19 Djent and the Aesthetics of Post-Digital Metal

MARK MARRINGTON

This chapter considers djent, a subgenre of metal whose emergence in the late 2000s reinvigorated metal practice while simultaneously reigniting debates concerning metal's identity in the post-digital era. Djent did not begin to come to the attention of metal scholars until relatively recently, mainly due to its having been pigeonholed as an informal, hobbyist activity whose origins as an online phenomenon made it appear somehow remote from the mainstream of metal music practice. Djent's reputation has also not been aided by the often tongue-in-cheek and sometimes disparaging approach of bloggers and journalists (see later in this chapter) to evaluating it, which has tended to obscure the seriousness of intent of its individual practitioners as well as the importance of the music in its own terms. A particular benefit of the increased scholarly focus on djent is that key lines of enquiry have now begun to emerge that highlight important themes for research. Robert Burns and Allan Moore and Remy Martin, for example, have focused on djent's progressive musical characteristics, while Steven Gamble, in the vein of much previous metal scholarship, has considered the scene context, here in reference to the online community that congregated around djent during its early period.[1] Another significant line of enquiry, which is also a focus of this chapter, concerns the technological circumstances of djent's emergence, particularly the post-1990s digital production environments, which were integral to both its creation and dissemination. Djent's reliance upon digital tools to construct its guitar timbres has been the focus of Matt Shelvock, for example, while Mark Marrington and Robert Strachan have commented more broadly on the importance of digital production environments to the musical aesthetics of the subgenre.[2]

This chapter aims, firstly, to provide some background to djent's emergence, focusing upon its musical provenance as well as the technological factors underlying its creation and production and the digital aesthetics these bestowed upon the music's sound and character. Following this, an overview is provided of djent's stylistic features, including its progressive musical leanings and gravitation towards electronic and popular music influences. The final part of the chapter considers the polarised critical reception surrounding djent, providing a backdrop from which to consider

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the subgenre's position in relation to modern metal, particularly regarding its technological stance, which, it is argued, aligns it with recent trends for situating metal in ever-closer proximity to the aesthetics of post-digital musical practice.

The Emergence of Djent and the Technological Circumstances of its Production

Djent initially began life as an underground internet phenomenon during the early-mid-2000s, becoming recognised as a subgenre of metal music around 2010–11. It is generally accepted that the word 'djent' was coined by Misha Mansoor of Periphery as an onomatopoeic reference to the Swedish band Meshuggah's distinctive palm-muted staccato riffing style, which had a particular influence on his own playing.[3] This trope became so closely identified with djent thereafter that Meshuggah are now commonly recognised as the progenitors of djent even though they themselves have tended to downplay this role.[4] Djent artists also acknowledge the influence of Meshuggah's guitarists' (Mårten Hagström and Fredrik Thordendal) use of down-tuned seven-string (and later eight-string) instruments, and the band's celebrated rhythmic innovations – namely, their superimposed polymetres and juxtapositions of odd time signatures.[5] Another frequently cited influence on djent is the band SikTh, hailing from Hertfordshire in the UK, who pursued the progressive paradigm into what might be best described as postmodern territory on their seminal early recordings *The Trees Are Dead & Dried Out Wait for Something* (2003) and *Death of a Dead Day* (2006). Their work, which owed much to earlier technical metal, was characterised by rapid time changes, vocals that are part-rapped, part death-metal screaming and part clean-sung, altered guitar tunings and advanced guitar techniques.[6] The band's eclectic musical outlook, synthesising frenetic mathcore with ballad-style material and even piano-led classical-style instrumentals, anticipated the pronounced contrasts of style found in djent.

