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Narrative Identity And Audience Construction: A Case Study Of The U.S's Heavy Metal And Hip-Hop Subcultures

Anthony Jolivet

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Narrative Identity And Audience Construction: A Case Study Of The U.S's Heavy Metal And Hip-Hop Subcultures.



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Anthony Jolivet

Under the supervision of Dr. Mohamed Saki

Master 1 Textes, Images et Langues étrangères.

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UBO

Université de Bretagne Occidentale

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Introduction

“Metallica *isn't* metal anymore”, “Drake is not a *real* rapper”. These are some statements that are often heard within heavy metal and hip-hop subcultures. Of course, the name of the band and/or artist mentioned can be interchangeable with any other as the debate over who truly represents the subculture have been sprawling within since their beginning. What is interesting in those statements are the usage of the verb “be”, which suggests far more than the appearance or demeanor of those artists. It suggests a real part of their being, their identity, that seems to be missing. But how can someone *be* metal or hip-hop?

Hip-hop and heavy metal both share a long history together. Born around the 70s, they both originate from a background of disenfranchised youths that searched new ways to express their discontent against a system that seemed to ignore them. However, ever since their birth, their visual representations and ways of expression have been fundamentally different. Heavy metal always expressed itself with gore imagery, graphic lyrics and a particular sense of fashion, while hip-hop distinguished itself with themes of mutual aid, rivalries and street violence. These themes and values are what constitute the identity of both of these subcultures; it is what makes them unique and recognizable. The fact that these two music genre are also part of a subculture is what makes the artists the subject of such scrutiny about their identity from their audience. A subculture is: “a way of life and set of ideas that are opposed to those accepted by most of society; a group of people who share such a way of life and such ideas”. As such, every member of the subculture is expected to abide by the principles established within it. Therefore, in the same way an individual that does not abide by the values of society would be deemed “not normal”, an individual that does not abide by the values of the subculture will be rejected by its members. Artists must therefore showcase to their audience their membership to the subculture through their discourse, and more specifically through the narration of their life. As identity is defined by the persistence of certain set of markers through time, the narration of life is the only way to present their existence throughout the life of the narrator. This is why we will focus on the discourse of artists throughout this essay; to

study and show how musicians portray themselves in order to be qualified as “metal” or “hip-hop”.

In the first part of this essay, we will establish what we consider to be identity, how it is constructed, and how it expresses itself within narration. This will allow us to target specific parts of the identity of artists. In that way, we will be able to compare their construction between artists of the same subculture and of other subcultures. We will also explore the history of both hip-hop and heavy metal in order to identify the codes, values and historical references that we will look for in our musicians’ discourses.

In the second part of this essay, we will analyze and deconstruct the narration of sub-cultural artists in order to identify what forms their discourse about membership and identity take. When reading interviews and statements from sub-cultural artists, we observe that, while the themes presented differ from musician to musician, the form of their discourse remains very similar. We will attempt to explain the origin of these similarities by placing their discourse within the context of the history of heavy metal and hip-hop subcultures, in order to determine the place sub-cultural identity occupies within narration. We will also analyze how artists present themselves as unique and subversive through narration, while maintaining their sub-cultural identity.

And in the final part of this essay, we will reflect on the impact of the sub-cultural discourse on the audience. As the narration of musicians is aimed at their audience, we have to take into account their expectations and reception in order to better understand the construction of narration within sub-cultural discourse. Furthermore, we will also reflect on the freedom of expression within subculture, as we will see that sub-cultural artists are subjected to a variety of restrictions.

I. Artist Identity And Subculture Identity

I.1. Subculture and identity.

I.1.a. Identity and the process of identification.

To study the artist's construction of their identity, we must first define what composes identity in the first place in order to determine which aspects are to be analyzed. We will therefore deconstruct the process of identification to understand what is needed for identity construction, before tackling what hip-hop and heavy metal artists need to take into account when presenting their identity.

The identity of an individual is defined as the result of the process of identification, which is the process through which the person observing an individual will compare the present unique markers that form the individual's identity to the markers they identified in the past. If the markers are deemed the same, or similar to some degree by the spectator, the individual will be identified as being "the same" and its identity will be verified. These unique markers and their permanence are what forms an individual's identity.

Identity is divided in two parts that partake in the process of identification of an individual: the identity-*ipse* and the identity-*idem* (Ricoeur, 1997, 140). The identity-*ipse* is what Paul Ricoeur defined as: "[...] *l'ensemble des marques distinctives qui permettent de ré-identifier un individu humain comme étant le même.*" (Ibidem 144). These distinctive marks range from physical to moral traits that can be identified as being similar between a point A and a point B in time. These traits are what differentiates the individual as being "unique" compared to others. On the other hand, the identity-*idem* is what is defined by Ricoeur as the: "[...] *parole tenue en fidélité à la parole donnée.*" (Ibidem 148). The identity-*idem*, as opposed to the identity-*ipse*, is a non-substantial set of markers. The permanence of these markers rely on the individual's will to maintain their similarities, or in other words, to maintain a coherent speech between two points in time. To be successful, the process of identification in present time therefore implies the observer's knowledge of the individual's markers at a past time, in order for the individual's identity to be recognized and be perceived as unique.

For an artist, this perception of uniqueness is essential to their success, especially in the context of subculture where showing a divergence from the mainstream culture is key. This uniqueness is also what sets them apart in the market and attracts a potential audience. It is therefore a priority for artists to present to an audience the different markers that set them apart from the mainstream and from other artists from their subculture as well. These markers will be their appearance, their moral compass, their musical style, their visual productions; such as music clips, album covers, merchandise etc... These compose the substantial markers of artists, or their identity-*ipse*. Their identity-*idem* will be composed of their political opinions, personal stories, goals and wishes, which are non-substantial markers. The presentation of these various markers to the audience is important. Since identification requires the audience to have knowledge of the artist's markers at different points in time in order to recognize them and qualify them as "the same", the artist has to make sure their audience is exposed to the markers they want to put forward. It is this presentation and the choice of markers presented that will constitute part of the analysis of artists' construction of identity.

1.1.b. Sub-cultural identity and individual identity.

However, when talking about subcultures, the individual identity of artists is not the only identity we have to take into account.

Subcultures are cultures that aim to set values and morals that are different from those of established society. Heavy metal and hip-hop are classified as subcultures meaning they possess their own values that differentiate them from the established society they refer to as the "mainstream culture". Therefore, there are two different identities that must be taken into account: the identity of the subculture and the identity of artists. Because, as subcultures differentiate themselves from the mainstream one, they possess their own set of markers that allow them to be recognizable, and distinguishable by the public. Artists must therefore present not only the markers that qualify them as unique, but also the markers that prove their membership to the subculture they are a part of. This membership is essential to their success

as the audience seeks the presence of these markers before even identifying what makes an artist unique or not.

As what fans listen to determines their membership to the culture, artists therefore determine the membership of the audience and must project the markers that are expected of them. It is therefore essential for them to conform to the markers established by the history of their subculture in order to be accepted by the audience.

“To many metal fans, the true definition of what constitutes a metal fan is not so much about what metal excludes, but what it includes, especially on a technical level, namely what kind of metal one listens to, true or false metal.” (Phillips and Cogan, 2009, 7)

An audience that is, as much as artists, a member of the community that abides by the principles established within it, and produces content within the culture that also conforms to its identity. The audience therefore seeks artists that conform to the identity of the subculture they are a part of, as members of the audience will be judged by their peers as “true fans” of “posers”¹ based on their listening habits. It is therefore expected from artists to not only present themselves as unique, but also to present themselves as *being* heavy metal or hip-hop, in order to be accepted by the members (i.e. the audience) of the subculture.

“The notion of membership is one of the most challenging and confrontational questions of youth popular culture, and Hip Hop was not spared from this vexing issue. Simply stated, “Who is Hip Hop?” [...]” (Price, 2006, 46).

This idea of group identity being mixed with individual identity is not unique to heavy metal and hip-hop, but something that subcultures share. The questions of identity and authenticity are highly valued because of the nature of such cultures, as they are constructions of identity built by a group of individuals.

“Dans la représentation qu’ils se font d’eux-mêmes ou dans l’image qu’ils veulent donner d’eux, les sujets humains s’appuient sur des représentations/images groupales, ce qui explique la puissance des références et affiliations identitaires, et l’importance accordée à ce qui a pu être appelé groupes d’appartenance ou groupes de référence.” (Barbier, 2018)

1 Someone who affects some behavior, style, attitude or other condition, often to impress or influence others. A popular pejorative slang in subcultures, as authenticity is often placed in high regard.

Social groups need to be uniform in order to establish a proper identity, therefore the idea of *being* a part of the social group means adhering to a whole set of codes established through its history that are expected to be part of the individual's identity. The relationship to identity in subculture therefore goes in two ways: the artists projecting markers and the audience expecting markers.

1.1.c. Hip-Hop and Heavy Metal history and codes.

In order to understand which markers of sub-cultural identity must be found in the artists' discourse, we must first look into the history of both heavy metal and hip-hop subcultures, starting with heavy metal.

The heavy metal music genre characterizes itself with heavy guitar riffs and high speed tempos, as well as profane lyrics that lean into satanic and occult symbolism. The goal of the genre was to shock the music scene of the time by overturning Rock'n Roll's tempos and guitars with faster and heavier instrumentals. An overturn led by the fact that, in the 70s, Rock'n Roll was a mainstream genre listened by all. As the hippie movement and counterculture fell into popular culture during the 60s and 70s, the Rock'n Roll genre, largely associated with it, accompanied its fall. A fall into popular culture caused by the increase in labels promoting Rock'n Roll's "subversive aspect" as a marketing tool, which led to a massive influx of money poured into concerts to promote the genre. Music labels saw the opportunity to invest in a pre-established market, built by a community that tried to overturn the U.S system of the time (Bidaud, 1982, 33). The questions of systemic racism, anti-patriotism, anti-war and overall progressive topics the Hippie movement held, all were reduced to the popular imagery composed of a lazy youth only preoccupied with cannabis consumption and anti-patriotism. An imagery largely created by the U.S.'s economic market of the time. Head shops² opened around the country in order to capitalize on the cannabis culture that developed at the time, and a variety of Rock groups made a success in the 70s by singing their rejection of the militaristic catastrophe that was the Vietnam War. Along with these came the increase in representation of the Hippie movement in American cinema that further amplified its recuperation by mainstream media in order to cater to the youth of the time.

2 Retail outlets for cannabis products and other related items.

The Hippie movement and Rock'n Roll genre therefore barged into the mainstream and its audience saw themselves being dispossessed of their culture. A culture that, through economic recuperation, saw its ideology being pillaged by the market (Ibidem 34). It is in this context that heavy metal was born. As Geezer Butler, bassist for the band *Black Sabbath*³ declared:

"It was always the hippy, happy stuff on the radio and there were we, in Aston, having to go to work in factories. We wanted to put how we thought about the world at the time. We didn't want to write happy pop songs. We gave that industrial feeling to it." (Woods, 2017).

Their goal was to sing about the violence they faced on a daily basis, a violence ignored by the pop-cultural scene and this is what gave heavy metal the violent and heavy identity that constitutes its backbone as of today. *Black Sabbath*, in the 70s, sang about mental illnesses, war, love, with a heavy, gritty tone, and references to the occult, that built what we know of metal as of today. It is this violence and profanity in both music and themes that constitute the subversion of morals and values of the subculture, and that reverberates into the audience and the codes it adopted along the years. Heavy metal fans, or metalheads, dress in black, wear leather, band clothing and merchandise. Metal concerts appear as violent and wild through various practices, such as moshing⁴ during band plays or large amounts of alcohol consumption (e.g. In 2019, during the French metal festival *Hellfest*, 440 000 liters of beer were consumed) (Bertrand, 2019). However, despite the many markers that define what *is* a metalhead, it is most commonly accepted within heavy metal culture that the primary defining trait of a metalhead is simply listening to metal music (Phillips and Cogan, 2009, 7). A definition that is not unanimous across the different schools of thoughts but listening to Metal music always *is* the primary marker.

3 A British heavy metal band considered to be one of the founding fathers of the genre, along with the groups *Led Zeppelin* and *Deep Purple*.

