

SAMBA IN PRACTICE:
MOTIVATIONS FOR JOINING THE UIUC SAMBA ENSEMBLE AND AN EXPLICIT
THEORY OF PRACTICE FOR ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

BY

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis addresses two primary topics. The first is an ethnographic study of the University of Illinois – Urbana/Champaign Samba Ensemble that took place in the spring of 2008 in the framework of the Department of Music as one of the offered “ethno ensembles”. The ensemble drew in people from the music department, from the university at large, as well as other community members with no university affiliation. The ethnographic study attempts to analyze the various motivations that the different participants had for joining the ensemble. The conclusion of the ethnographic study is that while each individual participant may have their own unique constellation of reasons for joining such an ensemble, the set of possible reasons for joining is quite limited. All individuals thus combine a certain number of these shared motivations and it is probable that this same set of reasons is applicable to other ethno ensembles.

The second topic addressed in the thesis is the theoretical framework – practice theory – used to conduct the analysis of the UIUC Samba Ensemble. The thesis argues that practice theory, in its contemporary iteration, is a form of social theory that presents significant advantages, both moral and practical, over competing theories in ethnography. Practice theory claims that the ultimate site of the social is not to be found in the individual or in some supraorganic body such as culture, habitus, or structures, but at the very point where they intersect: in practice. As such practices are mind-body ways of doing and being that combine individual actors, background knowledges, built environments, and material artifacts. Given this understanding, practices are accessible to the ethnographer because their components are all part of the phenomenal world, they are anti-mentalistic, they reject a dichotomy between the subject and the social, and they incorporate both dynamism and agency at their core. These are reasons argued in favor of practice theory and used in the analysis of the Samba Ensemble. Finally, a distinction between two types of practices – dispersed and integrative practices – is introduced. This distinction is utilized to understand how intense musical experiences can have a transformative effect on individuals beyond the realm of musical activity itself.

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CHAPTER 1: THE BIRTH OF THE SAMBA ENSEMBLE

Winter break was over and I had shown up for mbira ensemble excited to see Professor Turino (Tom), although I was also worried that he might chastise the graduate students for having lost our chops over the previous month. Publicly and privately he said we're doing very well, but in private we always worried that we don't practice enough and are thus always forgetting parts. I didn't need to worry, I was later to find out; other matters would dominate the hour. As I entered the windowless cinder-block room where we practice - one of dozens in an otherwise cheerless building, ameliorated only by fellow students and friends - I expected to find our usual group of eight or so. Instead I encountered a full house; twenty or more people were sitting in every possible chair in the room. Some others were standing or sitting on the floor.

Tom wasn't there yet. Having said 'hello' to a few fellow music grad students we all sat there somewhat awkwardly, eyeing the new people. What did all these folks want here? We've got our little group. Didn't Tom say he was going to close enrollment for this semester so we could continue as before? I think we were all rather confused.

Before too long Tom arrived. He stopped as he came through the door. Stunned, his eyes opened wide and his head shot back slightly. "Wow!" It was a characteristic Tom exaggeration; not disingenuous, just slightly overplayed. When he finally came into the room, a woman followed close behind him. She didn't look like a student exactly and she'd seemed to come with Tom. Yet someone else I didn't know.

Somehow the enrollment for the mbira ensemble hadn't been closed and all these people had therefore signed up for the course and were there ready to play. Tom didn't know what to do. On the one hand it was obvious that this many people could not do mbira. There simply weren't enough instruments to go around, but as he said of himself, "I never learned how to say 'no'." So, something had to be done. The first solution was to allow those students who'd been in mbira in previous years or who really, really wanted to play to form a beginner's ensemble to be taught in addition to ours. The second solution proved equally popular.

It turned out that the woman Tom had come in with was Luciana Prass, a visiting scholar from Porto Alegre, Brazil. A few minutes before coming to the ensemble Tom had asked her if she'd be willing to lead a samba ensemble, but, apparently, nothing definitive had been set up. In front of the assembled group he asked her if she'd really be willing to do it. Yes, sure, ok. After a show of hands it was clear that there was plenty of interest. Mine was also immediately piqued, but my mind started racing to figure out how to coordinate it with my wife, Niki, and daughter, Izzy. Maybe they could all come, too. Molly, another music grad student and one of our best mbira players, said she'd even quit mbira to be in samba. Given how many ensembles she's in, that wasn't a surprising response. Tom wanted her to stay; she could do both, he said.

Obviously relieved that a solution had been found, someone found a note pad and everyone interested in samba signed up on the spot. Then we spent an arduous five minutes trying to schedule a time. This is always a problem with so many different people. At the end of last semester we'd lost one mbira player because all the times conflicted with someone's schedule. In the end, Tom's solution was Monday 7 to 9 pm: late enough that no one would have a conflict and it fit his schedule.

And so the samba ensemble was born.

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCTION

In the spring of 2008 the UIUC Samba Ensemble was formed with the visiting scholar Luciana Prass as its director. Luciana came from Porto Alegre, in the south of Brazil, having recently finished her Master's thesis on Bamba's samba school, the oldest of her hometown. There she had conducted fieldwork at the samba school, following the troop through almost two complete annual cycles, playing the *tamborim*, a small drum struck with knitting needles which is traditionally played by women. Following her Master's work Luciana became an instructor at a local arts academy and conservatory, where she started her own samba ensemble – a highly unusual gesture within the classical confines of the institution – thus she brought with her both fieldwork and teaching experience. She came to Illinois to work together with Professor Turino in preparation for her Ph.D. thesis work, which would begin upon her return to Brazil. As both a player and an ethnomusicologist, she offered us an amazing opportunity in leading the samba ensemble, stylistically based on the style of carnival samba that she had learned at Bamba's.

The group that made up the Samba Ensemble consisted of about 20 to 25 individuals, depending on the week and time of the semester. Almost all participants were students of the university, with a small majority of them coming from the music department, both graduate and undergraduate students. Other students were drawn from a variety of other subject areas, but for the most part these students had some friendship with another person in the group. Finally, a small group of participants joined who were not from university. Two of them were the spouses of musicology graduate students (my wife included), two were professors of ethnomusicology themselves (Prof. Turino and Prof. Helbig), a small cohort of members of the community with Brazilian background or connections was there, as well as Prof. Turino's son Matt.

The ensemble met in the lower level of the music building at the university. This floor is used for a variety of music courses and rehearsals. Each of the rooms is equipped with a piano and stereo equipment for these purposes, although there was no direct need for them in our ensemble. The instruments were property of the musicology department, some of the many instruments that have been accumulated over the years and kept on hand should such ensembles be formed. They were stored in a dedicated room on the

musicology floor, thus before each rehearsal a small group of people – usually Luciana, a couple of musicology graduate students, and one or two other participants – would take the elevator up to retrieve the instruments, bring them to the rehearsal room, and unpack them. Normally, by the time most participants arrived, the instruments were already there.

From the first meeting, the focus of the ensemble was obviously on the experience of performing the music. Luciana spent little time telling us about her experience with Bamba's or about the history and current practice of samba in Brazil today. In fact, the ensemble practiced the form of samba called *escola de samba* which is practiced in samba schools in preparation for the annual carnival parades. These samba schools are not schools in the sense of offering instruction, but are better understood as established ensembles with their own compounds, instruments, and bureaucratic structures that organize the rehearsals, the storage of the instruments, and the funding of the new costumes that have to be purchased every year. Usually the schools are located in poorer neighborhoods and the players are also drawn from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The visual focus of the samba schools falls on the extravagant dancers and floats that process during carnival, all accompanied by a percussion ensemble called the *bateria*. The UIUC Samba Ensemble recreated such a samba *bateria*.

The types of percussion instruments that make up the *bateria* are quite homogenous from school to school, although in a proper ensemble the numbers are much larger than in ours. In our case this included, on average, three *surdos* (large bass drums) and three *repiniques* (metal snare drums) that are both worn with a sling and played with sticks, two *atabaques* (tall, wooden hand drums) played with the hands, and five *tamborims* (small, frame drums) held upright in one hand and struck with several knitting needles bound together. In addition, we had two *agogôs* (a set of two pitched metal bells) struck with a wooden stick and two *ganzás* (metal-bodied shakers) held in one hand and played at shoulder level. At our first meeting these instruments were simply laying around the rehearsal room and Luciana just told us to pick up whichever instrument we felt like. In fact, however, Luciana “guided” some people toward certain instruments, ensuring that the women played the majority of the *tamborims* and that musicians with greater experience were represented on the *surdos* and *repiniques*, since these instruments have such a

dominant role in the ensemble.

Rehearsal were spent learning basic rhythms and breaks. Luciana did this almost exclusively by demonstrating each part on the individual instruments. In most cases she would begin by playing the *surdo* part, then the *repiniques*, the *atabaques*, and then the *agogôs*, *ganzas*, and *tamborims*. Each instrument section would continue to play their part as she progressed through the other instruments until the entire basis rhythm had been established. Once the basic rhythm was sufficiently solid for Luciana she would introduce a short, usually one measure, break that could be inserted at anytime. She would count down the four beats of the measure before the break on her fingers held up in the air and then the group would play the break and return to the original rhythm. We practiced these samba rhythms and breaks, in addition to two other pieces with voice and accordion, for the duration of the semester. Two performances took place: one at the local *Canopy Club* after about two-thirds of the semester and one in a procession through the center of the university campus at the end of the semester.

The ensemble was one of the several ensembles offered by the ethnomusicology department at the university, open to department members, other students, and even community members. For many years the UIUC ethnomusicology department has offered a certain flexible set of ensembles on a regular basis. Balkanalia and Shona mbira are the most prominent of these, while other ensembles are organized around the interests of the students or the availability of visiting scholars. During my time at the university this latter set of ensembles included didgeridoo, Andean pan flutes, West African drumming, Chinese classical music, dance samba, and the Samba Ensemble.

Having been exposed to many of these ensembles both directly and indirectly I became interested in the motivations of the various members of these groups. During my time at the university I took part in the Balkanalia, Shona mbira, Andean pan flute, and Samba ensembles and in all my experience these ensembles included a diverse range of students from music graduate and undergraduate students to students from other departments and members of the community. I had a pretty good idea why the ethnomusicology graduate students were there, but what about the others? What was it that drew people to these ensembles? What did they seek to get out of them?

This paper, thus, asks two basic questions. One asks why it is people from different backgrounds join ethno ensembles, looking in particular at the Samba Ensemble and the experiences of its participants. The second question, however, is of even greater import. Is there a theoretical framework, a tool box, that allows the fieldworker to make generalizations about these motivations – and others like it – that avoid metaphysical concepts inaccessible to fieldwork itself and that can safely rely on the participation of a limited number of informants? Practice theory, in its contemporary form, is presented as an alternative that fulfills these requirements. Introducing this toolkit in a form significantly clearer than is currently available in the literature is the second goal of the paper.¹

Contemporary practice theory is a form of social theory that seeks (1) to avoid many of the epistemological and ontological errors of its forerunners as well as other contemporary theories and (2) to deliver a pragmatic tool for the analysis of meaningful human activity. The first of these two involves a rejection of the mind-body duality, a rejection of a subject-social dichotomy, a focus on the materiality – both mind-bodily and worldly – of the social, a suspension of assumptions about causality, an emphasis on the background intelligibility of all meaningful action, and a strong emphasis on the processual, dynamic, and relational aspects of practices. The second involves the insistence upon the development of a set of analytic tools that exclusively describe aspects of the phenomenal world. In so doing contemporary practice theory hopes to set social theory simultaneously on solid theoretical and practical footings. Finally, the intention of this insistence upon clarity is to place both the theory and its findings within the realm of the verification, thus lessening argumentative impasses caused by underdetermination. Practices theory is an ontology of the social, of meaningful human coexistence. Practices replace ‘cultures,’ ‘societies,’ and, indeed, ‘subjects’ as the both the substance and process of human being. They are understood as spatio-temporally occurring bundles of actions, made meaningful against a shared background familiarity and intelligibility, which take (make) place in a structured/structuring material world.

¹ In the literature of cultural anthropology both Knaft (1996: 136) and Ortner (2006: 1-4) have also explained the lure of the practice theory and the need for greater clarity in its formulation.

To fulfill this dual requirement of theory and practice the paper is structured by an alternation between ethnographic sections, each focusing on one of five members of the ensemble (Katia Sussmann, myself, Adriana Helbig, Filipe Pereira, and Luciana Prass), and theoretical sections that look at the difficulties posed in trying to unpack these experiences. This weaving together of theory and practice is meant to do two things at once. To begin with it provides a demonstration of the kind of ethnography that can result from using practice theory as a way of thinking. My hope is that the tools will show themselves to be simultaneously revelatory and straightforward. One basic attraction of practice theory is that it tries not to deal in intangible (metaphysical) concepts like "culture", but in the who, what, when, where, and how available to experience. Second, the contrast highlights that theory is second-order observation, and can never achieve the sort of care and concern for other people that empathetic narration does (Titon 1997: 96; Fuchs 2001). That is to say, in 'doing theory' we are seeking to refine our practice of ethnography, but we can do so only by removing ourselves from the flow of experience to a meta-conceptual level that risks losing touch with everyday selves (Bourdieu 1997: 50-57; 1998: 138-140). This contrast between the sections is meant as a warning and as a call to constantly make the journey back and forth between these levels of observation (Fuchs 2001).

People have many different reasons for joining ensembles such as the UIUC Samba Ensemble and the narratives of the individuals make clear the consistency and commonality as well as the uniqueness of their various motivations. My proposal of practice theory as a theoretical framework is based on the conviction that the *structure of experience* is universal and can, therefore, be fruitfully described in the terms presented in the paper. Nonetheless, this conviction is solidly founded and forcefully argued *not* to preclude conversation with other toolkits for ethnography, but rather in order to be a clear statement that can be reasoned through and argued against. Following Gadamer, I claim that such a hermeneutic methodology,

understands itself not as an absolute position but as a way of experience. It insists that there is no higher principle than holding oneself open in a conversation. But this means: always recognize in advance the possible correctness, even the superiority of the conversation partner's position. Is this too little? Indeed, this seems to me to be the kind of integrity one can demand only of a professor of philosophy. And one should demand as much. (1985: 189)

Despite the difficulty brought on by this constant simultaneous statement of conviction and suspension of belief, I think we must demand as much of ourselves. Thus the contrast between the theoretical and ethnographic sections is meant to provide a counterpoint to my own proposals of practice theory and foreshadow precisely the input of other opinions that may hopefully lead us to a better way of talking with each other and an improved way of experiencing the world (Beaudry 1997: 66-82).

Practice Theory in Ethnomusicology

Practice theory is no newcomer to ethnomusicology and given the very tangible nature of musical activity it might come as no surprise that ethnomusicologists have long been sensitive to the practical aspects thereof. Bourdieu's conception of *habitus* has become so pervasive in the discipline that one might jokingly consider any book or article incomplete were it not to reference his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* at least once (1977). Thus it makes sense to first get a sense of the work some other scholars have done in the discipline to apply practice theory before moving on the work I claim can still be done by a clearer, more useful form of the theory as elucidated in its contemporary discourse.

Some of the discipline's finest theoretical minds work directly from a practice-theory basis. Jane Sugarman's *Engendering Song: Singing and Subjectivity at Prespa Albanian Weddings* is a masterful marriage of larger-scale analysis and highly personalized narratives blended together to create a work that outlines a clear set of practices surrounding the Albanian weddings both in Albania and in North America (1997). Her mode of analysis takes a Foucauldian, historicized vantage of Bourdieu's theory of practices, thereby allowing for the temporality and individual negotiations that *habitus* is often accused of lacking. Furthermore, she thoroughly drives home the bodily aspects of practice in her astute analysis of gesture and seating arrangements at wedding receptions in the home.