SikTh were also notable for producing their own albums, which reflected the growing importance of the DIY aesthetic within metal production in the early 2000s. This attitude was built upon by djent artists, whose emergence coincided with the explosion of the bedroom producer phenomenon, a movement catalysed by the increased availability of Digital Audio Workstation (henceforth, DAW) software, which was now beginning to substitute for the 'real-world' studio. With this democratisation of technology came the decentralisation of music production practice to the

home environment, affording musicians the freedom to evolve their music in a situation of relative autonomy from commercial industry trends. A number of djent artists initially began their musical activities as solo 'projects', a term commonly associated with solo DIY set-ups during this period, using DAW software as a collaborative substitute for the full-band line-ups they initially lacked, before morphing, in the majority of cases, into full-band outfits.[7] Among the more notable djent practitioners who emerged from the bedroom producer nexus were Misha Mansoor, initially operating under the pseudonym Bulb, before co-founding the band Periphery, Acle Kahney, guitarist in Fellsilent (and later TesseracT), and one-man operation Chimp Spanner (Paul Ortiz). Djent artists also benefitted from the internet and specifically the social media platforms that had begun to proliferate in the early 2000s, such as SoundClick, which provided a means of sharing musical ideas and songs. In a guest post for the *MetalSucks* website Acle Kahney summarised the circumstances of djent's emergence and the importance of the internet:

> It was probably back in 2002/2003 when the online community of producer-musicians who spawned the bands of this new wave of progressive metal, or 'djent', began to come together. A key unique factor that set this community/scene/then-to-be-genre apart from others is that it had no geographical base; people from all over the world were (and still are) sharing ideas, recording parts for each other and even jamming via the internet. Like punk came from the bars, clubs and rehearsal rooms of New York, this scene started in chat rooms, forums and home studios. This made it easy for many like-minded people to find each other, something which would have been impossible without the internet.[8]

For Kahney, who was based in Milton Keynes (UK), the internet afforded the opportunity to form a fruitful collaborative relationship with Mansoor, based in the United States (Bethesda, Maryland), with whom he exchanged ideas on equipment and the use of DAW software for recording and the programming of drum parts. Mansoor has indicated that djent evolved organically through the free exchange of ideas and a willingness to share and re-use one another's material:

> We had these ways of making songs on our own and appropriated them to our bands. I remember some of their riffs would be like TesseracT riffs and some would be Fellsilent riffs – whatever would fit. I don't think any of us had any huge plan. It just sort of evolved over time.[9]

Djent artists were thus early pioneers of online collaboration, a concept now increasingly accepted as the norm in contemporary record production practice.

The technological circumstances of the production of djent, including the use of the DAW for recording and programming musical parts and digital effects to process guitar sounds, played an important role in shaping the aesthetics of the subgenre. These technologies engendered a unique sonic fingerprint, summarised in the words of got-djent.com spokesman Sander Dieleman as a 'simulated', 'processed' aesthetic with 'no rough edges'.[10] A particular preoccupation of djent artists was with achieving an ideal 'djenty' guitar tone. This was the subject of continuous debate and discussion within the djent community on online forums such as got-djent.com, and amongst bloggers and YouTubers. As limited technological resources precluded the use of complex hardware set-ups, djent artists achieved their sound using a combination of characteristic guitar pickups (such as Bare Knuckle's Aftermath humbucker) and software and hardware-based digital amplifier modelling technologies, including Fractal Audio Systems' Axe FX and the Line 6 Pod Farm software and HD Pro hardware. They also experimented with freeware plugins, audio software made available at no charge on the internet by third-party developers, to simulate the required signal chains, another consequence of the budgetary constraints of the bedroom production scenario.[11]

With this equipment, djent guitarists were able to evolve a distorted guitar timbre that exhibited both a low-range heaviness appropriate to metal and a distinctively crisp, dry character. Here digital tools permitted precise control of the signal path via gating, compression and simulated amplifier configurations, together with the facility to build up a detailed inventory of easily retrievable presets. The cultivation of djent tone served more than a merely aesthetic purpose, being designed to allow for clear articulation of the relatively sophisticated pitch structures found within the power chords typically employed by these artists, as explained by Shelvock in reference to Animals as Leaders, Periphery and TesseracT:

> The traditional guitar power chord, spelled Root-Fifth-Root on the guitar's lowest strings is modified-usually in a drop A (or lower) tuning – to be spelled Root-Fifth-Root-Fifth in this genre. This four-string chord necessitates a guitar tone which provides more clarity than metal of the past, where power chords would consist of two or three string power chords. In addition to using these expanded power chords, some progressive metal artists favour a harmonic palette which lies outside of the typical metal milieu. It is not uncommon to hear suspended chords, and some artists even choose to employ 7th and 9th voicings both with and without the application of distortion.[12]

Also fundamental to the post-digital character of the djent sound were the MIDI-programmed drum parts, which were drawn from software-based

drum sample libraries. In the early period, these were often created using Toontrack's now-iconic *Drumkit from Hell*, a resource that had significance for djent artists, as it was one of the earliest sample libraries to be designed specifically for a metal performance context. Adding to the aura, this particular sample library had also been recorded by Meshuggah's drummer Tomas Haake at Dug-Out Studios in Uppsala, Sweden.[13] Djent artists programmed their drum parts using sequencing software such as Steinberg's Cubase and Propellerhead's Reason, the latter emulating a real-world rack-based studio set-up and including digital modelling of earlier sampler technologies.

Another popular software tool amongst djent artists was Native Instruments' dedicated drum sampler plugin, Battery (released in 2002), which enabled highly refined editing of sampled drum sounds.[14] Interestingly, the drum programming aesthetic remained central to djent bands' creative processes even when they had moved fully into live band performance. In some cases, this was a matter of practicality. Misha Mansoor, for example, who began his musical life as a drummer before moving to the guitar, has commented that, compared to the degree of control afforded by sampled drums, he found live drums to be far more troublesome to record, edit and mix.[15] Elsewhere, drum programming served a particular creative purpose, as in the case of Animals as Leaders, who retained this approach on their second album, *Weightless* (2011), despite having recruited an actual drummer – Navene Koperweis – in the meantime. Discussing the making of the album in an interview for *Modern Drummer*, Koperweis gave a succinct account of the MIDI-based process of creating the album's drum parts:

> We used Cubase to write the MIDI, and I use a Yamaha electronic kit with the Toontrack *Drumkit From Hell* as the samples. You're able to play beyond your abilities [this way]. We're using MIDI. It's not audio; we manipulate it and run it through the Toontrack software. I can play a bunch of fills and put them where I want, then program or play beats. It's seamlessly arranged and then rammed through the *Drumkit From Hell* software. I did play a lot on the electronic kit, but sometimes I'd program a part, because then I'm not restricted to what I can play in the moment. And it's a lot faster to not [play the drum tracks] right off the bat. It's a weird, futuristic way of making music. It's 60/40 programmed/live drums. Every song has a mixture. And I never program anything I can't actually play.[16]

TesseracT drummer Jay Postones also developed his drumming in relation to software tools, typically evolving his drum performances from demos provided by guitarist Acle Kahney, containing parts programmed using

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Superior Drummer, which he would attempt to replicate physically on the kit. Postones implied that this would entail trying to find a way to play a programmed part that at first sight might seem impossible: 'Sometimes I'll hear it and think, "Yup, that's something I can't play – I've got to learn how". I like trying to re-create the ideas he's had. I don't try to overstep the mark, because Acle has got a clear vision of what he wants it to sound like'.[17] Postones also remarks on the importance of using DAW software (Cubase in this instance) as a vehicle for clarifying a drum pattern idea before attempting to realise it using the kit:

> Obviously I prefer to sit behind the kit and jam it out. But if I get an idea for a pattern, like putting fives and fours together, or sevens and nines and elevens, I might end up having to put it into a computer first to really hear it. . . . Occasionally . . . something will be quite tricky, and if I want to turn it into a triplet feel or whatever, I'll need to put it into a computer so that I can hear it played back perfectly first. That's the benefit of technology these days. You can slow it down to a tempo that makes sense, digest that, and then try to get it to a stage that you're not counting things – you're just kind of feeling things.[18]

The comments of Koperweis and Postones illustrate the extent to which digital tools informed the conception and realisation of djent, with the software here taking on an essentially collaborative role by assisting in the generation of rhythmic material that might not have been imagined when using the drumkit in a more traditional fashion. Even the very fact of engaging with the DAW from the perspective of more conventional performance activities, such as the tracking of guitar parts, left a mark on the character of djent as Mansoor observed regarding the evolution of his own very precise guitar performance style: 'When you're playing that way you start to focus on parts of your technique that make all the difference in the world. Things you'd never have noticed if you weren't sitting in front of a computer and hearing your playing back. It taught me how to play guitar'.[19]

Djent as a Style of Music

Djent began to crystallise as a recognisable genre of music around 2011, by which point the term was being used to describe the work of a wide range of artists. Joel McIver's *Metal Hammer* feature (April 2011),[20] for example, included the following in its 'league of djentlemen': Periphery, Vildhjarta, Animals as Leaders, Elitist, Of Legends, After the Burial, Born of Osiris, Skyharbor, Chimp Spanner and Mnemic, several of whom were now signed to high profile established, or up and coming, metal labels

including Roadrunner, Century Media, Prosthetic, Sumerian, Nuclear Blast and Basick.[21] Having surveyed the output of these artists, McIver noted that 'the djent tag' was becoming applicable 'to a relatively wide range of sounds'.[22] Unsurprisingly, given the subgenre's progressive musical provenance, virtuosic rhythm and lead guitar performance skills are central to djent. The influences here are wide-ranging, including the progressive metal styles of guitarists such as Dream Theater's John Petrucci, but also (in the cases of Misha Mansoor and Tosin Abasi, for example) styles from outside metal, including contemporary jazz and jazz-rock fusion.[23] Hence the harmonic language of djent is often constituted of complex chords and dense textures derived from the polyrhythmic layering of guitar parts, sometimes involving up to three instruments simultaneously (see Periphery's work, for example).

At the same time, djent guitarists also showed leanings towards more traditional styles of top-line lead playing, such as Chimp Spanner, whose melodic approach is reminiscent of Steve Vai or Joe Satriani. While djent riffing is certainly a defining aspect of the style, as encapsulated by the characteristic djent 'breakdown', djent artists also favoured calmer, more ambient material in the form of reverb saturated and/or delay-effected clean arpeggiated guitar, employed as intro/outro material or to provide interludes between tracks. Instances can be found in much of the work of TesseracT, including the early *Concealing Fate* EP (2010) and subsequent debut album, *One* (2011), Periphery on *Periphery* (2010), Uneven Structure on *Februus* (2011), Chimp Spanner on *At the Dream's Edge* (2009), Skyharbor on *Blind White Noise: Illusion and Chaos* (2012), and Vildhjarta on *Måsstaden* (2011).

While a number of djent bands employ vocals prominently, the styles adopted can vary considerably, one key characteristic (seen in the work of TesseracT, for example) being the frequent alternation between clean sung and death metal style screaming, which is sometimes amusingly referred to as 'good cop, bad cop' technique. It should not be assumed that vocals are central to the work of all djent artists, however, as illustrated by Chimp Spanner and the trio Animals as Leaders, whose music is entirely instrumental in conception. Misha Mansoor's remark that Periphery's self-titled first album (2010) 'was written to be an instrumental album and vocals were thrown on top'[24] suggests that djent artists did not necessarily see themselves as beholden to song formats. Indeed, many djent compositions appear conceived in a manner consistent with instrumental music, adopting elaborate formal structures worked out over extended time frames, with many tracks lasting between 5 and 7 minutes, and in some cases even longer (see, for example, the 15-minute 'Racecar', which concludes Periphery's debut LP). Djent albums and EPs are

likewise conceived as multi-movement compositional structures linked by conceptual themes, in some cases, such as TesseracT's *Altered State* (2013) and Periphery's double album *Juggernaut – Alpha/Juggernaut – Omega* (2015), on a grandiose scale befitting 1970s progressive rock.

