Rethinking Metal Aesthetics: Complexity, Authenticity, and Audience in Meshuggah's *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*

Eric T. Smialek

Schulich School of Music, McGill University

Montréal, QC.
Canada

Thesis Advisor: David Brackett

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Abstract

The unusual complexity of two recent recordings by the extreme metal band Meshuggah has resulted in a strongly divided reception amongst fans, providing the opportunity to reconsider some common conceptions of metal aesthetics and to contribute to subtler ways of understanding taste and social demographics. Spanning twenty-one and forty-seven minutes respectively, *I* (2004) and *Catch Thirtythr33* (2005) surprised fans with their unusual lengths (both recordings considered by the band to be single songs), complex song writing, and, with *Catch Thirtythr33*, the band's use of programmed drums. In response to interviewers' questions about each of these factors, the members of Meshuggah have made remarks that have been widely accepted among fans and rock journalists but that also seem to contradict their compositional practices and sometimes even their own previous statements. In my thesis, I investigate this discrepancy and its implications for how the concepts of authenticity and aesthetic values vary in metal discourses using concepts derived from critical theory, music theoretical analysis, and sociology. By uncovering several diverse aesthetic values through these discourses, I argue for an alternative to traditional class-based models of metal fans, one that will acknowledge the wide variety of aesthetic values found amongst metal audiences in this study.

Résumé

La complexité inhabituelle de deux enregistrements récents du groupe métal extrême Meshuggah a entraîné un profond schisme parmi les fans, offrant ainsi l'opportunité de reconsidérer certaines conceptions courantes concernant l'esthétique métal ainsi que de raffiner la compréhension du goût et de la démographie sociale. Durant vingt-et-une et quarante-sept minutes respectivement, *I* (2004) et *Catch Thirtythr33* (2005) ont surpris les fans par leur durée inhabituelle (les deux enregistrements étant chacun considérés par le groupe comme chansons individuelles), leur écriture complexe et, avec *Catch Thirtythr33*, l'utilisation programmée de la batterie. En réponse aux questions des intervieweurs concernant chacun de ces trois facteurs, les membres de Meshuggah ont mis de l'avant des affirmations qui ont été bien reçues parmi les fans et les journalistes de rock mais qui semblent cependant aller à l'encontre de leurs pratiques compositionnelles habituelles, contredisant même, parfois, certaines de leurs affirmations antérieures. Cette thèse examine ces contradictions et ce que celles-ci impliquent dans la façon que varient les concepts d'authenticité et des valeurs esthétiques présents dans les discours sur le métal, utilisant des concepts issus de la théorie critique, de l'analyse musicale, ainsi que de la sociologie. En mettant en lumière les diverses valeurs esthétiques existant dans ces discours, je voudrais ici démontrer qu'il existe une alternative aux modèles traditionnels des fans du métal se basant sur la classe sociale et qui rendra compte de la diversité des valeurs esthétiques que l'on retrouve parmi le public du métal de cette étude.

Acknowledgments

For the ideas I've developed in this thesis I owe my most immediate thanks to my advisor David Brackett. By way of example in the quality of his own work, and by insisting that I challenge myself, David has taught me to look beyond my comfort areas in scholarship, to apply broader questions of social meaning to my musical interests, and, as a result, to become a more creative and insightful thinker. I am grateful for the patience and encouragement he has shown me. I owe thanks to many more professors at McGill who have given me their counsel and have inspired me. In particular, Steven Huebner, René Daley, Don McLean, and William Caplin have been enormously helpful. At the University of British Columbia, Professors Richard Kurth, John Roeder, and especially Ken Morrison, each showed tremendous interest in my ideas, often meeting with me on their own time to discuss Meshuggah and music analysis. My graduate student colleagues at McGill have been sources of motivation and friendship (and so has Asher!).[1] I've especially looked up to Michael Ethen and Dana Gorzelany-Mostak with whom I have shared many enlightening and many equally vacuous—but no less valuable—conversations about music, scholarship, and life at McGill. I owe thanks to Claudine Jacques for her translation of my abstract and for her generosity with conversations *en français*. Brian McMillan and the staff of the Marvin Duchow Music Library have been fantastic, always friendly and willing to go out of their way to help me. Maria-Alexandra Francou-Desrochers has been a wonderful companion throughout the "thesing" process. During my times of greatest stress she has been a source of

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[1] Asher Vijay Yampolsky shares my taste for mischief and will appreciate my little jab.

Chapter 1

"Inside What's Within Behind": Metal Research and the Problem of Meshuggah

By borrowing my chapter heading from the title of an early Meshuggah song, I hope to have captured some aesthetic concepts that characterize nearly the band's entire career: playful deception, contradictions, confusion and complexity.[1] To varying degrees, these terms might seem at odds with the genre of metal as it is usually conceived in the popular imagination and in a great deal of scholarship. Complexity in particular, with its connotations of sophistication, organization, and skill, is frequently opposed to the hedonism (found mostly in heavy metal of the 1980s), immediacy, and hostility that are often attributed to the music and subculture of metal.[2] But this opposition is not only unnecessary (and the latter three characterizations are often inaccurate), it can obscure certain aspects of metal that are thought to be uncommon yet are meaningful to many fans and musicians. With so much scholarship stressing the cathartic function of metal for frustrated working class male youths—who, we are often told, saturate the market for metal—one is left wondering about other kinds of fans for whom this music

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[1] This chapter's title is taken from the title of a Meshuggah song on the album *Destroy Erase Improve* (1995). One can get a quick sense of some of the aesthetics I've referred to above by the following fan statement: "Want to know what it's like to be high? Trace one of the myriad of time signatures going on in a Meshuggah song. Try to predict one of Tomas Haake's drum patterns and feel yourself stumble mentally over and over again as you constantly get it wrong" (Deadwired, "Masterpiece in Mentality - 100%," [online fan review] November 9, 2005) http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (August 21, 2008).

[2] Robert Walser's *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993) is an important exception to this trend. I will discuss his work in more detail below.

could hold an assortment of functions, cathartic or otherwise.[3] Meshuggah, and the idiosyncratic aesthetics that fuel their music and attract their fans, provide us with an opportunity to explore these other dimensions of metal. How do we account for a band that invites contemplative as well as cathartic listening, for the university students who stand alongside blue collar workers at Meshuggah concerts, and for their music that seems to ignore, straddle, or invert conventional binary oppositions that are widely used to categorize and describe the musical experience of metal? In short, how do we account for an example of extreme metal that seems to defy our theories?

Two of Meshuggah's recent recordings, *Catch Thirtythr33* (2005) and the epigrammatically titled *I* (2004), are particularly revealing of the extent to which aesthetics for metal fans can vary. Spanning forty-seven and twenty-one minutes respectively, both *Catch Thirtythr33* and *I* are single continuous songs containing

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[3] Some examples include Natalie J. Purcell, *Death Metal Music: The Passion and Politics of a Subculture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2003), 99 (see Purcell's chapter on "Demographics" in ibid., 99–115; Peter G. Christenson and Donald F. Roberts, *It's Not Only Rock & Roll*, (Creskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1998) cited in Purcell, *Death Metal Music*, 99; Roy Shuker, "Heavy Metal," in *Key Concepts in Popular Music* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 161; and Deena Weinstein*: The Music and Its Culture* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2000) [first published in 1991 as *Heavy Metal: A Cultural Sociology*].

Weinstein goes so far as to give her chapter on metal fans subheadings such as "Male" (pp. 102–06), "Youth" (pp. 106–11), "White" (pp. 111–13), and "Blue Collar" (pp. 113–17). She introduces her discussion of "The Core Audience and Its Subculture" by tracing its demographics: "The stereotypical metal fan is male, white, and in his midteens. As one journalist writes, 'heavy metal fans are usually white working-class males between the ages of 12 and 22.' Most are also blue collar, either in fact or by sentimental attachment. This is an accurate external description of the vast majority of enthusiasts for the genre, from its beginning through the mid-1980s. Further, these characteristics form a consistent pattern across geographical settings, although the Japanese and some Latin American fans could not be designated as 'white'" (Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 99). We shall see later on that studies on metal fans from outside of North America tend to portray fans in quite a different light than Weinstein does.

Although Jack Harrell does not outline a fan demographic, he does make an explicit reference to the importance of catharsis among fans: "Death metal is a fascinating cultural field and often just exciting to listen to (the affective fallacy, but probably the only important criteria for most of its fans)" (Harrell, "The Poetics of Destruction: Death Metal Rock," *Popular Music and Society* 18, no. 1 (1994): 102).

unusually complex approaches to rhythm, meter and form which band members,

fans, and critics have often described as experimental. Although Meshuggah

(meaning "crazy" in Yiddish)[4] was already well known for the complexity of their

previous albums, fans and CD reviewers were strongly divided over the

increasingly unorthodox song-writing for *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*. To further

complicate matters, the band decided to record *Catch Thirtythr33* with

programmed drums (a general taboo in metal), causing interviewers to probe for

explanations and provoking debates among fans over the nature and importance of

rock authenticity.

The controversies surrounding these two recordings can tell us a great deal

about the aesthetic and ideological values of those involved, inviting us to

challenge pre-existing conceptions of metal fans and develop more complex

models for understanding how they relate to music. This thesis seeks to contribute

to the goals above by exploring these controversies using concepts derived from

critical theory, music theoretical analysis, and sociology. I will take up each of

these approaches individually in subsequent chapters and will outline my

theoretical frameworks in more detail below; in order to lay a foundation for that

work, the current chapter is dedicated to surveying current research on metal that

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[4] Current information from interviews indicates that the band's name is not an allusion to Judaism or Jewish culture; the band simply wanted a name that "sounded cool" (Jonathan Pieslak also notes this in his "Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah," *Music Theory Spectrum* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 219, n. 1). Guitarist Mårten Hagström explains the name as follows: "Well, it means insane or crazy. When the band was in it's [*sic*] infancy and we were just getting started, Jens was sitting looking through books and encyclopedias for some name ideas for the band. He came across the word Meshuggah, which means insane. We liked it so much we decided to keep it as a name. It really seems to fit us too, because we are all crazy and insane in our own ways" (Hagström, "Interview with Marten Hagstrom [*sic*] of Meshuggah" by Michael Mitchell-Loud, May 10, 2003),
http://www.mortado.com/gravemusic/news/interviews/meshug.shtml (accessed September 10, 2008).

is most relevant to questions of fan demographics and Meshuggah's ambiguous position with respect to genre. But before I address these questions, I would like to introduce some ways in which Meshuggah has presented themselves as something of an anomaly throughout their career.

I. A Postmodern Aesthetic in Extreme Metal

Let us first turn our attention to the music video for "New Millennium Cyanide Christ," a popular song among fans from Meshuggah's *Chaosphere* album (1998). It begins as any metal video might, with the camera fading in to reveal the band in mid performance—although we can only see them past a glossy window. The opening guitar riff, heavily distorted and metrically conflicting with the drums, fades in as well but everything is strangely quiet. As the music abruptly switches to full volume, we become aware of a number of peculiar things. Firstly, the glossy window actually looks into the band's tour bus where Meshuggah is playing in somewhat cramped quarters. The vocalist (Jens Kidman) stands in front, as we might expect him to, but the guitarists (Fredrick Thordendal, Mårten Hagström) and bassist (Gustaf Hielm) are seated, two at a table, one across the bus, each head banging furiously; the drummer (Thomas Haake) performs sitting atop of what appears to be a sleeping bunk. Secondly, while each of the band members seem focused on their performances, none of them are holding any instruments. Haake strikes imaginary drums, maintaining a robotic indifference to the intensity of both the music and his bandmates' headbanging; he has a blank expression behind his sunglasses with his head fixed straight ahead at the camera, bobbing side to side. Thordendal scowls behind state-trooper glasses, exaggerating his body movements in a jerky, almost confrontational,

manner—all the while playing air guitar. (Fans are particularly fond of

Thordendal's intricately air fret-tapped guitar solo as a quick glance at the

comments left on any YouTube clip will show.) Kidman, wearing thick black

shades, screams into a pen *qua* microphone (see Figure 1.1). Thirdly, as indicated

by the eyewear sported by every member of the band, the members of Meshuggah

have, for the most part, not dressed themselves in ways we might expect of

musicians filming a metal video. Both guitarists wear hockey jerseys (as they

often do during live performances) and we can see Haake's toes poking out of his

socks, wiggling in time with the kick drums.

Figure 1.1 – Still images from the "New Millennium Cyanide Christ" music video (shown clockwise): Fredrick Thordendal, wearing a hockey jersey, air fret-taps during his guitar solo; Thomas Haake air drums on top of what appears to be a sleeping bunk; Jens Kidman screams into a pen.

Most extreme metal bands tend to portray themselves with an unironic seriousness. The deliberate absurdity of the "New Millennium Cyanide Christ" video is atypical in this respect and is in many ways indicative of the unusual aesthetics and public persona which Meshuggah have generally maintained throughout their career. While the video has an unquestionably aggressive sound (owing to the band's heavily detuned seven-string guitars, their stuttering hybrid meter rhythms, and Kidman's gruff screams), the visual aspects of the video seem to subtly undermine it, drawing attention to the normative codes, and thus the artifice, of the metal video. In place of spectacular special effects and expensive equipment, Meshuggah uses mundane surroundings and cheap props, replacing images of rock stardom with those of wannabe air guitarists; caricatures are made of common performance attitudes and behaviours (Haake's robotic drumming, Thordendal's overly tough grimaces), paralleling the band's satirical press photos (see Figure 1.2).[5]

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[5] After an interviewer described how he laughed at the "New Millennium Cyanide Christ video, Hagström replied, "Yeah, that's the point, it's so fucking ludicrous and out there. And the thing is, Nuclear Blast didn't think everybody would get the joke. You know? But I'm like... dude, man, everybody's gonna laugh when they see that one. They're gonna know that it's not serious." Hagström, "Interview with Mårten Hagström from Meshuggah" by Mike Meier http://www.jensmetalpage.com/interviews_meshuggah.htm (accessed August 24, 2008); although no date is given for the interview, it appears to have taken place shortly after the release of *Nothing* in 2002.

Figure 1.2 – Satirical (bottom row) and uncanny (top row) images in Meshuggah's press photos. Note the Neanderthal poses and overly stern facial expressions. In the bottom left corner, Haake's exaggerated angry stare (standing on the far left) is not nearly as typical for metal musicians as Hagström's semi-apathetic frown (standing on the far right).

Each of these gestures, in accordance with Meshuggah's penchant for contradictory lyrics and titles, could be considered extreme metal examples of what Jonathan Kramer calls a postmodern attitude.[6] (Specifically, in the case of the "New Millennium Cyanide Christ" video, they might be considered examples of what Lawrence Grossberg has called "authentic inauthenticity," an idea which will resurface in chapter 3.)[7] While a good deal of other metal bands exist that

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[6] A succinct list of sixteen characteristics for postmodern music (conceived as an "attitude" rather than a historical period) is offered by Jonathan Kramer in his "Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time," *Indiana Theory Review* 17, no. 2 (1996): 21–22. The list can also be found in idem., "The Nature and Origins of Musical Postmodernism," in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, eds. Judy Lochhead and Joseph Auner (New York: Routledge, 2002), 16–17.

[7] Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of this Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 224–34. My understanding and application of Grossberg's "authentic inauthenticity" is derived from David Brackett's use of the term in his

could also fulfill a number of Kramer's sixteen criteria for postmodern music,

Meshuggah seems to be unique among them for being widely known among

metal enthusiasts (reaching the *Billboard* Top 200 three times).[8] In light of the

band's relative popularity, I believe they allow us a unique opportunity to explore

some potentially postmodern aspects of the extreme metal scene and its members

that have been largely overlooked. They give us a special case study in metal

where we can pursue the following challenge posed by Judy Lochhead: "How

might a postmodern musical practice be construed: in terms of aesthetic and

stylistic issues, in terms of how people use music, or how music is promoted in

consumer culture?"[9] Considering the band's wide appeal, the answers we find

may compel us to reconsider our ideas about metal and the people who care about

it most.

II. Scholarly Literature on Metal: Issues, Attitudes, Beliefs

The scholarly literature devoted to metal is now quite large and it is

expanding at an ever increasing rate. One need only visit Keith Kahn-Harris'

online bibliography of 137 references (a number that has nearly doubled in the

past two years) to get a sense of this literature's expansion during the past

decade.[10] The sociological focus of most of this research is also apparent in Kahn-

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"'Where's It At?': Postmodern Theory and the Contemporary Musical Field," in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, 217.

[8] The albums *Nothing* (2002), *Catch Thirtythr33*, and *obZen* (2008) reached the 165th, 170th, and 59th spots respectively. See Gary Sharpe-Young, *Metal: The Definitive Guide* (London: Jawbone Press, 2007), 486 and *Billboard* magazine's online database of chart rankings at http://www.billboard.com/bbcom/retrieve_chart_history.do?model.chartFormatGroupName=Albums&model.vnuArtistId=142561&model.vnuAlbumId=1174892 (accessed August 24, 2008).

For a brief article that describes several "post-metal" bands, see Jon Caramanica, "Heavy Metal Gets an M.F.A." *New York Times*, September 18, 2005.

[9] Judy Lochhead, "Introduction," in *Postmodern Music/Postmodern Thought*, 8.

[10] http://www.keithkahnharris.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/metalstudies.htm (accessed July 8, 2008). Kahn-Harris and Fabien Hein, whom Kahn-Harris credits with "alerting me to a number of

Harris' list, representing the work of sociologists, ethnomusicologists, and cultural studies scholars whose work has traditionally dominated the diffuse and interdisciplinary field of popular music scholarship.[11] While this emphasis may seem unremarkable in light of historical developments in popular music studies, I believe it nevertheless merits a closer look.[12] In particular, I would like to draw our attention to some notable trends in the writings of popular music scholars that either risk perpetuating long debunked myths about metal or reflect some widespread scholarly beliefs and attitudes towards the genre which I would like to call into question. As we shall see in the concluding section of this chapter, Meshuggah's incongruency with those beliefs prompts us to be wary of applying them wholesale to the diverse genre of metal.[13]

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these items," have published a print version of the bibliography in Hein and Kahn-Harris, "Études Metal: Metal Studies: Une Bibliographe," *Copyright Volume!* 5, no. 2 (2006): 19–32.

[11] Of course, the sociological emphasis of Kahn-Harris' bibliographic website is partially the result, understandably, of his disciplinary affiliation as a sociologist. Nonetheless, because he openly invites contributions to his list from anyone and because he also includes most of the published studies devoted to compositional or music stylistic aspects of metal of which I am aware, I believe the focus of his bibliography is generally representative of the current state of scholarship on metal.

[12] Both the widespread influence of subcultural theories from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) and the oft-cited disinterest in popular music shown by musicologists before the 1980s are certainly contributing factors. See also Kahn Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 16–19 and Martin Cloonan, "What is Popular Music Studies? Some Observations," *British Journal of Music Education* 22, no. 1 (2005): 77–93. For an account of the many challenges facing musicologists who (in the late 80s) wished to study popular music, see Susan McClary and Robert Walser, "Start Making Sense: Musicology Wrestles with Rock," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin eds. (New York: Pantheon, 1990), 277–92.

[13] In *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2007), Keith Kahn-Harris argues for the exceptional diversity of the subgenre of extreme metal, a category that for most listeners primarily focuses on death metal and black metal bands; similarly aggressive bands such as Meshuggah are usually also referred to as "extreme metal." Kahn-Harris in fact lists its diversity as one of four "reasons why extreme metal is a significant phenomenon…More than any other kind of metal, extreme metal is exceptionally diverse. There has been a continual process of musical experimentation that has expanded the possibilities of metal. Extreme metal culture is equally diverse, with musicians and fans located across the world" (Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 6). This is, of course, to say nothing of the diversity of metal writ large.

For a historically oriented description of extreme metal and the development of its subgenres, see Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 2–5; see also Natalie Purcell, *Death Metal Music*, 9–24 for

Beliefs about the Simplicity of Metal

Perhaps the most widely circulating belief among both the general public and many music scholars is that metal is simple or formulaic.[14] The tongue-in-cheek descriptions of "bone-headed simplicity," "adolescent glandular mayhem," and "zit cream for the soul," offered by rock critic J.D. Considine capture a sense of the condescension that many journalists and unsympathetic academics have shown towards metal and its audience, a fanbase depicted by Considine as adolescents with hormonally driven tastes.[15] Allan Moore's brief section on "Hard rock and Heavy Metal" in his *Rock: The Primary Text*, although much more nuanced and charitable than Considine's account, risks being similarly reductive.[16] Despite his awareness of formally complex thrash metal songs—he speaks of "the lengthy structures of Metallica" and earlier cites a musical example from Metallica's *...And Justice for All* (an album with a reputation amongst fans for its especially complex song forms)—Moore claims that "formal predictability

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descriptions of subgenres within death metal as well as testimonies of genre defining qualities supplied by musicians and prominent scene members.

[14] Robert Walser makes a similar point in his *Running with the Devil*: "Historians and critics of popular music have so far failed to take seriously the musical accomplishments of heavy metal musicians. The prevailing stereotype portrays metal guitarists as primitive and noisy; virtuosity, if it is noticed at all, is usually dismissed as 'pyrotechnics' " (Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 103).

[15] J.D. Considine, "Purity and Power—Total, Unswerving Devotion to Heavy Metal Form: Judas Priest and the Scorpions," *Musician* (September 1984): 46–50 reproduced (although mostly omitting the section on the Scorpions) in David Brackett, *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader: Histories and Debates* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 373–75; see also Brackett's commentary on pp. 371–72. Ernest A. Hakanen and Alan Wells, although theirs is a statistical study of taste demographics rather than rock criticism, present a similar condescending conclusion about heavy metal and its audience in comparison to other genres: "Some types of music (eg. classical and jazz) appear to need continuous maturation while others (heavy metal) may be linked to a specific stage of adolescents [*sic*]" (Hakanen and Wells, "Adolescent Music Marginals: Who Likes Metal, Jazz, Country, and Classical?" *Popular Music and Society* 14, no. 4 (1990): 64). It should be noted that this statement is omitted from their revised version of that essay, Hakanen and Wells, "Music Preference and Taste Cultures Among Adolescents," *Popular Music and Society* 17, no. 1 (1993): 55–70.

[16] Allan Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text; Developing a Musicology of Rock* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, [1993] 2001), 147–51.

at both ends of the continuum [between hard rock and heavy metal] is high."[17]

Having described a number of bands according to four musical factors

("structure," "speed" [and guitar articulation], "instrumentation and associated

texture," and "voice and subject matter,") Moore concludes, "Taking all these

factors into account…my impression is that heavy metal is perhaps the most

formulaic of rock styles"[18] Since Moore's strongest evidence for this conclusion

comes from two examples before heavy metal's surge of popularity in the early

80s,[19] one is left wondering whether he has taken later styles of metal into account

when making his judgment (the Metallica example notwithstanding).[20]

Ultimately, Moore risks perpetuating the stereotype of metal's simplicity by

overlooking many of the genre's more recent developments, particularly those of

extreme metal bands throughout the 1990s.[21]

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[17] Ibid., 149, 151. The complexity of *…And Justice for All* is so iconic amongst metal fans that those who accused Metallica of "selling-out" with later releases alluded to it in order to mock (what they understand to be) the contrived complexity of Metallica's *St. Anger* album; see Eric Smialek, "The Unforgiven: A Reception Study of Metallica and 'Sell-Out' Accusations," paper presented at the annual meeting of IASPM–Canada [International Association for the Study of Popular Music], Brock University, St. Catharines, ON, May 9–11, 2008, p. 11. For several examples of Metallica's complex song-writing, see Glenn Pillsbury, "Thinking-Man's Metal: Whiteness, Detachment, and the Performance of Musical Complexity," Ch. 3 in *Damage Incorporated: Metallica and the Production of Musical Identity* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 57–98.

[18] Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 150.

[19] Moore offers a comparative example of how Black Sabbath's "Paranoid" (1971) and Motörhead's "Overkill," (1979) recorded eight years apart from one another, "really [differ] only in speed" (ibid.).

[20] Groups that Moore lists has having been taken into consideration as examples of either hard rock or heavy metal include "Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Def Leppard, Magnum, Gary Moore, Motorhead [*sic*], Nazareth, Saxon, UFO, Uriah Heep and Whitesnake…Anthrax, Exodus, Robert Plant, Judas Priest and Iron Maiden (and, more recently, Garbage and Skunk Anansie)…Steppenwolf, Metallica, Boston, Heart, Bon Jovi and others" (ibid., 148).

[21] Of each of the bands mentioned by Moore, Garbage and Skunk Anansie—two bands that seem to me at least to be alternative rock bands rather than belonging anywhere along the continuum of hard rock or heavy metal—represent the only bands on Moore's list who formed during the 1990s. Neither of them is explicitly mentioned in his analyses.

To be fair, the first edition of Moore's book was published only in 1993. Accordingly, my critique of this small excerpt from *Rock: The Primary Text* should not be taken as any kind of accusation towards Moore. Rather, I would like it to be read as a caveat to anyone who might

Robert Walser has come to an entirely different conclusion in his *Running with the Devil: Power, Gender, and Madness in Heavy Metal Music*. The first—and until 2006, the *only*—musicological book devoted to heavy metal, Walser's study drew upon his close familiarity, as a performer, with the recordings and discursive practices of heavy metal enthusiasts.[22] Uncovering a dimension of complexity within heavy metal often overlooked by outsiders, Walser revealed that a significant portion of heavy metal fans pursue instrumental study and that many metal guitarists, professional and amateur alike, were increasingly drawing upon "academic music theory…[for] technical innovation and expansion."[23] Through detailed discussions of heavy metal guitar solos, discursive analyses of the guitar magazines that transcribe and analyze them, and interview excerpts from electric guitar virtuosos, Walser outlined several forms of soloistic guitar virtuosity that various artists used to signify the romanticism, prestige and

interpret his remarks, along with the 2001 second edition date, as representing the current state of metal.

[22] The 2006 publication I refer to here is Pillsbury's *Damage Incorporated*, a book which grew out of a dissertation that Walser supervised. Depending on the flexibility of one's heavy metal genre boundaries, Susan Fast's monograph on Led Zeppelin also appeared between Walser and Pillsbury's monographs; see Susan Fast, *In the Houses of the Holy: Led Zeppelin and the Power of Rock Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Deena Weinstein's *Heavy Metal* (first published in 1991) is generally credited as the first book-length academic study dedicated to heavy metal.

[23] Summarizing some of the responses he obtained from his fan questionnaire, Walser notes, "While quite a few of the Poison crowd indicated that they play musical instruments, a clear majority of the Judas Priest sample played instruments and owned musical equipment" (Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 18). Similarly, Jeffrey Arnett's ethnographic research found that "[q]uite a remarkable proportion of the metalheads in this study (76 percent) said that they play some kind of musical instrument (electric guitar, for most), compared to only 35 percent of the boys in the comparison group" (Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation* [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996], 86). Purcell argues that "most [fans of metal] are not only listeners, but also musicians. Whether or not most have any success in their pursuit of musical prowess, it is difficult to come across a metal fan who has not made some attempt at creating music or starting a band of his or her own" (Purcell, *Death Metal Music*, 156).

Although I am momentarily drawing attention to only one kind of complexity, it should be noted here that by "technical innovation and expansion," Walser seems to mean both complexity in terms of music theoretical resources and in terms of physical dexterity on the fretboard (Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 90). Mårten Hagström has emphatically denied the importance of instrumental virtuosity to Meshuggah, as we shall see in the opening epigraphs of chapter 2.

austerity of classical music. In doing so, he raised our awareness of both instrumental and compositional virtuosity in metal, two often overlooked ideals that play a significant role in the discursive struggles between metal fans, critics, and musicians over "authenticity."

Like Moore, Walser limits his study to heavy metal bands of the 1970s and 80s (and, as with the first edition of Moore's book [1993], this is likely owing to the time of his publication). His findings about the practices of earlier metal groups and their fans thus invite us to compare them to those of later groups such as Meshuggah. Many of Walser's ideas will become central to my discussions of Meshuggah fan forums in chapter 3 where transcription threads pool together large group efforts to transcribe entire albums and discussion topics often involve detailed arguments over music theoretical definitions. As we shall see, many of Meshuggah's fans are musicians whose musical preferences include other genres that foreground musical complexity. This alerts us to at least two issues that involve musical function and genre. Firstly, both the guitar magazines dedicated to musical study that Walser explores as well as their parallel discourses in Meshuggah's message boards suggest that, for many fans, the appeal of metal is not limited to a "taste for sensation" or a need for catharsis.[24] Secondly, an interplay of genres comparable to the "heavy metal appropriations of classical virtuosity" that Walser identifies has affected Meshuggah's reception. While references to baroque styles, such as those that Walser discusses, are absent from Meshuggah's music, one could easily draw comparisons between Meshuggah and

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[24] See, for example, Jeffrey Arnett, "Three Profiles of Heavy Metal Fans: A Taste for Sensation and a Subculture of Alienation," *Qualitative Sociology* 16, no. 4 (1993): 423–43.

the musical avant-garde. In the case of Meshuggah, the band's aural similarities to

contemporary art music, free jazz, and finally progressive rock—a genre whose

musicians *did* quote the classical masters—have stirred up a multitude of

connotations to which fans and critics have often reacted strongly. In chapter 3, I

will explore these reactions in light of the overwhelmingly negative critical

reception drawn to progressive rock during the 1970s. Walser's discussions of

virtuosity will be of special interest when I examine the tensions present in fan

forums and CD reviews between compositional and instrumental as well as

between human and machine-based virtuosity.

