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## Music Scenes in America: Gainesville, Florida as a Case Study for Historicizing Subculture

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MUSIC SCENES IN AMERICA: GAINESVILLE, FLORIDA AS A CASE  
STUDY FOR HISTORICIZING SUBCULTURE.

By

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A Thesis submitted to the  
Program in American and Florida Studies  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts

Degree Awarded:  
Summer Semester, 2009

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This document is dedicated to the best and most complete teacher I have ever had, my mother, who passed away on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2001.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Neil Jumonville for being supportive and directing this thesis. Also, my eternal thanks to Dr. John Fenstermaker for accepting me into the American and Florida Studies program at Florida State University, and for encouraging me to grow independently as a scholar, teacher, and all-around human being. To Dr. Laura Pruitt and Dr. Meg Jackson; without your guidance and going out of your way to advise a young freshman with no clue, I would not have found my passion for studying music as a cultural product. Thank you to all the scene members who invited me in and talked my ear off about their favorite bands, and memories of Florida's good old days. And lastly, all thanks, love and affections to my wife Abby, for allowing me to take breaks and kicking me into gear when I needed to work. You are my first priority no matter how much time I spend reading, writing and thinking about music.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract .....	iv
1. Introduction .....	1
2. From Subculture to Scene – A Historiography.....	5
Theorizing Deviants, Hippies and Mods .....	5
The Birth of Scene Studies.....	11
Understanding Independent Music Scenes.....	18
Points on Perspectives.....	25
3. Setting the Scene .....	30
Position and Method.....	30
The State.....	32
The History.....	36
Gainesville: Sites and Sounds of Community.....	39
4. Conclusion.....	55
BIBLIOGRAPHY .....	58
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH .....	61

## ABSTRACT

The history of music scenes is a topic that has been misunderstood. Scholarship has tended to focus on sociological theory as a basis for understanding how and why music scenes exist and motivate youth. While accomplishing important work and connecting the study of scenes to academia, theory has left uncovered the narrative history of music scenes. Setting scenes in their specific historical, social and cultural context allows them to be examined by a different set of research goals and methods. In this paper, I outline a historiography of music scenes, from the original implications of subcultural research to ethnography in the early 1990s. Tracing the literature on scenes, I argue that studying scenes from my position in 2009 must be accomplished with a historical point of view, not ignoring theory, but placing narrative history as the primary methodology. The growth of post-punk music scenes in America throughout the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s had extensive effects on popular culture, and through understanding the history first, I propose researchers will have a better grasp on what a scene is, why it functions in society, and how it has affected regional and national subcultural identity. I used Gainesville, Florida as an example of this method. The social characteristics of Florida and the shifts in the national subculture throughout the 1990s are two essential points I bring to bear in the case study of Gainesville. Overall, I hope to introduce Florida's scenes as anomalous instances of subcultural activity and to spur further inquiry on the topic of (re)writing music scenes into the history of youth culture, especially in the 1990s.

## INTRODUCTION

Since 1980 independent music has become an integral part of American culture. The influence it's had on its participants continued to inspire many to create music and art and to form their own systems by which these products were shared. The DIY (Do It Yourself) ethic formed a model for independent artists to work outside the mainstream venues of mass culture. "Indie" culture held sway throughout the 1980s as a primary source of communalism for youths and young adults disenchanted with conservative values, the fakeness of pop culture, and the boredom of Middle-American towns and cities. The acknowledgement of a common disdain brought these people together in geographically centered, musically inspired communities that became known as "scenes." The birth of scenes apart from a national subculture set the independent music world on a course that fostered a generation with very specific ideas on how to combat the timeless angst of youth. First, they maintained an ardent sense of place and identified locally with a city, town, or neighborhood. Second, they developed an almost religious reverence for music that captured specific feelings at specific points in life. Third, they created a complicated culture with its own press, business practices, fashion and sphere of influence.

Discussions on this topic must begin by differentiating between the concept of subculture and scene. There are some important definitional principles. The term subculture, when used throughout this document, is meant to signify a *taste-based* subset of the ideals and lifestyles of the mainstream culture. Therefore, a subculture can be any collection of people who consciously collect themselves around a shared interest, idea or activity that is not representative of the majority. Very recognizable examples of a subculture in this context are the people, often youths, who mark themselves as "punks" or "punk rockers," who are dealt with through this study, collecting themselves around the genre of music called "punk." In contrast, a scene, as used in this study, is a *place-based*, locally distilled version of a subculture. Thus a scene is part of a



subculture, and often represents all the characteristics of a subculture. But a scene is distinguished from the larger subculture by acting as a product of a geographically-specific, local outlook in a precise time-period. The scene, therefore, is the *local* expression of the subcultural ideal that exists across many boundaries. Current trends in scholarship tend to use the terms scene and subculture interchangeably, speaking about the “indie rock scene” meaning the large collection of concepts, fashions, and music that define indie rock for many people. I am convinced that using the terms *subculture* and *scene* for different concepts helps scholars of this topic be more precise about what they study.

This concept of an indie music scene played out in many different ways in various places, each with unique characteristics that produced unique results. The most widely recognized and thoroughly studied of these were Washington D.C. (which produced among many things the Straight Edge philosophy), Southern California (the home of internationally influential punk, pop punk and hardcore punk bands like Black Flag), Austin, Texas (a pivotal scene in the growth and revitalization of indie culture), New York City (continually a center of progressive art with groups such as Sonic Youth, and movements like Krishnacore, and New York Hardcore), and Athens, GA (which gave rise to the seminal college rock band REM and a group of indie musicians known as The Elephant 6 Collective).

The foundational character of these scenes for the American indie underground is incontestable. Yet, a narrowed focus on these scenes specifically excludes an interesting offshoot of the post-punk era: the indie music scenes in Florida, broken down into locales, grew and flourished in a profoundly different way than the national indie subculture. Reflective of Floridian history and culture, the scenes as they took root in Florida adopted very specific traits that caused them to become more insular and intense in their associations than other historic scenes, or the larger subculture. Florida’s scenes grew on a similar timeline to the national subculture, but because of Florida’s geographic limitations, being cut off from the national touring circuits, these scenes blossomed at a much slower pace. The years 1994-2001 represent a period of high activity and of notable

influence outside the state. Whereas the larger American indie subculture peaked prior to or just after 1991, related closely to the rise of Nirvana in mainstream attention, Florida's influence remained relatively confined until the latter half of the 1990s. The history of Florida's music scenes, in relationship to those of the nation's as a whole, presents an alternative perspective on how scenes work, what their function is in culture, and in what ways a scene influences its member's lives.

The first section of this paper will present a historiographical overview of the scholarship on subcultures, and it later will lead into studies of specific music scenes. The majority of research done on subcultures focused on the social aspects of the groups studied, and based in the field of sociology, much of the research was then slanted toward producing theories of social behaviors. Throughout this first section, I attempt to argue that this sociological bias ignored important shifts in the history of music scenes that related to the development and evolution of youth culture in America. My underlying goal is to create a historical view of music scenes that will increase awareness in other disciplines of the importance of studying these subcultures in their historical context. The close of my first chapter is meant to offer some parameters by which a music scene can be studied, based on earlier historiography.

My second chapter is an exercise in that methodology. Based on my interests and participation in the music scene in Florida, I spend the second chapter constructing a historical overview of one of Florida's most active scenes. To accomplish this I conducted face-to-face interviews with a variety of scene members, from record label owners to band members. The aims and goals of conducting this type of research were to collect an oral history of how the scene in Florida developed, and what sorts of issues were dealt with from the ground level participants. As a researcher I act, at different times, as an oral historian and as a participant observer, allowing some of my own experience in the scenes to augment the stories I collected. I utilize these research methods to construct a snapshot of the music scene in Gainesville between 1994 and 2001. I introduce Florida into the history of music scenes that has been written earlier by others,

and I, emphasize the feeling of Florida's scenes, that they are outsiders with respect to scenes in other areas. I also situate Florida's music scenes within the social and cultural changes occurring in the state and the nation during this time. My hope is that I can add a new point-of-view to the discourse on subcultures in America, and ultimately that a historical understanding of yet-unstudied music scenes should be the next step for subcultural studies.

## FROM SUBCULTURE TO SCENE – A HISTORIOGRAPHY

### Theorizing Deviants, Hippies and Mods

The history of rock and roll is a story that has been told many different ways: from the perspective of the people that lived through it, as academic studies for theoretical purposes, and as fodder for journalists and fans to debate. One aspect of this history that held considerable veneration for the founders of the music, and that seems to be subsequently underrepresented in its telling, especially in American rock music, is the connection of music to place, locality and regionalism. In fact one could argue that the story of rock music is bound up in the places it happened: locations like Memphis, New Orleans, Chicago and Detroit. The rise of technology – recording and broadcasting – combined with music business played a role in the lack of emphasis on place. Despite the transient nature of music in the 1960s and 1970s, the interaction of geography and music has produced some fascinating dialogue between scholars, writers and fans in many different contexts. Inspired by, or because of, an intense reaffirmation of regional affiliation through music in the early 1980s, a small number of academics took interest in how musical subcultures worked out their regional identities. Through the writings of scholars like Sara Cohen, Barry Shanks and Andy Bennett, the concept of “scenes” reached a loose definition.

The general consensus is that a scene is a locally bound, globally connected collection of people, most often youths, centered on the production and consumption of music. Invaluable as this description may be, the continued tradition of scenes, especially in America, presents further opportunity to clarify the meaning and signification of a scene to its participants and also to those who study it. The relatively short lifespan of music scenes in their contemporary context provides a useful backdrop against which to frame their history in relationship to theories about how scenes work in society. On the surface, scene studies are the product of complexly related concepts of subcultures and youth culture. In order to accurately begin to synthesize and articulate the nature and importance of scenes to American culture, I will begin with a brief history of the

literature and scholarship that is foundational to subcultural studies, leading into scene studies. In addition, I will discuss the fluidity of the terminology that is used to discuss contemporary subcultures, and also the problems and issues inherent in researching this subject. The final portion of this chapter will provide an overview of my position as a researcher and will outline the stance that I will take in producing a contemporary historical study of music scenes.

Subcultural studies are a small portion of the important work that has been done over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The rise of cultural anthropology, theory and sociology as academic disciplines, coupled with mass migrations to American cities throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century led scholars to take notice of the small groups that formed around social markers, such as common interests, work/life patterns, or shared heritage. Interestingly, many researchers in the 1920s and 1930s who investigated these groups centered their studies on city life and utilized ethnography to produce their claims. According to Ken Gelder, the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, after its inception in 1892, “came to dominate sociological perspectives in the United States for the next forty years.”<sup>1</sup> Early works from the “Chicago School,” as it came to be known, emphasized concepts like eccentricity and marginalization to explain the segregation of the Second City. As Gelder later noted, the first use of the term subculture as a sociological category was by Milton M. Gordon in 1947, who sought to recast these divergent groups as “more nuanced collective arrangements,” regarding subcultural tendencies as assimilation tactics rather than acts of difference. Howard S. Becker, another professor at the University of Chicago, in his seminal text *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*, published in 1963, took stock of the specific type of social group that was most often studied by the Chicago School, and focused on finding a way to categorize deviance in youth. Becker’s work, though not the sole summation of early 20<sup>th</sup> century sociology of group behavior, was crucial to the next phase of subculture studies for a few reasons. First, he recognized the all important point that

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Gelder, *Subcultures: Cultural Histories and Social Practice* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), 27.

theoretical discourse on subcultures cannot achieve all that is necessary to understand them as forces of society. He also made the connection that deviance is a fluid concept, negotiated between the rule-makers and the rule-breakers. Lastly, Becker noted that a social subject could belong to many different subcultures at one time.<sup>2</sup> The shift in the 1970s from the University of Chicago to a new center of sociological study, while underscoring some of Becker's acknowledgements, advanced the overall concept that the interaction of alternative social groups, most often youths, with modern societies would produce important social change, and cultural progression.

