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Affective masculinities and suburban identities: Nu-metal as reflexive art

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AFFECTIVE MASCULINITES AND SUBURBAN IDENTITIES:
NU-METAL AS REFLEXIVE ART

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This thesis is dedicated to my brother, who gave me everything,
and also his CD case when he left for college.

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"If our work is to explain the role of music in society, then our interpretations of music must be an attempt to understand the meaning of the music for the people who participate in it. If an interpretation of a genre of music or subculture is present for the scholar and no other social actor, I cannot see how it can be consequential for the larger society." – Harris Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience*.

"To many of its detractors, heavy metal embodies a shameless attack on the central values of Western civilization. But to its fans it is the greatest music ever made" – Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture.*

Chapter 1 – Click Click Boom

In their 2001 song "Click Click Boom" Saliva singer Josey Scott says, "What the hell is wrong with me? / My mom and dad weren't perfect / But still you don't hear no cryin' ass bitchin' from me", over the chug of the genre-encapsulating down tuned guitars, making one of the most self aware statements in nu-metal. Nu-metal resonated with a generation of discontented youth that considered themselves to be disenfranchised and abandoned by the cultural state of the U.S. around them, while also being given a powerful sense of individualism. What Scott is saying elucidates the confusing, often brutal, and strangely self-honest nature of nu-metal. The popularity of nu-metal ostensibly peaked in 1999 at Woodstock's 30th anniversary, where Korn, Limp Bizkit, Rage Against The Machine, Creed, and numerous other acts played to 200,000[1] people over the course of three days in upstate New York. Two gang rapes, several overdoses, and widespread violence were frequently documented occurrences at the festival.[2] These kids, largely from the suburbs, exurbs, and rural areas, found some form of empowerment in the violence, misogyny, aggression, and party-fueled life repeated back at them through songs like Limp Bizkit's "Nookie" and Drowning Pool's "Bodies".

Understanding why this music held the weight it did is a complex task and the ultimate goal of this thesis. The decade in which nu-metal was most active coincided with a number of profound changes in the way that people, especially youth audiences,

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[1] Alona Wartofsky. "Woodstock '99 goes up in smoke," *Washington Post,* July 27, 1999.
[2] Rob Sheffield. "Woodstock '99: Rage Against The Latrine", *Rolling Stone*, Sept 2, 1999. http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/woodstock-99-rage-against-the-latrine-19990902?page=2; Warofsky, "Woodstock '99", *Washington Post.*

consumed music and media as a whole. There was a confluence of the Internet moving into homes, online music sharing, catastrophic suburbanization, and the specter of censorship that changed the influence that nu-metal had on popular culture at the time. Additionally, the expectations of masculinity were shifting to a more emotionally capable, as well as culpable position.

In his phenomenal 10-part "Whatever Happened to Alternative Nation?" music critic and journalist Steven Hyden describes nu-metal as "music that took the sludge and the self-pity of early-'90s rock and turned it into something leaner, meaner, and nefariously empowering".[3] The empowerment that Hyden refers to came through rejecting the aesthetics of pity; nu-metal bands made a point to mock the demonstrative, emotionally pitiful displays that much of grunge championed at the time.

As an aesthetic sub-culture, nu-metal riffed heavily on the aesthetic precursor that metal provided – long before infamous nu-metal band Slipknot was wearing masks and donning pseudo-kabuki makeup, Ozzy Osbourne was famously biting the head off a bat and being accused of worshiping Satan.[4] Metal, in most of its various forms, has been mainstream since its inception. Rosemary Overell says on metal's sub-culture status: "metal existed right in the heart of hegemonic culture — in the suburbs — as a

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[3] Steven Hyden, "You're Either With Korn and Limp Bizkit, or you're against them," *AV Club,* February 8, 2011, http://www.avclub.com/article/part-9-1998-youre-either-with-korn-and-limp-bizkit-51471

[4] Helen Farley. (2009). "Demons, Devils and Witches: The Occult In Heavy Metal Music," in *Heavy Metal Music in Britain,* ed by Gerd Bayer. (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2009), 73-85.

deviant, even resistant anomaly,"[5] and nu-metal is but one subgenre in a long lineage of metal to capture the hearts and minds of America's predominantly teenage, middle class, buying-power heavy youth. The merchandising power, ticket and record selling ability of metal artists was almost unrivaled between 1975 and 1990 in the United States.[6]

Of metal's many subgenres, nu-metal stands as one of the shortest-lived and most commercialized. Use of the genre description "nu-metal" began with Korn's 1994 self-titled album and ended, in terms of significant commercial popularity, in 2004. Korn's lead singer Jonathan Davis reportedly "detested" the genre tag nu-metal, instead preferring "fusion" to refer to the group's hybridized sound.[7]

The lackluster sales of Korn's album the year prior, and Limp Bizkit's minimally selling *The Unquestionable Truth (Part 1)* signaled the end of nu-metal's commercial dominance, and cultural relevance. However, in its decade long reign, bands like Godsmack, Disturbed, and Saliva were routinely selling millions of copies. Media outlets like MTV, SPIN, and Rolling Stone devoted serious amounts of time to nu-metal, and retail outlets like Best Buy and Wal-mart did exclusive album releases of nu-metal

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[5] Rosemary Overell, *Affective Insensities In Extreme Music Scenes: Cases from Australia and Japan.* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014.)

[6] For example Kiss, one of the earliest glam metal bands, has recorded around 215 studio songs over the course of 19 albums. In comparison, there have been over 3,000 different products with the Kiss logo attached – nearly 14 different commercial products for every Kiss song.

[7] Jonathan Pieslak, "Text and Identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'", *Popular Music* 27 (2008): 36.

albums.[8] As a derivative of metal, and ultimately rock, nu-metal brought with it a set of influences that had proven to be commercially popular already and hybridized them with those of hip-hop. One of the first true forays into genre hybridization came from established metal act Anthrax, and up and coming hip-hop group Public Enemy. Their 1991 song "Bring The Noise" reached #56 on the Billboard chart and registered as a significant commercial success, ushering in the idea that a rap-rock hybrid was commercially possible. As early as the late 1980's Brooklyn, NY's Beastie Boys were beginning to test the waters of success with something akin to a rap-rock hybrid, although theirs was still firmly rooted in the early hip-hop tradition. Other acts like Suicidal Tendencies were also bordered on rap-rock territory in this time, finding varying amounts of success combining the contextual elements of rock (guitars, distortion, singing) with the more stylized lyrical delivery of hip-hop.

As Public Enemy and Anthrax worked on "Bring The Noise", the United States was reaching the end of a decades-long crossroads, one that took a predominately white industrial workforce and shifted it to one that was highly skilled and rooted in a more intellectual tradition.[9] As a result of this, a large amount of previously heavy-laboring white communities of the U.S. experienced something akin to widespread disenfranchisement for the first time in the post-war era. At the same time, black populations were being left with the deindustrialized city, and the wastelands left behind. In her book *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America,*

[8] Korn was one of the most prominent and successful bands at utilizing these commercial tools.

[9] Ryan Moore, *Sells Like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis.* (New York: NYU Press, 2010).

Tricia Rose speaks to the effect of deindustrialization on black population and culture, saying: “hip-hop emerges from the deindustrialization meltdown where social alienation, prophetic imagination, and yearning intersect.”[10] Hip-hop as a medium attempted to understand and voice marginalization as a product, primarily, of white flight and the social policies that followed.[11] Nu-metal negotiated a path between these moments, although primarily representing the whiter side of this transition.

Both shifts were coupled with a transformation in the expectations of masculinity that had a profound effect on the male-produced culture that was being created. Pieces by Moore and Hyden especially illuminate the perceived threat from the end of second wave, and beginning of third wave feminism in the mid-to-late 1990’s and early 2000’s. The rhetoric of dominant masculinity was one that was increasingly being shut down and critically deconstructed through these moments. The rise of nu-metal also coincided with an industry that was commercially focused on grunge. As Hyden says so perfectly about grunge:

“Grunge reminded us that, deep down, we’re all victims of a cruel and unjust world, and this vulnerability unites us; there was only one victim in the new music, and that was the listener, who was beset on all sides by abusive parents, mocking teachers, needy

[10] Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America.* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994). p. 21.
[11] Jay Chang in his book *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop* and Tricia Rose both agree on this point.

girlfriends, and all the uncaring and privileged kids at school, who never, ever had it as bad as you; even worse, those fucking bitches thought they were better than you."[12]

The misogyny and violence of Hyden's description is satirical, but what he touches on comes from a place of cultural truth. In the same piece, he goes on to discuss the time he wrote a scathing review of a Korn concert for the regional paper, and soon began to receive hate mail from all over the country. Hyden collected all of the hate mail into a booklet he titled "Dear Faggot", saying that was "the most common salutation I received from Korn fans."[13]

The guiding principal for this thesis can be taken from Harris Berger's assertion that:

"if our work is to explain the role of music in society, then our interpretations of music must be an attempt to understand the meaning of the music for the people who participate in it. If an interpretation of a genre of music or subculture is present for the scholar and no other social actor, I cannot see how it can be consequential for the larger society."[14]

By using this ideology to approach nu-metal, we can attempt to understand the cultural, societal, and chronological conditions that instigated some of the most divisive, gender-specific, and lucrative *culture* in post-war America. The sheer male domination

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[12] Steven Hyden, "You're Either With Korn and Limp Bizkit, or you're against them," *AV Club,* February 8, 2011, http://www.avclub.com/article/part-9-1998-youre-either-with-korn-and-limp-bizkit-51471

[13] ibid.

