

“Your Trip is Short”: Phish and the Anthropology of Time (Travel)

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If time shapes reality, and if Phish influences our perceptions of time, then Phish shapes our reality.

- But, does Phish shape everyone’s reality equally?
- Do all fans perceive time in different ways because of Phish’s influence?
- How does Phish, and Phish’s ability to alter perceptions of time, effect its’ fans and their lives?

Introduction

Phish shows are fleeting moments that can alter our perceptions of time. A few hours can sometimes feel like a week. A ten second segment during a Phish song can instantly transport you into any given moment in the past, and simultaneously project you into a future that can be both unknown and realized. Pivotal, transformative moments in our lives can and have occurred while either at a Phish show or when listening to the band outside of live performances. For some, a fleeting moment can be nothing, for others, it can be life changing. One thing remains constant: time passes and Phish and our individual connection to the community can alter our perception of time.

The way Phish alters our perceptions of time on the individual and group level directly influences our abilities to create a sense of place and define identity. Anthropologists seek to understand how humans make sense of the world through the cultures they create and maintain. However, the anthropological study of culture creates labels that do not capture the uniqueness of the individuals that comprise a “culture.” Therefore, the whole-culture approach makes it difficult to highlight the diversity of personal lived music-experiences within the Phish community.

Autoethnographies allow us, the band’s fans, to capture and assert our agency as living tribunal-historians of not just the band’s past, but our own past. We reflect on the past while in the present, and when we listen to Phish, emotions, memories, places and people channel through us, which forces us to consider our present and future selves. **Our stories allow us, as individuals within the Phish community, the chance to contextualize our lived experiences in culturally significant ways—ways beyond that which traditional anthropology can document or interpret.** We hope that we can help fans become participatory “insiders” of their own autoethnographic documentation of their lives in regards to Phish and how Phish’s force shapes their reality in various ways.

Sharing in The Grooves

Phish’s effect on our lived experiences can be so strong that it forces us to teleport into moments of our past and future. Autoethnography allows people to crystalize the connections between our Phish-influenced past to reflect on and enhance our present. Similar to these time loops the stories we share can create a loop of reflexivity that can reverberate throughout the Phish community like Anastasio’s haunting loops during the intro of *Ghost*.

We have created a platform that invites phans to join us in our autoethnographic journey of our Phish experiences. **As we explore our own stories we will guide others through the process and offer a space for the collection of these stories – a place for reflection, contemplation, connection, and inspiration.** The process of sharing and mutual reflection can create a diverse tapestry of stories of our experiences within the ‘Phishverse’ from the perspective of the phans themselves. Through reflection we can enhance our own experiences while the band is still active.

“Every music system is predicated upon a series of concepts which integrate music into the activities of the society at large and define its place as a phenomenon of life among other phenomenon.”

(Merriam 1964: 63)

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7/4/2010 Alpharetta audience, image by Andrew Agha



The stories on the right are examples of our own stories.
For more information please join us at sharinggrooves.net

“Gotta Jibboo”: 7/4/2010, Alpharetta lawn

By Andrew Agha (excerpt from full story on sharinggrooves.net)

My wife and I were on the tail end of the four-night Raleigh>Charlotte>Alpharetta run. I had a feeling this Jibboo would close the 1st set. Jibboo isn’t even a song I totally love, but, I figured it would be a rocking set closer.

A few minutes into the jam, as the end of daylight gave me one last chance to see everything, I looked around at the crowd, the WHOLE crowd. Seeing nearly 12,000 extremely happy people basking in this moment made me realize something dire: after set break and one last set of summer Phish, this moment, these four days of exciting fun, would come to an end and waiting for me when it’s over is the office, my desk, my boss. I felt lost, depressed, sad and quite bummed out amidst this revelatory sea of joy.

‘Why am I thinking about this right now, here, of all places?’ This thought made me realize that shows give me the happy and the joy, but I needed that feeling more of the time than just a few days a year. I never used to think like this. It was not right; it was not me. As I stood in silence and stillness, with everyone’s light reflecting off of me, it happened. A thought crystallized and there was nothing I could do to deny its truth.

I had to quit my job.

In this moment I saw my past, understood the reality of my present, and dreamed of a future that offered me more joy and happiness whether Phish was on tour or not. I was scared of the reality that Phish forced me to actually realize my life. With determination to change, I shifted from standing still to full-on dance floor. Now, every time I even think about this song, I’m back on that lawn, pondering my life, realizing I made the right choice.

“The Line”: 7/1/2014, Edgefield, South Carolina

by Nicole Isenbarger (excerpt from full story on sharinggrooves.net)

“Autoethnography challenged me to find the cadence point, to breathe, and to listen to the reverberations of my pain and sadness...”

(Bartlett in Bartlett and Ellis 2009:234)

My autoethnographic story reflects on how hearing the album version of “The Line” immediately after being told that I had tongue cancer helped me cope with the news. Learning the news was nothing like what we see in Hollywood movies: after two separate diagnoses of cancer I have still never seen the inside of my oncologists office. Instead I found myself alone on the side of a country road two hours from home hearing the news over the phone.

The underlying message in *The Line* is about overcoming adversity (Boone 2013). The song and its message caught me when I needed to hear it most. Hearing it through Phish—a band usually associated with positivity—allowed me to contemplate my situation in a way that looked beyond myself. I was able to step outside of my usual logic-oriented thinking and explore the situation in a more creative way. We all have mishaps and downfalls in life which we can see as either a dead end or a shift in our path. Through music I was able to see a timeline beyond the current moment, muster strength to face my adversity, and find hope for a future beyond my current diagnosis.

I felt inspired to move forward and improvise on a new beginning for myself.

While fans have been waiting for major improvisation or a jam in live performances of “The Line,” I think part of what Anastasio and the band are doing with the song is allowing us as fans to improvise on the lyrics in the decisions that we make in our own lives as we step over the line. Life, like improvisation, is always a challenge. And meeting that challenge requires both strength of character and a step over the line.