

Exploring the Superunknown: Composition and the
Music of Soundgarden

by

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Class of 2011

A thesis submitted to the
faculty of Wesleyan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Degree of Bachelor of Arts
with Departmental Honors in Music

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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Yonatan Malin, for guiding me through this endeavor; it is with his insight, guidance, advice, and support that this project was made possible. I would also like to thank Jane Alden and the other tremendous educators and staff of the Wesleyan University Music Department for giving me the tools and the mindset to approach this material and come away a more learned person.

Additionally, I want to extend endless thanks to all others who helped me with this project in any way, shape or form, especially Graham Richman, Sam Backer, Sandy Brough, Aaron Paige, Noel Garrett, and Dan St. Clair.

Last but not least, this project could not have come together without the unwavering support and love of my family. From brainstorming to editing and formatting, to helping me through rough patches, Mom, Dad, Allie, and Ava, I owe you more than I can say, and I could not have done this without you. And Cam, thank you for everything.

Introduction

If this isn't what you see, it doesn't make you blind
If this doesn't make you feel, it doesn't mean you've died

If this doesn't make you free, it doesn't mean you're tied
If this doesn't take you down, it doesn't mean you're high
If this doesn't make you smile, you don't have to cry
If this isn't making sense, it doesn't make it lies

Alive in the Superunknown
First it steals your mind
And then it steals your soul

- "Superunknown," *Superunknown*, 1994

* * *

On the title track from their 1994 album *Superunknown*, Soundgarden describe an elusive metaphysical state imbued with liminality and ambiguity, without ever explicitly telling the listener what the "superunknown" is. The idea of the 'superunknown' represents what 'grunge' was to many people: a massive musical and social phenomenon that caused the different people who responded to it, viewed it, loved it, hated it, understood it, and reflected on it to do so in widely varied ways. Grunge was different things to different people, and Soundgarden was no exception. As a hugely successful band that emerged from Seattle in the mid-1980s, but only achieved international notoriety in the early 1990s, they took a unique approach to grunge music, and to rock music more generally. The in depth musical analysis that is the focus of this paper shows how Soundgarden and their musical 'superunknown' evolved over the course of their career.

The major grunge bands shared a common musical style in their early years, due primarily to the nature of the local Seattle scene. When grunge as a genre began to outshine grunge as a musical style and local scene, these major bands started on divergent paths, growing and developing naturally towards their own musical goals. The unique way in which Soundgarden diverged from the early grunge sound was through an inward focus on composition that eventually led them towards increased complexity and flexibility in their compositional frameworks. Soundgarden took the same kernels of what made up early grunge and developed them differently; glimpses of the compositional complexities that would develop later in their music were present in their early songs, but as they continued as a band these characteristics became much more prominent.

Soundgarden, over the course of their career, developed uniquely flexible compositional approaches. Instead of metrical systems existing as rigid grids to which music must conform, for example, Soundgarden composed music that treated meter as a flexible system that they were able to modify and adapt as needed. As part of this, many of their songs employ multiple meters, moving among them or layering them on top of each other for different effects. The layering of meters and their interaction through time creates a kind of complexity that is rare in rock. The kind of complexity and flexibility present in their use of meter is evidence of a general compositional framework that applies to many aspects of their music. It is this complex and flexible compositional

framework that sets them apart from other grunge bands as they develop their own musical style over the course of their career.

What is 'grunge'?

Grunge is a musical style, a genre of music, and a local music scene, all of which emerged from the greater Seattle area in the mid-1980s, which broke into the national consciousness in the early 1990s, and dissolved into popular culture over the course of the decade. The complexity of this single descriptor lies in the relationship between its threefold definition and the inherent variance within it. Musical style, in this case, refers to aspects of the music itself, including form, instrumentation, timbre, tone, harmony, and other fundamental aspects of composition that contribute to how grunge sounds at the rawest level. Genre is a slightly more complicated descriptor that builds on aspects of musical style. In his detailed article on genre, Jim Samson defines it as “a class, type or category, sanctioned by convention,” stressing its role as an organizing and communicative principle that contains information about the music to which it is applied, information that is garnered through repetition of similar characteristics¹. In Western Art music, this may simply refer to common musical forms or common modes and arenas for production, depending on the narrowness of the genre at hand. However, in popular music, another layer complicates Samson’s primarily philosophical discussion: within the popular music sphere, genres are used by record companies to market a product,

¹ Jim Samson, “Genre,” Grove Music Online.

grouping together bands, albums, and songs that have similar appeal on some level, be it musical, geographical, or otherwise. In the case of grunge, the musical styles associated with certain bands labeled as grunge spread to other bands, that then through media and other sources became part of the 'grunge' genre. This is fundamentally different than their participation in the grunge scene, which was a specific musical phenomenon, localized in time and place. The grunge scene consists of a number of individuals with similar musical influences and interests and their musical and social interactions with each other, from playing in the same bands, and attending concerts at the same clubs, to becoming involved in other aspects of music production, such as start-up record companies, photographing concerts or making album artwork. The nature of 'grunge' as a scene clearly relates to the shared aspects of musical style, which also relates to the creation of the grunge genre by sources within and outside the original local community. In conceptualizing grunge and examining how Soundgarden fits into its many aspects, it is important to keep these three interrelated yet distinct facets in mind.

With the understanding that grunge is at once a style, a genre, and a localized musical scene, we return to the question 'what is grunge?' in search of more specificity. Allmusic's anonymous writer defines grunge first as a musical style that is exemplified by certain bands². S/He writes:

Using the sludgy, murky sound of the Stooges and Black Sabbath as a foundation, Grunge was a hybrid of heavy metal and punk. Though the guitars were straight from early '70s metal, the aesthetic of grunge was far from metal. Both the lyrical approach and musical attack of grunge

² Allmusic. "Explore: Grunge." AMG. Accessed April 12, 2011.

were adopted from punk, particularly the independent ideals of early '80s American hardcore. The first wave of grunge bands -- Green River, Mudhoney, Soundgarden -- were heavier than the second, which began with Nirvana. Nirvana was more melodic than their predecessors and they also had signature stop-start dynamics, which became a genre convention nearly as recognizable as fuzzy, distorted guitars. After Nirvana crossed over into the mainstream, grunge lost many of its independent and punk connections and became the most popular style of hard rock in the '90s.³

Although this description successfully interprets the musical influences that best characterize grunge as a musical style and accurately captures its relationship to the genre as a whole, it distorts the historical development of grunge as a local music scene by looking back on the music instead of tracing it from its origins.

This anonymous writer falls into the common trap encountered by many historians writing about grunge in the context of popular music, that is, favoring certain elements of grunge's multifaceted definition over others. The following overview of some of the significant literature on grunge highlights this trend.

In his "story of grunge," Kyle Anderson places grunge within the context of popular music history, the overlap between how music developed and how it relates to popular culture on the mass media scale⁴. Although he makes some intelligent and eloquent points about how grunge begot the heavy, guitar-driven rock that pervades rock radio stations today but utterly lacks the intricacies or idiosyncrasies that marked the famous grunge bands, like other scholars, Anderson blurs the lines between grunge as a musical style, a genre, and a scene, clumping all his cause and effect history under the same subheading of grunge while failing to differentiate between its different facets. Thus, his history fails

³ Ibid.

⁴ Kyle Anderson, *Accidental Revolution: The Story of Grunge*, (New York: St. Martin's, 2007).

to adequately capture the full impact of grunge, because it oversimplifies grunge to its impact on popular culture.

By contrast, Clinton Heylin, in his book *Babylon's Burning: From Punk to Grunge*, historically contextualizes grunge on the punk continuum, focusing on its production as a local music scene and the networks of bands, record labels, and other related actors integral to its development⁵. However, this leads to a highly one-sided view of the grunge scene, almost completely ignoring the bands integral to the scene who less embody punk aesthetics and ideology than their peers, Soundgarden chief among them. The superficial discussion of musical influences and how they were represented in the music made by Seattle bands only relates to aspects of punk; this evaluation supports the argument of the book but is incomplete in terms of a well-rounded overview of how grunge sounded.

Lastly, Joshua Clover's integration of grunge into the historical complexity of popular culture in his book *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This To Sing About* focuses primarily on Nirvana as the exemplar of the grunge genre⁶. The author contextualizes Nirvana within the punk continuum, in relation to other popular music of the day, and primarily in relation to itself, identifying Kurt Cobain as the pop culture icon that he truly was. However, despite his in depth use of lyrical analysis and historical to context explain Nirvana, he fails to explain of grunge as a whole. By using Nirvana, and Kurt Cobain, as the epitome of grunge, Clover

⁵ Clinton Heylin, *Babylon's Burning: From Punk to Grunge*, 596-615, (New York: Conogate, 2007).

⁶ Joshua Clover, *1989: Bob Dylan Didn't Have This To Sing About*, 73-91, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2009).

bases his conclusions about grunge as a genre on limited data, almost completely excluding other bands from his analysis.

Thus, most attempts to historically contextualize grunge have been overly teleological, grounded in an implicit knowledge that grunge was historically significant to music and to pop culture. This tendency is easy to understand because of grunge's eventual cultural impact and the clarity of hindsight, but it nonetheless distorts other understandings of how grunge actually came about and simplifies the multifaceted nature of 'grunge' as descriptor. Thus, most scholarly works fail to adequately take into account all three aspects of grunge—musical style, genre, musical style, and local scene—and instead focus on one above the others. Moreover, scholars have yet to define grunge in this threefold way, a distinction that is essential to untangling its separate musical and cultural impacts.

I offer a different history of grunge, focusing on its origins as a local music scene and how the musical style emerged from within it. This history is heavily indebted to Greg Prato, author of *Grunge Is Dead: The Oral History of Seattle Rock Music*⁷, who presents the history of grunge through the words of those who lived it. The history that follows is therefore primarily a critical summary of Prato's oral history, highlighting how Soundgarden fits in to the history of grunge as a whole.

⁷ Greg Prato, *Grunge Is Dead: The Oral History of Seattle Rock Music*, (Toronto: ECW Press, 2009).