[14] Harris Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and The Phenomenology Of Musical Experience*. (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999).

of nu-metal, coupled with the targeted manifestations of its commercial marketing and the propagation of its highly dedicated suburban fan-base was a unique turn of events. Nu-metal also was one of the first examples of a pop cultural desegregation that has only intensified since it burst onto the scene, pairing white and black music.

Any answer will come from a multifaceted approach encompassing urban studies, media studies, American studies, and additional interdisciplinary canons that shed light on the innumerably complex system of American life and culture. In facing nu-metal a decade removed there is the alluring sense of the present that still lingers, but also the scholarly distance to critically understand some of the potential fallout both as it pertains to the music industry, and what Harvey calls the "socially destructive"[15] architecture of sprawl and the suburbs. This thesis is a cultural sociology in the sense that Weinstein[16] considers, namely: a thorough investigation of the creation, appreciation, and celebration of nu-metal, in addition to a survey of the audience, and literal mediators (Korn TV, SPIN, Rolling Stone) that paved the way for a cultural phenomenon.

[15] Dolores Hayden, *A Field Guide to Sprawl*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2004).
[16] Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal: The Music and Its Culture. (*Boston, MA: De Capo Press, 2000).

Chapter 2 – Heavy Metal

Understanding what heavy metal is, as a genre, is impossible without understanding the history of heavy metal and how it came to be ubiquitous as part of the greater rock music umbrella. Prior to this however, there must be an understanding of the role that genre plays in cultural analysis -- both what 'genre' is, and how the term is used.

There is a long academic discourse on genre, some agreement across disciplines. Lena and Peterson identify genre as "plac[ing] cultural meaning at the forefront of any analysis of category construction" going on to say that it "has potential and significant general utility across domains" such as film, music, literature, and even cuisine.[17] Italian musicologist Franco Fabbri describes musical genre as "a set of musical events (real or possible) whose course is governed by a definite set of socially accepted rules."[18] Gabriele Marino, expanding on Fabbri's work, declares genre to be "a socio-culturally connoted and a functionally justified music style (the 'compositional norm')."[19] In both Marion and Fabbri's position on genre, a key differentiation between style and genre is being made to distinguish a 'typology' of music (electronic, hip-hop, rock) from the

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[17] Jennifer C. Lena, Richard A. Peterson, "Classification As Culture: Types and Trajectories Of Music Genres," *American Sociological Review* 73 (2008): 697, accessed December 20, 2015, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/25472554.

[18] Franco Fabbri (1981). "A Theory of Musical Genres: Two Applications," edited by D. Horn and P. Tagg *Popular Music Perspectives* (1981), 1, from Göteborg and Exeter: International Association for the Study of Popular Music.

[19] Marino, Gabriele, ""What Kind of Genre Do You Think We Are?" Genre Theories, Genre Names and Classes Within Music Intermedial Ecology," In *Music, Analysis, Experience New Perspectives in Musical Semiotics*, ed by Costantino Maeder et al. (Leuven, BEL: Leuven University Press, 2015) 243.

culturally loaded terminology describing certain sonic movements within those typologies (EDM, trap, and Emo for example). Marino explains this as: "genre names are nontransparent labels just like 'trap' and have actually nothing to do with music; the elements which participate in the naming of the genre say nothing about the musical features, but maybe say *everything* about the pragmatics of the music."[20]

Bourdieu distinguishes genre as merely a widely applied taxonomy for dictating levels of class structure in cultural output. In Bourdieu's view, people are drawn to what is societally deemed appropriate for their class. He succinctly writes: "social subjects comprehend the social world which comprehends them."[21] This can be translated to metal, where "class" can be interpreted as a strictest reading of genre in the sense that Lena and Peterson use it. In metal, "hair metal" (synonymous with "glam metal") served to separate and delineate the music it was applied to from that of true heavy metal; however, "hair metal" got picked up as *the* descriptor for bands like Def Leppard and Poison, aligning them as being part of yet another (sub)genre in metal. By finding a middle ground between Fabbri's socio-temporal definition of genre, and Bourdieu's class-based definition, the widely-used names for subgenres of metal begins to be clearer, as does the term "heavy metal" itself. Using these understandings of genre as a guide, an (overly) simple description of heavy metal could be given as such: a genre that encapsulates a subset of guitar-based rock music that focuses on speed, distinctive aesthetic, and prodigious noise.

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[20] Marino, ""What Kind of Genre Do You Think We Are?", 246.
[21] Pierre Bourdieu, *A Social Critique of The Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. (Boston, MA: Harvard Press, 1984).

Across a wide reading of critics, scholars, and musicians alike, there is not 'true definition' of heavy metal, however, there is a relative consensus as to why and where the genre originated.[22] Heavy metal[23] developed out of the latter half of 1960's rock music, a time where longer and more intricate compositions overtook simpler ones from earlier in the decade. The Beatles darker turn towards the 70's as well as Hendrix, the Yardbirds, and a revitalization of blues-inspired guitar playing all influenced the birth of metal. Weinstein specifically points to volume as being the cohesive difference between the "jangly" rock and roll of the late 50's and early 60's, and the massive sound of Led Zeppelin and Black Sabbath in the early 70's by saying that: "the essential sonic element in heavy metal is power, expressed as sheer volume. Loudness is meant to overwhelm, to sweep the listener into the sound, and then to lend the listener the sense of power that the sound provides."[24] Berger, Moore, Overell, and Walser all reference the role that volume played in metal's development as a genre.

It is not as important to this work to understand the exact originator of metal, be it Zeppelin, MC5, Black Sabbath, or any number of similarly minded, chronologically congruous (mid-1960's to the mid-1970's) contenders for the throne of "first heavy metal band". However, understanding the role that metal played in the culture of the 70's, 80's, and 90's is crucial to decoding nu-metal's eventual place in American society.

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[22] Bourdieu, *A Social Critque,* 483; Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*; Robert Walser, *Running With The Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music. (*Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1993).

[23] Henceforth interchangeably referred to as simply "metal". Subgenres, such as glam metal and nu-metal (the focus of this work) will be referred to by their proper name. This per Weinstein's use of the term "heavy metal" and subsequent shortening.

[24] Weinstein, *Heavy Metal,* 23.

The visual, sonic, and verbal coding of metal was unique in music when it first came around. As metal splintered into sub-genre upon sub-genre, shared codings were much of what kept the sub-genres from developing into full-fledged genres of their own right. Much of Chapter 3 will be spent discussing the aesthetics of metal and nu-metal, both in meaning and in practice.

Subgenres of Heavy Metal

An essential part of understanding the various subgenres of heavy metal comes from understanding the codings, or shared features, that span different facets of metal. When looking at shared codings, volume level, verbal, visual, and clothing cues are the strongest uniting factors. Each of these is far more distinct than in many other genres, partially contributing to a widely unifying capacity. Arguably three of the four of these cues are fan-propagated, as documented in Weinstein's chapter "Digging the Music: Proud Pariahs."[25] The hegemony of several aspects of metal culture manifests in these similar codings and factors, and is present across all non-technically specific literature pertaining to heavy metal. Beyond this, every critic and scholar are united on the concept of a shared culture that, while driven by volume level, verbal, visual, and clothing cues, is animated in large part by the vast audience metal captivated.

Across metal's many subgenres, the most noticeable non-fandom based example of collective culture comes in the form of nomenclature. There is practically no other genre in which one can surmise an idea of a particular bands' sound by seeing their

[25] ibid.

name, without actually encountering their music. Across metal, bands like Megadeth, Slayer, Anthrax, Poison, Black Sabbath, Iron Maiden, AC/DC, and later Puddle of Mudd, Saliva, and Insane Clown Posse, employ a deliberately grotesque, medieval, occult, gothic, and juvenile, vocabulary that by association has primed the listener for what they're about to hear.[26] Each of the aforementioned names functions as a signifier for something outside of convention or any sense of normalcy, and while that may seem like a fairly large and diverse set of categories, but it is remarkable how few bands fall *outside* of any of them. There is a long tradition of risqué or controversial band names in all genres of rock and roll (see: Joy Division[27]; many punk bands), but a disproportional amount come from bands that play various forms of heavy metal. These names function as a collective demarcation system for metal bands; it is extremely rare that bands do not follow this custom, even on the fringe of metal subgenres.

Often specific subgenres will have their own naming conventions that fall in line with those of metal more broadly. Grindcore, a particularly fast and sonically brutal branch of metal is an example of adherence to a fairly rigorous schedule of naming that goes far beyond what is seen in other metal subgenres. Among others, acts such as: Anal Cunt, Cripple Bastards, Napalm Death, Pig Destroyer, Cephalic Carnage, Circle of Dead Children, and Carcass, participate in the usually physically grotesque naming conventions that link the subgenre together.[28]

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[26] These are some of the most common names that appear in nearly every text, but specifically Weinstein, Bayer's anthology on British heavy metal, and Robert Walser's book speak to naming conventions in heavy metal.
[27] Joy Division was the name given to Nazi brothels in concentration camps.
[28] Overell, *Affective Insensities.*

Throughout metal, not only are the names lexically stylized, but also often they are similarly visually stylized, usually in a gothic, jagged, or improbable manner.[29]

The poster for 2010's edition of seminal metal festival Maryland Deathfest. The headlining acts are allowed to use the stylization of their name, each one acting an identifying logo.

