

CRANBERRIES, CHILI PEPPERS, MELONS AND JAM

SPATIAL ORIGINS OF ALTERNATIVE

MUSIC ARTISTS, 1992-1997

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JACOB BESTERMAN

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Thesis Approved:

George O. Carney

Thesis Advisor

Stephen W. Tweedie

Alphon Z. Guener

Wayne B. Powell

Dean of the Graduate College

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Introduction

The definition of alternative as it pertains to music is rather vague. What makes a performer or group alternative? Some focus on controversy in lyrics and subject matter of the songs as the hallmark of a truly alternative performer. Others maintain that the element of controversy is not as necessary as is an unorthodox manner of performance. The element of rebellion against a norm seems to be important for some also. These varying interpretations of alternative music have left any true definition rather vague and have created difficulties in deciding who was or was not alternative. One definition seems to cover what most people consider as alternative music. This definition is provided by Rolling Stone magazine in its New Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll. "...[G]enerally speaking alternative acts tended to make rough-edged or adventurous music with world-weary lyrics; to dress down or dress strangely..." They also state that "'Alternative' is a catch-all adjective for young rock artists ... who vociferously condemned the commercialism and glitzy conventions of mainstream pop rock"(Romanowski, 18). Using this definition, Robert Palmer in his history of rock music, as well as other musicologists, credit the beginning of alternative rock to the appearance of The Velvet Underground, led by Lou Reed, in the late 1960s (Palmer, 45). Throughout the 1970s, as rock became more corporate and image-oriented, an alternative movement began to grow. In the 1980s, groups, such as R.E.M., started to introduce the alternative style to the mainstream. It was not until the grunge movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s that the alternative style entered the mainstream. The grunge movement was one subset of the general alternative classification that emerged, specifically, in Seattle. The music of grunge groups was influenced by both punk and the hard rock of 1970s groups, such as Black Sabbath and Kiss (Romanowski, 399). The sudden popularity of Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" single

in 1991 brought grunge music to a broader audience. As it became more popular, it dominated alternative's transition to the mainstream, and became almost synonymous with alternative. However, the term alternative refers to a much broader group of music that rejects traditional pop rock conventions. Now alternative music, in general, has become firmly established as a genre of mainstream music, indicated by a plethora of radio stations that have a specific alternative format. The subject here is alternative as a popular form of music, focusing on the alternative groups that are broadcast over these mainstream radio stations. This phenomenon has only occurred since 1991, the year of Nirvana's sudden success.

One characteristic of alternative music is of interest to geographers. While most popular musicians travel to New York or Los Angeles to move into the mainstream, alternative artists tend to emerge from peripheral locations. The aforementioned R.E.M, as well as other lesser known groups, broke into the mainstream from the college town of Athens, Georgia. Seattle, more recently, has contributed a wealth of artists to the alternative genre. The appearance of these peripheral locations is one form of rebellion against mainstream rock. Of course alternative rebels in more substantial ways than this. The subject matter of alternative songs tends toward the controversial. Many alternative artists also use unorthodox song arrangements to assert their independence from corporate control of music. In combination these create music that is very personal to the artist. This approach has found resonance in a mass market that has been fed overly softened music for too long and yearns for something unique.

This distinct approach to music has led to the recognition of alternative as a style of music, differentiated from "normal" rock music, leading many enthusiasts to wonder about its origins. Most styles and substyles of music can be traced back to a single geographical

source. Cities like Memphis (Rockabilly) and Detroit (Motown), as well as regions like southern California (surfer rock), are well recognized as hearths for different versions of rock 'n' roll. Whether these cultural hearths continue to exist into modern times has not been decided. The mass popularity of alternative rock music provokes this very question. Questions and discussions over its origins, musical as well as geographical, have emerged. Though Seattle is recognized as the home of many groups, not all are from this city. Seattle's dominance in the style, in fact, has already declined. As Seattle's dominance wanes it is significant to determine what regions may take its place. This thesis provides answers to the geographical questions of the rise of alternative rock music.

Literature Review

As alternative music has taken its place in the history of popular music, much has been written about its characteristics and origins. And when it finally fades into history, as so many other musical styles have, scholars will investigate and analyze its rise and fall. Geographers in particular have a special interest. With a growing interest in cultural geography, and that of popular culture in particular, future geographers will no doubt eventually look at alternative music, and the culture surrounding it, as an important element in the popular culture of the United States in the 1990s. This literature review provides background on the subject and how it has been dealt with by other writers.

Music Geography

As a background to the geography of alternative rock music, it is beneficial to look at the geographical writings on music in general, but rock music in particular. George Carney, one of the pioneers of music geography, produced an article describing the nature of music geography. He lists eight subtopics of music phenomena that geographers have studied. These include styles, structure, lyrics, performers and composers, centers and events, media, ethnic music, and instrumentation (Carney, 38). Carney also co-authored with Peter Nash an article entitled "The Seven Themes of Music Geography." In it the authors divide the geographical study of music into the seven areas including origins, world distributions and types, location analysis, source areas of musical activities, trends based on electricity, impact on landscapes, and global music (Nash and Carney, 70-73). These two sets of subdivisions provide better focus for future scholars as they conduct their own

studies. As study has continued, other concepts have arisen and are explored to evaluate their validity. One such concept that is relevant to studies of modern alternative music is that of place-specific music. One article that has dealt directly with this geographic idea focuses on the Miami Sound. James Curtis, assistant professor in geography at the University of Miami, and Richard Rose, instructor of music at Miami-Dade Community College, in analyzing this musical style, determine factors that contribute to the development of a place-specific music. These include past migrations to the area, rate of persistence of traditions and the importance of social institutions, such as the church (Curtis, 112-113). These characteristics should be considered if alternative is to be treated as a place-specific music.

Geography of Rock Music

The first geographical writing on rock music appeared in 1970, a masters thesis written by Jeff Gordon at Pennsylvania State University (Gordon, 1970). He used radio play charts for selected cities throughout the 1960s to determine diffusion patterns of early rock 'n' roll music from urban centers. Larry Ford, the next year, wrote the first full article on the topic (Ford, 1971). His work basically served as an introduction to the spatial origins of rock music. Richard Butler wrote a second piece in 1984 and covered much of the same ground as Ford (Butler, 1984). Butler's was more extensive in that he compared the rock songs at the top of the charts in the United States in the 1960's with those in the United Kingdom over the same period. Where these two articles overlap is in presenting the birthplaces of rock music and later influential centers.

Both trace rock 'n' roll back to a combination of white country music and black blues. Centers for these two musical styles were Nashville and Memphis, Tennessee,

respectively (Ford, 205-207). Intermixing of enthusiasts of these two styles ultimately produced a combination that became rock 'n' roll. With the help of Sun Records, an independent record label in Memphis, that city became the home of rock 'n' roll. Chicago served as a secondary center through the efforts of Chess Records, which was formed to record many of the blues artists who had migrated to this city from the Mississippi Delta, hearth of the country blues, making it the home of the urban blues. These two cities produced the majority of the records that shaped early rock 'n' roll, before the major labels became involved (Butler, 218-223).

By 1960 the future for rock 'n' roll appeared bleak. Most of the early stars had disappeared, having either died, been drafted, or been arrested. In the wake of this downturn, additional cities began to emerge as centers for new movements. Philadelphia moved to prominence with the help of Dick Clark and his show, "American Bandstand". He discovered many of the teen idols who were popular at the time, many of whom came from Philadelphia itself (Ford, 211-212, Butler, 225). A second city to emerge was Los Angeles. The surfer community began to produce its own music with a unique style. The most famous of these groups were the Beach Boys (Ford, 212, Butler, 226-227). These two cities, however, did not last long as major influences on the music. One that emerged at this time that did have some staying power was Detroit. Berry Gordy's Motown Records discovered much talent among the black community of the city and produced what would be called Motown music. This center survived through the 1960's and was still producing new artists into the 1970s (Ford, 212, Butler, 225-226).

The event that brought an abrupt end to the other American centers was the British Invasion. For a brief period the spirit of true rock 'n' roll shifted from America to England where groups around London, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham gained notoriety by

doing covers of early rock 'n' roll tunes. Eventually they brought their sound to America where they gained fame through a renewed interest in rock 'n' roll (Ford, 213, Butler, 228-232).

What Ford and Butler have in essence accomplished is to establish a place context for the music, in this case, cities. The general public has a tendency to describe a music by its city of origin. Terms like the Philadelphia Sound, the Nashville Sound, and Motown are very familiar to the fans of that music. But many people may not realize why their music comes from these places. Ford and Butler have taken this tendency to relate musical styles to certain cities and have added the background to complete it. They explain what events took place in and around these cities that led to their association with a style of music.

Butler's article goes further than this. He also examines the origins of the artists as well. His article contains two maps comparing the origins of rock 'n' roll artists from 1954 - 1959 and from 1960 - 1970. The earlier map shows definite conglomerations around Memphis and Chicago. The later map reflects rock's acceptance by the nation and the influence of later centers, demonstrated by conglomerations in New York City, Detroit, and Los Angeles. He also maps Britain as well. He maps the origins of British rock 'n' roll artists, comparing 1955 - 1962 with 1963 - 1969. The early centers of Liverpool and London can be seen, later diffusing to other cities, like Birmingham and Manchester.

Here again the role of the cities becomes clear. The origins of the original American rock 'n' roll artists are centered around, though not exclusively, the two early centers of Memphis and Chicago. Later, as it became more popular across the nation, other cities began to produce more artists.

These early centers are presented in greater detail in the book Rock and Roll: A Social History by Paul Friedlander. Here Friedlander, assistant dean of the Conservatory of

Music at the University of the Pacific, discusses the same distinct styles mentioned above but with less of a geographical emphasis. Rather than concentrating on their geographic origins, he places their history in a social context. Written much later than Ford's and Butler's articles, this book extends past 1970 to include 1970s rock and punk as well as pop rock from the 1980s. Rockin' in Time is a similar book, in fact, also subtitled "A Social History," presenting much the same material as Friedlander's. This volume is of special interest to scholars of modern alternative music because it includes a chapter entitled "The Generation X Blues". Here the author, David Szatmary, a social historian and sometime professor, discusses grunge music and its 1980s progenitors, hardcore punk and thrash metal. Szatmary outlines the situation faced by the so-called Generation X. These children of the Baby Boomers came from broken and abusive homes into a world of increasing violence and depression. Fear and frustration at this situation manifested themselves in the music of the generation. Screaming vocals and buzz-saw guitars exemplified these styles as they developed throughout the 1980s and ultimately coalesced into grunge and the growing alternative movement.

Richard Francaviglia, a cultural geographer, delves deeper into the subject of rock 'n' roll origins in an article he wrote for Lanegran and Palm's An Invitation to Geography. Not only does he outline the places from which rock 'n' roll emerged but he also examines the factors that led to rock 'n' roll's diffusion across the country. Of these, two were most important. One was the disc jockeys who discovered the initial interest white teenagers had in rhythm 'n' blues and early rock 'n' roll and began to play the music on radio stations. Another was the 45 rpm records that allowed kids to listen to their music in the privacy of their own rooms outside of their parents' supervision. Parental disapproval of rock 'n' roll also contributed to its popularity. Rebellious youth were naturally interested in anything

that their parents rejected. Later centers were popularized through the development of their own image through certain activities and lingo. The conversion of television shows and celebrities from the image of one center to another lent validity to the new center and helped it gain recognition (Francaviglia, 89-94).