Beliefs about the Homogeneity of Metal (or, the Instability of Genre)

Genre boundaries, which often shift over time and are contested amongst

fans of many forms of popular music, are especially unstable within discourses on

metal—fan, academic, non-fiction, and general media discourses alike. Witness,

for instance, the countless debates in fan magazines during the 1980s over which

groups were worthy of being called "heavy metal;"[25] as subgenres continued to

fragment and shift throughout the 80s and 90s, these kinds of fan debates have

persisted with the same intensity.[26] In spite of this, many books on metal fail to

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[25] Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 5–7. One question in Walser's "Heavy Metal Questionnaire" asks fans to indicate from a list of twenty-four bands which "you think best define 'Heavy Metal' " and which "bands you think are not metal at all." He reports that "many fans told me [this question] was their favorite part" (p. 18); his complete survey may be found on pp. 175–177.

[26] I have found that the most vehement arguments over genre boundaries involve fan debates over whether the globally successful bands Cradle of Filth and Dimmu Borgir belong to the subgenre of black metal. William Ross Hagen states, "A quick glance through the variety of 'black metal' discussion groups on Yahoo.com reveals more than a few which specifically forbid discussion of either [Cradle of Filth or Dimmu Borgir], in an attempt to limit the discourse to 'true' black metal" (William Ross Hagen, "Norwegian Black Metal: Analysis of Musical Style and its Expression in an Underground Scene," [MMus thesis, University of Colorado, 2005], 17).

Following arguments made in Pierre Bourdieu's "The Field of Cultural Production, or: The Economic World Reversed," the particular vigor of the debates in black metal discussion groups

acknowledge the instability of genre, preferring instead to stipulate their own

fixed boundaries or to treat the entire complex of genres and subgenres as a single

monolithic entity under the (arguably outdated) term "heavy metal."[27] It seems to

me, however, that genre designations in metal warrant much more caution, for as

Walser and Deena Weinstein have argued, genre labels and the debates

surrounding them are not merely arguments about details of musical style.

Musicians will often refute the genre labels that their fans and the popular media

assign to them because the labels do much more than divide music into categories;

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may be connected to the genre's lack of popularity. This is because genres lacking popularity such as black metal—which approach Bourdieu's description of "the most perfectly autonomous sector of the field of cultural production, where the only audience aimed at is other producers"—tend to prioritize "symbolic capital" (such as genre distinctions) over "economic capital" (which is negatively associated by black metal fans with "the mainstream") (Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1993), 39); specifically, these genres operate "on a systematic inversion of the fundamental principles of all ordinary economies" (ibid.) where black metal scene members "who are least endowed with specific capital tend to identify with [a] degree of independence from the economy, seeing temporal failure as a sign of election and success as a sign of compromise" (ibid., 40). We will revisit Bourdieu's various forms of capital in greater detail in chapter 3; for now, it suffices to explain "symbolic capital" as a social currency that can endow its possessors with power in an analogous fashion to economic capital (or monetary wealth).

[27] My parenthetical interjection may come as a surprise to readers who use the phrase "heavy metal" as a very general designation of genre. While I have also followed this usage at times, I am have tried to avoid doing so throughout this thesis except under certain circumstances where I wish to suggest connotations of the 1980s. It has been my experience that metal fans generally prefer the term "metal" to "heavy metal" unless they are referring to either older pre-grunge styles of the 1980s, or to current subgenres such as power metal that are closely derived from 80s styles. Although this distinction may at first seem trivial or may seem as though I am merely casting my own fan-based opinion on genre, I raise it because I believe that to conflate two genre labels which fans commonly separate is to also ignore the subtle culturally- and historically-specific meanings that fans attach to genre distinctions. Jonathan Pieslak has voiced a similar statement: "'Heavy metal' is sometimes used to refer to popular metal bands of the 1970s and 1980s, like those mentioned in Walser (1993), *not* a broader category within which [the subgenre] nü metal would be included" (Jonathan Pieslak, "Sound, Text and Identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'," *Popular Music* 27, no. 1 (2008): 50). David Brackett has commented that this distinction between metal and heavy metal "highlights how genre labels are not used consistently between fans, critics, musicians, music industry parasites, etc." (personal correspondence, July 21, 2008).

See Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 5 for a discussion of rigid genre boundaries in academic writing, concert promotions and record marketing. Kahn-Harris speaks of the lack of unanimity in genre terminologies used in writings on extreme metal with "generic terms…often assumed to cover other genres (with death metal treated as a part of thrash metal, for example) or…assumed to be discrete (with black metal discussed as entirely distinct from death metal…)" (Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 9).

genre designations "[situate artists] with respect to audiences, interpretative norms, and institutional channels" as well as imply "historical and discursive connections to other music."[28] Generic distinctions mean a great deal to audiences as well because, as Simon Frith has shown (in an extension of Pierre Bourdieu's research on aesthetic judgment to the field of popular music tastes), the labels which fans use and the categories they prefer are often the means by which their social status and character are judged by other fans.[29] The fan arguments I alluded to above (over the boundaries of heavy metal) demonstrate this and remind us that genre borders are perpetually in flux as various individuals struggle to change them.

The instability of the very concept of genre and the diversity of metal—or, to put it in a perhaps appropriately laboured way, the variety of musics which are thought to participate within the category of "metal"—complicate two matters which I will take up in turn: 1) the applicability of prior research on heavy metal to bands such as Meshuggah and 2) the effectiveness of the methods we choose to employ.[30] To begin with, there is the problem of disagreement between various

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[28] Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 6. Weinstein argues for a similar extension of the notion of genre beyond musical sounds: "The genre [of heavy metal]…is a total sensibility based on sonic patterns but not exhausted by them. The codes provide the form of the sensibility and will be discussed here [i.e. throughout Weinstein's chapter] under the headings of aural, visual, and verbal dimensions of heavy metal. Other aspects of heavy metal's code …relate more closely to the social transaction that constitutes the genre…" (Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 22).

[29] Frith gives an intriguing image of the connection between identity and taste near the beginning of his *Performing Rites*: "We assume that we can get to know someone through their tastes (eyeing someone's book and record shelves the first time we visit them, waiting nervously to see what a date says as we come out of a movie or a concert). Cultural judgments, in other words, aren't just subjective, they are self-revealing…" (Frith, *Performing Rites: On the Value of Popular Music* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996], 5).

[30] One could potentially argue that the very notion of genre, in fact, can never be truly stable. For an example of a vigorous problematization of the concept of genre, see Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn, 1980): 55–81. An oft-cited passage from Derrida's essay captures both the instability of genre as a descriptive category and the

authors over what musical groups are relevant to a study on heavy metal and (as a

direct consequence) which listeners count as heavy metal fans. Jeffrey Arnett for

example, whose research I will address in more detail below, dismisses some of

Walser's findings on gender demographics because they include the fans of glam

metal groups such as Poison and Bon Jovi. Since these bands attracted an equal

number of male and female fans, as both Walser and Arnett observe, one's

impression of heavy metal as a predominantly masculine music is greatly affected

by whether such groups are taken into consideration.[31]

Compounded by differences in authors' disciplinary backgrounds and

relationships to metal music, the bands represented within various studies can at

times cause scholars to reach radically different conclusions about heavy metal

and its fans. A footnote by Arnett demonstrates this succinctly: "Weinstein (1991)

and Walser (1993), in their books on heavy metal, included what I would call hard

rock bands as metal bands, which is one of the reasons they reach somewhat

different conclusions than I do about the nature and significance of heavy

metal."[32] Arnett's reluctance to transpose Weinstein and Walser's very inclusive

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impossibility of avoiding its use: "Every text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet *such participation never amounts to belonging*" (Derrida, "The Law of Genre," 65, emphasis mine); to clarify my emphasis somewhat, I understand "participation" as the act or process of a text (e.g. a song, band, individual, etc.) being signified by a genre label—leaving open the possibility of alternative labels—while I interpret "belonging" as suggesting a fixed ownership of a text to a genre. David Brackett, who also draws from Derrida's essay, warns that "[a]n unproblematic evocation of the concept of genre certainly risks presenting the popular musical field as a static, spatialised arrangement, with different kinds of music clearly demarcated from one another" (Brackett, "Elvis Costello, the Empire of the E Chord, and a Magic Moment or Two," *Popular Music* 24, no. 3 (2005): 365, n. 10). See also Brackett, "Questions of Genre in Black Popular Music," *Black Music Research Journal* 25, no. 1–2 (Spring–Fall 2005): 76 for a lucid discussion of the malleability and inevitability of genre boundaries on musical texts using Derrida's distinction between "participating" and "belonging."

[31] Arnett, *Metalheads*, 171, n. 4.

[32] Ibid., 174, n. 1. By stating that he comes to "somewhat different conclusions," as we will see below, Arnett is putting it quite mildly. The differences between Arnett's background as an

genre boundaries to his own study is a reluctance that I share, especially

considering how the passage of time can cause not only shifts in musical style but

also in audience demographics. (Could it be that today's age range among metal

fans has expanded as heavy metal's originally youthful audiences aged throughout

the 90s and beyond?) The generic discrepancies to which Arnett objects not only

suggest that caution is needed if we are to compare Meshuggah's fans to the

various descriptions of metal fans found in other studies; they also prompt us to

be aware of some methodological challenges which can potentially affect their

results.

The instability of genre equally affects authors who hope to tease out taste

publics through surveys and statistical studies. Partially as an effort to reduce this

instability, authors like Ernest A. Hakanen and Alan Wells, who wish to

"investigate empirically the nature of adolescent music tastes," have attempted to

carefully control for the numerous potential confounds that can arise during their

experiments.[33] But despite all their precautions, even the most carefully designed

experiments still face the insurmountable task of stabilizing genre categories to

the degree that they can be controlled as independent variables. Meanwhile, the

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associate professor of human development and family studies (at the time of publishing) and the backgrounds of Walser and Weinstein as both academics and fans is made most apparent in the preface to Arnett's study: "I love many kinds of music, but heavy metal is not one of them. In fact, one of the reasons I became interested in it was that I was amazed that anyone could find it appealing, and that made me want to find out why they did. Attending many heavy metal concerts and listening to dozens of tapes has failed to convert me. Still, I think I understand quite well by now the appeal heavy metal music holds for the metalheads, and I respect the love that they have for it and the importance it holds in their lives" (p. xi). Considering Arnett's condescending references to college-aged "boys" and his insulting descriptions of fans at a heavy metal concert ["neoprostitute style" (p. 9), "mesomorphic young man" (ibid.)], his last remark seems disingenuous to say the least and I believe it should be kept in question when considering the validity of his conclusions. (Also, compare Weinstein's chapter title "The Concert: Metal Epiphany," with Arnett's "A Heavy Metal Concert: The Sensory Equivalent of War") (Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 199–236; Arnett, *Metalheads*, 7–22).

[33] Hakanen and Wells, "Music Preference and Taste Cultures Among Adolescents," 55.

subjects of these studies—who undoubtedly have many of the same conflicting ideas about genre boundaries that we witnessed between Arnett, Walser, and Weinstein—are asked to provide data by selecting their preferred genres from a list. When the list includes such a broad and potentially vague category as "heavy metal," it is unlikely that it will accurately reflect taste preferences for heavy metal writ large. Rather than act as a stable variable, "heavy metal" listed as an option on a taste survey is more likely to generate an unpredictable mix of subgeneric preferences. Since each of these subgenres can draw considerably different audiences (as we observed with glam metal and its relatively large female fan base), I am especially hesitant to draw from these studies any overarching conclusions about audiences for heavy metal—especially considering the extraordinarily large audience for heavy metal in the 1980s. With earlier fan surveys in particular, how are we to know if the fans who state that they listen to "heavy metal" are responding to preferences for Poison or for Slayer? Such discrepancies can unpredictably affect our results and, in turn, can warp our impressions of fans.

Even if the correlations between race, gender, and social class that these authors seek are not significantly affected by these discrepancies, there are further ways in which the broader applicability of their results may be limited. Due to logistical constraints, these studies are often forced to impose various limits on their samples such as geographical location. And as we will soon see with the geographical limits in Harris Berger's ethnographic research on death metal in Akron, Ohio, it is often unclear whether the connections they show between generic taste and social demographics are the result of relatively stable

homologies or the socio-economic characteristics of a particular region. The additional element of time is once again a factor to keep in mind; one cannot easily predict when empirically established homologies might dissolve in the future.

Since many of the same interests in empirically relating taste and fan demographics lie at the root of Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction*, an expansive ethnography and critique of class-related taste judgments in France, at times some of his methodological caveats have appeared to me as though they were tailored for statistical studies of metal fans such as Hakanen and Wells' study described earlier. In one of many instances where Bourdieu reflexively questions the significance and relevance of his findings, he explains the uncertainty that still remains when a researcher is able to correlate an independent variable such as "occupation, sex, age, father's occupation, places of residence etc." with a dependent variable such as knowledge of a particular genre. He begins with a rhetorical sense of pessimism:

> One has explained nothing and understood nothing by establishing the existence of a correlation between an "independent" variable and a "dependent" variable. Until one has determined what is designated in the particular case, i.e. in each particular relationship [between independent and dependent variables], by each term in the relationship (for example, level of education and knowledge of composers), the statistical relationship, however precisely it can be determined numerically, remains a pure datum, devoid of meaning. And the "intuitive" half-understanding with which sociologists are generally satisfied in such cases, while they concentrate on refining the measurement of the "intensity" of the relationship, together with the *illusion of the constancy* of the variables or factors resulting from the *nominal identity* of the "indicators" (whatever they may indicate) or of the terms which designate them, tends to rule out any questioning of the terms of the relationship as to the meaning they take on in that particular relationship and indeed receive from it.[34]

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[34] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1979] 1984), trans. Richard Nice, 18 (original emphasis).

Rather than be satisfied with what Bourdieu refers to as "the *nominal identity* of the indicators" (such as the genre label "heavy metal" acting as an independent variable in a survey of taste preferences), Bourdieu stresses what he calls "the *social significance* of the indicators."[35] Although the example of "social significance" he gives involves considerations such as the class connotations of various foods, one can easily imagine "social significance" referring to how different consumers and producers of music understand and use genre labels in diverse ways (see my n. 27). In Bourdieu's own empirical studies, he is able to account for the social significance of his indicators by maintaining a sensitive philosophical and anthropological awareness of his research subjects' different subjective experiences. This quality makes his theories especially flexible, providing a powerful set of tools which I will apply in chapter 3 to various discourses concerning *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*.

Beliefs about the Demographics of Metal

Another explanation for the current focus of most studies on metal may lie at the intersection of two observations we can make: 1) one of the most salient aspects of metal as both a musical style and a social scene is its sense of transgression,[36] and 2) in the words of Edward Macan, "Most popular music studies tend…to categorize and describe particular styles largely through a demographic assessment of its audiences."[37] Just as the widespread fondness amongst metal bands and their audiences for spectacle and transgression has

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[35] Ibid., 21 (my italics).

See for example, Hakanen and Wells' Table 1 in their "Music Preference and Taste Cultures Among Adolescents," 60.

[36] See Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 27–49.

[37] Edward Macan, *Rocking the Classics: English Progressive Rock and the Counterculture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 144–45.

drawn a great deal of negative attention from censors (most notably with the

PMRC in the 1980s),[38] it seems to have also served as the catalyst for a body of

psychological and sociological research which treats heavy metal as a hazard of

adolescence. Many of these studies dedicate themselves to profiling fans and

assessing the degree to which heavy metal is responsible for their delinquent

behaviour, alienation, hopelessness, and a host of other concerns.[39] More recently,

it has become common for writings on metal to launch impassioned defences that

attempt to reverse these attributions of pathology.[40] Regardless of whether they

view metal as a positive or negative influence on fans, a common thread

connecting these studies is their investment in a heavy metal taste public

conceived rather narrowly as a working-class male youth subculture. With this in

mind, I would like to draw attention to two ethnographies which focus primarily

on the study of metal fans and amateur metal musicians and which both seem to

insist on inscribing metal enthusiasts within a definable taste public.[41]

In *Metalheads: Heavy Metal Music and Adolescent Alienation*, Jeffrey

Arnett's central concern is "[t]he alienated individualism of American

adolescents," an alienation which he believes "is displayed with unsettling clarity

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[38] See Robert Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 137–45. See also, Deena Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 2000), 237–75.

[39] For a sampling of six scholarly writings that "are concerned about the extent to which metal music harms young men and/or the greater culture," see Adam Rafalovich, "Broken and Becoming God-Sized: Contemporary Metal Music and Masculine Individualism," *Symbolic Interaction* 29, no. 1 (2006): 20. Rafalovich categorizes those writings according to the associations that the authors have with fan preferences for metal, among them "juvenile delinquency," "wanton sexuality," "misogyny," "drug abuse," "Satanism," and "suicidal ideation."

[40] See for example Rafalovich, "Broken and Becoming God-Sized," 2006 and Karen Halnon, "Inside Shock Music Carnival: Spectacle as Contested Terrain," *Critical Sociology* 30, no. 3 (2004): 743–79.

[41] Although, as reflected by its title, Harris Berger's *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience* has extensive coverage of three other music scenes, Berger states that "heavy metal is at its center;" see *Metal, Rock, and Jazz* (Hanover, NH: University of New England, 1999), 17.

in the heavy metal subculture and the lives of metalheads."[42] In order to explore

this subculture and demonstrate the alienation of its members, Arnett offers nine

detailed profiles of heavy metal fans along with his own descriptions of concerts,

analyses of lyrics, and statistical comparisons between "Metalheads" and "Other

Boys."[43] Though his research is thoroughly documented and engages the earlier

scholarship on heavy metal of Walser and Weinstein, it is difficult to avoid the

conclusion that Arnett's representation of metal fans as a youth culture is skewed

by his *a priori* limits on the age of his ethnographic subjects (an age range of 13–

25).[44]

　　Sociological research on fan demographics conducted by Fabien Hein

(submitted to a wide variety of metal fans in France) and Natalie Purcell (given to

American fans of death metal) appears to support the idea that most metal fans are

young but they also suggest that there is a sufficiently large population of fans

over twenty to discard the notion that metal is an adolescent phenomenon. (Hein

found that over 32% of the metal fans he studied in France were over the age of

25; Natalie Purcell's surveys of death metal fans indicate that 42% were "twenty

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[42] Arnett, *Metalheads*, 17.

[43] One can get a sense of Arnett's concept of alienation from some of the statistical tables he provides: "Sample sensation-seeking items" (p. 68), "Rates of Reckless Behavior" (p. 78), "Attitudes Toward Family" (p. 104), "Educational Enrollment, 1890–1985" (p. 118), and "Percentage of American Teenagers (aged 13–17) Calling Values [e.g. Honesty, Responsibility] 'Very Important' " (p. 123).

[44] Arnett states, "There was one exception in my sample, an unusual 31-year-old man, but I did not include him in the analysis because his age was so much [*sic*] different…" (ibid., 171, n. 2). Addressing the issues of his focus on male fans and of how he will refer to them, Arnett states, "I have chosen to focus on boys because heavy metal mainly reflects them and their concerns. (I refer to them as 'boys' throughout the book, even though some of them are well beyond boyhood, so as to avoid having to use the awkward 'boys/young men' every time. The reader should keep in mind the age range, 13–25)" (ibid., xi).

A particularly notable exception in metal fan demographics is Brother Cesare Bonizzi, a 62 year-old Capuchin monk who sings in a heavy metal band called Fratello Metallo ["Brother Metal"]; see http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7513571.stm (accessed August 24, 2008). My thanks go to Stephen McAdams for showing me this link.

years of age or older.")[45] It seems equally tenuous to conclude that alienation is a

significant factor in the lives of metal fans.[46] If metal fans were by and large

alienated as Arnett claims, one might expect Purcell's study of death metal fans to

uncover a high degree of anti-social attitudes given the extreme transgression of

the genre's lyrics.[47] However, she found death metal fans to be "moderately

sociable on the whole, leaning neither in the direction of sociability levels nor

anti-social attitudes."[48] Purcell does, however, note that death metal fans place a

high value on a sense of individualism, an ideal which Arnett may have

interpreted as symptomatic of an "ideology of alienated individualism."[49]

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[45] Fabien Hein, *Hard Rock, Heavy Metal, Metal…: Histoire, Cultures et Pratiquants* (Paris: IRMA; Nantes: Mélanie Séteun, 2003), 225; Purcell, *Death Metal Music*, 99.

[46] Karen Halnon has voiced some of the sharpest criticisms towards Arnett's claim that metal fans are generally alienated with her research on "Shock Music Carnival," a generic term she derives from Bakhtin's notion of the carnival-grotesque which she applies to (both metal and non-metal) groups and artists such as GWAR, Cradle of Filth, Insane Clown Posse, Mindless Self Indulgence, Marilyn Manson, Slipknot, Eminem, Kid Rock, Rancid, Pennywise, Godsmack, Mudvayne, Guttermouth, and Twisted. In her view, "[t]he increasing carnivalization of the metal scene, *as well as the increasing heterogeneity of metal's fan base*, calls for an update and correction of Arnett's rather narrow understanding of metal music as expressive of and reinforcing alienation" (Halnon, "Inside Shock Music Carnival: Spectacle as Contested Terrain," *Critical Sociology*, 30 (2004): 749, emphasis mine). Rather, she feels that shock music carnival (which includes a great deal of metal) is expressive of and reinforces "*dis-alienation*: to find community; to celebrate tolerance and egalitarianism; to experience freedom of self-expression; to witness refreshing difference from the commercialized mainstream; and to participate in an alternative world of *grotesque realism*" (pp. 749–50, original emphasis). For Halnon's work on specific examples of heavy metal shock music carnival, see "Heavy Metal Carnival and Dis-alienation: The Politics of Grotesque Realism," *Symbolic Interaction* 29, no. 1 (2006): 33–48; Halnon's (much more brief) criticism of Arnett in that article can be found on p. 34. Notably, the fans who Halnon interviewed in "Heavy Metal Carnival" "included high school and college students, high school dropouts, service workers, blue-collar laborers, and white-collar professionals" (Halnon, "Heavy Metal Carnival," 35).

[47] On the transgression of death metal lyrics, see Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 35–36. See also idem., "Death Metal and the Limits of Musical Expression," in *Policing Popular Music*, eds. Martin Cloonan and Reebee Garofalo, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003), 81–99 and Michelle Phillipov, "'None So Vile'? Towards an Ethics of Death Metal," *Southern Review* 38, no. 2 (2006): 74–83.

[48] Purcell, *Death Metal Music*, 119.

[49] Arnett, *Metalheads*, 127. Purcell states, "The primary unifying factor discovered among those interviewed (and even those merely encountered at shows) was a sense of individualism" (ibid., 158). Many other authors have commented on the prevalence of individualistic ideals within metal subculture; see Harris Berger, "Death Metal Tonality and the Act of Listening," *Popular Music* 18 (May 1999), 161–78; Halnon, 2004; Joseph A. Kotarba, "The Postmodernization of

In contrast to Arnett, Harris Berger's ethnographic studies on death metal in Akron, Ohio contain critical but positive conclusions about the role of death metal in the lives of fans. In *Metal, Rock, and Jazz: Perception and the Phenomenology of Musical Experience* and "Death Metal Tonality and the Act of Listening," Berger attempts to add the often neglected voices of metalheads to scholarly debate, interviewing metal musician Dann Saladin in great detail about how he perceives moment-to-moment musical relationships in his composition "The Final Silencing" and how he perceives a number of socio-political topics as well as their relation to his music making. Berger's approach is sensitive to multiple perspectives on these issues and, indeed, his studies are especially valuable for demonstrating how the musical expectations of metal fans can differ from non-fans and for showing how metal fans distinguish themselves from other genres ("commercial hard rock and pop metal") by the importance they place on active listening.[50]

At the same time, because his musicians come from a city in the Midwest ("one of the regions hit hardest by [deindustrialization]"), the perspectives provided by his subjects appear to be more directly shaped by working-class

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Rock and Roll Music: The Case of Metallica," in *Adolescents and their Music: If it's Too Loud, You're Too Old*, ed. J. Epstein (New York: Garland, 1994), 141–64.

 Arnett's final chapter, "Heavy Metal Music, Individualism, and Adolescent Alienation," explicitly links the concept of individualism to the alienation that Arnett sees in heavy metal fans. It is important to note that for Arnett, this individualism is a characteristic that he recognizes as a product of not just heavy metal subculture but American culture in general (particularly post-war America); see Arnett, *Metalheads*, 155–168.

 [50] "Over and over again, the metalheads explained that music listeners must not merely let sound wash over them, but they should listen to music *actively*, engaging with the music and making it meaningful. What distinguishes death metal and underground metal in general from commercial hard rock and pop metal, they said, is that the music requires active listening" (Berger, "Death Metal Tonality," 173).

struggles than those of metal fans who live elsewhere.[51] At times, Berger is

undeniably aware of this, voicing numerous caveats reminding readers of how fan

demographics can vary—especially in "Latin America, Scandinavia, and East

Asia."[52] Yet at other times, Berger appears to generalize his findings to larger

populations of metal fans, asserting that "[i]n the English-speaking world, metal is

primarily a working-class phenomenon of the deindustrialized period, and there is

little doubt that much of the rage in metal has its roots in class frustrations;" and,

most problematically, that "it would be impossible to understand heavy metal

without reference to de-industrialisation, joblessness and the ever-increasing

difficulties of the working class."[53] But as we shall see in chapter 3, many of the

notationally centric ways that fans have obsessively engaged with Meshuggah's

music seem quite far removed from each of the issues that Berger references. This

is, of course, not to say that these issues are completely absent from the aesthetic

debates that Meshuggah have sparked—in fact, in chapter 3 we shall see using

theories by Keir Keightley and Pierre Bourdieu how those issues inform these

debates—but rather that Meshuggah's mixed reception begs the question of just

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[51] Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*, 283.

[52] Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*, 310, n. 2. Berger states, "At this point, it is important to recognize that metal's audience is not uniformly blue-collar, nor are all frustrated working-class youth metalheads" (ibid., 291); also, "Not all blue-collar youth become interested in metal, and some metalheads do not come from blue-collar backgrounds; those blue-collar youth that get involved in metal do so of their own choosing and engage with the scene with varying levels of intensity" (Berger, "Death Metal Tonality," 172).

[53] These quotes come from Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*, 289 and "Death Metal Tonality," 172 respectively. While I am critical of perspectives that totalitize the notion of working-class, describing metal and its fans as blue collar *tout court*, I do not want to completely eradicate the idea that working class frustrations hold primary importance for certain metal fans. Berger's statement that "[t]he frustrations of blue-collar life in a declining economy are a crucial context for heavy metal" (*Metal, Rock, and Jazz*, 283) seems to me much less problematic than those I've cited in my text above.

how widely and accurately one can assume a single community of metal fans for whom metal functions in a small number of definable ways.

Studies of metal fans often present conflicting demographic information with one another, indicating that metalheads are much more of an ambiguous and varied group than is often believed. To a large extent, this is revealed most by studies which involve metal fans in disparate geographical locations. In contrast to the predominantly blue collar fan base Berger described in Akron, Ohio, Emma Baulch states that most of the Balinese metal enthusiasts she studied "were distinctly bourgeois, and for the majority of them, the future seemed relatively bright. Most of them were university students whose parents had helped them to buy guitars and approved of their music-related 'hobby'."[54] Metal fans in France, according to Fabien Hein, "manifestly belong to the middle classes and…moreover, they are instead strongly educated (*diplômés*)."[55] Quoting Berger's statement that "much of the rage in metal has its roots in class frustrations," Hein concludes that such analyses are "difficult to support in Europe."[56]

In contrast to the consensus among most North American studies that metal fans generally come from blue collar backgrounds, many of the studies

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[54] Emma Baulch, "Gesturing Elsewhere: The Identity Politics of the Balinese Death/Thrash Metal Scene," *Popular Music* 22, no. 2 (2003): 199.

[55] "Au vu de notre échantillon, il semblerait que la situation européenne soit nettement différent, puisque les amateurs de metal appartiennent manifestement plutôt aux classes moyennes et que par ailleurs, ils sont plutôt fortement diplômés." "According to our study, it seems that the European situation is clearly different [than the working class or blue collar descriptions provided by North American studies], since the fans (*amateurs*) of metal manifestly belong to the middle classes instead and that furthermore, they are instead strongly educated (*diplômés*)" (Hein, *Hard Rock, Heavy Metal, Metal…*, 228). For Hein's statistical results on levels of education amongst French metal fans, see ibid., 226.

[56] "Les analyses américaines selon lesquelles « la rage contenue dans le metal tire ses racines dans les frustrations de classe » sont donc plus difficiles à soutenir en Europe" (ibid., 228); Berger, *Metal, Rock, and Jazz*, 290.

taking place outside of the United States describe metal fans as a diverse group. In Indonesia, Baulch states that metal "frequently served as a site of class struggle, and death and thrash metal enjoyed popularity among workers and bourgeoisie alike."[57] After surveying the vocations and education levels of a small sample of metal fans (twenty-two fans) as well as the vocations of their parents, Bettina Roccer notes how "multifaceted and heterogeneous" her results were.[58] Writing on North American metal fans, Will Straw stated "that the heavy metal audience, by the early 1980s, consisted to a significant extent of suburban males who did not acquire postsecondary education and who increasingly found that their socioeconomic prospects were not as great as those of their parents."[59] Hein's findings on French metal audiences couldn't be more dissimilar: "It appears that the individuals in our study are very clearly more educated than their parents."[60] In addition to their geographical differences, the discrepancies between Straw and Hein's findings may also be due to the passage of time. This seems to apply

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[57] Baulch, "Gesturing Elsewhere," 199.

[58] "Dennoch wird meines Erachtens deutlich, daß die sozialen Hintergründe der Fans sehr unterschiedlich sind und keineswegs dem Stereotyp "Arbeiterfamilie" oder "asozialer familiärer Hintergrund" entsprechen, vielmehr vielfältig und heterogen sind" "[After acknowledging that her sample may not be representative because of its size,] Nevertheless, clearly in my judgment, the social background of fans is very diverse and is by no means consistent with the stereotypical 'working [class] family' or 'antisocial [dysfunctional] family background.' Rather, it is multifarious and heterogeneous" (Bettina Roccor, *Heavy Metal: Kunst. Kommerz. Ketzerei.*, (Berlin: Iron pages, 1998), 149). Roccor presents a variety of statistical charts on metal fans in ibid., 146–151.

