

“IT’S NOT A FASHION STATEMENT,  
IT’S A DEATH WISH”: SUBCULTURAL  
POWER DYNAMICS, NICHE-MEDIA  
KNOWLEDGE CONSTRUCTION, AND  
THE ‘EMO KID’ FOLK-DEVIL

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in the Department of Sociology  
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By

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the genesis of the derogative ‘emo kid’ representation and considers the latent functions it initially served in being applied to visible categories of adolescent subculturalists on the behalf of participants within the wider punk subculture. Pulling from the work of Stanley Cohen in arguing that the ‘emo kid’ representation be conceptualized as a subcultural ‘folk-devil’, this thesis argues for the applicability of a Bourdieuan theoretical framework in understanding the means in which subcultural ‘authenticity’ is not only distributed throughout ‘fields’ of subcultural participation, but within those spheres of communicative entertainment media in which subcultural knowledge is created, legitimized and disseminated. In offering a Foucaultian genealogy of the niche-mediated ‘emo’ pseudo-genre, and highlighting its correlation with concurrent movements perceived as facilitating the mainstream colonization of the punk subculture, this thesis argues that the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil was constructed and reified by virtue of an array of discursive measures – based largely in online, ‘micro-mediated’ forums - through which punk subculturalists vied to marginalize those ‘emo kids’ so perceived as threatening the exclusivity of the punk subculture and the long-established ‘symbolic economies’ contained therein. Finally, this thesis demonstrates the process through which this subcultural folk-devil was annexed into a wider socio-discourse concerning dangerous youth populations and, thus, came to be utilized in collusion with mass-mediated campaigns meant to perpetuate the political disempowerment of adolescent populations through the endorsement of ‘representational politics’.

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## **Dedication**

I wish to dedicate this work to my ever-expanding family – especially my Parents, Monica and Gerald, for their unconditional love and support, my brother Murray and my sister-in-law Melissa; my nephew Blake and my niece Meadow. Above all else, I dedicate this work to the memory of my Grandfather, Douglas Alfred Whenham, and the enduring strength of my Grandmother, Lily Joan Whenham – an exemplary human being in the context of her kindness and undying support. Were there more of her kind, humankind might not be doomed.

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## Chapter One: An Introduction

### 1.1: A Preamble: the ‘Emo Reports’ and the Inventory

In part, this thesis concerns itself with a relatively new manifestation of music and fashion-based youth subculture that has, to date, most notably come to garner recognition (and notoriety) as the emo culture. This emo culture, perceived as being constitutive of ‘emo kids’ and alternately regarded as the ‘emo movement’ in some cases, has ostensibly gained gradual popularity with largely Caucasian, middle-class North American adolescent men and women over the course of the past seven years. Like those manifestations of youth subculture with which it is most oft associated – most notably the punk and Goth subcultures - the ‘emo culture’ is most easily associable with a collective affinity for a certain bloc of contemporary ‘alternative’ musical styles and a curious sense of fashion that, in this case, appears to pull from a plethora of styles once deemed indicative of one’s affiliation with the punk, Goth, new wave, indie-rock, glam rock, and ‘hair metal’ subcultures. Unlike the punk and Goth subcultures, however, the ‘emo culture’ would not appear to be endowed with anything resembling the ideological dimensions that so imbued the former with a particular world-view that, to some degree, rendered their conventions and particularities of dress susceptible to ‘substantive’ interpretation. In so many words, then, the ‘emo culture’ can arguably be characterized as one that is largely based around aesthetics (in dress as well as musical taste).

While I wish not to contend that the emergence of a subcultural fashion that pulls its stylistic particularities from a multiplicity of (sometimes antagonistic and contradictory) sources does not potentially speak volumes on the (arguably) postmodern climate of contemporary youth (and North American) culture, I must admit, at the very onset of the argument to follow, that the ‘emo culture’ of which I have just spoken is neither the phenomenon – nor even the *subculture* – of my primary focus. Instead, this thesis concerns itself with the genesis, evolution and reinforcement of a derogatory *representation* of the ‘emo kids’ and their wider culture. It details the emergence of a pejorative stereotype whose authorship I largely trace back to the contemporary punk subculture and, more importantly, its largely invisible struggle for the power requisite in maintaining its independence from the wider ‘mainstream’ culture. It argues that the ‘emo kid’ representation – and, to be sure, it is this *representation* which has indelibly shaped the manner

in which the emo culture is perceived within the wider social milieu – was initially constructed to serve as a punk subcultural ‘folk-devil’; a highly sensationalistic (and stereotypical) representation meant to condemn the onset of certain practices within (and the migration of certain populations into) the subcultural field. For the time being, however, I wish to introduce those readers who might be largely unfamiliar with either the ‘emo kid’ or the ‘emo culture’ to our population of interest in the very same manner as an untold number of broadcast news audiences had the ‘emo culture’ introduced to them in early 2007.

On the evening of February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, Grand Forks’ WDAZ TV Evening News featured a report concerning the emergence of an unnerving trend of self-mutilation among select pockets of area youth. Armed with the expertise of Eddy County Sheriffs Department Deputy Brandon Maygra and the testimony of two duly informed high school students, journalist Lacey Crisp correlated the ostensible wave of embodied teenage depression with a recent youth movement spurred on by “a type of music [that] has warped into a lifestyle” and, in collusion with the evils inherent in unsupervised adolescent internet use, had finally come to constitute “a fashion turned deadly”. Deputy Maygra described the fashion as being “not what you’d say ‘gothic’, but close to it. There’s no boots, there’s no chains, stuff like that - but its all black hair, hair that covers half your face, that covers one eye...and the point of that is to only see the world in half view”. In reporting from ground zero, so to speak, Sophomore Tracey Weber described the problematic population as “people who are expressing their pain through their actions; whether it be cutting, writing lyrics, music...” before adding, “I don’t think we understand it, ‘cause we don’t have that pain. We don’t have those imbalances”. Central High School student Chelsey Wentz added that she knew “that some of them cut themselves, and that they like to wear tight clothes”.

And so it was that that population of young subculturalite which had come to be known as ‘Emos’, ‘Emo kids’, and ‘Emo scene kids’ throughout the threads of any number of music-based subcultural websites had effectively made their first network television appearance. The WDAZ report would, however, be neither their last nor most renowned. A Fox News Los Angeles ‘Undercover Report’ airing on the third of May gave investigative reporter Leila Strogoff license to deduce that, though anyone aged over twenty-five would most likely be rendered completely ignorant to the pervasiveness of the ‘Emo scene kid’ movement, “the music is embraced by millions of kids struggling with deep, intensely personal emotional issues”. ABC Utah’s Reed Cowen primed viewers for his report, airing on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of the same month, by warning parents

that “there are some dangerous elements to this culture psychologists say you need to know about - and, we want to warn you that some of what you are about to see is created by teens and may be just a little bit disturbing”. A CBS Investigative report, airing two months later on July 9<sup>th</sup>, carried a similar, albeit less condescending, disclaimer. Momentarily foregoing any measure of critique, we might briefly adopt the position of those to whom such reports were initially designed to cater: those parents, likely oblivious to the presence of the ‘emo culture’ and of the dire risks posed to those adolescents participating within it. We might consider each in turn.

*Shared musical taste:* Though the WDAZ report traces the genesis of the culture in relation to “a type of music” and does nothing more, the Fox, ABC, and CBS broadcasts pepper their pieces with video and sound clips from bands deduced to be flagship representatives of the Emo culture. Fox 11’s Strogoff, who traces the genre’s roots “from early punk rock to Goth to Emo: short for emotional hardcore”, describes the music as an “intense” genre which succeeds in “giving voice to raw teen angst” while a montage of video clips courtesy of such bands as Thursday, Underoath, As I Lay Dying, and My Chemical Romance (the only band singled out by name) disarmingly segue into one another. Though the ABC report offers little direct commentary on the music propelling the movement, My Chemical Romance serve as the soundtrack to a slideshow of images alternating between images of alleged ‘Emo kids’ and bands such as The Used and AFI<sup>1</sup> - the latter of whom soon later serve to soundtrack a fictionalized depiction of an adolescent engaging in self-mutilation. Rebecca Lindstrom’s CBS 47 report, without question, assigns those bands associated with the Emo genre - described to be releasing music “about pain, agony, and dying” - the most culpability in delegating who best is to be blamed for the practices inherent to Emo culture. An anonymous young woman admits that she believes that “its the music, too, that kind of brainwashes [Emo kids], that helps them do that” while the camera focuses on the scars criss-crossing her wrists.

*Shared trends in fashion:* While both Fox and ABC serve to substantiate Deputy Mayor’s account of the Emo culture’s affinity for black clothing and hair styles meant to obstruct half the face (be it through witness testimony or imagery), each assigns themselves the duty of delving deeper into the specificities of Emo style. While Strogoff comparatively restrains herself in noting that “girls wear huge buckles on their waists, double piercing in their lips, and band

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<sup>1</sup> Granted, it is unlikely that few save ardent music connoisseurs would be able to tell the difference between the alleged ‘emo kids’ and the band members themselves.

ragged in their pockets” while boys typically “wear their band shirts tight and pants even tighter [and wear] make-up from powder to eyeliner”, Cowen and Lindstrom eschew any such subtext. Cowen bluntly deduces that “gender-bending is also part of the Emo culture. Boys wear girl pants and make-up”; Lindstrom ups the ante in claiming that “Emo is often associated with gender-bending...and even drugs”.

*Emotional instability:* All three newscasts purport that Emo culture serves to attract teenagers vying for an outlet through which to vent what are differentially referred to as “teen angst”, “mental imbalances”, and “deep, intensely personal emotional issues”. One clip unearthed online and featured on ABC’s broadcast depicts an adolescent exuberantly asking, “what am I supposed to do with all these Emotions I have inside?”. Another features a monotone voice, in the spirit of a mid 1950s instructional video, which serves to claim that participants must “avoid happiness. Happiness is a carnival sin to Emo culture”. In demonstrating that “some [participants] take [their emotionality] to extremes”, the Fox piece counters the testimony of a seemingly balanced young woman who attributes the appeal to the music defining the culture to the fact that “everyone, at some time, wants to scream out” with a snippet of a web-log in which a seemingly *unbalanced* young woman clad in black morosely asks her audience to consider the fact that “birds are dying...birds are *dying*”. Lindstrom cautions that “most teens who call themselves Emo don’t feel like they belong - even if they have other Emo friends” before returning to her anonymous informant for confirmation: “because...we’re, like, kind of worthless together”.

*Tendencies toward self-harm:* Both WDAZ and ABC primarily concern themselves with the fact that Emo culture avidly promotes self-mutilation among its members. The central concern of the WDAZ piece is the fact that Emo culture entails a point system “where the more depressed you look, the more points you earn”. Crisp uncovers the fact that there is an online “Emo-scale” whereby participants “earn a point or two for wearing tight, worn sweaters; more points if you cry a lot, and a few more if you cut yourself. And you hit the jackpot if you commit suicide” - an act rendered all the simpler by the fact that “you can even buy cutting boards online that show you exactly how to cut your wrist”. ABC’s Cowen is also careful to note the “disturbing dynamic” lurking within “the deepest levels of the Emo lifestyle...points for pain”. The report cuts to an image of a youth, subsequently identified as fifteen year-old Ridge Tanner, before Cowen deduces that “advanced Emo kids cut themselves. *This* teen denies being an Emo, but his friends say he is one...and the proof is etched on his arms”. Though Crisp is quick to remind

concerned viewers that “there’s no prize for gaining all these points; it’s just bragging rights kids use on their friends and on their web-blogs”, Cowan subtly attributes the high suicide rate among Utah adolescents to the prevalence of Emo culture in referring to self-injury and suicide attempts as “Emo pitfalls”. A prologue to the ABC piece reveals that Ridge Tanner went missing several days prior to the broadcast of the piece in which he was so prominently featured. “His father is very worried about his son,” explains Cowan, “because he says he does exhibit some of the traits of Emo that are disturbing to psychologists and parents alike”.

*Risk of external hostilities:* Strogoff’s Fox News report renders itself unique in two distinct ways. First, it resolves to direct its focus less to the dangers that Emo scene kids pose to themselves than the dangers posed to them by other groups of youth subculturalites. The threat posed by the punk subculture is articulated by a young woman with day-glow pink hair - “we would all jump them over there, kick their ass ‘till they start to bleed to death” and seemingly accredited by a quick clip of a fervent mosh pit. A representative from the Goth subculture - who also serves as the co-creator of an online video series entitled “Goth Assault Squad” wherein ‘Emo’ kids are tracked down and ‘beaten’ in a slapstick manner meant to parody the reality television series Cops - is quoted as claiming that “Emo is kind of like a pansy version of the Goths, so in a way its almost our duty to give them a little bit of crap”. “Heavy Metal Rockers” also pose a threat, as evidenced by the fact that “The band Vesuvius, from Riverside, gained national attention for their anti-Emo festival called ‘Emocide’”. An assumed organizer of the event is quoted as saying, “If you are Emo, I wouldn’t show up”. Herb Moyer, creator of the website Emo Scene and of the impression that Emo culture is coming to constitute “a social movement, so to speak”, substantiates Strogoff’s claim that the ridicule other adolescents have long directed toward cultural participants “has even turned to rage [as cited by] calls for violent assault...and other efforts to target scene kids” in admitting that “kids have been just constantly harassed online...and it has turned into violence”.

The Fox report is also the one broadcast which does not explicitly profess to be targeting a specific audience. WDAZ, ABC, and CBS attribute their inspiration in exposing the darker recesses of Emo culture to a dire need to educate parents who might unwittingly be housing at-risk youth. Cowan’s report aggressively drives this theme home via the inclusion of footage in which “Moms Liz and Debbie”, both of whom have teenagers but aren’t at all familiar with the term, are urged to call their children. Upon receiving the inventory - “emotional, dramatic, they

cut themselves? What else did you say? Black clothes?” - Debbie becomes incensed; “Why didn’t I know about it before?”. When an oblivious parent admits that she was “thinking ‘Elmo’” when initially faced with Lindstrom’s question, a voice-over condescendingly asks “would Elmo sing *this?*” and transitioning to a clip of a From First To Last video promoting the album *Dear Diary, My Teen Angst Has A Body Count*.<sup>2</sup> The lyrics, lest they be misconstrued, run across the bottom portion of the screen in subtitle: “Your body will never be found. I’ll wear your skin as a suit”. All three reports inevitably recommend that parents intrude upon the lives of their children to varying degrees. Lindstrom recommends that parents “tell your kids what you saw on CBS 47 and ask them how they would define Emo. If they really seem into it, then maybe you should ask them more about their music” - a tactic perhaps best facilitated by visiting the affiliate’s website where, aside from other “helpful links”, parents can “also find a list of bands often associated with Emo”. Crisp’s WDAZ report would seem tailored toward suggesting that concerned parents should familiarize themselves with how their children spend their time on the Internet. Cowan’s piece urges parents to physically check their children for signs of self-mutilation, which kids who cut “often hide...under clothing or bracelets” while “[trying] not to react with fear, although that is the first reaction”.

## **1.2 In Keeping with Tradition: Media Problematization and Youth Subculture**

The manner through which ‘Emo culture’ came to find itself subject to mass media problematization was not unique: perceptively threatening manifestations of unorthodox youth subculture - most oft centred around shared affinities for a musical style and a correspondingly oppositional fashion - have traditionally been subjected to some degree of media stigmatization ever since the concept of the ‘teenager’ gained currency as a social category with post-world war II Western societies (Savage, 2007). Subcultural groups such as the Teddy Boys, Mods, and Rockers each gained attention (academic and otherwise) by virtue of the fact that they were taken to signal the onset of a nihilistic predisposition, born of idleness and boredom, that might corrupt all youth as if transmitted virally (Cohen, 2002). Other collectivities, such as the Punk and early Hell’s Angels subcultures, were granted condemnation by virtue of their endorsement

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<sup>2</sup> A title lifted from a line of dialogue from the 1986 film *Heathers*; itself arguably meant to parody problematic adolescent stereotypical representations.

of an ideological radicalism meant, in large part, to stand in opposition to the commonsensicality of those value systems that bolstered inequitable class stratifications and facilitated the disempowerment of blue-collar, and adolescent, populations (Hebdige, 1979; Thomson, 1995). The media pundits and socially conservative moral entrepreneurs of the mid to late 1980s looked to the burgeoning Heavy Metal and Rap subcultures as a means of denoting pronounced patterns of moral decline amongst young populations: a line of indictment which not only succeeded in advancing the perception that controversial musical artists were single-handedly responsible for rearing a generation of morally corrupt (and potentially dangerous) young men and women (Binder, 1993), but re-emerged to successfully condemn the Gothic subcultures which emerged with the mid-90s popularity of self-proclaimed 'Antichrist Superstar' Marilyn Manson (Goodlad and Bibby, 2007; Manson and Strauss, 1998).

Media narratives concerning the *symbolic* dangers posed by unorthodox youth cultures fell beneath the treads of those concerning the *concrete* dangers posed by unorthodox youth cultures as the 1990s drew to a close. Initial media reports attempting to deduce what might have inspired Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold to orchestrate the Columbine High School massacre instantly implicated Goth culture - and, quite specifically, the influence of Marilyn Manson - even though the pair had no verifiable affiliation with the subculture and most likely took their stylistic inspiration - the infamous black trench coats which instantly led to the pair being pegged as Goth youths - from the initial *Matrix* film (Lenson, 2007). Though granted significantly less attention than those attempting to account for the crime, reports pertaining to the fact that adolescent tendencies toward anti-sociality and subcultural affiliation had effectively come to constitute transgressions warranting school expulsion began to emerge shortly thereafter (Goldberg, 1999). When combined with the concurrent panic surrounding the popularity of Rave culture - primarily propelled by reports concerning the rampant use, and potentially lethal effects, of ecstasy and other narcotics (Wilson, 2002) - it might have seemed as though the landscape of youth culture housed few manifestations that did not render adolescents a viable risk, be it to themselves or others.

The mediated representation of the Emo scene kid might be said to exhibit many of the elements serving to define each distinct era of youth problematization while adding a unique, and distinctively modern, dimension of its own. Like the Goth subculture, black clothing, anti-sociality, and an unhealthy obsession with death are assumed to serve as prerequisites for indoc-

trination into the culture. Though the adoption of a sexually ambiguous style would also be in keeping with Gothic fashion, the aforementioned reports serve to frame such as an ideological affront: be it against the tropes of hegemonic gender performances or, like some elements of early punk fashion, an attempted offensive against the institution of normalized heterosexuality itself (Hebdige, 1979). Like Metal before it, Emo music is alleged to possess such a sway over its admirers as to inspire (self-induced) violent tendencies and suicide (Stack, Gundlach, and Reeves, 1994). Finally, the contagion narrative made popular among the press and policy officials of the 1960s finds resurrection and revision: given an ample degree of emotional instability and a reasonable degree of unsupervised internet access, 'Emo' is virtually characterized as something that adolescents can catch, but need not leave the comfort of their own homes to do so. Indeed, the emergence of the Emo scene kid might be the first opportunity for which the discourse surrounding problematic youth populations might so conveniently be merged with that concerning the nefarious nature of living in a web-dependent society.

### **1.3 In Breaking with Tradition: The Problematized Population (publicly) Reacts**

In considering the extent to which each report indirectly problematized the manner in which adolescent populations had come to utilize the internet (be it in the process of becoming involved in the movement or reacting against it), it is somewhat ironic that the world wide web has actively ensured that the greatest audience for these reports has been the very adolescent populations with whom they concern themselves. *Youtube.com* users 'jarrettm' and 'happytime-harry' each posted the WDAZ report to the popular video sharing website, the latter under the title "Funniest TV report about Emo ever!", within the week of its initial broadcast. The similar uploading of the remaining three reports each managed to warrant attention from the *Punknews.org* website, a well established underground music news resource. In posting a news bulletin entitled "More Emo hysteria, this time from Utah", the anonymous poster declares that, "A local Utah ABC affiliate has assembled the latest in a series of reactionary reports 'alerting' parents to the dangers of 'Emo'. Like most stories, it focuses on the perceived fears and ostensibly discusses the "cutting" and suicide undercurrents of the scene". Replete with a link to the report in question, the poster offers the comment that "The piece relies heavily on Internet reports, but also like many of these reports, it doesn't properly distinguish between genuine Emo and those making fun of Emo and presents a perfectly surreal account" [grammatical errors in origi-

nal]. By the time the CBS report surfaced online, the news contributor felt the presence of sufficient precedence to take the liberty of duly prefacing the notification: “since we know how much you guys enjoy these, here's another interesting news report which could be described as ‘Emo is the devil’”.

Weeding through the *Youtube.com* user comments posted in response to each broadcast renders it readily clear that that the alleged web-based subcultural artefacts featured in the WDAZ, ABC, and CBS reports - the cutting boards, how-to-become-Emo guides, and the Emo-scale points system - were actually widely renowned efforts meant to parody, ridicule, and antagonize those who might be identified as Emo. “These reporters went to some kind of journalism school, got jobs, and take themselves very seriously”, comments you tube user ‘braniac123’ (2007), in responding to the WDAZ report, “Yet they can't distinguish printouts of joke websites from actual investigative reporting”. In replying to the video himself, ‘Happytimeharry’ (2007) claims that “I just really love how they used every ironic example they could find as ‘actual research’ into this story, particularly the points system (if you attempt suicide, you hit the jackpot)”. “Stupid,” writes you tube user ‘Silent Apprentice (2007), in responding to the CBS report. “‘your teens may be at risk’[...] they talk like it's a disease worse than HPV (sic)...they're trying to control parents to fully control their kids. It's all misleading and downright complete bullshit”. Even *Newsday* contributor Rafer Guzman (2007) devoted a column to the ABC broadcast, which he deduced as being a report that “relentlessly tries to strike terror into the hearts of parents, painting Emo teens as depressed, out of control and prone to suicide.” Guzman notes that, “the whole ‘story’ is an outdated throwback to the early days of punk, when the mass media vilified that subculture as a kind of alien germ infecting America's youth. Then as now, the media missed the self-mocking humor in the music and among the fans” before keenly noting that the report features “several kids [explaining] the dark philosophy of Emo in somber tones [while] clearly struggling to keep a straight face.”

In opening with an ironic word of warning - “Look out, you Emos! The media finally heard about you, and they're looking at you like you're the next Columbine killers” - Guzman’s column encapsulates the same air of exuberance to be found in the *Youtube.com* discussion forums. Many would not only appear to pride themselves on the fact that they had caught the broadcast media in the process of attempting to usher in a climate of panic, but so too with their participation in facilitating a counter-discourse meant to assassinate its credibility. Quoted at

Spin.com (2007), *Everybody Hurts: An Essential Guide to Emo Culture* co-author Leslie Simon even went so far as to suggest that “it seemed like the news team, or the local station, or ‘the man’ had an objective for the story before they even started their research”.

#### **1.4 Representational Politics and Adolescent Disempowerment**

Indeed, the inspiration to air reports detailing the emergence of a movement appearing to grant young men and women the ability to celebrate the emotional (and mental) imbalances purportedly characteristic of modern day adolescence could be correlated to a broader political agenda. In concerning himself with the manner in which youths are characterized in popular entertainment media, Giroux (1996) attributes the unsavoury fashion in which adolescent populations are characterized as “criminal, sexually decadent, drug crazed and illiterate” to incidents of “representational politics” vying to “[deny the young ] opportunities for self-definition and political interaction”. Giroux believes that disseminating representations of the young as “the embodiment of alienation, anger, and potential danger” not only reinforces those discourses surrounding the immaturity intrinsic to adolescence, but justifies the continuation of their political disempowerment. In concerning himself with the derogatory nature through which youths are characterized in crime reportage, Schissel (2006) has similarly outlined the manner in which the continued political disempowerment of the young facilitates the Western economy. As young men and women constitute both a plentiful reservoir of potential low-wage service industry workers and expendable fodder for militaristic operations, there is a great deal of tactical reason behind prohibiting adolescents the rights extended to the adult workforce: without that easily exploitable resource pool, profits might decline, young men and women might be less inclined to resign themselves to military duty, and Western economies would be dealt a considerable blow. Côté and Allahar (1994) suggest that the social construction of the emotionally unbalanced adolescent has also facilitated the process whereby the “custodial professions” - such as “teachers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers” - have rendered the young “‘clients’ to be serviced for an ever-increasing period of time” (1994: 151); a jurisdiction over the normalization of adolescence that also facilitates proper “gender conditioning” (1994: 95) and traditional patterns of racial stratification. All four authors, to some degree, insinuate that perpetuating the aura of potential dangerousness surrounding the adolescent is just one means of reinforcing the notion

that the young lack the mental faculties requisite for the rational utilization of political agency; and there is no question that the 'Emo reports' serve to characterize those adolescents with whom they concern themselves as emotionally unhinged, sexually confused, potentially dangerous, and undeserving of any measure of political (not even to speak of *personal*) agency.

It is equally likely, however, that the reports filed by Crisp, Cowan and Lindstrom serve to evidence less the presence of an agenda tailored toward perpetuating the political marginalization of adolescent populations than a justifiable naivety on the part of each individual broadcaster. Though the majority of web artefacts concerned with Emo culture exist for the sole purpose of ridicule, I would posit that this fact might only resonate clearly for those endowed with a certain degree of familiarity with how adolescent culture has adapted some of its less congenial practices to a web-mediated world. Fox 11's Strogoff stands as the sole reporter evidencing a cognizance that "scene kid culture has been savaged by lampoons... which [are] all over the net" and, by extension, architect to the only report devoid of allusions to self-mutilation, a 'point-system', or the potential for an epidemic of teenage suicide. In time, I will argue that Strogoff also succeeds in brushing against the source of such parodic artefacts in detailing the fact that 'scene kids' have come to be targeted by adolescent culture and, most specifically, by rival youth subculturalites. The nature and severity of such threats might, however, take on an air of sensationalism for those taking note of the subtle details. The young punk woman testifying her compulsion to beat scene kids " 'till they start to bleed to death", for example, can barely keep a straight face as her cohort break into laughter as she delivers each threat, and the mastermind behind the Goth Assault Squad video clips sounds less like a viable threat than a slightly disgruntled older sibling in testifying to the fact that he feels it his "duty to give [the Emo kids] a little bit of crap".

Should we peel away the blatantly inaccurate characteristics included in the inventory provided by the mediated representation of the 'emo kid', the only traits remaining are, once again, a shared taste in an identifiable genre of music and the shared adoption of a discernable fashion of dress. While it will be shown that it is difficult to bring the existence of an 'Emo style' into question, there would appear to be a great deal of debate - internal to those producing and supporting those bands having effectively been invoked as flagship representatives to the genre - as to whether they warrant being affiliated with the genre. The majority of the Youtube.com user posts responding to the ABC and CBS reports consist of irate tirades concerning how each

broadcaster grossly erred in the choice of bands they opted to affiliate with the movement. With the publication of *Nothing Feels Good: Punk Rock, Teenagers, and Emo* (2007) - a work which will later be granted a significant amount of attention - Spin contributor Andy Greenwald spoke to the impossibility of finding any groups willing to endorse the term as a means of describing their music. To date, figures ranging from Guy Piccioto of the band Rites of Spring (the very band alleged to inspire the term's creation in the mid-1980s) to Gerard Way of My Chemical Romance have vehemently denied that justifiable grounds on which to affiliate their music with the genre exist (Prindle, 2003; Sowerby, 2007). If Fox 11's Strogoff is correct in claiming that "[Emo] music is embraced by millions of kids", the determination that the likes of Piccioto and Way exude in attempting to disassociate themselves with the genre would appear curious.

### **1.5 Emo: Toward a Genealogical Analysis**

When subjected to a superficial analysis, the emergence of the Emo culture might appear a most unusual social phenomenon. Both the term and the inferred youth culture are subject to more satire than substantiation, renounced by those most widely renowned as its progenitors, and seemingly rarely used in processes attuned to self-declaration. Indeed, 'Emo' would seem less a descriptor reflexively adopted by a burgeoning youth subculture than a pejorative designation levelled against groups endowed with particularistic tastes in music and fashion. The 'emo kid' representation itself would seem less meant to denote the characteristics endorsed by an authentic breed of youth subculturalite than to stereotypically affiliate those who might participate within the culture with acute over-emotionality and tendencies toward self-harm. Though the 'emo reports' succeeded in introducing this sensationalistic representation to wider audiences, they cannot be attributed authorship over its construction, for the ammunition utilized in stigmatizing, problematizing, and condemning any adolescent who might be prone to wearing black and listening to angry music was not exclusively created within the parameters of such reports: it was merely annexed directly from a discourse long promulgating within those public spheres and cultural spaces commandeered by adolescent populations. Should we attribute the broadcast of these reports to a fresh manifestation of representational politics against the young, it would serve diligence to demonstrate that such reports *also* constitute a symptom to a preceding rash of representational politics - in this instance, levelled against a perceived manifestation of youth

subculture, and as enacted by a longstanding manifestations of youth subculture. The overarching question at hand, then, would rest with not only determining who orchestrated such an affront, but what goals they vied to achieve in doing so.

The following body of research thus constitutes an attempt to subject the term emo - and, by extension, the emergence of the corresponding culture - to a genealogical account highlighting the actors, power dynamics, and representational tactics attributable to the emergence of what might effectively be regarded, on one hand, an orchestrated trend in popular music and youth fashion and, on the other, a subcultural 'folk-devil'. Through invoking, adapting, and aligning the theoretical concepts as presented and popularized by the likes of Pierre Bourdieu (2007; 1999; 1993; 1984), Michel Foucault (1995; 1990; 1980), Sarah Thornton (1996) and Stanley Cohen (2002), I will demonstrate that the 'emo kid' representation can be conceptualized as a 'folk devil' whose representational construction primarily came to be facilitated by two concurrent subcultural initiatives: the first being the manner through which the term 'emo' was granted pejorative connotations in a concerted attempt to sustain the integrity of the 'field' of punk subcultural participation; the second relating to the process through which fields exterior to such subcultures hijacked the term 'emo' and, concurrently, the perceived authority to grant it legitimate constitution. In essence, I propose to demonstrate how the process through which the term 'emo' came to be annexed into the discourse of the mainstream music media inspired the creation of a representation meant to prohibit the mainstream colonization (and commodification) of the subcultural 'underground' while, simultaneously, denying those attracted to the subcultural milieu under the auspices of emo's mainstream appeal the ability to extract status within (and thus potentially alter the structure of) the field of subcultural participation.

Chapter two will concern itself with illustrating the manner in which the concept of the representational 'folk-devil' will be used in a unique manner meant to draw attention to those processes through which contemporary youth subcultures arguably impose participatory normalization and, concurrently, subcultural perpetuation. This line of reasoning will also demand that the theoretical debates regarding the proper conceptualization of subculture, as attended to by critical neo-Marxist structuralists and postmodernist commentators, be granted due consideration. I will, however, inevitably posit that the adoption of a 'middle-range' Bourdieuvian framework - meant to characterize pockets of subcultural participation as 'fields' and those within them as actors pursuing the accumulation of various types of 'capital' - might not only best stand

to account for the phenomena of interest, but facilitate something of a synthesis between the primary tenets of the structuralist and postmodernist theoretical orientations.

In arguing for the utility of a Foucaultian genealogical framework in regarding the emergence of the subcultural ‘emo kid’ folk-devil representation, chapter three will briefly highlight Foucault’s postulations regarding the interrelationship between the creation of knowledge, the conduction of power, and how each contributes to processes through which individuals come to be granted constitution as ‘subjects’ to a body of knowledge - or ‘truth’ – tailored toward ensuring dispositional homogeneity or ‘normalization’. In describing how discourse serves as the conduit through which knowledge and power come to accumulate their ‘force’, I will briefly explicate the principle tenets of the discourse and content analysis which this thesis will utilize in aspiring to substantiate its primary arguments. Furthermore, and against the backdrop of the Foucaultian theoretical framework, chapter three will concern itself with those postulations, as advanced by the likes of Thornton and Bourdieu, regarding the manner through which the creation of knowledge, and thus the dissemination of power, suffices in not only *structuring* those ‘fields’ dedicated to processes of cultural knowledge production, but *shaping* those fields of cultural consumption so dependent on the knowledge produced therein. In essence, the chapter will provide the context against which I will argue that the phenomena of our current concern constitutes an instance in which that body of knowledge constructed within the *field of cultural production* was deduced to pose a danger to the sanctity of those conventions having long guided the *field of subcultural participation*.

Chapter four will work toward better contextualizing the applicability of this framework in providing brief overviews of the genesis of the term ‘emo’, the histories of *Alternative Press Magazine* and the *Punknews.org* website (the niche-mediated and micro-mediated sites of cultural knowledge production on which I will extend primary focus), and past occasions that can be taken to support the postulation that the punk subculture is a ‘field’ in which participants strive to construct ‘authentic’ identities in correspondence with longstanding conventions meant, in large part, to facilitate its exclusivity. This chapter will demonstrate that, following its initial inception into the lexicon of subculturalist discourse, the term ‘emo’ functioned as a means of not only denoting subcultural ‘inauthenticity’, but constituted part of a larger initiative whereby the Washington ‘hardcore’ scene might prohibit the emergence of new practices through which ‘subcultural capital’ might be recognized and disseminated. It will utilize the testimony of *Alternative*

*Press* magazine founder Mike Shea in arguing for the applicability of a Bourdieuan framework in conceptualizing the field of cultural knowledge production as a field of struggle in which the creation of ‘legitimate’ knowledge, and competitively striving for acclaim as ‘authentic’ knowledge sources, are paramount. It will demonstrate the manner wherein the punk subculture reacted to processes whereby the punk musical genre threatened to become ‘the next big thing’ by establishing discursive strategies through which the subcultural ‘authenticity’ of choice subcultural producers – and those they had duly attracted to the subcultural field – could be criticized and revoked. Finally, it will describe the process through which *Alternative Press* magazine effectively moved toward committing ‘heresy’ within the field of niche-mediated cultural production in constructing the perception of a burgeoning ‘emo’ pseudo-genre and detail a portion of the subcultural artist in which they effectively ‘invested’ their attention in the process.

The fifth chapter will concern itself with analyzing those texts through which an eclectic collection of communications media publications – including *TIME* and *Seventeen* magazine – worked toward constructing the perception of a burgeoning ‘emo culture’ in extending an ostensible ‘body of knowledge’ on a proclaimed to be emergent youth ‘movement’. So, too, will it analyze that subcultural discourse that effectively arose in reaction to these articles; discourse that initially arose in an effort to criticize the notion of a substantive ‘emo’ pseudo-genre, but subsequently evolved into a ‘body of knowledge’ sufficing to identify and stereotypically problematize those populations that might be attracted to the subcultural field by virtue of each article’s dissemination. The chapter will then dedicate a substantial amount of attention to *Spin* Magazine alumni Andy Greenwald’s (2003) *Nothing Feels Good*; a book that I argue strives not only to assert itself as the authoritative text on the ‘emo’ pseudo-genre, but so too aspires to self-actualize, and thus effectively inspire the objective emergence of, an adolescent ‘emo kid’ culture. The chapter will conclude in briefly considering the prospect that this trio of texts worked toward reinstating the ‘emo’ term’s subcultural utilization as a derogatory signifier and, by extension, inspired *Alternative Press* magazine to utilize such as a derisive term in an effort to maintain its status as a legitimate resource for subcultural knowledge.

Chapter six will chart the process wherein the ‘multiplicity of crises’ that sufficed in endangering the subcultural field following *Alternative Press*’ ‘heretical’ shift in coverage. I will argue that these crises include the corporate ‘colonization’ of the subcultural field, patterns of ‘heretical’ practice amongst once revered artistic producers, and the popularization of new trends

in aestheticism, and demonstrate how they inspired the creation of a subcultural discourse striving to condemn those artistic producers so propelling such forces and, by extension, those subcultural 'other' populations so extending said artists their fanaticism. The chapter will demonstrate that, though these emergent trends in 'heretical' subcultural practice were initially granted derogatory representation by alternative means, the subcultural 'body of knowledge' developed as a means of problematizing *these* trends effectively merged with that 'body of knowledge' previously developed in problematizing a stereotypical representation of the 'emo kid'. Finally, the chapter will note the process wherein this 'emo kid' representation began to be granted sensationalistic depiction in a range of cultural products and, inevitably, a number of web-based micro-mediated parodies so sufficing in attributing the representation those additional derogatory characteristics, including 'abnormal' sexual proclivities and tendencies toward self-mutilation, that the 'emo reports' would subsequently focus upon whilst annexing the 'emo kid' folk-devil into the mass-mediated discourse on 'dangerous' adolescent populations.

## Chapter Two: Toward Conceptualizing the Subcultural Folk-Devil

### 2.1 Current Debates Regarding Subculture and the Utility of a Bourdieuan Framework

This thesis contends that the mediated ‘emo kid’ representation found inspiration less from the presence of a substantive manifestation of youth subculture than the emergence of a subcultural ‘folk devil’. The concept of ‘folk-devil’ is associated with the work of Stanley Cohen, who was concerned especially to explore how youth culture was interpreted and distorted by media and other authoritative voices. Though popularized with the publication of Cohen’s land-mark *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The Creation of the Mods and Rockers* (2002a), the subsequent range of applicability granted to the concept of the ‘moral panic’ has arguably begat a process through which the works marquis terms have come to be deemed interchangeable. In decoupling the ‘folk devil’ from the ‘moral panic’ in a manner meant to dispel the notion that the latter is necessitated for the emerge of the former, we might subsequently critique the implicit notion that representational folk-devils might only be crafted and utilized by a society’s ‘moral entrepreneurs’ and, furthermore, only invoked in the interest of facilitating large-scale socio-legal alterations.

In deriving due inspiration from Becker’s (1963) labelling theory and a body of social constructivist literature suggesting that deviance does not exist beyond the bounds of collective social perception, Cohen aspired to illustrate *one* of the processes through which, firstly, certain populations come to be perceived as problematic and, furthermore, the means through which societal reactions to such populations might inspire changes in the manner in which deviance is defined and dealt with. Through crediting the mass media, politicians, and other authoritative figures with the ability to convince wider publics of the presence of dangers by disseminating “stylized and stereotypical” media depictions in chorus with the “diagnoses and solutions” offered by “socially accredited experts” (2002a:1), Cohen served to demonstrate how ‘folk devils’ might arise should empowered interest groups with the requisite means to do so choose to target subservient groups through attributing them with unsavoury - and, indeed, potentially fictitious - characteristics. As Schissel (2006) notes that folk-devils are necessarily “identified by association with a particular, visible social category” and “imbued with stereotypical characteristics that set them apart from so-called normal, law-abiding society” (2006:53), it follows that a “condi-

tion” (Cohen, 2002:1) of ‘moral panic’ might arise should those characterizations successfully seep into the public conscience. Moral panic is, in essence, a phenomena prone to arise when the wider social arena perceives of, first, the presence of a dire problem and, furthermore, a readily identifiable representative population to whom the threat can be attributed and, thus, mobilized against.

It would seem to me, however, as if Cohen’s original framework concerned itself with two separate processes - the formation of the threat to be perceived (the folk-devil) and the wider reactions to the perception of the threat (the moral panic) - which might subsequently function to reinforce each other once the latter condition has found initiation. In my opinion, a stern adherence to the orthodox assumption that “folk devils are constructed in the context of moral panics” (Schissel, 2006:53) has limited the potential applicability of the concept. Though St Cyr (2003) offers a very rich definition of the ‘folk-devil’ in claiming such to be a “personification of evil, characterized through a totality of negative attributes” which, once having been “identified and named through the creation of a moral panic...becomes a direct reminder of what we should not be” (2003: 29), even she fails to disassociate the representational spectre from the phenomena their perceived presence is assumed to instigate. For the purpose of this paper, I would indeed wish to conceptualize the folk-devil as a representation composed of ‘a totality of negative attributes’ that is meant to serve as a ‘direct reminder of what one should not be’. I would not, however, wish to argue that this particular representation was initially constructed in tandem with a wider condition of moral panic or, indeed, *initially* meant to inspire a widespread condition of moral panic. In lieu of such, I will argue that the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil warrants specification as being a *subcultural folk-devil* - a representational construct whose authorship rests with those participating within the spheres of youth subcultural participation – that was effectively annexed into that wider program of representational politics so designed to reinforce the political disempowerment of adolescent populations. To be clear, though the ‘emo kid’ representational folk-devil has always been tailored toward facilitating the disempowerment of targeted populations, its function within the subcultural context largely rest with ensuring processes of *symbolic* disempowerment bordering on representational degradation. The fact that it was so easily usurped and used by the moral entrepreneurial American broadcast media in what I perceive to be an effort to further foster the substantive disempowerment of all perceived-to-be non-conventional youth cultures is, to some extent, ironic.

Though I have surely not yet suitably justified my endorsement of the concept of the ‘folk-devil’ for the purposes of the initiative at hand at this time (I will return to this matter shortly), I now wish to divert my attention to considering my utilization of another controversial term: that of ‘subculture’. As the designation and the manner in which it might best be utilized as an analytical concept has become a subject of great debate amongst contrasting sociological dispositions, it would appear necessary to consider the long-standing debates between, on one hand, those choosing to conceptualize youth subcultures as collectivities meant to inspire “resistance against hegemony” and, on the other, groups engaged in “a form of delimited role-playing” that merely prove “resistant in ways linked to individual pleasure in transgression rather than in materialist political terms” (Nogic and Riley, 2007:318). I would thus wish to briefly highlight the theoretical positions advanced by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and note how those tenets have come under fire by post-subcultural and ‘lifestyle’ theorists for the sake of advancing a postmodernist re-conceptualization of subculture. I will then demonstrate the manner through which adopting a Bourdieuan (1993; 1984) framework might serve to credit elements derived from each orientation - thus lending credence to those calling for some degree of synthesis between the critical neo-Marxian and postmodernist narratives on youth subculture (Nogic and Riley, 2007; Greener and Hollands, 2006; Schildrick and MacDonald, 2006; Hesmondhalgh, 2005). Finally, I will return to my justification for endorsing a slightly modified version of the ‘folk-devil’ concept.

## **2.2 The CCCS on Subculture: Collective Reactions to Social Conditions**

In taking the phenomena of the music and fashion-based youth subcultures that arose in the wake of England’s post-war climate as their objects of study, the Birmingham Centre and its affiliates merged the tenets of structural neo-Marxism with the traditions of choice Chicago School theorists (Thomas and Znaniecki, 1996; Thrasher, 1963) in deducing that subcultural movements find their genesis, first and foremost, by virtue of a shared sense of class-correlative social under-privilege. Birmingham theorists such as Hall and Jefferson (1976), Willis (1981), P. Cohen (1972) and Hebdige (1979) characterized such subcultural manifestations as the Teddy Boys, Mods, Rockers, Skinheads, and Punks as groups engaged in a collective reaction to an emergent social climate that promised only to fortify their disempowerment. By their account,

working and lower-class youth were given the sense that their foreseeable futures would either be plagued by inescapable poverty or soul-crushing manual labour - granted, of course, that the cold war did not make good on its looming promise of inevitable nuclear escalation. It was this heady brew of omnipotent social tensions, by all accounts, that inspired the formation of youth cultures meant to signal an opposition to these wider trends and the longstanding institutions that facilitated their persistence. The Birmingham theorists, then, interpreted subcultural participation as a channel through which adolescents and young adults could voice collective protest against those phenomena perceived to threaten them through the few means available to them: the use of leisure time, interpersonal affiliation, consumption patterns and, perhaps most importantly, the use of fashion.

In taking equal inspiration for the semiological Marxism of Barthes (1986) and Gramsci's (2004) concept of hegemony, Hebdige (1979) looked to youth subcultural fashion as a form of critical dialogue with the wider culture. "Style in subculture", he wrote, "is pregnant with significance. Its transformations go 'against nature', interrupting the process of 'normalization' ... [and can be interpreted as] movements towards a speech which offends the 'silent majority', which challenges the principles of unity and cohesion, which contradicts the myth of consensus" (1986: 18). Thus, according to Hebdige, subcultural style was inspired by much more than shared tastes in fashion, and every instance of subcultural 'bricolage' professed the *potentially decipherable* ideological undertones propelling the subcultural manifestations to coalesce and persist. Thus, the fashions appropriated by the Teddy Boys (Jefferson, 2006) and the Skinheads (Clarke, 2006; Cohen, 1972) were interpreted as speaking to the presence of a socially conservative ideology that speaks out against those social dynamics serving to threaten Western cultural austerity or, at a more micro-socio level, the ethnic solidarity of traditional working-class neighbourhoods. The aesthetics adopted by the Mods and the Punks (Hebdige, 2006a, 1979), on the other hand, signal an ideological dissatisfaction with the ills born of Western capitalism, the socially conservative lifestyle conventions expected of post-adolescent populations, and - indeed - those initiatives tailored toward rearing a generation of subservient youth whose 'normality' might render them suitable fodder for the dehumanization of the labour market. The Teddy Boys' appropriation of the 'zoot suit', the Skinhead's affinity for the work boot, and the Punk's misuse of the safety pin were all taken as examples whereby "humble objects...[came to be] stolen by subordinate groups and made to carry 'secret' meanings: meanings which express, in

code, a form of resistance to the order which guarantees their continued subordination” (Hebdige, 1979: 18).

Though unquestionably overshadowed by the attention granted to the potential significance of subcultural style, the Birmingham theorists also - albeit often implicitly - concerned themselves with the means through which subcultural participation might impact one’s sense of personal identity. Suffice to say, Althusser’s (2004) proposition concerning the manner through which ideology “interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects” (2004: 320) - with ‘interpellation’ meant to denote how ideology serves to supply the means through which individuals come to develop self-actualization - cast a considerable shadow over the work of the Birmingham theorists. Clark, Hall, Jefferson, and Roberts (2006) thus suggested that subcultural studies might be best suited toward analyzing the processes “by which individual identities and life-histories” (or ‘biographies’) are “constructed out of collective experience”. (2006: 45). More specifically, they suggested that the most prominent point of theoretical interest should rest with studying the processes through which an individuals’ development of personal identity is influenced by “the set of socially organized positions and experiences of class in relation to the major institutions and structures [and] the range of socially organized and patterned responses to the social and material conditions” (2006: 44). This might even suggest that the Birmingham Centre’s primary interest lay with charting the emergence of pockets of collective identities - which could neither “be conceived as wholly individual or free-floating” (2006: 45) - born of counter-hegemonic ideological forces. Subcultures could be said to serve as the expression of subversive ideologies given rise by similarly marginalized groups of youth who, in turn, came to find themselves subjectified by those ideologies. As those ideologies would subsist at the very core of the so-indoctrinated subculturalite, the constitution of their very identities might cater to a form of resistance that, though signalled to others through self-presentation, was actually put into practice by the sheer fact of the participants’ ideological allegiance.

It is of distinct note that the Birmingham theorists ultimately declared youth subcultures incapable of establishing anything resembling substantive social betterment. Such was attributed, by and large, to the fact that youth subcultural resistance strategies too seldom transgressed the realm of a symbolic subversion that manifested in little practical action beyond open feuding between rival groups (Cohen, 1978); initiatives, in other words, that were all too easily perceived as gang warfare, and unlikely to serve as a constructive means of challenging the status quo

(Cohen, 2002b). Willis (1978) advanced a dour forecast in deducing that the seeds of any subculture's defeat were planted by its members themselves; for what did adopting the anti-intellectualist values popularized by most subcultures result in, besides serving to unwittingly coax the devout into securing their own status as inevitable fodder for an exploitative labour market? As subcultural resistance strategies would likely never breach the realm of mere symbolism, and as the Birmingham theorists were resigned to "[oscillating] between dystopian despair at the limitation of subcultures and celebration of their all too tenuous achievements" (Kahn-Harris, 2004: 96), a near decade of sociological enquiry might be said to have deduced that none amongst the plethora of youth subcultures to have emerged had held any substantive hope of challenging the wider social processes serving to maintain their current predicaments.

Beside criticisms centring around the Birmingham Centre's lack of interest in factoring the personal narratives of subcultural participants into their theoretical accounts (Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995) and lack of appreciation for the 'true' genesis of some subcultural styles (Cohen, 2002b), the propositions extended by the CCCS have come to draw distinct criticisms from a vocal block of self-professed postmodernist theorists. Redhead, in famously deducing that "subcultures were produced by subcultural theorists, not the other way around" (1990: 25), would appear to have meant to extend an insinuation accusing those critical theorists of allowing their own wish for the emergence of counter-hegemonic groups to taint their academic objectivity. Muggleton (2000), a former affiliate with the punk subculture, partially cites his own obliviousness to the dialogue that his sense of fashion was purported to contribute to as grounds on which to debunk Hebdige's notion of ideologically inspired style-based subcultural semiotics. Bennett (1999) chastises the Birmingham theorists for denying the fact that such forms of 'resistance' functioned to facilitate an economy of "mass-produced consumer items, such as popular music and visual style" (1999: 601) which had just set about targeting youth populations with a requisite degree of disposable income. According to Bennett, the notion that one's style reflected one's allegiance to their class positioning, as opposed to a newfound freedom to express oneself with a wide range of novel consumer products, is ludicrous. As the process of bringing the notion that subcultural style was used as a means of signalling the presence of a collectively adhered-to ideology into question ultimately brought the commonsensicality of the presence of any such ideology into question, key figures within the sociological landscape deduced that the subcultural theory of the Birmingham theorists need be retired for the sake of forging a body of speculation

better meant to reflect the modern use of subcultural style and, indeed, the significance that contemporary subcultural participants attribute to the concept of 'subculture' itself. It is to these 'post-subcultural' theories that we now turn.

### **2.3 'Post-Subcultural' Theories: Postmodern Societies and the Fluidity of Identity**

In pulling the bulk of their epistemological backdrop from the theoretical propositions advanced by Lyotard (1984), Baudrillard (1983) and Jameson (1991), postmodernist subcultural theorists presume that western societies have undergone concurrent processes whereby a collapse of faith in the 'grand narratives' of enlightenment thought, the onset of a post-industrial economy centred around the manufacture of signs, and a movement through which culture has become no more than a haven for 'simulations' have brought the notions of truth and reality into dire question. The resulting post-modern subject, unable to utilize any certainty in attempting to grasp an understanding of themselves and the world around them, must resort to the consumption of cultural signifiers as a means of attempting to achieve self-definition and some sense of solidity. Such cultural signifiers, though meant to produce the collective representations on which social solidarity depends, have been divorced of their genial significance and rendered superficial, difficult to decode, and open to interpretation. The post-modern individual, in a sense, suffers a disorientation brought on by virtue of being forced to negotiate a scenario wherein the plethora of symbols with which the subject is to 'make sense' of the world around them are hollow, indeterminate, and easily interchangeable, thus rendering it improbable that tangible identities can be negotiated. It thus goes without saying that the Birmingham Centre's deduction that youth subculture functions to allow that discontent be voiced within the symbolic universe of shared meanings would be deemed inapplicable in the modern context: no such symbolic universe of shared meanings is any longer believed to exist.

In arguing that modern youth subcultures are constituted less by participants endowed with a collectivist mind-set than individualists evidencing distinct post-modern 'sensibilities', Muggleton (2000) deduces that "subcultures are manifestations of self-expression, individual autonomy and cultural diversity...[entailing] a postmodern (or liminal) working-class subcultural sensibility [that] can be traced back at least to the beginning of the 1960s" (2000: 167). In lieu of conceptualizing subcultural style as a means of resisting hegemonic indoctrination or lashing out against the oppressive conventions of the parent culture, Muggleton channels Baudrillard (1983)

in reinterpreting such as celebrations of cultural inauthenticity; processes whereby subculturalites “revel in this simulation culture...by inscribing visual signs upon their bodies [that refuse] meaning in the name of the spectacle” (2000: 46). As “subcultural styles have become simulacra, copies with no originals” (2000: 46), Muggleton argues that the subcultures constitute spheres of ‘hyperreality’ wherein signifiers are endorsed (or ‘reproduced’) in a manner which not only dissolves their allegiance to that originally signified, but an allegiance to any shared conception of a concrete representation of an over-arching ‘reality’. Subcultural style, in Muggleton’s view, not only says nothing; it contributes to those very processes through which nothing can be intelligibly said. Paired with empirical interviews with subcultural participants professing a proclivity to affiliate themselves with whatever subculture best coincides with their personal evolution, Muggleton deduces that subcultural identities entail a considerable fluidity demanding that the concept of a cohesive subcultural dialogue with the wider society be brought into question. In lieu of propping up the CCCS conception of the ideologically entrenched subculturalist, Muggleton characterizes (post)modern subculturalites as “post-subculturalists” who “do not have to worry about contradictions between their selected subcultural identities, for there are no rules, there is no authenticity, no ideological commitment, merely a stylistic game to be played” (2000: 47).

