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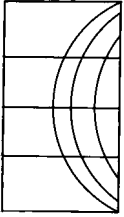
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**Karen Bettez Halnon**

## Alienation Incorporated: 'F\*\*\* the Mainstream Music' in the Mainstream

### Introduction

For many youth today, the most pressing social problem is not globalization, consumer society, the extreme and increasing polarization of wealth and poverty, the ultra concentrated media, or even the domination of the culture industry. As music consumers, the more immediate, narrowly conceived and *implicit* problem is *commercialism*, or the synergistic mass-marketing of processed, image-driven and formulaic music *styles*. Some youth avoid the problem with fleeting, lightly committed and eclectic music tastes. Others, rejecting major record labels and Clear Channel radio, listen to Indie records and turn to the music underground. For the slightly less passionate in seeking purist alternatives, there is the 'high underground', or artists and bands that teeter at the border of the mainstream, have quite a large following, but (at least) *not everybody* knows about them. Many more, seeking escape from the superficial world of corporate-sponsored music, turn to garages and basements, a group of friends with a few instruments, and aim to create something more authentic.

This article is about millions of anti-commercialistic youth who have made a consumer compromise. Such youth do not reject consumerism, lead counter-culture lives, commit to political activism or even completely reject commercialism. What satisfies their politics 'lite' is music that gives a loud, hostile, vile, and alienated 'finger' to the totality of officialdom. What is aptly but not delicately labeled 'F\*\*\* the Mainstream Music' (hereafter abbreviated FTMM) involves artists and bands who break nearly every conceivable social rule governing behavior, taste, authority, morality and civility. In stage performances and music lyrics, band members shout obscenities, threaten,

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assault each other, self-mutilate, desecrate what is holy and lampoon political and religious leaders. They act like pimps, pseudo-Nazis, the anti-Christ, monsters and aliens. They dramatize murder, war, rape and pillaging, glamorize pimping and prostitution, advocate taking illegal drugs and the death of God, and militantly assert the supremacy of the alienated. Unrecognized as a temporary, ludic and liminal retreat from the social and moral orders of everyday life, such music has faced the seriousness of picket lines, Wal-mart censorship via refusal of sales, concerned attention of the American Psychological Association and even congressional hearings. In large part because of moral outrage bereft of laughter, FTMM has become one of the most popular alternatives for anti-commercialistic consumer youth. Thus, in some initially confusing and contradictory ways, FTMM has become precisely what it is dead set against.

In 'White America', a song that serves as a prelude to what follows, Eminem declares himself leader of the 'circus of worthless pawns'. As self-appointed 'motherf\*\*\*ing poster child for White America', he taunts and threatens to corrupt white suburban youth (playfully labeled 'Eric' and 'Erica'), as he repeats in the song chorus:

WHITE AMERICA  
I could be one of your kids  
WHITE AMERICA  
Eric looks just like this  
WHITE AMERICA  
Erica loves my shit  
I go to TRL  
Look how many hugs I get

In a final angry tirade, Eminem 'piss(es) on the lawns of the White House'. 'spit(s) liquor in the faces of this democracy of hypocrisy', and spews crass venom against Ms Cheney and Tipper Gore. Then he pauses. The song ends with a playful retraction of serious critique, and with laughter and reassurance of his love for White (corporate) America:

Ha Ha Ha!  
I'm just playin America  
You know I love you

The main marketing pitch for Eminem's music, as he directly explains, is to provide Eric and Erica with a blue-eyed, 'peroxide blonde' hair kid who looks just like them, and to especially provide more coveted Slim Shady, his dark alter ego, or more anger that just 'sprays and sprays' but 'in no particular direction'. Trailer park kid turned multi-millionaire is thankful for his success. He is the celebrated anti-hero of mainstream youth culture who has attained the increasingly 'postmortem' American Dream, as the double-M'd rebel explains in the song 'Lose Yourself'.

While Eminem exposes white suburban youth to words and experiences

he says 'they never knew existed', his alienated anger and violence are rooted in harsh material realities of poverty: parental abuse, neglect, abandonment, domestic violence, gang violence, drug addiction and even fantasized rape and murder. His is a deeply personal and detailed portrait of *alienation experience*, a chaotic expression of pain, suffering and retribution. The intimacy offered fans has made him a leader, who 'shoveled shit all (his) life', and is now gleefully 'dumpin it on White (E)merica'.

Other multiple-award-winning, multi-platinum and internationally touring exemplars of FTMM include proudly self-proclaimed 'American Badass', 'Pimp of the Nation' and 'Devil Without a Cause' Kid Rock, and Slipknot, who describe their music as a 'unique audio-visual nightmare' (Crampton, 2001: 39). In 'maggot' fan book *Barcode Killers* (Crampton, 2001: 71), Slipknot vividly depicts and promotes their explicitly named 'alienation':

Nine black-hearted psychopaths with thousand-yard, serial killer stares. Slipknot are here to truly dirty up your minds . . . These intense, focussed [*sic*] individuals have the worst attitude in the world. With a psychotic-induced energy, they claim to hate everyone and everything, and they will stop at nothing to deliver a humungus 'F\*\*\* you' to all detractors.

The Limp Bizkit prototype of alienated anger is the song 'Break Stuff', on the seven-times-platinum *Significant Other* LP (1999). This hostile, destructive, and notorious Woodstock 1999 song aided in inciting a fiery and rapacious riot, and subsequently won MTV's prestigious 2000 Best Rock Video Award. More recently, the Bizkit official website ([www.limpbizkit.com](http://www.limpbizkit.com), retrieved 1 May 2004) for 'Hater' fans announced, 'It's Cool to be a Hater!', and is sponsoring an 'international HATE CAMPAIGN', where fans are invited to 'show the world your finger', and enter a 'unique limp-bizkit world' where fans 'have faces'. A final exemplar of FTMM is Marilyn Manson, whose alienation is expressed in numerous ways, including past performances costumed betwixt and between a pseudo-Nazi and *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang's* Vulgarian Child Catcher in the song 'AntiChrist Superstar'. There Manson tears up a Mormon bible and repeatedly flails his long, thin and uniquely flaccid body over a huge pulpit as he demands that followers 'repent' from conformity, and declares the coming liberation from the fascism of 'Christianity' and 'the police state mentality'. In performances such as this, Manson's body is quintessentially uncivilized. It is one that is exceedingly loose, lanky, flaccid and flailing; long fingers and wrists that flop about; a body that contorts as it falls, rolls, twists, humps and gyrates in strong 'fits' of breaking out.

