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Organizations, Institutions and Networks in
Local Scenes: An Analysis of the Growth of San
Francisco Bay Area Punk Rock



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Abstract

Economic geographers have exhaustively acknowledged the importance of the cultural industries to many regional economies and have begun to establish that these industries have economically important interactions with local “underground scenes.” Less well known however is how these scenes themselves develop. Based on archival research on zines, or small circulation independently produced magazines, I illustrate how the 1980s San Francisco Bay Area punk rock scene was a vibrant cultural community. I demonstrate how what was once an underground scene becomes a commercialized one, with bands like Green Day and Rancid becoming hugely popular in the 1990s “wave” or growth of the genre. I develop a framework for understanding the growth of local scenes, arguing that the essential ingredients are achieving a robust mix of organizations, institutions and networks. Of particular importance are institutional practices of frequent communication and inclusivity and networks on both local and extra local scales.

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1 Introduction

San Francisco Bay Area punk rock in the 1980s is poorly understood in terms of its importance for the growth of the genre in the 1990s. A deeper analysis of punk in this period than has been done to date has important implications for the way we think about the 1990s explosion, and the role of underground music scenes in the generation of commercially viable ones. Moreover, music scenes are embedded in specific localities. While past works have focused on topics such as punk aesthetics and style (Marcus 1989; Marcus 1993) or punk economics (Goshert 2000; Thompson 2004), by adopting spatial and institutional perspectives, we can better understand the importance of both local proximity and extra-regional linkages in the actual formation of music scenes. Other work in economic geography has argued that underground scenes serve as an important source of information for more mainstream commercial activity (Cohendet et al. 2010), but the development of these scenes has received little consideration from economic geographers. My central contribution is to provide a framework of the mechanisms that facilitate the growth of robust underground scenes. In particular, I contribute to existing literature by demonstrating how zines¹, which are frequently underappreciated in studies of punk rock (Schmidt 2006), were used as a channel for knowledge exchanges amongst punks and a means through which institutional practices and networks were created. Frequent discourse and inclusivity stand out as important institutions, and local, national and global linkages were all integral to the growth of the scene. The role of different types of organizations is also considered. Previous analyses of punk rock have tended to focus on well-known bands from the initial explosion of the genre in the late 1970s while often neglecting the “*continuing life of the punk scene*” after the initial explosion (Goshert 2000: 86). While the genre experienced a period of subdued growth in the 1980s (O’Connor 2008), a second explosion in the 1990s led to another wave of bands becoming popular nationally and internationally. Coming out of the Bay Area alone, Green Day, Rancid, AFI, Operation Ivy and a number of other bands all achieved widespread commercial success during this second explosion.

The following analysis links these two periods and probes what was happening between these two landmark eras, arguing that doing so tells a much more complete picture about the growth of the genre as well as sheds light on the processes through which underground scenes develop. I excavate the role of both bands and the often more influential fans in creating the institutions and networks that expanded during this time. This intermediary period from here forward will be referred to interchangeably as the late 1980s to early 1990s or the “neglected decade.” It encompasses the time between the end of the initial “wave” of punk rock around 1980 and ends roughly with the beginning of the second one in 1994 when Green Day became hugely successful with their album *Dookie* which to date has sold over 10 million copies (Recording Industry Association of America

¹ Zines, also known as “fanzines,” are small circulation independent magazines. Usually, they are not-for-profit and done entirely by one person though several larger ones such as *Maximum Rockroll*, which will be described later, have multiple staff and writers.

2018). Among others, this album helped put the alternative, and notably punk, music scene back into the mainstream spotlight.

The next section illustrates the importance of the cultural economy to economic development and San Francisco's role in the industry, highlights the interdependency between commercial activity and underground scenes and develops a unifying framework for the development of local scenes. Sections three and four briefly describe the methodology and some definitions necessary for the rest of the paper. Sections five, six and seven present evidence from archival research on Bay Area punk organizations, institutions and networks respectively, and their roles in the growth of the scene. Section eight concludes with some final comments on the growth of local scenes, and how this growth both interacts with and is affected by the more commercial elements of the music industry.

2 The Economic Geography of the Music Industry and Local Music Scenes

2.1 The San Francisco Bay Area Cultural Economy

In recent decades, the cultural economy, often interchangeably dubbed the "creative" or "cultural industries", has been a major topic in economic geography, ranging from studies on the U.S. music industry (Florida and Jackson 2010; Scott 1999), film in Vancouver (Coe 2000, 2001) and Los Angeles (Christopherson and Storper 1986; Storper and Christopherson 1987), fashion in Toronto (Leslie et al. 2014) and Spain (Tokatli 2008), to name only a few. It has been extensively established that cultural industries constitute a non-trivial component of many countries' national economies (García et al. 2003; Power 2002; Pratt 1997), play an important role in the development of many regional economies, and that large globally well-connected cities in particular are important nodes in the cultural economy (Lorenzen and Frederiksen 2008; Scott 2000).

One of the hallmarks of the cultural industries is their strong tendency to agglomerate. In the U.S. context, only a limited number of cities stand out as major agglomerations. Markusen and Schrock (2006) show that artists are increasingly concentrating over time in the "big three" artist creating and/or attracting cities of Los Angeles, New York and San Francisco. According to Florida and Jackson (2010), San Francisco has the third largest number of people working in music among U.S. MSAs, as well as the largest number of musicians per square mile in both 1970 and 2004 highlighting its uniquely dense concentration of musical activity. San Francisco also has a particularly large agglomeration of independent music labels, tied in third place with Chicago after Los Angeles and New York for the number of indie labels (Scott 1999). Moreover, research has also suggested that musicians catalyze innovation and value added services in industries like information and communication technology (Power and Jansson 2004) and fashion (Hauge and Hraacs 2010).