The early geographic centers are also covered by Ron Murray, a geography graduate student at Oklahoma State University, in a 1974 Master's degree report. He takes the theme a little farther in dividing early influences of rock 'n' roll music into country and blues, then identifies, not only, source areas for each of these, but also, peripheral regions that contributed a minor style to rock 'n' roll. New Orleans was one of these, serving as a center for dance blues (Murray, 27). In addition to this, though, he looks at the image of place in early rock 'n' roll music, examining song lyrics that involve place names to reveal how certain places are portrayed by the music (Murray, 43-53).

The early influences of rock 'n' roll are also the prime interest of the book The Sound of the City. Charlie Gillett, a teacher of filmmaking and popular music in London, presents a more in-depth analysis of the origins of rock 'n' roll. He presents the early history in terms of the relationship between black and white culture of the time. The lyric analyses Gillett uses are one way to understand white culture's response to rhythm 'n' blues. Though the book is not explicitly geographic in nature, it does provide an in-depth analysis as a good background to studies of rock 'n' roll music.

The role of the city birthplace, or in another case several cities comprising a region, is central to another geographical article on rock music. This one, written by Warren Gill, covers another less-known movement in early rock 'n' roll known as the Northwest Sound. Again a musical style became known for its association with a place.

Gill, geography professor at Simon Fraser University, wrote the article because the scene was less known and therefore not covered in either Ford's or Butler's articles. It was certainly a local scene, but because it was so local Gill believes it is an excellent example of how culture in a region can be affected by the social structure and context of the region. The development of the Northwest Sound was the result not only of the musical influences in the region but also social, economic and geographic influences that distinguished the Northwest from other parts of the country.

First Gill defines the Northwest as comprised of the cities of Portland, Oregon; Seattle, Washington; and Vancouver, British Columbia. Outside of these cities the region stretches to the west side of the Rocky Mountains and to the California border (Gill, 21 - 22). One of the defining features of this region is its physical isolation. Until the dawn of the mass communication age, cultural advancements were late in arriving to the region. The Northwest continually developed its own style derivative of the nation's culture. As the technological age developed, Seattle came to be a locale for developing new technology. Particularly the Boeing Corporation's constant testing of new airplanes created an atmosphere of mechanical noise. This aspect is most reflected in the music of the Northwest Sound. Most of it sounds similar to the rock 'n' roll of the period, but the Northwest music is much louder and noisier. This characteristic has also been attributed to the physical environment of the region. The Northwest is known for its rain and dreary weather, producing musty basements and garages. It is believed by many local musicians that, because the bands practiced in these garages, the musty setting produced the noise that is characteristic of Northwest music (Gill, 22-23).

Socially the Northwest contributed to the rise of this music through the development of a teen culture. Many old ballrooms had been converted to teenage dance halls. These

places did not serve alcohol and catered to the teenage crowd. Here teenagers had a place to go where they could mingle with each other and enjoy their music. The Northwest Sound, having a predominantly teenage following, thrived at these places, allowing it to develop into a musical style (Gill, 23-24).

These are the kind of influences that resulted in the development of musical styles in general and are only hinted at in Ford's and Butler's articles. Gill demonstrates well how a musical style can be tied to a place. Music develops not only out of pure innovation but also from changes in culture. Culture is often thought to influence folk and ethnic types of music. These musics are inherently related to their culture and would not likely exist without it. However, cultural influences in popular music largely go unrecognized. By the definition of popular music, people can assume that it is consistent throughout the country and changes only occur through independent innovation. While Carney and others have developed it at a folk level, Ford and Butler introduced and Gill fully developed the notion that a region's character can play a large role in influencing popular music.

Gill's particular subject matter is of interest to anyone studying the current alternative rock scene. The primary locale for alternative music today is the grunge scene of Seattle. Grunge music can be seen as a direct descendant of the Northwest Sound. Both have very similar characteristics. The legacy of loud music that was prevalent in the Northwest Sound continues in alternative music. Another characteristic of alternative that can be found in the Northwest Sound is controversial lyrics. These two specific characteristics show the similar attitude that the music styles share. Most analyses of grunge music today concentrate on the punk and heavy metal origins and ignore any earlier influences. However, a close examination of the Northwest Sound demonstrates that there is much more in common between the two than just native region. Any serious

investigation of the history of grunge/alternative should look at the Northwest Sound as an influence.

Geographical Literature on Alternative

Two very recent writings take a geographical approach to alternative music. Both incorporate the work of Thomas Bell, a geographer at the University of Tennessee - Knoxville. His son, Brian, who was a member of the popular alternative group Weezer, has stimulated Bell's interest in the subject. The earliest, presented in March of 1995, takes a look at the role Seattle has played in contributing to alternative rock culture and questions very simply "Why Seattle?" as opposed to any other city. Bell first identifies common traits in the music from Seattle groups, though he will not admit that there is a "Seattle Sound". The common elements he finds are excessive noise, authenticity, and recognition outside Seattle before within. He even traces the first two to Gill's article that describes the Northwest Sound with these characteristics. Authenticity of Seattle music he further attributes to an extreme sense of place. The members of Seattle bands are all aware of the unique character of the region and all speak through that character in their lyrics (Bell, 3-6). Bell then analyzes specific events that occurred in Seattle, especially the creation of Sub Pop Records and its search for local artists. Several compilation compact discs resulted from this search and brought Seattle bands to the attention of the nation (Bell, 6-8). The final part of the paper outlines the decline of Seattle. Bell believes that Seattle has peaked in musical popularity. The downward trend has already begun with many Seattle musicians disowning their home because it no longer has any special meaning (Bell, 9).

Bell's geographical analysis addresses the same themes as other writings but ties them to a geographical location much more effectively, developing grunge as a place-

specific music. The concept of a place-specific music is also developed in a paper related to the alternative movement. Arthur Jipson, a member of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, examines the music scene in Athens, Georgia around 1980, developing it as a place-specific style. Jipson lists three factors that helped Athens develop such a thriving music scene. The structure of the city provided plenty of venues, parties, bars, and other outlets where a new band can develop their talents. Their sense of community provided interaction between band members and the fans, inspiring others to form their own bands. The lack of organization by an established music industry found in a college town, allowed bands to develop their own personal style, rather than having to conform to a set image. This Athens music scene is relevant to alternative music because it led to the rise of R.E.M., one of the first bands to bring an alternative style to mainstream music.

The second paper that Bell co-authored with Codi Lazar appeared in 1996. This deals with alternative music on a much broader scale. In fact, because its focus is non-mainstream rock, grunge, now a mainstream style and the subject of most of the other writings, is less important than are other types of alternative music. College radio is the area of interest here. Traditionally, college radio stations have been locations where independent music has been able to receive airplay. The authors want to determine how true that is today. Since college radio was the first outlet for grunge on a national basis, the study is relevant to that style. The values of independent music are also in line with grunge values. A further purpose of the article is to provide a map for aspiring independent artists to show where in the nation most independent music is programmed and, consequently, where they should send their tapes.

The independence of a radio station is determined by how high a station's programmed songs perform on the national popular charts. Week by week, a station's standard format is compared to the top 150 songs in the nation. The more matches there are, the more mainstream a station is. As correlations for stations were calculated, regional variations began to develop. Most notable among the most independent regions were urban areas and, as would be expected, the Pacific Northwest (Lazar, 7-8).

This is a purely geographical account of the state of alternative music. The map reflects the dominance of Seattle in the alternative scene, as well as past centers of southern California and Athens, Georgia. Though numerous Seattle groups have become mainstream, it is clear from the map that Seattle is still able to produce much truly alternative music. The atmosphere of Seattle that produced grunge has not yet become stagnant and still influences the musical tastes of its residents (Lazar, 8-9).

Non-Geographical Literature

Outside of the geographical realm, most literature on alternative music is rather popular in nature. This is due to the style's being such a recent phenomenon. There have, however, been a few scholarly articles that attempt to evaluate the grunge subculture, its ideals and sources. These combine many of the elements that have been covered separately in the popular literature to arrive at a more complete picture of the grunge movement.

The first of these articles is "Bleached Resistance: The Politics Of Grunge" by Thomas Shevory, Associate Professor of Politics at Ithaca College in Ithaca, New York. This article concentrates on the ideals and values of the grunge artists in relation to events and trends in society and the music industry. Most of the attitude of grunge fans consists of a backlash against dominance and unfair treatment by a particular group. One group is the

Baby Boom generation. Generation X, the age group consisting primarily of people who are now in their twenties to which most grunge fans belong, feel that the boomer generation has exploited the world and left the remains for Generation X to deal with. As decent jobs become more and more scarce and the environment becomes more and more deteriorated, the belief in "no future" began to dominate their attitude. A lot of anger at the previous generation's wasteful ways has begun to arise. They think of the boomer generation as hypocrites. Most boomers went through the hippie stage of peace, love, environmentalism and simple values, then turned into yuppies, the most wasteful, materialistic of all lifestyles (Shevory, 33). Anger also arises in response to the practices of the music industry. Most grunge musicians believed that the record companies dominated the musicians' careers and music too much. The businessmen were telling the artists what to play, attempting to produce music that would cater to the market. The "indie" movement, which had been important since the 1950s, gained strength in response to this trend. The term "indie" refers to independent record labels as opposed to major label corporations. Though there have always been independent record labels, it was not until the grunge movement that emphasis was placed on remaining with an independent label as a sign of a group's integrity. It was a revolt against the procedures of corporate producers, as well as, on a different level, a revolt against corporations in general. The conflict deepened as grunge became more popular and the well-known bands, such as Nirvana and Pearl Jam, switched to major labels. Fans accused them of selling out after the switch (Shevory, 36).

Shevory notes that these attitudes prevailed in the punk generation of the late 1970's. At the start of the article, Shevory looked at the punk movement as a precursor to grunge and examined their values and attitudes. The theme of "no future" was common in punk music as the punk generation realized they were doomed to low-pay factory jobs with no

hope of promotion. Punks also revolted against the corporate control of rock music that became prevalent in the 1970's. Both are the same themes that grunge music revolves around (Shevory, 26-27).

Shevory's article comes from an issue of Popular Music and Society that was devoted entirely to the grunge movement. The other articles in the issue dealt, more specifically, with Kurt Cobain and his music. Two articles review the media coverage of Nirvana's rise to fame and Cobain's suicide to demonstrate how the media influenced the generation's identification with Cobain as their voice (Mazzarella, Jones). Two others analyze lyrics of Nirvana songs to develop the general themes of his music (Muto, Fish). One of these connects the themes to descriptions of Generation X to establish a connection between the two (Fish). Yet another article interviews college students to find out how much they identify with Generation X and Nirvana (Pecora).

Another scholarly look into the grunge subculture spends much time looking at the music itself and its origins and influences. Tony Kirschner, in "The Lalapalooziation [sic] of American Youth", first redefines the subculture as the hip-mainstream. This name arises from the fact that the music is so popular that it is now mainstream, but it has not compromised its central values and attitude in becoming mainstream, so it is still hip (Kirschner, 74-75). Kirschner, a member of the Department of Speech Communication at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, hypothesizes that the main artists of the hip-mainstream have come from a variety of different musical backgrounds, but he recognizes that most have come from the Seattle grunge scene. However he lists rap, punk, heavymetal, and industrial as contributors to the hip-mainstream also (Kirschner, 74). For the purpose of this review it is safe to assume that the hip-mainstream culture and alternative culture are synonymous.