Rather than revise and amend the established orthodoxy regarding the sociological significance of subcultural manifestations, the bulk of the postmodernist theory regarding youth subcultures serves to suggest that the very concept of ‘subculture’ - and the theoretical baggage the term entails - be abandoned outright. Chaney (2004, 1996) points to wider cultural processes in suggesting that ‘subculture’ has become a redundant notion. In denoting a progression by which the arena of mass culture, once constitutive of a relatively limited number of channels through which adherents might cull the information requisite in conceptualizing themselves and the world around them, has “fragmented [and now presents] a plurality of lifestyle sensibilities and preferences” (2004:47), Chaney argues that there is presently no discernable dominant culture against which subcultures might form in the interest of rebelling against. With due attention paid to dispelling the Birmingham Centre’s tent-pole assumption that the adoption of unorthodox lifestyles serve as a means of negotiating one’s unsavoury class positioning, Chaney interprets the present absence of any notion of a ‘normalized’ cultural identity - or, for that matter, the impression that the adoption of unorthodox lifestyle choices would no longer appear class-specific - as grounds on which to deduce that subcultural manifestations should “be regarded as collective

lifestyle statements, which reflexively negotiate rather than directly mirror the structural experience of social class” (2004:42). In likewise regarding youth subcultures as “prime examples of the unstable and shifting cultural affiliations which characterize late modern consumer-based societies” (1999:605), Bennett (1999) argues that a variation of Maffesoli’s (1996) concept of the ‘tribe’ might be better applied in concerning more recent incidents of subcultural emergence. Though tribes, like subcultures, find denotation in similar styles of dress, taste, and leisure habits, they are also taken to “illustrate the shifting nature of collective associations between individuals as societies become increasingly consumer orientated” (Bennett, 1999: 606). In lieu of conceptualizing such group formations as entities endowed with any degree of ideological content or permanence, Bennett proposes that adherents quite simply be regarded as reflexive agents having engaged in a *lifestyle* choice; the term ‘lifestyle’ here being utilized to denote “the sensibilities employed by the individual in choosing certain commodities and patterns of consumption and in articulating these cultural resources as modes of personal expression” (1999: 607). In attempting to introduce the term ‘neo-tribe’ into discussions concerning manifestations of assumed group collectivity, Bennett characterizes the ‘neo-tribal’ participant as one whose affinity for constantly “moving between different sites of collective expression” - an affinity which is, itself, an outcome of the “temporal nature of collective identities” (1999: 606) in a postmodernist consumption-based society - renders their corresponding tribes superficial conglomerations of transitory adherents who effectively affiliate themselves with the group until opportunity for the next transition reveals itself. A variety of terms - ranging from ‘scene’ (Straw, 1991) to ‘genre’ (Hesmondhalgh, 2005) to ‘bunde’ (Hetherington, 1998) - have additionally been proposed as replacements suitably fit to highlight the fluid nature of modern identity-based collectivities.

Post-subcultural theories have, quite predictably, drawn the ire of critics possessed of the opinion that such lines of inquiry have proven themselves too eager in debunking the primary tenets of the CCCS canon. Blackman (2005) claims that post-subcultural theories suffer a dire lack of critical self-reflection; thus allowing them leeway in ignoring “the collective basis to subcultural practice and performance” while rendering themselves incapable of noting how the spaces which subcultures inhabit are “structured by capital as a universalistic form of exploitation” (2005: 15). Shildrick and MacDonald (2006) take issue with the fact that post-subcultural studies neglect to concern themselves with issues pertaining to class stratification and social inequities, noting that “once one accepts that, for some young people at least, social divisions still

shape youth cultural identities, the postmodern tendency to celebrate the fragmented, fleeting and free-floating nature of contemporary youth culture becomes difficult to sustain” (2006: 126). Hollands (2002) and Carrington and Wilson (2004) each censure the tendency for postmodernist frameworks to deny the political dimensions of modern youth subcultures in a brash attempt to completely negate the structuralist propositions advanced by the CCCS - with the former going so far as to claim that “postmodernists do not appear to find inequalities or stratified youth cultures partly because they are not looking for them” (2002: 158). Hodkinson (2004, 2002), quite simply takes issue with the orientations’ disinterest in concerning itself with subcultural manifestations (such as the Goth movement) that do not conform to post-subcultural expectations concerning fluidity, superficiality, and transience. Though willing to concur that such postmodernist theories are prone to advance valid points in concerning *some* of the elements of modern-day subcultural manifestations *in some cases*,<sup>3</sup> the over-arching criticism rests with the apparent lack of any attempt, on the part of the post-subcultural apologists, to credit those elements of the Birmingham Centre’s analyses that might still prove pertinent.

Admittedly, any initiative meant to synthesize the macro-theoretical propositions advanced by the CCCS and the micro-sociological analysis developed by the postmodernist theorists would indubitably prove destined to fail if, first, every proposition forged by each orientation (often at dire odds with each other) were uncritically compiled and, secondly, any such synthesized framework was assumed applicable to every manifestation of subculture. Suffice it to say, and as I will attempt to demonstrate as this project unfurls, I argue that the subculture with which this project will primarily concern itself - the punk subculture - can be acknowledged as possessing an ideological dimension entailing an allegiance to initiatives of counter-hegemonic resistance and a plethora of strategies through which participants - individually or collectively - might engage with them. I also argue for the possibility, however, that a considerable portion of those who might be conforming to the surface-level lifestyle traits of the subculture possess the

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<sup>3</sup> It is perhaps of note that Hodkinson – quite accurately, in my opinion – conceives of a continuum of subcultural manifestations embodying differing degrees of what he deems to be ‘substance’. In deducing that subcultural substance might be assessed through taking note of any “*consistent distinctiveness* in group values and taste, a strong sense of *shared identity*, practical *commitment* among participants, and a significant degree of *autonomy* in the facilitation and operation of the group” (2004: 141-42, italics in original), Hodkinson essentially means to argue against uncritically taking postmodernist assessments of largely substance-deprived subcultures – including the dance and rave subcultures with which Bennett and Miles (2001, 1995) primarily concern themselves – as being applicable to those subcultural entities that do not seem to be typified by fracturation and participatory transience.

‘post-modern sensibilities’ that Muggleton aspired to detect, and that one’s participation with what might be described as the ‘theatrics’ of the subculture cannot necessarily be taken to entail the presence of a class-specific, ideologically bound collectivity. Assuming such necessarily demands the utilization of a theoretical framework that not only means to account for both the macro-structural tendencies and the micro-level dynamics of individualized participation, but would refuse to defer to postulations regarding either a status of unwavering solidarity or chaotic fragmentation in lieu of characterizing the unique tensions between the two. I suggest that the theoretical framework advanced by Pierre Bourdieu in regarding the structuration (and function) of cultural participation would not only supply such a bridge, but grant those elements, heretofore likely perceived as theoretical contradictions, a drastic re-conceptualization thus exposing the operation of a specific cultural logic tailored toward perpetuating established social hierarchies and the processes through which identity-construction is achieved. It is to Bourdieu, then, to whom we now turn.

#### **2.4 Identity in Difference, Distinction in Capital: The Theory of Pierre Bourdieu.**

In rigorously subjecting various dimensions of French culture to a personalized brand of what might be considered ‘middle-range’ sociological analysis, Bourdieu developed a theoretical framework meant to suggest a symbiotic relationship between the implicit ‘rules’ facilitating patterned conventions of social practice and the conscious decision, on the part of social actors, to reinforce such conventions through their willingness in abiding by them. In conceptualizing the social as a landscape entailing partitions into stratified regions of differentiated social spaces, Bourdieu not only implied that processes whereby social groups would inhabit “positions which are exterior to one another and which are defined in relation to one another through their mutual exteriority and their relations of...[distance] and [hierarchy]” (2007a, 271) were essentially required by processes of social structuration, but that all social actors - regardless of their relative positioning - were products of, and participants in reinforcing, such stratification. In identifying culture, that shared network of symbols and practices which means to give a social body a cohesive identity and collection of practices, as the primary locus through which processes of differentiation find engagement, Bourdieu deduced that culture must be characterized as both a force actively serving to *perpetuate* social division and, simultaneously, a by-product *of* processes of

social division. Bourdieu's seminal work, *Distinction* (1984), bolstered the former proposition in not only demonstrating a strong correlation between class position and consumption patterns (themselves dictated by seemingly innate personal 'tastes'; be they for music, foods, or fashion), but locating in distaste, and by extension the differential capacities for different classes to develop the 'aesthetic disposition' requisite in appreciating 'legitimate' culture, "one dimension of a distant, self-assured relation to the world and to others which presupposes objective assurance and distance...in an essential way, since taste is the basis...whereby one classifies oneself and is classified by others" (1984: 56).

#### 2.4.1 Positions, Position-taking, and Habitus

It is important to note that Bourdieu deduced that social space primarily functions (and can only be analyzed if treated) as a *symbolic* space in which actors preternaturally correlate the manner in which they articulate themselves with their social 'positions'. Indeed, the notion of an objective and collectively shared conception of a singular 'reality' must be done away with under the premise of this framework; and replaced in its stead by a re-conceptualized social landscape constitutive of individuals reared within particularized realities structured and influenced by a spate of differentiable elements - class, be it in terms of wealth or social prestige, being just one of a multitude of variables. By the nature of this logic, the cultural conventions through which social actors come to constitute their social identities - and relay such identities to others - can best be interpreted as incidents of 'position-taking' that are invariably inspired by one's positioning in social space. Bourdieu ultimately locates one's propensity to develop their preferred position-taking sensibilities - and, indeed, the aforementioned 'aesthetic disposition' - less with a connoisseurs' conscious inclination than with the subconscious influence of their *habitus*; that cognitive structure which guides one's manner of perceiving social reality, and which finds its own particularistic constitution through absorbing the implicit logic propelling the class-specific practices alongside which one was initially socialized. Knowing no other way of articulating identity than through the conventions absorbed in chorus with the cognitive framework through which one perceives and understands the social world, the social actor is bound to embody their positions whilst consuming cultural products as a means of partaking in the symbolic rites of cultural participation.

Though constructed by virtue of what might be regarded a situated socialization, one's disposition for particularistic tastes (and thus particularistic cultural products) not only appear intrinsic within the social actor, but substantiate the notion that differential 'tastes' signal the presence of naturalistic differences between social classes. In declaring "life-styles...the systematic products of habitus, which, perceived in their mutual relations through the schemes of the habitus, become sign systems that are socially qualified (as 'distinguished', 'vulgar' etc.)" (1980: 172), Bourdieu explicitly suggests that the perception of 'naturalistic' difference serves as the primary basis on which social identities find their initial development - and, one might argue, implicitly suggests that the concept of identity is allotted the ability to persist through the perpetuation of the perception of intrinsic difference. However, and though Bourdieu indeed means to posit here that an individual's cultural identity is, in many respects, a manifestation of their place within a hierarchy of stratified social realities, such does not mean to suggest a strict class-determinism; for, even though social actors must refer to their space-specific habitus in the process of expressing themselves to others, the manner in which they might decide to do so is amendable to some degree of personal creativity. Hence, there is a great deal of potential for novel forms of position-taking to materialize, and it would likely not stand as a stretch of the imagination to suggest that manifestations of youth subculture, to a large extent, might be perceived as such.

#### *2.4.2 Capital and the concept of the Field*

Bourdieu does not, however, contend that social spaces constitute calm collectivities in which an implicit allegiance to the specificities advised by the collective habitus entails intra-spatial harmony. On the contrary, the various factions of social space inevitably overlap and conflict as social actors intrinsically vie to ascend their spatial placements and, thus, improve their objective life-conditions. Though Bourdieu regards such impulses as wont to failure - graduation into an alternate social space without the correspondingly requisite habitus is more apt to breed anomie than the desired comforts (2007b: 287) - the processes wherein those populating the desired realms of social space vie to defend the stasis of the existing social landscape nonetheless inspires a phenomenon whereby those cultural signifiers meant to denote spatial placement are invested with a great deal of gratuitous significance. In conceptualizing those arenas of social practice wherein individuals and classes vie to construct, substantiate, and defend the uniqueness

of their social identities as ‘fields’, Bourdieu elects to employ something of a game analogy in illustrating the logic of what could be regarded as an ‘economy’ of social interaction.

Bourdieu contends that social spaces retain their stratification - and internal stasis - by virtue of a process through which personal attributes serve to constitute, and find utilization as, various types of *capital*. Though *economic* capital, referring to capital in the material sense, stands as one of the manifestations attributed a considerable significance, such is no more significant than the immaterial manifestations which Bourdieu takes pains to highlight. Possession of the ‘aesthetic disposition’ and any comparable ability to derive a privileged appreciation from otherwise seemingly nondescript practices, for example, might signal a wealth of *cultural* capital derivative of class-positioning, honed by virtue of educational inculcation, and used as a strong indicator of intrinsic ‘belongingness’. *Social* capital is gained through the obtaining the social stature requisite in forming (and the implicit ability to know how to utilize) networks amongst the social space that one is either trying to gain induction into or, alternately, defend. Finally, *symbolic* capital is meant to refer to “the acquisition of a reputation for competence and an image of respectability and honourability” (1980:291), or the ability to navigate the use of economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital to achieve and maintain distinction within one’s field of elected participation.

If my reading of Bourdieu is correct, there are essentially two concurrent ‘games’ at hand. The first and most immediate requires that social actors vie to excel in procuring whatever form of capital is most sought after in keeping with the structural logic underlying both their social positioning and the specific field in which they have elected participation. Thus, social actors confined to social positioning marked by a relative scarcity of economic capital will aspire to establish their prominence through compiling whatever manifestations of capital the relevant field might call for; be it a wealth of ‘expert’ knowledge regarding cultural products (amidst the ‘field’ of cinematic fandom, for example) or a generous proportion of deep interpersonal ties (what might be regarded as the ‘field’ of street gang participation comes to mind here). This first game is individualistic in nature; the goal lies with not only amassing capital, but knowing how to utilize it against those who might threaten one’s stature through compiling their own. The second ‘game’ is far more collectivist and requires that spatially-homogenous populations protect the sanctity of their social space from those who might breach the positional barrier and, thus, deplete the exclusivity functioning to reinforce collective distinction. Hence, the ‘aesthetic dis-

position' renders elite culture a weapon allowing that those inhabiting positions typified by a wealth of both economic *and* cultural capital to prevent those who might possess a generous stock of the former (but not the latter) from succeeding in the 'field' of higher-class cultural consumption.

#### 2.4.3 Subcultural Capital and the Function of Authenticity Claims

In adopting a Bourdieuan analytical framework as a means of understanding the processes of insulation and stratification prevalent within 'underground' British club subcultures, Thornton (1996) has deduced that fields of subcultural participation are structured and reinforced by an implicit economy wherein actors vie to procure variations of 'subcultural capital'. Noting that Bourdieu declared it "possible to observe subspecies of capital operating within other less privileged domains" (1996: 11), Thornton declares that subcultural capital,

Confers status on its owner in the eyes of the relevant beholder [and can be] *objectified* or *embodied*. Just as books and paintings display cultural capital in the family home, so subcultural capital can be objectified in the form of fashionable haircuts and well-assembled record collections...[and] just as cultural capital is personified in 'good' manners and urbane conversation, so subcultural capital is embodied in the form of being 'in the know', using (but not over-using) current slang and looking as if you were born to perform the latest dance styles. Both cultural and subcultural capital put a premium on the 'second nature' of their knowledges. Nothing depletes capital more than the sight of someone trying too hard. (1996: 11-12, italics in original)

Though Thornton's analysis might seem to best play with postmodernist tenets in subtly suggesting that taking on the subcultural identity is ultimately a competition wherein participants compete to put on the most sophisticated front, it is important to note that, as the habitus is conceptualized as a cognitive structure that manoeuvres below the level of explicit cognition (2007b), Bourdieu himself did not correlate the perpetuation of such symbolic economies with any conscious intentions on the part of its participants. Though Thornton's observations do not contrast with the sense that homogenous subcultural participation might initially appeal to groups endowed with similar habitus imparted upon them by virtue of their locality within a shared social space, her conceptualization of subcultural capital might be accused of losing grasp of the fact that such participants might *unconsciously* abide by, and reinforce, practices meant to impede groups, with different habitus as conditioned by different environments, from interjecting themselves into the field and, thereby, threatening the autonomy of the field and the individuality of its participants themselves.

I would argue that this notion of an unconscious drive toward differentiation coincides with the manner in which ‘authenticity’ has been found to be sanctified within various fields of subcultural practice by a considerable host of ethnographic initiatives regarding the punk subculture (Nogic & Riley, 2007; Williams, 2006; Moore, 2005; Widdicombe and Wooffitt, 1995; Baron, 1989; Fox, 1987). In each example, those subculturalists whom each research project implicitly regard as being ‘authentic’ representatives of their respective ‘scenes’ not only testify that their authenticity derives from being *intrinsically* drawn to the practices and values endorsed within the subculture, but argue that their personal authenticity is perpetuated through maintaining a stern allegiance to those customs and ideological dispositions. Though it would seem commonsensical to note the similarity between the subcultural utility of authenticity and Bourdieu’s “ideology of natural taste” - characterized as “an ideological [strategy] generated in the everyday class struggle [that] *naturalizes* real differences [by converting ] differences in the mode of acquisition of culture into differences of nature” (1984, 681; italics in original) - it is of dire importance to note that the manner in which authenticity is conceptualized has not retained any considerable degree of stasis within the punk subculture. Fox (1987) and Baron (1989) found that, while self-professedly ‘authentic’ subcultural participants declared that they couldn’t vocalize why they felt as if participation within the punk subculture came ‘naturally’ to them, they could gage the lack of in-authenticity in others through their lack of a stern commitment to opting out of the conventions of wider society or engaging in violent altercations with rival subculturalists. Widdicombe and Wooffitt (1995) and Moore (2005) subsequently found that, while self-professed ‘authentic’ subcultural participants declared that they couldn’t vocalize why they felt as if participation within the punk subculture came ‘naturally’ to them, inauthentic members could be deduced by virtue of their having been introduced to the movement by ‘mainstream’ cultural products or their proclivity toward signalling their belongingness through the consumption of ‘mainstream’ cultural products. Nogic and Riley (2007) and Williams (2006) illuminate manifestations of punk subcultural practice in which authenticity is measured by virtue of the manner through which one garnered their knowledge concerning the conventions endorsed by their scenes and, furthermore, how adequately newer participants respect the conventions endorsed therein. It could be argued that these studies serve to demonstrate that ‘authenticity’ has become something of a catch-all trope that self-purportedly naturalized subcultural participants utilize in problematizing whatever conventions of practice or emerging subcultural populations

inherently feel ‘wrong’ and ‘threatening’ at any given time. It could also be argued, however, that the manner through which ‘authenticity’ is conceptualized is but one of the stakes over which to be fought within the field of subcultural participation, and has undergone a number of discernable permutations within the past twenty years. Both postulations only serve to bolster the applicability of a Bourdieuan framework and, even if this collection of research initiatives do little to suggest that each served to detail but one pocket of a widely dispersed but unified ‘punk’ subculture, the identification of unique stratification techniques within each example mean to suggest that, be it subcultural aristocracy or a purity of ideological agenda, those assured of their own hierarchical ascendancy within the field felt it requisite that they protect the sanctity of *something*.

It would therefore appear that the Birmingham Theorists’ conceptualization of subcultures as harbouring a sense of solidarity fit to render them egalitarian collectives is certainly problematic and, though a great deal of theorization might have been dedicated to understanding conflicts between subcultural entities and other out-groups (Hebdige, 2006; Jefferson, 2006), there is little material present for the purposes of aiding one in understanding any such deep-rooted conflicts, or patterns of stratification, within the same subculture.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, however, the fact that accusations of in-authenticity would oft appear levelled against participants either unwilling to conform, or pay due respect to, the conventions and expectations functioning in not only maintaining group homogeneity, but the collectivity’s comparative structural heterogeneity, might be taken to dispel the notion that subcultures consist of superficial compositions of participants who neither invest in the maintenance of cultural conventions nor adhere to anything resembling a subcultural *conscience collective*. The adoption of a Bourdieuan framework of analysis and, thereby, conceptualizing the ‘field’ of subcultural participation as a pocket of social space in which two games find simultaneous engagement - one whereby individual members compete for subcultural capital, another entailing a collective initiative to maintain the longstanding structure of the field - might thus harbour something resembling the synthesis between the Birmingham School’s structural-Marxism and the postsubculturalist orientation.

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<sup>4</sup> Except for, of course, those studies highlighting processes of gender stratification within subcultural collectivities; with the work of McRobbie and Garber (2006) standing as the most renowned.

## 2.5 The 'Generalized Other' as a Subcultural 'Folk-Devil'

To return, finally, to justifying my intentions in regarding the representation of the 'emo kid' as a subcultural 'folk-devil', I might wish to highlight a peculiar tendency as denoted by Muggleton (2000) and Widdicombe and Wooffit (1995, 1990) in their respective ethnographies of the contemporary punk subculture: namely, the utilization of a generalized representational 'other' in processes relating to discursively maintaining self-authenticity and reinforcing subcultural sanctity. To Muggleton's credit, he concedes that patterns tailored toward the invocation and stigmatization of subcultural 'Others' serving as "a stereotypical characterization based on subculturalists who are contemporaries rather than consociates" and "against which the interviewees authenticate themselves" (2000: 90) - or, groups which are "invariably perceived as homogenous, internally coherent and externally demarcated...unknown contemporaries [that are] judged only by reference to general cultural categories" (2007: 127-28) - prohibits his initial hypothesis that modern subcultures have taken on an *entirely* postmodernist nature from achieving definitive affirmation. In granting the discursive phenomena whereby subculturalites vie to deauthenticate those perceived to function as the generalized 'other' a greater depth of attention, Widdicombe and Wooffitt have observed that "speakers use three primary resources to accomplish their negative assessments of other members" (1995: 151). The first involves the use of *derogatory labels* meant to "draw attention to the differences between [subcultural] factions" (1995: 152). The second involves the utilization of descriptions meant to "emphasize the shallowness of new members"; used in indicating "the [inauthentic] motives which lead these individuals to affiliate" and insinuating that such motives "are insincere as they are not adopting the overarching lifestyle of the subculture" (1995: 153). Finally, ostensibly authentic members endorse a practice whereby the inauthentic are ascribed prototypically unsavoury features that most often relate to the unsanctioned manner in which undesirable factions are believed to enter into the field of subcultural participation.

To be sure, Muggleton, Widdicombe and Wooffitt each mean to demonstrate the processes through which established subculturalites utilize and reinforce stereotypes in prohibiting certain factions due regard as authentic participants; what might, under different circumstances, be interpreted as a program of subcultural representational politics. And, indeed, even in adopting a Bourdieuan framework, these processes might rightfully be interpreted as a strategy

through which to impede select populations from acquiring the authenticity that might appear to serve as the most sought-after form of subcultural capital, and thus exclude them from the individualistic 'game' at hand. However, in recalling that the concurrent game - that involving a collectivity attuned to unconsciously adopt practices simultaneously meant to protect *and* perpetuate itself - it might safely be assumed that these representational strategies serve to facilitate a secondary function: that of implicitly promoting, and discursively punishing transgressions against, the longstanding conventions of subcultural practice and ideological allegiance. In essence, I wish to argue that such representations might be meant, in part, to facilitate processes of subcultural normalization tailored toward guaranteeing not only a requisite degree of dispositional conformity, but an ever more salient need for a requisite *number* of normalized subcultural participants.

It might be recalled that St. Cyr defines the classic conceptualization of the 'folk devil' as a "personification of evil, characterized through a totality of negative attributes...[which] becomes a direct reminder of what we should not be" (2003: 29). I would wish to posit that the subcultural 'folk-devil' might similarly be conceptualized as a representation constructed around the perceived or threatened presence of subcultural 'others' who are taken as embodying whatever variety of prototypically negative attributes are deemed particularly problematic within any subcultural field at any given juncture. The subcultural folk-devil is reified through intra-subcultural discursive practices for the sake of fulfilling three potential functions, each correlated with the implicit structure of the economy of subcultural capital and, furthermore, preserving the sanctity of the field of subcultural practice. The first regards a means by which established subculturalites might protect their individual capital-stocks and, by extension, their standing in the field from those constituting the influx of problematic subcultural aspirants. The second is that of allowing those groups so concerned with maintaining the established doxa of the subcultural field the ability to maintain their stature by virtue of protecting the longstanding processes - liable to challenge by virtue of an incursion of either the uninitiated or disrespectful - through which such is measured and disseminated. The third regards replenishing the requisite population of the subcultural field with participants subjected to proper inculcation; processes potentially facilitated, in part, by presence of representational constructs of a generalized other meant to serve as a fledgling participants' *direct reminder of what they should not be*, should they them-

selves aspire to take part in the individualistic ‘game’ while, concurrently, perpetuating its collectivist counterpart.

In the coming chapters, I will attempt to demonstrate that the ‘emo kid’ stands as one such subcultural folk-devil born with a due concern for protecting some of the longstanding conventions within, and in response to a number of the distinctly contemporary anxieties suffered by, what might most conservatively be regarded as the modern punk subculture. Prior to doing this, however, due attention must be dedicated to outlining the means and methodologies with which I shall inspire to do so. Therefore, and in addition to mapping out the tenets for the genealogical analysis of the emergence of the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil, I wish to dedicate the following chapter to illustrating the pivotal role played by quasi-subcultural ‘niche’ media products and invoke the theoretical works of Michel Foucault (1995, 1990, 1980) as a means of introducing the operation of subcultural power dynamics into the current project.

## **Chapter Three: On the Foucaultian Genealogy, the Mediated Constitution of Subculture, and the Field of Subcultural Production.**

### **3.1 Introductory Notes**

I have conceptualized subcultures, in the previous chapter, as ‘fields’ of cultural participation in which those actors so engaged adhere to implicit conventions of practice in competing for various manifestations of ‘capital’. This characterization implies that the emergence of the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil might be attributed, in part, to the processes through which established figures within the punk subculture vied to denigrate ‘inauthentic’ participants in collusion with strategies tailored not only toward protecting the stasis of their own capital reserves, but the sanctity of the processes through which this capital is distributed throughout the subcultural field. I link this analysis with Bourdieu’s assertions regarding the processes that facilitate the overarching function of the field of cultural production. This chapter, which will be divided into three distinct sections, will advance the argument that the music media - or ‘niche media’, as described by Thornton (1996) - have served to play an equal (if not greater) role in inadvertently inspiring the subcultural construction of the ‘emo kid’ representation. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the manner through which this thesis will abide by the parameters of a Foucauldian genealogy - and thus utilize critical discourse analysis and content analysis – in attempting to highlight the differential power dynamics involved in both the emergence of the perceived genre of ‘emo’ music and, subsequently, the discursive genesis of the ‘emo kid’ representational folk-devil. The second section will contextualize the applicability of the genealogical methodology through considering Thornton’s (1996) assertion that communications media products (and the authoritative ‘expert’ voice with which they speak) fulfill a crucial role in not only facilitating the emergence of subcultures, but in determining the conventions with which they structure themselves. This section will also consider Bourdieu’s thoughts concerning the manner through which knowledge producers within the ‘field of cultural production’ - which is also structured by competitive power dynamics - legitimate the ‘value’ of artistic works through determining their authenticity. The final section will explicitly touch upon a number of prospective ‘struggles’ - within and between the variety of ‘fields’ both involved with, and that might stand to benefit from, the creation and consumption of cultural *products* and *knowledge*- that I will correlate with the processes through which the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil came to emerge. By the conclusion of this chapter, I will have compiled a theoretical backdrop against which to advance my overarching argument: that

the 'emo kid' representation came into being as a means through which subcultural participants could utilize *representational* measures in resisting an agenda whereby key 'niche' media outlets attempted to facilitate the construction of a new subcultural entity and, thus, threatened to deconsecrate the established conventions serving to structure their subcultural fields.

### **3.2 Section One: Foucault and Genealogy: Power, Discipline and Normalization**

The majority of Foucault's work might be taken as a wide-ranging inquiry into the nature of power and the mechanisms through which it is invoked. However, Foucault does not conceptualize power in the juridical sense, where "power is taken to be a right" and looked upon as a "concrete power which every individual holds, and whose partial or total cession enables political power or sovereignty to be established" (1980: 88). Nor does he regard power as an entity of oppression constitutive of "a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through derivations, pervade the entire social body" (1990: 92). Instead, for Foucault, power is ultimately regarded as "a multiplicity of force relations" which suffices in "forming a chain or a system" and manifesting in "strategies...whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of law, in the various social hegemonies" (1990: 92-93). As Foucault regards power as indelibly relative and in constant flux, power is essentially regarded as a force which is less possessed by any social agent than found to work *through them*. He posits that power ultimately comes to be exercised "in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations" (1990: 94) which can simultaneously be found to operate through (and perpetuate the power imbalances within) a plethora of individualistic social relationships and wider social processes. Foucault nonetheless deduces that these dynamics implement and perpetuate "comprehensive systems" tailored toward serving functions above and beyond the "aims and objectives" possessed of those individuals, or groups, taken to be dominant within any particular relation; systems in which "the logic is perfectly clear, the aims decipherable, and yet...no one is there to have invented them, and [there are] few who can be said to have formulated them" (ibid., 95). In being exercised within and throughout the social arena, then, tactics of power that can be attributed to the conscious aims of social actors might also be found to facilitate processes escaping the explicit cognisance of the oppressors and oppressed alike. This phenomenon allows the emergence of processes through which systems of power, devoid of ei-

ther any architect or governor, silently envelop and regulate the entire social body. Indeed, one of the aims of Foucault's genealogical project lay not only with denoting and exposing the operation of these processes, but identifying the social artefacts and practices that might be taken as their product.

In the course of his studies, Foucault alluded to the presence of two forms of widely pervasive powers. Disciplinary (or anatomic-political) power, expressed in the entrenched conventions of such institutions as those concerning education, healthcare, and militarism, is taken to be a force that "produces subjected and practiced [or] docile bodies" (1995, 138) through increasing their concrete utility while, simultaneously, guaranteeing subservience, or "a relation of strict subjection", to the overarching "machinery of power" (1995: 138). Discipline essentially exerts its force over the subject at the corporeal level; it takes the body as a machine and sees to "the optimization of its capabilities, the extortion of its forces, the parallel increase of its usefulness and its docility, [and] its integration into systems of efficient and economic controls" (1990: 139). Regulatory power, or the 'bio-politics' focusing "on the species body" and "the mechanics of life and serving as the basis of the biological processes", vies to subsume control over populations at the very level of life through concerning itself with - and, indeed, orchestrating - "propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, [and] life expectancy and longevity" (1990: 139). Foucault deduces that each manifestation of power - the former enacting itself over individualized 'subjects' and the latter over subjectified populations - contributes to the realization of a "society of normalisation" (1980: 107) in which individuals (and entire societies) might conform to the expectations of (and act in due accordance with) those tenets determined vital should any given society perpetuate itself.

### *3.2.1 Truth and Knowledge, Scientific Discourse, and the Construction of the Subject*

Though Foucault was not naïve to the fact that certain populations ultimately stood to benefit from the operation of these mechanisms of power, the fact that disciplinary and regulatory powers operate without the guidance of sentient instigation warrants repetition. Instead, Foucault directs his attention to the emergence of the enlightenment mindset and its corresponding assumptions that the human body could not only come to be known and optimized through the creation of truth-claims, but that human societies could, likewise, achieve a state of perfection through the accumulation of knowledge. As the human sciences ultimately constructed and

reinforced connotations of normalcy - and abnormality - in the process of mapping the human body and cognitive processes, individuals become 'objects of knowledge' in that the analytical 'gaze' of the human sciences renders them objects to be understood in collusion with scientific paradigms; the 'subjects' of processes meant to study, categorize and (potentially) condemn or correct. Foucault thus deduces that power operates through the creation of knowledge that not only successfully purports itself to constitute 'truth', but proposes a mandate tailored toward achieving the ideal society. This assumption has not only since facilitated a process whereby "the formation of knowledge and the increase of power regularly reinforce one another in a circular process" (1995: 224), but one whereby fewer and fewer dimensions of life are unmolested by regimes of surveillance and control. As an example, *The History of Sexuality* (1990) meant not only to chart the process through which sex was subsumed under the domain of health practitioners and psychoanalysts, but came to show how categories of sexual deviants were created as a means of curtailing manifestations of sexual orientation that might neither contribute to societal regeneration nor correlate with the dominant moral order. The human sciences, in essence, created a 'truth' discourse meant to identify expressions of sexual deviance (that the field of pedagogy, in part, vied to prevent through a variety of inculcation techniques) while simultaneously 'creating' populations of sexual deviants for whom normalization might only be achieved through further subjecting oneself (or being forcibly subjected) to the expertise of the clinical gaze.

Though Foucault conceptualized the sexualized body as one of the primary sites through which power renders the subject-of-interest subservient to the aims and will of power mechanisms attuned to normalization and social regeneration, his assertion that the institutions of medicine also succeeded in creating 'species' of sexual deviants hints toward a further presupposition: that the very 'regimes' of discourse from which knowledge and truth are constituted simultaneously served as the frameworks through which the post-enlightened individual came to achieve self-reification, or construct one's own subjectivity. Though "discipline 'makes' individuals" by virtue of the fact that "it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise" (1995: 170), Foucault concludes that those so subjectified also reinforce disciplinary mechanisms through not only self-identifying with their classifications, but also enacting disciplinary powers upon themselves as a result. In essence, then, truth is just as likely to take on an air of substantiation through the acknowledgement and

repentance of the self-professedly ‘abnormal’ subject as it is through scientific discovery, and it is no wonder that Foucault traces the roots of self-disciplinary mechanisms to the emergence of the practice of confession.

### *3.2.2 The Genealogical Method: Using Discourse and Content Analysis in Uncovering a History of Struggles*

In addition to subjecting individuals to processes of objectification, categorization and normalization, Foucault also deemed that the sciences’ construction of universalistic ‘truth’ narratives also functioned to suppress and deny what he referred to as ‘subjugated knowledges’: that “whole set of knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate [by virtue of being located] beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity” (1980: 82). These subjugated knowledges entail a cognition of ‘historical contents’ - or *struggles* - that “have been buried and disguised in a functional coherence or formal systematization” (1980: 81). In other words, Foucault means to suggest that the validity of the knowledge-stocks which have come to constitute human subjectivities did not simply emerge and come to find acceptance with those populations whom they vied to affix their gaze upon. Even should the established histories of the emergence of such ‘regimes of truth’ gloss over or deny recollections pertaining to instances of their own refusal and resistance, those recollections might still persist elsewhere - be they inscribed within the subtext of case-studies, the collective memories of disempowered peoples rarely given the chance to ‘speak’, or relegated the status of having been ‘disqualified’ by virtue of their inability to conform with the lofty standards expected of empirically verifiable ‘scientific’ claims to truth. Subjugated knowledges, then, concern themselves with “a *historical knowledge of struggles*”(1980: 83, italics in original), and Foucault elected to concern his studies with those stocks of ‘popular knowledge’ in which “there lay the memory of hostile encounters which even to this day have been confined to the margins of knowledge” (1980: 83).

A Foucauldian genealogy thus consists of unifying “erudite knowledge and local memories” in a manner that “allows us to establish a historical knowledge of struggles and to make use of this knowledge tactically today” (1980: 83). The method consists of engaging with “a painstaking rediscovery of struggles together with the rude memory of their conflicts” that might ultimately “entertain the claims of [subjugated knowledges] against the claims of a unitary body of

theory which would filter, hierarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge [as to] what constitutes a science and its objects” (1980: 83). In lieu of taking that commonsensicality facilitated by theoretical doxa as its data, the genealogy sifts through the discourses, artefacts, and collective recollections of subjugated populations in hopes of not only mapping a history of any identifiable struggles, but alerting us to the presence of those subjugating power mechanisms operating therein. The genealogy is thus a brand of historical sociology which concerns itself less with landmark eras and events than the *power dynamics* underlying said eras and events; dynamics which might be deduced through studying the manner in which allusions of implicit struggles are manifest in the *discourse*, and concrete *artefacts*, of the subjugated populations.

It stands to reason that the compilation of a genealogical inquiry demands the employment of a methodology that might allow one to take the means through which knowledge is communicated, and testimonies of ‘truth’ reinforced, as its primary focus. In this light, discourse analysis has stood as one means through which the histories of implicit struggles might be recognized and rendered suitable for analysis. Informed by the ontological presupposition that meaning (and, in effect, social reality) is effectively constructed through the manner in which we speak about, or construct knowledge concerning, the world (Berger and Luckmann, 1984), discourse analysis concerns itself with detailing the processes through which discourses “do not simply describe the social world, but categorize it [and] bring phenomena into sight” (Parker, 2004: 252). However, and rather than taking the significance of a discourse (or a ‘text’) at face value, critical strains of discourse analysis concern themselves with a number of pressing questions. About whom does the discourse speak, and who is speaking? What meanings, or representations, might the discourse subtly be enforcing? How might the discourse impact those with whom the discourse concerns itself, those who constructed it, and those who inevitably receive it? As Hall (1986) notes, critical discourse analysis essentially strives to deduce the subtle means through which certain dimensions of social reality are ‘naturalized’ - or made to appear commonsensical and unavoidable - in a manner serving to benefit those populations endowed with the power to determine the means through which we speak about certain populations, issues, and social processes. In taking instances of discourse as its research data, critical discourse analysis vies to uncover and highlight the manner in which a discourse facilitates the construction of meaning and the means through which people conceptualize reality (and deny the validity of alternative meanings and conceptualizations of reality) while extending due care and consideration

in deducing the origins of a discourse and the overarching power dynamics in relation to which it might have been constructed.

Content analysis, on the other hand, aspires to apply a similar programme of critique to those communicative products that strive to construct meaning through non-discursive, or symbolic, means (Woollacott, 1986). Having come to be perceived as epistemologically inseparable from the concept of deconstructionism - a methodology drawing from the post-structuralism of Derrida (1981) and the critical semiology of Barthes (1986) - critical content analysis presupposes that the meanings contained within any cultural product might not confine themselves to the messages *explicitly* conveyed within. The constructive power of the communicative product might reside at the level of symbolism, in the nature of the imagery, or even within the associations which audiences are implicitly expected to draw on their own accord (Denzin, 2004). These methods of representation are correlated with measures meant to inspire an audience in forging associations between particularistic traits and particular populations and stake jurisdiction over the dissemination of those touchstones with which collective meanings are created and reinforced. Critical content analysis, simply put, concerns itself with the representations that are created and reinforced through the latent meanings that are disseminated through the symbolic dimensions of the social text. Taken together, both discourse and content analysis constitute a methodology that serves not only to deduce how meaning is being created through what is being stated explicitly, but also through what is being stated implicitly through the presentation of particularistic imagery or symbolic subtext.

### **3.3 Section Two: The Dissemination of Cultural Knowledge, the Mediated Constitution of the Subcultural Subject, and the Field of Cultural Production.**

At this point, the question might arise as to exactly how the adoption of a genealogical framework might be of use in the context of the research issue at hand. Indeed, initiating a Foucaultian genealogy would arguably appear to entail two prerequisites in regarding the phenomenon under study: the first being an entity dutifully engaged in the process of producing an 'expert knowledge' regarding the normalized dispositions and practices of a subjugated class; the second the presence of populations so measured against the standards and 'truth claims' constructed therein. Though it might not initially appear as if the subcultural realm harbours any fitting

equivalents to the health professionals whom Foucault believed to have played a part in constructing species of sexual deviants or categorizations of mental illness, I would argue that such a first impression might not hold entirely true. In considering Thornton's (1995) assertion that the formation and structuration of subcultural entities is inspired less by subcultural participants than by widespread communications media which "create subcultures in the process of naming them and [drawing] boundaries around them in the act of describing them" (1995: 162), I wish to initiate a discussion regarding the processes through which the value of, or meaning associated with, subculturally revered artistic products is largely constructed and distributed by virtue of the 'expert' discourses constructed within what Bourdieu would describe as the 'sub-field of cultural knowledge production' - but which we might, for the time being, simply describe as the entertainment media industry.

### *3.3.1 Regarding the Three Orders of Media*

Thornton (1995), discussed previously with reference to her role in coining the term 'subcultural capital', conceptualizes subcultural manifestations as Bourdieuan 'fields' in which practices are informed by (and the structure of the field is maintained through) an implicit logic centred around the distribution and accumulation of privileged knowledge which might translate into the development of sanctified 'tastes' and, by extension, prestige. However, Thornton parts company with those who might deduce that the cultural products and practices indicative of subcultural authenticity are decided upon by the sole volition of the subcultural field; instead, she asserts that, "the media are crucial...[as] a series of institutional networks essential to the creation, classification and distribution of cultural knowledge" (1995:118). Aside from functioning to alert the unfamiliar to the existence of such subcultural groups (and the tastes celebrated therein), Thornton credits media institutions with a formative role in deducing that,

subcultures are constructed in the process of being discovered. Journalists and photographers do not invent subcultures, but shape them, mark their core and reify their borders...[thus proving] integral to the process by which we create groups through their representation (1995:160).

Thornton speaks to the presence of what might be described as three orders of communications media, each of which plays a significant role in functioning to reify, perpetuate, and (at times) restructure subcultural manifestations. The first, *micro-media*, which include "flyers, fan-

zines, fly posters, listings, telephone information lines, pirate radio, e-mailing lists and internet archive sites” (1995: 137), harbour a significance beyond the obvious fact that many serve to alert subcultural communities in regards to events and current issues of collective concern. Indeed, in many cases, micro-media allow subcultural participants to utilize media dissemination channels as a means of purveying information to a specific target audience of fellow subcultural participants. Thornton singles out the practice of creating ‘fanzines’ - independently produced and circulated publications centring around show reviews, album critiques, and other subculturally relevant commentaries - as one such method through which subcultural audiences might develop an appreciation for those tastes and conventions which are currently regarded as ‘hip’ from an authentic, decidedly ‘grassroots’ source. Micro-media products can essentially be taken as indicative of initiatives, on the part of subcultural participants, to ensure the necessitated dissemination of cultural knowledge throughout a limited body of specific recipients; a practice which Thornton declares to be crucial as a means of prohibiting other mediated entities from exploiting the subculture for monetary profit or, worse yet, devaluing some manifestations of subcultural capital through the process of distributing sensitive knowledge to non-participatory media consumers.

The second order, the *mass media* - which might be placed at the opposing end of the spectrum - consist of such mainstream information channels as televised and print news broadcasts, network television entertainment programs and, in Thornton’s analysis, the tabloid press. These are the mediated entities which expose wider publics to potentially sensationalistic and erroneous representations of the subcultural entity through derogatory news reportage concerning itself with burgeoning (and highly problematic) ‘trends’ in youth fashion and culture. Thornton also correlates factions within the mass media with initiatives tailored toward exploiting those subcultural manifestations perceived as harbouring an ‘untapped’ market potential through the dissemination of sterilized representations; a process that suffices in popularizing surface-level subcultural fashions amongst the general population while, quite effectively, assassinating the allure of the derivative collectivity. The mass media thus not only harbour the ability to inspire the unwarranted stigmatization of a subcultural entity, but the ability to render a subcultural field fallow grounds as a sphere in which to construct subversive identity through the sheer process of extending *approving* media coverage.

The final permutation of communication media, which we might place in the centre of the spectrum, is *niche media*; those ‘consumer magazines’ which proliferated in the 1980s and themselves stand as “the result of more detailed market research, tighter target marketing and new technologies such as desktop publishing” (151). Thornton deduces that niche media function to facilitate a plethora of crucial roles in regards to shaping subcultural manifestations, the most crucial of which stem from their proclivity to,

...categorize social groups, arrange sounds, itemize attire and label everything. They baptize scenes and generate the self-consciousness required to maintain cultural distinctions. They give definition to vague cultural formations, pull together and reify the disparate materials which become subcultural homologies. The music and style press are crucial to our conceptions of [youth]; they do not just cover subcultures, they *help to construct them* (1995: 151, my italics).

In effect, Thornton would appear to speak of the presence of a reciprocal relationship between subcultural collectivities and the niche media which aspire to cater to them. As these media products provide the mediated artefacts through which readers might introduce themselves to the trends in dress, artists, and ideological undercurrents indicative of proper subcultural participation at any given point, their readers come to grant such publications an equal measure of financial support *and* implicit legitimacy. As their audiences become further indoctrinated into the subcultural milieu, so too do they become further dependent upon these publications in keeping up-to-date on permutations within the ‘scene’. In inevitably deducing that niche media effectively serve as “a network...akin to the education system in their creation, classification, and distribution of cultural knowledge” (1995: 161), Thornton could arguably be taken to suggest that it is ultimately they who deduce what qualifies as distinguished taste, classifies as relevant knowledge, and constitutes accepted practice. In other words, Thornton’s postulations implicitly refer to, without explicitly invoking, many of the key insights advanced by Pierre Bourdieu in considering the practices facilitating - and, above all else, the struggles noted as structuring - the field of cultural production. It is toward a consideration of these presuppositions that we now turn.

### 3.3.2 Bourdieu on the field of cultural production

Chapter two provided a brief overview concerning Bourdieu’s postulation that patterns of cultural consumption - and the very constitution of what might be regarded as ‘natural’ taste - are informed by a quasi-subconscious economy wherein social actors compete for a variety of

manifestations of ‘capital’ and, in doing so, reify and reinforce the longstanding divisions between inhabitants of the various ‘social spaces’. The following discussion will concern itself with the fact that Bourdieu also took pains to deduce that the field of cultural production - or, that space wherein a multitude of specialized actors partake in the production of cultural products and, by extension, culture itself - operates in congruence with a similar logic and, indeed, suffices in realizing the perpetuation of a similar economy of capital distribution. It is of dire note, however, that Bourdieu correlates the operation of the field of cultural production with the operation of a wider field of power - itself functioning to develop widespread allegiances to the dominant economic processes and political ideologies which thus suffice in reinforcing the smooth operation (and stratified character) of the social landscape - in an arguably peculiar fashion. Though implying that the field of cultural production reinforces hegemonic allegiances to the operation of the field of power by virtue of the nature of many of the cultural products produced therein,<sup>5</sup> and though admitting that pockets within the field tend to adhere to (and thus facilitate) those practices imposed by the field of power, Bourdieu nonetheless posits that “the literary and artistic field is contained within the field of power, while possessing a *relative autonomy* with respect to it, especially as regards its economic and political principles of hierarchization” (1993: 37-38, my italics). In suggesting that the field of cultural production retains an equal propensity to either conform to, or act in contradiction with, the logic of the field of power (and, by extension, apt to engage in tendencies that might either reinforce or challenge that logic), Bourdieu argues that the field of cultural production must be conceptualized as “a *field of forces*, but [also] a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces” (1993: 30, italics in original).<sup>6</sup> The field of cultural production plays host to two categories of cultural producers, each of which operate in collusion with distinctly contrasting logics and each of which, furthermore, correlate their artistic production toward the ultimate objective of obtaining the ability to dictate the dominant structuration of the entire field. In christening this perpetual programme of struggle a competition over the ability to determine the “dominant principle of hierarchization” (1993: 40), Bourdieu sought to rationalize those processes through which the field of cultural

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<sup>5</sup> ...and thus channelling Adorno (1991), who proposed that the culture industry strives to sterilize any cultural product that might stand a substantive chance of breeding mass discontent with established ideological systems.

<sup>6</sup> Though I will not do so explicitly at every applicable juncture of the discussion to follow, I would request that the reader not only note the wealth of parallels between the theoretical presuppositions of Bourdieu and Foucault, but the ease with which they can be taken to complement one another in broaching subjects (or employing discursive concepts) that either one or the other did not explicitly entertain.

production could simultaneously prop up the field of power while, at times, appearing to operate by a completely inverted logic to that of the 'economic world'. We might thus turn our attention to Bourdieu's postulations concerning the struggle between those who aspire to assure a field-wide allegiance to the *heteronomous* principle of hierarchization, those who might challenge such in support of an *autonomous* principle of hierarchization, and the strategies that each employs in striving to achieve their aspired goals.

### 3.3.3 *The Struggle for Hierarchization and the Legitimation of Capital*

At the risk of oversimplification, we might say that Bourdieu's primary argument centres around the prospect that cultural producers will intrinsically gravitate toward prescribed positions within the field of cultural production by virtue of two deeply interrelated factors: one's fundamental 'dispositions' (or method of 'being', as informed by their class-inscribed habitus) and the capital - be it economic, cultural, social or symbolic - which they possess at the onset of their induction into the 'game'. Those actors imbued with a habitus derived from positioning within social spaces primarily centred around the procurement of economic capital, and who thus stand to acquire privilege from the continued perpetuation of the wider field of power, implicitly tailor their practices (and products) toward recreating the logic of the market within the field of cultural production. As they stand to benefit from the perpetuation of established systems of power distribution (and thus tailor their products toward protecting these systems - be it through actively creating the market or reinforcing a wider allegiance to its logic), Bourdieu elects to identify those who participate in the creation of highly commercialized cultural products as striving to facilitate a *heteronomous* principle of hierarchization within the cultural field. Those who might gravitate toward the field from social spaces that value forms of capital alternative to those revered within the field of power - such as spaces in which one's stern refusal to embody the logic of the market economy translates into a highly coveted manifestation of *symbolic* capital, for example - will tailor their products and practices toward facilitating a field that is primarily centred around the dissemination of alternative gains. Bourdieu deduced that these actors as these correlate their practices toward realizing a field of cultural production entailing an *autonomous* principle of hierarchization and, by extension, a field of production so estranged from the wider field of power that it stands as an inverted economy wherein achieving success with mass audiences actually serves to *deplete* one's capital reserves.

Though the omnipresence of both breeds of artistic producer effectively creates two parallel ‘artistic communities’ - one in which select producers create artefacts for mass consumption (the sub-field of large-scale production) and another in which art is created ‘for art’s sake’ and, primarily, for consumption by other like-minded producers (the sub-field of restricted production) - each camp nonetheless strives to achieve jurisdiction over the wider field - even if only for the fact that the successful entrenchment of the heteronomous principle of hierarchization would endanger the established means through which autonomous producers accumulate capital (and vice versa). By Bourdieu’s account, then, the struggle which structures the wider field of cultural production is that between those producers who, in striving to institute a heteronomous principle of hierarchization, might facilitate a field which will parallel the structural tenets of the ‘economic world’ and those producers who, in vying to realize a field entailing an autonomous principle of hierarchization, might aid in constructing a field in which the principles of the wider ‘economic world’ are effectively reversed. Though the struggle over the ability to dictate the hierarchical logic of the entire field of cultural production has never produced a discernable victor, Bourdieu notes that certain sub-populations of artistic producers can be taken as operating by the tenets of one of the competing logics. By way of example, the fact that popular novelists constitute an artistic community in which high book sales are taken to indicate success suffices in suggesting a sub-field guided by heteronomous principles. As poets thrive less on commercial success than the reputation and prestige awarded to them within small circles of fellow poets, that realm of the field can be taken as endorsing a dedication to the autonomous logic. It is no wonder, then, that Bourdieu notes that poets are regarded as artistic failures within circles of popular novelists and popular novelists considered insincere opportunists by the community of poets.

It should go without saying that, in the case of those artistic producers so championed within the punk subculture, the gross majority of those deemed ‘legitimate’ or ‘authentic’ produce their works in correspondence with the autonomous logic of the sub-field of restricted production. It is of dire importance to note, however, that their allegiance to the autonomous logic might not necessarily be entirely dependent upon their own choice in doing so. In returning briefly to the topic of the field of subcultural *participation* – and in situating the subcultural field within the wider field of power – it is worth highlighting the fact that the field of subcultural participation asserts itself in ideological opposition to the wider field of power. This postulation is

rendered all the more salient in considering instances – one of which will be detailed to a greater extent in the Chapter to follow - in which actors within the field of subcultural production *and* subcultural consumers alike effectively deem artistic producers ‘illegitimate’ or ‘inauthentic’ should they develop business relationships with the corporatized sphere of the ‘mainstream’ music industry.

### *3.3.4 Producing Discourse and Disseminating Legitimacy: The Processes of Consecration*

Bourdieu ultimately deduces that the field of cultural production is primarily structured by the opposition “between two economies...which endlessly produces and reproduces the negative existence of the sub-field of restricted production and its basic opposition to the bourgeois economic order” (1993: 53). However, he also notes the presence of a second program of long-standing struggle which might have a comparably significant impact upon the structure of the field: namely, “the opposition, within the sub-field of restricted production...[between] the established figures and the newcomers, i.e. between *artistic generations*” (1993: 53, italics in original). Though the processes through which artists in the sub-field of large-scale production have few means of accumulating the artistic capital which they seek beyond creating products to be deemed popular with the mass public, the conventions of capital dissemination as employed within the sub-field of restricted production are much more amenable to the creative whims of fledgling producers “who cannot make their own mark without pushing into the past those who have an interest in stopping the clock, eternalizing the present state of things” (1993: 60). Though the autonomous principle of hierarchization might be allotted the ability to persist despite the emergence of a new onslaught of cultural producers, the same cannot be said for the bases on which the processes of hierarchization are actively executed; especially when considering that the process of improving one’s position within the sub-field of restricted production entails “winning recognition...of one’s difference from other producers...[and], by the same token, creating a new position, ahead of the positions already occupied, in the vanguard” (1993: 60).

Bourdieu posits that one historical by-product of these struggles, which now functions to facilitate the recurrence of each struggle, is the creation of the ‘genre’. The genre is an entity that effectively “widens the gap between the two sub-fields and leads to the increasing autonomization of the sub-field of restricted production” (1993: 53) through the utilization of “pseudo-concepts”, or “practical classifying tools which create resemblances and differences by naming

them...[facilitate one's] *struggle for recognition*...and function as *emblems* which distinguish galleries, groups and artists and therefore the products they make or sell" (106, italics in original). Though duly noted that pseudo-concepts - such as 'drama', 'poetry' and the 'novel' - originally sufficed, and continue to serve as, a means by which artistic producers and their products could be categorized, differentially legitimized, and comparatively placed into the hierarchical order of valued works, the contemporary practice of creating new genres entails one strategy through which actors might create new (and more prestigious) positions within the sub-field of restricted production. In essence, the emergence of a new genre, and a new palette of works serving to constitute it, threatens to interrupt the established hierarchical order and, indeed, permanently disrupt the established processes through which capital is distributed and legitimacy assessed. The genre, then, might be taken as one of the primary weapons through which the struggle between the established vanguard and the new generation - which Bourdieu effectively describes as a struggle "between cultural orthodoxy and heresy" (1993: 53) - finds perpetual continuation.

