

The Polka Alternative: Polka as Counterhegemonic Ethnic Practice

Ann Hetzel Gunkel

Introduction

[C]ontemporary ethnic re-creations are given impetus by the fear not merely of being levelled into identical industrial hominids, but of losing an ethical (celestial) vision that might serve to renew the self and ethnic group as well as contribute to a richer, powerfully dynamic pluralist society. (Fischer 197)

The purpose of this essay is to write a subversive historiography of polka.¹ According to bell hooks, subversive historiography connects oppositional practices from the past with forms of resistance in the present, thus creating spaces of possibility where the future can be imagined differently (*Art* 151).² To achieve this, I want to revalue polka as a counterhegemonic ethnic practice.³ In fact, I will trace polka's history to reveal its radical impetus.

Over and against my project, the popular image of polka has remained remarkably consistent both within Polonia (the Polish diaspora) and without. For many, linked in the popular imagination to the "Polish joke," polka serves as a convenient emblem for stodgy, corny, moronic, and backward ethnic entertainment (Crease 73). "The Polish joke is a vestige of the racist eugenic theories of the early twentieth century and symbolizes the negative connotations associated with the Polish American ethnic identity: stupidity, vulgarity, racism, anti-Semitism, illiteracy, and filth" (Erdmans 52). As Robert Crease has shown, polka's history belies this image. That this perhaps goes against the grain of common sense is part of the larger project of subversive historiography. Insofar as "common sense" is a discursive construction that can serve to reproduce ethnic stereotypes, class prejudices, and other hegemonic tropes, then indeed I hope to cut against its grain. Lest this seem a tired project, I would recall two issues. First, one study, cited in Bukowczyk, shows that "Polish Americans continue to enjoy low social esteem, despite their considerable accomplishments in American society" ("Image" 76). Second, anti-Polish slurs, especially in the form of the Polish joke, seem to be one of the last remaining socially acceptable bigotries. According to Keil, "Poles are still, among all of America's ethnics, the easiest group to pile abuse upon, the group that one can have the most racist feelings about while having the least guilt feelings" (39).

This project consists of three parts: to revisit briefly the radical history of polka, to consider the sources of the persistent bad reputation of this cultural form along with a consideration of the genre's relation to the politics of ethnic identity, and to suggest several lenses through which one might revalue polka as a counterhegemonic or radical ethnic practice. My theme is neither new nor original.

ISSN 0300-7766 print/ISSN 1740-1712 online/04/040407-21 © 2004 Taylor & Francis Ltd
DOI: 10.1080/0300776042000264649

In fact, this work depends on the groundwork laid by Victor Greene's *A Passion for Polka* and *Polka Happiness* by Charles and Angeliki Keil and Dick Blau. These texts broke new ground in revaluing popular music in general and "old-time ethnic" or "people's music," as they have called polka, in particular. My aim is simply to revisit their insights in order to call for a renewed reevaluation of polka against the continuing stereotypes that besiege it. Despite the critical work of Greene and Keil, Blau, and Keil, polka remains "perhaps America's last great undiscovered genre—or as others say, 'the real alternative'" (Bessman, "Monarchs" 1).

One note on the American identity of polka seems necessary. That polka can be conceived as "America's last great undiscovered genre" requires reaffirmation of the American origin of the music. While my focus is on the Polish-American style of polka which—along with Slovenian-American—has dominated popular circles, it must be stated that Polka is a uniquely American cultural hybrid with many ethnically inflected forms. Keil, Blau, and Keil note six forms of ethnic American polkas: Slavic (Polish-American and Slovenian-American), Germanic (German-American and Czech-Bohemian-American), and southwestern (Mexican-American and Papago-Pima) (3). The Polish-American form is further subdivided into Eastern, Chicago-style (or "Honky"), and "Push" (Kleeman 65–106). As many scholars have demonstrated, contrary to the popular opinion that polka is a Polish musical form,⁴ polka in its popular form was not a transplant of a pre-existent Polish folk form to America, but a unique amalgam of ethnic styles and mass-mediated popular forms that emerged from America's multi-ethnic urban milieu (Keil, Blau, and Keil; Kohan; Savaglio). Keil and Feld's discussion of polka's development highlights this musical cross-pollination:

1

The challenge to Krolikowski and the other bandleaders was to do something Polish *and* American, something Polish immigrants would recognize as theirs that would also be suitable for radio and records, something bigger and more organized than a three- or four-piece wedding band, something that could appeal to other Americans as well. I think it was in meeting this challenge that Polish-American polka bands and polka style were born.... "[T]he polka" as a distinctively American style of music could not be created and legitimated outside of the new mainstream channels of communication. (205)

As Paula Savaglio has explained:

In a study of the musical self-representation of Polish-Americans, the issue of dual identity—Polish and American—is central. The hyphenated ethnic label is as much a description of the way the group perceives itself as it is an indication of the community's national origins. ("Polka" 35)

The Polish-American polka is, then, a cultural practice continually negotiated across the hyphen of ethnic identity.

The radical history of polka

Polka began as a kind of upstart, working-class rebellion against the stuffy, elitist minuet (Spilner 121). According to Robert Crease, "polka dancing was a revolutionary act from the beginning. Its birth, development, and triumph were framed by the two most important series of European popular uprisings of the nineteenth century in 1830 and 1848" (78). Suited to the turbulent mood of Europe in the 1840s, the polka raced through Europe, triumphing in Paris, where novels,

plays, hairstyles, and even fabric design (whence polka dots) incorporated polka into their themes. Suiting the liberal ideals of the day, polka was seen as an affirmation of the human spirit, a rebellion against constraint, the excitement of the forbidden, sensual, and exotic. The absence of ceremonial gestures common to court dances and the suspiciously close proximity of male and female partners, combined with the relative speed of the dance, cemented its popular appeal. Spreading to Mexico, North Africa, Finland, Russia, India, and Indonesia, "polkomania," according to Keil, was a recognition of the common culture of the working class (13). One dance historian notes: "The whole world wrote and talked about it, and apparently thought little of anything else" (Crease 80). The polka burst on the scene as the revolutionary dance form accompanying the popular fascination with oppressed workers, revolutionary intellectuals, and Polish freedom fighters (Keil, Blau, and Keil 13).

The accordion, now seen as perhaps the quintessential polka instrument, has an equally radical pedigree. Emerging in the same revolutionary period as polka itself, although not yet identified with it, the accordion craze was in full swing by the mid-1800s. Despised as the instrument of "ordinary people played in taverns, dances or in the streets," the accordion's massive popular success frightened the European musical establishment (Wagner 6). In the age of emigration, the accordion traveled with immigrants all over the globe, eventually becoming the defining instrument in a variety of revolutionary people's musics, such as tango. According to Shapiro:

No other wind instrument on the face of the earth is as versatile as the accordion. It can play melody, harmony and rhythm simultaneously, AND it's portable. Its diverse family includes both chromatic and diatonic accordions, as well as concertinas, bandoneons, and even harmoniums. (5)

It is perhaps a sad testament to our collective historical illiteracy that the accordion is widely accepted today as a popular stereotype for the old-fashioned and the corny.

Musette—like later American ethnic polkas—emerged as a reed-based urban music of rural peoples flowing into Paris during the industrial revolution (Roussin 5). A second wave of Parisian immigration, this time of Italians, brought with it the accordion that would eventually define the popular notion of "authentic" Parisian café culture. The racist suspicions of the French toward Mediterraneans underlay the eventual ironic triumph of Italian accordion music as the defining Parisian sound of *bal musette*. The phenomenal popular appeal of the accordion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries spawned racist and classist suspicions elsewhere—even causing it to be outlawed by fascist ideologues. In fact,

Nazi propagandists claimed that the accordion was a "nigger jazz instrument," for its close connection with modern American dance music. The Nazis tried to stop accordion bands from playing classical music which for them was an "abuse of the music of our great masters." The president of the *Reichsmusikkammer*—the highest institution controlling music in the Third Reich—declared that "now is the time to build a dam against the flooding of our musical life by the accordion." (Wagner 7)

The intermingling of Polish-American polka with electrified jazz and blues in the multi-ethnic urban centers such as Chicago was oddly anticipated by fascist music authorities.