As America reeled from post World War II affluence, more people identified with occupation over location, and the socio-cultural make-up of the populous began to mirror the geographic landscape. The suburbs grew farther from, and less connected to cities meaning that society was quickly adapting by fracturing into smaller and smaller subsections, each self-reliant to some degree. Along the same lines, social groups became harder to categorize; delineators like ethnicity, race, and religion held less weight than in previous decades. In efforts to adjust sociological study, the concept of subcultures evolved to include sub-categorizations such as "lifestyle" and, the focus of this study, "scenes." Drawing from the work of the Chicago School, but contrasting their focus on the moralization of alternative groups, John Irwin published his book, *Scenes* in 1977. It was this text that applied the phrase "scene" to a small group of people "doing certain things together in certain places."<sup>3</sup> Irwin's book was a study of "an emergent urban phenomenon", as he wrote in his introduction. The urban structure suited Irwin's study best due to the variety of people living in such places. Also, the social mores of city life provided him with ample room to propose why people might decide to be involved in a scene.

Applying the word "scene" to urban groups collected around similar tastes was, for Irwin an attempt to take the focus away from the actions (delinquent or otherwise) and move it to the actors. He chose the word "scene" specifically for

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 42

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 45

its dramatic implications. Irwin wrote, “The theatrical metaphor of the word ‘scene’ reflects an emergent urban psychological orientation – that of a person as ‘actor,’ self-consciously presenting him- or herself in front of audiences.”<sup>4</sup> Irwin modified the Chicago School’s approach by allowing members of subcultures more cultural agency than prior theorists had. The key difference for Irwin was that subcultural/scene identity was not necessarily something that was negotiated between society and its subgroups, but was chosen and entered into by active participants in an effort to build relational connections in the modern, urban city, a social space characterized by alienation. He wrote, after laying out some key principles of scene making,

When all these qualities are present – a central leisure activity, a set of special symbols and meanings, relative availability, and action – we have a scene. It is a locale, a stage, where urban actors can voluntarily enter into expressive drama, can put themselves on display to affirm their character, meet new people, take risks, engage in exciting, stimulating physical activities, and converse about the special and subtle meanings which surround the activities. Increasingly, modern urbanites are retreating from serious, conventional pursuits and organizations, from work-a-day life, and seeking these expressive, leisure forms to fill their lives with meaning and pleasure, and to circumvent the barriers the city has placed between them.<sup>5</sup>

John Irwin went on in his book to apply his foundational ideas to two social groups, relevant to his time and place, hippies and surfers. His baseline ideas about the scene member as actor, and the importance of scenes to connecting people to one another relationally in urban environments are the points that become most useful to the next stage of subcultural studies, which was interestingly contemporaneous to Irwin’s own work. His basic ideas carried significance for introducing the term “scene” to sociological lexicon, but also in its movement toward a broader, interdisciplinary methodology through which subgroups of society could be examined. The concept of a scene had only to join with an established, current and notable pop culture movement to be instated as

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<sup>4</sup> John Irwin, *Scenes* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1977), 23.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 30

deserving more intense academic study. That movement came in the form of radical punk rock in the late 1970s in England.

The introduction of subcultures into interdisciplinary culture studies came through the pioneering work of cultural critics based mostly in the England in the late 1970s. The scholars who worked there at the time were primarily theoreticians whose backgrounds were in Marxist theory and post-structuralism. Out of such a pedigree, the works by Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige and others spent considerable time joining the actions of the present day youth in England to assumptions about class struggle and ideology. The books and articles published by these academics certainly broke new ground, and through theoretical focus books such as *Resistance Through Rituals* (1976) challenged the structure of sociology to rethink methods of studying youth culture. Engaging especially with the work of Antonio Gramsci, much of the subcultural research was conducted at the Birmingham Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS). Perhaps the most enduring work published during the CCCS' heyday was Dick Hebdige's *Subcultures: The Meaning of Style* (1979). Hebdige, along with others at the CCCS, tended to focus on the working-class, male subcultures that had risen in post-war England. The point at which this work is vital to the continuation of scene studies is when Hebdige acknowledged that subcultural identity revolved around new, different and strange music.

The linking of musical tastes to fashion sense, regional pride, group cohesion, and more became foundational to the understanding of subcultures, and later the study of scenes. As Hebdige put it, discussing the reflections of punk style in its musical heritage, "This unlikely alliance of diverse and superficially incompatible musical traditions... reproduced the entire sartorial history of post-war working-class youth cultures in 'cut-up' form... [And] is therefore a singularly appropriate point of departure for a study of this kind."<sup>6</sup> He went on throughout the book delving into various strands of the British youth culture (Mods, Hipsters, Teddy Boys), and provided not only descriptions of their

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<sup>6</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1988), 26.



specific sense of clothing style, but also the music that captivated the youth. Hebdige's work also took the place of a sort of qualification for further study of similar groups. His rigor in attempting to synthesize cultural meaning with subcultural styles, and including current discourse on class and cultural theory (Barthes, Gramsci) ratified subcultures as necessary and critical to understanding of modern youth culture.

As the history of scene studies progressed, the groundwork laid by the aforementioned authors and their colleagues provided a base on which further research was built. The Chicago School's ethnographic approach, while complicated by stringent "rules" of subcultural or scene membership and objectivity of the researcher, reigned as the primary method of collecting the most pertinent research. John Irwin's application of the term "scene" and its implications for the "actors" developed a useful vocabulary by which to discuss these smaller units of subcultures, connected to urban (and later suburban and rural) locales. Dick Hebdige and the CCCS introduced punk to academic study, emphasizing the musicality of subcultures and also the duty of those researching punk to attempt to explain how the members of the subculture construct meaning and then how that should connect to the contemporary academic context.

Scholarship from this point on began to deal with the punk and post-punk subculture in a very different manner, due in part to the fact that the subculture grew, blossomed and developed into popular culture from the early 1980s to present time. Research that entered scholarly discourse after these foundational works had not only to contend with subcultures being "under the radar," but also with the fragmentation and development of many new branches of subculture, and culture as a whole. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, there was a lull in writing and researching on scenes. The next group of published books dealing specifically with scenes came out around 1991. This second wave of scene studies picked up on themes and ideas from the previous schools, but the connections these second wave authors had to their contemporary popular culture increased the ethnographic focus of their studies, and also broadened the scope of musical styles worked out in scenes. Lastly, and perhaps most

importantly, the flood of new research in the 1990s included a range of new issues that informed modern subcultural identity. Some of the important themes were loss of authenticity or “selling out,” technology, the ethic and aesthetic of DIY (Do-It-Yourself), and the rabid intensity of a sense of place that characterized many of the new American scenes.

### The Birth of Scene Studies

Following in the tradition of the CCCS, a few other works were produced in the sociological field that held substantial weight for understanding music scenes. Will Straw’s essay “Systems of articulation, logics of change: Communities and scenes in popular music,” published in the journal *Cultural Studies* in 1991 was one of the works that took the concepts proposed by the CCCS and related them to contemporary music subcultures. Straw wrote the piece to speak to several important issues rising in pop music scholarship in the early 90s: one, the supposed decline of rock-based music as the main source of progression and, two, the fragmentation of American media due to a broader global market. Briefly discussing a suggested similarity of popular music with the film industry, which underwent similar processes of fragmentation on a similar timeline, he wrote, “If the condition of contemporary popular music is quite distinct, however, this is because processes of internalization within it have served to reproduce a complex diversity – rather than a coherent uniformity – from one urban center to another.”<sup>7</sup> The uniformity he contrasts here was the vertically-integrated structure that American popular media had developed in the 1980s, pushing the top echelon of pop music and film stars to ultra-fame, and nearly ignoring anything outside those circles. It was due to, and in concert with, such practices in the mainstream media that localized, regional music scenes began to develop, originally centered on hardcore punk music. The tendency toward diversity rooted in a sense of place Straw mentioned was a starting point

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<sup>7</sup> Will Straw, "Systems of Articulation, Logics of Change: Communities and Scenes in Popular Music," *Cultural Studies* 5, no. 3 (1991), 368.

for redefining scenes. To distinguish the term “scene” from the sociological category “community”, Straw added, “A musical scene, in contrast, is that cultural space in which a range of musical practices coexist, interacting with each other within a variety of processes of differentiation, and according to widely varying trajectories of change and cross-fertilization.”<sup>8</sup> Here, again Straw drew closer to a clearer definition of a scene, emphasizing the importance of movement and expansiveness that scenes perpetuate. A good example of the perpetual motion within a scene that Straw pointed at is the cycle of a scene that shares a variety of members between a few bands, with perhaps one of the bands achieving some degree of success.

Straw went on to write about the “terrain of musical activity commonly described as ‘alternative.’” He outlined the method by which members of alternative groups separated themselves from earlier subcultures. Through the building of an infrastructure of independently motivated, relationship-based practices – setting up events, putting out records, spreading information – members of scenes in the late 1980s and early 1990s no longer relied on a specific musical style or fashion to connect them, as punk had done for subcultural youth in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Straw completed his definition of a scene as a subcultural entity “grounded more fundamentally in the way in which such spaces of musical activity have come to establish a distinctive relationship to historical time and geographical place.”<sup>9</sup> The connection to a specific time and a specific place is the central tenet in defining a scene as a unique social construction. The foundation of scene identity then, as a branch of subcultural identity, must be tied to a combined sense of history and place, it must allow for a spectrum of musical variety, and it must be inextricably linked to processes of cultural production employed outside of mainstream avenues. These three facets of scene-dom are upheld, challenged and disputed in subsequent scholarship, but, for the astute research of Straw, these tenets might have been overlooked longer than they were. As it was, the aforementioned

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 373

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 375

“collapse” of rock music in the 1990s spawned a small body of literature, and much of it dealt directly with the problem of how to define newly recognizable pockets of subcultural activity.

Over the short history of scene studies, two patterns of study emerged, both useful in their own right, achieving different goals for the furtherance of the scholarship. While Will Straw maintained some of the more theoretical characteristics that the CCCS used, two other young scholars in the early 1990s saw more potential in a direct approach, and utilized ethnographic studies to ground their research on music scenes. This ethnographic turn was not only valuable at the time, but also necessary. As “scenes” developed in definition from John Irwin to the early 1990s, the lived reality of the subculture had drastically evolved. Acknowledging this, Sara Cohen embarked on an ethnographic study of the Liverpool music scene in 1985, out of which came her book *Rock Culture in Liverpool* (1991). She opened her book with an introduction, defining her parameters for the study and also making an argument for more new ethnographic forays into the world of music scenes. She wrote, “Much of the literature on rock music has concentrated upon lyrics, youth culture, rock stardom, the record industry... There has been a preoccupation with rock’s origins and relatively short history... what is particularly lacking in the literature is ethnographic data and microsociological detail.”<sup>10</sup> She went on to mention that her particular study would pay attention to “the grass roots of the industry,” how music scenes were developed by groups of bands at a local level, and “the actual process of music-making by rock bands,” the lived experiences of the scene members. As one of the first in the new wave of scene scholars, Cohen’s work emphatically set the example for subsequent researchers to use participant observation as a primary tool for data collection.

Cohen borrowed heavily from anthropology and ethnomusicology to ground her work in academic discourse. Despite that, and that much of the prior research had been sociologically based, *Rock Culture in Liverpool* constructed its

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<sup>10</sup> Sara Cohen, *Rock Culture in Liverpool: Popular Music in the Making* (Oxford; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1991), 6.

own interdisciplinary space, using the most relevant parts of those disciplines in combination with a contemporary historical context to create an alternate perspective for youth or subcultural studies. Her analysis of the relationships between the scene's participants and their surroundings expanded the CCCS' model, synthesizing arguments about class, gender, cityscapes, and how all of these together are necessary to the understanding of collective identities in music scenes. Cohen meticulously wrote out the arc of activity that made up the lives of band members in the Liverpool scene, from practice to the gig to the big break, and through her insights a pattern emerged. The ethnographic turn in scene studies brought to bear three important amendments to the half-century old subcultural debate. First, strict sociology, although useful for foundational precepts, could not provide the final word on how and why scenes were constructed. Second, the inherent contradictions of authentic/false, rock/pop, art/entertainment, and creativity/commodity were integral to the establishment of scene identity, and were constantly in flux from one member to the next. And third, Sara Cohen mapped the specific events, places, types of people, and ideas that construct a scene, opening the door for subsequent scholars to add to or detract from that list of essential physical attributes of a music scene in an urban locale.