[59] Will Straw, "Characterizing Rock Music Culture: The Case of Heavy Metal," in *On Record: Rock, Pop, and the Written Word*, ed. Simon Frith and Andrew Goodwin (New York: Pantheon Books, [1983] 1990), 107.

[60] Hein states, "It appears that the individuals in our study are very clearly more educated than their parents" ["Il apparaît que les individus de notre échantillon sont très nettement plus diplômés que leurs parents"] (Hein, *Hard rock, heavy metal, metal*, 229). He adds however, "If the level of studies indicates, *a priori*, an upward movement in the socio-professional sphere, in the end, nothing permits affirming categorically here, that the individuals of the study are submitting to some particular determinants" ["Si les niveaux d'études indiquent, a priori, un mouvement ascensionnel dans la sphère socioprofessionnelle, au final, rien de permet d'affirmer catégoriquement ici, que les individus de l'échantillon sont soumis à des déterminants particuliers"] (ibid.).

equally to Karen Halnon who, like Hein, wrote more than twenty years after Straw's study, but unlike Hein, wrote in North America. Halnon refutes the view of metal fans as "white working class male youth[s]" by stressing that "there has been an increasing representation of late boomer metal fans and college-educated middle class male youth." She continues,

> At shock music carnival concerts today one finds people from many walks of life, including, for instance, high school and college students, service workers, auto mechanics, nail techs, massage therapists, construction workers, nurses, lawyers, corporate managers, and other white collar professionals, thus broadening the class representation and extending the age group into the thirties and occasionally older than that.[61]

Writing even more recently (in 2007), and with a remarkable range of global metal scenes included in his research, Keith Kahn-Harris also refutes the idea "that metal fans are predominantly young, white, working-class males":

> My own impression is that, in Europe at least, the more affluent working classes and lower middle classes tend to dominate. Certainly, with some exceptions, extreme metal does not seem to be the music of the 'underclass' in wealthy countries and there seems no shortage of scene members from relatively wealthy middle-class backgrounds. This situation may vary across the globe. Anecdotal evidence suggests that extreme metal scenes in some countries in South America *may* have members from extremely poor backgrounds…Conversely, in the Islamic Middle East and some parts of Asia, extreme metal scenes appear to be dominated by the wealthy. Generally speaking though, in most contexts extreme metal is neither the music of the poor and dispossessed, nor is it the music of the wealthy and privileged.[62]

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[61] Halnon, "Inside Shock Music Carnival," 749. Halnon is incorrect, however, to attribute the "working class" characterization of metal fans to Arnett since he actually expresses doubt towards writings (such as Weinstein's) which do describe fans in those terms: "I do not think there is persuasive evidence for an argument based on social class. Heavy metal has millions of fans in the United States and around the world, and most evidence indicates that they are at least as likely to be middle class as working class. (See Lewis, 1987 for a summary of the evidence indicating that social class is only weakly related to musical preferences. Also, the data in Tanner, 1981 on Canadian adolescents showed heavy metal to be preferred equally by working-class and middle-class adolescents.) Among the metalheads I interviewed, few were from families where the father had an occupation that could be called working class (truck driver, factory worker); the majority were from middle- to upper-middle-class families (sons of insurance agents, electrical engineers, college professors, and so on)" (Arnett, *Metalheads*, 172, n. 3).

[62] Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 70.

As I briefly touched upon earlier, Kahn-Harris' perspectives are especially valuable for their geographical breadth. Included amongst the many global metal scenes which Kahn-Harris has studied and compared is Meshuggah's home country of Sweden, a country with some of the most highly praised local and national scenes in his book.[63] Although Kahn-Harris does not directly discuss Meshuggah, his discussions of Swedish scenes suggest that Meshuggah's capacity for complex song writing may be linked to the fertility of their musical environment.[64] According to Kahn-Harris, "Music education [in Sweden], both in schools and municipal music schools is strongly supported financially by the state…[resulting in] an exceptionally musically literate population with many opportunities for musicians to develop to a professional standard."[65]

This has at least two consequences for the present study. Firstly, since extreme metal has much more of a high public profile in Sweden—*Catch*

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[63] Kahn-Harris' chapter "Comparing Extreme Metal Scenes" includes overviews of "The USA" (pp. 102–05), "Sweden" (pp. 105–09), "The United Kingdom" (pp. 109–11), "Isreal" (pp. 111–15); "Europe" (pp. 115–16), "South America" (pp. 116–117), "South-East Asia" (p. 117) and a number of other scenes described in brief detail (pp. 117–18). The prestige of the Swedish metal scene in the larger global metal scene is reflected in the "Special Swedish Scene report" (as advertised on the cover) of Canadian metal magazine *UNRESTRAINED!* See Paul Schwarz, "Swedish Metal: Dissecting Over a Decade of Carnage," *UNRESTRAINED!* 16 (2001): 26–30, 33–34, 37, 39–40, 42, 44, 46. Notably, Tomas Haake voices some opinions on the Swedish metal scene in this report. I will revisit them later in chapter 3.

[64] Comparing Umeå to "a Swedish Liverpool or Seattle" ("un Liverpool, un Seattle à la Suédoise"), Matthieu Metzger quotes Meshuggah vocalist Jens Kidman who states that Umeå has several good bands "probably because there is not a lot to do" (see Mattieu Metzger, "Meshuggah: Une formation de Métal atypique; Esthétique et technique de composition," master's thesis, Université de Poitiers, 2003, available online at http://matthieu.metzger.free.fr/recherches.html (accessed August 25, 2008), 28; Kidman's quote comes originally from Meshuggah's bio page on their official site [written by Espen T. Hangård] http://www.meshuggah.net/bio/ [accessed August 26, 2008]). After briefly discussing the rock scene in Umeå and Sweden's fertile jazz scene, Metzger states, "So, 'the members of [Meshuggah] had a good environment to develop their own style. […] The city (*ville*) was the perfect platform for the emergence of Meshuggah's style' " ("Ainsi, 'les membres du groupe avaient un bon environnement pour développer leur propre style. […] La ville était la plate-forme parfaite pour l'émergence du style de Meshuggah") (Metzger, "Meshuggah: Une formation de Métal atypique," 28 citing a biographical page on Meshuggah from a now defunct website).

[65] Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 108.

Thirtythr33 was nominated for a Swedish Grammy Award in 2006 and in the same year "the popular power metal band Hammerfall recorded a video with the Swedish women's Olympic curling team!"—one can easily imagine how the Swedish musical infrastructure allows for a very different mix of social class backgrounds than those described by Berger in deindustrialized Akron, Ohio.[66] Secondly, as we shall see in the epigraphs which begin chapter 2, Meshuggah has denied that they have had schooling or lessons; however, even if Meshuggah did not directly partake in the "subsidised rehearsal space, musical instruments and courses" available to Swedish musicians through "*Studieförbund* ('study circles')," the fact that the members of Meshuggah are from "Umeå, a college town in northern Sweden," may have influenced some of Meshuggah's more modernist aesthetics (which I will discuss in chapter 3).[67] As one of the few book-length academic studies which deal extensively with extreme metal, Kahn-Harris' *Extreme Metal: Music and Culture on the Edge* will provide some key concepts that will resurface in chapter 3, particularly his subtypes of Bourdieu's cultural (and Sarah Thornton's subcultural) capital which I will describe later in more detail.

Some Anomalies: Scholarly Writings on Meshuggah

I briefly alluded earlier to the general lack of prior musicological work on popular music before the inception of the International Association for the Study

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[66] Ibid. 108–09. Information from the 2006 Swedish Grammy Awards was taken from the "Metal News" feature of metal underground.com http://www.metalunderground.com/news/details.cfm?newsid=17921 (accessed August 26, 2008).

[67] Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 108; Mårten Hagström, "Meshuggah," *Decibel* 8, (June 2005), interview by Rod Smith http://www.decibelmagazine.com/features/jun2005/meshuggah.aspx?terms=meshuggah&searchtype=2&fragment=True (accessed August 26, 2008).

of Popular Music (IASPM) in 1981.[68] Although musicologists have since devoted

much more attention to popular music, scholars who specialize in close readings

of popular music texts have often noted that their work is still quite marginalized

within the disciplines of musicology and music theory. The work of these scholars

can be understood as a double-marginalization: analytically-minded popular

music scholars face both disinterest in their repertoires from most music theorists

(in North America at least) and disinterest in their methodologies from popular

music scholars who have not undertaken conservatory-style training.[69] With this

in-mind, it is indeed remarkable that the only widely available scholarly texts on

Meshuggah—at least the ones I have come across—are of a music analytical

nature.[70]

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[68] For a brief discussion of the origins of IASPM as well as some of the professional difficulties which sparked its inception, see Philip Tagg, "Why IASPM? Which Tasks?" *Popular Music Perspectives* 2 (1985): 501–07 available online at http://www.mediamusicstudies.net/tagg/articles/iasptask83.html (accessed July 15, 2008).

[69] That popular music remains a minority repertory in North American music theory seems evident to me from the necessity of a "Popular Music Interest Group" in the Society for Music Theory (a "Classical Music Interest Group" would by contrast be nonsensical since the vast majority of practicing theorists publish actively on Classical genres); "popular-music studies have been dominated by cultural critics and sociologists, many of who do not possess the specialized skills necessary to deal with the musical 'texts' in the ways that musicologists do" (John Covach, "Popular Music, Unpopular Musicology," in *Rethinking Music*, ed. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 454) See also, John Covach and Graeme M. Boone, eds., Preface to *Understanding Rock: Essays in Musical Analysis*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), vii.

I would like to acknowledge that music analysis can be understood in a much broader sense than I am using it here (as a formal academic discipline); see David Brackett, "Music Analysis" in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Musics of the World*, ed. John Shepherd, David Horn, and Dave Laing (New York: Continuum, 2003), 86–90.

[70] The most widely available texts include Espen T. Hangård, "A Presentation of the Musical Expression of the Band Meshuggah through an Analysis of the song 'Future Breed Machine,'" widely known as "The Meshuggah Thesis," 1997 http://old.notam02.no/~espenth/mesh/ (accessed August 20, 2008); Metzger, 2003; and Jonathan Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah," *Music Theory Spectrum* 29, no. 2 (2007): 219–46. There have also been a number of conference papers on Meshuggah including an earlier version of Pieslak's article, "Re-casting Metal: Popular Music Analysis Goes Meshuggah," paper presented at the *Music Theory Society of New York State Annual Meeting* Saratoga Springs, NY, April 8–9, 2006, and Eric Smialek, "Blurring the Popular and Academic: Analytical Interest in Meshuggah's *I*," paper presented at the 2005 Pacific Northwest Music Graduate Students Conference, Vancouver, BC,

The earliest of these analyses, Espen T. Hangård's "A Presentation of the Musical Expression of the Band Meshuggah through an Analysis of the Song 'Future Breed Machine'" is both the most well-known amongst Meshuggah fans and the briefest, a short online student analysis of one of Meshuggah's most popular songs. Aside from containing some excellent transcriptions, it would perhaps warrant little mention here except that its age and online accessibility have made it widely known amongst fans, it has received criticism in the popular press (which we will see in chapter 3), and it was a primary source of inspiration for Matthieu Metzger's "Meshuggah: Une formation de Métal atypique; Esthétique et technique de composition."[71] Metzger's thesis substantially expands the analytical scope of Hangård's work by including a comprehensive survey of Meshuggah's musical style leading up to *Nothing* (2002) and analytical charts of song form for six Meshuggah songs selected from various albums (most with detailed analytical commentary).[72] Apart from his analyses, the remainder of

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September 30–October 2, 2005 revised and expanded in idem, "Harnessing Chaos: Analytical Interest in the Rhythms of Meshuggah's *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*," paper presented at the University of Western Ontario Graduate Student Symposium in Music, London, ON, May 13–14, 2006.

[71] Metzger states, "The work of Espen T. Hangård is the point of departure for the current thesis" ("Les travaux de Espen T Hangård sont le point de départ de la présente maîtrise") (Metzger, n.p.; see his section "Cahiers de Relevés").

[72] *Nothing* is Meshuggah's final studio album before their more experimental releases of *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*.

Metzger's survey can be found in Metzger, "Meshuggah: Une formation de Métal atypique," 37–78. His analytical commentary is mostly contained in his "Corpus d'étude" (ibid., 79–115) although he also briefly discusses the song "Future Breed Machine" separately in an addendum to his "Cahier de relevés" in order to complete Espen T. Hangård's analysis. ("Il s'agit ici de compléter son analyse de *Future Breed Machine*") (see ibid., n.p.). I will revisit this in chapter 2.

In addition to categorizing all of Meshuggah's songs from *None* (1994) to *Nothing* (2002) into different types of "solos" and "ambiences," Metzger has gathered a collection of primary source references that will be especially useful to music analysts, including a diagram of Haake's drum kit and a schematic diagram of Haström and Thordendal's guitar rigs (pedals, amplifiers, and various electronics); the chart of solos can be found in his unpaginated "Cahiers de Relevés" between R19 and S1 under the heading "Soli" while the "ambiences" can similarly be found

Metzger's thesis is biographical in nature, aimed at providing an introduction to

Meshuggah to readers unfamiliar with metal.

Jonathan Pieslak has recently published an analytical article on

Meshuggah in *Music Theory Spectrum*, the flagship journal of professional music

theorists in North America.[73] Since the bulk of Pieslak's analyses focus on *I* (he

also examines examples from earlier in the band's career), they will be of central

interest to me in chapter 2 where I compare some interview statements made by

Meshuggah to musical analyses of *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*.

Also of primary relevance to the goals of this thesis is Pieslak's interest in

the significance fans place on what he calls the "formal aspects of music":

> The rhythmic organization of music composed by progressive/math metal bands
> is vital to the process of fan identification and plays a significant role in shaping
> the surrounding subculture. In 2003, I began ethnographic research on
> Meshuggah and the progressive/math metal subculture. Through fan interviews,
> concert attendance, and internet research, I discovered that the structure of
> pitches and rhythms (formal aspects of the music) carry significant meaning for
> the fans of progressive/math metal, and in many cases determines not only how
> fans relate to the music, but how they distinguish themselves from other metal
> subgenres. During interviews, fans consistently emphasize the technical aspects
> of the music as a source, if not *the* source, of attraction. They describe their
> relationship with the music as revolving heavily around "the notes," and our
> conversations frequently involved formal considerations of the music. While
> many fans may not be able to articulate their analytical understanding of the
> music with theoretical terminology, they are acutely aware of the relative
> complexity behind the music and admire it for its sophisticated structure.[74]

The arguments advanced by Pieslak above parallel many of the fan activities and

aesthetic values which I detail in chapter 3. They are crucial for the understanding

of how fans relate to metal not least because some of the most influential popular

music scholars have expressed scepticism towards fans' awareness of structural

relationships in music: "The question remains, though: does a technical

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between S9 and A1. Metzger's diagrams, which are both applicable to Meshuggah's recording and
live performances for *Chaosphere* (1998), can be found in ibid., 52, 118.

[73] Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal," 2007.

[74] Ibid., 244.

understanding of what metal musicians do explain what metal audiences hear? Is

what sounds right to the music's makers what sounds good to the music's

listeners"[75] Although Pieslak, who has addressed these questions in other writings

as well, has undertaken extensive research in order to come to his conclusions—

he conducted "informal interviews at twenty-seven concerts, twenty formal fan

interviews, and online research"—his writings have always focused primarily on

other issues, arguing for fans' perceptions of musical complexity as a concluding

afterthought or a way to compare other subgenres of metal.[76] Especially in light of

Bourdieu's arguments discussed above (regarding the necessity of adding "social

significance" to the "nominal identity of the indicators"), more extensive coverage

of metal fans' subjective experiences of music seems needed in order to show in a

convincing manner that metal listeners identify with music in a wide variety of

ways (including the "technical understanding" that Frith questions). I have

undertaken this thesis, and its third chapter in particular, with the aim of providing

that coverage.

It is noteworthy that the bulk of the analytical work discussed above has

been generated by students or, in the case of Pieslak's very recent article, by a

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[75] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 64. See ibid., 63–64 for "an argument about high cultural musicology" where Frith doubts the relevancy of "a technical understanding" of music to the experiences of popular music consumers. Also of direct relevance is Richard Middleton's discussion of methodological and ideological issues linked to popular music analysis, its forms of notation and terminology, and its historical link to Western European (classical) musicology; *Studying Popular Music*, (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1990), 104–07. See also Brackett's section "To see or not to see: the question of transcription" in *Interpreting Popular Music*, 27–29 as well as *passim*.

[76] Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal," 244, n. 19. "Re-casting Metal" concludes with the paragraph quoted above while Pieslak's "Sound, Text and Identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'," *Popular Music* 27, no.1 (2008): 35–52 uses an example from Meshuggah's "Straws Pulled at Random" (a track from the album *Nothing*) to compare different ways that fans identify with music by Meshuggah or the nü metal band Korn; see ibid., 46–48.

professional scholar in the early stages of his career.[77] As far as I'm aware, each of the student writings on Meshuggah have been undertaken at conservatory-style music schools, often by students with a central interest in music composition (Pieslak too is a composer-theorist working at such an institution). That so many analytically-minded scholars have been drawn to Meshuggah is likely due to both their rhythmic and metrical complexity and the particular way in which that complexity is easily understood through Western notation. If we are to ask what importance technical complexity might have for Meshuggah's fans, it is worthwhile to note that each of the analytical authors I've discussed above *are themselves fans*. Their way of engaging with Meshuggah's music in a contemplative fashion is not some academically distanced activity symptomatic of what Frith calls "the music/listener value gap" but rather a sign that many Meshuggah fans *are* musicians (with what Bourdieu might call an academic habitus).[78] We shall later see in chapter 3 that this analytical approach is neither rare nor pervasive amongst Meshuggah fans but is actually a point of contention, another indicator of the variance of dispositions among metal audiences.

III. A Brief Look at Meshuggah's Participation in Genre

Keeping in mind Derrida's statement that "[e]very text participates in one or several genres, there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging," I would like to devote the

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[77] Specifically, I am thinking of Hangård's "Presentation of the band Meshuggah," 1995; Metzger's "Meshuggah: Une formation de Métal atypique," 2003; Smialek, "Blurring the Popular and Academic," 2005 revised and expanded in Smialek, "Harnessing Chaos," 2006; and in the case of Pieslak's works, "Re-casting Metal: Popular Music Analysis Goes Meshuggah," paper presented at the *Music Theory Society of New York State Annual Meeting*, Saratoga Springs, NY, April 8-9, 2006 and "Re-casting Metal," 2007.

[78] I shall address this concept in chapter 3.

remainder of this chapter to situating Meshuggah within the context of genre.[79]

More than most popular music texts, Meshuggah's music seems to clearly

illustrate Derrida's argument. Authors who have concerned themselves with

assigning bands into genre categories consistently describe Meshuggah as

something of an exception.[80] According to Hein, Meshuggah doesn't belong to

any standard genre category (nor could they following Derrida's statement)

despite the fact that they participate in many of the genre characteristics he

describes for "Progressive Rock, Progressive Metal."[81] *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33* in

particular exemplify the extended song lengths, sophisticated song lyrics, odd

time signatures, and technological advances that Hein attributes to progressive

genres.[82] Most tellingly, as we shall see in the coming chapters, Meshuggah has

often been the focus of some of the same value judgments that Hein raises with

the following statement on progressive metal bands: "[Progressive metal bands

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[79] Derrida, "The Law of Genre," *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 1 (Autumn, 1980): 65.

[80] In Garry Sharp-Young's encyclopedia "Metal: The Definitive Guide," Meshuggah is placed in the last chapter of the book titled "Innovators" along with other bands ironically united by the uniqueness they have in common. In contrast to his earlier chapters which are grouped by either geography or standard subgenres, his "Innovators" chapter contains widely diverse groups to which he assigns such disparate descriptors as "Folk-metal genius" (for the band Skyclad), "Stoner-rock gods" (for Kyuss) and "neo-pagan battle metal" (for Bal-Sagoth); see Sharp-Young, "Metal: The Definitive Guide; Heavy, NWOBH [i.e. NWOBHM], Progressive, Thrash, Death, Black, Gothic, Doom, Nu," (London, UK: Jawbone Press, 2007), 478–95.

[81] This genre is discussed in Hein, *Hard rock, heavy metal, metal*, 78–80. It is part of a huge segment of Hein's book titled "Une fragmentation de genres" (ibid., 47–132). Hein outlines the characteristics of twenty-nine different genre categories, assigning hundreds of CDs into those categories and several subgenres within them. See also Hein's "Arbre Phylogenetique du Metal" which distributes his categories chronologically using a tree of filiation (ibid., 136–37) ; a similar chart created by Éric Lestrade is available at http://membres.lycos.fr/ericlestrade/histoire/diagramme2.gif (accessed August 27, 2008) and cited in Metzger, "Meshuggah: Une formation de Métal atypique," 14.

[82] Hein, *Hard rock, heavy metal, metal*, 78–79.

carry] the risk of falling into a sterile demonstrative exercise where technique

supplants emotion which seems to be above all contrived."[83]

Rather than progressive rock, Hein places Meshuggah (using the album

Nothing as his example) within his "Les inclassables" category. At the same time,

the descriptions he offers for it echo the modernist values of progress and

innovation inscribed within the very label of "progressive" genres.

> The history of art teaches us that it is always whichever artist who is searching to free him or herself from conventions who structures his or her discipline. This "transgressive logic peculiar to the avant-garde" confers to the individual who possesses it ("*confère à son promoteur*") a relative advantage over his or her contemporaries on the matter of innovation. This gap [between the innovator and his or her contemporaries] is well evident with the metal *oeuvre*. Many forms evolve there outside of [standard traditions] ("*piste*"). Certain ones renew their *oeuvres* with each new CD release. Others produce a single masterpiece which is momentarily without peer. The character which they previously had ("*Leur caractère précurseur*") reaches whatever is at the time more difficult than [what would be necessary] to meet the public. The spirit of adventure which animates them often reduces their audience to an irreducible nucleus ("*noyau d'irréductibles*"). One recognizes these groups by the resistance that they offer to all but the most tentative categorizations. One recognizes them equally by the fact that they engender few successors, as if their work necessitated a time of digestion clearly longer than usual. Profoundly original and often divergent ("*déroutantes*"), their works explore new territories and constantly nourish a process of evolution for which the only limit is the imagination of their fans and musicians ("*de leurs protagonistes*").[84]

The concepts of "evolution," "innovation," "progression," "renewing,"

"masterpieces," elitism (beyond the public, reduced audience, "few successors"),

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[83] "Avec le risqué de tomber dans l'exercice démonstratif stérile lorsque la technique supplante l'émotion qui semble être avant tout recherchée" (Hein, *Hard rock, heavy metal, metal*, 79). In chapter 2, this concern will resurface in the form of guitarist Mårten Hagström's denials of "calculation."

[84] "L'histoire de l'art nous enseigne qu'il est toujours quelque artiste cherchant à s'affranchir des conventions structurant sa discipline. Cette « *logique transgressive propre aux avant-gardes* » confère à son promoteur une relative avance sur ses contemporains en matière d'innovation. Ce décalage est bien évidemment à l'œuvres lors de chaque nouvelle production discographique. D'autres produisent un seul chef d'œuvre momentanément inégalable. Leur caractère précurseur parvient quelquefois plus difficilement à rencontrer un public. L'esprit aventureux qui les anime réduit souvent leur audience à un noyau d'irréductibles. On reconnaît ces groupes à la résistance qu'ils offrent devant toute tentative de catégorisation. On les reconnaît également par le peu de successeurs qu'ils engendrent. Comme si leur travail nécessitait un temps de digestion nettement plus long qu'à l'accoutumée. Profondément originales et souvent déroutantes, ces œuvres explorent de nouveaux territoires et nourrissent constamment un processus d'évolution dont le seul frein est l'imagination de leurs protagonistes" (Hein, *Hard rock, heavy metal, metal*, 125–26).

time needed for digestion and so on are all recurring tropes within fan reviews of

Meshuggah as we shall see in chapter 3. With respect to genre, we shall also later

view these concepts through Keir Keightley's theoretical lense of Modernist rock

authenticity, a field of aesthetic tendencies to which several bands of seemingly

different genres such as "classical, art music, soul, pop styles" do not "belong"

but rather participate.[85]

To show some ways in which Meshuggah participates in the progressive

rock genre, I have reproduced in Table 1.1 below a selection of generic signifiers

from John J. Sheinbaum's list of "Stylistic Characteristics of Progressive Rock"

derived from Edward Macan's influential study of the genre.[86] Some of these

connections are obvious while others, such as Meshuggah's methods of

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[85] One could attribute Garry Sharpe-Young's statement that "avant-garde jazz crept into the metal arena courtesy of Meshuggah and Ephel Duath" equally to Derrida's sense of "participating" rather than "belonging" based on the shared participation by both Meshuggah and jazz musicians in the generic signifier of complexity; see Sharpe-Young, *The Definitive Guide*, 478. In a less abstract sense, guitarist Fredrik Thordendal is also known to have been heavily influenced by jazz/progressive rock guitarist Allan Holdsworth; see Metzger, "Meshuggah: Une formation de Métal atypique," 56–58 and Mike G, "Meshuggah: Swedish Speedballs," *Metal Maniacs*, (January 1999): 66. (This influence is a point that will resurface briefly in chapter 3.)

[86] Sheinbaum, "Progressive Rock," 26. The progressive rock traits I chose not to list above (for clarity of presentation) are listed below:

Soundscape:	Reaching "beyond" conventional rock instrumentation; focus on keyboards; acoustic versus electric sections
Harmonic progression:	Less reliance on "three-chord" songs, and the simplest chords
Lyrical material:	Mythology, nature
Visual material:	Elaborate stage shows
Influences:	Use of blues, classical, folk, the Anglican church, "exotic" musics
Deployment of band:	"Choral" vocal arrangements
Historical period:	Considered "flourishing" in the early- to mid-1970s
Historical setting:	Originally southern England, especially the London area; then, in the United States
Cultural influences:	Psychedelia, late-1960s counterculture (against "establishment," largely metaphorical)

developing rhythmic and small melodic motives will need further explication in

chapter 2.[87] What is important here is not simply that Meshuggah shares a striking

number of qualities with progressive rock bands but rather the *implications* that

those qualities have for the kinds of aesthetics which the audiences for

progressive rock and Meshuggah might share. Moreover, I have placed in

boldface two of the audience traits—educated and upper middle class—which are

not widely thought to belong to metal audiences and which, as we shall observe in

chapter 3, appear to be evident in the aesthetic values of some Meshuggah fans.[88]

I must stress here that my point is not to argue that metal fans, or even Meshuggah

fans, *are* educated or upper middle class. Rather, in chapter 3 I want to

demonstrate a rich mixture of class-related tastes and values, the variety of which

(as we've seen throughout this chapter) tends to be frequently ignored in North

American scholarship.

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[87] Will Straw also provides some direct comparisons between progressive rock and heavy metal (in early forms of the genre from 1983 and earlier). Some connections he makes include both genres' predominantly male audience, antagonistic response from rock critics, "similar forms of opposition to the constraints and concerns of the Top 40 single," and "links to a continuing drug-based culture and to many of the same remnants of psychedelia that recurred in progressive rock;" see Straw, "The Case of Heavy Metal," 106–07. Cf. Tomas Haake's statement on *Catch Thirtythr33*: "The listener should just sit him or herself in a dark room with headphones on and just kind of trip out" (taken from the **Official Catch 33 Thread** in the Official [online] Meshuggah [fan] Forum, post #1; for an explanation of the citation style I will use for forum references throughout this thesis, see chapter 3, n. 8 as well as the Websites Cited section after the bibliography).

[88] On these traits, Macan states, "Progressive rock was never a working-class style, and progressive rock musicians never set out to be working-class heroes. To the contrary, progressive rock—especially in its early stages—was the vital expression of a bohemian, middle-class intelligentsia" (Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 144). Also, "…it is rather astonishing how many [progressive rock] bands were formed at institutions of higher learning" (ibid., 147); "The bulk of progressive rock musicians, however, came from families in which some sort of post-secondary education was to be expected" (ibid., 148).

Soundscape:	Explorations of sound [e.g. "Minds Mirrors" from *Catch Thirtythr33*]
Thematic material:	Use of riffs (short repeating ideas); potential for "development" reminiscent of classical music
Rhythm & meter:	Syncopations, tricky rhythms; less reliance on 4/4 time signature
Lyrical material:	Utopia versus technology, modernism; surrealism
Visual material:	Elaborate surrealistic album covers
Influences:	Jazz [Allan Holdsworth's influence on Thordendal's lead guitar; other influences not associated with progressive rock are not shown here]
Deployment of band:	Long instrumental sections; less focus on singer; virtuoso playing [both *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*]
Form:	Embellishment of traditional shapes (verse-chorus); less reliance on traditional shapes; unconventional forms
Length:	Longer songs; toward whole album (concept album) structures [*Catch Thirtythr33*]
Site:	Toward the mind; less focus on the (dancing) body
Audience:	White, **educated (?)**, **upper middle class (?)**; slight differences in the United States
Gender:	Primarily male musicians; primarily male audience

Table 1.1 – Reproduction of John J. Sheinbaum's Stylistic Characteristics of Progressive Rock (Derived from Edward Macan).

I have also reproduced Sheinbaum's table of "Conventional 'High'/'Low'

Dichotomies" in Table 1.2 along with some short commentary on how

Meshuggah's musical production and reception relate to common high/low

binaries which circulate widely in discourse on music.[89]

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[89] Sheinbaum, "Progressive Rock," 24.