Indeed, one of the continuing sources of musicological interest in polka is the phenomenally hybrid nature of the genre. From Little Wally's blueslike jams to Eddie Blazonczyk's country and western inflections, polka has continuously incorporated the strains of mass culture, even as it redefined its own unique cultural sphere. As Keil and Feld have observed, polka responded to variety of musical and social styles.

The mediated polka style had to respond to both the dominant culture's definition of "polak" and its definition of "nigger" at the same time. . . . This sort of double definition or triangulation vis-à-vis the dominant culture is even clearer in the early 1950s when Chicago-style polkas proudly take on the label "dyno" or "honky," defying the old Eastern-style norms and saying, in effect, We used to be immigrant peasants who had to prove our respectability with legitimate American jazz-influenced music; now we know we are despised immigrant workers, and we must dig a little deeper for a "soul music" of our own and do it our way. (206–07)

As Kohan, Keil, and Greene have demonstrated, polka has had a remarkable ability to interact with other cultural forms, both influencing and being influenced by a wide variety of musical genres. In this way, perhaps it has been seen as both suspect and fallen.

Polish-American polka and the politics of ethnic identity

It is precisely this hybrid nature that speaks so well to the postmodern debate over multiple identities. Yet, on this account, polka finds itself situated in the midst of intragroup struggle over the meaning of authentic ethnic identity. It is not only in the eyes of mainstream culture that polka seems backwards, primitive, and corny. In fact, owing to intraethnic tensions, polka forces ethnic scholars to reconsider the heterogeneous nature of groups that have been summed up often in convenient and homogenizing ways. The multilayered, multiregional, and multi-generational Polish emigration "has been reduced to a single 'Polonia' category" (Gross 158). As Feliks Gross has pointed out, "the simplification of the immigration picture was influenced in part by the excellent work of Thomas and Znaniecki, *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America* (University of Chicago Press, 1918–20)" (158). To validate the theoretical assumptions of this work, the authors needed "as homogenous a sample as possible" (158). Thus, this definitive Polonian ethnic study "included primarily immigrants of peasant background, strongly related to church and parochial organizations, groups that were rather conservative in outlook" (159). This early and definitive scholarly examination of Polish immigrants in some ways solidified the notion of Polish-American backwardness, ruralness, and conservatism both within and without Polonia. (This image persists in contemporary popular cultural representations of the "Polak," such as *NYPD Blue's* Andy Sipowicz.) The study did not include radical, socialist émigrés, for example.

A successive pattern of Polish immigration to the United States during the last one hundred years has resulted in a widely diverse Polish-American population comprised of post-Solidarity émigrés as well as fourth-generation descendants of pre-World War II immigrants. The rubric "Polish-American" itself enforces an outsider's sense of commonality on a group of people who, though they share a

common national descent, vary greatly in their political orientation, educational backgrounds, and economic situations. (Savaglio, "Big-Band" 35)

Thus, the tendency to define Polonian identity in these terms, rather than in urban or politically radical contexts, presented those Polonian groups, especially those in later waves of immigration, with a dilemma.

It has been the case, historically, that the vast majority of polka performers were/are the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of immigrants from the early waves of Polish rural movement to American industrial centers. Sociological studies of American Polonia have noted the cultural differences between these second-, third-, fourth-, and now fifth-generation Polish-Americans and post-World War II, Post-Solidarity émigrés (Emmons, Obidinski). Recent immigrants are likely to

point out that Old Polonians are not really Polish anymore... But ironically, although they have lost their Polishness, they have not lost their peasant status... New immigrants find parallels between working-class South-side-of-Chicago culture and Polish peasant culture and contrast it with the life styles and sophistication of present-day urban Poland... A much more frequent music-cultural association is made between the old Polish community and polkas. "Polkas are a cheap way of being Polish." (Emmons 68-69)

Although Chicago's definitive honky-style polka originated on the north side of Chicago on Division Street, the "Polish Broadway" (Keil, Blau, and Keil 24-25), the current home of Chicago's polka activity, is the solidly working-class, south-side Polish-American enclaves. The polka stereotype within Polonia itself is not dissimilar to the scorn heaped upon rural blacks of the Great Migration by members of the established "Black Belt" elite on Chicago's south side. Despite the apparent homogeneity of the community in the eyes of (white) outsiders, Chicago's African-American south side was divided along class lines. "Fearful that the migrants, with their rural southern manners, would disrupt the community and embarrass the race," Chicago's black middle class scorned the manners, foodways, clothing, and most notably the Delta boogie-woogie "plantation music" of the migrants (Grossman 329). Whereas the established blacks scorned newcoming migrants, Polonian émigrés scorn the descendants of earlier immigrants.⁵ It is also the case that this scorn is often aimed in the reverse direction. In both cases, class-based fears and intragroup struggles over authentic ethnic/racial identity seem to coalesce around musical production.

One quasi-racial dimension of polka's beleaguered image within Polonia is the question of regional ethnic identification. Another possible source of intra-Polonian antipolka feeling has, to my knowledge, not been discussed. I would argue that there is also an element of class and racial prejudice against polka music because of its incorporation of *Góral* (Polish highlander or mountaineer) melodies, themes, instrumentation, and distinctive harmonies. Not unlike the biases northern Italians have historically expressed against southern Italians (Mangione and Morreale xv) or North Americans toward Appalachian peoples, stereotypes of *Górale* often portray them as archaic rubes. The popular conception of *Górale* is an odd mix of fascination and derision. It should be noted that not only does polka music incorporate *Górale* styles but also many polka musicians (Grammy-winner Eddie Blazonczyk, for example) are descended from *Góral* immigrants. Keil, Blau, and Keil cite a polka fan on this distinctive sound,

I can't get enough of the "old style," old village styles like *górale* fiddling, the minor keys, something barbaric about it. That's why I go for the Chicago-style polkas; they still have some of that mountain music sound. . . . All the Chicago bands, the AmPol Aires, even modern Eddie B. has some of it. (137)

The frequency of *Górale* names, themes, and citations is represented by this small sampling: the Dynatones' "Góral'skiu Medley" (*Ania*), Eddie Blazonczyk's "Mountaineer's Polka" (*Award*), "Hej Góralu Polka" (*Everybody*), "Gorole Gorole Polka" (*New*), "Swine Herder's Oberek" (*Always*); John Góra's "In our Village—W Naszej Wiosce Oberek," "Góral—Mountaineer Polka," "Góralu Waltz" (*Duty*); Marion Lush's "Góralu" (*Golden*), Jan Lewan's "Góral'ska Medley" (*Live*).

The ongoing struggle over the meaning of ethnicity is seen most clearly in this struggle over "real" Polish identity. As Erdmans clearly documents, the ability of each group within Polonia to preserve its self-definition and ownership of the community depends in part on each group's power symbolically to define the public arena. "The new immigrants would find themselves outside the community if Polonia were defined as speaking English and celebrating folk-culture; the Polish Americans would find themselves shoved aside in a polka-hating, Polish-speaking community" (122).

This intergroup struggle depends in part on the majority culture's homogenous understanding of ethnic identity. For it must be noted that:

In America, the polka is almost synonymous with Polish Americans (perhaps to Polonian scholars and leaders it is synonymous with working-class Polish American culture, but to the rest of America it represents Polish American culture in general.) . . . It is not a meaningful symbol of Polish national culture in Poland. (Erdmans 120–21)

As Keil notes, "most of middle-class Polonia hates the polka with a passion deeper than the Atlantic" (38). Within Polonia, polka is a Polonian—not a Polish—symbol.