The History: Grunge and Soundgarden

The local scene that came to be known as 'grunge' was in reality a group of friends and acquaintances growing up in the greater Seattle area, extending into Olympia and Aberdeen, sharing similar music tastes and playing in local bands together. Influenced by North American hardcore bands and inspired by punk shows, the beginnings of grunge emerged in the early and mid-1980s with local bands like The U-Men, The Fastbacks, and Mr. Epp. The scene was marked by an atmosphere of community, from the different members of bands who went to school together, to other contributors to the music scene, like photographer Charles Peterson and artist Art Chantry who both contributed album covers and other art to the visual aspects of the music scene. By the mid-'80s many of the now famous grunge bands started to emerge, including the Melvins, Green River, the Screaming Trees, Malfunkshun, and Soundgarden. In 1986, C/Z records put out the seminal *Deep Six* compilation to showcase the local talent, which laid down the groundwork for grunge as a musical style. The bands on the album—Green River, the Melvins, Skin Yard, Malfunkshun, Soundgarden, and The U-Men—had musical commonalities derived from their shared punk and metal backgrounds, most notably: loud, guitar driven sounds, use of noise as a major component, use of both fast punk tempos and slow, heavy tempos, and in some cases shifts in tempo, time signature, and rhythmic emphasis, as is exemplified by Green River's "10000 Things," and Skin Yard's "Throb." From these roots, the other major bands emerged: Green River split up, leaving its former members to form Mudhoney and Mother Love Bone, with former Malfunkshun singer

Andrew Wood, and Nirvana began as musical soul mates Kurt Cobain and Krist Novoselic bonded over a shared love of the Melvins. As bands continued to emerge and become popular, the scene developed other means to support them, namely the creation of the Sub Pop record label in 1988 by Jonathan Poneman and Bruce Pavitt. Thus, all the elements were in place for a powerful music scene, not just the bands themselves, but also an established sense of community between the bands and their fans, and as well as the systems needed for production, including Sub Pop and “go-to” record producer Jack Endino.

As the scene solidified, so did the musical similarities that came to make up ‘grunge’ as a musical style and, eventually, genre. According to Mudhoney guitarist Steve Turner, “It seemed like all the Seattle bands were starting to meet at some place. Soundgarden started out as one thing and were going this way; we started out as [another] thing; Melvins started out as something else [again]. I guess, everyone was starting to influence each other”⁸. Sharing record labels, musical influences, producers, live venues, a fan base, and being friends with one another created a metaphorical echo chamber that allowed musical ideas to flourish, but also to cross-pollinate. Although each band had unique features, especially with regards to their vocal styles and live performances, that they shared many other characteristics is not surprising given their shared roots. Soundgarden exhibited many of the same musical characteristics as their peers, aligning with and contributing the effect of a consistent Seattle sound.

⁸ Heylin, *Babylon’s Burning*, 606.

Soundgarden emerged from within the local Seattle scene in the mid-1980s. Lead guitarist Kim Thayil and founding bassist Hiro Yammamoto, who grew up together outside Chicago, were playing together in a bar band called The Shemps when they met lead singer Chris Cornell. The three began playing together when Yammamoto and Cornell were roommates and in need of a guitarist to round out their trio—Cornell doubled as drummer and vocalist at this time. After deciding to hire a drummer, Scott Sundquist, to free up Cornell for vocal duties, they played as a quartet with the name Soundgarden for a while before they decided to record. Sundquist eventually quit the band to pursue his family life, and was replaced by former Skin Yard drummer Matt Cameron. This lineup remained for Soundgarden’s formative years and their first two full-length albums. In addition to providing three songs to *Deep Six*, Soundgarden put out their first two EPs, 1987’s *Screaming Life* and 1988’s *FOPP*, on Sub Pop, before moving to SST for their first full length LP. *Ultramega OK*, released in 1988, captures Soundgarden’s punk and heavy metal roots while blending them with a sarcastic wit easily missed by an unobservant listener. Steve Huey describes the album as “the best expression of Soundgarden’s early, Stooges/MC5-meets-Zeppelin/Sabbath sound” and “a dark, murky, buzzing record that simultaneously subverts and pays tribute to heavy metal”⁹. Surprisingly, this unorthodox mixture of influences earned them a Grammy nomination for Best Metal Performance, even before ‘grunge’ became a common household item. Soundgarden’s other early album, 1989’s *Louder Than Love* was

⁹ Steve Huey, review of *Ultramega OK* by Soundgarden, Allmusic, AMG.

their first on A&M, making them the first grunge band to get signed by a major label. Although it received mediocre critical reviews¹⁰, the album does highlight Soundgarden's penchant for sludgy riffs, noise, and irony. These early albums and EPs form the beginning of Soundgarden's musical trajectory, which fits in with their contemporaries in the grunge scene.

Grunge truly emerged as its own genre in 1991, after Nirvana's second album, *Nevermind*, attained colossal success. In eagerness to profit from this unexpected shift in popular preference, record companies jumped at the opportunity to popularize any and all of the bands coming out of Seattle, or bands that simply sounded like those from the Seattle scene. It was in this opportunity for profit, coinciding with Nirvana's explosive popularity and their becoming a fixture in popular media, that grunge as a genre began to overpower grunge as a local scene, or even grunge as a musical style. The external forces of media and commercialism brought the now well-known grunge bands to the forefront of popular music. Pearl Jam, who emerged from the ashes of Mother Love Bone after singer Andrew Wood died of an overdose in 1990, released their debut album, *Ten*, in 1991, and Alice In Chains likewise released their debut, *Facelift*, in 1990 with great success. However, during the three-year period between Nirvana's appearance in popular consciousness and Kurt Cobain's suicide in 1994, the major grunge bands all diverged in their musical styles. Released from the echo chamber of the local Seattle scene, and straining against the external pressures attempting to portray grunge as a homogenized genre,

¹⁰ Steve Huey's review is one such example. (Steve Huey, review of *Badmotorfinger* by Soundgarden, Allmusic, AMG)

Nirvana, Alice in Chains, and Pearl Jam all pursued increasingly different musical goals. Pearl Jam, with their strong musical grounding in classic rock, maintained the energy and power of grunge but favored virtuosic and melodic guitar solos that were the antithesis of what the early grunge bands stood for. Alice In Chains perfected their heavy, sludgy sound on their sophomore album *Dirt*, released in 1992, and their music bearing the weight of the world was closely tied to personal struggles, including singer Layne Staley's ongoing battle with heroin abuse. Nirvana, caught up the pressures of international superstardom, explored harsher qualities on their third album, 1993's *In Utero*, in an intentional attempt to alienate some of their fan base and regain some sort of normalcy. Thus the grunge genre became marked by a hybridized mutation of original grunge elements. As faux-grunge bands from outside Seattle who attempted to replicate the musical style they heard in Seattle's most popular bands were made popular by record companies, the members of the original grunge scene who had broken through to the mainstream fought against the confines of this genre by subverting 'grunge' as a musical style and re-asserting the significance of the grunge scene by popularizing whatever music they, as grunge bands, decided to produce.

Soundgarden is no exception to this characterization, which is made clear in the musical developments on their third and fourth full-length albums. After recording *Louder Than Love*, bassist Hiro Yammamoto left the band on good terms, and was eventually replaced by Ben Shepherd. Shepherd was integral to the band's overall development, as evidenced by the growth in sound on their

third album, 1991's *Badmotorfinger*. Marketed as a metal album, it was commercially successful but was overshadowed by the overwhelming success of the other grunge albums of 1991: *Nevermind* and *Ten*. Steve Huey of Allmusic makes the point that the musical growth exemplified on *Badmotorfinger* showed more advanced songwriting, but also made it less accessible¹¹. He writes: "Not that it isn't melodic, but it also sounds twisted and gnarled, full of dissonant riffing, impossible time signatures, howling textural solos, and weird, droning tonalities. It's surprisingly cerebral and arty music for a band courting mainstream metal audiences, but it attacks with scientific precision"¹². Despite touring with metal act Guns'n'Roses to support the album, Soundgarden was able to establish a solid fan base interested in their kind of grunge that expanded further upon the release of *Superunknown* in 1994. *Superunknown* is widely considered to be Soundgarden's best album, a culmination of their combined songwriting abilities and musical explorations, well beyond the more straightforward blend of heavy metal, punk and hardcore from their early days. Steve Huey highlights the inclusion of pop and psychedelia as important additions to their "sonic palette," elements that effectively replace their "earlier punk influences" and yet mesh quite well with "their rapidly progressing mastery of songcraft"¹³. He goes on to offer a slight retrospective, placing *Superunknown* within the context of Soundgarden's previous albums. He writes:

The focused songwriting allows the band to stretch material out for grander effect, without sinking into the pointlessly drawn-out muck that

¹¹ Steve Huey, review of *Badmotorfinger* by Soundgarden, Allmusic, AMG.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Steve Huey, review of *Superunknown* by Soundgarden, Allmusic, AMG.

cluttered their early records. The dissonance and odd time signatures are still in force, though not as jarring or immediately obvious, which means that the album reveals more subtleties with each listen. It's obvious that *Superunknown* was consciously styled as a masterwork, and it fulfills every ambition.¹⁴

Huey's assessment of the album clearly places it at the height of Soundgarden's compositional arc, pushing beyond the constraints of the grunge genre to incorporate other influences and satisfy their own creative drives. However, it was while touring to support this album that Soundgarden heard of Kurt Cobain's suicide, and their and everyone else's careers changed.

After Kurt Cobain's death on April 5, 1994, grunge as we know it dissolved. The idea of grunge had become a household commodity during the three years in which Nirvana was popular, and after Cobain's death the ideas the media associated with grunge continued to integrate into popular culture. In the following years, many major grunge bands gasped their last breath: Alice In Chains released their eponymous third album in 1995, shortly before Layne Staley went into reclusion and the band ceased to exist; Screaming Trees put out their last album in 1996 before disbanding due to internal tensions, a path which Soundgarden also followed; Pearl Jam carried on, continuing to make music, but became more removed from grunge in its original form than ever. As the major grunge giants ceased to be, post-grunge proliferated, seeping onto the radio-waves in the form of straightforward hard rock with superficial elements in

¹⁴ Ibid.

common with grunge but lacking the emotional and musical depth that made true grunge so special¹⁵.

Soundgarden released their final album, *Down on the Upside*, in 1996, amidst internal pressure within the band and external confusion about the direction of alternative rock. The record is decidedly poppier in its sound, letting go of more of its heavy metal roots in favor of a softer acoustic-tinged numbers, a broader instrumentation that includes mandolins, and soaring vocal melodies that replace the pounding guitar riffs. Although they, as Allmusic's Stephen Thomas Erlewine puts it, "retained their ambitious song structures, neo-psychedelic guitar textures, and winding melodies,"¹⁶ the band dynamics were plagued with tensions about their musical direction. Notably, the composition process became more isolated, with band members bringing in songs almost complete, and Kim Thayil only contributed one song, "Never The Machine Forever," which clearly stands out from the rest of the album because of its metallic sheen. After months of strained touring to support the album, the band broke up due to collective dissatisfaction and individual unhappiness, leaving primarily on good terms. Although for years they all thought there would be no chance of a reunion, fans are lucky that fate had different plans, as Soundgarden played a few shows in 2010 and is currently going back to the studio in 2011.

¹⁵ Anderson, *Accidental Revolution*, 5.

¹⁶ Stephen Thomas Erlewine, review of *Down On The Upside* by Soundgarden, Allmusic, AMG.

Analytical Goals

In terms of musical analysis, little attention has been given to grunge specifically. The field of rock music analysis is growing and developing, and many debates about what direction it should be moving in are currently at play¹⁷. Since many grunge bands and singles broke through to the mainstream, they have become part of the popular music lexicon that is open for discussion by music scholars, and some grunge songs have been included in general analytical explorations about rock music¹⁸, or even more specific analyses about alternative rock music¹⁹. However, these scholars do not treat grunge as a specific music genre or style, and instead merely take the songs as examples from within the larger canon of rock music. Thus, little or no scholarly work has been done viewing grunge as an independent and organic musical style that grew from the Seattle scene.