	"High"	**"Low"**	**Comments**
Label:	"Classical"	"Pop," "Rock," etc.	Genre labels are used differently by fans and writers who want to signify either "high" or "low"
Forces:	Orchestra	Electric/electronic instruments	Meshuggah use traditional rock instrumentation
Coherence:	"Unified" with "Development"—material repeated, but with important differences	"Repetitive"	*I* and *Catch Thirtythr33* use "extensional development" (chapter 2); negative reviews of *Catch Thirtythr33* stress its repetition; fans who have done transcriptions and listened carefully to form (invested in Bourdieu's "pure gaze," see chapter 3) stress important differences
Historical force:	Traditional	Trendy, momentary in importance	This dichotomy applies to rock interviews where Meshuggah stresses the influence that consecrated metal bands have had on them (an example of "mundane subcultural capital," chapter 3); by contrast, subgenres without those ties such as nü metal are accused by metal scene members of being trendy
Site:	Mind (intellectual)	Body (sexual)	Functions of contemplative and cathartic listening are both sought by fans
Difficulty:	Complicated	Simple, common	Meshuggah often downplays their reputation for complexity
Response:	Moving	Uninteresting	This often determines whether a fan review is positive or negative
Background:	Professional training	Rough, casual, natural	Meshuggah stress lack of training and deny "calculation" (chapter 2)
Audience:	Fancy dress, silent attention	Comfortable; talking and applause	Meshuggah concerts follow the standard casual atmosphere of the rock concert
Class and education:	Upper class, elite, well educated	Middle and low social strata, not highly educated	A mixture of class-related tastes and activities is evident in Meshuggah's online fan forum (chapter 3)
Purpose:	Abstract contemplation	Entertainment, background	Most fans stress the importance of abstract contemplation
"Author":	Composer	Performer	"We're composers" (chapter 2)
Originality:	Innovative	Derivative	Fan reviews and metal magazine articles stress Meshuggah's reputation for innovation; innovation is highly prized within the extreme metal scene ("transgressive subcultural capital," chapter 3)
Skill:	Genius	Craftsperson	Fan reviews at times refer to the "genius" of *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*; in the 1990s guitarist Fredrik Thordendal was a carpenter

Table 1.2 - Reproduction of Sheinbaum's Conventional "High"/"Low" Dichotomies

These concepts will be useful to keep in mind throughout this thesis, particularly in chapter 3 where my central concern will be to tease out the mixture of "high" and "low" signifiers which have caused debates among fans and which seem to have, due to their various connotations of "authenticity" and "inauthenticity," influenced band members to give contradictory responses during interviews. In order to prepare some groundwork for that chapter, I will draw my attention in chapter 2 to the dichotomy Sheinbaum refers to as "Fixity versus Improvisation," a binary which straddles both the "author" and "background" categories in Table 1.2. Because the members of Meshuggah are adamant in stressing the "randomness" and lack of "calculation" in their most avant-garde works, I will turn to music analysis in that chapter for its ability to provide very different information about musical texts than the information provided by the band during interviews.

With the I EP, Fredrick and I went to a jam room and we would [j]ust play. When we would find something that we liked, like a pattern or a riff, on the drums, we would do takes of ten to fifteen minutes of me playing that part. Since we jammed them I would stray from the pattern and keep going. We would take a chunk of that and add it to the next part. That is how the I EP came to be extremely random. For us, it is almost impossible to learn it, because everything is so random. When we had to record the guitars and bass, we had to draw schematics for the whole thing. Not notations, but simple guides to where all the hits w[ere] because it was all random. There is not a pattern or anything. That was also why it took so long to record it.

Thomas Haake, drummer for Meshuggah[1]

We're not about playing instruments. We don't give a fuck about being instrumentalists…[being a good instrumentalist for us] is a side effect. Our philosophy is that if you're an instrumentalist first and a song-writer second…fuck it. I wouldn't do this; I would quit straight away. It's okay for other people to do it but that's not why we play music. We play music to write music—we're composers.

Mårten Hagström, guitarist for Meshuggah[2]

The calculating part has never been there. We're just feeling it; none of us [have had schooling or lessons]…I don't even know what math metal is…To me "math metal" implies something that's calculated and it's not. I know it sounds calculated but that's the thing: it's pretty basic but not. It's like illusionary, ya know? Both at the same time but that's what we like.

Mårten Hagström[3]

Chapter 2

Interrogating (Our Representations of) the Text: A Turn Towards Music Analysis

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[1] Thomas Haake, 2005 interview, http://www.fourteeng.net/meshuggah.html (accessed June 8, 2008).
[2] Mårten Hagström, June 2005 interview, http://www.toazted.com/download.php?interview=875 (accessed August 29, 2008).
[3] Ibid.

In the previous chapter we were exposed to a number of beliefs about metal which scholars have expressed in their writings. Using two tables derived from progressive rock research by John J. Sheinbaum, we briefly observed how Meshuggah does not easily conform to those beliefs but rather "highlight[s] the tensions, frictions, and incompatibilities" of "high" and "low" culture in many ways which are reminiscent of progressive rock.[4] Before we examine those tensions in detail with the turbulent reception of *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33* in chapter 3 (a turbulent reception which is in many ways similar to that of progressive rock in the 1970s), it will be necessary to first look closely at some of Meshuggah's musical texts. This will be important not only in order to gain familiarity with Meshuggah's musical style but more importantly because, as we shall see in the next chapter, much of the information the band communicates about their music appears to be filtered according to the conventions of the rock interview "speech genre."[5] This pressure to conform to these codes while appearing candid, to meet fan expectations while appearing disinterested in

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[4] Sheinbaum argues that "instead of leaving the 'low' aspects of progressive rock off the table (whether by taking them for granted or pretending that they don't exist), or considering progressive rock as a successful 'fusion [of] rock and art-music practices,' I believe we should highlight the tensions, frictions, and incompatibilities among those very different musical value systems" (Sheinbaum, "Progressive Rock," 29–30).

[5] I must stress that I do not mean to suggest that music analysis communicates "unfiltered" information. Rather, it is filtered in a different manner than we will see with the rock interview speech genre. This provides us with a valuable perspective precisely because it is a *different* filter which we can use for means of comparison.

For an informative discussion of critiques towards analysis from the perspectives of popular music studies and from musicology, see Adam Krims, *Rap Music and the Poetics of Identity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17–24, 27–31. See also David Brackett's discussions of difficulties facing popular music analysts in *Interpreting Popular Music*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 17–31; For a discussion of analytical approaches to popular music before the turn of the millennium, see Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 11–15 (cf. Middleton, *Reading Pop*, 2), as well as his discussions of analytical terminology on pp. 29–31 (cf. Middleton, *Reading Pop*, 4); a brief and informative overview of American popular music analysis can be found in Jocelyn Neal, "Popular Music Analysis in American Music Theory," *Zeitschrift Der Gesellschaft fur Musiktheorie* 2, no. 2, (2005) http://www.gmth.de/www/artikel/2005-07-14_01-00-33_7/ (accessed June 27, 2008).

external pressures, is no doubt responsible for much of the seemingly

contradictory information that the band communicates about their attitude to

music making and especially to their song-writing practices. I have included some

of these conflicting messages in my opening epigraphs to raise questions about

their responses—questions that will perhaps be considered differently upon a

closer examination of Meshuggah's musical style. Does Mårten Hagström's

identification as a composer appear to contradict his denials of calculation in his

song-writing? What does it mean to calculate or not to calculate, to use

schematics, patterns, or conversely, to make "random" music? This chapter will

attempt to demonstrate through music analysis that there are traces of

compositional deliberation in *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*—the two Meshuggah

recordings frequently described as experimental—which band members have

downplayed during interviews.

I. A Deeper Look at Meshuggah's (Late) Musical Style

As a brief indication of Meshuggah's earlier approach to musical form, I

have reproduced Metzger's analytical chart for "Future Breed Machine," the

especially popular first track from *Destroy Erase Improve* (1995) (see Figure 2.1

below).[6] Like the vast majority of Meshuggah's songs prior to 2004, "Future

Breed Machine" contains highly complex surface-level rhythms and conflicting

meters but a relatively simple formal structure. One can see from Metzger's chart

that its organization of verses (labelled "Couplets"), choruses, and guitar solos

resembles the verse–chorus–verse format that one might expect in a conventional

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[6] Metzger, n.p (see Metzger's section titled "Cahiers de relevés").

rock song.[7] Since, as both Metzger and Jonathan Pieslak's writings attest, *Destroy Erase Improve* is stylistically representative of Meshuggah's earlier musical style, the form of "Future Breed Machine" provides an example of the kinds of musical organization that fans came to expect of Meshuggah before their much more experimental releases.[8]

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[7] For another example of a song organized similarly to a verse–chorus–verse setting, see Metzger's formal chart of "Concatenation," the first track from *Chaosphere*.

[8] Jonathan Pieslak writes: "Meshuggah's music developed a distinctive style beginning in the latter half of the 1990s with the release of three full-length albums, *Destroy Erase Improve* (1995), *Chaosphere* (1998), and *Nothing* (2002), and a number of shorter-length EPs, *None* (1994), *Self-Caged* (1995), and *The True Human Design* (1997)" (Pieslak, 219). Metzger calls *Destroy Erase Improve* "the first of Meshuggah's albums with a quasi-definitive form and instrumentation." ("…le premier album du *Meshuggah* sous une forme et une instrumentation quasi-définitive"). His laudatory comments on the song "Soul Burn," the album's third track, and especially his associations between its musical style and the album's popularity with fans, reflect the statements of praise that many fans direct towards *Destroy Erase Improve*: "It ["Soul Burn"] illustrates the originality of the group in the writing of riffs, structures, and the variety of musical influences [that they have]. This song is, in the manner of the disc, violent, complex but contrasting—some of the reasons why a portion of Meshuggah's fans prefer this album over their more austere and less varied ones which followed it." ("Il illustre l'originalité du groupe dans l'écriture des *riffs*, des structures, et la variété des influences musicales. Cette chanson est, à l'instar du disque, violente, complexe mais contrastée, raisons pour lesquelles un partie des fans de *Meshuggah* préfère cet album aux suivants, plus austères et moins variés.") See the section labeled "Ajouts pour « Future Breed Machine »" in Metzger's "Cahiers de Relevés," n.p.

Temps	Structure				Évènements instrumentaux	Évènements chantés
0'00"					Sons « industriels », tempo marqué par le cluster de guitare	
0'30"	A A	A	A	A		
	A A	A	A	A		
0'41"	B'				Introduction du riff B aux guitares	
0'47"	B					
0'52"	C	C				Couplet 1
0'03"	C2	C2				
1'15"	D	D	D'			
1'25"	C	C				Couplet 2
1'37"	C2	C2				
1'47"	E	E	E	E		Refrain
2'04"	F	F	F	F		Couplet 3
	F	F	F	F	Retour du cluster de guitare	
	F	F	F	F		
	F	F	F	F'		
2'25"	G'	G'				
2'34"	G"	G"				
2'43"	G	G	G	G	Premier solo de guitare (jazz-rock)	
	G	G	G	G		
3'19"	H	H	H	H		
3'30"	H2	H2	H2	H2		
3'41"	I					
3'51"	I	I				Couplet 4
4'10"	I				Deuxième solo de guitare (taping)	
4'29"	J	J'				Couplet 5
4'51"	B"					
4'57"	B	B				
5'08"	D	D	D'			
5'19"	E	E	E	E		Refrain
5'36"	A	A	A	A		
	A	A	A	A		

Figure 2.1 – Metzger's Formal Diagram of "Future Breed Machine," Track 1 of *Destroy Erase Improve*.

In contrast to the verse-chorus-verse structures of previous albums,

Meshuggah's *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33* (both are single continuous songs although

Catch Thirtythr33 is divided into thirteen tracks), exhibit types of musical form

which seem much more akin to the "[e]mbellishment of traditional shapes (verse-

chorus); less reliance on traditional shapes; [and] unconventional forms" that

Sheinbaum attributes to progressive rock.[9] While *I* is largely through-composed,

containing approximately "fourteen distinct sections based on changes in pitch

and rhythmic organization…," *Catch Thirtythr33* has been described by Nick

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[9] *Catch Thirtythr33*'s tracks are at times divided by musical changes and at times by changes of vocal text. Haake has described the recording as "…one single song into a full-length album…it's more like chapters of a book" (Haake, April 2005 interview http://www.toazted.com/download.php?interview=804 [accessed August 29, 2008]).

Terry of the online metal magazine *Decibel* as "a symphony in four movements,

with interludes" (see Table 2.1).[10]

"Movement"	Track Number	Track Title	Comments
1	1 2 3	Autonomy Lost Imprint of the Unsaved Disenchantment	Minimalistic repetition, single riff throughout with very slight variations
2	4 5 6	The Paradoxical Spiral Re-inanimate Entrapment	Widely spaced intervals, compound melodies, riff variation through processes of interpolation and subtraction (cf. Pieslak's analyses of riffs in *I* shown in Fig. 2.2)
Interlude	7	Mind's Mirrors	Clean tone ambient section with vocoder speech
3	8 9	In Death - Is Death In Death - Is Life	Complex mutations of fretboard patterns in "In Death - Is Death;" Nested motivic patterns in "In Death - Is Life"
4	10 11 12 13	Shed Personae Non Gratae Dehumanization Sum	Use of rhythmic clusters (e.g. 16ths, triplets) Return of musical material from "Mind's Mirrors"

Table 2.1 - *Catch Thirtythr33* divided according to Nick Terry's four movements

Like the sectional divisions in *I*, these "movements" within *Catch Thirtythr33*

appear as coherent groups because of the consistent textures and especially the

similar guitar riffs which are shared between adjacent tracks.[11] For example, the

first movement which Terry describes (a grouping of the first three tracks) is

[10] Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal," 240; see Pieslak's double-reading of large-scale form in *I* between a two-part and three-part interpretation in ibid., 240–42. For the article which parses *Catch Thirtythr33* into four movements, see Nick Terry, "Meshuggah *catch 33*: A Futurist Symphony in the Key of Sleep," *Decibel* 9 (July 2005) http://www.decibelmagazine.com/reviews/jul2005/meshuggah.aspx?terms=Meshuggah&searchtype=2&fragment=True (accessed August 27, 2008). These kind of references to classical music (Terry also alludes to "*sturm und drang*" is his review article) are not rare and, as we shall see in chapter 3, recur throughout fan discourses.

[11] Haake has described *Catch Thirtythr33* as a "guitar driven album" (Haake, "Interview Tomas Haake Meshuggah," by Alexi Front http://www.fourteeng.net/meshuggah.html (accessed August 27, 2008). Indeed, both recordings often contain long stretches without vocals paralleling Sheinbaum's criteria for progressive rock's "Deployment of band."

focused almost entirely around a single two-note guitar riff rhythmically synchronized by the programmed bass drums—although, as members of Meshuggah's fan forum are quick to point out (which we shall see in chapter 3), very slight rhythmic and melodic variations occur but are not heard until well after a minute into the first track. Such a minimalistic approach to repetition, more akin to the looping processes of electronic dance music or the phasing of minimalist works than to progressive rock, does not occur in the other movements.[12] Rather, these other track groupings are organized by patterns of motivic variation and development, some examples of which we shall see later in this chapter. Lastly, *Catch Thirtythr33* differs from *I* in its treatment of ambient interlude sections.[13] While *I* contains two ambient sections of clean tone guitar, the music that occurs within these sections does not occur anywhere else in the recording. By contrast, "Mind's Mirrors," the longer and more developed ambient interlude in *Catch Thirtythr33*, is formally emphasized when the harmony from Haake's multiple layers of vocoded speech (0:30–1:30 of "Mind's Mirrors") returns in the final track of the recording (2:40–5:14 of "Sum").

***Extensional Development in* I *and* Catch Thirtythr33**

Recalling Sheinbaum's category of "Thematic material," or "Use of riffs (short repeating ideas); potential for 'development' reminiscent of classical music," it will be useful to examine some ways in which Meshuggah has made of use of small motivic fragments in a manner described by Andrew Chester as

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[12] On looping in electronic dance music, see Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 90.

[13] By "ambient," I mean a much slower section than most of Meshuggah's music, one which emphasizes undistorted timbres, melody, and clear harmonies.

"extensional development."[14] In contrast to intensionally developed music, which

draws greatly on subtle inflections of pitch and rhythm, extensionally developed

music, such as progressive rock and Western European classical music, "build[s]

diachronically and synchronically outwards from basic musical atoms. The

complex is created by combination of the simple, which remains discrete and

unchanged in the complex unity."[15] This closely describes the rhythmic building

blocks which make up the minute-and-a-half introduction to *I* (see Example 2.2).

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[14] Andrew Chester, "Second Thoughts on a Rock Aesthetic: The Band," in *Critical Essays in Popular Musicology*, ed. Allan Moore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 114–15. On extensional development and progressive rock, see Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 166. This dichotomy is not without its problems of ambiguity and over-generalization (see Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 22–24). While I agree with Moore's need to understand these terms as forming "either end of a continuum" (*Rock: The Primary Text*, 23), I reserve Chester's emphasis on the composer rather than the performer (Moore's emphasis) because my chief concern in this chapter are questions of patterns, "randomness," and "calculation."

[15] Chester, "Second Thoughts," 114–116.

Example 2.2 - Introduction to *I* (0:00–1:32)

Although the rhythmic reduction I've provided in Example 2.1

corresponds more or less to one's aural experience of the introduction, the

simplified rhythms represent extremely quick "gallop" rhythms (> 200bpm) idiomatic to metal (see Example 2.2a). Rather than use the gallops to form a regularly repeating riff, a technique used in the vast majority of metal songs, Meshuggah has written a series of rhythmic motives built from a combination of gallops and clusters of sixteenth notes (or a combination of "short" and "long" rhythms). In Example 2.2a I have labeled the first of these motives (which can be observed by each 7/4 time signature in Example 2.1) the "principal rhythmic motive" since the *I* EP begins by repeating it several times. When two successive clusters break this pattern in m. 4, extensionally developed rhythmic variation occurs for the first time. The principal rhythmic motive is at times fragmented so that only one gallop occurs (see Example 2.2b and each 5/4 measure in Example 2.1) and at other times it is extended with additional gallops (e.g. Example 2.1, m. 33). Most notably, long stretches of successive clusters create agogic accents at fairly regular intervals throughout the introduction (in the 15/8 measures in mm. 10, 16, 27, 38–39, 48, 79; see Example 2.2c).

Example 2.2a - Principal Rhythmic Motive

Example 2.2b - Fragment

Example 2.2c - Successive Clusters

Example 2.2 - Motives used in the introduction to *I*

A more complex example can be found in the first thirty seconds of "In Death - Is Life" (see Example 2.3), the eighth track of *Catch Thirtythr33* which occurs immediately after the ambient interlude "Mind's Mirrors." Like the introduction to *I*, the beginning of "In Death - Is Life" can be parsed into a series of motives built from smaller cells but its construction no longer involves a single pitch. Instead, almost the entire excerpt can be divided into four variants of a two note melodic figure (see Examples 2.4a–d). Rather than simply alternating between patterns of "short" and "long" like the introduction to *I*, the motivic cells in "In Death - Is Death" are rhythmically varied with the effect that they function in different ways. Most notably, the quicker sixteenth note variants (Example 2.4c) generate a sense of anacrustic forward momentum while cells b and b' have the opposite effect of repose by ending on a sustained quarter note; in so doing, these "cadential" cells create boundaries between larger motivic groups (separated by dotted bar lines in Example 2.3). Also of note is the way in which some of the variations between these cells and motivic groups behave similarly to the variations we discussed earlier in the introduction to *I*. To begin with, after the opening dotted rhythms establish a sense of rhythmic regularity during the beginning of "In Death - Is Life," cell 'c' interrupts that pattern in much the same way that the successive clusters in *I* (Example 2.1, m. 4) interrupt that excerpt's repeated opening rhythm. And just as those successive clusters created agogic tension in the *I* introduction through stretches of "long" rhythms, a similar agogic tension is present in m. 8 of "In Death - Is Life;" specifically, a series of dotted rhythms and quick sixteenths continue without repose until finally a quarter note is sounded (shown just before m. 9 in the transcription). In these ways, throughout

both the beginnings of *I* and "In Death - Is Life," small motivic cells are

extensionally combined, creating and thwarting musical expectations for an active

listener. Later in this chapter, we shall return to "In Death - Is Life" in a more

detailed examination of some larger motivic patterns present within it. Such

patterns will have important implications for gauging the kinds of compositional

planning that seems to have gone into Meshuggah's later recordings.

Example 2.3 - Transcription of the first 30 seconds of "In Death - Is Life" with motives annotated

Ex. 2.4a - Principle Motivic Cell   Ex. 2.4b - "Cadential" Cell

Both a rhythmic borrowing from
Ex. 2.2a and an extension of Ex. 2.2b

Ex. 2.4b' - Cadential Cell Variation   Ex. 2.4c - Quick "Stutter" Variation

Ex. 2.4d - Three-note Stepwise Ascent   Ex. 2.4e - Three-note Stepwise Ascent
(Suggested: Fused with Ex. 2.2a)   (Realized: Independent of Other Motivic Cells)

Example 2.4 - Motives used in the first 30 seconds of "In Death - Is Life."

Is I *"Random," "Calculated," or Somehow Both?*

In addition to its greatly extended song length and its generally through-composed formal organization, the *I* EP boasts a substantially more complex and varied approach to rhythm and meter than Meshuggah's earlier recordings.[16] Describing the band's style before *I*, Pieslak states, "Meshuggah's music from 1987-2002…is based on three specific techniques: large-scale odd time signatures, mixed meter and metric superimposition [i.e. playing a 4/4 backbeat on the hi-hat and snare drum while simultaneously playing a hybrid meter rhythm pattern on the guitars, electric bass, and kick drums]."[17] Each of these techniques are seldom present during *I*, and since Meshuggah rarely establishes a single metric grouping for an extended length of time during the EP,[18] it might intuitively seem that *I* is indeed "random" as Haake describes it. However, several

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[16] General stylistic differences between *I* and previous Meshuggah recordings as well as more detailed analytical examples of excerpts from *I* at 0:00–1:32, 5:40–7:46, and 13:15–14:07 can be found in Smialek 2006.

[17] Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal," 220.

[18] Ibid., 225. For a discussion of a passage in *I* (5:40–7:46) that does make use of an extended four-on-three polyrhythm, see Smialek, "Harnessing Chaos," 4–5.

of Pieslak's analytical observations suggest that there are a number of patterns within *I* that problematize this intuition.

When we compare Meshuggah's interview statements to their recordings, Pieslak's analyses become especially valuable because they inform us of musical properties that are not obvious when they are heard. Although Meshuggah no longer hypermetrically organized their music in the same way as they had previously (i.e. hypermetric groupings of common-time backbeats played on the drums), large sections within *I* are still divisible according to even groups of hypermeter—or, as Pieslak terms them, "symmetrical [groups of] phrase rhythm."[19] In contrast to the clearly delineated hypermeter of their earlier discs, the hypermeasures within *I* are difficult to detect aurally, in part, because they cannot be divided further into smaller patterns (or "hyperbeats") of repeated guitar riffs and drum beats.[20] Considering that these hypermeasures usually take around 10 seconds to repeat (despite being played at speeds upwards of 200bpm), their surface rhythms can seem unpredictable or—as Haake might put it—"random." To demonstrate this surface level complexity and its relation to larger hypermetric divisions within *I*, Figure 2.2 reproduces Pieslak's chart of hierarchically nested

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[19] Pieslak states, "These longer repetitions [of repeated patterns of pitch and rhythm throughout *I*] are largely governed by the same symmetrical phrase rhythm that characterizes songs from *Nothing*" (Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal," 225).

[20] Pieslak does, in fact, place hyperbeats along his annotated transcriptions but they appear to be given only because he can divide his four hypermeasures into groups of four hyperbeats which further divide into four beats. Nearly all of the rhythmic and melodic events in his transcription conflict with the hyperbeats, making their relevance to the excerpt seem somewhat arbitrary. This can be felt by attempting to conduct along with the beats that Pieslak places along his transcription; seldom do the hyper-downbeats sound more significant than any of the other time points within the excerpt. See Pieslak's Example 5 on p. 226.

hypermeasures and some guitar riffs shown as pitches and "attack-point intervals."[21]

Bold arabic numerals indicate hypermeasure length.
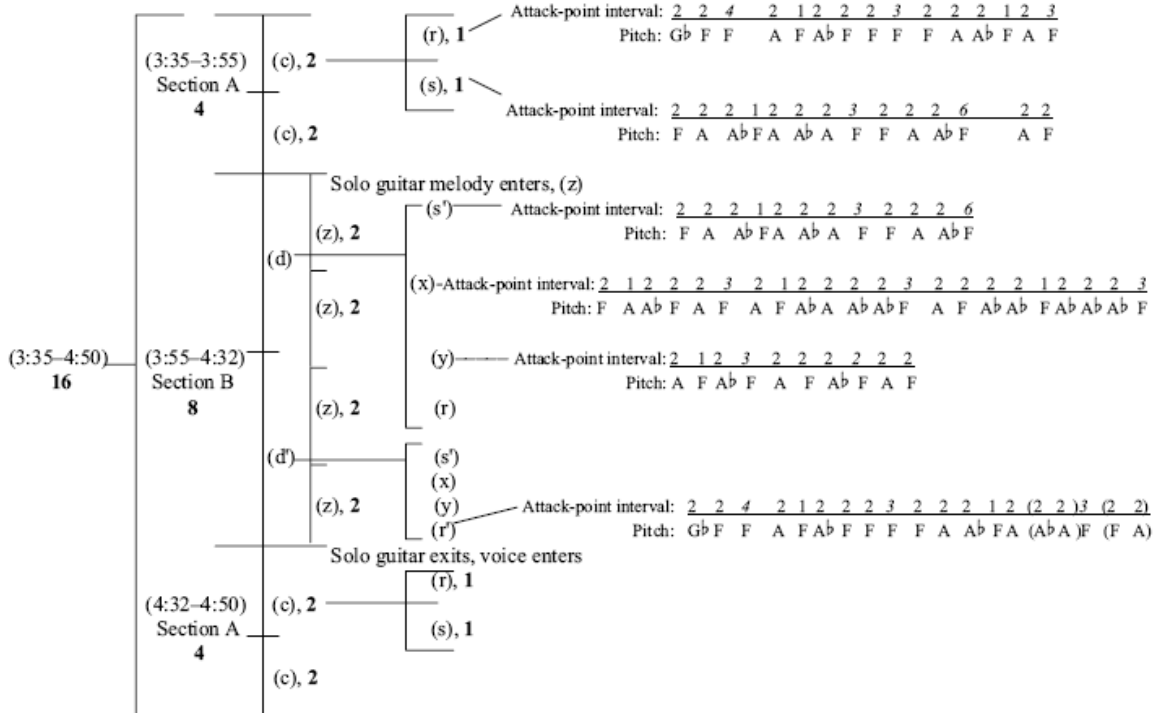
EXAMPLE 13. *(3:35–4:50), rhythmic strata.*

Figure 2.2 – Reproduction of Pieslak's Chart of Hypermetric Layers and Attack-Point Analyses of Guitar Riffs; *I* (3:35–4:50)

One can observe how the riffs might sound "random" not only because they are extremely long but because they are at times truncated (e.g. (s')) or extended (e.g. (r')).[22] Nonetheless, the hypermeasures can be evenly parsed because the smallest unit of hypermeter is not always based on riff patterns as it is in the two groups

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[21] Pieslak borrows the concept of attack-point interval analysis from Maury Yeston, *The Stratification of Musical Rhythm*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976). He explains the numerical notation as follows: "If the eighth note is considered to be the minimal duration, each Arabic numeral corresponds to the duration of the number of eighth notes before the next attack, such that 1 = eighth note, 2 = quarter note, 3 = dotted-eighth note, and so on" (Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal," 227).

[22] For the guitar riff that Pieslak labels (r'), the pitches and attack points that are not present in (r) are enclosed with parentheses.

labelled "Section A;" when the riffs are varied in Section B, the hypermeasures are counted along with the repetitions of a much simpler guitar melody (over which the riff variations are superimposed).[23] By simultaneously creating surface-level complexity and an ordered system of hypermeter, Meshuggah's music can sound chaotic yet be very controlled.

But if we are to speculate at the degree of deliberation with which the members of Meshuggah may have organized these nested layers, it will be helpful to look more closely at the passages such as Section B when hypermeter and guitar patterns conflict—particularly, we might ask when and how the hypermetric boundaries realign with the conflicting guitar riffs. (Indeed, Pieslak's divisions between the two A sections and Section B are compelling not only because they coincide with changes in instrumental texture [i.e. they indicate when a solo guitar or voice is present] but because they mark when conflicting instrumental streams align.) The moments of alignment at 3:55 and 4:32 seem especially remarkable because they align the solo guitar melody with guitar riffs of considerable length and complexity—a rhythmic stratum of riffs that is sufficiently long, complex, and varied so as not likely to be aligned by chance. It is important to note here that the rhythmic strata marked (d) and (d') are asymmetrical: (d) is 62 beats long while (d') is comprised of 66 beats.[24] Upon closer inspection, one can see that the asymmetry is the result of the parenthetical notes inserted into (r'). These added four beats allow the guitar riff stratum to

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[23] For a transcription of the melody, see Pieslak, "Re-casting Metal," 232.
[24] Recall that in Pieslak's example (given in Figure 2.2 above), the smallest rhythmic value is an eighth note which is given an attack-point intervallic value of 1; a quarter note beat is thus represented by each two attack points.

align with the solo guitar stratum and the hypermetric boundary that signals the entrance of the voice (4:32).