This was especially true in the early days of metal, through the era of glam and thrash. Looking at the biggest names in metal at the time: Iron Maiden, Kiss, Pantera, AC/DC, Black Sabbath – each one brings to mind a distinctive logo almost regardless of whether one is a fan or not. Indeed, through the power of 80's metal's prodigious merchandising, it became that the logos and name stylizations of metal bands were more culturally ubiquitous than the music. A prime example of this later in nu-metal

[29]Weinstein, *Heavy Metal,* 27-30.

comes from Korn, famous for their "r" being backwards and capitalized. This can be viewed as commentary on the concept non-conformity in juxtaposition with grunge.

Beyond vocabulary, apparel was and continues to be an immense part of metal culture's fan hood and performance. The fashion in and around metal is particularly distinctive, especially when considered next to other western genres. Jazz, country, pop, and blues, for the most part, have some common uniforms outside of stereotypical garb expectations[30], whereas metal has phenomenally recognizable accoutrements.[31] Leather vests, black jeans, underground band t-shirts, black boots, tattoos, unorthodox piercings, and several other visual signifiers traditionally represent metal culture.[32] Heavy metal apparel, as is often found in any underground or specific genre scene, tends to be specific in its look, with associations about certain fandom often able to be deduced from a passing visual examination. Nu-metal had its own version of this

[30] I.e. jazz being played by people in suits, country being played by people in blue jeans, etc.

[31] There has been extensive writing about how music and fashion correlate, but Janice Miller's book *Fashion and Music* (2011) does a really good job of outlining the history of their relationship.

[32] Across readings from Azzerad, Hyden, Berger, Weinstein, Moore, Klosterman, and several others, each pertains a description of metal fans using these exact terms (as well as others).

subgenre specific apparel that will be delved into later. It had quite a bit to do with the hybridization between metal and rap style, and also nu-metal's non-conformist, transgressive nature.

Beyond apparel, hairstyle was a seriously significant part of metal, enough so that glam metal is often referred to as hair metal, due to the outrageous locks sported by Kiss, Bon Jovi, Mötley Crüe, and Poison among others. In his book about growing up a metal-head, Chuck Klosterman places an emphasis on the importance of hair in metal in the 80's, a sentiment Deena Weinstein echoes. Both writers indulge an argument that unruly hair was a response to the socio-concept of the 'traditional American male' in the late 70's and early 80's. Additionally, it functioned as a response to the comparatively clean-cut look of commercial rock at the time, metal's de facto enemy.[33] Indeed, hair has remained a significant aesthetic expression in metal. The black/Nordic metal revival on the 2000's features a number of bands, including acts like Liturgy and Deafhaven, both of whom have members that maintain healthy locks. Later on, as dreadlocks became common in nu-metal they signified not only a rejection of the contemporary pop-sphere (N*SYNC, Backstreet Boys), but also nu-metal's cultural transgression and connection with black culture through hip-hop.

Sonic Coherence Across Subgenres

In terms of musical codings, each various subgenre of metal that spun off retained certain elements of the initial British and American waves of heavy metal.

[33] Chuck Klosterman, *Fargo Rock City*. (New York: Scriber, 2001).

Grindcore took the goriest and darkest aspects of metal and turned them into their own subculture, replete with bloodstained logos and lyrics entirely about various mutilations.[34] Glam (also known as lite) metal took some of the buoyant sonic traits of pop rock of the 70's and early 80's and sped it up and added distortion, fusing the soft, emasculated California surf-rock aesthetic and a louder metal lineage. Nordic Black Metal took the premise laid down by British heavy metal bands and expanded the cult, mythological, and Satanic elements spawning infamous bands like Burzum. Outside of these, there are prominent entries from Christian metal, doom metal, metalcore, prog metal, stoner metal, and alternative metal among others, each of which has further subgenres. It is perhaps helpful to imagine a taxonomy that encompasses all of metal's subgenres: across these subgenres, there are various stylistic differences, but the similarities often far outweigh those differences and create an aesthetic family replete with infinite differences and infinite similarities.

Perhaps at the far end of the spectrum is Christian metal, which lyrically is the most at odds with much of the rest of metal. Often however, even Christian metal is not overtly religious in lyrical content, and maintains many of the same compositional tropes of other metal subgenres.[35] 1980's glam/heavy metal act Stryper was a well-known early Christian Metal act, achieving platinum status for their third album *To Hell with the Devil*, in so cementing Christian Metal as a viable subgenre. As seen with this album title, and later ones such as *Murder by Pride*, *No More Hell to Pay*, and *Fallen*,

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[34] Overell, *Affective Insensities.*

[35] Jonathan. H. Ebel, "Jesus Freak and the Junkyard Prophet: The School Assembly as Evangelical Revival," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, *77* (2009), 16–54.

Stryper used tropes of metal nomenclature and applied them to their own work. Besides not being immediately evident from any of those album titles that Stryper is devoutly Christian, their look was traditionally glam and played well with audiences regardless of their faith.

Whether glam, death, Christian, or black metal, speed and volume, as well as a large amount of distortion and various other effects applied to the guitars are essential components of metal DNA. When one of these factors is altered, others remain and often in an advanced state – akin to losing one sense and the others getting better, where neural reorganization reverts unused brain capacity to enhance the remaining senses. Doom metal, typically far slower than many other forms of metal, is some of loudest metal around. Loudness (actual volume), while a facet of equipment and technical ability, can be surprisingly malleable tool in determining how dynamics are used to denote various passages and changes in compositions. In nu-metal, often the speed of conventional metal was parlayed into the use of a DJ who would "scratch" behind the rest of the band, using an element of hip-hop to reference high picking speed on a guitar. The hybridization that defined nu-metal was not excluded from being implicated in metal tradition, and across nu-metal it is easy to observe metal's influence.

The Role of Metal In Society (1972-1990)

In his book *Sells Like Teen Spirit: Music, Youth Culture, and Social Crisis*, Ryan Moore attributes the birth of heavy metal to de-industrialization and the rise of

counterculture in Britain throughout the late 1970's.[36] With deindustrialization came a subsequent loss of mechanized jobs in the economy, and widespread joblessness, and low wage earning middle class of British men, accustomed to being a provider ("breadwinner") for their family. In the midst of this transition to a service-based economy, there was the perception that skilled labor demanded "self-presentation, emotional labor, and customer service… historically defined as 'women's work'."[37] Coupled with fiercely neo-liberal policy making through Thatcherism and Conservative rule in Britain at the time, this bred a deep seed of mistrust for authority among Britain's youth. The state was seen as merely interested in economic policy, not the daily struggles of citizens, and to many British youth this gave reason to move outside of the traditional working-class existence of many Brits.

From this mistrust and discontentedness arose the originators of heavy metal. Ozzy Osbourne was the child of a toolmaker and a factory worker, the fourth of six children. Out of this situation Osbourne managed to start one of the single most influential, original, and famous bands in the history of western music after dropping out of school at 15 to work construction jobs.[38] Ozzy is but one example that can be found throughout metal, of people who did not see a traditional education or workforce path ahead of them, and instead preferred the ideals that metal presented. Making metal music stood as a direct refutation of societal norms – it was loud, it was ugly, and the lyrical content aligned it as an uncouth art. Metal was ostensibly in this way a youth

[36] Moore, *Sells Like Teen Spirit*; Weinstein, *Heavy Metal.*
[37] Weinstein, *Heavy Metal.* 80.
[38] Ozzy Osbourne, *I Am Ozzy*, (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2009), 3-5.

movement that ran counter to the larger youth movement of the 60's. Much in the way that the 60's youth movement sounded like mainstream rock of the time (Woodstock being a key cultural/musical example) in several ways, the 70's and 80's bore vast swaths of people that metal appealed to far more. A large reason for this was the bleakly modern conditions that early metal musicians and fans came out of, with conditions that profoundly shaped what metal looked and sounded like. By and large, theirs was restlessness with suburban and exurban spaces in Britain that in no way mirrored what the idealist images of rock and rock fans presented. This would be echoed later by nu-metal, and the architecture of wasteland suburbia that was seen throughout the United States.

In the 1970's Birmingham (Black Sabbath's city of origin) was losing its status as England's manufacturing capital in a Conservative-led effort to divert jobs to other regions in Britain and the UK. In turn, Birmingham saw some of the largest unemployment rates and job losses in the UK, and large numbers of residents struggled to get by. The state was seen as a driving force behind job loss and despair in Birmingham, and many of the aesthetic tenets of metal were seen as a direct response to this. Laura Weibe Taylor, in her piece "Images of Human-Wrought Despair and Destruction: Social Critique in British Apocalyptic and Dystopian Metal", pushes the view that much of early heavy metal's fascination with the occult, science fiction, and dystopia was a manner of critiquing the state. The earliest British metal bands "came from the white, male industrial working class of Birmingham, England)" displaying "militant grimness" in every dimension of their music, be it logos, staging, lyrics, or

album art.[39] Looking at Black Sabbath's second album, *Paranoid* has distinctively dystopic album art, and the early Led Zeppelin covers depict varying and vaguely disturbing scenes. The cover to *Houses of the Holy* (1973) shows faceless, female figures crawling up a terraced monolith to no certain destination.