What makes FTMM so attractive to millions of anti-commercialistic consumer youth is not the vivid (and potentially politicizing) revelation of human suffering, stigma or class inequality, but *authenticity*. Authenticity – what is different, transgressive, unique, bizarre, deep, basic, raw, honest and

unmediated – is especially attractive to consumer youth who inhabit a world of overprocessed and superficial brands, images and gimmicks. In a commercialized world of spectacle and simulation, that induces a vertiginous overpopulation of self and cynicism against reality itself (Gergen, 1991), FTMM offers real people, honest stories and open access. For this, artists are praised repeatedly by fans because they ‘don’t give a shit’, ‘don’t give a f\*\*\*’, ‘know who they are’ and ‘tell it the way it is’. As one fan explained, with a specific example:

Eminem tells it the way it is and is respected for that. No apologies. No cover-up. No gloss. Just the real, often sad truth about his life experience. (Anger Management Tour, Tweeter Center, Camden, NJ, 25 July 2002)

As elaborated further on, the alienated ‘sad tales’ of ‘social junk’, the unrestricted opening of ‘closet’ skeletons and personal poisons, and the ‘anti-everything’ spirit of FTMM ‘moral daredevils’ not only offer fans an encounter with authenticity, but also inspire and teach them to tailor their own non-conformist individuality, or to chart their ‘Own Way’ in but not of the mainstream, as Durst encourages with one of his most popular songs.

In what follows I probe deeper into the meanings of FTMM. In the first section, ‘Alienation in Consumer Society’, I draw on works by Debord (2002), Baudrillard (1988), Gergen (1991), Kellner (2003) and Ritzer (2004) in a discussion of a consumer society of simulation, spectacle and nothingness. Then, drawing on works by Frank and Weiland (1997) and Klein (2002), I discuss ‘The Commodification of Dissent’, explaining how the culture industry caters to ‘rebel consumers’. I also discuss Poor Chic, or an array of contemporary fads and fashions that make stylish, adventurous and often expensive ‘fun’ of traditional symbols of lower-class statuses. Extending earlier work (Halnon, 2002), I argue that the culture industry has not only commodified rebellion as raw, basic, adventurous and tough lower-class exotica, but that the commodification of dissent is more invasive and more sociologically astute with the explicit marketing of the alienated and alienation experience. The body of the article, ‘Alienation Incorporated’, in three subsections (‘Sad Tales and Social Junk’, ‘Cleaning Out Closets’ and ‘Anti-Everything’), is a delineation of how the alienated and alienation experience are contained and conveyed in FTMM. In the next section, ‘Inspiring and Teaching Fans’, I explain how anti-commercialistic youth, in their search for authenticity and non-conformist individuality, are inspired by and learn from alienated artists. In the first of three concluding sections, ‘Rage Against Nothing’, I explain how FTMM concerts are an enticing ‘fight club’ where alienated consumer youth surface and express implicit and unarticulated rage against a society of the spectacle and nothingness, escape the numbing impact of commercialism, and feel the exhilaration of being alive. Next, in “‘F\*\*\* the Mainstream Music” in the *Commercialized Mainstream*’, I explain artists’

delicate credibility requirements, their rise to stardom and their inevitable descent to death by commercialism. In the last section, 'The Real Obscurity', I reiterate the ultimate thesis of this article, that FTMM is a form of hegemonic control and containment that quells youth rebellion, depoliticizes alienation and reduces both alienated youth and alienated artists to a source of profit.

### Alienation in Consumer Society

While production-related alienation survives as material reality, not only for globalized working classes but also increasingly for 'white collar sweatshop' workers (Fraser, 2001) faced with a spiral of profit-driven downsizing and deskilling, the shift in focus of contemporary social theory is on alienation as a consequence less of the production process itself, than of *the production of unreality* as the dominant and oppressive force colonizing and governing social life in consumer society. The focus of such work (Debord, 2002; Bauman, 1998; Ritzer, 1999, 2004; Jhally, 1990; Klein, 2002; Kellner, 2003) is on the dehumanizing effects of living in a globalized world of mass media and advertising, spectacle and simulation, and consumption of simulated experiences and branded lifestyles and identities.

Most extreme among critics of consumer society, and basic point of reference for postmodernist writing, is Baudrillard's (1988) totalizing claim that consumer society is one of simulacra, a 'political economy of the sign' without referents, an all-embracing mode of domination that makes compulsory consumption the universal code for social standing. For Baudrillard (1988: 218), the only 'strategic resistance' to 'the present phase of the system' is 'the refusal of meaning . . . or of the hyperconformist simulation of the very mechanisms of the system, which is another form of refusal by overacceptance'. In Baudrillard's world of simulacra, there is no alienated subject to liberate, no subject at all. Elaborating this position, Gergen proclaims the dissolution of the self in consumer society is the result of 'multiphrenia', or a media-saturated overpopulation of the self. With no less hyperbole than his intellectual predecessor, he proclaims:

A multiphrenic condition emerges in which one swims in ever-shifting, concatenating, and contentious currents of being. One bears the burden of an increasing array of oughts, of self-doubts and irrationalities. The possibility for committed romanticism or strong and single-minded modernism recedes, and the way is open for the postmodern being . . . the erasure of the category of the self. (Gergen, 1991: 80)

Gergen says that what is different between the modernist and postmodernist selves is not a Whitmanesque 'multiplicity', but a lack of *ego certainty* that anchors it in place as it travels through the multiplicity. In the language of

psychology, the postmodern ego, according to Gergen, lacks a 'synthesizing function' (Erikson, 1968: 211). The privileged postmodern non-subject is one who suffers from a vertiginous overconsumption of media brands, images and lifestyles.

In another extreme view of a society dominated by the spectacle, French critical theorist Guy Debord proclaims 'democracy is *ideology*', a cover-up for the 'the dictatorial freedom of the Market, as tempered by the recognition of the rights of Homo Spectator' (see Debord, 2002: 9). In this view, commodities have replaced reality or authentic experience, and are 'the *chief product* of present-day society' (Debord, 2002: 16). For Debord, 'THE WORLD OF THE SPECTACLE . . . is the world of commodity ruling over all lived experience' (Debord, 2002: 26). Elaborating this totalitarian vision of alienated consumption in modern capitalist consumer society, he (Debord, 2002: 44–5) says further:

The commodity's mechanical accumulation unleashes a *limitless artificiality* in the face of which all living desire is disarmed. The cumulative power of this autonomous realm of artifice necessarily everywhere entails a *falsification of life*.

Kellner (2003: 2–3) summarizes the Debordian view:

For Debord, the spectacle is a tool of pacification and depoliticization; it is a 'permanent opium war' which stupefies social subjects and distracts them from the most urgent tasks of real life – recovering the full range of their human powers through creative practice. The concept of the spectacle is integrally connected to the concept of separation and passivity, for in submissively consuming spectacles one is estranged from actively producing one's life.

Departing from Debord's totalizing claims, Ritzer (1999: 190–1) argues that even though spectacle is ever-present in consumer society, consumers are not trapped in an absolute 'iron cage' or 'carceral archipelago' with no escape. Granting a larger modicum of agency than the Debordian spectacle (or the passive subject of the Baudrillardian simulacra), he says consumers exercise rational choice by moving in and out of various 'islands of consumption'. By doing so, consumers may find localized means of enchanting an otherwise disenchanting world.