Zeroing in on punk, Alan O'Connor shows that the Bay Area is vastly overrepresented in terms of headquartering punk labels across the United States (O'Connor 2008: Ch.2). Mordam Records, which for many years was possibly the largest indie record distributor in punk rock, also came out of the San Francisco. While it is difficult to determine what percentage of San Francisco's cultural economy is related to the punk scene, it is clear that a) the cultural economy plays a non-trivial role in the national economy and b) that more so than other cities, with the exceptions of New York and Los Angeles, San Francisco holds a central position in the U.S. music industry and particularly the U.S. punk scene. The subsequent analysis builds off the premise that the San Francisco punk scene was exceptionally productive relative to other U.S. punk scenes in the 1990s and that more

broadly, San Francisco is an important site in the production of cultural products. The question that follows is why did such a prominent scene arise in San Francisco and not other locations?

Research has begun to demonstrate that important linkages exist between mainstream commercial activity and local artistic activities. Indeed, Scott (2000: 2) notes that *“the realm of human culture is increasingly subject to commodification,”* and that few cultural forms, even those in opposition to this dynamic, are able to operate completely outside this system of production. Cohendet et al. (2010) develop a notion of three “layers” in a paper on the processes generating creativity within cities. They call these 1) the upperground, or specialized innovative firms that integrate different types of knowledge into commercial activity 2) the underground, which is more exploratory by nature, consisting of different artistic and cultural activities outside of commercial organizations, and 3) the middleground, or groups who mediate between the two, giving the former access to the innovations of the latter. These boundaries can become blurred however, as in the case of the number of indie record labels whose sales total millions of dollars a year. New musical styles or innovations might develop in the underground, but *“large agglomerations can also be seen as a sort of repository”* for such novelty (Scott 1999: 1975). Thus, there appears to be important interactions that occur between “underground” and “upperground” elements of the scene, and while economic geographers have given considerable attention to the development of commercial industrial activity in the cultural industries, less attention has been paid to the development of the underground with which these commercial elements interact.

2.2 A Unifying Framework for the Development of Local Scenes

Throughout this paper I refer to this underground element as the local “scene.” As with workers and firms in industrial clusters (Saxenian 1994; Storper 1997), musicians too benefit from colocation with other musicians and support services that facilitate learning and allow them to practice their craft. These are what this paper refers to as local “scenes,” which by their variegated nature have different abilities to produce music and musicians that might become popular. These scenes consist of both particular activities that occur in a geographically bound area by a definable group of people within a specific set of physical structures, as well as a set of symbolic meanings that articulate notions of legitimacy, theatricality and authenticity (Silver and Nichols Clark 2015). The most notable scenes feature “vibrant combinations of venues, local production and methods of information flow and exchange,” (Connell and Gibson 2003).

Hracs et al. (2011) emphasize the importance of “civic capital,” or *“interpersonal networks and solidarity within a community based on a shared identity, expectations, or goals and tied to a specific region or locality”* (Hracs et al. 2011; quoted from Wolfe 2009: 184 – emphasis in original), in what they observe to be a growing ability of Halifax to attract musicians and grow its local music scene relative to Toronto. For scenes to grow, it is thus imperative that they have the right mix of both organizations, such as venues or labels, as well as institutional practices, which give musicians opportunities to practice their craft and expand their network.

Along these lines, networks have been an important conceptual tool in the study of music. Leyshon (2001) describes four types of networks – creativity, reproduction, distribution and consumption – that are central to the music industry. Music is made and performed within networks of creativity, stabilized in networks of reproduction and moved to retail and promoted through networks of distribution before it is finally purchased by end users in networks of consumption. These networks of creativity might exist within the underground, where they

“may be defined as centres of musical knowledge, both in the sense of being a repository of the requisite technical competencies to compose, perform, and record music, but also of knowledge

of what different compositional, performative, and recording styles signify within a wider cultural and subculture context” (Leyshon 2001: 62 - emphasis in original)

It follows that the density and connectivity of such networks plays an important role in their total output, and that not all such networks, or scenes, will be as productive as others. At the same time, extra-local linkages facilitate important knowledge exchanges. Watson (2008: 20) argues that in the context of knowledge development for London-based music industry firms, “*it is important not to overstate the local scale at the expense of developing an understanding of the role of global flows.*” Power and Hallencreutz (2002) suggest that better global integration of Stockholm, Sweden’s music firms, relative to Kingston, Jamaica’s, has created greater returns to the industry in Stockholm, despite Kingston’s greater overall profitability. Moreover, they emphasize that the creative elements of the industry, in some cases this is an underground scene, must also be embedded into local commercial elements in order for the benefits of such creativity to be captured locally.

While these studies are focused on the music industry, which should be conceptualized differently from local scenes given the stronger emphasis on competition and profit in the former, their activities are strongly interrelated, and the same logic that emphasizes local and global connectivity in the industry can be applied to local scenes as well. There is in other words a “buzz” and “pipelines” dynamic at play, which suggests that both local face-to-face interactions associated with exchanges of tacit geographically localized knowledge, but also exchanges of knowledge between disparate locations, are essential components to the success of industrial clusters (Bathelt et al. 2004). This can be extended to the Bay Area scene, where it benefitted from both local networks of creativity as well as exchanges of knowledge across distance. These can enhance creativity in the production of culture but also better facilitate the spread and influence of one scene’s product relative to others. Crossley (2009) demonstrates how expanding network formation was instrumental to the growth of the Manchester post/punk scene. Kruse (2010) also provides evidence in this respect, arguing that indie scenes in the 1980s and 1990s built up social and economic networks wherein musical knowledge and practices were exchanged, and asserting that scenes do not exist in isolation but rather, develop within a broader network of scenes.