Many djent recordings also show a marked influence of electronic music aesthetics, which manifest themselves in various ways. Often electronic styles are introduced for short periods at certain points in tracks to add colouristic interest, such as the chiptune-esque arpeggio introduction to Chimp Spanner's 'Bad Code' (2009), or the Aphex Twin-like beats heard briefly at the beginning of Periphery's 'Jetpacks Was Yes!' (2010) and outro to their track 'Totla Mad' (2010). Elsewhere, electronic music gestures are integrated more substantially into the proceedings, such as Animals as Leaders' track 'On Impulse' (2009), which includes 'glitch' style passages of mangled percussion and, in the acoustic guitar introduction, looped material, giving the impression of skipping audio.[25] Such examples can be regarded as a further by-product of the post-digital context of djent production, engendered by exposure to the possibilities of the DAW for the creative manipulation of sound. Looping, for example, is a DAW-induced compositional construct, which encourages the user to copy and paste short passages of recorded audio – bass lines, guitar riffs and drum parts – producing the effect of literal repetition more commonly associated with sample-based music.[26] Another interesting instance is Swedish band Vildhjarta's track 'Benblåst' (2011), which contains *musique concrète*-like passages of metallic clanking juxtaposed with a delay-effected noise loop, suggesting links to industrial music.

Working in the DAW also encouraged artists to utilise software-based sound design tools, including synthesisers and samplers. Chimp Spanner's sound on *At the Dream's Edge* (2009) and the *All Roads Lead Here* EP (2012), for example, is strongly defined by the synthesiser, which he uses to generate introductions, interludes and ambient backdrops to his riff and lead playing. Unsurprisingly, he has listed Brian Eno and Vangelis as particular influences on his musical thinking.[27] Elsewhere, French guitarist Rémi Gallego, known as The Algorithm, engaged directly with tropes of contemporary EDM, fusing characteristic djent-style riffing with elements of dubstep (see the track 'Trojans' on the 2012 album *Polymorphic Code*). Gallego's approach, which was aptly labelled 'djent-step', was consonant with developments that had been taking place in US metal, most notably in the work of Korn on their 2011 album *The Path of Totality*.

As djent began to proliferate during the early-2010s, it also showed itself to be amenable to fusion with a range of other popular music genres. One notable synthesis was 'rap-djent', pioneered by the British band Hacktivist,

hailing from Milton Keynes (also the home of TesseracT). The band's eponymous debut EP, released in 2012, melds typical djent riffing with clean singing and a rapped element that has obvious roots in British grime.[28] Rap-djent was in one sense an iteration of the rap-metal fusion that had characterised 1990s US-American nu metal and its earlier prototypes, but now with a distinctly British tint.[29] One of the most contrived fusions of djent with the wider popular music sphere occurred on *Djent Goes Pop* (2011), an album released for free on Facebook by the Djent-Lemen's Club.[30] This multi-authored (and almost parodical) effort included mash-up style re-workings of (then) contemporary material, such as Lady Gaga's 'Poker Face' (2008) and Rihanna's 'Russian Roulette' (2009), utilising audio samples from the original recordings, as well as imaginative cover versions of earlier mainstream pop favourites such as George Michael's 'Careless Whisper' (1984) and A-ha's 'Take on Me' (1984). What this, and the work of Gallego and Hacktivist, tended to highlight was the extent to which djent's most recognisable elements – particularly its power chord riff – had quickly become self-contained clichés that could be readily re-inserted into other musical contexts, rather as a hip hop artist might treat an iconic drum-break. It also served as reminder of the general ambivalence of djent artists towards being pigeonholed in terms of any one specific musical genre – including metal.