4 Moshing is a style of dance in which participants push or slam into each other, typically performed to "aggressive" live music such as heavy metal and punk rock.

Therefore, in contrast to Rock'n Roll, which was now devoid of any progressive social commentary, heavy metal appeared as authentic and unique, which is why it gained popularity in the late 70s. An authenticity that is now greatly valued in the culture, and shapes heavy metal's relationship with money. Seeing what the music labels have done to the Rock'n Roll scene, heavy metal artists and fans are weary of everything that implies marketing and profit. Artists are now expected to reject the music industry, along with the mainstream culture.

On the other hand, hip-hop was born, not out of reaction to a genre being pillaged of its ideas, but out of a need for an outlet for the Afro-American community. The genre was born in the poverty plagued Bronx of the early 70s, nicknamed "America's worst slum", where gang turf⁵-wars and abandonment from the city of New York left a black youth to survive alone (Price, 2006, 4). This period saw the rise of House parties in the borough, parties organized in houses, empty halls or whatever place was available, by people who knew or were DJs, in order to make a little money. It is in these house parties and from the creativity of DJs that hip-hop was born: by mixing various vinyl tracks together in order to keep only the parts where the crowd was the most entertained. A practice DJ Kool Herc, commonly referenced to be the one having invented it, describes:

"On most records, people have to wait through a lot of strings and singing to get to the good part of the record," [...] "But I give it to them all up front." (Lynch, 2020)

House parties quickly spread around the Bronx as the places to have fun for the youth of the time, away from the misery of the borough and the persistent gang violence. Gang violence that, along time, mixed into hip-hop culture. House parties became the place where gang would square off with dancing or MCing instead of physical violence. People would organize rap battles, challenging their lyrical and improvisational skills, during House parties and rivalries became a significant part of hip-hop culture:

"Because of this, many Bronx citizens that were in gangs or were being recruited by gangs used rapping as a way of channeling violent urges into artistic ones instead." (ATL Vibes, "The History of Hip-Hop in the 1970s", 2019).

5 Slang designating the area that a group or individual considers its own.

These battles also sprouted the discipline of B-Boying, also called breakdancing, where people would dance during the “breaks” DJs aimed to extend in order to have a sound that was easier to enjoy and dance to. Furthermore, rivalries not only sprouted within audiences but also between DJs, as house parties grew in popularity. Some DJs were localized within certain parts of the city that constituted their “turf” and many DJs often trash-talked their peers in order to distinguish and impose themselves in the city (Itch FM, 2017). The popularization of hip-hop culture therefore attracted various creative disciplines along with its new mass of audience and hip-hop is now assumed to be composed of four elements; DJing, B-boying, MCing⁶ and Graffiti (Price, 2006, 13). It is these four disciplines that compose the culture, with DJing and MCing being the most notorious and prevalent. And enjoying or partaking in any of these disciplines is what makes you a member of hip-hop culture.

Hip-hop therefore replaced the violent climate of the Bronx by a creative outlet for the disenfranchised black youth. Creating a culture in which they were free to express themselves and flee from the violence of their daily life. The genre became a way for the black youth to create wealth, share their way of life and the challenges they face. This mentality reverberated from the first house parties into today’s hip-hop culture, where success is held in high regards due to its emancipation aspect for Afro-Americans. A reason why many rappers like to show off their wealth and why signing with labels and succeeding is not automatically seen negatively in the culture, contrary to heavy metal. However, it does not mean that authenticity is not valued. Even if most artists seek success, respect to the community that put them up to the top is still greatly valued and very important if hip-hop artists want to be taken seriously and respected. As DJ Kool Herc worded:

“Never forget where you come from. I came from the people’s choice. Never said I was number one, I never gloated myself for nothing. I gave it to the people that came to my party and I call them the “man on the street”.” (MoreThanAStance, 2011, 7:20)

6 MC or “Master of Ceremony” is a term used in Hip-Hop to designate rappers.

When analyzing artists' discourse, we will therefore be looking for the markers established by the history of their subcultures. For heavy metal artists, we will look for references to violence or aggressiveness, authenticity, disregard for profit and rejection of the mainstream culture. For hip-hop artists, we will look for references to community, rivalry, success and social commentary. Knowing what markers are to be expected will allow us to compare and analyze the various forms in which they are presented to the audience in order to prove artist membership. It will therefore be interesting to compare the different forms the sub-cultural and individual markers take within discourse between artists, and between subcultures, in order to see the various adaptations of artist discourses depending on need and context.

I.2. Narration and subculture.

I.2.a. *Narration and its relationship to subculture and identity.*

As we have established, in order to construct an identity, an individual needs to present a certain set of markers that are unique to themselves, but also needs these markers to be identical from one point in time to the other. This is the idea of **permanence through time** that defines what identity is, in addition to uniqueness. In order to study the identity of artists, we therefore not only need to study the uniqueness of the markers they present (or the uniqueness of the way they present them) but also how they present the permanence of these markers through their lives. As artists begin their career unknown by the audience, they have to use various methods in order to communicate and prove the presence of these markers throughout their lives. Markers that, as we have established, are divided into two categories: sub-cultural markers and individual markers. This is why we will use the concept of “narrative identity” in our study.

Narrative identity is defined by Paul Ricoeur as: the mediation through narration of the two parts of identity (Ricoeur, 1997, 150). The use of narration allows the individual to create a continuity between the different events of their life in order to produce a digestible version of their life-story. This creation of continuity therefore allows the notion of permanence through time to be utilized in order to create identity through the life events of the “narrator”.

“Ricoeur montre ainsi la manière dont temporalité, identité et constitution du soi se nouent intimement dans la narration et le récit, en offrant une continuité historique, c’est-à-dire une continuité de sens, au sujet qui « se raconte lui-même ».” (Herlant-Hemar, 2013, 1)

Narration is therefore a medium through which the individual has access to the “temporality” and point of view of events in order to present what is advantageous for them. In the context of subculture artists, what is advantageous to express is membership to the subculture, as it is essential for their career. A membership only proven by the presentation of sub-cultural markers of identity throughout the life of the artist to the audience.

The concept of identity being very important in the context of subculture, it is capital that this identity is transmitted to the audience in order to establish relevance. However, this identity being only known by the individual itself or an entourage that has known the individual for an extended period of time, the only outlets for artists to present their identity is through their own voice (i.e via interviews, songs...). The narration of their life is the primary tool for them to establish the permanence of their identity through time. By narrating life events, individuals can put forward aspects that reflect the markers they deem necessary to present or highlight. By the reorganization of these events, they create a continuity and a permanence that chronological time does not allow. Reorganizing these events through narration allows artists to build a continuity between them. They therefore have access to a way of proving the permanence of their membership, through this continuity, to their subculture, in order to then prove their identity as a member of said subculture.

This continuity of narration is extremely important for artist's credibility, and it is why artists must establish and maintain it. If the continuity of markers were to be ruptured, backlash from their audience would ensue. Something that has been seen recently with the heavy metal group *Metallica* for example. On November 18, 2021, the group posted on their official Instagram page a giveaway for a Mercedes super car, sponsored by the company *Omaze*⁷ (*Metallica*'s profile (@*metallica*) on Instagram, Nov. 18, 2021). Even though a part of the money raised is given to charity, the act of posing next to a super car and promoting it is enough to damage the image of the group due to what a super car represents. As we've seen before, this type of practice goes completely against the philosophy of heavy metal subculture, and therefore the group faced backlash⁸ from the heavy metal community. Something the group is accustomed to as their status of highest grossing heavy metal group already gives them a questionable reputation in the heavy metal sphere.

7 A private for-profit fundraising company which model is based around donating money, of which 15 to 60% is versed to a charity, in order to enter prize giveaways.

8 See *Figure 1* on page 21

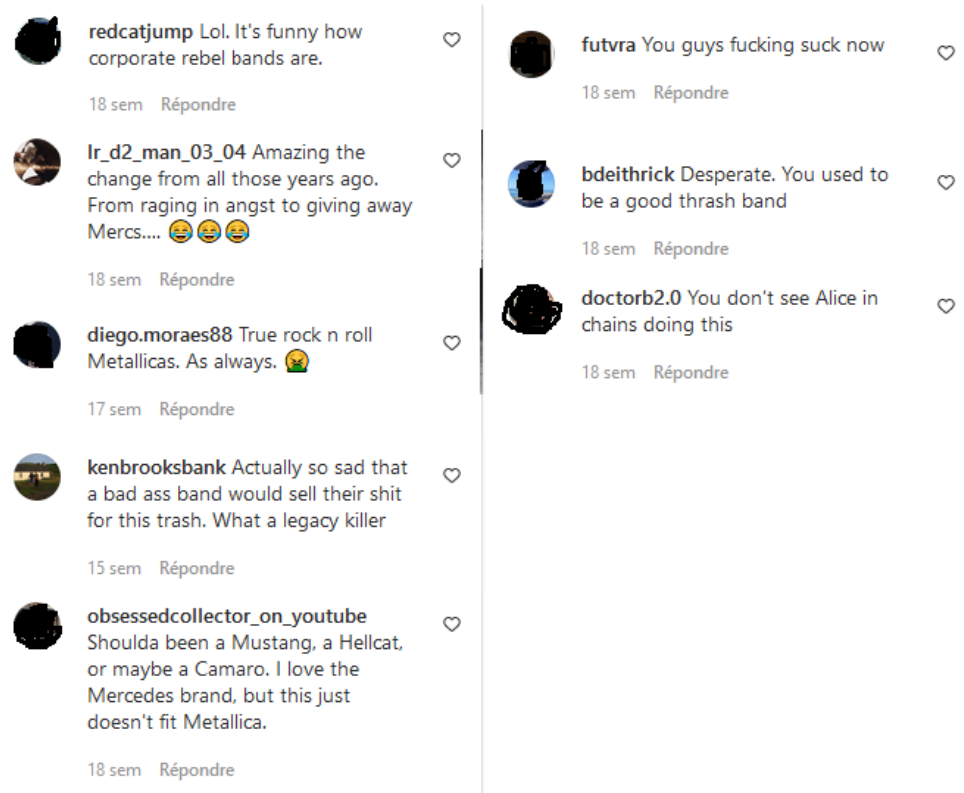


Figure 1: Examples of comments found under @metallica's post from 18/11/2021

The reason this post is so controversial is that it marks a break in the coherence of the narration of the group's identity. Ever since their debut in 1983, they established themselves as a group full of angst against society, sometimes denouncing corporate practices (e.g. Metallica, *Damage Inc.*, "Master of Puppets" 1986.). Looking at the way they narrate themselves, according to Ricoeur's narrative identity theory, we can establish here a break of the continuity of the narration of themselves and therefore a collapse of their identity: the spectator cannot identify the group as being the same as in the past due to the lack of past markers in the present. The group therefore failed to maintain its identity-*idem*. This is something artists in subculture must avoid in order to maintain credibility. The backlash due to a rupture in identity can also be seen in the hip-hop subculture, where young artists have a tendency to disrespect older and more respected artists within the subculture in order to draw eyes on themselves (ourculturehiphop, 2018).

As respect is one of the fundamental aspects of the culture, especially towards artists that paved the way for the younger ones, this kind of attitude is always met with resistance in the community, and most of the times, anger, as it represents a disruption of historical markers of the subculture.

We therefore established the reasons why narration is at the center of identity representation in subculture, as it puts forward the sub-cultural and individual markers in order to prove their continuity as well as the legitimacy of artists on the sub-cultural scene. If the narration of these markers is interrupted throughout their career, they will be met with backlash from the audience. They must therefore pay attention to the image they present of themselves. It is the different forms this narration takes, as well as how it is organized and for which reasons, that we will study. A narrative that will be constructed through interviews, social media posts, musical works etc... which will be constructing the identity of artists as both members of their subculture and unique individuals within it.

1.2.b. Presentation of the corpus.

In order to analyze artist's identity discourse we will be studying six different groups/artists. All of the artists under study have started their career around the year 2010; meaning their first ever album has been published around that year. This year restriction is in order to have a reasonable time frame in order to study the various evolution of the narration of their identity through time, without leaving aside parts of their discourse. All bands also originate from the United States, in order to have a uniform cultural background when analyzing discourses and cultural references.