Across the Atlantic, reactions to major cultural change and entertainment business restructuring produced similar social conditions in America to the subjects of Cohen's study. The United States experienced a flood of subcultural activity in the early 1980s, with scenes founded in striking speed and connected nationwide almost as quickly. Inspired by the punk music of the late 1970s and the ideals of the hippies, hardcore punk, post-punk and heavy metal drastically altered the soundscape of America throughout the 1980s. The new American scenes further complicated the subcultural theories of earlier scholars by combining as diverse a demographic as only America could muster with radical political ideas, ground-breaking musical progression, and scene-formed relationships that grew out of regional boundaries and crept toward national identification. The fundamental characteristic of a scene, being geographically

bounded and centered, began to flex with the foundation of touring networks across the United States. Scenes often did retain a strong sense of place, but adopted camaraderie with many other scenes around the country. Out of this quiet cultural upheaval, which went nearly unrecognized by pop culture until perhaps the early 1990s, Barry Shank researched and wrote *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas*, focusing on one of these new American scenes.

Shank's major contribution to the study of music scenes was a hybrid point of view that combined the best aspects of earlier research with the straightforwardness of cultural historical research. Where Cohen had ventured with ethnographic studies, Shank expounded on her work, and wrote both a historical/ethnographic study of Austin, Texas and a theoretical treatise on the scene as an identity-building practice. The melding of these two approaches into one text, with the specific topic of music scenes, had not been so seamlessly executed to this point. Shank's book thus held a place as a seminal work culminating the two sides of the discourse on music scenes. He wrote about his motivations for using these two approaches, "The details of [the Austin music scene's] story give us many ways to think about how the performance of popular music functions as a process of identity-formation. Therefore, this book carries on two quite different arguments at the same time. In doing so, it brings together two antagonistic analytical paradigms and, consequently, breaks certain familiar scholarly rules. Deliberately."<sup>11</sup> Shank also laid out his take on the argument for scenes as important to greater scholarly discussions. He wrote, "I believe that this performance of new, sometimes temporary but nevertheless significant, identities is the defining characteristic of scenes in general as well as their most important cultural function."<sup>12</sup> Later in the text he offered a definition of a scene as "an overproductive signifying community,"<sup>13</sup> meaning that scenes were often characterized by outputting copious amounts of media (albums, zines, bands),

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<sup>11</sup> Barry Shank, *Dissonant Identities: The Rock'n'Roll Scene in Austin, Texas* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), x

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 122

providing more content than necessary for the community it served. Labeling a scene here as a signifying community, Shank began to seat this research in the larger cultural studies framework, and while he maintained throughout the text the point of his work as ethnography, he clearly introduced a contemporary theoretical lexicon indispensable for the continuation of scene studies.

The two-fold approach that Shank accomplished is proved more relevant to shifting dynamics in scene studies throughout his text. The organization of his book, dealing first with the historical/cultural contexts, and second the application and analysis of scene identity, allowed certain unifying perceptions to surface. One specific concept he brought to light works very well as a bridge between the dual methods he employed, and enters at the forefront of scene scholarship. Shank established this approach by introducing the term “sincerity,” and went on through the book to trace it into ethnographic narratives and theoretical discussions. Sincerity, according to Shank, was the essence of a scene’s cultural function, working for “the construction of identity and community... through an evident resistance of the disciplinary restraints of the dominant culture.”<sup>14</sup> This venerated “sincere” quality, in his study, is what separates the rock’n’roll scene in Austin from other branches of musical practice occurring at the same time, in the same places.

Promoting this claim, Shank wrote, “Sincerity is the quality most-highly valued in Austin’s rock’n’roll aesthetic... its presence guarantees the validity of a musical style, and by extension, a way of life. Its importance is enhanced by, and in turn enhances, the intimate emotional connections between musicians and their fans.”<sup>15</sup> Taking into account the historical point that Shank was conducting his research, synonymous terms for sincerity were also being used and later proliferated throughout the new American scenes. The “DIY” (Do-it-Yourself) ethic that became part of the independent music world in the early 1980s was seen as producing a more “authentic” brand of music, culture and identity. The sincere/authentic characteristic is a core principle in the foundation and

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 153

continuation of many scenes in the early 1980s, and became an organic part of scenic identity. This DIY authenticity manifested in the scene through social interactions, like conversing about a particularly regional band or physical attendance at “underground” venues, and also through the contents of ones record collection, zine library or clothing styles - band t-shirts, and subcultural accoutrements like tattoos or body piercing for example. Shank’s perceptivity in recognizing this base quality of scenes continued to solidify the place of scenes in subcultural research.

After the publishing of Cohen and Shank’s books in the 1990s, few crucial works were produced dealing specifically with music scenes until the early 2000’s. The ethnographic turn that Cohen and Shank kicked off resonated for its novelty, but was not reproduced with a focus on music scenes for some time. The historical context provides several possible explanations for the dip in scene studies that led into the next phase of scholarship on the topic. First, the “golden age” of music scenes in the US was concentrated in the 1980s. Following the release of Nirvana’s *Bleach* in 1991, mainstream attention very suddenly turned to the marginal musics (marginal in region and in aural qualities) that had played a role in the formation of Nirvana’s sound. The “under the radar” feeling that was so important to the sincere/authentic lifestyle of scene members and bands was in their minds being exploited for the sake of pop culture’s next new fad. Referred to as “the year punk broke,” 1991 represented an important shift in the factors by which scenes produced identity. Second, as the punk/post-punk subculture became a cornerstone of early 1990s popular culture, the socio-cultural abrasiveness, which had been championed by the earlier permutations of the subculture, lost its edge, perhaps therefore prompting a loss of critical interest from the academic world.

Holly Kruse, whose book *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes* is the next salient work on the topic, wrote of this very phenomenon, “When faced with potentially disruptive marginal musics, mainstream institutions attempt to maintain their dominance by either 1) ignoring these forms of music, or 2) bringing them in, but employing procedures for



incorporating their threatening elements to minimize the disruption of orderly consumption.”<sup>16</sup> The cooption of the music that had specifically belonged to scenes, and that had maintained important centralizing points for the production of scene identity, squelched the spread of scenes for a time and also limited their cultural impacts. However, through the 1990s, as popular culture grew and evolved at an ever more rapid pace, focusing its attention on another subcultural music, namely hip hop, local punk/post-punk music scenes across America regained a sense of autonomy and began again to perpetuate the qualities and characteristics that Cohen and Shank observed.

### Understanding Independent Music Scenes

In 2003, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes* was published. This book, written by Holly Kruse, utilized interviews and ethnographic techniques to amalgamate previous scene scholarship, and dealt directly with the questions and issues that popular attention had raised for the American post-punk subcultures. From the opening paragraphs of the book to the final page, Kruse made clear her position as a fan/member of the American independent music scene, preparing the reader to imbibe the content critically but with appreciation for an “insiders” view.<sup>17</sup> *Site and Sound* entered academia at a time ripe for a book of its type. Having not just the prior scholarship to lean on, but also the historical contexts, Kruse was able to extrapolate definitions of many core principles and ideals of music scenes – how they work, what are the necessary environs under which they form, what philosophical ideas they might contain, and much more. Her book was not only important for its discussions on the internal mechanisms of a scene; it also outlined the tenuous relationship between independent music scenes and mainstream music business. Kruse’s

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<sup>16</sup> Holly Kruse, *Site and Sound: Understanding Independent Music Scenes* (New York: P. Lang, 2003), 30.

<sup>17</sup> The “insider’s” view is an issue dealt with critically by Andy Bennett, another scene scholar. Discussion of his point of view on that topic appears at the close of this chapter.

main points provided an in-depth overview of the fundamental characteristics of music scenes, and, in true scholarly form, projected a methodology by which to study and write about scenes. As a work of synthesis, Kruse's book returned to the themes that previous scholars identified, and updated and modified these themes for the post-millennial scene scholar. The ideas she traced and studied were central tropes in scholarship on, and participation in, music scenes in the 1990s and 2000s. Using her book as a model, I will attempt to construct a framework through which contemporary scenes can be studied.

The initial obvious point Holly Kruse wrote about was the sense of place/locality that creates the spatial aspect of music scenes. First and foremost, a music scene is connected to or allied with a geographic location. Kruse's introductory sentence stated that while there have been many studies done on "the consumption and production of cultural artifacts, relatively few studies have focused on the ways in which these cultural practices are situated within specific spaces and places."<sup>18</sup> The foundational works of subcultural studies had affirmed this claim indirectly but had not expressed it as pointedly as Kruse. The Chicago School's focus on youth in urban Chicago, John Irwin's surfer/hippie parameters centered on California, and the CCCS' sweeping view of youth culture in London all had geographic elements, but it was not until Shank and Cohen's studies that scene identity was directly related to concentrated, specific locales.

Holly Kruse, writing a decade after the studies in Liverpool and Austin, definitively argued that place was not simply the framework of scenes, it was the whole picture. In fact, throughout the book Kruse clarified her interviewee's positions in the scene by acknowledging the specific locale they were associated with. As a way of categorizing locales that develop music scenes, Kruse wrote, "Recurrent in narratives of indie/pop rock is the conscious geographical and ideological positioning of the 'peripheral' local sites and practices of indie music production and consumption in opposition to the 'centers' of mainstream music production."<sup>19</sup> Fundamentally, the conscious opposition to popular culture that

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 1

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

music scenes represented was played out through their spatial position. Kruse's assertions on this point are maintained throughout her text, and therefore act as an underpinning frame for subsequent scene scholarship.

The common understanding in academia of music scenes, as evidenced in more recent scholarship, is that scenes are interconnected bodies with international and virtual components.<sup>20</sup> While this may be more true in the current historical climate, the music scenes that founded independent music business in America and the ones studied by Kruse, Cohen and Shank specifically maintained a sort of autonomous connectivity, separate from one another but sharing ideas, bands, and general identities. It is important then for continued studies of music scenes, especially with a historic view, to begin to make distinctions between two very different paradigms of scenes. Whereas a scene in 2009, technologically and internationally connected, can be thought of as a "taste-based scene", a historically-placed, geographically specific scene such as Austin, Texas for Barry Shank or Champaign-Urbana, Illinois for Holly Kruse must be understood as a "place-based scene."<sup>21</sup> When distinguishing between place and taste as the primary characteristic of a music scene, placing the scene in historic specificity is much more essential than its sociological character. Therefore, in contrast to contemporary scholarship, and by way of arguing for historicizing music scenes, I contend that music scenes in their essential form exist primarily as geographically centered constructions, agreeing with Kruse's earlier assertion that place-based music scenes are the historical antecedent of taste-based music scenes.

Returning to Kruse's book, the second essential characteristic that she brought to the fore also held key historical dimensions. The philosophy of DIY that permeated music scenes in the early 1980s, and prompted the foundation of the independent music infrastructure (record labels, peer-journalism, touring

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<sup>20</sup> For example see Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson, *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*, 1st ed. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004)

<sup>21</sup> Mark Olson, "Scenes, Spatiality and Migrancy," in *Mapping the Beat: Popular Music and Contemporary Theory*, eds. Thomas Swiss and others, (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 269.

networks), evolved from a necessity for youths with no money, to a codified ethic with real aesthetic value for members of music scenes. Kruse pointed out that this progression of the DIY ethic through the 1990s formed the standard to measure “selling out,” a label applied to scene members or bands who disconnected from the scene by aligning with popular culture, most often through the signing of a major record label deal. She wrote, reminiscent of Shank,

As indie pop/rock increasingly became part of mainstream American culture... the debate over its ‘authenticity’ became more vital for those who seek to assert identities oppositional to the dominant culture. Many members of the original audiences for alternative acts believed that bands can no longer express the ‘truths’ of and for those original audiences once the bands’ fan bases have grown beyond original audiences.<sup>22</sup>

The penchant of scene members to construct identities in deference to authority figures reaffirms some of the work done by sociologists in the Chicago School, however, the defining factor, and the point where Kruse provided an alternate perspective, was that scene members used the ethic of DIY to build their own seemingly authentic world instead of using rebellion to tear down existing structures. This was an essential delineator between punk as studied by the CCCS, a product of the late 1970s, and post-punk (involving a variety of genres pulling from similar musical roots) in the 1980s; whereas punk sought to spread chaos, the music scenes formed around the post-punk genres ignored the mainstream and organized a nationally-connected dissemination model for their ideas and music. The sense of authenticity came from not only belonging to a subculture, but also from having a hand in building the scene located in a peripheral locale.