Veit Erlmann is another scholar who is acutely aware of the theoretical difficulties posed in trying to combine social and subject-oriented modes of analysis and has found practice theory – among many others – a useful resource in ethnography. In his *Nightsong: Performance, Power, and Practice in South Africa* Erlmann acknowledges the difficulties and the ethical problems associated with structuralism broadly understood while strongly

arguing against rejecting the generalizing stance altogether (1996: 1-26). He pleads that a balance must be found. "[M]y writing strategy resists the determinism inherent in notions of consciousness and human practice—to be observed and circumscribed by various ethnographic means—as outcomes of structure preconstructed by mostly ethnocentric theoretical models. Rather, in trying to explore the constitution of social practice, I wish to highlight the embeddedness of consciousness in everyday practice and the interdependence of transformative action and sociocultural form. (28)"

Very recently Ingrid Monson, in her *Freedom Sounds: Civil Rights Call Out to Jazz and Africa*, directly addressed the problems of using a monolithic 'concept of culture' in ethnographic work by adopting a set of three constructs – discourse, structure, and practice – as the core toolbox of her analysis (2007: 3-7, 11). It is obvious from Monson's theoretical exposition that her understanding of the object of study is deeply nuanced. She, like Sugarman, Erlmann, and others, has seen the forest, the trees, and everything in between and is therefore desirous of a theoretical apparatus that can encompass all of these realities: those of the subject, of social, cultural and economic structures, of history, of discourse, etc. Accordingly her analysis of the interaction between jazz as an aesthetic practice, the social practices of the communities jazz is a part of, and the economic structures in the US from roughly 1950 to 1967 deftly moves between all of these different levels, enlightening the reader to their delicate interplay. For whatever reason, this view of music as a practice is especially common among those studying jazz as can be seen in the work other scholars, such as Travis Jackson and Bruce Johnson (2002), although with less explicit theoretical exegesis in these cases.

Finally, there are many other scholars who carry out their analysis of musical life using practice theory if not by name, very much in spirit. At the top of this list must surely stand Christopher Small whose 1998 work *Musicking: The Meanings of Performance and Listening* takes readers directly to the heart of music as "what people do" (1998: 8). In focusing on music as verb Small draws attention not only to the musical activity itself but in powerful ways to the physical surroundings, the social setting, the movements of all the actors, and much more. Although Small never discusses any practice theorists directly, his emphasis and use of the term itself shows his attraction to this way of conceiving human

experience (1998: 43, 51, 67, 94, 207, 216). Similarly Thomas Turino, Christopher Waterman, and Donna Buchanan have produced engaging works that are especially sensitive to the interaction of subject experience and social and economic structures, to the embodied nature of our cultural activities, and to the dynamism of practices (Turino 2008; Waterman 1990; Buchanan 2006). Taken together all of these scholars have gone a long way toward equipping ethnomusicology with a theoretical basis that is simultaneously sensitive to the complex truths from the single individual all the way to global phenomena while also seeking to avoid the philosophical and pragmatic difficulties of trading in the metaphysical, intangible, or essentialist concepts that dominated the discipline's discourse before their time. The goal of the theoretical side of this paper is to move practice theory in ethnomusicology farther along above all by introducing insights from contemporary authors on the subject and creating a clear, basic toolbox for using the theory in ethnography and analysis.

The Structure of the Paper

This thesis contains three sections on practice theory interwoven with individual narratives based in fieldwork and interviews. Each narrative section attempts to more fully answer the basic research question regarding motivations for joining the Samba Ensemble while also demonstrating the aid provided by the theoretical tools presented up to that point. The three theory sections lay out a clear, succinct exposition of practice theory with topics based on the unresolved questions that are thrown up by the ethnographic narratives.

I begin properly with Katia Sussmann, an undergraduate physics student who was in the ensemble. My talks with her were utterly fascinating for the range of reasons she was able to provide for joining the group. This made it clear that the motivations would be many, but what stumped me was the fact that she both shared many characteristics with other members – avid player of music, socially engaged, looking for something fun to do – and expressed others that were quite unique – very retiring, few musical skills, a non-music major, etc. In short, I had asked a general question and I had gotten specific answers.

Thus the first theoretical section deals with what I see as a set of common problems in

ethnomusicology as in ethnography in general: how do we conceive of the relationship between the group and individuals, or as I will deal with it here, what is the relative status of the subject and the social, and given this understanding, what is the appropriate level of generalization? I begin by outlining the problem itself and pointing to common solutions from the field's practitioners. Some, as will be shown, tend more toward in-depth descriptions of individual cases, even individual subjects, while others veer off in the direction of broad generalization. The majority, sensing the problems associated with these tacks, sets course down the middle, including narratives focusing on both subjects and the social. While this solution is certainly more satisfactory than either of the extremes it raises the obvious theoretical (and simultaneously practical) questions: What is then the subject *as opposed* to the social? What is the social if not a composite of individuals? How is the social analyst to deal with incongruities between these two?

Ultimately, my suggestion is that the subject-social dichotomy is fallacious. Much as the mind-body distinction has been shown to be both inaccurate and deleterious for understanding human being, so too, I contend, is the distinction between the individual and the group both wrong and harmful in the course of social science. Subjects have no existence outside their existence as part of a social being just as the social has no superorganic existence beyond the individuals that make it up. Breaking down this distinction at once helps better understand how cases such as Katia's can be made sensible in terms of other knowledge about the ensemble and makes it clear that generalization is perfectly possible without losing our grasp of individuals' particularities.

Next, I turn my gaze inward and present a narrative of my motivations for joining the group. In many ways my story is more typical than that of Katia, thus making it easier for me to make generalizations about people who joined the group, but a couple striking details diverged from others. I think I was the only member with a small child at home to consider when planning the weekly rehearsal and I may have been the only person who attempted to create a reason to take part for a spouse who would have been unhappy spending the evenings home along while the other was off playing music. Lastly, when I lined up my list of reasons for joining, there just seemed to be so many. How was I, in my role as analyst, to deal with this sheer multiplicity of motivations? If I couldn't even figure

out for myself which ones were more important and which less, how would it be possible to determine this in other people? My understanding of the subject and social as one, indivisible entity helped me better place my reasons within the context of roles I shared (or did not share) with others in the group: as an ethnomusicology graduate student, as a musician, as a father, as a spouse, etc. What I lacked was a good way to talk about this locus of the subject and the social.

The second theoretical section provides this language by proposing we look at practices as the most basic form of this subject/social form of human being and activity. Practice theory has gained significant traction since the 1970s and certainly become one of the central theoretical models in the human and social sciences. I stand behind this development and attempt to use the most recent developments of this theory to make it simultaneously clear and useful as an ethnographic toolkit. Many of the questions that vex ethnographers – including how to deal with individuals and groups, how to conceptualize change and stasis, how to deal with variation and improvisation, how to integrate thoughts, habits, the material environment and tools, etc. – all find potentially satisfactory answers in practice theory. While I would not like to go so far as to suggest that practice theory replace all other ways of conceptualizing human being and doing, this introduction of practice theory in its modern form is meant to provide a solid basis for its use both in this thesis and for others' research.

The third ethnographic narrative tells the story of Prof. Adriana Helbig, a recent Columbia PhD who came to teach at UIUC for one academic year and who took part in many (if not *all*) the ethno ensembles, including the Samba Ensemble. Adriana's situation is interesting for how it compares and contrasts with those of my own and Katia Sussmann's. Through the lens of practices as subject/social modes of being and doing it becomes easier to see the various motivations that Adriana had for joining the samba ensemble as related to the roles she plays and analyze her behavior in terms of the practices that those roles engage in. The narrative elaborates upon the function of ethno ensembles in the professional life of ethnomusicologists, while also shedding light on the often-hidden ethical issues raised by such ensembles in general. Her story deepens the understanding of both motivations for joining the ensemble and the utility of practice

theory in general. It ends with a thorough discussion of many possible motivations for joining the Samba Ensemble and others like it, utilizing practice theory to demonstrate how this plurality of views can be conceptualized with a coherent understanding of the question.

The next ethnographic narrative changes gear slightly, presenting Filipe Pereira, a Brazilian graduate student in agribusiness. Filipe was a great musician and an animated friend who was planning on trying his fate as a professional musician immediately after finishing his PhD. This stunning turn of events was, in part, precipitated by Luciana's visit and the Samba Ensemble. In combination with other, earlier experiences of Filipe's, his story provides an example of how intense musical experiences can be personally transformative both in and beyond musical practices themselves. While the toolkit of practice theory developed up to this point in the thesis makes Filipe's subject position more comprehensible, it remains an open question how practice theory can account for such transformative effects.

Thus, the final theoretical section introduces one final distinction – between dispersed and integrative practices – in an attempt to use practice theory to make clear how practices overlap, interact, and influence one another. At their most basic, dispersed practices are more fundamental ones (such as, ways of asking, modes of bodily comportment, forms of social relation) that can be found as elements of many other integrative practices (such as those conventionally viewed as such, like cooking, building, or musicking practices). My claim is that this conceptual method of parsing gross practices themselves gives the social analyst a much more refined and useful tool for understanding how it is that certain realms of experience can act upon others because one can see how a subject's new take on dispersed practices can then simultaneously affect all the other integrative practices of which that particular dispersed practice is also an element. More specifically, in the case of the Samba Ensemble it makes it easier to understand how intense musical experiences can serve as the basis for other experiences outside the musical. Two participants in the samba ensemble in particular – Filipe Pereira and Luciana Prass – make clear how playing samba forever changed their comportment and desires in their everyday life. I claim that the same process often underlies music's ability to be more than a reflection or participant in social

life, but itself a force for change.

The last narrative section is about the ensemble's leader, Luciana Prass. In its large gestures Luciana's story parallels that of Filipe's. For her samba has been a life-changing force and one that has motivated her to try to effect change in others' lives as well. Through her story the transformative power of music becomes palpable and my hope is that practice theory provides a convincing explanation of how this metamorphosis has occurred.

The conclusion inquires into the final question for musicology: to what end the analysis of people making music? The essayist Alain de Botton has eloquently commented on the difficulties of writing plainly, warning, "there is a danger that one will be overlooked, dismissed as simpleminded by those with a tenacious belief that impassable prose is a hallmark of intelligence. (2000:159)" And so it may be, I fear, with simple arguments. Nevertheless, I want to claim that knowing ourselves makes us more aware of our own tacit assumptions and everyday practices, thus, by presenting them to us, we are able to gain explicit knowledge of their effects and, perhaps, rethink our own ways.² Knowing others, on the other hand, makes us more aware of how different worlds can be, showing us the arbitrariness of our customs and giving us the freedom to change them (Rosaldo 1989: 39; 46-48). The immediate aim of this paper is to investigate why people join ethno ensembles like the UIUC Samba Ensemble and to outline an updated form of practice theory as a useful tool for gaining understanding of the world and describing it to ourselves and others. On a larger scale, my hope is that both allow us to lead more considered lives.

² Carol Babiracki gives a concrete ethnomusicological example of this process in her article "What's the Difference? Reflections on Gender and Research in Village India" (in Barz and Cooley, ed. 1997: 128, 132-33). By sometimes taking on a male role in dancing and drumming she made explicit and visible the gendered division of roles in public music making. Like Rosaldo's breakfast ethnography, laying bare the truth of a situation can lead to a renegotiation of the status quo.

CHAPTER 3: KATIA SUSSMANN

Katia met me on the minimalist concrete benches in front of the university's music building. We sat down; I turned on the recorder. Katia is a fascinating character. She's an exceptionally bright junior at the university, studying physics and engineering. Small and mousey, constantly smiling, but seemingly shy, Katia is fully present in everything she does - school or music. At that time I saw her around quite often. She was in the world music course for which I was a teaching assistant, she was in the mbira ensemble for many weeks, and, of course, she was in the samba ensemble. She was not in my discussion sections for the course so I hadn't really spoken with her very much, but her presence was more than noticeable in the mbira ensemble.

The truth is - she says so herself - that she just can't learn the pieces. The pieces are often quite difficult to learn, there being no notation, and the phrases are often confusingly similar to one another. Many of us struggled to learn them. Still, Katia seemed never to get past square one. Often, in fact, she would leave the circle and go sit off to the side, trying to solidify what little she did know, while the rest of us went on. I remember thinking, "What's this girl doing here? Why does she keep showing up?" There were good reasons.

I asked her which ensembles she has joined. In addition to samba and mbira, she had started learning didgeridoo at a friend's house and she also played domra in the Russian Ensemble. She couldn't get into the didgeridoo course, because it was full, but she practiced every chance she got. She said it may be "her instrument." She'd say that about the drums, too. Katia's difficulty with music wasn't only apparent at mbira, but in samba as well. Yes, the volume and numbers drowned out any glaring mistakes, but the eyes didn't lie. Plus, she often looked around - not quite sure what she was supposed to be playing. She claimed that part of the problem may have been the demonstrative form of teaching - there was no sheet music for the rhythms we play, Luciana taught by showing - that she found hard to follow, but whatever the problem she tends to stick with it.

She talked about learning piano and harp in childhood and said that that was also a great challenge for her. She could never learn to tune without an electronic tuner, she could never repeat something just by hearing it. Yet she's always loved music and now has

several musical instruments that she plays on at home: guitar, harmonica, drum sticks for the coffee table, trumpet. She loves to just play around with sounds, all by herself. She's never learned to play with others, she told me, but she really wants to.

What Katia was most involved with, however, is not music. It's civil engineering. She has worked on projects that seek to improve water access and irrigation in Nigeria and was learning the necessary skills to do these projects more effectively. This includes drilling wells, setting up distribution points, building solar energy sources for the pumps, devising irrigation systems, and more. She was obviously passionate about using her skills to benefit others and make a real difference in the world. How does music fit into that?

She told me that after a long day of school and her project activities, just going to samba and banging on something can be very relaxing, very therapeutic. So is music just a diversion, like sports or TV to someone else? She changed the topic. Apparently she dropped out of the University of Oregon – which she attended before the University of Illinois – because of her love of music. She had volunteered at a community music venue that had performances almost every night and she was the only person who knew how to run the lights. If she didn't show up, she told me, the lighting didn't happen. She loved the music so much that her schoolwork fell to the side and she focused her attention on the music venue. "Nothing in life's ever made me as happy as the time where I was just listening to music," she said about that time.

Since she had been at the University of Illinois, however, she said that music played less of a role in her life and she regretted that. She thought back to her first few years of college – at Barnard College and the University of Oregon – and decided that she wanted to make music again. She heard about samba from a friend and decided that it was just the thing. Free, open to everyone, perfect.

Music, she repeated several times, doesn't come easy to her, but neither does physics. I was beginning to better understand the girl sitting off to the side in mbira. In fact when I asked her how she became a physics major she told me that it was because she was simply interested in too many things and so she chose her major because it was the topic she thought she'd be *least* likely to learn on her own. In effect, she chose her major based on what was, for her, the most difficult of her interests. Music seemed to have a similar place.

Only the world music course she was taking gives her a slight respite. That, she said, she can follow and have a lot of fun with. Everything else, from quantum physics to mbira, was a great challenge - but a challenge that she loved.

Then Katia told me that after the second week of the world music course she wrote to the instructor - Adriana Helbig - to ask how she could learn about these musics even better. Prof. Helbig told her about the performance ensembles and Katia thought that learning through doing would be a great opportunity to really internalize the material in the course.

During our interview Katia told me quite a lot about the water project she had participated in in Nigeria the past summer. One thing she said that she had to get used to was the different sense of time the Nigerians there had. More specifically she said that no matter how urgent the foreigners seemed to think the project might be, the Nigerians always took time to celebrate visits from neighboring villages, birthdays, departures, and more with music and ample dancing. She was deeply struck by these experiences. She loved the music and the dancing. She loved the vitality of the activity. She reveled in the earnestness with which they took their celebrations. She seemed to want to say something more.

Katia was obviously a very devoted learner. She had already told me that she had chosen physics because it was so hard and yet she still wanted to master it. With music it was apparently slightly different, but not much. She said over and over that she's not very good at music and my experience with her in a few contexts confirmed this. Mbira became too frustrating for her because she has real difficulty learning through demonstration. It was only with great effort and much extra time with Jessica, another ethnomusicology graduate student and member of the mbira ensemble, that she was eventually able to play *one* of the mbira pieces. In the end this was too much and so she stopped coming. Samba, in contrast, didn't have the same disadvantages. Yes, Luciana taught by demonstration, but the patterns were much shorter (typically only 8 beats per cycle with only one cycle to remember as opposed to 12 beats per cycle with 4 cycles to remember per tune in mbira). Plus, with so many instruments in the samba ensemble no one would ever notice one person playing out of sync. This situation was much more amenable to Katia.

Thus, if she had joined all three of these ensembles - samba, Russian, and mbira - what did she get out of them? How are they different?

She began with samba. "I really love samba class. First off because it's really up-beat and that's how I'm feeling all the time. And also because it's just an amazing group experience. And with the loud drums and the way that Luciana teaches just by pointing to someone and saying "You start playing this and you start playing this" and showing us for a minute the beat it really, really makes you feel so uplifted and really, really ... part of a group. And that really energizing."

Russian Ensemble she said she "loves" because of Prof. Helbig, because she finds the instruments "funny", and because she's interested in the links between the music and socialism. It was in that ensemble that she first had the opportunity to perform music in public and she says that she really enjoys the fact that Prof. Helbig expands upon the historical background of the pieces that they play.