To analyze discourse in hip-hop subculture, we will study the following groups/artists:

- ***CZARFACE***: *CZARFACE* is a hip-hop supergroup⁹ formed in 2013 by hip-hop duo 7L and Esoteric, and joined by Wu-Tang Clan member Inspectah Deck. As a supergroup, of which one (Inspectah Deck) is a member of one of the most influential hip-hop groups of the 2000s, it is interesting to study how they handle their already established career in the context of a new formed group and identity. An experience as artists we

⁹ A supergroup is a musical group whose members are already successful as solo artists or as part of other successful groups, or well known in other musical professions.

see in their approach of hip-hop, which is old-school, emphasizing good music and rejecting profit.

“Sellout, sellout, muthafucka get the hell out.

[...]

Keep balling, 'cuz emceeing ain't your calling.” (Czartacus, 2015, 1:55)

Their image is centered around pop-culture and mostly comic-book visuals, which makes them fairly unique in the scope of the hip-hop scene. The junction of the two pop-culture juggernauts that are comics and hip-hop, and their interaction, is another part that will be interesting to analyze.

- **Freddie Gibbs:** *Freddie Gibbs* is a solo gangsta rapper, whose debut studio album *ESGN* was released in 2013. However, he self-released various extended plays prior to that date, from 2009 to 2012. His style is consistent with the gangsta rap scene of the 90s. He is outrageous, unhinged, despite having developed a style of soft spoken melodic rap in the latest years that makes interesting an analysis of how this change is explained by the artist himself. Furthermore, Freddie Gibbs is known for his borderline comments and attitude on social media. An attitude that got him banned of *Instagram* on Dec. 21st, 2020. His discourse will be a way to analyze the different ways strength, wealth and subversion can be put forward in narration, and how it compares to other hip-hop artists.
- **Run the Jewels:** *Run the Jewels*, or sometimes shortened to *RTJ*, is a hip hop super-duo composed of rapper and producer El-P and rapper Killer Mike, which released their self-titled debut album *RTJ* in 2013. The group has shown a deep involvement in the latest social issues and social battles in the U.S., overtly supporting the Black Lives Matter movement by releasing a special album named *Cat Remix* (i.e. a joke album, with the artists rapping over a soundtrack entirely composed of cat noises) and giving all the benefits to an association helping victims of police brutality. The group therefore does not shy away from expressing political opinions. What will be under study is therefore this integration of the political into their discourse and how it compares to other groups under study.

On the other hand, to analyze discourse in heavy metal subculture, we will study the following groups:

- ***All Pigs Must Die***: The group *All Pigs Must Die* is a hardcore-punk group formed in 2010. The group operates in one of the most extreme scenes of the subculture, and produces music that is extreme, loud and violent. Having under study a group from an extreme fringe of the subculture will allow us to analyze how their discourse compares to those of other, less extreme, metal groups. Furthermore, despite being the most hardcore band chosen for this essay, their stance on political topics as well as philosophical opinions are rather neutral, which is interesting considering their extreme style of music. The origin of their name being described as: “ [...] the name means neither to glorify violence per se nor, with a familiar slur, to vilify the police in particular.” (Ratliff, 2012). It is a peculiar stance for an extreme group to avoid divisive statements. This will allow us to also study the relationship groups have with subversion, and if this subversion is substantive or only conspicuous.
- ***Power Trip***: *Power Trip* is a thrash metal band formed in 2008, and whose first studio album, *Manifest Decimation*, was released in 2013. This group is interesting to take into account as it is one of the most successful thrash metal band of this decade. An achievement, as this metal genre peaked in popularity during the 80s and 90s before declining and leaving its place to death metal, deemed more hardcore and more faithful to the roots of the subculture following the success of thrash metal on the mainstream. *Power Trip* therefore is worth analyzing to see what separates them from the thrash metal bands that peaked in the 90s, such as *Metallica*. And see how they present themselves in order to follow the identity linked to thrash metal, without assimilating themselves to groups that are now considered “mainstream” or “sellouts”.

- ***Thou***: The group *Thou* is an experimental doom metal band formed in 2005 that released their first album, *Tyrant*, in 2007. The group characterizes itself with medieval imagery, and a “do it yourself” philosophy, especially with the planning of their tours. The group is also very vocal on political topics, assuming an anarchist/anti-fascist stance in interviews and lyrics. Their lead singer, Bryan Funck, is also very involved in anti-animal cruelty campaigns and veganism on social media. A set of stances that separates them from the majority of heavy metal groups, which have a tendency to remain apolitical or leave a blur around their convictions. The integration of these convictions into their identity as a heavy metal band is what is interesting in the analysis of their discourse.

These six groups will offer us a wide range of discourses and styles that will be interesting to analyze in order to compare and establish the various ways artists in hip-hop and heavy metal construct and maintain their identity. Studying identity markers and using narrative identity theory will allow us to study the various mechanisms of discourse used within subculture in order to determine: how discourse is constructed, for what purpose, how the audience responds to it and in what way. With the various groups presented we will attempt to decompose this discourse into various categories of subjects and symbols in order to deconstruct and dress the picture of sub-cultural discourse and its intricacies.

II. Narration And Sub-cultural Discourse

II.1. Narration through initial presentation.

This chapter is centered around the various ways artists can, through the para-text, narrate their own identity as artist. An identity, as we have seen, composed of the identity-*ipse* and identity-*idem*; meaning identity as being unique, and identity as being the same as either yourself from another point in time, or, as we will see, as being similar to another. What we define as para-text, in this instance, is every piece of communication shared by artists that is not from a musical production. This part is therefore dedicated to study how artists can, through narration, present themselves as either being unique, or similar to themselves or another.

II.1.a. Naming schemes and their signification.

As we have established, artists are the narrators of their own identity to their audience, as they are in control of what to show, hide, highlight etc... Narration designates the set of tools that are used to tell a specific story, we can argue that the name of an individual artist itself or of a group tells part of their identity, in a context where a name carries both an identifying and a marketing goal.

“That is why to the concept of identity, following by T.A. Komova (2003), we include “the name that is given to us from our birth” (p. 4), as the absence of a name means the absence of an identity.” (Aksholakova, 2014)

The first and most visible way artists can implement identity through narration therefore is via their name. The name of a group or artistic formation is the first piece of identity that the audience will be subjected too, it therefore is expected that this name reflects the style of the artists that it defines, as well as present their membership to a specific subculture. The group name will therefore be composed of words or expressions that relate to certain markers of sub-cultural identity.

The hip-hop group *Run The Jewel* named themselves after a common expression in Atlanta, their hometown. “Run the jewels” is originally a slang expression used in armed robberies in the 80s, meaning “give me what you’ve got” (Clique TV, 2017, 30:54). Using this

expression as a group name identifies the group as members of the poor population of Atlanta, the one that knows the struggles and hardships of living in poor communities where crime is the most present.

El-P: “We just thought it was a badass, gangsta rap, rap name you know? Because we both remembered that...” (Ibidem, 31:00).

The name therefore allows the group to reference the narrative of hip-hop history, referencing its background with the gangs of the Bronx, in order to adopt a “hip-hop identity”. On the other hand, referring to a slang not well known outside of Atlanta’s poor boroughs also allows them to prove their legitimacy to express themselves in the name of poor communities in general, as it proves a membership to that same community.

El-P: “Man we kinda been there, we kinda know what it’s like to lose everything” (Ibidem, 31:57)

With this name they therefore establish themselves as both a hip-hop group and as artists with a background of struggle and hardships caused by their socioeconomic background. This usage of name in order to establish membership to a genre is also applicable to solo artists. Freddie Gibbs produces music under his own name instead of a group name, even if he does not produce music alone. Rappers using their own names or nicknames is a common practice in gangsta rap. As the genre is defined by lyrics establishing personal success, wealth etc... it is therefore revolving around rappers as individuals and not as members of a group. Using their name, or nickname, is therefore a way to put themselves at the center stage and establish that their music is about them. Establishing therefore a membership to gangsta rap as a genre, in the way artists like *Snoop Dog*, or *Eminem* have.

The practice of using your group name as a way to be easily assimilated to a genre by the audience is a common practice in heavy metal. The group name serves as a mark of membership to certain sub-genres within the subculture, as heavy metal grew in various different branches. Thrash metal group names have a tendency to include references to notions such as “power” or adjectives that evoke an “industrial” lexical field. The name “Power Trip” therefore encapsulates this naming scheme, in the lineage of popular thrash metal groups of the 90s such as *Metallica*, *Megadeth* or *Panthera*. It expresses the idea of power with the

usage of “power trip”¹⁰ as an expression. On the other hand, groups belonging to more extreme sub-genres, such as death metal, tend to use a more gory and graphic lexical field. Which is what the group *All Pigs must Die* identifies itself with through its name. The group describes the origin of the name as: “a pig is anybody who is irreversibly corrupt.” (Ratliff, 2012). Through the notions of “death” and furthermore a kind of “genocide”, through the expression “All”, they are adopting the gory lexical field established by death metal groups such as *Slayer*, or *Death*.

These naming schemes classify into a category of names evoking parts of the genre’s history in order to create a self-explanatory name. They partake in, and reference the story and identity markers of their subculture. Furthermore, they allow artists to prove their own membership, as they use references and codes that are only comprehensible by members of their subculture.

Groups that do not correspond to these naming standards also do express a part of their identity through their name, but using narration in a different way. The name of the group *Thou* makes the group stand out compared to other metal groups. As the group is more inclined towards experimental metal, the uniqueness of their name hints towards the genre they belong to through the subversion of the established codes we have seen. Something various experimental groups of heavy metal have adopted, such as *Tool*, or *Dream Theater*. The name still implies some of the identity markers of heavy metal: “thou” is an archaic second-person pronoun which triggers the imagery of the medieval, along with the imagery associated of the time (i.e wars, violence). The reference to violence is much more subtle, and the name being just a single pronoun is eye-catching. The name therefore follows a pattern among experimental groups but also plays around existing codes by doing so. Here, the name is used to tell the audience what the group *is not* and play on their curiosity to attract them. It is therefore a different usage of narration. A uniqueness in narration that also differentiates the name “CZARFACE” from the rest of hip-hop groups, while still using a set of markers from hip-hop culture. Using the term “czar”, the Russian royal denomination, caters to hip-hop’s culture of “proving who is best” and therefore is used in order to establish a sense of

10 A sustained and often aggressive exercise of power over others in order to boost one's stature or feelings of self-worth.

superiority from the group. But what makes the name of the group unique is that the name also designates the persona “CZARFACE” that the group created: “an antihero in the spirit of Wolverine or something...” (Olmstead, 2015). *CZARFACE* therefore is both a hip-hop formation **and** a character that features in several visual representations, comics and is the voice through which the group expresses itself in their songs. The symbiosis between comic book culture and hip-hop culture is what makes the group different, which is why this symbiosis is told to the audience by the group through its name.

The narration of one artist’s own identity therefore starts with the way they name themselves. Through the history and references a name carries, it tells to the audience what is expected to be found in the group. The name is a piece of narration of their identity that artists put forward willingly. But the name “CZARFACE”, or any other name we cited, does not carry any of its intended impact if it is not combined with the imagery that originally goes with it.

II.1.b. Narration through imagery

The second part of initial presentation of identity in the musical scene is through album covers. Aside from the group name, they are the primary exposure to the group which the audience have at first glance. Their composition is important in order to be effective at telling what the group’s identity is about.

All Pigs Must Die covers feature various illustrations: from a decaying Jesus Christ head on their 2011’s “God is War” album, to circle formed by dead mice on their 2017’s album “Hostage Animal”. The covers have the characteristic to illustrate the name of the album through graphic artistic renditions that stick with the gory identity of hardcore metal. In order to stay coherent and express that all of these albums are made by one group, these artworks are all in black and white, juxtaposed with the band’s logo. They therefore establish visuals that allows the audience to understand what is the type of the group, while also establishing a coherence between the albums that establishes the visual identity through a coherent visual narration. Visual narration that was consolidated after their first album, “God Is War”, by featuring animals and nature, in some shape or form, on their covers; namely “Nothing Can

Violate This Nature” and “Hostage Animal” feature a reference to nature or wildlife either through their title or their covers. The usage of animals as a representation echoes the name of the band, which allows further recognizability through coherence



Figure 2: Covers from the albums "Nothing Violates This Nature" (2013) and "Hostage Animal" (2017) (from left to right).