From left to right: *Houses of the Holy (1973); Led Zeppelin (1969); Paranoid (1970)*

This 'grimness' was an effort to confront the social malaise and spatial wasteland they grew up in. Weinstein, speaking on the origins of metal, points out that Black Sabbath's name was sourced from a horror film, as a "corrective to the 'peace and love' credo that permeated the youth culture" of the late 1960's and early 1970's.[40] It is also fittingly metal to consider the Sabbath, a day of worship, as being "black" and hence aesthetically referential of Satanism. Following this line of thinking, it makes sense that metal sounded chaotic, and purposefully rough-hewn. The opening track on *Paranoid* is

[39] L. W. Taylor, "Images of human-wrought despair and destruction: Social critique in British apocalyptic and dystopian metal." In *Heavy Metal Music in Britain,* ed. Gerd Bayer, (Farnham, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2009) 90-110.
[40] Weinstein, *Heavy Metal,* 35.

a nearly 8 minute middle finger to everything: the Vietnam War, pop rock of the time, and the British state as a whole, among other targets. It is immensely difficult to understand how "War Pigs/Luke's Wall" would have sounded to people hearing it for the first time, but even today it is a complete onslaught of sound that even post-My Bloody Valentine bands don't often compete with. It is not hyper-well composed either – the technical proficiency pales in comparison to the sheer magnitude of what noise is being made.

When looking at this period of metal, understanding the practice of transgression in cultural spaces is important. In his work on censorship across all popular music, Keith Kahn-Harris discusses metal, specifically death metal, and how brutal themes throughout function in relation to the creation and reception of metal. The salient point as it relates to the role of metal in society comes when he discusses transgression. Metal, which lyrically, aesthetically, and noisily still transgresses beyond what is considered mainstream acceptable, was even more the object of consternation in its formative days. The cultural and social establishment's (culture critics like Rolling Stone's Nick Tosches) response to metal only encouraged metal fans to be proud of what they so passionately related to. Tosches deigned to review Black Sabbath's *Paranoid* without mentioning the name of the band, or a single song on the album. Kahn-Harris relates that transgression "allows people to escape power and authority, if only for a time."[41] This is an annunciation of early metal's rejection of the state as an enterprise built for some but not all. It also falls in line with the dichotomy between

[41] Keith Kahn-Harris "Death Metal and the Limits of Musical Expression" in *Policing Pop* ed. Martin Cloonan et al. (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2003), 85.

metal as music of the people, and the widespread critical distaste in the first two decades of its existence. It'll be seen that transgression is a key part of nu-metal, as it was an affront to hip-hop and metal as well as existing as a youthful cultural zeitgeist that abhorred the modern miasma of the 1990's that had its locus in suburban mall culture.

Nu-metal's sonic transgression was multifaceted and will be further explored later, but it is important to recognize that where people expected the heavier sound of down tuned metal, Limp Bizkit and contemporaries added a DJ, functioning as an affront to the strict guitar-orthodoxy of metal. On top of this, the succinct and often rhyme based vocal delivery of Jonathan Davis (Korn) and Fred Durst (Limp Bizkit) drew associations with the more sing-song hip-hop of the early 1990's. Rage Against The Machine's Zack de la Rocha directly rapped over the heavy tones of bassist Tim Commerford and the pioneering metal-turned-laser guitar tone of Tom Morello. On their 1993 single "Bombtrack", Morello sends out squalls of riffs while de la Rocha spits verses about inequality: "Landlords and power whores/ On my people they took turns/ Dispute the suits I ignite/ And then watch 'em burn."[42] This combination was unprecedented, even when considering the Beastie Boys and certain Red Hot Chili Peppers songs that came out prior to this.

Metal was the angry, fun, and much louder child sonically borne out of the first 15 years of rock music. However, heavy metal also initially existed in a liminal space that was not overly rock-influenced; the early Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden records,

[42] Morello, Tom. "Bombtrack", *Rage Against the Machine*. Epic Records, B00138KCC4.

especially 1970's *Paranoid* and 1980's *Iron Maiden*, have little to do with the past decade of rock before them, perhaps borrowing slightly from The Who and Yes, but only in the least strict sense. This gave metal a huge cultural push, as it was seen as ontologically *different* from other guitar-based music and it differentiated itself as much as possible. Metal found its difference in its relentless dedication to unchanging magnitude – it refused to bend to pop sensibilities of how respectable music should be made. It turned into a commercially successful genre because of this relentlessness, and its refusal to be easily digested. Into the 1980's, when metal subgenres began rapidly developing, metal fans across the board saw their favorite acts as profound statements of acceptance and insight to their daily lives.[43] The massive explosion of metal into the mainstream was carried by the buying power of fans who demanded to hear their favorite records on the radio, right next to more mainstream popular[44] acts at the time, like Hall and Oates, REO Speedwagon, The Steve Miller Band, among others. However, understanding this fan base is essential to understanding metal's role in society in the US, and is essential for laying the groundwork from which nu-metal would find its massive niche.

Much of the scholarly work on metal has come in the form of ethnographic survey of metal fans, whether autobiographic or not. This is far less common when looking at other genres or styles; the work on hip-hop, rock, jazz, and blues more often

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[43] Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 10-15; 95-143; Chuck Klosterman refers to this phenomenon as one of the "redneck intellectual" a truly brilliant term that serves to mean someone who thinks in critical terms in a place (geographically and culturally) where "critical thinking is almost impossible".

[44] Per the Billboard Top 100 chart.

focuses on musical theory or performer-based interpretation of a large body of work.[45] One result of this difference is that metal, perhaps more so than any other genre, is critically filtered through the institution of metal fandom. Across the texts surveyed in the writing of this thesis, there have been none so far that do not engage the passionate fan experience of metal. This means that metal (and eventually nu-metal) must be critically approached through both aesthetic and societal tenets to be fully understood.

In an effort to simplify a wide array of cultural factors, this survey will look to focus on three primary tenets of study. The first of these deals with the sound of nu-metal, namely what does it sound like, who originated this sound, and what does this sound tell us about the ideals the music is promoting, to the extent that it can. Secondly, a survey of socio-cultural "scene" around nu-metal – namely who was it being sold to, and why? And finally, what do subgenres, or what Mark Slobin calls "micromusics" allow us to understand about a greater system that surrounds cultural production in the United States? Using these frameworks to progress will ultimately allow a cohesive understanding of both how nu-metal became popular and what effect on American society it had.

[45] See: *Lipstick Traces* by Greil Marcus for rock, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop* by Jeff Chang for hip-hop.

Chapter 3 – Bulls On Parade

In this chapter, the bare-bones aesthetics of nu-metal will be examined, ranging from what nu-metal sounds like to what nu-metal looks like, and how those particular things manifest. Nu-metal was, in many ways, an aesthetic genre that was borne out of several simultaneous moments in the chronological progression of America as well as that of metal and hip-hop as larger genres.

Rap-Rock and Nu-Metal

Before there was nu-metal there was rap-rock, a hybridization that took the lyrical style and delivery of hip-hop and sonically surrounded it with traditional rock instrumentation. The Beastie Boys had been making sonic inroads into a combination between rock and rap since the mid-1980's, and was distinctly hip-hop, but made by three white kids with guitars used for sampling purposes. Their sound was rap-rock, which is different from that of nu-metal, as rock is different from metal. Along with the Beastie Boys, the Red Hot Chili Peppers were early champions of a rap-rock sound, with Anthony Kiedis' distinctive song/rap vocal performance being surrounded by funk and rock instrumentation. This was especially apparent on *Blood Sugar Sex Magik*, where songs like "Suck My Kiss", and "Give It Away", showcased Kiedis' pseudo-rapping over loud, active instrumentation. Nu-metal capitalized on all of this – the heavy bass chords of funk, the tight snares of hip-hop and funk-rock, and the lyricism that combined rapping and singing. This hybridization became increasingly appealing to white audiences. In the words of SPIN writer Charles Aaron: "Ever since Run-D.M.C. matched

screeching guitars with minimal drum-machine beats and turntable scratching (circa "Rock Box," 1984), hip-hop has sounded like the rebellious truth for increasing numbers of white youth."[46]

Seminal acts in nu-metal (outside of Korn) include: Limp Bizkit, Drowning Pool, Deftones, System of a Down, Incubus, 311, Kid Rock, Slipknot, Linkin Park, Mudvayne, Puddle of Mudd, Saliva, Crazy Town, Sugar Ray, Godsmack, SEVENDUST, Rage Against the Machine, Orgy, and Disturbed. Other bands warranted the nu-metal genre tag at various points, but the aforementioned acts were the most successful, and hence commercially influential, by traditional sales numbers. To put their successes in perspective, it helps to look at their sales numbers and Billboard 200 chart rankings, both traditional metrics for understanding mainstream popularity. Korn, Limp Bizkit, Deftones, and Rage Against the Machine will be the primary focus of this thesis from here on our, as they were the most well known and most influential.

Korn's third album *Follow The Leader* hit number 1 on the Billboard 200[47] the week of September 5th, 1998, beating out albums from Shania Twain, NSYNC, Snoop Dogg, and the Beastie Boys. *Follow The Leader* went platinum[48] 5 weeks after its initial release, and went 5x platinum within 3 years. The following year, Limp Bizkit's second album *Significant Other* bested Backstreet Boys' *Millennium* for number 1 on the billboard 200, after selling 643,874 copies in its first week. *Significant Other* went platinum in under 2 months, and in just over two years was 7x platinum. Limp Bizkit's

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[46] Charles Aaron, "What the White Boy Means When He Says Yo", *SPIN Magazine*, November, 1998.
[47] Chart numbers courtesy of billboard.com.
[48] Sales and award statistics courtesy of riaa.com

next record, the peculiarly named *Chocolate Starfish and the Hot Dog Flavored Water* sold over 1 million copies in its first week.