One unique thing about this article is that Kirschner describes very succinctly how grunge music became so popular. "The genesis of the hip-mainstream was not so much a process of mainstream unhip music ... becoming cooler but, rather, hip music ... slowly but surely redefining itself and winning fans until it truly became mainstream."(Kirschner,77) With grunge's rise to popularity, Kirschner claims that three other music styles have risen on its coattails. As the ideals of grunge music became the mainstream, grunge allowed other music styles with similar values to gain a larger acceptance. These are speed metal, gangsta rap and neo-hippie music (Kirschner, 77-78).

Kirschner then notes how the hip-mainstream has made itself known to the general public. He counts MTV, a cable music television channel, as one of the primary influences in popularizing the style. Its popularity is also reflected in increased record sales and coverage in the rock press (Kirschner, 79-80). Lastly, and probably most tellingly, it has influenced other types of music. Artists known for styles unconnected to the hip-mainstream have begun to move toward a sound more similar to the hip-mainstream. Rap uses hard rock samples rather than rhythm and blues; mellower artists, such as Morrissey and Suzanne Vega, have begun to use louder guitars in their recent recordings. The hip-mainstream can even be found in commercial jingles (Kirschner, 81).

The hip-mainstream attitude can be seen in other forms of popular culture. The lifestyles of this generation are a response to the materialistic values of the 1980s. This group's taste in television, literature, and film also reflect a desire to challenge suburban middle-class values (Kirschner, 84).

Both Shevory's and Kirschner's articles cover the same subject matter that the popular literature has been emphasizing. Rather than investigating grunge television or grunge films, these articles, as well as most popular literature, focus on the origins of

grunge music. It was the music of grunge that led to the popularization of the subculture as a whole. The sociological conditions of the grunge generation as opposed to previous generations also has been one of the important themes in analyses, popular or scholarly, of the subculture.

Popular Literature

Because grunge music and the culture that surrounds it has been so popular recently, a sizable amount of popular literature on the subject as been published. Magazines, such as Rolling Stone and The Village Voice, have embraced the subculture and provided much literature not only on its origins but also on its changes as events have altered its course. Much literature in Rolling Stone, of course, reviews the music groups and their music that have influenced the sound. Most is rather superficial in nature, such as reviews of albums or clothing styles. There are, however, some articles that begin to delve into the past and behind the scenes of this music, as well as, present insights into various aspects of the subculture. Two articles, "Walk on the Wild Side" by Robert Palmer, contributor to Rolling Stone and former critic for The New York Times, and "To Go Where No Band Has Gone Before" by Simon Reynolds, writer for The Village Voice, examine the history of alternative rock before its recent popularity. As some may not realize, alternative rock is not that recent. Palmer's article investigates the groups that first created the genre of alternative rock back in the late 1960's. The Velvet Underground, MC5, and The Stooges are three of the better known groups that refused to play by the rules of the rock establishment, although all three had limited popular success (Palmer, 47). Reynolds' article covers a later period, the post-rock movement in New York in the 1980's. Post-rock is characterized by an abandonment of the traditional format of rock music, ranging from

what instruments are used to how they are played to how songs are arranged (Reynolds, 27). These emphases are in line with the values of pre-grunge alternative rock. It was in this atmosphere of opposition that grunge rock first appeared.

Three further articles take into account some factors that contributed to the development and rise of grunge rock. Mark Jenkins, contributing writer for Washington City Paper, examines the role of MTV in bringing the grunge sound to the nation in his article "Sound and Fury". He claims that MTV responded to the movement and adopted it as a regular format so quickly, that the cable channel led all other sources in giving grunge a nationwide appeal (Jenkins, 25). A less obvious contribution to the rise of grunge was the social conditions of its fans. This aspect is covered by Sarah Ferguson, contributor to The Village Voice, in "The Comfort of Being Sad". The lyrical subject matter of many grunge tunes, especially Nirvana's "Smells Like Teen Spirit" and Pearl Jam's "Jeremy" are about child abuse, suicide, and drugs. As more and more of today's youth are afflicted by these problems, the songs become sources of identification (Ferguson, 60). The young can now admit that they feel damaged and use grunge music as a support group. With the rise of grunge music, for whatever reasons, other issues begin to emerge. As with any type of music that rises from obscurity to national appeal, grunge artists have been adopted by the major label record producers. This has caused controversy with the fans of grunge who view these artists as giving in to the establishment, the establishment that grunge and alternative music in general have been rebelling against (Weisbard, 17). This conflict is reviewed in "Over and Out: Indie Rock Values in the Age of Alternative Million Sellers" by Eric Weisbard, writer for The Village Voice.

Outside of the typical musicological or sociological looks at grunge history, one article analyzes the demographics of grunge music, "Rock & Roll for Modern Youth" by

Joan Brightman, writer for American Demographics. In it, Brightman identifies the primary listening group for modern alternative music, consisting mostly of grunge, as young adults, ages 18-34. The article describes the industries that have targeted this group and are now marketing their products toward it. These include soft drinks, fast food, and cars (Brightman, 9-12).

Finally, one of the popular literature articles touches on geography. Rolling Stone writer, Michael Azerrad, identifies Seattle as the primary source for the grunge music and subculture in his article entitled "Grunge City". Azerrad explores Seattle's musical past, chronicling the events that led to grunge. He recognizes the Northwest Sound as one of the earliest influences in music from Seattle (Azerrad, 44-48). Another event in Seattle that led to the rise of grunge was the founding of Sub Pop Records. The owners of this label recognized the Seattle music scene and wanted to record it. It was the efforts of Sub Pop's attempts to capture as much of Seattle music as possible on record that introduced many grunge groups to a wider audience (Azerrad, 44).

These articles represent only a small portion of the total scholarly and popular literature on the subject. Each of these articles addresses a different aspect of the rise of grunge music. Each of these aspects, in turn, has contributed and plays its own role in influencing and developing the music style, just as Warren Gill found that different aspects of society and music had contributed to the rise of the Northwest Sound. Though it may seem to one that MTV was a major cause or that child abuse was a major cause to another, both are equally important, as well as many other factors, to understanding how the music and its subculture became popular. Any serious, scholarly inquiry must consider all of these factors. However, the subculture still has a popular status which has discouraged most scholars from seriously examining it.

These geographical studies provide another vantage point from which to examine the grunge music and subculture. Other articles have taken musicological or sociological approaches or combined these with many others. But, as the popular literature suggests, opinions and perspectives on the movement are varied and carry equal validity. Any final analysis must consider all aspects to present the complete picture.

Methodology

Problem Statement

This thesis will establish the spatial distribution of mainstream alternative music groups at the time of their formation, discovery (when their music began to be played at a national level on alternative radio stations) and after they have signed with a major record label (for example, MCA or Columbia). This information will be then used to evaluate alternative's viability as a place-specific music.

Hypotheses

1. The distance between the groups' original location and the location of their discovery is less than 100 miles.
2. More than two-thirds of the groups will have been discovered in a West Coast metropolitan area.
3. More than one-half of the groups have switched from an independent label to a major label after discovery.
4. More than one-half of the groups have relocated after they have signed with a major label.

The distance determined for the first hypothesis is based on the expectation that some alternative groups may have formed in smaller cities, but, upon realizing that their opportunities for national success were scarce in such locations, will have moved to nearby

larger cities in hopes of more opportunities for performance and, ultimately, discovery. Upon, discovery I expected most of the groups to continue to be interested in their national success and desire close connections with their record label. This expectation led to the third and fourth hypotheses. The second was based on prior knowledge of Los Angeles' and Seattle's importance in alternative music.

Initially I had planned to contact major label recording companies to obtain information about where the groups in their alternative category were based. This idea was based on the trend that music groups, once they have been discovered on a nationwide basis, make a switch from an independent label to a major label. However, I decided that this approach assumed too much about music groups' rise to popularity. Not all popular groups will switch labels. More importantly, the company any group records for is not the determining factor in whether alternative stations play their music. A station will play music it thinks is appealing regardless of whether it came from a major or independent label. Because the radio stations are the key factor in determining what groups are studied, this approach is rendered inappropriate. An additional problem that could arise in contacting record companies is the proprietary nature of this type of information.

The second approach considered was to contact the artists themselves, or at least a representative. Through this channel I would likely be able to obtain a more complete account of any groups' origins. Many of the groups post their own web page and include an e-mail or regular address where the members can be reached. I could then write to them with questions concerning their origins, from where the group was first formed to their current location.

That option was eliminated when a third option that would likely yield better results became apparent. In addition to the group's own home page, many fans maintain their own

web sites dedicated to their favorite groups. These fans are usually quite familiar with the origins and history of the group and could provide information that is nearly as complete as what the artists themselves may provide. They are also much more willing to correspond with others than the artists may be. I decided that I would likely acquire more answers to questions about the groups through the fans.

Of my original list of fifty groups I initially wrote to forty-six of them. R.E.M. and Nirvana were left out because of their popularity. These two have become such successes that many books have been written about their histories. A brief perusal of these has provided all necessary information. Another pair from the original list that were deleted from the initial mailing were ultimately dropped from the list. These were Alanis Morissette and Beck. Alanis Morissette was dropped first because her music, though initially found on alternative radio, has moved too far into the realm of strictly popular music for her to be considered an alternative artist. This left Beck as the sole single artist on the list. My hypotheses, however, are oriented around the careers of groups, referring to the group's formation. This stage is somewhat difficult to translate into the career of a single artist. So, although Beck was very instrumental in the popularization of alternative music, and continues to be unlike some others in this study, he was unfortunately dropped from the list, solely for consistency. Radiohead and Oasis were substituted in their place.

The e-mail message sent to the fans contained four questions that address the career stages of interest. These questions are:

1. Where was the group based when it was initially formed?
2. Where was the group based when it was discovered, that is, when it first achieved national recognition?
3. Did the group switch from an independent label to a major label after

achieving national recognition?

4. If so, did the group relocate after the switch?

Of the forty-six fans written to, twenty-one responded with complete information. Some respondents suggested other sources for information, books or other fans. Generally, those who responded were very thorough with their answers and proved helpful. Information for the groups whose fans did not respond was found through exploration of various web sites, a time consuming, laborious process that fortunately proved fruitful in most cases. Three groups (Dishwalla, Hole, the Foo Fighters) were ultimately dropped from the final list because of lack of information, with only one substitution proving viable, 311. The final list contains forty-eight groups (Appendix A), representing the majority of influential alternative acts in the 1990s, with the unfortunate omissions of Beck, Hole and the Foo Fighters.

Birthplaces and Discoveries

Music geographers, when examining the origins of a style, tend to focus on the birthplaces of artists as the greatest indication of any source area. Concentrations of these birthplaces are used to identify a region of origin. As one of the five themes of cultural geography, the identification of a culture region has proved an important element in the study of cultural traits. Culture regions have been identified, using birthplaces of artists, for many musical styles already, especially country music. An analysis of birthplaces will identify source regions for alternative music and allow one to explore the style as a place-specific music and establish the strength of that relationship. Of the two sets of divisions of music geography discussed earlier, this approach uses performers within the theme of origins to identify a culture region of this style.