The image cover of “Hostage Animal” also corresponds to a visual representation of its name. What is featured on the album cover is what is called a “Rat King”, which is a group of rats found with its tails tangled up with each other. It is a rare phenomenon, rarely found in the wild. The particularity of this phenomenon is that almost no “Rat King” whose individuals are alive have been found. It is therefore presumed that the rats have died following the phenomenon, as they are unable to escape. We can therefore see the connotation between the graphic visual allegory and the name of the album; “Hostage Animal”. This type of reference further elaborates the imagery of the group.

On the other hand, *CZARFACE*’s album covers feature the character CZARFACE in various situations, represented in an art style reminiscent of early *Marvel* comics; meaning their album covers also work as comic book covers, with the composition of both the character and group name being similar to those of 80s comic-books, that presented the character and its name on the cover. The symbiosis introduced earlier when studying their denomination therefore takes its meaning when put together with their visual identity. The name itself is the

name of the group, but when put together with the composition and visual style of their album cover, the name also becomes the one of the character CZARFACE. This introduces the audience to the identity of the group through visual narration. A visual narration that is consistent throughout the career of the group, which is a direct benefit from the usage of a “mascot”, a practice that has been popularized by various thrash metal groups like *Megadeth* and their mascot Vic Rattlehead, or *Iron Maiden* with their character Eddie, from which *CZARFACE* declares having been inspired by (Writers, 2019). Having a unique character feature on each of their album is an easy way to keep a consistent visual narrative and therefore being recognizable by their audience. Therefore, each *CZARFACE* album creates the impression of tuning into a new adventure of the character, rather than listening to a new hip-hop album. The consistency of visual narration therefore establishes a visual identity for a group; as previous and present visual iterations being the same allows identification by the audience.



Figure 3: Cover artworks for the albums "Inspectah Deck + 7L&Esoteric = CZARFACE" (2013) and "Every Hero Needs A Villain" (2015) (from left to right).

However, having a consistent visual narrative does not only create identity, it also opens various different ways of conveying a message. The group *Thou* has had a consistent visual identity throughout its career, using cover arts done in the style of medieval engravings, consolidating the imagery affiliated with their name. They also released covers illustrated using daguerreotype photographs that give a surreal aspect to their production. However, in 2020, they released the album *May Our Chambers Be Full*, in collaboration with Emma Ruth Rundle, a rock singer. The cover of this album differs completely from the style established by the group, using a more modern approach through a digital photograph of a person dressed in a black robe. This album clashes with the rest of their production from a musical standpoint, the instrumental is calmer and Emma Ruth Rundle brings a soft voice that is the opposite of the usual death growl¹¹ of *Thou* singer Bryan Funck. The fact that this clash is represented with the shift in the visual narration of the band's album covers shows that the consistency in narration and visual representation can also be something that can be played with in order to bring a different story to tell the audience, and therefore present them a product that varies in identity.

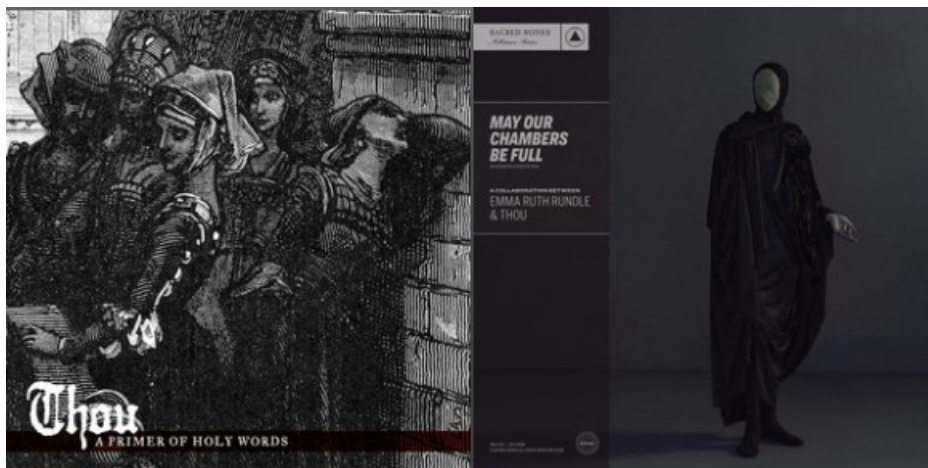


Figure 4: Comparison of *Thou* covers: On the left "A Primer Of Holy Words" (2020), on the right "May Our Chambers Be Full" (2021)

11 A vocal style usually employed by death metal singers but also sometimes used in other heavy metal styles.

What we studied is what I consider to be a form of narration of identity unique to subculture, as it can only be fully understood if the audience is aware of the codes and identity markers associated with it. Contrary to mainstream productions, that are made to be recognized by the majority of persons, subculture productions requires the audience to learn a set of codes in order to be fully understood. The way identity is narrated by artists here is only efficient within the context of subculture, but in doing so, is far more efficient at giving information about the identity of a group or artist, with limited tools.

II.2. “Legacy” and sub-cultural identity.

In order to present themselves as part of their subculture, artists present a set of values and reference to their audience through narration. These values and references vary in form within the multiple expressions of identity. If we look at multiple artists’ discourse we can identify recurring types of speech constructions and semantics in sub-cultural discourse, within the narration of identity. While the themes presented within these discourses are generally similar, the way they are presented vary from sub-genre to sub-genre, or from artist to artist. And the modifications of the way music performers address these themes can influence the goal pursued by the discourse. It is these various ways of performing identity that we will be studying in this chapter.

II.2.a. The legacy in hip-hop: Inspiration, collaboration and “shout-outs”.

One of the theme presented by musicians through discourse is “inspiration”. If we look at hip-hop artists, we observe that, when they address other artists, they tend to present them as inspiration to their own art. They also highlight the artists they collaborated with in order to present their own belonging to the scene. This construction of discourse relies heavily on the history of the subculture, being one of social empowerment and community (“ATL Vibes The History of Hip-Hop in the 1970s”, 2019). Exposing your history of collaborations and/or rivalries between yourself and other respected artists in the scene allows artists to prove their membership by “proxy”. The same process is at work when artists declare what artists inspired their work. Mentioning artists, declaring their impact on their work, and referencing some parts of sub-cultural history allows artists to insert themselves into the story of their subculture. This insertion into a lineage of musicians through narration, in order to prove your identity as a hip-hop artist, relates to the concept of the “*suite des générations*” from Ricoeur.

“A cela s’ajoute, pour Ricoeur, la « suite des générations » dont le socle biologique vient succéder au recours à l’astronomie du temps calendaire. Inscrivant l’individu dans une lignée humaine, lui donnant le sentiment d’appartenance historique à une génération et lui permettant de se tourner bi-directionnellement, vers les générations passées ou les générations à venir, cette notion de « suite » offre un élément de continuité au-delà des discontinuités, géographiques, culturelles, sociales, etc.” (Herlant-Hemar, 2013, p.7)

Establishing this membership to a lineage of musicians allows artists to therefore establish their membership to the subculture through the proven membership of other musicians. They inscribe themselves into the history of their subculture through this lineage formed with narration, as it allows them to ignore the chronological time separating them and, therefore, establishing a continuity through storytelling rather than history. For example, *Run the Jewels*, in interviews, talks about the various artists they worked with before collaborating with each other:

Killer Mike: “I’ve been looking for that sound. I think Andre 3000 tried to find that sound early on with my first single “Akshon”.”(Clique, 2017, 3:16).

Talking about other established artists as previous collaborators and inspirations establishes this “proxy” of membership. *Run the Jewels* also talks about the types of systems they used to work on in order to make music:

El-P: “Me, DJ Muggs¹², or RZA¹³, we all use the same samplers, the keyboard samplers. I use it (Ensoniq EPS 16 Plus¹⁴) a couple of times on every album. That’s my first love.” (Ibidem 5:35).

Here, El-P references other artists that are well known within the hip-hop scene, and links them to himself through the specific hardware the three of them use. He therefore establishes a similarity between him and them that only narration can create. Furthermore, giving specific information about hardware that only aficionados of the hip-hop scene will understand proves your long-term belonging in the subculture. This allows the group to establish the relevance of their discourse on the scene. This builds credibility, membership to the scene and allows easier identification through the identity-*idem*.

With the narration of their life and experiences, *Run the Jewels* establish themselves as being similar to other, already established artists. If the audience knows what the artist references, they will identify them as being the same as the artist referenced, because of the “proxy” they establish. *Run the Jewels* therefore establishes membership here through

12 DJ and producer known for his work with the group *Cypress Hill*, pioneer of West Coast rap in the 90s.

13 Founding member and leader of the *Wu-Tang Clan*.

14 The EPS (Ensoniq Performance Sampler) was one of the first few affordable samplers on the market. It was manufactured from 1988 to 1991.

narration, and more specifically through reference, to other artists and by referencing parts of hip-hop culture. All of this aims to establish a membership to a lineage of artists, to integrate themselves into the narrative of the hip-hop genre's history, in order to establish their identity as hip-hop artists.

It is a storytelling tool we find in every hip-hop interview, such as this *CZARFACE* interview, where the group is asked about their inspirations from 90s hip-hop:

Esoteric: "There's pros and cons to everything but I think one pro is that we were lucky enough to be a product of that era and we have a real understanding of it, so a lot of it just comes naturally. It isn't forced. You can tell that it's not coming from an inauthentic place." (Olmstead, 2017)

In this case, the reference to the lineage of artists is less specific, and encapsulates a time-frame rather than an artist. But *CZARFACE* does not need to legitimize itself as *being* hip-hop. The group is a super-group, with already established artists composing it, therefore the question of *being* hip-hop or not is not up for debate. The group reminds the audience that they are prominent artists from the 90s in order to legitimize the type of music they produce. They can make 90s style hip-hop because they were there to experience and produce it. This allows them to legitimize their point of view about modern hip-hop too, and the philosophy behind their production.

Inspectah Deck: Everybody wants to be the man now! I remember watching Tribe perform, and it was all four of them. [...] Nowadays everybody wants to be the man, so the group aspect is lost. (Ibidem)

They therefore inscribe themselves into the "old-school" hip-hop scene in order to prove their legitimacy to criticize the modern rap scene.

Using hip-hop history in storytelling therefore has various purposes, but is always employed in order to legitimize or prove an aspect of an artist's or a group's sub-cultural identity.

Another way hip-hop artists can use storytelling in order to define their sub-cultural identity is through the practice of “sampling”, which is the root of hip-hop music in general. As hip-hop constructed itself as a genre through the usage of various music tracks put together and reassembled into another piece, the choice of these tracks also has an impact in both proving membership and narrating individual identity. Freddie Gibbs, in his 2018 song “Death Row [feat. 03 Greedo]”, uses the beat from Easy-E’s “Boyz-n-the-Hood” from 1987. Using this song as a sample carries a lot of meaning within the hip-hop subculture. “Boyz-n-the-Hood” is the debut song from rapper Easy-E, who will, in the year following its release, form the group *N.W.A.* (i.e. Niggaz Wit Attitude), the group responsible for the popularization of the gangsta rap genre in the U.S.. Easy-E therefore is a figure in the culture of gangsta rap, and his song “Boyz-n-the-Hood”, tells the story of the daily life in the boroughs of Compton, filled with grand theft auto, drugs etc... It is the “textbook” gangsta rap song. Sampling this song therefore allows Freddie Gibbs to recall this history of gangsta rap in order to integrate himself, and 03 Greedo, who’s debuting at the time, into it. This integration into the hip-hop lineage is even more effective for 03 Greedo. At the beginning of his career at the time, being featured with Freddie, an established artist, on a track that references this clearly the gangsta rap legacy, allows him to be integrated almost instantly into the gangsta rap scene, proving therefore his legitimacy on the scene, which we can see on the following excerpt of a “Death Row” review:

“The impish howl that powers his lyrics—“Cruisin' through the city in my oh-eighteen”—evokes Eazy-E’s so well, it’s almost a *séance*. The moment is a clear reminder that 03 is a part of that California hip-hop lineage, and his breezy performance swiftly takes us from tribute to rallying cry.” (Nast, 2018)

Hip-hop artists therefore use narration in order to put forward the history of their subculture. By putting forward this history and integrating themselves to it through narration, they assimilate into the subculture and create a sub-cultural identity for themselves. A sub-cultural identity defined by the part of sub-cultural history they decide to put forward.