It naturally follows that Bourdieu deduces that the struggles which structure the field of cultural production are primarily manifest in the entrenchment of the differential strategies through which modes of artistic production are catalogued and, by extension, the methods through which their legitimacy is appraised. As such, the most potent strategies through which artistic works are deemed 'authentic' or 'inauthentic' are necessarily *discursive* strategies, and the primary struggle over the dominant principle of hierarchization can simultaneously be read as "a struggle for the monopoly of legitimate discourse about the work of art, and consequently in the production of the value of the work of art" (1993: 36). It is, therefore, crucial to note that Bourdieu does not presuppose that artistic producers are the sole agents engaged in the struggle over the dominant principle of hierarchization, and any attempt to understand the struggles which serve to establish the structure of the field of cultural production must take due note of the fact that,

...works of art exist as symbolic objects only if they are known and recognized...as [socially instituted] works of art and received by spectators capable of knowing and recognizing them as such. [therefore,] the sociology of art and literature has to take as its object not only the material production but also the *symbolic production* of the work, i.e. the production of the value of the work or, which amounts to the same thing, of *belief* in the value of the work. It therefore has to consider as contributing to production not only the direct producers of the work in its materiality (artists, writers, etc.) but also *the producers of the*

*meaning and value of the work* - critics, publishers, gallery directors and the whole set of agents whose combined efforts produce consumers capable of knowing and recognizing the work of art as such. (1993: 37, my italics)

It would thus appear as if those who hold jurisdiction over the *discourse* concerning artistic products ultimately retain the ability to grant the legitimacy so sought after within the competing sub-fields of cultural producers, substantiate the construction of new genres, and guarantee artistic ‘success’ or ‘failure’ by sheer virtue of their authority in shaping the manner in which wider audiences perceive of, and react, to the landscape of cultural products. Bourdieu concedes that these ‘producers of meaning’ - and, in particular, the artistic critic - effectively hold a monopoly over the dissemination of legitimacy in both the sub-fields of large-scale production and restricted production, albeit in a drastically differential sense: whereas those among the former depend on the consecration that the approving critique might extend to their works for the sake of their commercial viability, the wrong kind of positive critical attention can assassinate the legitimacy of an artistic work created within the confines of the latter. In sum, the critics, publishers and promoters of cultural works effectively serve as the “creator of the creator” in that they harbour the “acknowledged power to consecrate” the legitimacy of a cultural producer by “[proclaiming] the value of the author he defends...and above all [investing] his prestige in the author’s cause, acting as a ‘symbolic banker’ who offers as security all the symbolic capital he has accumulated” (1993: 77).

Of course, this necessarily begs the question as to where these ‘symbolic bankers’ might derive their own symbolic capital from. Bourdieu accounts for this phenomenon in arguing that the spheres of artistic criticism, publishing, and promotion also constitute sub-fields, within the wider field of cultural production, that endorse a similarly attuned structural logic based around the accumulation of economic and symbolic capital. As critical media outlets, publishing houses and art galleries derive economic capital from the processes through which they ‘invest’ in artists with a high potential for marketability and, alternatively, derive symbolic capital from ‘investing’ in artists who demonstrate a high potential to accumulate a celebrated reputation within genre-specific audiences, Bourdieu places the ultimate power of consecration less with any corporeal pocket of actors than with “the field of production, understood as the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions” (1993: 78) itself. Though I wish not to dwell on the matter, it is interesting to note that, once again, considerations concerning the root of power

ultimately trace back to an omnipotent force, born of intrinsically stratified social spaces, that primarily works *through* social actors in securing the perpetuation of practices facilitating the structuration of social interaction.

### **3.4 Section Three: On the Multiplicity of Possible Struggles Informing the Present Analysis and the Proliferation of Subcultural Micro-Media**

In sum, Bourdieu's analysis highlights how those in possession of the ability to construct the discourse that cultural consumers utilize in approaching the artistic product are likely to hold domain over the processes through which artistic producers cumulate worth (be it economic or symbolic) and, thus, jurisdiction over the overarching structure of any particular sub-field of artistic production. As noted previously, Thornton has subsequently extended a strong argument to suggest that subcultures primarily come to find constitution with the aid of communication media products; most notably those 'niche' media resources which not only function to create 'cultural knowledge' through exposing subcultural audiences to certain artistic products and practices, but grant said products and practices a legitimacy born of their critical approval. In combining these theoretical trajectories, I would argue that we might extract three preliminary notes - or note the presence of three potential 'programs of struggle', if you will - that might ultimately aid us in correlating the struggles inherent to the field of cultural production with the emergence of the 'emo kid' folk-devil representation.

*1. Communications media products facilitate a sub-field of cultural knowledge production that participates in the constitution of 'legitimate' cultural knowledge.* As Bourdieu regards communication media producers to be actors who fill a significant function within the wider field of cultural production, we might also presuppose that they, like those populations of artistic producers, are engaged within a perpetual struggle to protect (or improve) their positions within a hierarchy of communication media products. In addition to participating in struggles attuned to deducing the dominant principle of hierarchization, it might be presumed that communication media producers also participate in a struggle over the authority to construct cultural knowledge. We might, therefore, not only assume the presence of what can be referred to as a *sub-field of cultural knowledge production*, but one which operates in a manner similar to those fields contributing to the production of *scientific* knowledge, another realm which Bourdieu (1999) de-

notes as being structured by a perpetual program of struggle. Though the sub-fields of scientific knowledge production also entertain competitions between actors vying to improve their standing within the hierarchy of knowledge producers, Bourdieu suggests that these struggles also entail a consequence whereby the legitimacy of certain forms of knowledge - and, indeed, entire scientific paradigms - is rendered dependent upon the state of struggles within the field at any given time. In essence, and though the sub-field of cultural knowledge production entails a competition over the symbolic capital to be derived from supporting 'bankable' artistic producers, it is ultimately a struggle tailored toward deducing who can legitimately '*speak*' and, most importantly, what can be looked upon as constitutive of legitimate cultural knowledge (on the sheer grounds of who '*spoke*' to its validity). It might thus be proposed that the struggle between communication media figures to obtain consecration as the legitimate *source* for cultural knowledge concurrently grants those most successful consecration as the legitimate *creators* of cultural knowledge.

2. *The creation of new pseudo-concepts (or genres) constitutes a strategy through which cultural knowledge producers can challenge the hierarchical orthodoxy within the sub-field of cultural knowledge production.* As in the wider field of cultural production, we might presume that cultural knowledge producers also adopt a number of strategies through which to challenge the current hierarchy of relations within the field with the ultimate aspiration of improving their own positioning. It is doubtlessly the case that the most conventional means through which cultural knowledge producers vie to protect or challenge the status of field positioning, regardless of whether they create cultural knowledge for use in the sub-field of large-scale production or the sub-field of restricted production, is through the practice of not only 'investing' their interest in deserving cultural producers, but being the *first* to do so. One might ask, what better way to develop an esteemed reputation among targeted readerships than through not only being the first to consecrate the work of an artist who comes to be cherished and deemed influential, but reserving the ability, exercised through any number of means, to remind audiences of this fact in consecrating subsequent artists? One possible response to this question (which presents itself as rhetorical but is, in fact, not) is that the best way might prove to be the first to introduce the work of a soon-to-be-revered artist to *the largest audience* or, in other words, through poaching artists having been consecrated by less renowned publications. A case in point rests with the fact that, though *Rolling Stone* magazine was not the first to feature Nirvana (Azerrad, 1993), the band's

1992 cover appearance - alongside a caption declaring that *Rolling Stone* has discovered the “new faces of rock” (Rolling Stone, 1992) - seems to be the image which has indelibly seeped into the public conscience.<sup>7</sup> It might therefore be deduced that merely being the first publication to detail an emerging artist is not enough.

We might also assume that being the first publication to detail an artistic *movement*, and establishing one’s own authority in speaking of that movement before one’s competitors succeed in catching wind of its emergence, breeds an authority that is considerably more impervious to usurpation. Alas, we must reaffix our attention to the notion of the pseudo-concept and the means through which Bourdieu declares that cultural producers might jockey to disrupt the orthodoxy of the field of positions through creating the *perception* of new artistic genres with which to align themselves. It is of note, however, that Bourdieu would not seem to determine which sub-field, if any, retains the greatest proclivity for planting the seeds from which legitimated pseudo-concepts blossom; and it would serve as a stretch to assume that the creation of new genres cannot be accomplished lest the artistic producer, artistic promoter and those colluding in the process of artistic consecration combine their efforts in a collective assault against the hierarchy of field-positions. It is likely the case that any one of the three sub-fields might take the initiative and, should they succeed, inspire those remaining to follow suit in substantiating the presence of the perceived movement. It is equally possible that, should the construction of a novel pseudo-concept only appear to benefit the sub-field from which it emerged, that the corresponding sub-fields will vie to contribute to its substantiation in a manner that might not only benefit their interests, but dissolve the jurisdiction which the sub-field of original authorship holds over its constitution. Finally, it is also possible that the sub-field which constructs the pseudo-concept might inadvertently, or maliciously, affix their categorization to artistic works without ensuring the permission, or heeding the protests, of those who stand to be impacted amongst the corresponding sub-fields.

The prevalence of these possibilities necessarily begs the question as to which sub-field ultimately retains the most power over the process through which pseudo-concepts stand to be granted legitimating as ‘real’ entities or movements. Should Foucault’s aforementioned assertion

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<sup>7</sup> Granted, the fact that Nirvana’s front-man, Kurt Cobain, was resolute in donning a t-shirt which read ‘corporate rock magazines still suck’ during the Rolling Stone cover shoot – potentially as a means of deflecting claims of having ‘sold out’ (Heath and Potter, 2004) – is likely an ancillary reason as to why the image is so easily recalled to this day.

that power and the creation of knowledge are symbiotically entwined with one another carry credence, it almost goes without saying that we might assume that the sub-field of cultural knowledge production harbours the greatest ability in those processes regarding the substantiation of the pseudo-concept. That is to say, though the artistic producer (or artistic promoter) can claim, “this work is something new, exciting and well worth your support” in hopes of displacing the upper echelons of the hierarchy of positions within their native sub-field, they must defer to the cultural knowledge producers in hopes of having any such claims gain prominence within the wider sphere of cultural consumers lying beyond their personal social networks. Should cultural knowledge producers aspire to invoke a spatial regeneration bordering on ‘heresy’ within their sub-field, however, the implicit powers extended to them as the gatekeepers of artistic consecration grant them leverage in not only deducing what is ‘new’, ‘exciting’ and ‘well worth attention’, but to do so with an authoritative voice that might far eclipse that of the artistic producer while drowning out whatever objections he or she might have to the manner in which their work is being classified and ‘sold’ to mass publics.

An excellent example rests with the emergence of the perceived ‘grunge’ movement in the early 1990s. Following the considerable commercial success of Nirvana’s *Nevermind* and Pearl Jam’s debut album, *Ten*, there was a proliferation of niche-media reportage concerning Seattle’s ‘grunge’ scene that strove to cover (and discover) the bands renowned as being constitutive of it while, quite unsubtly, celebrating the manner in which the movement had effectively ceased the commercial dominance of the ‘Hair Metal’ genre (Snowden, 1996). What the music press did not take account of (or conveniently neglected to admit) was that some of the most prominent so-called ‘grunge’ bands, like Soundgarden and Alice In Chains, had formerly been categorized as metal bands and, in the case of the latter, continued to proclaim themselves to *be* a metal band (Gilbert and Aledort, 1996). Though to no avail, a sizable contingent of figures within the Seattle music scene actively strove to disown and de-legitimize the mediated grunge label, the most prominent example being the instance in which *Sub Pop* records receptionist Megan Jasper, speaking with the New York Times as a self-professed ‘expert’ on the grunge subculture, conned the paper into publishing an article concerning a ‘grunge lingo’ that did not actually exist (Henry, 2007). Meanwhile, the Seattle music community fell victim to a bombardment of unrequited media attention, and veritable swarms of major label representatives (Beaujour, 1996), that did not subside until the ‘grunge’ label fell out of use as the flagship bands

of the movement either began to ‘burn out’ or ‘fade away’.<sup>8</sup> Alas, we might not only deduce such to have been a case in which cultural knowledge producers had constructed the perception of a pseudo-concept independent of the intentions (and best interests) of those artists ostensibly being heralded as part of it, but a case in which those artistic producers struggled, and failed, to bring the legitimacy of the pseudo-concept, and those perpetuating it, into question.

*3. Mediated pseudo-concepts that inspire the emergence of new subcultural manifestations can incite a climate of ‘strain’ in pre-existing subcultural fields that might initiate a movement whereby ‘subcultural traditionalists’ aspire to protect the consecration of the established conventions.* It is extremely important to note that, as freshly mediated pseudo-concepts do not exist in a cultural vacuum, the emergence of the subcultural manifestations that they might inspire are bound to threaten the sanctity of the conventions endorsed by (and capital-stocks possessed within) pre-existent fields of subcultural participation. Though we might imagine that the exclusivity of the subcultural field is typically under some degree of endangerment (there would indeed be instances wherein a cherished artist ‘accidentally’ slips on to the mainstream radar, or a sizable portion of ‘outsiders’ nonchalantly stumble across the channels of privileged subcultural information), the emergence of a mediated pseudo-concept that strives to poach artists or conventions that already ‘belong’ to a collectivity of established subculturalists in constituting itself, or vies to ‘recycle’ movements that, though long devoid of mainstream appeal, are far from being dead and entirely abandoned, are bound to instigate a climate of crisis within the field of subcultural participation. When appearing in minute flocks, it is surely the case that subcultural ‘tourists’ can be branded ‘other’ and, as the previous chapter detailed, prohibited from participating in the ‘game’ of legitimate capital accumulation. But what if these ‘tourists’ not only stand to outnumber the population of established field participants, but constitute such a force as to rewrite the conventions of acceptable practice in a manner better reflecting the knowledge culled from ‘heretical’ niche media than that of ‘proper’ field inculcation? What, in essence, if the ‘rules’ suddenly change?

Unfortunately, as Bourdieu did not share his own thoughts on the process whereby the field of cultural consumers account for a sudden shift in the nature of the artefacts imparted upon them by the field of cultural production, and as Thornton only details the manner through which

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<sup>8</sup> To steal a quote from what is unquestionably the most famous suicide note of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, at the same time, Neil Young’s “My My, Hey Hey”.

subculturalists react to positive coverage on the part of the *mass media*, we need look elsewhere for a theoretical framework that might aid the development of a general idea as to how the established subculturalist might grapple with the prospect of a subcultural field at risk of being fundamentally restructured. I would thus wish to elect that Robert Merton's (1968) strain theory might not only carry some relevance in regards to the conversation at hand, but concerns itself with many of the themes prevalent in Bourdieu's own insights. In Merton's view, social 'deviance' erupts by virtue of the manner in which social actors negotiate an inclination to achieve the 'goals' coveted by the wider society (such as achieving success and social prestige) with the availability of means through which they might do so. Depending upon whether actors accept or reject these cultural goals, and whether they aspire to achieve them through socially sanctioned or socially disavowed means, Merton constructed a typology whereby individuals might fall into five groupings. The first, *conformists*, not only harbour a proclivity toward accepting the validity of the coveted goals, but tailor their actions in a manner resembling the conventional means of achieving them. *Innovators*, on the other hand, accept the goals but - often in considering the likelihood whereby they might do otherwise - reject the acceptable means of achieving them. *Ritualists*, for their part, abide by the means of achieving such cultural goals despite the fact that they have either lost sight of, or given up on achieving, the goals themselves. In implicitly rejecting not only the conventional goals, but the means of procuring them, *retreatists* essentially 'drop out' of the race altogether. The final category, the *rebels*, essentially vie to entrench new goals to be sought after and deduce new means through which to achieve them. This last category is, in fact, that in which Merton placed practices related to participation within 'deviant' subcultural manifestations.

Should we entertain the notion that it is possible to construct a similar typology in concerning subculturalists duly faced with the threat that the goals long aspired for within the subcultural field (such as garnering prestige and authority within the collectivity) might soon only be achieved through alternative means than previously established, we might deduce the likelihood of four potential responses. If possible to do so in a manner allowing that any degree of one's previously established legitimacy might be retained, *subcultural conformists* might continue to strive for the coveted goals, but through adhering to the newly designated 'acceptable' means of doing so - a transition that might demand that they abandon previous tropes in taste and fashion for the sake of adopting the new trends in musical preference and dress. *Subcultural ritualists*

might deduce that continuing to aspire to the overarching goals through employing the new bevy of means is not a worthwhile venture and, in doing so, retain their proclivities for subcultural taste and practice at the expense of succeeding in the modified ‘game’ at hand. My own experiences might suggest that the largest contingent of participants effectively render themselves *subcultural retreatists* who not only reject the new means of achieving subcultural goals, but eventually come to reject the entire prospect of participating within the subcultural field.

In lieu of bastardizing Merton’s typology to a degree extending past that required, I would argue that we need only propose one additional category that I would wish to christen *subcultural traditionalists*. Subcultural traditionalists might not only reject the emergence of the new methods of achieving the traditional goals, but actively strive to *resist* or *counteract* the onset of their wider adoption and, by extension, the total extinction of the conventions informing the previous incarnation of the field. They are the vanguard which vies to protect the sanctity of those conventions having previously informed the individual and collectivistic ‘games’ serving to have structured the subcultural field (Chapter 2) against the influx of ‘heretical’ newcomers, the treachery of subcultural conformists, and the exodus of subcultural retreatists. Subcultural traditionalists might indeed require the employment of any number of subcultural resistance tactics; the most traditional of which (at least within the punk subculture) has been that of stigmatizing artists who achieve some measure of commercial success for having ‘sold out’ their status as authentic representatives of the field.<sup>9</sup>

There would, in essence, appear to be three programs of struggle - between fellow cultural knowledge producers, between the sub-field of cultural knowledge production and those other fields participating within the wider field of cultural production, and between those cultural knowledge producers who facilitate the construction of subcultural manifestations and the pre-existing subcultural collectives who they thereby offend - that might be assumed to approach an apex of intensification when attempts to introduce a new pseudo-conceptual ‘genre’ are initiated. This thesis will argue that the sub-field of cultural knowledge production is primarily responsible for the initial constitution of the ‘emo’ genre, and that this triage of struggles each sufficed to contribute, in some manner, to the corresponding construction of the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil. However, as I have not yet adequately granted grounds on which to substantiate the claim that princi-

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<sup>9</sup> As a point of fact, it would appear that ‘selling out’ has been a heretical practice within the punk subculture for as long as the punk subculture has existed – and the band most widely believed to have committed the sin was, somewhat inconceivably, the Clash (Gray, 2004: 218).

ple authorship of this representational construct might be traced back to the field of subcultural participants and, more specifically, those who we have come to deem subcultural traditionalists, I wish to dedicate some attention to the emergence of contemporary communicative technologies and the manner in which subcultural collectives have adapted to them. I argue that contemporary communicative technologies have initiated a process through which subcultural participants have had opportunity to infiltrate the sub-field of cultural knowledge production.

### **3.5 Blurring the boundaries between knowledge consumers and knowledge producers: Micro-media in the Internet age.**

At this point, it might serve to our benefit if we briefly return to Thornton's concept of subcultural micro-media and, most importantly, the qualities that serve to differentiate its processes of construction and production from that of the niche-media. Whereas the latter are deemed to fulfill the function of disseminating subcultural knowledge by way of widely available informative products, the former are purported to utilize small-scale products destined for limited - and highly specified - distribution. Whereas niche-media producers constitute 'outsiders' attempting to disseminate subcultural knowledge to audiences beyond the subcultural realm, micro-media producers serve as 'insiders' who utilize small-scale dissemination channels as a means of reaching 'insider' audiences (while preventing that subcultural knowledge be distributed through 'outsider' populations). Whereas niche-media strive to 'poach' and *disseminate* subcultural knowledge, micro-media products, in effect, *are* subcultural knowledge; concrete artefacts indelibly shaped by the patterns and practices which guide the field of subcultural participation. It logically follows that Thornton's account carries with it the implication that dramatic permutations in the manner through which subculturalists communicate with each other will inspire dramatic permutations in the nature of their micro-media products.

Having been published in 1995, Thornton's *Club Cultures* just barely revokes itself of the ability to speak to the emergence of the Internet, the drastic means by which the prevalence of web-based communications might impact subcultural interaction and, by immediate extension, the form that micro-media has taken in a web-mediated world. Nonetheless, and as Moore has recently noted, "young people continue to appropriate the technologies of communications media to establish creative forms of work, participatory social networks, and outlets for self-

expression” (2007: 469). Subsequent commentators have, indeed, taken pains not only to note the differential means through which subcultural communities have since come to constitute *online* communities, but to consider the benefits gained - and hardships sustained - by virtue of such processes. In concerning himself with the construction of internet forums tailored for use by participants of the Goth subculture, for example, Hodkinson (2007) notes a curious process wherein the proliferation of online ‘blogging’ practices has allowed participants to interact within much larger networks than sheer locality might allow - but, quite concurrently, the ability to do so in increasingly individualized ways. Williams vies to demonstrate how the emergence of online ‘straight-edge’ communities effectively “confounds the idea that a face-to-face scene is necessary” (2006: 195) and has thus fractured the straight-edge subculture into traditionalists who “[earn] respect...through *doing* straightedge community in local punk/hardcore music scenes” and “new members, disconnected (often by choice) from hardcore music scenes, [who] consider themselves authentic [in utilizing] computer-mediated spaces to articulate their identities and experiences as straightedgers” (195, italics in original). The important point to note here is that Hodkinson and Williams each came to their conclusions, in large part, through utilizing easily accessible web-based forums and online journals that any internet user, if so inclined, could access and utilize as reservoirs of cultural knowledge. In essence, those web forums and journal sites which concern themselves with ‘privileged’ subcultural knowledge are remarkably accessible, even despite the fact that they might either retain an aura of privacy or facilitate tactics through which the possessors of these knowledges might nonetheless serve to have their claims to authenticity criticized.

As subcultural micro-media products have also thrived in response to the emergence of web-based communications, the ease with which any subcultural participant (with the means and the integrity requisite in doing so) can become a micro-media producer - and, by extension, subcultural knowledge producer - has increased dramatically. In concerning themselves with the permutations that the rave and straightedge subcultures have undergone in the wake of having ‘gone online’, Wilson and Atkinson highlight the manner in which their groups of focus “used the Internet to promote ideologies, communities, events, and consumer products...while at the same time responding to the sometimes-negative mass-mediated mainstream portrayals of their subcultures and to *attempts to incorporate their scenes*” (2005: 303, my italics). In so many words, and in concluding that “the Internet provides subculture members with frequent and vari-

ous opportunities to be active media audiences/consumers and producers - roles and identities that are also [becoming further] blurred and interconnected” (Ibid., 303) Wilson and Atkinson can be taken to suggest that the old boundaries that had long rendered the sub-field of cultural knowledge production exclusive to a limited number of individuals have effectively collapsed. Micro-media products - be they constitutive of on-line ‘fanzines’, photoshopped flyers, or forum threads allowing subcultural participants the ability to forge discourses and debates regarding the proper conventions of their scenes (Nogic and Riley, 2007) - are now not only just as accessible to mass audiences as are niche and mass media products, but afforded the opportunity to struggle against ‘attempts to incorporate their scenes’ *within* the sub-field of knowledge production itself. In essence, then, we might not only deduce that the subcultural micro-media producer and the subcultural traditionalist are one and the same person, but suspect that they would retain a pre-disposition to employ strategies tailored toward challenging the legitimacy of niche-media knowledge producers, *and* the authenticity of aspiring subcultural ‘heretics’, simultaneously.

### **3.6 To Return to the Genealogical Project: Uncovering Evidence of Struggle in Warring Mediated Outputs.**

To this point, I have attempted to develop an analytical framework that conceptualises the sub-field of cultural knowledge production as a site of potential struggle. I have argued that the onset of struggles over the authority to produce ‘legitimate’ cultural knowledge ultimately impact the field of cultural production in that they not only contribute to the development of differentiating ‘pseudo-concepts’, but effectively ‘create’ pockets of consumers. I have also argued that cultural knowledge producers can be assumed to compete for jurisdiction over the ability to construct and legitimate knowledge in such a manner as not only to guarantee implications for existing fields of subcultural participation, but that might inspire the emergence of new - and potentially ‘heretical’ - subcultural manifestations. I have advanced this framework in chorus with a decidedly Foucaultian presupposition that those who retain control over the processes of knowledge production effectively retain a great power in legitimizing the patterns of consumption and practice that structure both the field of cultural production *and* the participatory fields of cultural consumption. I have advanced the argument that the emergence of new communicative technologies has initiated a process through which subcultural ‘micro-media’ producers - once

confined to the margins of cultural knowledge production in comparison to ‘niche-media’ knowledge producers - have been granted the means through which they can not only reach as wide an audience as niche-media producers, but challenge, or strive to counteract, the emergence of niche-mediated discourses that might serve to threaten the structuration of the existing field of subcultural participation. Finally, I have spoken to the possibility that these struggles will achieve a climax of intensification in the event that niche-media producers employ the ‘tactic’ of striving to create a pseudo-concept which ‘subcultural traditionalists’ might then aspire to de-legitimate through utilizing their own role as subcultural knowledge producers.

In Chapter Two, I argued that the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil might be perceived, in part, as a representation which found construction within the punk subculture as a means of denying those identified as ‘emo kids’ the legitimated ability to participate within the established field of subcultural participation. The current Chapter has supplied the theoretical backdrop against which I can now advance my central research hypothesis; namely, that the construction of this subcultural folk-devil was *simultaneously* utilized as a means through which micro-mediated knowledge producers could challenge and de-authenticate the emergence of a discourse through which niche-mediated knowledge producers vied to construct the *perception* of an emergent ‘emo’ genre and, thereby, risked inspiring the *substantive* emergence of an ‘emo’ subculture. Furthermore, in having argued that both sub-fields of cultural knowledge producers utilize the creation of mediated products in facilitating the dissemination of their oppositional knowledges, we might finally identify the subcultural products that the impending genealogy will take as its artefacts as being, on one hand, *those niche-media products which concerned themselves with facilitating the perception of an emo subculture* and, on the other, *those micro-media products which not only strove to de-legitimize those publications and artistic products heralded as speaking to, or constitutive of, an emo genre, but de-authenticate those subcultural ‘others’ so attracted to the field of subcultural participation under the auspices of the presence of an emo subculture.*

In compiling a genealogical account of the emergence of (and subcultural reaction to) the emo pseudo-concept, the current thesis will employ a methodological framework which can be partitioned into three distinct components. In utilizing the testimonies through which *Alternative Press Magazine* founder and executive editor Mike Shea recounts the storied history of his publication, I will employ a program of critical discourse analysis in concerning the climate within the sub-field of cultural knowledge production (and the wider subcultural ‘underground’)

prior to the consecration of the emo pseudo-concept. Above and beyond justifying the adoption of our Bourdieuan framework, approaching Shea's testimony as a discourse that subtly speaks to the presence of a climate of struggle between niche-media producers will suffice in supporting the notion that the 'emo' genre was less an organic artistic advent than a necessitated mediated construct. The second component of the genealogical initiative will demand that we employ a program of critical content analysis in arguing that the coverage featured in *Alternative Press Magazine*, and concurrent publications like Greenwald's (2004) *Nothing Feels Good: Punk Rock, Teenagers, and Emo*, can be taken to denote initiatives through which cultural knowledge producers vied to substantiate the presence of an emergent 'emo' genre. This program of content analysis will allow that we observe the means through which knowledge producers subtly strove to re-categorize artistic producers, revise the history of choice subcultural works, and extend the parameters of the 'emo' pseudo-concept as a means of creating (and asserting one's own authority over) an emergent body of knowledge concerning the genre. Finally, we will employ simultaneous programmes of critical discourse analysis *and* critical content analysis in concerning ourselves with the manner in which subcultural traditionalists used such micro-media sites as *Punknews.org* to facilitate an anti-emo discourse (which subsequently inspired the emergence of anti-emo subcultural products) that was duly tailored toward stigmatizing those associated with, and perceived as supportive of, the emergent pseudo-genre. It is within these discursive strategies, and within these subcultural products, that we might uncover the development of the stereotypes that would come to inform the construction of the 'emo-kid' folk-devil.

In the chapter to follow, I subject the testimonies of those cultural knowledge producers which I deem primarily responsible for the emergence of the contemporary 'emo' pseudo-concept to a discourse analysis uncovering the embedded 'history' of the struggle over the ability to shape the dominant discourse surrounding 'emo'. In doing so, I will necessarily devote some attention to justifying why I have come to extend particular publications and artists a privileged role in facilitating the climate in which the 'emo' pseudo-concept was allotted the ability to emerge and, indeed, the manner in which the term originally came to warrant utilization itself.

## **Chapter Four. The Prelude to the Reconstitution of a Pseudo-genre: Brief Histories of ‘Emotional Hardcore’, *Alternative Press*, and the Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Subcultural Climate.**

### **4.1 Introductory Notes**

In keeping with the analytical framework provided in the previous chapter, the genealogical analysis, this chapter will serve to better contextualize this thesis’ two corresponding hypotheses. The first hypothesis, to be granted a significant amount of attention in Chapter 5, is that the perceived emergence of an ‘emo’ movement can be attributed to processes through which select actors within the sub-field of cultural knowledge production (and, in particular, niche-media producers) attempted to facilitate the construction of a new pseudo-conceptual genre (heretofore referred to as the ‘pseudo-genre’) and, in doing so, renegotiate the hierarchy of cultural knowledge producers by formulating new means of acquiring coveted manifestations of capital. The second, to be detailed in Chapter 6 considers the possibility that the emergence of the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil can be correlated with discursive strategies through which subcultural traditionalists, having infiltrated the sub-field of cultural knowledge production through the proliferation of web-based micro-mediated products, strove to protect the consecration of the pre-existent field of subcultural participation through assassinating the legitimacy of those artistic producers - and fledgling subculturalists - who might reinforce the reification of such a movement. Before moving on to these tasks, however, it is important that I substantiate a number of the propositions that I have heretofore advanced. One is the notion that this new subcultural entity primarily stood to threaten the conventions of the punk subculture - in no small part because the very term ‘emo’ was unapologetically annexed from punk discourse. Another is the presupposition that niche-media producers are duly engaged in a ruthless struggle for status, the authority in legitimating cultural producers, and commercial viability. Yet another is that the subcultural affront against ‘emo’ simultaneously can be perceived as an affront against those artistic producers who came to be associated with the movement (be it by their own design or otherwise).

This chapter details the state of relations within the various punk-subculturalist fields before the initial movement toward constructing and consecrating the ‘emo’ pseudo-genre found initiation. In doing so, I will detail the original genesis of the term ‘emo’ and argue that the term came into use as a means through which subcultural traditionalists strove to protect the sanctity of the subcultural field in which it arose. My focus will also concern the history of *Alternative*

*Press Magazine*; the niche-media publication that I will opt to identify as the principal architect of the perceived emergence of the contemporary emo ‘movement’. I also comment upon and contextually situate *Punknews.org*, the micro-media entity of my primary focus, subcultural artefacts (including Deep Elm records’ *Emo Diaries* compilation series and Weezer’s 1996 *Pinkerton* album) and ‘underground’ artists (including AFI and Saves The Day) who would - with intent or otherwise - inevitably come to facilitate the climate in which the contemporary emo pseudo-genre would emerge and come to find constitution.

I wish to prelude the discussion with a word of preliminary caution. In compiling the account to follow, I acknowledge the inevitability of pulling information from many of the mediated products that will subsequently be submitted to a critical content analysis centred, in part, around advancing the argument that niche-media products attempt to legitimize the pseudo-genres that they strive to consecrate through constructing ‘artificial histories’ of the genre. As such, it is entirely possible that the true ‘history’ of the initial emergence of the ‘emo’ genre, and the manufactured history of the emo genre, are indissolubly entwined in such a fashion as to bring the legitimacy of any conceivable source into question.

#### **4.2 1978-1980: The Rise of American Hardcore.**

Any attempt to explicate and contextualize the emergence of ‘emotional hardcore’, the genre which would later come to be heralded as a precursor of contemporary emo music, necessitates (at the very least) a cursory explication of the emergence of the ‘hardcore’ genre itself. According to subcultural lore, hardcore came into being as North American youth began to familiarize themselves with the bands spearheading the politicized punk rock movement in England but, simultaneously, also developed a distaste for the highly publicized (and stereotyped) conventions as purportedly being endorsed by England’s punk subculture. With the establishment of fanzines like *Search And Destroy*, *Damaged* and *Los Angeles Flipside* (soon after amended to *Flipside*), and a steady stream of debut singles from the likes of The Germs, Fear, Black Flag and The Dead Kennedys, the California coast effectively became the region within which the conventions set to guide the decidedly American permutation of punk culture were to be established (Savage, 1991). However, whereas the latter groups were primarily drawn to punk as an avenue through which to merge artistry with counter-hegemonic social commentaries

(Grad, 2008), the former appeared to adopt the style by virtue of its appreciation for a lack of musicianship and the notion (as likely facilitated by the legendary exploits of Sid Vicious and Iggy Pop) that punk culture served to celebrate nihilism, drug abuse and self-destruction (Brake, 1985).

By the time Germs vocalist Darby Crash took his own life with a calculated heroin overdose in 1980 (Mullen, 2001) and the initial wave of east-coast punk bands reinventing themselves as ‘New Wave’ acts, regional hostilities between those collectives that gravitated toward punk communalism on the basis of its subaltern ideology, and those collectives which did so on the basis of its nihilistic aestheticism, had become so prevalent that a predilection toward engaging in aggressive behaviour seemingly became requisite - regardless of which ‘side’ one had initially gravitated toward.<sup>10</sup> As increasingly aggressive subcultural conventions parlayed into increasingly aggressive music,<sup>11</sup> the term ‘hardcore’, originally coined by the *Damaged* fanzine in regarding Black Flag (and subsequently popularized as Vancouver’s DOA used the term in entitling their *Hardcore 81*’ album), came to replace ‘punk’ as the signifier of choice among music-based underground collectivities. As *American Hardcore: A Tribal History* (1991) author Steven Blush recalls, “Hardcore extended, mimicked, or reacted to Punk; it appropriated some aspects yet discarded others. It reaffirmed the attitude, and rejected New Wave. That’s why it was *hardcore* Punk - [it was] for people who were fed up” (1991: 13, italics in original).

If the legend surrounding the rise and disbandment of Minor Threat is to be taken at face value, it might be said that few regions took the idea of hardcore quite as seriously as did Washington, DC. Though the national notoriety afforded to the Bad Brains had previously cemented Washington’s reputation as a bastion in which ‘punk ideology’ and ‘punk debauchery’ best intertwined, the 1980 formation of Minor Threat - and the resultant amount of attention garnered by their outspoken front-man, Ian MacKaye - initiated a process through which the Washington scene would not only attempt to codify its own definition of what should constitute ‘proper’ hardcore conventions, but attempt to enforce those conventions on a national scale. It might be said that, by the close of Minor Threat’s short tenure as an active band, the field of subcultural participation had undergone a decisively ‘heretical’ shift - due, in large part, to the emergence of

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<sup>10</sup> See Blush (1991) for a plethora of reflective accounts that serve to substantiate these points.

<sup>11</sup> ...which, in turn, begat the influx of increasingly aggressive audiences, not the least of which was those white supremacist groups who had become so prevalent as to inspire the Dead Kennedys to record and popularize a song (and slogan) entitled “Nazi Punks Fuck Off” in 1981.

the straightedge movement.

### 4.3 1981: Minor Threat, HarDCore, and the Straightedge Movement

In DC, we called ourselves ‘hardcore’ to distinguish between us and the Sid Vicious kind. We were ‘hard-core’ Punks - we weren’t into the fashion as much as we were into the approach and intensity and urgency. I’ve put a lot of thought to this - even before D.O.A.’s Hardcore 81 record, we’d begun to make a distinction that we were more hard-core. That’s how we came up with ‘harDCore’ - a play on the word. It was just zeitgeist or serendipity that we all felt the same way.

Excerpt from an interview with Ian MacKaye, American Hardcore (1991:134)

An early passage in Becker’s *The Outsiders* (1963) notes that, “whether a rule has the force of law or tradition or is simply the result of consensus, it may be the task of some specialized body, such as the police or the committee of ethics of a professional association, to enforce it” (1963: 2). It would not be a stretch to claim that the Washington Hardcore scene possessed a conglomeration of figures, standing in equivalence to a ‘committee of ethics’, by virtue of the manner in which MacKaye and Minor Threat’s ardent followers espoused - and enforced - their ethics. Having soured on the notion of the potential for intra-regionalized subcultural unity by virtue of a failed West Coast tour with his previous band, Teen Idles, MacKaye became enamoured with the prospect of strengthening the communal nature of the Washington Hardcore collectivity. MacKaye would later confess to the urge “to create an imprint; I wanted to be part of a gang. I wanted to be part of a group...you could identify as a tribe” (Blush, 2001: 136). In concurrently forming Minor Threat, and founding the independent Dischord Records label, it might be said that MacKaye not only succeeded in procuring a viable avenue through which to disseminate music harbouring an ideological dimension paralleling his own (*as well as his own*), but sufficed in providing himself with the means through which he and his inner circle - including figures who would go on to establish the seminal *Flex Your Head* fanzine - a virtual monopoly over the field of subcultural knowledge production (Azerrad, 2001). As MacKaye recounts, “the older Punk Rockers in DC were off put (sic) because they thought we stole the scene. Damn right we did! But we didn’t steal shit - we created something. We came with our own crowds. People say, ‘you guys came in and took over.’ Took over what? We built the motherfucker!” (Blush, 2001: 136).

MacKaye, Minor Threat, and likeminded bands such as Government Issue and S.O.A. (which included a pre-Black Flag Henry Rollins) set about ‘building’ a new permutation of the Washington scene, in large part, by constructing a decidedly more aggressive permutation of Hardcore; songs which proved themselves devoid of melody or any musical eccentricities beyond a steady succession of bar-chords, and rarely breaching the two-minute mark, quickly became the norm among Dischord Record’s slate of releases and, by extension, within the community of Washington’s hardcore artists. Though these trends in musical execution can best be attributed credit for ensuring that harDCore rendered itself suitable for a limited cast of musical connoisseurs, it can safely be said that Minor Threat’s lyrical output can best be held responsible for initiating those unsavoury processes through which one’s authenticity as a communal member was measured and validated. The song “Guilty Of Being White”, about the hardships MacKaye suffered by virtue of being “[blamed] for slavery a hundred years before [he] was born” (*Complete Discography*, 1989),<sup>12</sup> effectively served to fracture the Washington scene along racial lines. This is most troubling, and curious, in considering the fact that DC’s Bad Brains, an African American group, were revered for *breaking down* racial barriers within the context of the National scene. Just as “Seeing Red” arguably served to problematize subcultural cliquishness in just such a way as to *incite* subcultural cliquishness; “Stand Up” condemns violent altercations in just such a way as to glorify violent altercations (and, in particular, the danger of provoking MacKaye and *his* ‘friends’ into a fight).

Without question, however, the Minor Threat lyrics which left the most indelible imprint on the collective conscience of the Washington scene - and, by extension, inspired the deepest lines of fracture - can be found in such songs as “Bottled Violence” and “Straight Edge”. To varying extents, each allowed MacKaye to extol the virtues of committing to a ‘straight’ lifestyle prohibiting the use of drugs, alcohol, and casual sexual relations. In describing the initial reaction to Minor Threat’s endorsement of a clean lifestyle as “so contemptuous, we couldn’t believe it”, MacKaye admits that “I didn’t realize that it was gonna upset the appplecart so much - the reaction we got made us up the ante. That’s when I realized, ‘Man, I’m saying shit, and people are getting angry. This is really effective’.” (Blush, 2001: 26). One might assume that MacKaye’s decision to pen “Out Of Step (With The World)”, and therein disseminate the rally-

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<sup>12</sup> I have cited online links to Minor Threat’s lyrics, as provided by Lyrics Domain, for the sake of convenience.

ing credo “Don’t smoke/ don’t drink/ don’t fuck/ at least I can fucking think” (*Compete Discography*, 1989), was part of the initiative to ‘up the ante’.

In proposing that straightedge culture be subjected to sociological enquiry some twenty-four years after the fact, Haenfler (2004) correctly claims “the movement arose primarily as a response to the punk scene’s nihilistic tendencies, including drug and alcohol abuse, casual sex, violence, and self-destructive ‘live-for-the-moment’ attitudes” (2004: 409). Though such is true in a sense, the testimonies of those involved with the DC hardcore scene would suggest that, above all else, the movement served the function of giving the ‘harDCore’ scene leverage with which not only to differentiate themselves from other regional scenes, but profess claims of superiority. Blush himself recalls how MacKaye and Rollins - heralded as the progenitors of ‘harDCore’ - often “travelled as a wolfpack to NYC ‘to represent’” (2001: 135). In doing little to dispel the accusation, Rollins recalls that, “at that point, we were ‘hardcore’ than anyone. There’d be people on the dance floor with cigarettes, talking while a band played. We’d just hammer these people. We were definitely into the ‘DC’s in the house’ thing...That’s what we liked to do.” (2001:137). “The whole thing was rife with contradiction,” notes Tesco Vee of the Meatmen. “Ian, Henry, and Sab Grey, in whatever Skinhead phase they were in, would come to New York, cause huge brawls and say they went up and kicked New York’s ass. How stupid is that?” (2001: 137).

By what we might take to be the ‘logic’ informing the Washington hardcore collective of the early 80s, the practice of attempting to assert superiority through physicality was likely not ‘stupid’ in the least. It can, as a point of fact, be conceptualized as an extension of the manner through which the various collectives within the Washington scene struggled, amongst themselves, to implement their preferred vision of the dominant principle of hierarchization among the communal subculture. Though Minor Threat quickly came to resent their status as a ‘straight edge’ band, their acolytes nonetheless adopted the practice of broadcasting their adoption of the philosophy through scrawling thick black X’s across the backs of their hands and persuading others to adopt the lifestyle - be it through applying a stigma meant to ensure conformity or through physical altercations. Against the backdrop of escalating hostilities between a semi-militant straightedge collectivity and a small but virulent minority of non-straightedge Washingtonian subculturalites, Minor Threat disbanded in 1983.

Though regarded, to this day, as a seminal Hardcore act, one cannot help but wonder whether Minor Threat might be held partially responsible for the fact that, to this day, the punk and hardcore subcultures are largely homogenous in terms of the racial make-up of their participants. Indeed, those resolved with holding a microscope to the contemporary (so-called) ‘emo subculture’ might immediately take note of the fact that the movement is framed as – and would surely appear to be – an adolescent movement largely catering to *Caucasian* populations. Curiously, the topic of the racialized nature of the ‘emo movement’ would not appear to have been granted even the slightest hint of mention amidst those initiatives wherein a variety of niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers later aspired to advance their ‘expert’ synopses detailing the emergence – and significance – of the culture. Rather than arguing, however, that the ‘emo culture’ was intentionally framed as a ‘Caucasoid’ movement meant to be sold to largely ‘Caucasoid’ populations; I would instead argue that, in spite of the storied history of anthems meant to call for substantive racial unity among punk and hardcore artists over the course of the past 30 years, both these subcultures and their affiliated off-shoot cultures have, nonetheless, earned widespread and quasi-commonsensical recognition as a ‘white’ subculture from the point of their very genesis. It would, indeed, be interesting should the racially homogenous make-up of the punk and hardcore subcultures be traced back, first, to each movement’s early public misrecognition as white supremacist movements<sup>13</sup> and, furthermore, the manner in which songs such as Minor Threat’s “Guilty of Being White” did – and continue to – further perpetuate that misconception. Nevertheless, and although the link between the mid-80s Washington hardcore scene and the racialization of the contemporary punk and hardcore scenes is tenuous, that between the ‘Washington HarDCore’ movement and the eventual emergence of the ‘emo movement’ is undebatable.

#### **4.4 Washington, 1985: ‘Revolution Summer’ and the Emergence of ‘Emo-core’**

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<sup>13</sup> Punk Historians (for lack of a better term) would unanimously appear to locate the genesis of this misaffiliation with the Sex Pistols and, more specifically, Sid Vicious - not only on grounds of the fact that it was the Pistol’s bassist who popularised the incorporation of the Swastika into punk fashion tropes, but also penned the song “Belsen Was a Gas”. According to *Lipstick Traces* author Greil Marcus (1989) “Belsen Was a Gas” was not only “a musical version of the punk swastika” (or, a song absentmindedly meant to provoke outrage for the sheer sake of provoking outrage), but holds the distinction of being a “crude, cheesy, stupid number [as] thought up...[by] the crudest, cheesiest, stupidest member of the band” (Marcus, 1989: 116-17).

Though Minor Threat were no more, the tensions that the band had provoked between those who came to embody the straightedge philosophy, and those who were of the opinion that MacKaye's disciples had 'stolen' the scene, continued to permeate the hardcore community. MacKaye recalls that,

By '84, DC was in a depressing situation. There was intense friction within the Dischord scene, the shows sucked and violence was so prevalent...I was talking to [an acquaintance] and said...“why do you fight?” [She said] “Because you used to defend the scene but now you don't fight anymore. Now we're doing it”. That's when I thought, “I'm not fighting no more - ever”. Also, H.R. [of the Bad Brains] said something like that...I was at a Bad Brains gig with him; we were watching the opening band and there was a kid who was being crazy dumb. I turned to H.R. and said, “this is ridiculous.” he said, “You created it.” That hurt. (Blush, 2001: 156-57).

It might be said that, though MacKaye's initiative to re-invent the character of the Washington hardcore scene was initially successful, the inevitable realization that he could not supplant the conventions he had previously contributed toward consecrating, in a manner reflecting his personal shift in ideology, persuaded him to develop a distaste for his own creation. Faced with the process wherein contemporaries opted to abandon the subculture altogether, but in being armed with an awareness that, “for a lot of us, [the scene] was all we had”, MacKaye and a number of like-minded traditionalists deduced that “we were all gonna form new bands in October [1984] and create our own scene. Instead of trying to take back the scene, we were just gonna let them go, form a new community, and start again” (Blush, 2001: 157). MacKaye and those other artistic producers who had congregated in light of this initiative even granted their project, which inspired to “reinvolve everybody and remove the parade of macho behaviour” (2001: 157) a name: Revolution Summer. The trio of bands that have reflexively come to be looked upon as best epitomizing the Revolution Summer movement are Embrace (MacKaye's first post-Minor Threat musical endeavour), Dag Nasty and - perhaps most significantly - Rites of Spring (Azerrad, 2001).

According to MacKaye, the Revolution Summer bands vied to challenge the doxa of the scene in a number of ways; be it through “[making] kids sit on the floor, [just] to fuck with them” (Blush, 2001: 57) or decidedly more substantive means. “At the beginning of our scene, we were very anti-political and in fact ridiculed people who were into politics. But for some reason in '85, art and politics suddenly made sense to us and we ran with it. Apartheid, women's issues, and the homeless were really galvanizing issues” (Blush, 2001: 157). *Nothing Feels Good*

(2003) author Andy Greenwald, on the other hand, correlates Revolution Summer - and the emergence of Rites of Spring in particular - with a decided shift away from politicized content. “With Rites of Spring, the goal was no longer to shake your fist at the injustices of the world, it was to shake yourself, to push down...to confront and break down the limitations of the self” (2003: 12). Though Greenwald cites Rites of Spring’s innovative artistry as one means through which the group “[broke] free of the rigid, self-imposed bonds of hardcore [as] the guitars careened dramatically and melodically across the songs like paintbrushes on a canvas [and] the rhythms enlivened and varied”, he locates the groups true innovation in the lyrics of vocalist Guy Picciotto; which “were like nothing ever heard before in punk rock: majestic, poetic, indulgent, ecstatic” (2003: 12). Though there is little indication that Greenwald actually *attended* a Rites of Spring show himself, he nonetheless testifies to the fact that the band “brought together an inspired hodgepodge of individuals eager to convert private pain into public purging...audience members would weep among strangers; hardened cynics would rock and sway like born-again” (2003: 13). Graham McCulloch, of such noted harDCore bands as the Meatmen and Negative Approach, and who can be assumed to have actually attended a Rites of Spring show, described it as “unbearable. Rich girls would cry and throw flowers at the stage. It became Emotional-Core” (Blush, 2001: 157). MacKaye concedes that, “the first thing [the Revolution Summer bands] found out was all these other kids hated us because we were ‘pussies’” (Blush, 2001: 157).

Greenwald states that, aside from the fact that “it first came into common practice in 1985...the origins of the term ‘emo’ are shrouded in mystery” (2003: 14). I might posit that it would not require a stretch of the imagination to suggest that the term rose by virtue of a most curious amalgamation of circumstances. It would appear to me that the very cultural producers who had entrenched the means through which subcultural ‘authenticity’ was disseminated within the Washington hardcore scene - namely, through adhering to extremely rigid conventions in musical taste, ideology, and practices in which dominance was asserted through aggressiveness - had suddenly moved toward inspiring *another* movement toward ‘heresy’ through condemning the ‘rules’ which had come to structure the field. Whereas the progenitors of the ‘harDCore’ movement encouraged that reserved animosities boiled over into violence, many of those same figures condemned violence, while promoting self-introspection, under the banner of the ‘Revolution Summer’ initiative. It can be assumed that this movement provided a great deal of strain

for those subculturalists who, in having constructed their subcultural identities in correspondence with the established conventions of the field, had a great deal to lose should Revolution Summer have succeeded in reshaping the conventions of subcultural capital distribution. However, and unless it can be assumed that Washington's hardcore traditionalists had not any qualms with pummelling outspoken advocates against violence (or crying 'rich girls'), it is likely that the traditional means of reinforcing scene hierarchization were recognized as being off limits.

We might therefore speculate that the term 'emotional hardcore', or 'emo-core', developed as a means through which subcultural traditionalist could assault the authenticity of the Revolution Summer movement, and prevent the conventions guiding the structuration of the field from undergoing reinvention, through affixing the movement with a discursive signifier harbouring pejorative connotations. The testimony of Jenny Toomy, Greenwald's first-person witness to the impact that Rites of Spring had on the Washington scene, can be taken to substantiate this postulation in recounting that, "the only people who used [the term] at first were the ones that were jealous over how big and fanatical a scene it was. The bands existed well before the term did and they hated it." (2003: 14-15). Nonetheless, the process whereby the term became prevalent in antagonistic communal discourse - and "immediately became a big joke in the fanzines" - led to the onset of a "weird moment...where you were using the term even though you hated it" (2003: 15). Even this brief collection of quotes points to the fact that the 'emo-core' qualifier had so percolated throughout the hostile discourse of subcultural participants and knowledge producers as to infiltrate the discourse that others constructed around, and used in forming representations of, the artists who they actually supported. If the established Washington hardcore community might be said to have engaged in a programme of representational politics against the Revolution Summer insurrection, it can be declared a successful affront: there would not seem to be any commentators, aside from MacKaye himself, who regard the summer of 1985 as anything other than that period typified by the onset of the 'emo-core' genre.

The majority of the Revolution Summer bands had dissolved by the summer of 1986. Though Fugazi, the band that MacKaye and Picciotto would join forces in forming in 1987, would be plagued by the 'emo-core' qualifier at their onset, the group's emergent proclivity for defying any and all musical conventions spared them the hardship of being affixed with the categorization for any great span of time (Sinker, 2008). As the Washington hardcore scene (and the *militant* straightedge movement) largely began to grow stagnant and evaporate, a new wave of

musically adventurous groups - including Nation of Ulysses and Shudder To Think - began to amass stature and recognition, alongside Fugazi, as the progenitors of the 'progressive' - or 'post' - hardcore movement (Blush, 2001: 158). Naturally, as the Washington scene developed a tolerance for experimentation, and an intolerance for the machismo that had once proven prevalent, the term 'emo-core' largely fell into disuse.

#### **4.5 Cleveland, 1985: The Establishment of *Alternative Press* Magazine**

While MacKaye and his affiliates set upon striving to inspire a 'revolution' within the Washington hardcore community, aspiring fanzine publisher Mike Shea embarked upon inspiring something of a revolution within the underground music scene in Cleveland, Ohio. Shea recalls that, "a lot of the fanzines and college radio stations back then were really negative. Everybody was fighting one another. There wasn't any kind of a cohesive voice [and] I saw an opportunity to unite these factions and get the word out" in deciding "to do a fanzine about the punk and new-wave music I was into at the time. I always wanted to stand up for the underground and unite it" (2003a: 38). Financed through a loan from his Grandmother and a string of successful benefit shows, Shea published the first issue of *Alternative Press* in June of 1985 and, in doing so, introduced the wider Ohio region to the 'AP philosophy'. "I got heavily criticized for putting Depeche Mode in the zine next to Black Flag. I didn't care - we were all one scene; we were all in the same boat. We're all into the underground - lets put it all in the same spot" (2003a: 38). Despite the onset of criticism from rival fanzines that "were all about tearing the scene apart [and embodied] that whole 'We were there, these kids don't know nothing [philosophy]'," Shea testifies to the fact that "people started agreeing with AP's philosophy" (2003a: 38).

Though *AP* were to be commended on their music coverage philosophy, Shea admits that the publication's business philosophy left a lot to be desired: the publication charged next to nothing for advertising space and sternly ensured, over the span of their first six issues, that *Alternative Press* would not carry a cover charge. Shea admits that, "to even claim that we were a business would be a stretch. We were a bunch of fans who lived and breathed underground music, and all we wanted to do was write about our favourite bands so that all the cool people would

know about them” (2003b, 52).<sup>14</sup> Though finally having resigned itself with carrying a cover charge and becoming a “legit fanzine” (Shea, 2003b: 52) through acquiring nationwide distribution in early 1986, *Alternative Press* would cease publication, by virtue of the strain incurred by heavy financial hardship, after just eight issues. The magazine’s ‘hiatus’ would extend through the entirety of 1987; a period in which Shea came to a grim realization as to “how much AP threatened the local weekly entertainment papers. All of a sudden, they were covering more of the underground scene than ever before because of AP’s previous encroachment on their music coverage” (Shea, 2004a: 40).