Ritzer's non-purist acknowledgment that *enchantment* – or magic, mystery, fantasy and dreams – still resides for consumers in certain 'islands of consumption' provokes elaboration, as does his more recent work (Ritzer, 2004). In *The Globalization of Nothing*, Ritzer argues that we live in a world increasingly characterized by 'nothing' or amid social forms that are centrally controlled and conceived, generic, impersonal, interchangeable, superficial and mass produced. According to Ritzer, as Americanization ('the propagation of American ideas, customs, social policies, industries, and capital around the world') and McDonaldization ('fast-food'-modeled capitalist

rationality principles of efficiency, predictability, calculability and control) have expanded globally, *nothing* has increasingly characterized the contemporary world. Nothingness abounds in social forms and settings that are shallow, and void of distinction, uniqueness, or authenticity. In other words, Ritzer says we live amid a plethora of ‘non-places’, ‘non-things’, ‘non-people’ and ‘non-services’. Referencing Simmel’s cautioning of the ‘tragedy of culture’, or the growing gap between subjective culture (or human-created local culture) and objective culture (or industry-produced mass culture), he says that ‘the tragedy today is that those who continue to search for something are likely to be increasingly frustrated by, alienated from, and oppressed by the nothingness that increasingly characterizes the world’ (Ritzer, 2004: 192). However, he expresses optimism that even though pure forms of local culture have been largely eliminated, ‘glocalized’ sites of consumption (albeit themselves a product of the culture industry) may offer *at least a greater degree of enchantment*.

While differing with Ritzer on the attribution of rationality to human subjects, Kellner’s (2003) work further articulates the magnitude of a society of spectacle, avoids a totalitarian Debordian vision, and emphasizes the possibilities of contradictions, conflicts and resistance. It is his general thesis that *spectacles are contested terrain*. That is, Kellner argues that while corporate-orchestrated spectacles dominate the media landscape, they are also pluralistic and heterogeneous sites of resistance. He thus distinguishes his work from Debord’s when he says:

... although Debord’s concepts of ‘the society of the spectacle’ and of ‘the integrated spectacle’ (1990) tended to present a picture of a quasi-totalitarian nexus of domination, it is preferable to perceive a plurality and heterogeneity of contending spectacles in the contemporary moment and to see spectacle itself as a contested terrain. (Kellner, 2003: 2–3)

Elsewhere, in the spirit of Kellner’s and Ritzer’s works, I provide rich ethnographic accounts of how ‘shock music’ and ‘dark carnival’ cannot simply be reduced to a matter of pacified subjects of the spectacle, but constitute enchanting, liminal and ludic worlds of ‘grotesque realism’, in totalistic opposition to the artificiality, inequalities and injustices of officialdom (Halnon, 2004a, 2004c). The focus of the present work is less on the liberatory and creative potential *inside* music scenes (both in the mainstream and the ‘high underground’) than on the detail by which alienation is transformed into a fetishized commodity.

## The Commodification of Dissent

Vividly highlighting the issue at hand, Debord (2002: 38) asserts that in a world of the commodity, in a world of endless pseudo-gratifications, even



'dissatisfaction itself becomes a commodity as soon as the economics of affluence finds a way of applying its production methods to this particular raw material'. While overstating the case, Debord suggests that in a society of spectacular commodities, or the falsification of human needs and desires, commodities may exist that are 'a purely spectacular rebelliousness'.

Frank and Weiland's (1997) writing on the commercialization of rebellion, youth culture fabrication, the merchandizing of deviant subcultural practice or counter-cultural entrepreneurship adds necessary empirical substance to Debord's theoretical observations. *Commodify Your Dissent* describes how the ideology of counter-culture today – largely based on the 1960s model of youth rebellion – is essentially indistinguishable from the ideology of corporate culture. The writers discuss subjects such as the commercialization of beatnik, grunge and punk *styles* and the corporate cultivation of the 'rebel consumer'. They explain how rebellion, revolution and/or counter-culture have become standard catchphrases of the new standard marketing strategy. Explicitly critical of scholarly valorizations of rebel celebrities (e.g. Madonna, Henry Rollins, Nirvana and Pearl Jam), Frank insists that such academics miss the most obvious point, *rebellion is the zeitgeist of capitalist marketing ideology* that strategically addresses the (economically expedient) perpetual, spiraling consumer desire for authentic campy *alternatives*, or what Klein calls the 'uncool-equals-cool' consumer esthetic. Frank (1997) asks rhetorically: 'Alternative to What?' Then, not so politely, he chides cultural studies scholars that promote the fallacy of 'consumer democracy': 'F\*\*\* you and your (so-called) underground'.

Frank's political passion, as well as Klein's of a more tempered sort, is based in a keen empirical awareness that pseudo-'revolution', 'rebellion' or 'revolt' are pervasive brand content for 'alternative' banking, clothing, soft drinks, liquor and music. Some specific examples include Martin Luther King Jr and Mahatma Ghandi 'Think Different' Apple computers, Che Guevara 'Revolution' soda, House of Prada's spring 1998 line of 'Maoist/Soviet-worker chic', and more recently, a 2003 line of 'Ideology' women's clothing and the 2004 rap/metal fest 'Projekt Revolution'. The combined media analyses of Klein, Frank and Weiland and Frank, the ongoing writing of the Chicago-based anti-corporate culture journal *The Baffler*, or for that matter, a stroll through the local shopping mall, provide a tour de force of examples of how dissent has become the central 'culture vulturing' marketing pitch of 'cool hunters'.

Cool hunting is big business aimed at the culture industry's most profitable consumer demographic, consumer youth who spend or have at their disposable US\$150 billion a year (PBS, 2001). The conquest of this demographic is facilitated by cool hunting agencies, such as Look-Look, and the advertising arms of corporations such as Sprite, Nike, Reebok and Levis, who hire 'youth stalkers and promoters' (former cool kids turned corporate

advertising executives on the ethnographic prowl for non-conformist trend-setting youth to be used as models for product promotion) and 'street snitches' (hip kids on the corporate payroll to be 'walking infomercials' for their products) (Klein, 2002: 81). The Merchants of Cool (or of pseudo-rebellion or dissent) have stunted, stolen and distorted grassroots youth cultures. Youth cultures have become the object of 'cultural mining', 'arrested development' (who knows what grunge or punk would have been without corporate cultural thievery) and merely a promotional tool for the culture industry. Rebellion, revolt, revolution and ideology have been reduced to stylish 'consumer rebel' brand content.