A final ingredient to the development of local scenes supported in the literature is the presence of a local organizational infrastructure. Azerrad (2001) notes that between 1981 and 1991, people involved in underground scenes “*had built an effective shadow distribution, communications, and promotion network – a cultural underground railroad,*” made up of “*a sprawling cooperative of fanzines, underground and college radio stations, local cable access shows, mom-and-pop record stores, independent distributors and record labels, tip sheets, nightclubs and alternative venues, booking agents, bands, and fans,*” (Azerrad 2001: 3). Print spaces such as zines have been important in shaping the cultural politics of alternative communities and facilitating discourse within them (Duncombe 1997) as well as facilitating cohesion within, and the delimitation of the boundaries of, underground scenes (Schmidt 2006). Moreover, physical spaces such as community centers form important test sites for new musical innovations and the development of local scenes (Hoyler and Mager 2005) as well as for tie formation in musical networks (Crossley 2009).

We can thus identify three essential elements to the growth of local scenes. First, there must be sufficient institutional infrastructure that facilitates creative processes such as patterns of communication and trust (Cohendet et al. 2010; Hracz et al. 2011). Second, there needs to be networks through which communication can occur and these ought to exist both locally and extra locally (Leyshon 2001; Power and Hallencreutz 2002; Watson 2008). Finally, it is essential that there be sufficient organizational density for functions like promoting, recording, and performing music once it is developed (Crossley 2009; Schmidt 2006; Watson et al. 2009). The

forthcoming analysis demonstrates the importance of these three factors in the development of the 1990s Bay Area punk scene.

To this point I have not provided precise definitions of any of these terms. Past studies in economic geography have exhaustively established the importance of institutions in economic development (Farole et al. 2011; Gertler 2010; North 1991). However, we often fail to define them in a very precise way. To overcome this limitation, I draw my definition of institutions from Bathelt and Glückler (2014). They create a more easily operationalized conceptualization of institutions wherein they are considered as recursive patterns of interaction, that may be contingent upon, but ultimately supersede, the formal laws, policies and regulations that attempt to shape interaction. This is much closer to what we often think of as conventions, and will allow for distinction between what I call “organizations,” or collections of people motivated by a common goal such as zines, radio stations, record labels, and concert venues, and the patterns of social and economic behavior (institutions) that often work in concert with these organizations. Resulting from such institutional practices, and mediated by the organizations that facilitate these institutions’ development, networks might also arise which describe relationships between organizations, scenes or individual actors.

3 Methodology

To carry out the following analysis, I largely rely on archival methods, focusing on zines as the principal data source. Although archival methods are uncommon in economic geography research, zines offer a crucial window into the institutional practices and networks developed during the period of the study, functioning in practice as important communication channels in the punk rock scene. In drawing on this data I thus engage in systematic review of “*primary sources*” that were “*created contemporaneously with the events they discuss,*” (Roche 2016: 174). Zines were examined with particular attention to the discussions and debates happening between issues, the main objective being to understand what type of institutional and network configurations were forged during the period between the two explosions of punk rock music. The San Francisco Bay Area was chosen for its value as an “extreme” case (Seawright and Gerring 2008), which is exploratory in nature and allows the researcher to probe unexpected causal mechanisms underlying the outcome of interest, in this case, the “extreme” output and influence of the Bay Area scene.

The following paragraphs focus on three zines in particular, supplemented by KALX (UC Berkeley’s community and student radio station) program guides. A typical zine might feature editorial and opinion sections, as well as interviews and reports on bands, other zines, concerts, labels, stores, and local, national and international punk rock communities. Most were produced with very low budgets, had one principal author/editor (e.g. *Cometbus* and *Absolutely Zippo!*) and were either free or no more than a couple dollars. Others (e.g. *Maximum Rocknroll*) had multiple authors and much larger editorial and opinion sections. KALX program guides were also used as KALX was very integrated into the local punk scene and the format and production of the guides were very similar to a zine. The zines used were *Maximum Rocknroll*, *Cometbus*, and *Absolutely Zippo!*. These were chosen for two reasons 1) they were four textual voices with high influence in the local scene and 2) they offered multiple issues’ worth of data. Considering all zines in punk rock, it is hard to overstate the importance of *Maximum Rocknroll* (from here forward *Maximum* to describe the zine and all of its external endeavors or *Maximum* when referring solely to the zine). It originated as a radio show on Berkeley’s KPFA radio station in the late 1970s but in 1982 its founders Tim Yohannon and Jeff Bale released a punk compilation album titled *Not So Quiet on the Western Front* featuring a variety of Bay Area bands as well as the first eponymously named issue of its fanzine. It quickly came to be released every month, reaching a circulation of about 20,000 issues per month (Jeff Bale cited in Boulware and Tudor 2009). *Cometbus* and *Absolutely Zippo!* represent two other influential Bay Area zines written by local scene participants Aaron Cometbus and Robert Eggplant, respectively.

I made use of four archives to access these materials. First, I contacted Maximum Rocknroll and was given access to their back issue archive. I also drew on the San Francisco Public Library's "Little Maga/Zine Collection" for issues of Absolutely Zippo! as well as Maximum Rocknroll's guide, *Book Your Own Fuckin' Life*. Finally, I drew from the Bancroft Library's special collections at UC Berkeley for issues of *Cometbus*, as well as an archive of program guides, posters and issues of the student newspaper at KALX. Some data from *Cometbus* is also from the compilation book *Despite Everything: A Cometbus Omnibus*. The final sample consisted of 26 zines and program guides in addition to posters, newspaper articles and song lyrics, corresponding to the period between the early 1980s or the end of the first explosion, and the early 1990s or the beginning of the second.

There are important limits to archival research. Sources should be assessed for accuracy and cross-checked with other sources to verify consistency with established facts (Black 2010). In light of this, I also read several oral histories that either directly or indirectly focused on the Bay Area scene (Blush 2001; Boulware and Tudor 2009; Edge 2004; McNeil and McCain 1997) and conducted six semi-structured interviews with members of the scene during the 1980s-1990s to corroborate my findings in the zines. The following analysis heavily relies on zines, although at various points these other sources are used as well.