That is not to say, however, that polka is somehow a fallen or inauthentic manifestation of Polish-American identity. It should be noted that polka performs an increasingly important role in the self-definition of one segment of Polish-American society, whose ethnic identity is not constructed around a prior Polish citizenship. As the old ethnic enclaves disperse, "the act of defining the ethnic group's music becomes increasingly necessary as the ethnic group itself can no longer be defined merely by reference to geography or language" (Savaglio, "Big-Band" 42). In fact, it is the essentialist mobilization of the category of authentic ethnicity that requires vigilant critique. On this point, I would want to affirm DiLeonardo's critique of the dominant discourse of white ethnic life in the United States, which postulates, among other notions, a quasi-essentialist, class- and regionally normative, homogenous ethnic "community" irrespective of lived and fluid ethnic identities. She points out that "professional narratives" of ethnic identity are often mobilized both to obfuscate ethnic identity as lived and understood by members of the groups in question as well as to deploy highly reactionary social values by imagining them as privileged in "unchanging" pre-industrial-ethos ethnic enclaves (133–35). DiLeonardo's work is particularly powerful as it uncovers the contrast between commoditized ethnic identities and those of her informants, many of whom express strong feelings of inauthenticity, bred "by 'ethnic' advertising, media stereotypes, and popular writing on ethnic

communities" (180). It behooves us, therefore, to revalue polka as a Polish-American practice as it is lived and experienced by its participants rather than as theorized by brokers of ethnic identity. This means one would need to advocate it as an "authentic" expression of ethnic identity without privileging it as a normative expression of Polish-Americanness. It seems that polka musicians themselves are already very much in tune with this "postmodern" demand. Walser explains that the creation of polka styles is "opposed to the bourgeois passion to preserve or create 'folk culture' and 'folk' lore. Ethnic musicians typically create with little concern for 'authenticity' or purity" (194).

Indeed, in the battle over "authentic" ethnic identity, I would argue that we must reexamine polka not in light of "externally imposed preconceptions of [ethnic] meaning," but, rather, as Turner and Seriff argue, "from the strategic way in which the participants themselves organize and reorganize the meaning of this [practice] according to what they consider to be valuable" (93). In this way, one sees a clear valuing of polka *on the part of its practitioners and participants*, as a powerful, emotive, and significant cultural expression of ethnicity. According to Davis, enjoyment of polka is "a means of partaking in Polish-American ethnicity or 'heritage' as defined by the participants" (122). If one examines the vast body of polka lyrics, a clear trend emerges on this point. The expressions of Polish-American ethnic identity are both frequent and consistent: Eddie Blazonczyk's "Polish and Proud of It Polka" (*All American*), "Kiss Me I'm Polish Polka" (*It's Our 25th*), "Melody of Love Polka" (*Award*) (which covers the Pol-Am Bobby Vinton tune), "White Eagle Waltz" (*Always*), Lenny Gomulka's "Old Fashioned Polish Ways Polka" (*For Old*), John Góra's recordings of "Sto Lat" [One Hundred Years] (*Take*) and *Jeszcze Polska Nie Zginie*^{3a} (Polish National Anthem) (*Duty*), Li'l Wally's "Kocham Polskie Polki" [I Love Polish Polkas] (*Brings*), and Polka Family's popular anthem "Polish People in the USA" (*We*). Without exception, these enthusiastic formulations of ethnicity are shaped in the language of the 1970s "New Ethnicity" as documented by Michael Novak. That its slogans and discursive formulations (i.e., "Kiss Me I'm Polish") appear nonsensical to later immigrants in no way delegitimizes meaningfulness for its own participants.⁶ In fact, polka as a popular ethnomusical form offers a unique and largely untapped site for scholarly study of the phenomenon of identity politics. Interestingly, polka practitioners themselves have articulated a kind of border identity. Eddie Blazonczyk describes moving between two cultures using metaphors of travel. His "Home Away From Home" states, "I'd like to find a way to be two places at one time" (*Smokin'*). In an accessible yet poetic way, he thus describes the dual or even multiple positionality of the border crosser (see Anzaldúa). Polka offers a space for the creative expression and negotiation of hyphenated and often conflicted ethnic identities.

Polka as counterhegemonic ethnic practice

Despite the stereotypes, polka fans and musicians often conceive of polka as a radical alternative to mainstream culture. Frequently, polka partisans express their continuing interest in polka as both a means of "preserving their heritage" and of resisting mainstream American mass culture. If we are to take seriously Turner and Seriff's edict that cultural practices be assessed "from the strategic way in which the participants themselves organize and reorganize" their meaning, then polka must be examined as a counterhegemonic practice, merely because it is *experienced*

as such (93). Polka promoter Leon Kozicki states that polka people “[K]now who they are, and they do not pretend they are someone else. There is strength in acceptance of oneself and one’s past” (Keil, Blau, and Keil 95). As Walser states,

An increasingly monopolistic corporate America used mass media to promote cultural homogenization, and ethnic cultures seemed in danger of obliteration by the mass culture of capitalism, which often disrupts communal loyalties as a means to produce more efficient consumption. But the same forms of commercial culture that replace and destroy traditional bases for communal culture can also provide means for the creation of new cultural forms that oppose homogenization. (195)

Polka people may not use this terminology, but they are clear about this value. Despite its integration of many mass-mediated musical styles, polka, according to Savaglio, “produced a decidedly non-mainstream sound,” maintained “a distinct repertoire of Polish American dance genres—polkas, obereks and kujawiaks,” continued the “use of the Polish language” (although not exclusively), and “maintained the Polish-American identity of the music by performing it exclusively at in-community events” (“Big-Band” 34). Moreover, polka people’s own perception of the radicality of their practice continues to contrast sharply with the dominant culture’s stereotypes about the backward and hokey nature of the music.

In an age of multiculturalism and increased emphasis on cultural pluralism, why is polka music still ignored at best, reviled at worst? Despite the wild success of the commodification of cultural difference under the corporate category of World Music, polka music remains solidly unhip. Once marketers responded to the craving for packaged ethnicity and cultural difference, the world music craze created an increased interest in everything from Afro-Pop to Klezmer. Interestingly, however, one won’t find a polka record in the same world music bin with the *Buena Vista Social Club* soundtrack. With the increased attention to the commodified music of “Others,” polka is squarely out of it. To speculate briefly on this exclusion, to ask why polka hasn’t gained alongside *Tejano* increased attention with the hip, upscale consumers of world music is to revisit the relation between race and ethnicity in American life. In the white supremacist imagination, the exotic appeal of “Otherness” is provided only by racially marked others, imagined as somehow more authentic, more soulful, and more real. “Within commodity culture, ethnicity becomes spice, seasoning that can liven up the dull dish that is mainstream culture” (hooks, *Black* 21). Ignoring the racist, historical conditions that produce the very concept of whiteness, the upscale consumer reinvests blue-collar white ethnicity with the blandness that is said to characterize WASP culture in the postmodern age. As Dick Blau has noted, “While black culture was thought to be cool, the culture of the white ethnic working class was thought to be corny” (ix).

2

3

Poles first became white and then became ethnic. Matthew Frye Jacobson states that for Celtic, Slavic, and Hebrew immigrants, becoming American depended upon becoming Caucasian (182).

While the Irish became white in the middle of the nineteenth century . . . it was not until after World War I that Slavic immigrants began to lighten their swarthy status. . . . John McGreevy argues that the immigrants became “Catholic whites” only in the context of African Americans moving in large numbers to a particular area. Ethnicity was flattened into race. (Erdmans 33–34)

The invisibility of whiteness, particularly for southern and eastern European white ethnics and their musical forms, persists for scholars. A recent essay in the *Journal*

of *Aesthetics and Art Criticism* asks: "Where, then, can one find a specifically white American ethnicity expressed in a distinctive, ethnic popular music?" (Shusterman 222). The only answer offered by the essay is country and western music. Hence, a persistent blindness to the fabrication of white identity as well as an ongoing class prejudice keeps polka out of the dubious realm of the fashionable.

I would assess polka's "failure" in the realm of fashion as a sign that its radical possibilities are not easily coopted and commodified by the culture industry. In some ways, it is the professional brokers of ethnic history who have eradicated polka's radical possibilities within the uneasy narratives of ethnic identity in an assimilationist context. As whiteness subsumed ethnicity, ethnicity was constructed as a benign identity that would allow people an attachment to a subculture without challenging their loyalty to America. According to Erdmans, "Historians continue to record only those values that did not contradict American values. For example, Bukowczyk argues that immigrant values that survived in the second generation were the peasant value of self-reliance, thrift, and hard work (76). James S. Pula defines Polish values as "respect for home ownership, community, and country" (35). Erdmans claims that, according to historians and sociologists, "No aspect of the Polish American identity challenged capitalism, democracy, religious freedom, or the values of independence, individualism, and hard work" (35). While her observation that scholars of Polish America appear collectively to have forgotten the socialists seems quite accurate, I would want to revisit polka in terms of its challenges to American hegemonic values, such as individualism and the Protestant work ethic (35). (I will return shortly to this theme in order to elaborate two preliminary points on which one might reconsider polka's counterhegemonic potential.)