II.2.b. *The legacy in heavy metal: Admiration, deification and hommages.*

In heavy metal, artists also insist on the sources of their inspiration which foregrounds their relevance and highlight the fact that they belong in heavy metal subculture. However, contrary to hip-hop artists, the discourse that characterizes the statements of their artistic inspiration is much more centered around the admiration of other artists. As we can see from this excerpt of an interview of Adam Wedgeworth, guitarist for *All Pigs Must Die*:

“Matt and I are huge Pink Floyd fans. ANIMALS is one of the heaviest records, if you read those lyrics... it’s just furious and that’s sort of the idea that heaviness isn’t about volume or what you’re tuned to, it’s in your fingers and it’s in your intention.” (Marijane, 2018)

Or this interview of Riley Gale, lead singer of *Power Trip*:

“*Je dirais Obituary. On a fait une tournée américaine avec eux et c'est une influence majeure pour nous. [...] ils faisaient partie de ma liste des groupes avec qui je voulais jouer quand j'étais plus jeune. C'était vraiment mon groupe préféré.*” (Maxwell, 2018)

Hip-hop artists also express admiration of various artists, but they also don’t hesitate to call out some artists if they are in the midst of a rivalry with them, or even outright brag about their superiority over an artist in particular, as we can see in this interview of Freddie Gibbs:

“All these rap niggas, I gotta talk to they assistant and talk to these motherfuckers—I just think that’s bitch shit. [...] You can line all these niggas up and knock they ass off a cliff, for all I care.” (Joyce, 2012)

Whereas, in heavy metal subculture, there is some sort of hierarchy established between artists, where artists declare their admiration of one another, while rarely throwing a jab at another heavy metal group. The instances of heavy metal artists criticizing one another *ad personam* occur when there was expressed animosity and/or aggressiveness between them, due to an event during their career. One example of this type of events is the bittersweet relationship between *Megadeth*’s singer Dave Mustaine and the group *Metallica*, after Dave was kicked out of *Metallica* in 1983 due to his drug problems and violent tendencies. Both *Metallica* and Dave Mustaine have since then regularly thrown jabs at each other during interviews or concerts.

As we have seen before, *being* a metal fan consists of being a fan of heavy metal music. Therefore, establishing themselves as metalheads allows the artists to put forward their sub-cultural identity: they showcase themselves as metalheads. This discrepancy between hip-hop and heavy metal rhetoric around inspiration is therefore caused by the history and inner workings of both subculture.

Heavy metal artists also have a way to integrate themselves into the history of their subculture, and that is through the custom of cover songs. Covers are a new performance of a song performed by someone other than its original artists. They are faithful to the original, on the opposite of remixes that modify it, but still allows some creativity as artists can reinterpret the original in their own style of music. Nowadays, cover songs are mostly used as a way to either showcase the style of the artist that is interpreting it, and/or as a tribute to the original band or artist. In heavy metal, choosing to cover a song can be done for these reasons. As we have seen with samples in hip-hop, what song is chosen by the artists to cover will be meaningful in giving information about the type of heavy metal artist they are, as it provides storytelling about their musical tastes and references. Traits that will be judged by their audience in order to verify the authenticity of their sub-cultural identity. Furthermore, covering a song will also create an identification of membership and identity through the identity-*idem*, as we have seen before. Fans of the original band will assimilate the cover band as being “similar”, and therefore *be* heavy metal artists.

The group Thou, for example, covered four Black Sabbath songs in their 2020 cover album *A Primer of Holy Words*; “Into the Void”, “Sweet Leaf”, “Black Sabbath” and “Lord of this world”. These four songs are very famous Black Sabbath songs, as they originate from their two first ever albums. They, therefore, are songs that shaped what heavy metal is today, that Thou are reinterpreting in their own style of heavy metal music. This anchors them into the roots of heavy metal subculture; showing their respect of the scene in its entirety, despite being a more progressive group attempting to break the codes established. Meaning that even if their style and the themes they tackle vary from the classic heavy metal tropes, they still are very much metal fans at heart. An intent highlighted in this review of the album:

“This one they are calling *A Primer of Holy Words*, which is possibly a reference to the fact that many of the songs covered have some profound significance on the band (ie Holy Texts).” (Mick R., 2020)

As worded by this review, the title of the album also serves as a way to tell the audience the importance of the songs compiled into the album; another instance of a title used as a narrative tool for identity. The wording of the title, and the tribute aspect that covers hold in the music field, goes to showcase the culture of admiration within the heavy metal subculture we brushed upon before. Heavy metal artists tend to pay tribute to “classic artists” within the subculture in order to perpetuate it. The “classics” are a way to knit the heavy metal community closer together, which is why they are revered so much; they are transformed into some sort of untouchable deity.

“The metal subculture is polytheistic. Fans genuflect before all the metal gods, but also reserve special worship for one- or a few personal favorites.” (Weinstein, 2000, 141)

This “deification” of some artists would explain the fact that artists rarely criticize each-other and have a tendency to “stay in their own lane”. Criticizing another group could therefore provoke the wrath of their fans and greatly dent their career.

Other groups under study also covered a song in some way or another. *All Pigs Must Die* released in 2020 a cover of the song “Deep Sleep” by *Poison Idea* (Sacher). *Poison Idea* is a U.S. hardcore punk group that was active between 1980 and 2006. Releasing a cover of one of their songs enables the group to prove itself to be part of the history of hardcore groups in the U.S. by showcasing their knowledge of the scene. On the other hand, *Power Trip*, did not release covers either digitally or on an album. However the group has a tendency to cover some songs during their concerts and tours (Power Trip Covered Songs and Artists, Setlist.Fm). The group has, on record, covered bands like *Outburst*, one of the pioneers of thrash metal in France in the late 80s (La Patte de L’Ours, 2006), and *Breakdown*, a New York band that helped popularize the hardcore scene in the 80s (“Breakdown (Band)”, Wikipedia). These bands, which they covered the most in concerts, have the particularity to be pioneers in their domain, both thrash and hardcore metal, of which *Power Trip* contributes since their band is considered to be a hardcore thrash metal one. Paying homage during their concerts to

groups that paved the way for them and that are, supposedly, inspirations inscribes them into the history of the genre as some sort of relay for their legacy. Furthermore, covering a French band adds uniqueness to the group by incorporating variety into their list of inspiration. A variety that Riley Gale, lead singer of the group, used to push forward during interviews:

“Tu sais, un mois je peux par exemple lire de la philosophie médiévale, un autre mois j'ai envie d'en apprendre plus sur le cinéma italien du vingtième siècle et en ce moment par exemple, je suis à fond dans la BD.” (Maxwell, 2018)

In conclusion, we can see that both heavy metal and hip-hop artists establish their sub-cultural identity through narration. However, the process through which artists of both these subcultures varies. This variation is due, as we have seen, by the difference in codes established within the subcultures ever since their creation. Hip-hop artists will tend to put forward their collaboration record or their rivalries with various artists. This discourse directly echoes the history of hip-hop as both, a collaborative subculture built in order to shelter the Afro-American youth of the 70s and as a subculture filled with rivalries and artistic showdowns. As for heavy metal artists, they will put forward their inspiration in way that is less about collaboration and respect, but in a way that is closer to admiration and humility, since the subculture reveres artists that have proven themselves and values authenticity. Artists are therefore influenced in the way they present themselves as artists from a certain subculture by the subculture itself. Furthermore, this presentation of sub-cultural markers is made by referencing the scene and its history. Through narration, artists will inscribe themselves into the history of their subculture, with the help of the various ways we studied, in order to be identified, through the identity-*idem* as either hip-hop or heavy metal artists.

II.3. Narrating Uniqueness.

As we have seen, artists use various narrative processes in order to construct their identity as sub-cultural artists. These narrative processes are influenced by the codes and history of the artists' respective subculture. However, these processes are not only used in order to prove membership to subculture, they are also proving the uniqueness of artists within the subculture. In hip-hop, artists can already distinguish themselves from other artists through sampling and sub-cultural history, which allows them to establish their membership to particular fringes of the subculture, or movements within it. The same goes in heavy metal, where particular imagery and semiotic establishes a membership to various sub-genres of the culture. But these various processes can also be used in order to establish difference through the identity-*ipse*, instead of through similarity via the identity-*idem*. This subpart will be mostly centered around the bands *CZARFACE* and *Thou*. Both bands are unique in their expression of sub-cultural identity, and will be interesting to study in order look at the expression of uniqueness.

II.3.a. Narrating identity-*ipse* via comparison.

One of the first ways for artists to distinguish themselves on their scene is to directly dissociate themselves from other artists. This can be made by direct comparison of themselves to other artists.

The group *CZARFACE*, as we have seen, uses visual narration in order to distinguish themselves from other bands; they possess a visual identity resembling the one of 80s comic books. But this distinction does not stop at visual production. In their songs, *CZARFACE* adopts the point of view of their *CZARFACE* persona. In the album *Inspectah Deck + 7L&Esoteric = CZARFACE*, the group is using the persona as a way to represent itself:

“Back once again
Like I left something behind
Rebel I shine day and nighttime... evolve
"Hey! Who's this guy?!"
"This 'guy is the Czar!'" (Czarface Intro, 2013, 0:40)

“He don't hear em out, he just air 'em out

He just fuck it up, it's like if really there's a doubt” (Air'em out, 2013, 0:24)

The album is their first under the *CZARFACE* name, and if we assume that every album the group produces composes a part of a narrative about them, the first album is the one meant to introduce the group. Since the name of the group is identical to the name of the super-hero persona they created, it creates a double-meaning meant as a way to talk about themselves in a point of view other than with the first person. They therefore narrate their identity through their persona, creating a third person narration point of view of a fictional character, meant to represent them. Once established, this way of representing themselves is used in every instance of musical work they produce in order to create an ambiguity that serves, at times, as a metaphor. In the album *Every Hero Needs A Villain*, the group is set out to criticize modern-day rappers. As seen in the following excerpts:

“A phantom Pteranodon

Quick, turn the cameras on

Get a pic with him or the dying rapper he's landing on” (The Great, 2015, 1:28)

“Fuck your label, fucking with us, results are fatal

Czarface - Heartbreak for your favorite rapper” (Sgt. Slaughter, 2015, 0:21)

The name of the album sets up the theme as, through the metaphor of the group/persona, *CZARFACE* antagonizes other artists they qualify as “villains” (the artists they target are not specific but it is implied that they are “mainstream” rappers, through the allusions to greediness and lack of respect to hip-hop). This, combined with their identity as old school rappers, combines to create an identity of a “hero set out to save” the hip-hop scene. The group therefore establishes itself through narration as some sort of solution in order to “save” hip-hop from the mainstream. An identity that is still established with a discourse following the codes of hip-hop culture, with antagonism and rivalry at its core, doubled with references to popular culture (i.e comic-books) that further references the nature of hip-hop music: a genre for the masses. Through this established antagonism, the group therefore constructs an identity that is made to be the contrary of “other hip-hop artists”. They therefore construct a unique identity, the identity-*ispe*, through comparison as well as narration, through their persona.

Antagonism is something that Freddie Gibbs also pushes forward, as we have seen before¹⁵. However, as a gangsta rap artist, establishing antagonism is not only a marker of differentiation, but also a defining maker of attitude that comes with the genre. As the genre is mostly based around gang-culture, proclaiming superiority over other rappers is regarded as “fitting”, since it allows the artist to appear as “tough”.

The doom metal group *Thou* also antagonizes other heavy metal groups, but through the spectrum of political divergence. Politics in the heavy metal scene is a complicated topic and is often the ground for controversy. The scene is, for example, notorious for housing pro-fascism community and even Neo-nazi ideology (Everley, 2016). The violent nature of the subculture is often what attracts these ideologies and individuals, as the expression of their point of view can be hidden under the “shock factor” of heavy metal music. Furthermore, the subculture, as of today, tends to be increasingly shying away from politics and discussions surrounding it:

“The year began with the women of our subculture’s underground – most notably *Ithaca*’s Djamila Azzouz and *Svalbard*’s Serena Cherry – voicing discontent. [...] Astoundingly, some men responded to these enlightening perspectives with the demand to “keep politics out of metal”.” (Mills, 2019)

To this increase in conservative ideology, the band *Thou* has clearly positioned itself:

“Andy: I think it’s because there is a growing antifascist scene in general, which is a reaction to fascism being on the rise in a global sense. Though there are still no shortage of self-described “apolitical” bands in metal. I’d still venture to say most metal bands in 2019 consider their music to be apolitical.