The sense of authenticity, or sincerity, became a core value of music scenes in the early 1980s expressed through the lived ethic of DIY. The socially articulated version of this authenticity was then responsible for determining who could take part in the scene – the “sell out” had betrayed or lost this authentic characteristic and therefore was no longer included in the scene. Holly Kruse,

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<sup>22</sup> Kruse, *Site and Sound*, 24

again stating plainly what others had hinted at, wrote, “All music scenes demand of their participants, both audience members and musicians, a certain level of (sub)cultural competence.”<sup>23</sup> A similarly related concept, originally proposed by sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, in his words “cultural capital,” was later linked to music scenes in Sarah Thornton’s *Club Cultures*, wherein she made the case for “sub-cultural capital,” the specific knowledge required of any person – band and audience alike – to be recognized as a member of the scene. In the case of music scenes, like the ones studied by Kruse, subcultural capital is a confluence of many factors, including but not limited to fashion, locally specific bands, effort and involvement in the scene, record collections, social and business relationships, and a sense of authentic experience. The intricate web of shifting meanings between all of these factors made it extraordinarily difficult to define, and in attempts to establish a model for further study it was necessary to simplify. At base level, the second foundational precept of music scenes, augmented by history and social relationships, is a sense of authenticity, accomplished through active participation (DIY) and constructed knowledge (subcultural capital).

The importance of specific sites within a geographic context where the scene is acted out was the third characteristic that Holly Kruse developed through her text. As Cohen and Shank had illustrated, music scenes existed as a collection of practices that occurred in venues that had been claimed or developed for the purposes of the scene. What Kruse called “subculturally territorialized spaces” were the very same types of venues that other scholars used as observation sites for the dissemination and sociality of a music scene.<sup>24</sup> As a whole, most researchers agree on a few key sites that spatially define music scenes in the urban environment. They are a locally run, independent record store, a music hall or venue, practice/recording spaces, and a space dedicated to socializing. Depending on the average age of the music scene, these sites could be bars, malls, or church-based youth groups. Often, the sites can exist as all-inclusive spaces, housing retail goods and ample space for performance,

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 121

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 128

available equipment/technology for recording and practicing, and enough frequent visitors to bolster a social circle. Depending on the size and reputation of the music scene in its urban location, there can also be a wide variety of these sites that serve the various needs of the community. Kruse, summing up this aspect of music scenes, wrote,

Music scenes... are largely defined by places within them that are meaningful. What is specifically important in studying independent pop/rock music scenes of the 1980s and 1990s is not *that* places are meaningful – places are prominent and meaningful in all personal histories – it is the particular places (certain clubs, record stores, coffee shops, houses, ect.) that are meaningful. These places were sites of culturally specific practices, and their inclusion in personal narratives positioned narrators within both a specific geographic space and a specific set of social relations.<sup>25</sup>

The foundation provided by the actual physical sites where the scene is experienced and lived out was a determining facet of music scenes. Studies of music scenes tended to be built around observing the scene in these various sites. I would like to argue that in focusing on sites, scholarship has overlooked one other element necessary for the propagation and vivacity of independent music scenes, namely a tangible source for disseminating information.

As a topical generalization, word-of-mouth historically was the main source of spreading news throughout a music scene. The interchange of subcultural knowledge via social interaction was a method of enculturation, to borrow an anthropological term. However, given a historical dimension to the study of music scenes, the rapid rise of personal journalism through fanzines and mixtapes was a revolutionary shift in the most vibrant scenes of the 1980s. While plenty of research has been done on fanzines (self-published periodicals, usually of personal content) as sources of spreading information, those studies are most often focused on the content of the zines and not their role as an indispensable part of a music scene. However, Stephen Duncombe, author of *Notes From the Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (1997), did devote one

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 127

section of his book to “Community.” Duncombe compared the local music scene to the concept of “bohemia,” writing, “the greater network that connects all zines is the Scene: the loose confederation of self-consciously ‘alternative’ publications, bands, shows, radio stations, cafes, bookstores and people that make up modern bohemia.”<sup>26</sup> Here, he was referring to the entire alternative taste-based scene that encompassed the local place-based music scenes.

He went on to acknowledge rising new bohemias in peripheral cities such as Olympia, Portland, Austin, and Chapel Hill, but claimed that “in the new bohemian diaspora, place no longer plays the important role it once did.”<sup>27</sup> While accurately making the case that networks and shared ideas are the traits that would continue to unite zine writers, Duncombe did not account for the sense of pride and ownership that in fact married many zines to their local scenes, and thus reproduced the role of place. For example, Flipside, a zine from Whittier, California, was foundational in developing the same southern California scene that, in the early 1980s, gave rise to Black Flag, a bastion of region-based punk rock.<sup>28</sup> Similarly, one of the most revered zines in the underground, Maximumrocknroll, based in Berkeley, California, played an essential role in the rise of Berkeley as a punk rock Mecca in the early 1990s. As a researcher with a long-range point of view, I again assert that tools of dissemination – zines, albums, compilations, and archival websites – must be included as a cornerstone of historical studies in place-based music scenes. To only focus on content analysis would cheapen the impact a local zine had, in its own time, on instilling regional pride in scene members, and fostering a sense of community and authenticity.

After affirming the historical criteria by which to conduct studies of music scenes, as I have attempted to do using Holly Kruse’s book as a model, the next step is to identify the researcher. There seem to be two streams of scholarship

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Duncombe, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture* (London; New York: Verso, 1997), 53

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 55

<sup>28</sup> This claim is included in Steven Blush’s *American Hardcore* DVD, a pseudo-memoir/collection of interviews with members of the early 80s hardcore scenes.

dedicated to music scenes; one focuses on content and analysis of media output like zines or albums, and the other compiles and theorizes the history and socio-cultural importance of scenes. This divide is the contemporary embodiment of the theory versus ethnography discussion as previously mentioned. Produced within these two streams are two types of researchers, those who maintained a close relationship with music scenes (often through participation in it) and those who have established an interest in it for reasons of studying it, but are removed from the actual practices and lifestyles of music scenes. While these lines of course overlap, there is an argument in scene scholarship about the value of greater distance and objectivity on one side in comparison to less objectivity on the other but with the potential benefit of an “insiders view.”

### Points on Perspectives

The studies that have tended toward an ethnographic base, true to anthropological form, took careful steps to qualify the writer’s position in relation to the music scene. For example, Barry Shank, who studied in Austin while participating in the scene, wrote, “By announcing my interests, I hope to mark out my specific placement in the constellation of forces and to use that positioning to achieve a dialectic of distance and intimacy, subject and object, generality and particularity, description and object-described...”<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Holly Kruse wrote, “Perhaps my association with the topic of my research caused me to lack crucial perspective in my analysis, but I hope that it gave me useful knowledge about independent music scenes that allowed me to ask productive questions of my interview subjects and show discernment when sorting through archival materials.”<sup>30</sup> The identification of the researchers’ points of view is necessary in order to allow their story to be one of many possible stories. The insider’s perspective can then be useful as a single narrative that can enter into discussion with other similar narratives on the same topic, and eventually form a

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<sup>29</sup> Shank, *Dissonant Identities*, xii

<sup>30</sup> Kruse, *Site and Sound*, 2



cohesive history. While these views provide one argument for the insider's voice in academic studies of music scenes, the opposing position is authoritatively stated by Andy Bennett, a highly qualified and respected scholar of subcultures, in his article "Researching youth culture and popular music: a methodological critique" published in the *British Journal of Sociology* in 2002.

Bennett began by directly addressing the claims lobbed against theoreticians like the CCCS. He referred to the theoretical framework historically applied to youth culture as a "major obstacle," writing that the CCCS scholars "served to render fieldwork redundant in social settings deemed to be underpinned by irremovable socio-economic determinants."<sup>31</sup> Although Bennett is not particularly fond of strict theoretical approaches, the point of his article, and one that must be confronted by current and future scene scholars, is that "little attempt has been made in empirical research on youth and music to reflect on the role of the researcher, the relationship between the researcher and the research respondents and the possible impact of the latter on the nature of the research data produced."<sup>32</sup> He went on through the article to explore several flaws of methodology that seem to plague young, idealistic researchers conducting fieldwork in a subculture they are familiar with, most often centered on a lack of critical techniques and fully-explored analysis of data.

Bennett did recognize several positive points about the use of insider knowledge. He wrote that this turn was a trend equaled in ethnographic studies as a whole, and out of it could come "an open acknowledgement of the researcher's tiedness to space and place."<sup>33</sup> Also, he claimed that "the use of insider knowledge in research on music and youth may point the way to a timely deconstruction of the researcher/fan position," a role that many scene scholars have played.<sup>34</sup> Bennett's overview acknowledged the need for a balance to be struck between empirical research and theory, accomplished through critical

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<sup>31</sup> Andy Bennett, "Researching Youth Culture and Popular Music: A Methodological Critique," *The British Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 3 (2002), 453

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 456

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 461

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

debate on proper and useful methodological practice. In addition, he suggested that questions be raised not so much about the use of insider knowledge, but the use of it as a specific method of research. He closed the article recommending that research conducted outside of established theory and methodology must produce “a body of work that critically reflects on the research process itself.” Bennett’s argument seems not so much an opposition to Kruse’s or Shank’s methodology, but a warning to be aware of your critical position and to firmly seat your research in established discourse.

One perspective that Bennett did not necessarily account for was the trend for scene studies to be housed in a variety of academic disciplines. As scholarship builds and new researchers are further removed temporally from the object of their study, the divisions of topics, subject areas and disciplines become less rigid. A bulk of the previous scholarly research done on music scenes is confined to sociology, and therefore should adhere to specific disciplinary boundaries. A researcher in 2009, for example, begins to have concerns outside of sociological theory and methodology. Contemporary studies of music scenes are in such a place that they must begin to interact with and take account of almost 30 years of cultural influences and historical contexts that have affected the formation, growth and adaptation of music scenes. Scene studies, while having distinct sociological characteristics, must evolve to achieve a more conscious interaction with the disciplines of history and culture studies. The history of music scenes in America requires an eye for detail, encompassing the historiography, the framework by which to study music scenes, the socio-cultural contexts in which the scenes took place and the forms of media (from zines and records to journals and books) in which they were discussed. The combination of these tools, applied to a music scene in its specific historical place, can then begin to build a body of literature that will foster cross-disciplinary understanding of what a music scene is, how it works, and why it matters to the study of subcultures.

In this chapter I have outlined some of the foundational texts that have collectively formed a discourse of what I call “scene studies.” The methods used

by the researchers, and the concepts they produced, constructed the skeleton of subcultural theory. The more recent literature built upon that skeleton by employing varying research techniques in smaller, localized urban areas, and interacted directly with the idea of a “scene” as it was becoming an integral part of youth culture in America. The focus of many of these studies has been on the musical descendants of punk, collectively referred to as post-punk. The term “post” as I use it is meant to carry dual meanings – post-punk is simply after punk, progressing forward in time from 1977, but also post-punk as an evolution of the ideology of punk, like post-structuralism as an evolution of structuralism. While scenes form around various genres of music, and other by-products of adolescence, the post-punk music scenes demonstrated a certain reverence and interacted more conclusively with popular culture than other subcultural unifiers. The studies conducted in Austin and Liverpool began the vein that was picked up by Holly Kruse, working not only to apply theories to these scenes but also to map out the physical terrain that aids the growth and vivacity of a scene in an urban landscape. The next phase of scene studies, as I have attempted to argue, must not only advance the concepts of subcultural theory, but also historicize them, and thus begin to piece together the body on the bones of theory and ethnography.