As bell hooks notes:

It is sadly ironic that the contemporary discourse which talks the most about heterogeneity, the decentered subject, declaring breakthroughs that allow recognitions of Otherness, still directs its critical voice primarily to a specialized audience that shares a common language rooted in the very master narratives it claims to challenge. If radical postmodernist thinking is to have a transformative impact . . . it must be reflected in styles of being, including styles of writing as well as chosen subject matter. (*Yearning* 25)

In focusing on the subject matter of polka, this project attempts to align itself with such efforts as Robert Walser's study of the polka mass, which argues "that however distant the polka mass may seem from the debates of academics, it exemplifies and helps illuminate many of the strategies of what is typically called postmodern culture" (184). Walser's approach, however, is atypical.⁷ The creative possibilities for thinking about postmodern ethnic and racial identity are currently betrayed by the continuing elitism of ethnic scholarship, musicology, and academic discourse. As Victor Greene has explained:

[E]thnomusicologists and music historians have generally ignored or even deliberately avoided a genre that has also been referred to as "people's" music. . . . Among academic intellectuals polka music has suffered from a bad image. Most serious critics claimed, for example, that it lacked artistic quality, in large part because it had a rather unsophisticated audience. It was charged that ethnic old-time music was the musical entertainment of America's *lumpen proletariat*, that uncultured—according to its critics—blue-collar working class who frequented the corner saloons and taverns of midwestern industrial cities. (3)

The continuing class-based scorn towards “polyester polka people” bears out Greene’s assertion. The popular image of polka as unfashionable is often simply mockery of working-class folks.

“Everyone thinks of polka music as ‘Roll Out The Barrel,’ ‘She’s Too Fat,’ . . . and dancing with fat Polish girls,” says Eddie Blazonczyk, Jr., who plays concertina in [and manages] his father’s band, “but it’s nothing to do with that” . . . According to Henry Guzevich, trumpet player and lead vocalist of Polka Family, “Polka carries such a stigma.” (Bessman, “Young” 1)

4

As Erdmans explains, in the “old immigration” of Poles to America at the turn of the century, Polish-American identity was solidly associated with its working-class character (35). The majority of immigrants who arrived between 1870 and 1914 came from rural backgrounds but joined the proletarian industrial labor force. Thus, Polish Americans of this migration—whose descendants comprise most “polka people”—were a strong component of the labor movement finding that their working-class identity became intricately interwoven with their ethnic identity (Erdmans 35). One could convincingly argue, with Keil and Greene, that polka stereotypes are condescending, class-based judgments on the “unhip.”

In a popular cultural milieu in which the mass-mediated pressure to conform seems almost inescapable, it is rather extraordinary given the popular image of polka that people who polka in the twenty-first century “must not care much about what fashionable people think of them” (Keil, Blau, and Keil 3). Polka, according to Keil, Blau, and Keil, represents “at least a hundred years of resistance to the melting pot, a refusal to disappear into mediated entertainment, a ‘no’ to monoculture, and an ongoing vernacular alternative to the sorts of fun manufactured by the culture industry” (3). Most interesting about polka people’s resolute indifference to popular opinion is their persistence in crafting a cultural self-identity “even if that presentation is often used by outsiders as a caricature or exaggeration of what it means to be Polish-American” (Keil, Blau, and Keil 10). Polka forms communities of resistance—not perhaps in the narrowly conceived sense of organized political action—but rather in the sense of “alternative forms of cultural expression and ways of being that critique the dominant conception of the world” (Sciorra 79). Most polka events make available for sale “typically” Polish foods such as *pierogi*, *kie³basa*, *go³abki* [cabbage rolls], and *p¹czki* [“donuts”]. These cultural performances bring together music, dance, and foodways in powerful and emotionally charged ways that “accomplish a complex set of counterhegemonic tasks, including physical autobiography and landmarking memory” (Sciorra 81).

5

Given the continuing valuation of “history from the ground up,” polka must be seen as one cultural practice which has named and preserved the cultural memories of working-class immigrants of a particular era. It continues to be common for polka lyrics to enshrine memorable people, places, and local institutions—i.e., to write polka history as part of its explicit task. In Eddie Blazonczyk’s “Polka Lounges in Chicago” (*Everybody*), the lyrics present a litany of tavern, nightclub, and social hall names, all but lost in the suburban migration of the fifties and sixties. Each place of significance to the polka community is landmarked and preserved in song.⁸ Along with “organized” polka efforts such as the International Polka Association Museum and the successful lobby to create a polka Grammy category at the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences, polka lyrics memorialize innovators and ancestors of the polka tradition. For example, a recent

tribute album to “the late great Marion Lush,” has received substantial airplay on polka radio shows (*Polka Drive Time*).⁹

Polka has responded to the lack of working-class history and the now well-documented ethnocentrism of American history by writing its own. Perhaps the local history created through polka has not been recognized as such because of the persistent struggles over what constitutes “legitimate” history.¹⁰ In producing something uniquely American within a Polish immigrant context, polka has, in fact, created a valid expression of lived ethnic identity. This observation comes with a caution, however. It necessitates affirming polka’s legitimacy as one cultural voice that landmarks a particular version of Polish-American memory without reifying it through the lens of nostalgic desire for the “imagined” communities of the mythic “old neighborhood” *Polonias*. As Dominic Pacyga notes, Chicago’s ethnic neighborhoods are often imagined mythically as constant and homogenous, despite their documented multi-ethnic and fluid character (604).

Polka needs to be revalued through a politicized memory “that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present” (hooks, *Yearning* 147).

The nostalgic mobilization of polka may run the risk of collapsing class into ethnicity, romanticizing the working class, and deploying a “good old days” agenda of reactionary politics. Such nostalgia would cover over the counterhegemonic possibilities of this unique musical amalgam. To counter this danger, the remainder of this paper suggests two areas in which polka might be revalued for the counterhegemonic values it bolsters. One caution is required on this point. The counterhegemonic effects of polka music must be seen from a social/cultural rather than strictly musical point of view. “‘Blues’ and ‘polka’ do not really challenge bourgeois music; they take the harmonic frameworks utterly for granted (Shepherd 1982) and simply flow around or past institutionalized music as they keep to their own proletarian purposes” (Keil and Feld 209). Thus, the analysis examines both “polka practices” and the explicit messages of the music.

Polka, it has been observed, is not “message music.” Its lyrics tend to function “like creeds, stating communal beliefs and feelings at their simplest” (Crease 81). This is likely one source of the common stereotype that polka music is vapid or unsophisticated. The genre seldom provides explicit “messages.” But when clear value statements are made, they turn toward two predominant themes: Catholic spirituality and working-class resistance.

Regarding the latter theme, while not claiming any overt political agenda, and certainly not a socialist one, polka music has consistently identified with and given voice to the frustrations of the so-called “working man.” Polka continues to present a classed analysis of the world even as the larger culture continues to insist on its classlessness. One example is Eddie Blazonczyk’s “Lord Have Mercy on the Working Man,” which explains that the “rich man does the dancing while the poor man pays the band” (*Always*).¹¹

Alongside the more limited sphere of explicit economic messages in polka lyrics, one must also consider the capitalist (or anticapitalist, depending on one’s spin) issues related to the production and distribution of polka music. As Keil, Blau, and Keil have noted, polka’s development is intricately linked to the mass-mediated forms of the twentieth century (19–35). Currently, it is quite fashionable for ethnic

6

studies both to promote and to document entrepreneurial leaders of a given ethnic community—especially those who establish community-based, independent business alternatives to the mainstream. Given this scholarly trend, the lack of such scholarship regarding polka entrepreneurs is astonishing. Chicago’s Grammy Award winner Eddie Blazonczyk is not atypical in this regard. He not only writes, orchestrates, sings, and performs the music but also has established his own record store, recording label, recording studio, travel business (focusing on “polka cruises” and special events), and radio programs. With the notable exception of Victor Greene’s and Richard Spottswood’s documentation of ethnic music publishers such as Alvin Sajewski, there is a tremendous lack of attention paid to entrepreneurs in ethnic scholarship in general and Polonian history in particular. While one might not necessarily call these practices counterhegemonic—as they establish more of a parallel capitalist economy than a critique of it—these are, nonetheless, community-based businesses that arise out of and serve the ethnic sphere. Yet, such an artist-controlled and -distributed musical genre is a radical alternative to the global conglomerates of pop music. The music industry has barely noticed such polka entrepreneurs even as a pop cultural battle erupts over artist control and distribution of music in a corporate setting. That polka entrepreneurs have achieved what so-called “Independent,” “Alternative,” and MP3 musicians only dream of is remarkable indeed.