Mbira, she said, was her favorite instrument, but the class was the most frustrating. She had told me earlier that her first experiences with the mbira happened when she borrowed one from a friend and she had the impression that every sound you make sounds good.

Just before we finish she gave me one more reason why she wants to learn music. She said that one of the most important ways to communicate with people is to play music with them. Her goals in life obviously d trying to make a difference in communities with economic and infrastructure challenges and she saw music as one more way to connect with the people she wants to help and cooperate with.

While Katia was amazingly lucid and forthcoming about her interests and the motivations for her various activities, what her story revealed to me was the sheer multiplicity of reasons that underlie our decisions. If the question "why do people join ethno ensembles?" can be answered, then it will be with a laundry list of possible reasons. Katia's list included wanting to regain the joy of earlier listening experiences, the fun of a challenge, desire for the collective experience of group music making, the love of certain sounds by themselves, the relation to university course work, links to friends and

colleagues, historical and political interests, as well as simple relaxation. These are the reasons she gave me in a mere three quarters of an hour.

On the face of it there is nothing particular about this state of affairs. When we talk to people about why they do things, they are usually able to give us answers. What is noteworthy – on both a personal and a social scientific level – is that there seems to be a disconnect between the standard question and the standard answer. The question – "Why did you do that?" – seems to ask for a single reason, while the answer often involves multiple reasons. Even in cases where single reasons are first offered, most subjects are quite willing to admit that other things also played a role. In short, we most often have some idea why we do things, but we are almost hopeless at recognizing *all* the reasons or explaining how a final decision was reached in this multifactorial process. In the course of ethnography, this led me to question how best to go about analyzing and presenting these motivations within the Samba Ensemble. If each person had all this going on inside them, what form of ethnographic representation best does justice to this state of affairs and also respects the stories of the individuals?

CHAPTER 4: BEYOND THE SUBJECT/SOCIAL DICHOTOMY IN ETHNOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION

Ethnographers often face opposing demands. One is the seeming conflict between our desire to create meaningful work by generalizing about the people we work with and our simultaneous obligation to respect the uniqueness of those same individuals. This invariably arises because of incongruities between what is true of the group in general and what is true of each individual in particular. Any full description of either subjects or the social body precludes the other. A second difficulty facing ethnographers is that, in comparison with other social sciences, our “sample sizes” – concerning both time and number – must be frustratingly small if we are to achieve the depth of experiential understanding to which the field currently ascribes. This limitation threatens to render our conclusions, those same ones we want to be meaningful for others, seriously underdetermined. Short of something comparable to Gerhard Kubik’s decades of almost constant work in the field, we seem fated to make our generalizations based on limited time and scope among the people we study. The discipline’s standard research period of circa 12 months with occasional shorter follow-up trips further embeds this in our *modus operandi*.

Fundamentally, these conflicts are based on differing goals and constraints combined within the discipline: the moral, scientific, and practical. Morally we are obliged to treat other humans in a manner we consider just or right; this subject-based understanding of moral obligation thus leads us to demand in our work a respect for the experiences and uniqueness of individuals. To leave individuals out of our narratives – even if it were possible from a scientific and practical standpoint – would “depopulate” our stories in a way simply considered unacceptable. At the same time, ethnomusicology does not see itself as free to follow whatever inspiration may come along as the basis for its scholarly output. Dancing your dissertation is still not an option. Instead the discipline’s self-conception as a human or social science demands that constraints of reason, proof, evidence, and a conformity to the discourse’s rules of genre, argumentation, citation, and terminology be adhered to. In short, even if the understanding of these constraints is somewhat “softer” than in other sciences, ethnomusicology still considers itself a science and science is in the

business of generalization. Finally, the practicalities of finishing a dissertation, finding an academic position, getting tenure, teaching, et al, impose "reasonable" limits on the time and scope of research done in the field. Rare is the ethnographer who can ignore these considerations – as well as ones of spouses and family – in order to conduct research for as many years as it takes.

At issue is the perception that these three constraints cannot coexist harmoniously. Taking up the issues of limited "sample size" and the subject-social dichotomy I want to look briefly at how these constraints have been negotiated in the field to-date, roughly sketching a spectrum of scholars who tend either toward greater generalization or toward a focus on individuals. I insist that our work must remain solidly on the side of generalization, for it is only in this way that our work can have any meaning. Finally I suggest that, by seeing our object (and subjects) of study as practices, the dichotomy can be largely resolved. In turn, interpreting Katia's remarks in this theoretical framework allows me to understand how her various – typical and atypical – motivations arise out of the practices she takes part in.

Looking over the breadth of ethnomusicological literature reveals a spectrum of three theoretical positions in relation to generalization. At the one extreme are those scholars whose works focus intently on the larger trends and generalizations, yet eschew too much detail about the individuals involved in the study. Thomas Turino's work *Music as Social Life* (2008) is but a recent example. The chapters of the book remain largely grounded in fieldwork done by Turino himself – thus following the discipline's standards for "originality" in research – but the emphasis is clearly on the larger issues that these ethnographic experiences are able to highlight. Indeed, even the general themes of the chapters themselves, ranging from participatory and presentational forms of performance, the concepts of cultural cohorts and cultural formations, to the relationships between music making and political movements, are all finally subordinated to what could perhaps be considered the ultimate question of the discipline: why music? Acknowledging the scale of the work Turino writes, "throughout this book I have tried to show how and why music making, dance, and the arts are valuable activities for personal integration and wholeness, which, in turn, is necessary for social and ecological survival. [...] Music making, dancing,

drama, painting, literature, sports, games, and ceremonies, in conjunction with symbolic thinking and dialogue, are universal and necessary because, balanced together, they make us whole. (233)" The result of this kind of study is a brilliant suggestion about how all ethnomusicological inquiry might help us answer the discipline's questions and how that knowledge may aid us in everyday life. At the same time it is also one where the uniqueness and thisness of individuals is clearly subordinated to the goal of generalization.

At the other end of the spectrum stand those scholars who provide very detailed descriptions of individuals within the groups they study and largely eschew the urge to make statements that are not true for all individuals involved. Michelle Kisliuk's engaging study of the BaAka, *Sieze the Dance* (1998), is one such example. While in the introduction Kisliuk states a desire to "tie [the] specifics [of the ethnographic narrative] to larger issues of global politics and critical theory", in fact what Kisliuk has accomplished is a monograph that leads its readers deeply into the personal lives of Kisliuk and her BaAka informants as well as the intricacies of their dances and music making (1998: 13). The result is a rich sense of being there with these people and a detailed understanding the musical performances addressed in the book, yet all of this is left largely in isolation, presented as it unfolds to Kisliuk herself. Certainly, little mention is made of "large issues of global politics or critical theory" or of other musical practices of central Africa, but there is even very little generalization done about the BaAka themselves. Like a vivid still life, *Sieze the Dance* draws us into the utter thisness of Kisliuk's experience with the BaAka while leaving the possibility of its larger meaning untouched.

Of course scholars at both ends of this spectrum of generalization can find reasoned theoretical bases for their respective approaches. Those who tend toward generalization may draw inspiration from theoretical models that span all the way from anthropology's origins through to the height of structuralism. From theories of *Kulturkreise* and functionalism to Levi-Strauss and practice theory, all these approaches openly sought to provide answers about human nature, cultures, or, at least, local communities in ways that synthesized the particular experiences of individuals. On the other hand, anthropology's violent potentials as embodied in phenomena from colonialism to "mere" symbolic violence have led other scholars to react against this universalizing tendency in

generalization (Shostak 1981). For instance Lila Abu-Lughod has written that generalization "as a part of a professional discourse of "objectivity" and expertise [...] is inevitably a language of power (1991: 150)." By using a professional discourse – here, meaning vocabulary, genres, modes of citation, publishing practices, etc. – anthropological writing is divorced from "the languages of everyday life" thus creating "a fundamental separation between the anthropologist and the people being written about that facilitates the construction of anthropological objects as simultaneously different and inferior. (1991: 151)." In response she has advocated for an "ethnography of the particular" in which an intense focus on individuals and their particularity serves as an antidote to a monolithic culture concept or, indeed, any other form of universalizing (1991: 138). In short, scholars at both extremes have reasoned theoretical bases for their approaches.

Still, a reasoned approach may ultimately not stand up to closer scrutiny and I would suggest that is here the case. Bruce Knaft, himself a scholar with a broad overview of anthropological theory, has written:

"Epistemological relativism (which is often commendable) should not devolve into ontological relativism, in which existence itself becomes relative and attempts at systemic analysis become meaningless. Granting a relativity of perspective should not deter us from trying to understand the external world as clearly as we can. To do otherwise, to paraphrase Bateson (1972: 455), is not only to mistake the map for the territory but to preclude the possibility of mapmaking altogether.

While ultimate knowledge of others' experience or actions (or even their existence) is impossible, greater or lesser approximations of this otherness are possible; indeed, they provide the basis of all social living. Absolute impossibilities should not blind us to pragmatic possibilities for comprehension, translation, and representations across the intersubjective divide. (Knaft 1996: 46-7)"

More straightforwardly, this means that while we should remain skeptical of the work done by generalization, at least within the discourse of science, we have no other choice. "Generalization is not intrinsically bad; it only becomes essentialist when it harbors a stigmatizing edge that is pernicious or excessive in its evaluations. The point is not to avoid generalizations but to use them heuristically—not to pretend that they mirror the

complexity of underlying variations. This does not preclude refinement but rather begs for it by way of detailed, smaller-scale studies. (1996: 289)"

The works of both Kisliuk and Turino are relative rarities, with the majority of scholars choosing to take a middle ground that combines foci on the individuals encountered during fieldwork and the posited social group described in the academic text, but the problem remains: how to deal both theoretically and practically with the seeming conflict between subjects and the social. Whether implicitly or explicitly, most scholars wrestle with their attempts to combine analysis of these two entities into a coherent and non-contradictory ethnographic narrative. By way of example, there was for a period of many years – from the 70s through the 90s – one prominent approach in ethnomusicology that focused on the supposition that smaller-scale phenomena could be taken as representative, iconic, or synecdochic (the terminology varied) of larger-scale phenomena (Turino 1989, Becker and Becker 1981, Feld 1988). Sensing an opening to make the contributions of ethnomusicology more relevant within the social sciences, musical activity was presented as a microcosm of larger social structures; musicking could be taken as a window onto a "culture". Eventually the promises of this strategy were abandoned because there were simply too many examples of practices that did not fit the theory, thus leading to the current middle ground that combines narratives of individuals with those of the social group. Veit Erlmann, summing up this theoretical landscape at the outset of his *Nightsong* (1996), makes a plea that this balance be maintained and not cast off in the hopes of avoiding its imperfections. "For if performances are described in nothing else but their thisness, a new kind of empiricist objectivism is bound to result which the critique of holistic representation in fact sought to eliminate in the first place. Thus if the study of performance as social practice is to be of any value, the "hopping back and forth between the whole conceived through the part that actualize it and the parts conceived through the whole that motivates them" will remain central to the ethnographic project (Geertz 1983, 69; Erlmann 1996: 16-17)." This is the situation that I claim the discipline largely finds itself in: stuck in the dichotomy of the part and the whole, the subject and the social and lacking a well-theorized way of understanding how these interact. These were precisely the problems I had trying to deal with Katia's comments about the Samba Ensemble.

My major claim in this theoretical section is that this dichotomy between subjects and the social – on an ontological level – is illusory. Subjects have no existence separable from their being in the social and, at the same time, the social has no superorganic existence separable from its being (at least partly) in subjects. If we transfer our object of study from subjects and social groups to a third term – practices – that more accurately incorporates the mutually constitutive way that human being is experienced and lived, then many of the difficulties posed by the dichotomy disappear.³ The problem remains, however, that demonstrating this is much more difficult than simply stating that a change of paradigm will make dilemma go away.

In fact, much of 20th century philosophy (not to mention anthropology and sociology) could be considered an attempt to address this growing realization. Most specifically it is Martin Heidegger whose *Being and Time* (1927) tries to overcome the dominance of a Cartesian *cogito*-centered philosophy by showing how our way of being (*Sein*) is always Being-in-the-world, that is always a mode of being in which the subject is in the social, not separate from it. Heidegger's lengthy task in *Being and Time* is to demonstrate the numerous ways in which this experiential truth of being is even more fundamental than the subject-oriented form of experience that has dominated philosophical (and other) discourse at least since Descartes. The length and complexity of *Being and Time* should hint that this is no easy affair and certainly not one that can be recounted here. In my opinion, the ultimate arbiter of whether to use practices as the object of ethnographic research will be the utility thereof. In effect, it doesn't matter whether practices are more fundamental ontologically or not, only whether they are more useful. Nonetheless, at the level of human experience I think that they have been shown to be the base of our fundamental ontology, and therefore I wish to briefly present two arguments to that effect – one dealing with

³ I'm trying here to neither confuse the situation, nor to cover over subjects that might be raised in the reader's mind. What I want to make clear is a distinction of several levels between the way the world is experienced by people and what might be a demonstrable fact. It is true that people generally talk about individuals and groups. To that extent they will also experience the world in that way. They will experience things as being true of themselves as individuals or of groups. It is also, of course, true that the physical world could be described from multiple perspectives: one that describes humans as billions of separate individuals or one that describes them as a single species or any number of other levels in between. The claim I'm trying to make here is in between these two. People may *talk* about individuals and groups – and we shouldn't ignore that discourse – but experience is more fundamentally based in a mode between the individual and the social.

being as part of a teleologically-oriented referential totality and another dealing with being in language.

A 'web of culture' may be a memorable turn of phrase, but it does little to improve our conception of how being experiences the world, except to say it's all connected. Referential totality (*Verweisungsganzheit*) is the term Heidegger uses to explicate how being is structured, first, according to the relations between everything in experience and, second, according to hierarchies of purpose, or self-understandings. With other structuralisms this theory of meaning shares an emphasis on relations over substance: meaning does not inhere in objects, words, melodies or situations, but exists in the networks that are formed by the contents of experience. However, it differs starkly from Levi-Straussian structuralism in insisting that these elements are not innately inscribed in the human brain, just as it differs from Bourdieu's concept of relational thinking in that relationality is not reduced to binary pairs (cf. Swartz 1997: 61-64). Meaning is potentially affected by any other content of experience, thus relations and references are massively multiple.⁴

At the same time both high structuralism and post-modernism fail to recognize that meaning is not based on relationality alone, it is also – as Wittgenstein and Peirce too enjoin – based on use and use, in turn, on self-understanding. A hammer, to take Heidegger's favorite example, cannot be usefully described as a wooden stick of a certain length with a blob of metal attached at the end; this would be a substantive description – of an object with properties. Instead, a hammer is, for ethnographic purposes, *for hammering*. Hammering constitutes its use and thus its being for humans. Hammering, in turn, only makes sense in relation to the totality of other tools in which it is always involved: nails and wood, saws and chisels, etc. The hammer is for hammering nails in order to fasten together pieces of wood. Securing pieces of wood together in this way is meaningful in the totality of house building, although only in areas where houses are not built of stone or brick. Ultimately, these purposes are oriented towards a specific self-understanding, a way of being that, in this case, only makes sense for sedentary peoples as a method of sheltering. For nomadic peoples hammering would have a different meaning,

⁴ The term 'totality' is meant to convey this experience of meaning in which everything known to an individual is or can be called upon to bear on any given situation. There is no singular totality, but all experience is of a totality.

because of its different place among their proximate purposes and self-understanding. One could think, for instance, of what a hammer is in a nomadic culture in which horses must be shod or in a culture of blacksmiths, and so on. In each of these cases what is learned is that a physical description of an object not only floods us with information that is largely irrelevant to understanding what the object really is in human experience, because we are diverted from investigating its use, but also that each "individual" object, such as a hammer, is really only meaningful – which is the same thing as saying that it only exists – within the referential totality to which it belongs.

For another example, the computer sitting before me could be described in great detail according to its substance and properties. If I knew more about electronics, engineering, chemistry, and so on I could list and describe all the materials it is made of, give precise values for its properties, and draw up schemata that would demonstrate the places of all its parts. However, if Heidegger's argument is convincing, this description would do very little to get at the meaning this computer has for me. It would merely furnish a description true of all such computers, regardless of how they are used and by whom. Instead, we should examine its use, by whom, and for what ultimate purposes. As a scholar I use my computer for writing, storing notes, doing research, and staying in contact with colleagues abroad. As a father I use it to store pictures of my family and video-telephone with friends and family abroad. As a concerned citizen (read: procrastinator) I use my computer to stay current on world events and other issues that engage me. And while these few sentences merely provide a cursory list of the uses I have for my computer, they go much further towards understanding what it means *for me* than a detailed substantive description many hundreds of pages long. And more than this it also draws us immediately to my self-understanding, into everything that is involved in who I am: a scholar, father, and media consumer.