The use of birthplaces of people in alternative music, however, is somewhat impractical. The vast majority of performers of alternative music are part of bands, with very few single artists. Since a band's style, though certainly influenced by the past tastes of its members, is more a result of the milieu surrounding its formation and early development, I chose to look at the location of alternative bands' formation, or the band's birthplace, as an indication of the style's source. Using Wilbur Zelinsky's culture regions for the United States (Zelinsky, 118-119), I have evaluated the regional production of alternative groups. One modification of Zelinsky's original regions was necessary. Because my hypotheses distinguish a West Coast region differentiated from an inland West, I have divided Zelinsky's region of the West likewise (Figure 1).

The Culture Regions Of The United States

Figure 1

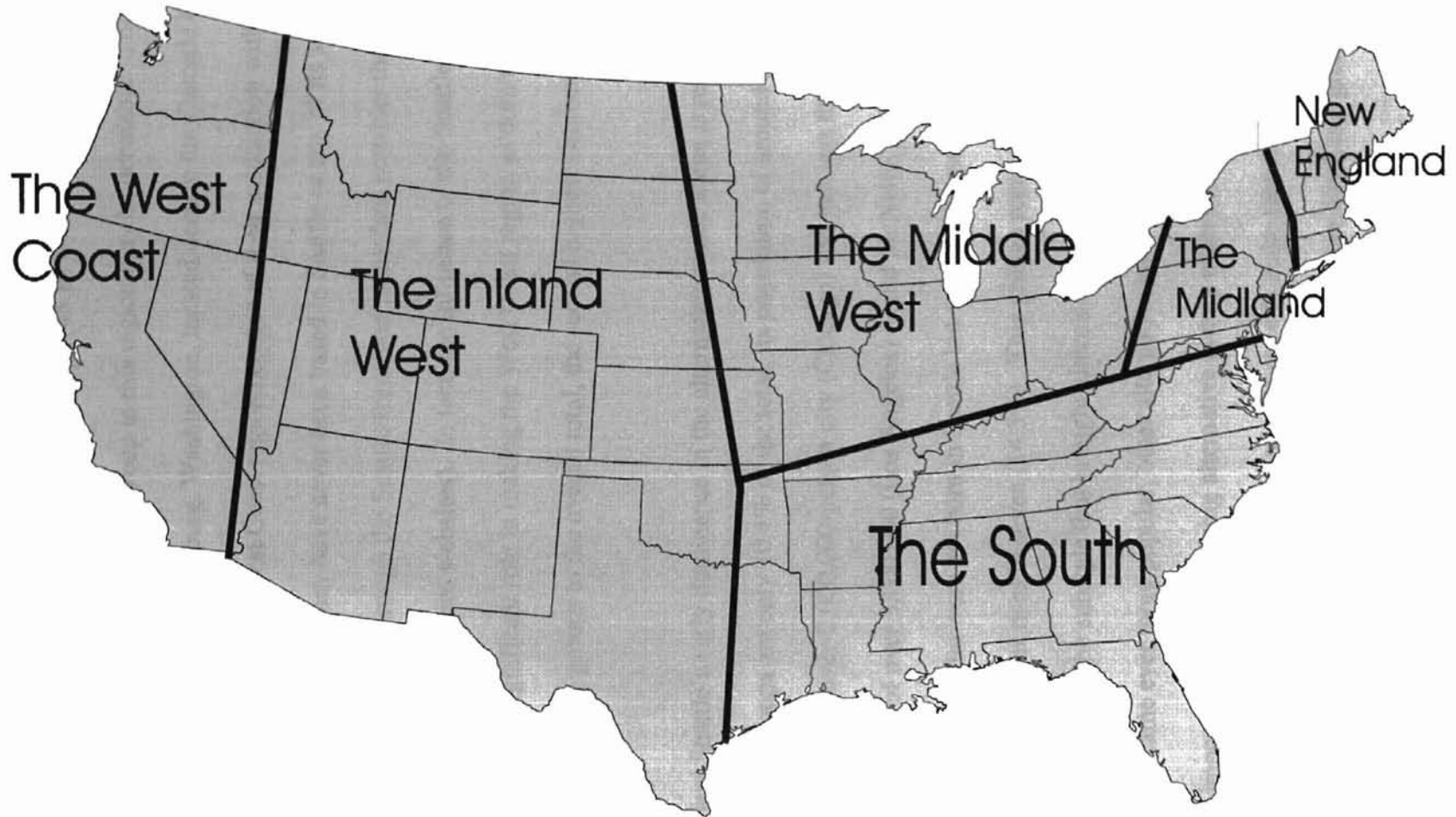


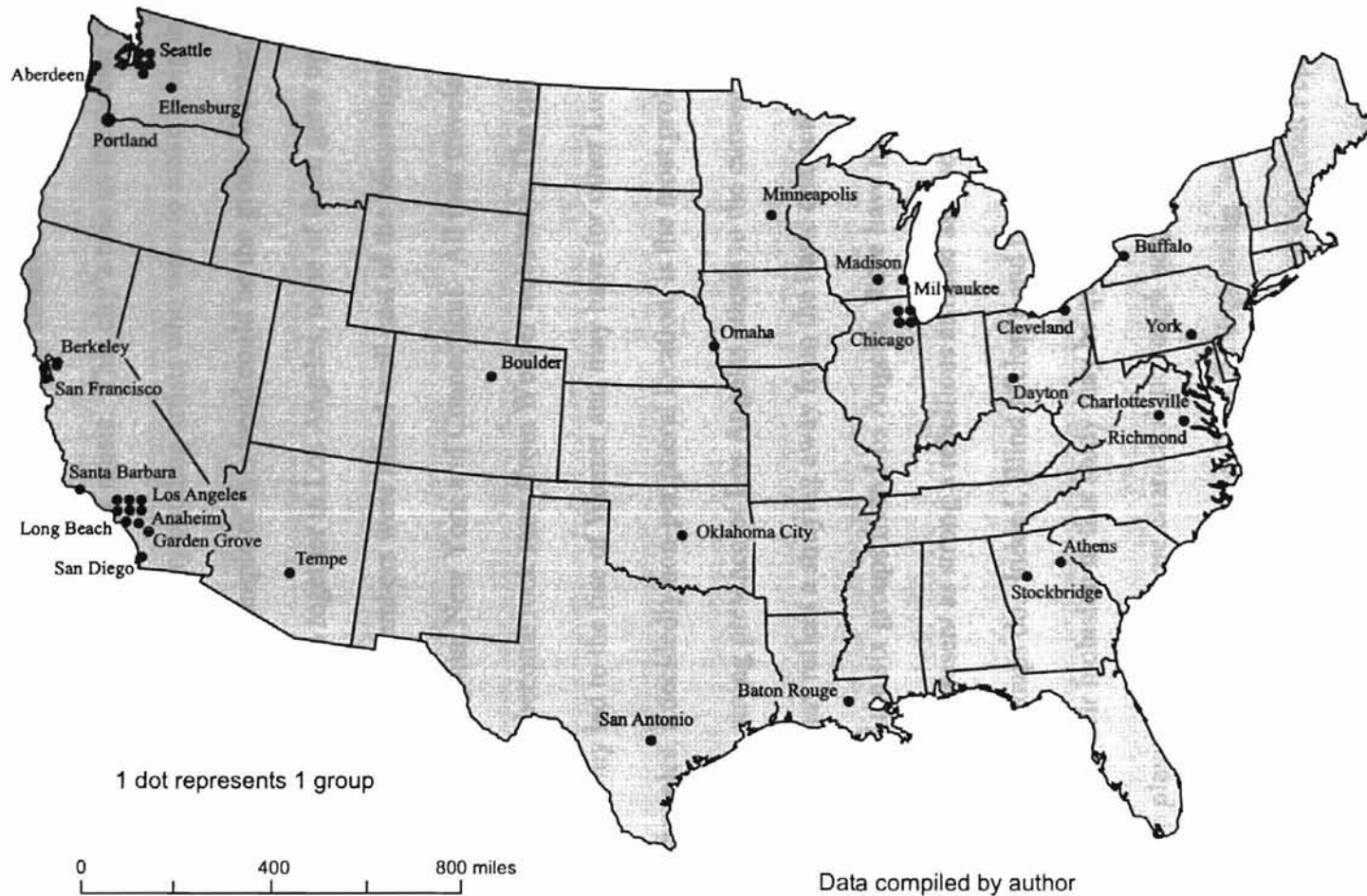
Fig. 1 The Culture Regions of the United States (adapted from Zelinsky, Wilbur. *The Cultural Geography of the United States*. rev. ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 1992.)

As may be expected, the West Coast produced the greatest percentage of alternative groups (Figure 2). Just under half of all the groups (45.83%) formed in a city on or near the Pacific Ocean. The inclusion of one group in this region may be debatable. The Screaming Trees are from the city of Ellensburg, Washington, located deep in the Cascade Mountains. I have included them in the West Coast region because of their association with the grunge scene of Seattle. Though they have never been based in Seattle or any of its suburbs, the Trees rose to popularity through the Seattle scene and many fans consider them a Seattle group (from Screaming Trees websites). In fact, the influence of the Seattle music scene, in general, played a significant role in making the West Coast region as dominant as it is. The city contributed five groups to the overall total, the second highest number contributed by any one city.

Here Seattle's early dominance in the alternative music scene is reflected. Though the city's five groups are only 10.4% of the total, its population of around 500,000 is more productive than an over-2,000,000-person city (Chicago) and just less than the lead city with a population of over 3,000,000 (Los Angeles) (Rand McNally, 121-127). If one includes the groups who were not born in Seattle but were later associated with its grunge music scene the number rises to seven (14.5%). This grunge scene is the factor in Seattle's stature. Grunge was the substyle that brought alternative music to a nation-wide audience. As grunge became ever more popular, other alternative bands rode on its coattails. Grunge's importance in popularizing alternative is duly reflected on the map. However, Seattle groups do not have a strong enough presence to make that city the hearth for alternative as a place-specific music, especially when another city has a greater contribution.

Birthplaces of Alternative Music Groups (United States)

Figure 2



That city is Los Angeles, also located in the West Coast region, with six groups from Los Angeles itself and three others from various suburbs. The repeated appearance of Los Angeles is to be expected in popular music. This city's role as the center of the entertainment industry attracts many budding artists who want to make it big in the music industry. The most obvious example of this trend could be the group Weezer. Though the four members met and joined together in Los Angeles, none of them grew up in the city or anywhere near it. All four members were raised well east of the Mississippi River in the states of Tennessee, Virginia, New York and Connecticut. All four traveled to the City of Angels specifically to become rock stars (from Weezer websites). The city's attraction in this respect certainly led to the rise of Weezer and may have for other Los Angeles groups.