II. *Catch Thirtythr33* and the Question of "Calculation"

The examples we've seen thus far have shown various degrees of what we might call compositional deliberation—the sense of "calculation" to which Hagström so forcefully objects. The hypermetric layers that Pieslak revealed in *I* were striking in their organization, suggesting that the members of Meshuggah might have planned their hypermetric alignments with much more deliberation than we might have presumed from the "random" sounds of their surface-level rhythms. For the remainder of this chapter, a pair of excerpts from *Catch Thirtythr33* will allow us to further investigate traces of "calculation" in Meshuggah's recent music while reflecting upon our analyses and the validity of the information that we uncover. We previously encountered the first excerpt, the beginning of "In Death – Is Life," earlier in this chapter. With our attention focused on genre characteristics of progressive rock, we considered how Meshuggah's motivic variations could be understood using Andrew Chester's concept of extensional development. We can now look even more closely at this excerpt, extending our previous motivic analyses one step further.

The more detailed motivic analysis of the beginning of "In Death - Is Life" shown in Example 2.5 displays a number of intricate patterns that seem to imply a fully conscious sense of musical organization. But to what extent do they conflict with comments band members have made about their song writing practices? The recurrence of Pattern A in both mm. 2 and 5 seems to be a deliberate restatement of not simply one motivic cell but an entire motivic grouping. But while it could

be a deliberate variation on the pattern in m. 1, created by interpolating cells 'c'

and 'a,' it could equally be a product of improvisation following Haake's

statement that "[a]ll these parts are written on a spur-of-the-moment thing."[25] The

truncated Pattern A' that occurs shortly after could equally be explained away in

terms of a desire for varied musical interest, a way of thwarting the expectations

created by the recurrence of Pattern A earlier: "We don't try to make it hard or

complex; we just want to make it intriguing."[26] Even the reappearance of both

Patterns A and A,' in m. 12, which I have labeled Pattern AA, could conceivably

be linked to processes of spontaneous real-time creation but using computer

notation: "We always just mess around in a studio..."[27] "Musically, we sit down

and do these file-swapping things and it helps us get the snowball rolling."[28]

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[25] In an interview, Tomas Haake states, "All these parts are…written on a spur-of-the-moment thing. All the things are very random and it's almost impossible to learn the stuff…going back to it now once it's done and trying to figure it out…It's proving to be almost impossible" (Haake, April 2005 interview http://www.toazted.com/download.php?interview=804 (accessed August 29, 2008)).

[26] Again, I'm quoting a response by Hagström after an interviewer complemented him for "keep[ing] it fascinating and rhythmically unpredictable." Hagström replied, "Well, thanks a lot, I'm glad you like it. We want to do something we think that *we* would like to hear. We don't try to make it hard or complex, we just want to make it intriguing." Mike G, 66.

[27] This statement comes from an interview where Hagström responds to the difference between *Catch Thirtythree* and earlier albums: "…People talk about, 'Oh it's just an experiment.' But all our albums are experiments. And then they say, 'Well they just messed around in a studio.' We always just mess around in a studio so there's no difference there." (Hagström, June 2005 interview, http://www.toazted.com/download.php?interview=875 [accessed August 29, 2008]).

[28] Hagström describes the role of file-sharing in creating *Catch Thirtythr33* as follows, "With *Catch Thirtythr33* we've gone back to sitting down in front of the computer, programming drums, playing guitar over it and basically finishing a song without vocals in Cubase, sending mp3s over the internet…Musically, we sit down and do these file-swapping things and it helps us get the snowball rolling…Nobody does anything and then somebody comes up with half a song…*Catch Thirtythr33* is going to be some of the file-swapping parts and some of the stuff we've come up with together in the studio…the rest of it we're going to do mostly in the studio but on the computer so that everyone sits, perhaps at separate workstations…with no time pressure, just letting it flow." (Hagström, June 2005 interview, http://www.toazted.com/download.php?interview=563 [accessed August 29, 2008]).

Example 2.5 – First 30 seconds of "In Death – Is Life," Track 8 from *Catch Thirtythr33*. The level of motivic analysis has been extended from the analysis undertaken in Figure 2.2.

We could continue to form similar questions about the recurrence of Pattern A' in

m. 9, and the similarities between Pattern B and Pattern B' which could be

explained using different kinds of compositional logic—the uniqueness of the

three-note 'd' motive at m. 4, for example, might be emphasized by rhythmically

varying it upon its return in m. 10. However, it seems unlikely that our motivic

analyses could prove that the members of Meshuggah did not entirely improvise

this passage. And if even if there is a prevailing logic that is responsible for the

patterns we see, when would we be justified in calling Meshuggah's

compositional choices "calculations?" The mouse in a notation software program,

just like a decision in a recording studio, can be very deliberated or quite

impulsive. Equally important is the possibility that, as music analysts, we can

create the very patterns we seek to prove. Matthew Brown, following writers such

as Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend and Norwood Hanson, warns us "that since

our observations about the world may be theory-laden, decisions about what

constitutes evidence will be determined by our theoretical prejudices."[29] In the

case of this analytical example, we can beware not only of the tendency for our

motivic labels to stress similarities and synecdochal part-whole relationships but

also our own tendencies as music analysts to make sense of every possible

detail.[30] But what might we think if we were to come across an example with

much more intricate patterns?

Figure 2.3 displays what I will call Pattern 1, the first fretboard pattern of

"In Death – Is Death" (see also m.1 of the transcription in Example 2.4) as I

imagine a guitarist might envision it on the fretboard during performance or

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[29] Matthew Brown, *Explaining Tonality: Schenkerian Theory and Beyond*, (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 19. For his balanced discussion of problems surrounding what he calls theory-ladenness as well as counterarguments from critics who feel that those anxieties are exaggerated, see ibid., 19–20.

[30] The tropological mode of synecdoche (one of four tropes in total) involves an internalized schema for organizing information according to integrative part-whole relationships where, to quote Kevin Korsyn, "the part participates in the whole, with which it shares a common essence" (Kevin Korsyn, *Decentering Music: A Critique of Contemporary Musical Research*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 118. See Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1973), 31–38 for White's discussion of how the tropological modes relate to the more commonly known rhetorical master tropes of metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony.

perhaps—considering Meshuggah's interview claims to real-time creation and spontaneity—as a guitarist might imagine the pattern during the act of composition. Firstly, the guitar neck is depicted by a grid so that horizontal lines represent guitar strings and vertical lines represent frets; numbers on the frets represent the order of notes as they are played during the excerpt. Secondly, to the left of the fretboard I have labeled the lowest four strings of Meshuggah's 8-string guitars with their string numbers and respective tunings.[31] Lastly, and most importantly, I have drawn arrows and lines—I differentiate the arrows from the lines for reasons that I will discuss shortly—below the guitar to indicate fretboard shapes that I perceive from the ordering of notes on the fretboard. Since I am partly using my analysis to imagine how Meshuggah's guitarists might direct their attention while playing this excerpt, the arrows and lines are partly meant as heuristic devices that reflect my own visual thought patterns as I would play this excerpt from memory. They will also, in conjunction with similar patterns from m.2 onwards, serve to suggest the possibility that, when writing "In Death – Is Death," Meshuggah may have used such compositional strategies as pattern inversion, symmetry, and retrograde orderings of patterns—techniques that reflect Meshuggah's ambiguous alignment along such continua as extensional/intensional development, art/popular musical discourses, and spontaneous/pre-meditated composing styles. At the very least it problematizes their claims during interviews to spontaneous real-time creation.

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[31] In accordance with the string numbering system followed by most guitarists, the highest numbered string is the lowest pitched on the guitar. I have omitted Meshuggah's highest four strings which do not sound in "In Death – Is Death."

My derivation of Pattern 1 will require some explanation. Beginning in Figure 2.3a with the first two notes of the pattern, each diagram adds new notes until the full pattern is displayed in Figure 2.3c. Figure 2.3b presents the first hint of fretboard symmetry which I indicate by shading the third and fourth notes more heavily than the first pair. It is important to note that this is a significant interpretive step on my behalf since I am no longer simply tracing the order of notes played but am now *organizing* them into coherent groups—a point to which I will return. With Pattern 1 becoming complete in Figure 2.3c, I further organize the pairs of notes into groups of fours notes or, more specifically, pairs of pairs. This can be observed by the introduction of squares in Figure 2.3c to the fretboard diagram as well as in the differently shaded arrows and lines below the grid. At this stage in the analysis, it is sufficient to note that my arrowheads serve a secondary purpose of reflecting a pair of notes' direction along the fretboard (as a guitarist might imagine it while performing) and a primary purpose of indicating which of two pairs sounds first. This ordering of pairs will become important when we observe larger patterns in "In Death – Is Death."

Fig.2.3a: The First Pair of Notes
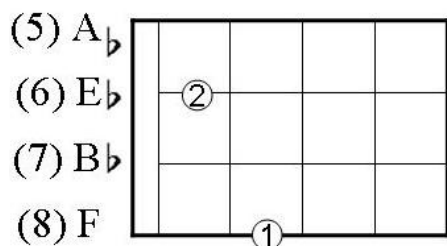
Fig.2.3b: A Second Pair of Notes
(A Pair of Pairs)
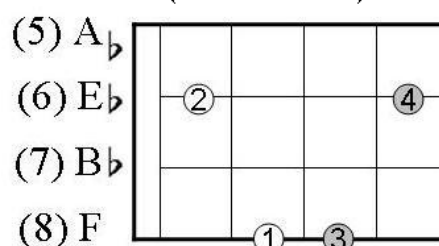
Fig.2.3c: Pattern 1 Established
(Intersecting Pairs of Pairs)
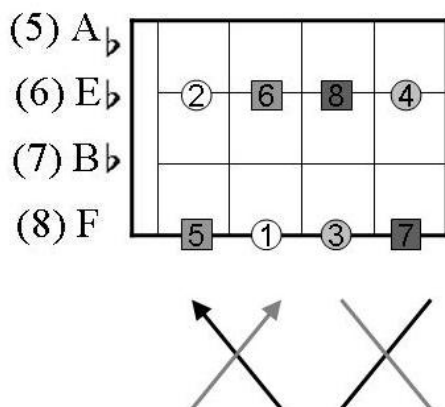
Figure 2.3 – Pattern 1 Established. Opening 29 seconds of "In Death – Is Death," Track 9 from *Catch Thirtythr33*.

The process of tracing pairs of notes and pairs-of-pairs that we have undertaken for Pattern 1 (in Figure 2.3) can be continued for the remainder of the "In Death – Is Death" excerpt. Referring to the transcription given in Example 2.6, the transcription's bar lines coincide with boundaries between fretboard patterns. Thus, m. 1, for example, only involves Pattern 1's fretboard shapes. Similarly, mm. 2 and 3 both contain new fretboard patterns (Patterns 2 and 3 respectively) which I have diagrammed along with Pattern 1 in Figure 2.4.

Figure 2.4 – Fretboard Patterns for the opening 29 seconds of "In Death – Is Death," Track 9 of _Catch Thirtythr33_.

Like Pattern 1, these two new patterns both skip over the seventh string of the guitar and make use of each of the first four frets without repeating any notes.[32] Some surprising analytical observations follow from how these patterns appear to be organized throughout the excerpt, further raising questions surrounding Meshuggah's song writing methods. Most intriguingly, after the first system has presented Patterns 1–3, the second system appears to invert those fretboard patterns. The symmetry of these inversions can be easily seen in Figure 2.4 where I juxtapose my arrow-and-line diagrams from the first system's fretboard patterns (these are indicated in Figure 2.4 by rectangular boarders) with those of the new patterns established in the second system. Curiously, each of these juxtapositions show Patterns 4–6 reinterpreting Patterns 1–3 in such a way that the shading of their arrow-and-line diagrams appears symmetrically related in Figure 2.4. This is a potentially deceptive observation, however, and one that again highlights how music analysts can take active roles in shaping the appearance of musical organization (in contrast to the idea of an analyst objectively presenting factual statements about a musical text). Outside of my analytical construction of differently shaded arrows and lines, the fretboard patterns in the first and second systems seem to be organized in a much less unified way, relating to one another in different ways: Pattern 4 maintains Pattern 3's ordering of notes within pairs (as indicated by rightward pointing arrowheads) but exchanges the order with which its X-like pairs-of-pairs are presented; Patterns 5 and 6, however, do precisely the opposite when they transform Patterns 2 and 1 respectively.

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[32] See Allan Moore's discussion of how rock music is often heavily influenced by rock musicians' tendencies to "compose at the instrument" (Moore, *Rock: The Primary Text*, 59–60).

Equally surprising is the observation that after the six fretboard patterns have been presented, the third system of the transcription retrogrades Patterns 5, 4, and 3. This results in m. 6 acting as an axis of symmetry for the presentation of patterns played in ascending and descending order (see annotations in Example 2.6). Rather than merely being a compositional curiosity, this symmetry strongly begs the question of how much of Meshuggah's patterning can be attributed to the kind of real-time experimentation with fretboard shapes that rock guitarists commonly use when writing at their instruments and how much of it implies a kind of puzzle-like compositional strategy that the members of Meshuggah have at times denied during interviews. If Meshuggah's guitarists were merely interested in inverting their fretboard patterns to create variation, they could have discarded the third system's symmetrical layout by using any other ordering throughout mm. 7–9. Similarly, a different ordering of patterns in the second system would have made its presentation of pattern inversions seem random rather than sequential.

The fourth system, however, shows no obvious logic to its layout of fretboard patterns. Rather than continue the retrograde ordering of the third system, it begins on Pattern 1, inexplicably skipping to Patterns 4 and 6 to end the excerpt. Considering the ethos of contradiction, chaos, and deception—an ethos professed by the band in interviews—most evident in Meshuggah's lyrics and rhythms, it is tempting to "explain" the fourth system of Figure 2.4 as another example of their characteristic "thwarting of expectations." Perhaps, as with so many of the rhythms in *I,* Meshuggah's guitarists decided to establish a pattern only to break it towards its end. Would this mean that they are indeed deliberately

planning their variation techniques in the manner of a score-focused art music composer? Or does the "problem" of the fourth system merely serve as another instance of the common analytical impetus for cohesion and rationalization? Again, it is probably not possible to rule out or affirm any of these possibilities (or, for that matter, of the possibility of affirming or denying both of them simultaneously). What seems most interesting is Meshuggah's silence surrounding excerpts such as this one. Regardless of their compositional intentions, they clearly have downplayed the existence of patterns such as the ones we have examined in "In Death – Is Death." The exploration of reasons why they may feel pressure to do this will form the focus of my next chapter.

1st System: Establishes Fretboard Shapes

Rhythmic acceleration suggests two groups of four notes per measure.

Pattern 1   Pattern 2   Pattern 3

2nd System: Inverts Fretboard Shapes (See Figure 9)

4

Pattern 4
(Pattern 3 Inverted)

Pattern 5
(Pattern 2 Inverted)

Pattern 6
(Pattern 1 Inverted)

3rd System: Retrogrades Fretboard Patterns with m.6 as an Axis of Symmetry

7

Pattern 5   Pattern 4   Pattern 3

4th System: Thwarting of Expectations (?)

10

Pattern 1   Pattern 4   Pattern 6

Example 2.6 - Transcription of the first 29 seconds of "In Death - Is Death," Track 9 from *Catch Thirtythr33.*[33]

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[33] http://www.mysongbook.com/tab-tab_download-id_tablature=49488.htm (accessed September 1, 2005); original transcription by Kyle and various members of the Meshuggah.net message board. Arrangement by Eric Smialek.

*For us, lyrics are like viewing a piece of art. If I go to a gallery or a museum, I don't want to look at a famous painting of a vase with some flowers in it. If I'm to be intrigued and get really interested in a painting, I want it to be a bit more defused [*sic*] and abstract, so it gets me to start thinking. And then that's how we feel about our music also.*

Tomas Haake[1]

The music on this LP is not dancing music, but basically music for listening to. It is harmonically and rhythmically complex, designed to be as original as possible within the confines of the instrumental lineup; so it's pretty demanding on the listener's attention.

Liner notes from progressive rock band, Egg [2]

Chapter 3
Meshuggah and the Fields of Production and Consumption: An Alternative to Marxist Models of Metal Fans

Considering the extremely complex musical practices that we observed in the previous chapter, it may not come as a surprise that Haake insists on diffusion and abstraction when he explains Meshuggah's philosophy toward the lyrics he writes. But the first epigraph listed above reveals much more than this. In light of the prevailing view of metal as a primarily blue collar phenomenon, a common scholarly assertion which we encountered in chapter 1, Haake's allusions to sanctuaries of high art seem decidedly out of place. Galleries, museums, paintings and vases make strange bedfellows with the concerns of the working class often

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[1] Justin Donnelly, "Meshuggah Interview," http://www.skinnysmusic.com.au/Interviews/meshuggahinterview.htm (accessed March 26, 2007). This online interview is now only accessible through internet archive websites such as The Internet Archive (http://www.archive.org/index.php), a site which provides partial access to defunct websites as they appeared at the time they were stored. For an archived version of this interview, see http://web.archive.org/web/20050624005828/http://skinnysmusic.com.au/Interviews/meshuggahinterview.htm (accessed August 4, 2008).

[2] Macan, *Rocking the Classics*, 48.

thought to permeate the lives of metalheads, yet Haake alludes to them in place of

any number of imaginable alternatives such as a list of his musical preferences for

metal or some other allusion to a more blue collar set of objects (a satisfying lager

perhaps?).[3] When he offers a setting for his explanation, it is a given that he will

be going "to a gallery or a museum" rather than, say, a metal concert or a tavern.

Haake's intellectual overtones are strikingly similar to those within the second

epigraph, a disclaimer on an LP made over thirty years earlier by progressive rock

band Egg. The mutual importance placed on musical complexity as well as the

value both statements place on contemplative listening call to mind Meshuggah's

affinities with progressive rock both in terms of Sheinbaum's "conventional

'high'/'low' dichotomies," touched upon in chapter 1, and also in terms of their

stylistic similarities which I introduced in chapter 1 and briefly analyzed in

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[3] One might object that the lifestyles of working class metal fans should not be conflated with those of the members of a globally successful metal band such as Meshuggah. This line of thought could argue that Haake's omission of working class symbols is unremarkable since he may have had a substantial increase in wealth following the increased success of his band over the years—as has been the case most controversially with Metallica, the highest selling metal band in history (see Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated*, 133–81 and Smialek, "The Unforgiven," for studies of "sell-out" accusations partially involving the band's wealth), and has also been the case, although to a much less publicized extent, with the popular nü metal band Korn (cf. Korn's music video "Got the Life"). Although, to begin with, I do not associate working class concerns with metal aesthetics to anywhere near the degree of scholars such as Harris Berger and Deena Weinstein (for reasons argued in chapter 1), it is worth noting that the level of financial success reached by extreme metal bands such as Meshuggah rarely rises past the point where band members do not require a second job to support themselves. Consequently, it is unlikely that the success of an extreme metal band such as Meshuggah would alter the economic class affiliations of band members.

Two years after Meshuggah released their first album with major extreme metal label Nuclear Blast, Thordendal was still working as a carpenter (Sharp-Young, *Definitive Guide to Heavy Metal*, 485). A year after Meshuggah had released their third full-length album *Chaosphere*, Hagström alluded to "not pulling in enough cash to live off your music" (Mike G, "Swedish Speedballs," 65).

See Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 126 where an interviewer is amazed after hearing that the guitarist from Morbid Angel (one of the most successful death metal bands in the world) earns enough money from his music to "make ends meet." See also Weinstein, *Heavy Metal*, 75 for a discussion of financial issues facing both struggling heavy metal bands and those "that have 'made it.'" As I hope to make clear throughout the course of this chapter, these financial challenges do not necessarily result in extreme metal bands drawing from a working class aesthetic.

chapter 2. Most importantly, the two epigraphs are indicative not only of the aesthetic values of the musicians they represent, they also carry important implications about the social demographics that accompany those values. In order to glimpse how social strata and tastes can manifest themselves within extreme metal discourses, it will be useful to first briefly consider some further ways in which Haake's statement could be interpreted.

If Haake does not wish to alienate metal fans, who form the audience of his interview, his response could imply that he assumes they will not find his allusion to consecrated institutions strange or insulting. While such an assumption would be more than warranted for a musician whose audience is drawn from privileged class backgrounds, the situation for an extreme metal drummer alluding to high art is considerably more complex. As we will later see, many metal listeners—fans of metal with a passing interest in Meshuggah, devotees of the band specifically, and writers of CD reviews alike—have demonstrated in a variety of direct and more subtle ways that they do react, at times with great hostility, to the class divisions implicated in Haake's statement. It can also be shown, as we will see in more depth later on, that Haake's words could carry with them the exact opposite (potentially unconscious) assumption: that fans *will* be offended on some level by his ideas. That is, even with the polite and open-minded demeanour which he keeps throughout his interview, Haake's intellectual stance could be interpreted by some readers as a means to belittle those who do not share his taste for abstraction and diffusion; in this particular interview, the (perhaps unconsciously) "targeted" individuals could include the groups of fans whom Haake discusses immediately prior to his remarks cited here, those who

interpret his lyrics literally, who "assume they know what we're trying to say."[4]

Even if readers are dissuaded from interpreting Haake's words this way—he

almost immediately professes a reluctance to tell fans that their lyrical readings

are wrong—and even with the sincerity and candour he projects, Haake cannot

completely absolve himself or his bandmates from the tensions between

Meshuggah's aesthetics and the traditional ideals of rock authenticity. Like many

other groups and artists "who occupy a somewhat marginal place in the popular

music industry," Meshuggah seems caught between a number of binary

oppositions widely circulating within consumer culture: calculation/spontaneity,

innovation/accessibility, "nature/culture, body/mind, feeling/thinking."[5] The

different ways in which fans have reacted to Meshuggah's blurring of these

binaries, especially the ones foregrounded by *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*, can make

explicit the often overlooked diversity of aesthetic values in metal. As we will

later observe using the sociological theories of Pierre Bourdieu, the ways that

these aesthetic values are affected by class-based struggles for power and prestige

can allow us to re-evaluate our conceptions of how class divisions affect the tastes

of metal fans. More specifically, I believe they challenge the degree to which we

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[4] Considering that I am putting forward an interpretation of Haake's remarks—albeit a preliminary and hypothetical interpretation—I have not missed the irony that his last phrase could be applied to myself. I do not wish to engage in any acts of clairvoyance but rather I would like my hypothetical interpretation to introduce a context of social conflict which will become much clearer as this chapter progresses.

[5] In his discussion of a famous interview statement made by Elvis Costello, David Brackett provides several insights to which the present discussion is indebted. These include commonly held anti-intellectual attitudes "adopted by both artists and lay people" as well as some of the difficulties facing popular musicians who must balance their reputations along contradictory ideals of spontaneity and calculation held by themselves, the music industry, and the public market; see Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, 157–59.

might perceive working class social demographics as a defining feature of the extreme metal taste public.

Rather than attempt a statistical exploration of fan demographics, as have many studies in the past, this chapter will focus on extreme metal discourses where different class-related aesthetics are frequently placed in conflict with one another. I hope to demonstrate that a considerable mixture of aesthetic values is not only evident in fan forums, but that it can also be traced throughout fan-written album reviews, and can even be related to Meshuggah's interviews where band members occasionally voice contradictory responses at different times. Taking this mixture to be symptomatic of the contradictions and blurred dichotomies of postmodern musical practices, this chapter will attempt a response to Judy Lochhead's challenge, raised earlier in chapter 1. Before turning to Bourdieu's sociological work on systems of social class and aesthetic values at the end of my chapter, I will draw theoretical inspiration from Keith Kahn-Harris on two forms of cultural capital which circulate within extreme metal subcultures and Keir Keightley on two forms of rock authenticity. If Kahn-Harris and Keightley's theories act as prisms, diffracting aesthetic discourses which might otherwise remain undifferentiated, the concepts of Mikhail Bakhtin's *speech genres* and Bourdieu's *fields* will allow me to synthesize some relationships between those diffractions "without succumbing to the mechanistic determinism of many forms of sociological and 'Marxian' analysis."[6] By situating these

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[6] Randal Johnson, "Editor's Introduction: Pierre Bourdieu on Art, Literature and Culture," in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* by Pierre Bourdieu, 2. The theoretical sources mentioned here include Kahn-Harris, "Extreme Metal and Subcultural Capital," chap. 6 in *Extreme Metal*, 121–39; Keir Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," in *The*

discourses along Bourdieu's fields of cultural production and consumption, this chapter provides a case study in the reception of metal, using Bourdieu's theories to make explicit the complex variety of aesthetic backgrounds found amongst metal listeners.

I. A Sample of Fan Activities and Musical Preferences

"So why is 'Post-Metal' so popular here???"[7]

Originally asked in Meshuggah's official online fan forum, a website where fans are able to exchange opinions and ideas about the band and related topics of interest, the responses fans have given to the question cited above can provide us with a number of insights into the attitudes and tastes of Meshuggah's audience, both of which suggest some striking parallels with audiences of progressive rock.[8] To begin with, many of the respondents begin by first voicing

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Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 109–42; Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986); Pierre Bourdieu, "The Field of Cultural Production, or: the Economic World Reversed," chap. 1 in *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, 29–73 and idem., "A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste," chap. 1 in *Distinction: a Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, [1979] 1984), 9–96.

[7] The genre of post-metal (by no means a stable sub-generic term) has received a brief explanation in Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 133 and a lengthier treatment in Jon Caramanica, "Heavy Metal Gets an M.F.A.," *The New York Times*, September 18, 2005.

[8] The forum is linked to the band's official website and is moderated by an acquaintance of the band (Timothy "Timdog," Stevensson). Band members themselves only occasionally and indirectly participate in forum activities through statements relayed by Timdog or interviews conducted by him. For general information regarding online forums of this type, see http://www.vbulletin.com/ (accessed August 29, 2008).

For ease of reference and to enable readers to relocate forum discussions, I will cite the pseudonym of the speaker followed by the number of the comment as it appears on the thread (the original post is always marked "#1" on forum threads; see n. 9 and *passim* for examples). Also, because the URLs given to specific threads tend to change over time, I will indicate their location on the forum by showing how they are nested within discussion areas; the following example refers to the thread currently under discussion: Official Meshuggah Forum/Music Discussion/Other Bands/**So why is "Post-Metal" so popular here???** (the boldface indicates the title of the thread cited) http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=15655 (accessed

their distaste for the genre label but do so by protesting the ways in which it may

be potentially inaccurate rather than by accusing it of pretentiousness.[9] In fact, the

attitudes and values which rock critics often cite as evidence of progressive rock's

pretentiousness, beliefs about the genre's superiority to other forms of rock and

the prioritization of musical complexity, are voiced in many of the forum

members' responses—at times with direct references to progressive rock bands:

> The genre's home to a great deal of musical experimentation and a diverse range of moods.[10]

> To anwer [*sic*] the question, even though I think the term 'post metal' is pretty redundant, I like those bands because they incorporate atmosphere and ambience within the heavy metal framework. I've long grown tired of verse-chorus-bridge metal bands with the exception of Celtic Frost of course. I just like long drawn out passages of music which are allowed to develop and breathe, without the constraints of typical song lengths. I feel that a lot more thought goes in to how the music is composed and that approach to music, whether it be classical or heavy, appeals a lot to me…I've always liked music which didn't follow normal song structures and was progressive; for example, King Crimson [a progressive rock band active since the late 1960s] opened a lot of doors to me. Like Moloch said [see n. 9], it [post-metal] should just be termed progressive music, in the truest sense of the word.[11]

> Space is great. I like prog rock from the first bands on. Even Led Zeppelin used space - breathing room - very well. It was I suppose orchestral ambition.[12]

August 11, 2008). For a complete list of the forum rooms used throughout this thesis, see the subsection of the bibliography titled "Online Fan Forums Cited."

[9] The arguments which rock critics voiced against progressive rock, often in terms of its "pretentiousness," are thoroughly examined in Macan, "The Critical Reception of Progressive Rock," chap. 8 in *Rocking the Classics*, 167–78; for a further study of how "high"/"low" tensions affected the reception of progressive rock, see John J. Sheinbaum, "Progressive Rock and the Inversion of Musical Values," in *Progressive Rock Reconsidered*, ed. Kevin Holm-Hudson (New York: Routledge, 2002), 21–42.

Some reasons for arguing against the term include what forum members argue are the label's false distinctions and anachronisms: "justl [*sic*] like post-hardcore, post-punk...its all bullshit. How is it "post-whatever" IF IT SOUNDS LIKE THE SAME DAMN THING...." (Crazy7Stringer, #5); "The metal "movement" is still going strong, infact [*sic*] its going stonger [*sic*] then ever, albeit with tons of shitty bands (-core bands)" ("moloch," #3) and "Imo [i.e. 'in my opinion'] 'post metal' bands like Pelican should just be called art metal or prog metal... thats [*sic*] what they are. Post implies after... and the metal is still strong (just ask Devin Townsend). Post punk is the only thing that would make sense, since punk is long dead" (moloch, #6) each cited from Official Meshuggah Forum/…/**So why is "Post-Metal" so popular here???**.

[10] Jacksta, #29, ibid.
[11] Alexander, #30, #33, ibid.
[12] Gustav, #37, ibid.

In addition to the allusions to classical music made my Alexander and Gustav above, a number of fans voice their musical preferences in terms that create an aura of "high art." At times they explicitly connect Meshuggah to qualities of sophistication or hint at the band's progress beyond the "stereotype of a metal band":

> lots [*sic*] of people here like post-metal probably for similar reasons that they like meshuggah [*sic*]: technicality, mood, sophistication, and tastefulness.[13]

> if [*sic*] you mean bands that have veered away from traditional and canonical metal styles and structures of composition, then meshuggah [*sic*] are post metal. it's [*sic*] a broad term, but i [*sic*] use it whenever the band has stopped fitting in with the stereotype of a metal band a whole bunch.[14]

Finally, it is worth comparing two fan remarks about Meshuggah which were not intended as answers to the above question but which could easily serve as a response along the same lines as the fan quotes cited above:

> Catch 33 is so abstract and weird, but as amazing and awe inspiring as classical music is to high society types.[15]

> You are absolutly [*sic*] right. IMHO [i.e. "In my humble opinion,"] it is the same concerning Tool.[16]

These statements, by capturing some of the terms of valuation through which fans are drawn to Meshuggah, also provide a glimpse of the ability for musical complexity to signify a number of related aesthetic concepts which have wider cultural significance. As we will later observe with Bourdieu's concepts of the *pure gaze* and the *popular aesthetic*, the descriptions that these Meshuggah fans

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[13] meh, #27, ibid. Cf. "This is a sophisticated and intelligent band to be reckoned with" (TID, "Grinding, churning, the sweetest ever noises - 99%," [online fan review] August 16, 2006) http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=17163 (August 21, 2008).