In this paper I aim to reconceptualize grunge, using music analysis to separate it from the rest of the rock genre and treat it as its own entity. To capture the genre, style, and scene aspects of grunge in such depth is beyond the scope of this paper; therefore, I will focus on one band that has unique things to offer to the field of musical analysis. For the sake of musical analysis, grunge as a whole only provides the backdrop for understanding how Soundgarden developed as a band. This distinct vantage point affords a dramatically different

¹⁷ Allan F. Moore offers a discussion of different trends in rock music analysis in the first chapter of his book *Rock: The Primary Text: Developing A Musicology of Rock* (9-30).

¹⁸ Guy Capuzzo, "A Pedagogical Approach to Minor Pentatonic Riffs in Rock Music," *Journal of Music Pedagogy*, 23(2009), 45, 51.

¹⁹ Chris McDonald, "Exploring modal subdivisions in alternative music," *Popular Music*, 19(2000), 355-363.

view of grunge, focusing not on its importance to popular culture or popular media, nor on its significance to music history, but instead on its role in shaping the way Soundgarden sounded over time. Thus, the focus on trajectory from start to finish—instead of reflecting back on the past in search of answers to contemporary questions—allows us to listen to Soundgarden within the context of their peers and influences but treat them as an independent entity and analyze them as such.

The following chapters use musical analysis to show how Soundgarden developed complex and flexible compositional frameworks over the course of their career. The first chapter is a trajectory analysis, focusing on unusual meter as a single aspect of Soundgarden's composition and tracing how it emerged and changed over time. The second chapter is a snapshot analysis, looking at a single song, "The Day I Tried To Live," in depth to demonstrate how it captures complexity and flexibility in other compositional elements at a single moment in their career.

Developing Metrical Complexity and Flexibility

Soundgarden's musical style started out well within the boundaries of early grunge, and although kernels of what they developed into were present in their early work, it was nothing unusual compared to other grunge bands. After the local grunge scene began to dissolve and grunge became more the property of the national media than the bands themselves, Soundgarden focused more on their composition, developing increasingly complex and flexible compositional frameworks over the course of their career. Their treatment of meter, specifically unusual meter, is a prime example of this developmental arc.

Soundgarden's first two albums explore different techniques for dealing with unusual meter that are fairly elementary and rigid in their early stages, but these ways of thinking about meter lead directly to the more complex, refined work on their third, fourth and fifth studio albums. As Soundgarden become fully able to manipulate these techniques, to combine and to play with them, the flexibility and complexity intrinsic to the way they think about meter becomes clear.

Their music suggests that over the course of their career they came to grasp the idea that meter is layered, that different layers rise to the forefront of our perception in different ways and for different reasons. This idea is fundamentally complex because it allows meter to have multiple functions at once, but it also shows flexibility in their interpretive and compositional frameworks. In addition, meter is not a rigid grid that other musical elements must be fit into; instead, it is a flexible component that can be manipulated

however they choose. In the beginning, the way Soundgarden present meter is as something that can be altered, but not as a compositional element that is completely within their control. By the end, after a great deal of experimenting with these options, the techniques they use coalesce, creating an overall framework in which meter is just as complex and flexible as pitch, mode, and other elements of music.

The first examples of Soundgarden's conceptual approach to meter can be heard on the *Deep Six* compilation album, released in 1986. Both "Heretic" and "Tears to Forget" mix meters in somewhat unconventional ways. "Heretic" opens in 6/8—which is especially obvious on the *Deep Six* version in which you can hear Cameron counting off—but switches into 4/4 for the chorus (0:10). The perpetually alternating 6/8 verse and 4/4 chorus throws off the response of a typical listener, who in a live setting would most likely be head-banging and rocking out in time with the beat. "Tears to Forget" similarly mixes meters, but instead of alternating steadily between two standard meters, it simply drops and re-adds beats during a post-verse bridge section, creating an uneven, jolting feel (0:35, 1:30). The different uses of mixed meter in these songs form two important options for Soundgarden as they go on to develop their songwriting skills: consistently alternate meters in two sections, or insert sections of an unusual time signature where needed for some effect.

Soundgarden continued to expand their use of unusual meter on their first full-length studio album, *Ultramega OK*, released in 1988. Out of the 11 full-length songs, four feature unusual meters, marking the beginning this

compositional element's integration into their compositional frameworks. "Circle of Power" follows in the pathway carved out by "Tears to Forget" in which disconcerting sections of 5/4 are interspersed through the typically punk 4/4 meter. The punk influence, evidenced by the fast backbeat in the 4/4 sections, the quickly changing chords, the out of control vocals, and the distorted guitars, makes the 5/4 sections, unusual for the genre, stand out even more. Each eight bar section of 5/4 is further complicated by the guitar riff, which creates a pattern of 2+3+3+2 in eighth notes. Expressing the pattern in eighth notes, which gives an even number of 10 for the measure, shows that they have split the measure directly in half, forming a palindrome out of the hits²⁰. As shown in the example, only one guitar hit lands between the beats, creating the key moment that confuses the 5/4 meter (see Example 2.1). Moreover, layering four attacks on top of a five-pulse beat obscures the meter of the section, especially in conjunction with the 4/4 sections in which it is interspersed. The drum hits further this, playing minor hits on all beats and a major hit on the last beat of the measure, contributing to an unclear sense of where the measure begins and ends. All played at breakneck speed, the complexity of this small section is masked, leaving a listener with the feeling of confusion and an audience member lost in the lurch of the mosh pit. The techniques used here go

²⁰ I owe this kind of metrical analysis, which involves breaking down sections into sub-groups to look for different kinds of patterning, directly to Mark J. Butler and his work in *Unlocking The Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music*. See chapter 2, p. 82-85 for a more detailed discussion of how he explores this technique within standard, even meters (Mark Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 2006).

far beyond the basic punk template, showing early signs of the musical creativity displayed in Soundgarden's later albums.

Example 2.1: Symmetrical Hits in the 5/4 Section of "Circle of Power," (0:00, 1:19)

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Electric Guitar, Pulse, and Drum Set. The Electric Guitar part is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 5/4. It features a melodic line with a dotted quarter note followed by an eighth note, and a final measure with a dotted quarter note. Above the final measure, there are brackets indicating fingerings: a '2' over the first eighth note, a '3' over the next two eighth notes, another '3' over the next two eighth notes, and a '2' over the final eighth note. The Pulse part is in a bass clef with a 5/4 time signature, consisting of a series of eighth notes. The Drum Set part is in a bass clef with a 5/4 time signature, showing a pattern of eighth notes and rests, with a double bar line in the middle of the section.

The small bursts of odd time here are juxtaposed against the highly audible, heavy sections of 9/8 in "Beyond the Wheel." Like "Circle Of Power", the odd time sections in "Beyond the Wheel" are also inserted into a fully composed song to form a bridge section, providing contrast with the sludgy, pounding verse (1:52). Each bridge is introduced by dropping an eighth note from the preceding measure, such that the first measure of 9/8 seems almost even, as combined with the preceding measure of 7/8 it adds up to two full measures in 4/4. The 9/8 riff repeats three complete times plus 4 additional eighth note beats, temporarily establishing the odd meter, followed by a measure of 4/4. Interestingly, the riff itself could easily have been shortened into eight eighth note pulses by truncating the final note, turning it from a dotted quarter simply to a quarter note. This change would have made the meter more consistent (see Example 2.2). However, the unexpected switch to 9/8 by elongating the final note keeps this section more in tune with the overall feel of the song. The dotted

quarter length is the same as the opening note in the vocal rhythm of each line, a similarity that creates cohesiveness between sections. Furthermore, a shortened final note would have increased the sense of motion dramatically, completely undoing the work that the main riff did to achieve the feel of trudging through, of the futility of life mentioned in the lyrics. Thus the 9/8 meter over the bridge, although seemingly unnecessary, helps the song remain consistent.

Example 2.2: 9/8 Section of "Beyond the Wheel" with Alternative 4/4 Re-imagining, (1:50).

Original:



Re-imagining, to make the riff fit into 4/4:



Both songs discussed above use the method first explored on “Tears to Forget,” while remaining completely within the musical style of early grunge, albeit on opposite ends of the punk-metal spectrum. The sophistication of the metrical disturbances in these two examples is, in some ways, countered by their context; although they are well designed snippets of music, they are thrown into the songs in slightly haphazard ways, and lack the polishing and elegance of execution that comes out of Soundgarden’s later work. Another track, “He Didn’t” epitomizes the struggle in Soundgarden’s early years of exploring metrical subversions without allowing them to compromise the quality of their songwriting. After a brief intro in quick 6/8, the main riff enters in lengthy

10/4. Main hits on beats 3 and 6 conclude sets of three to give the feeling of triple meter, and the final four beats often have minor hits on beat 8 and beat 10 (see Example 2.3). However, drum fills often obscure these last two hits, to the point that the last four beats of each measure feel mostly undifferentiated. The guitar riff is in consistent eighth notes, moving mostly chromatically up and down, but combined with the undifferentiated last four beats and the endless chromatic motion, this riff creates the musical equivalent of a run-on sentence. Early drum hits on the solo section beg the question if this sloppiness was intentional for some purpose, but no apparent reason arises from the lyrics or from the context within the song or on the album, nor is it particularly in keeping with the general grunge aesthetic. Thus, this song makes the most sense as a failed experiment in unusual meter. Although this song is not one of Soundgarden's best, it provides an excellent basis for comparison for their works to come.

Example 2.3: Main Riff from "He Didn't," (0:14).

The musical notation for Example 2.3 consists of two staves. The top staff is for the Electric Guitar, written in treble clef with a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#) and a time signature of 10/4. The riff is composed of eighth notes. The first two measures each contain a triplet of three eighth notes, followed by a single eighth note. The third measure contains a group of four eighth notes. The bottom staff is for the Drum Set, written in bass clef with a time signature of 10/4. The drum part features a simple pattern of eighth notes with rests, corresponding to the guitar riff.

A new technique for dealing with meter emerges on Soundgarden's sophomore album, 1989's *Louder Than Love*. Two tracks, "Get on the Snake" and "I Awake," feature highly irregular meters, including unexpected momentary shifts that give the effect of adding and dropping beats as needed. "Get on the

"Snake" is particularly complicated. The main guitar riff is comprised of a descending line repeated twice with different rhythms (see Example 2.4). The riff, although it could be heard in evenly divided measures of 9/8, seems to be in alternating measures of 4/4 and 5/4, as demonstrated below. However, this meter is almost completely masked by the drums, which effectively play in 4/4 until they are about to be too out of sync with the guitars, at which point, after the first two measures of the verse, an additional beat is added to the drum part. This creates a sense that the emphasis shifts in the drumbeat, switching from the typical rock backbeat to a more traditional downbeat and back again, creating the highly unusual effect of having two downbeats consecutively. Even after this pattern has become consistent it gets broken apart, and when the guitar line changes and the drums must change in response (0:40). Thus the drum pattern is consistently reactionary, creating a system of constantly changing meter and emphasis that carve out moments of rhythmic suspension in which listeners cannot easily entrain to the beat and get caught in the jolting shifts.