The Reception of Djent

A survey of the critical literature (typically magazine articles, posts on blogs and forums, and YouTube videos) that appeared in response to djent from the time of its emergence in the late 2000s reveals that its effect was to polarise the metal community, in some quarters being welcomed for its freshness and innovation, while in others inviting vociferous ridicule and derision. The main sticking points for commentators negatively inclined towards djent can be succinctly summarised in the remarks made by The Mad Israeli, a regular blogger for the *No Clean Singing* website (writing in November 2011):

> What do I think of djent? I honestly think it's pretty f**king stupid. Now, I didn't always think that, mind you, but for several reasons I've come around to that way of thinking: The word 'djent', the community centred around it, the scene kids, the desensitization of the style for commercial or widespread appeal, and the butchering of original-sounding production due to its foundation in totally digital recording technology.[31]

Elaborating each of these reasons, in turn, The Mad Israeli painted a picture of a subgenre that had become a cliché. This included criticism of the onomatopoeic use of the word 'djent' itself, which had become even more problematic since it had also taken on verb status ('to djent', 'djenting') as well as the presence of the 'scene kids', who had seized upon and over-exposed particular djent characteristics: 'All they have are 7- and 8-string guitars and a load of unnecessary clean and ambient overlays to boring, open-note grooves that are, dare I say, worse than the drivel Slipknot put out'. His criticisms of djent production were levelled at the homogeneity of the djent sound that had been engendered by the persistent use of digital tools in the music's creation:

> I also dislike the growing trend of ultra-slick, ultra-clean production. Nowadays, mix is too often cast aside as an integral tool for conveying the songwriters' conception of the music, and in its place we have nothing more complicated than a simple desire to make the music shiny and pretty, because that sells better . . . Many bands today sound the same because everything is done via Axe-FX recorded guitars and bass with Superior or EZ-drummer replacing a real person on the kit. It's very disheartening, and it's getting quite old.[32]

John Hill, another outspoken metal critic, wrote a particularly scathing commentary on djent for *Vice* in 2014, entitled, 'It's time for djent to djie [sic]'. Hill's article's overall position was that djent was little more than a fashionable offshoot of metalcore:

> Djent is what happens after years of trolls tell metalcore kids in YouTube comment sections they should listen to 'real metal'. Instead of staying in their own lane and doing their own thing, metalcore bros have had their feelings hurt to the point that they feel they must prove to 'real metalheads' that they can also be edgy.[33]

Then, taking Periphery as the exemplar djent's shortcomings, Hill deconstructed the subgenre further:

> If you remove the off-time guitar parts and the boring noodly bits, the track is reduced to your standard fare of Hot Topic-core scene metal. Breakdowns, lame-o scream-sing tradeoffs, and not much else make this band sound like Saosin covering Meshuggah at a high school talent show.

Elsewhere, the *MetalSucks* website, which acted as a placeholder for much of the online commentary on djent during the 2010s,[34] was less abrasive in its approach, tending to take a more tongue-in-cheek attitude to representing the scene, as illustrated by the titles of posts such as, 'The Debate Rages On: Is "Djent" a Genre' (2015) and 'Scientific Proof that Djent is a Genre' (2015). It also featured video content, which gently

poked fun at the clichés of the music, such as YouTuber metal guitarist Jared Dines' annual parodies of djent guitar style, Andrew Baena's[35] 'Random Djent Breakdown Generator', a software algorithm, which triggered short pre-recorded segments of djent riffing over a drum loop, and Rob Scallon's 'The Discovery of Djent', which suggested that creating a djent track was simply a matter of copying and pasting a single power chord multiple times on a DAW arrange page. Much of the commentary was curated by *MetalSucks* blogger Vince Neilstein who, while generally sympathetic to the more high-profile djent bands, was outspoken in his criticism of djent hybrids such as djent-step and djent-rap.[36]