On the strength of an additional sixteen thousand dollar loan from Shea’s grandmother, *Alternative Press* would spring back into distribution in the summer of 1988. Though Shea asserts that “AP quickly became a ‘must-have’ for anyone who bought zines”, he maintains that the staff still “had no idea how to run a business” and likely survived the year by virtue of being “the fanzine that was pulling together Cleveland’s underground scene instead of attacking it from our own little [point of view]” (2004b: 36). One might suspect, however, that the fact that the fanzine succumbed while being run by four volunteer-basis enthusiasts, and re-emerged with a paid staff of ten (including, for the first time, an Advertising Director and Marketing and Promotions department) might not only have ensured some fiscal security, but subtly rendered *Alternative Press* a national magazine (as opposed to a local fanzine). It might be argued here that, though the transition was not immediately beneficial, *Alternative Press* had graduated from being a micro-media resource to that of constituting a *niche*-media resource. Shea himself can be taken to substantiate this postulation in noting that, “AP was starting to do things that I had thought would take years to achieve. We had snatched big interviews [and distribution] across the country through major record distributors, which at that time were the primary way fanzines ended up in cool indie record stores” (2004c: 32). As true as it may be that one can’t judge a magazine by its cover, a cursory glance at the collection of *Alternative Press* covers from the late-80s era might be taken to suggest that the magazine was certainly making ‘investments’ that would not only bolster its credibility as a legitimated cultural knowledge producer, but one endowed with a great degree of foresight. Whereas early cover stories concerned themselves with such well-established new-wave and punk acts as New Order (AP #4), The Cure (AP #5; # 23) and Circle

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<sup>14</sup> The continuation of this quote, which has no *direct* bearing on the present discussion but speaks volumes nonetheless: “of course, we didn’t want the ‘uncool’ people to know about them, because then the bands wouldn’t be cool anymore” (Shea, 2003b:52).

Jerks (AP # 7), later issues would effectively grant burgeoning groups such as Guns N' Roses (AP #10), Metallica (AP # 14) and "the then-infant Red Hot Chili Peppers [AP # 24]" (Shea, 2004c: 32) coverage that would, in many cases, prove to be some of their earliest cover appearances. As all three of these particular acts would go on to achieve a staggering popularity with mainstream audiences shortly thereafter, it might be prudent that we assume that *Alternative Press* secured some prestige as a viable consecrator of 'privileged' cultural knowledge - among their readership and their competitors alike.

#### **4.6 1990-95: AP Thrives in the Era of Alternative Rock; Struggles in the Wake of Success**

According to Shea, 1990 marked something of a turning point for *Alternative Press* Magazine. Though "‘alternative music’ had been deemed the new trend by MTV", and despite the fact that "*USA Today* labelled [the magazine] *the* ‘bible of alternative music’" (2004d: 40, italics in original), Shea identifies the point at which he "knew [the magazine] had arrived" with the appearance of "a subscription order from *Spin* publisher Bob Guccione Jr. from his home address. I hated *Spin* with a passion, and here was their leader, subscribing to my magazine!" (2004d, 40). Shea recalls that *Alternative Press* also made a considerably wise investment in developing a relationship with Trent Reznor - an artist who had just taken to recording a solo project under the name Nine Inch Nails. As Shea recollects, when the magazine "launched Trent with his first national cover...I knew we had tapped into an artist that was going to explode, and I was right...[*Alternative Press* and Nine Inch Nails] grew up professionally together, and I think we'll always be joined at the hip" (2004d, 40). The process of admittedly "turning into one of the country's premiere alternative rock magazines" (Shea, 2004e: 46) did not, however, come to pass without considerable sacrifice,

All small publishers hit a point in their magazine's lifespan where, due to advertiser pressure, they have to increase their circulation substantially to get access to bigger advertising accounts...ultimately, what happens is that small publishers start negotiating with a national newsstand distributor to help them increase their circulation beyond the bookstores [and into] supermarkets, newsstands at airports, Wal-Mart and so on. These distributors routinely give these sales talks to small publishers, making us think they can guarantee that our magazine will sell in every store in the U.S....[but] the big mistake we small publishers make is thinking that all of our titles belong (and, more importantly, will actually sell) in all these major retail accounts nationwide, regardless of regionalism or demographics. What happens is that because 15 copies out of every 100 distributed sells, the distributor sends no money to the publisher, and the publisher...ends up owing the printer a ton of money (2004e: 46).

In resolving to cater to the magazine's established readership as opposed to the best interest of their distributors, *Alternative Press* "kept putting our indie-cred bands...on the cover, figuring it would sell like crazy"; a decision which ensured that, "within six months of being distributed to major newsstand accounts, [the magazine] saw [its] finances go from the five-figure blacks to the six-figure reds" (2004e: 46). Though *Alternative Press* had cemented its reputation as (ironically enough) an alternative to the mainstream niche media endowed with an established record of supporting artists that wider cultural tastes had not yet attuned to, Shea nonetheless came to appreciate "the cold, hard reality [that] cool bands on the cover don't necessarily sell magazines"; a fact that *Alternative Press* "would struggle with over the next five years" (2004e: 46). Shea nonetheless notes that the conundrum concerning the best manner through which *Alternative Press* might reconcile retaining credibility as a resource for underground music information with achieving the lofty sales expectations demanded of them by distributors was compounded by a climate of unruly competition tactics among niche-media publications. Though Shea contends that "the music industry and the music press didn't take AP seriously enough," he admits to an awareness of the fact that "[they] were keeping an eye on us regardless, 'cause we usually knew what was going on before they did, and they would usually just cop our ideas and our new band discoveries and claim them as their own (out of all the corporate magazines, *Spin* was the most notorious for that)" (2004g:50). Nevertheless, Shea still correlates the early to mid-90s as the period during which *Alternative Press* developed its own distinct 'voice'; thanks in large part to the presence of a group of writers who "were light years ahead of everyone else with their tone - a funny, sardonic style of writing that magazines like Maxim would [later] end up making famous" (2004f: 54). The development of a philosophy allowing that staff writers be "brutally honest with their opinions" (Shea, 2004f: 54), even should they be concerning themselves with the 'mainstream' acts that distribution pressures effectively forced the magazine to cover, allowed *Alternative Press* the ability to caustically criticize the mainstream culture industry even as the magazine further came to be assimilated into it.

We might thus speculate that, as *Alternative Press* entered the decade of its tenth anniversary, it did so within the confines of a curiously precarious position. Its transition from a small-scale fanzine to a revered national niche-media publication - with established 'underground sensibilities' - had not only awarded the magazine a great deal of power in consecrating

otherwise little-known artists (such as Trent Reznor) amongst the circles of ‘cool people’ which the magazine aspired to cater to, but had solidified the magazine’s own status as a legitimated channel of non-mainstream music information. However, the magazine’s determination to grow beyond the confines of its current readership, and its reputation for being an essential source for information that was not being offered by ‘corporate’ music magazines, simultaneously thrust *Alternative Press* into two perilous fields of competition. The first, that of the mainstream publication industry, demanded a measure of conformity with the established processes through which music magazines can be assumed to ensure the highest number of monthly sales: by featuring artists who are not only well established, but popular with a wide range of diverse audiences. The second, to be sure, was the field of cultural knowledge production wherein the consecrators of artistic value compete not only for the privilege of being regarded the legitimate source for pertinent cultural information, but largely succeed in doing so through developing affiliations with, or being the first to ‘discover’, those artists with which targeted audiences enamour (or might come to enamour) themselves with. As the magazine entered its eleventh year, it might be said that *Alternative Press* was burdened by the prospect of having to transform itself into a revenue-minded magazine while concurrently struggling to maintain its identity as an authority on the alternative music scene as competing publications, like *Spin*, began intruding upon its territory.

#### **4.7 1994: Punk Infiltrates the Mainstream; The Term ‘Neo-punk’ Emerges in Response.**

In considering the climate of power dynamics that Blush’s (1991) collection of interviews would suggest was prevalent within the early 1980s Washington Hardcore scene, I extended the argument that the initial construction of the pejorative term ‘emotional hardcore’ was inspired by virtue of two antagonistic forces: a collection of subcultural producers aspiring to restructure the fundamental conventions of subcultural practice, and a bevy of subcultural *participants* who vied to de-authenticate the movement through not only affixing the artistic products propelling it with a derogatory label, but constructing an unsavourily stereotypical representation of its supporters. Should we consider the subcultural reaction to punk rock’s escalation in mainstream popularity in the mid-1990s, I would argue that we can deduce an example wherein choice subcultural *producers* resorted to similar de-authentication tactics in an effort to retain the consecration (and exclusivity) of the subcultural field.

As any attempt to account for the plethora of significant artists, regional movements and distinct stylistic permutations that punk rock underwent in the years spanning from 1987 to 1994 would doubtlessly result in the compilation of a substantially weighty tome, it might prove most pertinent to do little more than highlight the fact that 1994 marked the year wherein select punk rock bands came to be awarded a great deal of mainstream attention. Propelled by a memorable performance at Woodstock '94 and a colourful video for the song "Basket Case", Green Day's first major label album, *Dookie*, sold in excess of three million copies within the first year of its release; an achievement that inspired "cries of 'sell-out' [to begin] rumbling in punk rock cultural centres [as] Green Day [came to be perceived as] the new corporate evil" (Diehl, 2007: 60). When the Offspring's third album, *Smash*, began to achieve similar sales plateaus (despite the fact that it was released on the independent Epitaph Records label), well revered artists and sub-cultural knowledge producers (perhaps, most notoriously, San Francisco's *Maximum Rockroll* fanzine) began disseminating a crisis narrative. To paraphrase: the network of independent labels, grassroots promotional ventures, and the very do-it-yourself ethic that the wider punk community had constructed (while happily being ignored by the cultural mainstream) was being thrust into a state of crisis by virtue of the fact that the major record labels and mainstream media entities, themselves well aware that the popularity of 'grunge' had run its course, were in search of a fresh movement to sell off as the 'next big thing'. As the same A&R label reps who had swarmed Seattle began infiltrating well-established punk centres (such as Southern California, New York and Berkeley), the call was effectively placed to circle the wagons and, as a result, the overarching subculture suddenly became very stringent in applying measurements of authenticity and enforcing the standards of 'legitimate' subcultural practice.

It was not long before figures within the field of subcultural knowledge production – most notably, the San Francisco-based fanzine *Maximum Rockroll* - began chastising many of its most revered artists in an effort to minimize the looming threat of mainstream co-optation. Though Bad Religion, a long-running and well-respected punk outfit, had signed with major label Atlantic Records in 1994, the fact that the group released their best-selling album, *Stranger Than Fiction*, on the label a year later was perceived as an act of heresy so severe as to allegedly inspire Epitaph founder and guitarist Brett Gurewitz to leave the group in protest.<sup>15</sup> Though Ran-

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<sup>15</sup> Gurewitz would rejoin the band once Bad Religion was dropped by Atlantic Records and, subsequently, opted to rejoin the Epitaph roster.

cid turned down a multi-million dollar deal with Epic records prior to releasing their 1995 album *...And Out Come The Wolves* - a title meant to comment on the mainstream's newfound interest in punk rock - on Epitaph (Gold, 1995), the band nonetheless weathered considerable subculturalist criticism for appearing on the cover of *Spin Magazine* and, shortly thereafter, performing on *Saturday Night Live*. Though NOFX displayed an outspoken hostility for the mainstream culture industry - as evidenced through pointed liner notes<sup>16</sup> and lyrics such as "its my job to keep punk rock elite/ this music ain't your fucking industry" (*So Long And Thanks For All The Shoes*, 1997) - fanzines like *Maximum Rocknroll* labelled the band 'sell-outs' on grounds that their 1994 *Punk In Drublic* album was well on its way to achieving gold sales status.<sup>17</sup> At some point, 'neo-punk' emerged as a term that was not only applied to any group (or independent label) that managed to achieve anything resembling commercial success, but as a means of bemoaning the fact that "punk was now manufactured, bottled, and sold for mass consumption" (Diehl, 2007).

Though it can be assumed that a plethora of punk bands (and independent punk labels) stood to watch their audiences swell far beyond the numbers they had encountered prior to Green Day's mainstream breakthrough, punk did not *actually* succeed in becoming the 'next big thing'. Ironically, this might be largely attributable to the fact that many of the very artists who were garnering criticism for transgressing the conventions of authentic subcultural practice were, at the very same time, utilizing their artistic output as a means of introducing those conventions to their burgeoning audiences. We might thus speculate that the painstaking effort which a number of the high-profile punk bands devoted to crafting songs meant to demonize 'selling-out', boast of their allegiance to the do-it-yourself ideology, and reinforce the exclusionary *us-against-the-mainstream* mindset would ultimately contribute toward assuring that fledgling subculturalists be properly inculcated in regarding the conventions of the field. Indeed, though those newly attracted to 'punk rock' through the exposure granted to acts such as Rancid and NOFX by mainstream media channels like MTV or *Spin Magazine*, the bands themselves introduced those same

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<sup>16</sup> The insert of NOFX's *Heavy Petting Zoo* album (1996) reads as follows: "No thanx to: MTV – quit bugging us. Major labels – quit bugging us. Commercial radio stations – quit playing us. We've been doin just fine all these years without you so leave us the fuck alone!"

<sup>17</sup> The band responded to the accusations levelled against them in *Maximumrocknroll* (and, more specifically, MRR founder Tim Yohannon) by way of a song, entitled "I'm Telling Tim" (1996; 1997), that criticizes the fanzine for having granted itself the function of serving as 'moral entrepreneurs' within the punk scene. Following Yohannon's death in 1998, NOFX recorded the song "We Threw Gasoline On The Fire And Now We Have Stumps For Arms And No Eyebrows (1998) as a means of lamenting the fact that the feud served to ruin the friendship between Yohannon and NOFX front-man Mike Burtett.

listeners to a subcultural narrative serving to condemn mainstream media channels and the artists who overenthusiastically catered to them.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, and in keeping with the credo that actions speak louder than words, the majority of the bands whose popularity rose markedly in 1995 resolved to stay with the independent labels which had thus far supported them.

Alas, one cannot solely attribute punk's 'failure' to become the next big thing to the success of subcultural initiatives. The sudden mainstream popularity of such rap-metal fusion bands as Korn, Limp Bizkit and Linkin Park would prove to ensure that the wider entertainment industry would abandon popularizing punk and, instead, set its sights upon promoting bands aligned with the genre that would come to be known as 'nu-metal'. One of the niche-media outlets to begrudgingly participate in this initiative was, in fact, *Alternative Press Magazine*.

#### **4.8 1996-2001: *Alternative Press* Enters Its 'Lost Years'.**

In considering the 'cover' artists which *Alternative Press* began to feature beginning in 1996, it appears obvious that the magazine had begun a process of catering to the demands of their distributors over those of their established readership. Shea contends that, "1996 was a mixed year...as far as cover choices went. We had alt-rock icons along with credibility-saturated indie bands next to punk icons-in-waiting - pretty much the gamut of cool" (2004h: 52). Nonetheless, the testimonies offered by the *Alternative Press* staff, in regarding which cover choices resulted in acceptable magazine sales (decidedly mainstream acts like Rage Against The Machine and Weezer) and which did not (decidedly underground acts like Girls Against Boys and the Jon Spencer Blues Explosion), speak volumes in concerning the direction the magazine would inevitably take. In reflecting on the course which the magazine took in 1997, Managing Editor Dave Segal notes that, "thumbing through 1997's back issues is sobering. If nothing else, it confirms the transient nature of almost all bands...labels...[and] movements" (2004i:60).

There is something of a confession to be found should we consider the manner in which Editor-In-Chief Ron Cherry reflects on the magazine's 110<sup>th</sup> issue and the logic by which the magazine chose their cover artist,

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<sup>18</sup> Though there is a plethora of examples to substantiate this statement, I will resign myself with noting two that are attributable to the artists heretofore discussed: Rancid's "Disorder and Disarray" (*...And Out Come The Wolves*, 1995) and NOFX's "The Desperations Gone" (*So Long And Thanks For All The Shoes*, 1997).

As alternative rock became less commercially viable, we started looking further out for copy-shifting cover options. Enter nu metal. The seven-string-plinking, Bakersfield-based musical aberration known as Korn were selling shitloads of albums to frustrated kids in the hinterland, but they'd yet to receive any serious coverage in a non-techie mag. The story made it safe for other mags to cover the genre. (2004i: 60).

From that point on, Shea admits that *Alternative Press* resolved itself with devoting the majority of their front-cover attention to artists who had not only established themselves with mainstream audiences, but were of little to no interest to their established readership of 'underground' music aficionados. *Alternative Press* followed the Korn cover appearances with in-depth features concerning such multi-platinum artists as Fiona Apple (AP #111) and Oasis (AP #112). In hindsight, Shea attributes the 1998 cover appearances of artists such as Sarah McLachlan (AP #119), Tori Amos (AP #120), Korn (AP #122) and Sugar Ray (AP #116) - the latter of which Cherry regards as the "shark-jumping sell-out issue" (2004j: 68) - to the onset of an era in which *Alternative Press* "began [to enter] what I refer to now as 'The Lost Years'". (Shea, 2004j: 68). His commentary, in its near-entirety, reads as follows,

There were a lot of great artists we would've liked to slap on AP's front cover [in 1998]. Unfortunately, increasing sales pressure from retailers, along with a highly competitive (and getting worse by the month) atmosphere that had erupted between corporate mags like Rolling Stone and Spin, leaving bigger indie mags like us in the middle, was making it near impossible to keep what we felt was our credibility while being able to pay the bills and keep the lights on. So, as alternative music was wavering and becoming less focused as a genre (was it really 'alternative', or was it just pop?), major music magazines were being forced to go after the hottest or newest thing, not only to remain 'relevant' from a business standpoint, but also to stay on top of the next big thing - with grunge on the way out, every music magazine wanted to be able to say it could see what was coming next. Practically every staff meeting, much less editorial meeting, we spent time strategizing our next moves against Stone and Spin in NYC. Being in Cleveland, I think, kept us a bit more objective and less stressed out over the drama that'd been playing out between Stone and Spin each issue, but we still got frustrated when we would get into a cover battle over a previously B-level band like, you know, the Verve. Eventually, we started hearing that the editors of Stone and Spin were now telling publicists to keep us from having stories on certain artists (e.g., No Doubt, Marilyn Manson, or someone similarly well-known who could sell copies)...as [the year] went on [you could feel] that morale was eroding. We were starting to have to do things we didn't want to do in order to survive, and we were growing less tolerant of it (Shea, 2004j: 68).

Against our theoretical backdrop, it would not be difficult to argue that Shea is inadvertently commenting upon the presence of a climate of intense competition within the field of niche-media producers. It is also of dire importance to note the fact that Shea speaks from the standpoint of a cultural knowledge producer who is, quite admittedly, grappling with the consequence of having betrayed the sub-field of restricted production in conforming to the conventions demanded of those niche-media products catering to the needs of the sub-field of large-

scale production. Rather than abiding by its original utility of notifying ‘cool people’ to the presence of ‘cool bands’; *Alternative Press* was battling the ‘corporate mags’ over the pleasure of featuring such artists as Orgy (AP #130), Kid Rock (AP # 133) and Insane Clown Posse (AP # 131) on their cover.

One can also derive the sense that the climate of competition within the field of niche-mediated knowledge producers was further compounded in light of the fact that, as with grunge, nu metal had overstayed its tenure in the mainstream spotlight. There did not appear to be, however, any substantive movements to which cultural knowledge producers could transplant their gaze. Shea recounts that, “at the turn of the millennium, all the major music mags were off chasing the next big thing ‘cause, lets be honest, no one had a clue about what was going to stick” (2005b: 40). In the interim, *Alternative Press* resigned itself to indiscriminately chasing unit-shifting artists deeper and deeper into credibility-corrosive territory; “Creed on the cover? Why the hell not. Slipknot? Sure, lets go for it” (Shea, 2005b: 40). By 2001, *Alternative Press* was haemorrhaging staff who had grown weary of the fact that, “advertisers and distributors wanted [the magazine] to sell more copies, while readers wanted more credibility. We couldn’t please both, so we got caught in the crossfire - and found ourselves unable to get out of the trenches in the process (Shea, 2005c: 42). Shea concedes that “having to discuss Kid Rock or the over-commercialization of music, and being forced to chase the lowest common denominator just to get people to advertise or carry you in their stores” almost inspired *Alternative Press* to “shut it down and move on” (2005a: 50). Of course, rather than ‘shutting it down’, the magazine would soon instead pursue the alternative option: moving towards incurring ‘heresy’ by shifting its focus to an untapped pool of artists who were comfortably amassing prestige within the sub-field of restricted production. In the process, the term ‘emo’, which had regained some favour within the lexicon of subcultural, micro-mediated discourse, would come to be used in chorus with initiatives tailored toward advancing the perception of an emerging musical movement. Before detailing the specifics of this process, I would wish to further elaborate on the manner in which the field of subcultural knowledge production re-introduced, and utilized, the term.

#### **4.9 “Emo” in the Interim: The Term Re-emerges with “The Emo Diaries”.**

Though I have argued that the term ‘emotional hardcore’ was initially coined as a means of stigmatizing a relatively small number of short-lived bands within a decidedly localized scene,

it is important to note that the term would subsequently be resurrected, as a positive descriptive, just over a decade later. In utilizing interviews conducted with members of those bands who would come to be heralded as progenitors of the ‘second wave’ emo movement (Zemler, 2004; Herrera, 2006), we might cautiously surmise that the term’s eventual reintroduction into the lexicon of subcultural discourse can largely be attributed to the national following, and subsequent influence, that MacKaye and Picciotto’s Fugazi project developed in the years following their formation. Be they inspired by Fugazi in regards to musical intonation, lyrical content or ideology, bands such as Jawbreaker and Sunny Day Real Estate took a great deal of inspiration from the ‘Revolution Summer’ mindset in creating their own music. However, though each band did garner some positive attention from the mainstream niche-media in the early to mid 1990s, it is important to note that they were championed as creative progenitors within the parameters of pre-established genres. Though noted for delving in to complex song structures and brandishing a quasi-poetic lyrical sensibility, Jawbreaker were comfortably categorized as an adventurous pop-punk band with deep-rooted ties with the ‘Gilman Scene’ in Berkeley, California (Bouffon, 1993; Oh, 1995). While enjoying modest success with their 1994 *Diary* album, Seattle’s Sunny Day Real Estate were - surprise, surprise - garnering national acclaim as an experimental grunge outfit (Crane, 1998). Though there is little in the way of evidence serving to contradict the *possibility* that these groups were recognized as ‘emo’ bands in the eyes of select populations, the niche-media artefacts of the period offer no evidence to suggest that the term ‘emo’ had taken on any widely regarded currency in being used to describe them.

The first tangible instance in which the term ‘emo’ was explicitly utilized in describing a burgeoning genre of music came in 1997 when Deep Elm Records, a small independent label based out of North Carolina, released the first volume of a series of compilation albums entitled *The Emo Diaries*. Though the Deep Elm website describes the album, which featured such soon-to-be-revered bands as Jimmy Eat World and Samiam, as “the record that started passionate waves of discussion about the ‘emo’ scene - where it’s been, where it’s going, and which bands to look out for” (Deep Elm Website, Accessed 2008a); it is not entirely clear whether the compilation was developed as an effort to complement the pseudo-generic term or, alternatively, if the term was chosen as a means of affording the compilation a sense of cohesion. In stipulating that the bands featured on the initial (and subsequent) volumes of the *Emo Diaries*, “were selected to participate based on open submissions of their music,” and that “only the music mattered” (Deep

Elm Website, Accessed 2008a), there is an inkling of evidence that the latter possibility is the likely case. The label even takes the initiative of providing what amounts to a disclaimer in qualifying their own use of the term in professing that, “Deep Elm has never attempted to define any musical style, as we believe any combination of songwriting, lyrics and live performance means something different to every listener. We have only intended to share with you the music that moves us and support these bands...it's what we do” (Deep Elm Website, Accessed 2008a).

Nevertheless, and in judging by the critical response that the initial compilation garnered,<sup>19</sup> critics within the field of micro-mediated knowledge production focused less on the participating artists than the idea of the genre itself. An unaccredited positive review offered by *Pitchfork Media* precludes their overview of the sound that constitutes the genre - “it’s basically a lot like hardcore ‘cept that it sounds a little mellower, the themes are more focused on loss than pure anger, and they have a new compilation on Deep Elm” - by quipping that, “even the Tin Men of the hardcore scene used to wish they had a heart. Nowadays, tho’, the Wizard has granted them the niche sound of emo-core, a loosely defined group of bands that many believe have been undeservingly ignored” (Deep Elm Website, Accessed 2008b). An unidentified reviewer, simply affiliated with “Scratch”<sup>20</sup>, grants readers a brief - and extremely poetic - lesson on the specificities of the genre in stating that,

Emo-core operates on a basic principle: that noise, coupled with strong songwriting and at least some semblance of melody, can capture the raw essence of emotion. That drums, guitars and maybe a set of pipes can wedge a screwdriver into the most private pain center and pry out a response...All sorts of noise-rock crows and screams for attention these days. There's Rollins-style rage-rock, veins a-poppin' and limbs a-thrashin'. Art-noise is interested in music as a technical exercise. And there's plenty of acts making noise just to make noise. What separates the bands on WHAT'S MINE IS YOURS, the neophytes as well as the grizzled vets, is their insistence on building their music upon a base of uncooked, bloody-rare emotion. Don't get me wrong, these acts, well, ROCK, but as a means to an end. In the current vogue of artifice and irony, it's a novel concept. And that's the golden thread that keeps this sloppy genre from flying apart at warp speed. (Deep Elm Website, Accessed 2008b)

I would argue that these reviews offer an insight into the manner in which the term ‘emo’ was used less in describing bands that conformed to an identifiable genre (or harnessed a particular sound) than bands that possessed some qualities which were unique to other bands in-

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<sup>19</sup> Though the Deep Elm website has select reviews archived on their website, they provide nothing more than the name of the fanzine or webzine in which they appeared.

<sup>20</sup> Barring the unlikely chance that this is the popular Scratch magazine that concerns itself with hip-hop, I would personally assume that Scratch was either an underground fanzine or a short-lived webzine. My search for sources that speak to the magazine’s existence, aside from the Deep Elm website, has proven futile.

volved with either ‘hardcore’ or ‘noise rock’ scenes. In offering descriptions which substantively state next to nothing - describing emo-core as ‘a little mellower’ than hardcore, or as music that is built ‘upon a base of uncooked, bloody-rare emotion’ - each critic would seem to be sidestepping the chore of describing what emo sounds like. Instead, they focus on virtues exterior to the actual music: it is not as angry as hardcore - a style that, having been concocted by ‘Tin Men’, is implied as being, in some manner, intrinsically hollow. While Emo-core bands are not perceived to be ‘screaming for attention’ (and thus engaging in narcissistic showboating) or ‘making noise for the sake of making noise’ (and thus pretentious), they are ‘undeservingly ignored’ (and thus only appreciated by those with unique - and, by extension - superior tastes). In a word, these reviews speak to the presence of a sub-genre constitutive of a ‘loosely defined group of bands’ who not only instil their music with *authentic* emotion, but create music for *authentic* reasons. Of course, it is of no small measure of significance that each critic subtly extends themselves the authority to speak as though they stand among those few who can detect, and are appreciative of, this authenticity.

Regardless of the validity of Deep Elm’s claim to have never vied to ‘define any musical style’, the label nonetheless released a new Volume of The Emo Diaries every year and, in doing so, affiliated a host of new artists with the term. We can safely surmise that the compilation series is likely largely responsible for instigating the process through which the term ‘emo-core’ came to enjoy a degree of popularity it had previously not experienced. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning here that only two of the bands featured on the compilation - Further Seems Forever (Volume 4, 2000) and, to a lesser extent, Jimmy Eat World (Volume 1, 1997) - would be deemed significant as niche-media cultural knowledge producers inevitably strove to construct a revised history of emo’s genesis - and, by extension, fundamentally alter that which the term was meant to denote.

#### **4.10 2001-2002: *Alternative Press* Moves Toward ‘Heresy’; Modifies the Landscape of the Underground.**

While *Alternative Press* were catering to the ‘lowest common denominator’, a number of web-based micro-media websites functioned to disseminate (and create) subcultural knowledge for ‘underground’ music enthusiasts. One such landmark web-based micro-media channel,

*Punknews.org*, came into being in October of 2001. Founded in Ontario, Canada by Aubin Paul, *Punknews.org* was created with the intention of providing “an inclusive community-based site for the delivery and discussion of music news surrounding punk, ska, hardcore, emo, metal and indie” (Punknews.org, Accessed 2008a). *Punknews.org* functions less as a site entailing a staff of writers than a forum in which any user so inclined might submit music related news, interviews or album reviews which will be posted pending the approval of the editorial staff. Another of *Punknews.org*’s defining features is that it grants users the ability to post comments and carry out discussions in response to any submission that the website opts to accept. It might be said that *Punknews.org* thus serves not only as a medium through which subcultural participants might become subcultural knowledge producers, but as a site wherein subculturalists might either reinforce the validity of that knowledge, or subject it to unabashed scrutiny, through facilitating the construction of discourse.

While *Punknews.org* set about solidifying its status as a popular resource for underground music information, *Alternative Press Magazine* began to deduce the presence of a surging audience to whom magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *Spin* had not yet set about catering to. Shea notes that Marketing Director Aaron Wilson had been “reporting back [from the Warped Tour] with some attention-grabbing news: *AP* readers were coming to our booth and telling him how much they totally dug our more punk-rock coverage...these readers were complete fanatics of the bands they followed...and [Wilson] felt there was something here we should be thinking about” (2005c, 42).

Wilson’s suspicion was granted some credence when *Alternative Press* opted to dedicate featured article of the May 2001 issue (*AP* # 154) to the re-emergence of Weezer. Having released a self-titled debut album that became something of a cultural phenomenon in 1994 (propelled in no small part by the success of such songs as “Undone (The Sweater Song)”, “Buddy Holly” and “Say It Ain’t So”), the hardships which befell Weezer following the release of their second album, *Pinkerton* (1996), has become the stuff of subcultural legend. A sombre and strategically under-produced record, *Pinkerton* functioned as something of a conceptual album through which vocalist Rivers Cuomo unabashedly opened up about his fear of intimacy (“Why Bother?”, “No Other One”), his longing for companionship (“El Scorcho”, “Falling For You”) and his self-professed failings as a human being (“Across The Sea”, “Butterfly”). The initial critical and public reception to *Pinkerton* was far from kind: in addition to poor record sales and

the distinction of being named the second worst album of the year in *Rolling Stone's* 1996 Readers Poll (Luerssen, 2004), the album was panned by a sizable contingent of niche-media publications including *Entertainment Weekly* (Gordinier, 1996) and, of course, *Rolling Stone Magazine* (O' Connor, 1998). The scorching response to the album inspired Cuomo to disown the album and put the band on a hiatus that would render it silent until the release of its second self-titled album in 2001 (Luerssen, 2004; Greenwald, 2003).

The critical reaction to *Pinkerton* was not, however, entirely negative. Though *Pitchfork Media* had yet to become a micro-media phenomenon, it is noteworthy that Schreiber's (1996) positive review of the album is now heralded as one that had some impact on *Pinkerton's* ascent to 'cult-classic' status (Luerssen, 2004). The subsequent discourse surrounding the album, a great deal of which was inspired by a trio of reviews posted on *Punknews.org*, harbours a subtle narrative regarding the fact that *Pinkerton's* mainstream failure only served to render the album more enticing for underground music fans ('lolaq', 2002; 'EvilMonkey', 2002; 'pete21', 2001).<sup>21</sup> When Weezer opted to end their hiatus and begin recording a third album in 2000, a flurry of news postings on *Punknews.org* gleefully strove to document the band's every baby-step back into being.

As Weezer readied their comeback effort, *Alternative Press* proved to be the sole niche-media publication to have adequately gauged the level of anticipation swirling throughout sub-culturalist pockets. In opting to tailor its coverage toward detailing the manner in which the band made the transition "from has-beens to cult icons" (*Alternative Press* cover text, 2001), the magazine had, furthermore, effectively asserted itself - however briefly - as a niche-media publication which still retained *some* sense as to what was occurring beneath the mainstream radar. Though the publication once again resigned itself to catering to established popular tastes for the majority of 2001, Shea admits to coming to the realization that, "for the past four years we had been trying to be something we weren't and never wanted to be in the first place (i.e., Spin-like)", and that - the survival of the publication be damned, *Alternative Press* had to "return to [its] punk-rock roots; the ones [it was] founded upon" (2005c, 42). As Shea recalls, this new ini-

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<sup>21</sup> It is interesting to note that, over the course of the years to follow, this undercurrent of appreciation would suffice in planting *Pinkerton* upon a substantial number of reflective 'best of the 90s' lists (Spin Magazine, 2005; Pitchfork Media, 2003) and inspire *Rolling Stone* to retract their initial review - in favour of publishing a much more positive critique - some eight years later (Edwards, 2004). As will be considered in the near future, the album would also come to be recognized, quite reflectively, as one of the most significant progenitors of the 'emo' movement.

tiative, combined with the fact that “it was now October, and our 100 bands You Need To Know issue was around the corner”, inspired the magazine to focus on “finding two bands that were cool, full of integrity and unknown to the NYC rock media elite. Norman and the editors came back with AFI and Saves The Day” (2005c, 42).

#### *4.10.1 Notes on the Underground: The Subcultural Significance of AFI and Saves The Day*

A self-professed affiliate of the ‘East Bay Hardcore’ scene, AFI had unquestionably become one of the most revered bands within the underground punk scene. Though having established a commendable following on the strength of three full-length albums on the independent *Nitro Records*, the band’s greatest brush with underground success came with the 1999 release of *Black Sails In The Sunset*. As opposed to previous releases, which did not stray far from conventional punk and hardcore in execution and lyrical content, *Black Sails In The Sunset* succeeded in infusing the band’s sound with a number of dark, quasi-gothic qualities which better served to reflect the influence that the band derived from artists such as the Misfits, the Cure and Joy Division. In concocting lyrics imbued with a gothic poeticism largely foreign to the punk and hardcore genres, vocalist Davey Havok successfully strove to construct songs that spoke of persecution (“Malleus Maleficarum”), self-destructive impulses (“The Last Kiss”, “Exsanguination”) and a self-loathing born of marginalization (“At A Glance”). However, the darker lyrical offerings - some of which detailed self-inflicted wounding and likened adolescent persecution of non-conformists to the Salem witch trials - were offset by songs calling for the development of communal bonds through which those so afflicted by disconsolate emotionality could take strength (“Porphyria Cutanea Tarda”, “The Prayer Position”, “Narrative Of Soul Against Soul”). Having shortly thereafter released the Halloween-themed *All Hallows EP* (2000), the band began to develop a quasi-gothic aesthetic meant to complement their burgeoning sound. Havok took up the ritual of donning a decidedly gothic ensemble for the band’s performances, replete with a tight-fitting ‘pleather’ bodysuit, jet-black hair fashioned into a pronounced ‘devilock’,<sup>22</sup> and white facial make-up offset by black lipstick. A grainy black-and-white video for the band’s *All Hallows*’s track “Totalimmortal” (another song detailing a tumultuous struggle with inner demons) featured

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<sup>22</sup> The ‘Devilock’ hairstyle, as popularized by the Misfits, consists of congealing one’s hair into a long tail-like formation which is to be draped down the centre of the face.

the band performing in a cemetery. By virtue of the depth of connection that the band had begun developing with their increasingly growing fan base, and though outright ignored by the mainstream niche-media, AFI developed such an underground following that their subsequent Nitro album, *The Art Of Drowning* (2000), served to register on the *Billboard* charts at 174th (Punknews.org, 2000).

New Jersey's Saves The Day, on the other hand, had garnered a great deal of attention by virtue of the fact that the pop-punk outfit released two well-received albums - *Can't Slow Down* (1998) and *Through Being Cool* (1999) - while its members were still attending high school. Unlike AFI, Saves The Day had developed a reputation for crafting easily digestible pop songs that typically harboured downright malicious - and unabashedly juvenile - lyrical themes. By way of example, a lyrical excerpt from *Through Being Cool's* title-track reads, "You know what?/ The next time you see Nick, tell him I'm gonna stick some needles in his face and watch him on his knees/ Watch him when he sees that I'm not fooling / 'Cause I'm through being cool and he keeps telling everyone about me/ Like how I'm such a fool and that I'm so deceptive/ I think I'll make him eat the ground" (Conley, 1998). The song "Rocks Tonic Juice Magic", from the same album, continues in this spirit as vocalist Conley serenades the recipient of his unrequited affections: "Let me take this awkward saw and run it against your thighs/ Cut some flesh away / I'll carry this piece of you with me because all I can say tonight is that I hate you / But it would be all right if we could see each other sometime/ If I could somehow make you mine/ And if not I'll take my rusty spoons and dig out your blue eyes" (Conley, 1998).

The band signed with Vagrant records before the release of their subsequent album, *Stay What You Are* (2001), a move of which the significance might be lost should we fail to recognize that, just as the field of niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers were desperately scrambling to deduce what the 'next big thing' would be, so too were a host of independent record labels. However, and as nu metal continued to usurp the mainstream attention that had been afforded the punk and hardcore underground when labels like Vagrant were forming, the climate in which upstart independent punk labels could easily thrive had been replaced by one entailing a struggle to *survive*. Greenwald (2003) contends that a number of to-be significant independent labels thus reconciled themselves with signing "a seemingly interchangeable crop of young, vaguely punk boy bands that produce entirely hummable guitar in the vein of Blink-182 and New Found Glory [with] themes [that are] limited to girl trouble and hangin' with the dudes"

(2003: 129). Greenwald specifically references Vagrant in contending that Egan, less a bona-fide subculturalist than an aspiring label mogul, devised a strategy wherein he might “[ride] the explosion of internet use among high school students and the universal appeal of his musical formula (cute, bruised boys who fall in love too easily and tour too much)” (2003: 70) in an attempt to win consumer allegiances with a market that most credibility-saturated independent punk labels rarely aspire to attract: adolescents for whom a band’s image, though not everything, was an important aspect of their appeal. In this respect, we might speculate that Saves The Day - a band of adolescents striving to make music specifically catering to adolescents - served as the perfect artist through whom Vagrant could connect with their aspired fan-base.

Not unlike AFI, however, Saves The Day would not seem to have drawn any significant amount of niche-mediated attention prior to January of 2002 when, alongside AFI, *Alternative Press* allotted them one of the two cover slots on issues 164.1 and 164.2 (respectively). In regarding how the *AP* readership reacted to the relatively drastic move, Shea testifies that, “readers went bananas for it. We got more positive letters about that single issue than we’d received for the past several year’s worth of covers. Best of all, it felt like the readers were actually appreciating us again” (2005d, 46). In response, Shea and the editorial board devised a program of action whereby the publication would initiate a series of ‘baby-steps’; “we’d test a relatively unknown band on the cover, then give the cover to another supposed alt-rock heavyweight, then go back again to the lesser-known band, and so on” (Shea, 2005d, 46). Thus, alongside mainstream bands as Puddle of Mudd and Disturbed, *Alternative Press* extended a number of soon-to-be revered artists their first instance of significant niche-media attention. Having left the aforementioned Further Seems Forever for the sake of focusing on an acoustic project christened Dashboard Confessional,<sup>23</sup> Chris Carrabba graced the June cover of the magazine (AP #168); an issue which enjoyed sales so healthy as to ensure that the magazine would “never have to worry about Limp Bizkit again” (Pettigrew, 2005: 158). New Jersey’s Thursday, a post-hardcore act who had built a strong following on the strength of their 2001 Victory Records album, *Full Collapse*, were extended the same opportunity with the August 2002 edition (AP #170). Shea notes that, “I had started 2002 not sure if we were going to survive this return to our original punk-rock vision, but by the time we printed our second AFI cover in December, I knew we had turned the magazine

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<sup>23</sup> ...not to mention having elicited a significant amount of discussion on websites such as Punknews.org when Vagrant and Drive-Thru records – another independent label vying to cater to decidedly younger audiences – engaged in a public feud when Carrabba opted to sign with the former over the latter (Punknews.org, 2001).

around and returned to it something it had been missing for some time: spirit” (2005d, 46). Shea does not, however, hazard to mention the impact that granting relatively unknown artists as AFI, Saves The Day, Dashboard Confessional and Thursday would have on the wider music industry. In each case, the *Alternative Press* cover exposure translated into increased album sales, increased support from music video channels and mainstream radio stations and - most importantly - increased ‘buzz’ within the sphere of niche-mediated cultural knowledge production. By the close of 2002, three of the aforementioned acts had left the sub-field of restricted production for the sake of signing with major record labels; AFI and Saves The Day with Dreamworks (Punknews.org, 2001; 2002a) and Thursday with Island (Punknews.org, 2002b). We might further consider the ramifications of this trend in chapter six.

#### **4.11 Closing Thoughts: Toward the Onset of the ‘Summer of Emo’**

In concerning itself with the genesis of the term ‘emo’ and charting *Alternative Press* Magazine’s storied evolution, this chapter has attempted to provide something of a history of struggles. I have argued that the term ‘emo’ was originally born by virtue of the Washingtonian hardcore subculture’s initiative to prevent ‘heretical’ artistic producers from modifying the conventions serving to structure their field of subcultural participation. In briefly detailing some of the repercussions befalling those artistic producers who came to be affiliated with the mid-90s ‘neo-punk’ movement, I have attempted to demonstrate the manner in which the punk subculture reacted to the potential co-optation of their culture through applying standards of demarcating revised - and inherently exclusionary - means of determining ‘authenticity’ for subcultural consumers and producers alike. I have also explicated the process through which *Alternative Press* Magazine successfully strove to penetrate the sub-field of niche-mediated cultural knowledge production and, in effect, sacrificed the standing it had possessed within the sub-field of restricted cultural knowledge production in conforming to the ‘rules’ enforced within the sub-field of large-scale cultural knowledge production. Finally, I have detailed the process through which *Alternative Press* moved toward committing ‘heresy’ within the sub-field of niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers by re-shifting its coverage focus to artists native to the sub-field of restricted production (and, thereby, artists over whom entities within the micro-mediated field of subcultural knowledge production, like *Punknews.org*, held implicit jurisdiction).

I have not yet, however, adequately explicated the means through which the pseudo-generic signifier 'emo' - a pejorative term originally meant to denote (shall we say) 'emasculated' artistic products, but more recently utilized in consecrating works deemed to be 'authentic' within micro-mediated circles - came to be granted such a level of significance in the wake of this heretical initiative. To put it simply: as *Alternative Press* vied to introduce its readership to a new flock of noteworthy bands, so too did it introduce its niche-mediated competitors to the ill-defined pseudo-generic signifier of our focus. It had furthermore done so, in large part, by way of a caption, featured on Saves The Day's 164.2 cover appearance, which heralded the band as "pop-punk's emo-tional rescue" (*Alternative Press*, 2002: Cover). In chorus with the meagre currency which the term was compiling by virtue of 'Emo Diaries' alumni Jimmy Eat World's burgeoning mainstream success (Walters, 2001), we might speculate that the manner in which *Alternative Press* flaunted the term - while in the process of asserting their expert jurisdiction over 'new' movements in music, no less - effectively tantalized a niche-mediated sphere which had long been aspiring, yet failing not only to deduce what the 'next big thing' would be, but to brand it. The following chapter will explicate the manner in which *Alternative Press*, in addition to a plethora of niche-mediated figures ranging from *Spin Magazine* contributor Andy Greenwald (2003) to *TIME Magazine* contributor Josh Tyrangiel (2002) and, most infamously, *Seventeen Magazine* (Schwartz, 2002) would vie to develop an 'expert discourse' regarding the emergence of what was quickly being heralded as an 'emo movement'.

## Chapter Five. Constituting a Pseudo-Concept; Manufacturing a Movement: The Niche-Mediated Construction of an Expert Discourse on the Emo Pseudo-genre.

“I don’t really know what emo means...but apparently I had something to do with it.”

- Rivers Cuomo, 2001 interview (Sullivan, 2001)

### 5.1 Introductory Notes

In chapter four, I argued that the term ‘emo’ was annexed into the lexicon of niche-media discourse by virtue of the process through which select cultural knowledge producers strove to focus their attention on those artists, within the sub-field of restricted production, who had developed considerable followings amongst ‘underground’ music enthusiasts. It is, however, important to note that the term was primarily used as a *descriptor* when it first came into popular niche-mediated use. Though magazines such as *Alternative Press*, *Blender* and *Rolling Stone* invoked the term in describing acts like Jimmy Eat World, Weezer and Saves The Day, they devoted little attention toward explicating what, in fact, rendered such acts ‘emo’ as opposed to, say, ‘pop punk’ or ‘alternative rock’. We might speculate that this practice of utilizing a unique term without adequately justifying its application rendered the term popular but hollow; a semantically ill-defined signifier granted utilization less for the sake of describing artists with distinguishable qualities than for the sake of describing them in a *novel* way. In light of this, and although a number of artists came to find introduction to niche-mediated audiences under the auspices of the ‘emo’ description, they shared little in the way of any unifying trait beyond the fact that their increased niche-mediated attention was translating into increased audiences. The term itself was effectively ‘empty’; fit for utilization, at the discretion of the cultural knowledge producer, in cases wherein the overarching goal lay not only with being the first publication to introduce audiences to a scarcely-known artist, but to do so while implicitly presenting oneself as a source for - and authority on - privileged information on a scarcely-known genre. During the early months of 2002, a curious variety of niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers were allotting ‘emo’ the role of the *signifier*; an adjective meant to orient, or ‘frame’, the manner in which the reader would conceptualise the *signified* artist of focus. The primary objective of such instances or reportage, however, would appear to have lain with constructing the perceived emergence of a burgeoning youth-cultural movement; one replete with distinct tastes in artistic producers and aesthetic practices.

This chapter will focus on a number of the niche-mediated texts which strove to focus on ‘emo’ in and of itself and, in so doing, succeeded in not only framing ‘emo’ as less a *signifier*

than that being *signified*, but drawing the pronounced ire of web-based subcultural discourse centres in misappropriating, reinventing, and widely disseminating ‘privileged’ subcultural knowledge. I argue that those cultural knowledge producers not only strove to manufacture the perception of a burgeoning ‘emo movement’, but asserted their own jurisdiction over the authoritative ability to identify, define, and speak about the specificities of the emo pseudo-genre. I will subject a cross-section of the niche-mediated texts that strove to grant the emo pseudo-genre constitution to a program of analysis concerning itself with two questions. First, what do these texts aspire to ‘say’ to those populations who we might assume constitute their ‘intended’ recipients; i.e., those adolescent populations who are either presumed to be interested, or presumed to be potential adherents of, the emo pseudo-genre? Second, what information might they inadvertently convey to those subculturalist populations that might take a pronounced interest in what such niche-mediated texts aspire to say (and who they aspire to say it to)? Finally, and in regards to this second question, I will demonstrate the manner through which these instances of high-profile niche-mediated coverage not only assured that the term ‘emo’ would come to denote a lack of subcultural legitimacy and once again take on pejorative connotations within the arena of subcultural discourse, but provoke the construction of an unsavoury ‘emo kid’ stereotype; a burgeoning conceptualization of a problematic population of impending subcultural ‘others’ that would, indeed, suffice in evolving into the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil representation as annexed by the ‘emo reports’ of early 2007.

## 5.2 “Emotional Rescue”: *TIME Magazine* on the ‘Emo Movement’.

Though an array of niche-media publications – primarily *Alternative Press*, but also *Spin* and *Rolling Stone* - had sporadically taken to invoking the term ‘emo’ in describing rising stars as Dashboard Confessional and Jimmy Eat World, one of the first accounts meant to focus on ‘emo’ itself came courtesy of *TIME Magazine*. In including a Josh Tyrangiel article entitled “Emotional Rescue”, The May 21<sup>st</sup> edition of the weekly news magazine effectively took it upon itself to notify its readership about a musical style that, though “having been around since the mid-’80s... [was] only now developing into a broad cultural phenomenon” (Tyrangiel, 2002); one replete with fans imbued with a “spooky intensity” (Ibid. 2002) and the fixated interest of the wider music industry. In leading off with a brief overview of Dashboard Confessional’s burgeoning success that takes pains to note that, “[though one] might think Carrabba is a rock

star...he is not. He's an emo star" (ibid. 2002), the article affords itself an over-arching purpose, and approaches its dominant theme, in postulating that, "emo might be even bigger if anyone knew precisely how to define it" (ibid, 2002). Armed primarily with the educated testimony of Deep Elm Records founder John Szuch and Tyrangiel's personal insights, the remainder of the article concerns itself with doing just that in denoting a number of qualities which are ostensibly advanced as being unique to the emo genre. I wish to focus on how, in the process of so doing, Tyrangiel would effectively advance a rudimentary depiction of a homogenous 'movement' of 'sensitive' emo kids, strive to affiliate choice artistic producers with the 'movement' for the purpose of fulfilling potentially ingenuous purposes, and inspire a reactionary subcultural discourse that would not only strive to problematize the manner in which Tyrangiel aspired to characterize the 'emo' pseudo-genre, but bemoan the sheer fact that an inauthentic cultural knowledge producer was aspiring to re-constitute the 'emo' pseudo-genre *at all*.

### 5.2.1 *The Content: An Overview*

Though Tyrangiel almost immediately threatens to derail his own intentions in declaring that, "emo is musically broad enough to include country, thrash, acoustic, and traditional pop sounds", he nonetheless argues that the term is applicable to artists who focus on "the specific hurt of a bad relationship" in a manner so autobiographical as to ensure that, though the lyrics are not "abstract and thus accessible to lots of listeners...a fragile teen being broken up with for the first time will wear the repeat button down to a nub" (2002, online). For the most part, however, Tyrangiel locates that quality rendering an artist's output 'emo' less in the nature of the music than in the manner of its distribution in stating that,

True to its punk roots, emo has a self-sufficient community that functions outside the mainstream. While dozens of emo bands have signed with major labels, the great majority remain on independents like Deep Elm and Jade Tree. These labels put out CDs and compilations like *The Emo Diaries* on the cheap, and they don't have major record-store distribution (2002).

Above all else, the Tyrangiel text vies to describe the particularities of the 'emo kid' and, by extension, the 'self-sufficient community' that Chris Carrabba is quoted as describing to be "cultlike (sic)" at the onset of the piece (2002, online). Beneath a passage entitled "Sensitive Kids Love Emo", Tyrangiel opines that "adolescents can be divided into two categories: those who pretend to feel nothing and those who aspire to feel everything. The latter make up the emo

demographic” (2002, online). The adolescents who constitute the “emo community” are described, on the one hand, as being prone to “buy albums... [and] then huddle online at diaryland.com, makeoutclub.com and the emo post-punk Web ring to bare their souls and trade reviews” and as a collectivity harbouring “domineering and spiteful” traits, on the other. Citing the instance in which “emo fans howled” because The Promise Ring’s *Wood/Water* album not only “sounded overproduced”, but was released through Epitaph Records as opposed to the “tiny, emo-friendly Jade Tree” label, Tyrangiel cautions that “emo fans go ballistic when they think a band is selling out” (2002, online).

Despite his own comments regarding both the musical breadth of the genre and the vehemence the emo community purportedly reserve for popular artists, Tyrangiel nonetheless identifies Dashboard Confessional and Weezer as the flagship bands of the genre. In arguing that “Emo is the antipop”, Tyrangiel subjects Dashboard Confessional’s most recognizable song, “Screaming Infidelities”, to a deconstruction tailored toward deducing its widespread appeal. Noting that “[Carrabba’s] guitar is mournful [and] his voice strained”, and that, “the song isn’t about being cheated on; it’s about Carrabba’s being cheated on”, Tyrangiel essentially heralds “Screaming Infidelities” as the quintessential representative of a musical genre that “shuns abstraction to drive home a single point: woe is me” (2002, online). Weezer’s popularity with the emo community, on the other hand, is described as being by virtue of the fact that “[Rivers] Cuomo is an emo everyman”; a statement which finds accompaniment with a brief - and largely incorrect - account of the process through which Cuomo reformed the band once having “realized that Harvard was not a cure for feelings of social inadequacy” (2002, online). In noting that Weezer find favour with emo enthusiasts despite having committed such ‘sins’ as signing to a major label and selling almost four million albums, Tyrangiel concludes his article in noting that Weezer’s appeal proves, “that emo kids - who pride themselves on not being like everybody else - don’t mind living vicariously through a star, particularly an overwrought one...It’s tough to avoid the conclusion that the emo faithful, like Red Sox fans, are only happy when they’re sad.” (2002, online).

### 5.2.2 *The Nature of the Text: Contrasting Themes*

In essence, the Tyrangiel article is an odd amalgamation of unsubstantiated claims and contradictory information. Though speaking to the fervent dedication of the ‘emo faithful’, the

article does not include a single first-person testimonial from anyone who might self-identify as part of the 'emo community'. It strives to celebrate emo as 'the anti-pop' while, quite concurrently, ridiculing the 'sensitive kids' which make up its fan base. In noting that, "most emo band names blend irony and sincerity as if they were the same thing (which, in the current adolescent idiom, they are)" (Ibid, 2002), Tyrangiel even subjects the bands constitutive of the genre to a subtle derision. When subjected to any measure of scrutiny, it becomes clear that the piece lacks a cohesion of narrative; it advances statements prone to contradicting all that have come before it and which will themselves find contradiction in those that follow. There is no thematic unity. The author takes on a multitude of positions - from expert to befuddled spectator, advocate to unflattering critic - all within a single paragraph. These qualities necessarily demand that we speculate as to which the audiences to whom the text means to speak and, furthermore, the overarching intentions of the piece. In doing so, I must admittedly take some liberties with Barthes' (2006) notion that an author's intentions should not be taken into consideration when examining the various ways in which an audience might interpret, and pull significance from, a text. I argue that this particular article was constructed in a manner allowing that a multiplicity of audiences could extract unique sub-narratives which cater directly to them while, at the same time, pulling one uniform meta-narrative from the piece; namely, that emo is the emergent 'big thing', and that Dashboard Confessional and Weezer, specifically, are the flagship acts associable with it.