The same thing, I want to argue, is true for subjects as it is for objects: being subsists only within a referential totality organized toward a set of goals and roles. Heidegger puts it this way:

Dasein itself, ultimately the beings which we call men, are possible in their being only because there is a world.... Dasein exhibits itself as a being *which is in its world but at the same time by virtue of the world which it is*. Here we find a peculiar union of being in the world with the being of Dasein which itself can be made comprehensible only insofar as that which here stands in this union. (Heidegger

But we can state this more simply by saying that, on the one hand, *who we are* cannot be reduced to the individual because integral aspects of our being are *in the world* – in our children, in our jobs, in our tools, in our loved ones, in our books, in our environments, in the languages we speak, and in the practices that we carry out. It would be meaningless, for instance, to call myself a graduate student if I lacked books, journals, a university, professors, other students, and so on. Who I am *as a graduate student* is not contained even largely within myself as subject, but *in the world* that surrounds me.

Of course this is not a simple static world in which the subject is a powerless agent. We are handed a pre-interpreted world dependent upon the practices and arrangements of others' life experiences (past). However, at the same time we are always in the process of re-interpreting precisely those hand-me-downs based on our own past experience, current concerns, future plans, or just plain errors in interpretation (present). These, finally, further affect the practices and arrangements that constitute the being of the world of ourselves and others (future). To remove these worldly aspects of meaningful human existence, "does not do justice to our experience, [because] it forces us to describe our experience in awkward ways, and places the emphasis in our philosophical inquiries on abstract concerns and considerations remote from our everyday lives. (Blattner 2006: 48)"

This focus on being-in-the-world is not meant, however, to totally remove subjects from our study; it is plain that individuals are central carriers and agents of practices. Precisely those components of practices that make them meaningful – practical understanding, rules, ends, and emotions – are carried by and executed by individuals. Thus practices as conceived of here portray our experience of the world as reducible neither to individual experience nor to social phenomena. The job of the ethnographer is therefore not to decide between a false either/or, but to investigate how these ways of being are articulated with one another in practices.

Again, while I hope that the examples of referential totality and language provide insight into understanding why being-in-the-world is more fundamental ontologically than a subjective mode of being, my decision to use practices as an object of ethnography beyond the subject-social dichotomy is based on utility. The immediate advantages are

quite apparent and one powerful example is that this understanding of practice allows the researcher to depend more confidently on a limited 'sample size' precisely because one knows that whatever is encountered can only be but a set of entry points into a larger practice.

As I mentioned earlier, it is something of an open secret that fieldwork in ethnomusicology is often based on close interaction with a small number of individuals. Books with expansive titles such as *Sound of Africa!*, *Mande Music*, and *Capoeira, Samba, Candomble* turn out to be generalizations drawn primarily from a small group of participants (Meintjes 2003, Charry 2000, Pinto 1991). Such limited 'sample sizes' seem to make generalizations difficult, even if we admit that the process of drawing conclusions in interpretive fields is different from those that rely on strictly quantifiable data. Nonetheless, "if it is accepted that generalization from interpretive data is a legitimate goal, then presumably the interpretivist needs a sample that will reflect the relevant characteristics to the wider group to which she wishes to generalise. (Williams 2000: 216)" While I agree, my claim is, first, that this *can* be done effectively with a small number of participants given this ontology of practice. If meaning is only from within a referential totality composed of practices, individuals' experiences of any node will light up connections within the network that is common to many others. The worldliness of practices means that in ethnography one isn't comparing isolated individuals and attempting to see what similarities they have, but that one is opening horizons onto a shared world of meaning. Larger samples will never invalidate previous indications, but merely add unforeseen nuances, as long as one is cognizant of the scope of the practice at hand. The theoretical model outlined above allows the ethnographer to maintain that this picture only makes sense in so far as it utilizes realities of a common world: it might be personal, but it is also intrinsically social. The ability to work safely with small groups of individuals as an entry point to shared practices is a great advantage of the ontology.

Furthermore, although subject-oriented ethnography is often touted as morally superior because of its respect for individuals' uniqueness, it strikes me that a stronger argument can be made the social must remain squarely in view of all ethnography if it is going to be a relevant endeavor, for it is this level of analysis that allows us to hone in on the power

dynamics within a social order (Sewell 2005: 143-51). In effect, subject-oriented ethnography could be accused of missing the forest for the trees. In this sense I would also criticize subject-centered ethnographies that feign isolation from larger social forces. Any theoretical stance that argues against the ontology of the social in favor of “empowering the agent,” as it is often stated, effectively renders itself impotent against precisely those orders that wield the greatest power (Ortner 2006: 129-53). My task has been to show that, because the subject and the social are mutually constitutive, it is possible to access the latter even from a limited number of subject positions and that, further, this understanding of practices helps us overcome the common ethnographic disparities between individual experiences and social phenomena. The choices posed between phenomenological and structural, interpretivist and positivist, subject-oriented and social-oriented modes of analysis are false ones (Sewell 2005: 319-372). The world is known and must be known in both ways. By conceiving of practices as nexuses of activity which are reducible *neither* to individuals *nor* to social phenomena, but nodes of articulation between these modes of experience I claim we, as ethnographers, can provide a picture of the world that is meaningful, that engages our experiences of it, and that respects the centrality of humans in our concern.

With this conception in place it is possible to finally return to the ensemble itself. In Katia's case, analyzing how she fits into the various motivations for joining the Samba Ensemble meant that I needed to expand the network of practices that intersect with the ensemble itself. What was required was not dichotomous or binary thinking, but relational thinking. The ensemble was a practice itself, but the members also brought their own practices with them and performed them simultaneously. For Katia this included practices of the self that allowed for relaxation, themselves related to her work-load in physics. It included practices of socialization related to friends from campus as well as to her desire to communicate with those she works with in Africa. It included a practice of self-discovery that drove her to try her hand all manner of activities regardless of her proficiency in them. It was not that any of what Katia told me was consistent with or inconsistent with other members of the ensemble, but merely that the network of practices that intersect in the Samba Ensemble needed to be expanded and investigated, with certain ones placed more

proximally and others more distally. This greatly aided me in understanding my own motivations for joining the ensemble and worked toward creating a comprehensive view of why people take part in such ensembles.

CHAPTER 5: MYSELF

I first heard about the samba school at the mbira ensemble meeting and was immediately excited about the idea. From a musical standpoint I'm multiply interested in Afro-Brazilian musics. To begin with, as someone who plays at jazz drums, I'm fascinated with the interwoven textures of the African-diasporic musics and saw learning samba as one way to deepen that field of understanding. Due to the amount of work required in our graduate program, playing the drums has fallen a bit by the wayside, so the ensemble was a way to get some sticks back in my hands. Furthermore, as a musicology student at the Humboldt University in Berlin from 2005 to 2007 I had the opportunity to take courses with the Brazilian ethnomusicologist Prof. Tiago de Oliveira Pinto on his areas of focus: Bahian capoeira, samba de roda, and candomblé. Then, in March 2007, members of a course Tiago co-taught with an African literature scholar, Dr. Ineke Pfaff-Rhienberger, took a three-week trip to northeastern Brazil to take part in a conference on African-Brazilian cultural exchange and to visit the areas where Tiago does much of his research. Having learned and experienced so much of Afro-Brazilian musics, I was multiply primed to take part in the samba ensemble.

However, as I hinted in the introductory section, my initial thoughts fell to my family. I wanted very badly to take part in the ensemble, but knew that if I suggested doing it alone, my wife Nikolina, who as a Berlin transplant doesn't exactly love living in Urbana/Champaign, would protest that I already "get to do all the fun things." She has always loved bossa nova and taken several Latin dance courses, plus, since we were trying to expose our daughter Isabel to as much music as possible, I thought about including them in the ensemble. I thought it would fit perfectly if we could just adjust Izzy's sleep schedule to the late hour. (She was only 22 months old at the time.) Before we left mbira for the evening I asked Tom if it would be o.k. to bring Niki and Izzy and he agreed. On the walk home from ensemble my mind raced to figure out how this could all be arranged and how to convince Niki to have Izzy out so late. Maybe we could leave an hour earlier? Maybe, if Izzy couldn't come, we'll need to find a baby-sitter? Will Niki be as excited about the idea as

I am?

In the end, Niki came to several meetings and played tamborim, while Izzy stayed at home because of the volume level. Niki found it interesting, but not overly exciting. She had expected our samba mestre Luciana to provide more explanation about the rhythms and what we were doing, to learn more about the place of samba in Brazilian musical life, and, perhaps, for there to be more emphasis on body movement. Finally, given that she was in the front line and I was near the back of the ensemble, she didn't feel like we were doing something together. I had tried to sell her on the idea that the ensemble would be a chance to get out once a week and do that; she felt more isolated up front. That, in combination with the expense of the baby-sitter, led her to stop eventually. Thus, one strong personal reason for participating in the ensemble fell away.

Professional considerations also played into my decision. Firstly, given my respect for Prof. Turino as a mentor, I wanted to show my willingness to make the ensemble a success for him and for Luciana. Even at the mbira session it was obvious that he wanted the graduate students to make Luciana feel welcome here and I thought this was one way to do my part. To boot, I needed to find a topic for the ethnography class. As part of our practical seminar on ethnomusicological ethnography we were required to choose a "field site" here in town to study for the semester. This research is one result of that fieldwork. Again with thoughts to my family, I saw participating in the samba ensemble as a way to kill several birds with one stone; the ethnography work was just one of them.

In sum, I fear that the multiplicity of my reasons for taking part in the ensemble may only lay bare the violent simplification that has been done upon the other participants presented here. Just because the issues listed here are ones conscious to me doesn't mean that they would be easily accessible to a third-party, such as an ethnographer. Observable doesn't mean easily so; subconscious fears and desires or privately-held religious or spiritual beliefs may be kept from the ethnographer. What my answers do reveal is how the decision to take part in the ensemble fits into the various roles I play in my life: as a graduate student, as a father, as a husband, and as a musician. Expectations and desires from each of the practices played into my behavior and my role was to negotiate these conflicts. I have tried to demonstrate the temporal element of my own justifications, showing which ones

were spontaneous, which later came into relief, and leaving open to conjecture which ones may just be post-hoc rationalizations. Still, my intent has been to explicate my personal motivations, which certainly colored my perception of the events, and to suggest that the straightforward narratives given of the others belie their true complexity.

For the ethnographic situation it suggests that, even in instances where we feel relatively secure about some explanation, we should remain open to the possibility that some other vital reason has been left uncovered or unrevealed. Healthy skepticism needn't lead one to completely question a set of causes or reasons, but merely underline their almost certain underdetermination. Nonetheless, what my realizations about practices as the intersection of subjects and social entities provided me with was a way to view these seemingly conflicting and overlapping motivations as simpler expressions of the many roles I play. As with Katia, some of these practices would end up being much more central to the core practice of the ensemble, such as being a musicology graduate student or being a musician, while others, such as being a father or a wife, were less central to the network of practices. What I had gained was a clear way to think past the dichotomy of the subject and the social to place all the elements and experiences within a graduated field of practices and begin to assess their relative significance. What I still lacked, however, was a more precise way of thinking about what practices are.

CHAPTER 6: PRACTICE THEORY INTRODUCED

One inevitable result of extended inquiry into any human activity is a certain wonder heavily laced with befuddlement. Specialists do often talk in incomprehensible language because they fail to empathize with their readers sufficiently, but it is also the result of seeing the world differently, as more nuanced and complicated than everyday speech admits. The entomologist cringes every time someone refers to spiders as insects just as the anthropologist raises an eyebrow at the indiscriminate use of ‘culture.’ So it is that musicology’s object of study – ‘music’ – has over time has become more nuanced and multifaceted.

At the turn of the last century the discipline concerned itself primarily with musical sound. German missionaries were sent off with Edison gramophones and wax cylinders to record whatever ‘primitive’ musics they happened upon. Then delivered back to the University of Berlin, Carl Stumpf – one of ethnomusicology’s founding fathers – analyzed the recordings for clues into the ‘universals’ of musical scales. Further into the century ethnomusicology aligned itself with anthropology, resulting in a strong influence of functionalist thinking. This turn led scholars such as Alan Merriam to see music as one domain of a holistic culture, each part of which fulfilled some social use, be it maintaining social cohesion, aesthetic enjoyment, or communication with the supernatural (Merriam, 1964: 209-227). Developments in the latter half of the 20th century have expanded our understanding of music even further. Starting in the late 1970s substantial work has been done to reveal how metaphorical understandings of music shape its roles in society, highlighting for instance music as commodity, music as healing, music as social action, music as cultural capital (Zemp 1978, Becker and Becker 1981, Feld 1984, Buchanan 1995, Rice 2003). Other work has elaborated on the embodiment of music, showing the interdependence of sound and the body (Blacking 1977, McClary 1991, Farnell 1999). Major work was done to illustrate the role music plays in the representation and contestation of identity (Monson 1996, Buchanan 2006, Mendoza 2008). Lastly, primarily since the 1980s significant insight has been gained into how music functions as a semiotic

system (Turino 1999, Monelle 2000, Tarasti 2002). In a fairly straightforward humanistic manner, I interpret this elaboration of subtle knowledge as nothing less than the gradual explicit disclosure of musical being and activity to its own understanding practitioners. The aspects of music that have entered the discourse over the last 120 years were always there in musical experience and musical understanding; it was simply through a reflexive musicology that they came to the fore, making our conception of music more inclusive, but also more complex (Bohlman 1992; Kubik 2000).

This more nuanced and multifaceted conception of musics and ways of knowing them is both a blessing and a curse. Certainly our understanding of music has greatly benefited from our engagement with the theoretical concerns of other disciplines. The debates in anthropology have been the main source, but those of cultural studies, sociology, economics, literary criticism, psychology, gender and performance studies have also had a meaningful impact. This has undoubtedly led to a greater plurality of voices and a larger range of perspectives on music in human life. The unfortunate result, however, is that this has also led us to a point where scholars from the same discipline often have difficulty speaking with one another because of their differing theoretical allegiances and the lack of clarity in these same theoretical worlds.

People can only speak to one another to the extent that they have common vocabularies. This wealth of possibilities has forced more and more researchers into conversations with themselves. Gramsci scholars can talk about hegemony and ideology, Peirce scholars about rhematic icons and final interpretants, Heidegger scholars about *Dasein* and being-in-the-world, Deleuze scholars about rhizomes and BWOs, but their words (and thus works) often fall on deaf ears.⁵ On the other hand, *everyone* talks about cultures, practices, diasporas, subjects, lifeways, and experiences without clearly defining what they mean. What I see as the greatest contemporary challenge in musicology is to find a common conceptual framework and vocabulary that stand up to higher standards of definitional rigor than are currently used. Such a framework must be possessed of many virtues at once. It must encompass the major theoretical and practical insights contained in

⁵ This was made quite poignant at a discussion after a conference paper by Prof. Turino when one prominent ethnomusicologist asked with a sense of frustration in her voice, “Do we have to use Peircian terminology?”

a multiplicity of other frameworks, it must focus on tangible experience and describable phenomena, and it must be practicable in fieldwork. The major claim of this paper is that the contemporary formulation of practice theory, as outlined here, could vie for such a position and that it is worthwhile that this be clearly articulated.

What Are Practices?

As an initial account, practices are collective ways of doing things based upon shared understandings, consisting of mind/body repertoires, and performed with and in non-human artifacts such as tools, built environments, and sites of performance. Practice theory traces its philosophical roots primarily to the late works of Ludwig Wittgenstein (*Philosophical Investigations*, *On Certainty*, *Blue and Brown Books*) and early works of Martin Heidegger (*Being and Time*) (cf. Reckwitz 2002: 250). In contrast to their philosophical and sociological contemporaries, both philosophers radically challenged Western thinkers of the previous two millennia by redirecting attention away from speculation about that to which we have no direct access (metaphysics) and turning it toward the everyday world we inhabit (Guignon 1990 *passim*). Wittgenstein pithily remarked, "Don't think, but look!" (2001[1953]: § 66) while Heidegger's version was, "To the things themselves!" (2001[1927]: 27). Of course, the effects of their collective work are still underway – think of how often we have to insist on the flaws of Cartesian dualism or of the centrality of the social's material dimension – still, a few perceptive thinkers have taken up their ideas in earnest and applied them outside philosophy. Practice theorists are among them.