4 Defining Punk and the Bay Area Scene

The first use of the term "punk rock" has been attributed to New York musician Ed Sanders when he described his 1970 album as having a "*punk rock – redneck sentimentality*," but became popular in association with the Sex Pistols (Oxford English Dictionary). Though it is debatable whether the Sex Pistols were the first punk rock band, it is clear that the use of the term with respect to a genre of music exploded in the mid-to-late 1970s.

Defining what is and is not punk rock is a hotly contested and dubious endeavor, and in an essay focusing on how scenes produce popular and novel music, it is not my intention to insert myself into this polemical debate (though any definition of course makes this virtually impossible). A variety of media in addition to music, including zines, films and other works of art have all been considered punk rock, and the idea of "punk" itself has aesthetic, economic and social implications. For the purposes of this research I am not so concerned with either of these and choose to focus instead on the fact that there is clearly a continuous but evolving agglomeration of actors in the Bay Area who frequent the same set of physical structures and embrace similar symbolic meanings (Silver and Nichols Clark 2015) as well as are embedded in the same institutional practices and networks. I adopt a constructivist definition of the genre and describe bands, zines, labels and other organizations as being punk if they themselves identify as such or have clear ties to this self-defined "punk" scene.

Along these lines, defining what it or is not part of the Bay Area scene also has no perfect solution. Certainly, punks in San Francisco, the east bay and San Jose for example, were all in close communication and frequently met at different concerts and other community events. However, bands such as 7 Seconds from Reno, NV, and later Sacramento, CA, frequently played shows in the Bay Area, participated in many Bay Area organizations and were important to the formation of Bay Area punk institutions. Thus, they were functionally very much a part of the scene. In light of this observation, I a definition of the Bay Area that includes actors who were explicitly based in the 12 Bay Area counties as well as those who were instrumental to the formation of its organizations and institutional infrastructure. That being said, this analysis primarily focuses on San Francisco and the East Bay.

5 Creating an Inclusive Participant-Based Scene (The Bay Area Punk Organizational Landscape)

As Leyshon (2001: 62) notes, “scenes are able to reproduce themselves most successfully when they produce a set of stabilizing institutions [what I refer to as organizations], such as performance venues, specialized record shops, rehearsal and recording studios, specialized music press, and record labels.” One of the great strengths of the Bay Area punk scene was its ability to build a vast infrastructure of organizations, media and entrepreneurs dedicated to the scene. Of these, I argue the most critical in developing punk beyond a sudden outbreak of novel, aggressive music in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and into a robust community and vast organizational-institutional infrastructure by the end of the 1980s, is the zine. Zines both facilitated local or intra-scene communication, as well as communication and collaboration between different punk scenes. They also allowed for frequent and intensive interaction that in turn helped to facilitate inclusivity within the scene.

Beyond zines, the presence of physical spaces around which members of the scene could meet, and musicians could practice their craft, were also instrumental to the development of the scene. Hoyler and Mager (2005) highlight how in the 1980s and 1990s German hip-hop scene, community centers and youth clubs were allowed young people to meet up and perform this new cultural activity. In punk rock music, people’s homes, music venues and outdoor public spaces all played a pivotal role, as these spaces were critical to feedback processes between producers and consumers of music and allowed for creation of new ideas and recombination of old ones (Watson et al. 2009).

Bay Area concert venues in particular were of paramount importance to fostering a flexible and innovative punk rock scene. Thompson (2004) notes that part of the Bay Area punk scene’s success in producing popular bands and gaining influence relative to other scenes (particularly Los Angeles) was its ability to establish a network of primarily punk rock venues during the initial explosion, though this continued throughout the neglected decade. The 924 Gilman Street Project or “Gilman” in Berkeley, has been the most important. Other venues that preceded Gilman such as Mabuhay Gardens or “The Mab,” The Farm, and the On Broadway in San Francisco all closed their doors to punk shows in the mid-1980s as they came to be plagued by problems such as violence, drug abuse and various forms of prejudice and bigotry (these predominately came out of the rise of a far right skinhead subculture that became linked to the scene through a shared interest in fast aggressive music).² It was in this context that 924 Gilman opened in 1986 as an all ages DIY, volunteer run, not-for-profit, music and community venue, originally in order to create a safe space for those who did not want to associate with the infiltration of violence, bigotry and drug use. To attend a show you must become a “member” by agreeing to abide by the community rules displayed prominently on the front of the building, including not using alcohol or drugs at the venue, no violence, no racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and in general, “*NO FUCKED UP BEHAVIOR,*” (924 Gilman 2018). This attempt to make such an inclusive space for the punk scene was the result of years of discussions about polemical issues in zines. Moreover, the venue is run by its members who hold meetings twice per month. As a result of its rule to not book bands on major labels, the Gilman became a place where bands that would not have an opportunity to play elsewhere could cultivate their skills on a level unparalleled by other venues. In doing so, the Gilman became an incubator for bands that would later become

² While American skinhead politics are outside the scope of this paper, in fairness, it is important to note that not all skinheads adhered to these various forms of bigotry. This was a later development that occurred many years after the onset of skinhead culture and at no point has ever become ubiquitous throughout it.

popular for their original and innovative styles such as Green Day, Rancid and AFI, and thus attempted to foster an ethos of inclusivity for both the bands and the fans.