Example 2.4: Irregularity in Verse from "Get On The Snake," (0:22).

The musical score for "Get On The Snake" (0:22) illustrates irregular meter changes. It consists of five staves: Guitar, Emphasis, Downbeat, Ld. Gtr., and Perc. The meter shifts between 4/4, 5/4, and 3/4. A "3X" marking is present above the guitar staff. The score shows a repeating pattern of three measures of 3/4 followed by one of 2/4 (0:43). The guitar riff is made up of a repeating mini-riff that takes three beats, followed by a slightly modified version that takes only two beats. The percussion part also shows irregular meter changes, with a 5/4 section in the second measure.

Likewise, "I Awake" shifts meters constantly, until it settles into a pattern of recurring sets of measures with different lengths. Although the song opens in 4/4, the chorus riff in 3/2 is immediately juxtaposed against the introduction. The verse, however, features a highly irregular pattern: three measures of 3/4 followed by one of 2/4 (0:43). The whole guitar riff is made up of a repeating mini-riff that takes three beats, followed by a slightly modified version that takes only two beats (see Example 2.5a); thus the pattern is easily altered by removing one of the repetitions, which results in metric compression on a larger scale. After four cycles of the full riff—taking eleven beats each—the riff is shortened into alternating sections of [3+3+2] and [3+3] (see Example 2.5b). This could be analyzed as measures of additive meter, first 11/4 and then 8/4. However, because the sets of beats that are removed function as individual entities it

makes more sense to view them as measures of their own, not independent and unassociated sets of beats. Although the pattern makes sense once it has been diagrammed, the effect for the listener is wholly unstable and illogical. Without knowledge of the song, the truncated patterns seem to come out of nowhere, and the listener cannot predict when it will occur and when it will not.

Example 2.5: Meter and Compression of the Verse Guitar Riff in "I Awake," (0:43).

a. 4X

b.

Note: The full verse is as follows; numbers refer to beats per measure and brackets delineate measure groups:
 [3, 3, 3, 3] [3, 3, 3, 2] [3, 3, 3, 2] [3, 3, 3, 2] [3, 3, 2] [3, 3] [3, 3, 2] [3, 3] [2].

It is this disorienting feature that characterizes Soundgarden’s first iterations of what I term metrical ‘additive phrasing’: grouping together measures with different numbers of beats to create larger phrases that may also be manipulated metrically. In a sense this goes back to the purpose of meter altogether, that is, a structured framework on which to organize the temporal perception of music through series of pulses at multiple levels. In the case of additive phrasing, however, the structure goes beyond the individual measures, combining them to create a larger framework of metrical patterns. For Soundgarden this is inextricably tied to their riffs, the fundamental building

blocks of their music, which therefore prescribe the time signatures that we superimpose on top of them. Thus, the main guitar riff in “I Awake” determines the metrical patterns, or additive phrases, that are repeated, skipped, and otherwise manipulated. It is important to note, however, the sloppiness of the additive phrasing in these early songs. Like the run-on melody in “He Didn’t,” the addition of extra beats in the drum part of “Get On The Snake” seems to have emerged from disorganized composition or a lack of communication between drummer and guitarist rather than tightly conceived, intentional use of additional pulses. In the case of “I Awake,” the additive phrasing is more clear and less convoluted, but remains nonetheless disorienting to the listener, rather than flowing fluidly from the interaction of guitar and drums. In later Soundgarden albums, these issues, whether intentionally or not, seem to be resolved.

In their first two albums, Soundgarden established a few primary ways of working with meter in an unusual fashion: consistently alternate between two or more set meters in a formally structured way; intersperse sections of an odd time into a song with a different meter in a more sporadic, less organized way; and create additive phrases of different measure lengths that combine to form one section of music. Each of these techniques were embedded in Soundgarden’s compositional lexicon during the creation of their first two albums, such that these techniques are fully integrated into their later work. It is through the combination and manipulation of these main options that Soundgarden go on to create the complex metrical landscape of their third,

fourth, and fifth studio albums. Moreover, as Soundgarden became more confident songwriters, bolstered by the addition of Ben Shepherd on bass, their ability to use these techniques became increasingly fluid and flexible.

“Rusty Cage,” the first track off of 1991’s *Badmotorfinger*, Soundgarden’s third studio album, is a prime example of their more advanced use of these techniques. The song is primarily in neck-throttling 4/4, with a strong punk backbeat and a rhythmic guitar riff that propels the song forward. The repetitious riff is broken up at the end of each chorus with a four beat break that adds dramatic tension. This break is led into by a measure of 5/4 and followed by a measure of 5/4 (1:09). By contrast, the second chorus ends with a measure of 6/4 instead of 5/4 (1:57); the beat-long extension lengthens the dramatic pause between sections and sets up the final section of the song, which likewise comes after the chorus²¹. The addition of extra beats is something seen in earlier Soundgarden songs, and here it merely adds to the diverse use of meter in “Rusty Cage.” The bridge sections also mix up time signatures slightly, with each repeated section consisting of two measures of 7/8 and two measures of 9/8 (2:16). The overall length of this section is normal, as if it were simply four bars of 4/4; however, internally it functions like additive meter in which uneven numbers of beats add up to create the whole. This true example of additive phrasing is subtle enough to be missed, since it does actually fit into an even four

²¹ Extending the break for an extra beat does not function as a change in time signature so much as an extension of the dramatic pause. These kinds of examples benefit from being non-notated music, written and learned mostly by ear, in which case the songwriters would only have to say ‘make this pause longer,’ instead of consciously acknowledging the change in time signature. These kinds of issues will be addressed further in the final chapter.

bar phrase, yet the seven and nine beat groupings lend the effect of slight syncopation. With such percussive guitar riffs, changing the metrical accents by changing the length of the measures is a successful way to add interest and depth to the music without changing or losing the driving force that propels the song forward. In this case, the guitar riffs determine the measure lengths, in keeping with the idea that the guitar riffs are the building blocks of the music; therefore in this example, each measure begins with a heavy chord on B or A. On previous albums, the compositional logic may or may not be apparent, but in this instance there is a highly logical, smart reason for such a design. The intentionality of these changes is not obvious, but the result, is. Given the form of the song up through this point, it seems that this is a more coherent use of additive phrasing. However, the next section of the song shows that Soundgarden has moved beyond just these simple examples and can use both straightforward and clean, and messy and complex iterations of the technique.

A five-second break in the song leaves the listener suspended between meter and tempo as the growling, stretching guitar and bass establish the main motifs of their riff. At this point we are thrown into a metrical confusion: two bars of $3/4$, followed by two bars of $5/4$ another bar of $3/4$ ²² (see Example 2.6). Leaving the listener off-balance, this riff is outlined by the guitar and bass and simply accompanied by the drums, instead of being driven by them. The drums emphasize the and-of-2, blurring the distinction between the measures in triple meter and those in compound $3 + 2$. This is a perfect example of a completely

²² An alternate way of hearing this passage would be as two bars of $3/4$ one bar of $5/4$ and one bar of $8/4$, adding up to a total cycle of 19 beat that makes up the phrase (see Example 2.6).

different use of additive phrasing than those earlier in the song. The metrically unstable combination of measures creates a repeating pattern that listeners can learn and grasp onto during the song. This section then becomes layered with vocals, which treat it as its own phrase, ignoring the metrical shifts beneath it.

Example 2.6: Additive Phrasing at the end of "Rusty Cage," (3:03).

The image shows musical notation for the end of the song "Rusty Cage". It consists of two staves: "Electric Guitar" and "Drum Set". The guitar staff is in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The drum set staff is in bass clef with a 3/4 time signature. The notation shows a sequence of measures with various time signatures (3/4, 5/4, 3/4) and a final measure with a '3' above it, indicating a 3/4 time signature. The drum set part shows a pattern of hits (marked with 'x') and rests.

Note: This is an approximation of the drum hits, disregarding fills.

This usage of additive phrasing is new to Soundgarden and to Soundgarden's fans. The placement of "Rusty Cage" as the first song on the album is significant in that the shift halfway through the song changes the listener's understanding. Any longtime Soundgarden fan would be familiar with the fast-paced and rhythmically unusual guitar riffs from the first half of the song, since they also characterize *Screaming Life*, *FOPP*, *Ultramega OK*, and most especially *Louder Than Love*. The sudden metrical shift in "Rusty Cage," however, is entirely new and unexpected. Opening the album *Badmotorfinger* with this distinct style introduces a new emphasis on even more extreme explorations into rhythmic and metrical abnormalities. The successful use of additive phrasing in the final section of the song is similar to the mixed meter examples from *Ultramega OK*, in which sections of a new time signature are interspersed randomly in a song, but the song also contains the additional

technique of applying a new meter to a specific section of the song within its construction. Combined with the other metrical tricks used to add depth to the listener's perception of rhythm in the song, "Rusty Cage" clearly exemplifies a more advanced use of the three techniques developed on Soundgarden's first two albums.

In addition to the advanced use of additive phrasing in "Rusty Cage," *Badmotorfinger* also contains the first examples of a meter mixture according to structured aspects of the form since 1986's "Heretic." In particular, "Outshined," the second track on the album, and "New Damage," the final track, make use of this technique. "Outshined" uses a 7/4 meter for the verses and a standard 4/4 for the choruses, establishing a pattern of alternating odd-time verses with 4/4 choruses that lasts over Soundgarden's career. After the irregularity of "Rusty Cage," "Outshined"'s 7/4 meter feels even and stable, even though it is uncommon in rock music. Unlike the previously discussed songs, there is little syncopation meant to confuse the listener; instead, the drums heavily define the downbeats of the measure, and the bass and vocals reinforce the guitar riffs. The overall effect is a clear, definitive illustration of the 7/4 meter. Here, the odd meter is not being used as a tool to cause rhythmic ambiguity; rather, it is the point itself. Thus it is fitting that the song flows easily from 7/4 to 4/4 for the pre-chorus and chorus, placing emphasis on the and-of-2. In the pre-chorus, this is when the chord changes, providing harmonic emphasis, and Cameron continues to emphasize this beat throughout. The straightforward 4/4 chorus utilizes the same heavy downbeats, and here the vocals mimic the guitar and

bass riffs for a powerfully united impact. The chorus closes with one bar of 7/4 under the repeated “outshined/outshined” to lead back into the verse. However, the transition is made smoothly by breaking the measure into 2+2+2+1, as the drums emphasize, or if heard in 14/8, into 3+3+3+3+2 as the guitar riff plays. This transition is eased because the subdivisions minimize the difference between the 4/4 and 7/4 meters; breaking up the measure to feel like 2/4 means that they are adding an extra beat, instead of subtracting a beat from a second measure of 4 or adding three whole beats to get a full measure of 7. In fact the close relationship between the subdivided 7/4 and the 4/4 of the chorus is made explicit in the last chorus, when the rhythm section plays the transitional riff underneath the regular chorus vocals (4:40).