Los Angeles, a decidedly non-peripheral location, is the most prolific in producing alternative acts. The strong presence of Los Angeles attests to the current popular nature of alternative music. It may reflect a straying away from the basic characteristics that define alternative music. Of the six groups from Los Angeles, three have a definite lighter sound. Their music does not represent as strong a rebellious attitude as other, some may say more authentic, alternative groups do. Indeed, Blind Melon's and the Wallflowers' styles verge on mainstream and their inclusion in this study may be questionable to some people. Weezer, while playing with the more characteristic rough-edged sound, does have a more upbeat attitude about their music and strays from the depressing "world-weary lyrics" that characterize most alternative music. A fourth group, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, are certainly known for their rebellious music and stage presence and cannot be accused of having a light pop sound. But their history dates farther back than most others and by the time alternative was becoming popular, they were already enjoying a significant level of popularity in mainstream rock. Because of this they bring a certain level of popularity to

Los Angeles' image. The last two groups, Rage Against the Machine and Fishbone, cannot be considered mainstream and seem to be the truest alternative groups from the city. The question of the peripheral nature of alternative music arises. Yet the general popular nature of its groups may reduce their authenticity enough to allow other peripheral locations, Seattle for instance, to seem more important.

The popular nature of Los Angeles can also be derived from the city's radio stations. KROQ was the premier alternative music station in the country at a time when alternative music was not often broadcast over the airwaves. As the popularity of alternative music rose, so did the popularity of KROQ. This station became the model for other alternative music stations as they became prevalent in most major cities. This situation shows Los Angeles to be at the lead in alternative's popularity. But it is only in respect to the style's popularity that the city proves important.

The second most productive region of the country is the broad Midwest. This region's output is exactly half that of the West Coast yet is still larger than all other regions of the United States combined (Figure 2). Again the presence of a large metropolitan area influences the region's output. Four of the eleven groups of this region are from Chicago. A city of this size will naturally support a large music scene and could contribute a number of artists to any form of popular music. Chicago's contribution to alternative music should also not be surprising because of its heritage in jazz, blues and early rock 'n' roll. The other seven Midwestern cities are not so easy to generalize. It is surprising that cities such as Buffalo, New York; Omaha, Nebraska and Dayton, Ohio have produced any successful groups in the alternative scene. The location of these cities in the Midwest leads to a popular image of backward places that are always behind the times. Many would not expect to see prominent groups arise from so many Midwestern locations.

The prominence of the Midwest can partly be explained by the association of many of the Midwestern groups with major universities. Cities that are home to major universities tend to support a strong local music scene. Some college town scenes have given rise to many popular groups and are even considered minor movements. Athens, Georgia is the most overt of these scenes. The presence of the University of Georgia gave rise to a significant music scene in the early 1980s. Several groups achieved national popularity from this scene, R.E.M. and the B-52's being the best known. Though only one of the Midwestern cities that have appeared in this study, Madison, Wisconsin, is a bona fide college town, the influence of universities has played a role in the development of the careers of at least two other groups. Though Minneapolis is too large to be considered a true college town, the group Soul Asylum arose out of the scene surrounding the University of Minnesota (from Soul Asylum websites). And in Dayton, Ohio, clubs catering to students at the University of Dayton have assisted the careers of several bands, represented here by the Breeders, though the university does not support a thriving music scene (from Breeders websites).

The college town effect also makes an appearance in the South. Of the five groups from Dixie (Figure 2), universities influenced the careers of three of them, two being from the obvious college towns of Charlottesville, Virginia and the aforementioned Athens, Georgia. Baton Rouge, Louisiana, like Minneapolis, is not a bona fide college town but Louisiana State University was the birthplace of the group Better Than Ezra (from Better Than Ezra websites). Other groups from the South present unusual situations that merit discussion.

Richmond, Virginia is the home of Cracker. Though they have been based in the city since their inception, both of the two primary members grew up in southern California.

David Lowery, the lead vocalist, also served as vocalist in Camper Van Beethoven, a southern California based band. After the Campers' breakup, he and long-time friend Johnny Hickman moved to Richmond for no obvious reason and created Cracker. The two still frequent southern California, though. Thus, to call this band a southern band is somewhat inaccurate. Their style was fully developed through a Californian influence. Their location in the South is a pure accident of fate (from Cracker websites).

The last southern group deserves special mention not for the nature of their history (though they do have an unusual history) but for the nature of their hometown. Throughout this paper, I have discussed the locations of bands in terms of cities, whether large or small. The case of Collective Soul is different. Their hometown is just that, a town. Stockbridge, Georgia, where the members of the band grew up, has a population of just over three thousand. This town was the band's retreat after several false starts in the Atlanta music scene. A last ditch effort at a demo recording led to the surprise popularity of their song "Shine" in Georgia and, soon after, the entire nation. Their sudden mass popularity did not require a move to a major city and so the band remained in their hometown (from Collective Soul websites).

Two other regions contributed only a smattering of groups. Four groups hail from the Inland West (Figure 2). Tempe, Arizona, San Antonio, Texas, and Boulder, Colorado all have universities that gave rise to the now-defunct Gin Blossoms and not-defunct Butthole Surfers and Big Head Todd and the Monsters. And the Flaming Lips hail from Oklahoma City, though they rose to fame through the bars and clubs around the University of Oklahoma in nearby Norman (from personal correspondence). Some may have expected Austin, Texas to have produced a group or two. Austin is becoming known across the country for its availability of live music of any kind, including alternative rock. Tourists to

the city flock to Sixth Street in hopes of hearing a future success. My only explanation as to why Austin has not contributed any nationally successful alternative bands is that an anti-establishment spirit thrives among the musicians of the city, seeming stronger than in other places. This spirit may be strong enough to prevent groups from going mainstream even if given an opportunity. Investigation into this matter is a worthwhile possibility for future scholars.

The final region is the Midland, which has produced only one group from York, Pennsylvania, with no production from New England whatsoever (Figure 2). In light of the effect large metropolitan areas had on the West Coast and in the Midwest, such a low number in the Northeast is surprising. One would expect that the influence of New York City would produce larger numbers in the region.

New York City's infertility may be the result of the nature of alternative music. This genre of rock music arose in rebellion to the practices of the established music industry. Though both Los Angeles and New York City are seats of entertainment, there is a greater spirit of rebellion out west than in the east. This may better encourage the desire to change the established practices and lead to more interest in alternative bands in the west. A relative conservatism in the east has relegated New York City to a negligible position in the development of a climate that encourages alternative acts.

Outside the United States, production is fairly minimal. The greatest foreign contributor is England with three groups who have become successful in the American alternative scene. The hometowns of two of these groups are expected; they are also cities known for producing rock groups in the past. London has given us Bush while the group Oasis hails from Manchester. And Oxford appears as the birthplace of Radiohead. Two final groups have come from abroad to be successful in America. Limerick in Ireland sent

us the Cranberries and the long-distance winner is Silverchair, coming all the way from Newcastle, Australia (Figure 3).

The trend in the birthplaces of alternative groups, then, seems to be toward the western United States. Just observing the difference between the nation's two largest cities, Los Angeles (6) and New York City (0), one can sense the disparity between the two coasts. Looking at each coast as a whole, the difference becomes even more apparent. Every major West Coast city (Los Angeles, San Diego, San Francisco, Portland and Seattle) has produced at least one popular alternative group, most having more than one. By contrast, no major East Coast city, among some of the largest cities in the country, has produced any group whatsoever. Of the smaller eastern cities that have produced alternative groups, most exhibit the college influence. In fact, the influence of universities has played a role throughout the nation and not just in specific regions. Even certain West Coast cities (Berkeley, California and Ellensburg, Washington, among others) have major universities that have fostered the careers of alternative groups. This college town effect no doubt contributes to a spatial peripheral tendency in alternative music.

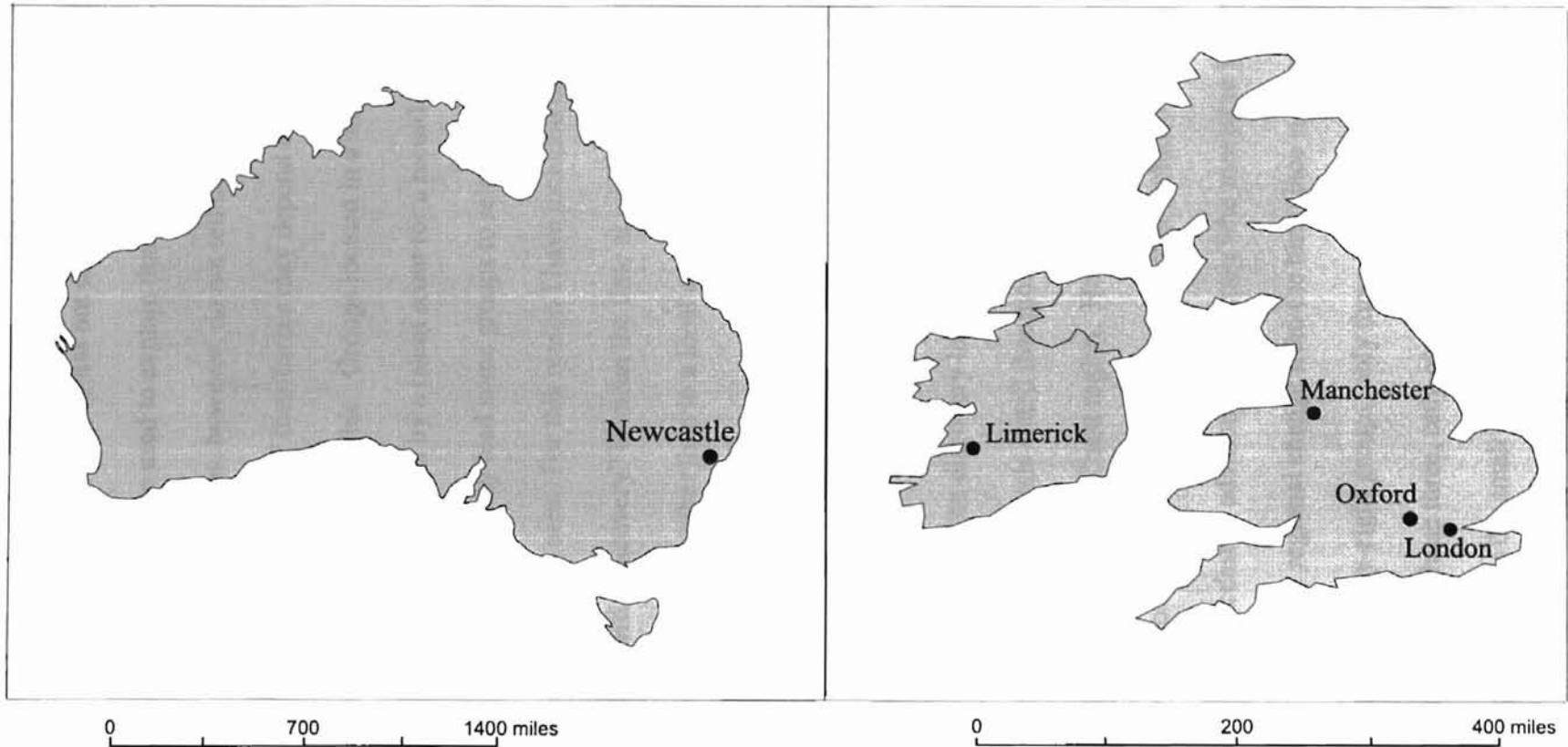
Certain scholars would try to use these birthplaces to establish a pattern of origin and diffusion for alternative music. If the earliest groups had formed in one city or one region of the country, then the style could be viewed as having disseminated from this region to spread throughout the country. However, when the times of formation for these alternative groups are examined, there appears to be no connection among groups of the same age. The Violent Femmes, the only group to have formed in the 1970s, formed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. In 1980 R.E.M. formed in Athens, Georgia; the Butthole Surfers formed in San Antonio in 1981. No stretch of the imagination can include these three cities within one region. By the mid-1980s, Oklahoma City, Chicago and Los Angeles have

Figure 3

Birthplaces of Alternative Music Groups (British Isles & Australia)

Data compiled by author

1 dot represents 1 group



appeared on the birthplace map, further complicating any attempts at finding one source area. Alternative music clearly has not diffused from one specific area to any others.