Alongside the class and economic arenas, a second sphere of counterhegemonic “messages” and attitudes dominates polka. It has long been noted that Polish identity politics are intricately bound up with Roman Catholicism (J. Pula 2).¹² But seldom have scholars commented on the complex ways in which polka as a Polish-American cultural form articulates a resistant Catholicism in the face of the larger culture’s persistent anti-Catholic, anti-immigrant, and anti-urban biases. As Robert Orsi points out, one of the most important forces shaping modern American Protestantism was the “widespread senses of apocalyptic urban crisis provoked by the swelling populations of immigrant Catholic laborers” (24–25). It should be remembered that “immigrant Catholicism” as it was called, or something worse, “ghetto Catholicism,” was seen as “an obscurantist form of cult worship that stood in the way of Catholics being fully accepted in the American cultural mainstream” (Ehrenhalt 118). In fact, polka continues to create a culture of resistant Catholicism in an age largely assumed to be post-Christian. Many polka artists have recorded “religious” albums and compact discs, from hymns to the Virgin Mary to *Kolędy* [Polish Christmas carols]. But rather than separating the religious from the everyday—as is the custom in the dominant Protestant culture, which stresses religion as a private matter—polka music has included religious motifs throughout its songs.¹³ Many polka lyrics include spiritual appeals. For example, John Góra has recorded a curious (and very popular) polka cha-cha (!) based on the famous poem and hymn “*Polskie Kwiaty*” [Polish Flowers], which imagines the homeland and the Madonna through floral metaphors (*Take*). More typical of the usual religious motifs in polka lyrics is Lenny Gomulka’s “God Bless This Music Polka” (*For Old*).

While simply mentioning God or the Blessed Mother is increasingly a countercultural gesture in a “post-Christian” society, this is not the primary counterhegemonic religious stance effected by polka. This stance more accurately might be defined not by what polka states explicitly within its lyrics, but rather the worldview it presents. This worldview, called “polka happiness” or “the will to party,” emphasizes joy and celebration as fundamental postures of polka music

and dance. I would argue that these modes of “ritual ecstasy” inherent in polka give the genre its radical impetus” (Keil, Blau, and Keil 5). This ecstatic emphasis (described by Keil and Feld as Dionysian [202–17]) is linked to two traits of polka music, which I would argue are Catholic in nature: (1) the participatory, communal nature of the genre; and (2) its relentless emphasis on joy and ecstatic celebration.

The forums in which polka developed “were not concert or recital halls—where music and dance are essentially performances for spectators—but communal events such as wedding, feasts, and celebrations, and also bars” (Walser 81). Thus, as Keil, Blau, and Keil stress, polka—unlike most other forms of music and dance—is not a product “consumed” by a community but an integral part of a larger social experience (3). The seemingly simplistic lyrics of polka are in part, according to Crease, a reflection of the communal nature of the experience, wherein the personal confessions and manifestos of many pop music forms would seem incoherent (81). This communal participatory art form resists easy commodification as it eschews the “stars” of pop music’s culture of celebrity. Polka musicians are expected to play until exhaustion, to dance during the sets of other bands—in short, to be one of the crowd. Polka musicians typically mingle with the audience and establish a reciprocal rapport with audience members through “dedications” and other onstage techniques. Perhaps this single tendency is polka’s most potent counterhegemonic quality. In the Protestant culture of individualism, polka remains a communal form that does not raise its finest practitioners to celebrity status. “[T]he IPA [International Polka Association] does not generally glorify polka music as ‘art’ and polka musicians as ‘artists’ or ‘composers.’ There is no fetishizing of ‘music’ and ‘art,’ only a pragmatic concern for the health of polka music” (Keil, Blau, and Keil 87). While polka musicians are loved and appreciated by their fans, they are not idolized as are other popstars. The communal ritual of polka dancing emphasizes a far more “catholic” understanding of the world than does any other form of popular music. Such communal rituals, in the tradition of pilgrimages, serve “not so much to maintain society’s status quo as to recollect, and even to presage, an alternative mode of social being, a world where *communitas*, rather than a bureaucratic social structure, is preeminent” (Turner and Turner 39). It is interesting that, while “community” is an absolutely unquestioned buzzword of both the right and left (see Suarez 24–25), a communal popular cultural form such as polka is either overlooked or mocked.

This Catholic, communal *Weltanschauung* is linked to the creation of ritual time and space in the ecstatic practices of polka happiness. I would argue that this ritual ecstasy enacts a counterhegemonic movement. The smug and condescending mockery displayed toward polka people is largely, I believe, an expression of intense discomfort in the presence of ritual excess, that is to say, a translation of the Puritan ethos in contemporary terms. My reevaluation of polka wishes to refuse this condescension. This refusal is based in the anthropology of festival and celebration. According to Leigh Eric Schmidt,

A common feature of festivity is to overindulge, to eat, drink, or spend to excess, lavishly to use up resources otherwise diligently saved. [Such rituals give] expression to a kind of festal excess that is often fundamental to celebrations. In other words, festive behavior is built in large part on wastrel prodigality, on surplus and abundance, on conspicuous consumption. [The critique of such practices is often an attack on] festival itself, a repudiation of celebratory indulgence and dissipation out of adherence to puritanical or republican values emphasizing

hard work, self-control, frugality, and simplicity. The contemporary contest stands as another battle between the heirs of the Puritans and the perennial bacchanalians of popular culture. (8)

The Puritanical disdain for ritual is a continuing embodiment of anticelibratory, anti-Catholic attitudes, which find outlet in the scorn heaped upon "polka happiness." The possibility for radical joy in the context of material culture presupposes a prior Catholic worldview, called by Tracy and Greeley "the analogical imagination." Discussions of the analogical and dialectical imaginations suggest that the Catholic analogical imagination assumes a "God who is present in the world. Thus, the world and all its events, objects, and people tend to be somewhat like God" (Greeley 45). The Protestant dialectical imagination, by contrast, "assumes a God who is radically absent from the world and who discloses Herself only on rare occasions." The world and all its events, objects, and people tend to be radically different from God, thus needing "consecration" (45). The much-covered polka standard, "In Heaven There is No Beer" (Brave Combo, *Polkas*), poses a radical joy in the material world of flesh with a playfulness that is virtually countercultural against a backdrop of Puritanical austerity.¹⁴ As Leigh Eric Schmidt argues, consumption replaced the Catholic liturgy for the American Protestant middle-class (159). The antiritual norms of Anglo-Protestant American culture reproduced ritual in market spaces (Douglas 1–4). Hungry for ritual yet wary of the public, communitarian nature of "immigrant religions" such as Catholicism and Judaism, the American middle-class responded to the sacralization of consumption offered by capitalist spectacle. This wariness of public, communal ritual is perhaps another reason that polka is seen as suspect.

It is not merely the communitarian aspect of polka that provokes critique, but the specific emotive emphasis on joy, suspect also in the Anglo-Protestant world of rational, productive time. The bottom line of polka is conveyed by the simple question, "Is everybody having a good time?" Polka promoter Leon Kozicki states: "Those who are involved in polka, they enjoy it, they find happiness, which is part of what life is" (Keil, Blau, and Keil 93). The songs and records of polka musicians most often stress words related to joy, celebration, partying, and good times.¹⁵ While this is perhaps a source for the scorn heaped on polka—"After all, How corny!"—I would argue that joy is also an undervalued category of radical potential. Thinkers as different as Pope John Paul II and Paulo Freire have noted the pervasiveness of what they call the "culture of death." As Freire comments, "Oppression . . . is necrophilic; it is nourished by love of death, not life" (58). Polka is life-affirming in the most direct ways. Its relentless, emphatic assertion of joy pronounces a love of life that to outsiders seems moronic or simple-minded. This is most understandable when one considers the capitalist commodity of romantic love. As Cornel West has explained: "A love ethic has nothing to do with sentimental feelings or tribal connections. Rather it is a last attempt at generating a sense of agency among a downtrodden people" (19). Even Ché Guevara, who admitted "the risk of sounding ridiculous," claimed that love is revolutionary (Freire 70). Moreover, the joy of marginalized peoples has always been a radical act. Through painstaking scholarship and activism, that realization has at long last been achieved regarding African-American musical traditions. But scholars of white ethnicity have missed the boat.