Klein points out 'branding's cruelest irony':

... most manufacturers and retailers begin by seeking out authentic scenes, important causes and cherished public events so that these things will infuse their brands with meaning. . . . Too often, however, the expansive nature of the branding process ends up causing the event to be usurped, creating the quintessential lose-lose situation. Not only do fans begin to feel a sense of alienation from (if not outright resentment toward) once-cherished cultural events, but the sponsors lose what they need most: *a feeling of authenticity with which to associate their brands*. (Klein, 2002: 36; my emphasis)

This study goes beyond Frank's (1997) *The Conquest of Cool*, the PBS (2001) documentary *The Merchants of Cool* and Klein's (2002) discussion of the same, to show that 'cool', while elusive and mutable in the marketing of 'rebel' products, is more well-defined than these studies suggest. The culture industry has not merely mass-marketed dissent. They have tapped into something more exploitative. *The marketing of cool is, in large part, the commodification of poverty, or of the 'socioeconomic losers' of capitalist society*. Among the plethora of Poor Chic commodities, or traditional lower-class status symbols turned stylish and often expensive fads and fashions, we find: construction worker boots (Timberland), tattoos (body art), pumping iron (body sculpting), 'wife-beater' shirts, Hum-Vee army trucks (Hummers), motorcycles (Rich Urban Biking), bowling shoes (House of Prada), gas station jackets (Emo punk fashion), baggy, beltless hand-me-down pants (Hilfiger designer ghetto), flea market shopping (Shabby Chic) and the barrios of Rio (Favela Chic). These and many other traditional lower-class symbols are now refurbished and culturally upgraded into expensive, stylish and recreational commodities for those desirous of *authentic* (wild, raw, rebel, class savage) alternatives, albeit typically in safe and predictable 'gentrified' form (see Halnon, 2002, 2003, 2004b, forthcoming). Poor Chic – from the mass-marketing of Hip-Hop's 'urban authenticity' to \$50,000 refurbished army trucks – has become some of the most basic and pervasive raw material for the marketing of (allegedly authentic and rebellious) 'alternatives'.

## Alienation Incorporated

The popularity and profitability of FTMM can be critically interrogated as an extension and elaboration of Frank and Weiland's (1997) work on the 'commodification of dissent' and related work on the merchandizing and corporate 'conquest of cool' (Frank, 1997; Klein, 2002; PBS, 2001). In this article I argue that the culture industry has not only commodified rebellion (as the aforementioned authors have shown) and poverty (as I have demonstrated earlier), but also *the alienated and alienation experience, in particular*.

This article's value for critical theory is that it provides a concrete, empirical example of how the alienated and alienation experience have been transformed into a commodity, and a type of consumer fetishism (i.e. *alienation consumed as authenticity*). As such, FTMM is explained as a conservative phenomenon that depoliticizes inequality, quells consumer rebellion, secures the status quo and contributes to the hegemonic political economy of White (corporate) America. More specifically, this article makes greater empirical sense of Spitzer's (1975) claim that the modern capitalist state contains the threat of troublemakers – or alienated consumer youth, potential 'social dynamite' – through assimilative rather than segregative techniques. He explains:

Instead of waiting for troublemakers to surface and managing them through segregative techniques, the state is likely to focus more and more on generally applied incentives and assimilative controls. This shift is consistent with the growth of capitalism because, on the one hand, it provides mechanisms and policies to nip disruptive influences 'in the bud'. and on the other, it paves the way toward a more rational exploitation of human capital. (Spitzer, 1975: 648)

The ultimate critique of this article, then, is that alienation incorporated – or the commodification of alienated artists and their alienation experiences, and the assimilation of potentially troublesome anti-commercialistic youth – not only transforms alienation (at both points of production and consumption) into a source of profit, but also forestalls more conscious, directed and pragmatic avenues of rebellion, at a time that is especially ripe for youth-led social movements that might pose a serious challenge to what Eminem so aptly calls a 'democracy of hypocrisy'. What is glaringly missing in such ostensibly troubling and trouble-making music is directed and explicit political critique. (It is important to note that this article does not deal with the many artists and bands that have specific political agendas, such as Rage Against the Machine, System of a Down, Blink 182 or Henry Rollins. The focus is on highly transgressive anti-mainstream mainstream bands minus an explicit political agenda.)

What follows is not an esthetic critique. Rather, it is my view that elitism, or the esthetic valuation of 'high culture' over 'low culture', has the

consequence of misunderstanding what is mass-marketed across popular culture today. My aim is not to extend Adorno's thesis that the culture industry has lowered its standards, commodified and commercialized all art, thus stifling individuality and critical thought (see Adorno, 1991). I also do not aim to advocate Twitchell's (1992) work on carnival culture, or what he pejoratively labels the 'trashing of taste in America'. While there is general agreement with Adorno that the culture industry is a hegemonic power that promotes 'mass deception' and advances ruling class interests, what is more pertinent to this analysis is not judging cultural 'trashing' but providing a political economic analysis and critique of the actual selling of 'trash', or what Spitzer calls 'social junk'.

### Sad Tales and Social Junk

Spitzer (1975: 645) uses the term 'social junk' to refer to those who through 'failure, inability, or refusal' do not 'participate in the roles supportive of capitalist society', such as welfare recipients, the homeless, the incarcerated and the otherwise unemployed. Concerning FTMM, social junk refers to bands that are marketed as elaborately costumed, painted and masked blasphemers, psychotics, vulgarians, aliens, or so many ludic, parodic, defiant expressions of having lived as outsiders and outcasts. The music is about those who have lived labeled and stigmatized as alienated 'white trash', 'rejects', 'losers', 'misfits' and 'nobodies'.

Sad tales are the very underlying theme of FTMM. The general tale is one of young white men who have lived punished lives of struggle, of having been 'treated like shit', used and abused, rejected and beaten, abandoned and betrayed, marginalized as 'freaks' and 'outcasts', and told they were 'failures' who would never succeed.

Slipknot's story is about young men with previous job histories as Burger King clerk, gas station worker, welder and DJ, and identifies itself as being 'from the middle of nowhere'. The self-labeled 'alienated' rural 'nobodies' from Des Moines, Iowa have numbers (0–8) rather than names, and wear matching industrial coveralls with number and random barcode from their first album *Mate. Feed. Kill. Repeat* (1996). Shawn (#6) says of their music in *Barcode Killers*: 'It's the discordant sound of the middle of nowhere, a terrain where Slipknot is jester and king'. Slipknot's Ultimate Fan Site ([www.slipknotufs.com/articles/muzi.html](http://www.slipknotufs.com/articles/muzi.html), retrieved 2 May 2001) celebrates the band as 'Misfits . . . Freaks . . . Lucifer's children . . . Weirdos . . . [and] possibly [a] Sadistic cult'. The autobiographical video *Slipknot: Behind the Mask* depicts a life of excruciating, mind-numbing boredom and outlets of excessive drinking, vandalism, fighting, bullying and physically dangerous activities such as playful dark alley, daredevil-sparing with sharp weapons. As they put it: 'In Des Moines, there's nothing to do except get drunk, have mindless sex, and play the loudest f\*cking rock n' roll possible'.