Sara Cohen articulated her perspective on future scene studies, writing, “Further ethnographies of scenes could help to illustrate the way in which scenes are lived, experienced and imagined by particular groups within particular situations... such ethnographies would not study scenes simply as local culture in particular places, but attend to the way in which scenes both produce the local and move across and connect disparate places.”<sup>35</sup> Pressing Cohen’s idea a bit further, I suggest that further studies of scenes would serve to highlight important points in the history of youth culture in America in this period, and investigate how scenes move temporally in addition to spatially. The following chapter will focus on a music scene in Florida, an enigmatic location, peripheral to the

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<sup>35</sup> Sara Cohen, “Scenes” in *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*, eds. Bruce Horner and Thomas Swiss (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1999), 249.

utmost, and ripe for the study of scene character. In it I will seek to synthesize these foundational scene studies in order to highlight the historical dimensions of music scenes, to reinstate regional identity as an essence of a music scene, to discuss the value of the various foundational characteristics of music scenes.

## SETTING THE SCENE

### Position and Methods

As a student of culture I will begin by placing myself historically and spatially in relation to the scenes I will study. Following my self-positioning, I will parse out the details of my methods and research techniques, in an attempt to remain critical of my own point of view and to better inform the reader of the quality of my study. In undertaking this study I maintained several goals that drove my research. First, that in collecting and compiling this study I would produce *a history* of Florida's music scenes – one of many possible narratives – and connect that history to the greater narrative of national music scenes that have received considerable popular and scholarly attention. Second, I hope to show Florida's scene identity as exhibiting unique characteristics not largely evident in the larger discussion of music scenes in America. Partially related to several elements of the state's sociological history, Florida reveals the place-based music scene ideal in a new and unique manner that I will detail throughout my study. Third, I will place the study of Florida's music scenes into the academic discussion of subcultures, scenes and their importance to the understanding of youth culture in American history, sociology and culture studies. The focus of this research is on the years 1994-2001 during which Florida experienced a renaissance of vibrant scenes producing nationally and internationally revered bands, as well as stimulating a sense of place connected to specific subcultural sites and activities. The area I chose to focus on is representative, in my opinion, of a specific sound and/or ideal that was prevalent in Florida's scene at that time.

The idea for researching Florida's music scenes came from two places. First, I grew up in Melbourne, FL and experienced the state's scene as it evolved through its transformative years. My own personal involvement in the scene was the primary point of interest in studying it. Second, I was introduced to popular music studies early in my undergraduate career at Florida State University, and I developed a strong desire to contribute to what seemed to be a missing link in pop music scholarship. The gap I perceived was primarily historical, jumping from

punk in the 1970s to grunge and hip-hop in the 1990s without a substantive look into the subculture that grew in the 1980s, and the subsequent underground that came from it. Furthermore, in my original introduction to pop culture studies there seemed to be a bias toward cities and centers of culture that did not necessarily represent the entire subculture. Also, as my studies continued I noticed interesting correlations that were not yet being researched between the scholarship on rock music and the lived experiences of the post-punk music scene I was familiar with. My interest in studying post-punk music scenes developed out of these perceptions, and while some were proved untrue based on the historiography that I became familiar with, it is my goal to see whether there are more studies of regional identity and music scenes that still need to be written to begin to grasp the importance of these peripheral sites of subcultural activity.

I was first introduced to the scene in Florida as a 14 year old. I entered into public schools for the first time in 1997, being previously home schooled, and my interests in music quickly attracted me to peers who were actively participating in local music scenes. My first exposure to popular music outside of my parent's oversight was locally produced, Floridian post-punk bands. My high school years were spent forming various bands with friends in the scene, traveling the state playing and attending concerts, and participating in a local DIY group that promoted and put on concerts in the greater Melbourne area. As a member of the music scene in Florida, I grew familiar with the sites and media that form the basis of this study. After moving to Tallahassee to attend Florida State University in 2003, I began to focus my writing on my musical interests and as an undergrad wrote several papers on heavy metal and punk rock. As a senior, I wrote an ethnographic memoir on Florida's scenes, which became the impetus for my graduate work in American and Florida Studies, also at Florida State University, and the origins of this thesis. Membership in the scene combined with the training and opportunities I undertook in college provided me with a unique point of view through which I chose to filter my experiences into an ethno-historical study of Florida's music scenes.

The research I collected was varied in content and media. Due to the deficiency of academic, or even journalistic, writings on Floridian scenes I utilized technology, oral history and media analyses in order to construct this portrait of Florida's scenes. I consulted several socio-cultural texts on Floridian identity, and though not focused particularly on subcultures they served to ground some of my research in established scholarship on Florida's unique relationship to the United States. Many of the bands that the scenes revolved around took care to document their careers through websites, blogs, and printed interviews. I collected many facts and biographies of the bands through such sources. The most informative source I used was face-to-face interviews with band members, club owners/promoters, record label owners and scene members. During the summer of 2008 I traveled around the state, after having been in touch with possible interviewees through email, and collected stories and memories from a sample population of Florida's scene members. The interviews allowed me to fill in my study with locally specific knowledge, and to broaden the scope of my study from a single personal account to a collective social memory. Another key component of my research was collecting media produced by the Floridian scenes. The albums, zines, photos and archived video further allowed me to construct a multilayered insight into the scenes themselves and the issues, ideas and identities of their producers. The compilation of these various sources provided me with a web of information, and this paper will serve as a means of synthesis to produce one perspective on the scenes that made Florida an interesting and foundational place for the national post-punk subculture in the 1990s.

## The State

### *Geography*

Florida, like most states, retains some individual characteristics that infiltrate the citizen's perception of the state itself, and their place in it as an ideological construction and as a geographic body. The primary trait that forms Floridian identity is the disconnectedness from the landmass that makes up the United States. The peninsula played a direct role in the unique construction of

music scenes in Florida; cut off from the touring networks that formed during the development of the national music scene in the 1980s, Florida developed on a slightly slower timeline, and insular to a greater degree than other scenes. The geography of the state, being twice as long as it is wide, also affected the interrelations of scenes. In the North East, where many of the early influential music scenes grew, the commute from one scene, Washington D.C. for example, to another, Philadelphia, was a few hours drive, whereas in Florida it could take an entire day to drive from Miami to Tallahassee. The urban development of the state asserts considerable influence on the music scenes, and the identities of the scene members are inextricably tied to the landscape.

Part and parcel to the geographic makeup of the state is the breakdown of the state into manageable regions. The idea of “3 Floridas” is based largely around the long stretches of highway between major urban areas. The 3 regions within Florida are referred to as North Florida, Central Florida, and South Florida. As earlier mentioned this delineation of area is predicated not just by the geography but also the infrastructure of Florida; the highway system that connects the major urban areas is almost solely confined to the coasts, with a few major roads cutting across. The layout of the urban centers also set up the state to be scene-ready. Most of the big cities in Florida are actually collections of many smaller towns with the only option of transportation between the towns being automobile. While similar conditions do exist in other states, the mix of these factors within the peninsular shape of Florida creates a unique urban experience. In the introduction to *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida*, Gary Mormino wrote,

Florida held no monopoly on American dreamstates, but unlike in sunny rivals Hawaii and California, fantasies could be validated in Florida on the cheap... In a state where distances isolated people socially and physically, the automobile and truck, the airport and interstate highway provided critical transportation links... Shaped by the automobile and Main Street and reshaped by the interstate highway and suburbs, downtown



Florida has experienced the trajectory of boom, decline, and renaissance.<sup>36</sup>

The most critical difference is simply the cultural makeup of these urban collectives compared to other major U.S. cities; for all of Florida's growth, population and urban area, it is barely thought of as a major cultural force in American culture beyond Disney in Orlando and the beaches of Miami. The geography of the state is foundational to its scenes. Historically, it allowed them to develop relatively autonomous of the national subculture and to form insular connections that bred a different kind of regional pride and identity than in other scenes. Socially, the geography helped to construct the regional divisions in the state that would become the same parameters that scenes would identify with. Also, the geographic makeup of Florida allowed the scene members to form tight knit communities that centered more on a shared state identity than differences of city affiliations. The sprawling expanse of Florida's landscape had an integral hand in the construction and formation of the scenes that filled its cities and towns.

### *Demography*

As a byproduct of the state's geography, the music scenes in Florida were also in a tenuous relationship with the demography of the Floridian population. Snowbirds and tourists are the two main stereotypes that characterize the citizens of Florida. Both of these stereotypes represent opposing qualities of music scene members; the retiree's age and the tourist as consumer of commodity, and the wealth of both are all qualities that scene members, in their youth and desire for authenticity, commonly reject. In fact, though, the population boom in Florida was a factor in the creation of many of the urban idiosyncrasies that may have allowed the scenes to flourish in the 1990s. The post-war affluence and the creation of the American highway system participated in the creation of the Sunbelt, and according to Gary Mormino, Florida reaped the

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<sup>36</sup> Gary Ross Mormino, *Land of Sunshine, State of Dreams: A Social History of Modern Florida* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 3.

benefits of this cultural upheaval. The influx of technology, industry and capital in Florida was reflective of the populace. Mormino, paraphrasing Kevin Phillips, the inventor of the term Sunbelt, wrote of the characteristics that define the newest American “belt,” “[It is] a super-region defined by its moderate climate, reliance upon air conditioning, support of the military and defense programs, dynamic economy, favorable business climate, modern transportation advantages, and drift toward conservatism and Republicanism.”<sup>37</sup> The tendencies toward middle-class values and economic excess are the very same tendencies that scene members thrived on resisting.

Florida’s population boom, beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the early 2000s, brought to the state the same type of capitalist conservatives, in the minds of the youth, that were embodied in Ronald Regan, the political catalyst of the early American scenes. Whereas in California the Dead Kennedys railed against Jerry Brown, and in D.C. the punks congregated for homosexual rights, in Florida the scenes resisted the transience of snowbirds and tourists by rooting deeply in the state, and forming identities that strongly affirmed that sense of place.

This tradition in Florida’s music scenes was only one of the side effects of the demography. The complicated position of Floridians between the ideological “South” and the Caribbean also played a part in the identity formation of scene members. Again dividing along the in-state regional lines, North Florida aligned more commonly with southern American ideals, and the Latin American population typically had greater influence on South Florida. The specifics of these regional identities will be discussed in greater detail in the sections to follow, but it is necessary to acknowledge that the same issues that were apparent in the overall demographic of Florida were reflected in the music scenes. Residents of the state recognize the variety of race, class and ethnicity that typify the modern Floridian experience, and the negotiation of these cultural issues is a relevant topic for histories of any scope. The confluence of geographic determinism and demography in Florida created the social and cultural climate in which the music

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 12

scenes of the 1990s began to mature. I will continue to analyze these factors in the next section where I will identify one major scene in the state, discuss some of the elements that created and solidified it, and analyze interviews and media to sketch the scene and its importance to Florida's subcultural history in the context of the national subculture.

### The History

The birth, adolescence and maturity of the national American scenes were concentrated in the 1980s. The original historical factors that aided this life cycle were the election of Ronald Reagan as president and the massive shifts in American popular media, especially the record industry. Members of the original American scenes saw Reagan and pop culture as the antithesis of everything they valued, and as means of rebellion they formed scenes around shared hatred for 1980s American normalcy. The two most widely heralded scenes, having influence in their time and beyond, were interestingly located in the centers of American pop culture and politics: Washington D.C. and Southern California. Many of the early scenes exhibited some level of political action. However, the fact remains that the majority of the youth involved in the early scenes were middle class, teenage, white males. The political fervor that these scene members exerted, while meaningful to their peers and to the foundations of the scene, was not recognized by the mainstream political figures and was more often dismissed as teen angst. In addition to having a political agenda, the early scenes also developed the ethic of DIY (Do-It-Yourself). The ideas, practices and lifestyle that DIY promoted cannot be underestimated in the history of post-punk subcultures. Simply out of financial necessity and desire to connect with like-minded peers, youth from around the country grasped onto the concept of DIY and built an infrastructure of independent music business that coalesced into the means, method and ends of the music that the scenes lived off of. The accomplishments of the early scenes, through the DIY model, were revealed in the enormous amount of self-run independent labels, zines, and venues that

housed the scene activity. Politics and DIY ethics were two of the core values that the early scenes instilled in the post-punk subculture.