Record labels and distribution companies were also a critical component of the Bay Area punk rock organizational infrastructure. Record labels like Lookout! Records and Alternative Tentacles as well as distribution companies such as Blacklist Mailorder and Mordam Records (which doubled as a label as well) operated on a similar anti-commercial DIY ethic as Maximum and Gilman. Blacklist Mailorder was founded in 1988 *"on a philosophy...that you CAN make a difference, you CAN have an impact, [and] you can do something to fight the greedheads, the cynics, the gougers, the assholes, [and] the apathetic couch potatoes,"* (KALX 1989: 20). Thus, they were able *"to keep the markup as low as possible...through the use of an all-volunteer staff,"* (KALX 1989: 20). Similarly, Lookout! Records, established in 1987, operated on the principle that *"the bands and label were partners, both invested in creating the same outcome (record sales), and that each should benefit when we [they] were successful...60% of the net profits going [went] to the artists,"* (personal communication with a former employee). Through their DIY ethic, embrace of volunteer labor, and not-for-profit or mutually beneficial business agreements, Bay Area punk organizations created an environment that facilitated music and culture that had a low barrier to entry, allowing people from a broad range of socioeconomic backgrounds to participate

One final influential organization during the neglected decade is the University of California, Berkeley both through the student co-op Barrington Hall and through KALX. Barrington Hall served as a staple venue for out of town bands (Ray Farrell cited in Boulware and Tudor 2009), as well as inexpensive housing for many punk rockers when students left for the summer (Dean Washington cited in Boulware and Tudor 2009). KALX program guides often featured reviews of local and national punk bands as well as advertisements for various other organizations affiliated with the punk rock scene. Bay Area punk label Alternative Tentacles' owner and Dead Kennedys' singer Jello Biafra once wrote in to KALX saying *"Alternative Tentacles would like to thank KALX for supporting our artists including Dead Kennedys, D.O.A.,"* and others (KALX 1986b: 3). KALX also put on shows with bands like Dead Kennedys and Fang (KALX n.d.),³ interviewed bands such as AFI and The Misfits on air (Aaron Cometbus and Tiger Lily cited in Boulware and Tudor 2009), and was even the beneficiary of benefit shows held by out-of-town bands like the Descendents (DESCENDENTS 1986).

6 Institutions and Their Development within the Scene

Schmidt (2006: 59) notes that *"A scene cannot only be carried in the individual heads of its members, but it must find its material expression in shared practices. Only through these practices can common attitudes become manifest."* Punks used zines to delimit the boundaries of the scene, and iteratively develop institutional practices of inclusivity through frequent discourse. This next section will illustrate how these institutions were developed and the impact they had, as well as a few salient political issues for Bay Area punks during the neglected decade.

Zines were a medium through which punks engaged in regular debate and discussion. In describing which letters to the editor got published in *Maximum* and which did not, Tim Yohannon wrote that they began with trying *"to pick intelligent letters. Beyond that we'll print some of those that are in response to prior letters or articles, ones that don't repeat what others have said, ones that say something cleverer than others...etc."* (Maximum Rocknroll 1985: 3). Similarly, one KALX program guide tried to facilitate discourse amongst its readers saying, *"Letters to the editor have always been welcome, but now we'd like to take a more active approach and actually solicit responses*

³ Though this poster had no date, based on the timeline of these bands' existence and the poster's location in the archive, it is very safe to assume that these shows were in the 1980s.

from our listeners, which we just might print...Hopefully we can get a regular forum going. Feeding back the station that bites you will be fun, and can only make things better," (KALX 1986a: 1). Like KALX and *Maximum*, other zines attempted to facilitate discussion amongst their readers and within the local scene. On the back cover of one issue of *Cometbus* was written, "Contributions always welcome and usually accepted," (Cometbus 1984). Zine editors' willingness to facilitate discussion was the bedrock upon which inclusivity was developed.

This is not to say however that such inclusivity was not a reaction to a lack thereof. Arguably the most ubiquitous political discussions revolved around gender and sexuality in response to hyper-masculine and heteronormative elements in the scene. Throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, women contested sexism within the scene as well as more broadly in society. In one issue of *Absolutely Zippo!*, one female columnist notes how she "told Eggplant [the editor] the problem with *Absolutely Zippo!* was that there were no girl writers. He said 'Why? Do you want to write something?'...So anyway I'm writing the scene report..." (Eggplant 1989: 13). As with many other social and cultural spaces, women were frequently underrepresented in zines and punk rock more generally, despite their active involvement in shaping the scene. Many punks, both female and male, strived to counteract this tendency by creating more inclusive spaces, such as in their zines.

Kevin Seconds of Sacramento band 7 Seconds was one of the more influential players in 1980s and early 1990s hardcore, along with the "posicore," or positive hardcore movement, which sought to reject trends like sexism, homophobia and violence within the scene. He described how he wrote his influential 1984 song "Not Just Boys Fun" "... (after all the shit girls like the WRECKS and my sister Jane, editor of media massacre, used to get at out-of-town gigs). I feel good, and a bit proud of knowing that there's always been women involved within our little scene," (Maximum Rocknroll 1983b: 4). "Not Just Boys Fun" is a call to recognize women's contribution to the scene with lyrics such as "There's girls who put out fanzines, others put on shows/Yet they're not allowed to get out on the floor," ("Not Just Boys Fun" 1984). Seconds also noted that along with his sister and the Wrecks, what inspired him to write the song was the "Annihilate Sex Roles" article in *Maximum* issue seven. This article was compiled by four women and intended to object to the fact that "male (i.e. most) punk bands here seem to have a vague and often flawed politics that does not represent the supposed radicalism of our culture," (Maximum Rocknroll 1983a: 59). Punks brought polemical debates into discursive processes in zines that fostered solidarity, civic capital (Hracs et al. 2011) and inclusivity.

