little uncomfortable. It allows you to broaden your horizon and experience life a little differently. [Some] shows forced me to look at music and style through completely different eyes than what I was used to” [KM].

Students also had the opportunity to dedicate a large amount of time to a special academic focus. Such a focus, when mixed with daily opportunities to learn about, reflect on, analyze, and engage in meaningful social action about music, strengthens the learning process (Fobes, 2005). Finally, they became empowered by sociological knowledge itself. In-class and out-of-class routines reinforced the dialectic between music-as-object and music-as-art (see DeNora, 2003) that fostered a more active form of learning (Langley & Breese, 2005). The sense of wonder and empowerment that students came to feel toward the mundane aspects of popular music has made the program worth the effort. The knowledge students exhibited at the end of the experience further energized me to continue what was also a very stressful and tiring time for me as the program's director, teacher, driver, chaperone, and occasional "older brother." There is also a sincere sense of gratitude that I feel toward the scholars who continue to make music – and popular culture more generally – a serious scholarly endeavor.

NOTES

1. In temporal order: Hungary, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Lichtenstein, Serbia, and Romania.
2. Each year different musicians performed at the festivals that I discuss; however, distinguishing between what musicians played which years seemed unnecessarily tedious. Therefore, for each festival I have combined my discussion of musicians from multiple years.
3. Since this part of the trip has little to do with music, I will not describe it here.

REFERENCES

- American Sociological Association. (1991). *Liberal learning and the sociology major*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.
- Becker, H. S. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the sociology of deviance*. New York: Free Press.
- Bennett, A. (2001). *Cultures of popular music*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Billig, M. (1995). *Banal nationalism*. London: Sage.
- Cressey, P. (1932). *The taxi-dance hall*. New York: Greenwood Press.
- DeNora, T. (2000). *Music in everyday life*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- DeNora, T. (2003). *Beyond Adorno: Rethinking music sociology*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Farrell, P., & Suvedi, M. (2003). Study abroad in Nepal: Assessing impact. *Frontiers: The International Journal of Study Abroad*, 9, 175–188.

- Fobes, C. (2005). Taking a critical pedagogical look at travel-study abroad: "A classroom with a view" in Cusco, Peru. *Teaching Sociology*, 33(2), 181–194.
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. London: Methuen.
- Kaufman, P. (2002). *Critical pedagogy in the sociology classroom*. Washington, DC: American Sociological Association.
- Kotarba, J. A. (2006). Introduction: Conceptualizing popular music. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 1–3.
- Kotarba, J. A., & Vannini, P. (Eds.). (2006). Special issue: Symbolic interaction and popular music. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1).
- Kotarba, J. A., & Vannini, P. (Eds.). (2009). *Understanding society through popular music*. New York: Routledge.
- Langley, C. S., & Breese, J. R. (2005). Interacting sojourners: A study of students studying abroad. *The Social Science Journal*, 42(2), 313–321.
- Martinez, T. A. (1994). Popular music in the classroom: Teaching race, class, and gender with popular culture. *Teaching Sociology*, 22(3), 260–265.
- Mead, G. H. (1934). *Mind, self, and society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Peterson, R. A., & Kern, R. M. (1996). Changing highbrow taste: From snob to omnivore. *American Sociological Review*, 61(5), 900–907.
- Sloboda, J. A. (1992). Empirical studies of musical affect. In: M. Riess-Jones & S. Hollerman (Eds.), *Cognitive bases of musical communication* (pp. 33–45). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Thornton, S. (1996). *Club cultures: Music, media, and subcultural capital*. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Tusting, K., Crawshaw, R., & Callen, B. (2002). I know, 'cos I was there': How residence abroad students use personal experience to legitimate cultural generalizations. *Discourse and Society*, 13(5), 651–672.
- Wagenaar, T. C., & Subedi, J. (1996). Internationalizing the curriculum: Study in Nepal. *Teaching Sociology*, 24(3), 272–283.
- Weigert, A. J., & Gecas, V. (2003). Self. In: L. T. Reynolds & N. J. Herman-Kinney (Eds.), *Handbook of symbolic interactionism* (pp. 267–288). Boulder, CO: AltaMira Press.
- Williams, J. P. (2001). Liminality among European exchange students. *International Education*, 30(2), 19–40.
- Williams, J. P. (2006). Authentic identities: Straightedge subculture, music, and the Internet. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 35(2), 173–200.
- Williams, J. P. (2007). Youth subcultural studies: Sociological traditions and core concepts. *Sociology Compass*, 1(2), 572–593.
- Wilson, R. J. (1993). Conversation partners: Helping students gain a global perspective through cross-cultural experiences. *Theory into Practice*, 32, 21–26.

APPENDIX. LIST OF ASSIGNED READINGS

- Aldredge, M. (2004). Negotiating and practicing performance: An ethnographic study of a musical open mic in Brooklyn, New York. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 109–118.
- Baker, S. L. (2004). Pop in(to) the bedroom: Popular music in pre-teen girls' bedroom culture. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(1), 75–93.

- Bakker, J. I. (Hans), & Bakker, T. R. A. (Theo) (2004). The Club DJ: A semiotic and interactionist analysis. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 71–82.
- Bennett, A. (2001). *Cultures of popular music*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Bessett, D. (2004). 'Don't step on my groove!' Gender and the social experience of rock. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 49–62.
- Boomkens, R. (2004). Uncanny identities: High and low and global culture in the music of Elvis Costello. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(1), 59–74.
- Davis, J. R. (2004). Growing up punk: Negotiating aging identity in a local music scene. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 63–70.
- Halnon, K. B. (2004). Heavy metal carnival and dis-alienation: The politics of grotesque realism. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 33–48.
- Kahn-Harris, K. (2004). The 'failure' of youth culture: Reflexivity, music and politics in the black metal scene. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 7(1), 95–111.
- Kotarba, J. A. (2006). Introduction: Conceptualizing popular music. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 1–3.
- Kürti, L. (2001). Youth and political action: The dance-house movement and Transylvania. In: *The remote borderland: Transylvania in the Hungarian imagination* (pp. 137–164). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Martin, P. J. (2004). Musicians' worlds: Music-making as a collaborative activity. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 95–108.
- Rafolovich, A. (2004). Broken and becoming god-sized: Contemporary metal music and masculine individualism. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 19–32.
- Renshaw, S. W. (2004). Postmodern swing dance and secondary adjustment: Identity as process. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 83–94.
- Saldanha, A. (2002). Music, space, identity: Geographies of youth culture in Bangalore. *Cultural Studies*, 16(3), 337–350.
- Steinberg, M. W. (2004). When politics goes pop: On the intersections of popular and political culture and the case of Serbian student protests. *Social Movement Studies*, 3(1), 3–29.
- Vannini, P., & Waskul, D. (2006). Symbolic interaction as music: The esthetic constitution of meaning, self, and society. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 5–18.
- Wallace, C., & Alt, R. (2001). Youth cultures under authoritarian regimes: The case of swings against the Nazis. *Youth and Society*, 32(3), 275–302.