In concerning the sub-narratives, I wish to speculate that one might identify three unique audiences, aside from that completely oblivious to the prevalence of the term 'emo'<sup>24</sup>, to whom the article vies to extend differing narratives. First, we might consider the themes which might purport themselves as pertinent for adolescents who are either supportive of the emergent 'emo movement' or, to some extent, interested in knowing more about it. The article opens and closes by identifying artists with whom this audience, more likely than not, will already have some degree of knowledge. Through invoking reference to widely known artists, it invites this audience to approach the remainder of the text from the standpoint of one who is already, to some degree, 'in the know'. The text also panders to this audience in deducing that, lest one is 'in the know', emo is almost impossible to identify and, in doing so, suggests that those with some familiarity with the applicability of the term harbour a privileged knowledge; they are already part of a

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<sup>24</sup> Ironically, we can safely assume that the gross majority of TIME Magazine readers warrant categorization amongst this 'completely oblivious' audience

movement that ‘outsiders’ are described as being unable to understand. From thereon, the article can be taken as providing a number of pointers in regarding how the privileged audience can best interject themselves into the movement in providing an overview of the genre’s history (here, Rites of Spring are heralded as the progenitors of the movement), some little-known celebrated subcultural artefacts (the Emo Diaries compilation) and some of the conventional practices used to signal participation with the subculture (like utilizing livejournal.com, a practice that we might assume the gross majority of readers already partake in). The article also offers pointers on how to pass oneself off as an authentic member of the ‘emo community’: allow yourself to live vicariously (or present yourself as if living vicariously) through your favourite ‘emo stars’; keep close watch out for artists who might be vying to ‘sell-out’, but don’t forbid yourself to develop close affinities with emo ‘everymen’ like Chris Carrabba and Rivers Cuomo just because they’ve infiltrated the mainstream. Oh, and don’t hesitate to celebrate your sadness.

The article simultaneously vies to credit the intelligence of a second prospective audience: the longstanding, and decidedly ‘authentic’ subculturalist. The article can only stand to reinforce its reputation as a credible text - and, by extension, its authority in speaking on this subject matter - in name-dropping little-known but widely-revered bands like Rites of Spring, including comments from the likes of Szuch and The Promise Ring’s Davey von Bohlem. It also vies to cull credibility among less pretentious subculturalists in bemoaning the manner in which fledgling subculturalists condemn a “lovely, mature rock album” (Tyrangiel, 2002) like The Promise Ring’s *Wood/Water* on such inconsequential grounds as its production value. For the longstanding subculturalist audience, the article essentially serves to celebrate the genre while problematizing the influx of ‘emo faithful’ and, in doing so, more likely than not stands to parrot those lines of discourse fluctuating throughout ‘authentic’ websites like *Fourfa.com* and *Punknews.org*. Finally, and in regarding that inevitable audience of ‘emo detractors’, the article presents themes allowing that it be perceived as a tongue-in-cheek diatribe that relies heavily on ridiculing the ‘emo faithful’ through playing on ‘sensitive adolescent’ stereotypes and focusing on the glaringly hypocritical traits of the ‘movement’. It would be difficult to assume that the article is less politely ribbing the ‘emo faithful’ than catering to those who would laugh directly at them in deducing that emo fans “are only happy when they’re sad” or that they sing along with “[Carrabba’s] desperate, heartbroken lyrics in a sort of primal-scream karaoke” (Tyrangiel, 2002). The manner in which the article compares ‘emo kids’, en masse, to popular culture’s most

recognizable caricature of the anomic young intellectual in suggesting that readers, “think Lisa Simpson: she values her individuality and brainpower while bemoaning the loneliness that goes along with being smart and artistic” (Tyrangiel, 2002) all but ensures that even the least culturally-cognizant reader will extract a sense as to why self-obsessed emo kids are deserving of some ridicule.

I here draw attention to the presence this multiplicity of audience-specific sub-narratives for the sake of extending the speculative argument that the Tyrangiel text concurrently strives to ‘legitimize’ itself with three distinct audience and, in doing so, panders to diffuse populations of prospective readers in a bid to ‘authenticate’ its authority in speaking on its subject matter; albeit regardless of the nature of the publication in which it appears. It could be argued that the Tyrangiel text strives to not only authoritatively interject itself into terrain better suited to those niche-mediated publications concerned specifically with catering to music aficionados, but also purports itself the ability – by very virtue of its exteriority from the cultural field under analysis – to frame the pseudo-genre as an event without (ostensibly) serving the purpose of detailing the particularities of any specific artists. The text allows that Tyrangiel, in other words, might advance an *authoritative* synopsis on the burgeoning ‘movement’ despite the fact that – and, indeed, precisely because – he is an ‘outsider’ who, nonetheless, incorporates *allusions* to his ‘legitimate’ understanding of the phenomena irregardless of the particularistic vantage of the texts’ recipient. Catering to a multiplicity of readership populations while simultaneously situating itself as a commentary from an ‘outsider looking in’ effectively grants the text the credibility requisite in reporting on the ‘bigger picture’ as might only be denoted by an auteur who is not so close to the event as to be rendered oblivious to its procession.

### 5.2.3 *The Meta-Narrative: ‘Emo’ is, and this is Emo.*

In focusing on the differential themes which this particular text means to purvey to the differential audiences which it potentially stands to attract, it is easy to lose sight of the overarching meta-narrative; or, the one piece of information that any reader, regardless of their subjective standpoints, cannot help but extract from the piece: namely, that the ‘emo genre’ - and, by extension, the ‘emo community’ - is an entity that *exists*. Though the article mulls over the difficulties intrinsic to the task of defining ‘emo’, it never hazards to risk extending the impression that the term is, in essence, hollow; that it cannot substantively be taken to refer to any *tangible* quality

of an artistic work. Instead, the piece assures the reader that ‘emo’ is whatever ‘sensitive kids’ define as being ‘emo’. Should the reader ask, “*how can one deduce that these ‘sensitive’ kids are, in fact, ‘sensitive kids’?*”, the text replies, “*well, look at how they relate to ‘sensitive artists’ like Chris Carrabba and Rivers Cuomo - they are obviously sensitive kids*”. If the reader then asks, “*but how can one definitively deduce that these artists are emo?*”, it replies “*Because the emo community is buying their albums and talking about them on Livejournal*”. And what, exactly, is the ‘emo community’? A community of sensitive kids. How do we know that they are sensitive? “Well,” the text replies, “just look at what they are listening to”. A circular logic to be sure, but nonetheless effective should the targeted audience be assumed unlikely to instigate a deep interaction with the text. However, should the article be perceived as failing to succeed in substantiating the notion of the genre by associating it with a wealth of longstanding (and culturally prevalent) adolescent stereotypes, it simultaneously cites relatively easily identifiable artists as ‘living proof’ of the genre’s reality. It is important to note that, though the term was previously used in aiding the cultural knowledge producer in framing the manner in which readers might orient themselves with a lesser-known artist, two relatively well-known artists are here identified as a means of framing the manner in which readers might orient themselves in approaching the topic of this lesser-known *pseudo-genre*. Even then, should the suspect evidence supporting the notion of the emo pseudo-genre attract the attention of the critical reader, the article nonetheless succeeds in not only interjecting the term ‘emo’ into the wider current of public discourse, but indelibly ensuring that certain artists will come to be affiliated with it. In essence, we might deduce that the intentions inspiring the publication of this article are threefold. It informs the reader of the fact that ‘emo’ is an existent youth-oriented musical genre. It identifies a shortlist of artists who epitomize the genre. It renders it likely that, should the reader opt to converse on the topic of the ‘emo’ genre -or its corresponding movement - they will not only do so in a manner that reinforces the genre’s status as something that exists, but invoke reference to a specified roster of artists in so doing.

The reader might be forgiven for harbouring a healthy degree of scepticism at this juncture. True enough, given the information that I have thus far granted, it would not be difficult to presume that a niche-media publication dedicated to disseminating music coverage might jockey to shape the manner in which its readership accepts the reality of, and conceptualizes, a theretofore poorly explicated artistic pseudo-genre. It is quite plausible that a *music* magazine might do

so in vying to retain jurisdiction over the legitimate ability to profess oneself as being the one and only *authentic* source for ‘privileged’ information regarding the ‘new’ and ‘unique’ musical style that is certainly destined to prove itself the ‘next big thing’. Claiming exclusive dominion over the ability to consecrate those artists to be affiliated with the ‘movement’ would indeed be a wise ‘investment’ for any niche-media publication so aspiring to improve their positioning amidst the hierarchy of cultural knowledge-producing institutions. But can we assume that *TIME* Magazine so abruptly aspired to interject itself into the field of niche-mediated cultural knowledge production for the purpose of making a bid to be regarded the authoritative source on emo music? Is it truly credible to insinuate that such an esteemed *news* publication would harbour any substantial degree of interest in ‘selling’ the wider populace on the validity of such a questionable pseudo-genre or, for that matter, ensuring that the term might immediately conjure a heuristic association with such specific artists as Dashboard Confessional and Weezer? We likely cannot. It is, nonetheless, pertinent to note that, should we connect the requisite dots, the publication of the article potentially served to benefit the AOL Time-Warner media conglomerate for which *TIME* magazine is, arguably, a flagship publication. A run-down of the assets in possession of the company following the 2000 merger between AOL and Time-Warner (McAvoy, 2000) serves to reveal that, at the time of the “Emotional Rescue” article’s publication, AOL Time-Warner not only owned *TIME* Magazine, but Weezer’s Geffen Records, Jimmy Eat World’s Dreamworks Records<sup>25</sup> and, finally, Interscope Records - which had quietly purchased a portion of Dashboard Confessional’s Vagrant Records in early 2001 (Punknews.org, 2008c). One can’t help but speculate that the Tyrangiel article might best be categorized as a text through which the largest corporation in the mainstream music industry vied to usurp the role of the niche-media in disseminating an ‘expert knowledge’ that strove to reify the ‘emo’ pseudo-genre in a manner suiting their fiscal interests.

#### 5.2.4 “*Because You Asked For It...*”: *The Subcultural Response*

Regardless of the Tyrangiel article’s overarching intentions, one of its inarguable effects proved to be that of drawing the ire of those subculturalists frequenting the *Punknews.org* website and, by extension, inspiring the creation of a subcultural discourse that framed the preva-

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<sup>25</sup> Though Jimmy Eat World is not spoken of in the text, their photograph accompanied the online version of the article.

lence of the 'emo' term as an emerging problematic. A news contribution, authored by a user identified simply as 'travis' (2002) and entitled "Because you asked for it: TIME defines Emo", appeared on the main page of the website on the evening of the twentieth of May. Along with providing a brief synopsis of the article and an online link to the piece, the contributor posts the rhetorical question, "is there any band that actually accepts the label of 'emo' anyway" (Punknews.org, 2002). Over the span of the following two days, the news posting had attracted 52 comments; the majority of which either vied to attack the term and those artists associated with it or, most poignantly, the Tyrangiel article itself.

If the Tyrangiel article strove to extend an 'expert' knowledge aspiring to frame emo as less a frivolous descriptor than a substantive genre - or, an entity worthy of consideration as something in and of itself - we might take the comments that the news-posting inspired as fledgling initiatives meant to facilitate the creation of an antagonistic counter-knowledge - or, a discourse-based *resistance* initiative - within the subcultural sphere. It might be prudent to map the implicit exchange between the 'expert' voice of the Tyrangiel article and the 'educated' responses on behalf of those subculturalists so interested in contesting the former as an instance of call-and-response. Whereas Tyrangiel claims that, though all music is emotional, "Emo fans...say comparing emo with mainstream rock is like comparing The Bell Jar to a Hallmark card" (Tyrangiel, 2002), a litany of *Punknews.org* users, who admit to enjoying a number of (quote-unquote) 'emo' bands, counter the statement in testifying to their lack of interest in substantiating the discursive divide between styles of music. "I listen to music," notes user 'Exar\_Kun', "I don't call the bands emo...I call them music" (2002). *Punknews.org* user 'YellowTrash' counters Tyrangiel's notes on the evolution of the genre in testifying to the fact that, "Emo's dead. Seriously, all bands that were labelled emo who didn't care for the term have either broken up, or are wondering what the hell that means. The other bands who call themselves emo are basically rehashed pop-punk or power-pop" (Punknews.org, 2002). In focusing specifically on Tyrangiel's claim that "[Emo's] subject matter has gradually narrowed from the general pain of being an outsider to the specific hurt of a bad relationship" (Tyrangiel, 2002), 'Big Letter Guy' deduces that, "that line is perfect! It sums up about 50 billion bands" (Punknews.org, 2002).

There is a pair of posts that I would argue to be deserving of specific attention. *Punknews.org* user 'cuzima' (2002), for one, berates the article's intentions, the ostensible rela-

tionship between 'emo' and punk rock and the validity of the notion of the emo pseudo-genre altogether in posting,

You know...I really hate misinformed articles...especially from time magazine...I'd expect some journalistic integrity. As much as the media would like to associate emo with punk rock, the connection just isn't there. Sure, in the 80s some bands turned from political overtones to more emotionally driven music, but comparing the styles of dag nasty or fugazi to that of dashboard confessional or bright eyes and saying you see a similarity is just outrageous. Sure, fugazi songs have rollercoaster vocals and swaying emotions, but they also had varied topics not just dealing with sorrow. If anything emotional in music makes it emo, than Hank Williams Sr. singing "There's a tear in my beer" would classify as emo. Do hate and anger classify as emotions? If so, than Skrewdriver and Brutal Attack can be emo bands too. Garth Brooks, Snoop Dogg (who really loves his gin and juice...love is an emotion), and Tom Waits are all emo too. What about feelings of disgust or isolation? I guess we can throw every political punk band in the emo category too. The fact is, the acoustic guitars and whiny vocals don't equate to anything to do with other types of music. I have no problem with emo standing on its own, but people need to quit reaching for connections with other scenes (Punknews.org user 'cuzima', 2002).

In likewise aspiring to problematize the emergence of the perception of a revised 'emo' pseudo-genre, an anonymous *Punknews.org* user (2002) dedicates his or her post toward the ill consequence intrinsic to the process of having a subcultural 'outsider' strive to further substantiate the reification of the 'emo' label within the subcultural sphere and beyond,

The problem with having a middle-aged, bespectacled, shirt and tie wearing journalist defining a music genre is not only the fact that he's misinformed or anything other problems you all came up with, the problem is it's just adding to the problem of everyone having a serious desire to label stuff. i mean, when did punk and emo become personalities? if i hear one more "that guy is so fuckin' punk" i think i'm going to lock myself in my house. but this middle-aged journalist isn't really writing for people like all of us who've known about emo, like it or not. he's writing it to the middle-aged parents who want to know what's in their kids' cd players. yippy. if overbearing parents want to take this article seriously when it says "emo hurts" and "sensitive kids love emo," go right ahead. i know some assholes that listen to emo, too. (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2002).

Though each of these posts subtly calls the validity of the pseudo-concept into question, their overarching concern would appear to lie with the manner in which Tyrangiel article either affiliates 'emo' with punk rock or, alternatively, demands that categorical lines be erected in deducing the difference between 'emo' and punk rock. Though 'cuzima' would appear to harbour the opinion that 'emo' is too broad a categorization to harbour any validity as a genre, he or she nonetheless demonstrates some unease in concerning the fact that the article associates punk rock with the 'acoustic guitars and whiny vocals' which they associate with the 'emo' genre. The anonymous poster, on the other hand, would primarily seem concerned with the fact that emo's

graduation from a signifier to that being signified necessitates the onset of a counter-productive process whereby the entire field of subculturalists will inevitably come to be partitioned into antagonistic camps.

In sum, it is important to note that, while the Tyrangiel article moved toward introducing an expert discourse through which non-subculturalists might extract an understanding of what ‘emo’ was, the manner in which the article framed ‘emo’ as a genre in and of itself inspired a subculturalist discourse largely concerned with determining what ‘emo’ was *not*. Suffice it to say, and less but one post,<sup>26</sup> every respondent strove to argue against the prospect that the artists who *they* admire were constitutive of an ‘emo’ artist or, by extension, that *they* constituted one of the ‘emo kids’ of whom Tyrangiel spoke; evidence, indeed, that the term was well on its way to once again sufficing as a derogatory signifier within the subcultural field. However, and despite the presence of a sparse number of posts that move toward bringing the validity of the idea of an ‘emo’ genre into question, the majority implicitly succeed in substantiating the reified presence of a bona-fide ‘emo’ pseudo-genre in the process of differentiation; for one cannot extend a justification regarding what does not deserve to be regarded as ‘emo’ without implicitly granting credence to the notion that *‘emo’ is something that is*. In essence, then, while the Tyrangiel article succeeded in working toward the reification of the perceived ‘emo’ pseudo-genre, the strategy that the text employed in striving to be recognized as a legitimate source of authentic knowledge effectively failed (in regards to established subculturalist audiences, at least) and, in so doing, inspired a subcultural discourse wherein the ‘emo’ pseudo-genre was allotted framing as an emerging problematic.

### **5.3 “Am I Emo?”: Seventeen Magazine and the Constitution of a Fashion**

It is also of significant note that, in regarding this particular cross-section of subcultural discourse, the gross majority of respondents vie to distance themselves from being classified as ‘emo kids’ without utilizing a discriminatory discourse meant to stereotype those subcultural ‘others’ who might warrant such a classification. This pattern whereby self-professed ‘legitimate’ subculturalists would vie to assert their subcultural authenticity through assailing the ‘genre’ in lieu of assailing those presumed to be supportive of it would, however, begin a sparse

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<sup>26</sup> ...made on the behalf of another anonymous user in taking advantage of an opportunity to argue that “punks say emo is whiny, yet punks have to be the whiniest people on earth (Punknews.org, 2002) and, in doing so, only further reifying the ‘reality’ of feuding subculturalist pockets.

two months later as trends in 'emo' fashion came to draw the interest of the editorial staff of *Seventeen Magazine*. One of North America's self-professedly pre-eminent youth magazines, *Seventeen Magazine* is a publication that unabashedly strives to extend tips on fashion, diet, and dating to "the largest, most affluent teen audience" (Seventeen Media Kit, 2008). Having already established a penchant for publishing content meant to introduce perceptively 'hip' youth movements to their readership<sup>27</sup> - and suspected of doing so in collusion with established clothing companies vying to either penetrate 'subversive' youth markets or co-opt 'subversive' youth fashions (Moore, 2007) - it is somewhat unsurprising that the magazine featured a two-page spread on 'emo fashion' in its August 2002 edition.

Published in conjunction with an article authored by Mara Schwartz (2002), the arguably tongue-in-cheek photo spread (Fig. 5.1) essentially strives to dissect the particularities of 'emo' fashion. Though the piece, entitled "Am I Emo?" boasts a cognizance in regarding the fact that "Emo's a music thing, not a fashion movement"; it nonetheless offers a rundown of all the fashion accessories that "all true Emo kids swear by". According to the corresponding captions, 'emo boys' can be taken to swear by "Geeky Glasses (with thick frames, of course. Think Weezer's Rivers Cuomo or your science teacher)...Too Small Sweaters (to help you with that slouchy, disaffected look)" and "Deep Reads" from Salinger and Marcus - not to mention "a notebook to express your innermost thoughts" (*Seventeen*, 2002: 176-77). 'Emo girls', on the other hand, purportedly require "Black Hair Dye (because blondes don't have more fun - not at the Get-Up Kids show, anyway)...Studded Belts (to show [one's] punk roots)" and "lots of pretty bracelets to express one's softer side" - and a "Discman loaded with seminal emo Cds from Hot Water Music, Rival Schools and Sunny Day Real Estate" (2002: 176-77). As 'DIY' and 'subversive' as these models are portrayed as being, a number of well-established companies surface amidst the run-down of featured clothing and accessory details: The 'emo girl' sports Dickies Jeans, a Sony Discman, Old Navy socks and Doc Martin shoes; the 'emo boy' Calvin Klein jeans, Converse shoes, and 'Rivers Cuomo' glasses courtesy of Cohen's Optical. In what can seemingly be interpreted as a further assurance that the feature would draw the ire of devout

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<sup>27</sup> Moore (2007) details the process through which *Seventeen* sought to educate their readership about the 'riot grrrl' movement by way of a 1992 article that noted, among other things, that "riot grrrls don't shave and deliberately give each other bad haircuts" (Moore, 2007:9); it is once again difficult to definitively ascertain whether *Seventeen* intended to promote the movement or lampoon it.

Fig. 5.1: The “Am I Emo?” photo-spread



underground music subculturalists, a number of ‘Emo pick-up lines’ - such as “wanna trade mix tapes?” and “is that a Promise Ring 7” in your pocket, or are you just happy to see me?” (2002: 177) - are also included. As with the Tyrangiel article, we might speculate that the Seventeen photo-spread vies to speak to a multiplicity of distinct audiences at once; those whom it vies to inform (potential consumers) and those who might derive entertainment value from the manner

in which they ridicule the former group in the process of doing so.

The corresponding article, a short piece by Mara Schwartz entitled “Music Doesn’t Have To Suck”, offers little beyond brief biographies of six bands deemed the most prominent within the emo pseudo-genre,<sup>28</sup> a host of recommended websites,<sup>29</sup> and a very brief introduction serving to notify *Seventeen* readers to the fact that,

There’s more to life than what’s on the radio. Yes, there are bands out there who write their own songs, play their own instruments and steer clear of shiny, polished studio perfection in favour of something that sounds real. People who like to label things are calling it “emo” (short for emotional), although that doesn’t say much. Isn’t all good music emotional? And just as in life, emo covers a broad spectrum of feelings – from loud to soft, from mad to glad to sad. But the one thing these artists do have in common is that they’re all independent-minded rock acts. Some, like Jimmy Eat World and Thursday, have already been snatched up by major labels eager to make emo the next big thing. We kinda hope it’s not. If this stuff sells a gazillion copies, we’ll have to hide from the copycat bands looking to cash in (Schwartz, 2002: 178).

It is interesting to note how Schwartz, not unlike Tyrael, precludes her explication of what emo is with a statement that is critical of both the term and those who ostensibly deem it necessary to affix the transpiring musical ‘movement’ with any label whatsoever. The manner in which Schwartz strives to demonize those major labels that are ‘eager to make emo the next big thing’, and are thus apt to incite an onslaught of ‘copycat bands looking to cash in’, might lead us to speculate that the author is vying to embody the persona of a legitimate subculturalist for the sake of advancing what might thus appear to be an ‘authentic’ commentary concerning (and serving to constitute) the emo pseudo-genre. In a sense, then, Schwartz’s brief introduction would appear to be promoting the emo pseudo-genre while, at the same time, inculcating readers with the proper cognition – or method of position-taking – that one should endorse for the sake of passing off as an ‘authentic’ participant amongst the ‘true emo kids’ as alluded to in the preceding photo-spread. The conventions of legitimated subcultural practice, in other words, find reflection in a text that strives to disseminate privileged subcultural knowledge to an outsider

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<sup>28</sup> Those six bands include Dashboard Confessional, Jimmy Eat World, The Rocking Horse Winner, Onlinedrawing, Desaparecidos and Thursday.

<sup>29</sup> One of the websites listed is Andy Radin’s (2008) *Fourfa.com*; a very detailed page constructed for the purpose of countering the initial misuse of the term ‘emo’ by offering a detailed history of the dispersed ‘emotional hardcore’ scenes that arose following the dissolution of the ‘Revolution Summer’ bands. It would be very, very interesting should one be able to deduce whether the fourfa.com site served as one of the primary resources from which niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers extracted the information to then be used in constructing their own ‘expert discourse’ on the term...

population who might thus accordingly berate major label taste-makers, develop a proclivity for supporting artists within the sphere of ‘independent-minded rock acts’ (i.e., the sub-field of restricted production), and keep a keen eye out for inauthentic ‘copycats’ should emo artists begin to sell a ‘gazillion’ copies of their albums. One might wonder whether the fact that the Schwartz article subtly offered *Seventeen* readers something of a ‘window’ into the consecrated subculturalist mindset sufficed in rendering the piece particularly offensive to the field of subcultural participants or, at the very least, the sizable body of *Punknews.org* users who either read the article (or feigned having done so) for the sake of fashioning a condemnatory response.

Before continuing, it might be prudent to recall the means through which the punk subculture effectively ‘delegitimized’ a number of formerly renowned artists once they had effectively penetrated the mainstream and came to be celebrated by non-subculturalist populations of listeners. Should I have succeeded in substantiating the prospect that the field of subcultural participation entails a ‘symbolic economy’ wherein an individual’s affinity for certain artists is no longer taken to deduce ‘authenticity’ once said artists come to be granted mainstream attention in briefly detailing the emergence of the ‘neo-punk’ signifier, one can only imagine how the subcultural capital-stocks of those having ‘invested’ their affinity in such lesser renowned artists as Thursday, Desaparecidos, and Onlinedrawing – not to mention the distinction inherent to being ‘aware’ of websites like Fourfa.com – suffered a marked depletion when each was granted central attention by Schwartz’s *Seventeen* exposé. As Bourdieu is decidedly resolute in positing that the economy of ‘symbolic capitals’ depends upon a certain degree of secrecy, on the part of those involved with it, for its continual perpetuation,<sup>30</sup> any and all allusions regarding the manner in which texts like the *Seventeen* article suffice in upsetting one’s individualistic capital-stocks will, inevitably, be buried within the deepest subtextual recesses of one’s reactionary discourse (if, indeed, it is alluded to at all). Nonetheless, the reader might wish to retain a general sense of the ‘crises of subcultural capital’ that these niche-mediated texts might have incurred when perusing the excerpts of subcultural discourse provided throughout the remainder of this thesis.

### 5.3.1 *Toward the Emergence of a Counter-Knowledge.*

As far as the manner in which emo music is concerned, neither the *Seventeen* photo-

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<sup>30</sup> To quote Bourdieu directly: “to utter, ‘in public’ the true nature of the field, and of its mechanisms, is sacrilege *par excellence*, the unforgivable sin which all the censorships constituting the field seek to repress. These are things that can only be said in such a way that they are not said” (1993: 73).

spread nor the corresponding article deviate in offering examples of artists who had not previously been characterized as ‘emo’ artists in the Tyrangiel article, selections of *Alternative Press* magazine, or by their respective record labels. Nonetheless, the publication of the “Am I Emo?” feature further elicited the vehemence of subculturalists; less on grounds of the content contained within the piece than by virtue of the reputation of its source. *Red and Black Website* columnist Leah Newman (2002), who admittedly harboured a prejudice toward *Seventeen* as a magazine that “makes its money...[by] telling our little sisters what to wear and what’s hip and cool” published a piece regarding her reaction to the *Seventeen* piece and, ultimately, her thoughts concerning its inevitable impact on the ‘emo’ genre,

‘Hopefully Ian McKaye hasn't seen this,’ I think. I'm a fan of his, and the heart attack it could cause won't be good for any upcoming Fugazi tour dates. Let me start off by saying whoever started calling this latest rash of trendy indie rock "emo" needs to get a little more creative. That name's already been taken. Who was it that first decided Dashboard Confessional was emo? Bands like Embrace and Rites of Spring who helped found the genre involved up-tempo cries and screams set to heavy guitar riffs. Emo sprung from the bowels of Washington during the mid-80s. Yeah, that's right, most of the *Seventeen* readers were just coming into the world. Real emo still does exist, and it is worth checking out. I mean, look up Autumn to Ashes or Indian Summer sometime. That's emo. It's emotional -- as is all music from Cyndi Lauper to Garth Brooks -- but it's also hardcore, a definitive characteristic of the genre. But labeling difference aside, *Seventeen* still goes against most of what indie rock itself is. Indie rock -- think about it. Independent rock, as in not supported by major mainstream labels, radio or press. That usually translates into working your tail off and touring most of the year just to ensure you have enough money to eat and clothe yourself. It's not so glamorous, and it's certainly not the picture *Seventeen* portrays. [Emo's] become trendy, however, because that's what *Seventeen* told us would be cool. Prada will no doubt make emo sneakers and graffiti logo tees, and Old Navy will help all the bargain shoppers out by doing the same.

Interestingly enough, and beyond expressing the author’s distaste for *Seventeen*, Newman’s response can be approached as a text that strives to de-authenticate the contemporary ‘emo’ pseudo-genre, while, quite simultaneously, constructing a discourse that strives not only to celebrate (and distinguish) ‘real’ emo, but frame it as a genre under threat of transitive de-legitimization. In speaking from the vantage of a ‘legitimate’ subculturalist (as demonstrated via her ability to invoke mention of Ian MacKaye),<sup>31</sup> Newman assumes herself the authority to speak on behalf of that bevy of ‘legitimate’ emo artists whom she perceives as having been done offence against twice over. The first slight, manifested in the ‘latest rash of trendy indie rock artists’ to whom the term has been applied, is derived courtesy of the fact that contemporary under-

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<sup>31</sup> ...even should she be unable to spell his name correctly

standings of emo fail in recognizing the fact that ‘hardcore is a definitive characteristic of the [true] genre’. The second offence against ‘true’ emo is the process through which niche-media outlets of questionable repute are further tarnishing the term in vying to render it commercially viable, depriving it of its ‘independence’ and - perhaps worst of all - striving to assure that it will be the next ‘big trend’ among adolescents. As with the mid-90s problematization of ‘neo-punk’s’ popularity, we can take Newman’s piece as an initiative to deduce and disseminate standards of authenticity against which ‘legitimate’ emo artists might be identified (and, by extension, legitimate ‘emo’ *subculturalists* identified).

Mind you, it is also of note that the *entire* text can be interpreted as an initiative solely meant to construct and reinforce not only Newman’s reputation as a ‘legitimate’ subculturalist but, more importantly, her status as an ‘expert’ source on ‘real’ emo - an *authentic* subcultural knowledge producer hazarding to surface in calculated response to an emergent field of *inauthentic* opportunists. Alas, we might deduce that the publication of the *Seventeen* photo-spread inspired the onset of a climate in which subcultural commentators, like Newman, could not only adhere to convention in condemning such a blatant movement toward co-opting the notion of the ‘emo’ genre (in the interest of manufacturing a new adolescent ‘style’), but stake claim over the authority to advance a legitimate ‘expert knowledge’ meant to contrast that percolating throughout the mainstream niche-mediated spheres. Though the Newman text ostensibly asserts itself as a resource striving to extend fledgling ‘emo’ enthusiasts a proper inculcation regarding the particularities of the ‘real’ genre, we can cautiously infer that the article’s main priority rests with speaking directly to those already possessed of a cognizance regarding the risks inherent to the renewed popularity granted the term ‘emo’ by virtue of its misappropriation. It insinuates that those whose ‘subcultural capital’ is deeply tethered to their affinity for ‘emotional hardcore’ (in the traditionalist sense) must strive to condemn the affiliation being drawn between the term and those artistic products coming to be associated with it - lest, of course, they want to see their prestige within subculturalist circles be tarnished by virtue of their affiliation with the *Seventeen* readership. In so many words, Newman advances the suggestion that ‘emotional hardcore’ enthusiasts strive toward adopting a generic signifier underwriting the *hardcore* element. Alas, it is of peculiar note that, soon thereafter, niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers burdened with the dual task of investing in ‘emo-core’ artists while doing so without risking their claims to authenticity in invoking the term ‘emo’ would do just that. By way of example, we might con-

sider the process through which bands that *Alternative Press* had formerly heralded as flagship 'emo' bands - like Thursday and Brand New - came to be granted re-categorization as 'post-hardcore' acts by 2003.<sup>32</sup>

### 5.3.2 *Punknews.org* and the 'Emo Monster': The Reactionary Discourse.

As with the Tyrangiel piece, *Punknews.org* featured a news contribution serving to notify its readership of the "Am I Emo?" article shortly after its publication. The news posting, tactfully titled "Emo Monster Must Die!" by its anonymous contributor (2002c), went on to attract over 100 user responses – a considerably higher-than-average amount - over the span of the subsequent three days. Though the contribution primarily concerns itself with ridiculing the quality of the information offered by the *Seventeen* piece - "time to cut your mopy hair and take back them big thick glasses," warns the contributor, "'cause emo is not going to be 'hip' by next summer with all the attention it is getting from these shit mags" (*Punknews.org*, 2002c), the gross majority of the replies it so inspired concern themselves, to varying extents, with the problematic repercussions which the *Seventeen* piece might facilitate.

As with those posts advanced in reaction to the Tyrangiel article, a significant number of the comments supplied by *Punknews.org* users strive to criticize the manner in which, and means through which, the niche-media are attempting to define and promote the 'emo' pseudo-genre. *Punknews.org* user 'sincerely me' (2002), as one example, asks, "why does every one of your shit magazines want to classify emo?...I love some \*emo\* bands but I don't feel the need to right (sic) some fucking essay about what it is". It is important to note, however, that the questionable manner in which the niche-media are attempting to frame the emo pseudo-genre is no longer regarded as being the most pressing problematic in the opinion of the majority of respondents. As the following excerpts serve to insinuate, the overarching problematic would now seem to reside in the types of readers that the *Seventeen* coverage would be most likely to attract to the ostensible 'emo' movement and, by extension, the wider field of subcultural participation.

It's very typical for a mainstream media co. to skew something because they have no idea what they're really talking about. Anytime you hear a description of some underground scene of any sort it's always so off. *What really bothers me about these things is they try to pass it off as something it's really not and it tricks the mindless readers.* These 'emo' bands they talk about are hardly emo at all...Songs about girls do not make you emo. A lot of it just trickled down into punk rock and now we have bands that are

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<sup>32</sup> Thursday on the cover of AP # 184.1; Brand New on the contents page of AP #185 (p. 15).

semi-emoish and semi-punkish and *it all gets passed off by alot of people and now, media companies as a fashion and hip style. I think people need to get a grip on what emo is/was before they use the word to describe anything in the indie scene that doesn't have a typical punk sound.* Yes, I understand emo means emotional, but it still is used to describe a certain sound of emotional music (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2002; my italics).

When will they be satisfied? Have they not already ruined half the shows I actually enjoy going to? *What next, are they gonna throw Rancid and NOFX on the cover and send their legions of screaming girls to those shows too?* Fucking hell! Yes, I do enjoy music that could be classified "emo" (although I still stand by my assertion that Saves The Day and Get Up Kids are not emo) and I've even been in a band that played a couple of "emo" songs ourselves, but none of us ever went out of our way to attempt to "look" emo. It's a musical subgenre, not a fucking clothing style. Tommy Hilfiger is never going to make an "emo" sweater or "emo" jeans (hopefully). *Still, the simple fact that now I'm going to have to put up with all these insolent fucks trying way too hard to be "cool" and acting like idiots at the shows I go to during my entire senior year is a big fucking downer...gah.* (Punknews.org user 'Daegan', 2002, my italics).

In a really big nutshell emo is just punk with feelings (i might be wrong, but that's my opinion) and now, if you are going to just consider certain bands that sing of heart-breaks, relationships, anger, happiness, sadness whatever then you're considering every god damn band in the world emo. I mean, every song by every band is based on some type of feelings or emotions. Sure, some people may say that Seventeen catching the emo scene very bad or whatever. But then again, it's somewhat good in a way, a lot of bands who've been working their asses off for a really long time are finally getting noticed. *To you it may not be the right type of people (posers, blink182 freaks who only wear hurley and atticus because tom and mark do) but at least it's somebody....don't really let all this bullshit get to you like that. Sure, the whole article is pretty much telling mindless readers to just do whatever the hell the magazine tells them to.* Big deal! and if all you people are so punk.....then why are you giving a damn fuck?...*Don't care if mainstream takes away your little underground scene. It's not like we won't find another scene to belong to.* and like one person said: "Rancid was mainstream at one point." and same as emo's going to be. Pretty soon nobody's going to give a rat's ass. so don't get all bent out of shape about it! *Just because the people you wouldn't like to find out about the scene doesn't mean u have to find a new scene to belong to...this just makes it more fun to kick people's asses because they have no fucking idea why they're at some emo show other than the fact that they saw it in some girlie ass magazine!* (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2002; my italics).

Be it through subtle or explicit means - and by design or accident - each of these posts serves to correlate the *Seventeen* photo-spread with the actions, or forecasted emergence, of a problematic population of subcultural 'others'. In following suit with Tyrangiel's critics, the author of our first example castigates the niche-media for assuming the authority to issue a credible account of the 'emo' pseudo-genre. He or she also succeeds, however, in problematizing that population of 'mindless readers' assumed destined to be 'tricked' into absorbing that false information as provided. Furthermore, and while this particular author decries the lack of general awareness concerning what constitutes 'real' emo in a similar manner as Newman, they primarily trace the root of this *facetious* manifestation of cultural knowledge less to a corporate initia-

tive to co-opt (or manufacture) the emo pseudo-genre (and corresponding 'style') than to those *within the subcultural field* who have been using the term in an improper manner. By this account, *Seventeen* is not responsible for the fact that their 'mindless readers' now harbour a fledgling knowledge about a style and a cohort of bands who are erroneously being classified as 'emo' - responsibility rests with the presumed-to-exist bloc of subculturalites who have improperly been utilizing the term in describing their tastes in music or, alternatively, their tastes in style.

In a similar fashion, 'Daegan' - the author of our second example - laments the likelihood that the *Seventeen* feature will attract a very clearly identified population to the field of subcultural participation: namely, the 'legions of screaming girls' and 'insolent fucks' who, we are made to believe, have already developed a tendency toward ruining the author's concert going experiences by 'trying way too hard to be cool' and 'acting like idiots'. In carefully asserting himself as an 'authentic' subculturalist through including key statements concerning some of his own personal qualities - the ability to discern between 'real' emo and bands so mislabelled, his experiences playing in a band - Daegan's post might conceivably be taken as a text through which the author vies to lash out against illegitimate 'others' whom he fears might be endangering the sanctity of his own subculturalist identity - be it because they haven't the capacity to detect or dutifully respect his status, or because his own musical tastes put him at risk of being identified as an 'other' himself. One cannot help but assume that, should it be the case that 'half the shows' the author enjoys attending have been ruined by the presence of subcultural 'others', it is likely that said 'others' have gravitated towards half of the bands with which Daegan strives to affiliate himself with. Alas, the author must assert his superiority over those fledgling subculturalists with whom he might be confused by resorting to other measures through which to broadcast his legitimacy. In a previous posting, *Punknews.org* user 'JoSH' (2002c) admits that, "I feel bad for the people who always liked this music and who always dressed that way. Now they'll just be lumped in with the posers" (*Punknews.org*, 2002c). It would be difficult to avoid making the educated assumption that a substantial number of the postings which, similarly, berate the audiences to whom such niche-mediated reportage is tailored while, simultaneously, admitting to harbouring an affinity for those artists and conventions of dress endorsed therein, constitute something of a strategy through which to prevent that such might happen *to them*.

Whereas the former two posts can be taken to suggest that their respective authors are speaking from within a subcultural field now bracing for an emergent influx of illegitimate 'trend

followers', the third excerpt renders itself unique in the fact that it explicitly references this climate of apprehension while it further contributes to the unsavoury representation of the impending influx of inauthentic 'emo faithful'. Though this anonymous commenter agrees that the article is likely to attract 'mindless' *Seventeen* readers who do not constitute the 'right type of people', he or she also chastises the 'authentic' faithful for overlooking those benefits which might be imparted upon subcultural producers by virtue of a wider audience base. In a sense, this commentator would appear to be challenging the counter-intuitive logic of those orthodox subcultural conventions which call for stern judgement within a subculture purporting itself as a 'safe haven' for those who often bear the brunt of being unfavourably judged within the wider society. The derisive tone of the reference to the 'little underground scene' adequately serves to bring the authenticity of those forum users who are boasting of harbouring such a fervent indignance into question on grounds that true 'punks' would not hesitate to create 'another scene to belong to'. Nonetheless, and in so many words, the author also indirectly advances the opinion that an influx of misinformed fledgling subculturalists would also serve the benefit of reinforcing the stratified nature within the field of subcultural participation; it will be good sport to observe and ridicule those who gravitate toward subcultural spaces solely because of the fact that they came to be aware of them 'in some girlie ass magazine'. In advancing a similarly themed response, *Punknews.org* user XxvanessaxX (2002) posted the following comment,

Kay... first of all, if everyone is so punk, wtf do you care what some 12 yr old kids are doing? Everyone knows that article was mad commercialization but WHO CARES... They aren't changing your mind. Thats what matters. Besides, if these kids are stupid enough to follow that (they all are of course) then that just creates fuel for future punks of North America. Lets just thank sweet jesus they aren't doing any punk articles... for now. Oh, yeah. They'll get us too (Punknews.org user XxvanessaxX, 2002).

I might wish to speculate that this particular comment, and those with which we concerned ourselves before it, grants us a greater understanding as to why so many *Punknews.org* users might have chosen to devote their attention toward critiquing an article that, we might safely assume, the majority of them did not actually *read*. In judging by this thread of subculturalist discourse, the niche-mediated movement toward mass-popularizing the emo pseudo-genre, and attempting to demarcate and promote an emo fashion, are being framed as threats against the exclusivity of the closely associable punk subculture. In Bourdieuan terms, one could claim that each of these responses denotes an opportunity through which each respective commentator - subtly but surely - strove to protect their 'positions' within the symbolic economy

of subcultural capital. Some strive to assert their own status as a legitimate subculturalist through imparting their own ‘informed’ wisdom (or, perhaps, their familiarity with the accepted subculturalist line) on the ‘true’ nature of emo. Others tailor their comments toward subtly attesting to their seemingly inborn ability to deduce mainstream initiatives to co-opt a pseudo-generic sect. A select number even implicitly cite their longstanding residency within the subcultural field in referencing the process through which niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers attempted (and failed) to render ‘ska-punk’ the ‘next big thing’ in speaking to the fact that the mainstream popularity of ‘emo’ would surely be fleeting. Albeit through various means, the gross majority of the comments posted in reference to the “Emo Monster Must Die!” bulletin suffice in allowing their authors the ability to testify to their possession of the subcultural *habitus* while, concurrently, contributing to a discourse meant to reinforce the consecration of those character traits becoming of an authentic subculturalist: the possession of a ‘legitimate’ knowledge running counter to that purported by mainstream sources, a cognizance toward those processes tailored toward inciting subcultural co-optation, the ability to deduce - and attest to an intolerance for - the presence of illegitimate subcultural ‘tourists’. These are the character traits that not only serve to protect the sanctity of the subcultural field, but allow those within to broadcast their positions within the echelons of the internal hierarchy.

Suffice it to say, any discursive movement toward securing one’s own claim to superiority necessitates the identification of an inferior counterpart; and it is interesting to note the process through which these comments, by and large, uniformly construct the representation of the problematic population of subcultural ‘outsiders’ who are widely assumed likely to constitute subcultural ‘others’ in gravitating toward the field by virtue of the *Seventeen* article. In this case, many of the unsavoury traits ascribed to this particular manifestation of subcultural ‘other’ are derived from the stereotypical representation of the inauthentic ‘posers’ (so described as ‘mindless’ vessels who will latch themselves to whatever practice or fashion the mainstream deduces to be trendy). This particular ‘other’, however, would also seem to harbour particularistic traits so ascribed in correlation with the character of the publication in which this particular piece surfaced. The offending (or to be offensive) population is forecasted as being *young*, decidedly *female*, and prone to engage in practices more becoming of an N’ Sync concert than, say, a Thursday performance. Between the stereotypical traits ascribed to the ‘emo faithful’ by the Tyrangiel article and those developing amidst threads of subcultural discourse such as this, we might de-

duce the presence of a prototypical representation of what would inevitably become the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil.

As one final observation before moving on to identify the authoritative text on the emo pseudo-genre, it must be noted that the collective subcultural response underwent something of a discursive ‘shift’ at some point between the publication of the Tyrangiel article and the *Seventeen* piece. Whereas responses to the *TIME* article entailed something of a narrative proving critical of the concept of a substantive emo genre, Newman’s ‘expert’ counter-discourse and those replies levied against the *Seventeen* piece suggest the impression that the subcultural field had also come to extend the concept of the emo pseudo-genre some degree of credence; even if only for the sake of differentiating between the ‘authentic’ emo genre and its modern, illegitimate counterpart. It might thus be suggested that, at some point amidst the pattern of call-and-response generated between the niche-mediated field of aspiring subcultural knowledge producers and those self-proclaimed subculturalists so disgruntled in their stead, the contemporary emo pseudo-genre took on an aura of legitimacy as a verifiable entity; some degree of substantiation, or reification, even despite the fact that there would not appear to have been any self-referential conglomeration of emo enthusiasts possessed of any desire to identify themselves as the ‘emo kids’ that the niche-media had been advertising (and the subcultural field had been condemning). This significant detail would be granted little in the way of concern until the following fall of 2003, wherein Andy Greenwald’s *Nothing Feels Good: Punk Rock, Teenagers and Emo* suggested that the absence of any self-referential emo culture could easily be attributed to the fact that those adolescents constitutive of it may or may not have been cognizant of their own participation *within* it. It is to the Greenwald text which we now turn.

#### **5.4 The Authoritative Text: Greenwald’s *Nothing Feels Good***

While shallow celebrities dominate the headlines, pundits bemoan the death of the music industry, and the government decries teenagers for their morals (or lack thereof), earnest, heartfelt bands like Dashboard Confessional, Jimmy Eat World, and Thursday are quietly selling hundreds of thousands of albums through dedication, relentless touring, and respect for their fans. This relationship - between young people and the empathetic music that sets them off down a road of self-discovery and self-definition - is emo, a much-maligned, mocked, and misunderstood term that has existed for nearly two decades but has flourished only recently. In *Nothing Feels Good*, Andy Greenwald makes the case for emo as more than a genre - its an essential rite of teenage hood. From the ‘80s to the ‘00s, from the basement to the stadium, from tour busses to chat rooms, and from the diary to the computer screen, *Nothing Feels Good* narrates the story of emo from the inside out and explores the way this movement is taking shape in real time

and with real hearts on the line. *Nothing Feels Good* is the first book to explore this exciting moment in music history, and Andy Greenwald has been given unprecedented access to the bands and to their fans. He captures a place in time and a moment on the stage in a way only a true music fan can.

Back cover explication of Andy Greenwald's *Nothing Feels Good* (2003).

To this point, the only niche-media texts with which this analysis has concerned itself have been magazine articles; texts that, while capable of disseminating knowledge to a wide population of recipients, do not retain a notable degree of pedagogic durability. In so many words, the magazine article suffices less in providing a 'deep' knowledge than a superficial overview; it is meant to facilitate knowledge pertinent 'to the moment' and does not assume itself a knowledge-source fit for re-visitation. In regards to the types of publications that we have heretofore examined in the course of this chapter, it can safely be assumed that neither *TIME* nor *Seventeen* aspired to advance texts that might, years later, be heralded as those definitive texts successfully having encapsulated the phenomenon from every conceivable vantage point - neither, in essence, aspired to advance an authoritative text. I might wish to utilize the term 'authoritative text' regarding Greenwald's (2003) *Nothing Feels Good: Punk Rock, Teenagers, and Emo* because it *does* aspire to profess itself a definitive resource on the emo pseudo-genre and, by extension, the presumed 'emo culture'. It asserts itself as the benchmark text against which all subsequent texts must regard, be taken in light of and contrasted with. It aspires, in other words, to become the quintessential source for 'expert' knowledge and to grant Greenwald the distinction of having 'written the book' on the pseudo-genre.

Seeking a means to justify relocating to New York during an interim between terms as an English major at Brown University, Greenwald procured an internship position with *Spin* Magazine and, by his own account, quickly secured the position of managing the magazine's website. As Greenwald recounts, the inspiration for compiling a book to document the rise of the 'emo movement' arose in the wake of,

...a series of stories I did for Spin in 2001 and 2002. The first was on Dashboard, Makeout club, blogs. They were totally outside of my experience, but I was really excited. I felt there was a connection between the three. What was really appealing about the genre was the teenagers themselves. I'm fascinated by fandom. The love and devotion people have towards music and the music they discover during that time of life. I was really interested in it. I felt I'd have a unique perspective, since I was an outsider (Stover and Carlson, 2005).

Armed with considerable access to many of the artists affiliated with the emo genre and, we might assume, with the blessing of a magazine whose authors had achieved notable success in the wider literary market,<sup>33</sup> Greenwald set about compiling an account meant to document the pseudo-genre, “during the big boom of emo [when] the fans and bands were getting signed” (Stover and Carlson, 2005). Named after a seminal Promise Ring album, *Nothing Feels Good* essentially concerns itself with striving to cast contemporary youth culture *as* the emo culture to which the likes of Tyrangiel and Schwartz *referenced* without adequately *situating*. It is also significant to note that Greenwald breaks company from our aforementioned columnists by virtue of his care in attempting not only to compile an authoritative text on the pseudo-genre, but to do so in a manner meant to reflect, and reinforce, his own status as an authentic subcultural knowledge producer with his ‘legitimate’ subculturalist sensibilities firmly intact. The final text proves to stand as an expert discourse that succeeds in creating a great deal of the privileged ‘subcultural knowledge’ that it disseminates, a document fit for utilization by fledgling ‘emo subculturalites’ vying to penetrate the barriers of the subcultural field and a resource through which established subculturalists might better come to conceptualize - and recognize - the problematic population of insurgent subcultural ‘others’. In dissecting the diverse narratives underlining the Greenwald text, we can gain a sense of the manner in which this text reified and reinforced the already prevalent, but ill-defined, construct of the subcultural ‘other’ in a manner that would reverberate long after the popularity of the emo pseudo-genre, as Greenwald vies to characterize it here, no longer came to be heralded as the most pertinent threat to the consecration of the subcultural field.

#### 5.4.1 *Redefinition, Interpellation and the Direct Text: Striving to Actualize the Audience*

In what might appear to be an odd choice of preliminary focus, Greenwald aspires to prelude his exposé on the emo pseudo-genre (and movement) with an introduction fit to bring the validity of the term’s applicability into question,

Originally, emo was short for ‘emocore,’ a strain of hardcore punk... then it started to be applied to bands that weren’t punk, to fashion trends, to sad-eyed kids in the back of class. It’s always been mildly derisive, a term used by haters and critics to dismiss something that’s overly weepy, self-indulgent, or unironic. Every generation that loves emo bands simultaneously rejects the term while claiming ownership of it - meaning even if they won’t admit that

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<sup>33</sup> I here refer to Chuck Klosterman, who afforded *Spin* a great deal of prestige when his excellent account of heavy metal fandom, *Fargo Rock City*, was published in 2002.

they love emo, they certainly will say how much they hate everything that's been called emo since then. But still, no one knows what it is (Greenwald, 2003: 2).

The author, furthermore, recounts the fact that none among the “dozens - if not hundreds - of people” he had spoken with in compiling his text had ever “encountered a band that claimed to be emo” (2003:2). He explicitly invokes reference to ‘grunge’ in raising a red-flag in regards to emo’s status as a “media buzzword [that has been] thrown at bands” (2003: 2). He even attests to the fact that “emo is a lame word,” and asks as to why “anyone in their right mind [would] choose to be called something so silly, reductive, and confusing?” (2003:2).

Suffice it to say, within the first two pages of *Nothing Feels Good*, Greenwald asserts his legitimate ability to speak on the subject by echoing the very same sentiments voiced within the *Punknews.org* discussion threads inspired in the wake of the Tyrangiel article - albeit while simultaneously alluding to - and chastising - the manner in which the term has been used in the context of the capital-based ‘game’ at play within the field of subcultural participation. In one fell swoop, Greenwald highlights the ambiguous nature of the term, decries the manner in which “the marketers, the publicists, and the radio formatters who refer to music by genre” (2003: 2) have striven to co-opt it,<sup>34</sup> and subtly criticizes the means through which it has been utilized as a derogatory label by those so eager to differentiate themselves from those attracted to the sphere of subcultural participation in the wake of its reinvention. In sum, Greenwald successfully aspires to notify the emo label’s vocal detractors of the fact that he is of the same mindset as them while in the process of subtly deconstructing the term in a manner fit to frame it as symptomatic of one overarching issue of concern. Namely, that mainstream forces have extended their continuing effort to colonize the ‘underground’ by co-opting a pseudo-generic qualifier that has, in response, become a derogatory subcultural slur.

By the introduction’s end, however, Greenwald parlays a narrative that is openly critical of the misuse of the emo pseudo-generic signifier into one that purports to harbour a revelation regarding the true nature of the emergent ‘emo culture’:

The truth is, the thread that connects the D.C. hardcore bands of the '80s with the lovelorn, clean-cut pop-rockers of the '00s doesn't lie in the music at all; it's in the fans. Emo isn't a genre - it's far too messy and contentious for that. What the term does signify is a particular relationship between a fan and a band. It's the desire to turn a monologue into a dialogue, to be a part of the art that affects you and to connect to it on every possible level - sentiments particularly relevant in an increasingly corporate, suburban, and diffuse culture such as ours. Emo is a

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<sup>34</sup> Suspiciously, but unsurprisingly, ‘entertainment journalists’ are spared inclusion within this list.

specific sort of teenage longing, a romantic and ultimately self-centered need to understand the bigness of the world in relation to *you*. In short...[Emo's] too contentious, too stylistically and generationally diverse to be a genre, too far-reaching to be a subculture. Emo is an essential element of being a teenager. It is the sound of self-making...It's the desire to make yourself bigger by making yourself part of something bigger (Greenwald, 2003: 4-5; italics in original).