In the realm of social theory – sociology, history, anthropology – practice theory came to prominence in the 1960s and 70s with the likes of, among others, Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, and Michel de Certeau. Launched from within sociology this group of writers forwarded practices as an alternative to the suspect 'society' and 'culture' that formed the ontological objects of study theretofore. The grounds for this critical stance are far too numerous to detail here, but it is fair to say that the Marx-inspired humanist debates of the time were their collective driving force. Out of both theoretical frustration with the metaphysics of social theory and a 'real-life' frustration with the field's impotence to lay bare the mechanisms of social repression, practice theory brought the

promise of 'getting down to work' by theorizing subjects and the social in tangible, yet humanist, terms (Swartz 1997: 287-295).

The initial spark of the 60s and 70s has lit a fire that continues on until today. Contemporary formulations of practice theory are very much a continuation of and refinement upon the important work of this first flourishing. Conducted mainly by a small cluster of sociologists and philosophers – foremost among them Theodore Schatzki and Andreas Reckwitz – this growing body of thought is systematically working through its immediate sociological and more distant philosophical predecessors, all the while incorporating insights from other, more current, theoretical veins – phenomenology, science studies, gender studies, systems theory, etc. signaling, as one book title spells out, a “*Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*” (cf. Schatzki, Knorr Cetina, and von Savigny 2001). Although the differences between practice theorists are, of course, manifold, the central claim is unified: *the social can be reduced neither to individuals nor to collectives; it is located in practices.*

Understanding where practice theory fits into other social theories requires a brief explanation. As a way of roughly sketching the terrain it is possible to classify social theories according to how they conceive of the social and explain action. Before culturalist social theories became dominant the terrain was divided between those who ascribed to *homo economicus* and those to *homo sociologicus*. In broad brushstrokes, *homo economicus*, with its roots in Scottish utilitarianism and reaching into today's classical economics and rational choice theory, posits that actions are best explained by identifying the explicit goals and interests of individual actors. Say, a decision to get married is made *because* the people love each other and think that spending their lives together would, on balance, be preferable to spending them apart. Social order is constituted by the sum of individual acts; single actions by actors. Order itself is equated with the "market" of interests. *Homo sociologicus*, on the other hand, with roots in Durkheim and Parsons, posits that actions are best explained by recourse to a set of social norms, expectations, 'oughts' that individuals follow. Here, the couple gets married *because* it is expected of them by their relatives, friends, age group, etc. "Social order is then guaranteed by a normative consensus. (Reckwitz 2002: 245)" The objects of study, then, are the normative structures that

determine action.

Beyond *homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus* are those theories of the social which recognize the work done by goal-oriented and norm-oriented explanations, but which insist that they both miss the base layer of shared cultural knowledge and know-how. In essence each of the three theory types represents an explication of the silent assumptions of its predecessor (Reckwitz 2000: 142-147). The goal-oriented theory largely formalizes a common sense understanding of people's actions: they have goals they want to achieve and their decisions to do something are based upon their desires to reach said goals. The norm-oriented theory lays bare the fact that these goals are often not the conscious choice of rational actors, but are imposed on the individual by the expectations of society. Further developments of *homo sociologicus* show how these norms are largely internalized as personal values and desires.

In contrast, the newness of the cultural theories consists in explaining and understanding actions by reconstructing the symbolic [read: semiotic] structures of knowledge which enable and constrain the agents to interpret the world according to certain forms, and to behave in corresponding ways. Social order then does not appear as a product of compliance of mutual normative expectations, but embedded in collective cognitive and symbolic structures, in a 'shared knowledge' which enables a socially shared way of ascribing meaning to the world. From the point of view of cultural theory, the seemingly opposed classical figures of the *homo economicus* and *homo sociologicus* share a common 'blind spot': They both dismiss the implicit, tacit or unconscious layer of knowledge which enables a symbolic organization of reality. (Reckwitz 2002: 245-6)

In sum, the cultural theories maintain that seeking goals and following norms presupposes an enormous wealth of knowledges that make the world meaningful to begin with. This includes, but is certainly not limited to, spoken languages, modes of knowing, body languages, practical know-how, the contents of the world and the properties ascribed to it, all of which could be referred to as the semiotic organization of reality. In this view, explaining why the couple gets married would involve describing a large set of understandings – of subjects, of class, of meaningful ways of living, etc. – that would serve as the background *against which* getting married would only make sense. Cultural theories demonstrate that it is not over reality that culture is laid, but that via culture reality comes to exist meaningfully. This basic understanding is shared by the various forms of culturalism: mentalism, textualism, intersubjectivism, and practice theory. Where they

differ, in turn, is in their location of these structures of knowledge and thus where they are to be sought by the ethnographer. Thus, while the following outline of the three other forms of culturalism may be common knowledge of most readers, I include them precisely because I am convinced that it is necessary to clearly understand what practice theory does (by understanding what it *doesn't do*) and to precisely formulate what is meant by a practice.

Culturalist mentalism locates the social in the human mind. The structures which explain action and which are the object of social inquiry are, according to this culturalist theory, ultimately mental structures. Mentalism, however, has two divergent subgroups itself: *objectivist* mentalism, most prominently forwarded by Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic theories and Claude Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology and *subjectivist* mentalism, ala Alfred Schütz and Edmund Husserl. Objectivist mentalism maintains that human behavior is caused by the unconscious structure of the mind, which are presumed to be universal. This makes these structures the ultimate object of social inquiry and essentially equates the social with the psychological. The social is the mental. Modern heirs to this theory of explanation can be found in cognitive psychology and cognitive linguistics such as Noam Chomsky's, and it seems clear that there is at least some truth to existence of such universal cognitive structures. Subjectivist mentalism, on the other hand, is based on Husserl's insight that the mental is characterized by intentionality, not in the sense of having a goal or explicit intention, but in the sense of being 'of' or 'about' something (Cerbone 2006: 11-21). Thus, for subjectivist mentalism the social is not located in the unconscious, but in the intentional acts of consciousness. These structures are (1) not universal, but vary from 'life-world' to 'life-world' and (2) they cannot be deduced from observation of behavior or the analysis of texts and artifacts. Instead, the methodology of investigation required by this pre-Heideggerian form of phenomenology requires the analysis of subjective experiences of the world. Actions would be described by reconstructing the sequence of intentional acts that lead up to some behavior. Social order is equated with the structures of an idiosyncratic life-world or culture, in the pluralizable sense. For both kinds of culturalist mentalism the mind is the inner locus of culture and the social, which “causes” the outward acts of behavior.

Culturalist textualism opposes mentalism by locating the social not in the interior

of the subject but in the exterior world - in signs, communication, texts, symbols, discourse, etc. Textualism also has three distinct strands. The first, epitomized by Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1972 [1969]), attempts to reverse the structure of causality between the mind and structures of meaning, arguing that the social is to be located not in subjects, but in discourse. It is discourse that defines subjects, not the mental structures of subjects that define discourse. The second strand is that of Clifford Geertz's symbolic anthropology in which culture is treated like a text to be read and interpreted in the manner of hermeneutics. Here again the subject is inextricably involved in cultural process/structure, but so is the materiality of culture as behavior, artifacts, symbols, and knowledge. The goal of ethnography in Geertz's eyes is a 'thick description' of this culture-as-text which transcends the subjective reality of individual participants (Silverman 1990: 121-159). Niklas Luhmann's systems theory, extremely influential in Europe and largely unknown in America, is a third kind of culturalist textualism, heavily influenced by semiotics, phenomenology, and the theory of autopoietic systems (Luhmann 1997). According to Luhmann it is communication itself which observes, which "interprets [the world] according to certain systems of difference (Reckwitz 2002b: 249)." Thus it is in systems of communications that the social is to be found. What links all three strands of culturalist textualism is (1) the strictly anti-mentalist attitude which seeks to locate the social beyond the subject and (2) the emphasis on the materiality of the social in discourse, texts, artifacts, and media.

Culturalist intersubjectivism places the social in the semiotic interactions between subjects. The intersubjective structure of semiosis, which ensures the success of signs, is said to reside not in individuals' minds nor in a completely exterior world of texts, but in the interaction itself. "Sociality can be nowhere other than in a constellation of symbolic interactions between agents. (Reckwitz 2002: 249)." Epitomized by Jürgen Habermas' 'theory of communication', intersubjectivism bears a resemblance to *homo sociologicus* with a linguistic bent. Meaning is, in this view, objectively determined, but internalized and executed by individual subjects (Cooke 2003: 282-284). This provides the last of the culturalist theories against which practice theory can be understood.

Practice theory remains solidly within the realm of culturalist theory in insisting

that reality exists to the extent that there is a shared semiotic structure manifested in languages, codes, material arrangements, objects and properties, etc. This is the layer of base knowledge and know-how that undergirds the goals and norms that are higher in our focal awareness of social interaction. What distinguishes it from other culturalist theories is the conception that this structure consists of practices, understood as “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understandings. (Schatzki 2001: 2)”

A 'practice' (Praktik) is a routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge. A practice – a way of cooking, of consuming, of working, of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. – forms so to speak a 'block' whose existence necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements. Likewise, a practice represents a pattern which can be filled out by a multitude of single and often unique actions reproducing the practice (a certain way of consuming goods can be filled out by plenty of actual acts of consumption). The single individual – as a bodily and mental agent – then acts as the 'carrier' (Träger) of a practice – and, in fact, of many different practices which need not be coordinated with one another. Thus, she or he is not only a carrier of patterns of bodily behaviour, but also of certain routinized ways to understanding, knowing how and desiring. These conventionalized 'mental' activities of understanding, knowing how and desiring are necessary elements and qualities of a practice in which the single individual participates, not qualities of the individual. (Reckwitz 2002: 249-50)

In sum, practice theory is a culturalist theory of the social which (1) locates the social in mind/body habits that (2) are performed on a background of shared knowledge and which (3) take place in a semiotically constructed space, most often (4) with the use of material artifacts. All of these elements are considered part of a practice and none is secondary or inessential; the social and the subject are thereby *both* constituted in practices and neither is reducible to the other.

Why practice theory?

In order to fulfill my own plea for theoretical clarity I wish to elucidate *why* it makes sense to use practice theory given the range of theoretical alternatives available today. What I present here are – in my judgment – the five most pressing reasons to favor the use of practice theory in ethnography: its practicability, focus on materiality, anti-mentalism, rejection of subject/social dichotomy, an emphasis of process, dynamism, and agency, and

a highlighting of the background knowledge necessary to execute any said practice.

1. Practicability

Practice theory conceptualizes practices as largely observable phenomena. Partly this insistence is due to the philosophical untenability of the metaphysical claims other theories make. Certainly the rational goals of *homo economicus* and the norms of *homo sociologicus* are not open for viewing, but the same is also true of many other constructs such as Lévi-Strass' *structure*, Foucault's *discourse*, Bourdieu's *habitus*, and Schütz's *lifeworld*. It also reflects the practical orientation of practice theorists. The difficulties of dealing with the constructs of other theories and the intuition that we should return "to the things themselves" is a major impetus driving practice theory. Material arrangements, tools, artifacts, bodily motions, gestures, habits, spatio-temporal events make up the majority of practices and this makes them (more) easily observable and useful as an tool in ethnography.

2. Focus on Materiality

Andreas Reckwitz writes, "not only human beings participate in practices, but also non-human artefacts form components of practices. The things handled in a social practice must be treated as necessary components for a practice to be "practiced". In fact, one can say that both the human bodies/minds and the artefacts provide "requirements" or components necessary to a practice. (Reckwitz 2002: 212)" Practice theory's view of the materiality of practices has two advantages. One is that of practicability, already mentioned. The other is part of the dawning realization that the material world is not merely an object upon which we project our desires or meanings. Instead, the artifacts of the material world also show up as active agents (Latour 1996; Kittler 1999). They enable new modes of being, of communicating, of seeing, of remembering, of healing, etc., they act upon one another in the Earth's environment, and they impose limits upon the possibilities of most of our practices (Sewell 2005: 132-37). Thus they are not simply passive tools, but agents of change with which we can furnish a more accurate description and understanding of our world.

3. Anti-mentalist

Already present in the anti-metaphysical philosophies of Wittgenstein and Heidegger is a complete rejection of the Cartesian distinction between the mind and the body. Practice theory does more than pay this realization lip service, but places it at the center of the understanding of practices. Practices, of course, are habits executed in time and space by people and people have bodies with minds, which have *some* contents not directly accessible to anyone but the subject. However, practice theory chooses to deal with unitary mind/bodies for at least two reasons. To begin with the sort of self-reflexive moments in which the experienced distinction between the mind and body are most poignant are a small minority. Proximally and for the most part, as Heidegger likes to say, we are fully unitary mind/bodies absorbed in our world. Only in rare instances does a seeming split occur, such as in the practice of solitary philosophical reflection. Thus it only makes sense to base our model on what is most common. In addition, it is a simple pragmatic concern that makes mind/bodies more viable objects of study. Mental contents are notoriously hard to locate and describe, and they certainly pose problems of underdetermination; the regularities of bodies moving through space and time make for a considerably handier ethnographic object.

4. Rejection of the Subject/Social Dichotomy

A major debate in 20th century social theory has been between the holists who believe that some superorganic entity – rules, norms, structures, habitus, etc. – is necessary to explain the regularities of the social and the methodological individualists who believe that all social phenomena can be ultimately described in terms of individuals (cf. Kincaid 1996: 1-15). Essentially the disagreement comes down to the direction of causality: part to whole vs. whole to part (Reckwitz 2000: 174-8). Practice theory takes a unique position in arguing that the choice is a false either/or. At its simplest, the claim is that it is *both* true that individuals are central, necessary agents in social entities *and* that social entities display properties and continuities which are not reducible to collections of individuals. Practice theory maintains that both individuals and social entities are constituted in practices; practices are the nexus between the two and the main site of their existence (Schatzki 2002:

124-141; Reckwitz 2000: 544-588; Barnes 2001: 17-26).

5. Process, Dynamism, and Agency

The social sciences have also come to the realization that what we study are not nouns (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 3-25, 232-309; Schatzki 2002: 6, 189-262). “In contrast to earlier approaches which contributed to the substantialization, totalization, and territorialization of culture, now culture is understood as process, as relation, as verb. (Hörning and Reuter 2004: 9, translation my own)” Culture, the social, subjectivity, music, indeed the entire subject matter of the human and social sciences, is taken as an activity, a practical doing, not as an object, a structure, a web, or any other substantive entity (Small 1977). Practice theory recognizes this directly by seeing practices as “temporally unfolding and spatially dispersed nexus[es] of doings and sayings. (Schatzki 1996: 89)” This recognition is not only ontologically superior, but it also builds into practice theory an understanding of dynamism and space for individual agency. Practices are always in flux. Behaviors are never exactly replicated, material conditions alter, individual subjects acquire unique sets of practical know-how, goals vary, and on and on. In this view nothing counts as creation *ex nihilo*, just as nothing is ever a precise copy of what came before. At the same time people are not simply passive automatons. As the “carriers” of practices, individuals possess a degree of control over them to the extent they recognize their positions, exert a will to do differently, and succeed therein. Practice theory doesn’t see process, change, and agency as remainders to be incorporated into an otherwise static ontology, but as central to the very nature of practices.

6. Focus on Background Knowledge

As I tried to make clear above the primary realization of culturalist social theories is that all forms of human behavior and experience presuppose an enormous wealth of background knowledge without which the world would fail to exist meaningfully. This ranges from very general and pervasive knowledges such as what objects populate the world, what kind of attributes they have, and understandings of time and space to practice-specific knowledges about what is possible, how things relate to one another, and appropriate feelings and

responses. “For practice theory, this knowledge is more complex than ‘knowing that’. It embraces ways of understanding, knowing how, ways of wanting and of feeling that are linked to each other within a practice. In a very elementary sense, in a practice the knowledge is a particular way of ‘understanding the world’, which includes an understanding of objects (including abstract ones), of humans, of oneself. This way of understanding is largely implicit and largely historically-culturally specific. (Reckwitz 2002: 253)” The project to lay bare this background knowledge is not unique to practice theory; it was what drove the entirety of Heidegger’s philosophy, Foucault’s *epistemes*, and Bourdieu’s *habitus*, among others. In keeping with practice theory’s general social ontology, background knowledge is not superorganic, nor is it attributed to minds, texts, or the intersubjective. What is unique is that this knowledge is not considered exterior to behavior, but embodied in the very execution of practices.