Mitch: Because there has been a fascist black and doom scene for too long and people are sick of it. Its about time!” (ANSUZ, 2020)

15 See chapter II.2.b.

Through this narrative, the group antagonizes itself with most of the black and doom metal scene, making themselves stand out as unique among them. This antifascist stance is not only present in their interview, but also in their merchandising. One of their official T-Shirt features, as its design, a portrait of Sophie Scholl, a figure of the German resistance movement “*Weißer Rose*” and a symbol of anti-fascism (“THOU Sophie Scholl Tri-Blend Shirt”). This portrait is followed by the quote: “He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence.” from William Blake’s “Proverbs of Hell”. The quote, along with the picture, is a clear reference to antifascist actions and motto; which generally involves taking direct action against fascist movements during manifestations for example. *Thou* therefore embraces this antifascist identity as one of their defining traits in the heavy metal scene. This makes “anti-fascism” one of the unique markers of the band. It allows their audience to distinguish them from the rest of metal artists. And, just like *CZARFACE* or Freddie Gibbs, the band does as such through the codes established by the subculture; violent discourse and the usage of band merchandise, a staple of heavy metal culture (Weinstein, 2000, 126-127). However, instead of following them and diverging through content, *Thou*, here, subverts the expectations in discourse of the heavy metal scene to differentiate itself.

II.3.b. Pushing forward uniqueness through social media.

Artists can push forward what makes them unique and put it in the center of the self-narration of their narrative identity. And one of the ways artist can narrate their identity is social media. As social media is self-managed and creates a sense of intimacy with the audience, it is a great way to convey identity and personality through daily activity and posts. This part will mostly focus on Twitter, as every group under study possesses an active account on the platform, on the contrary to platforms like Instagram or Facebook.

The band *Thou*, for example, has two Twitter accounts, one for their band activities and one for more personal posts: respectively @nonpaler and @eyehatethou. The second one is very vocal about vegan activism. The account often retweets news articles or vegan activist’s posts about recent break-ins in animal farms¹⁶. These types of actions are illegal in the United States, and supporting them presents *Thou* as both unique; as being a vegan and animal right

¹⁶ See *Figure 5* on page 49

supporter band, and as subversive; promoting hands-on action and illegal means to fight for animal rights. The subversiveness of such promotions allows them to stay in line with the sub-cultural identity of heavy metal, which promotes violent behavior and language; meaning that, even if animal rights activism is not a value held by most metalheads, it is impossible for them to deny their metal identity, as they still express themselves according to metal markers.



Figure 5: Thou repost of a tweet about a hen liberation action, from the 12/09/2021 (@eyehatethou)

We can also find violence and subversion in their discourse when the group expresses itself about their anarchist/antifascist views. They often post anti-cop or anti-capitalist discourses and comments on the @eyehatethou account¹⁷. This type of anti-cop discourse is very subversive in the United States, as the country upholds respect to the police forces in high regards, and wishing death upon a type of individual is seen as punishable behavior. But, even if this type of discourse is seen as subversive in U.S society, it is not out of the norm in heavy

¹⁷ See *Figure 6* on page 50

metal subculture discourse, which constitutes another reason why it does not break *Thou's* identity as a heavy metal band.

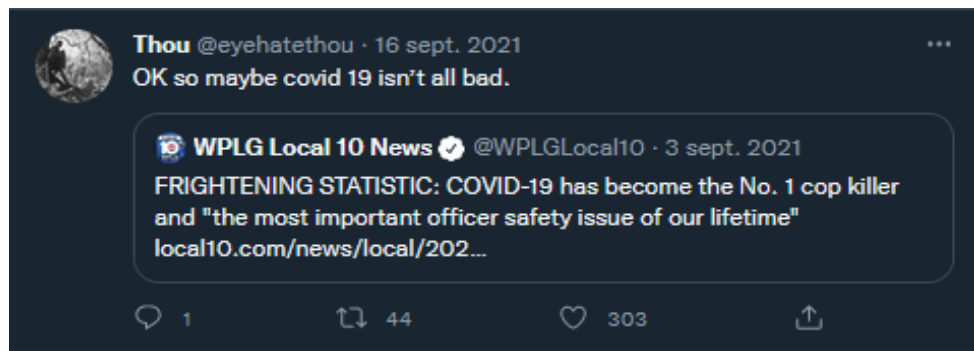


Figure 6: Thou repost of a tweet from local news about the COVID-19 epidemic within cop ranks, to which Thou adds a comment on the possible benefit this would create.

16/09/2021 (@eyehatethou)

The group *Thou* also has a third type of tweet to further promote their uniqueness: quotes. The band regularly posts movie quotes, black and white photos and screenshots on their Twitter page. The “vintage” identity these posts establish corresponds to their visual identity; which we brushed upon in part II.1. They therefore promote, and present to anyone stumbling upon their profile, their unique visual aesthetic.



Figure 7: Thou tweeting a quote from the 1961 Japanese movie "Zero no Shôten". 18/04/2022. (@eyehatethou)

In order to understand how *Thou* stands out from other bands, we can compare their social media presence with the bands *All Pigs Must Die* and *Power Trip*. *All Pigs Must Die* rarely, if ever, posts about political topics. The only way the group shares political opinions is by retweeting their drummer's, Ben Koller, comments and posts (@apmdcult). The band therefore never officially takes side or expresses a political stance. We can argue that the group still expresses an opinion by retweeting these posts. However, these statements, on the contrary of *Thou*, are not made by their official account, and are both less frequent and about less divisive topics; *All Pigs Must Die* only retweets statements about police brutality and the Trump presidency, which are far from being subversive when they are made in times of protests, they rather express a support of movements that are hardly conflictual.

On the other hand, *CZARFACE*'s social media presence is a way for them to also push forward what makes them stand out in the hip-hop subculture. Since political statements are far more recurrent in hip-hop than in heavy metal, due to the social movement nature of hip-hop subculture, we will not take them as unique characteristics. We will therefore concentrate on the unique characteristic of the group, which is to say, the comic-book aspect of their work.

The comic-book identity they put forward is constructed with more than their songs or visuals, they also collaborated with the comic-book industry itself. In 2016, on the Pitchfork Youtube channel, a channel dedicated to independent music, was broadcaster a mini monthly series in collaboration with Marvel Comics around the character Black Panther. The point of the series was to link hip-hop and comic-books in order to highlight their similarities. On Episode 5, it was *CZARFACE* that was chosen to be featured (Pitchfork, 2016). The video features excerpts from a Black Panther comic and a synopsis, accompanied by commentary, told by Black Panther's writer Ta-Nehisi Coates. Featured in the background is *CZARFACE*'s "All in Together Now", from the upcoming album at the time: "*A Fistful of Peril*". The video is therefore a publicity stunt for *CZARFACE*, since it promotes a song that is yet to be released. The endeavor is a way to display their aesthetic and identity as a band to an audience of potential people that are unaware them. They therefore expose the uniqueness of their identity to people that might not be knowledgeable of hip-hop and its codes; which is a way to select the part of identity you want to narrate as it is most convenient. The group therefore has the

power to put forward what part of their identity they want to present depending on the audience. Furthermore, the communication is aligned with hip-hop codes and does not break their sub-cultural identity. Black Panther is the first black super-hero to ever have been published and found success. It represents a part of Afro-American representation in U.S. culture. Hip-hop being, at the beginning, a tool of expression for the Afro-American youth, this publicity stunt does not break the coherence of their sub-cultural identity.

II.3.c. Using narration to twist codes around.

Narration, when it comes to presenting identity, can be used in order to highlight or hide parts of identity to showcase only the beneficial parts. As we have seen, artists of various subcultures have a distinct way of narrating their identity, depending on the subculture they take part in. This typical way of narration can therefore be used to present a part of identity in order to make it appear as a sub-cultural marker.

When studying the official *CZARFACE* Twitter account we can see that, the face of the group, Esoteric, often posts about his comic-book related activities. He, for example, shared his trip with his son to Disneyland, with photos showing himself in front of the Star Wars part of the park, associated with a comment with a quote from the movies (@Czarface_Eso, 06.04.2022). He also posted a short video of himself, holding a graded¹⁸ Spider-Man comic book, ranting about how his Instagram followers were angry at him for posting the book on the platform, allegedly to make “people mad”.

18 A graded comic-book is a well preserved comic, of which the state has been certified by an official “grading” agency. The term “grade” comes from the fact that the comic receives a grade depending on its quality of preservation.



Figure 8: Video posted by Esoteric on February 19, 2022. (@Czarface_Eso)

In the comic-book culture, graded comic-books represent rare and expensive items. The issue Esoteric possesses is “The Amazing Spider-Man Issue #300”, a comic that can be sold up to a \$1,000USD (“Amazing Spider-Man Issue # 300 (Marvel Comics)”). This showcase is therefore what is called in the hip-hop subculture; a flex¹⁹. Meaning that, here, Esoteric showcases his wealth through comic-book culture, and therefore appears unique compared to other hip-hop artists, which generally showcase their wealth through cars, watches etc... Esoteric therefore pushes forward its uniqueness by twisting hip-hop markers into his comic-book fan persona, which makes him stand-out on the hip-hop scene.

19 “Flexing” is a slang meaning “showing off wealth”. It is a wide-spread practice in hip-hop subculture.

The group *Thou* also operates this twist when talking about LGBTQIA+ subjects in one of their songs, “Transcending Dualities”:

“We are vast unknowable beings
Without the confines of perception
Our gender is disorder
Our sexuality is transgression and transience
Shape shifting through life
To navigate the trench of sex and design” (Transcending Dualities, 1:12)

“Yours is the decaying corpse whose stench is lost in the lapse of time
Ours is painful, victorious birth of limitless form” (Ibidem, 7:26)

As we can see, the band tackles the theme of gender as a spectrum but with the lexical field of death (i.e. “corpse”, “stench”, “decaying”) and violence (i.e. “trench”, “painful”). Most heavy metal artists would relegate these themes to interviews, as is the case with *Power Trip*’s Riley Gale, for example:

“C’est le vrai propos et la raison de la création de Power Trip : nous sommes à un endroit où il y a la place pour tout le monde quelle que soit sa classe, sa couleur, son identité sexuelle à partir du moment où tu n’es pas un connard qui essaye d’imposer sa manière de voir les choses à tout le monde. On n’est pas là nous même pour imposer notre vision des choses...” (Maxwell, 2018)

The band *Thou*, chose to adapt the topic to heavy metal and, as Riley Gale worded, “impose their point of view”. They therefore, by doing so, stand-out as one of the few heavy metal bands to speak about LGBTQIA+ related topics.

On the other hand, Freddie Gibbs, on the 21st of December 2021, had his Instagram account banned by the platform. The rapper had made a habit of posting graphic content in his stories²⁰, or picking at other personalities, which is not surprising considering the fact that being disrespectful and hard to handle is one of the key characteristic of gangsta rappers. Gangsta rapper Snoop Dogg, for example, is known to have smoked cannabis inside of the White House bathroom (SiriusXM, 2016, 0:21). He also more recently, in 2018, took a picture of himself smoking cannabis in front of the White House; after publishing a video on Instagram promising that, if said video had 20,000 likes, he would do some “gangsta shit” (@snoopdogg). Freddie Gibbs posting this type of content on his Instagram page is therefore a way to showcase his “gangsta” persona. What is interesting in his ban from the platform is the way he adapted it into the narration of his identity. In an interview following the ban he declared:

“Man, you’ve got to be a gangsta ass n***a to get banned from Instagram, man. Shoutout Instagram, man. I want my page back now. Y’all might as well give me my shit back. I’m the best motherfucker on there, on the low.” (Shube, 2021)

Rather than acknowledging the fact that what he posted was an infringement on Instagram’s user policies, he doubled down on the fact that he was “too much to handle” and adopted the ban as a marker of “gangsta” identity. As a result, Freddie is now known for his online presence being borderline.