In essence, Greenwald elects that 'emo' is less a musical sub-genre, or a youth subculture based around a musical pseudo-genre, than a fitting term with which to conceptualize an emergent manifestation of contemporary youth culture. As the provided quote would suggest, Greenwald argues that today's youth culture constitutes an 'emo' culture by virtue of the means through which, and desperation with which, they strive to forge humanistic connections within the confines of a wider mass culture that is largely prefabricated, impersonal, and decentred. Here, 'emo' is described less as an entity than a communal *practice* whereby adolescents come to better assert their own identities - as 'authentic' human beings in an increasingly 'inauthentic' world - in connecting over, and living vicariously through, a small movement of cultural producers who utilize their art, for lack of a better term, as a *confessional*. As Greenwald later muses, "after a lifetime...of hearing voices obscured by crashing hip-hop beats, squealing electric guitars, and meaningless, scripted lyrics...hearing something as simple as an acoustic guitar and a voice is revolutionary. It is, quite literally, the sound of not hiding, of being yourself, of being real" (2003: 60).

Lest the reader be tempted to confuse the contemporary 'emo' movement with the Post-war 'folk' movement (as exemplified, most easily, by Bob Dylan, another artist who gave the notion of 'revolution' some substance with little more than 'an acoustic guitar and a voice'), Greenwald takes pains to explicate a pair of traits fit to render this new manifestation of adolescent culture unique and decidedly postmodern. First, the 'emo culture' is primarily an online phenomenon; a digitized subcultural manifestation. As Greenwald attests,

Online, a message board is a rock show - you've got your moderators on stage, setting the tone. You've got the loudmouths in the front, pushing everybody around with their attitude, their righteousness, their need for attention. You've got the lurkers in the back, taking in all the action, not saying a word, holding their opinions close to their chest, giving nothing away but taking what they need and more. But both, at their most basic level, are invented, temporary spaces. A common interest has filled them with people, but all are free to leave whenever they like, and the people who fill them are there as whoever they want to be. They are presenting an idealized version of themselves (2003: 57-58).

A second important quality, related very closely to the first, is that ‘emo culture’ condones - and, in fact, promotes - the practice whereby participants utilize various enclaves of web-based discourse - be it music-minded message boards, online diaries, or personalized web-pages - to feature a running commentary on their every feeling, personal tribulation, and introspective feat. “In a world supposedly desensitized to extremes of sex, violence, and media,” posits Greenwald, “teenagers online immerse themselves in a heightened reality, one where emotions are currency and instant messaging never means having the time to say your sorry” (Ibid., 284). In including excerpts from a number of decidedly sensationalistic (and, one would hope, atypical) Livejournal diaries, Greenwald strives to demonstrate the therapeutic value that online discourse - and, it is implied, the output of the ‘emo’ artists with whom they have allegiance - provides to members of the ‘emo culture’. However, there is a deducible subtext meaning to suggest that the popularity of online journals, in combination with the onset of the aforementioned youth culture wherein ‘emotions’ act as sought-after ‘currency’, has led to a climate wherein confessing to one’s own emotional throes breeds *stature* within these spheres of adolescent discourse. In a sense, and although Greenwald strives to celebrate the fact that *web-based* connectivity has facilitated an avenue through which *interpersonal* connectivity (albeit as impersonal as web-based relations are), he simultaneously raises a red flag in concerning the onset of a quasi-narcissistic youth culture in which traits best associable with bi-polar personality disorders are celebrated - *and* implicitly encouraged.

Less the limited (but notable) number of instances in which Greenwald vies to explicate the particularities of the ‘emo culture’ for the benefit of the assumed outsider, the majority of the text strives to speak directly to those amidst the ‘emo culture’ itself. Chapter five of Greenwald’s text, entitled ‘who are the emo kids?’ and functioning to denote the symbiosis between emo culture and online culture, concludes with an interesting passage. Having dedicated just over half a dozen pages to characterizing the particularities that distinguish ‘emo kids’ from the general adolescent population,<sup>35</sup> the chapter’s concluding two paragraphs are meant to speak directly to the ‘emo kids’ themselves,

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<sup>35</sup> In this case as elsewhere, those traits used in deducing who are the population of concern are actually composed of declarations regarding who the emo kids are not: “They’re not traditional punks; they’re not frustrated indie kids or disillusioned college English majors. They’re not wearing glasses to be cool and they’re not wearing vintage t-shirts to impress...” (Greenwald, 2003:55).

You are disenfranchised, your parents don't understand you. You like girls/boys, they don't like you. You are smart but not smart enough. You are too fat. You are too thin. You have to get into college but you have to finish your eighteen extracurricular activities first. Your best friend betrays you, your girlfriend/boyfriend cheats on you. Your parents get divorced. People offer you drugs/drinks. Maybe you take them, maybe you don't. People are mean to you. Again and again and again. When you come home from school, you sit in the bathroom and cry for an hour. Every day. With the door closed, you turn on the stereo. Someone is singing about problems just like yours. They're not commenting on them, not judging them, just echoing them, making them real, validating them. You sing along and your tears dry up. You switch on your computer. You're safe in your room. You control everything. You're alone. But you check your buddy list and know, you are anything but alone (2003: 62-63).

I would argue that this might perhaps be the most significant passage in the entire text. Having just extended a highly romanticized overview of the evolution of the 'emo' genre (which we shall focus on soon), Greenwald invokes reference to a wide range of unsavoury (but decidedly commonplace) life-experiences and introspective anxieties in probing the reader to come to the realization that they, themselves, might be one of the 'emo kids' about whom the author is speaking. This passage would appear to be, in essence, an initiative through which to facilitate the self-recognition, or self-actualization, of a potential audience of 'emo kids' who aren't even aware of the fact that they *are* 'emo kids'.

It can be argued that Greenwald here strives to inspire something akin to Althusser's *interpellation* in coaxing the reader to see themselves reflected in the text and, by extension, re-interpret Greenwald's overview of the history of the emo pseudo-genre as a history of a cultural movement - of which, they might suddenly realize, *they are a part*. If the passage does *not* speak directly to the reader's experiences, however, it might be assumed to aid in the construction of a very particularistic - and highly stereotypical - representation of the readership to whom Greenwald is aspiring to speak directly: over-sensitive (and arguably emotionally unbalanced) youths who have no respite for coping with their problems aside from forging deep connections with their artists of choice and the 'friends' on their 'buddy list'. Therein, I would argue, lays one of the overarching criticisms that the suspicious reader might voice in relation to Greenwald's text: in an effort to speak directly to the largest population of adolescents possible, and coax them into 'seeing themselves' in his text, the author inadvertently tailors his discourse toward those who embody a wide range of the stereotypical traits largely associated with overly-sensitive adolescent populations. In doing so, the utility of his quasi-sociological narrative concerning the rise of a web-based adolescent culture simultaneously facilitates, reifies and reinforces the stereotypical representation of the highly effeminate, emotionally unstable generation

of modern youth as rendered prevalent within Western popular culture. In other words, it feeds into the representational politics as problematized by Giroux and detailed in the first chapter.

A more pertinent criticism, in the context of the discussion at hand, would be that Greenwald strives to frame the manner in which adolescent populations are utilizing web-based discourse as indicative of the onset of a burgeoning 'emo culture'. As valid as many of the arguments that Greenwald extends in reinforcing this argument may be - that, for example, many 'emo' fans utilize web-based forums in discussing musicians of common interest, or that a band like Thursday crashed the *Billboard* charts, in part, on the strength of strong 'internet buzz' (2003: 58) - the author cannot substantiate any unique link between 'web culture' and 'emo culture' without referring back to the 'sensitive adolescent' stereotype. Though Greenwald succeeds in describing a number of the ways in which 'web culture' has modified the means through which music-based discourse is carried out and 'buzz' is disseminated, he presents little in the way of grounds on which to suggest that these practices should warrant specific affiliation with the 'emo' pseudo-genre or, indeed, punk subculturalists in general. There is no commonsensical reason to equate the *exclusive* prevalence of internet use with the populism of 'emo' music (and vice-versa), and Greenwald's implicit initiative to argue that there is - on the sheer basis that the popularity of online diaries and the commercial success of bands like Dashboard Confessional are both largely attributable to adolescent populations - lends little weight to the overarching argument that web-situated youth culture *is* 'emo culture'.

#### 5.4.2 *Icon Narratives and the Romanticization (And Revision) of Subcultural History*

Needless to say, extending the argument that the entirety of web-savvy adolescents should be taken to constitute an 'emo culture' is only one of *Nothing Feels Good's* overarching agendas. Another, despite Greenwald's early assertion that emo is "far too messy and contentious" (2003: 4) to classify as a genre, rests with providing a detailed overview of those artists, and music industry figures, whom Greenwald aspires to identify as responsible for having shaped the genre. Though Greenwald, not unlike Tyrangiel, locates the genesis of 'emo-core' with the Washington hardcore movement, his analysis also stretches itself to cover the intervening fifteen years between Rites of Spring and Dashboard Confessional. In so doing, however, it might be said that Greenwald takes some liberties not only with the artists that he chooses to advance as 'second-generation' emo bands, but the manner in which he strives to encapsulate their significance. Al-

though many - if not all - of the late 1980s to mid 90s-era bands that Greenwald mentions had previously been affiliated with the emo-pseudo genre in some capacity, I wish to argue that the manner in which he speaks on the legacy of these artists might warrant interpretation as an initiative through which the text not only disseminates ‘privileged’ subcultural knowledge to outsider populations, but allows Greenwald the opportunity to *revise* it in the process.

I have already, in chapter four, alluded to the means through which Greenwald describes Rites of Spring in a highly sensationalistic, quasi-poetic manner serving to accentuate the band’s significance as a cultural (or emotional?) force. Now, I might wish to grant a more detailed analysis to the manner through which Greenwald frames Rites of Spring vocalist Guy Picciotto under the auspices of the overarching goal of probing the self-actualization of an ‘emo culture’. In particular, I wish to highlight the manner in which the text strives to simultaneously personalize *and* aggrandize Picciotto as something of an artistic revolutionary in the process of forming what I wish to refer to as an *icon narrative*.

Guy Picciotto, a tall, wiry, handsome student at the elite Georgetown Day School, was a huge Minor Threat fan and, though he had little musical training or inclination, he reverently believed in the power of music. Harnessing all of his anger, disillusionment, paranoia, and fear to which MacKaye had given a voice, he turned every last drop of it in on himself. The name of the band he formed, Rites of Spring, was cannily chosen - it echoed the riot-inducing Stravinsky piece that had shocked the world seventy years before, a true example of artistic expression fomenting a cultural and political shift (2003: 11).

In introducing the notion of an ‘icon narrative’, I mean to refer to the manner in which the author frames the subject - in this case, Picciotto - as a subcultural luminary; a ‘heroic’ figure whose ‘special’ characteristics grant them the ability to epitomize all that was unique and *authentic* about past manifestations of the emo pseudo-genre. Though absolutely average in demeanour and situation (he was, after all, little more than a ‘tall, wiry, handsome student’ to the untrained eye), Greenwald contends that the struggle wherein Picciotto grappled with his lack of ‘musical training and inclination’ for the sake of reinforcing his unwavering belief ‘in the power of music’ resulted in the creation of a band of such significance as to justify their self-affiliation with a ‘true example of artistic expression fomenting a cultural and political shift’: the Stravinsky piece *Rites of Spring*. Doing so was not, however, without personal cost: Picciotto had to harness all of his ‘anger, disillusionment, paranoia, and fear’ and turn ‘every last drop of it in on himself’ in order to create art as uncompromisingly sincere, and as authentic as Rites of Spring

are here described as being. Suffice it to say, this is the type of narrative far more often used in describing the ascent of superheroes than short-lived hardcore bands; or, to put it another way, the type of aggrandising discourse meant to appeal to young readers in desperate search for ‘underdog’ archetypes. Though we might assume that Greenwald’s intentions in offering a quasi-comic book rendition of Rites of Spring’s history might have rested with rendering a palpable overview for readers more familiar with the *Harry Potter* series than Blush’s *American Hardcore*, it is equally likely that a great deal of information was lost - and manufactured - in the transition from verifiable fact to ‘emo lore’.

Greenwald does not let the icon narrative rest once having trod the familiar terrain (to those keeping up with the niche-mediated treatment of the emo’s genesis, at least) of mid-80s Washington. It surfaces, once again, in light of Greenwald’s initiative to demonstrate that, contrary to popular belief, “two bands stand out as advancing the emo cause into the 1990s...[both of which] fostered similar cult followings and, in so doing, redefined, reintroduced, and recontextualized the word ‘emo’ for an entirely new generation” (2003: 19). Those two bands, by Greenwald’s account, were Jawbreaker and Sunny Day Real Estate, neither of which, as mentioned in chapter four, were actually heralded as ‘emo bands’ to any degree worthy of attracting denotation by the niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers of the early 1990s. Nonetheless, Greenwald assuages any doubts that the reader might harbour regarding the validity of categorizing each band as ‘emo’ in granting both Jawbreaker’s Blake Schwartzenbach and Sunny Day Real Estate’s Jeremy Enigk the idol narrative treatment. In regarding Schwartzenbach, Greenwald attests that, “[his] throat sounded like a rust corrugated pipe pumping ache and bile from his heart directly to the microphone; his hoarse cries gave voice to scores of similarly disillusioned post-collegiate souls...his appeal was his publicly private torment. There was a bitterness and frustration in his lyrics that was both universal and magnetic” (2003: 20, 22). Of the band itself, Greenwald opines that, “Jawbreaker songs weren’t overly sentimental and their shows weren’t displays of excess or indulgence. They merely communicated an intangible sense of longing that triggered young people’s hearts like defibrillators” (2003:21). Enigk, on the other hand, is described as having, “gathered all of his seething torment and [throwing] it to the winds...the odd and occasionally invented words on [the *Diary* album] suggested speaking in tongues...so intense was Enigk’s desire to subsume his own problems into something larger, he loses track of language” (2003:29). So intense would seem Greenwald’s desire to herald

Schwartzenback and Enigk as the heroic progenitors of the emo pseudo-genre - while demonstrating his personal ability to construct arguably ridiculous analogies – that he loses sight of his original claim that there *is no substantive emo genre*. Nonetheless, Greenwald notes that Jawbreaker and Sunny Day Real Estate,

Pointed the way toward a new underground consensus and aesthetic...[the] bands were doomed...but the roads were paved. Over the next decade emo would retreat again, reform, and be reborn both as a national subculture and, eventually, as something even greater, but in terms of scope, style, passion, and emotion, all of the bands that came next were following Jawbreaker and Sunny Day Real Estate's tearstained map (2003: 33).

#### 5.4.3 Greenwald on Authenticity; Inspiring Heresy in the Subcultural Field

Though Greenwald goes on to utilize an idol narrative in recounting the artistic proclivities of such figures as The Promise Ring's Davey Vonbohlen, Braid's Bob Nanna and - indeed - Weezer's Rivers Cuomo, I do not wish to dwell on the matter. Instead, I wish to point out the manner through which Greenwald's text asserts itself as the authoritative text on the emo pseudo-genre while, simultaneously, vying for legitimacy in parroting that subcultural discourse meant to *deny* the presence of that *very same* emo pseudo-genre. At its very onset, Greenwald claims that 'emo' is, in a manner of speaking, solely recognized and deduced under the auspices of the beholder; it is less a genre of music than the *practice* of "seeking a tangible connection out of intangible things...the act of reaching out towards something larger to better know yourself"(2003: 5). It follows that the 'emo culture' constitutes that population of web-savvy adolescents who cull their personal identities through on-line interaction with others that, similarly, come to better grasp an understanding of their own emotionality in living vicariously through the artists whose works they consume. In the admitted absence of any objective means of identifying an 'emo' band, Greenwald posits that one can only be identified by virtue of the fact that 'emo kids' identify them as such. In the absence of any objective means through which to identify an 'emo kid' - aside from the fact that they are young and familiar with web technologies - Greenwald deduces that they can be identified by virtue of their musical tastes; the 'emo' artists whom they speak about and support. Lest the text is critically deconstructed, Greenwald succeeds in implicitly reifying both the 'emo band' and the 'emo fan' while explicitly denying the objective existence of either.

All the while, a text purporting that its main directive should be to educate the external

reader to an emergent culture strives, in many ways, to indoctrinate readers *into* that culture. The early chapter's utilization of the icon narrative in characterizing the progenitors of the emo genre frames those bands - and, more particularly, their front-men - as the underappreciated heroes of a largely underappreciated, but nonetheless significant, musical *force*; artists whose abundant authenticity went overlooked amidst the confines of a mass culture that is described as celebrating inauthentic artistry. The likes of Rites of Spring, Jawbreaker and Sunny Day Real Estate are described as artists having inflicted suffering upon themselves as a means of producing a heartfelt art that, tragically, found appreciation from but a small (and otherwise inadequately described) population of similarly 'authentic' subculturalists. It was *real* art that spoke to *real* people with *real* emotions. Though Greenwald neglects to identify those comparatively *inauthentic* artists, people and emotions, his narrative nonetheless succeeds in alluding to the presence of an 'underground' pocket of authentic artists whose brilliance can only be perceived by a select population of cultural consumers; it only 'speaks' to those endowed with particularistic 'authentic' qualities. And how might one deduce whether or not they possess the privileged ability to identify and appreciate this brilliance? Just as the text grants itself the authoritative ability to denote and explicate those qualities inborn to uncompromisingly authentic music, so too it claims itself the ability to characterize the authentic recipient; they are 'disenfranchised, their parents don't understand them, they like 'girls/boys' who don't like them, and so on and so forth.

In a nutshell, then, Greenwald's *Nothing Feels Good* speaks to the presence of an emergent subcultural manifestation in which one's claims to authenticity are indelibly tethered to one's ability to relate to the artists whom they covet in a distinctly personalized way. The text reports on a collectivity in which subcultural capital is not only meted out on the basis of one's ability to relate to authentic artistic products, but one's ability to affiliate themselves with those artists through a variety of measures; including (but not limited to) engaging in intense rites of fandom in the context of the live performance and posting testimonials regarding the context in which such works 'spoke' to and 'saved' the emo culturalist on personalized websites. The 'rules' of the 'game' have been modified to allow, first, that the depth with which one can relate to an artist is deemed a pinnacle in deducing one's subcultural authenticity and second, that broadcasting one's allegiance to select artistic works takes precedence over protecting consecrated subcultural knowledge from outsider populations. In regards to the punk subculture, it

goes without saying that both of these measures run counter-intuitive to the orthodoxy informing the structuration of the established field of subcultural participation.

The Greenwald text does not, however, merely aspire to actualize a subcultural manifestation endowed with a differential means of amassing subcultural capital and deducing authenticity as compared to the punk subculture; it actively strives to characterize 'emo culture' as the new (and superior) embodiment *of* the punk subculture. This task is implicitly executed by virtue of the manner through which Greenwald assimilates crucial elements of the aforementioned counter-discourse on 'real' emo into his history (or revision) of the genesis of the emo pseudo-genre and, in doing so, definitively recasts well-respected punk acts like Jawbreaker and The Promise Ring as the progenitors of a movement that stood to offend the exclusionism of the established punk subculture just as much as it strove to promote cathartic emotional expression. Whether factual or not, the recurring utilization of the icon narrative succeeds in extending the impression that each of the artists inflicted torment unto themselves as a means of countering the implicit hierarchies sufficing to divide their subcultural communities and reinvigorate the spirit of the music produced therein. As Greenwald contends, "after years of raging sameness, hardcore desperately needed a brain; after years of studied, ironic detachment, indie desperately needed a heart. What they found was each other, and what it got called was emo" (2003: 34). Greenwald furthermore contends that the music bore "a welcoming, self-affirming community. All the kids who listened to emo in the '90s were seeking to validate themselves, to join in something shared and secretive" (2003: 48). Alas, what might be read as a text celebrative of inclusive communality by the fledgling subculturalite might read like a critique of the *established subcultural order* for the long-entrenched subculturalist. That latter audience might thus perceive the text as a thinly-veiled attempt through which Greenwald aspires to arm a contingent of potential subcultural 'others' with a revised (but nonetheless pertinent) stock of privileged subcultural knowledge with which they might inject themselves into the established field of subcultural participation. Unlike your run-of-the-mill subcultural 'other', however, the text might be perceived as imparting this particular bloc of conspirators with something akin to a 'manifest destiny' whereby they might conceive of themselves as those imbued with the distinct ability to materialize the vision set forth by those underappreciated icons of the emo genre; a vision whereby establishing emotional connectivity trumps and eradicates the validity of all other measures through which subcultural capital has heretofore been disseminated and collected. In

other words, the established subculturalist might perceive that the Greenwald text vies to describe, inspire, and *empower* a heretical movement within the field of subcultural participation that might not only fundamentally alter the ‘rules’ of the ‘game’, but unapologetically reorganize the distribution of spaces - and thus the hierarchical organization - within the field itself.

Finally, Greenwald further reifies the projection of a substantive ‘emo culture’ in dedicating a brief chapter of his text toward considering pre-established claims that the emo pseudo-genre promotes sexism and the subcultural marginalization of female participants. Inspired in large part by a *Punk Planet* column wherein renowned subcultural critic Jessica Hopper (2003) deduced that “Emo became just another forum where women were locked in a stasis of outside observation, observing ourselves through the eyes of others,” and that “Women in emo songs are denied the dignity of humanization through both the language and narratives, we are omnipresent, but our only consequence is in romantic setting; denying any possibility or hope for life outside the margins, where they express a free sexual, creative or political will” (Hopper, 2003), Greenwald concedes that the general absence of ‘emo bands’ featuring female members – and the fact that “some emo bands...make songs that can be heard as virulently anti-women” (Greenwald, 2003: 135) – indeed serves as a notable point of dire concern. However, whereas Hopper essentially argues that emo’s sexist undercurrent serves as the common thread through which the genre gains weight *as* an identifiable genre, Greenwald deduces that the marginalization of women’s participation simply serves as the primary element of the ‘emo’ pseudo-genre that must be rectified should the ‘emo’ culture’s status as a morally superior field of subcultural participation find substantive realization. “Perhaps when this generation of emo fans begins to form their own bands,” Greenwald writes, “a new female-voiced wave of heartbreak songs will emerge” (Greenwald, 2003: 138-39). Nevertheless, Greenwald counters Hopper’s claim that ‘emo’ serves as the generic *embodiment* of subcultural misogyny in noting – without, mind you, substantiating – that “the place where the real male/female dialogue is occurring and the rules are being rewritten is not on record, but online, where the huge number of women fans have their say and assert themselves in varied and surprising ways” (Greenwald, 2003: 139). In advancing one final and arguably dismissive statement in noting that “it’s also possible that fearing for the ears of young female fans is presumptuous – that the unifying appeal of emo may just be that, at heart, emotional devastation knows no gender” (Greenwald, 2003: 139), Greenwald effectively grants the issue of sexism within the ‘emo culture’ voice while, concurrently, arguing for its

status as a soon-to-be *non-issue*. Taken in chorus with the presupposition of the ‘manifest destiny’ that Greenwald subtly prescribes for those who might extract their self-actualization as ‘emo kids’ from his authoritative text, the author downplays the significance of the contemporary subculture’s inherent sexism in not only forecasting the inevitable emergence of blocs of counter-hegemonic female artistic producers, but in subtly arguing that the unifying thread which renders participation with the ‘emo’ culture appealing to both genders has simply, heretofore, been *misinterpreted* as sexism. By virtue of a strange twist in logic, then, Greenwald arguably strives to frame a subcultural sphere that appears rife with sexism at first glance as the best contender to be that which dissolves gender stratification – and, ironically, thus retracts the perception that subcultural critics like Hopper even need speak to the issue of sexism within the subcultural field.

Given the inarguably sexist nature of the material being created by those artists alleged as being ‘emo bands’ - and in noting the notable number of adolescent females that would subsequently gravitate toward the ‘emo movement’ - one cannot help but wonder how affiliating oneself with the ‘emo’ subculture might impact the identity-formative processes of female adherents. Above and beyond being once again marginalized to the status of ‘spectators’ (as opposed to artistic ‘creators’), it would be difficult not to assume that the highly misogynistic nature of the content ostensibly propelling the ‘emo culture’ would not have a negative impact upon listeners who might surely come to conceptualize themselves, to some degree, as representative of the ‘problematic’ population against whom much of the subculture’s material is meant to demonize and strike out against. Though it is not yet time to concern ourselves explicitly with Hannah Bond - a British girl, aged just thirteen years, whose suicide was attributed with her participation with the emo subculture - it might nonetheless be worthwhile to ponder how one’s self-esteem might ultimately be impacted by participating within a ‘movement’ that strives to vilify a sizable contingent of its adherents on the sheer basis of gender alone and, furthermore, whether those correlating the popularity of ‘emo culture’ with particular incidents of adolescent self-harm might be (theoretically) justifiable – albeit that correlation oft bolstered by misinformation and the utilization of derogatory adolescent stereotypes.

#### 5.4.4 *The (Lack Of) Subcultural Response: A Pejorative Re-designation?*

Though news bulletins had promptly been posted in notifying users about the publication of the *TIME* and *Seventeen* articles, and although the Greenwald text arguably takes the greatest pains in extending an authoritative body of knowledge concerning the emo pseudo-genre, it would not seem to have elicited any immediate subcultural response from the *Punknews.org* online community. Though there is a plethora of speculative points that might be invoked in attempting to account for this seeming lack of subcultural interest – ranging from the fact that the Greenwald book is *considerably* longer than either of those previous niche-mediated articles, to the fact that very little of the Greenwald text appeared online<sup>36</sup> - the most likely possible explanation rests with the prospect that ‘emo’ had once again taken on subcultural currency as a derogatory term long before *Nothing Feels Good* achieved publication. One might extract some support for this assumption from the fact that *Alternative Press* would essentially seem to have retired the term following its September, 2003 edition, in which Thursday and Thrice were suddenly proclaimed to be ‘post-hardcore’ acts and the AP poll, a monthly feature in which readers and musicians are given opportunity to weigh in on an issue of debate, concerned itself with the question as to whether or not ‘emo’ is sexist (Simon, 2003a: 21). Following this, and even though the magazine offered extensive ‘retrospective’ articles on many of the bands featured prominently in the Greenwald text (Schulz, 2003; Ryan, 2004a; 2004b), the term ‘emo’ was seldom invoked.<sup>37</sup> More generally, the term would appear to have been used in near-exclusive<sup>38</sup> collusion with negative criticisms as confined to the publication’s album review section;<sup>39</sup> a fact perhaps rendered no more evident than by the fact that, whereas a *positive* article concerning *Saves The Day* does not contain a single instance in which the term ‘emo’ is used (Simon,

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<sup>36</sup> It is worth noting here that, at the time of this research, very little of the *Seventeen* piece – save poor resolution recreations of the fashion spread – could be located online.

<sup>37</sup> One notable exception is Kyle Ryan’s (2004b) Braid article wherein the band members are probed to offer their negative feelings regarding their treatment within the Greenwald text. Greenwald’s response to the criticisms levied by the band (and within the article) was published with the September, 2004 edition’s letters section (*Alternative Press*, 2004: 16). One might be enticed to note that the feud within the sub-field of cultural knowledge production rarely manifests quite as explicitly as it would appear to in this case.

<sup>38</sup> I wish to bracket the curious case of Coheed and Cambria, who are granted positive coverage despite not only being categorized as an emo band on numerous occasions, but being a band whose entire catalogue concerns itself with a science-fictional creation myth that (as best as I can tell) takes place in outer space.

<sup>39</sup> Exceptional examples of this can be found in Hawthorne’s (2003: 76) review of Blue Sky Mile’s *Sands Once Seas*, Kelley’s (2003: 120) review of Time In Malta’s *Alone With The Alone* and, most memorably, Bennett’s review of Haste The Day’s *Burning Bridges*: “Someone should really invent an Emo-Removal Machine. The way it would work is that you could take a CD, put it in the ERM, and it would erase all the shitty crying parts from discs that would otherwise be totally decent metal albums...” (2003:100)

2003b), a *negative* review of the group's *In Reverie* album, published in the very same issue, snidely refers to the band as "emo superstars" in the course of its critique (Bayer, 2003:120). Granted, whether the term 'emo' largely fell out of favour with the majority of the *Alternative Press* staff because using it might harm their reputation as a legitimate source of subcultural knowledge, or because a *Spin Magazine* affiliate had effectively written the authoritative text concerning it, is entirely debatable and empirically impossible to deduce.

## **5.5 Concluding Thoughts: The Niche-Mediation and the Damage Done**

This chapter has reviewed three texts in hopes of demonstrating how an 'expert knowledge' concerning the emo pseudo-genre was constructed and disseminated by an array of niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers. Even though all three dedicate some effort to critiquing the utility of the 'emo' classification, each circumvents its own criticism by extending a commentary concerning the history of the pseudo-genre, the particularities of the pseudo-genre, and a run-down of those significant artists who are representative of the pseudo-genre in a manner which nonetheless assumes, and thus reinforces, the reification *of* the pseudo-genre. The chapter has also noted that, though the overarching intent of these three niche-media texts undoubtedly rests with advancing a body of knowledge meant to explicate (and, simultaneously, constitute and consecrate) the particularities of the emo pseudo-genre, all three concurrently extend a body of knowledge concerning adolescent populations allegedly constitutive of an emergent 'emo culture'. The subcultural discourse that we have thus far encountered would appear to indicate that these niche-mediated texts facilitated a predictable problematic by virtue of their proclivity for not only maligning the privileged subcultural knowledge on which they focus, but disseminating it to a burgeoning population of 'mindless twelve year-old girls' (to paraphrase those responses heretofore encountered) whose sheer presence would seem to offend the sensitivities of the 'legitimated' subcultural *habitus*. In examining that subcultural discourse which arose in response to the Tyrangiel article and the *Seventeen* photo-spread, I have attempted to demonstrate how these niche-mediated texts helped inspire the first incarnation of an 'emo kid' stereotype representative of a population coming to be perceived as a threat to the sanctity of the subcultural field.

To this point, the astute reader might have already noted that the ‘emo kid’ *stereotype* that arose in response to the niche-mediated constitution of the emo pseudo-genre in the summer of 2002 only vaguely resembles the ‘emo kid’ *folk-devil* as detailed by the inventory provided in chapter one. Chapter six seeks to flesh out the process through which the ‘emo kid’ came to function as a subcultural ‘other’ whereby entrenched subculturalists might problematize, and strive to battle against, a multiplicity of forces and trends that placed the consecration of the established subcultural field under duress. I will now consider the re-constitutional permutations - and the various mediums of transmission - through which the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil came into being by virtue of those discursive and representational processes through which subcultural traditionalists endeavoured to retain authority over the ability to deduce, demarcate and reinforce the conventions shaping the symbolic economy within the field of subcultural participation.

## **Chapter Six. The Multiplicity of Crises and the Construction of the Emo Kid Folk-Devil.**

### **6.1 Introductory Notes**

Over the course of the past two chapters, I have outlined the process through which the emo pseudo-genre was invoked by a variety of niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers in aspiring to meet a variety of ends. Chapter four detailed the process through which *Alternative Press* Magazine sought to ensure its survival in annexing the term ‘emo-core’ from the lexicon of the sub-field of restricted production. This move had the potential to constitute ‘heresy’ within the field of niche-mediated cultural knowledge production as it allowed that the publication might invest its consecratory authority in a new bloc of artistic producers so endowed with the potential of epitomizing a new ‘movement’ in modern music - and to whom their competitors had paid scant attention. I touched on the fact that this strategy was successful in that *Alternative Press’s* abrupt shift in coverage not only served to increase the magazine’s commercial viability dramatically, but also to thrust those subculturally revered artists so described as being ‘emo’ (be it explicitly so or by insinuation) onto ‘mainstream radar’. Chapter five concerned itself partially with the means through which a number of niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers strove to assert their expertise in constructing a ‘body of knowledge’ meant to concern - and, simultaneously, reify the notion of - a substantiated emo pseudo-genre that was poised to constitute the ‘next big thing’ and, by extension, a body of knowledge sufficing to detail the emergent ‘culture’ of ‘emo kids’ ostensibly propelling this movement. I brought the preceding chapter to a close in noting that, while *Spin Magazine’s* Andy Greenwald had delivered what can be taken as the ‘authoritative text’ concerning the emo pseudo-genre and its correlative youth culture in the fall of 2003, the manner in which *Alternative Press* subsequently utilized the term ‘emo’ in a derogatory manner might lead one to speculate that the niche-mediated attention granted to the process of constituting the emo pseudo-genre in a manner meant to instigate the emergence of an adolescent ‘emo culture’ had effectively stripped the term of any legitimacy in the context of the established field of subcultural participation. I argued that we might cull some evidentiary support for this assumption from the manner in which the subculturalist community of *Punknews.org* users tailored their responses to news bulletins concerning the publication of the *TIME Magazine* and *Seventeen* pieces toward two distinct threads of condemnatory discourse: in regards to the Tyrangiel article, a discussion serving to problematize the means through which ‘outsider’ niche-

media forces strove to construct a misguided characterization of an emo pseudo-genre while simultaneously vying to co-opt it; in response to the *Seventeen* piece, a discussion serving to perpetuate a stereotypical representation of the problematic bloc of fledgling subcultural ‘others’ who might surely gravitate toward the field in the wake of the article’s publication. This ‘emo kid’ stereotype was, in other words, the initial by-product of a programme of a struggle wherein the field of subcultural participants formed a derogatory discourse in attempting to counteract the niche-mediated field’s authoritative ability not only to create an erroneous ‘body of knowledge’ concerning an ostensible ‘emo’ pseudo-genre, but potentially inspire that the subcultural field undergo an incursion by those unsavoury populations characterized as being part of the ‘emo culture’.

In chapter six, I examine the manner in which this initial emo kid stereotype evolved in an effort allowing it to function as a subcultural folk-devil; a representation serving to condemn a wide range of de-legitimized subcultural practices (and those that might engage in them) in an effort to protect the sanctity of the field of subcultural participation and the ‘subcultural capital-stocks’ of longstanding field participants. I argue that the evolution of the emo kid folk-devil representation was informed by the presence of a multiplicity of distinct forces that were perceived as endangering the exclusivity of the established field and the integrity of the conventions through which authenticity was traditionally disseminated and deduced, and that the stereotype sufficed as a means through which elements within the punk subculture strove not only to representationally problematize a new manifestation of subcultural ‘other’, but disempower and delegitimize those artists and actors, within the sub-field of restricted production and the wider culture industry, taken to be threatening consecrated subcultural practices by virtue of, first, the methods of subcultural position-taking they implicitly espoused and, secondly, the inauthentic audiences which they served to attract. This chapter will contextualize the manner in which the emo kid folk-devil came to serve as a means through which punk subculturalists stigmatized fledgling subcultural ‘others’ who were not only young, but also aspired to assert their own legitimacy through adopting particular styles of dress and aligning themselves with ‘heretical’ artistic producers; two traits that either threatened to alter the manner in which subcultural capital was deduced and disseminated, or threatened to ‘devalue’ the subcultural capital of longstanding subculturalists and, thus, deplete their distinction (and power) within the field. I argue that the primary incentive propelling the construction of the emo kid folk-devil rests not only condemn-

ing a distinct population of fledgling subculturalists, but also that range of illegitimate subcultural practices, having been popularized by a bevy of unauthenticated artistic producers and ‘mainstream’ cultural forces, that found popularization when certain factions of ‘underground’ artistic producers were believed to be (or were feared destined to become) inheritors of the stature of being the ‘next big thing’.

The first section of this chapter concerns itself with the emergence of that which I refer to as a ‘multiplicity of crises’ that potentially endangered the consecrated conventions of subculturalist position-taking in 2002. It argues that the impetus for the emo kid folk-devil resides not only in concerns regarding the misappropriation and exploitation of the emo pseudo-genre, but with concerns stemming from the perceived implementation through which corporate ‘outsider’ forces were taken as attempting to colonize the subcultural underground. In utilizing instances of subcultural discourse regarding the career trajectory of AFI and My Chemical Romance as my primary examples, I analyze the manner in which discussions regarding artists so accused of having ‘sold out’ through signing with major record labels, initiating marketing deals with clothing manufacturers and retail chains and drastically altering their aesthetics and artistic output reflect subcultural tensions regarding how the mainstream popularization of de-legitimated practices and position-takings might influence the sanctity of the subcultural field. I examine how the perception that these fears might have found fruition can be deduced by the evolving nature of the content featured in *Alternative Press* magazine, that niche-mediated publication which I allege came to be used as the knowledge reservoir from which the particularities informing the emo kid folk-devil were drawn upon and revised. The second section will endorse a program of critical content analysis in investigating those products (as constructed within the sub-field of restricted production) and instances of discourse (as featured by subculturalist micro-media sites) that contributed to the problematization of this ‘multiplicity of crises’ in a manner serving to perpetuate, and further construct, the representation of the emo kid folk-devil. I concern myself here with such cultural products as Adam and Andrew’s infamous “Emo Kid” song, Steve Emond’s (2006; 2007) *Emo Boy* graphic novel series and, finally, a selection of the derogatory *Youtube.com* videos - such as the “How To Be Emo” (2006) and “Lars the Emo Boy” (2006) - that became popular over the course of 2006. Finally, I comment on the means through which the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil’s transition from a discursive construct to a multi-modal cultural archetype allowed that it might be problematically regarded without any requisite familiarity with the crises facing the

field of subcultural production and, thus, incited its induction into the wider programme of representational politics being levied against non-conformist adolescent populations.

## **6.2 The Multiplicity of Crises: The Colonization of the Underground and the Onset of the Gothic Aesthetic.**

As it may be recalled, chapter four utilized the recollections of *Alternative Press* founder Mike Shea in demonstrating the overarching inspiration for those processes through which the publication transformed from a 'legitimate' niche-mediated resource for 'privileged' subcultural knowledge to one that concerned itself with covering decidedly 'mainstream' acts in the interest of catering to the demands of its national distributors and, by extension, conforming to the conventions of the 'corporatized' sub-field of large-scale cultural knowledge production. In so doing, *Alternative Press* had effectively 'sold out' its status as a legitimate information source in the context of the sub-field of *restricted* cultural knowledge production, a fact that Shea correlates with the onset of a near-catastrophic climate of disillusionment, within the *AP* offices, that almost brought the publication to its end.

It follows that the January, 2002 publication of *Alternative Press Magazine's* 164<sup>th</sup> issue - featuring alternate cover appearances by Saves The Day and AFI - might be regarded as something of a landmark: it evidences a junction where the field of niche-mediated cultural knowledge production served as the stage upon which a movement toward 'heresy' had been undertaken. In breaking with field orthodoxy in featuring artists theretofore unfamiliar to the mainstream culture - and being duly rewarded with a substantial increase in both sales and reader-assigned credibility as a legitimate source of information on 'authentic' artists - *Alternative Press* had effectively gained the requisite confidence in challenging the field of positions internal to the field of niche-mediated entertainment magazines and in identifying an oft-neglected pocket of cultural connoisseurs to whom it could cater coverage and, effectively, become considered an authoritative source for 'expert' knowledge. Ultimately, however, I have argued that this 'heretical' move also sufficed in granting the 'emo' signifier prominent attention among cultural knowledge consumers, drastically increased the profile of a great number of theretofore 'underground' artists and - in light of the fact that the magazine's foray into underground coverage sold

notably well - ultimately demonstrated to the wider cultural industry that the punk subculture (and its immediate affiliates) entailed a notable degree of market potential.

It is thus crucial to note that the increased coverage that such 'authentic' artists thus enjoyed subsequently placed them in something of a precarious position with not only their established fan-base, but with the wider subcultural field of which they were inevitably a part. The manner in which those bands affiliated with the 'neo-punk' movement had their reputations assailed in accordance with the degree to which they had allegedly forsaken their claims to subcultural 'authenticity' (chapter four) might serve as a reminder, in part, of the subcultural field's proclivity for attempting to stave off mainstream co-optation by manner of collectively revising the nature of the 'consensus' on those artists should they be willing to cater to the sub-field of large-scale production. Alas, one might be curious to know what types of cause-and-effect correlations those subculturalists, devoted to the sub-field of restricted production, began to draw as *Alternative Press* cover appearances began to parlay into major label recording contracts for the likes of Saves The Day, Thursday, and - albeit on the sly - Dashboard Confessional.

I would furthermore suggest, however, that examples wherein established punk subculturalists strive to tailor their discourse toward de-legitimizing 'heretical' artistic producers might simultaneously be a by-product of the nature of the economy of individualistic subcultural capital. Just as Bourdieu posits that the cultural knowledge producer strives to build a reputation for legitimacy in 'investing' their attention in artists endowed of certain qualities, so too might the subcultural consumer gain 'capital' by 'investing' their allegiances in those artists so perceived as epitomizing one's conceptualization of 'proper' subcultural ethos. In essence, I would argue that one's specific 'taste' in subcultural artists essentially serves as an avenue through which one's status within the field can most easily, and instantly, be deduced by pertinent onlookers. In the early 90s and prior to the emergence of the 'neo-punk' movement, for example, asserting a subcultural identity professing a pronounced fondness for Bad Religion or NOFX could be taken to comment on more than one's mere tastes in music; these signifiers implied that the 'investor' was familiar with and committed to the ideals of the 'underground', were possessed of the ability to implicitly extend respect to 'progenitor' artists, and need not resort to mainstream music information channels in order to deduce the existence of 'authentic' artistry. However, when each of these bands came to surface on the 'mainstream' radar in the mid-1990s and, thus, attracted attention from extra-subcultural audiences, we might easily imagine that the 'subcultural capital'

possessed through being a vocal supporter of *either* band was either devalued or, as is more likely the case, completely eradicated as Bad Religion fanship, for example, collectively came to be perceived as the mark of an insurgent, ‘trend-following’ subcultural *outsider*. In these cases, and for those so interested in protecting their subcultural distinction, the logical counter-strategy would appear to be a process of publicly disaffiliating oneself from the offending artistic producers and, perhaps most importantly, those having gravitated toward the group following their movement toward ‘heresy’. I might thus posit that the ‘degradational’ subculturalist discourse that circulates regarding ‘heretical’ artistic producers thus serves concurrent functions in regards to both the collective goal of assuring subcultural sanctity and the individualistic ‘game’ of procuring subcultural capital. Of course, and as I briefly made mention of in chapter five, it is only the collectivist function that can be granted explicit denotation within a subculturalist discourse that might hazard dissolving the *implicit* economy of subcultural capital by the sheer process of attesting to its existence.

In chapter four, I briefly alluded to the sizable ‘underground’ following that the group AFI had attracted following the release of the albums *Black Sails in the Sunset* (1999) and *The Art of Drowning* (2000). Unfortunately, as the bands 1999-2000 era website is no longer available, and nor are the ‘fansites’ that have arisen in dedication to the band at this same time, the reader must largely take my word for it that the group’s fusion of quasi-gothic musical undertones and traditional hardcore, unique approach to live performance and highly poeticized lyrical content inspired something of a phenomenon – relatively speaking, of course – within punk subculturalist circles. AFI tattoos had so become something of a popular commodity during this era that the band took pains to make direct mention of this in *The Art of Drowning* album’s liner notes. Having taken on such a subcultural momentum, AFI translated their newfound mainstream exposure, following their first *Alternative Press* magazine cover appearance, into a bevy of initiatives that would draw the ire of the subcultural field to such a pronounced degree that I might hazard the opinion that the bulk of those traits destined to epitomize the emo kid folk-devil found their genesis in the subcultural reaction levied against *this particular band*. For the sake of explicating the manner in which AFI’s ‘transgressions’ against subcultural convention served to converge upon and reiterate one another, I might opt to divide their mainstream ascent into three different eras.

### 6.2.1 *The Dreamworks Deal and the Depletion of Subcultural Authenticity*

Following the modest success of *The Art of Drowning* album, rumours concerning whether the band would remain with the independent Nitro Records label, or sign with a major label, ran rampant throughout circles of subculturalist discourse. Rumours of their impending major label jump were somewhat quelled, however, with a post, as submitted by *Punknews.org* user 'Goldstein books' (2001), entitled "AFI Sticking to Nitro Records",

I had the opportunity to catch the tail end to a radio interview with AFI on 102.1 The Edge (out of Toronto). During the interview, the band confirmed that the rumors are false and they are and always will be on Nitro Records. "That's where we started and that's where we'll finish," said lead singer Davey Havok. Also, the band was confronted with their new found mainstream chances. They responded by stating that they just want to play and keep playing and wherever it takes them is where it takes them.

The band indeed left Nitro, however, for the sake of signing with Dreamworks Records just one month later. On December 12<sup>th</sup>, an anonymous *Punknews.org* user (Punknews.org. 2001) posted a bulletin, entitled "AFI signs to Dreamworks, Its Official", that reproduced a personal message<sup>40</sup> to the fans that the band had provided on their website in its entirety,

Hey Everyone, We know there's been tons of speculation recently about us signing to a new label and we apologize for the lack of information, but our future plans hadn't been decided up until now. Ok, here goes: A couple of months ago, Dexter (owner of Nitro Records, as I'm sure you know) came to our show in Ventura and sat us down to talk. He told us that he believed we were at a point where we were outgrowing Nitro's resources and he thought it was a good time for us to move on. As you can imagine, we were quite taken aback; we owed him another record and were very happy on Nitro but he went on to explain that a different label could offer us things he felt we needed. From the start, we all agreed that we wanted to continue to work with Nitro, even though we'd be on a different label, Nitro would be involved. After a few months of research, we decided on Dreamworks as our new home based on a few important things. First and foremost, we're able to keep the complete artistic freedom and control that we had at Nitro; in other words, we can make the music we want and no one can tell us otherwise. Second, Dreamworks is a privately-owned label that is free from a lot of the corporate bullshit that other labels face. Third, our good friend Luke Wood works there, a guy who completely understands what we're about, and played a large part in our decision to go there. So that's the big news. We know that you guys have always had faith in us and trusted us to make music that we're passionate about, and we'll continue to do just that. Those who truly understand us will know that none of this will ever change us or our music. We're sure many of you have questions or comments about all of this so we'll be doing an online chat through our website to

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<sup>40</sup> It is perhaps worth mentioning that, following AFI's decision to construct a personal message to their fans in light of acting in a manner that might have been perceived as selling out, subsequent much-beloved punk acts opting to engage in similar criticism-inducing deals - such as Rise Against (Punknews.org, 2003) and Anti-Flag (Anti-Flag website, 2005) crafted similarly-themed messages for their assumptive disgruntled subculturalist fan-bases.

answer them. Thanks... Love, Davey, Jade, Hunter, and Adam

As might be expected, those replies posted in response to the bulletin were largely unkind.<sup>41</sup> Though the majority of responses concerned themselves with the hypocrisy inherent in signing with a major label just weeks after being publicly affiliated with statements serving to suggest that this would never occur, select responses took issue with the ‘strategies’ which they felt that the band were trying to employ within their statement. *Punknews.org* user ‘punky’ (2001, p.28) took particular grievance with the band’s claim that, “‘Dreamworks is a privately-owned label that is free from a lot of the corporate bullshit that other labels face’ Oh I feel so relieved now...Dreamworks is just like nay other major, and FUCK OFF TO AFI for trying to tell us otherwise”. An anonymous poster (2001, p. 7) admits to considering it “cool of Dexter to take all of AFI's heat and let the blame go to him, cause without this ‘excuse’ they are using about being too big for Nitro (what a bunch of crap), they would be called sell outs in a second!”. Yet another anonymous user (2001, p. 20) offers a comment concerning,

the hilarious statement: "*our good friend Luke Wood works there, a guy who completely understands what we're about, and played a large part in our decision to go there.*" Well, i refer you to Steve Albini : "*After meeting "their" A&R guy, the band will say to themselves and everyone else, 'He's not like a record company guy at all! He's like one of us.' And they will be right. That's one of the reasons he was hired.*" Ah, its all falling into place...

I wish to highlight the manner in which each of these replies, in its own manner and to varying degrees, seems to criticize the band, less for signing with Dreamworks than for concocting what is taken as a fraudulent story concerning the impetus for the move and striving to conceal speculation concerning the ‘true’ nature of the corporation under which the group was newly contracted. Though the statement issued by the band in no way conceals its objective of assuring those so concerned that the major label transition will in no way translate into the creation of ‘in-authentic’ art, the zeal with which the aforementioned subculturalists deconstruct and dissect the bases on which the band asks that their audience’s faith rest assured exudes little effort to veil something which registers as *betrayal*. In light of this, it must be kept in mind that the Dreamworks deal was announced very shortly *before* the band was featured on the cover of *Alternative*

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<sup>41</sup> Above and beyond that, Punknews.org user ‘major\_scam’ (2001) even offered a post meant to manufacture suspicion that those responses voiced in support of the signing were, in fact, Dreamworks employees attempting to quell the impression that the fans had been perturbed.

*Press* magazine, and one may thus assume that these responses were tempered by the fact that, though the group had signed to a major, there was little in the way of grounds on which to assume that they would successfully be thrust onto the mainstream radar.

### 6.2.2 *The Hot Topic Distribution Deal: Fashion, Co-optation and Illegitimate Fandom*

By the same point the following year, and despite having released nothing in the way of new material, the band had already garnered so large a following as to have attracted its second *Alternative Press* cover appearance on the January, 2004 edition, replete with a glowing article proclaiming the band's then as-yet untitled impending major label debut album the most anticipated of the year (Downey, 2003:38). The corresponding photography also served to suggest that the band - or, more specifically, vocalist Davey Havok - was in the process of undergoing something of an aesthetic transition: having abandoned the devilock and the ghost-white pancake make-up formerly attributed to his on-stage persona, Havok was now found to don thick mascara and sternum-length black hair that, curiously, manages to partially drape just one eye in all but one of the featured photographs.<sup>42</sup> Though the band drew some criticism in the wake of founding *The Despair Faction* - an AFI fan-club that demanded its members pay for the pleasure of induction (user 'childofpunk76, Punknews.org: 2002) - the band did not draw its second wave of *pronounced* subculturalist criticism, until an anonymous *Punknews.org* user (Punknews.org, 2002) submitted a bulletin announcing that AFI harboured plans to release a limited edition ten-inch 'picture disc' vinyl record that could only be purchased through two exclusive avenues. One such avenue was through the band's website. The other, however, was through Hot Topic retail outlets, a chain founded by Orv Madden in Westminster, California in 1989 for the sake of capitalizing on the prevalence of the fashion accessories made popular by those artists propelling the 80s 'hard rock' industry. According to the biography offered on the Hot Topic website, the company inevitably "found a niche[,] and its name was music-influenced accessories. Whether it was fingerless gloves like Billy Idol or glam metal bootstraps like Poison, music was definitely the driving force behind teen fashion" (2008). By the mid-90s, the mall-based outlet had transformed

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<sup>42</sup> Over the preceding years, it is of prudence to note that Havok would reinvent his personal image in drawing from a variety of tropes pulled equally from gothic and 70s-glam fashion. One might wish to imagine a number of looks that pull, from varying degrees, from the Cure's Robert Smith and Ziggy Stardust-era David Bowie.

**Fig. 6.1: The aesthetic evolution of AFI's Davey Havok; Left October 2003 (Saskatoon); Right August 2007 (Calgary). Photos courtesy of Ryan Jackson.**



itself from a retailer on the perpetual brink of folding to a lucrative company by focusing its attention solely on providing youths with music-based attire and, eventually, “the underground cartoon, cult movie and comic book scenes. It was a unique culture they could call their own, and it was difficult to find merchandise from these licenses” (Hot Topic Website, 2008).

Suffice it to say, the prospect that the band had developed a distribution deal with a mall-based outlet that also specialized in *Care Bears* merchandise did not sit well with elements amidst the *Punknews.org* community. Though the bulletin announcing plans for the record drew little in the way of responses,<sup>43</sup> the pleasant review as contributed by *Punknews.org* contributor

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<sup>43</sup> One notable exception comes courtesy of Punknews.org user ‘Timis’, replying simply with, “woo-hoo...”exclusively in Hot Topic stores”....all i have to say is WOW, how did punk or whatever you want to call it come to this??????

JanelleJ (2002) served to incite a number of vindictive comments from a largely anonymous pool of *Punknews.org* users,

The Goth Topic sucks. I've never been there, but thats where my poser little sister goes to buy her Brody Armstrong shirts. AFI only selling their music there proves what corporate slime-balls they must be (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2002).

I'm not a big AFI fan, but only selling this at hot topic is really wack. That is exactly what punk rock should not be about. I remember what AFI said when they went to a major label, something along the lines of how they wouldn't change and the label will be good for them. If being forced to or agreeing to only selling something only at the most ridiculous example of corporate punk is for the better...then...I can't think how to finish that line with something clever. Either way, what a joke (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2002).

ok, for one: davey havoc and the rest of afi have a contract with hot topic. hot topic gives them free clothes/makeup/blowjobs/whatever...i read it in an interview with davey. so that's probably why the album is there. doesn't make it any cooler, in fact, it makes it 10x lamer. think about it, it has nothing to do with dreamworks - it has everything to do with afi...isn't it funny to see all the davey lookalikes nowadays at the shows? black clothes, fishnets, makeup, devil locks or davey bangs, and ALL of them either wearing afi or misfits shirts (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003).