Like “Outshined,” “New Damage” uses different meters to go with different sections of the song, creating a—mostly—clear division of odd and even meters. The verse is in a heavy 9/8, which is divided into 2+2+2+2+1, rather than compound triple. The drum hits that make this pattern clear create a sense of even time within the odd meter, making it as close to even as possible while including the final beat. This occurs in most Soundgarden songs in odd times like 5, 7, and 9²³. The heavy verse flows easily into the chorus, which is in 4/8. Although this time signature is highly uncommon, it best represents the song, which keeps the pulses at the same tempo from the 9/8 sections but has a

²³ Mark Butler describes this phenomenon as “maximal evenness,” that is, in this case, the maximally even distribution of five attacks among nine beats. His discussion is primarily among Electronic Dance Music, in which most meters are even—generally 4/4 of some nature—but it is helpful to think about in this context. In “New Damage,” Soundgarden opt for a maximally even distribution of beats that is still asymmetrical, to borrow again from Butler’s terminology, instead of a maximally even distribution that results in perfectly even groupings of three beats, which would simply be compound triple meter. (Butler, *Unlocking the Groove*, 83-85.)

harmonic rhythm of one chord per measure. The chorus feels strongly in 4, back to what we as listeners are familiar with, and is contrasted against the verses' 'almost'-evenness. The bridge section (2:24) is more complicated: it opens with three-and-a-half measures of 6/8, which completely changes the feel of the song by switching from mostly duple to compound triple. This is brief, however, as the solo section enters in (2:34). Leading into the solo, which is in 9/8, are two measures, one of 8/8 and one of 10/8. Together, they add up to two measures of the song's standard 9/8, but the uneven division adds more interest, like the examples in post-chorus break of "Rusty Cage."

Both "Outshined" and "New Damage" are less complex than the additive phrasing used in "Rusty Cage," yet they demonstrate an important aspect of Soundgarden's development: the trend in favor of cleaner, more precise use of metrical complexity. That each section of the song has a different meter associated with it is an important step beyond the sporadic interjection of odd-time sections used in "Circle of Power," and the intelligent and reasonable instances of dropped and added beats are far beyond the seemingly random chaos of "Tears to Forget" or even "I Awake." As Soundgarden master the techniques they explored on their earlier albums, they become more able to combine them, creating an overall more diverse metrical landscape that moves them more towards the flexibility they eventually achieve in their compositional frameworks. Combined with the eloquent yet rocking use of additive phrasing on "Rusty Cage," these songs taken as a whole show clear development that is

consistent with the stylistic changes on *Badmotorfinger* discussed in the Introduction.

Superunknown marks incredible growth and development in almost all aspects of Soundgarden's songwriting, and the metrical characteristics are wholly included. Eight of the fifteen tracks make use of unusual meters, most of which go far beyond the templates established on *Badmotorfinger*. "The Day I Tried To Live" clearly and definitively combines additive phrasing of unusual meters with standard time, juxtaposing these elements formally according to section of the song. After a twelve-bar introduction at slow-tempo 4/4, the verse begins its consistent additive phrase: alternating measures of 7/4 and 8/4 at a quicker tempo (0:33). The two measures of these durations are clearly delineated by the guitar line, which features sequence-like repetitions, and by the vocal phrasing, which spans one lyrical phrase across each measure (see Example 2.7). Thus the verse does not feel like it is in sections of 15, nor does it feel like groups of 4 with a beat dropped part way through. Furthermore, drum hits divide the measures further, as they would a common time measure on either a downbeat or a backbeat, in this case with snare hits on beats 3 and 7 in both measures. This is very different from the subdivisions in the previous use of 7/4, such as in "Outshined" which shapes the emphasis as close to a standard backbeat as possible. Instead, the hits on 3 and 7 emphasize the jerkiness of the non-repeating metrical pattern by creating groups of eighth notes in this manner: 3 + 4 + 3 + 4 + 1. The form of the song uses each set of measures—one of 7 and one of 8—as an individual set, repeating it two or four times to fit with

the lyrics and the melodic phrasing. This clear cut example of additive phrasing is contrasted with the straightforward 4/4 chorus, which lasts for 10 bars, followed by set of the additive phrase, adding up to a 12 bar total chorus. Although this length is unusual, the final two measures have almost the same duration as four measures of 4/4, since the tempos are the same, which approximates for the listener the perception of 16 bars within the metrical context of uneven phrasing. The definitive use of additive phrasing, smoothly alternated with the sections of 4/4 and integrated into the overall form combines the developments achieved on *Badmotorfinger* and takes them further by putting them together.

Example 2.7: Vocal Phrasing in the Verse of "The Day I Tried To Live," (0:46).

Vocals

I woke the same as a-ny o - ther day ex-cept a voice was in my head

“Spoonman,” one of the top singles from the album, also provides an advanced use of additive phrasing by combining 7/4 and 8/4 measures and juxtaposing them against a standard 4/4 time signature, albeit in a very different way from “The Day I Tried to Live”. Moreover, the song shows growth and development because of the characteristics of the 7/4 sections, in addition to their combination with other meters. The main riff from the song is in heavy 7/4, first established in the introduction. For the verses, it alternates with an 8 beat pause filled with call and response vocals, syncopated to obscure the main pulses. This takes on the new meter, integrating the riff with other vocal

elements, and is repeated throughout the verse. The uneven verses are contrasted with the stable 4/4 chorus, the two of which consistently alternate in standard verse-chorus form (see Appendix A, Table 1). Two other sections, the pre-solo bridge and the drum breakdown, use measures of other lengths, the former alternating measures of 2/4 with 4/4, and the later moving to 3/4 with a 6/8 feel before it switches back to 4/4 when the bass enters. This list of all the different measure lengths alone shows that Soundgarden developed more ability to move between different meters, and in a fluid manner that integrates them without the harsh jolting feel that characterized earlier albums.

The true marker of the complexity of this song, however, is the details within the unusual meters. The introduction to “Spoonman” highlights the descending riff accompanied by embellishing percussion that only plays on lower levels of metrical priority²⁴, leaving the listener lost in the rhythm and without a clear sense of the meter. In addition to the lack of pulse-establishing drums, the main guitar riff is responsible for this uneasiness, in that it contains an even subdivision of four attacks across three beats (4:3) inserted within the riff (see Example 2.8). The string of four dotted-quarter notes gives the impression that each dotted-quarter is actually the pulse, instead of a single quarter note, which makes it difficult to determine where the pulse actually is. It is not until the major drum hits enter in the verse that the listener is able to

²⁴ This terminology is borrowed from David Temperley’s discussion of Lerdahl and Jackendoff’s theory of metrical perception. Lerdahl and Jackendoff conceive of meter as consisting of multiple layers of beats, spaced out in time, with those at higher levels given more priority in our listening. Thus, in traditional 6/8 meter, the first beat is of primary importance, the fourth beat is of secondary importance, and those in between are less important. (David Temperley, “Syncope in Rock: A Perceptual Perspective,” *Popular Music*, 18(1999), 23-25.)

clearly grasp the meter (0:23). Although the 7/4 meter of the main riff is uncommon in rock music, it feels fairly stable, thanks to drum hits that emphasize the 2, 4, 6 and and-of-7 in an almost-offbeat pattern that is as close to a typical rock backbeat as possible while maintaining the 7 beats per measure. These hits form a symmetrical pattern, which is fairly unique, of 3+4+4+3 eighth notes, with the hits landing on the last eighth of each set in keeping with the backbeat style. Unlike the symmetrical pattern in "Circle of Power," these drum patterns serve to create a steadiness against the jolting and unsteady guitar riffs. However, these drum hits show the highly syncopated nature of the main riff, with its string of four dotted eighth notes bridging across the beat. This in part explains why it is only in the verse that we can begin to fully grasp the meter of the riff. Extrapolating on David Temperley's theory that syncopation reinforces an existing meter by allowing us to perceive it in contrast to an underlying deep metric structure, it is the space created by such definitive syncopation that allows us to interpret the surface structure and deep structure as such; we can perceive the events as separate and particular as opposed to joined on the same temporal scale²⁵. This is evidenced by the final refrains of "Spoonman" where Cameron introduces a woodblock hit on the 'and' of every beat, even further articulating the powerful 7/4 against the syncopated riff (3:39). The now completely established interaction between the guitar's 'surface' structure and the drums' 'deep' structure is reiterated with a simple addition to the drum part.

²⁵ Temperley, "Syncopation in Rock," 26-30.

Example 2.8: Metric Ambiguity in the Main Riff from "Spoonman," (0:00).

The image shows two staves of music. The top staff is labeled 'Guitar' and is in 7/4 time. It features a melodic line with a syncopated rhythm. The first measure contains seven sixteenth notes, followed by an eighth note that divides the measure in two. The second measure contains a quarter note, followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a quarter note. The third measure contains a quarter note, followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a quarter note. The fourth measure contains a quarter note, followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a quarter note. The fifth measure contains a quarter note, followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a quarter note. The sixth measure contains a quarter note, followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a quarter note. The seventh measure contains a quarter note, followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a quarter note. The eighth measure contains a quarter note, followed by a dotted quarter note, and then a quarter note. The bottom staff is labeled 'Pulse' and is in 7/4 time. It features a steady, even drumming pattern of seven quarter notes.

The chorus riff, which is in 4/4, also contains syncopation. At first the guitar plays evenly in sixteenth notes, until the string is interrupted by an eighth note duration that divides the measure in two (see Example 2.9). Preceded by seven sixteenth notes, this moment obscures the 4/4 meter by coming too soon; although the quarter beat 3 is at the exact halfway mark temporally, tying these two sixteenths together creates a symmetrical pattern of 7+2+7. The last two sixteenths of the measure are tied together, but this does not retroactively change our perception of the syncopation earlier in the measure. Thus, in subtle ways, Soundgarden is making guitar riffs in odd-time measures more even through drumming and making even drumming in even-time measures more uneven through syncopated guitar riffs. That both of these examples are within the same song shows mastery of syncopation in a way that was not present in their earlier work. Moreover, that this kind of syncopation is embedded within additive phrasing marks a step in their development that coincides with greater stylistic changes.

Example 2.9: Symmetry in the Chorus Riff from "Spoonman," (0:43).