Eminem's sad tale of 'shovel[ing] shit all [his] life' involves an abandoning father, moving around a lot with his sexually promiscuous mother, who he says took more drugs than he did, physical and verbal abuse from his mother, being evicted from houses, living in a trailer, being beaten by peers so badly that he suffered a brain hemorrhage followed by coma for six days, making it as a white rapper in a black music industry, and suffering a chaotic and some times violent relationship with an unfaithful, selfish prima donna, suicidal girlfriend/wife and mother of his prized daughter, Hailie (the single glimmer of hope, pride and joy in his life). Among a plethora of vivid lyrical descriptions, Eminem laments in the song 'If I Had' of being 'tired':

tired of skinny friends hooked on crack/ . . . tired of drowning in my sorrow/  
 . . . tired of motherf\*\*\*rs spraying shit and dartin off/ . . . tired of jobs startin  
 off at five fifty an hour/ . . . tired of being fired every time I fart and cough/tired  
 of having to work as a gas station clerk/for this jerk breathing down my neck  
 driving me bezerk

Marilyn Manson says he suffered the abuses of a sexually 'perverted' grandfather preoccupied with hardcore pornography, molestation by a neighbor and being treated like a freak at school. Set out among Manson's specific sad tales is an event as a young boy, where, while playing Jesus in a Christmas church play, his peers stripped him of his loincloth, leaving him naked and exposed before the congregation. More generally, Manson says his alienation is rooted in a corporate-driven, militaristic society of violence that neither listens to nor values youth, as explained in the song 'Disposable Teens': 'I'm a teen distortion/survived abortion/rebel from the waist down/I wanna thank you mom/I wanna thank you dad/for bringing this world to a bitter end.'

Fred Durst of Limp Bizkit claims in the song 'Nookie' that he 'came into the world as a reject' and in the song 'Full Nelson' that he was 'picked on' by 'everyone' in high school. Kid Rock declares himself, if not a true-blue 'regular failure . . . straight out the trailer' as he claims in the song 'Cowboy', then at least a 'motherf\*\*\*ing' 'American Badass', as explained repeatedly and explicitly in his promotional video *Devil Without a Cause*. Playing the apropos part in his introductory concert, Kid Rock first toured as 'White Trash on Dope'.

### Cleaning Out Closets

What is ordinarily private or 'behind closed doors' for those concerned with *self-image*, is a wide-open Dionysian book for alienated outsiders who reject such repressive pretense. For example, Slipknot band members process their troubles at public concerts while they assault each other to the point of breaking bones and roll and hump about the stage floor. Band member Cracken says: 'I'm famous for hitting myself in the face and beating the shit out of myself' (quoted at 'Slipknot: Rage Against Everything' by Anthony

Bozza, [www.rollingstone.com/news/newsarticle.asp?](http://www.rollingstone.com/news/newsarticle.asp?)). *Barcode Killers* (Crampton, 2001: 36) – as if written by a Marxist sociologist in training – explains that Slipknot's music is a 'highly original' expression of 'alienation':

In every second of every song you can almost hear the hatred and frustration that springs from Slipknot's upbringing. Venomous, apoplectic and vein-poppingly furious, this pure intense sound and nihilistic atmospheric lyrical vive is clearly the result of a sterile environment that normally fails to nurture or inspire any creativity in the masses.

Band members further explain in their video *Slipknot: Welcome to Our Neighborhood*: 'Basically [it's] nine people working out every poison that ever affected them in their life and putting it on tape'.

Manson's eclectic set of media for expressing and processing personal traumas has included a variety of stage techniques such as mutilating his body; strangely and uniquely loose and violent body thrashing; and elaborate parodic costuming in a range of unfinalizable carnivalesque characters resembling but never exactly reducible to bishops, Nazis, Disney's Vulgarian Child Catcher and Willy Wonka, crucified Jesus, serial killers and Mickey Mouse. Other alienation imagery includes S & M and the display of dead, mutilated and decapitated bodies. While on stage, Manson has also received oral sex, vomited, urinated, spat, wiped slow dripping diarrhea on the American flag, simulated ejaculation, 'humped' the audience and more recently, rubbed his crotch on the neck of a security guard (for which he ultimately paid US\$4000 in fines). Manson elaborates across numerous LPs, music interviews, biographies and his autobiography, *The Long Hard Road Out of Hell* (Manson and Strauss, 1998), that the explicitly Freudian catharsis at work is to descend back into (an unrepresed oral, anal and genital) hell as cure, or to return to all of those events and persons that traumatized him and to re-enact them through his music, personas and musical spectacles.

Similarly, Eminem's music is not merely the detailed and intimate lyrical telling about trials and tribulations. He openly and unabashedly re-enacts them before the audience. However, what is distinctive about Eminem's music is the elaborate lyrical personification of his dark alter ego, Slim Shady. Shady does, thinks and says things that shock and amaze, going far beyond what most listeners could ever imagine. For example, 'My Name Is' on the *Slim Shady* LP, Shady's world is one where he says with strikingly particular transgressive detail:

I hung my original self from the top bunk with a belt/Got pissed off and ripped Pamela Lee's tits off . . . smacked [my junior high school English teacher] in his face with an eraser, chased him with a stapler/and stapled his nuts to a stack of papers . . . [Made] a record about doin drugs and name[d] it after [my mother] . . . [and] just drank a fifth of vodka, dare me to drive?

Shady concludes the rhyming lyrical transgression by saying, 'I spit when I talk, I'll f\*\*\* anything that walks . . . And by the way when you see my dad

... Tell him that I slit his throat, in this dream I had.' In other songs, Shady imagines raping his high school teachers, and even his mother, who he tells to 'bend over and take it like a slut'. In '97 Bonnie & Clyde', Shady murders his wife Kim and drives around with her dead body as he talks playfully with Hailie. In a gentle, high-pitched parent-voice, he tells his little girl that he's 'making a nice bed for mommy at the bottom of the lake ... there goes mommy'.

In the song 'My Dad's Gone Crazy', Shady sums up the situation, 'and that's pretty much the gist of it, the parents are pissed but the kids love it'.

### Anti-Everything

While alienation – or being outside and against conventional understandings of what is moral, legal, or civilized – is demonstrated by a plethora of examples, alienation is also expressed in FTMM songs that provide more general litanies of *anti-everything*. Manson's '1996', from the album 'Anti-christ Superstar' is instructive. Read properly in the FTMM scene, the following list of transgressions are less significant by themselves than for their collective willingness to violate any and all rules. Manson sings slowly and defiantly:

Anti-choice and anti-girl, I am the anti-flag unfurled  
 Anti-war and anti-man, I got the anti-future plan  
 Anti-fascist and anti-mind, I am the anti-music god  
 Anti-sober and anti-whore, they'll never be an anti-more  
 Anti-money and anti-hate, anti-Christians are f\*\*\*ed at eight  
 Anti-cop and anti-fun, here is my anti-security god gun  
 Anti-satan and anti-black, the anti-world is on my back  
 Anti-gay and anti-dope, I am the faggot anti-pope.