The highest echelons of nu-metal bands were capable of moving immense amounts of records, and beat out more critically accepted, mainstream acts like NSYNC and Backstreet Boys for sales and popularity in short windows. However, Korn and Limp Bizkit's notoriety did not translate into the larger swaths of the American buying public. *Millennium,* the Backstreet Boys album that Limp Bizkit beat out for the Billboard number one spot, eventually went 13x platinum in the same two year span that *Significant Other* sold just half that number of copies. Linkin Park was one of the few nu-metal bands able to reach comparably vast populations, with their first significant true nu-metal album *Hybrid Theory* selling 10 million copies. Bands like Godsmack (8x), Slipknot (5x), Drowning Pool (1x), Deftones (3x), and Orgy (1x) all went platinum in the heyday[49] of nu-metal, and it was common to see these bands charting on the Billboard 200.

The Hills Are Alive With Drop D Bass

In 1991, Anthrax asked Public Enemy if the two could remake Public Enemy's hit from 3 years prior, "Bring The Noise." Public Enemy agreed to the remix and the track became the first widely popular crossover hit. The sound was a collision between two genres at distinct points in their existence. Metal was in the process of evolving into a style of music, as it had been around for just over 20 years at this point; in the same

[49] Corresponding to 1994-2004, roughly.

time hip-hop was just being born, with the first generation of rappers beginning to reach mainstream popularity and success after spending the 1980's in relative obscurity.[50] Hip-hop was becoming hi-fi and more produced, Wu-Tang Clan's influential album *36 Chambers* came out in 1993 and introduced a slicker sheen to popular hip-hop. At the same time, metal was exiting the glam era and bands like Anthrax and Poison were looking to stay commercially relevant. Rage Against the Machine, a group of Harvard-educated kids from Southern California who made hip-hop influenced metal that was deeply political and increasingly popular, neatly highlighted this competing trajectory.

Jonathan Pieslak describes nu-metal as "characterized by aggressive, rap-influenced, angst-ridden, and pitched yelling vocals, hip-hop style beats or drum samples, and heavily distorted, detuned guitars playing largely syncopated, riff-based music with a distinct absence of solos and overt displays of instrumental virtuosity."[51] However, as nu-metal was a true hybrid between hip-hop and metal, and as such technical innovation and unique music making techniques *were* important to its development.

Rage Against the Machine's guitarist Tom Morello was a technical pioneer, his use of effects pedals and signal splitting creating new tones that were previously unheard, and referenced those being digitally created for hip-hop. A good example of this comes on the song "Know Your Enemy", where Morello writes a iconic riff taken straight out of Black Sabbath's playbook, and then throws laser-y reverb and echo over it beginning around the 3:20 mark. Similarly, Rage bassist Tim Commerford used

[50] Jeff Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop,* (New York: Picador, 2005).
[51] Pieslak, "Korn's 'Hey Daddy'", 37.

innovative effects constructions to add an element of more beat-like bass performance than had ever been heard in metal. It was a truly an evolution past Red Hot Chili Peppers' bassist Flea's impressive funk/rock hybrid style of playing, and it elevated Rage Against the Machine into a new genre (nu-metal). Elements like the "bass drop", a term later popularized in electronic music like EDM can initially be heard in Commerford's compositions.[52] At the 0:39 second mark in the RATM track "Killing In The Name", the bass drops out behind a wall of Morello's guitar and two seconds later (0:41) reappears with unbelievable volume and depth, shooting the band into a heavy first verse. This is a prime example of a bass drop, and it appears several other places throughout the Rage discography. A year later, on Korn's first and self-titled album, the song "Blind" features a similar oomph to the bass's delivery.

Another significant technical development in nu-metal came from Limp Bizkit's taking on a DJ as a full time touring member. DJ Lethal joined the band in 1997 after his prior group House of Pain opened for Limp Bizkit on a large tour.[53] The incorporation of turntablism to Wes Borland's phenomenally metal guitar playing was yet another element of hybridization that first appeared in nu-metal. Limp Bizkit's "Break Stuff" highlights the combination of chuggy guitar with a DJ, with DJ Lethal both effecting the guitar and certain words of Durst's delivery. The video features DJ Lethal prominently. This was widely incorporated, most notably with Linkin Park's DJ Mike Shinoda, who went on to additionally perform under the name Fort Minor, perhaps the first true post-

[52] EDM (Electronic Dance Music) and nu-metal share a large amount of characteristics, and EDM pioneer Sonny Moore (Skrillex) was in a semi-popular nu-metal band before he starting making festival dance music.
[53] Colin Devenish, *Limp Bizkit*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

nu-metal act. Looking at Limp Bizkit specifically, the use of turntablism and the "scratching effect", which has roots in the dub movement that came out of Jamaica in the late 1970's.[54]

Meaning Behind The Noise

The trajectory established by nu-metal aligned with larger cultural discourses that spanned across much of popular culture in the United States. It is possible to see nu-metal as an agent in the increase in accessibility of popular culture that was driven by the rise of Internet access. No longer was an audience limited to who was "supposed" to be engaging with art and culture – but instead, whoever had a dial-up modem could participate. Ryan Moore elaborates on this, saying that the rise of the digital age of cultural cooperation was something predicted by Benjamin saying that: "digital technologies will continue to make it easier to produce, reproduce, and circulate music along with other forms of media in the making of subcultures that allow people to participate, create, and communicate."[55] What was subculture became part of hegemonic culture, and started to look like the saturated mediation we see today. Mark Slobin refers to this onset of hegemony as "superculture". By using Slobin's superculture, we can evaluate the presence of a larger cultural narrative that was coming about from the Internet's move into homes by simplifying the diverse set of scenarios that led to such. Commenting on superculture, Slobin helpfully refers to it as "an umbrellalike, overarching structure that could be present anywhere in the system –

[54] Chang, *Can't Stop Won't Stop.*
[55] Moore, *Sells Like Teen Spirit,* 217.

ideology or practice, concept or performance . . . the usual, the accepted, the statistically lopsided, the commercially successful, the statutory, the regulated, the most visible: these all belong to the superculture."[56] Accepted as such, superculture is the most useful term to categorize the increasing 'hegemony of culture' that the Internet inspired in the late 1990's and early 2000's, of which nu-metal was both a promoting agent and a product.

As a function of superculture, the popular rise of hip-hop is tied with that of nu-metal. In the mid-1990's hip-hop was becoming a popular music of the masses, both for black and white audiences, and hybridization reflected a desire on the part of white audiences to claim a corner of hip-hop for themselves. Eminem, and the Beastie Boys before him, made hip-hop widely accessible to white audiences, and traditionally white metal had been commercially successful for decades prior. Fusing the two into nu-metal was a commercially practical move for big labels interested in maintaining and furthering their profits. 1999 saw the highest physical record sales in history, with over 1.08 billion copies shipped that year.[57] Of several noteworthy factors, the sales of nu-metal and genre bending albums were a significant addition to this number. Korn's 1999 album *Issues* sold 3 million copies, and Limp Bizkit's *Significant Other* selling 5 million copies the same year.

[56] Mark Slobin, *Subcultural Sounds*. (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 29.
[57] Data courtesy of the RIAA.

Lyrical Content

Another important and noteworthy tenet of nu-metal is the lyrical content of the predominant acts. Although often delivered in a manner influenced by hip-hop, much of the actual lyrical content is distinctly representative of who was making the music, and their background. Similar to metal, nu-metal presents itself lyrically as a hyper-masculine zone, with songs like Deftones' "Teenager", and Limp Bizkit's "Nookie", both approaching sexuality from a distinctly patriarchal and heteronormative stance. However, nu-metal moved away from the party and glamour of 1980's metal to dark, violent, and often introspective lyrical content. Working in tandem with the historical fan base metal held (young white males) the combination of the masculine ontology of metal created a monetary reward system for artists who stuck to traditionally masculine content matter.

It is impossible to distill all of nu-metal lyrics into a simple description, but Rafalovich's 2006 survey of the lyrics of a number of 1990's-early 2000's metal bands does an excellent job coalescing a large amount of lyrical data into a hypothesis. Nu-metal found its niche appealing to self-centered masculinity alongside an often-violent and self-destructive outlook. In this tradition it plays off traditional tropes of horror in metal, but internalizes them. For example, Korn's 1994 song "Shoots and Ladders" turns a classic nursery into a tale of personal horror:

"Ring around the rosies/ Pocket full of posies/ Ashes, ashes, we all fall down/ Ring around the rosies/ Pocket full of posies/ Ashes, ashes, we all fall down/ Nursery rhymes

are said, verses in my head/ Into my childhood they're spoon fed/ Hidden violence revealed/ darkness that seems real/ Look at the pages that cause all this evil."[58]

Jonathan Davis uses a nursery rhyme to position himself as a childlike entity, revealing the vulnerability of his masculinity, before adding an element of horror "hidden violence revealed/ darkness that seems real".