As the 1980s wore on and the post-punk subculture grew in size and membership, variety of musical style became a marker of the evolution away from punk. The rise of the extreme metal genres (thrash, death, black and doom), lo-fi (paired down recording techniques and musical skills), and emocore (emotional hardcore) were all previews for the diffusion of DIY ethics and independent ethos across disparate genres. As a reaction to the politicization of punk and early 1980s hardcore punk, these genres began to move toward more personal politics, or no political stance at all. For some of these genres, in their specific local scenes, other ideals took precedence. For example, Beat Happening, a lo-fi band from Olympia, Washington, had a hand in introducing music scenes to the aesthetic of awkward, peculiar music and personalities that somehow developed into part of indie rock's perceived arrogance in the early 1990s. Some of the extreme metal bands, fighting the rampant popularity of glam metal in pop culture, used lyrical content and visual imagery for their album covers to carve out a niche fan base that outgrew local scenes and began the move toward taste-based international scenes. And the emocore sound, typified in the mid-1980s by Rites of Spring from Washington D.C., introduced melody, passionate stage performances and personal poetic lyrics to the American indie underground. These three examples were some of the changes that began to move music scenes from politically charged, autonomous bodies, to community-focused collectives espousing ideas ranging from artistic abstraction to religion.

Paramount in the history of music scenes is the personal narratives of the people who experienced it. In recent years, there have been more than a few attempts to collect and compile some of these narratives for the sake of posterity. Overall the memoirs are nostalgic, emphasizing the feelings of community and common purpose that seemed to unite many of the members of the scenes. 924 *Gilman, American Hardcore*, and *Our Band Could Be Your Life*, along with others, chronicled the lived experiences of some of the most important and historical bands, scenes and people that were foundational during the 1980s.

Central to many of these personal histories was the feeling of camaraderie, that together the scenes were accomplishing something more than kids playing music. Michael Azerrad, author of *Our Band Could Be Your Life: Scenes from the American Indie Underground, 1981-1991*, explained that feeling by correlating the independent bands of the 1980s with the hippie culture of the 1960s. He wrote,

Both [movements] hinged on purism and authenticity, as well as idealism about the power of music within culture and society; both were a reaction to shallow, complacent times and their correspondingly shallow, complacent entertainment; both had populist roots but were eventually commandeered by white middle-class college kids... indie rock's political message was often more implicit.<sup>38</sup>

The obvious link between the Counterculture and the Indie culture was further pressed in the reverence given to the “leaders” of the movement. Many of the personal narratives from early 1980s scene members that were collected and compiled into books and documentaries became the sacred texts of subsequent generations. Oral histories were always an essential part of the scenes, creating a sense of dialogue with the heroes of the movement, even as it was being established and developed. As research, though, these narratives must be carefully dissected since by nature the past is often seen through rose-colored glasses.

The shift from the 1980s to the 1990s was a drastic alteration of the subculture. These were the years when college radio, MTV and shifts in the music industry caused music that had previously been neglected as too odd for mainstream tastes to be pulled into the public sphere. Despite the desire of many local music communities to remain alternative to popular media, bands like R.E.M from Athens, Georgia, Nirvana from Seattle/Olympia, Washington, and Green Day from Berkeley, California changed the landscape for independent bands by paving the way into the mainstream. As popularity became possible,

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<sup>38</sup> Michael Azerrad, *Our Band Could Be Your Life : Scenes from the American Indie Underground, 1981-1991*, 1st ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 2001), 8

many independent bands considered for the first time the option to make money from their craft. The influx of attention and capital into the music scenes in the American indie underground fostered a time, concentrated in the mid-1990s, when marginal music scenes tended to pull further away from the mainstream, to distance their music, culture and lifestyles from anything resembling popular media.

The geographic centers of the subculture, New York, D.C., Chicago, Austin, Southern California and more, which had been so effective at subversion throughout the 1980s, became the mining grounds of record labels looking to capitalize on the new alternative sound. All of these factors combined, and set the stage for scenes that were still outside of the eye of the media to grow, produce and become truly unique in sound and deed. Scenes such as Louisville, Omaha, and Gainesville, Florida, overtook the previously established scenes in musical output, producing bands that retained connections to earlier scene ideals, but more importantly with new, original, regionally focused sounds. The new American scenes in the mid-1990s carried the zeal for community focused around locally based, original music into an era where originality was packaged and sold. These scenes and others tried hard to retain the ethos and principle of DIY as long as it would hold up against the pressure of the mainstream popular culture.

### Gainesville: Sites and Sounds of Community

Inspired by the precedents of DIY and independent music scenes, Gainesville, Florida placed its own mark on post-punk subcultural history. Entering the trajectory of scene history a little earlier than other Floridian areas, Gainesville established some important roots that were recognized and acknowledged by the national subculture. The position of the city in North Florida, connected north and south by I-75, increased Gainesville's probability of becoming a key stopping point for touring bands. Also, the University of Florida's draw for artistic, intellectual and academic people had an interesting effect on the

scene. For one, it attracted people who were familiar with ideas of community, art, politics in action, and general interest in social participation. On the other hand, the continual admissions and graduation cycle caused population turnover in the city that the scene constantly interacted with. Despite geographic and demographic issues, many of Florida's subcultural participants, from the 1980s and the 1990s, spoke of Gainesville with reverence, due in part to the longevity of the scene there, but also because of several foundational bands that came from Gainesville, and the establishment of No Idea Records, a mainstay of Florida's post-punk subculture. In the following section, I will discuss a brief history of the Gainesville scene, as told through some central elements of scenes: a record label, sites of scenic activity, and one band in particular that, for many, represented the Gainesville sound, ideal and core principles.

#### *Record Label -*

No Idea Records began in 1985 as a zine, inspired by the larger national post-punk community who were writing about their local scenes. Var Thelin, a teenager at the time, and a group of friends wanting to revitalize the punk community in Gainesville took it upon themselves to document the goings-on of bands they enjoyed. A re-zoning of the local schools brought together a larger group of youths who were the social outcasts, and because of this alteration in the school system, suddenly many of the kids who were on the edge of different subcultures were interacting daily. The decision to move from a zine to a label happened around 1987 when Var realized that,

The big thing that had been missing locally was bands actually putting out records. So, we got the idea to put a record in with the zine... we went to the preeminent band at the time locally [Doldrums]... they were into it, so we did it. And that was, I think, the first piece of vinyl to come out of Gainesville, since Roach Motel had put out their last record [3-4 years earlier]... Bands here just didn't think of doing it... we were proud of what was going on here and we wanted to put it out to the world, and that was our first way of doing it.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Var Thelin, interview by author, video tape, Gainesville, FL., 27 June 2008

Over the next few years Gainesville's music scene began to cluster around No Idea, and as the scenes around the nation were experiencing the rumblings of popular attention, North Florida became established as a viable cog in the circulation of post-punk music. Positioned at the head of the state, Gainesville and No Idea worked as a gateway for Florida's scenes, and especially bands from their area, to gain some clout in the burgeoning national punk scene.

The early 1990s were an influential time in North Florida's scene history. According to Var, there were a few migrations that ended up producing key bands in Gainesville's scene. As groups of kids around the state matured, they acted on the hearsay that Gainesville was an important town for scene activity and moved there. Var mentioned the value of being a zine writer at the time, and how through zine distribution networks, there were attempts to build a "Florida Contact List," that provided phone numbers and addresses of promoters, bands, and venues. Having the ability to connect with other scenes around the state allowed for friendships to be built and eventually, as the youths grew into young adults, relocation.

The "cross-pollination" of scenes, in Var's words, was the beginning of the boom that in the early 1990s solidified Florida as a hotbed of subcultural happenings. He said, "There was a point when I felt pretty securely that there was a lot going on in Gainesville... the beginning of that would be the early 90s. By around that point I think you started seeing... more of a unified thing... There's cool bands from this area, and that area again, and people were motivated [to build the scene]." He explained also that as the momentum of the scene picked up, bands began to use DIY competitively, to spur one another on. When one band put out a tape, the next would work to put out an album, and the next would book a local tour. This cycle of motion, in migratory patterns of scene members and the friendly competition of bands, caused Gainesville's scene to experience a surge of activity that would then produce the sites and sounds that significantly altered Florida's scene history. To paraphrase Var, as the 1990s began, Gainesville skimmed, from around the state, a lot of the people who had been or would have been participating in their hometown scenes, and the confluence of



all of these people moving to Gainesville, peers in age, ideals, and interests, had profound effects on the future of the scene.

### *Band -*

Representative of the perpetual motion inherent in Gainesville's scene is the career of the band Hot Water Music (HWM). HWM was formed around 1993-94 out of two bands from the Bradenton area, near Sarasota. The members of HWM made the collective decision to move to Gainesville when bassist Jason Black enrolled at the University of Florida.<sup>40</sup> Relocating opened the door for HWM to begin a mutually beneficial relationship with No Idea Records, and as a product of that melding both the band and the label received critical acclaim and national exposure. The story of HWM as a band is wrapped up in the perception many outsiders have of the Gainesville scene, and the style of intelligent post-punk they played became known as "the Gainesville sound." Stated plainly, this style is typically rock-based guitar riffs, relying heavily on the drums and bass, with dueling, raspy vocals shared by Chuck Ragan and Chris Wollard, the band's two guitarists. One of the primary factors that distanced this sound from other post-punk genres was the high-level of musicianship the band explored, using the two guitars/vocalists in call and response form, with the jazz-inspired moving bass line atypical in punk contrasting the guitars, and the drums playing technical rhythms and off-tempos, while emphasizing George Rebelo's background as a heavy metal drummer.

Jokingly referencing HWM's facial hair choice early in their career, this brand of post-punk music was dubbed "beardcore" or "beard punk," highlighting a gruff edge and working-class mentality of the band. The more important storyline in Hot Water's career is the effort they put into writing lyrics and speaking out at concerts about the importance of community, a cornerstone of scene identity. Through a brief context and overview of several albums, the connection to local

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<sup>40</sup> Jonah Bayer, "The Oral History of Hot Water Music," *Alternative Press*, #220, November 2006, 126-132.

scenes through personal relationships that they championed becomes apparent and essential to the history of Gainesville and Florida's scenes.

In 1994 the national popularity of "indie music," a term applied to a variety of post-punk genres being produced in local scenes, became very evident in American pop culture. Green Day released their album *Dookie*, with several music videos reaching MTV's charts, popularizing the style of pop punk that was played in the Berkeley, CA scene. Weezer's *Blue Album* introduced a nerdy blend of pop and indie sensibilities to a newly formed college-aged fan base, many of whom were recently turned on to alternative music through Nirvana's rise to stardom. In addition, Guided By Voices, from Dayton, Ohio and Pavement, from Stockton, California, evolved the lo-fi sound and achieved critical acclaim for releasing *Bee Thousand* and *Crooked Rain, Crooked Rain* respectively, and together concreted a form of early 1990s indie rock. Southern California's Epitaph Records, an independent label founded by Bad Religion guitarist Brett Gurewitz, released three albums that resounded throughout independent and pop culture as the dawn of a new era in punk music. The Offspring's *Smash*, Rancid's *Lets Go*, and NOFX's *Punk in Drublic* dominated many year end charts, and raised the awareness of many critics and fans to the uprising of palatable punk rock, far removed from 1970s rebellion and 1980s political agendas.

It was no surprise then that the melodic, intelligent version of punk being played by Hot Water Music was well received. In contrast to the rising popularity of these and other independent bands, HWM took care to be thoughtful and responsible with their lyrical content, acknowledging their audience and home scene as holding sincere, authentic principles like community, friendship and emotional responses to music. Hot Water Music released 10 full length albums, several short albums known as EPs (Extended Play), numerous songs for compilations, and more than a few split 7" records, where one band would record two songs for the A side and another band would provide the tracks for the B side. Their second album, *Forever and Counting*, to their seventh, *A Flight and a Crash*, were recorded during the height of Florida's music scenes. Utilizing the lyrics from some of these albums as cultural texts, I hope to capture a small

piece of what inspired the band as members of Gainesville's scene, and also to explain how this band's lyrics were easily grafted into the idealism of youth, which produced a feeling of authenticity that was so integral to Gainesville's music scene.