In this song, Manson emphasizes radical self-stylization and denounces the 'doping' of the masses via control and conformity to mainstream values, beliefs, behaviors, socially constructed identities, and Christianity in particular. At the end of the song, he wipes his ass with a large American flag, and throws it into the cheering crowd.

Aiming to raise the alienation ante even higher, Slipknot claims (in an implicit comparison with Manson), 'To say we're anti-religion is junk. We're anti-everything.' The chorus of their song 'Surfacing' is perhaps the very best condensed expression of the anti-everything spirit, which the band screams in a deep, throaty, alienated growl as follows:

F\*\*\* it all  
 F\*\*\* this world  
 F\*\*\* everything that you stand for  
 Don't belong  
 Don't exist  
 Don't give a shit  
 Don't ever judge me!



## Inspiring and Teaching Fans

While most outsiders would surely find FTMM extremely violent, unsavory and even dangerous, fans seldom view it that way. The alienated are praised as 'real', or as those who reject all pretense or just 'tell it (and show it) the way it is'. For fans, they are authentic individuals who are *a radical difference and departure from the conformist, image-driven, commercialized mainstream*.

One way fans distinguish FTMM as being *different* is by the 'freaky', 'bizarre', or 'unique' qualities of artists or their shows, as several fans explained at Marilyn Manson's mOBSCENE Tour (Upper Darby, PA, 26 October 2003):

Freaky is interesting. Nothing really interests me anymore. People like Manson because he's freaky.

Manson puts on a show. It's awesome. I love his stage presence, costumes, and music. And he's *so* bizarre!

You won't see another show like this.

I like the way they dress. It's very theatrical.

It's unique and amazing.

Three fans explained further that the concert scene is attractive to them as a 'peaceful' place different from and away from the usual 'image pressures'; a tolerant place where all are free to self-stylize:

You might not think so by the sound of the music, but it's like peaceful. People aren't looking for that image, you know?

I like to see something different, people experiencing their view. Everybody gets to be who they are. I'm a very open-minded person.

I like people-watching. It's really fun to see so many different kinds of people, hair, and styles . . . everyone can do their own thing and it's accepted.

FTMM is also attractive and inspiring to fans because artists are *moral daredevils*. Like circus tight-rope daredevils prancing above all that is safe, stable and certain, the moral daredevils of FTMM awe and amaze with their extraordinary and spectacular courage to reject anything and anyone, transgress any rule, and say absolutely anything they want to. In other words, they get 'down' to the *dis-alienating truth of self-expression*. For example, Slipknot's Ultimate Fan Site conveys admiration for a band that stands out and up against any and all pressures to conform: 'Call them what you will. Slipknot doesn't really give a shit. They know who they are, they do what they want, they do it for themselves and they get off on it' (Slipknot Ultimate Fan Site, at: [slipknotuf.com/articles/muzi.html](http://slipknotuf.com/articles/muzi.html), retrieved 2 May 2001). In sum, FTMM artists inspire fans to be as confident as they are, that no matter



what anyone says about them, to know who they are, tell it like it is and 'just don't give a f\*\*\*' about other people's judgments! Apparently having internalized this lesson, when I asked a 24-year-old male warehouse worker about his 'kind of rebellious' Ozzfest 2003 'Jesus is a C\*nt' T-shirt, he explained: 'It's kind of a sick joke. Kids today speak their minds and are not really going to back down. Everybody's got to have a free mind' (Cradle of Filth, Electric Factory, Philadelphia, 16 December 2003). Others at Ozzfest 2003 and 2004 expressed similar sentiments of courage and conviction with T-shirt slogans such as 'Remove the Fear from My Eyes' and 'Cut Your Throat and Keep Walking'.

While FTMM inspires fans to have courage and conviction in self-expression – or as Eminem puts it, saying 'F\*\*\* you with the free-est of space this divided state of embarrassment will allow me to have' – the violent and otherwise extreme content of FTMM has prompted him and other artists to guide fans in making distinctions between reality and fantasy. For example, in the song 'My Name Is', Eminem provides a comedic lesson, in a sarcastic teacher voice, where he ridicules fans foolish enough to copy Slim Shady:

Excuse me/Can I have the attention of the class/For one second?/Hi Kids/Do you like violence?/Want to see me stick nine inch nails through each one of my eyelids?/Want to copy me and do exactly like I did?/Try this and get f\*\*\*ed up worse than mine life is?

Explaining further, Eminem says the popular lyrical violence in his music via Slim Shady is an authentic reflection of self and a 'problem child['s]' 'golden' opportunity to make a 'fortune':

We're entertainers, of course this [violent, disgusting, alienated] shit's affecting our sales/You ignoramus, but music is *reflection of self*/We just explain it, and then we get our cheques in the mail . . . We're nothing to you [i.e. the critics], but we're the f\*\*\*in shit in their [i.e. the fans'] eyes/That's why we seize the moment, and try to freeze it and own it/Squeeze it and hold it, 'cos we consider these minutes golden . . .

For Eminem, to 'Lose Yourself', or to garner the courage to expose all the true and troubling realities of one's alienated experience – was his 'one shot, one opportunity to have everything that [he] ever dreamed of'. He muses openly about his catapult to stardom in 'Sing for the Moment':

It's like kids hang on every single statement we make  
Like they worship us, plus all the stores ship us platinum  
Now how the f\*\*\* did this metamorphosis happen?  
From standin' on corners and porches just rappin'  
To havin' a fortune.

## Rage Against Nothing

So much anger aimed in no particular direction  
 Just sprays and sprays  
 Straight through your radio waves  
 It plays and plays . . . (Eminem, 'White America', *The Eminem Show* LP, 2003)

Ritzer's numerous works on the hyper-rationality of consumer society make a compelling case that as capitalism has developed into its present-day globalized form, the cost for society is a world of nothingness, a world largely robbed of authenticity, intimacy and distinctiveness. A necessary elaboration of Ritzer's work, and an ongoing area of my own, is a further exploration of the *emotional consequences* of living in a hyper-rational and fictitious world of non-people, non-services, non-places and non-things. For many people today, daily encounters are a series of scripted people, impersonal interactions, artificial environments, phone menus, lines, drive-thrus, fast-food meals, 'fast-food' situations and people, computer spam, self-service duties, commercial images and advertising – in a word, a series of encounters with what is unreal, unfulfilling and often the source of considerable frustration and anger.