While the scholars from within ethnomusicology mentioned above have surely been attracted to practice theory for many of these same reasons and have certainly done the discipline good in moving it toward this kind of theory, the work that this paper seeks to accomplish goes beyond theirs in important ways. First, as discussed in the section on the subject/social dichotomy, it seeks to place the primary ontological emphasis on practices *above* those of subjects and social entities, essentially positing that those previous objects of ethnography are modes in which practices express themselves. Second, as I will discuss later, it attempts to move beyond noting that there are practices operating simultaneously upon one another and more precisely understand how practices interact with one another. Finally, this work seeks to define practices as clearly as possible – what they are and aren’t, what components they have, how they interact – and thereby provide other ethnographers with a toolkit for research. More than anything it is this urge for clarity that I hope this text can bring to the fore.

In brief, practice theory as presented here is a form of social theory that seeks (1) to avoid many of the epistemological and ontological errors of other culturalist social theories, while retaining their fundamental insights and (2) to deliver a pragmatic tool for the analysis of meaningful human activity. The first of these two involves a focus on the materiality – both mind-bodily and worldly – of the social, an insistence on anti-mentalist

description, a rejection of a subject-social dichotomy, an emphasis on the background intelligibility of all meaningful action, and a strong emphasis on the processual, dynamic, and agential aspects of practices. The second involves the insistence upon the development of a set of analytic tools that describe exclusively aspects of the phenomenal world. Previous scholars in the discipline have done a great deal to move the theoretical bases of ethnography and analysis in this direction, but not enough has been done – in my estimation – to be as clear as possible. In so doing here I hope to set this social theory simultaneously on solid theoretical and practical footings.

At the same time the refinement of the move beyond the subject/social dichotomy toward a defined understanding of practices made it easier to think the statements and actions of Katia and myself in terms of general motivations for taking part in ensembles such as the Samba Ensemble. The first step, as I demonstrated in the case of Katia, was to see how all her actions and motivations stemmed from other practices (and their roles) that made up her person and therefore were operative in the Samba Ensemble as well. This understanding allowed me to see the seeming contradictions as just that: only apparently so. In fact the Samba Ensemble was a practice in which all the participants brought with them elements of the other practices they were engaged in. Coming to grips with the motivations for joining the ensemble was not a matter of trying to put some reasons in the box and exclude others, but one of seeing which were more central and which more distant. The second step, that of better defining what precisely a practice is and isn't, allowed me to better focus on the participants' actions and statements as such, without seeking some mental edifice behind them and it turned my attention to the ensemble as an knowable, changing same – a practice that was defined by the materiality and actions that transpired while it was going on and thus that could be described in general terms, but without giving up the deep knowledge that it didn't consist of some unified, superorganic whole. Finally, as I argue in the following case of Adriana Helbig, it led me most fruitfully to simply look at and list all the motivations that different participants brought with them, see what role they were thereby enacting, and what goals they hoped to achieve.

CHAPTER 7: ADRIANA HELBIG

Adriana joined our department the year of the ensemble. A recent PhD from the ethnomusicology program at Columbia University, she was invited by Prof. Donna Buchanan to spend the year teaching a world music course and a graduate seminar on East European music as well as leading the Russian Ensemble. On top of that she furiously wrote the articles and book chapters required of junior academics. Gladly, her job search was successful, and in the fall 2008 she began as an assistant professor at the University of Pittsburg.

While the prevalence of ensembles in ethnomusicology departments has greatly increased since the 1960s and Mantle Hood's arguments for "bi-musicality," some universities, such as Columbia, still lack any institutionalized performance opportunities (Hood, 1960). For junior academics entering the job market this can be felt as a disadvantage, because professors are often expected to lead such ensembles as part of their teaching duties. Even participating in ensembles provides a form of indirect training. Thus Adriana embraced the wealth of ensembles here at UIUC partly to gain professional experience.

"But then when you came here you joined the..."

"Everything. So first I started with...I had never...I mean, some of these instruments I had never even seen up close, so...it's actually a perfect example, the first day I arrived, and Donna took me into the [instrument] room, and (laughs) she's like, 'What kind of flutes are you going to use for the ensemble?' and I picked one up that looked something like I would probably use, and she's like, 'Yeah, but that's from Thailand.' (more laughs) And it's like, 'Well, that's not the one I need.' So, it was really, totally new...the actual, tangible experience with instruments."

"Right."

"So, then I did gamelan, I did didgeridoo, [as well as mbira and samba]."

Furthermore, Adriana said that as a result of this "tangible experience" she was better able

to teach in her world music courses those instruments and musics she had played. For instance, she came to our mbira ensemble for a few weeks and although she had difficulty with the pieces she said, “I even noticed though, even, teaching about mbira, then already just even that little bit of experience that I had with it...you know, it personalized it for me. So, it was good.”

From a musical point of view, Adriana made clear that the Samba Ensemble provided her with a participatory environment in which she could focus on her rhythmic skills. As a skilled guitarist and pianist she said, exaggerating, “[n]othing about my musical experience was ever about rhythm. It was always about melody, it was about harmonizing. [...] And, so, then here, what I like about it is that it’s kind of easy for me to be able to [take part.] I take the [tamborim] cause I can mess it up and no one’s gonna say anything.” Gamelan proved more difficult, because each individual is responsible for a distinct voice in the ensemble. Samba, on the other hand, was perfect because multiple performers play each voice. In our case we had, on average, three *surdos*, three *caixas*, two *repiniques*, two *atabaques*, two *ganzás*, two *agogôs*, one *reco-reco*, and five *tamborims*. This allowed students with varying levels of previous musical or percussion experience to play together.⁶ Finally, although Adriana was to be leading a Carpathian ensemble at Pittsburg, she said that samba ensembles are ideal precisely for their capacity to absorb players with varied musical backgrounds. She said that she has enjoyed the ability to work on her rhythmic skills within the framework of the samba ensemble.

A final story is telling as a window into her ethical stance on ethnomusicology ensembles, for while many non-ethnomusicologists simply see these ensembles as a bit of fun and perhaps an opportunity for intercultural exchange, many within the discipline have qualms about the essentialist discourse they can traffic in (Averill 2004). UIUC has a long tradition of Russian Ensembles, with a large number of the instruments used in Soviet folk orchestras and a vast archive of scores to draw upon. Given Adriana’s geographic specialization in Slavic musics, Prof. Buchanan offered Adriana the opportunity to lead the Russian Ensemble while she was here. Initially she was reluctant because of the role Soviet folk orchestras played in the sustaining the ethnic and political ideology according to

⁶ This is a characteristic common to most participatory musics, as has been highlighted in Turino 2008.

which all the Soviet republics and their peoples were seen as subordinate to the dominant Russian ethnicity and the Moscow government. Adriana's own Ukrainian background even led her to argue that such Soviet-style ensembles should be abandoned altogether. While she eventually consented to lead the ensemble – Prof. Buchanan is quite persuasive – she intentionally set out to avoid any mimesis of the Soviet practices. At their second rehearsal Adriana gave the ensemble members a presentation of the history of the folk orchestras, complete with the valid postcolonial critique of their complicity in oppressive cultural policies. She recounts their reaction:

“They were like, “Well...ok, we get it. But let's then just take it and make it our own. And so, they...we, we play the repertoire, but we've started to add, jazz, and we've added, I don't know, Latin rhythms, and a double bass.... [...] Now, at least, there's a recognizable break; that we're not just repeating, you know, what was at the Soviet times.”

Making clear the historical context in which Soviet folk ensembles arose and the political uses to which they were put, Adriana demonstrated to the ensemble members that learning to play another music is more than simple copying sound and movement, all the while expressing values that came from both her own background and her academic training. In their disregard for any notions of correctly replicating the repertoire and, even more so, in their inclusion of musical elements that would have been antithetical to the practice, the ensemble members not only fail to play Soviet folk orchestra music, but perform an explicit critique thereof. This critique is further augmented at public performances by Adriana's introductions that highlight the history of the genre and their intentional deviation from that norm.

Taken together, Adriana's reasons for joining the various ensembles were at once clear and complex, revealing the various practices she participates in: music lover, ethnomusicologist, adjunct professor, musician, and Ukrainian-American. As someone with a deep interest in these different musics she was simply excited about getting to know them in a more direct way, by playing them, by having the instruments in her hands. As a

professional ethnomusicologist teaching courses she noted a lack in her training and saw her time at UIUC as a great opportunity to gain that set of skills as an ensemble leader. As an adjunct professor, she was certainly concerned with making a good impression on her colleagues, who might have influence over her future job prospects, thus affecting her willingness. As a musician she wanted to take part in musical practices that broadened her rhythmic abilities and introduced her to new sounds. While, finally, as someone of Ukrainian heritage she wanted to structure the Russian Ensemble she led to reflect her moral position with regard to the history of Soviet repression of its "satellite" republics.

It would be mere speculation, perhaps even on Adriana's part, to place these reasons in some kind of hierarchy and, of course, this particular constellation of reasons is unique to her life history. On the other hand, it would be a mistake to overemphasize the uniqueness; all of these reasons, taken individually, are ones that one could expect from any number of other ensemble participants. This is an important lesson to be taken from the analysis of reasons for taking part in ensembles and one that can and should be extended to the analysis of other musical practices as well. Overgeneralization is a mistake if it posits something to be the case for all members of a group. Simple observation makes this more than apparent, as almost every individual reveals some contradiction in relation to such position. This is *not*, however, a refutation of the explanatory utility of general reasons. Instead what is sought is a set of reasons that are articulated from within a practice, found in various combinations within each particular individual.

This practice theoretical understanding of the subject and the social has two important consequences for ethnography. First, the move beyond the subject/social dichotomy allows the ethnographer to gather any and all data that occur as part of the practice – here, the Samba Ensemble – without attempting to "reconcile" those states of affairs that are true for the subjects and then attempt to synthesize them into something coherent for the group at large. Instead all observation is gathered catholically with an eye to placing elements more or less centrally to the practice based purely on commonness and frequency. Second, it means that while each subject may be unique, the practices they express will most likely not be, thus the problem of generalizing from a small number of subjects is less problematic, *unless* one knows the group to be highly eccentric (or one doesn't have any idea).

More precisely, alone from the narratives of Katia, myself, and Adriana it was possible to formulate a set of motivations for joining the ensemble and ascribe to each the corresponding practice of which that reason is an expression as well as its approximate goal. The following outlines the most prominent of these reasons, practices, and goals.

People join ethno ensembles because:

- *It sounds like fun.* Young people and students often engage in new and unfamiliar activities as a means of discovering their adult identity and finding their place in society. Certainly in American society university is cordoned off as a place and period of time for such activities. Joining ethno ensembles would easily fall into this category.

- *Their friends are in it.* Again young people and students, who are in the process of adult identity formation, often spend a great deal of time with friends and are willing and able to try new activities – whether particularly interested in them or not – based on friends' participation. In addition, this may be combined with the search for partners in a new environment with possible exposure to people outside the ordinary circle of friends.

- *They want to expand their musical horizons.* In American, musicians of many stripes display a willingness to participate in and be exposed to a wide variety of musics in the belief that such catholicity can aid in one's own musical self-discovery. Musicians in and around university campuses are no different.

- *They are expected to as ethno/musicology graduate students.* Students in musicology and especially ethnomusicology departments are expected to take part in a number of ethno ensembles during their studies in order to learn about some musics first-hand and to gain experience in ensembles similar to those they may be expected to teach later as professors. This is considered part and parcel of their academic and professional training.

- *They have some relationship to the country/culture of origin by ethnicity, heritage, or travel.*

People with an active interest or background in other cultures often express that identity through activities such as cooking, travel, dance, and music. Thus it was unsurprising that several members of the ensembles had these sorts of connections to Brazil, including myself.

- *They want to experience other forms of social togetherness.* Various groups within society actively seek out "alternative" forms of social practice. An incomplete list of such groups would include university students, members of the political left, artists of many kinds, and people with broadly spiritual interests. Their interest in these non-standard forms of social practice leads them to try out various new activities, such as ensemble music making.

- *They are doing so as part of their research or in preparation for later research.* Beyond the broad ranging expectations placed on ethnomusicology graduate students, individual students may choose a particular ensemble based on its relation to their current or proposed research areas. This first-hand experience with a musical practice can serve as a jumping board for learning about it, provide contacts, and give the student some proficiency in playing that may aid them in the field. Taken together, it is helpful in reaching the ultimate goal of graduation.

- *They just want to relax.* In contrast to the first motivation, some people may join ensembles knowing full well what they can expect and do so therefore specifically to engage in an activity they know to be enjoyable and relaxing. Not isolated to any one group of people, it is more common among younger people and those without extensive family responsibilities. Engaging in activities for this reason can also serve a number of goals such as simply keeping sane or providing a deeper meaning to everyday life.

Of course these are not the only reasons that people have for joining ethno ensembles such as the Samba Ensemble, but the task of forming useful and insightful generalization does not require completeness. The benefit of practice thinking is to move beyond the seeming contradictions between subjects and the group and instead to focus precisely on

what people are doing. The fact that practice theory observes that practices are not unique to individuals, but shared ways of doing things with shared, common goals allows the ethnographer, then, to parse these practices one by one in each case. Doing so for the motivations of the Samba Ensemble made much clearer what people were doing there. They were doing several different things, but there was still a common set from which they all drew. In short, this way of thinking made both the ethnography more straightforward while also making the analysis more easily generalizable. This is because, although this particular Samba Ensemble was of course unique, the practices that were found to be expressed by the members can, with relative certainty, be assumed to function in other ethno ensembles like it.

Unsurprisingly then, many of these motivations were same for Filipe Pereira – the focus of the next narrative section – but his story added one new element. For Filipe the Samba Ensemble was a significant event; it played an important role in his decision to change his life's path and pursue music. Furthermore, his story lays the groundwork to understand how, using a further distinction between practice types, practice theory can provide insight into precisely *how* it is that intense musical experiences can have this transformative effect.

CHAPTER 8: FILIPE PEREIRA

The samba ensemble had its first Monday meeting precisely two weeks after it was spontaneously organized at the mbira class. The ensemble met in a large, painted cinder-block room on the lower level of the Music Building. At our first rehearsal about twenty people showed up. As expected, there was a strong contingent from the music graduate students as well as several undergrads, Professors Turino and Helbig, and a small group of Brazilians, both from the community and from the university. One of the latter was Filipe.

Filipe was finishing his PhD in agricultural economics with a focus on agribusiness; he was writing on 'legitimacy' as a business concept and how it can be improved upon by the managers of specific businesses. He was at the university for five years and, although he' was obviously invested in his research and talked about it with great interest, something else drove him more deeply: Brazilian popular music. A long-time student of piano and guitar, he was in fact planning to spend the following two years pursuing music alone and hoped to turn it into a career. In the school year 2006-7 he was in a band with other Brazilian students from the university who played Brazilian popular music and is a great fan of both samba and axé music. Thus, for Filipe, Luciana's coming was extremely fortuitous, as can be seen in the following notes from my talk with him.

"He's is very excited about Luciana being here, because she knows what he wants to know. He's in the ensemble and is taking private lessons with her. He's obviously really excited about it all. He's a guitar player and knows a couple samba rhythms, but hasn't really played [samba] before. "Samba has the, it's called *balanco* in Portuguese." "It has this movement, you know?" I suggest 'groove,' but he doesn't want it because that can be used for any rhythm. "That is just very fascinating to me. And it's very exciting to feel." I interject again about groove. He responds to the definition about 'tension.' He seems to be getting what I'm after. "I think I know what I want to say, like for *balanco*. *Balanco* is how I call this samba groove, specifically the samba groove. With other grooves I don't name them. It has this *balanco*. It's going, but it's not going. I think, oh my God, it's going, and everything, it's broken, I mean." I ask him if he's felt that at the ensemble and he said that last time was the first time there was a little bit of it. He says he felt it, "Ok, it's coming,"

and adds that Luciana said after the class that she'd felt it a little bit too as if this is proof that it happened. I proffer 'swing,' and he's only sort of having it."

"We return to talking about his plans for after the PhD. Music is his true passion, he says and so he wants to take the chance to try it. He just wants to play and take private lessons. He's from Rio. He comments about the videos he emailed to us all. I hadn't seen them but they must be about samba in Rio. He says he has a funny relation to them [the members of the Brazilian samba schools] because, coming from the middle class, he never really had anything to do with samba, "except from TV." It's seen as a lower class endeavor and says that even around carnival time many from the upper classes leave the city to avoid it altogether. He'd talked about the same thing with Luciana. So it's interesting for me to note that these two people – Filipe and Luciana – who are so passionate about the music come from the 'wrong' class. He'd even like to play music as a career. I then ask him about what excites him so much about playing music and he tells me an anecdote about a professional surfer who was asked why he kept surfing after his retirement. He responded that in surfing he was awarded "all the good things in life you are promised as a kid." Filipe said he could relate to that. "It's the fact you are interacting with other people. It's the fact that you excited..." and then I stupidly cut him off to ask if he remembers his first experience like what drives him. I then start to explain my ideal musical experience of loss of self. But he can't relate to that. For him it's the opposite - he's really there. "I'm super self-aware, and super-connected and everything in the body and the mind, everything is tuned. Tuned, ah, by the music, to the music, by yourself, by the other person." (Personal notes, interview of 20.02.2008)"

In the ensemble Filipe played *surdo* – one of the large bass drums that drive the whole group – and did so excellently. One of the keys to the samba grooves is the interlock between all of the instruments, but especially between the *surdos* and the *caixas*, or snares. As I was dubbed by Luciana "the president of the *caixas*," my musical relationship to Filipe was a special one. When we played I often focused intently on his rhythm and he has said many times he did the same with me. After our performance at the local Canopy Club for a benefit Filipe elatedly described the feeling especially on the Olodum rhythm we played.