“Without a shadow of a doubt, Freddie Gibbs is one of the funniest rappers on social media. Unfortunately, for the last few months, we have had to find other pages to keep us entertained [...] but on Wednesday, he officially returned under a new username, immediately sharing the wildest content on his Stories.” (Zidel, 2022)

Using narration, Freddie Gibbs therefore constructed for himself a unique marker of identity.

20 A feature of the social media Instagram, where one can post a photo or short video that will be visible for up to 24 hours.

All these strategies to narrate uniqueness therefore overlap in the way their narration to the audience is done; while the subjects are different, all discourses abide to sub-cultural codes. The narration of their unique identities are done in a way that corresponds to the sub-cultural codes we have seen earlier, while still showcasing their differences. By doing so, narration is not ruptured and artists continue to maintain their membership while pushing for their uniqueness; they diverge in themes but maintain themselves through form.

III. Narration And Reception.

III.1. Selecting and adapting to the audience.

As we have seen, the construction of identity by artists is not only influenced by the history and codes of their respective subculture, but also by the audience and its possible reaction to certain transgression of the codes. Artists have to be careful about the identity markers they present to the audience in order to be accepted within the subculture and therefore be free to make music. The audience, then, is also a component to be taken into account if the artist wants to have their identity well received. Addressing an audience that is hostile to the political views presented, or without knowing the subculture, would mean backlash and eventually difficulty to find success. Artists therefore have to pay attention to the audience they address. And it is the means through which they choose the audience they target that we will study in this part.

III.1.a. Addressing the audience.

The primary thing to take into account when analyzing discourse is to whom it is addressed, as the discourse will change form depending on its audience. When speaking in front of an audience, physically or not, the speaker adapts his utterances to the audience in front of him. This principle is called “audience design” (Horton and Gerrig, 2002, 590). “Audience design” refers to the act of modifying the content or form of the discourse in order for it to be better received by a specific audience. It is one of the first principles of audience construction that we will refer to in this part. *Run the Jewels*, for example, in an interview for Clique TV, a french TV program about pop-culture in general, has a discourse that is very open to newcomers. They express sympathy to people who discovered rap only recently; explaining that people who listen to rap without being from the “ghetto” are welcome to, since it is the point of art to share a point of view. Killer Mike even makes a reference to Salvador Dali as a point of comparison, which is a reference almost anybody can understand.

“We all are voyeurs, that’s the beauty of being an artist. I don’t see the world as Dali saw the world, so I’m a voyeur into his world and I accept it, [...]” (Clique TV, 2017, 10:05)

However, in an interview for Treble, an independent media specialized in music reporting, we can clearly see that the group is talking to a different kind of audience. While on Clique TV, they most importantly talked about their past collaborations, politics and future projects, which are standard interview topics, this interview, instead, dives deep into their writing process, the artists they collaborate with during the production of their albums etc... When asked about their writing method, Killer Mike does not hesitate to give details about their writing sessions, even mentioning how he organizes his lyrics around verses.

“I’ll have a 16-bar verse on this one; he may have a 16-bar verse on that one, if it fits the theme. On the next one though, if it’s just so fast and rapid fire, I’ll do four, he’ll do four and we’ll plot it out like that.” (Martinez, 2014)

Outside of their past collaboration, the duo does not refer to other artists on Clique TV, whereas on Treble, they do not hesitate to reference various artists from both the hip-hop scene, and outside. We can attribute this variation both to the fact that the group is on a platform where the audience is more susceptible to be receptive to musical references, and also to the fact that the group does not address the same nationality in both interviews. Since Clique TV is a French program, the group must therefore be careful about the references they present, as their audience might not share the same ones.

What we have to keep in mind to, is that these media have established audiences. By choosing which media to express themselves on, artists decide which audience they want to address and therefore, design their public. While the interview from Clique TV is broader and covers a variety of topics, the interview with Treble is specialized in their music making, which allows them to express themselves differently.

This is something we also witness with heavy metal bands. On media that cover a broad variety of subjects they tend to speak more about what their music means, its themes, the intentions behind it, while on media that are specialized in heavy metal subculture they tend to speak more about their inspirations, their touring journeys etc... This means that heavy metal bands talk about surface level information with medias whose audience is not directly seeking heavy metal content, while they talk more about inside information with specialized heavy metal medias. However, with the growth of the Internet, heavy metal bands have been

only expressing themselves through platforms directly designed for them. Heavy metal media have seen a boom in variety and numbers on the Internet, to the point where heavy metal bands barely appear on what are considered more “mainstream” media. This can be attributed to the defiance the subculture has with “mainstream” media, since it was the same outlets that dragged the culture through the mud during its debuts; with allegations of satanism, encouraging violence etc... But this demeanor can also be attributed to a sense of comfort. Heavy metal bands do not have to worry about presenting themselves in front of an audience possibly hostile to them, when they have a variety of other outlets that have an audience that is already part of heavy metal subculture. Furthermore, they do not risk presenting themselves as “mainstream” this way, and therefore breaking their narrative. That is why when the band *Thou* wanted to talk about antifascism, they chose an antifascist outlet (i.e the blog “Antifascist Neofolk”). Or when Power Trip wants to talk about their demeanor on stage without worrying about their image, they chose a magazine specialized in subcultures, *Impose*, where the audience will that their recklessness is a mark of subversion.

“We played a Sony showcase and they had no idea what we were getting into. They shut us down a few songs into our set because people were getting too rowdy and they had all this expensive Sony equipment, behind us.” (McCafferty, 2013)

Artists therefore have ways to select the audience they want to cater to in order to perform their identity as efficiently as possible. This selection also allows them to maintain the narrative they have put together, by addressing media that will not oppose their vision of the subculture or their stance as artists. This shows that subculture artists are not interested in attracting an audience outside of their subculture, which is understandable given the marketing aspect of subculture. Trying to convince a new audience is much more effort than potential reward in a context where, as we have seen, a lot of knowledge is required before starting to appreciate the subculture as a whole. Even so, hip-hop artists have been much more incline towards newcomers as hip-hop, and rap music in general, have broken into the mainstream music market. However, obstacles still exist if one wants to dive into more underground fringes of the culture. The goal of subculture artists is therefore not to attract a new audience, but to convince and attract the existing audience of the subculture of their legitimacy and uniqueness, while conserving their own audience.

III.1.b. *Selecting the audience.*

What leads us to think that subculture artists do not address an audience that is new to their culture is the fact that most of their identity performances to the public are made through sub-cultural medias and the Internet. On one hand, sub-cultural media have a substantial established audience of *aficionados* that are already part of the subculture. On the other hand, the possibilities that the Internet offers has lead to more “audience fragmentation”.

“Furthermore, a number of scholars have shown that the Internet tends to fragment audiences [...]. This fragmentation is presumably the result of technologies that allow and even encourage people to narrow the focus of their media consumption and to pursue their individualized interests and needs [...]” (Yanoshevsky, 2009, 412)

It is well known that Facebook, YouTube and other platforms and websites use these algorithms to tailor their recommendations to their users. Therefore, audiences on the internet are not universal, they are specific. Indeed, this audience rarely passes by a content but rather already has an interest in said content. Besides the Internet’s “dialogue” promoting potentialities, this allows communities to bond together and furthermore rarely interact with outside opinions and content, as the algorithms will only recommend further of what is already consumed. Sheltering the community from new outside input.

Sub-culture artists therefore do not (or rarely) address an audience that never has been exposed to their subculture. This is the reason why these musicians are permanently scrutinized for markers of their belonging to the subculture, because they are watched by an audience majorly composed of subculture members. It is also the reason why they have to push forward their uniqueness, in order to differentiate themselves in front of an audience that is accustomed to artists that belong to the same field. Their goal is therefore to attract and retain this audience of *aficionados*, rather than trying to find a new type of audience, which is why their discourse can be incomprehensible to a mainstream public.

III.1.c. *Building an engaged audience.*

The interview format that we have studied throughout this study is a powerful tool of engagement with the audience. It corresponds to what Chaïm Perelman calls: the argumentation before a single hearer. Since the interview format consists of the interviewer asking questions to the interviewee, the result becomes, not a presentation of identity, in our case, by the interviewee, but a dialogue between two people.

“There is no doubt, says Perelman, that the single hearer, having the opportunity to ask questions and raise objections, gets the impression that the arguments he eventually accepts are more solidly supported than the conclusion of a speaker who unfolds his arguments in sustained discourse” (Yanoshevsky, 2009, 414)

In the context of specialized sub-cultural media, the interviewer is, by default, considered to be a part of the subculture, since he is partaking in the subculture as both a fan and an active participant, as he creates content within the subculture. The audience is therefore inclined to identify to the interviewer, which creates a sense of proximity between the audience and the artist interviewed through their “dialogue”. An invitation to proximity that we can see in the introduction of most interviews, where the writer sets the scene for the audience, as we can see in the following introduction to the interview of *Power Trip*’s Riley Gale we saw before:

“I’d made plans to interview vocalist Riley Gale when Power Trip played an after show at the Acheron in Brooklyn a few weeks back. After watching him fall off the stage to land on his head during their set, I suggested that we reschedule it for another time. We wound up speaking on the phone for about an hour and a half a week later. Check out the following transcription to read about life on the road, the new record and fine art.” (McCafferty, 2013)

This sense of intimacy between the audience and the artist is important in order to build an engaged public. If the public feels closer to the artist, they will interact more frequently with them and their production, as they feel validated in doing so by being under the impression that they are in a position to be noticed and recognized. This encouragement towards interaction is especially important in the context of the Internet where interaction results in visibility. This interaction between audience and artist is pursued by musicians on social media, as we can see with the following poll posted by the band *Thou*.



Figure 9: A poll made by Thou on Twitter, asking their audience if they are vegan. 15.08.21. (@eyehatethou)

Proximity is also important for the artists' legitimacy. As we have demonstrated before, artists are expected to be part of the subculture themselves. Therefore they have to appear no less different than their audience. The sense of intimacy found in specialized sub-cultural medias is thus very important for them in order to maintain their identity.

This need for proximity between the audience and the artist is the reason why having a social media presence has become important for artists in the recent years. Social media removes the single hearer from the equation and allows the artists to directly dialogue, and even interact, with their audience. Bringing the two closer and reinforcing the feeling of artist and audience being on the same hierarchical plane.

“Appealing to their participation summons the voters to take an active part in the campaign, making it thus their own venture. Asking them to move in closer (appeal to proximity) seemingly effaces the barriers raised by social hierarchy, and by computer mediated communication (there is a screen between the candidate and his voter).”
(Yanoshevsky, 2009, 416)

Social media communication and, in general, every type of communication tailored for sub-cultural artists are therefore also part of the construction of their identity.

III.2. Discourse and its repercussions on the audience.

III.2.a. *The paradox of authenticity in subculture.*

Hip-hop and heavy metal subcultures value authenticity above all else. However, as we have seen throughout this research paper, authenticity, being linked to the person and therefore their identity, can be crafted from various different means. Meaning that what the audience expects from subculture artists can be created in the sole goal to gain its approval. We can therefore ask ourselves if the identity presented by artists is really a reflection of their true self, or a performance crafted in order to conform to the idea of “authenticity” that the sub-cultural audience crafted.

Knowing if artists really present their “true selves” to their audience is impossible. However, these artists express themselves within a market, meaning that the identity they choose to present to their audience is more or less presented with a lucrative goal in mind. In the music industry, music labels are the ones that produce, sell and market music to the audience. When they choose an artist to commercialize, they do so because they expect them to be profitable. This means that if the artist does not correspond to the standard that sells, they could expect their career to come to an end.