Masculinity does present in more concrete forms throughout nu-metal, often aided by visual imagery. Saliva's "Click Click Boom", in which the lyrics are about a similar quest to understand emasculation ("why have I clouded up my mind/why's my mother always right/ and will I make it to the end?/ or will I crawl away and die?[59]) is paired with a video in which moshing is equated with sexual virility and prowess. The video shows a man at an outdoor Saliva show feeling physically insignificant, perhaps due to his lack of tattoos or beefy physique. To remedy this, he heads "into the pit", emerging after having taken a beating and immediately proceeds to kiss what is clearly supposed to be a previously unattainable woman: blonde, full chested, and barely clothed. An obvious iteration of male fantasy, Saliva play into a culture of making music that represents the male id. Rage Against the Machine and System of a Down are exceptions, both bands focusing on politics in lieu of specific gender dynamics. Later in their discography System of a Down does foray into male insignificance on "Lonely Day", but even so it's a rare occurrence.

Adam Rafalovich, in his piece "Broken and Becoming God-Sized: Contemporary

[58] Jonathan Davis "Shoots and Ladders", Immortal/Epic Records, B004PWXIKI
[59] Josey Scott "Click Click Boom", Island Records, B000VWQVBY

Metal Music and Masculine Individualism" contends that nu-metal lyrics were a break from the overtly womanizing metal of the 1980's, where bands like Ratt, Poison, and Twisted Sister would sing almost exclusively about "the pursuit of women, the acquisition of sex, partying into all hours of the night, and so on."[60] His assertion is that nu-metal reflected a larger move in masculinity towards looking inwards, and as such "the formula that mandated the objectification of women and self-indulgence yielded to introspection, the expression of emotional pain, and a limitless exploration of violent fantasy."[61] A key tenet of this argument, and one that is fundamentally important to this study is the shift from the pronoun "she" being the target of violence, to the more nebulous and widely applicable "you". Rafalovich's argument pivots on this assertion that "you" allowed for young males to identify with the desire to inflict domination upon a large range of targets, no longer just women.

To understand the appeal of this kind of lyrical content, and why it is profoundly important in situating nu-metal, it is helpful to use the critical framework set up by Simon Frith. In his essay "Music and Identity" Frith argues that specific music's aesthetic is the signifier for creators and the consuming audience. Instead of looking at who appreciates musics, his framework looks at "how it [music] creates and constructs an experience . . . by *taking on* both a subjective and collective identity."[62] As such, nu-metal was a reflection of its fan base, and what that group of people wanted to hear.

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[60] Adam Rafalovich, "Broken and Becoming God-Sized: Contemporary Metal Music and Masculine Individualism", *Symbolic Interaction* 29 (2006), 22.
[61] ibid.
[62] Simon Frith, "Music and Identity" in *Questions of Cultural Identity* ed. Stuart Hall et al. (New York: SAGE Publications, 1996), 109.

The reflections of self that nu-metal lyrics often present were then manifestations of the self that Frith (via Marx) presents as "an imagined self . . . imagined as a particular organization of social, physical, and material forces."[63]

This discourse illuminates a key tenet of understanding nu-metal's popularity: by engaging with hyper masculine and mostly depoliticized lyrics, nu-metal artists were able to be commercially successful, especially in suburban America where emasculation and self-focus is the social architecture. The embodied values that Rafalovich points out -- "masculine psychodrama" -- acquaint perfectly with this directive of Frith's; Rafalovich points out the "implied social relationship between the metal artist who vocalizes this narrative and the audience who expects certain emotional and circumstantial admissions", perfectly encapsulating the relationship between nu-metal and its fan base. It is important to understand why this is the relationship that was fostered, and how it functioned in relation to the vast suburban populace that was the primary audience.

[63] ibid. p. 110.

Chapter 4: Freak On A Leash

As part of their day-to-day existence, audiences were seeing themselves embodied in the messages of nu-metal -- Frith's "subjective and collective identity". The music that was speaking to commercial participants in the genre reflected their socio-economic and geographic situation by and large. Nu-metal albums in the late 1990's were being marketed heavily, and that marketing reached a largely suburban, young white male audience. This was the demographic group for whom Korn and Limp Bizkit resonated most. Rubin, West, and Mitchell, in their piece: "Differences in Aggression, Attitudes toward Women, and Distrust as Reflected in Popular Music Preferences" give a good overview of genre's effect on fandom – who listens to what. Their study looks at what is affecting in music, and how those factors differ genre to genre. Aggression, low-self esteem, and depression can all manifest in a listener's preferences.[64] This study primarily evaluates metal and hip-hop, and determines a positive correlation between those genres and a lower self esteem fan base.[65] Rafalovich comes to a similar conclusion through less quantitative measures, but corroborates Rubin, West, and Mitchell's theorem with critical theory, citing Foucault's fitting assertion that "Western

[64] This is obvious to anyone who is alive – ones listen to music that reflects their state of being, but there is now data that proves this to be the case.

[65] Alan M. Rubin , Daniel V. West & Wendy S. Mitchell, "Differences in Aggression, Attitudes Toward Women, and Distrust as Reflected in Popular Music Preferences", *Media Psychology* (3) 2001: 25-42.

man has become a confessing animal."[66] As such, nu-metal fandom was the space for confession of distaste for one's current situation, and offered an escape. Jonathan Davis' tales of emasculated ennui (on "Falling Away From Me"), abuse (on "Faget"), low self esteem (on "Blind") were intimately relatable to an audience that saw themselves in Davis' lyrics. The driving force behind this relatability was nu-metal's paired aggressive (and appealingly simple) compositions with lyrics that reflected a uniquely non-urban miasma.

This aforementioned "suburban miasma" is one that comes up across multiple narratives of the late 20th century and early 21st century. Across multiple mediums, authors took to the suburbs to attempt a current explanation of American Culture, the same way that Rod Serling floated around the country in the late 1950's and early 1960's attempting to illuminate post-war America. In the late 1990's and early 2000's texts like Sofia Coppola's *The Virgin Suicides*, and Richard Kelly's *Donnie Darko*, subverted and commented on assumptions about "the perfect suburban life". It became increasingly common to see "suburban" be understood not merely an urban plan, but rather as a socio-spatial system that predicated a so-called life of luxury on a repression of emotion. By inducing an architectural landscape of conformity, aesthetic and emotional rebukes to such became necessary to craft a sense of individuality.

Donna Gaines' book *Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead End Kids* fleshes out this world, the same world in which Korn lyrics hit home with their audience. Her book focuses on northeastern suburbs and exurbs, specifically in Bergenfield, New Jersey and

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[66] Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* cf. Rafalovich, "Broken and Becoming God-Sized", p 30.

the socio-economic milieus that are common in ostensibly middle-class areas. Gaines' focuses on the term "burnout", and how the term reflects a classification unique to areas where there are no technical barriers to success, other than the overbearing weight of the suburban machine. The "suburban machine" is an assemblage of logistical, educational, spatial, and socioeconomic factors that lead to suburban miasma. It is the logistical branch of the suburban topology that illuminates the reasons behind the people and creative output the suburbs spit out.

This concept of the "suburban machine" is essential to understanding the appeal of nu-metal. Gaines focuses on the concept of the "burnout", which in her reasoning is a social stratum (much like jocks, or nerds) around which the "social order of the American high school" forms. In this system "teens are expected to do what they are told – make the grade, win the prize, play the game."[67] What Gaines is describing is the suburban machine, driven by the inflexible drive forcing students to do well and succeed by traditional metrics. American schools are woefully inept and fostering multiple learning environments, and burnouts are a direct result of this. The etymology of the word itself implies the stresses innate in being in high school in a relatively close-knit community; these are the students who burn out from the constant state of expectation that follows their every decision and find solace in unsanctioned extracurriculars, be it alcohol, drugs, music, or all three. Outside of institutional pressures, built environments do their part in fostering a sense of malaise. This is seen across Weinstein, Gaines, Berger, and Klosterman's work especially: the built environment's lackluster existence

[67] Donna Gaines, *Teenage Wasteland: Suburbia's Dead End Kids* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 1998.

being a vital ignition for sub-culture fandom and interest in rock and specifically metal. As early as the 1960's the suburbs were being critiqued as places devoid of cultural and physical meaning, and by the late 1990's this was only amplified. Writing in 1961, the urbanist Lewis Mumford described the suburbs as a: "multitude of uniform, unidentifiable houses, lined up inflexibly, at uniform distances, on uniform roads, in a treeless communal waste, inhabited by people of the same class, the same income, the same age group, witnessing the same television performances, eating the same tasteless pre-fabricated foods, from the same freezers, conforming in every outward and inward respect to a common mold [sic]."[68]

Mumford was speaking of the post-war suburbs, and the uniformity both expanded and crumbled as the next three decades passed. Everything became more commercialized, with box stores starting their unstoppable march through the middle landscape. Robert Bruegmann argues that the suburbs and sprawl hold weight as an entrenched cultural factor even though we: "live in the ugliest of all ages of the world, and that the worst part of this ugliness – the suburbs and exurbs – constitute the largest part of our urban system, [and] house a majority of the population."[69] While some of the architecture changed, it rarely manifested in anything more dignified than the squat rows introduced in Levittowns across the country. It is no wonder that out of this came what Gaines called the "teenage wasteland", an environs where going to the mall was the social activity, and buying the same "pre-fabricated" trinkets of suburban capitalism

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[68] Lewis Mumford. *The City in History: Its Origins, Its Transformations, and Its Prospects*. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc, 1961), 486.