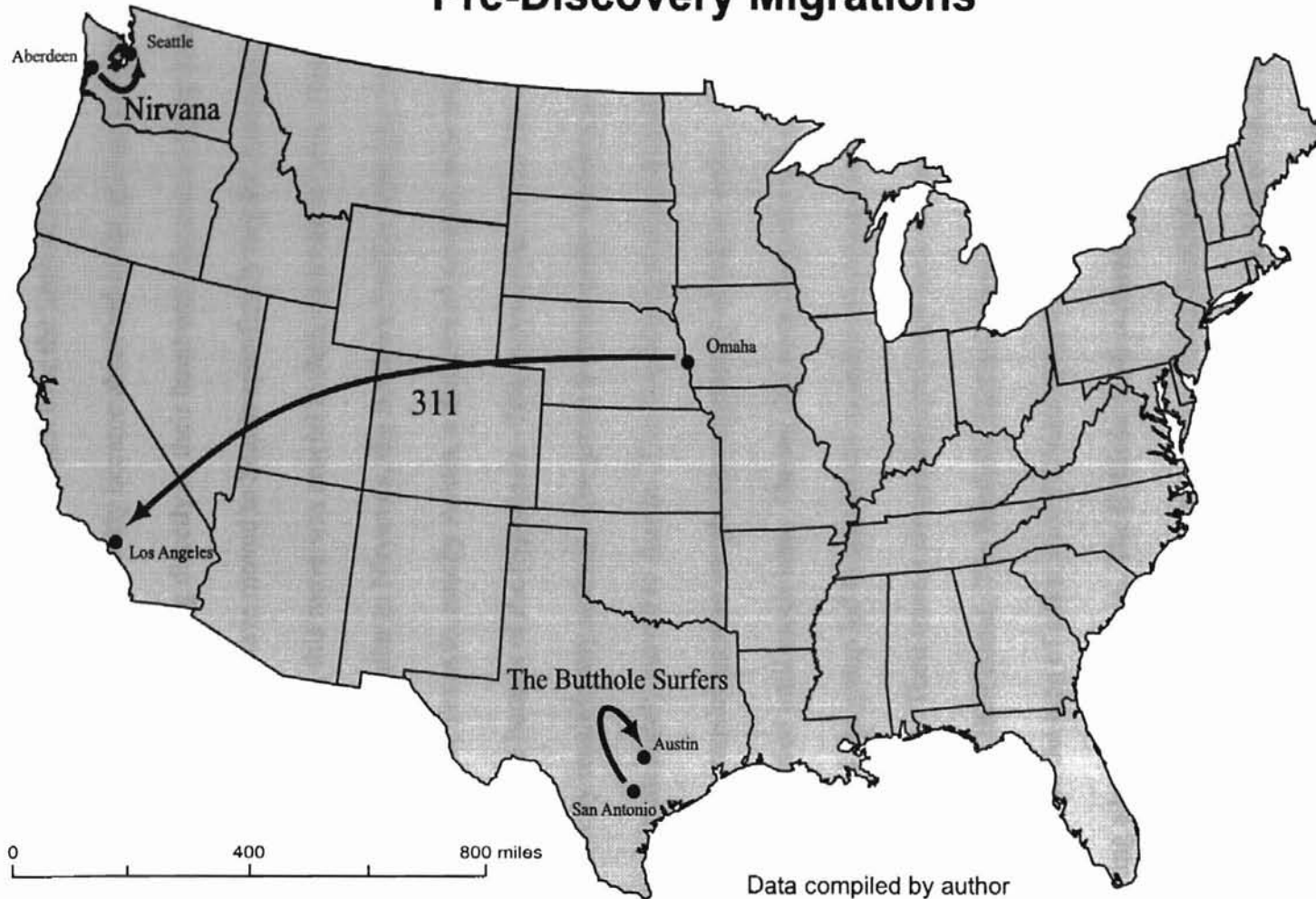
Another model must be used to explain this map's pattern.

These birthplaces, however, do not tell the entire story. A band may form in one location but the success of their career may depend on relocation to a city through which fame is more easily accessible. Groups located in a small town far from any major city are less likely to be contacted by a talent scout for a record label than those located in a major city. This situation may lead some groups to relocate if they want to further their career outside of a local area. For this reason I have included the "discovery" stage of a career. I use the word "discovery" to mean the time at which the group's music was played on a nation-wide basis rather than in a local area. Expecting any particular group to be interested in success, I hoped to see how important they considered their location in attaining it. More specifically, I expected several groups to have moved from a small-size hometown to a nearby major city in an effort to be discovered.

Regionally, the discovery locations are not that different from the birthplace locations. My hypothesis stated that more than two-thirds of the groups would have been discovered in the West Coast region. However, just less than half (47.92%) were actually discovered on the Pacific Coast. This number includes all of the groups whose birthplaces were on that coast in addition to one group who moved to Los Angeles from the Plains. This is the only regional change from the birthplace stage to the discovery stage. Of the total forty-eight groups, only three changed their location before their discovery (Figure 4). Of those three, only one followed the pattern I had predicted. Nirvana formed as a punk band in the small fishing town of Aberdeen on the coast of Washington. Unfortunately there is not much call for punk music in a town dominated by the working

Figure 4

Pre-Discovery Migrations



class. The only venues they could play were in Tacoma and Seattle, cities over an hour away. Their final decision to move to Seattle was based on these circumstances. Their move covered a distance of 109 miles, just over the limit of my original hypothesis. After moving to the big city, they quickly became absorbed in the grunge movement that was brewing at the time, leading directly to their burst onto the national pop music charts. Though they may not have moved to Seattle specifically to gain notoriety, as one member's later actions suggest, this move was crucial to their national success (Azerrad).

In a move similar to Nirvana's, the Butthole Surfers relocated from their birthplace in San Antonio, Texas to, nearby Austin, a distance of seventy-nine miles, the only group to stay within the bounds of the hypothesis. This move differs from Nirvana's in that it did not directly result in any success. The group formed while students at Trinity College and almost immediately moved to Austin. The flourishing music scene of Austin was inviting to these new musicians who sought the community of fellow artists. However, any success was not achieved until much later. During this time the group did not remain in Austin. The whims of the group led to spur of the moment relocations to cities like Los Angeles and Athens, Georgia. Their travels always brought them back to Austin, though, the city most fans identify as their home. The Butthole Surfers' move differs from Nirvana's and my prediction in the type of cities also. Nirvana moved from a small city to a major one seeking a better music scene. The Butthole Surfers moved from a major city to one not so large, though still seeking a better music scene (from Butthole Surfers websites).

The third group to move before discovery made a clear effort at attaining national success. 311 was formed in the Midwestern city of Omaha. Here they did not experience a lack of opportunities for performance. Yet opportunities for national success were scarce. A move halfway across the country, and well over my hypothesis limit, to Los Angeles

remedied this dilemma and today 311 remains in California enjoying moderate success (from 311 websites).

311 and Nirvana, however, are the exceptions. Their national success was directly connected to moves they had made. Though the Butthole Surfers did move before their success, the success came much later and their relocation was not likely a direct cause of it. Of forty-eight groups, then, only two underwent a relocation that greatly affected the success of their career. This leaves forty-six groups who were satisfied with their location enough that they did not perceive a change was necessary to further their career. Some of these already lived in advantageous locations. Those groups that formed in and around Los Angeles certainly were already in a preferred position. In fact, one had theoretically relocated before its birth. As mentioned before, no member of Weezer grew up in Los Angeles, but had all migrated west from various eastern locales. These Los Angeles groups had no reason to relocate. The same goes for other major cities. Seattle had its own recording studios and independent record labels that were very interested in seeking out local talent. It was these labels, Sub Pop in particular, who brought about the rise of grunge and the popularization of alternative music in general.

The benefit of major city locations does not apply to all of the forty-six groups who remained in their hometown, though. Places like Dayton, Ohio, and York, Pennsylvania are not looked to for fresh young talent. Groups from these peripheral towns did not need the presence of a major recording center to make their career. The cultivation of their own style, away from the pressures of the industry, was their approach to the development of their career. A distinct sound brought the attention of the industry and their national success. It is through this method that the influence of the college town, which has played a part in so many groups' careers, has taken effect.

College Town

The influence of the college town derives in part from its separation from the major cities. The university atmosphere fosters an independent attitude among students. Those who are musically inclined are more interested in developing a unique style that is their own rather than trying to appeal to a common crowd. This difference in approach produces bands that are more distinct and more inclined to innovation. Depending on the quality of innovation, access to greater success can follow. Sometimes innovation is so great that a minor musical movement can arise out of a college music scene. Such a situation occurred in Athens, Georgia in the early 1980s.

College towns seem to be the most important avenues for groups outside the major recording scenes to advance their career. Their effect on the alternative scene is particularly great. Of the total thirty-five cities that appear on the map, eight of them (23%) are college towns. Other cities, though they are too large to be considered true college towns, have a major university out of which the representative alternative band or bands have come. The University of Minnesota in Minneapolis gave rise to Soul Asylum; some of the bands in the famous Seattle music scene contain members who have attended the University of Washington. Alternative music seems to thrive on the independent and rebellious spirit that grows out of the university atmosphere. This is only natural considering alternative's tradition of rebellion against mainstream culture.

In describing alternative music as a place-specific music, the search for a hearth of the style leads to the college town. A place-specific style is one that has arisen from the unique characteristics of one particular place and could not have developed the same way

without it. James Curtis and Richard Rose introduced the concept with a study on the Miami Sound from Miami, Florida (Curtis, 111-113). They enumerate several contributing factors to the creation of a place-specific style. Among them are the presence of community institutions, common social group values and traditions, past and present migrations, and distinct socioeconomic conditions. Curtis and Rose use these to demonstrate how the Miami Sound was created out of the city of Miami.

The most important factor for them is the past and present migrations. The mass migration of Cubans to the city after the Castro revolution caused a mixing of Cuban and American cultures that resulted in a unique atmosphere about Miami. The Miami Sound music style is just one example of this blending. It draws upon native Cuban and other Latin styles with a significant influence from American rock and jazz. Certain social institutions are also important for the Miami Sound. By the mid-1970s, the earliest years of the Miami Sound, Miami had become a center for recording. With over sixty studios, it was the nation's third largest recording center. These provided performers with opportunities to record their music. A second social institution, tied in with the migration to the city, is the development of Spanish language radio stations. The Miami Sound could not have flourished as it did without these opportunities for the recording and broadcast of the style.