Renowned African-American scholar Cornel West has argued that the single most destructive force pervading black communities is nihilism, defined not as a

philosophical doctrine but as the “lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most important) lovelessness” (14). He goes on to chronicle the genius of “black foremothers and forefathers” in creating “powerful buffers to ward off the nihilistic threat.” Such buffers include “cultural structures of meaning and feeling that created and sustained communities. . .” (15). In light of his powerful observation, we must reconsider the ways in which white ethnic communal culture has provided similar structures for its people. Alongside the growing scholarship on the identity politics of whiteness, we must write genealogies of resistance in tribute to those, such as polka’s innovators and practitioners, who created and sustained community in the working-class ethnic milieu. Because it revalues joy, the sheer energy of “polka happiness” is counterhegemonic in a fundamental way.

As has been pointed out by Keil, polka is not folk music (9–10). But to the extent that it incorporates and deploys folk symbols (Krakowian costumes, *Góral* [mountaineer] hats and vests, and certain folk melodies, such as “*Dwanaæcie Listeczków*” [Twelve Angels]), it should be noted that polka could fit well into Williams’s radical reassessment of folklore. 7

[T]raditional culture or folklore represents areas of human experience, aspiration and achievement which the dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognize. Folklore’s power as a culture of contestation resides in the active process of selection and choice by which individuals call into play a repertoire of past symbolisms and infuses it with new meaning and values. Folklore is not some mental baggage mindlessly perpetuated by bearers of tradition but must be seen instead as a process of thought—an ongoing interpretation of the past . . . [that is] symbolically reinvented in an ongoing present. (Sciorra 79)

Considered against this statement, perhaps one source of polka’s dismissal from within Polonia and without is its misconstrued antiquarian nature. When a Polonian scholar such as John Bukowczyk makes the following legitimate suggestion about Polonian cultural life, polka can mistakenly be tossed by the wayside. He states: “Polish-American cultural vitality and integrity would benefit by reducing our reliance on Polish and Polish-American culture of past times and developing greater connectedness to the culture of contemporary Poland” (“Image” 81). While this suggestion is both interesting and provocative, it can mean that a Polish-American genre such as polka finds itself further marginalized as a relic of “past times.” This misconception (although certainly not presented by Bukowczyk) is widely shared, and misses the point that polka is a vital, living, and changing contemporary form. 8

According to Cleveland International Records’ owner Steve Popovich, “There’s this huge misconception about what polka music sounds like, how it’s played, the level of musicianship. . .” (Bessman, “Monarchs” 110). Popovich recalls a performance where Chicago’s Eddie Blazonczyk played his “Polish Wedding Song,” “where he modulates ten times and keeps building—and people rush the stage” (Bessman, “Monarchs” 110). According to Crease, polka music “continues to be performed by skilled musicians who are continually incorporating new influences. . . . By any reasonable criterion, then, the polka ought surely to be regarded as among the most dynamic and innovative participatory art forms this country has ever produced” (82–83). New Wave/“punk polka” innovator Carl Finch, of the Grammy-winning Brave Combo, notes:

When I first listened to a real, honest-to-God polka record—instead of pigeon-holing it as a dead form of music or a joke for a quick laugh on TV, like we're conditioned to feel—it was a whole life transformation. . . . The nonpretentious nature of it combined with the unique energy . . . makes it without a doubt the freshest music happening. (Bessman, "Monarchs" 110)

Finch's comment stands in stark contrast to the popular image of polka as outdated or old-fashioned. And yet one could argue that this notion is not strictly related to polka itself so much as the popular understanding of ethnicity, which also requires challenge. As Fischer has argued, "ethnicity is not simply passed on, learned or taught, or inherited by blood; it is a dynamic component of identity that must register and respond to the flux of the modern world, through dialogue with it" (194). In this sense, polka, especially in view of its hybrid influences and effects, is an ideal site for the investigation of identity politics and ethnicity in the postmodern era. According to Giroux, "Ethnicity as a representational politics pushes against the boundaries of cultural containment and becomes a site of pedagogical struggle in which the legacies of dominant histories, codes, and relations become unsettled and thus open to being challenged and rewritten" (*Disturbing* 91).

This brings us squarely back to the counterhegemonic possibilities of polka as ethnic practice. Polka does not simply reproduce a static or even uncontested past but symbolically reinvents it in an ongoing present. Fischer claims that:

the search or struggle for a sense of ethnic identity is a (re-)invention and discovery of a vision, both ethical and future-oriented. . . . Such visions can take a number of forms: they can be both culturally specific . . . and dialectically formed as critiques of hegemonic ideologies (e.g., as alternatives to the melting pot rhetoric of assimilation to the bland, neutral style of . . . conformis[m]). (196)

I have argued throughout this article that polka fashions such a vision, both culturally specific and dialectically formed as counterhegemonic. In this way, polka's contribution to the search and struggle for a sense of ethnic identity is both ethical and future oriented. In particular, the counterhegemonic critiques posed by polka offer vivid and progressive modes of imagining the future through a communitarian rather than individualistic lens. I have argued that the emphasis on joy is a potent way to reimagine that collective future and its ethos. In this way the essay has performed hooks's task of subversive historiography, by connecting oppositional practices from the past with forms of resistance in the present, thus creating spaces of possibility where the future can be imagined differently.

Acknowledgments

Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the Polish American Historical Association and the American Studies Association. I would like to thank participants at these conferences, the readers at *Popular Music and Society*, and David Gunkel for their comments. Special thanks to Karen Majewski for suggesting I write this piece and Charles Keil and Dick Blau for their energetic support of my work on polka.

Notes

1. It should be noted that the majority of studies concerning polka are musicological in nature (Keil, Blau, and Keil; Walser; Kleeman). My methodological approach is not

ethnomusicological but draws from the aesthetic populism of postmodernism and the eclecticism of cultural studies. In attempting to complicate traditional hierarchies of modern aesthetics (high over low art, avant-garde over kitsch, highbrow over middlebrow), the analysis attends to “the material forms of popular ritual—the kitsch, schlock, and camp . . . with both a new seriousness and a new playfulness. . . . [T]his aesthetic subversion can occur . . . while continuing to preserve room for critical perspectives on the expansive reach and power of consumer capitalism” (Schmidt 15).