A third song from the album, “Limo Wreck,” exemplifies the metrical flexibility that Soundgarden attained at this point in their career. Although the song does not feature the compositional elements we have discussed this far—alternating meters, additive phrasing—it nonetheless is integral to a discussion of how Soundgarden use meter in their songs. The important feature in most standard definitions of Western theories of compound meter is the number of *groups* into which beats are divided; however, for Soundgarden, this number seems secondary to the number of *beats* per group, and “Limo Wreck” is a perfect example. The song opens in standard 6/8, for four bars, establishing our sense of what we expect to come next. Then it moves to a combination meter that is similar to additive phrasing. Because we have just heard a section of 6/8 we hear the next 15 beats as either two bars of 6/8 and one of 3/8, or one bar of 6/8 and one bar of 9/8. The bass line makes the second option more plausible as it emphasizes beats 1,4, 7 and 10, but not 13 (see Example 2.10). It seems, then, that the second measure of 6/8 is extended for another three beats, stretched for musical emphasis, and the lack of melodic differentiation contributes to this feeling of being pulled.

Example 2.10: Pre-Verse Riff from "Limo Wreck," (0:10).



The verse and chorus sections use a slightly different variation on this metric scheme. While remaining in some kind of compound triple that lasts for 15 beats total, it is less clear what the differentiations are. Unlike the previous section in which the bass line did not differentiate on beat 13, both the guitar and bass parts change chords for the last set of three beats in the verse and chorus, which raises questions about how to divide the section (see Example 2.11). It could still be 6/8 then 9/8, it could still be 6/8, 6/8 then 3/8, but there are no logical justifications for either time signature. Here, the lower level beats, those in sets of three, become almost secondary to the higher level beats that divide the section into 5, such that it is almost like some kind of measure of 5, with each beat being a dotted-quarter note. The downbeats on 1, 4, 7, 10, and 13 are so strong here that they almost eclipse the other beats and become the sole beats themselves. Interestingly, there are instances in which the measures are extended by three eighths or one dotted quarter, such as at the end of the first chorus (2:15) and before the final set of choruses (4:44) or even by six eighths or two dotted quarters, like at the end of the second chorus (3:47). These extensions, mostly for musically emphasis, flow smoothly from section to section, which strengthens the idea that for Soundgarden what matters is not the number of sections of beats, but how many beats are in each section. Since each extension is the same length they feel fluid instead of harsh. Moreover, during a

complicated meters on the chorus of “Dusty” in contrast to the straightforward 4/4 verse, and the coincidence of an additional bar of 2/4 with an important chord change on “Applebite” (1:02). However, “Switch Opens” epitomizes the complex and flexible use of meter on *Down On The Upside* due to its layering of different meters. The song opens with four bars of 4/4 but quickly transitions into the layered and complicated verse, which I have transcribed in 8/4 (see Example 2.12). Despite the standard-feeling meter, the guitar line is comprised of sets of two eighth notes separated by an eighth rest to create sets of three eighths, while the drum beat pounds out a 3+3+2 pattern in quarter notes. This means that the snare hits land alternately on the first note of the guitar pattern or on the rest. The vocal pattern is also divided into sets of threes, with each attack lasting a dotted quarter note. However, the vocal line begins on the sixth beat of the first measure, and continues through the second, spanning eleven beats—ignoring embellishing extensions at the end—with eight attacks. Thus although the meter adds up to 8 beats in total, none of the parts are playing in phrases that feel an 8, or even a 4, beat pulse. The flexibility demonstrated in “Limo Wreck” with the different layers of metric perception in sets of three here reappears as control over metric perception of different durations, with lengths of dotted-quarters, dotted-halves, spans of 3+3+2 beats, and spans of 11 beats. In the context of this analysis, this song seems to represent a condensed additive phrasing, which instead of having different meters joined sequentially, layers the meters on top of each other to form polymetric phrasing. This is not exactly a polymeter, since each part fits into the integrity of the 8/4 superstructure and

with the drum articulated each beat as a downbeat the other parts fit in as syncopation. Instead, the concept of polymetric phrasing seems to be Soundgarden’s evolved use of the techniques acquired through additive phrasing and syncopation, combined to create a complicated and unique metrical landscape.

Example 2.12: Metrical Textures in Verse from "Switch Opens," (0:25).

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Guitar, Vocals, and Drum Set. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 8/4. The Guitar part consists of two measures of music. The Vocals part has two measures with the lyrics "Hey you slaves go hang your own - ers". The Drum Set part shows a complex rhythmic pattern with brackets underneath indicating groupings of 3, 3, 2, 3, 3, and 2 eighth notes.

“Switch Opens” features other metrical changes in keeping with Soundgarden’s compositional frameworks, namely switching in and out of other unusual meters. The chorus of the song is in 13/8, a meter that they do not use in any other song (0:59). Unlike many of their other odd times, like “Outshined” or “New Damage”, this section is not divided as evenly as possible to create an almost backbeat effect, nor is it divided into symmetrical sections, like in “Circle of Power” or “Spoonman”. Instead, there are major drum hits on 1 and 4, with increasingly minor hits on 9 and 12, creating a pattern of 3+5+3+2 (see Example 2.13). This could be heard as 8 +5, but because the last two drum hits give the effect of fills more than defining the beat, the whole section stays cohesive. After the chorus and a filler measure of 7/4, there is a post-chorus section in 3/4

(1:31). The guitar line is divided into sets of three eighth notes, but because of a half-beat anacrusis, our sense of the downbeat is distorted (see Example 2.14). This continues for 5 bars until the pattern is broken by a variation measure of 5/4. Following the second chorus, this measure is extended to 6/4, adding drama to the final iteration of that section (3:01). To further complicate our hearing of this section, there is a repeating vocal pattern on top that consists of three eighth notes and an eighth rest, with the lyrics “switch is on”, that creates a polyrhythm on top of the 3/4 meter and the guitar pattern subdivision (see Example 2.14). Combined with the reverb used to on the vocals, the overall effect is to obfuscate the meter but leave a wash of sound, an emotional effect that is beyond that of the uneasiness or instability achieved by the harsh jolts of other metrical tactics used in earlier songs.

Example 2.13: Chorus Riff from "Switch Opens," (0:59).

Guitar 

Example 2.14: Metrical Textures in the Post-Chorus from "Switch Opens," (1:31).

Vocals 
 Guitar 
 Voice 


The complex layering of metrical textures on “Switch Opens” represents the end of Soundgarden’s developmental trajectory that began with haphazard sections of mixed meter in their first few releases during 1986. The course of their development shows not only their divergence from the early grunge sound, but more centrally the complex and flexible way of thinking about music intrinsic to their style of composition. With an understanding of how they achieved the kind of compositional frameworks their music embodies with regards to unusual meter by the end of their career, one can move forward to study how these frameworks are significant in other elements of their music.

Shifting and Emotion in “The Day I Tried To Live”

I’ve already discussed how Soundgarden developed a complex and flexible framework of composition with regards to meter over the course of their career. This chapter shows how they use similarly complex and flexible frameworks of composition that encapsulate multiple musical elements beyond simply meter within a single song. In this example, the way in which the different elements that function as themes, both musical and lyrical, are combined, reorganized, and layered is what makes the song powerful and successful.

* * *

Complexity and flexibility are deeply embedded in the compositional framework of “The Day I Tried To Live,” a pivotal song in Soundgarden’s repertoire from their broad-minded fourth studio album, 1994’s *Superunknown*. This song was written at the peak of Soundgarden’s collaborative songwriting, which is reflected in the compositional techniques they used to build musical and textual complexity. Distinguishing Soundgarden’s composition from that of other grunge bands, “The Day I Tried To Live” interweaves vocals and guitars to create an environment of shifting harmonies and meters, achieving both intricacy and emotional power. The use of additive phrasing, alternating measures of 7/4 and 8/4 during the verse, was discussed in Chapter 2, and although it contributes to the feeling of instability in the song, it is not among the primary musical elements that convey the emotional qualities of the song. In

a Rolling Stone review of the album, J.D. Considine writes, “it’s that ability to evoke the emotional life beneath these melodies that keeps the group from coming across as just another heavy guitar act”²⁶. The emotional intensity that Considine identifies as an essential feature of the album develops in “The Day I Tried To Live” through an interaction between the lyrics and the music, which are connected in a structured system of shifts and juxtapositions of harmony, meter and lyrical emphasis. Intentionally disrupting the listener’s expectations creates a sense of harmonic and rhythmic instability that enhances the emotional content of the lyrics. Thus, Soundgarden’s use of shifting on multiple levels gives their music in general, and this song in particular, a compositional framework that is both complex and flexible, allowing for the use of discrete musical themes in unexpected ways that are both freethinking and unique.

In “The Day I Tried To Live,” there are shifts within musical lines as themes move between major and minor modes, and there are shifts among musical themes as they are organized and reorganized into different combinations. Furthermore, these kinds of changes are paralleled by shifts within the lyrical content of the song, which represent a diametric tension between trying and failing, between realizing one’s potential and accepting one’s fate (see Appendix B for complete lyrics). What makes this song both powerful and musically successful is that the complexity and flexibility of the composition are reflected and emphasized by the lyrics such that the musical and textual

²⁶ J.D. Considine, review of *Superunknown* by Soundgarden. *Rolling Stone*. January 31, 1997, accessed online.

elements become a mutually reinforcing system, drawing the listener into the emotionally charged world of the speaker's mind.

Complexity and flexibility are both immediately evident in the harmonic makeup of musical themes that comprise "The Day I Tried To Live." The main themes of the song are built on the edge of E major and E minor, teetering precariously between the two (see Appendix B, Table 1 for a list of themes). The distinguishing pitches that differentiate between the two modes — scale degrees three, six, and seven— are constantly alternating between their major and minor counterparts, often multiple times within a given theme. Even within a phrase or musical fragment there may be both major and minor components, causing the modality to feel unstable. For example, the first theme in the introduction opens with D, from the E minor scale, moves through a chromatic passing tone of C# to B and D, before going to G#, the third scale degree of E major. Therefore, even though the minor third between B and D outlines the minor v of E minor, the G# in the next measure suggests an E major harmony. The bass notes, first B then E strengthen this impression (see Example 3.1).

Example 3.1: Theme 1 from Introduction of "The Day I Tried To Live," (0:00).



The vocal melodies of the verse function similarly, working within major harmonies at one moment and minor the next. The first phrase of the vocal

melody, “I woke today”, comes purely from E major, floating around the E major triad with the addition of the major 6th, C#, at the top. The next measure shifts to E minor, emphasizing the minor third, G natural, in a descending line with F# and E, before the next measure returns to the first phrase (see Example 3.2).

Example 3.2: Theme 3, Vocal Melody from Verse of "The Day I Tried To Live," (0:46).