He said he just had to focus on my *caixa* and everything fell into place. In such musical and spoken exchanges the excitement of the groove is clearly palpable. I can only guess that this is the feeling that Filipe wanted to go after, what he wanted to seek after he was finished with his doctorate.

"Then he started talking about which city he wants to move to when he goes back – maybe Rio, where his sister lives, maybe Salvador, because that's where *axé* is being played, and maybe now Porto Alegre, because of Luciana. "I will really be exploring, you know, something I really never did very actively, you know. I was always very laid back with music and I'm really active about it." He wants to stay here for six months to save up some money for the music years."

"Speaking of Luciana, he says again about how much fun he's having learning from her and notes that she's really unique in Brazil because she both knows the music and instruments and is able to teach it to others. He's learning guitar with her. She's just taught him some samba rhythms. "It's so exciting man. Oh my God. It just blows you off," he says.

"So you've finished your dissertation already?" I ask.

"No."

"Oh, no."

"No, no. I'm really juggling it all, like..."

"Type real fast."

"Yes, yes. It's funny, cause I met my advisor about, like, two weeks ago and he said, 'Filipe, let's focus on this last stretch,' you know and I say, 'Ok, let's focus,' but I just can't let it go, the samba opportunity, of having Luciana here. No, there's just no way. I can't let that go, you know. No way. It's just too special to let it slip off."

He then described how hard it is in Brazil to find someone like Luciana. She both knows the instruments and the music and she's able to teach others formally (because of her conservatory training). You either get one or the other, but not both.

“Well finish your dissertation (laughs) and then become a musician,” I say.

“That’s the plan, that’s the plan.”

CHAPTER 9: DISPERSED AND INTEGRATIVE PRACTICES: HOW INTENSE MUSICAL EXPERIENCE CAN BE TRANSFORMATIVE BEYOND THE MUSICAL EVENT

The first theory section dealt with the problems posed to the ethnographer in conceiving of the subject as separate and opposed to the social. In broad brush strokes, I argued that there are solid ontological as well as practical reasons to transcend this dichotomy and find some other conceptual object of social study. The second theoretical section proposed practices, as understood and developed by practice theory in its contemporary formulations, as this object. Practices – repeated ways of doing things involving subjects, spaces, artifacts, and shared understandings – resolved many of these problems and made it much more straightforward to analyze and understand the many motivations that led people to join the Samba Ensemble. To my surprise, however, the process of both the ethnography and the theoretical considerations threw up a further insight that I present in this final theoretical section: a possible understanding of *how* intense musical experiences can be transformative beyond the musical event.

The eventual discussion of the various "other" practice that participants in the Samba Ensemble brought to bear on the practice of the ensemble itself made apparent that practices could have different scales – some larger, some smaller. The Samba Ensemble itself is a practice, being a musicology graduate student is a practice, being a musician is yet another kind of practice, and so on. Thus the question arose: how can the ethnographer think these different kinds of practice? How do they relate to one another? Can they be categorized in any reasonable, justifiable way, thus allowing the ethnographer to better understand how they interact?

Contemporary practice theory provides a distinction that can be of great help: that of dispersed and integrative practices (Schatzki 1996: 91-110). *Dispersed practices* are smaller-scale, more generalized practices – e.g. asking, owning, proxemics, forms of social relation, gender practices – that are dispersed throughout many other integrative practices. Not only are they more general, but they tend only to have the most basic components of practices, namely (1) a set of bodily/discursive, regularized activities that are performed against (2) a background understanding of what is being done. *Integrative practices*, on the other hand,

are those that integrate certain dispersed practices and form a node of activity with a recognizable goal or task, like being a professor, playing in a samba school, or baking bread. They generally encompass all that dispersed practices lack: (1) a set of artifact and tools, (2) a special place in which they take place, and (3) particular emotive or affective structures.

In the case of the Samba Ensemble the focal integrative practice was a particular instance of an ethno ensemble. This included a range of musical performance activities learned in the course of the ensemble, arranged around a weekly rehearsal meeting (basic bodily/discursive component). The general background understanding was one in which the participants learned the basics of a “non-Western music” in the context of a university music department ensemble. This included the necessary instruments as could best be provided given the financial restrictions (artifacts/tools), taking place in a music department rehearsal space (place), and the range of affective structures that were elucidated in the sections above regarding motivations for joining the ensemble and goals therein. This may provide the highest-level description of the Samba Ensemble in terms of the components named above, but of course there was an enormous range of additional (dispersed) practices that are also contained within. These might include dispersed practices for direction taking, for questioning, for behavior toward shared property, for dressing (an example that does include artifacts), for punctuality, and so on.⁷ Of particular interest in this section, however, are those dispersed practices involving social relation: the basic understanding and behaviors of how social groups are organized and how the members relate to one another.

In general this distinction can be a powerful analytical tool because it allows the ethnographer to see the “bones” of structural homologies between very different integrative practices. In fact, further elucidation of practice theory could bear important fruit on the issue of structural homologies. The 1980s saw attempts within the discipline to refine an embattled structuralism by showing how, at the very least, convincing homologies could be constructed between musical and non-musical practices on the basis not of mental

⁷ As with so many conceptual distinctions, the key to its implementation is to hold this pair not as an ontological dichotomy, but as a heuristic for placing practices along a spectrum from more basic to more complex. This preserves the undeniable simplicity of essentialist thinking, while in fact remaining relational.

gymnastics, but rigorous fieldwork and close observation. Indeed many of the works, by authors such as Becker and Becker, Feld, and Turino, remain central to the canon for they continue to resonate with the intuition that how we make music cannot be wholly unrelated to how we conduct other parts of our lives (Becker and Becker 1981, Feld 1984, Turino 1989). But on their heels came many critiques that seem to have been taken as wholesale refutation. This seems obviously to be a mistake. There are ample cases where the social structures in musical practices are homologous to those of other social practices, just as there are cases where this homology does not hold. The conclusion needn't be that this is a non-causal (or non-dialectical) correlation; instead what is needed is an investigation into how these cases differ. In short, the baby may have been thrown out with the bath water and I would argue that the distinction in practice theory between dispersed and integrative practices is one way to take a more refined look at such homologies.

For instance, the intuitive truth of comparisons, such as those made by Christopher Small between social relations in an orchestra and those of a Christian church or a factory, can be more precisely delineated if one can pinpoint which dispersed practices are in fact present in both integrative ones (Small 1998). One can decompose the practices of the orchestra and the church and see that they share a dispersed practice of particular hierarchical social relations where, in contrast to an informal rock band or a game of pick-up basketball, there is a defined leader-group relation with strict deference to the former. Thus, using the practice theory framework one can state that it is not that the musical practice and the church or factory practice are *structurally homologous*, whatever that might mean at an ontological level, but they are diverse integrative practices that all share a particular dispersed practice of social relation which participants enact through their bodily practices and discourse. My claim is that the epistemological clarity of practice theory as I have outlined it here – that is, that its constructs refer to things, events, habits to which we have direct experiential access – would enable many of these homologies to be rehabilitated

In the current case I want to use this distinction to investigate how musical experiences have the power to change people and their lives. Specifically I want to suggest that intense musical experiences, like all very intense experiences, can be transformative because they make real the potentialities of certain dispersed practices that can then be applied beyond

their immediate spatio-temporal existence in a musical setting. In the Samba Ensemble both Filipe and Luciana surprised me by saying that the experiences they had playing the music had brought them to appreciate certain ways of doing things and ways of being with other people that they then wanted to extend to other areas of their lives. In understanding this the distinction between dispersed and integrative practice serves as a useful tool in breaking down practices to see homologies with other non-musical ones and demonstrate how intense musical experiences can have a transformative effect beyond the musical sphere. I turn to an example from the Samba Ensemble next.

In the Samba Ensemble

To date the discipline has made considerable progress in understanding the basics of why musical experiences are often so emotionally intense (Feld 1982, Rouget 1985, Keil and Feld 1994, Friedson 1996, Becker 2004). First, musical experiences stand out from more everyday experiences because of their sensory polymodality. Many live musical experiences simultaneously and actively engage our sense of sight, sound, movement, and word. Furthermore these sensory inputs also engage multiple modes of experience, from the intellectual and affective to the perceptive and kinesic. Together these many ways of knowing and being in the world conspire to create an experience that transcends our more everyday modes of dealing with the world in which our focus rests, at any given time, on just one or two such modes. Secondly, several scholars have also highlighted the significant influence of how the spaces and performances are framed in creating an overall environment that is both permissive of and even encouraging of such intense experiences (van Gennep 1960, Turner 1967, Goffman 1974, Csikszentmihalyi 1990). The expectations for musical events to be safe places for such intense experiences seems quite obviously to have the effect of making them correspondingly more common. All of these factors contribute to an extremely rich form of experience that is perhaps best described as an *intensity of feeling*. Thus, the basic understanding of how musical experiences can be so emotionally intense is well established. What has eluded the discipline is an analytical framework within which to understand *how* it is that in some instances these experiences are transformative of the participants' lives (and practices) beyond the events themselves.

My argument is that this intensity of feeling is taken as an index for the Really Real – a half-serious phrase I use here to indicate greater ontological authority of a practice in situations where there is competition between alternate practices – and thus variants of dispersed practices that are experienced as more real than others take on greater authority in the other integrative practices of which they are a part beyond the musical event. Situations involving intensity of feeling are often transformative for individuals. Our first love, the death of a loved one, divorce, drug experiences, periods spent abroad, serious illnesses or injuries, exceptional aesthetic experiences, among others, are all examples of situations which often involve intensity of feeling and which also often transform people's behavior, view of themselves and of the world. My suggestion is that intensity of feeling is linked to transformative experiences because we take the intensity to indicate that what we are experiencing is the Really Real.⁸ By that I want to point to the fact that we are, of course, constantly confronted with various explanations and versions of reality. For example, cultural messages tell us that being out in the cold can make us sick while the doctor tells us this is nonsense; a sense of fate tells us that some misfortune was a result of poor conduct, while “common sense” tells us it was a random event; a friend says he's head over heels in love with someone and we're unsure whether it's him or the scotch that's talking. In short there are multiple realities that are in frequent conflict with each other pulsing through our daily lives, complicating our perceptions and decisions. In this mix intensity of feeling is taken as a sign of veracity – whatever I'm experiencing right now, if it's intense, must be the way things really are.

In the case of the Samba Ensemble the dispersed practice at hand is that of social relation: the basic understanding of how people should relate to one another. In any group situation there is a number of model, dispersed practices for social relation that are available to us. The details of these models are beyond the scope of this paper, but thinking through a few examples should make the point clear. Hierarchical one-to-many relations can be found in school settings, in many church activities, in classical orchestras, and in many other ensemble types; hierarchical one-to-one relations can be found in interactions with police, with teachers, with elders, and so on; non-hierarchical one-to-one relations are

⁸ For more on events as transformative see Sewell 2005: 197-224; 225-270.

common in friendship and intimate relationships; non-hierarchical group relations are common to participatory music making and dancing, some religious rituals, and periods following extreme natural disasters. The basic point is that there exists this set of models for social relation that can be described as a dispersed practice and found in many different integrative practices. While many situations' frame clearly dictates which model is operative, in some cases there is a choice and, for many, there is a choice as to which activities to participate in *based on* which form of social relation they entail. Someone who has had many positive, intense experiences with forms of competitive group-to-group relation in sports, say, may be inclined to seek a career environment that also involves this form of relation over others. In contrast, negative experiences with a form of social relation in one practice may lead an individual to avoid that form in others.

Filipe made it clear that the experiences he had playing music, before the ensemble, with Luciana, and in the ensemble itself, had strongly affected how he went about his daily life and planned for the future. He expressed this perspective stating that he sought a particular structure of feeling, in which he said, "I'm super self-aware, and super-connected and everything in the body and the mind, everything is tuned. Tuned, ah, by the music, to the music, by yourself, by the other person." Not only his words, but the sheer excitement on his face and his body made evident that this was something he so valued that he was willing to forgo a potential career for which he'd gained a prestigious PhD, an act which in itself demonstrates the significance it had for him. It was not that he questioned his career chances or that he had lost interest in his discipline; he simply told me that this feeling and this way of relating to other people was so special that it was worth the attempt to forge a life based on them, even in the face of lower odds of success. Filipe and I repeatedly spoke after rehearsals and performances about how we had actively sought to play our own parts while simultaneously focusing on that of the other. Since we played two of the dominant voices in the ensemble – *caixa* and *surdo* – and we usually stood near one another, we had many opportunities to attempt entering this mode of relation, often successfully. And these successes had a kind of transcendent effect, one in which our everyday individual subjectivity was sublated and replaced, if briefly, by another mode of being in which our common togetherness was visceral and palpable. Filipe told me that, for him, this intensity

of feeling that he repeatedly experienced in these musical settings – specifically regarding how people related to one another – made him want to construct his life so as to focus on this kind of relation. In other words, these intense, pleasurable experiences that he had in various – although structurally similar – musical activities led him to consciously value a certain mode of social relation, that is, a certain form of dispersed practice, so much that he was willing to actively seek out a profession/life-style that allowed him to experience the same with greater frequency.

For Luciana, whose narrative follows this section, the dispersed practice of social relation as experienced in Bamba's samba school, where she conducted her Master's research, in Porto Alegre – in which everyone worked together toward a common goal and in which everyone was interdependent – gave her a different understanding of the potentialities that this same practice might have “for other settings” as she said. Coming, like Filipe, from the Brazilian upper-middle class it is a safe assumption that most of the activities she participated in growing up were not ones that included the form of dispersed practice for social relation that she found in playing samba. It is not difficult to see how this kind of interaction contrasts with the more dominant, individualistic, competitive manifestation found in many other integrative practices like church, school, work, and family politics. Like Filipe, her experience at playing music was transformational and she began to shape her activities around this new way of being. For example, she started a samba ensemble at the music academy in Porto Alegre where she taught, much to the chagrin of several other music professors fearing that the students might “have too much fun.” She persevered, however, partly because she thought that the students learned important rhythm and ear training skills in the ensemble, but also because she wanted to share with them this way of relating to one another – one in which the individual role is transcended by the interaction of the whole. So again, those intense musical experiences gave her exposure to a new form of dispersed practice of social relation, which she then actively wanted to implement in other integrated practices where there was some choice as to which form of social relation should be applied. Furthermore, beyond these concrete examples, such as Filipe “quitting” academia and Luciana starting a samba ensemble in a classical conservatory, this preference for a non-hierarchical mode of social relation could

also be found in more everyday ways of comportment: how they addressed both friends and strangers with openness and a smile, how they actively listened to others while speaking, and how joyfully they participated in the ensemble activities.

The distinction between dispersed and integrative practices both allows the ethnographer to better see practice types and provides a tool for analyzing how they interact. Although the categories are certainly not beyond critique, I think they do a better job of parsing the components of human activities and the grounds for their interrelations than other competing ones.⁹ By identifying integrative practices we see what individuals experience as blocks of activity with all their component parts and by analyzing them for their constituent dispersed practices we see how homologies between diverse integrative practices obtain.

Finally, in the case of the Samba Ensemble, I suggested that this distinction allows us to understand *how* it is that intense musical experiences can be transformative. The sensory polymodality, combination of modes of knowing, repetition of events, sustaining community, and a frame that permits such extraordinary experiences can all contribute to a heightened sense of reality – the Really Real – that then lends its ontological and epistemological authority to experience beyond the musical practice. This, I claim, is because the style of certain dispersed practices as experienced in these intense musical events then becomes the preferred model for those same dispersed practices in other non-musical integrative ones. This lays bare one mechanism whereby music is more than just reflection of social structure, more than just even a participant in social practices, but potentially a powerful force for change. Above all it would indicate that ethnomusicologists, in their “applied” work, pay close attention to the social implications of the musical practices they present and offer to their various audiences with specific regard to the component dispersed practices, for it is they that may have the greatest effect.