Each of these posts can be taken to indicate a burgeoning subculturalist concern with both the character of the distribution channels that the band elected to employ in disseminating the *336* record and the types of adherents the band is catering to in doing so. The first post speaks volumes on the specific types of consumers he or she believes to frequent Hot Topic locations in referring to the retailer as 'the goth topic'. The author characterizes the chain as a site that specifically caters to inauthentic subculturalists such as his 'poser little sister'. In professing to be an authentic subculturalist in implying that he or she has not (and would not) set foot in the establishment themselves, the fact that AFI has elected to establish a distribution deal with the retailer is taken as proof that they are 'corporate slime balls' by virtue of having taken brazen initiative of marketing their artistic output directly through an outlet that primarily caters to 'goths' and 'poser little sisters'. The second post, on the other hand, invokes reference to the band's personal statement regarding the Dreamworks recording contract in regarding the Hot Topic distribution deal as further evidence of the group's facetiousness. In taking position as a defender of punk morality (and, by extension, that of an authentic subculturalist), he or she characterizes Hot Topic as 'the most ridiculous example of corporate punk' in trying to highlight the overarching

gravity of a direly problematic possibility: that a major label recording contract might now be taken to necessitate exclusionary distribution agreements with ‘illegitimate’ retail outlets. By this line of logic, signing with a major label might now be taken to signal that subcultural artistic producers will be forced into forging alliances with corporate merchandise retailers or, perhaps worse yet, can be taken to signal the artists’ willingness to forge such alliances. The final excerpt, which might be taken in partial response to the former, strives to place blame for the Hot Topic distribution deal solely with the band itself in referencing a presumed interview in which Havok concedes authorship of the arrangement. What is most interesting about this case is the manner in which the author derogatorily characterizes AFI as a band who are willing to co-opt their own punk values for the sake of procuring free clothing, make-up, and sexual favours; they have, in other words, not only sold out their ideals in exchange for free stuff, but stuff that will only further inflate their implied concern for their own image (and tantalize the sexual pleasure that they purportedly derive from doing so). In essence, then, this post can be taken to strive toward characterizing the band as either *prostitutes* or *predators* who extract sexual gratification from the power that their emergent fan base confers unto them. The poster also takes pains in subtly problematizing this fan base in denoting, first of all, their tendencies toward replicating Havok’s image (the ‘black clothes, fishnets, makeup, devilocks or daveybangs’) and, second, their proclivity for conforming to very specified styles of dress (AFI and Misfits shirts, each of which might be assumed to have been purchased at Hot Topic locations) while attending the consecrated space of the live concert experience.

Alas, it can be said that choice selections from the subcultural response to the release of the *336* record denote the gradual emergence of a discourse serving to identify and explicate a multiplicity of problematic initiatives that might threaten the sanctity of the established subcultural field. There is the threat as posed by major record labels that might force their artists to enter working relationships with illegitimate corporate entities or, worse yet, the threat posed by artists who might willingly construct working relationships with illegitimate corporate entities. There is, of course, the pressing problematic posed by corporate entities like Hot Topic; companies seemingly intent on mass-marketing those cultural products long used as marks of distinction – of being ‘in the know’ in regards not only to ‘underground’ cultural producers, but ‘underground’ merchandizing outlets - within the subcultural field to inauthentic populations of *mall shoppers* ostensibly taken to be less interested in their subcultural significance than their aes-

thetic value as fashion accessories.<sup>44</sup> Finally, there is the concern surrounding the fact that this union between subcultural artists and corporate forces has likely bolstered the ranks of problematic ‘outsider’ populations; those who might buy products once used in denoting a keen subcultural awareness at any major shopping centre and utilize the concert as a sphere in which to assert their fanaticism for particular artists by altering their appearances in like manner.

### 6.2.3 *The Sing the Sorrow Review: Devaluation on the Basis of Orthodoxy Offended*

When AFI finally released their Dreamworks debut, *Sing The Sorrow*, on March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2003, *Punknews.org* celebrated the occasion by posting a review as compiled by ‘theundergroundscene’ (2003). Once having asserted authority in granting the album a credible review - admitting to being a fan of their back-catalogue, and especially those albums released after guitarist Jade Puget joined the band in 1997 - the reviewer elects to offer a brief paragraph that serves to explicate his personal situation in approaching the album,

If you weren't on your knees, crying, holding your head in your hands when you first heard that AFI had signed to a major label, you're a liar. None of us wanted to believe it, but we figured that they deserved it, for being such a hardworking band, releasing great CD after great CD continuously. When the songs "Now The World" and "Reiver's Music" were released on the Internet and on vinyl only available at Hot Topic (::shudder::), it was a shock, at least to me, how bad this band sounded. Their music was boring, and vocalist Davey Havok, an amazing vocalist in the past, never sounded worse. The songs were just...bad. So now it's a little over a month until this CD which I am currently reviewing comes out, and my expectations for it have severely dropped. When I finally got my hands on it, my subpar expectations proved to be correct. This isn't the AFI that I knew. This isn't the AFI that I wanted to hear. This AFI sucks.

Though it cannot be substantively argued that the band's affront against subcultural orthodoxy might have subconsciously served to taint the manner in which the reviewer approached the album, I do wish to draw attention to how reference to these affronts frames the remainder of a review that primarily serves to bemoan the dissolution of the band's ‘edge’ and, with it, their

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<sup>44</sup> The term ‘mall punk’ has long served as a means of stigmatizing those who would purchase the merchandise of ‘underground’ artists at mainstream retail shopping centre locations. Though I am not aware of any attempt to provide a history of the term, I personally became aware of it by virtue of the band Jughead's Revenge and their 1996 album, *Image Is Everything*. The title-track of the album, which heralds “fashion punk [as] the latest thing”, serves to problematize those “plastic as hell” punk subculturalists, complete with “new store-bought punk wear”, who render themselves “a billboard” for those corporate entities so identified as rendering ‘punk’ a superficial trend by virtue of their initiatives to exploit the subculture.

authenticity.<sup>45</sup>

Curiously, the majority of those among the *Punknews.org* community who professed to harbour a considerable distaste for the album very rarely did so while citing the Dreamworks deal as their primary grievance. In judging from a considerable portion of the eighty-six user responses posted on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March (a number that would swell to 144 by the end of March 13<sup>th</sup>), one of the most popular routes of criticism lay with characterizing the particularistic nature of those listeners who expressed, or were *assumed* to exude, a pronounced fondness for Sing The Sorrow and, now, the band themselves,

It's ok...not bad by any means...but nothing special...very "controlled". Hearing my 18 year old little sister and 13 year old little brother blasting it in their rooms kind of detracts from me really taking it seriously. I guess that's just my problem, not AFI's. (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003).

There are many times on this album in which davey havok manages to sound like a girl...i've realized what is lacking about the new direction AFI is constantly headed. This music isn't honest at all... [Havok is] going out of his way to be "goth" because he thinks that "goth" is cool and it will make the kids like him more, and it works, in its own little creepy way. This music is so unenthusiastic and overproduced to fit some image that they've created for themselves. The first time I saw the "days of the phoenix" video, I honestly thought it was Orgy, and there's something fundamentally wrong with that. (Punknews.org user 'Dubar', 2003)

what happened if dave became a woman? you know, a transsexual? would all his fruity male fans with their black nailpolish and goth girls still swoon over him during shows? (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003).

I give this baby a "10" because it is the funniest CD I've heard all year...my basic contention with AFI was their tendency to take themselves waaaayyy too seriously and their use of over-flowery Edgar Allen Poe meets Jim Morrison purple prose that although it sounds nice and pretty it doesn't really say anything and isn't really all that relevant now is it?...That having been said, I'm glad goth fashion and music exists because it gives me something amusing to laugh at. Angsty teenagers across the globe can play dress up and pretend that they have magical powers and mope around the malls while bemoaning the fact that they didn't grow up in the 17th century and why doesn't anybody like them? I guess their just so far advanced from the "herd" that no one can understand them. It is their blessing and their curse to know so much more about the universe than the pathetic mortals down below. (Punknews.org user 'fuckarmageddon77', 2003).

Taken together and with those statements having come before in regards to the 336 album review, one can gather that the vocal contingent of subcultural traditionalists were well on their

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<sup>45</sup> It is important to note that this review, and the negative comments which followed it, inspired the creation of a glowing counter-review from Punknews.org contributor 'Jonathan' (2003). The gross majority of this review concerns itself with lambasting those contributors and users who took factors beyond the actual worth of the music into consideration in constructing unsavoury positions.

way to characterizing AFI as a band who had not only tailored their image and musical output toward amassing success with extra-subcultural listeners, but a particularly problematic cross-section of listeners. The first poster discriminates against the band on the basis of the fact that they have found favour with his eighteen year old 'little sister' and thirteen year-old little brother; cultural consumers who presupposedly deplete the value of the artistic work on the sheer basis of the fact that they are an eighteen year old *female* and a *thirteen year old*, respectively. The second poster, likewise, bases their criticism regarding the fact that the music isn't 'honest', in large part, on the fact that it facilitates an image meant to appeal to the same 'creepy' goth 'kids' who, it is insinuated, supported Orgy during their brief tenure as a popular act. The latter pair of responses are considerably more pointed in their characterization of the contemporary wave of AFI fanatics. The third poster suggests that, should Havok become a transsexual (with the insinuation being that he already acts like one), it would prove to have little impact beyond rendering the 'fruity male fans' who 'swoon' over Havok during shows heterosexual and, by extension, the 'goth girls' who do the same homosexual. The latent implication of this comment would seem to posit that the band now exclusively cater to a fan base who solely gage an artist's merits on their aesthetic attractiveness or, to put it bluntly, gravitate toward the live performance as a means of indulging in a queer sexual thrill.

The final response rather eloquently pulls on a number of the stereotypical traits evoked in identifying, and stigmatizing, the subcultural other having emerged in the wake of AFI's success, and it does so in a manner best forecasting the emo kid folk-devil representation as yet to emerge. By this account, the band are proclaimed guilty of taking themselves too seriously while blatantly endorsing tactics meant to exude the impression that they are creating 'gothic' art of a substantive value and, thus, producing art of no value at all. By the author's estimation, that pocket of cultural connoisseurs most likely to buy in to the illusion that AFI's artistic output is substantive does not extend past that global population of 'angst-ridden' teenagers endowed with proclivities tailored toward 'playing dress up' and 'moping around the malls' (where, it is vaguely implied, they are likely frequenting the Hot Topic). The remainder of the effort that the author exudes in stereotyping the quasi-vampiric, adolescent AFI fanatic who has taken to surfacing amongst the subcultural spheres would almost seem to insinuate that *they* are, in fact, the greatest threat facing the consecration of the sub-field of restricted production and the subculture having long functioned to facilitate it.

It is prudent to note that the subculturalist discourse emerging in response to the release of AFI's *Sing the Sorrow* album can be taken, in various instances, to constitute the gradual construction of a stereotypical representation of *another* subcultural 'other'. Though it shares many of the attributes correlated with the 'emo kid' stereotype as developed in response to the *Seventeen* article of August 2002 - in each case, these stereotypes focus on alleged-to-be emotionally imbalanced adolescent populations who threaten the legitimacy of various subcultural conventions - the specified target of the March, 2003 representation harbours some decidedly unique features. The subcultural 'other' that the latest stereotype targets purportedly draws one's inspiration in dress and musical taste less from illegitimate reservoirs of subcultural knowledge than from the traits expressed by one specific band and the merchandise offered by one specific retail chain. In considering the 'emo kid' representation as facilitated by the subculturalist discourse emerging in the wake of the "Am I Emo?" photo-spread in chorus with the 'emo kid' representation as problematized by the collection of newscasts we considered at the onset of this thesis, the obvious question might stand as follows; how did the representation so granted constitution in August of 2002 merge with the representation coming into formation in March of 2003? I would suspect that this transition might be better explicated and understood if we, once again, concern ourselves with the continuing evolution of *Alternative Press Magazine* and, more specifically, the nature of both the magazine's content and the character of those bands which the publication would aspire to 'invest' in.

### **6.3 The Evolving Character (And Function) of *Alternative Press Magazine***

According to Mike Shea, the unprecedented success that *Alternative Press* had managed to garner in 2002 inspired the publication to strive toward forging a deeper relationship with its devout readership in a concerted effort to allow that "that same sort of intimate connection between fan and musician would be felt within the pages of AP" (Shea, 2005: 54). By his account, the most crucial stage of the process of fostering such a connection demanded that the editorial staff,

Let go of the reigns...usually, music editors single out what they perceive to be 'quality music' (oddly most of their picks echo what the music-publicity hype machine happens to be selling at the time), while the majority of readers are on a different page altogether. In a relationship like this, the critics are the 'experts', while the readers are just the poor, huddled masses that don't know any better. So, instead of telling our readers we knew better, we turned over the magazine to our readers and let them give the orders...you see us say within these pages all the time

that this is your magazine, and it really is (Shea, 2005:54).

It is not entirely clear, however, whether Shea speaks of handing the ‘reigns’ over to the *Alternative Press* readership in terms of *coverage* or *content*. In regards to the latter, it is perhaps of note to mention that, in charting the evolution of a number of *Alternative Press Magazine*’s monthly features, the publication appears to have begun catering to a decidedly adolescent audience during this time period. The *AP Readers Poll*, for one, provided an opportunity whereby the magazine would post a series of questions concerning themselves with a particular topic on their website and provide readers the opportunity to appear in the magazine should they take the time to submit their responses. Though earlier incarnations of the featured question could be considered to reflect issues appearing pertinent to a broad audience of more mature subculturalists - such as, “Have Independent Record Stores Become Obsolete?” (Simon, 2003a: 25) or “Once An Addict, Always An Addict?” (Simon, 2003b: 31) - subsequent polls, such as “Is It Harder to be Dumped or Do the Dumping?” (Simon, 2004a: 29), “Have You Ever Cheated In School?” (Simon, 2004b: 23) and “Does Abstinence-based Sex Education Work?” (Heisel, 2005: 22-24) might lead us to deduce that *Alternative Press* had come to perceive itself as a publication catering to a decidedly adolescent audience.

Late 2003 also marks the onset of a period in which *Alternative Press* began experimenting with a number of fashion-based features. The October, 2003 edition included a picture spread (Alternative Press, 2003: 54-57) wherein the band The Sounds effectively garnered coverage from the magazine by modelling products from clothing manufacturers such as Dickies Girl, E.C. Star, Hot Topic, Hurley, and others. Curiously, similarly themed spreads would not resurface until July and August of 2004, wherein the bands Tsunami Bomb (Alternative Press, 2004a: 71-76) and Sugacult (Alternative Press, 2004b: 55-60) would likewise donate their modelling prowess before the feature was seemingly abandoned altogether. It was replaced, however, with a number of features - like the September, 2004 edition’s “Back To School (2K4) Gear Up” (Alternative Press, 2004c: 61-65) and the December, 2004 issue’s “We’re Totally Stocking You!” holiday gift guide (Burgess and Simon, 2004: 81-86) - which provided a plethora of images of clothing, fashion accessories and technological goods, the identity of their manufacturer, and their retail price. It might also be prudent to note the shifting nature of the magazine’s advertisers: whereas the average 2003 edition typically featured up to five advertisements for shoe and

clothing companies (namely, Vans, Dickies, Atticus, Role Model, and Made), issues toward the latter portion of 2004 consistently feature additional advertisements from clothing companies of the likes of Level 27, Strhess, Vision Street Wear, Ordinary Clothing, Clandestine and Pitchfork Hardwear.

Given *Alternative Press* magazine's perceptible shift toward serving as a site of subcultural knowledge that not only predominantly catered to 'problematized' adolescent crowds, the fact that it exuded an apparent resolve to serve as a willing channel through which clothing companies might attempt to cater to this 'market', I wish to speculate that those pre-established anxieties concerning the co-optation (and marketization) of the subcultural field, and the particularities of those populations that might be gravitating toward it, encountered some degree of subtle aggravation and reinforcement during this period. Nevertheless, I must admit that, were *Alternative Press* magazine's developing role as a medium through which clothing companies might affiliate their brand with subcultural position-taking to have been *explicitly* denoted by vocal subcultural traditionalists (and I've found no evidence to suggest that it was), it would have been well overshadowed by the development of a trend that was explicitly deduced as being extremely problematic throughout reservoirs of subculturalist discourse: namely, that of the procession wherein a significant number of highly revered subcultural artistic producers began signing deals with major record labels.

### *6.3.1 The Iconic Exodus and the Reinforcement of the Multiplicity of Crises*

*Alternative Press* Magazine's choices in coverage granted those artists who would come to be affiliated with the emo pseudo-genre their first instance of notable press exposure (and served to foster their affiliation with the emo pseudo-genre in the first place); a secondary initiative would appear to have positioned long-established artists amidst the punk and hardcore underground. In an apparent effort to aspire to once again becoming a "punk rock fanzine" (Shea, 2005, 46), a significant proportion of its 2002 era cover slots were granted to such pop-punk acts as Sum 41 (AP #165), Good Charlotte (AP #172), A Newfound Glory (#173) and, in a shared cover appearance, Blink-182 and Green Day (AP #167); one and all being inarguable 'punk' acts who had already committed to major label deals long prior to their esteemed cover appearances. However, as this trend continued into 2004 - with cover features on the Distillers (AP #176) and Rancid (AP #180) - a burgeoning trend whereby esteemed punk artists featured prominently

within the magazine began to sign major label contracts, which attracted growing subculturalist concern. Beginning with the July announcement that Rancid had come to a curious ‘distribution’ agreement with Warner Records (Punknews.org, 2003a) and in closing with the December announcement that Dreamworks had signed political punk band Rise Against (Punknews.org, 2003), the *Punknews.org* online community became rife with discussions concerning both the climate of artistic integrity within the punk subculture and the sense that attempts were once again being made to render punk rock a mainstream genre:

All of these bands signing to majors has made me wonder, these are bands that people think typify punkrock in our time, they're held up as icons. *If bands like RA who are supposed to be what the scene is all about are selling out (and they are selling out to a major) what does that say about the scene?* The fans make such a thing of selling out but most of the bands will jump at it when they get the chance, its all so false. Serves anyone idiotic enough to worship rancid, RA, AFI right though. The scene is a sinking ship (Punknews.org user ‘sincerely me’, 2003b).

WHATEVER TO THESE GUYS! *I guess cuz hypocrites like AFI and Rancid sellout it becomes okay for the rest of the scene to turn their back on the ideals at the core of the punk movement.* These guys will now be making money for one of the BIGGEST corporations in the world. A corp. that spends many of it's resources on ill deeds. Oh they'll candy coat any way they want, but the fact is that they're a part of a machine that is not aligned with the way that most punks feel. *Now they want to cash in on us...Thanks again to hypocrites like AFI for making selling out an acceptable option* (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003b).

[Quoting a Rise Against lyric] "You're the new revolution/The angst filled adolescent/You fit the stereotype well" *These are the kind of kids that'll see you guys on MTV, buy your album at Hot Topic and start beating up people at your shows, mistakenly thinking that they're attending a Korn show.* You never were my favorite band, but I guarantee I cannot stand behind this act. Here's to the memories. Fuck off, you capitalist pigs (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003b)

i don't know what to say. dreamworks is out to sign every band ever referred to as punk it seems. i guess we're gonna hafta drop the major label pretention eventually cuz it looks like punk is going mainstream...(Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003b)

Once again, these posts denote a climate of anxiety concerning the integrity of the punk subculture’s foundational ideals and the suspected presence of an initiative by which mainstream forces are orchestrating the co-optation of the subculture. The subculturalist reaction, in this case, would appear to boil down to discursive initiatives that strive to identify and stigmatize those artists perceived as rendering ‘selling out’ acceptable (most notably, in these cases, AFI) while, simultaneously, constructing a representation of the type of problematic subcultural ‘other’ that might be expected to gravitate toward the subcultural field as result; namely, the ‘kinds of kids’

who might see Rise Against in MTV, procure their albums at Hot Topic, and poison the consecrated sphere of the live performance by ‘mistakenly thinking that they’re attending a Korn show’ and, thus, engaging in mindless violence.

### 6.3.2 *The Rise of the ‘New School’ and the Emergence of the ‘Metalcore’ Pseudo-genre.*

Meanwhile, and in assumed correlation with *Alternative Press*’s initiative to hand its ‘reigns’ over to readers, the October 2003 issue (AP # 183) offered dual covers (one featuring the longstanding pop-punk band MxPx, the other the relatively new Drive-Thru signing, The Starting Line) meant to symbolize the magazine’s commitment to offering more coverage on the ‘new school’ of emerging musical acts. Though the magazine had continued to grant the cover space to fresh-faced ‘investments’ for the better part of that year - debut AP cover appearances had already been awarded to such acts as Taking Back Sunday (AP # 176.1) and the Used (AP #176.2); it would appear that the October, November and December 2003 issues were uniquely tailored toward asserting *Alternative Press* magazine’s reputation as the definitive source on notable, fledgling underground acts. However, as this particular era also marks the point at which Greenwald’s *Nothing Feels Good* arrived on the auspices of being the authoritative text on the emo pseudo-genre, it must be recalled that *Alternative Press* has been shown to take pains to assert their claims to such a reputation *without* invoking the term ‘emo’ and beckoning all of the negative connotations that the term now carried with it. Alas, the articles concerning the magazine’s cover artists for November and December - namely, Thursday (AP # 184.1), Thrice (AP # 184.2) and Brand New (AP # 183) - refrained from mentioning ‘emo’ altogether (save for the case of Bayer’s (2003) Thursday article, which did so only for the sake of submitting the term ‘screamo’ to degradation). Whether or not it would be fitting that we interpret *Alternative Press*’s aforementioned utilization of the term ‘post-hardcore’ as an alternative to ‘emo’ to be evidence of an escalating initiative whereby the magazine might annex an untainted pseudo-generic signifier into its lexicon; it is nonetheless of note that the publication began “testing the waters” with features focusing on a number of supposedly burgeoning sub-genres during this same period. The November, 2003 issue, for example, featured Jason Bracelin’s (2003) expose on the current state of the Goth music subculture; a piece to be soon thereafter followed by Downey’s (2004c) brief February, 2004 feature on a pre-supposedly emergent genre coming to be known as ‘metal core’.

In the context of the coverage that *Alternative Press* had extended to such bands as Avenged Sevenfold (McHugh, 2003), Bleeding Through (Downey, 2004a) and Atreyu (Downey, 2004c), 'metalcore' was described as a sub-genre which fused heavy metal, melodic hardcore, and punk elements into a broad-ranging musical style. In judging from the photographs offered to complement coverage of each band, however, it would have been very curious were readers not to consume each article with the impression that metal core also denoted a specific fashion that seamlessly fused the more sensationalistic tropes associated with punk and 'metal' dress (such as the devilock and the 'fauxhawk') with the neo-gothic aesthetic around which AFI had, to this point, inspired something of a trend. In essence, before having developed anything resembling a sonic identity, the term 'metalcore' quickly came to be used to denote bands who uniformly dressed entirely in black, took conscious care in attending to their hair styles and - seemingly without exception - indulged in applying black nail-polish and eyeliner; traits that would appear to factor heavily in the manner in which sections of the *Punknews.org* community would react to their subsequent 'breakthrough' albums (Punknews.org contributor 'FortyMinutesWest, 2003, 2004; Punknews.org contributor 'Aubin', 2003).

It is amidst the user replies to one of these albums - Atreyu's second, *The Curse* (2004) - in which we find a collection of user comments aiding in the construction of a pejorative pseudo-conceptual signifier meant to suffice as a derogatory label. I might argue that the term in question - 'fashion-core' - sufficed as a means through which subcultural traditionalists might strive to corrode any claims to subcultural 'authenticity' that these bands or, more importantly, their fans, might assume themselves to possess. I consider a number of them here in chronological order:

wake the fuck up people ... these guys are not hardcore ... i repeat ... they ARE NOT hardcore they are fashionXcore at it's best ( Punknews.org user Mikeinflames, 2003).

Let's just end this, okay? \*The "fashion" "core" kids look stupid. White studded belts, painted finger nails, girl jeans, and stupid ass haircuts.Lots of songs about suicide and girls by bands who must have a member with at least ONE nautical star tattoo (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003).

couldnt have said it better myself whoever you are. 'punk' and 'hardcore' these days is all fashion. the kids are fucking dumb. I remember going to suicide machine/less than jake shows and shit back in the day. NO ONE cared about their hair except for the few dipshits that would dye their or have a mowhawk. i get sick at shows now (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003).

[quoting a previous post] "By the way...what in the fuck is fashion core?...forgive me for not

putting the X in between but i dont know what the fuck the x stands for in the first place" Fashioncore or however you want to write it is more to describe kids than music. You know all those kids who listen to hardcore like Atreyu and all dress the same (tight pants, black stylized hair, eye liner, tight hardcore band shirt, pink, jack purcells or all black converse)? Those are fashion core kids (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003).

One might note the process through which the concept of ‘fashion-core’ is built upon and expanded with each subsequent instance of subculturalist discourse. The first post merely functions to state its case, however devoid of any elaboration it might be, that Atreyu is a ‘fashion-core’ band and classifying the group in any other manner is a misguided exercise. The second post builds upon the preceding statement by explicating the unique properties of fashion-core bands (they have ‘lots of songs about suicide and girls’ and exhibit a taste for trendy-cum-cliché tattoo designs) and the stylistic particularities of the ‘fashion-core kids’ - replete with ‘white studded belts, painted finger nails, girl jeans and stupid ass haircuts’ - who support them. The third post, crucially, extends a comment concerning the manner through which the subcultural field has been detrimentally altered (‘punk’ and ‘hardcore’ these days is all fashion’) by the presence of such ‘fashion-core kids’ and the bands alleged to have inspired their practices; and we are to take it that their numbers have so swelled (and practices become so unseemly) as to move this ‘authentic’ subculturalist to illness. Finally, the fourth post is careful in advancing the declaration that ‘fashion-core’ is a term less used in meaning to describe bands than an identifiable block of adherents who support certain bands. While this *Punknews.org* user is careful to grant Atreyu the credit of being a ‘hardcore’ group, he or she ultimately locates ‘fashion-core’ in those patterns of uniform dress that their adherents endorse; ‘tight pants, black stylized hair, eye liner’ and so on.

I wish to dispel any suspicion that these threads of subcultural discourse could not have been suspected to herald any bearing on the manner in which those beyond the discussion boards of the *Punknews.org* community conceptualized this wave of ‘metalcore’ bands in noting the manner in which the issue of ‘fashion-core’ factored into a 2004 *Alternative Press* interview (Downey, 2004: 94-96) with Atreyu vocalist Alex Varkatzas. The article, entitled “Core Values” and tagged with the by-line “Hardcore! Metalcore! Fashioncore! Whatever you want to call

it...”, vies to assert an air of subcultural legitimacy in citing the burgeoning debate between traditionalism and this new wave of aestheticism within its opening paragraphs,<sup>46</sup>

And so the metalcore debate of style-versus-substance continues, with Atreyu (and fellow Southern Californians Eighteen Visions, Bleeding Through and Avenged Sevenfold) right in the centre of it. Back in the day, the dudes in Slayer wore Jams and ripped T-shirts while hardcore kids rocked Champion hoodies and Krishna beads. The new breed fuses both styles, looks slick and hip, attracts more fans *and* pisses the diehards off (Downey, 2004: 94).

That portion of the interview in which Downey probes Varkatzas into discussing Atreyu’s declaration as a ‘fashion-core’ band is also of note, as it cites (or, perhaps, strives to *incite*) a climate of hostilities between the Atreyu faithful and those subcultural traditionalists serving as the band’s critics:

**Lately, a few bands have made it their stance to preach that styled hair, nail polish and make-up have no place in the hardcore scene.**

I think the fact that people are talking about it means they’ve lost things to talk about. Its such a non-issue. All right, you wear athletic shoes, bootie socks, camouflage shorts and a hoodie from your favourite band from ‘98 who wasn’t that good to begin with - that’s not a style of dress? That’s just ‘keeping it real’? But if you wear tight jeans and give a fuck about your hair, that’s ‘fashioncore’?...if you’re going to talk shit on us because we wore make-up on two tours, then great, we’re a ‘fashioncore’ band...As far as the make-up thing, I’m over it. Some of us wear it, some of us don’t, but you can’t really talk shit about it, because Motley Crue wore make-up! (Downey, 2004: 94).

I would argue that the significance of this passage rests with the manner through which Varkatzas, albeit off-handedly, assumes the role of being a concrete representative of the alleged ‘fashion-core’ movement. Over the course of his response, the subject essentially accuses the established hardcore scene of being irrelevant (the fact that the subculture would heatedly condemn such a ‘non-issue’ as fashion illustrates that it lacks any grounds on which to discuss any-

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<sup>46</sup> It is perhaps also important to note that one cannot help but cull the impression that Downey himself is largely critical of Atreyu’s credibility; the article’s introduction closes with an explication of the interview-to-follow that reads “Ryan J. Downey rounded up singer Alex Varkatzas (admittedly ‘three sheets to the wind’ before sound check’) for a little chat about vampires, make-up and why Black Sabbath sucks, but Pantera rules. Go figure”. The insinuation here is that the shallowness of Varkatzas’s art and image finds reflection in his inability to appreciate substantive metal legends like Black Sabbath while attesting fandom for Pantera; a band largely looked upon as inauthentic and morally questionable at the time. This consensus would, of course, change following the 2004 murder of Pantera guitarist ‘Dimebag’ Darrell Abbot.

thing of actual significance), of being hypocritical (in pointing out that those hardcore tropes centring around a lack of discernable fashion constitute a fashion in and of themselves) and - perhaps most importantly - of possessing an inability to adequately deter Varkatzas and his band from endorsing their chosen means of practicing self-expression through the practice of affixing them with this derogatory signifier (as evidenced in the albeit begrudging acceptance of the 'fashion-core' label).

Thanks in large part to this interview, and doubtless others like it, the 'fashion-core' representation - and by extension, the 'fashion-core kid' representation - comes to be granted a measure of reification as a substantiated subcultural force. That which began as a derogatory stereotype amidst select reservoirs of subculturalist discourse (the *Punknews.org* website) is effectively absorbed and used as a topic point by a niche-mediated cultural knowledge producer (Downey, writing for *Alternative Press*) who frames the discursive construct as referencing a tangible force with the aid of the testimony of one of the movement's alleged progenitors (Varkatzas). Not unlike Greenwald, then, Downey frames the 'fashion-core' movement as a self-actualized contingent of fledgling subculturalists being endowed with a pronounced distaste for the orthodox conventions governing the subcultural field, a critical stance regarding the means of 'position-taking' promoted therein, and an implied agenda to change the nature of the 'game' through the active practice of operating in accordance with alternative 'rules'. It is also worthwhile to mention that, in the interview excerpt supplied here and elsewhere throughout the piece, positive references to glam-metal icons such as Motley Crue and Poison effectively serve to give the reader a sense as to the identity of that long-past subculture of music connoisseurs from which the 'fashion-core' bands might pull their dispositional inspiration.

#### **6.4 The Rise of My Chemical Romance and the Fusion of the 'Emo Kid' and 'Fashion-Core Kid' Stereotypes.**

To this point, then, it might be said that the 'fashion-core kid' stereotype had supplanted the 'emo kid' as the most significantly problematic construction of a subcultural 'other' threatening the consecration of the subcultural field. Whereas the latter served to problematize the erroneous niche-mediated reinvention of an established subcultural pseudo-genre and the 'mindless

population' of 'sensitive' adolescents that such coverage was ascertained to be catering to, the 'fashion-core kid' served to reference a convergent force of subcultural threats: the mainstream music industry's colonization of the punk 'underground', the co-optation of certain tropes of homogenous subcultural style and the reinvention they were undergoing, and the popularization of a bevy of artists who either implicitly or explicitly sufficed in transgressing, challenging and restructuring the longstanding conventions of orthodox subcultural practice. However, until June of 2004, there was no pretence under which these diverging representations might slowly begin to conjoin and, in doing so, take on an increased aura of representational force. I would argue that such an environment came to reveal itself with the rising popularity of My Chemical Romance, a band that best harboured the widest range of those shared qualities - aesthetic and otherwise - of which both manifestations of subcultural stereotype were constructed for the sake of condemning.

On August 31<sup>st</sup> of 2003, *Punknews.org* contributor 'katie4213' (2003) submitted a news bulletin meant to notify the online community of a message having been found on the My Chemical Romance website,

Dear friends, Let this be a declaration and a threat. This is how I wanted to write this, just having played a show, with everything on fire. My insides, my brain, and in the pit of my heart it burns...something is happening. There is a change. Not in music but in ourselves and in you. There are bands that have more to say to you than selling t-shirts from their personal clothing company. So frequently, especially when a band signs to a major label, they say "I want to change music. This is going to be the next Smells Like Teen Spirit." This is bullshit. People cannot change music, its music that changes people. It is bigger than you and me put together. It's a neutron bomb with the detonator set on "kill" waiting for you to push the button. This is an evolution and you can be part of the change or stuck eating your own shit on a quest for fire. About respect: We were never on an endless search for it, like some Holy Grail or Noah's fucking Ark. If I wanted respect I would be a father. I would have children and raise them to take care of me when I'm old and hooked up to machines that keep me alive. Music is a message. The message is more important than the messenger. People ask us what we have to say and my answer is to find out for yourself. This is not a copout. If you find out for yourself it means more to you. About elitism: If for one minute you think you're better than a sixteen year old girl in a Green Day t-shirt, you are sorely mistaken. Remember the first time you went to a show and saw your favorite band. You wore their shirt, and sang every word. You didn't know anything about scene politics, haircuts, or what was cool. All you knew was that this music made you feel different from anyone you shared a locker with. Someone finally understood you. This is what music is about. Things are about to change for us...for all of us. From the kids who supported us at the start to those that are here now. We will always be an Eyeball Records band. The support, dedication, and love from that label got us where we are right now - and we did it as a family. I wanted to be the first to tell you before the gossip and the hearsay, I want to shout it from the street-lamps to the coils, in every fucked up slum, where every seedy club lives and breathes. We are coming to your town. We are taking back what's ours. We're all in this together...And by the way...we've signed to Reprise and we are fucking ready for

the world to hear us scream. Xoxoxo, My Chemical Romance (Punknews.org, 2003).

It goes without saying that this statement aspires not only to announce the band's major label signing, but also to frame it as a conscious movement to offend the subcultural aristocracy and berate the manner in which it had moved toward marginalizing blocs of subcultural 'others'. It serves as something of a decidedly sensationalistic manifesto asserted by a group of artists who would admittedly appear to be aspiring to *eradicate* the hierarchy having long structured the field of subcultural participation through operating as a band that invites its listener to foster an unconditionally intimate relationship with their art - assuming they do not stand amongst those 'elitists' having lost grasp of what music is truly 'about' by virtue of minding such trivialities as 'scene politics, haircuts, or what was cool'. Though posted mid-2003, in other words, this statement condemns the elitism having emerged in symbolically marginalizing the proverbial 'sixteen year-old girl in the Green Day t-shirt' while simultaneously foreseeing - and condemning - the preoccupation with aesthetics that would soon after prove to emerge.

We might suspect that the manner in which this statement extends its forewarning of an 'evolution', or the onset of a force through which the band might 'take back' what is 'theirs', might inevitably read as more than a mere 'threat' for the subcultural traditionalist against whom it would appear to be directed. It furthermore reads like a text meant to self-actualize and celebrate the contingent of subcultural others to whom it refers while indulging in some of those taken-as-unsavoury dispositional traits having been affiliated with the 'emo kid' stereotype. With quips like 'my insides, my brain, and in the pit of my heart it burns' and 'We are coming to your town. We are taking back what's ours. We're all in this together...', the band might have been perceived to be indulging in the pseudo-poeticism and self-aggrandizement elsewhere problematized in both the subcultural responses to AFI's lyrical turn<sup>47</sup> and Tyangiel's depiction of the typical 'emo' band; thus providing grounds for eventual debate as to whether My Chemical Romance strove to empower that marginalized population of 'emo kids' or that marginalized population of 'fashion-core kids'. Inevitably, and by virtue of the subcultural discourse which would be generated around the band's first major label album, *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* (2004), each of these representational constructs would come to be congealed as if they constituted one

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<sup>47</sup> See comments regarding the *Sing The Sorrow* album review (Punknews.org contributor 'theundergroundscene', 2003) for examples.

unitary entity.

Curiously, the hostility that the contingent of subcultural traditionalists had developed in regards to the group did not surface until a review of the album, by 'colin' (2004), appeared on *Punknews.org* on the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, 2004. The unflattering review - which describes the album as, "very hooky (in a dark, Hot-Topic-sellable way)...shallow, unoriginal, overproduced and yet fun in a disposable and commercial way" (Punknews.org contributor 'colin', 2003) - holds the distinction of being one of the few album reviews to inspire a significant number of user responses even *years* after its release.<sup>48</sup> It is amidst these user-generated responses wherein the 'emo kid' stereotype and the 'fashion-core kid' representation, slowly but surely, converge and intertwine:

kids these days are getting blindsided by all this pop-post-hardcore-emo crap that it's like the explosion of drive thru records/pop punk of 5 years ago, but this time it's on major labels and really starting to ruin anything left of the 'scene.' i totally blame bands like this for the "fashion defines status in a scene where status shouldn't really matter" trend. thursday, okay, good band, stop ripping them off already and do something new (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2004).

This album is so awesome because ummm ok, we're emo and we have cool song titles. If you're 14 and have a hard time understanding why you have no life other than a close-minded view of music and lifestyle, then surely this is for you. No doubt this may be catchy, but you lose on the originality battle. No originality whatsoever on this. Vampires, bats, and heart-breaks. All good topics idiots (Anonymous Punknews.org user, 2003).

[Quoting a pervious comment] "Colin u jerk, don't review music u don't understand idiot..." i'm going to be a little biased on this comment and say you're probably under the age of 17, i haven't met anyone over that age who substitutes 'u' for 'you.' it's an extra two characters. and, believe it or not, i 'understand' it, if what you are referring to is one of teh following things: a) the emo / post core / screamo trend b) the concept album c) the faux goth post punk yet singalong song ( Punknews.org contributor colin, 2003).

It is important to note how the author of the first excerpt, another assumed subcultural traditionalist of the opinion that the mainstream co-optation of the sub-field of restricted production has effectively 'ruined' the 'scene', affiliates My Chemical Romance with both the 'pop-post-hardcore-emo crap' style of music and the 'fashion defines status in a scene where status shouldn't matter trend' or, in so many words, both the 'emo' movement and the 'fashion-core' movement. The second post is unique (to those excerpts provided here, but not in the context of the majority of derogatory posts made amidst the *Punknews.org* discussion threads) in that it vies

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<sup>48</sup> At the time of this writing, the last response to have been posted was added to the running discourse on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, 2008.

to ridicule the band's supporters by facetiously framing portions of itself as being authored by one of their own. While this poster serves to mock those who support the group on the basis that they are 'emo and have cool song titles' - particularities of taste that are purportedly becoming for a fourteen year-old - he or she ultimately identifies the band's use of themes more becoming of those neo-gothic 'fashion-core' bands in debasing their utilization of themes such as 'vampires, bats, and heartbreaks'. The final example is especially unique, and might be perceived as carrying the most weight in framing the manner in which the band (and their fans) are conceptualized by fellow subcultural traditionalists, because it is authored by none other than the very critic having written the original review under discussion. Aside from chastising the poster to which he is replying (in large part for being suspected of being 'under the age of 17'), 'colin' also succeeds in reinforcing the band's affiliation with both 'the emo / post core /screamo trend' and 'faux goth post punk'. In doing so, this micro-mediated subcultural knowledge producer effectively reinforces the perception that My Chemical Romance represent a group who have merged the unsavoury elements of the 'emo' pseudo-genre with the unsavoury aesthetics having become popularized within the 'fashion-core' movement.

Shortly after *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* was released, and just as it had done with AFI and, years previously, Nine Inch Nails, *Alternative Press* began 'investing' heavily in My Chemical Romance; first with a generous interview with vocalist Gerard Way in the August edition (Simon, 2004c: 68-70) and, with the December edition of that same year, the band's first cover appearance - and a rare nine page feature article (Simon, 2004d: 128-38). By this point, the band had begun to undergo something of a quasi-gothic 'aesthetic' shift that the band's documentary film, *Life On The Murder Scene* (2006), would eventually attribute to the want of a quasi-theatrical image denoting the band's determination to exude the aura of being a unique, and unified, cultural force. Nonetheless, a number of the problematized 'fashion-core' tropes re-emerge in this December 2004 feature; uniform black dress, some attention to hair stylization, and the utilization of eye-liner - by Gerard Way - are all present and accounted for.

Unlike the bands that I have heretofore considered in this chapter, however, My Chemical Romance quickly evolved into a bona-fide mainstream cultural phenomenon. The band's video for the second single from the *Three Cheers* record, "Helena", appeared to have struck a

**Fig. 6.2: My Chemical Romance; Summer 2007. Photo courtesy of Ryan Jackson.**



chord with the video consuming public and music video broadcasters alike with its depiction of a funeral which essentially dissolves into a ballroom dance. Shortly thereafter, *Spin* magazine granted the band a cover appearance – and a glowing article penned by none other than Andy Greenwald (2005) – for its June, 2005 edition. The band would soon later go on to dominate 2005 *Spin* reader’s poll, and thus granted accolades for being ‘band of the year’, having the ‘song of the year’ and standing as the ‘best live band’ of the year (Anderson, 2005). By the dawn of 2006, in other words, that group having come to be recognized as the epitome of all that was inauthentic in the sphere of subculturalist music – by virtue of their aestheticism, the content of their art, and the make-up of their decidedly devoted fan-base – were very quickly beginning to resemble a force that was entirely capable of making good on its threat to upset the logic of hierarchization within the subcultural field; a growing consensus perhaps best explicated in the following *Punknews.org* post,

Okay. Here we go. I liked My Chemical Romance. I thought there music was good, the sound wasn't oh so emo, and it was just...well, really good. It was alt. at it's best....during that time. But then they hit TRL and people began to watch...lots of people. I hate when this happens to good bands. Now we are forever doomed to see 13-15 year old males and females alike dress

in all black wearing red ties and/or bullet-proof vests. You're not 50 Cent, no one's going to shoot you or Gerard whatever-his-last-name-is. Last night MCR played a sold out concert here in St. Louis, and may I say that it was god awful. MCR is the boyband of this time frame. Instead of ditzy pop/prep girls, you've got ditzy pop punk/"goth"/whatever they call themselves girls that want to marry the lead singer and love him forever and screaming as loud as possible trying to fight their way through a half-assed mosh pit. Did I mention that there were parents at this concert telling lots of the children not to move around so much so they could keep an eye on their kids? Yea fucking right. N.O. Okay, so the first thing we noticed was the obvious: Reggie and the Full Effect and Alkaline Trio were way better. Simply because people don't know them as well, and because the mob of the newly formed 14 year old teeny bopper punk girls didn't stampede the floor yet...In short, the concert was god awful. And to sum up, Punk/Rock/Alt/Emo/Screamo/Metal.....it's all the new pop [and] it's gotten to the point where it's not enjoyable anymore in almost all aspects. It's been flooded by bi-sexual 14 year old girls who are looking for a high school identity, and it sucks. big time. (Punknews.org user Angel-Jin, 2006)

This excerpt is notably significant in that, above and beyond alluding to the 'multiplicity of crises' and reinforcing the 'emo kid' folk-devil representation, it comes perilously close to granting the symbolic economy of subcultural capital explicit mention. In so many words, 'Angel-Jin' would seem to lament the fact that the band's appeal for 'thirteen to fifteen year olds' with a predilection towards engaging in decidedly deplorable practices (by the author's account), in pairing with the band's aesthetic turn, has effectively 'spoiled' the 'investment' of fandom that they had extended to My Chemical Romance before they became popular. In many ways, then, this post can be taken to allow that its' author 'save face' not only in subjecting My Chemical Romance and its adolescent fan-base to discursive degradation by asserting that she or he still possesses the subculturalist 'aesthetic disposition' – and therefore some claim to subcultural authenticity – in testifying to the fact that the opening acts 'were way better...*simply because people don't know them as well*'.

It might be pertinent to note the prospect that the overarching conventions of subcultural practice and the significance implicitly granted to the symbolic economy of subcultural capital entail something of a curious *disciplinary power*. If one might recall my brief overview of Foucault's postulations (this volume, Chapter 3) regarding the processes wherein a power, largely dispossessed of any grand architect or cognizant orchestration, might facilitate dispositional normalization within a given population by virtue of processes wherein 'subjectified' actors will enact a normalizing, disciplinary power upon *themselves* as well as each other; the prospect that fields of subcultural participation, though spheres dedicated to the resistance of normalizing powers by the account of some theorists, are nonetheless spheres in which *different manifesta-*

tions of normalizing powers are simply given precedence, might warrant further analytical attention.

## **6.5 From Subcultural Problematization to Wider Ridicule: The ‘Emo Kid’ Folk-Devil Transcends the Subcultural Field**

To this point, I have considered instances of subcultural discourse that serve to indicate the presence of a subcultural folk-devil in reference to which anxieties concerning the multiplicity of forces that potentially endanger the sanctity of the subcultural field could be referenced and problematized. I have shown that a large contingent of *Punknews.org* community users made pejorative reference to the ‘emo kid’ and ‘fashion-core kid’ stereotypes in reinforcing the validity of concurrent narratives regarding those subcultural producers having renounced orthodox patterns of subcultural practice, the mainstream co-optation of the subcultural sphere, and the fact that an insurgent population of subcultural ‘others’ had effectively succeeded in devaluing the ‘authentic’ subculturalist’s live concert experience and, by extension, the sanctification of the subculture itself. Furthermore, I have highlighted instances of niche-mediated and micro-mediated reportage through which the subcultural traditionalist might have been extended the impression that this contingent of problematic artists and fledgling subculturalists might have been undertaking conscious initiatives through which to offend and devalue both the traditional conventions of position-taking through which subcultural authenticity had been determined, but the symbolic hierarchization that such authenticity claims had functioned in facilitating. In so many words, then, I have characterized the emergence of two antagonistic forces within the subcultural field, with the first striving to marginalize an identifiable bloc of emergent subcultural adherents in a likely bid to preserve the manner in which subcultural capital (and, with it, power over the field) had traditionally been distributed. The other might be conceptualized as a force striving to empower those marginalized subculturalist populations through challenging, or circumventing, the established ‘symbolic economy’, and the significance of ‘authenticity’, in either refusing to conform to its expectations or threatening to incite their revision and replacement. I have, in essence, explicated the presence of a struggle over the power to demarcate the nature of the field as primarily engaged in by ‘orthodox’ subcultural traditionalist and ‘heretical’ artistic producers; a struggle in which the former strove to deter the progress of the latter by means of

constructing a derogatory representation meant to identify and marginalize that subcultural ‘other’ through whom these ‘heretical’ actors contracted their means of amassing momentum. I have, furthermore, conceptualized this representation as a folk-devil by virtue of its implicit function of promoting hegemonic allegiance to traditionalist ethos while stigmatizing those practices attributed with their transgression.

There is a great wealth of subculturalist discourse that succeeds in demonstrating that hostilities regarding this population of subcultural ‘other’ increased exponentially<sup>49</sup> as the success of My Chemical Romance not only increased,<sup>50</sup> but paved the way through which a contingent of other groups resolved with endorsing similar aesthetic traits (such as Fall Out Boy and Panic! At The Disco) and proclivities of artistic content (like Aiden and From First to Last) achieved comparably notable success. It is also of interest to note that, as the aesthetically and dispositionally unique bloc of music fans which the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil representation was designed to assail garnered recognition by spectators beyond the borders of the subcultural field, so too was the representation itself warranted the ability to become an extra-subcultural discursive force; a pre-designed ‘body of knowledge’ that might be used in framing the manner in which this burgeoning population of aesthetically unorthodox adolescents might be perceived.

To be frank, there is no ‘commonsensical’ explanation for the relative synchronicity with which ‘underground’ artistic producers began depicting different variants of the ‘emo kid’ representation within their works. I would posit that, as the ‘emo kid’ representation took on a greater notoriety beyond subcultural spheres – and, at the same time, garnered recognition as a representation denoting both cultural inauthenticity and emotional instability – artistic producers in search of a means of increasing their profile within their respective circles might have deduced the presence of an existing audience for artistic works that might further contribute to their degradation. I now wish to explicate the process through which the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil representation began to find depiction in a number of such noteworthy cultural products whose authorship cannot be *explicitly* traced back to the field of punk subcultural production, and which thus only

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<sup>49</sup> Notable Punknews.org discussions that lend credence to this exponential increase can be found in considering ‘crazytoledo’s’ (2005) review of Aiden’s *Nightmare Anatomy* album, ‘colin’s’ (2006) review of My Chemical Romance’s *The Black Parade*, and the increasingly derogatory nature of those negative comments posted in response to those annual announcements concerning themselves with the bands features on the Rockstar Taste of Chaos tour (Punknews.org, 2004; 2005; 2006).

<sup>50</sup> The *Three Cheers For Sweet Revenge* album went platinum in America at some point during 2005, a sales achievement far outstripping any of the other groups that we have encountered thus far.

reference a limited number of the internal crises that the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil referenced when utilized in the subcultural context. The remainder of this chapter focuses on a selection of the cultural products through which the ‘emo kid’ folk-devil representation came to be granted sensationalistic depiction, the assignment of an additional number of unsavoury traits, and dissemination throughout populations exterior to the field of subcultural participation. In making the transition from an entity largely contained within subculturalist discourse to a multi-modal representation designed to attract the derision of wider audiences, I argue that the subcultural rendition of the emo kid evolved into a representational construct suitable for annexation into the wider program of ‘representational politics’ against unconventional adolescent populations. I would thus wish to grant my preliminary focus to Steve Emond’s *Emo Boy* graphic novel (2006; 2007), Adam and Andrew’s “Emo Kid” song (2005), and the process through which the latter’s *Youtube.com* video equivalent (2006) inspired something of a trend wherein the ‘emo kid’ archetype was subjected to lampoon by way of a rash of derogatory internet parodies.

#### 6.5.1 Emond’s “Emo Boy”: The ‘World’s Saddest Saviour’

Poor Emo Boy -- he's unpopular. Unloved. He has no family. Not only does he need to deal with things like pondering suicide and questioning his sexual identity, but on top of that he's got these emo super powers that only seem to bring destruction and disaster, causing everyone to hate him more than they already do. His first love suffers a head explosion, the football team wants him dead, and he got an F in English. No wonder he's so depressed! (SLG Website, 2009).

In June of 2005, San Jose’s SLG Publishing began circulating issues of Steve Emond’s *Emo Boy*, a graphic novella concerning the exploits of a socially awkward fifteen year-old high-school student problematically endowed with “unpredictable emo powers” that, as the back-cover of the first volume of collected works explicates, serve to “confound his enemies and sabotage his own happiness” (Emond, 2006). In discussing his title character, Emond rationalizes his adoption of the term ‘emo’ in noting that, “[the character’s] highs are real high, and his lows are real low. He over analyzes and just feels too damn much. As you’ll see in the comic, there’s a constant monologue running in his head, the world is a bad poem” (Adams, 2005). The twelve-issue comic-book format run of the series was subsequently compiled into two anthological collections - the first of which was rather tellingly entitled, *Nobody Cares About Anything Anyway*,

*So Why Don't We All Just Die?* - in 2006 and 2007.

In terms of appearance and musical taste, Emo Boy might predominantly be taken to better represent the original 'emo kid' stereotype as constructed in response to the *Seventeen* article. The character is endowed with thick rimmed glasses, tight-fitting clothing and - in better keeping with the emo-kid/fashion-core kid mutation - tendrils of hair meant to obstruct one half of the face. He is obsessed with such bands as 'Cheezer' (an obvious parody of Weezer) and 'Sad Eyes' (a take on Bright Eyes; an acoustic project by Desperacacitos Conner Oberst harbouring similarities to Dashboard Confessional), is depicted as "painstakingly choosing every color and font face" in designing his website (Emond, 2006: 136), and recounts a melodramatic genesis story - revealed to be facetious, mind you - in which his entire family perishes by means of drowning, illness, or bear attack (2006: 26). Over the course of the series's story arch, Emo Boy's predilection to 'feel too damn much' manifest in powers that suffice in decapitating the recipient of his first kiss, assailing the front-man of 'Cheezer' - his favourite "indy-nerd-core-screamo-geek-punk band" (Emond, 2006:34) - with projectile vomit (in the midst of an impromptu competition to see who can 'out-emo' the other), indirectly inspiring a classmate to commit suicide in utilizing an English poetry assignment as an opportunity to announce his own plans to do so, and inciting a plague of "emo zombies" (Emond, 2007: 44) through the potency of his tears. The stories are punctuated by excerpts of Emo Boy's internal narrative - the aforementioned 'bad poem' of which Emond speaks - that serve less to propel the overarching themes than simultaneously disparage the character's self-absorption and utilization of the stereotypical tropes so affiliated with 'emo' lyrics. To quote Emo Boy in the series's first issue, "I retreat [from a failed band practice] and I look to the stars, as I so often do. My mind throbs and aches and pulses, my skin burns...infinite stars kiss my soul, each one healing an ache, a wound, a scar. Damage. And while my soul weeps the pain away, my body continues to hurt. While the stars kiss my soul...there's no one here to kiss me" (Emond, 2006: 17).

Emond raises an interesting point of note in regarding the curious fact that, while he "figured the indie kids would love [the series] because of the subject matter [while] the comics crowd wouldn't get it...instead the emo kids are trashing it without reading it, and comics people totally get it" (Adams, 2005). One might be so bold as to correlate this unexpected climate of reception to the fact that, though the "Emo Boy" text harbours qualities serving to reflect its relation with the subcultural 'emo kid' stereotype - such as his fashion sense and his taste in artists -

the work predominantly invokes and recycles tropes most commonly associated with a more generalized representation of the anti-social, overly-sensitive adolescent archetype. In essence, while the recipient possessed of a previous familiarity with the ‘emo kid’ representation might find their conceptualization subtly amended and revised in light of this ‘emergent information’ (this might be the first instance in which the ‘emo kid’ is explicitly affiliated with suicidal fantasies, for example), those unfamiliar with the pre-existing representation (and the subcultural power dynamics in the context of which it was constructed) might come to conceptualize the ‘emo boy’ as a new variation of that longstanding cultural narrative concerning the mentally imbalanced adolescent. In other words, we might posit that the introduction of the *Emo Boy* text served as a juncture at which the subculturalist narrative concerning the ‘emo kid’ stereotype, and more prevalent cultural narratives concerning emotionally unstable youth, were allotted a space in which to incite, interact with, and fundamentally alter one another within their respective spheres of primary pertinence. The subculturalist ‘emo kid’ representation was effectively broadened to now insinuate depression and a predilection toward self-harm; the wider representation of the socially awkward and superficially depressed adolescent was granted semantic revision as the ‘emo kid’.