[69] Robert Bruegmann, "Learning from Sprawl," in *Worlds Away: New Suburban Landscapes,* ed. Andrew Blauvelt. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2008).

was rote. Burnouts were simply responding to what the world gave them, which was the option of participation in the suburban machine or an attempt to defy it. Nu-metal was a way in which kids saw someone who sympathized with this plight, funneling outward blight into personal rage. In a 1998 interview with SPIN Magazine, Jonathan Davis (of Korn) takes Neil Strauss around his hometown of Bakersfield, California, and the interview ends with Strauss narrating their trip:

"And finally there's the mortuary, where Davis worked as a coroner's assistant and lived on-site, the overflow corpses part of his kitchen decor. After seeing victims of car crashes, suicides, and sexual abuse -- including people he had known or talked to the day before -- he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and has nightmares to this day, one of which is exorcised in the Follow the Leader song "Pretty," about a young incest victim. Exploring Bakersfield -- meeting Jonathan's parents, sister, step-siblings, and former bandmates, seeing the gas station that Head's father owns, watching the forty-and-over alcoholic pick-up-scene at local bars -- Korn begin to make more sense. Korn began long before anyone in Korn was born."[70]

Strauss illuminates what is obvious to an outside viewer, but harder for people (especially youth) to annunciate – that the deeply unpleasant spaces in this country spawn deeply unpleasant desires.

After reading Strauss' evaluation of Bakersfield, Rubin, West, and Mitchell's

[70] Jonathan Davis, interview by Neil Strauss, *SPIN Magazine*, November 1998.

research about the correlation between emotions and music are prescient. The particular sound of nu-metal -- aggressive, low, and loud -- is a key component of understanding the relationship that Strauss is implying by saying "Korn began long before anyone in Korn was born."[71] In saying this, Strauss is making a connection between the social and spatial ugly-ness of the suburbs and exurbs (here, Bakersfield) and the perceived *ugly-ness* of the music that Korn is making.

Sianne Ngai's writings on the aesthetics of ugly emotions, or negativity, give a window into understanding how affected teens in the suburbs find themselves drawn to Korn, Deftones or Limp Bizkit. Her afterword on *disgust* gives insight into the gory allure of nu-metal to suburbanites, but to her "disgust finds its object intolerable and demands its exclusion"[72] which, while useful for critical insight into nu-metal, offers little in terms of understanding its affective abilities. However, her discussion of *tone* uses Herman Melville's esoteric *The Confidence-Man* to understand the effect of affect on tonal capabilities in a work, and illustrates the innate connection that affect – like that situated by Deleuze, shows "affect's surprising ability to produce distance rather than immediacy."[73] Through this, it can be understood that affect allows an approach to understanding the tone of a work that "provocatively reveals an 'aesthetic attitude' at the heart of the *critical* mindset that makes ideological analysis possible;"[74] in this case, nu-metal. In *Social Critique* Bourdieu says:

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[71] ibid.
[72] Sienne Ngai. *Ugly Feelings.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press (2005).
[73] ibid, 83.
[74] ibid, 84.

"it must never be forgotten that the working-class 'aesthetic' is a dominated 'aesthetic' which is constantly obliged to define itself in terms of the dominant aesthetics. The members of the working class, who can neither ignore the high-art aesthetic, which denounces their own 'aesthetic', nor abandon their socially conditioned inclinations, but still less proclaim them and legitimate them, often experience their relationship to the aesthetic norms in a twofold and contradictory way."[75]

As such the 'dominated aesthetic' is one that centers on ugly-ness.

"Distance rather than immediacy" is essential in understanding the relationship that teens and young people, nu-metal's predominant fan base, had to the artists. Acts like Korn and Limp Bizkit were idolized, having escaped the delirium induced by that same suburban machine. The music they made was informed by a similar delirium however, and thus ugly-ness functions as a mode of understanding. The aesthetic tonality of nu-metal: the down tuned guitars, flabby bass tones, and emotively sing-rapped lyrics, all functioned as a metric of relatability between the artist who escaped from sub and exurban wastelands, and the fan who is still consumed by it. Affective tonality drives this relationship, with ugly music speaking to those in ugly situations.

Ngai's assertion that affect drives Deleuze's framework of "distance rather than immediacy", illustrates how nu-metal bridged the gap between artist and fan. Jonathan Davis working in a morgue is a visceral ugliness that gets translated through Deleuze's framework to a distant, aesthetic ugliness (musically and lyrically). This is affect at work,

[75] Bourdieu, *Social Critique*, 33.

creating a warped immediacy to the artist-fan relationship. The fan understands and sympathizes with the ugliness that Davis experienced by, although theirs is most likely of a fundamentally different origin, and thus an intense relationship is born. Kids who hated school could box that into an affectual container of anger, and see the same anger reflected back through the distance between Davis and themselves without there being any moment where Davis is singing about hating school. This aesthetic transformation from visceral ugliness to distant ugliness should be understood as perhaps the defining reason for nu-metal's popular success. The embrace of ugliness is the most significant part of what nu-metal was doing – finding massive commercial success while also presenting something common, obscene, violent, all together aesthetically *unpleasant* to a populace who could see those same aesthetic and ontological affects in the world around them. These affective factors that connect artist and fan are the same as those that connect fan to fan, and through this series of relationships form a sub-culture similar to those throughout metal.

Commodification of Misery

The sub-culture that formed out of nu-metal fandom in the late 1990's and into the early 2000's was heavily commercialized and centered on the economies of suburbia. Korn, Limp Bizkit, and Deftones were the primary agents involved in engaging suburban fan bases through clothing and exclusive music deals with big box stores. Stores like Zoomies and Hot Topic built recognition around the intersection of nu-metal and suburban culture, using the established cultural transgression of skateboarding as a

launching pad for various other forms of aesthetic rebellion. The typical fashion of nu-metal was an amalgam of skateboarding couture, traditional metal outfitting, and hip-hop clothing – it favored dark colors, gigantic fits, and transgressive bodily modifications (dreadlocks on white kids, lip piercings, and tattoos) as signifiers of affiliation. Each of these aspects were filtered through chain stores and distilled into their purest form.

JNCO jeans became de facto representations of nu-metal subculture, with their distinctive graffiti-esque pocket designs and sometimes 50-inch leg openings being the clearest annunciation of ugly-ness as an affective identity. Impractical for walking, sitting, moving, or putting on[76], JNCO used a bawdy and almost playful representation of vulgar aesthetic to briefly dominate fashion in a particular cultural sphere. Sales of JNCO jeans peaked in 1998 at $186.9 million before precipitously falling in the years to come.[77] They took the concept of the puffy-jacket and sagged jeans look that dominated hip-hop fashion in the early 1990's[78] and parroted it back to suburban kids for whom transgression needed have a cartoonish architecture for it to be understood.

Dreadlocks were another significant instance of nu-metal taking an aesthetic out of context and used it to define a new kind of affective transgression. Jonathan Davis[79] was perhaps the most visible artist with dreadlocks, but Korn's Brian Welch, Deftones' deceased bassist Chi Cheng, Terry Balsamo of Evanescence wore them proudly as well. They functioned partially as wishful homage to the hip-hop culture nu-metal was

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[76] Some JNCO jeans required two users to don on.
[77] Sales data from: http://articles.latimes.com/2000/oct/18/business/fi-38109
[78] see: Biggie Smalls, Jay-Z, Puff Daddy, Busta Rhymes, et. al.
[79] This is enough of an identifying factor for Korn that their upcoming 2016 summer tour with Rob Zombie has been named the "Return of the Dreads" tour.

culturally outside of, but also existed as a marker of commodified transgression. Dreadlocks were an image sold through images of the artists as being an aesthetic tenet of genre, but additionally applied in a context (the suburbs) in which they clearly juxtaposed the surrounding crew-cut confines. They were the simplest refusal of a societal norm: grooming.

Outside of fashion, nu-metal was deeply commodified for ticket sales and pricey live concerts. Again, Korn led the way. Their Family Values tour, launched in 1998, took several of the highest profile nu-metal and hip-hop acts on the road together across the country, playing smaller towns like Lowell, Massachusetts; Hampton, Virginia; and Kalamazoo, Michigan alongside the typical United States tour destinations. The initial tour featured Korn, Rammstein, Ice Cube, Incubus, Limp Bizkit, and Orgy, and in subsequent years acts like Linkin Park, Ja Rule, Staind, and Mobb Deep would join the tour. The tour grossed over $10 million in 1999 and averaged 10,000+ attendees per stop across the 27 dates.[80] The phenomenal success of the Family Values tour spurred on what would become one of the most infamous events in nu-metal lore: Woodstock ’99.