Inclusivity was also a consequence of demographic factors in the scene. Many Bay Area punk rockers were under 18 years old. In response, a set of innovative and inclusive conventions were built up around concerts. This was manifest in several ways, one obvious example being all-ages shows. *Maximum* for example, who put on many shows throughout the 1980s, "was very adamant about these being all ages shows. It [they] started by six and was over by ten," (John Marr cited in Boulware and Tudor 2009: 189). Additionally Gilman, the only exclusively punk and community-run venue in the Bay Area as well as the most influential venue in the scene, only had all-ages shows. In writing scene reports, authors often noted if shows were all-ages, at times distinguishing between all-ages and "ALL AGES" illustrating the importance of this characteristic of a show within the scene (Eggplant n.d.: 6).⁴ Furthermore, "all-ages" was not solely to include young people in what was normally an "adult" scene, but rather was meant literally. Green Day singer Billie Joe Armstrong described how, "In the scene when they say "all-ages," they really mean it. 15 all the way up to 50," (Boulware and Tudor 2009: 326-7). All-ages shows eliminated a clear barrier and form of segregation that existed in many other social settings, bringing a wider range of people into the scene.

⁴ This zine had no date written on it but was likely from 1988 or 1989 based on the issue number.

The pricing of shows, media and other products of the scene also increased access to the scene. Issues six through thirteen of *Cometbus* had “FREE” written on their covers. KALX program guides were also free, and *Maximum* and *Absolutely Zippo!* maintained low prices, the latter only being a quarter. Punks also tried to keep show prices low to create ease of access. One Berkeley scene report noted “*There are good bands playing for good prices (no more than 4 bucks) in Berkeley, you just have to look a little harder to find them. Ruthies may have good bands but not a good atmosphere or good prices,*” (Cometbus 1983b: 1). Similarly, many of the organizations created during the 1980s were not-for-profit or equitably profitable for all those involved such as Lookout Records, which gave a generous 60% share of their profits to bands (personal communication with a former employee), or Blacklist Mailorder, which was able “*to keep the markup as low as possible...through the use of an all-volunteer staff,*” (KALX 1989: 20). Mordam Records was also known to both treat its employees really well and give exceptionally fair deals to record labels for its sophisticated distribution services (O’Connor 2008). Fair financial arrangements decreased barriers to entry and allowed different actors to take risks they may not have under different circumstances.

In addition to using shows as a mechanism for including more young people, novel approaches to alcohol consumption were another way punks attempted to make the scene more inclusive. Many punk rockers chose not to drink or use drugs, a movement known as “straight edge,” in solidarity with young people who were legally unable to drink or others who were negatively affected by alcohol consumption. Kevin Seconds for instance, while not claiming to be straight edge per se, has been a powerful critic of alcohol use and culture within the scene. Lyrics such as, “*You waited long for 21/For me the fight has just begun/You get in clubs, drink alcohol/It makes you feel you're ten feet tall/I don't wanna grow up/I'm never getting old/I'd rather work from 9 to 5/Than drink to stay alive/I'm gonna stay young until I die*” evidence both his distaste for the prevailing drinking culture, and demonstrate his efforts to stand in solidarity with young people (“Young ‘til I Die” 1984). Another approach many punks adopted was to try and make alcohol accessible to people of all ages. One *Absolutely Zippo!* article noted which East Bay liquor stores sold alcohol to minors, and wrote at end of the article, “*Send in those store names that sell to minors*” for further publication (Eggplant n.d: 6). In both cases, punks were attempting to make the scene more accessible to minors through communication channels like zines or song lyrics.

To conclude, institutions of frequent discourse and inclusivity facilitated the growth of the scene. Intense communication through zines allowed for novel approaches to social issues. Having a young demographic inspired a set of innovative institutions, based around both solidarity between members of the scene (Hracs et al. 2011) as well as economic rationale, that made shows and the scene more easily accessible. This accessibility was facilitated by communication in zines and in turn, helped the scene to grow, develop popular bands and become commercially viable in the mid 1990s.

7 Building Networks and Creating Community

7.1 Local Networks

Many Bay Area organizations and actors such as zines, venues, labels, radio stations, bands, and fans also created linkages at the local, national and international scales that in turn fortified the Bay Area scene and positioned it as a central node in a network of punk scenes. Part of this may be related to the broader leading position of the Bay Area in the global political economy – Power and Hallencreutz (2002) demonstrate how such a favorable position has benefitted the Swedish music industry – but it also arose out of deliberate efforts by Bay Area punks to forge linkages outside the scene and across other scenes. Zines often made positive references to other zines, bands and businesses as well as facilitated inter-scene dialogue and linkages.

Reviews are a common theme throughout punk rock fanzines in the Bay Area. These reviews could be of songs, albums, bands, venues, stores, labels or a number of other things, both explicitly or otherwise related to the punk rock community. Every *Maximum* issue ends with several pages of short record reviews. Similarly, some of the early *Cometbus* issues consisted of small cut-out pieces of paper and exclusively consisted of local news, band reviews and interviews (for example *Cometbus* 1983a, n.d.). Zines also often advertised for other zines. One issue of *Absolutely Zippo!* noted how “Ex: singer Adrienne,” of local band Spitboy sells “*Too Far Fanzine*,” (Eggplant 1991: 1). In the same issue he also mentioned other local zines for his readers to find such as *Blarg!*, *Cometbus* and *Maximum*. Zine writers also wrote in zines other than their own. Aaron Cometbus for example, wrote the Northern California scene report in *Maximum* between 1986-1989 in addition to writing for a number of other zines (Cometbus 2002). In one issue of *Absolutely Zippo!*, an anonymous writer’s article was published criticizing both Aaron Cometbus and his zine (Eggplant 1990). On the next page, *Absolutely Zippo!* editor Robert Eggplant let Cometbus respond. Zines were used to not only facilitate dialogue within the scene, but also connect readers and themselves with other local zines.

It is also clear that zines were a medium for creating bands as well as finding information about upcoming shows or booking a show. One issue of *Cometbus* wrote “*Atrocity are looking for a second guitarist. Call Sarah at 527-1961*” in addition to “*Kevin is reforming C.O.D. If you do anything besides sing call Kevin at 525-7286*,” (Cometbus 1983b: 5). Another provided an address and notified readers “*YOUTH BRIGADE looking for a bass player-get in touch!!!*” (*Maximum Rocknroll* 1985: 70). This last advertisement also illustrates the reach of this Bay Area zine, as Youth Brigade was a Los Angeles band.