“In music, the buy-off²¹ amounted to plenty of air play, television exposure, dough²², women, and contracts for good little boys and girls. As long as you cooperated in public, you could do damned near anything in private.” (Pichaske, 1989, 274)

As of today, labels specialized in sub-cultural music have sprawled, following the growth of the scenes in the 70s. As we have shown before, if sub-cultural artists deviate from their sub-cultural identity they will face backlash from their audience, and possibly lose it. But, by deviating from their sub-cultural identity can also mean being abandoned by their music label. These labels market their artists in a certain way; heavy metal artists will be presented as subversive and wild, while hip-hop artists will be presented as authentic people, with roots in the ghettos. If artists do not conform anymore to these standards, the labels can drop their

21 “[...] the buy-off, usually an unsubtle combination of punishments on the one hand, rewards on the other, with an offer that no sensible person could refuse.” (Pichaske, 1989, 274)

22 Slang designating money.

contracts, as these artists will not conform to their brand image anymore. Artists therefore have to correspond to a certain standard in order to be easily marketable, the opposite would mean an uncertainty for profit for the label. Sub-cultural artists are therefore coerced into a set of identity markers by both their audience and their music labels. This does not mean that every subculture artist hides their true self and present a facade to their audience, a vast majority most certainly find themselves represented, to a certain extent, by the subculture they express themselves in. We have to keep in mind that most of these artists are first and foremost fans of their subculture themselves, as we have demonstrated before. However, we can argue that these artists, who find themselves comfortable with the identity they present to their audience, were accepted by their labels for this reason in the first place; because their identity conforms to the standards they find easily marketable.

The markers of sub-cultural identity we have seen so far are therefore the result of the marketing strategy of music labels. By deciding which artists will be able to sell their work, they also decide what heavy metal or hip-hop representation is. The audience still has a say in the equation, as they can decide to boycott a group that does not conform to their idea of the subculture. But it is still the music labels that decide who will be presented to said audience.

“The music biz is an ideological whore. It is dedicated to maximum profit, and it won’t wring the neck of a goose that lays golden discs out of pure philosophical differences. But it happens that a smoothly functioning system generates more golden discs than a haphazard non-system, because it turns out the most product for the least effort. And a smoothly functioning system is by nature exploitive, not innovative. It prefers formulas and mass production to experimentation and innovation.” (Pichaske, 1989, 277)

Ironically, the backbone of subcultures, “authenticity”, is also its biggest marketing point. What the audience seeks in heavy metal and hip-hop, are artists that are not afraid to express themselves about society and politics, that play music for passion, with a disinterest for money. But as we have seen, this authenticity is voluntarily pushed forward by artists through narration, marketed by music labels, and expected by the audience. It therefore lies in a paradox within the subcultures studied. The audience does not want money to be involved with making music, but artists cannot present music to the audience without labels behind them. The audience expects artists to speak freely, but turn around at the mention of something

they deem to be “non-metal” or “non-hip-hop”. Artists therefore conform, in their narrative, to the vision of authenticity the audience seeks.

“Thus, coining Metal a youth culture or subculture, even in its early cultural history, is an abridging hypothesis. Rather, this narrative of youthfulness and a critique of society should be seen as a construction of discourse – constructed by artists, fans, industry stakeholders, media and other instances.” (Pichler, 2017)

III.2.b. Reflection about freedom of expression in subculture.

After seeing how codified the discourse in hip-hop and heavy metal is, how music labels have a grasp on the artists, and the pressure of audience expectation, we could conclude that artists in the subcultures we studied are not free to express themselves, contrary to what one could expect.

However, the expectation of the audience concerning authenticity, that has been crafted by music labels, is what gives artists their freedom of expression in the first place. The audience views these artists as “authentic” and approachable; they have the image of the common man, that composes music for the sake of passion. This image is what gives the artists the freedom to express themselves about social topics, politics etc... Most mainstream artists are unable to do so because they are deemed to be too removed from the general population. A discrepancy that was shown during the recent Covid-19 pandemic in the U.S., where movie star Gal Gadot, and many other mainstream artists, sung a cover of “Imagine” by John Lennon on Instagram. The project, that was originally made in order to show support to Covid-19 victims, was met with intense backlash from the general population.

““We are in this together, we will get through it together,” Gadot captioned the original post from March 2020, but many criticised the project as tone deaf, highlighting the apparent disconnect between lyrics such as “imagine no possessions” warbled from multimillion dollar mansions while hundreds of thousands lost their lives, relatives, jobs and homes.” (Shoard, 2022)

A problem that was already illustrated earlier in the year by actor and comedian Ricky Gervais, who brought up the subject at the 2020 Golden Globes:

“So if you do win an award tonight, don’t use it as a platform to make a political speech. You’re in no position to lecture the public about anything. You know nothing about the real world. Most of you spent less time in school than Greta Thunberg.” (White, 2020)

Throughout this essay, we have uncovered how subculture artists craft this image of authenticity and how they present it to the audience throughout their narrative. And it is this authenticity, that is constructed and presented throughout the narrative, that allows them to express themselves on the sub-cultural scene. The construction of their identity is therefore a justification of their legitimacy to talk about the topics covered by their subculture. If this construction does not meet the required criteria to be considered legitimate by the audience, they will be met with the same disdain that mainstream artists are, within the sub-cultural scene.

However, this expectation of certain codes and behaviors also leads to conservatism within the scenes. As the audience encourages the repetition of sub-cultural codes, the innovation in social and political discourses have been limited, as artists will tend to continue to express themselves on topics that have been proven to be successful with the audience. Both heavy metal and hip-hop are musical genres that are around 50 years old now. Artists that have seen and participated in the heydays of both subcultures are now fairly old, and this increase in the average age in the subcultures has also led to said conservatism.

“First of all, the artists who ‘invented’ and popularized Metal in the 1970s and 1980s cannot seriously be called young anymore: the members of Black Sabbath are approaching the eighth decade of their lives; the musicians in *Iron Maiden* are in their fifties or sixties; [...] ; also Lars Ulrich and James Hetfield, the creative duo of *Metallica*, left behind their fiftieth birthdays. We can expect their fans, at least a part of them, to be of a similar age.”

The heavy metal scene has been fairly stagnant regarding political and social values, as we have seen concerning women rights and LGBTQIA+ rights. As artists are expected to express themselves a certain way, topics that have been proven to be successful, like anti-war or anti-patriotism discourses, are much more prevalent within heavy metal subculture, and more recent social and political topics are rarely talked about within the scene. The scene also had (and still has) its problem with race, when hip-hop gained popularity in the 90s and was deemed a threat for heavy metal.

““People would look at you funny or give you a dirty look, but no one would really say anything to you: ‘What are you doing here, you don’t belong.’” This changed, she says, in the mid-00s – for the worse. “There was more of a reaction. People seemed angry to see you there.” She says that this was partly a response to hip hop’s cultural dominance over metal and hard rock since the 90s” (Everly, 2016)

As hip-hop became more popular, hip-hop sounds began to be incorporated in heavy metal; this led to the creation of a genre named “nu-metal” (Ibidem). The emergence, and popularity, of this new genre is what provoked the violent reaction of heavy metal conservatives towards black people, as they perceived hip-hop to be invading their culture.

The hip-hop culture also has its detractors. Many older hip-hop artists deem the scene to be devoid of any of its original values nowadays.

““Hip-hop got so ravaged, it's snobby now,” says Deck. “People rap about being the richest. ‘I got all that and you got nothing, you broker than me and you wanna be me. Look at me, I'm fuckin' extra cool. And I'm super thugged out, too. And I'm rich.’ That’s all rap is for me right now.” (Olmstead, 2015)

Criticizing the profit that rappers make, and the showcase of their wealth throughout their songs and behavior, is the main critique that hip-hop artists and the audience make when talking about the new hip-hop scene. It is often linked to the fact that being a hip-hop artist nowadays is far more profitable than in the 80s, since the genre has pierced outside of its confined scene. But this type of critic is ignoring the fact that hip-hop is first and foremost a cultural movement made for the emancipation of black youth, and that this celebration of wealth is, in part, what hip-hop always has been about. This explains the success of gangsta

rap during the 90s, which was filled with themes of wealth, superiority over others and violence.

This struggle for new artistic visions and expression has led to discontent within newer generations of artists, as we can observe a rise in popularity from “new” and more extreme genres within both heavy metal and hip-hop. The heavy metal scene is now more centered around progressive metal or death metal and its subgenres, as it gathers a younger audience. On the other hand, young hip-hop artists tend to disrespect older artists, even if it is considered a taboo within the scene, and are more inclined to heavily criticize society and the U.S system. These shifts in discourse and focus can be seen as an effort to break out from conservatism within the scene by younger artists, in order for themselves to re-appropriate it. These attempts at re-appropriation are nothing new, as we have seen with “nu-metal” at the end of the 90s for example. The genre tried to appeal to a younger generation and reinvent the sounds of heavy metal. Subcultures are therefore constantly trying to reinvent themselves and be progressive.

The discourse constructed within hip-hop and heavy metal therefore is designed to push forward the authenticity of artists. This authenticity is what separates them from mainstream artists and what allows them to formulate opinions that would otherwise be brushed off as “insincere”. This construction is, as we have seen, regulated by sub-cultural codes. However, this regulation is not what hinders their freedom of expression, it rather is the conservatism that was birthed as a result of said regulations. What these restrictions have produced is a new type of discourse within the younger generations of the subcultures. One that is set out to subvert the established codes of hip-hop or heavy metal. Therefore, even if both heavy metal and hip-hop have made their way into the mainstream, they still subside as subcultures thanks to different fringes within them, that make efforts to make the subcultures progress.

“Rock is progressive, pop reactionary. —Gary Herman, writing on the Who in 1971”

(Pichaske, 1989, 276)

Conclusion

What we have shown throughout the study of the para-text of various bands and/or musicians, is that the discourse of sub-cultural artists is articulated around two axes; the narration of their identity-*ipse* and of their identity-*idem*. Artists, throughout their discourse, present markers of these two types of identity construction in order to present themselves as both members of the subculture and unique individuals within it. This presentation takes place in interviews, songs, visual representations, merchandise etc... and follows, or plays on, the codes established by heavy metal or hip-hop subcultures throughout their history.

The narration of identity within subculture is therefore heavily codified. From the audience to music labels, artists are scrutinized for markers of sub-cultural identity within the narration of their identity. As the subculture is deemed a home for authentic artists, these sub-cultural markers correspond to a proof of authenticity, as they showcase membership to the subculture. The sub-cultural markers of identity are therefore held in higher regard by the audience than the unique markers of artists, which explains the increase in conservatism in heavy metal and hip-hop. This shows that a seemingly free space of expression is in reality a place where artists might be more closely watched by their audience than mainstream artists. The reason why is because subculture artists are supposed to be the representation of the common man. It is this representation that the audience seeks in subculture, and that the artists must provide to them. However, this does not mean that sub-cultural artists operate a facade that is completely removed from their actual self. Most of them surely find that the subculture they partake in represents values that are closer to them than mainstream culture. If it was not the case, artists would not be trying to make their subculture progress despite the criticism of conservatives.

This essay has for objective to highlight and explain the intricacies of sub-cultural discourse, which is, as per my observations, largely ignored as a research subject. Sub-cultural discourse is a way of expression that, in my opinion, is special in its construction. As it develops from a culture meant to exist aside from mainstream society, its set of references, imageries and values differ completely from what can be observed in everyday media. This

whole new cultural background gives birth to new ways to express oneself and express identity. As well as new expectations regarding the identity of individuals. I consider everything that was shown by heavy metal and hip-hop subcultures to be relevant for every piece of sub-cultural production, from Internet culture, to Gothic fashion for example. Every subculture has its codes, its values and its valued markers of identity, and by studying its history and the discourse of its members, it is possible to comprehend their discourse and its intricacies.

The debate over who is or isn't part of the subculture is a backbone for subcultures. It creates a collective image of the identity of the culture for its members. It allows them to debate over who deserves to represent them and their values, as well as who they deem relatable. This is why this debate, often criticized as elitist behavior, has been alive ever since the birth of subcultures. It constitutes a proof of a will to constantly monitor, construct and deconstruct the narration of identity of the subculture, in order for it to withstand the passage of time. The question "who is metal/hip-hop?" is therefore more of a questioning about the identity of the subculture, then it is a way to gate-keep its membership.

"Rock'n Roll is founded on misfits. [...] Rock'n Roll is founded on outrageous people. They will outrage you. Outrage you, not your parents, outrage **you**. Until you go up and be outrageous yourself." - Ian Fraser "Lemmy" Kilmister (Tracks – Arte, 2002, 11:46)

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