It is interesting to note the presence of some evidence serving to suggest that, though Emond’s conceptualization of the ‘emo-kid’ primarily referenced that stereotype constructed in the wake of the *Seventeen* piece, a considerable number of SLG fans had already come to endorse the conjoined ‘emo kid/fashion-core kid’ representation by the time the *Emo Boy* series debuted. On the first of June, 2005, subscribers to SLG’s Livejournal bulletin page were invited to compete for a copy of the series’ first issue by taking photographs of themselves “at their most emo” and posting them as a reply to the announcement (SLG Publishing, 2005). Those photographs posted in reply constitute a bevy of submissions which reveal the persistence of two contrasting understandings as to what types of aesthetic traits the term ‘emo kid’ should be meant to imply; some participants conform to a number of the more ‘traditional’ tropes in emo fashion (the thick-rimmed glasses and unkempt hair); others mimic the use of facial-obstructing tendrils and the quasi-gothic application of facial cosmetics. In considering the subsequent release of Adam and Andrew’s “Emo Kid” song, a cultural product that solely references the ‘emo kid’/‘fashion-core kid’ hybrid and to which I now turn my attention, it would appear as if the initial ‘emo kid’ representation had predominantly been subsumed into its subsequent counterpart.

### 6.5.2 Adam and Andrew's "Emo Kid" and the Popularization of Web-Based Parody

There is, unfortunately, little in the way of information about Adam Christensen and Andrew Portner - collectively known as the comedic musical duo Adam and Andrew - beyond that which is offered on their *Myspace.com* page: that the duo have been self-producing and disseminating albums dedicated to their personal brand of 'college humour' and pop-cultural parody since 2005, and that they would appear to have garnered some notoriety by virtue of offering their work through such channels as *Myspace.com* and *Youtube.com*. We can also surmise that the group independently released their debut album, *Music Pimp\$*, in August of 2005 and, in doing so, offered what is perhaps the quintessential artistic product through which the post-hybrid 'emo kid' representation was to be granted equal measures of reinforcement, revision, and popularity. I speak here of "Emo Kid",<sup>51</sup> a song doubling as a cultural text that, I would argue, is deserving of extensive analysis.

The lead-off track of the *Musical Pimp\$* album, "Emo Kid" alternates between spoken-word passages - so fashioned as to be perceived as excerpts from a fictional web-diary entry, and enunciated with a pronounced lisp - and verse/chorus components delivered in a rap styling. Followed by a brief instance in which the prototypical 'emo kid' narrator seeks to establish the appropriate setting - "[Spoken] Dear Diary: Mood: Apathetic..." - the text proceeds to advance a caricature that, though pulling some inspiration from the derogatory stock of subcultural discourse, primarily associates participation within the 'emo culture' with homosexuality, superficial self-absorption, and tendencies toward self-mutilation. Below, I dissect the text and consider each portion in turn:

[spoken] My life is spiralling downward. I couldn't get enough money to go to the Blood Red Romance and Suffocate Me Dry concert. It sucks 'cause they play some of my favorite songs like "Stab My Heart Because I Love You" and "Rip Apart My Soul" and of course, "Stabby Rip Stab Stab". And it doesn't help that I couldn't get my hair to do that flippy thing either. Like that guy from that band can do.

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<sup>51</sup> As of January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2009, The song and its corresponding lyrics can be previewed in their entirety, at the duo's MySpace page: <http://profile.myspace.com/adamandandrewmusic>.

This spoken introduction would appear to mirror the subculturalist discourse concerning the homogenous nature of perceived-to-be inauthentic 'emo' artists. 'Blood Red Romance' is almost certainly a thinly veiled allusion to My Chemical Romance, and the run-down of similarly themed song titles - "Stab My Heart Because I Love You", "Rip Apart My Soul" and "Stabby Rip Stab Stab" - reflect upon the longstanding line of discourse concerning the oft-replicated artistic themes common among the bands propelling the 'emo/fashion-core kid' movement. The subcultural discourse finds further reflection by virtue of the fact that the speaker is resolved with contending that his 'life is spiralling downward' not only because of his inability to attend the performance, but because he has failed in 'getting his hair to do that flippy thing like that guy from that band can do' and, thus, emulating the aesthetic tendencies as endorsed within the pool of (largely indistinguishable) 'emo' artists.

In sum, the 'emo kid' is here characterized as one so inclined to base the personal valuation of his own life on his ability to mimic adequately the artists whom he covets and, thus, a representative of a youth culture that is based entirely around fanaticism, aesthetics, and - as the second spoken-word excerpt demonstrates - extending narrative concerning the dour state of one's life,

[Spoken] My life is just a black abyss, you know, it's so dark. And it's suffocating me. Grabbing hold of me and tightening its grip, tighter than a pair of my little sister's jeans...which look great on me by the way.

The dichotomy presented here - wherein the 'emo kid' indulges in an over-sensationalistic, quasi-poetic overview of how his life constitutes a 'black abyss' and, within the same statement, comments on how 'great' his sister's jeans make him look - can be taken to advance the notion that, though 'emo kids' dutifully work toward asserting their status as existentially-minded 'deep thinkers', their true attraction to the 'culture' is derived from one's ability to indulge in the adoption of (decidedly effeminate) aesthetic tropes. As far as the spoken narrative of the song is concerned, this latent commentary regarding the prospect that effeminate 'emo kids' are, in fact, latent homosexuals finds fruition in the final spoken passage,

[Spoken] My parents just don't get me, you know. They think I'm gay just because they saw me kiss a guy. Well, a couple guys. But I mean, it's the 2000's. Can't two - or four dudes make-out with each other without being gay? I mean, chicks dig that kind of thing anyways. I don't know diary, sometimes I think you're the only one that gets me, you're my best friend. I feel like tacos...

In lieu of merely reinforcing the ‘emo kid as latent homosexual’ subtext, this passage would almost appear resolved in striving to suggest that the ‘emo culture’ is so sexualized as to constitute a quasi-incestuous entity wherein it is typical for ‘two or four dudes to make-out with each other’ under the justificatory auspices that ‘chicks dig that kind of thing anyway’. Alas, one interpretation of the text might take it as suggestive of the prospect that the primary reason as to why the ‘emo kid’ feels misunderstood by his parents (a detail that also suggests that the speaker is an adolescent) stems from the fact that, unlike the speaker himself, *they* are cognizant of the overt homoeroticism evident in considering ‘emo kid’ fashion and cultural practice.

The manner in which the ‘emo kid’ inevitably looks to his online diary - or, the site so allowing that the speaker engage in a lengthy discourse regarding *themselves* - as the ‘only one that gets them’ and their ‘best friend’ can also be taken to offer an interesting comment on the narcissistic tendencies of ‘emo kids’: it subtly suggests that the popularity of web-logging stems from the opportunity simultaneously to self-insulate and self-explicate in an inherently facetious manner. What I mean by this is that, taken in sum, the ‘diary’ portion of the lyrics depict a character who, though seemingly in the process of explicating his innermost private thoughts, is actually advancing a self-narrative through which his fellow ‘emo kids’ will come to formulate their understanding of him and, hopefully, come to empathize with his life crises, commend his ability to express his mordant life philosophies in a poetic manner, and relate to the persecution he has suffered by virtue of his parents’ unsavoury judgement. In essence, then, the speaker might look to the diary as his ‘best friend’ because it suffices as a channel through which he can disseminate a characterization of himself to others without the requisite need to socialize with others and, by extension, encounter the self-narratives of others. It allows the ‘emo kid’ to foster a depiction of himself without running the risk of encountering conversation that does not concern himself, and thus facilitates the textual commentary regarding the fact that ‘emo culture’ revolves around the triplicate themes of aestheticism, homoeroticism, and self-obsession.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> It is arguable that a fourth theme - consumerism - briefly emerges with the final reference to the speaker’s sudden compulsion to consume tacos: a food imbued with a great deal of cultural significance in its native countries, but rendered an inauthentic approximation in the context of the North American fast-food industry. The subtext in this case: the ‘emo kid’ proclivity for mindlessly consuming inauthentic commodities runs straight through his tastes for artistic works, fashion, *and* cuisine. Suffice it to say, assuming such might be extending this text a little bit too much credit...

Finally, there is the case of the song's actual lyrics; a weighty collection of pointed derogatory comments serving to reinforce those aforementioned themes while, haphazardly, introducing additional themes alluding to considerable emotional instability and self-mutilation,

I'm an emo kid, non-conforming as can be / You'd be non-conforming too if you looked just like me / I have paint on my nails and make-up on my face / I'm almost emo enough to start shaving my legs / 'Cause I feel real deep when I'm dressing in drag / I call it freedom of expression, most just call me a fag / 'Cause our dudes look like chicks, and our chicks look like dykes / 'Cause emo is one step below transvestite / *Stop my breathing and slit my throat / I must be emo / I don't jump around when I go to shows / I must be emo*

I'm dark, and sensitive with low self-esteem / The way I dress makes every day feel like Halloween / I have no real problems but I like to make believe / I stole my sister's mascara now I'm grounded for a week / Sulking and writing poetry are my hobbies / I can't get through a Hawthorne Heights album without sobbing / Girls keep breaking up with me, it's never any fun / They say they already have a pussy, they don't need another one / *Stop my breathing and slit my throat / I must be emo / I don't jump around when I go to shows / I must be emo / Dye in my hair and polish on my toes / I must be emo / I play guitar and write suicide notes / I must be emo* / When I get depressed I cut my wrists in every direction / Hearing songs about getting dumped give me an erection / I write in a live journal and wear thick rimmed glasses / I tell my friends I bleed black and cry during classes / I'm just a bad, cheap imitation of goth / You can read me "Catcher in the Rye", and watch me jack off / I wear skin tight clothes while hating my life / If I said I like girls, I'd only be half right / *I look like I'm dead and dress like a homo / I must be emo / Screw XBox, I play old school Nintendo / I must be emo / I like to whine and hate my parents / I must be emo Me and my friends all look like clones / I must be emo*

(Adam and Andrew Myspace page, 2005; italics meant to denote choruses).

As the majority of these lyrics are self-explanatory - or, to put it another way, seemingly difficult to misconstrue - I wish to highlight a number of the assumptions that might be drawn in considering the references and correlations suggested throughout. First, it is arguable that the content referencing suicide and self-mutilation - such as 'cut my wrists and slit my throat' and 'when I get depressed I cut my wrists in every direction' - stems, first of all, from the manner in which the text draws a correlation between 'emo fashion' and 'goth fashion' (as 'emo' is described as being 'a bad, cheap imitation of goth') and, subsequently, upon what we might describe as those generalized cultural stereotypes concerning the Goth subculture.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, whereas it is arguable that cultural representations of the Goth subculture insinuate a *sincere* infatuation with death, the 'emo' kid suffices as a 'cheap' imitation by virtue of the fact that these tropes are merely used to assert one's facetious proclamation of being 'dark and sensitive, with low self-esteem'. Within the sphere of the 'emo culture', it is thus insinuated, adherents are

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<sup>53</sup> It is certainly the case, however, that some notable songs from the likes of AFI ("The Last Kiss") and Avenged Sevenfold ("I Won't See You Tonight, Part 1") contain first-person narratives that explicitly concern themselves with cutting and suicide, respectively.

prone to feign (or truly attempt) suicide not only on the basis of one's emotional instability, but because it is the most drastic means of being 'non-conforming as can be'.

The run-down of the typical 'emo kid' traits also grants us a curious mixture of practices most easily affiliated with the pre-hybrid 'emo kid' stereotype and the post-hybrid, neo-gothic 'fashion-core kid' stereotype. Though the aesthetics, the declaration of hobbies such as 'sulking and writing poetry' and the obsession with Halloween reference the latter,<sup>54</sup> the reference to *Catcher In The Rye* and a preference for 'old-school Nintendo' over 'X-Box' (i.e., 'vintage' gaming systems over their contemporary counterparts) succeed in referencing 'emo kid' traits as characterized by the "Am I Emo?" photo-spread in *Seventeen* Magazine. In any event, we might deduce that these qualities serve to reinforce the likelihood that the text culled *some* degree of its inspiration from the subculturalist discourse surrounding the 'emo kid' folk-devil; a postulation that perhaps garners its greatest amount of credence in the allusion to the practice whereby 'emo kids' 'don't jump around when they go to shows' - meaning, of course, that these lyricists had either attended shows in which they witnessed this (lack of) practice personally or, otherwise, foresaw grounds on which to frame this as a particularly unsavoury tendency.<sup>55</sup> Nonetheless, we might presume that one would need not be a subculturalist to construct a befittingly derogatory conceptualization of the 'emo kid' population should the "Emo Kid" song have sufficed as a cultural text through which to compose one's first impression: from homosexuality to sexually ambiguous trends in youth fashion, and from manic depressive tendencies to an unwarranted proclivity to affront a faux-sophistication, this text spares little effort in touching upon a multiplicity of those devices through which, one might attest, antagonistic groups have striven to stigmatize and disempower one another over the ages.

## 6.6 The Aftermath: *Youtube.com* and the Outbreak of Representational Politics

Though Adam and Andrew did not begin promoting what has arguably become the quin-

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<sup>54</sup> There are a number of particularities strongly meant to suggest that the duo are predominantly referencing AFI followers here; as all aesthetic traits can be found to have been endorsed by Davey Havok, the band demonstrated a particular affinity for Halloween with the release of the *All Hallows* EP (1999), and "Bleed Black" is actually a title of one of the songs featured on the band's *Sing The Sorrow* album.

<sup>55</sup> This particular complaint very closely resembles that of an anonymous Punknews.org poster in attempting to voice his or her complaints regarding the lack of proper show etiquette demonstrated by 'fashion-core' kids, "I saw a free [Atreyu] show with these guys...and all the kids in aviator sunglasses with white belts, Nightmare Before Christmas gear and lip rings were eating this shit up. *And not moving a goddamn inch.* (Punknews.org contributor 'FortyMinutesWest', 2003b: p. 64 from bottom; my italics)

tessential ‘unofficial’ “Emo Kid” music video until October of 2006 (Adam and Andrew Myspace.com Blog, 2006),<sup>56</sup> June of 2006 marks the debut of the infamous *Youtube.com*-based ‘fan video’ of the “Emo Kid” song, as posted by *Youtube.com* user ‘hillcrestswimmer’ (2006). An ‘unofficial’ video that the duo would later post on their personal *Youtube.com* page (*Youtube.com* user ‘adamandandrewmusic’, 2006), the feature boasts itself as having been compiled by a duo known only as ‘BatWingedFaery’ and ‘Pyramus0264’.<sup>57</sup> Without exception, the videos follow the song narrative by presenting a succession of web-based photographs of ‘emo kids’ (discovered by virtue of a google photo search under the descriptor, as the end credits attest) and various other images - including such items as a poster for the film *Rocky Horror Picture Show*, images of self-inflicted wounds and males kissing - where and when relevant. By the end of 2006, a multitude of *Youtube.com* users - including ‘silkfire’ (2006), and ‘beccarmagie’ (2006)<sup>58</sup> - had posted additional visual companions to the song, each of which was identical in narrative faithfulness and execution.

Though the most widespread means through which to publicly ridicule the ‘emo kid’ movement, the construction of unofficial “Emo Kid” videos was far from the only means through which select *Youtube.com* users sought to parody the movement in 2006. Two of the most popular examples of derogatory ‘emo kid’ centred media to have arisen during this time period are the mock-documentary “How To Be Emo” (2006) and the “Lars the Emo Kid” skit (2006). As the pair have attracted a combined number of viewings well beyond the six million mark between the date of their posting and the time of this writing (1,269,537 for the latter, and a *staggering* 4,903, 188 for the former as of January 13<sup>th</sup>, 2009), we might safely assume that their content indicates what themes and representational tropes were popular at this time. In addition to offering a brief synopsis of each submission, I wish to highlight the curious manner in which

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<sup>56</sup> This version was, in fact preceded by at least two previous versions, endorsing similar stylistic presentation and content, as posted by *Youtube.com* users ‘Cheshirecat632’ (2006) and ‘nonjumpingrabbit’ (2006) on January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2006 and June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2006 (respectively). However, as the rate of viewing that the ‘hillcrestswimmer’ version dwarfs that of both combined at the time of this writing - 1,321,504 viewings as compared to a cumulative 546,945 - I feel that there are grounds on which to regard the ‘hillcrestswimmer’ version the best representative of the trend.

<sup>57</sup> Or, these are the identities of the video’s architects as best as I can tell, as the ‘credits’ are provided on a poor resolution scroll of red text on a blue background and, therefore, considerably difficult to decipher.

<sup>58</sup> It is also of note that this particular rendition also prominently features photographs of AFI and My Chemical Romance, and might thus be taken as evidence that, though predominantly fashioned in a manner meant to besmirch the character of ‘emo kids’, these videos also aspire to subject those cultural producers so affiliated with the trend to derision in select cases.

each piece - not at all unlike the *Emo Boy* comic in contrast with the “Emo Kid” song - extends a sensationalistic depiction that either pulls primarily from the pre-hybrid or post-hybrid ‘emo kid’ representation.

#### *6.6.1 Billy and Lars: Contrasting Representations Toward a Unified End*

Posted on the 31<sup>st</sup> of January, 2006, the “How To Be Emo” video, a considerably well crafted parody of a 1950s instructional video as produced and directed by Christian Andrew Bretz, was posted on the *Youtube.com* website. The piece concerns itself with Billy, a nondescript high school student who is obsessed with another classmate named Kyle’s ability to successfully court women even though he dresses “like a square”. Of course, the film’s disembodied Narrator notifies Billy to the fact that Kyle is, in fact, ‘emo’, and will aid Billy in becoming ‘emo’ himself by offering a run-down of the music’s history, the culture’s etiquette, and the significant particularities of the style. In concerning itself with the evolution of the emo pseudo-genre, this text would seem to pull primarily from the Greenwald genesis narrative while subtly serving to criticize its legitimacy. As with the account extended by *Nothing Feels Good*, the “How To Be Emo” video identifies Rites of Spring as the pioneers of the emo sound and Sunny Day Real Estate as the band most representative of its contemporary nature. However, in lieu of paralleling Greenwald’s abrupt transition from mid-1980s Washington to early-1990s Seattle, the video bridges the gap in stating that, “of course, there were also a slew of other bands between 1984 and 1992...but they’re all forgotten, so we’re skipping ahead”; a statement that might be meant to critique the claims-to-legitimacy of those having pulled their ‘cultural knowledge’ from Greenwald’s (in effect) inadequate ‘authoritative text’. Shortly thereafter, the piece goes on to depict a conglomeration of South Park animation-style youths better representative of the post-hybrid ‘emo-kid’ representation while the voice-over narrative contends that ‘emo’ has gone mainstream, “[and] most emo kids see this as the end of the genre and will do all in their power to not let that happen”. Immediately following the statement, every depiction amidst the group swiftly engages in some form of suicide - some reveal razorblades and begin mutilating themselves, some self-immolate, one descends into the shot dangling from a noose - before the narrative continues, “...and this is how emo continues to march along”. The portion of the text so focusing on ‘emo’ music essentially suffices in ridiculing the expertise of the most widely heralded genesis narrative and successfully reinforces the correlation between emo fandom and self-harm;

two accomplishments rendered somewhat curious as the remainder of the text would seem to suggest that its primary directive lays with ridiculing the ‘symbolic economy’ that arose amongst those adhering to the *pre-hybrid* tropes of emo fashion and disposition.

According to the narration, Billy cannot truly become an ‘emo kid’ until possessed of the proper mindset, range of fashion particularities, and cognizance of emo ‘etiquette’. The Narrator impresses upon Billy that one’s identity is, “not based on how you perceive yourself, [but] more based on how others perceive you outwardly” before adding, “emo kids are supposed to be sensitive, open-minded individuals. Now, with that in mind, don’t do that”. Instead, Billy is instructed to survey his local thrift-store for authentic emo fashion accessories (best that they “smell old”), wear thick-rimmed glasses despite the fact that he doesn’t need glasses (the narrator posits, “most emo kids don’t”), and mind the Narrator’s assertion that, “no emo kid would be caught dead without his or her trademark dyed black hair”. Billy is also forewarned that his transformation into an authentic ‘emo kid’ demands that he avoid logical thinking (as it “tends to take away from some of your sensitivity”), extroversion (because it threatens to “make you look interested in something”) and “above all, avoid happiness - happiness is a cardinal sin in the emo culture”. It is furthermore suggested that Billy learns to “solve [his] aggression the emo way - through poetry”, practice slouching, replace his compact disc collection with vinyl, learn the proper concert-going etiquette of crossing his arms and looking disinterested and - once again - reverting from the X-Box back to the first incarnation of Nintendo. The piece closes upon the revelation that Billy harbours qualms in conforming to the final demand of emo authenticity: “[crossing] the boundaries between straight and gay,” as has his initial role-model Kyle. In essence, and in chorus with striving to mock emo fashion - primarily as depicted in the *Seventeen* photo-spread - the “How To Be Emo” video can be taken to parody the insinuation that ‘emo kids’ are a largely vapid collectivity who strive to construct ‘authentic’ images in a largely manufactured, homogeneous, and therefore inauthentic manner. Along the route, those correlations between the ‘emo culture’ and a number of problematic dispositions and traits - feigned disconsolation, homosexuality, and suicidal tendencies among them - are all drawn and reinforced *despite the fact* that the “Am I Emo” takes the pre-hybrid emo kid stereotype as its primary muse.

Subsequently, on March 12<sup>th</sup> of the same year, *Youtube.com* user ‘killjoy192000’ (2006) posted “Lars the Emo Kid”. Self-described as a dramatic skit as written by Paxton Gilmore and concerning itself with “A Gay emo kid's story as he stumbles through his house trying to find the

meaning of his existence” (ibid., 2006), “Lars the Emo Kid” depicts the character of its title - clad entirely in tight, black clothing and possessed of an overstated speech impediment - as he aimlessly parades through his home while indulging in a detailed explication of his innermost, and largely mordant, feelings and compulsions. Shortly after admitting that he’s “just so complicated” that the viewer could “never understand” him, ‘Lars’ pulls a toy handgun into frame, points it at his head, and professes that, “sometimes I like to pretend this is a real gun so I can put it to my head and kill myself because...its so emo” - after which he, naturally, simulates fellatio with the gun’s barrel. From thereon, the caricature boasts of his popularity on *Myspace.com*, offers a run-down of his favourite bands (unsurprisingly, Dashboard Confessional and My Chemical Romance warrant mention) and prances throughout his home in a manner that - curiously - mimics the stage personality of the Rolling Stones’ Mick Jagger. While depicted as engaging in an online conversation with a fellow ‘emo kid’, Lars responds to a question pertaining to his evening plans with, “I don’t know...Prolly just gonna sit at home and...cut myself” - to which his chat partner replies, “That’s cool - us emo kids are so deep that its unbearable”. The climax of the first instalment (indeed, it would be followed by two subsequent editions) essentially arrives when Lars cannot successfully log in to his MySpace page.

### **6.7 Concluding Thoughts: Fused Representations Fit For Network News Debut**

Though “Lars the Emo Kid” is somewhat unique in the context of those videos considered alongside it in that it does not appear to harbour any implicit purpose beyond assassinating the character of those perceived-as-being emotionally unstable ‘emo kids’ alleged to be prone to utilizing web-based communication channels. What these videos *do* share in common would appear to be an overarching initiative - on the part of cultural producers and consumers alike - to representationally disempower, or de-authenticate, the ‘emo kid’ population on two distinct bases: their tastes in *popular* (read: co-opted) music and fashion, and the *effort* that they are believed to expel in appearing *as if* authentic possessors of the ‘aesthetic disposition’; those naturalistic proclivities of ‘legitimate’ taste that Bourdieu identifies as that through which the field of cultural consumption reifies intrinsic difference and, thus, enforces hierarchical stratification. However, above and beyond depicting the process through which the ‘emo kid’ offends subcultural conventions of legitimate practice - such as proper concert-going etiquette, transplanting the subculture from physical spaces to cyberspace, supporting artists rendered ‘illegitimate’ in hav-

ing migrated to the sub-field of large-scale production, and generally perpetuating the co-optation of the subcultural field - these depictions also cater to the lowest common denominator in infusing their caricatures with a number of tendencies widely identifiable as traits that offend the conventions of cultural *normalcy*. By virtue of these depictions and those akin to them, the 'emo kid' folk-devil transcends its status of sufficing to denote a mere subcultural heretic; it also becomes a self-obsessed manic depressive (or a potential narcissist *pretending* to be manic depressive) and sexually deviant.

Stripped of any subculturalist cognizance as pertaining to the fact that post-hybrid 'emo fashion' is problematic primarily because it symbolises initiatives toward corporate co-optation, the popularity of the artists having offended (or exploited) the conventions of the field, and serves as the established practice through which to contrast between inauthentic insurgents and legitimate traditionalists, the inclusion of these traits ensures that these media products simply reinforce the gradual amendment of those culturally pervasive, and similarly derogatory, representations of problematic youth populations when exposed to non-subculturalist audiences. It is thus of little surprise that excerpts from the "How To Be Emo" piece, and a number of the 'fan-made' "Emo Kid" song videos, would warrant inclusion in a number of those news reports concerning the pressing dangers posed by the 'emo movement' in early 2007.

## Chapter Seven: Concluding Remarks and the Further Exploits of the Emo Kid Representation.

### 7.1 An Overview of the Analysis

In arguing in favour of the possibility that the ‘emo kid’ representation, as depicted by the WDAZ, Fox, ABC and CBS news broadcasts of early 2007, might not merely be conceptualised as a representation having been constructed for the sake of aggravating public anxieties concerning a problematic new manifestation of youth subculture, this thesis has investigated the potential validity of two central hypotheses. The first hypothesis regarded the possibility that the emo pseudo-genre, and its corresponding culture, were largely constructed by a bevy of cultural knowledge producers in aspiring to ensure their survival – while improving their positioning within - the highly competitive field of niche-mediated publishing. I have substantiated this line of inquiry in charting the process through which *Alternative Press* magazine annexed the notion of the ‘emo’ pseudo-genre from the lexicon of subculturalist discourse – where it had been utilized as both a means of discursively denying ‘authenticity’ and denoting it over the course of its history – whilst reinventing itself as a niche-mediated resource on notable ‘underground’ artistic producers. I have argued that the increased success that both the magazine and the artists it had ‘invested’ in succeeded in not only attracting the attention of the cultural ‘mainstream’, but popularizing a poorly-defined ‘buzz-word’ that subsequent media entities – including the magazines *TIME* and *Seventeen*, but most notably *Spin* alumni Andy Greenwald – would attempt to grant further constitution. In so doing, I argued that each contributed to an emergent ‘body of knowledge’ serving to identify – or, in the latter’s case, *self-actualize* – a corresponding ‘emo culture’ of ‘sensitive’ adolescents; a ‘movement’ ostensibly based around a homogenous fashion, a shared taste in music, and the ability to foster an ‘authentic’ connection with the artists celebrated within.

In conceptualizing music-based subcultures as Bourdieuan ‘fields’ wherein one’s claims to authenticity are predicated on the perpetuation of certain conventions of practice – conventions that might abruptly mutate should a considerable influx of competitors enter into the ‘game’ without a proper cognizance of its inherent ‘rules’ – I have advanced a second hypothesis concerning the prospect that the derogatory ‘emo kid’ representation, as featured in the ‘emo reports’, was granted genesis by virtue of the emergence of a micro-mediated subculturalist discourse which strove to problematize a number of forces so perceived as endangering the sanctity

of the field of subcultural participation and the perpetuation of those conventions adhered to within. Having considered instances of comparable precedence wherein both the Washington hardcore community and the national punk subculture reacted to perceived 'heresy', in part, through the creation of pejorative pseudo-generic designations ('emo-core' and 'neo-punk', respectively), I have demonstrated that choice excerpts of subcultural discourse, as provided by the *Punknews.org* micro-media website, are suggestive of a process whereby the niche-mediated constitution of the 'emo' pseudo-genre - and perhaps, more pertinently, the emo culture - invoked comparable trends in reactionary subculturalist discourse. It is this discourse through which a derogatory representation of a problematic population of subcultural 'others' - those perceived-to-be 'inauthentic' subculturalists who might threaten the consecration of the subcultural field by virtue of their sheer participation within it - began to warrant construction under the 'emo kid' designation.

I have charted the process through which this representation perpetually took on additional traits as an increasingly broad range of practices and consumption patterns came to find affiliation with those forces perceived to be endangering the sanctity of the subcultural field. I have noted how the subculturalist discourse serving to problematize the 'emo kid' population simultaneously serves to problematize the corporate forces of the mainstream culture and consumer-item industry; the major record labels so striving to expose a considerable contingent of noteworthy subcultural artists to wider audiences and the retail chains - like Hot Topic - intent on rendering their merchandise available in mall-based outlets across the United States. I have noted how the emo-kid representation underwent an aesthetic evolution in response to the manner in which choice subcultural artists - such as AFI and My Chemical Romance - seemingly resolved themselves with defying the conventions of the sub-field of restricted production in not only aligning themselves with these corporate forces, but subtly initiating the emergence of a movement wherein the adoption of a quasi-gothic aestheticism came to be perceived as a central component of fledgling subcultural practice. Combined, these forces threatened to initiate the corporate colonization of the subcultural field and thus threaten a movement whereby the traditional methods of procuring and deducing subcultural legitimacy might disintegrate, a series of processes that might not only irrevocably alter the overarching structuration of the field, but usurp the standing hierarchy of positions within.

In light of the implicit function of this ever-evolving representation, I have argued for its conceptualization as a subcultural ‘folk-devil’ in that it implicitly promotes field orthodoxy in condemning dispositional heresy; it functions to promote ‘proper practice’ and reinforce one’s allegiance to the subcultural ethos while, concurrently, serving as a weapon through which to instigate a program of representational politics against the problematic population as so designated. Finally, I have argued that this representational folk-devil inevitably came to be infused with a number of highly sensationalistic particularities that might be perceived as less a reflection of pertinent subcultural concerns than evidence pertaining to the emergence of initiatives whereby the ‘emo kid’ representation was allocated characteristics granting such currency as an extra-subcultural stereotype that might draw the condemnation of a broader palette of antagonistic populations onto this aesthetically homogenous adolescent collective.

In the process of explicating the process wherein the ‘emo kid’ made the transition from a niche-mediated construct to a subcultural folk-devil, this thesis has implicitly concerned itself with the creation and dissemination of knowledge and the power that these processes of knowledge construction impart upon those that would orchestrate them. We might posit that, in attempting to utilize their expertise in constructing a ‘body of knowledge’ on the emo pseudo-genre and its correlative culture, those niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers who so partook in their representational creation did so, in part, with mind duly paid to those power dynamics and hierarchical principles that functioned to shape the sub-field of cultural knowledge production. Whether one pulls from the work of Bourdieu or Foucault, it would appear to me as if creating *and* popularizing a pseudo-genre over which one might claim dominion as the sole source of ‘legitimate’ knowledge – and thus jurisdiction over the creation of truth, the dissemination of authenticity claims, and the sole ability to shape the ‘aesthetic disposition’ – is an exercise of power tailored toward ensuring the accumulation of *additional* powers, be that power manifest in economic, cultural, symbolic or social capital (and the authority that each might grant its possessor within the wider field). I would not, however, go so far as to extend the argument that this constitutes a *cognisant* initiative as undertaken by niche-media producers assumed to be duly aware of their ability to revise and reconstruct the character of those subcultural pockets to which they cater their information; Thornton’s deductions regarding the creative capacities of media coverage, though credible in my opinion, are crafted from the perspective of an outsider looking in. It might nonetheless be the case that those initiatives centered around accumulating

the manifestations of capital and, by extension, the authority requisite in assuring competitive competence in regards to the ‘game’ of improving and defending ‘positions’ in one field of social space can suffice in incurring unforeseen (and largely detrimental) effects in another. In sum, then, one might deduce that knowledge created as a means of achieving one end might unwittingly contribute to the emergence of a force – of a *power* – that flows through any and all of those fields which, though seemingly independent, are in fact intrinsically interrelated. This power, over which no one holds definitive possession or can wittingly claim authorship, can threaten to alter the power dynamics functioning to structure this network of fields in a number of decidedly curious ways. In reference to the case study at hand, this power was granted the capacity to migrate – from the sub-field of cultural knowledge production through to the sub-field of restricted artistic production and, concurrently, the field of subcultural participation – by virtue of the former’s role as the primary centre through which ‘privileged’ knowledge is granted consecration and dissemination.

As the ‘multiplicity of crises’ serving to endanger the sanctity of the subcultural field came to emerge by virtue of the creation of an emergent ‘body of knowledge’, so too it was through the creation of a reactionary ‘body of knowledge’ through which the subcultural traditionalists mounted a movement toward countering its ill-effects. The subcultural micro-media centre on which I have focused contains innumerable instances of discourse explicitly directed toward revoking the ‘legitimacy’ of the ‘buzz-word’ through which the sub-field of restricted artistic production was being extended mainstream attention: artists having undertaken initiatives to facilitate their further penetration of the mainstream, and subcultural ‘others’ attracted to the field by virtue of an artist’s success in doing so. Above all else, however, the excerpts of subcultural discourse that I have detailed herein share one subtle, but prevalent theme: the fact that the subcultural field was undergoing a number of unsavoury changes – as defined by and denoted in the processes through which the corporate mainstream was successfully colonizing the subcultural field - and those possessed of the ability to appreciate the resulting dissolution of subcultural sanctity were effectively rendered *powerless* in preventing its continuation. It is in this sense that the construction of the ‘emo kid’ folk devil may best be conceptualized as the product of a struggle - less a struggle between that bloc of subcultural traditionalists and those actors having either willingly or unwittingly endangered the sanctity of the subcultural field, however, than a struggle between actors vying *for stasis* (at least in regards to the longstandingly

dominant principles of subcultural hierarchization) and against a palette of *forces of change*. Nonetheless, it would appear as if the representation of the problematic subcultural ‘other’ was derived of context as its popularity grew, and it is ultimately difficult to deduce whether cultural products like Adam and Andrew’s infamous “Emo Kid” song and those *Youtube.com* videos created to accompany it suffice as subculturalist initiatives through which to further disseminate the stereotype or evidence meant to suggest that the subcultural field had already been revoked of their sole jurisdiction over its utilization.

It is also curious, and worth noting, that the vehemence of the subcultural traditionalists appears to have been directed at ‘traditional’ scape-goats – those subcultural ‘others’ so gravitating toward the field, the mainstream culture industry that so informed them of it, and those artists having further facilitated both of these processes in having resolved themselves with ‘selling out’ – as opposed to either the niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers who began granting the sub-field of restricted artistic production increased attention or, for that matter, the infrastructure of the sub-field of (sub)cultural production that - in some cases - explicitly welcomed (and extracted benefit from) the increased attention without committing the cardinal sin of forging major label alliances (or, at the very least, trying to conceal the fact that they had done so). Might one speculate that the directionality of these resistance initiatives serves to indicate that the subcultural field is largely oblivious to the constructive powers of the sub-field of cultural knowledge production? Or is it equally, if not moreso, likely that the nature of the targets of the phenomena detailed herein suggest a willing subcultural ‘obliviousness’ to the fact that the gross majority of ‘underground’ labels, promoters, publicists and artists sincerely aspire to achieve – and actively work toward attaining – some measure of commercial success and monetary profit? It is quite likely that directing criticism serving to question the ‘authenticity’, or covert intentions, of the *entire* sub-field of restricted production might, as Bourdieu ascertained, bring the presence of the ‘game’ of amassing symbolic capital (and, by extension, reinforcing the positional stratification therein) perilously close to the level of public consciousness; a potentially fatal prospect in a ‘game’ that might only survive should its operation be tactically denied by all involved. So too might attention then be granted to the distinct possibility that those corners of the sub-field of restricted cultural production from which music-based youth subcultures pull the artistic works that inform, reify, and shape their conventions is, in fact, not as divorced from, or

as fundamentally opposed to, the wider field of power as the subculturalists themselves would like to believe.

## 7.2 After the 'Emo Reports': Initiatives Meant to Quell the Panic.

One might deduce that the 'emo kid' folk devil's transition from a largely discursive construct to a popular target of web-based parody ultimately facilitated the process whereby the representation might be absorbed into the mass-mediated narrative on perpetually problematic adolescent populations; first with the February, 2007 WDAZ report, the Fox News and ABC reports the following March and, finally, with the CBS report in July. It is worth noting that, as all three of the mainstream network television station broadcasts featured excerpts from at least one of the 'unofficial' "Emo Kid" *Youtube.com* videos, and the ABC broadcast contained excerpts from the "How To Be Emo" instructional video, it is of little surprise that a bevy of micro-mediated subculturalists suddenly felt duly possessed of the impulse to circulate acknowledgment of the fact that the 'emo kid' representation was nothing more than a caricature through which select traits in fashion and subcultural 'position-taking' could be allotted ridicule and condemnation. In essence, and above and beyond problematizing the duly perceived mass-mediated agenda to incur a 'panic' surrounding the current state of North American adolescent culture, the subcultural response to the 'emo reports' indicates a willingness to profess partial responsibility for the construction of the representation in the face of overwhelming evidence sufficing to suggest that the joke had, effectively, gone too far.

In extending a similar proclamation of guilt - albeit through potentially counter-intuitive means - select actors within the sub-field of niche-mediated cultural knowledge production essentially aspired to constitute, and thus usurp the authority in further demarcating, a decidedly tamer representation of the 'emo kid' with the publication of *Everybody Hurts: An Essential Guide to Emo Culture*. Authored by *Alternative Press* alumni Leslie Simon and Trevor Kelley (2007), *Everybody Hurts* is a curious text that strives to detail the particularities of 'emo culture' - such as what books, films, television programs, and fashion traits the movement covets - in a manner that largely lampoons that readership to whom the magazine effectively extended the reigns in 2002. Its first chapter, for example, declares that the culture harbours a distinct 'ideology' that ensures that,

Even if the wrong person did one day wake up, head directly to Diesel, pick up some black fin-

gernail polish along the way, and then buy the entire Saves The Day catalogue online upon getting home, that wouldn't ever truly allow them to differentiate between that which is emo and that which is totally lame. See, emo-ness is something that you are born with, and even if emo fans do think exactly like every one of their friends, that's what makes them totally different. Well, at least compared to the rest of the world...(Simon and Kelley, 2007: 1-2).

As the chapter also offers a list of “core emo values” - including, “depression ...the foundation of the entire emo ethos”, “effort(lessness) [as] being emo is all about trying really hard to look like you don't really care” and “empathy [as] feeling other people's pain is crucial to being part of the emo community” (Ibid, 2007: 2-3) - it is difficult not to extract the immediate impression that it is a text less resolved with laughing *with* the ‘emo kids’ on which it focuses than *at* them. However, the text also harbours a curious tendency toward lampooning a sizable contingent of those artistic producers whom *Alternative Press* had ‘invested’ in since its movement toward ‘heresy’ in 2001. In addition to sections dedicated to extending mildly derogatory explications regarding what “worshipping some of today's most popular emo-band frontmen” - including Chris Carrabba, Rivers Cuomo and Gerard Way - ‘says’ about a listener (Ibid, 2007: 155), a number of illustrations, credited to Rob Dobi, caricature these same ‘emo-band frontmen’ throughout the entirety of the text. At first glance, the inclusion of illustrations of members of Fall Out Boy (p. 63), Avenged Sevenfold (p. 178) and a caricature of Davey Havok - perusing through the AFI merchandise provided at a *Hot Topic location*, no less - (p. 68) initially impart the impression that Simon and Kelley, not unlike that contingent of subcultural traditionalists before them, had developed a tendency to categorize *any* artist having amassed a notable degree of mainstream popularity as an emo artist. This tendency is, finally, granted proper contextualization with a brief, highly tongue-in-cheek passage dedicated to heralding *Alternative Press* as the “emo scene bible...one of the greatest music magazines in the world, and in the last five...the only music magazine that emo fans read on a regular basis” (Ibid, 2007: 143-44). I might posit that this passage essentially allows that Simon and Kelley admit that *Alternative Press* can be regarded as harbouring a great deal of complicity in inspiring the ostensible ‘emo movement’. This reading allows one to interpret *Everybody Hurts* as a text that alerts those interested in ridiculing the ‘emo scene’ that Simon and Kelley possess a ‘subculturalist disposition’ allowing them not only to appreciate that the ‘running joke’ is effectively ‘on them’, but that they, too, can contribute to the ‘joke’. *Everybody Hurts*, then, reads like an effort in self-ridicule that might function to extend its authors an air of ‘legitimacy’ by virtue of their willingness not

only to admit their role in inspiring the ‘emo kid’ manifestation, but illustrate a willingness to join in on its mockery. Ironically, this would appear to be the sole case in which the niche-mediated field of cultural knowledge production is derisively correlated with the construction of the ‘emo kid’ representation; nowhere else are the niche-media products that so exposed those potentially ‘heretical’ artists to that burgeoning population of ‘problematic’ audiences delivered any amount of scorn comparable to the artists and audiences themselves.

Were it to have been published just slightly earlier, *Everybody Hurts* might have functioned in diluting the voraciousness of the anti-emo kid movement - it primarily jests in a light-hearted manner, and never once pulls upon those derogatory lines of representational politicking that correlates emo culture with non-heterosexuality and self-mutilation. Nonetheless, we might surmise that the fact that it was granted publication following the Fox News and ABC reports - and, indeed heralded as a text that ostensibly *promotes* self-mutilation in the CBS report - effectively depleted the text’s relevance as a source through which to deduce that the ‘emo kid’ representation was essentially a device through which to ‘poke fun’ at fledgling subculturalists who supported a specific bevy of artists, conformed to a sensationalistic number of aesthetic practices and - finally - largely culled the inspiration to do both from niche-mediated publications like *Alternative Press*.

### **7.3 Post-script: So...Who Are the Emo Kids?**

Over the course of the past six chapters, I have considered the manner in which ‘emo kids’ came to be granted representational cohesion *through* their depiction in an array of cultural products and *within* a number of adjacent social fields. Beginning in the summer of 2002, niche-mediated cultural knowledge producers like Tyrangiel, Schwartz and, eventually, Greenwald contributed toward constructing a representation meant to depict the ‘emo culture’ as a relatively strange subcultural reaction to the superficiality of the commercial music industry and the developing prevalence of web-based social networks. By their deduction, ‘emo kids’ used internet communication and the introspective artistic works of a select pocket of cultural producers as a means of celebrating ‘authentic’ emotionality within the confines of a wider Western culture that had taken to repressing the ‘real’, so to speak. Inevitably, as the full character of the ‘movement’ was explained with Greenwald’s authoritative *Nothing Feels Good* text, ‘emo culture’ came to be characterized as a collectivity which strove to locate the ‘authentic’ in practices that either re-

volved around excavating relics from, and celebrating art comparable to, an age when culture was genuine (vintage aesthetics, acoustic-based musicians) or utilizing largely impersonal communicative technologies to forge personal connections within a sphere of cultural consumption that, it was presupposed, had constructed a new manifestation of symbolic economy. Unlike that symbolic economy structuring the highly exclusionary punk subcultural field – wherein the possession of privileged cultural knowledge and an allegiance to conventions meant to reinforce subcultural barriers translated into authenticity – the ‘emo culture’ distributed subcultural capital on the basis of one’s ability to feel ‘real’ emotions and one’s fearlessness in confessing to possess them. Humanist authenticity, in other words, translated into subcultural authenticity within the confines of a burgeoning subculture that was decidedly unique in that it focused on the inherent value of emotional connectivity as opposed to the dissemination of status (and the stratification inherent to it). By this initial niche-mediated account, ‘emo kids’ are those who collectively perpetuate the public celebration of the highs and lows of being endowed the human condition in a manner meant to facilitate an open-armed collective of unapologetically sentient followers. The discourse to have arisen within the field of punk subcultural participation, on the other hand, pegged ‘emo kids’ as the ‘mindless’ followers (and, thus, the perpetuators) of those aesthetic habits and consumption trends having recently been popularized by virtue of the corporate mainstreams’ insurrection into the subcultural field and that choice bevy of subcultural artistic producers having forged allegiances *with* such corporate forces. The subculturalist, micro-mediated discourse characterises the ‘emo kid’ as the epitome of the inauthentic subculturalist: they are the middle to upper-class adolescents so devoid of the subcultural ‘aesthetic disposition’ as to support those groups having ‘*sold out*’ their authenticity, those corporate entities to which those artists have effectively *sold themselves*, and those mainstream retail outlets through which their merchandise is *sold* to the mass public. Above and beyond effectively rendering the subcultural capital that the established subculturalists had collected in affiliating themselves with those artists prior to their committing ‘heresy’ useless in asserting similar affiliations, the ‘emo kid’ deconsecrates the sanctity of the live performance in gravitating toward it as less a site of long-standing ritual (entailing certain conventions of practice) than a ‘stage’ on which to aesthetically assert their fanaticism for inauthentic groups – to ‘play dress-up’, in so many words. Devoid of any appreciation of the true purpose of, and conventions guiding, the subcultural field, the ‘emo kid’ is essentially a representational folk-devil that doubles as a sensationalistic depiction of a

population of ‘others’ who are not only aware of the ‘proper’ methods of subcultural position-taking, but threaten to corrode the value of that purpose, and those conventions, by virtue of the sheer *number* of those having penetrated the subcultural field. In a sense, and in sociological terms, the ‘emo kid’ is here represented as a problematic population denoting trends wherein the punk subculture is taking on decidedly *postmodern* qualities: fledgling participants are ‘playing’ with subculturalist identities and neo-gothic aesthetics for perceivably insincere reason (namely, superficially patterning themselves after the groups whom they idolize as opposed to substantively assimilating into the established field of subcultural participation). In the process of doing so, they are facilitating the growing popularity of a fashion *without significance* and empowering those force of mainstream colonization that would, inevitably, render subcultural participation *insignificant* for those having formed identities, and derived subcultural capital-stocks, inherently dependent on the desire that the ‘field’ of subcultural participation retain its longstanding orthodoxy of convention, hierarchization, and *structuration*. By the subculturalist account, the ‘emo kid’ is an inauthentic participant who is, at the same time, a *dire* threat to the field in that they denote the formulation of new ‘rules’ that disseminate subcultural capital on the basis of aesthetic style (as opposed to ideological substance) and further empower those forces striving to colonize the subculture. Finally, by virtue of a number of derogatory cultural products and some questionable investigative reporting, a third representation of the ‘emo kid’ came to be constructed. By their combined account, the ‘emo kid’ constituted what might be construed as the embodiment of every middle-American parent’s worst fears: hordes of socially privileged Caucasian adolescents who had taken to devoting their conspicuous consumption patterns and free time toward endorsing sexually ambiguous styles of dress, consorting with online communities that promote non-heterosexual experimentation, and supporting artists who so romanticize morbid emotions as to inspire a subculture in which status is derived through self-mutilation and attempting suicide.

Might it be said, however, that any of these representations – be they highly romanticized caricatures or derogatorily sensationalistic stereotypes – referenced back to an *actual* collective of subcultural participants in any way, shape or form? Less that highly fictitious representation as reinforced by the mass mediated news broadcasts of 2007, it might be said that, in a sense, the niche-mediated and punk-subculturalist representations of the ‘emo kid’ each pull a great deal of inspiration from archetypical conceptualizations of differing *subculturalist dispositions*; those

who sincerely *do* pull a great deal of their self-actualization from those cultural products in which they ‘see’ themselves reflected, and those who might sincerely regard fields of subcultural participation as a sphere in which to temporarily ‘play’ with different means of expressing self and identity. As theorists aspiring to locate a middle-ground between those theories on subculture as advanced by the Birmingham school and postmodernist thinkers have subtly argued (see chapter two), one *cannot* assume that all those participants within any particular subculture were drawn toward, or continue to participate within, the collective for any one reason; that they, indeed, conceptualize the subculture, or attribute value to their acting within it, in the same way. We *can* deduce the substantiated existence of subculturalists who foster emotional connections with the artists whose work they relate to and, similarly, others who can relate to those same artists. We *can* deduce the emergence of an aesthetic trend in which tight black clothing, the use of facial cosmetics, and unorthodox hair stylings became popular within certain populations of adolescents. What has been decidedly absent, in the gross majority of the cases detailed herein and over the span of the near-decade during which I have witnessed the emergence of these new permutations of subcultural style and subculturalist position-taking, are instances in which those demonstrating a proclivity toward adopting either of these practices has self-identified as an ‘emo kid’ or a representative of any substantive ‘emo culture’. During that span of time with which this thesis concerns itself, I would opine that the ‘emo kid’ could only be said to have substantively existed in the ‘eyes of the beholder’, so to speak; depending on one’s positional situation within the subcultural field and the particularities of their subcultural *habitus*, virtually *any* subculturalist could have deduced an ‘other’s’ status as an ‘emo kid’, or have themselves been labelled an ‘emo kid’. In the sense that ‘reality’ is a discursive construct, then, the ‘emo kid’ was certainly a subculturalist that existed in the sense that they could be identified and so labelled by external commentators in possession of that ‘body of knowledge’ concerning their inherent characteristics. At the same time, however, it would be very difficult to substantiate the prospect that the ‘emo culture’ was an objectively ‘real’ entity, given the pronounced absence of any considerable number of those willing to self-identify as members *of* it.

In the preceding paragraph, I use the past-tense in regarding the ‘emo kid’ representation – the emo kid ‘was’ and ‘was not’ – both consciously and very carefully. I do so in light of the fact that, with the benefit of hindsight and comparatively speaking, the American news media’s brief initiative to spread awareness concerning the dangers of ‘emo culture’ inspired little in the

way of a notable cultural reaction. Beginning in early 2008, however, alarming reports concerning the manner in which *other* cultures had taken to account for the ostensible migration of the ‘emo culture’ began to attract the attention of the *Punknews.org* website contributing staff. The first, a post tellingly entitled “Violence against ‘emos’ sweeps across Mexico” (*Punknews.org*, 2008d), redirected readers to the following blog, as authored by Daniel Hernandez (2008):

A bizarre wave of mob emo-bashings is sweeping across Mexico. The movement is being generated on message boards and social networking sites by non-emo youth who highly dislike the emo look and attitude. The spark came first in Queretaro on March 7. An estimated 800 young people poured into the city's Centro Historico hunting for emos to beat the crap out of. They found some. The next weekend it spread to Mexico City, where emos faced off against punks and rockabillys at the Glorieta de Insurgents, the epicenter of emo social space in the capital. There's also been reports of anti-emo violence in Durango, Colima, and elsewhere (Hernandez, 2008a).

The *Punknews.org* submission was subsequently modified once Hernandez, on this occasion writing for the LA Daily website (2008), better explicated his thoughts concerning the likely root of the uprising,

In Mexico, emo culture is a butt of many jokes. It is either despised intensely or generally ignored. But it's only the despising sentiment that lately has been getting wide airplay. In the above clip, a Televisa on-air personality named Kristoff expresses a serious dose of anti-emo rhetoric and switches to English to say, on network television, "*Fucking bullshit*" to the emo movement. Some emos I've interviewed point to the Kristoff clip as a defining provocation of the current wave of anti-emo violence (Hernandez, 2008b).

The 24<sup>th</sup> of July, 2008, subsequently witnessed the publication of an equally unsettling post (*Punknews.org* contributor ‘nowah’, 2008) concerning the manner in which Russian legislators were aspiring to deal with ‘emo culture’,

NME and The Guardian are reporting that Russia is currently formulating legislation to crack down on emo. The plan involves heavy regulation of emo websites and a ban on the display of emo and goth fashion in schools and government buildings. The legislation was first presented last month at a hearing held by at the State Duma on "Government Strategy in the Sphere of Spiritual and Ethical Education," a piece of legislation which aims to curb "dangerous teen trends". Among the stereotypes that are driving fears are claims that emo culture leads to depression, glorifies suicide and encourages anti-social behavior. Bill sponsor Yevgeny Yuryev hopes to pass the legislation by the end of the year (*Punknews.org* contributor ‘nowah’, 2008).

The most condemning example of foreign ‘emo culture’ coverage, however, is undoubtedly that which followed the suicide of Hannah Bond. In penning a story entitled, “Popular

schoolgirl dies in ‘emo suicide cult’” Telegraph reporter Richard Alleyne (2008) reported that Bond,

...had secretly chatted to “emo” followers online all over the world, talking about death and the glamorisation of hanging and speaking about “the black parade” - a place where “emos” believe they go after they die. She had even scratched her wrists in a form of self-harm often seen as a form of initiation into the popular fashion and lifestyle fad followed by young people who dress in black like their older “Goth” crowd. On her page on Bebo, the online networking site, she told friends with names like Sam Suicide, that she was obsessed with the American band My Chemical Romance, who hit number one with their last album *The Black Parade* (Alleyne, 2008).

Though I wish to leave any deeper analysis concerning the manner in which the ‘emo kid’ stereotype mutated following its migration open to future analyses (and analysts), it would nonetheless appear fitting to conclude this research initiative in taking note of the fact that the ‘emo kid’ representation – and ‘emo culture’ - still serves as the target of derision, problematization, and disciplinary action (be it legislative or ‘grassroots’) throughout locations spanning the globe. So too is it of note that, following the publication of both the *Telegraph* article and those reports detailing the proposed legislation in Russia, self-professed fans of the emo musicians and trends in emo fashion so problematized organized peaceful public rallies through which to condemn the unflattering manner in which these reports characterized the emo movements in Britain and Russia (Punknews.org, 2008e; Michaels, 2008). Suffice it to say, whereas instances in which North American youth have self-identified as ‘emo kids’ are, and have traditionally been, very few and far between, this may not be the case in those countries wherein derogative media reportage concerning the ‘emo culture’ would appear to have drawn the vocal ire of bona-fide collectives of self-actualized – and *self-referential* - ‘emo kids’. It will, indeed, be interesting to note the constitution of a substantive subcultural manifestation that might have found inspiration less in the knowledge advanced by niche-mediated resources, but that was constructed within micro-mediated subcultural spheres for the purpose of *preventing* that any such manifestations might substantively arise.

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