9 A topic for another paper would be to investigate the parallels between this distinction and that of the cultural formation/cultural cohort made in Turino 2008 with much the same goals.

CHAPTER 10: LUCIANA PRASS

Luciana was the leader, the *mestre*, of our illustrious “U of I Samba Ensemble.” She grew up in Porto Alegre, completed her undergraduate degree in classical guitar, and then went on to write a Master’s thesis on the city’s oldest samba school, Bamba’s (Prass 1998). While the south of Brazil is not known for samba – the associations are more with Rio de Janeiro for Carnival or with Bahia for *samba de roda* (Pinto 1991) – it does boast a long tradition of samba schools. For the project, Luciana participated in one complete annual cycle and part of second, in which she played *tamborim* (also called *caixeta*): a small membranophone, with a wooden frame, plastic head approximately six-inches in diameter, struck with a stick of six or so bundled knitting needles. Several of these *tamborims* march at the front of the *bateria*, or percussion section. In recent years they are more often played by women who also choreograph arm and body movements to add to the visual appeal of the performance.¹⁰

Luciana’s choice of *tamborim* is informative on several levels. Samba school members come almost exclusively from the lower class, thus the price of a *surdo* – the large bass drums – or a *caixa* – the snare drums – would be prohibitive for them to buy personally. The schools themselves, called *quadras*, are usually located in poor urban areas. Each samba school has its own instruments, which the performers are allowed to use. *Tamborims* are the exception. Because they are so small and inexpensive – “ten dollars or so,” Luciana said – performers buy their own instruments. By playing the *tamborim* she not only remained within the gender expectations, but also avoided taking an instrument away from another (presumably poorer) player. This was important, she said, because it was already clear to everyone that she was an outsider. “Especially because I am a woman, [...], and white skin, and with glasses, and with different clothes, maybe. The most of the people there are lower class, working class.” Luciana added that even asking to play another instrument would have placed the *mestre* in a difficult position because of her gender and class. The choice was therefore a strategic move to minimize the already great social distance between herself and the majority of the percussionists, or *ritmistas*. She fit the gender expectations of the

¹⁰ Luciana added that at some samba schools no women take part, and that in most their role is very small. For instance, she said that *tamborim* section at Bamba’s had three women and some 30 men.

group and didn't take an instrument away from anyone else.

As alluded to in the previous section, Luciana's time at Bamba's was transformational for her on many counts. Of course she learned to play samba. In addition to *tamborim*, Luciana also "unofficially" learned to play the other instruments in the *bateria*. Thus, as the *mestre* of her own samba ensembles, she was able to show students how to play all the parts on all the instruments. In our ensemble she did this primarily via demonstration. For instance at our first two meetings, when we were learning new pieces, she would first begin with the *surdo* parts, herself playing the drum, giving some explanation, and then have the players take over. Then she would do the same with the *caixas*. Having demonstrated those patterns, she would set the two going and then proceed around the room adding the voices of the *atabaques* (tall conical membranophones), *repiniques* (metal-framed, double-headed membranophones), *ganzás* (metal shakers), *agogôs* (double cowbells), *reco-reco* (metal scraper), and *tamborims* solely by showing. Only in cases where players failed to grasp the demonstrations quickly enough did she resort to writing rhythms out on the blackboard; this happened very rarely and it didn't always help.

Her time at Bamba's also had a strong effect on her approach to teaching. I did notice, sometime into the life of the ensemble, that Luciana in fact had sheet music with her that notated the samba rhythms. These seemed to be cut and pasted rhythms from a secondary source, not her own transcriptions. I don't know if she looked at them before our meetings or if she simply had them as a back-up, as I never noticed her using them while we were playing. I had been paying close attention to how she taught the parts and was curious how it related to what went on in a Brazilian samba school, like Bamba's.

"And, so, the way you lead the ensemble here, is that, is that how they would teach people a Bamba's? The new people, or...?"

"No. In Bamba's I don't teach."

"No, but is that how *they* teach?"

"Oh. Oh, no. I think that is different, because I explain things using words. And there all the time the people explain to me doing."

"Yeah."

“I say, ‘Oh, I don’t understand. How can I do this *tamborim*?’ And then, ‘Oh, you need [to] do ‘taka tchica taka’.’ [demonstrating the rhythm in the air]”

“But you do both. See, that’s interesting. I’ve noticed that you do both. You...you’ll often start...”

“Yes.”

“...explaining, you get, like, the *surdos* and the *caixas* going...”

“Yes, yes.”

“And then you just go around and show people what to do.”

“Yes, yes.”

“Without talking.”

“Yes, I try to do this. I don’t know, I think I want to [build] a bridge [between] these two forms of understanding. This is because, when I start[ed] teaching in academic settings I perceive that people will start to read music and then they start to put...ah...” (She motions to her ears)

“‘Turn off,’ you mean?”

“Yes.”

“Turn off their ears?”

(Mimicking a horn player in the orchestra, tapping his foot, reading from sheet music, not paying attention to the rest of the orchestra) “Um, dois, três...du, du, du, du, du, du, du...quatro, cinco, seis, sete...”

“Right.”

“And [they] don’t hear that in the rest are a lot of things happen[ing]. (laughs) And the orchestra [is next to] you. And I start to emphasize with my students the aurality.”

Thus, at Bamba’s and then in her own teaching Luciana became convinced both that “everyone can learn this. Some people [just] need more time,” and that by removing the medium of explanation or sheet music, players focused more intensely on the sounds themselves, and on each other. These realizations were significant because they greatly impacted the attitude she brought to the samba ensembles she led at the music and arts

school in Porto Alegre where she taught for eight years.

Similar to the place of popular musics in U.S. university and conservatory settings a few decades ago, samba is not taught at the secondary level, because of its lower class associations. Practical musical instruction is in Western European classical music. As I noted earlier, some more culturally conservative professors at her university were concerned that the samba ensemble might be “too much fun.” Luciana conceded that it is a lot of fun, but she also has substantial reasons to justify its value to the students, who included those from the music, theater, dance, and fine arts departments. The initial ones were musical – students who thought themselves otherwise ‘rhythmically challenged’ (my phrase) learned to play with great facility, they benefited from the demonstrative teaching style uncommon in the conservatory setting, and, finally, they learned the importance of listening to others, not just playing in tune and in time. In so doing Luciana took a set of pedagogical principles she had been exposed to at Bamba’s, found effective, and transplanted them to the arts’ university.¹¹ While this alone would have been a significant revelation for a music educator, in fact the import of Luciana’s experience at Bamba’s lies beyond the musical realm and bears directly on deeper values she finds in teaching her ensembles.

Conscious of the fact that the success of a groove is largely dependent upon the finest nuances of timing, when we sat down to talk after our third rehearsal I was curious to know how Luciana heard the ensemble. My worry was that, even though she had avoided using Western notation, many of the musicians were translating her demonstrations into strict note values that do not correspond to the correct feel of the rhythms. Her answer spoke tellingly to the question, but the course of the conversation took us into broader territory.

“So my question is when you, when you hear people downstairs playing...it sounds terrible to you, or it sounds...?”

“No, no. Really terrible, no. We... In some moments I feel that we are doing... Last

¹¹ For more discussion on the use of practice-specific teaching methods see Trimillos, Sumarsam and Susilo in Solís 2004.

Monday, we feel in some moments ‘Wow! This is...,’ when we are doing *breque 2*. It’s too perfect. And then, sometimes, whoa, we disconcentrate...because it’s very important that people hear the whole battery, and the first time, it happens with me too, we start just thinking [about] your instrument and, oh, in reality you don’t hear the others.”

“Yeah.”

“The swing starts to happen when you adapt your instrument, your rhythm with the others and perceive, ‘Well, when I did this, I hear the *surdo*. Oh, this *bacida* connects with this from *surdo* and this from snare drums and... But this is very difficult and this is a group job. It’s...ah...This is for me the most interesting in this set, because you start to... to... to play together, but play together is not just playing together. You need [to] connect with other people, you need to start [to] really feel these things, and your concentration... And this is very interesting, for me... This is the most interesting... Because of this I start to teach samba class (laughs).”

“Because of that feeling? Or because of...”

“Yes, because of that feeling [that] you perceive, ‘Oh, [I] need other people to do my job. I’m not alone.’ [...] And this is a kind of metaphor that you can, ah, transport, translate for other settings. [...] You can think this way, think together, to construct some knowledge together.”

Music in colonial and post-colonial Brazil has never just been music. The political implications of musical practices are easy to spot in everything from the hegemonic demonstrations of European operas to the guised rebellion of *candomblé*. Today many Afro-Brazilian musics are being utilized by the disenfranchised classes to solidify counter-hegemonic positions and, thereby, lay claim to rights, monies, and properties. Luciana’s comments, however, suggested a more abstract lesson that she drew from playing samba: that by playing, not together, but as a whole, we (re)gain a glimpse of our fundamental state of interdependence – one that can be “translate[d] for other settings.”

My suspicion is that such transformative experiences are quite common among ethnomusicologists. In the course of fieldwork many scholars come to know certain

practices intimately and are forced, by their otherness and by the need to produce academic texts, to reflect on them in some depth. During the course of her research and subsequently in teaching samba at the conservatory, Luciana experienced a musical practice that revealed a non-individualistic fundamental ontology, a non-hierarchical dispersed practice of social relation and then saw how it could be extended to practices beyond music making. We are not alone; playing samba, Luciana contends, makes this self-evident.¹²

¹² Trimillos and Averill in Solís 2004 also discuss the transformational role ensembles can play in participants' lives.

CHAPTER 11: CONCLUSION: BACK TO THEORY, BACK TO PEOPLE

In this thesis I have intentionally run the risk of pedantry for the sake of clarity. The central ethnographic question asked after why people join ethno ensembles, such as the UIUC Samba Ensemble. Of course anyone might have responded to such a question with a simple statement saying that they do so “for lots of different reasons.” In ethnography, however correct initial intuitions may be, the situation on the ground is almost invariably much more complicated than one could have imagined. Such was my finding. Throughout my time in the ensemble and through my talks with various members I found that the number of “different reasons” was quite overwhelming and I struggled to put them all into perspective. As I stated earlier I was particularly troubled by the seeming contradictions between descriptions of individuals and any description I wanted to create of the group as a whole. Given the scientific aspirations of this research toward something generalizable, this was not a contradiction that could simply be ignored. Furthermore, I am certain that this is a difficulty shared by most all other ethnographers.

This difficulty led me to seek out and develop a theoretical framework that would allow me to conceptualize both the social and the subjects in a way that did (scientific and ethical) justice at the same time. Practice theory filled this requirement because practices – understood simply as routinized activities carried out by subjects, using tools and artifacts, in a place, against a background understanding – are located precisely at the intersection of the subject and the social. Using this tool I was able to better look at the participants in the Samba Ensemble and see the different practices they engaged in and thereby understand the variety of motivations they had for joining the ensemble. The result was, first of all, an answer to the central ethnographic question in the form of a roughly hierarchical list of the motivations that were present at the Samba Ensemble *and* that I think it reasonable to assume would be present in most other ethno ensembles and, second of all, an answer that had successfully avoided the *seeming* contradictions between the subjects and the social. Further, with the help of the distinction between dispersed and integrative practices I argued that we can better grasp the interrelation of integrative practices on the basis of

their shared dispersed practices, thus refining the concept of structural homologies. Finally, the distinction showed the potential for intense musical experiences to be socially transformative beyond their immediate existence by initiating habit change with regard to particular dispersed practices – here, those of social relation.

However, I would like to finally suggest that this framework bears additional fruit – fruit that can help unify the disparate interests within the discipline. As I argued, music is always part of a referential totality: a network of activities with ends, relative to which the components derive their meaning. In other words, even when musical activities are most immediately experienced as distinct, any investigation of their meaningfulness will take us far beyond the musical into the entirety of the participants' ways of life. The difficulty is that these paths beyond have led in different directions and, as I see it, the conceptual and practical unity of the discipline has been weakened. Along with each sub-specialization has developed a corresponding body of theory, a different way of viewing and interpreting the world. As these theoretical tools become more specific they become more foreign to those in other corners of the field. Our varied interests are certainly all valid, but if we each speak in our own idiolect, then effective communication is the casualty.

Thus on a higher level this paper has suggested that practice theory, as presented here, shows that this divergence is not necessary. What is needed is not a master theory to replace all the others, rendering them obsolete, but a theoretical structure that is sufficiently *thin* to encompass the insights of the myriad theoretical pseudo-competitors that I'm claiming largely talk past one another. From discussions of agency in postcolonial theory and phenomenological descriptions of musical experience (Friedson 1996) to accounts of music's roles in socio-political transition (Buchanan 2006) and the relation of soundscape to landscape (Levin 2006) I think the conceptual framework and vocabulary of practice theory is sufficiently malleable to cover these bases. Furthermore, contemporary practice theory's focus on tangible experience and observable phenomena puts it on a more solid footing than culturalist theories dealing in abstractions such as *habitus*, *hegemony*, or *discourse*. Perhaps it's simply that as our world becomes more complex we long for a return to the concrete. As a result of both of these reasons, finally, practice theory proves highly practicable: it is not an edifice erected to draw praise and wonder, but a tool kit meant for

use. As the pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty has written:

The theories which provide new contexts are to be evaluated by their efficacy in effecting changes, not (as the logocentrists believed) by their adequacy to an object. Any tool is replaceable as soon as a handier, less clumsy, more easily portable tool is invented. (Rorty 1999: 221)

And it is use, practice, and application which it seeks to draw out.

My proximal concerns in this paper have been to outline the impasse – in ethnography, in fieldwork, in theory – posed by the multiplicity of theoretical frameworks and suggest that contemporary formulations of practice theory offer a way beyond. While my arguments finally stand or fall on their persuasiveness, on their ability to illuminate our experience, this move is convincing to me for one even more primary reason. Ultimately my theoretical and practical position is grounded, not in argument, nor in desires to further the field, but in an ethical gesture that focuses on subjects understood as socially constituted through practices. No worldview, that of practice theory included, can withstand sustained critique of its ontological foundations without disintegrating, without showing its ultimate groundlessness, without finally agreeing with Nietzsche's madman (Dreyfus 1991: 155-157). In other words, the last turtle is that there are no turtles. No, my allegiance is not to the Enlightenment *qua* rationality but *qua* humanism. Theory must retain its ethical dimension at every turn, all the while recognizing the fact that the groundless ethical gesture remains most basic (Zizek, 2006: 87; Dreyfus 1991: 246-80). As a (critical) humanist, my final imperative remains Humans Matter!, and when understood within the context of practices, involving bodily repertoires, material arrangements, spaces, forms of understanding, etc. such thinking can also help us think through problems like the isolation of individuals as competitors in late capitalism, the imminent ecological difficulties, and the conflicts between individual human rights and those of collectives (Knauft 1996: 41-61). In this way I want to suggest that the adoption of contemporary practice theory is not only justifiable in theory and useful in the practice of the social sciences, but also ethically preferable because of the conceptual hold on social phenomena it affords us. Our ethics force us to be practical.

Marx famously wrote that philosophers only ever provided different interpretations of the world; our job, he claimed, was to change it. Heidegger's response fits perfectly with my

own: to change the world we must often first reinterpret it. Doing so can deliver us, “ways of breaking with cultural traditions of human self-perception, changing them and opening up ‘new’ possibilities of self-understanding (Reckwitz 2002:257).” The effects of scholarship on the world at large must be recognized to be diminishingly small. However, the efforts of scholars certainly do effect their students and others who might listen through their way of seeing and interpreting the world. The particulars will be forgotten, but the mode of analysis – ultimately the theory – may resonate on. It is in this spirit that I hope practice theory can not only help improve discussion within the field or aid in the ethnographic endeavor itself, but allow others to more clearly see the fundamental interconnectedness of our being.

CHAPTER 12: A FINAL WORD FROM OUR LEADER

"Dear ritmistas!

I would like to congratulate all of you

for the excelent music that we played together

last Wednesday at Canopy.

I am really proud of you specially

because the energy we shared - among us and with the audience - was great!

How the ethnomusicologists like to say:

The quality of the music is in proportion to the quality of the social relations!

Or like professor Turino wrote:

"When a performance is good, I get a deep sense of oneness with the people I'm playing with" (Turino, Thomas. *Musical as Social Life*, Urbana: UIUC, 2006, p. 7. Draft).

This is the real "spirit" of a Samba School!"

Luciana Prass, email communication of April 6th, 2008, after our second public performance

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