These and other factors have worked in a similar way in the development of alternative music. But the place that alternative music is specific to is not as obvious as a certain city. Seattle has already been ruled out as a possible center. Though it fostered the careers of seven groups, more than most other cities on the map, it was not a high enough proportion to be regarded as the only center. The same applies to Los Angeles. No other city comes near to these two in contributing performers to the alternative genre. In this case

the place is not purely a geographical location but a certain type of place that exists in many locations.

Identifying just one city or region that serves as the source for all alternative music is not only difficult on the map, but is also difficult because the music that comes under the alternative designation ranges to very broad extremes. More specific styles, such as grunge and industrial, that may or may not resemble each other in sound, are classified into the broad alternative category. Some of these have source areas that can be specifically identified. The grunge substyle of alternative that helped popularize this music in general came directly from Seattle. But it is not accurate musically to call this city the source of all alternative music. One must look instead at a broader type of location that could exist throughout the country or the world that will better account for the variety of sounds that the alternative category encompasses. The college town fills such a role.

Before evaluating the importance of the college town, a clearer definition of the college town is required. A reference to the atmosphere of innovation provokes the question of how strong does the college presence need to be for an innovative spirit to take hold. Any town or city with a college in it will not necessarily have a dominant university atmosphere. Valparaiso University, with 4,000 students, does not dominate the character of the city of Valparaiso, Indiana, with a population of 30,000, the way a larger major university would. The local college must have a large enough enrollment that it requires much of town life to revolve around it. A certain percentage of the city's population that are students must be determined. For this thesis, I used a level of 20%; a city whose student population is 20% or more of the total population qualifies as a true college town. One other limit must be applied. Significantly large cities, though their student population may be higher than 20%, develop their own style and atmosphere independent of the university

community within it. It cannot be said that in these cities the university fosters an independent spirit within the entire city itself. An upper boundary on population must be determined to exclude these cities. I use a population of 300,000 as the limit for this study.

Applying these confines to the birthplace cities of alternative groups, we find that eight cities qualify as college towns. This is just less than a quarter (22.8%) of the total thirty-five cities. This indicates a definite, though not strong, trend toward the college town as an origin of alternative music. A comparison with non-alternative bands substantiates this claim. A brief survey of locations of formation in the Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll reveals that most mainstream bands are from major cities, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago and London being some of the most common. An examination of the college town's favorable atmosphere in terms of the contributing factors of place-specific music further validates the theory.

Applying Curtis and Rose's contributing factors I found that most, if not all, are present. The factors listed in their study of the Miami Sound are among the significant elements in creating a music style strongly connected to place (Curtis, 112). The college town exhibits these characteristics. A college town has a continual migration of residents from all over the country, bringing in many new influences year after year. The confluence of a variety of influences can account for some of the unique sounds that have appeared among alternative groups. The Dave Matthews Band is an important example. This group's sound does not feature the loud electric guitars that characterize most alternative bands. In fact, aside from the electric bass guitar, all instruments in the band are acoustic. Two of these instruments happen to be a saxophone and a violin. This makes for a very distinct sound, unlike that of any other current band. This band was formed among the bars and clubs around the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Though some of the

members are from the area, one in particular has come a long way. The lead man, Dave Matthews, grew up in South Africa. His background has undoubtedly shaped their sound (from Dave Matthews Band websites).

The Dave Matthews Band's history also reflects one of the other factors, although this one is not unique to them alone. The group, and many others, formed and gained popularity among the local bars and clubs that cater to the university students. These are an example of social institutions that have assisted in the rise of a musical style. Every college town has a throng of bars and clubs frequented, all too often in some cases, by the students. These bars provide opportunities for local bands to display their talent and hopefully advance their career.

Other social institutions are not as tangible as the clubs. These are social values that are characteristic of a certain group that affects the group's approach to their music. These values, as they pertain to college towns, have already been discussed. They are the spirits of rebellion and independence from the established music industry that lead to innovation in their music.

All of these factors combine to create alternative music as a place-specific style. It is not place-specific in the traditional sense of being from one specific location in the world. But it is specific to a certain type of place that can exist in multiple locations. These locations all have characteristics in common that have contributed to the development of a genre of music. In that sense they work like one disjointed region.

Not every college town will produce a nationally successful alternative group. There are thousands of college towns within the United States. The market for alternative music, indeed any kind of music, is not large enough to support thousands of nationally successful and popular bands. Just as only selected blues musicians from Chicago have

become nationally famous while many others remain locally-known, so only selected alternative bands from certain college towns will become famous. Which ones do succeed is left to the factors of talent, trends in the industry and simple luck to decide.

College towns have already become recognized as a distinct region by some scholars. Wilbur Zelinsky, in his Cultural Geography of the United States, includes them as one of, what he calls, voluntary regions. These are separate areas of the country where like-minded people live to cultivate similar lifestyles. The term voluntary arises from the ability of people to consciously choose to reside in such an area and migrate to it on their own volition. This is in contrast to the traditional region, which one enters primarily through birth. Zelinsky offers several examples of voluntary regions, among them military towns near major army bases and montane regions inhabited by avid skiers and climbers (Zelinsky, 134-139). Such a region provides identity for its inhabitants in the same way as a traditional geographic region. This identity can ultimately lead to the development of cultural features of a region, such as a folk music. A folk music, in this sense, refers to a type of music that has been developed and reflects the identity of a certain group, traditionally ethnic groups. Blues music is the folk music for blacks from the American South. The music originated with them and reflects their attitudes and experiences. Alternative appears to be arising as a new kind of "folk music", providing special meaning to the college town voluntary region's own residents.

Record Labels

The third stage of the careers of alternative groups that I examined relates directly to their national success. Often a music group begins their career on an independent record label. This is a small label that caters to a specific style of music, often in a specific location. Sub Pop is the best example. This label was located in Seattle and its recording artists consisted mainly of grunge groups from Seattle itself. However as a particular group's popularity grows, so does the interest of the major labels. With the ability to provide more money, the majors are able to woo the artists away from the independents. Sub Pop itself lost many artists to larger record companies as grunge popularized.

This trend was one of the focal points in the development of alternative music. Many alternative artists view a switch to a major label as a compromise of talents. Because the majors usually try to retain more control over the artists' output, a group recording for them was expected to have to abandon their own unique style to be marketable enough for that record label. The result was a loss of authenticity. A negative stigma arose among the alternative community in response to this trend. This stigma was strong enough to discourage many acts from trying to be nationally successful.

The intention of the third stage of this study is to evaluate how the negative stigma may have affected a group's career. Were the groups so concerned about their image to their peers that they avoided such a label change or was their own success more important than their image? Secondly how did a change affect them geographically? A group who, once they made the switch to a major label, gave in to the control of the label may have been compelled to move closer to their label's base, whereas a group who maintains their

independence will likely not find this move necessary. These questions are not meant to be the sole determiners in the independence of a music group, but can serve as an indication of such.

My hypotheses on this situation stated that more than half of the groups switched to a major label and more than half of these relocated after the switch. My basis for the first is that the lure of fame and national recognition, if not more money, will overcome any ethical feelings, whether legitimate or not, for most of the groups. In the second hypothesis, I believed that most of the groups that do switch will value their relationship with their record label so much to want to be in greater contact with it, thus making a move seem beneficial.

The reality proved quite different. Of the forty-eight groups studied, only eighteen (37.5%) switched from an independent label to a major label. This does not necessarily speak for the ethics of alternative groups though. The implication of this statement, with respect to my hypothesis is that the other thirty groups remained with their independent labels. That is not necessarily the case. A fairly large portion of the thirty had started on major labels to begin with. This may call into question the alternative nature of the group, with some critics. One of the basic characteristics of alternative music, indeed any new rebellious form of music, is to begin recording on an independent label that will initially foster the experimentation that new styles thrive on. One may wonder just how rebellious a new group actually is who starts out on a major label. Though a fair number of groups did switch labels, none were compelled to move because of it. Apparently the relationship with their record label has little or no bearing on where the group is located.

Conclusion

The subject of the peripheral nature of alternative music origins is an element of its definition. Does this peripheral nature manifest itself on the map? The cities of New York and Los Angeles were mentioned as the hearths of the music industry. Other cities as well should be included. A survey of the Rock & Roll Encyclopedia revealed Chicago, San Francisco and London as other important sources for rock music in general. A peripheral nature would seem to emerge from outside these centers. All but New York appear on the map of alternative group birthplaces. The popular nature of the music of Los Angeles has already been evaluated. Los Angeles' presence is more a result of the popularization of alternative than its original rebellious nature. This trend may also apply to the other cities. The two groups from San Francisco are definitely more recent in alternative's history, having formed in the 1990s, and more mainstream in sound.

However, these cities by no means account for a majority of alternative groups; only thirteen of the forty-eight were formed in any of them. The presence of so many smaller cities confirms that alternative music began on the peripheries of popular music culture. It is the college town and the university atmosphere in general that has forged alternative music's peripheral aspect. The lack of relocations after switching to major labels indicates that the major labels have not influenced any significant return to the centers. A peripheral nature has been more or less retained as alternative music moves into the mainstream. The style has not lost its sense of place as it has become more mainstream.

This is in direct opposition to my hypotheses. They were based upon expectations, perhaps based on some cynicism, that with popularization, alternative music would undergo a retreat to the traditional centers of popular music. Though bands may not have formed there, the industry would coerce them into abandoning their hometowns and reestablishing themselves where their careers could be more carefully supervised and plotted. The third and fourth hypotheses were based directly on this expectation. However, both were refuted, one quite conclusively. Only 37.5% of the groups had switched from an independent to a major label, rather less than the over 50% expected. The fourth hypothesis proved even more groundless. I predicted over 50% of the groups to have relocated after signing with a major label. However, absolutely zero of those groups relocated.

The first two hypotheses did not fare much better. Only 47.92% of the groups were discovered in the West Coast metropolitan areas that I expected over two-thirds of the groups to have been discovered in. The first hypothesis was the only one to be even partially correct. One group of the three who had moved before discovery stayed within my predicted 100 mile limit. Of the others, one wandered just outside the limit, while the third ventured halfway across the country to further their career. That only three groups moved in the first place is another telling sign that alternative music would retain its sense of place throughout its progress.

That this place is not a geographic region located at one specific site reflects a trend in modern culture. Scholars speak of the globalization of modern culture. Communication has become so immediate that contact between peoples on opposite sides of the world is now prevalent. This mass communication between cultures has reduced the isolation that fosters distinct cultures. Cultural attributes are being shared throughout the world and are,

consequently, reducing the differences between cultures. Some experts claim we are moving toward one world culture.

American rock and pop music has contributed to the globalization of culture. People the world over are familiar with the original rock and roll artists as well as modern celebrities like Michael Jackson and Bruce Springsteen. Though alternative music has become accepted as a mainstream style of music, it has not yet achieved the level of popularity that true international celebrities have. Indeed, original rock 'n' roll persisted for many years before it was fully accepted by American society and only then did it really become exported to the rest of the world. Alternative music, though recognized as a mainstream style by most youth, still has not achieved the mass acceptance that regular rock music now enjoys. That time is still in the future, if ever. It will not be until such a point occurs with alternative that it can be exported elsewhere. Cultural exportation only occurs with the elements of pop culture that have achieved mass acceptance. As mentioned before rock 'n' roll did not begin to cross cultures until it was firmly established in American society. Coca-Cola, another well-exported element of American pop culture (pun intended), became the official drink of America before others began consuming it. Only when alternative reaches a similar level of acceptance will it begin to be enjoyed within the unified global culture that is expected by some. But alternative music may fit into the world's cultures in a different way.