In addition to soliciting band members, zines published information for local shows and promoters. One early issue of *Cometbus* advised “*Berkeley bands – call promoters to play..sproul plaza – superb productions – 642-7477..[for] Sacramento [call] – Kevin – 322-8496. Bands interested in possibly playing Santa Cruz, Monterey, or live on KALX, write to this magazine*,” (Cometbus 1984: 1). By providing contact information for local bands looking for new members as well as people to contact for opportunities to play live, zine writers facilitated the expansion of a Bay Area punk network.

Many punks developed this network by leaving their addresses at the end of their writings. For example, one writer in *Absolutely Zippo!* ended his article saying “*Well if you ever need anyone to drink with, drop me and Matt a line at 643 Quinan St. Pinole 94564, CRAPAFORNIA*,” (Eggplant n.d: 1). In one published letter to *Maximum*, one punk rocker described her frustration with sexism in the community and left her address and said she “*would like to continue this debate with people of either opinion*,” (*Maximum Rocknroll* 1983b: 4). Nearly every letter *Maximum* published was coupled with an address and an encouragement for people to continue the discussion with them. Frequent communication through zines thus allowed punks to form local ties between zines, readers of zines, bands and organizations in the scene that facilitated networks of creativity (Leyshon 2001) as well as brought together key actors who were interested in promoting the genre (Crossley 2008, 2009).

7.2 National and International Networks

In addition to developing a local network both within and outside the punk community, punk rockers created a vast network and community on national and international scales. The best illustration of this is *Book Your Own Fucking Life (BYOFL)*, another of *Maximum Rocknroll’s* projects. This project was the culmination of the years spent making contacts throughout the neglected decade. The first issue of *BYOFL* was released in 1992 and illustrates a vast network built up during the 1980s, intended to be a guide for touring bands and other travelling punks. *BYOFL* listed bands, distributors, labels, promoters and venues, publishers, radio stations, record/book

stores and a variety of other organizations⁵ for each state as well as many other countries from where people contributed information (Maximum Rocknroll 1993). Nearly every listing had a phone number, including for the bands, so that touring or travelling punks could get in contact with them if they needed help while they were there or make connections before they left on tour. Similarly, the listing of venues enabled touring bands to book their entire tour themselves rather than relying on a booking agent. Listings of radio stations and zines also gave punks information on where to send their music, hopefully for airtime or review. *BYOFL* illustrates how punk rockers in the Bay Area were actively connecting their own scene with punk rock scenes nationally and internationally, and how this allowed bands to tour and hone their skills during the neglected decade.

Long before *BYOFL*, *Maximum*, in addition to Bay Area bands and other zines, was actively attempting to spread information about its local community and create contacts around the world. As one *Maximum* reader wrote in to the zine, “congrats are in order to you MRR folks for making the massive effort to cover, communicate, and inject a little brains, and hard analysis into the international punk scene,” (Maximum Rocknroll 1985: 9). *Maximum* tried to expand its readership around the world to fortify international linkages between punk scenes. By May of 1986, readership in Europe had gotten up to 1100 copies per month. This was high enough that the zine sent a volunteer to live in London with the goal of reaching a circulation in Europe of 6,000, so magazines could be printed cost efficiently there as well as in the U.S (Maximum Rocknroll 1986).

Maximum also tried to connect international scenes with its primarily American readers. One issue featured a letter describing a reader’s “new International Hardcore/Politics [radio] show in Halifax,” which could not afford to buy foreign records, and asked that people send in “new records and tapes. I can personally guarantee that they will get played,” (Maximum Rocknroll 1986: 6). Posting ads such as this developed national and international punk networks by facilitating exchanges between members of various punk communities. Bay Area punks “felt like we were bringing people together, and catalyzing and stimulating an international punk scene which had previously been separated, in many respects,” (Jeff Bale cited in Boulware and Tudor 2009: 189). These linkages enabled them to turn what were previously isolated local scenes into an international network, situating the Bay Area scene as a central node.

National and international linkages also enabled important knowledge exchanges across punk scenes. “Scene reports” described what was occurring in relation to punk rock music in a given city or country and contained information such as what bands and venues were active in the area, how that scene was involved with local politics, or contact information for people coming to that area. One 1985 issue of *Maximum Rocknroll* had scene reports from cities and countries including Tuscon, Las Vegas, New York, Newfoundland, Calgary, Peru, Italy, France, Sweden, Switzerland and Japan, all of which provided either an address or phone number to call to get involved with the local community or to book a show (Maximum Rocknroll 1985: 4).

Acts of solidarity across scenes were also important to tie formation and knowledge flows to the Bay Area scene. The writer of one report in *Maximum* described, “a childish move by the Faction,” a San Jose-based band (Maximum Rocknroll 1985: 17). They had been promised \$150 to play a certain show, but the door take was not enough to pay them. They went outside until they got the promised \$150. This resulted in the other bands on the bill that night, Pariah, Ugly Americans, and Still Born, the last two of which being from out of state, getting \$30, \$30, and \$16, respectively. Consequently, the writer of the report highlighted Bay Area punks’ efforts to stand in solidarity with their travelling comrades saying, “I may be pretty idealistic, but where the hell is support

⁵ These could be anything that might help a travelling punk, some varied examples of which being the Berkeley Free Clinic in the East Bay, Food Not Bombs in Santa Cruz, cheap restaurants in New York, and a whole host of others.

among bands going?" (Maximum Rockroll 1985: 17).⁶ Maximum co-founders Tim Yohannon and Jeff Bale also routinely let bands stay at the "Maximum Rockroll house," where they lived (Jeff Bale cited in Boulware and Tudor 2009). Other research has shown that such spaces serve as important mechanisms for network formation (Crossley 2009). During their stay they often met other bands, other members of the Bay Area scene, or would be introduced to new music, thus facilitating the formation of pipelines (Bathelt et al. 2004) that might simply enable touring bands to have a place to stay or possibly foster networks of creativity (Leyshon 2001) across distance.