At first glance, the lyrics are plainly written, more in conversational tone than poetry. Two songs off *Forever and Counting* (1997) illustrate this explicitly. For example, the last song on the album "Western Grace" reads like a letter: "Thanks to the people who cared enough to take us in, put us up, give us hope, let us know we're not alone."<sup>41</sup> This lyrical technique allows the band to sing back and forth with one another, and also with the audience, fostering a dialogue instead of coming off as preachy or oppressive. Most of this album, as told through the lyrics, is concerned with the usual matters of growing up, but written with a humbly inquisitive tone, posing questions and being down-to-earth honest about mental and emotional growth. The song "Manual" encourages the listener to pursue life to its fullest, despite struggles:

Go your own way, rid lies. Burn the stitches that held shut your eyes.  
Vacate and wonder, rid time. Tape off reminders and strive to shine.  
You said you've got it and I believe that you've got it and that you'll  
survive. Our hearts have exchanged the gifts that carry us over the walls  
that blind us, the walls that bind us, the walls that stand too tall to conquer  
alone. Bring back your wisdom to trade. Bring back the words you've  
saved. Teach me so that I may teach on.  
We reach, we learn. We don't, we burn on the inside as well as out. We  
search to solve how to not dissolve on the inside as well as out.  
So you're at war with yourself. With space and time you'll find a  
breakthrough if you don't lose what's real.  
You have our blessing. Clear your conscience and ride away.<sup>42</sup>

This song, a proclamation from the band to the scene, was a consciously crafted morale booster, urging listeners to participate in the band's path toward enlightenment. Written originally as a "farewell song" for a friend of the band, the community adopted the song as their own. As an example of a cultural product of

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<sup>41</sup> Hot Water Music, *Forever and Counting*, "Western Grace," Doghouse Records, 1997.

<sup>42</sup> Hot Water Music, *Forever and Counting*, "Manual," Doghouse Records, 1997.

Gainesville's music scene in the late 1990s, this song highlights the desire of the band to create real connections within the scene, again heightening the sense of authenticity that was felt when singing along with these lyrics. Representative of HWM's lyrical style, "Manual" remains an important piece of the cooperative spirit that surrounded the band for their entire career.

One song from *Fuel For the Hate Game* (1998) connected the band to an important site in Gainesville's scene. "Drunken Third" was written about The Hardback, a venue that housed many of the scene's influential bands and a place that held many important memories for the scene members. In fact, in 1999 the band released an album titled *Live at the Hardback*, and instead of lyrics printed in the album insert, each song had an explanation of what the song was about. "Drunken Third" was a term that a friend coined to describe the band that would play third in the lineup at the Hardback, often "too drunk to play." The writer of the notes described the song as "an opposite objective to most of the attitudes taken through that time ... another way we all could show respect to each other, our club, our scene, and our community. It was an appreciative outlook on the privilege of having a space [The Hardback] that held functions of freedoms as well as a constructive way of dealing with our differences."<sup>43</sup> This song again calls the listener to participate with the band in the scene:

2:30 is lucky it's late and I'm still thirsty. The band is still playing, we're  
amped and still waiting.  
Lots of talk, lots of plans, lots of everything (still waiting). Lots of people  
letting politics control the scene, and who's listening?  
It's time to take our place, lock ourselves, stand together. Accept the other  
face, load ourselves we can't break this.  
We're not done yet. I can see a stand if we learn how to know, how to let it  
go. It feels good connecting with the union all singing. Full hearted,  
frustrated but backed up by my friends.  
Gotta try, gotta fight, gotta never quit. You're forgetting why we're here,  
and what we're fighting for and who's listening. Lock on.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Quotes taken from the CD insert for Hot Water Music, *Live at the Hardback*, No Idea Records, 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Hot Water Music, *Fuel for the Hate Game*, "Drunken Third," No Idea Records, 1998.

Here again we see the band conscious of their place in the scene, as leaders and influencers, working to bring people together through common ideals. Hot Water Music wrote songs in this mode throughout their time as a band, and those who were connected to them, in the local scene especially, took their lyrics to heart perpetuating the sense of community the band sung about. Of course there were many instances of discord and groups of scene members who were not affected by Hot Water Music, but, representative of an important quality of the Gainesville scene in the 1990s, this band and the things they sung about are paramount.

The band continued to put out albums, eventually signing with California's Epitaph Records and releasing 2001's *A Flight and a Crash*. It was 1999, however when Hot Water put out an album that truly encompassed their ideals. The album was appropriately titled *No Division*, and many of the songs are true to that claim, focusing on themes of community, the power of music, and remaining true to ones own beliefs. The title song of the album reinforced the scene's continued feeling of repulsion toward the popular mainstream, despite the fact that the scene had been co-opted since the early 1990s. The members of Hot Water Music were interacting with the push to make post-punk subculture into a commodity, which was an impending movement in popular culture during this time period. "No Division", and other songs on the album, made earnest pleas to the listener to collectively refuse to be overridden by corporate greed.

We've been locked up and run right down. Been pushed aside for speaking out, against ways of division, set to hold us down, to put us back in line when we step out. But I'm not living under them. When we could rise above, a culture that says we are better or worse than anyone that's not like us. We'll sing our hearts in unity, that we won't obey or follow hate. We stand together, we stand with no division and the ways of old will be swept away.<sup>45</sup>

*No Division* took Hot Water Music into the position of clerics for the cause of music scenes' continued vitality in American pop culture. The cultural trends had

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<sup>45</sup> Hot Water Music, *No Division*, "No Division," Some Records, 1999.

picked up a lot of the music that was produced in local scenes, but often the songs lost relevance when divorced from their communities. HWM's *No Division* connected to post-punk's distrust of the mainstream, and told through the honest, authentic voice of the band, these concerns were updated for the time.

Through these three examples from Hot Water Music's musical catalog the pattern of their influence arises. As a band from Gainesville, FL, they related to their fans, their local scene and the socio-cultural changes occurring in the national scene. The influence of Jason Rebalo, Chris Wollard, Chuck Ragan and Jason Black was felt especially in the state that they called home. Justin Chamberlin, also known as Gristlejaw, ran a website from 1997 to around 2003 called Gainesvillebandpage.com which chronicled the Gainesville scene. An avid record collector, Chamberlin created an entire section of his website dedicated to documenting Hot Water Music's releases (vinyl and CD), back-history and artwork. That section was aptly titled "The Drunken Third" and existed as an unofficial fansite for HWM for many years. He said of the band, "I always collected all their vinyl... they had so much stuff getting out because they were getting big... I decided 'I'm gonna make Hot Water Music a page since they have so many releases out and they don't have a web presence'... I focused less on current news and more on discography and pressing numbers."<sup>46</sup> The time and effort Justin Chamberlin invested in hunting down and cataloging Hot Water Music's releases further illustrated their legacy in the Gainesville scene. One of his most prized records, as much due to the vinyl itself as the band and songs, was a cow-print copy of Hot Water Music's *Fuel for the Hate Game*. Justin, who recognized the importance of what was going on in the scene, also collected Gainesville zines (he mentioned buying a formerly free zine called Gas Leak for \$6 on Ebay for one interview he remembered enjoying) and for a time took a tape recorder to concerts and captured the live experience of many seminal Gainesville bands.

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<sup>46</sup> Justin Chamberlin, interview by author, video tape, Tampa, FL., 25 June 2008

## *Venues -*

The Hardback was just one of the many sites that Gainesville's scene congregated around. The spirit and enthusiasm scene members like Justin Chamberlin exuded in preserving the scene became a recognizable aspect of Gainesville's active DIY community, and thus, in addition to bands and a record label, there were always new sites and projects where the scene was being acted out. Several of the mainstays of the Gainesville DIY community are still in existence, and actively revitalizing the scene. Comparing Gainesville to other music scenes, it is interesting to note that the city is relatively small and that most of the centers of scene activity are within walking distance of one another. In addition to The Hardback, other popular venues were The Covered Dish, Common Grounds, and Wayward Council, all situated within the downtown area of the city.

Jason Rockhill, who originally grew up in Vero Beach, Florida, moved to Gainesville for school in 1994. Rockhill worked as a tour manager for Hot Water Music for a few years, eventually got involved in promoting and booking for Common Grounds, after the Covered Dish shut down and Common Grounds took over its location. He said, dispelling some of the folklore of the scene's venues, "The Hardback was not the most welcoming place at all. It was a gigantic clique... there was a big divide in Gainesville at the time between Hardback bands and a Covered Dish band. More of the alternative rock bands played [at the Covered Dish], and the punk rock bands played [at The Hardback]."<sup>47</sup> This confirmed the fact that scenes function primarily as social groups, and in one way or another certain people were left out. The social spaces that served as the locus for the scene were not immune to stereotypes and social outcasts. However, in the story of Gainesville's scene, the venues were respected as sites of activity and the memories of these clubs paint some picture about the social organization of the scene.

In addition to music venues, most often housed in bars or clubs, Gainesville's scene had sites dedicated to other forms of art. Wayward Council

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<sup>47</sup> Jason Rockhill, interview by author, video tape, Gainesville, FL., 27 June 2008

and the Civic Media Center were two other gathering points in the Gainesville scene. Besides Wayward Council being a space for bands to play, it was a record store that took pride in supporting the DIY community. Founded in 1998, Wayward Council claimed, according to their website, to be a “non-profit DIY collective music zine record coffee slingshot book store and punk indie metal folk rock underground show space and community center... But we're more than a record store; we're an open space for YOU to come and meet people while checking out some very interesting and intelligent music and literature.”<sup>48</sup> The efforts by Wayward Council to support local zines and scene members who did things other than music, was a boon for the DIY community. Also, as most of Gainesville’s venues double as bars and thus can only allow 18+ patrons, Wayward Council made sure to remain an all-ages space. Many of these ideas, including being all-volunteer run and holding meetings on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday of every month, were inspired by the seminal punk club 924 Gilman, located in the Berkeley, California scene, the very same scene that produced bands like Green Day and Rancid. Wayward Council, like 924 Gilman, took the ethic of DIY very seriously and because of their work, maintained a small but vital role in the history of Gainesville’s music scene.

In similar fashion to Wayward Council, the Civic Media Center was an active participant in the chronicling and documenting aspect of Gainesville’s scene. Founded as a library for alternative press in 1993, the Civic Media Center (CMC) was one of many entities that in the mid-1990s began to collect and archive zines, books, videos, pamphlets and all other forms of alternative media. According to their website, “The CMC, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, strives to educate, organize, and empower individuals and the masses in order to achieve social gain in the city of Gainesville, the state of Florida, the United States, and the whole world.”<sup>49</sup> While the CMC has a much more explicit social and political

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<sup>48</sup> <http://www.myspace.com/waywardcouncil>,  
[http://members.tripod.com/wayward\\_council/what.htm](http://members.tripod.com/wayward_council/what.htm)

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.myspace.com/civicmediacenter>, <http://www.civicmediacenter.org/>



agenda than Wayward Council, both formed a literary and activist cornerstone for the scene.

Joe Courter, one of the founders of the CMC and co-editor of a local independent newspaper, said about their involvement with the DIY scene in Gainesville, “The music scene was happening around us, we weren’t part of it... but we were doing occasional shows.”<sup>50</sup> The Civic Media Center did eventually begin to interact with the music scene when, for a time it doubled as a venue following The Hardback’s demise. Speaking about the importance of political activism Courter said, “I think it’s empowering to people to have their own space... I can’t say that the CMC inspired that stuff, but I think with Wayward, people saw that you could have your own space and they decided to go for it. I cant help but think that there’s a certain empowerment, a certain meaningful activity that builds a social network that transpired because of these entities in Gainesville.” In addition to bands promoting ideals, spaces like Wayward Council and the Civic Media Center were important to the enrichment of the scene, and in connecting the scene to countercultural ideas that remained an essential part of subcultures since the 1960s.

### *Festival -*

As these various aspects of the scene began to coalesce, Gainesville developed into a full-fledged, active music scene. From the foundations of No Idea to the memorable concerts at The Hardback, this music community evolved along a timeline that was mirrored by punk coming into some form of acceptance in mainstream popular culture. Partly influenced by national attention, bands and scene members in Gainesville became aware of their position in the story of subcultures in America. Dealing with these new pressures, Gainesville’s scene reacted by holding tighter to their sense of home. The mid-1990s saw the rise of national touring festivals, where groups of bands would travel from place to place to play to massive crowds, sometimes under the sponsorship of a corporation. Lollapalooza, Warped Tour, and Oz Fest all contributed to the transience that

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<sup>50</sup> Joe Courter, interview by author, audio recording, Gainesville, FL., 5 April 2009

subcultural music was facing as it was removed from place-based scenes. In response to this uprooting trend, Gainesville's scene produced its own musical festival, beginning in 2002, simply called The Fest. Usually held over Halloween weekend, The Fest quickly became one of the nationally recognized gatherings of punk, hardcore and indie bands, growing through its unique connections to Gainesville's close-knit scene.