The broad culture of one country can have a variety of subcultures. Regions within a country can produce their own variations in such things as language and musical style, based on the common background of whatever people live in that region. A global culture may develop similar subcultures. Rather than being regional subcultures they may be based around the common experience of a particular group of people who exist on a worldwide

basis. Wilbur Zelinsky addresses this potential development in the final chapter of the revised edition of his Cultural Geography of the United States. Rather than “melting into a single unified cultural blob”, American or world culture may just be reforming into new groupings (Zelinsky, 1983). College students and the university atmosphere may be one such group. Here is a group of people who do not necessarily come from one region of a country, certainly have migrated from all over the country and abroad. Yet they have common values and experiences that lend themselves to the creation of a form of music that is recognized as unique and distinct from others. Just as the folk music of one region of a country is distinguished from that of other regions, so alternative music is distinguished among other forms of rock, forms that may have their own associated social groups.

These social groups may form the new global regions. What globalization may be heading toward is a reduction in regional identity replaced by identification with a layer or section of society. Zelinsky’s voluntary regions are one example of this. He offers them as a “multi-layered sandwich ... in which very numerous strata of variable thickness tend to span the entire country.” (Zelinsky, 1983) The reduction of regional identity is already occurring. Families no longer remain in one area for the duration of the childhood of their offspring. Youth today increasingly cannot identify one region as “where they came from.” If this trend continues regional character will be less dominant in an individual’s personality. We will begin to feel more camaraderie with someone who has the same job as we do than with someone who grew up in the same county. Subcultures of the global culture will be based on this social group identity.

Another scholar has already recognized a sectioning of American society in this way. Michael Weiss, in his book The Clustering of America, has grouped the ZIP Codes of the United States into forty different clusters. Each of these clusters reflects a certain

combination of demographic characteristics, ranging from wealth to ethnicity to occupation type (Weiss, 4-5). The clusters are not located in one given region but are rather a combination of many locations, i.e. ZIP Codes in this case, that all have similar characteristics. This is quite similar to Zelinsky's voluntary regions. In fact both include college towns as a distinct section; Weiss calls it the Towns & Gowns cluster.

In discussing transnationalization of culture in his final chapter, Zelinsky summons Weiss' clusters to refute the claim that with globalization will come a homogenization of culture. Zelinsky addresses this concern and asserts that Weiss' clusters are one example of the groupings that are arising with the modern age of mass communication. Their borders are not so much physical as they are economic. Many clusters may exist in one city and will exist in a multitude of other cities as well (Zelinsky, 183).

If these clusters, or some variation thereof, will in the future replace physical regions in the identities of the population, then any music that emerges from their distinct qualities becomes a new kind of folk music. Alternative rock can serve as the "folk music" for the college students; other social groups or clusters may find or develop a music that relates to their own experience.

Alternative music's role in globalization is significant. Alternative has been able to retain a peripheral nature as it has moved from a marginal form of music to one that has dominated the mainstream. It is that peripheral nature that has allowed alternative music to be a major part of a developing identity. If this trend continues, alternative may become the "folk music" for a unique subculture in an increasingly global culture.

Suggestions for Further Research

This study has concentrated on the American music industry and those alternative groups who have become successful in it. Though it did include a few groups from foreign lands, by far the majority of the groups were American. Further studies could extend the theories presented here to the music industries of other countries. Does something akin to American alternative music exist in the United Kingdom or elsewhere? If so, has it developed with the influence of the university as in America? The appearance of Oxford on the birthplace map is a suggestion worth investigating.

If music industries in other countries have not developed an alternative movement similar to America's, has American alternative music been influential in their markets? The topic of the cultural exportation of alternative has been discussed as a possibility. Perhaps that possibility is already occurring outside of the author's attention. Alternative may have already achieved such a popular level that music fans in other countries have begun listening to it as a pop form of music. A second possibility is that music fans of other countries, in seeking a music form that counters pop music the way American alternative did, have begun listening to American alternative to fill that need. These possibilities for the exportation of alternative music remain to be explored.

Another area that invites exploration is the history of alternative music. As mentioned at the beginning of the study, alternative groups began in the late 1960s. The style underwent at least twenty years of development in a variety of directions before achieving any kind of mainstream recognition. Do these early alternative groups exhibit the college town trend as well? Or is there some other influence at work leaving the college town as a more recent development in the evolution of the alternative sound?

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Appendix A

Final List of Alternative Groups

Group	Birthplace	Selected Birthdates
Alice In Chains	Seattle, WA	1987
Better Than Ezra	Baton Rouge, LA	1988
Big Head Todd and the Monsters	Boulder, CO	
Blind Melon	Los Angeles, CA	1990
Breeders	Dayton, OH	1990
Bush	London, ENG	1992
Butthole Surfers	San Antonio, TX	1981
Candlebox	Seattle, WA	
Collective Soul	Stockbridge, GA	
Counting Crows	San Francisco, CA	
Cracker	Richmond, VA	1991
Cranberries	Limerick, IRL	
Dave Matthews Band	Charlottesville, VA	
Everclear	Portland, OR	
Filter	Chicago, IL	1993
Fishbone	Los Angeles, CA	
Flaming Lips	Oklahoma City, OK	1983
Garbage	Madison, WI	1993
Gin Blossoms	Tempe, AZ	1987
Goo Goo Dolls	Buffalo, NY	1986
Green Day	Berkeley, CA	
Live	York, PA	
Ministry	Chicago, IL	1982
Mudhoney	Seattle, WA	1988
Nine Inch Nails	Cleveland, OH	1989
Nirvana	Aberdeen, WA	1988
No Doubt	Anaheim, CA	1984
Oasis	Manchester, ENG	
Offspring	Garden Grove, CA	1986
Pearl Jam	Seattle, WA	
Radiohead	Oxford, ENG	
Rage Against The Machine	Los Angeles, CA	1991
Red Hot Chili Peppers	Los Angeles, CA	
R.E.M.	Athens, GA	1980
Screaming Trees	Ellensburg, WA	
Silverchair	Newcastle, AUS	
Smashing Pumpkins	Chicago, IL	1988

Soul Asylum	Minneapolis, MN	
Soundgarden	Seattle, WA	
Stone Temple Pilots	San Diego, CA	1990
Sublime	Long Beach, CA	
Third Eye Blind	San Francisco, CA	
311	Omaha, NE	
Toad The Wet Sprocket	Santa Barbara, CA	
Veruca Salt	Chicago, IL	
Violent Femmes	Milwaukee, WI	1979
Wallflowers	Los Angeles, CA	
Weezer	Los Angeles, CA	1992

Appendix B

College Towns

City	Total population	Student population	% of total
Athens, GA	45,734	28,800	63%
Berkeley, CA	102,724	30,750	30%
Boulder, CO	83,295	25,500	31%
Charlottesville, VA	40,341	21,400	53%
Ellensburg, WA	12,361	8,400	68%
Madison, WI	191,262	41,800	22%
Santa Barbara, CA	85,571	21,250	25%
Tempe, AZ	141,865	41,650	29%

Figures taken from Rand McNally Commercial
Atlas & Marketing Guide, 1998

Appendix C

Glossary

Alternative music – Rough-edged or adventurous music with world-weary lyrics.

Baby Boomers – The generation of Americans born in the years following World War II.

The generation that produced the hippies and later noted for materialism throughout the 1980s.

British Invasion – the domination of the American pop charts between 1964 and 1966 by

British rock bands. Ex.: the Beatles, the Rolling Stones, the Kinks, the Animals.

Cover – the second version, and all subsequent versions, of a song, performed either by another act than the one that originally recorded it or by anyone except its writer.

Gangsta rap – Rap subgenre characterized by violent, hard-hitting, often gang-related themes delivered in an angry, forceful vocal style. Ex.: Ice-T, Snoop Doggy Dogg

Generation X – Children of the Baby Boomers, born in the years from the mid-1960s through mid-1970s. Noted for rebelling against parents' materialism and values.

Grunge – A postpunk hard-rock subgenre of the “alternative” movement that dominated Nineties rock. Examples: Nirvana, Soundgarden.

Heavymetal – Heavily amplified, blues-based, electric guitar driven rock. Ex.: Led Zeppelin, Guns ‘N’ Roses.

Hip-mainstream – term devised by Tony Kirschner to describe modern popular alternative music. Characterized by “a hard rock sound.” Further it is “riff-oriented music where guitar, bass and drums are the central instruments,...harder, meaning heavier, than middle-of-the-road rock.” Hip-mainstream music includes grunge, heavymetal,

punk and industrial. Name is derived from a “hip [non-popular] music slowly but surely redefining itself and winning fans until it truly became mainstream.”

Indie movement – Indie refers to independent record labels. The indie movement sought to preserve the integrity of a performer or group by encouraging the continuation of their career through an independent record label rather than a major record label under the belief that a major label would exercise too much control over the artists’ output.

Industrial – Music created using harsh digital samples, gut-thumping drum machine beats, voice modulators, and often a heavymetal guitar foundation ... aiming to sonically re-create a postindustrial society in collapse. A subgenre of alternative. Ex.: Ministry, Nine Inch Nails

Neo-hippie rock – Modern bands who play in the Grateful Dead style of lighter, guitar-based rock with lengthy solo jams. Ex.: Blues Traveler, Widespread Panic, Phish.

Place-specific music – A distinctive musical style or sound ... that has come to be identified with a specific place.

Punk – Rock music that is raw, abrasive, basic and very fast, its rhythms forced and decidedly unfunky. Ex.: The Sex Pistols, The Ramones.

Speed metal/thrash – Blends the ominous half-step chord progressions ... and thudding grind of [heavymetal] with the speed and intensity of punk and hardcore. Ex.: Metallica, Anthrax

World-weary lyrics – Lyrics that focus on the negative aspects of modern life, such as violence, abuse, and depression.

All definitions taken from [The New Rolling Stone Encyclopedia of Rock & Roll](#) except:

Place-specific music – from Curtis and Rose’s “The Miami Sound”.

Hip-mainstream, neo-hippie rock – from Kirschner’s “The Lalapalooziation of American Youth”

Indie movement, world-weary lyrics, Baby Boomers, Generation X – derived by author.

VITA

Jacob Besterman

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Science

Thesis: CRANBERRIES, CHILI PEPPERS, MELONS AND JAM: THE SPATIAL ORIGINS OF ALTERNATIVE MUSIC ARTISTS, 1992-1997

Major Field: Geography

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Valparaiso, Indiana, on February 13, 1974, the son of C. David and Roslyn Besterman.

Education: Graduated from Valparaiso High School, Valparaiso, Indiana in May 1992; received Bachelor of Arts degree in Geography from Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, Indiana in May 1996. Completed the requirements for the Master of Science degree with a major in Geography at Oklahoma State University in July, 1998.

Experience: Employed by Valparaiso University, Department of Geography and Meteorology as a teaching assistant, 1994; employed by Oklahoma State University, Department of Geography as a graduate teaching assistant, 1996 to present.