[14] pafuftab816, #47 in Official Meshuggah Forum/…/**So why is "Post-Metal" so popular here???**

[15] AbsoluteCarib, #252, Official Meshuggah Forum/Music Discussion/Transcriptions/**Official Catch 33 Thread** http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=9259&page=26 (accessed August 14, 2008).

[16] LostInMind, #255, ibid.

have given for their tastes are deeply connected with the inclination many of them

share for listening to metal in highly interactive ways. In order to tease out some

of these activities, we shall take a closer look at Meshuggah's online fan forum.

Fan Interactions with Math Metal and Some Aggressive Rejoinders

In addition to containing discussion rooms dedicated to the usual fan

concerns surrounding live pictures, tour dates, and new releases, Meshuggah's

forum is divided into a number of nested topics that might appeal principally to

musicians and intellectuals. Some particularly striking discussion areas, each with

their own subtopics, include "Polymetrics and Polyrhythms: The Science of

Insane Rhythms," "Politics and World Affairs: World Issues, Religion and War"

and "Philosophy and Science: For the Scientors and Philosophists."[17] In the case

of the latter, we are given not only a clue as to some of the extramusical interests

of Meshuggah fans, we are also reminded of how the contradictions typical of

postmodern discourses can defuse connotations of snobbery. Recalling the self-

aware humour of Meshuggah's "New Millennium Cyanide Christ" video,

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[17] Official Meshuggah Forum/Music Discussion/Polymetrics & Polyrhythms; Official Meshuggah Forum/Non-Music Discussion/Politics and World Affairs; Official Meshuggah Forum/Non-Music Discussion/Philosophy and Science. Jonathan Pieslak has briefly discussed Meshuggah's "Polymetrics and Polyrhythms" discussion area in "Sound, Text and Identity in Korn's 'Hey Daddy'," 46–47.

The majority of the threads in these discussion areas present links to popular articles on scientific developments and current political events.

That Meshuggah's fan forum contains a discussion area titled "Politics and World Affairs" does not necessarily contradict Kahn-Harris' argument that "[t]he notion of politics is antithetical to many [extreme metal] scene members"—an important distinction between attitudes within extreme metal and punk scenes (Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 152). The global issues implied by the discussion area's title are much wider in scope than the restricted use of the term "politics" in scenic discourse which usually implies some sort of threat to the extreme metal scene from outside it. As Kahn-Harris explains, "[t]he use of the term 'politics' within the [extreme metal] scene is [generally] restricted to interventions in the public sphere that are consciously intended to have an impact on social institutions" (ibid., 154). For a discussion of extreme metal scene members' attitudes towards racism, religion, and sexual orientation—issues that Kahn-Harris treats as "political" in line with the previously cited definition of "politics"—see ibid., 152–56. See also Natalie Purcell, *Death Metal Music*, 120–22 for an overview of the range of political interests and aptitudes shown by death metal fans.

introduced in chapter 1, we can note how the altered suffixes of the discussion

area's title seem to undermine the topic's sense of sophistication in a similar

manner to how Meshuggah undermined the generic codes of the metal music

video. In both cases, the light-heartedness of the humour projects a likeable

immediacy, or sense of being "down-to-earth," that both disarms the sense of

alienation that certain fans might associate with high culture and, reciprocally,

serves as protection from the retaliations of the alienated. While at this point, it

would be reasonable to object that Meshuggah and the maintainers of their forum

are simply having fun, my reasons for associating that fun with a sense of conflict

will become clearer when we closely examine Bourdieu's and Bakhtin's theories.

For the present moment, and also in anticipation of Bakhtin, we can note that this

self-aware humour takes on an additional importance since it circulates in a

variety of Meshuggah media from which fans are able to form an impression of

the band: it is evident in Meshuggah's parodic press photos (see chapter 1), the

acknowledgements in their CD liner notes where the band has used ebonics ("We

be thanking these") or other quirky phrases ("We wish to point a thankful finger

at the following"),[18] and also in the seemingly random salutations that begin

Meshuggah's news postings on their official website (e.g. "Yo! Liberace!" "Yo!

Kurt!" "Yo Stevie Nicks!!!").

    The more musician-oriented discussion areas such as "Guitar Talk," "Bass

Talk," "Drum Talk," "Vocalist Talk," and "Meshuggah Music: Song

transcriptions and discussion" appear somewhat more typical of metal fan

forums—especially in consideration of the intense practice regimens that Robert

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[18] These quotes come from the liner notes to the *I* EP and *Catch Thirtythr33* respectively.

Walser revealed to be common among heavy metal guitarists and the often

sophisticated analytical language which he also uncovered in guitar magazines.[19]

Nonetheless, the intensity with which many of Meshuggah's fans have actively

studied the band's music may partially explain why some metal magazines have

described them in cult-like terms, a phenomenon which I will take up later

below.[20] The fan transcriptions in particular for *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33* have

involved the combined efforts of numerous forum members who pool together

their transcriptions over a period of several years. In a thread titled "The I

Transcription Project," forum members provided guitar and drum transcriptions

for individual segments of the *I* EP; they continuously worked on generating and

improving them from July 2004 to June 2008 with some forum members offering

to compile the segments into notation software programs.[21] At different occasions

in these and similar threads, the forum members also offer patterns and

mnemonics for memorizing some of Meshuggah's long rhythmic patterns such as

the extended introduction for *I* (0:00–1:32, see chapter 2, Example 2.1). One

member asks for advice on "how to memorize [the] first bars" of "In Death – Is

Death" (see chapter 2, Example 2.6), expressing an analytical interest in the track

for performance purposes: "I can see the individual fragments and how they're

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[19] Walser, *Running with the Devil*, 57–107; see also chapter 1 of this study.

[20] One fan engaged with Meshuggah in a particularly intense, if not strictly "analytical," manner by authoring lengthy and detailed narrations of a "music video" (complete with timing indications) that he liked to imagine while listening to *Catch Thirtythr33*. The narration has band members playing the roles of alien explorers in a science-fiction setting; other fans appeared evenly split on their reactions. Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Talk/**Catch 33 - The Movie** http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=12310&highlight=movie (accessed August 21, 2008). According to comments made on the form, a similar "video" was created by the fan for *I* although it no longer appears available.

[21] Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Music/**The I Transcription Project**. The thread is now available in an archived form at http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/archive/index.php/t-6925.html (accessed August 10, 2008).

being mixed together and grouped but I fail to see a definite pattern that makes it

easier to remember."[22] Several members respond with advice, indicating some of

the lengths to which they went to memorize Meshuggah's rhythms:

> how [*sic*] to memorize?? Literally I just sat through that album multiple dozens of times until I knew how every riffage was supposed to sound, made learning it a lot easier. As for patterns I know the whole 1,4,2,3 repeats on the F and Eb, but I think the point of this C33 and I was a sort of divergence from the typical nicely repeating-every-8-bar patterns.[23]
>
> This is how i did it, 1st of all i tabbed it, so it's easy when you actually have to sit down and analyse the rythm, it's like +..+..+..+..+.+.+.+ (the + being the strokes) like 4 4° then 4 8° ,then i just learned the hand pattern and the shift's between the different hand position.[24]
>
> For that particular part I just learned the 'shape'...it does a lot of root/seven and root/six shapes. For a few of the In Death riffs it was shape rather than melody that I memorized.
>
> Or just watch this a billion times.
> http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cRg378bNDM.[25]

Not only have many of the forum members memorized the excerpt, a

number of them have actively analyzed them using music theoretical concepts.

Zach, the last of the respondents quoted above, even provides a link to one of

three existent YouTube videos where he has filmed himself playing along to

tracks from *Catch Thirtythr33* from memory.[26] Taken together, these and some

other forum activities suggest a high degree of similarity between the members of

Meshuggah's online forum and the readers of progressive rock fanzine

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[22] tr0n, #1, Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Music/**In Death - Is Death first part**. http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=18443 (accessed August 10, 2008).
[23] Jibbix, #2, ibid.
[24] LoGoS, #7, ibid.
[25] Zach, #3, ibid.
[26] Although the accuracy of Zach's performances and the difficulty of the tracks he has chosen to memorize is, to some extent, exceptional, a brief visit to his link reveals a number of similar videos where other fans have also attempted to play along to Meshuggah from memory.

Proclamation studied by Chris Atton.[27] Both groups of fans frequently speak of their ambitions to perform complex songs, discuss the pleasures of odd time signatures, and often show an interest in applying music theoretical concepts to closely engage with their favourite music.[28] However, as Atton has noted with progressive rock fans, not all of these individuals are receptive to the most elaborate of fans' close readings.[29]

Fans strongly criticized one forum user, King Woodchuck II, after he posted a lengthy discussion of Meshuggah's "Bleed," appraising the song with detailed references to time signatures and previous songs as well as describing some editing work he undertook to revise the track.[30] In addition to voicing some complaints about the passages where King Woodchuck II criticizes Meshuggah's song writing most aggressively, some of the forum members ridicule King Woodchuck II for indulging in what they perceived to be a worthless engagement

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[27] Chris Atton, " 'Living in the Past'?: Value Discourses in Progressive Rock Fanzines," *Popular Music* 20, no. 1, (2001): 29–46. *Proclamation* is the fanzine to which Atton attributes the highest degree of "dominant values of high art" (pp. 33–36).

[28] Atton describes how the editor of *Proclamation*, "apparently without a hint of irony, suggests that readers photocopy [the transcription he presents of "On Reflection," an "extremely contrapuntal vocal piece" by progressive rock band Gentle Giant,] and distribute the parts for singing (Atton, " 'Living in the Past'?," 34). He later describes how with complex time signatures, readers are not especially interested in "appreciat[ing] how such devices serve a larger musical or extra-musical end; instead they are ends in themselves" (ibid.); cf. Meshuggah's thread titled "What's your favorite meter?" (Official Meshuggah Forum/Music Discussion/Polymetrics & Polyrhythms/**What's your favorite meter?**) http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=18367 (accessed August 11, 2008).

On music theoretical knowledge, Atton states, "Following the transcription of 'On Reflection', there follow a further transcription and musical analyses of Gentle Giant pieces. These latter not only assume the reader to be musically literate, they assume a high degree of knowledge of the language of formal musical criticism" (Atton, " 'Living in the Past'?," 34).

[29] Atton states, "*Proclamation* apart, the fanzines appear anti-intellectual, sceptical of any critical practice that gets in the way of 'the music'"(ibid., 35–36).

[30] Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Music/**Bleed - How I'm Listening to it Now** http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=18650 (accessed August 11, 2008). "Bleed" is a relatively popular song (extremely popular amongst fans) from Meshuggah's most recent album *obZen*.

with the song.[31] If the analysis of musical patterns and the detailed efforts

required for transcription appeal to fans as tools towards being able to memorize

and perform Meshuggah's music, it becomes clear by their mockery of King

Woodchuck II that many of the forum members do not value detailed music

criticism as an end in itself.[32]

> haha wow dude i bet if marten [Hagström] or fredrik [Thordendal] saw that
> they'd laugh their asses off and would think "wow this guy takes this shit WAY
> too seriously." I think you're over analyzing the music way too much, or maybe
> you just over explained the idea of you changing the structure of the song.[33]

> Next thing you know, someone's going to relate a Mesh[uggah] song to the
> Fibonacci sequence...[34]

> ... and find a key for Nostradamus prophecies.[35]

That some of this mockery associates the pursuits of music analysis with

mysticism—although analysts have not connected Nostradamus with music, they

have referred to the Fibonacci sequence in their work—suggests that many fans

are suspicious of close readings if they are undertaken for philosophical rather

than pragmatic reasons. King Woodchuck II is later mocked in another thread

when he analyzes "Obsidian," a two-and-a-half minute repetition of a short

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[31] For example, one forum member mocks, "Haha! What are you doing? Why did you do that? I have free time too, but shiiiiiat. :)" (Jacksta, #37).

[32] The forum members did, however, express some curiosity towards Jonathan Pieslak's "Recasting Metal" (see chapter 2). In a thread titled "Meshuggah Article in Music Theory Spectrum," a number of fans applauded the attention given to the band in statements such as "at least some people recognize Meshuggah's greatness" (Crazy7Stringer, #2; also quoted by Gustav, #10); see Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Talk/**Meshuggah Article in Music Theory Spectrum**. Other fan statements expressed scepticism towards the article's use of "big words" and hinted at its attempts to "sound smart": "it seemed very redudant [*sic*] with randomly thrown in sources. It told me everything I already knew, but with big words. I never knew what I hypermeter was before, so I guess I do now" (Jibbix, #25); "^ Hah yea, Im [*sic*] going to start using that in guitar lessons. Its [*sic*] the best term since 'areas of dodecaphonic concentration' to make you sound smart" (Tiger, #26). http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=17102&page=3 (accessed August 11, 2008).

[33] Immolation, #8, Official Meshuggah Forum/…/**Bleed - How I'm Listening to it Now**.

[34] samikaze, #14, ibid.

[35] Advers, #15, ibid.

rhythmic pattern. The mathematical logic he applies to Obsidian's alternating time

signatures is revealed to be of little interest to fans as they ridicule him for

choosing a trivial excerpt, regardless of whatever intellectual challenge it may

have given him:

King Woodchuck II:

> Yo I finally figured out Obsidian's missing 4/4 beat. Listen to it here: Disassembly
> ["Disassembly" is a hyperlink to http://www.box.net/shared/jn1sz13goo.]
>
> The polyrhythm is an alternation between 13/16 and 15/16, which together add up to
> 28/16 which is essentially 7/4. It looks like this:
>
> 13: X--x--x--xx-x
> 15: X--x--x--x--x--
> 13: X--x--x--xx-x
> 15: X--x--x--x--x--
> 13: X--x--x--xx-x
> 15: X--x--x--x--x--
> 13: X--x--x--xx-x
> 15: X--x--x--x--x--
> 13: X--x--x--xx-x
> 3: X--
>
> Total 128. QED.[36]

Responses:

> I think you spent more time on this than Meshuggah did recording +
> copy/pasting this "track" in the studio.[37]
>
> They probably don't and won't ever play Obsidian live anyway so none of this
> matters.[38]

Jerry Ewing, a writer for metal magazine *Metal Hammer*, voices a much

more sustained objection towards the kinds of detailed analyses conducted by

fans, framing his entire interview article around the question, "So what is it about

Meshuggah that inspires the kind of fanatical theoretical devotion rarely

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[36] King Woodchuck II, #1, Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah
Music/**Obsidian's Un-Polyrhythm**; Note King Woodchuck II's "QED" reference to mathematical
proofs (cf. Cateforis' observation that "mathematics is often seen in Western culture as a generic
symbol of complexity;" Cateforis, "The Strange Case of Math Rock," 257).

[37] Tsorovan, #8, Official Meshuggah Forum/…/**Obsidian's Un-Polyrhythm**.

[38] kilder, #15, ibid.

associated with heavy metal?"[39] Ewing introduces his article by citing four fan

websites dedicated to analyzing either the band's music specifically or metal in

general, portraying the site owners as "crazed fans" whose actions seem "to

border on the ridiculous in a pseudo-intellectual."[40] He describes a site titled "A

Theoretician's View of Metal" as "boring as hell," adding that two other

analytical sites, "The Meshuggian Riff" and "Math Metal Process" "really seem

to be labouring the point and, perhaps, delving into things a little too much.[41] *This*

is, after all, only rock'n'roll."[42] Drawing particular attention to the academic tone

of the website titles (note also the reference to "The Meshuggian Riff" in Ewing's

subtitle), Ewing opposes the enjoyment of metal music with the threat of

academic sterility:

> However, just when you think it's safe to enjoy your metal without having to
> attend The Open University, you stumble across the Meshuggah Thesis…kindly
> subtitled by its author "A presentation of the musical expression of the band
> Meshuggah through an analysis of the song 'Future Breed Machine') [*sic*]. A
> genuine thesis penned by a student to form part of a degree undertaken at the
> University of Oslo. Heaven help us![43]

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[39] Jerry Ewing, "Clash of the Titans: Osbourne and Zakk Wylde favourites, Jerry Ewing met
Legendary Swedes Meshuggah and Found Out About the Meshuggian Riff, Math Metal and
Crazed Fans," in "Subterranea," a subsection of *Metal Hammer* 106 (November 2002): 2–4 [the
page numbers within "Subterranea" are distinct from the rest of the magazine].

[40] "I mean, there's fandom and there's fandom, but this seems to border on the ridiculous in a
pseudo-intellectual" (ibid., 3). The characterization of "crazed fans" is evident in Ewing's subtitle
(ibid., 2).

[41] "A Theoretician's View of Metal" can be found at
http://web.archive.org/web/19990501022645/http://unofficial.capital.edu/students/jlucas4/etc/math
.html (accessed August 23, 2008); "The Meshuggian Riff" doesn't seem to exist by that name
except for two websites with similar titles: "Meshuggian Style"
http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/7332/meshugan.html (accessed August 23, 2008) and "The
Meshuggah Riff" now available in archived format at
http://web.archive.org/web/19990501024645/http://unofficial.capital.edu/students/jlucas4/etc/mes
huggah.html (accessed August 23, 2008); "Math Metal Processes" (alternatively titled "Operations
for Metal") can also be found in archived form at
http://web.archive.org/web/19990501022645/http://unofficial.capital.edu/students/jlucas4/etc/math
.html (accessed August 23, 2008). Each of the above websites are indexed at
http://www.geocities.com/CollegePark/7332/meshmain.html (accessed August 23, 2008) with a
message by the webmaster that they might "possibly be of interest to the Meshuggian scholar."

[42] Ewing, "Clash of the Titans," 3, emphasis mine.

[43] Ibid.

To a certain extent, Ewing's remarks can be understood as a strategy to grant the band a privileged position as musical innovators, a common practice in extreme metal magazines (we will examine this in further detail later on); and indeed, Ewing answers his aforementioned question by narrating an evolutionary summary through Meshuggah's discography and concluding, "On the evidence of 'Nothing', Meshuggah stands alone."[44] However, it soon becomes clear that his antagonism towards analytically-minded fans is not limited to this. Once Ewing begins his interview, he describes Hagström's "downtime," emphasizing the guitarist's relaxed—and, moreover, *simple* temperament—directly opposing it to the complexities of the websites:

> "For Meshuggah guitarist Marten Hagstrom [*sic*], the intricate complexities of his band's music, let alone the worrying analytical approach of the…websites are the last thing on his mind…'We're traveling to Illinois right now,' *he says lazily*…It'll be PlayStation and watching some videos, nothing much apart from that. Just chilling out basically.'"[45]

As soon as Ewing finishes quoting a number of statements where Hagström speaks dismissively about Meshuggah's complexity, he delivers a final jab:

> …Hagström ironically and amusingly shuns the idea of Meshuggah as some kind of musical mathematics experiment. 'To us, the melody is what ties the whole song together,' he explains with a basic *simplicity* that clearly evaded at least two Meshuggah webmasters.[46]

In the context of the previously discussed tensions between King Woodchuck II's musically detailed forum posts and the sceptical replies of his fellow fans, Ewing's interview not only reveals how much more aggressively extreme metal enthusiasts outside of Meshuggah's forum can object to the intellectual connotations of music analysis, it also serves as a powerful

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[44] Ewing, 3.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 2–3. Emphasis mine.

demonstration of the impact that seemingly disparate discursive actions, carried

out by different individuals, can have upon one another. Most obviously, the fans'

analytical websites have provoked a defensively worded article by Ewing who,

having been alienated by their "pseudo-intellectualism," lashes out at their

apparent naïvety. What is less obvious is how alienated reactions of this sort can

interact with the ways that popular musicians such as Hagström respond in

interviews and, in turn, can affect how their fans perceive the band and their

music. Ewing's passing remark about Hagström speaking "lazily" is not merely

an innocent observation about his demeanour, materializing in a vacuum of

objectivity before evaporating unnoticed by fans. Rather, it exists amongst

previous interviews where Hagström has remarked, "…we're a bunch of lazy

motherfuckers actually,"[47] and amongst fan discussions where "laziness" is

opposed to deliberate (or "calculated") composition:

> ya' know i quite often wonder that about many of meshuggah's parts,theres lots
> of little quirky parts in the writing that makes me think how the fuck they come
> up with some stuff. But then i just remember that it happens for meshuggah,
> they're probably lazy cunts who don't think about things half as hard about it as i
> would.
>
> Here's what helped me understand the opening riff a bit better…[forum user
> 7heaven33 gives a link to a Guitar Pro (notation software) file]…Hit play and
> watch the notes being played on frets. It's pretty amazing, you can see the logical
> sections of geometry being played. And yeah, they are a bunch of lazy asses.
> Mårten even said it himself.[48]

Each of these remarks gives momentum to the myth of Meshuggah's "basic

simplicity" (to quote Ewing's terms): a sense that the band's apparent laziness

supersedes the complexity of their music which, in the words of forum user Hydro

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[47] Aaron Small, "Meshuggah: Random Perpetual Shadows," *Brave Words & Bloody Knuckles* 63, (September/October 2002): 39.

[48] Hydro Drone, #8; 7heaven33, #9. Both comments occur in Official Meshuggah Forum/.../**In Death - Is Death first part**.

Drone above, "just…happens for meshuggah [*sic*]." This somewhat subtle process of myth building relies on a series of "references to an entire complex web of past and present discourses within…culture," the nature of which Bakhtin termed *heteroglossia*.[49] It is this concept and a number of ways in which it plays out in discourse surrounding Meshuggah to which we shall now turn.

The Heteroglossia of Speech Genres and its Consequences for Meshuggah

Hagström, who has years of experience with rock interviews and fan discourse, is undoubtedly familiar with the kinds of alienation that musical complexity can bring and the consequence that "even among the brainiest pop musicians, it is clearly undesirable to display one's analytical tendencies;"[50] consequently, during Ewing's interview, he is able to describe the complexity of his music in such a way that it does not seem paradoxical when Ewing speaks of Hagström's "basic simplicity."

> …we do have to find something that's interesting and challenging to us as a band to make us really want to play it. And it just happens that the challenge seems to be in the complexity of the song structures. It's not a deliberate thing, I mean we're not saying 'Oh I want to take this part of the song over here and then take that over there and make it something strange.' We don't think that way. We never mean to be strange, we just want to come up with something that works and is interesting to us.[51]

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[49] Stuart Sim, *Introducing: Critical Theory* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2001), 57.

[50] Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, 200. In a short afterword that uses XTC's "The Mayor of Simpleton" to discuss the tension between complexity and the value many popular music fans place on "uncalculated emotion," Brackett explains another potential motive for artists like Hagström to downplay the deliberation of their musical complexity: "Fans' resistance [to analysis] rests on…[an] argument [where] 'naturalness' is opposed to 'calculation.' 'Calculation' in this context means either openly attempting to gain commercial success or creating music methodically or intellectually. In both cases, the overt association with commerce taints the musical product" (ibid., 200); see Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, 199–202, esp. pp. 199–200.

[51] Ewing, "Clash of the Titans," 3. Earlier, in chapter 2, I quoted a similar description of Meshuggah's "natural complexity" made by Hagström: "We don't try to make it hard or complex, we just want to make it intriguing" (Mike G, "Swedish Speedballs," 66).

One can gain a sense of how influential Hagström's words have been, not only on Ewing but also amongst the attitudes of Meshuggah fans, from the similar attitude towards complexity expressed in statements such as the following (another response which a forum member gave to King Woodchuck II): "Seriously dude, it's just a fucking song. Fredrik and Marten aren't mathematical geniuses they are just musicians that like their music a bit more complex."[52] Similarly, Hagström's claims that Meshuggah's metric superimposition technique (discussed in chapter 2) is "actually an illusion"[53] and that "almost every song [on the album *Nothing*] was written in 4/4,"[54] have at times cast an aura of irrelevance and inaccuracy over attempts to discuss odd time signatures in Meshuggah's music.[55] On occasion, Meshuggah fans have quoted Hagström's resistance to the terminology of odd time signatures when other fans discuss hybrid meters in the band's music. In response to King Woodchuck II's analysis above, one forum member states, "The problem is that Meshuggah guys believe that their music is all 4/4. They just don't get it";[56] elsewhere in the forum, another fan voices a more direct—although likely sarcastic (considering the ironic pseudonym and laughing emoticon)—

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[52] WASDman00, #45. Official Meshuggah Forum/.../**Bleed - How I'm Listening to it Now** http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=18650&page=5 (accessed August 21, 2008).

[53] Small, "Random Perpetual Shadows," 39.

[54] Ewing, "Clash of the Titans," 4. In another interview Hagström states, "We've never really been into the odd time signatures we get accused of using…Everything we do is based around a 4/4 core. It's just that we arrange parts differently around that center to make it seem like something else is going on" (Hagström, "Meshuggah" interview by Rod Smith).

[55] For a discussion of the metric superimposition technique in Meshuggah's music prior to *I*, including some examples from the *Nothing* album, see Pieslak, "Re-Casting Metal," 220–23.

[56] Amian, #20, Official Meshuggah Forum/.../**Bleed - How I'm Listening to it Now**.

dismissal of analysis with a reference to one of Hagström's interviews, "Marten

says that Mesh always runned [*sic*] in 4-4!!!! Shame on you 23-16 fuckers! 😄"[57]

In light of the attention that fans have given to Hagström's statements, it is

not surprising that the members of Meshuggah will choose the terms of their

musical complexity with care. As one final interview response by Hagström

indicates, the topic of time signatures can quickly conjure up a host of

ideologically loaded topics to which popular music audiences are sensitive.

> We move the pattern of cycles over the 4/4, which makes it sound like an odd
> signature to the listener but in reality it's not. What I'm happiest about is that it's
> never deliberate; it's just the way we make music. It's a natural process for us.
> We're four fucked-up dudes from way up north in Sweden who moved down to
> Stockholm and don't know any better. We're pretty much punk rock but we're
> not doing it the punk rock way.[58]

By swiftly and effortlessly moving from time signatures, to the issue of

"calculation" vs. deliberation, and finally to his band's identity (implicitly

referencing punk rock's history of symbolizing simplicity and directness),

Hagström facilitates the paradoxical idea that Meshuggah can be both complex

and simple; his consistent ability to convey a strong sense of "authenticity"—

Ewing calls it "integrity"— in each of his interviews allows Ewing to

simultaneously characterize Meshuggah's music as "thinking man's thud" and

"only rock'n'roll."[59] Following some arguments raised by Glenn Pillsbury in his

discussions of Metallica interviews, I want to emphasize that Hagström's

"statements are not intentionally designed to mislead, but they do need to be

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[57] theory freak, #69, Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Music/**Official Catch 33 Thread** http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=9259&page=7 (accessed August 16, 2008).

[58] Small, "Random Perpetual Shadows," 39.

[59] Ewing states, "'Destroy Erase Improve' set out their stall as thinking man's thud…" (Ewing, 3). Tellingly, Ewing prefaces Hagström's discussion of complexity and deliberation (cited earlier) by saying, "The need for integrity is clearly strong in Meshuggah" (ibid.).

understood in the performative context of the rock interview."[60] While a number

of ideals related to rock authenticity (I will take some of these up in Part 2 of this

chapter) disguise this context, it can be made clearer by considering Hagström's

statement in light of some theories on communication developed by Mikhail

Bakhtin and, more specifically, by explaining some ways in which the rock

interview can become an example of what Bakhtin calls the *speech genre*.[61]

Essential to Bakhtin's theory of speech genres is the realization that there

is a great deal more to our speech patterns than indicated by the stable

grammatical rules typical of certain branches of linguistics (generative models of

sentence structures come to mind) or the unidirectional models of communication

implied by Sausserean semiology (e.g. sender → receiver; signifier →

signified).[62] Bakhtin devises a number of concepts that can account for this,

including a distinction between the *sentence*, a "unit of language" and the much

wider *utterance*, a "unit of speech communication" which can vary from the

largest novels to the shortest rejoinders (such as "Ah!").[63] Although unlike a

sentence, an utterance can never be repeated (since, according to Bakhtin, its

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[60] Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated*, 144.

[61] My understanding of Hagström's interview response through Bakhtin's theories is greatly indebted to Pillsbury's work; specifically, Pillsbury applies Bakhtin's concept of the speech genre to Metallica interviews in order to understand how the band is defended from accusations of "selling out;" see ibid., 144–45.

[62] As Michael Holquist puts it, Bakhtin's essay "The Problem of Speech Genres" "takes up…the difference between Saussurean linguistics and language conceived as a living dialogue (or, as Bakhtin sometimes called it, meta- or translinguistics)" ("Introduction," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, xv). See Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 68 for some of his objections to "*fictions* as the 'listener' and 'understander' (partners of the 'speaker')...[s]till current in linguistics" and the "diagrams of the active speech processes of the speaker and the corresponding passive processes of the listener's perception and understanding of the speech…frequently present[ed]" by "[c]ourses in general linguistics (even serious ones like Saussure's)."