The emotional consequences of living in a society of spectacle and nothingness are suggested in the expression of *everyday rage* at FTMM concerts, which fans call 'energy' and place at the very top of their list of attractions to the scene. When asked to define 'energy', fans often reply like this 20-year-old male, who said: 'I don't know. It's one of those words you can't describe. Energy is like all your emotions coming out at once . . . It's road rage!' (Ozzfest 2003, Ford Pavillion, Scranton, PA, 5 August 2003). When probed further, fans say it is 'negative' energy that can be safely and therapeutically released in the music scene. They say repeatedly of FTMM, it 'gets your aggression out' or that it's 'an aggression releaser'. Others, at Summer Sanitarium (Veterans Stadium, Philadelphia, PA, 9 August 2003), further explained the attractions of FTMM as the opportunity to safely release aggression and in doing so, to transform it into something exhilaratingly positive, feeling alive:

You can listen to this music and vent without hurting anybody.

If I've had a bad day, it gets it out, rather than taking it out on somebody else.

You get all your emotions out. It's like therapy.

Energy brings people to life. It just makes you feel alive.

Surfacing energy from negative emotion and transforming it into the intoxicating feeling of being alive is a regular ritual at FTMM concerts. Bandleaders routinely 'pump up' crowds with questions ('Are you alive, Philadelphia? Can you feel that emotion?' or 'Are you with me Scranton? Then show me

what you've got!'), declarations ('It's about time someone woke your sorry asses up!'), and exclamations ('*The ENERGY in this F\*\*\*ing building!*').

While examples of aggression-releaser (life-enhancing) songs abound, Limp Bizkit's 'Break Stuff' is a prototype. Introducing this song among thousands at Summer Sanitarium, he walked about the stage firing off loud blanks into the crowd from a sawn-off rifle. After a few rounds, he shouted: 'Did that get your attention?' Having focused the crowd's attention, the metal music began as Durst screamed: 'Right now, I'm dan-ger-ous'. Further screaming with an occasional pubescent-sounding squeal, to a pumped-up, excited crowd:

... it's just one of those days, when you don't wanna wake up, [and] everything is F\*\*\*ed, everyone sucks, and you don't know really why, but you wanna justify rippin someone's head off.

Relating to all those who have 'felt like shit, and been treated like shit', he further threatened and screamed:

... all those muthaf\*\*\*ers that want to step up, I hope you know I pack a chain saw, I'll skin your ass raw, and if my day keeps going like this I just might break, just might break something tonight ... just might break your f\*\*\*ing face tonight! Give me something break ... punk, so come and get it!

At the end of the song, fans cheered and smiled with middle fingers and devil's horns raised high in unity and appreciation. More tired, sweating and bruised men than could be counted left the mosh pits relieved and satisfied, having surfaced and then transformed their everyday rage into something exhilaratingly positive.

Fans sometimes compare *the exhilaration of being alive* at metal concerts to the apropos film *Fight Club* (1999, Twentieth Century Fox), about an exhausted and numb narcoleptic/insomniac suffering from the failed promise of self-fulfillment in a brand-name, corporate-driven, consumer society where 'everything is a copy of a copy of a copy', and where humans are reduced to 'byproducts of lifestyle obsession'. Brad Pitt (as the lead character Norton's alter ego) gives a passionate speech, explaining the (existential) consumer problem for his generation:

Goddammit ... Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don't need. We are the middle children of history, man, no purpose and place. We have no Great War. No Great Depression. Our great war is a spiritual war. Our great depression is our lives ... And we're very, *very* pissed off.

Norton's way out is through escaping to an underground boxing club. There, increasingly large groups of men from all walks of life engage in exhilarating fistfights. Pairs fight until bloody and bruised, or until one of them signals the fight is over. In *Fight Club*, men are awakened from the numbing impact of consumerism and commercialism and feel the intoxication of being

alive. There they know who they are, focus on what is meaningful, and go beyond – as Norton’s alter ego explains – being ‘Calvin Klein and Tommy Hilfiger men’. However, when the fights are over, men feel relieved and gratified but, the narrator says, nothing has changed:

You weren’t alive anywhere like you were there. But Fight Club only exists in the hours between when Fight Club starts and Fight Club ends . . . Who you were in Fight Club was not who you were in the rest of the world . . . Fight Club wasn’t about winning or losing . . . When the fight was over, nothing was solved, but nothing mattered. Afterwards we all felt saved.

In both *Fight Club* and the FTMM scene, there is an unsettling end to the story. Rather than ultimately blowing up the financial center of the credit card system, as in the case of the narcoleptic revolutionary with a ‘Cancer’ he struggles to name, the death blow for musical fight club is the blow *out* of commercialism.

### ‘F\*\*\* the Mainstream Music’ in the *Commercialized Mainstream*

Most FTMM consumer youth understand, some with anger and others with resignation, that most bands are ‘temporary’, and that the music industry will, as one concert goer explained: ‘blow them out in the mainstream and they’ll become pop like everything else’ (Ozzfest 2003, Scranton, PA, 5 August 2003).

One certain, if not usual, route to discredited ‘pop’ status is ‘when a band changes, [or] when they put themselves above the music’ (Anti-Flag, Tracadero, Philadelphia, 29 October 2003). To ‘make it’ and maintain credibility with fans requires a delicate dramaturgical exercise in *self-reflexive humility*. While self-celebration as suffering, angry and alienated anti-everything leader is permissible, blatant and egoistic self-promotion, or glam and glitter, are nothing less than objects of disgust among FTMM fans.

This delicate and tenuous line was eloquently illustrated at the 2003 Summer Sanitarium tour when Durst left the stage, moved to the back of the stadium, and sang and sat in the bleachers, in what, at first view, looked like an act of democratic sharing with the audience. However, while he was singing the excruciatingly apropos lyrics ‘No one knows what it’s like to be the bad man, to be the sad man . . . to be hated’ to a ‘great’ Who song (‘Behind Blue Eyes’), the center stage flashed (in red, white and blue), ‘LIMP. SAY IT. DISCOVER’. While watching the mass of standing, tattooed, arms-crossed and often muscular young men in the bleachers around me listen and stare with dead silence, the 18-year-old male sitting next to me had difficulty containing himself, as he protested: ‘He has *such* an ego. It’s disgusting! Look at what he’s saying!’ Pointing to the stage, and clarifying: ‘No. On the board. Yah, like I really believe his “reject” story in high school. If he keeps singing

like this, I'm not listening anymore.' After defiantly refusing to look up for the duration of the song, he protested further: 'You know, the best part of the show would be if Korn [another FTMM band still credible in his view] came out and smacked him in back of the head. I'd love it' (Summer Sanitarium, Giants Stadium, New Rutherford, NJ, 8 August 2003).