The guitar lines in the verse also exemplify the shifting modes of the song. The main guitar riff, Theme 2a, is comprised of a repeating sequence built on a descending chromatic scale with certain notes highlighted through repetition (see Example 3.3). Although the chromatic scale obfuscates any major or minor quality, the repeated notes emphasize significant pitches to form a descending A minor triad, the iv chord from E minor. As shown in the example, the second two repeated pitches, C natural and A, occur in the second measure, such that the despite the chromatic context, the second measure still has a prominent feeling of minor mode. Furthermore, when the power chords²⁷ add an interval of a fifth above this guitar line, a descending E minor triad intensifies the A minor triad, emphasizing the minor quality of the second measure of the riff since the C5 chord contains a G natural from the E minor scale. This adds to the E minor quality and is in keeping with the major and minor shifts of the vocal melody

²⁷ Power chords are guitarists’ term to describe a chord made up of scale degrees 1 and 5, with the first scale degree doubled by the octave. They are written with a ‘5’, such as E5 or A5. Their defining characteristic is the lack of a third, which makes them neither major nor minor in mode. The term ‘power chord’ comes from their versatile usage, but also from their powerful sound.

that goes with this guitar line. It is worth noting, however, that Theme 2a is unstable in its own harmonic shifts from major to minor, but it remains solidly within the key of E, and its repetitions provide a different kind of stability that allow it to function effectively in the verse.

Example 3.3: Theme 2a, Main Verse Guitar Riff with Harmonic Reduction from "The Day I Tried To Live," (0:46).



however, it goes to C natural, which is the submediant of E minor and the \flat VI of E major. As listeners, we do not expect either aspect of this deceptive progression, but the shift to minor and the upward half step from B to C natural that goes with it particularly intensifies our sense of suspense and tension within the music. Combined with the lyrics—“One more time around/might make it”—this harmony can be heard as a hopeful gasp, in which the upward motion of the melody mimics the quick intake of air upon realizing there may still be a chance and the harmonic tension is turned into positive anticipation by the lyrical content. The second half of the progression moves firmly back into E major, which sets up the repeat of the progression and our repeated deception. The major-minor shifts within the chorus contribute to an emotional climate of hope and optimism that play significantly into the interpretation of the song during its climactic moments.

Example 3.4: Themes 4a and b, Vocal Call and Response from Chorus of "The Day I Tried To Live," (1:40).

The image shows two staves of music in 4/4 time, key of E major (indicated by three sharps: F#, C#, G#). The top staff, labeled 'Call', contains the melody for the phrase 'one more time a-round one more time a-round'. The bottom staff, labeled 'Response', contains the melody for the phrase 'might do it might make it'. The lyrics are written below the notes on both staves.

The final musical theme of the chorus, Theme 2b, is the first riff to move beyond an E tonal center: it is a sequence of the main verse theme that begins on C#, the sixth scale degree of E major, and ends on F#, the second scale degree of both E major and E minor (see Example 3.5). Preceded by E and B chords, the progression outlines a descending F# minor triad, the ii of E major. This is in

keeping with the overall harmonic movement that returns to the tonic in the verse, and forms a conclusive step harmonically and melodically. The ii-I harmonic motion is delineated by the scalar line, descending chromatically at first, but then making the diatonic step from F# to E, from second scale degree to first, which brings us full circle back to where we started. As the last musical theme of the chorus, this riff concludes the chorus, transitioning back to the verse; however, it maintains its melodic integrity but is reorganized structurally later in the song to achieve a dramatically different effect.

Example 3.5: Theme 2b, Sequence of Main Verse Riff from Chorus and Climax of "The Day I Tried To Live," (1:59, 3:39).



The music’s unsettled nature driven by the constant shifting between modes, with measures of major and minor contrasted within musical themes, is mirrored in the verse lyrics as the speaker grapples with his sense of self. The verses juxtapose seemingly opposed ideas that are deeply embedded with a sense of wrongness, a vague understanding that things are not as they should be. In the first verse, this consists of the idea of waking “the same as any other day/ except a voice was in my head”, which makes this day fundamentally different from all other days. The voice goes on to encourage the speaker to commit vague atrocities—“pull the trigger/drop the blade/and watch the rolling heads”—under the guise of “seiz[ing] the day,” a traditionally positive statement. Likewise, the second verse continues to contrast opposing ideas in a

way that exemplifies the tension between trying and failing, between realizing one's potential and accepting one's miserable fate. He sings: "words you say/ never seem to live up to the ones inside your head/ lives we make/ never seem to ever get us anywhere but dead." The second verse is fundamentally hopeless, and contrasted with the first verse, we as listeners are unsure whether this hopelessness is the cause or the effect of the encouragement of the voices in the speaker's head. Juxtaposing opposites is a common element in many of Cornell's lyrics²⁸, but in "The Day I Tried To Live" melodic and harmonic shifts between major and minor are used to mirror shifts in the lyrics, making manifest the speaker's sense of conflict. This makes the lyrics more powerful and gives them more emotional weight. As a result, the listener feels the convoluted pain of the speaker more intensely.

In addition to the contradictions within the lines of each stanza, the overall tone of each section contrasts with the others. The second halves of both verses exemplify the wrongness the speaker is experiencing, as he sings first "I stole a thousand beggars' change/ and gave it to the rich," then "I wallowed in the blood and mud/ with all the other pigs." Themes of evil and baseness pervade the speaker's self-image, validating his hopelessness during the verses. This makes the hopeful choruses a complete change in tone to the polar opposite emotion in which the speaker is still trying to succeed, still trying to realize his

²⁸ Examples of this include: "I'm looking California, but I'm feeling Minnesota" and "I can't get any lower, still I feel I'm sinking" from "Outshined", as well as "what you wanted to see good has made you blind/ and what you wanted to be yours, has made it mine/ so don't you lock up something that you wanted to see fly/ hands are for shaking, no not tying" from "Fell On Black Days."

potential. The chorus lyrics repeat: “one more time around/ might do it/ one more time around/ might make it” over and over. As previously discussed, the shifting harmonies beneath the lyrics strengthen the hopefulness of the chorus by heightening our sense of anticipation and by creating one climactic moment of suspension and optimism through the use of an unexpected chord.

The lyric “the day I tried to live” is particularly interesting because of the contradictions it contains. In a literal sense, if one tries and fails to live then he or she dies, which metaphorically reflects the loss the speaker experienced after this day took place. The line implies that the speaker ‘tried to live’ and did not succeed, since it is the past tense and the speaker has hindsight on his side. It is within this context that we hear the hopeful chorus, the possibility that even though he failed yesterday maybe he will succeed with just one more try. The combination of lyrics and music, particularly with regards to the shifts and juxtapositions they contain, sets the listener up for the climax of the song, in which the musical themes get rearranged, and our understanding of the lyrics gets turned inside out.

Compositional flexibility represented in mode mixture within musical themes and lyrical content shifts throughout the song extend to a flexible structuring of the themes themselves. Musical themes are introduced at various points in the song and take on meaning in their original combination, which are then reorganized and recombined to create a different emotional effect. In this case, it is not the themes themselves that change, but the relationships between them. This mainly takes place during the climax of the song, beginning after 3:32

(see Appendix B, Table 2 for form outline). At this moment, Theme 2b, the main verse riff beginning on C# instead of E, replaces the normal verse riff, Theme 2a, by coinciding with the unaltered verse melody, and in doing so completely changes our understanding of the song at this point (see Example 3.6). Theme 2b here becomes the total opposite of the concluding function it served in the chorus; instead of transitioning us back to E—to where we ‘belong’—the theme repeats endlessly, looping back around to the beginning, failing to progress. As it tries and tries again to move forward, it goes nowhere, like the narrator of the song with his false hope that “one more time around/might do it”. The lyrics at this moment, “I woke today, like any other day you know I/Should’ve stayed in bed,” become an extreme understatement; the world sounds like it is falling apart because the assumptions we have based our musical understandings on—those of the relationships between riffs—completely unravel.

Example 3.6: Themes 2b and 3 Come Together in the Climax of "The Day I Tried To Live," (3:39).

The musical notation for Example 3.6 is presented in two staves. The top staff is labeled 'Vocals' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Guitar'. Both staves are in 7/4 time and have a key signature of three sharps (F#, C#, G#). The Vocals staff shows a melodic line with a repeat sign. The Guitar staff shows a complex rhythmic pattern with chords and a repeat sign.

As Theme 2b continues to repeat, almost endlessly, it takes on increasing permanence, representing the new emotional state of the speaker of in the song. Whereas it was previously a transitional device, now it mocks the stable function that Theme 2a had during the verse by filling in its role but with the wrong tonal center. Furthermore, as it is combined with lyrical content and melodic themes

from the chorus, it takes on even more meaning. At 4:05, the call from the chorus enters, singing “one more time around” without its response of “might make it”; this has been replaced by the new lyric “I learned that I was a liar.” Instead of alternating, these two lines coincide, existing on top of each other, suggesting that their meaning and significance are coalescing for the speaker. As the guitar line slips downwards, sliding down the neck of the guitar and further out of our grasp, the speaker confesses to the listener that he learned that he was a liar, that in the past he discovered that his hopes and hopeful claims that ‘one more time around might make it’ were fundamentally untrue. Even though all three themes are native to E major, the major harmony of the line ‘one more time around’ fundamentally clashes with the minor triads outlined in the guitar part—C# and F# respectively—because of their opposing emotional qualities. Thus in this climactic moment, the guitar theme on the non-tonic becomes the new ‘stable’ state in which we are stuck, ‘one more time around’ comes to signify the speaker’s realization that he is destined to fail each time he tries, and he comes clean with the listener, causing the way he or she hears his confessions to seismically shift.

It is important to note that the speaker’s epiphany does not take place in the present; instead, the speaker is confessing that he already knew that his attempts were doomed. It is evident that the day the speaker ‘tried,’ and failed, ‘to live’ was the same day that he learned that he was ‘a liar,’ the same day on which the cataclysmic events took place that lead to his realization that he did not and would never succeed. This explains the apparent contradictions

between verse and chorus, which we incorrectly heard as hopeful. Instead, the contradictions were simply foreshadowing the crisis to come. After this section, the reprise of the chorus as we have heard it before is rooted firmly in our and the speaker's past, a flashback to the way things were, a sardonic reiteration of what can now be known or is now known we now know to be false. The song ends by returning to Theme 2a, for the first time in two full minutes, returning us to our consistent instability, to the familiar that even if we understand differently, we can now at least grasp its whole story.

The relationship between lyrics and musical themes in "The Day I Tried To Live" shows that complexity and flexibility as fundamental compositional attributes can generate very powerful music. That none of the main musical themes stay within a single mode strengthens the compositional framework of combining and manipulating these compositional elements. An alternative model, such as composing a series of different musical ideas that unfold through time and are held together by a tonal framework, like a key signature, would have been much less powerful because it does not take advantage of the way in which our associations with musical themes contribute to the way we assign them meaning, much like Wagner's leitmotifs. The idea of establishing musical themes and then deconstructing, or developing, them is more common in Western Art music, particularly in sonata allegro form, but within that context such a constantly moving system of shifts between major and minor would have functioned quite differently. Thus, the flexible compositional frameworks

Soundgarden are working with here allow them to create a unique sound that is not constrained by conventions of any genre, rock, grunge, or otherwise.