Tony Weinbender, the creative mind behind The Fest, got his start promoting and booking bands in the late 1990s for MACRoCk (The Mid-Atlantic College Radio Conference), an independent music festival in Harrisonburg, Virginia. In an interview with Issue Oriented, a punk culture podcast, Tony spoke in depth about how The Fest came to be.<sup>51</sup> Living in Virginia, booking shows and playing in bands, Tony said, gave him "...a lot of experience, a lot of connections with bands, like Less Than Jake, Hot Water Music" [both from Gainesville]. After college he moved to Gainesville to work with a local record label called Fueled By Ramen. Based on his good experiences and knowledge of how to run a festival, some friends prodded him to create a similar event in Gainesville. Tony said about the first Fest,

We did [it] with a lot of help from a lot of volunteers, a lot of awesome bands that just said, 'You know what, we like Gainesville, we like what Tony's done in the past, let's go do this and make it awesome.' Our first year... I think we had 300 or something, people pay. It wasn't very big. We had posters, we had flyers, [and] we had three venues. Our biggest venue at the time was this place called Market Street Pub that holds about 400 people... That first year I lost money, and I didn't get defeated about it because there was so much good vibe and so much energy, and everybody was so excited about it, and what happened. Even the people that lived in town that I didn't know very well that were kind of like old guard, and kind of naysayers on it at the end they were like 'you know what, you pulled off something that nobody in this town would have pulled off. So lets just keep doing it, you'll always have my help...' Since then I think it has almost kind of outgrown this town in a lot of ways....<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Issue Oriented Podcast - Episode 35*, host Ronen Kauffman, aired 26 August 2008, available at <http://www.issueoriented.com/>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid

One of the points that Tony Weinbender continued to bring up during the interview was the sense of community that is so tangible in Gainesville, especially during The Fest. One of the greatest challenges, he mentioned, was finding venues to put on the concerts, and yet every year local businesses, artists and members of the community open their spaces to The Fest's crowds.

Ronen Kauffman, the host of the Issue Oriented Podcast, asked Tony what set The Fest apart from other gatherings of independent culture. In his response, Tony reaffirmed the historical, and almost ideological differences that Gainesville's scene had from other scenes that hosted similar events. He replied,

I talk to my volunteers and stress to them how important our community really is, and how it is pretty much them that run this thing... We kind of keep it like a family reunion, friends and family deal... we are not elitist about it in any way, but we also try to have people that fit in. I'm not going out there and trying to book bigger, giant indie rock bands, or trying to get some big hip hop group, I'm not trying to make it 'camping out Bonnaroo style', or I'm not trying to make it into this big industry event, where you have weird showcases everywhere sponsored by this major company that has a free show and giving out all this free crap...<sup>53</sup>

In this one short answer, he set three claims that entrench Gainesville deeper in the history of independent music scenes. One, Tony made clear that the community, and the vibrancy of the scene, is the primary focus of the weekend. Two, he rejected mainstream popularity as viable grounds for participation in The Fest, following trends from the mid-1990s to the early 2000s that were making "indie" music a pop cultural fad. And three, he intentionally curated the festival to stand apart from other musical festivals, like CMJ in New York, South by Southwest in Austin, and the traveling festivals like Bonnaroo, where the focus was more on independent music business, the industry, and commercialization than on music and friendships. Gainesville, in Tony Weinbender's mind, was a scene extricated from the shifting tides in independent music that characterized much of the post-Nirvana youth culture in America.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid

The interview concluded with Tony discussing the relationship the music scene maintained with the city, and some of the changes taking place in Gainesville that affected the local scene. As Florida continued to grow and become a larger state, developers retooled the cities and landscapes to allow for more population boom. Tony said,

Right beside Common Grounds, one of the awesome venues that we use for The Fest, they threw up a developmental condo... I mean right in the parking lot... and so now they are having issues fighting the landlord of that who doesn't want Common Grounds to be there... our nice, sleepy, beautiful college town... is getting overrun with commercial developers who don't really care about the actual beautification of a city, they just want to stack people on top of people on top of people who are only going to be here for four years.<sup>54</sup>

In this instance the scene was confronted face to face with modern Florida. Var Thelin also commented on the gentrification of Gainesville, saying that he fully expected the road where No Idea is located, in an old large house, to be built up with new buildings and condos in the next few years. Underscoring the fact that Gainesville was connected inevitably to its geographic position in the state, and to the University of Florida, the growth and development of the city will perhaps be something the scene will be up against to a greater degree in the coming years. Tony did however comment on why he thought Gainesville had existed for as long as it has. He said, "It's a small city, really close, communal... and I think it's just the south... I love the laid back mentality about stuff here... I think that's the key to why Gainesville works so well." The scene members in Gainesville constantly acknowledged that despite mainstream attention on the national subculture and a drastically changing state, the scene that blossomed in Gainesville was not taken for granted.

Florida's musical subculture benefited greatly from the influence of Gainesville's scene. In spite of the fact that the city itself is not near one of the urban centers in Florida, the scene attracted many people to relocate there, and many did so with the mind to become actively involved. For example Andrew

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid

Chadwick, who was well-known around the state for his “distro” (distribution – meaning lugging boxes of zines and albums to concerts and festivals and trading/selling them) and record label called Boxcar Records, moved from Melbourne to Gainesville and after doing so played a role in founding and promoting independent electronic music events as an offshoot of the post-punk scene. The community of people that founded, developed and spread the scene in Gainesville had profound effects on the revitalization of Florida’s music scenes, and tracing these few high points in the history of Gainesville’s scene only opens the door for more research. Returning to Barry Shank’s definition of a scene as “an over-productive signifying community,” it is clear to see that this short overview only scratches the surface of the actual lived scene that Gainesville residents acted out. The material covered in this section represents my point of view as a scene member in Florida, and as such there are many nuances and counter-narratives that are necessary for a more accurate understanding of Gainesville’s place in Florida, in “the south,” and in the discourse on music scenes.

## CONCLUSION

Across Florida, music scenes were actively producing bands, zines, and ideals that had considerable influence other scenes around the state and on the national subculture. Gainesville happened to receive a lot of attention, in no small part because of the city's relative position to other budding scenes like Athens, Georgia. The geographic divisions that made Florida grow as a state in such interesting ways doubled as a backdrop for the scenes that developed in those areas. Aside from North Florida, other major metropolitan areas like Tampa, Orlando and Miami supported vibrant scenes throughout the 1990s. Also, South Florida, including almost everything south of Vero Beach, developed a style of hardcore music known as "South Florida Hardcore" that grew quite significant and influential toward the end of the 1990s. This paper's focus on Gainesville should not in any way be taken as a statement that North Florida was the most productive scene, in fact, as further studies in the other areas would show, all of the major scenes in Florida were active and held sway in their own right. The more important narrative is that Florida as a whole cooperated and produced active scenes to a degree that was not recognized in the national subculture. Extensive research is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of what that meant to the state, the subculture, and the idea of music scenes in American culture and history.

Over the course of the years from 1994-2001, Florida experienced, and as I would argue, spearheaded, some of the movements in music scenes that have caused subcultures in America to be a very relevant and salient topic of study. Floridian bands took care to create and cultivate regional sounds, scene members all over the state took hold of DIY to found state-wide scenes affiliated through love of music and rejection of mainstream ideals (the transience of tourism for example), and Floridian scene members used a variety of media to participate in the scene. One form of DIY media that was not discussed in this paper, and was an entirely validating part of Florida's scene, were the numerous compilations and split 7" records that were put out to chronicle and document

local bands, for example *We Can't Help It We're From Florida* released in 1983, or *Welcome to Florida: Now Get the Fuck Out Asshole!*, a collaborative album from two different record labels.

These “comps” and the many zines that came out of the state present further evidence and material that would help construct a historical timeline of Florida’s scenes. Perhaps one of the most interesting and socio-politically relevant movements in Florida’s scene history was the birth of the Radical Cheerleading by two sisters from Lake Worth, Florida. Connecting to other gender movements that were happening in the national subculture, the Radical Cheerleaders took an American popular culture icon, added an activist agenda, dressed up in their most punk attire, and took action for gender equality, vegetarianism and other countercultural ideals. Cara Jennings, one of the two sisters, was actually elected to City Commission in 2006, another great example of the scene connecting with public policy and the future of Florida.<sup>55</sup> The relationship between Florida as a civic body in transformation and the growth music scenes is an aspect of this history that also deserves further study.

Alan Blum, a professor of Media and Culture at York University, contributed an article titled “Scenes” to a special issue of *Public*, a journal of arts and culture, in 2001. Professor Blum’s article speaks broadly about the concept of scenes as social entities, including much more than music as cohesive factors. His reasoning was that scenes and cities are connected, inseparable bodies, informing one another, but especially influencing one another socially, culturally and politically. He wrote,

What is apparent is that an exploration of the question of the scene and its status in urban life as a place that contributes to making the city itself a place, should begin to permit us to clarify the interpretive links between two important glosses that have petrified to the point of cliché, on the one hand the idea of public space, and on the other, the notion of imagined community.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Information from [http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/2665/anarchist\\_cheerleader\\_elected/](http://www.inthesetimes.com/article/2665/anarchist_cheerleader_elected/)

<sup>56</sup> Alan Blum, "Scenes," *Public* no. 22 (2001): 7

His assertion of the central concept of place in the scene, coupled with an increased focus on the scene's contributions to the city, is compelling and very much in line with his contemporaries, such as Holly Kruse. However, Professor Blum went on to apply the concept of a scene to a broad spectrum of social sites and activities, and in doing so pressed scene studies closer toward their 2009 understanding. The trend in scene studies, as evidenced in several published works in 2004, was toward conflating "scenes" with subcultures.<sup>57</sup> This development in the study of music scenes will have to be mediated by future scholars, and a key delineator will have to become the difference between a *taste-based scene*, like the electronic dance music scene, and *place-based scenes*, like the Orlando, Florida scene. Both permutations of the scene contribute to the overall position of scenes in subcultural study, but it is necessary to acknowledge the distinct character of place vs. taste in music scenes.

A variety of meaningful factors like music and activism, combined in a welcoming location with youthful, open minds can produce incredibly interesting results. The resilient work that subcultures have done in America over the course of the last thirty years remains wide open for multidisciplinary research. Florida, as a peripheral state and an ever-increasing influencer in the national scope, is ripe for study in this sense, and as I have begun to show here, it is also anomalous in the development of its subcultures and music scenes. The tides of mainstream media pulled hard for subcultures to become the cutting edge of popular culture, and in many respects that has been the case. However, in local music scenes like Gainesville, Tampa, and South Florida, the resistance continued and was enacted through DIY creativity, a strong sense of place, and foundations of subcultural infrastructure.

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<sup>57</sup> See: *After Subculture*, edited by Andy Bennett and Keith Kahn-Harris, *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal and Virtual*, edited by Andy Bennett and Peterson, and *Key Terms in Popular Music and Culture*, edited by Bruce Horner and Thomas Swiss



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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Micah Vandegrift grew up in Melbourne, Florida, amongst the palm trees and the sea breeze. He received his first guitar for his tenth birthday and taught himself the drums soon after. After graduating as Eau Gallie High School's Senior Class President in 2001, Micah was accepted to Florida State University and enrolled in the Spring of 2003. His course of study was primarily in music history and 20<sup>th</sup> century American culture, accomplished through a major in Humanities. Micah then went on to matriculate in the Program in American and Florida Studies, also at Florida State, for his Master's degree. During his tenure in the Master's program, Micah took course work in the Religion and History Departments, and presented several papers at conferences. His interest in music culminated in a thesis on Florida's subcultural music scenes, which he defended in April of 2009. Micah organized two symposia on the topic of music scenes while at FSU and designed, developed and taught a course on the history of Underground music in America, 1980 to present. He hopes to continue to research music scenes, and will pursue a PhD in History in the near future.