Organized by John Scher, the event took place in Rome, New York in late July of 1999. Korn, Limp Bizkit, Rage Against the Machine, and the Red Hot Chili Peppers all headlined the festival that saw 250,000 attendees grace its grounds over a three-day period. In a report for the Washington Post about the festival Alona Warofsky details the “reek of smoke, garbage, and human waste” that stemmed from “several

[80] Data from http://www.mtv.com/news/519634/family-values-with-limp-bizkit-outgrosses-last-years-tour/.

impromptu bonfires lit during the Red Hot Chili Peppers' set,"[81] which was followed by a melee between festival goers and police. Noteworthy music critic Rob Sheffield attended the festival on behalf of Rolling Stone, and detailed the grotesque scene he witnessed in his piece "Woodstock '99: Rage Against The Latrine", the title itself being a reference to lack of adequate plumbing on hand for the number of attendees. Sheffield's piece focuses on the amount of sexual assault and violence *he* witnessed; several other reports corroborate and verify instances of gang rape throughout the festival. At a particularly violent moment in his piece he describes the scene:

"The bulls on parade have picked up another girl, who shakes her head. The boys boo her. "Aw, come on," one yells. "This is your fifteen minutes, kid." This is sexual assault, and it's about power, not pleasure. Though the next girl willingly whips her bikini top open, she snaps it back up before everyone has had a chance to photograph her, which makes the boys very angry indeed. They push her onto the shoulders of a guy twice her size. A few hands reach up and unsnap her top, while other hands reach into her shorts. The big guy lowers her so everyone can grope her. The Peace Patrol finally arrives on the scene. They're here only to get the goons off the trailer – somebody might get hurt – but the mob quiets down."[82]

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[81] Warofsky, *Woodstock '99 Goes Up,* p. A1.
[82] Rob Sheffield, "Woodstock '99: Rage Against The Latrine", *Rolling Stone*, Sept 2, 1999. http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/woodstock-99-rage-against-the-latrine-19990902?page=2

The San Francisco Examiner famously dubbed Woodstock '99 as "The Day Music Died"[83] a sentiment that was echoed time and again afterwards when referring to the cultural impact of nu-metal. Fred Durst of Limp Bizkit was targeted as a specific instigator of violent behavior, as after asking attendees to rush the stage, he backed down when organizers made him take it back. In place of the request, he reportedly said "But I don't think you should mellow out. This is 1999 motherfuckers, stick those Birkenstocks up you ass!"[84]

Across every journalistic piece written about Woodstock '99 was an acknowledgement that the price gouging of attendees was a significant contributing factor when considering the mayhem. Tickets cost $150[85] plus fees, water bottles cost $4, and food was $10 or more. For a festival catering primarily to a youth audience, presumably spending their parent's money or money they made from part-time jobs, this was widely considered to be exorbitant. Indeed, this seems in line with much of the corporate culture of nu-metal, where rabid fans were exposed to a bare bones capitalism that insinuated that a specific amount of money could garner a transformative experience. As a subculture born out of ugly-ness it is of little surprise that Woodstock '99 bred such violence: physically, sexually, aesthetically, monetarily and territorially.

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[83] Jane Ganahl, "Woodstock '99: The day music died", *San Francisco Examiner*, July 28, 1999. http://www.sfgate.com/style/article/Woodstock-99-The-day-the-music-died-3073934.php

[84] ibid.

[85] In 1999 dollars, roughly 42% less than 2016 dollars, as $1 in 1999 = $1.42 now.

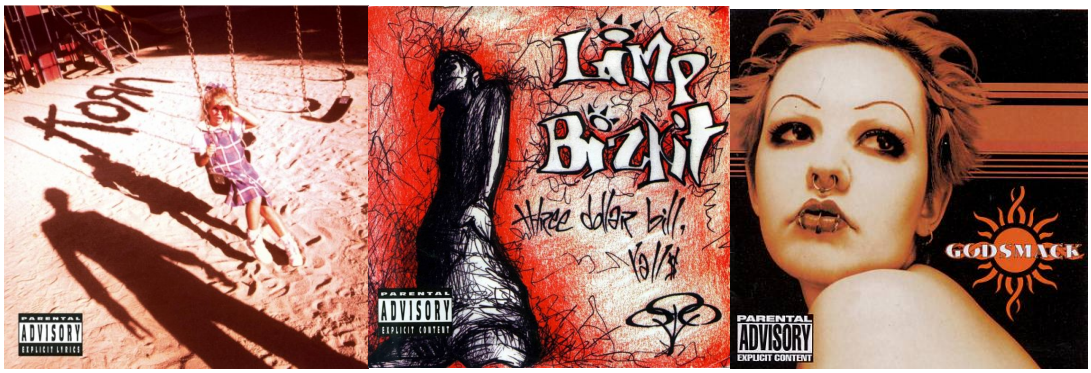
Chapter 5 – Change (In The House of Flies)

Mark Slobin's concept of micromusics attending to a greater "umbrella-like overarching structure" becomes clear when looking at nu-metal. Using this as a guiding principal, the subculture of nu-metal can be understood as a reflection of a specific and important time in the past 30 years of American cultural production. In a piece for SPIN, Charles Aaron goes about describing the impact that mainstream attention from white audiences had on hip-hop and black culture, and in doing so uses a framework of cultural hybridization. Aaron attempts to discover what cross-cultural acceptance of *part* of black culture had on the economically and socially powerful white populations in the United States.

As hip-hop culture reached white youth before it reached white elders, it became legislated through perceptions of impact rather than the impact itself; Tipper Gore's landmark creation of the Parents Music Resource Center (PMRC henceforth) was a response to "vulgarity and sexualization" that in turn politicized black art. Originally founded in 1985 to censor rock lyrics, the PMRC eventually latched on to *popular* music as their target. Writing about the founding of the PMRC and its impact on censorship Claude Chastagner points out that "while black music had been directed at the black market, no one had really objected; it was only when white youth began to be attracted that the attacks really began."[86] Nu-metal was an integral part of this censorship process, one that saw the infamous Parental Advisory sticker being on nearly every nu-

[86] Claude Chastagner, "The Parents' Music Resource Center: From Information to Censorship" *Popular Music* 18 (1999), 183.

metal album released. It is worth nothing that the sticker more likely than not directly contributed to the sales of nu-metal albums – it was another easy, and public way of non-conformity.



Prominent Parental Advisory stickers on nu-metal album covers. From left to right: *Korn* (1994, Korn); *Three Dollar Bill Yall* (1997, Limp Bizkit);

Nu-metal was vulgar, psychosexualized, and violent, but it was also a reflection of white kids being into black culture. In nu-metal fans rejecting the grunge and punk movements, they were embracing what Aaron refers to as a musical miscegenation. Aaron (writing in 1998) points out that:

"While many publications, including SPIN, have sincerely chronicled and bemoaned the so-called death of alternative rock as a relevant, creative genre (circa 1996, say), what actually faded with alt-rock is a belief in rebel style that exists independently of African-American culture. This was the secret legacy of punk rock

(indie rock and grunge) in America — it offered a handbook of cool for whites that basically ignored the existence of black people. What's happening now is that rock'n'roll is going back to its miscegenated roots. Like suit-and-tied black professionals donning kente cloth and attending the Million Man March, rock's white fans and performers are undergoing an intense re-darkening process."[87]

If this is taken as such, nu-metal was one of the most complete, early examples of a cultural desegregation that occurred in the last decade of the 20th century and is ongoing today. It is here that the untangling the knot of nu-metal becomes more complex; its possible that a music that was willfully self-involved and aesthetically unpleasant became an unconscious vehicle for a profound change in the cultural output of the United States. Beyond that alone, the subculture that drove this change was mired in a suburban middlescape that championed capitalism over creativity, and achievement over happiness. The "burnouts" of Gaines' *Teenage Wasteland* were the same kids for whom nu-metal resoundingly mattered and for whom fighting the censorship sent down from above was tantamount to a life or death struggle.
There is no absolute topology of the triangle between fan, artist, and the art itself, but even a rough understanding of each factor reveals a fundamental complexity in networks of cultural production. Korn means something vastly different to Jonathan Davis than it does to someone in Poughkeepsie, New York listening to Korn on their way to parochial school in the morning; however, they are both valid.. Deftones, Korn, Limp

[87] Aaron, "White Boy Says Yo", *Rolling Stone.*

Bizkit, and especially Rage Against the Machine *sound* like that journey to school in the morning for a generation of kids that were put to suburban pasture before they even had a chance to protest. Transgression – sonically, aesthetically – was good enough when the other option was encouraged conformity. Towards the end of the SPIN interview where Davis is guiding Neil Strauss around Bakersfield, a sentiment appears that encapsulates where nu-metal came from and what it means. Fittingly, Davis asks: "So, what did you think of Bakersfield?" To which Strauss responds: "It's a shitty place to live and a shitty place to visit".

"Now you understand," he [Davis] says triumphantly, "and you've only been here a few hours. Doesn't it make you want to start a band called Korn?

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Listening Appendix

Most of the songs in this thesis can be hear on the Spotify playlist found at the permanent link:

https://open.spotify.com/user/1212251242/playlist/1TvvJj0PqVoXHaXDtcxwSE

Otherwise, the albums below are considered helpful for understanding the content and argument made by this thesis.

Beastie Boys
Licensed To Ill 1986 (Def Jam Recordings)

Black Sabbath
Paranoid, 1970 (Vertigo Records)

Deftones
Around the Fur 1997 (Maverick)
White Pony 2000 (Rhino Entertainment)

Drowning Pool
Sinner 2001 (Wind-Up Records)

Eminem
The Slim Shady LP 1999 (Interscope/Aftermath)

Godsmack
Godsmack 1997 (Republic Records)

Iron Maiden
Iron Maiden 1980 (Harvest Records)

Korn
Korn 1994 (Epic Records)
Life is Peachy 1996 (Epic Records)
Follow The Leader 1998 (Epic Records)

Limp Bizkit
Three Dollar Bill, Y'all 1997 (Interscope Records)
Significant Other 1999 (Universal Victor, Inc.)

Linkin Park
Hybrid Theory 2000 (Warner Bros. Records)

Rage Against The Machine
Rage Against The Machine 1992 (Sony Entertainment)
Evil Empire 1996 (Epic Records)
Battle of Los Angeles 1999 (Epic Records)

Red Hot Chili Peppers
Blood Sugar Sex Magik 1991 (Warner Bros. Records)
Saliva
Every Six Seconds 2001 (Island Records)

Wu-Tang Clan
Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers) 1993 (Loud Records)