[63] Ibid., 73. The rejoinder example follows from Bakhtin, 71, n. c [i.e. footnote "c"]; on the same page, he mentions how utterances can be varied "in terms of their length, their content, and their compositional structure" (ibid.). See Kevin Korsyn, "Beyond Privileged Contexts: Intertextuality, Influence, and Dialogue," in *Rethinking Music*, 57–58 for a concise and lucid distillation of Bakhtin's concept of the utterance.

repetition would constitute a new utterance), one can observe patterns amongst successive utterances that can be characteristic of what he calls *speech genres*, "relatively stable thematic, compositional, and stylistic types of utterances."[64] One can thus speak of a number of observable patterns to the utterances made by musicians who are participating in the rock interview speech genre. Many of these patterns can be broadly applicable to musician interviews within a wide array of popular music genres, such as the tendency to use scene-specific jargon and to profess a disinterest towards the external pressures of commerce and public image. Others include the tendency to discuss one's oeuvre in terms of artistic "growth" or to stress one's stylistic ties to older groups who have been consecrated within a particular music scene.[65]

This notion of recurring patterns can serve as a reminder of an argument, first voiced by Glenn Pillsbury, that the speech generic codes of the rock interview are perhaps more fixed than its rehearsed candour would lead us to believe.[66] Because our everyday familiarity with speech can camouflage its generic codes, the rock interview can at times masquerade as a direct conduit between the thoughts of musicians and the audience of readers.[67] But as Bakhtin implies with his distinction between "creative" and more "formal" speech genres, a speech genre may be more or less standardized in the kinds of meanings one is able to communicate within it depending on the genre's function ("scientific,

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[64] Ibid., 64. 'Stylistic' refers to the use of 'lexical, phraseological, and grammatical resources' (ibid., 60).

[65] I have taken each of these two examples from Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, 159 and Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 121–139 respectively.

[66] Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated*, 144–45.

[67] As Pillsbury states, "We speak in diverse styles and genres without suspecting that they exist, and it is this subconscious characteristic that gives speech its sense of naturalness…" (ibid., 145).

technical…business, everyday").[68] While the rock interview may not be as

standardized as "the sphere of military and industrial commands…where speech

genres are maximally standard," it does contain a number of unspoken constraints

which are no doubt responsible for much of the seemingly contradictory

information we have observed between Meshuggah's intricate patterns of

hypermeter, melodic motives, and guitar fretboard shapes (discussed in chapter 2)

and Hagström's denials of "calculation" cited in both the previous and current

chapters.[69]

This can perhaps be best explained through Bakhtin's idea that "when the

listener perceives and understands the meaning…of speech, he simultaneously

takes an active, responsive attitude toward it."[70] That is, in contrast to the passive

model of communication where, for example, Hagström transmits his speech to a

reader who receives it, Bakhtin's notion of *active responsive listening* holds that

those whom Hagström addresses actually participate in shaping his speech

content: an interviewer such as Ewing, to cite the most obvious example, "either

agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it,

prepares for its execution, and so on."[71] Fans also have a hand in what is said

during an interview as we have seen from the forum statements that have agreed

and applied Hagström's thoughts on 4/4 time and the "naturalness" of complexity;

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[68] Bakhtin refers to this as the "semantic exhaustiveness of the theme [of the utterances found within the speech genre]" (Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 77).

[69] Brackett describes two (reciprocally related) constraints which could be easily applied to the members of Meshuggah: "[popular musicians] must continue to attract a sizable enough audience to make the record company a profit so that the record company will permit them to continue to release recordings; at the same time, if the musicians don't wish to see themselves as existing solely to please the public, they may try to create an aura of artistic 'growth,' which risks making their music less 'accessible' and hence less popular" (*Interpreting Popular Music*, 159).

[70] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 68.

[71] Ibid.

since, as the most active and experienced band member in rock interviews, he is

undoubtedly aware of the various ways in which fans can react to his statements,

we can assume that Hagström will take those possibilities into account when

choosing his words and will phrase his responses in such a manner that he and his

band will, at the very least, not be cast in an unfavourable light. Compounded by

the similar speech generic codes of the metal magazine through which his

interviews are narrated, Hagström's thoughts are filtered through a nested series

of unspoken codes so that, when they are transmitted to his readers, they are

never, as Pillsbury put it, "in some pure form."[72] Similarly, his utterances do not

spring from isolation but are "filled with echoes and reverberations of other

utterances" of which Hagström has become either consciously or subconsciously

aware.[73] In sum, when considering Hagström's responses, it is important to

recognize that the rock interview, as a speech genre, is characterized by a complex

mixture of social factors which influence what musicians such as Hagström

choose to—and limit what they are able to—communicate.

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[72] Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated*, 145. Bakhtin speaks of a distinction between *primary* speech genres such as the spoken responses given by Hagström and *secondary* speech genres such as the metal magazine which "absorbs and digests" his statements; see Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 61–62.

[73] Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 91 quoted in Pillsbury, *Damage Incorporated*, 144–45 along with another of Bakhtin's more poetic explanations: "He [the speaker] is not, after all the first speaker, the one who disturbs the eternal silence of the universe" (see ibid. and Bakhtin, *Speech Genres*, 69). This conception of speech can also be understood as *dialogic* (i.e. conscious of the relationship to other speech acts) in opposite to Bakhtin's notion of *monologicism* (i.e. lacking that consciousness); Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, 7 provides a brief explanation of Bakhtin's distinction between *dialogicism* and *monologicism*, later applying the concepts to various ways in which listeners engage with music and the implications the two terms carry for distinguishing listeners on the basis of their ability to appreciate and "discern…the multiplicity of voices in [a] popular music text" (ibid., 17). See also Kevin Korsyn, "Beyond Privileged Contexts," 56–64 and *passim* for an application of Bakhtin's *dialogicism* to a critique of what he calls "privileged contexts" in music research.

II. Contradictions, Dichotomies, and Opposing Factions

Thus far, we have encountered some ways in which Meshuggah fans have closely engaged with music, often interacting with other fans in notationally centric discussions involving their own transcriptions and music analyses. We have also seen some aggressive responses to those close readings from other Meshuggah fans as well as from a rock journalist writing in a widely read metal magazine. Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia has suggested some ways in which these discursive struggles are bound together, connected through their disagreements with one another, their ability to influence other speakers' opinions, and their capacity to generate myths regarding Meshuggah's "laziness" and the "naturalness" of their complexity. Finally, by viewing the rock interview as a speech genre, we considered how some of the apparent contradictions that arise during Meshuggah interviews—simplicity and complexity, composition and randomness (and we will add a number of others)—are partially the result of demands placed on Meshuggah by the music business and its speech codes. Each of the conflicting aesthetic values and music industry pressures described above have followed Meshuggah for most of the band's career, and indeed, many of the discursive struggles we have encountered so far occurred before the releases of *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*. Focusing our attention more specifically towards those recordings, we will observe some of these discursive tensions intensify, indicating that the contrasting aesthetic values of metal fans (implied earlier by different attitudes towards music analysis) are more divided than is often acknowledged.

Catch Thirtythr33's *Programmed Drums, Authenticity and Machine Based Aesthetics*

In addition to its extreme length, *Catch Thirtythr33* surprised fans with some especially unorthodox approaches to song writing and recording. While *I* had been recorded in a more traditional manner using studio recorded instruments, *Catch Thirtythr33* involved "sitting down in front of the computer, programming drums, playing guitar over it and basically finishing a song without vocals in Cubase [notation software], sending mp3s over the internet."[74] In June 2004, Hagström predicted that the album would be a mixture of studio performance and "file-swapping parts," describing to an interviewer that the band would be at a recording studio "but on the computer so that everyone sits, perhaps at separate workstations…with no time pressure, just letting it flow."[75] During the album's release, the knowledge of this process came as a shock to some fans, many of whom admired Haake as a virtuosic drummer and at times expressed disbelief at early rumours of the programmed drums.[76] In response to numerous interview questions about the drum programming, the members of Meshuggah often defended their decision not to record live drums by stressing that, since each of the band members had collectively written the drum parts by trading computer files, it would be impractical to re-record forty-seven minutes of programmed drums (especially since the band frequently edited the song writing).[77]

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[74] Hagström, June 2004 interview http://www.toazted.com/download.php?interview=563 (accessed August 29, 2008).

[75] Ibid. In another interview Haake describes the creation of *Catch Thirtythr33* as follows, "…because we programmed all the drums, it was basically all four of us in an office space around one computer and we had a Line 6 Vetta Head plugged into the PC through a soundcard, and that is how we made the whole album. The only things we added in the studio were the vocals. Apart from that, Catch 33 was us four guys sitting around a computer. Even though Martin [*sic*] and I wrote the lyrics, everyone was involved in putting the lyrics to the music" (Alexi Front,

According to another explanation used by band members, one that seems grounded in ideology rather than logistics, Meshuggah's programmed drums served as a means to rebel against certain values of rock authenticity, a taboo to be broken.[78]

> Within metal, maybe more so for a band like us, it's considered taboo to do something like [use programmed drums]. We're all for breaking taboos all the time. We thought it was a good move.[79]

> We really ended up breaking up a taboo within this genre. It is taboo to have programmed drums, especially a band like us, where the drums have always been prominent. It really throws a lot of people off: but it is one of those things we wanted to do.[80]

"Interview: Tomas Haake *Meshuggah*," http://www.fourteeng.net/meshuggah.html accessed August 17, 2008).

Haake's reputation as a virtuosic drummer can be observed by his being voted the top drummer in *Modern Drummer* magazine's metal category for their 2008 reader's poll; see http://www.metalunderground.com/news/details.cfm?newsid=37152 (accessed August 26, 2008).

[76] "Tomas [Haake] didn't play drums? I think I am going to be sick" ("Mahavishnu," #28); "No, I haven't heard that [the drums were programmed]. And I doubt he'd program an entire record anyway" (Snave, #24), Official Meshuggah Forum/…/**Official Catch 33 Thread**) http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=9259 (accessed August 16, 2008) . "It absolutely pains me to say this but, I still don't like the album yet. Then, today, I find out that all the drums are programmed. : (" (ClevelandRR, #180, ibid).

[77] "…the way we that we wrote the album, it's almost impossible to use live drums. It's not like we wrote a whole song, learned it, and then once we were all familiar with it, started recording it. Everything was done on the spur of the moment, and everything has been changed numerous times. It would have been almost impossible to record live drums and make it sound like this. Had we done live drums, it would have sounded completely different to this, and we would have finally finished it sometime next year" (Haake, "Meshuggah [Interview]," by Justin Donnelly http://www.blistering.com/fastpage/fpengine.php/link/1/templateid/9348/tempidx/5/menuid/3 [accessed August 21, 2008]).

"The reason for [programming drums] was that we knew, musically, what we wanted to do…we have a studio so we can do this long song that we've always wanted to do…we've been recording the guitars with the correct sound the way we want it to sound, the bass and everything was just so; we recorded the vocals and everything so we knew what we wanted to have. Then we were like, 'Okay now we have to redo all this…it sounds the way we want it to; the drums sounds [*sic*] perfect'" (Hagström, Interview with Mårten Hagström at the Dutch Waldrock festival, June 2005) http://www.toazted.com/download.php?interview=875 (accessed August 29, 2008).

[78] By using the term "ideology" I do not mean to connate a sense of deception or false consciousness. My use is closest to "forms of thought motivated by social interests," one of sixteen definitions offered by Terry Eagleton in his *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York: Verso, 1991), 1–2. For a sense of the rich variety of meanings which the term "ideology" can carry, see his introductory chapter, pp. 1–31.

[79] Haake, "Meshuggah [Interview]," by Justin Donnelly http://www.blistering.com/fastpage/fpengine.php/link/1/templateid/9348/tempidx/5/menuid/3 (accessed August 21, 2008).

[80] Front, "Interview: Tomas Haake *Meshuggah*."

By emphasizing Meshuggah's "desire to be different, to challenge and transgress accepted norms within and outside the [metal] scene," Haake's statements appear "authentic" despite the "inauthenticity" suggested by his absence on the recording: he appears disinterested in the pressures of image, an attitude necessary to reverse the incipient accusations of "sell-out" which threatened to follow the programmed drums.[81] That he could claim authenticity by rejecting other forms of authenticity is not paradoxical; rather, that possibility suggests some important ways that value discourses not only differ amongst the "three overlapping and contradictory grids" of folk, art, and pop studied by Simon Frith—a difference widely acknowledged and studied—but also amongst taste cultures within metal.[82]

Keith Kahn-Harris has studied two very different forms of subcultural values circulating within extreme metal, one of which can help explain why Haake's statement might especially appeal to extreme metal fans. Narrowing Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital—roughly definable as culturally-based "resources that provide different forms of power" indicated by one's "competence in some socially valued area of practice" (a concept we will revisit in greater detail later)—and further narrowing Sarah Thornton's concept of subcultural capital, Kahn-Harris theorizes the concepts of *mundane* and *transgressive*

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[81] Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 128. By referring to Haake's "absence," I mean only that he did not play drums on *Catch Thirtythr33*; as some of his interviews quoted here indicate, he was very active in lyric writing, drum programming, and the album art design. Also, by referring to "sell out" accusations, I do not mean to imply that a significant number of fans actually voiced such an accusation; indeed, I have not come across any complaints about the programmed drums that explicitly used the term "sell out." However, as will become clearer with some fan statements I address later, drum programming technology has triggered many of the same anxieties in metal fans that fuel sell-out arguments.

[82] Simon Frith, *Performing Rites*, 26. For Frith's discussions of these three discursive categories, see ibid., 36–39 ("bourgeois/art"), 39–41 ("folk"), and 41–42 ("commercial").

subcultural capital.[83] Although the most socially competent members of the extreme metal scene can accrue both forms simultaneously, Kahn-Harris describes his two types of subcultural capital as theoretically opposed to one another: while mundane subcultural capital "is produced through a commitment to work hard *for* the scene, as an altruistic commitment to the collective," transgressive subcultural capital can be claimed through one's individualism and independence of the scene and its codes.[84]

When asked his opinion on the metal scene in Stockholm, Haake presented a decidedly negative view, unconcerned with the possibility of losing mundane subcultural capital:

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[83] I have taken these definitions for Bourdieu's terms from Jeffrey J. Sallaz and Jane Zavisca, "Bourdieu in American Sociology, 1980–2004," *Annual Review of Sociology* 33, (August 2007): 23. On subcultural capital, see Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1996); on Kahn-Harris' theories, see his "Extreme Metal and Subcultural Capital," chap. 6 in *Extreme Metal*, 121–139. The descriptor "transgressive" in Kahn-Harris' theory comes from his earlier observation of three different types of transgression within the extreme metal scene: "sonic" (involving musical texts), "discursive" (involving written texts), and "bodily transgression" (a complex variety of potentially self-destructive behaviours to which various members hold differing degrees of ambivalent attitudes); see "The Scene and Transgression," chap. 2 in *Extreme Metal*, 27–49. He links subcultural capital to transgression by arguing that "...experiences of transgression...are struggled over and contested by scene members in their attempts to gain power, status and capital within the scene" (ibid., 121).

[84] "…transgressive subcultural capital is claimed through a radical individualism, through displaying uniqueness and a lack of attachment to the scene" (ibid., 127). One way of accruing mundane subcultural capital involves "knowing the complex histories of the scene and by having heard the music of its vast number of bands" (ibid., 122).

A revealing example of how transgressive subcultural capital can be used within the metal magazine speech genre in order to bestow prestige on an artist can be found in the following characterization of Miles Davis in *Metal Maniacs*: "…Miles Davis, the great American jazzman, a revolutionary who broke all the rules, so much so that people started hating him for it, and telling him what he was doing with electronics and feedback wasn't jazz anymore. So he basically told everybody to fuck off" (Mike G, "Swedish Speedballs," 66).

Carl Begai, a writer in the extreme metal magazine *Brave Words & Bloody Knuckles*, demonstrates how a metal journalist can make a bid for mundane subcultural capital by recognizing a band's transgressive subcultural capital. Implicitly claiming a superior knowledge of genre distinctions over an "uninformed press that has to put labels even where there shouldn't be any," he mocks the press for referring to Meshuggah as "Scandinavian black/death metal" when they "are one of those bands that have always defied being labeled…Haake and his cohorts are proud of the fact that they've been able to confuse people and avoid being boxed in with other metal bands. They thrive on the fact that they cannot and really should not be compared to anything else" (Begai, "Meshuggah: A World of Chaos and Fear," *Brave Words & Bloody Knuckles* 26, (November/December 1998): 43).

> I don't think there really is that strong of a scene anymore. There aren't a lot of great bands as there used to be. A lot of the same bands play Korn-inspired music. Some are even resorting to wearing makeup and masks to sell their band. I am probably the last person you'd ask about the scene. I have grown tired of it all. I can't remember the last time I was excited to go out and see a band play live here. I think the scene has changed a lot for the worse. It is probably healthy with lots of concerts and kids going to shows but it doesn't involve me much anymore.[85]

Such a critical statement towards the metal scene, unimaginable in folk discourses, can pass in a metal magazine with little backlash from readers largely because transgressive subcultural capital is much more highly valued by extreme metal fans than mundane subcultural capital.[86] Kahn-Harris points out that despite the special value that extreme metal scene members place on the acquisition of transgressive subcultural capital, the rebellious individuality which it rewards also widely circulates outside the scene. Transgressive subcultural capital is thus "a particular version of a form of capital that exists wherever artists and other individuals seek to attack taboos and 'the mainstream.' "[87] Since Meshuggah is a band whose fans widely praise them as musical innovators (as indicated by some of the fan comparisons between Meshuggah and post-metal earlier in this chapter), it is perhaps not surprising that Haake spoke in terms of "breaking taboos" when faced with questions about his drum programming.[88]

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[85] Paul Schwarz, "Swedish Metal: Dissecting over a Decade of Carnage," *UNRESTRAINED!* 16 (2001): 27.

[86] On the different emphases placed on the two forms of capital, Kahn-Harris states, "The most revered scene members are those who have committed themselves to transgressive individualism in some way. Those who are respected for their mundane commitment to the scene, such as label managers, never quite achieve the same level of adulation" (ibid., 129). Additionally, Haake's remark could in some ways be read as an attempt to gain mundane subcultural capital through his awareness of generic distinctions: Korn, the most widely popular nü-metal band globally, is frequently disparaged as a symbol of inauthenticity in extreme metal. As Kahn-Harris explains, nü-metal itself "has become an 'other' against which subcultural capital can be claimed" (ibid., 135); see pp. 133–137 for Kahn-Harris' discussion of nü-metal and subcultural capital.

[87] Kahn-Harris, *Extreme Metal*, 129.

[88] See ibid., 128 for Kahn-Harris' mentions of "musical innovators."

What seems much more uncommon than a desire to break taboos is

Haake's interest in an "emotionless" sound through the programmed drums.

> …we really found that the programmed drums and the sound we were using
> were almost emotionless and an extremely super steady sounding, and didn't do
> anything but support the guitar riffs throughout. That really helped enhance the
> vibe of the album.[89]

> We noticed the programmed drums worked really well with the idea of having a
> guitar driven album. The programmed drums sound a bit like a real drummer,
> they are emotionless and turned out really well.[90]

Notably, Haake's second statement, while praising the life-like quality of the

programming, also seems to equate that quality with a lack of emotion—as if a

"real drummer" were "emotionless." Such a desire for a specifically

"emotionless" sound, regardless of whether it is achieved through machine or

human-based performance, runs counter to several aesthetic/moral values deeply

engrained in metal audiences (and, as indicated by Frith's "folk discourses," the

audiences of many other popular music genres).[91]

Many of these values were present during a recent online debate titled

"Programmed drums (and other samplers)," revealing a wide variety of attitudes

circulating amongst metal fans towards the role of technology in musical

production. To begin with, in contrast to Haake, two opposers of programmed

drums strongly prioritized the experience of a live musician's ability to project

skill and emotion, an ability seemingly lost through drum programming:

> Drum Machines…[take] away ANY skill required to play the drums, just
> because you can program them! I also have to complain about the lack of
> emotion when a Drum Machine is used. Seriously, the pure agression [*sic*] let
> loose on the drums by a real drummer during a song has so much driving power,

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[89] Haake, "Meshuggah [Interview]," by Justin Donnelly
http://www.blistering.com/fastpage/fpengine.php/templateid/9348/menuid/3/tempidx/5/catid/4/edit
status//restemp/N%3B/fPpagesel/2 (accessed August 20, 2008).
[90] Haake, "Interview: Tomas Haake *Meshuggah*," by Alexi Front.
http://www.fourteeng.net/meshuggah.hmtl (accessed August 27, 2008).
[91] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 39–41.

and adds so much to the overall song, that i [*sic*] cannot imagine some songs without a real drummer.[92]

> I personally am still morally opposed to programmed drums in genres that aren't electronica of some sort because I just think it's weak. It's a matter of principle. I mean if it sounds good it sounds good, but I like to be able to enjoy the skills (or lack thereof) of the band I am listening to on a MUSICAL level. I am NOT interested in how well someone can program drums to imitate a human, that's not why I listen to metal, or any music really…Electronic music aside, for me to be able to fully appreciate a piece of music, I have to be able to respect the artistry involved in making it. Programmed drums instantly lower the amount of credibility I will give to a piece of music. If a band/artist lacks technical skill but has enough emotion, I can usually enjoy it; though I do prefer an equal amount of both.[93]

During the debate, supporters of drum programming called attention to the overtly moral quality of some of these arguments, noting that the complaints regarding "artistry" and "skill" selectively ignore the musical and technological proficiency required to make music with computers. Following Keir Keightley's insights on rock fans' anxieties towards "machine-made" music, the seemingly objective complaints raised by some metal fans about the loss of artistic skill appear to mask deeper "concern[s] with the industrial technological conditions of production."[94] One participant in the debate, when pressed to explain his or herself along these lines, makes these concerns explicit:

> I'm a drummer by trade pretty much, so when I see musicians using computers to do their work then it makes it fake to me. It's ridiculous today how much people rely on computers to create music. The old '80s and early '90s bands didn't need all the technology, and I think by following their example, that's the true way to perform metal.[95]

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[92] OlafTheViking, July 9, 2008, 2:07pm, Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives Forum Index/Metal discussion/**Programmed drums (and other samplers)**. http://www.metal-archives.com/board/viewtopic.php?t=40034&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=80&sid=234b2917ef7167867444e7be8410b343 (accessed August 18, 2008). Unlike the Meshuggah fan forum, the Encyclopaedia Metallum forum does not number their posts. On this forum, the quotes I have taken can be located by following the date and time of posting listed under each forum comment.

[93] Alsandair, July 11, 2008, 6:24pm, ibid. http://www.metal-archives.com/board/viewtopic.php?t=40034&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=120 (accessed August 18, 2008).

[94] Keir Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, ed. Simon Frith, Will Straw and John Street (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 133.

[95] Moravian_black_moon, July 9, 2008, 12:10am, Encyclopedia Metallum: The Metal Archives Forum Index/…/**Programmed drums (and other samplers)**. http://www.metal-

Alsandair, quoted earlier above, shows a more flexible attitude towards technology but accepts it reluctantly, distinguishing between his requirements for electronic music and for metal.

> Electronic music is fun to listen to every now and then, and I do respect many of those artists. In my opinion that kind of music should seek to create sounds that are not organic or possible without machines, and create awesome music by those means. Otherwise what the hell is the point of using machines? Convenience I think is the answer. And while I understand many people don't have access to drummers or the space for a drum set, using electronics to simulate something a real musician should be doing is just lame in my opinion.[96]

For Alsandair, electronic music focuses on "sounds that are not organic or possible without machines," while metal, which usually involves acoustic drums, is "something a real musician should be doing." This reluctant acceptance of technology in circumstances where it would be impossible to avoid it, a common position amongst supporters of programmed drums in the debate, seems congruent with Haake's logistical justifications discussed earlier; what separates those aesthetics from the more radical ones implied by Haake's third and final justification is not simply Haake's interest in an "emotionless vibe," but the implication that it derives its very affective power from the sense of alienation which technology can signify. By justifying the choice of programmed drums in *affective* (rather than logistical or ideological) terms, that is, by saying that he actually *wanted* the "emotionless" feel that so bothers the fans quoted above, Haake not only seems to distance himself from the largely taken for granted value placed on emotion in popular music, he displays a postmodern attitude towards

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archives.com/board/viewtopic.php?t=40034&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=0&sid=d3555aa1c8fd2aa64995478b6cb2a3bb (accessed August 18, 2008).

[96] Alsandair, July 11, 2008, 6:24pm, ibid. For the sake of clarity in my arguments, I have excerpted this passage from Alsandair's earlier remarks cited above. His full remarks, available at the link provided in n. 93 can be read by inserting this block quote into the ellipsis which I added to his earlier quote.

the role of technology in music that is highly uncommon in metal: to borrow a concept from Jonathan Kramer, Haake's comments suggest that he "considers technology not only as a way to preserve and transmit music but also as deeply implicated in the production and essence of music."[97]

In conjunction with Meshuggah's reputation for avant-garde aesthetics, breaks with tradition, and willingness to embrace technology (not only by their programmed drums but also by their use of custom-made eight-string guitars), the attitudes shown by Haake above reflect a strong investment the band has made in what Keir Keightley has called "Modernist authenticity" in rock.[98] Loosely corresponding to the differences between Kahn-Harris' transgressive and mundane subcultural capital, Keightley's Modernist authenticity opposes the apparent simplicity and compromise of the values expressed by "Romantic authenticity," which in turn opposes the apparent artifice of Modernist values.[99]

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[97] Kramer, "Musical Postmodernism," 16. The quote I have taken from Kramer represents the tenth of sixteen "characteristics of postmodern music" (ibid.). In contrast to what I have called the fan's "reluctance acceptance of technology," Keir Keightley argues that "[for] some, the 'machine-made' sounds of industrial music…may actually be a mark of a certain authenticity, of an affinity with the harsh reality of a mechanised, machine-dominated life" (Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," 133); such an attitude is suggested by the following remark made in a fan review of Catch Thirtythr33: "That cold industrial tremolo riffing which keeps popping up under all these massive riffs makes my hairs stand up! This whole album just makes me think of the inner workings of a massive sentient machine, calculating our demise with a cold unemotional mind" (TimeAndDust, "This rocks my socks! - 90%," February 5, 2007) http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 21, 2008). Cf. Grossberg's concept of "hyperreal inauthenticity," a subcategory of his postmodern concept of "authentic inauthenticity," in Grossberg, "We Gotta Get Out of This Place," 231–232.

[98] That Meshuggah's embracing of technology might be equally characterized as "postmodern" (as I have done using Kramer's theoretical framework) or "modern" (using Keightley's framework) is not necessarily a contradiction between theories but rather demonstrates "that modernism (or postmodernism) [does not exist] "out there" somewhere in the objects under discussion rather than as a theoretical construct that enables the understanding in a particular way" (Brackett, "Where's It At?," 209). For my present purposes, both constructs enable me to distinguish between systems of valuation widely circulating amongst different groups of metal fans which, as I discussed in chapter 1, are often conflated.

[99] "Many rock fans will reject those performers or genres who highlight Modernist authenticity as being somehow 'artificial', while other fans might dismiss Romantic rock as being simplistic or compromised by its populism" (Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," 137).

While both systems of authenticity aim "to avoid corruption through involvement with commerce and oppose the alienation [fans] see as rooted in industrial capitalism," they will often disagree as to what signals that corruption and what forms of opposition are needed.[100] Thus, in the case of the *Encyclopaedia Metallum* debate, fans butt heads endlessly over the charged signifier "fake," debating over whether synthesizers qualify as instruments or whether the concept of sampling qualifies as "real."

The frequently circular arguments of the debate's participants carry with them some important implications for the understanding of how systems of taste are divided amongst metal fans: as Keightley argues, "[r]ock's dual versions of authenticity may thus contribute to the formation of diverging scenes, communities, and taste cultures *within* rock."[101] At times, the positions which forum members take in the debate correspond tellingly with the subgeneric symbolism of their pseudonyms, revealing a link between different taste preferences (for metal subgenres) and different values of authenticity.[102] Considering that the seemingly minute distinctions which fans make between subgenres often appear indistinguishable from one another to non-fans, these distinctions carry with them important implications for our understanding of taste

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[100] Ibid, 136. "Even as there is a basic, underlying agreement between the various versions of rock that *some* form of authenticity is required to distinguish rock from the corruption of the mainstream, there may be polemical disagreement over what form it should take" (ibid., 137).

[101] Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," 137 (original emphasis).

[102] Some pseudonyms that involve subgenre-specific symbolism include "Moravian_black_moon" and "WinterBliss," two pseudonyms that carry some Romantic tropes typical of black metal: the wilderness, the cold [Scandanavian] north, and the night). WinterBliss comments, "I agree with the OP [original poster, i.e. Moravian_black_moon], fake drums really take away from an album. If they sound crappy, then that stinks, but if they sound great and are well programmed, it is still upsetting knowing that there's no drummer behind it" ("WinterBliss," July 8, 2008, 11:05pm), Encyclopedia Metallum: The Metal Archives Forum Index/…/**Programmed drums (and other samplers)**.

demographics amongst metal listeners: the aesthetic values which circulate within the metal scene may be much broader than is indicated by many scholarly models of metal audiences (see chapter 1).

As becomes apparent from the tendencies shown in Keightley's comparative chart of Romantic and Modernist authenticities, reproduced in Table 3.1, values of musical authenticity do not exist by themselves; rather, they are interconnected with numerous other systems of classification which themselves are associated with various markers of identity (e.g. Modernist authenticity/elitism/privileged social class).

Romantic authenticity tends to be found more in	*Modernist authenticity tends to be found more in*
tradition and continuity with the past	experimentation and progress
roots	avant gardes
sense of community	status of artist
populism	elitism
belief in a core or essential rock sound	openness regarding rock sounds
folk, blues, country, rock'n'roll styles	classical, art music, soul, pop styles
gradual stylistic change	radical or sudden stylistic change
sincerity, directness	irony, sarcasm, obliqueness
'liveness'	'recorded-ness'
'natural' sounds	'shocking' sounds
hiding musical technology	celebrating technology

Table 3.1 - Keightley's Tendencies for Romantic Authenticity and Modernist Authenticity in Rock

The tendencies Keightley lists for Modernist authenticity in rock, which map quite strongly onto Meshuggah's supporters and detractors, will be useful to keep in mind as we examine some fan debates centred specifically on *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*. Through them, we can begin to trace broader and more intricate systems of aesthetic values that, using Bourdieu's theories, we can then synthesize.