A final way Bay Area and other punks fostered the development of the punk rock community outside of their local sphere was through the creation of, or participation in, compilation albums. Alternative Tentacles owner and Dead Kennedys' singer Jello Biafra compiled the "*Let Them Eat Jellybeans*" compilation whose purpose "*was to alert people overseas and wherever to American talent and diversity,*" not just what was happening in New York and Los Angeles (Jello Biafra cited in Boulware and Tudor 2009: 84). Other Bay Area punks such as Berkeley band Fang linked the Bay Area with the international punk community by participating on a West German international compilation in 1983 (Cometbus 1983a). Compilations were a means for bands not only to create dialogue and awareness of smaller or unknown scenes on the national and international scales but also to facilitate linkages amongst these communities.

8 Conclusion and Directions for Further Research

Despite its proximity to Los Angeles' much larger music industry, the Bay Area was able to establish a large network of zines, labels, venues, radio stations, bands and fans that made it too a major center for the production of punk rock music. Several of the biggest and most influential punk labels today, such as Fat Wreck Chords, Alternative Tentacles and New Red Archives, are based in San Francisco. This and other Bay Area labels and organizations attracted a variety of non-local bands and facilitated the growth of value added activities within the scene. In his paper, I illustrate some of the processes through which robust local underground scenes develop. In particular, it is suggested that institutional practices of frequent communication and inclusivity, as well as establishing robust network relationships, were central to facilitating innovation and creativity. These are central underlying causal mechanisms to the growth of Bay Area punk in the 1990s.

Out of the 1980s-1990s scene we see Bay Area bands like Green Day and Rancid becoming popular across the country and the world. The popularity of these bands had significant economic impacts that further proliferated the development of the scene. The success of popular Bay Area bands brought money into the scene through purchases of their older albums on labels like Lookout! Records, necessitating a need to expand valued added services in the scene like distribution companies and record labels (O'Connor 2008). For example, Green Day's second album *Kerplunk*, recorded with Lookout! Records, is certified platinum by the Recording Industry Association of America meaning it has sold over 1 million copies. In turn, many other bands that otherwise may have never had the chance were then able to produce their own records because of this influx of capital and interest. The explosion of interest in Bay Area punk bands' music also attracted attention to other Bay Area bands and labels. Green Day's popularity let them establish their own label Adeline Records, which produced records for several Bay Area bands. In other words, the ability of a region to produce popular bands also has

⁶ Similarly, punk rock communities outside the Bay Area were also attempting to develop linkages with other scenes. Nearly every promoter or venue in *BYOFL* for instance says whether they will be able to provide food or a place to stay for the travelling band, in addition to what typical compensation for performing looks like. One Champaign, Illinois scene report in *Maximum 26* for instance thanks "*Elaine and Barb for their spaghetti dinners for out-of-towners.*"

important feedbacks for the scene they come from, provided this scene has sufficient organizational, institutional and network infrastructure to reap these benefits.

This is important as production in the music industry has undergone a process of vertical disintegration (Leyshon 2014) meaning interactions between a network of smaller firms play an increasingly important role in fostering the growth of the industry (Storper and Christopherson 1987). In the music industry, these smaller firms, such as the labels described above, are often strongly tied to niche markets such as that of Bay Area punk, and thus local cultural scenes function not only as an urban amenity, but also have important economic implications. The “underground” interacts with the upperground (Cohendet et al. 2010), and both provide important feedbacks to the other. Understanding the processes through which the underground develops thus sheds light on processes of regional development.

This of course is a great irony, as the DIY, independent, anti-commercial nature of the scene helped to facilitate the emergence of many popular bands, who in turn played a role in its subsequent commercialization. While increased commercialization of the scene may have provided opportunity for a new generation of bands, as well as exposed a broader audience to music and culture many people enjoyed consuming and may not have discovered otherwise, many members of the local scene would undoubtedly argue that the scene and music also became more homogenized and lost its authenticity in this process. It is understandable that people would call into question the authenticity of a scene that has evolved or changed, yet as Thompson (2004) notes, understanding scenes in spatially and temporally confined ways rather than relational terms leads to a narrative that a scene is created, commercialized and then dies. This type of thinking is at the heart of why punk is often thought of in terms of “first” and “second waves” without consideration for what was happening between them. Scenes remain intact while also evolving, transcending geographical and temporal boundaries. Scenes can at once become commercialized and perhaps lose their authenticity, while also maintaining their integrity and underground connections.

Several important areas of inquiry remain unaddressed by this research. Case studies comparing multiple regions may illustrate that scenes grow in conjunction with one another. It seems likely that linkages between bands, fans and organizations in the Bay Area, with other cities with strong scenes such as Los Angeles, facilitated mutually beneficial exchanges. I merely demonstrated that these linkages existed, and that they were important to the growth of the Bay Area scene, but they also have implications for other scenes. Moreover, part of the strength of the Bay Area scene was its anti-commercial ethos that allowed people from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds to gain opportunities to play at venues and record music. Comparing San Francisco to Los Angeles might reveal ways in which access to even more commercialized elements of the industry affect local scenes that are not elucidated in this study. Finally, while inclusivity in the scene facilitated active participation by its members, several key actors were particularly influential. Closer consideration for the ways in which individual entrepreneurs like Ruth Schwartz, founder of Mordam Records, or Tim Yohannon, co-founder of Maximum Rocknroll, shape local scenes, deserves further attention.

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