2. In order to consider polka in this perhaps unorthodox light, I need to clarify what is meant by oppositional practices or practices of resistance. This analysis depends on the analytical framework of cultural hegemony, articulated by Gramsci. Hegemonic process involves the creation, manipulation, and maintenance of cultural symbols by the dominant class that serves to achieve a consensus among subordinate groups to the legitimization of the existing social order as controlled by the former. This cultural hegemony is maintained through formal institutions, such as schools, churches, or the media, as well as through artistic, intellectual or scientific trends or formations. However, there exist at any given moment cultural forces that undermine the prevailing hegemony.
3. This essay attempts to explore musical cultural practices in relation to and not outside of the material contexts of everyday life. My use of the term “practices” draws on Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau argues that everyday practices—speaking, writing, walking, cooking, etc.—should not be dismissed “as merely the obscure background of social activity,” but should be analyzed as tactics through which seemingly passive consumers act upon, resist, and function as producers of late capitalist society. The methodology of everyday practice builds on “Gramsci’s recognition that the study of everyday life and popular culture needed to be incorporated strategically and performatively as part of a struggle for power and leadership” (Giroux, “Rethinking” 17). Because this essay is interested in the paradoxes of consumer culture, “[M]aterialism is not a ‘problem’ which [it] may be ‘for’ or ‘against’ . . . On the contrary it is the new possibilities and strategies of juxtaposition by both commerce and consumers which utilize . . . ‘kitsch’ to constitute new social and material possibilities” (Miller 22). As polka has often been imagined as the prototypical kitsch musical form, it is then especially suited to the ideological questions of this essay. “[K]itsch, which we see as signifying industrially produced aesthetic objects that have a certain hold over the emotions, together with a whiff of tradition . . . thus transcends the opposition between structure and agency which is at play in the debate over ‘dominant ideology’ and ‘resistance’” (Moeran and Skov 110). Of course, one would need to expand such analysis by emphasizing the complexity of such practices. The pedagogical emphasis of this material highlights the counterhegemonic but does not claim that such practices are merely or simply subversive or counterhegemonic.
4. “There is no evidence that before or after 1844 the polka was ever popular in Poland.” (Keil, Blau, and Keil 19). On the term “polka,” see Robert Pula as well as Keil, Blau, and Keil.
5. One would need to add a caution on depending uncritically on the “two opposing groups” model of Polonia, lest it betray the diverse makeup of the community. “The community’s non-uniformity in musical self-representation cannot be adequately explained by an analysis that rests entirely upon a neat and unproblematical cultural and social separation of pre- and post-World War II immigrants” (Savaglio, “Polka” 44).
6. “The polka, heard only infrequently in Poland, is an unfamiliar, if not unpopular genre among recent Polish émigrés” (Savaglio, “Polka” 41; see also Erdmans).
7. One would need to add in his company the work of Keil, Blau, and Keil, Greene, Savaglio, Kleeman, and Crease—scholars who have broken with these academic taboos.

8. Similarly, see Blazonczyk's "Chicago Times Polka" (*Music*), the Ampol Aires "Windy City Polka" (*Best Of*), Stace Golonka's "Chicago is a Polka Town" (*Horn*), Lenny Gomulka's "I'll Meet You in Chicago Oberek" (*For Old*), and the Dynatoness' "Buffalo Polka" (*XV*).
9. See also Henny and the Versa-J's' tribute song to the elder musical statesmen of polka, "If I Could Be Like You" (*If I Could*), and the Dynatoness' "Tribute to Ray Budzilek" (*Vintage*).
10. Keil's "Class and Ethnicity in Polish-America" succinctly parodies this line of thought. "If one does write local history, it should be of the first parish and the legendary priest who founded it. Almost any other history is dangerous to self esteem and peace of mind—why stir up bitter memories, reveal hidden injuries or recall false promises. It won't help 'The Image,' that's for sure" (37).
11. See also, "Working Man's Polka" (*Good Ol'*) and Dynatoness' "Staying Home From Work Polka" (*25th*).
12. Outside of Polonia, and the more recent popular image of the Catholic Solidarity movement, it is little known how central the Catholic Church was in the fight for Polish independence against partitioning powers determined to eradicate Polish language and culture. "Indeed, during the nineteenth century the bond between Polish patriotism and the Roman Catholic religion became so complete that to many being Polish became synonymous with being Catholic. It was this sense of religious attachment, both spiritual and secular, that formed the central focus of Polish community life in the United States, where, in the immigrant generation, the parish became the center of community life and a lasting influence on succeeding generations" (J. Pula 2).
13. See Keil, Blau, and Keil's interesting analysis of the Dynatoness' religious concept album *Chapter VII*, which retells the life of Christ (182–85).
14. "Southern and eastern Europeans have a far more 'pagan' attitude toward life . . . they love the earth. Religion for them is, so to speak, an earth religion rather than the religion of a sky-god" (Novak 123).
15. Typical of this emphasis are Eddie Blazonczyk's "Polka Celebration" (*Polka Celebration*), "Let's Celebrate Again" (*Let's*), "It's A Great Life Oberek" (*Smokin'*), "Everybody's Happy" (*Smokin'*), "Let's Have a Party Polka" (*All_American*), "Everybody Polka" (*Everybody*), "I'm Happy Today Polka" (*Everybody*), "I Love Everybody Waltz" (*Award*), "Music, Music, Music!" (*Music*) "Let's All Have A Goodtime Polka" (*Music*), "Polka Dance Tonight" (*It's Our 25th*); Brave Combo's "In Heaven There is No Beer" (*Polkas*); the Dynatoness' "Happy Life" (*XV*); Lenny Gomulka's "Havin' a Party Polka" (*For_Old*); Li'l Wally's "Dobre Czasy" [Good Times Polka] (*Fantastic*), "Happiness to Everyone" (*Brings*); Marion Lush's "Good Times Polka" (*Golden*); Polka Family's "I'm Singing Happily Oberek" & "Hej Polska Muzyka Gra" [Playing Polish Music] (*We Are*), "Happy People" (*Fiddle*), "Spiewamy Weso³o" [We are Singing Happily] (*Polka*); and Toledo Polkamotion's "Celebrate" (*Visions*).

9

Works cited

- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Bessman, Jim. "Monarchs of the U.S. Polka Mainstream." *Billboard* 3 Aug. 1996: 1+.
- . "Young Generation of Musicians Explores Polka's Cutting Edge." *Billboard* 3 Aug. 1996: 7+.
- Bukowczyk, John J. *And My Children Did Not Know Me: A History of Polish-Americans*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1987.
- . "The Image and Self-Image of Polish Americans." *Polish American Studies* 55.2 (1998): 75–83.
- Crease, Robert. "In Praise of the Polka." *Atlantic* 264 Aug. 1989: 73–83.

10

- Davis, Susan G. "Utica's Polka Music Tradition." *New York Folklore* 4 (1978): 103–24.
- De Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven Randall. Berkeley: U of California P, 1984.
- DiLeonardo, Micaela. *The Varieties of Ethnic Experience: Kinship, Class, and Gender Among California Italian-Americans*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1984.
- Douglas, Mary. *Natural Symbols*. New York: Pantheon, 1973.
- Ehrenhalt, Alan. *The Lost City: The Forgotten Virtues of Community in America*. New York: Basic, 1995.
- Emmons, Charles Frank. *Economic and Political Leadership in Chicago's Polonia: Some Sources of Ethnic Persistence and Mobility*. Diss. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1971.
- Erdmans, Mary Patrice. *Opposite Poles: Immigrants and Ethnics in Polish Chicago, 1976–1990*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1998.
- Fischer, Michael M. J. "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory." *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Ed. James Clifford and George E. Marcus. Berkeley: U of California P, 1986. 194–233.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 1993.
- Giroux, Henry A. *Disturbing Pleasures*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- . "Rethinking cultural politics and radical pedagogy in the work of Antonio Gramsci." *Educational Theory* 49.1 (1999): 1–19.
- Gramsci, Antonio. *The Antonio Gramsci Reader*. Ed. David Forgas. New York: New York UP, 2000.
- Greeley, Andrew M. *The Catholic Myth*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990.
- Greene, Victor. *A Passion for Polka*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1992.
- Gross, Feliks. "Notes on the Ethnic Revolution and the Polish Immigration in the U.S.A." *Polish Review* 21.3 (1976): 149–76.
- Grossman, James R. "African-American Migration to Chicago." *Ethnic Chicago: A Multicultural Portrait*. Ed. Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995. 303–40.
- hooks, bell. *Art on My Mind*. New York: The New Press, 1995.
- . *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End, 1992.
- . *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End, 1990.
- Keil, Charles. "Class and Ethnicity in Polish-America." *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 7.2 (1979): 37–45.
- Keil, Charles, Dick Blau, and Angeliki V. Keil. *Polka Happiness*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1992.
- Keil, Charles, and Steven Feld. *Music Grooves*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994.
- Kleeman, Janice Ellen. *The Origins and Stylistic Development of Polish-American Polka Music*. Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1982.
- Kohan, Mark. "Hupaj siupaj, get Down, Y'all Hear? A Look at the External Influences on Polonia's Music." *Polish American Voice* 1.9 (1983): 9–11.
- Mangione, Jerre, and Ben Morreale. *La Storia: Five Centuries of the Italian American Experience*. New York: Harper, 1993.
- Miller, Daniel. "A Theory of Christmas." *Unwrapping Christmas*. Ed. Daniel Miller. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. 3–37.
- Moeran, Brian, and Lise Skov. "Cinderella Christmas: Kitsch, Consumerism, and Youth in Japan." *Unwrapping Christmas*. Ed. Daniel Miller. New York: Oxford UP, 1995. 105–33.
- Novak, Michael. *Unmeltable Ethnics*. New Brunswick: Transaction, 1996.
- Obidinski, Eugene. "American Polonia: Sacred and Profane Aspects." *Polish American Studies* 32.1 (1975): 5–18.
- Orsi, Robert A. *Gods of the City*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1999.
- Pacyga, Dominic. "Chicago's Ethnic Neighborhoods: The Myth of Stability and the Reality of Change." *Ethnic Chicago*. Ed. Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones, 1995. 604–17.
- Polka Drive Time*. With Jarek Obrecki. WPNA-AM, Oak Park, IL. 1999.