Whether more or less skilled in the number one rule of humility, of staying real, or of not getting bigger than the music, the bottom line, in any event, is this. No matter how self-reflexive or modest the artist, once they are blown out in the mainstream – promoted repeatedly though Clear Channel, Viacom MTV, VH-1 and dance clubs across the country and internationally; signed with big record labels; added to the long and compulsory list of Ticketmaster touring; and subsumed under the more general whirlwind of corporate synergy (cross-marketed in movies, product commercials, clothing lines and wrestling, highlighted as guests on talk shows from *The Howard Stern Show* to *David Letterman*, and promoted in the marketplace by any other means possible) – they are doomed to death by commercialism.

The remaining question regarding the bands discussed in this article is not when they will be commercialized, but when rebel consumers will tire of them, and turn to yet other 'alternatives'. Time is certainly expiring when Manson's 2003 mOBSCENE Tour (stylistic) slogan is 'Look Good', he resorts to (simplistic and predictable) 'sex sells' grotesque, burlesque strip-pers dominating the stage, and he plays his new German-inspired 'artistic' music at sit-down theaters. Time is also expiring when red, white and blue, holders of 15 or so platinum discs Limp Bizkit won the 2002 American Music Award for Favorite Alternative Artist, and when Durst was hired on corporate payroll as senior vice president of Interscope Records. Even Eminem's days may be numbered, as the 'king' of pop music saturates the media beyond description. One fan expressed the sentiments accompanying commercial 'sell out', with a specific example and a generalization: 'Kid Rock sucks. Look at him, he's a f\*\*\*ing poser. He sold out with his new (of all things, country!) song. It's *so* overplayed . . . A band's sold out when you want something, you can find it, when they have too much goddamn merchandise' (Ozzfest, Scranton, PA, 5 August 2003). The saving grace for Slipknot (at least for the time being) is not simply their uniquely 'alienated' performance, but their *nine-member* band. Slipknot is praised by fans, as the young man disgruntled with 'egoistic' Durst (quoted above) explained in ostensible contrast: 'A nine-member band isn't doing it simply for the money, but for the music.' He did mention though, as an afterthought: 'But they're doing side projects. Some of the members are playing [in] other [smaller] bands.'

## The Real Obscenity

During the past five years, the multiple-award-winning, multi-platinum and internationally touring bands Eminem, Limp Bizkit, Kid Rock, Marilyn Manson and Slipknot are exemplary of the most transgressive, controversial and popular white male bands in the American music mainstream. As I have shown in some detail, what links these bands thematically is that they are representations of alienated outsiders (or proudly self-proclaimed white trash, failures, freaks, rejects, nobodies) who give a loud, hostile and unmistakable finger to the 'mainstream', or to all that is moral, sacred and civilized. In sharing their alienated experiences with fans, they open their closets wide, provide detailed and deeply personal stories of private troubles and personal poisons, and act out their alienated rage in spectacular performances involving grotesque language, firing weapons, psychotic raging, violent body trashing, self-mutilation, fantasized rape and murder, and glamorized roles as Hate Club leader, Anti-Christ Superstar, Pimp of the Nation, Slim Shady and (random) Barcode Killers.

Desirous of alternatives to the media-saturated, overprocessed and image-driven commercial culture, millions of anti-commercialistic consumer youth turn to the alienated and their delineated expressions of alienation as a refreshing alternative to the commercial pressures of conformity, and as a musical time outside time that is (ostensibly) *different, free and tolerant*. The leaders of this 'circus of worthless pawns' are praised for knowing who they are, telling it the way it is, not giving a 'f\*\*\*' about others' judgments, and getting down to the dis-alienating truth of self-expression. In the context of a world that is already saturated with shock, spectacle and transgression, fans see difference or uniqueness in a more totalizing opposition to officialdom, or in F\*\*\* the Mainstream Music artists' willingness to break any rule, to say or do absolutely anything, and to reject everything and anyone, without limitation. Moreover, while fans understand FTMM as a kind of (carnavalesque) 'sick joke', their desire for authenticity and *unmediated* self-expression is genuine, but lacking an explicit and pragmatic politics. Their fight, as in the Fight Club of Twentieth Century Fox, is an agentic (yet liminal and ludic) fight against the nothingness of an artificial, impersonal, duplicitous and numbing society of the spectacle, a world where individuals are reduced (in very large part) to byproducts of consumption.

As an extension of Frank and Weiland's (1997) work and my own writing (Halnon, 2002), this article has shown that while FTMM is an example of 'the commodification of dissent' and 'poor chic', it is the more specific *commodification of the alienated and alienation experience*. However, having detailed the specificity of the alienated and alienation experience, it is surely evident by now – given the blatant internal contradictions – that this theme constitutes less of a 'real' alternative than *one of the most pervasive, popular*

*and profitable music styles in the commercialized mainstream.* Thus, this article has specified a variation of what Frank and Weiland have described and criticized as ‘the commodification of dissent’. The real obscenity, then, of FTMM is that it effectively channels youth away from their traditional historic role as harbingers of social change. As a ludic and liminal retreat from the realities of everyday life, FTMM may constitute a totalistic challenge to officialdom, but does so in ways that make little difference *outside* the music scene.

In every historic period, youth are potential visionaries, energetic and hopeful dissenters, those who might successfully lead the serious and pragmatic march against unjust laws, leaders and institutions. Today, as Eminem directly explains of White (Alienation Incorporated) America, all that youthful and energetic anger ‘just sprays and sprays’, but ‘in no particular direction’. In my view, Eminem’s words are a disturbing but largely truthful mantra for the times. That Marshall Bruce Mathers took advantage of what, in his view, was his ‘one shot, one opportunity’ to make in America (by ‘losing himself’, or commodifying his alienation experience), is less indicting of an innovative rebel artist than of the immense structural constraints for those located at the very fringes of consumer society.

Consistent with the political economy of the modern capitalist state, which controls and contains ‘potential dynamite’ through assimilative techniques, FTMM is, in very large part, a corporate-sponsored ‘fight club’, an enticing and enchanting world of pseudo-rebellion, where alienated consumer youth temporarily escape the nothingness of everyday life, release their unarticulated everyday rage and feel the exhilaration of being alive. However, the escape and euphoria offered by FTMM are little more than a fleeting and ludic revolution, and one that, in the final instance, does more to secure than to challenge the status quo. Thus, the real obscenity of FTMM is not its anti-everything rebellion against all that is moral, sacred or civilized, but rather that it serves to control and contain what might otherwise be a directed and pragmatic youth movement aimed at social justice. This is especially obscene amid, for example, a stolen presidential election, preemptive and profit-driven military violence, blatant and extreme right-wing catering to global corporations, the dramatic and increasing polarization of wealth and poverty, government resistance to universal health care, the deindustrialization of cities, the failure of the Social Security system, the ultra concentration of the media, the unpinning of constitutionally guaranteed rights to privacy and the destruction of the global environment – just a few examples of the less-than-ludic ‘Democracy of Hypocrisy’.



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