

Studying The Grateful Dead Phenomena: From Interdisciplinary Studies to
Transdisciplinary Studies

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An abstract of a paper submitted for consideration in the area of Interdisciplinary Studies

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With the establishment of the Grateful Dead Archive at the University of California, Santa Cruz in 2008, studying the Grateful Dead has become more manageable as scholars now have access to a wealth of artifacts documenting not only the Grateful Dead's own history but also its influential role in the social history of the United States in the late twentieth century. Although the Grateful Dead phenomenon has only recently been formalized as an object of study, scholars from many different disciplines have been studying the Grateful Dead for at least the last fifteen years as the Grateful Dead Caucus, a subgroup of the Southwest/Texas American Popular Culture Association. When the Caucus began in 1998, scholars representing disciplines as disparate as music, art, literature, religious studies, sociology, history, communication studies, philosophy, business management and psychology applied the methods of their particular disciplines to that aspect of the Grateful Dead phenomenon that lent itself to those methods. For example, music theorists focused on their style of playing or specific analysis of pieces of music, historians on the 1960's San Francisco counter culture, art theorists on the poster art and other Grateful Dead iconography, sociologists on the sense of community that emerged, literature scholars on the poetry/lyrics of the music, and philosophers on subjective experience. Over the next few years, as other scholars representing different disciplines entered into the conversation that was centered on the Grateful Dead, what

became apparent was that our scholarly conversation about the band had transformed. What had begun as a series of isolated papers focused on those particular aspects of the Grateful Dead that were appropriate to our specific disciplines developed into a collective research project that took the entire Grateful Dead phenomenon as its object of study. As we became more comfortable regarding the Grateful Dead as single phenomenon with multiple aspects and dimensions, the boundaries of our particular disciplines began to blur, and we were no longer engaged in an interdisciplinary project where many disciplines were brought together to discuss a single object from different perspectives. Now, we had before us a new kind of object, a unitary object that incorporated holistically the various discrete objects studied by the particular disciplines, and as a result, our method of research changed from interdisciplinary to transdisciplinary.

In this paper, I offer a theoretical framework for accounting for the transformation of discipline specific studies and objects to interdisciplinary studies about the same object to finally transdisciplinary studies with its surfacing of concomitant objects of study drawing from both Minati and Collen's *Introduction to Systemics* and Michel Foucault's analysis of the emergence of the human sciences in *The Order of Things*. I then show how Grateful Dead studies instantiates the criteria established by this theoretical framework.