- Pula, James S. *Polish Americans*. New York: Twayne, 1995.
- 11 Pula, Robert. "Polish? Czech? Origins of the Word Polka." *Polish-American Journal* 84.4 (1998): 19.
- Roussin, Didier. Liner Notes. *Café De Paris*. CD, Music Club 50009, 1996.
- Savaglio, Paula. "Big-Band, Slovenian-American, Rock, and Country Music: Cross-Cultural Influences in the Detroit Polonia." *Polish American Studies* 54.2 (1997): 23–44.
- . "Polka Bands and Choral Groups: The Musical Self-Representation of Polish-Americans in Detroit." *Ethnomusicology* 40.1 (1996): 35–48.
- Schmidt, Leigh Eric. *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995.
- 12 Sciorra, Joseph. "Return to the Future: Puerto Rican Vernacular Architecture in New York City." *Re-Presenting the City*. Ed. Anthony D. King. New York: New York UP, 1996.
- 14 Shapiro, Michael. Liner notes. *Planet Squeezebox*. CD, Ellipsis Arts, 1995.
- Shusterman, Richard. "Moving Truth: Affect and Authenticity in Country Musicals." *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 57.2 (1999): 221–33.
- Spilner, Maggie. "Polka!" *Prevention* Oct. 1999: 121–27.
- 13 Spottswood, Richard K. "Commercial Ethnic Recordings in the United States." *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress American Folklife Center, 1982. 51–66.
- . "The Sajewski Story: Eighty Years of Polish Music in Chicago." *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*. Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress American Folklife Center, 1982. 133–74.
- Suarez, Ray. *The Old Neighborhood*. New York: The Free Press, 1999.
- Thomas, William, and Florian Znaniecki. *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1958.
- Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination*. New York: Crossroad, 1981.
- 15 Turner, Kay, and Suzanne Seriff. "'Giving an Altar to St. Joseph': A Feminist Perspective on a Patronal Feast." *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*. Ed. Susan Tower Hollis, Linda Pershing, and M. Jane Young. Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1993.
- Turner, Victor, and Edith Turner. *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture*. New York: Columbia UP, 1978.
- Wagner, Christoph. Liner notes: 6–8. "A Brief History of How the Accordion Conquered the World." *Planet Squeezebox*. CD, Ellipsis Arts, 1995.
- Walser, Robert. "The Polka Mass: Music of Postmodern Ethnicity." *American Music* 2 (1992): 183–202.
- West, Cornel. *Race Matters*. Boston: Beacon, 1993.

16 Discography

- Ampol Aires. *The Best of the Ampol Aires Volume I*. CD, Ampol Record Company, CD-5001-04, 1997.
- Blazonczyk, Eddie and the Versatones. *All American Country Flavored Polkas*. CD, Bel-Aire Records BA-3045, 1992.
- . *Always ... Forever ... and a Day*. CD, Bel-Aire Records, BACD 3047, 1994.
- . *Award-Winning Polkas*. 2 CD, Bel-Aire Records BACD V-135S, 1977.
- . *Everybody Polka*. CD, Bel-Aire Records BACD 3043, 1990.
- . *Good Ol' Days*. CD, Bel-Aire Records 3042-CD, 1989.
- . *It's Our 25th Anniversary*. CD, Bel-Aire Records 3041-CD, 1988.
- . *Let's Celebrate Again*. CD, Bel-Aire Records 3040-CD, 1987.
- . *Music, Music, Music!* CD, Bel-Aire Records BACD-3050, 1996.
- . *A New Batch of Polkas*. CD, Bel-Aire Records BA-3046, 1993.
- . *A Polka Celebration*. CD, Bel-Aire Records BA-3039, 1985.
- . *Smokin' Polkas*. CD, Bel-Aire Records BACD3052, 1999.

- Brave Combo. *Polkas for a Gloomy World*. CD, Rounder CD90456, 1995.
- The Dynatones. *XV & IX*. CD, Sunshine SNCD-147.
- . *25th Anniversary Tour*. CD, Sunshine, SNCD 123.
- . *Ania Meets the Dyna-tones*. CD, Sunshine, SNCD-139.
- . *Chapter VII*. Cassette, WO-20050.
- . *Vintage Dynatones*. CD, World Renowned Sounds WRD-2808, 1995.
- Golonka, Stace and the Chicago Masters. *Horn If Your Honky*. CD, Sunshine SNCD 127.
- Gomulka, Lenny and the Chicago Push. *For Old Times Sake*. CD, Chicago Push Enterprises CPE9501, 1995.
- Góra, John and the Górale. *Duty Free Polkas*. CD, Sunshine SNCD 154, 1997.
- . *Take a Spin with John Gora & Gorale*. CD, Sunshine SNCD 125.
- Henny and the Versa J's. *If I Could Be Like You*. CD, JAZZO-1005CD, 1993.
- Lewan, Jan. *Live from Atlantic City Jan Lewan & His Orchestra with Special Guest Ania Piwowarczyk*. CD, JRD Records JRDA212, 1997.
- Li'l Wally (Maly Wladziu). *Brings Happiness to You-All Night*. CD, Jay Jay Records 5162-3.
- . *Fantasztyczne (Fantastic) Granie I Spiewwanie*. CD, Jay Jay Records 5165.
- Lush, Marion. *The Golden Voice of Polkas*. CD, Dyno Polkas CD-1650.
- Polka Family. *Fiddle Faddle*. CD, PF1003CD, 1990.
- . *Polka Music Fan*. CD, PF1005CD, 1993.
- . *We Are Family*. CD, PF1004CD, 1991.
- Toledo Polkamotion. *Visions*. CD, World Renowned Studios WRD20121, 1993.

Author bio ...

17

Author Query Sheet

Manuscript Information	
Journal Acronym	PMS
Volume and issue	27 (4)
Author name	Gunkel
Manuscript No. (if applicable)	

AUTHOR: The following queries have arisen during the editing of your manuscript. Please answer the queries by marking necessary corrections **at the appropriate positions on the PROOFS. Do not answer the queries on the query sheet itself. Please also return a copy of the query sheet with your corrected proofs.**

QUERY NO.	QUERY DETAILS
	Introduction
1	4th para. Savaglio citation: to which of the two articles listed in the <i>Works cited</i> does this refer?
	Polka as counterhegemonic ethnic practice
2	2nd para. Blau is not listed in the <i>Works cited</i> . Please supply full referencing details.
3	3rd para. Frye Jacobson is not listed in the <i>Works cited</i> . Please supply full referencing details.
4	5th para, 3rd extr. quote. Please check the page number given with Bessman citation (the <i>Works cited</i> gives 7+).
5	7th para. Please check the polish words here for typographical errors.
6	14th para. Which of Spottswood's publications from the <i>Works cited</i> is intended here? Please state.
7	21st para. "...could fit well into Williams's radical reassessment of folklore." Please give clarification and add full referencing details to the <i>Works cited</i> .
8	22nd para. Which of Bukowczyk's publications from the <i>Works cited</i> is intended here?
	Notes
9	note 15. Please check "Spiewamy Weso ³ o". There appears to be a typographical error here.
	Works cited
10	Crease. Please check and correct the date given.
11	R. Pula. Please ensure that the full page range is given.
12	Sciorra. Please give the page range for the chapter.
13	Spottswood, "Commercial", "Sajewski". Please give the editor's name.
14	Shapiro. Please give the catalog number for the recording.
15	Turner and Seriff. Please give the page range of the chapter.
	Discography
16	*Please ensure that the recording company and the year of release are given for all entries.
17	Author biographical details: please supply a short text to be placed after the discography.