Reviews of Catch Thirtythr33 *and* I

Reviews of Meshuggah's later recordings are exceptionally polarized. While one might expect fans to often speak their opinions in passionate terms, Meshuggah's reviewers nearly always verge on hyperbole, at times professing an obsession with the recordings or a bewilderment over why anyone would want to listen to them at all.[103] The online reviews available at *Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives* are especially revealing of this trend; there, reviewers are required to evaluate recordings using a percentage grade in addition to their review and when Meshuggah doesn't score between 90 and 100, they usually fall below 30.[104] As with the fan debate on programmed drums discussed above, the reviews at *Encyclopaedia Metallum* appear to form two polarized groups, each characterized by the delight or revulsion which they show towards *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33*.[105] Since reviewers frequently show an awareness of the arguments and counterarguments expressed by other reviewers on the website, the *Encyclopaedia Metallum* fan reviews can also function as a site of debate between opposing aesthetic values. Indeed, the reviews at times refer to each other

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[103] The polar opposite reactions of these two fans, commenting on guitar riffs from the same recording, exemplify the kinds of hyperbole common in reviews: "And ALL of the riffs suck. All of them, every single one" (lord_ghengis, "Attack Of The Random Snare - 15%" written May 1, 2008); "…it bursts into…probably the best riff the Swedes ever wrote. Maybe even the best written on more than six strings" (Room101, "Interesting, Influential, Incredible - 95%" written January 10, 2008) both statements available at http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 16, 2008).

[104] For a chronological list of reviews see http://www.metal-archives.com/reviews.php (accessed August 16, 2008).

[105] One reviewer concludes his review by emphasizing the polarization of two groups of listeners: "If you don't like extreme, technical metal, you won't be able to stand this. Meshuggah is the kind of band that you'll either adore or despise, and if you're going to pick a side, I is the perfect place to base you opinion off of" (Usefulidiot42, "Metal taken to a new level - 100%," June 21, 2005). http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 21, 2008).

specifically or to opposing groups of fans and "haters," carry a polemical tone, and seem to imagine an unsympathetic audience.[106]

Many of the metal fans who despise *I* and Catch *Thirtythr33* make complaints regarding the discs' *self-indulgence*, a category of "bad music" that Simon Frith has divided into musical *emptiness*, *incomprehensibility*, and *selfishness* (a type not particularly present in Meshuggah's negative fan reviews). Emptiness, the belief that a musician or group has indulged "in form at the expense of content…as a display of technical ability,"[107] especially bothers two reviewers of *I* who oppose Haake's technical proficiency to his lack of musicality:

> Haake is easily as good technically speaking as he's ever been, but musically he's at his very worse. Random snare abuse, where Haake decides he needs his snare to be more involved in the song more, so he bashes it like bully [*sic*] hitting a fat slightly retarded kid, is rampant…12:05 through to about 14 minutes in, the timing just seems off. This is all over the place. But, admittedly more rare, but far worse, the snare is not stop, incessant and irritating…It's all technically impressive;…[during] 6:20 through to 7:50…he changes his foot rhythms without missing a beat with his hands. But it sounds like utter shit.[108]
>
> Of course, the music is played very technical, and I surely wouldn't be able to do the drumming this guy does, but if it just sounds like crap it is not of much use when you listen to the music, because *I listen to how the music sounds, and not how technical it is*.[109]

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[106] For example, one reviewer states, "Fundamentally, that [Meshuggah's 'sense of theory' and its distance from 'Metal'] is where the line between Meshuggah fans and haters is drawn" (Deadwired, "Masterpiece in Mentality - 100%," November 9, 2005) http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 20, 2008).

This belief in an opposition between Meshuggah fans and "haters" can also be found within Meshuggah's fan forum—notably, in the case of the following quote, with reference to an album review, "i just got Catch Thirty Thr33 in the mail today and man I don't know what all the fuckin mesh haters are talkin about…. I swear all these mesh haters and bad reviews…are just pissing me off." (Evermorenever, #83) Official Meshuggah Forum/…/**Official Catch 33 Thread** http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/showthread.php?t=9259&page=9 (accessed August 20, 2008).

[107] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 58.

[108] lord_ghengis, "Attack of the Random Snare - 15%," May 1, 2008 http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 20, 2008).

[109] DevineDevil, "Not as good as people claim it to be - 45%," September 8, 2007 http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 21, 2008), emphasis mine.

Often these complaints (about emptiness) are made in conjunction with those of incomprehensibility[110] and, like the first reviewer quoted above, those who complain about incomprehensibility often do so with a disdain for the "intensions" they perceive behind Meshuggah's song writing. A reviewer of *Catch Thirtythr33* claims that following *Chaosphere*, "Meshuggah seems to have dropped the creativity and replaced it with forced attempts at being artistic."[111]

Such remarks, understood in the context of rock authenticity according to Keightley's model, appear to express resentment towards the artistic "obliqueness" associated with Meshuggah that has replaced the "directness" most valued by Romantic authenticity. Similarly, Romantic authenticity's "belief in a core or essential rock sound" and desire for "'natural' sounds," can be observed in the following fan reviewer's prioritization of melody: "[*I*] is musical cancer…killing all things musical and replacing them with this horrid, melody-free, music-free noise."[112] Following a line of thought from Frith, a statement such as "melody-free" carries with it "a confusion of a technical 'objective' judgment…with an ideological, subjective one."[113] That statements about "melody" are particularly loaded can be seen most clearly in some contradictory remarks made by Hagström himself in two ideologically distinct contexts: "To us, the melody is what ties the whole song together" (a statement quoted by Ewing as an example of Hagström's "simplicity"); "[w]e've never been an accessible

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[110] "What Meshuggah have done on this 21 minute song is go crazy on their time signatures and polymetrics, and forgotten about having any of the music matching up and well, being music, leaving us with this horrible shapeless mess" (Ibid.)

[111] Deliverance, "A song that runs 20:59.. But could run 6. - 27%," December 13, 2004. http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 21, 2008).

[112] lord_ghengis, "Attack of the Random Snare - 15%," May 1, 2008 http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 20, 2008).

[113] Frith, *Performing Rites*, 57.

band…and I don't think we ever will be in that commercial sense…We don't have any melodies whatsoever."[114]

In contrast to the emptiness and incomprehensibility described by the negative reviews above, some reviewers who spoke highly of *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33* seem to embrace barriers to their comprehension, either rationalizing their sense of incomprehension or labouring to "appreciate" Meshuggah. During the long introduction to *I* for example, one reviewer describes his or her initial frustration with the guitars' repeated rhythmic patterns (see chapter 2, figure 2.2c) but then is grateful in retrospect for the mood it creates:

> The initial introduction even makes sense after the first listen, hell, I was glad they put that 2:30 set up in there. It's deliberately frustrating which sets the perfect mood for the rest of the song.[115]

Another fan, who describes *I* as "challenging," addresses the many accusations of repetitiveness that metal fans have given Meshuggah, and speaks of learning to look past those impressions:

> Many people I have heard talk about Meshuggah say that their music is very samey [*sic*], and I too thought this for a while. But once you truly understand their style, and look a bit deeper into the craziness that creates their albums, you begin to realise how much is actually in their songs, and begin to appreciate the power and the skill behind what they do.[116]

Similarly, reviewers of *Catch Thirtythr33* stress that "[i]t may take a few listens to truly 'get' or appreciate this work but it is very much worth the effort" and that

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[114] Ewing, "Clash of the Titans," 4; Paul Schwarz, "Meshuggah: They Didn't Make War For Nothing…," *UNRESTRAINED!* 20 (2002): 6.

[115] jciscrazy, "'I' like it - 90%," March 23, 2005 http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 21, 2008).

[116] Damnation_Terminated, "Insane, Incredible, I! - 99%," December 13, 2007, ibid. Multiple instances of fan reviewers who accuse Meshuggah of repetitiveness can be found on the Metal-Archives website. See for example, Shadow0fDeath, "zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz - 20%," July 3, 2004, ibid.; Noktorn, "Ehhhhhhh… - 70%," February 15, 2008) http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 21, 2008); darkreif, "One Song Worked for an EP…Not for an Album - 30%," March 20, 2007, ibid.); and Wahnsinn, "I'd Rather Piss Razor Blades… - 0%," June 6, 2005, ibid.

"to fully appreciate a Meshuggah album, you need to listen to it again, and

again."[117]

It is not uncommon for reviews to coax listeners towards music

appreciation with the kind of transcendent language usually reserved for culinary

delicacies or high art (e.g. "[t]hey are an acquired taste," "[i]f you have an open

mind and are patient, then buy [*Catch Thirtythr33*]!" and "those who are patient

eventually do journey to another plane").[118] Nor it is uncommon to even find

online discussions where fans encourage each other to keep trying to appreciate

Meshuggah's recordings if they are having difficulty:

ommadawn

> …it took about 40 full lenght [*sic*] listenings for me to fully appreciate [*Catch Thirtythr33*]. My head hurt really bad. Then I got addicted. I'm at about 300 full listenings now :)…

guitarplayer673

> Every Meshuggah album has taken me awhile to get used to,…It's well worth the time to get to know.

MadRussian99

> hmmm still planning to get catch 33, sure taking a while.[119]

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[117] frenchie, "The Future of Metal - 95%," June 5, 2006; caspian, "Really, really strange. - 90%" December 6, 2005" both available at http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 21, 2008).

[118] jciscrazy, "'I' like it - 90%," March 23, 2005 http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 21, 2008); TimeAndDust, "This rocks my socks! - 90%," February 5, 2007 http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 21, 2008); and Scratch, "Meshuggah, sense in the midst of chaos. A. - 88%," March 27, 2005 http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 21, 2008).

Another fan states, "True, Meshuggah is not for everyone. I know of many people who have listened to them before and dismissed them for being too 'odd.' But if one has the patience and open-mindedness to listen to Meshuggah, then this album is clearly the place to start. It was the first album of theirs I listened to, and at first I truly did not know what to think. But after relistening to it a few times, I saw the genius in their work" (metalhunter9, "It really grows on you… - 96%," December 3, 2006) http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 21, 2008).

[119] This exchange between fans (with some participants omitted for clarity of argument) is taken from the Meshuggah "shoutbox" at last.fm.; the URL I provide here will shift as new messages are continuously added to the shoutbox. However, it is possible to track down the dialogue cited above by searching past page 28 until the messages reach the beginning of March

Listeners with less patience are sometimes warned in reviews of the music's

difficulty and are reminded of the devotion necessary to push past impressions of

boredom:

> It required some time to get my ears used to the drilling of [Meshuggah's]
> masterminded chaos…"Catch 33" is not boring…Of course, the rhythm is
> complex (perhaps even more) as in the past. But, just to remind you, there was
> some melody crevice in the solos of previous efforts. Well, none of that
> anymore. I counted just one guitar solo in this album and it's cacophonic. There
> is also some catchiness in "I". Not anymore. And it's not just "un"catchiness,
> most of the music is at first plainly ungraspable. This is a redefinition of their
> experimental thrashy industrial metal and one cannot mistake it for an easily
> listenable album.[120]

> For those out there that would call Meshuggah boring, you're not listening to the
> same record or you're simply not listening at all. For metalheads that are craving
> departure from trends, patterns and standards, "Catch Thirtythree" will leave you
> with exactly that which you are seeking.[121]

Overall, it becomes clear that a great many fan reviews of *I* and *Catch

Thirtythr33* are not simply expressing the kind of reverence for records which

might be typical of any loyal fanbase. Rather, several of the positive reviews

convey an attitude that subordinates the appeal of music's sensuality to the

imperative of understanding "masterworks" (or, in some cases, they find

sensuality within the challenge of "obliqueness"). Like the ethical divisions we

observed earlier with debates on drum programming and the discursive conflict

we examined surrounding fan-based analyses, the reviews above indicate a clear

split between metal fans who quickly abandon Meshuggah's avant-garde

aesthetics, often believing them to be self-indulgent, and those who labour to

"appreciate" them. In order to understand some ways in which these differences

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2007 (the time at which the dialogue cited took place)
http://www.last.fm/music/Meshuggah/+shoutbox?page=28 (accessed August 21, 2008).
    [120] TID, "Grinding, churning, the sweetest ever noises - 99%," August 16, 2006
http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 21, 2008).
    [121] Erin_Fox, "33 Degree Tech Supremacy - 89%," October 28, 2006, ibid.

are connected to broader systems of social class and aesthetic values, I turn to

Bourdieu.

Bourdieu's Critiques of Taste Judgments and Social Class Struggles

Unsatisfied with essentialist notions of art and taste, Bourdieu argues that

aesthetic values are cultivated and reinforced by the social positions individuals

occupy throughout their lives. For Bourdieu, social agents are engaged in

permanent conflict on a "field of position takings" where different groups, most

notably groupings of social class, struggle for various forms of capital—economic

(in the form of money), social (membership and connections to social networks),

cultural (level of education, prestige, and reputation), and symbolic capital (ability

to distinguish and "appreciate" art).[122] Privileged classes especially, with greater

access to economic and cultural capital, have tended to transfer their monetary

power and cultural influence to dominate over other classes in more symbolic

spheres such as art and music.[123] Institutions such as the art gallery and museum

(to recall the opening epigraph of this chapter) or the public educational system

can facilitate this dominance by officially consecrating those works which most

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[122] For a concise model of various forms of capital in addition to some ways in which they operate along Bourdieu's cultural fields, see Helmut K. Anheier, Jurgen Gerhards and Frank P. Romo's Table 1 in their "Forms of Capital and Social Structure in Cultural Fields: Examining Bourdieu's Social Topography," *The American Journal of Sociology* 100, no. 4 (January 1995): 867. My summary of Bourdieu's types of capital is indebted to their elegant chart. See especially their definitions of economic, cultural, and social capital in ibid., 862. See also the definitions of these provided in Sallaz and Zavisca, "Bourdieu in American Sociology," 23–24 and Johnson, "Editor's Introduction," 7. For some of Bourdieu's own thoughts on the notion of struggle within his fields, see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. Randal Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 34.

[123] "Objective power relations tend to reproduce themselves in symbolic power relations" (Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson, [Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990], 135).

appeal to possessors of high cultural capital—those who have what Bourdieu calls "legitimate taste" (defined tautologically as taste for "legitimate works").[124]

What is most immediately striking, considering the importance which many studies of metal genres place on working class audiences (see chapter 1), is how many of the fans studied here approach their music either from vantage points typical of privileged classes or of possessors with high cultural capital. We have seen throughout this chapter that for a significant portion of fans, Meshuggah represents music of appreciation and contemplation (rather than say, music of resistance). These are fans such as King Woodchuck II who post lengthy analyses of Meshuggah's music or maintain websites dedicated to decoding Meshuggah's songs; fans active on the Meshuggah fan forum who coordinate their efforts over several years to transcribe *I*; and fans who urge others to keep trying to understand Meshuggah, to discover "A True Masterpiece,"[125] a "masterpiece that pushes the boundaries of metal,"[126] "one masterpiece, product of true evolution,"[127] "songwriting [*sic*] from a purely artistic standpoint."[128] These are all fans who are engaging in reverential behaviours most typical of either high art connoisseurs or students striving to become connoisseurs.

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[124] For Bourdieu's tripartite division of "legitimate," "middle-brow" and "popular" tastes, see Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 16. He discusses the tendency for vocations associated with high cultural capital to show preferences for "legitimate" art works in pp. 13–18; see especially his "Distribution of preferences for three musical works by class fraction" on p. 17. For Bourdieu's discussion of the relationship between educational capital and "legitimate culture," see ibid. 18–28; see also idem, *In Other Words*, 135.

[125] sp3tt, "A True Masterpiece - 100%," January 9, 2007, http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 22, 2008).

[126] frenchie, "The Future of Metal - 95%," June 5, 2006, http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 22, 2008).

[127] TID, "Grinding, churning, the sweetest ever noises - 99%," August 16, 2006, ibid.

[128] Erin_Fox, "33 Degree Tech Supremacy - 89%," October 28, 2006, ibid. Readers may perhaps recognize the influence Brackett, *Interpreting Popular Music*, 169 has had on this passage.

Many of these fans are applying what Bourdieu calls the *pure gaze*, "a quasi-creative power which sets the aesthete apart from the common herd" by virtue of focusing on "form over function."[129] Fans have even described Meshuggah's *Catch Thirtythr33* in ways that ascribe the "pure gaze" to themselves or to the band itself:

> [*Catch Thirtythr33*] is another one of those albums that I like substantially more *as a theoretical piece than as an album to be listened to for the purpose of entertainment.*[130]

> Meshuggah have just shifted away from the fundamental and conservative aspects of brutality and ushered in an original and potent method that uses *structure instead of sound.*[131]

> ...[Meshuggah] has been apparently striving to *worship the pure form*, the polyrhythm in its naked state, so that the riff is not as important as the pattern itself, taking away the melody of it.[132]

Pieslak describes the "pure gaze" amongst Meshuggah's fans as follows:

> [Meshuggah's] fans' process of identification revolves significantly around the sophisticated rhythmic and metric structure of their music…This is not to deny the idea that listeners are attracted to the sounds or timbres of the music; however, the pitches and rhythms (formal aspects of the music) appear to carry significant meaning for the fans of progressive/math metal, and in many cases, this is one of the most important features through which they not only identify with the music, but distinguish themselves from other subgenres.[133]

As Pieslak final sentence indicates, by making use of the "pure gaze," each of these fans are demonstrating a "disposition to *recognize* legitimate works;"[134] one fan reviewer puts it this way: "[i]t's necessary to be able to appreciate broader

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[129] See Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 28–30.
[130] Noktorn, "Ehhhhhhh... - 70%," February 15, 2008, http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 22, 2008).
[131] Deadwired, "Masterpiece in Mentality - 100%," November 9, 2005, ibid.
[132] TID, "Grinding, churning, the sweetest ever noises - 99%," August 16, 2006, ibid. It is noteworthy again how "melody" is used in opposition to "the pure form." "Melody" thus becomes a charged signifier for sensual (implicitly opposed to "intellectual" here) enjoyment of music as we have also seen above.
[133] Pieslak, "Sound, Text and Identity," 46–47.
[134] Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 26 (original emphasis).

ideas in music than the standard verse chorus verse fare that so often rears it's

[*sic*] sometimes ugly head."[135]

The sense of struggle that Bourdieu attributes to the fields of cultural

production and consumption becomes evident when fans claim symbolic capital

(understood in the quote above as a sense of distinction) from the impoverished

tastes of others. The concept of taste can be used to gain capital equally for

Meshuggah's supporters and for their detractors—for anyone on the cultural field

willing to claim it:

> Of course, there are those that love [*Catch Thirtythr33*]. If you love
> [Meshuggah's] older stuff, I assume your bias will carry over. Well, you go
> enjoy it. It's your ear drums being wasted. Mine, on the other hand, will listen to
> something that requires taste.[136]

The struggle for cultural dominance is also present whenever fans argue for the

superiority of their ability to hear musical details. Here, two members of

Meshuggah's forum admonish an online reviewer who accused *Catch Thirtythr33*

of excessive repetition:

> Haha, it went over his [the reviewer's] head. I like how he said that the first riff
> can be found a bunch of times in the album. Haha, did you know there's about 5
> or 6 different variations on the first riff in the first 3 songs?? It's subtle, but it's
> all there![137]

> Any criticism of the so called repetitiveness is nonsense...the riffs at the
> beggining [*sic*] are of exactly the right length and are superbly tension inducing
> and are non-repetitive despite sounding superficially so...I have only heard this
> trick pulled off sucessfully [*sic*] in some minimal techno where minutes can pass

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[135] The reviewer continues later: "[Meshuggah] completely throws out the three minute thirty second songwriting [*sic*] patterns that make it so easy for some listeners to follow the action" (Erin_Fox, "33 Degree Tech Supremacy - 89%," October 28, 2006, http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=74163 (accessed August 22, 2008).

[136] Chrispaks, "This album does NOTHING - 0%," March 12, 2007, ibid. Bourdieu explains how concepts such as "taste" are equally available for polarized groups on the cultural field: "Because the field is objectively polarized, critics on either side can pick out the same properties and use the same concepts to designate them ('crafy', 'tricks', 'common sense', 'healthy', etc.) but these concepts take on an ironic value ('common sense…') and thus function in reverse when addressed to a public which does not share the same relationship of connivance" (Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 93).

[137] Guinness, #43, Official Meshuggah Forum/…/**Official Catch 33 Thread**.

by pulling the listener in without boring and using what, to mortal ears, sounds 'repetitive.'[138]

Additionally, genre associations can become symbolic tools of exclusion where high art is used to belittle those who have yet to mature towards it:

> catch 33 is just 100% awesome and perfectly splited. and in fact, any album is like an akt in an "opera", supposed to be what it is… in sweden people get supported to studi in music. and a lot of the best musicans come from there. the music meshuggah make is not for young teenagers who still live in mumys house, there is art…[139]

We have seen throughout this chapter how those who feel excluded by this kind of symbolic violence will at times retaliate in attempts to gain the cultural upper hand. Ewing was most forceful among these, claiming social capital through the apparent similarity between his position and Hagström's "basic simplicity;" similarly, we saw a fan with the pseudonym of Immolation refer to the authority of Meshuggah's guitarists who he imagined would "laugh their asses off" at King Woodchuck II and "think 'wow this guy takes this shit WAY too seriously.' "[140]

The members of Meshuggah have often seemed caught in the conflict between these polarized groups of fans. We have seen the members of Meshuggah make contradictory statements—most blatantly about the role of melody in Meshuggah's song writing—which seem either to cater to Romantic authenticity or Modernist authenticity depending on how they are worded. Chapter 2 presented

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[138] Engulfed, #116, ibid.

[139] Alexander_Andreszka, #361, ibid. Alexander's many spelling and grammatical errors are likely to be the result of his being a second-language speaker (he is posting from Germany) rather than an ironic reflection of a lack in educational capital.

J.D. Considine's article "Purity and Power," discussed briefly in chapter 1, uses genre associations for an opposite effect of symbolic violence: "No, heavy metal isn't exactly serial composition, but then again, art isn't always a matter of complexity. Sometimes, getting and keeping things simple takes as much or more skill" (Brackett, *The Pop, Rock, and Soul Reader*, 373).

[140] Immolation, #8, Official Meshuggah Forum/…/**Bleed - How I'm Listening to it Now**.

a clear example of this where Hagström denied that Meshuggah's songs involve
"calculation" (a statement appealing to Romantic authenticity) yet he also made it
clear that he is a "composer," a term that not only implies some degree of
calculation, but also seems to appeal to Modernist authenticity through its
affiliations with classical and art music.

Other contradictions seem to manifest themselves not solely in
Meshuggah's verbal discourses but through the disjunction between the
statements they make and other factors over which they have less control. Again,
we saw this in chapter 2 where different music analyses revealed patterns of
organization that cannot be reasonably characterized as "random" *pace* Haake.
One rock journalist has even noticed a series of contradictions between
Meshuggah's ability to attract audiences usually drawn to sophisticated genres
and the band's projected simplicity on the topics of time signatures and genre
(although the codes of the rock interview speech genre prevent him from pursuing
the point any further):

> It's interesting because a) you say that it wasn't those different time signatures,
> and b) you say "this is not jazz," yet you have people that listen to very complex,
> avant garde music listening to you, basically a rock'n'roll band. That's a magical
> thing.[141]

Moments prior to this statement, Hagström had chuckled that "some of the avant
garde guys in Stockholm and Germany are getting into us as a curiosity [laughs],"
that Thordendal's lead guitar playing was influenced by jazz fusion/progressive
rock guitarist Alan Holdsworth, and that his own song writing was heavily

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[141] Mike G, "Swedish Speedballs," 66.

influenced by progressive rock band Rush, a band renowned for their use of complex time signatures.[142]

These affiliations with complex genres, in conjunction with the increasing complexity and avant-garde aesthetics of Meshuggah's *I* and *Catch Thirtythr33* recordings, tend to place Meshuggah on a trajectory towards a single pole in the field of cultural production—the pole occupied by an intellectual audience concerned with "art for art's sake."[143] But since a great number of metal fans are concerned with Romantic authenticity, distance from "the mainstream" in terms of "tradition and continuity with the past," and the subordination of musical technology to "sincerity" and "directness" (as we observed with both fan reviews and debates on programmed drums), Meshuggah must make an effort—even if it's an unconscious one—towards balancing their position on the field. Their ability to do this, to at times subconsciously claim both mundane and transgressive subcultural capital in their interview responses, seems to be a necessary characteristic of experienced musicians in metal and indeed in many other popular music genres. This skilful ability to navigate the rock interview speech genre is a quality derived from what Bourdieu calls the [metal musician's] *habitus*, a complex mixture of enculturated and innate dispositions which give one

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[142] "If you take it all together, it might be hard [to list some of Meshuggah's influences], but if you break our music down, for instance, Fredrick's lead guitar playing, you can hear guitarists he's listened to like Alan Holdsworth…One little aspect, when I write, it amazes me I might write a song, like it and think it's cool, then six months later go, 'shit, I know where *that* came from,' and it's almost always Rush. It's true. When I was 12, I listened to so much Rush. I don't listen to them that much anymore, but growing up as a guitar player, and listening to one band, it got me so influenced in a way I never even realized. The way they did old stuff like 'YYZ' and 'Jacob's Ladder,' [2 songs known for complex and shifting time signatures] and a lot of other old Rush songs are really amazing…" (ibid.).

[143] For an example of how such a field might appear in a visual sense, see Bourdieu's diagram of the "French literary field in the second half of the 19th century" (Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 49).

"a feel for the game."[144] Due in part to the habitus that Hagström and Haake possess, there is a sense that the members of Meshuggah are careful to temper with words any aspects of their artistic production or patterns of their fans' consumption which seem dangerously modernist.[145]

One of the reasons why it is particularly important to acknowledge this is because if the comments made in Meshuggah interviews are taken at face value, one can easily lose sight of the wide variety of Meshuggah's fans—and, as a result, the wide variety of aesthetics among metal audiences. In addition to the Swedish and German avant-garde audiences Hagström discussed above, Meshuggah has attracted numerous other listeners from a wide variety of backgrounds who are applying the "pure gaze" to metal:

> At the time, I did not listen to extreme metal, I was, so to speak, a real metal newbie, but I had always enjoyed the more complex and longer songs…This, coupled with my fascination for mathematics, made Meshuggah seem like a band worth checking out…is [*I*] repetitive? Not at all. The strange rhythms and time signatures will prompt you to find patterns.[146]

At the same time, the same fan above speaks of "a headbanging-friendly section" while others are concerned with the few moments in Meshuggah's *I* where fans will "be able to effectively headbang to without getting confused."[147] Remarks such as these indicate that fans are not only applying the "pure gaze" to Meshuggah, they are also concerned with function in addition to form.

[144] Johnson, "Editor's Introduction," 5; Sallaz and Zavisca, "Bourdieu in American Sociology," 24-25.

[145] Note, for example, the way Haake gives a balanced account of his fanbase: "We have a lot of musician fans, and a lot of fans that have a lot more of an interest in what we're doing from a technical aspect. That's all good, that's cool too. But it's not really a big effort on our side" (Haake, "Meshuggah [Interview]," by Justin Donnelly http://www.blistering.com/fastpage/fpengine.php/link/l/templateid/9348/tempidx/5/menuid/3 [accessed September 10, 2008]).

[146] sp3tt, "A True Masterpiece - 100%," January 9, 2007, http://www.metal-archives.com/review.php?id=48202 (accessed August 23, 2008).

[147] Ibid.; asmox, "Hail your metal overlords… - 100%," January 1, 2007, ibid.

This last point is an important part of my response to Lochhead's challenge regarding "postmodern musical practice[s]," raised at the beginning of this thesis. By presenting several conflicting aesthetic values throughout this chapter, and by showing how they can actively engage in conflict with one another, I have attempted to demonstrate that aesthetics among metal audiences are dynamic, varied, and fragmented. These audiences show a collage of contemplative and cathartic listening habits, of Romantic and Modernist values of rock authenticity, of "legitimate" and "popular" aesthetics—at times observable within a single review (e.g. pattern seeking and headbanging). Even if a significant percentage of (primarily North American) metal fans can be characterized by the categories of "blue collar," "working-class," and other labels which we encountered in chapter 1, I hope to have shown that there are many reasons why fans are drawn to metal other than the frustrations of the working class. The sometimes self-contradictory responses Meshuggah's band members have voiced during interviews indicate that they are quite aware of the postmodern pluralism of their fan base. Considering Meshuggah's increasing visibility in the metal scene, their ascent on the *Billboard* charts with the recent *obZen*, and the widening influence that their increasing popularity will bring to other metal bands, it seems essential that metal scholarship acknowledge it as well.

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Encyclopaedia Metallum: The Metal Archives; Message Board http://www.metal-archives.com/board/index.php (Accessed August 27, 2008).

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Official Meshuggah [Online Fan] Forum http://www.tandjent.com/meshforum/. (Accessed August 20, 2008).

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Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Music/**Obsidian's Un-Polyrhythm**

Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Music/**Official Catch 33 Thread**

Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Music/**The I Transcription Project**

Official Meshuggah Forum/Music Discussion/Other Bands/**So why is "Post-Metal" so popular here???**

Official Meshuggah Forum/Music Discussion/Polymetrics & Polyrhythms/**What's your favorite meter?**

Official Meshuggah Forum/Non-Music Discussion/Philosophy and Science

Official Meshuggah Forum/Non-Music Discussion/Politics and World Affairs

Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Talk/**Catch 33 - The Movie**

Official Meshuggah Forum/The Band/Meshuggah Talk/**Meshuggah Article in Music Theory Spectrum**