Conclusion

The simple fact that music affects you makes it worthy of analysis. Although until recently those with the tools to express how and why they have been affected have been generally uninterested in popular music, this fact is changing, and the field of music analysis continues to expand. Clearly, I am moved by Soundgarden and believe that their music is worthy of music analysis, a completely different kind of academic study than has previously been applied to it. In writing this paper, I hoped to explore what made this music special, powerful, and interesting, to focus on aspects of individual songs that one might not otherwise notice, and to think about how they relate to other elements within each song and within other songs. Kofi Agawu asserts that the “fundamental motivation [behind music analysis] lies in the desire to inhabit temporarily a certain sonic world—and to enjoy the sensuous pleasure of so doing”²⁹, but I propose that the motivation of analysis is not purely that; it is also about sharing that sonic space with others, to help others hear something as you hear it, and to open them up to the details of music that make it special or important to you. Analysis can be, in Agawu’s words, “an invitation to a way of perceiving”³⁰. On an even more fundamental level, the simple act of analysis suggests that the music at hand is worth analyzing, worth one’s time and attention, a claim that in the world of rock music scholarship is not taken for

²⁹ Kofi Agawu, “How We Got Out of Analysis, and How To Get Back In Again,” *Music Analysis* 23 (2004), 274-275.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 276.

granted. Finding something interesting in music that has been previously overlooked, such as in the compositions of Soundgarden, draws attention to it in a way that compels other listeners to join in the act of unlocking the secrets the music has to offer. Agawu suggests that “a good analysis leads you back to the composition; you re-enter that world, reconsider its making, and resume the process of exploration”³¹; in the realm of rock music analysis, drawing the uninitiated listener into this process is a success in itself, one that is ideally rewarded with a convert to the music. In delving into this study of Soundgarden, I sought to incorporate all of these goals: to bask in the musical peaks and valleys, to discover what made them so high and so low, to share the experience with others, and to encourage the analysis of grunge and other genres previously neglected by academia.

This paper has shown that Soundgarden compose with a series of complex and flexible frameworks that are both consistent with certain features of the rock genre yet highly unique in other ways. This begs the question: what are the elements from which these frameworks are constructed? Patterns clearly play an integral role in shaping the form and structure of Soundgarden’s songs, from the metrical levels and layers in songs across their career to the shifting of mode in “The Day I Tried To Live.” But the pervasiveness of patterns as a compositional element in Soundgarden deserves more study, particularly with regards to melodic and harmonic fragments and how they are manipulated and

³¹ Ibid., 275.

reiterated throughout songs, and layered on top of each other to create lush and complex textures.

The issue of patterns as a compositional feature is not likely to be limited only to Soundgarden. Although this paper focused primarily on Soundgarden, its aim was in part to legitimize grunge as a genre worth studying in a targeted analytical way, analyzing the details of the music instead of purely looking at its larger social implications. Therefore, it is likely that some of the compositional elements Soundgarden made use of are related to those used by other grunge bands, although possibly expressed quite differently. The social significance of Nirvana and Kurt Cobain has been greatly studied, but why not also look at the kinds of chord progressions that correlate with his trademark soft-loud dynamics? Why not look study the way Alice In Chains achieve moments of pop release within metal-tinged songs, possibly through the interaction of melodic harmonies or the use of diatonic vs. pentatonic chord progressions? Or more broadly, why not study the musical characteristics that set grunge apart from other sub-genres of rock music, other than its trademark 'superfuzz bigmuff' sound and its localized scene? Why did grunge sound the way it did? How did grunge really sound, on a harmonic and rhythmic level? All of these questions are worth investigating.

If any of these lines of inquiry are to be pursued, other issues pertaining to rock music analysis must also be addressed. Embedded in the methodology of this paper is the issue of notating music that was not notated by its composers. Our Western system of musical notation is quite broad, and thus we are capable

of writing down this kind of music, even though it is not its authentic form of transmission. However, there are many important elements of the music that are difficult to notate, and in order to notate them within this system exceptions must be made, and we must stretch the boundaries of the system in order to fully capture the music. For example, the concept of additive phrasing that I discuss in Chapter 2, in which consecutive measures of different meters function together as continuous phrase and repeating pattern, involves a shift of meter that is particularly noticeable when written down. By having to write down a change in meter at the beginning of the measure, anyone looking at the sheet music is aware of the different number of beats in the measure to come instead of simply being able to perceive them through experience. Having to constantly change the time signature of a written piece of music to signify what is in actuality a very consistent pattern, in many instances is not very efficient and gives a distorted impression that there is something unusual going on. It emphasizes irregularity, rather than patterning.

This kind of issue likewise arises in the context of key signature and shifting modes. Just as time signature is a written convention intended to communicate our perception of meter, key signatures are a defining system that dictate which pitches 'belong' and which do not. Written at the beginning of sheet of music and modified with accidentals, they draw attention to the pitches that do not fit into this system. This can be an issue in rock songs, like "The Day I Tried To Live," for which key signatures are an inaccurate way of communicating the common pitches used. In the case of "The Day I Tried To Live," the mode is

constantly changing, which means that any decision to set a key signature is a choice on the part of the transcriber that was not necessarily intended by Soundgarden themselves. It is clear that the song is in E, but the perpetual alternating between minor and major suggests that both G# and G natural are native to the key of the song, instead of one taking primacy over the other.

The instruments used in different genres are deeply related to the implications of notation and analysis because of the musical patterns that arise from the physical features of the instruments themselves. For example, music composed on guitars often relies heavily on intervals of a fourth, because that is the interval between the lowest strings. Similarly, chromatic movement on a guitar is quite easy because one can simply move his or her hand up the neck without changing hand position to achieve the same chord on a different pitch. This is fundamentally different from the piano, on which one must change their hand position to achieve the same effect, as well as staff notation, in which moving the relationship of chords up the staff without adding accidentals results in diatonic movement, not chromatic. The physical differences between the primary instruments used for composition in different musical genres complicate the issues involved in notating such music.

Thus, notating non-notated music invokes a clash between different systems, between the music for which such notation was originally intended and music that does not use it as its primary means of communication. As music

analysts, we must avoid playing into “unconscious preconceptions”³², about what is ‘normal’ in music because of the conventions of notation and strive for a more accurate way to convey the musical issues under discussion. Rock as its own genre has its own set of complexities and flexibilities distinct from the kinds of music that have traditionally been analyzed. Rather than imposing external, unrelated conventions of older analytical techniques, music analyses need to grow organically from the music itself, and music analysts must think about how to integrate a notational system that was not designed for this with music that is learned, composed, and communicated differently than that of the past. By ‘inhabiting temporarily’ the ‘sonic world’ of Soundgarden and seeking to accurately represent the discoveries we made during our explorations, we can continue to push towards an understanding of music that shows us why it affects us the way it does.

³² Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society*, (New York: Norton, 1998), 52.

Appendix A

Supplemental Materials for Chapter 2

Table 1: “Spoonman” Form Outline

Section	Time	Meters Employed
Introduction	0:00-0:18	7/4
Verse	0:18-0:42	Additive Phrasing: 8/4 + 7/4; 7/4
Chorus	0:43-0:53	4/4
Post-Chorus	0:54-1:02	7/4
Verse	1:03-1:27	Additive Phrasing: 8/4 + 7/4; 7/4
Chorus	1:27-1:37	4/4
Post-Chorus	1:38-1:55	7/4
Bridge (breakdown)	1:56-2:06	4/4
Bridge (build-up)	2:07-2:14	Additive Phrasing: 2/4 + 4/4
Guitar Solo	2:14-2:32	7/4
Percussion Solo	2:33-2:48	3/4 or 6/8
Breakdown	2:48-3:28	4/4
Chorus	3:29-3:38	4/4
Post-Chorus	3:39-3:57	7/4
Verse Reprise	3:57-4:04	Additive Phrasing: 8/4 + 7/4

Appendix B

Supplemental Materials for Chapter 3

“The Day I Tried To Live,”
Superunknown, Soundgarden, 1994
Lyrics by Chris Cornell

I woke the same as any other day
Except a voice was in my head
It said seize the day, pull the trigger,
Drop the blade,
And watch the rolling heads.

The day I tried to live
I stole a thousand beggar’s change
and gave it to the rich

The day I tried to win
I dangled from the power lines
And let the martyrs stretch

One more time around,
Might do it,
One more time around,
Might make it
One more time around,
Might do it
One more time around
Might make it
The day I tried to live.

Words you say never seem
To live up to the ones
Inside your head
The lives we make
Never seem to ever get us anywhere
But dead.

The day I tried to live
I wallowed in the blood and mud
with all the other pigs.

One more time around,
Might do it,
One more time around,
Might make it
One more time around,
Might do it
One more time around
Might make it
The day I tried to live.

I woke the same as any other day
you know
I should’ve stayed in bed.

The day I tried to win
I wallowed in the blood and mud
with all the other pigs.

And I learned that I was a liar
I learned that I was a liar
I learned that I was a liar
I learned that I was a liar...

One more time around,
Might do it,
One more time around,
Might make it
One more time around,
Might do it
One more time around
Might make it
The day I tried to live.

... just like you

Table 1: Themes in “The Day I Tried To Live”

Name	Instrument	Example #	Time Debuted	Sections
Theme 1	Guitar	3.1	0:00	Intro; Chorus (as Theme 1’); Bridge
Theme 2a	Bass & Guitar	3.3	0:33, 0:46	Verse; Outro
Theme 3	Vocals	3.2	0:46	Verse; Climax
Theme 4a	Vocals- “Call”	3.4	1:40	Chorus; Climax
Theme 4b	Vocals- “Response”	3.4	1:40	Chorus
Theme 2b**	Bass & Guitar	3.5	1:59	Chorus, Climax

* Theme 1’ is a slightly modified version of Theme 1 that occurs during the Chorus. The melodic changes are only to accommodate the shifts in mode surrounding it. For more information about these shifts, see the discussion of the Chorus chord progression in Chapter 3.

** Theme 2b is labeled as such because of its sequential melodic relationship to Theme 2a. For a more information, see Chapter 3, Example 3.5 and surrounding discussion

Table 2: Form Outline for “The Day I Tried To Live”

Section	Times	Themes	Additional Parts/ Instruments
Intro	0:00-0:32	1	
Pre-Verse	0:33-0:46	2a (Bass only)	
Verse	0:46-1:40	2a; 3	
Chorus	1:40-2:05	1'; 4a, 4b; 2b	Chorus Chord Progression/ Bass & Guitar
Verse	2:06-2:45	2a; 3	
Chorus	2:46-3:10	1'; 4a, 4b; 2b	Chorus Chord Progression/ Bass & Guitar
Bridge	3:11-3:32	1	
Verse Reprise	3:32-3:38	2a; 3	
Climax, pt. 1	3:39-4:05	2b; 3*	
Climax, pt. 2	4:06-4:18	2b; 4a	“I learned that I was a liar”/ Vocals
Chorus	4:19-4:43	1'; 4a, 4b; 2b	
Outro	4:44-	2a; 4a	“Just like you”/ Vocals

* When Theme 3 returns in the Climax of the song, the vocal melody is slightly modified, embellished for dramatic effect.

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