The more serious and balanced online commentary on djent tended to come from journalists representing commercial metal magazines, such as Europe's *Metal Hammer* and *Kerrang!*, which provided strong promotional support for the music as it emerged into the mainstream. *Metal Hammer* (UK), for example, published several articles devoted to djent artists from the early 2010s onwards, particularly TesseracT and Periphery, who were undoubtedly the most prevalent (and as time went on, least djent-like) of the bands associated with the scene.[37] Writing for *Metal Hammer* in April 2011, Dom Lawson remarked of djent that 'as daft as its name might be, this burgeoning scene sounds a lot more like the future of heavy music than anything else out there right now'.[38] Djent was also given significant coverage in guitar hobbyist publications such as *Total Guitar* and *Guitar Player*, which naturally foregrounded the music's guitar-centred virtuosity and the 'gear' culture surrounding it. There were also occasional articles in the British press, such as Jamie Thomson's 'Djent, the Metal Geek's Microgenre' (another somewhat tongue-in-cheek framing), which situated djent in relation to recent electronic music and the soloistic practitioner innovations associated with that field:

> While such home recording techniques have been the preserve of digital recording artists producing techno, dubstep and electronica for some years now, it took the perseverance of one guitarist, Misha Mansoor, to bring this 21st-century philosophy to the metal realm.[39]

Thomson also suggested that djent's proliferation via the internet represented an important paradigm shift for metal music:

> More than most genres, metal has a chequered history when it comes to the internet, not least Metallica's public spat with file-sharing website Napster. For the old guard, it has been something to fear; but for this new generation, it represents opportunity and a way to circumvent the established networks.[40]

Situating Djent within/without Metal

Having outlined the circumstances of djent's emergence, its characteristic features and given a sense of its reception by the metal community, it remains to offer some concluding thoughts on how djent may be situated in relation to the metal genre. It is interesting to note, given what has already been highlighted regarding the polarization of opinion on djent, that the position of the djent community has itself been one of ambivalence towards the 'djent' label. In an interview published by the Djentle-Music website in 2014, got-djent.com spokesman Sander Dieleman observed that 'the word djent just seems to cause a lot of polarized reactions . . . most of them [the djent bands] don't actually identify themselves as djent, like if someone says "hey you're djent" then they'll reluctantly acknowledge it'.[41] The main issue here is clearly the limited onomatopoeic signification of the word 'djent' itself, which most djent artists recognise is simply insufficient to encapsulate the scope of their individual musical remits. One of the most outspoken critics of the djent label has been Misha Mansoor, to whom (ironically) the origin of the word 'djent' is credited. Interviewed for the *Kerrang* podcast in 2011, Mansoor acknowledged that while the word djent was certainly applicable to aspects of Periphery's music, namely the djent style riffs employed, this was a relatively insignificant facet of a far less easily definable whole.[42] Instead, Mansoor preferred to see Periphery's music, and that of his djent contemporaries, as simply 'progressive'. This was also Dieleman's conclusion:

> I think the term djent might probably disappear in the long term. It's going to be modern progressive metal again because that's a little more marketable maybe – and I think the distinction between the djent bands on the one side and then other progressive metal on the other side's kinda gonna fade away.[43]

Djent's affinities with the progressive metal subgenre, as has been observed, are not difficult to discern, being rooted in the musical styles of foundational bands such as Dream Theater and Tool and foregrounding 'specialist' approaches derived from technical and 'math' metal (Watchtower, Meshuggah, Dillinger Escape Plan) and less easily classifiable forms of postmodern metal (SikTh). Considered in relation to such predecessors, djent's sophisticated guitar-centric harmonic and melodic languages, its rhythmic and formal complexity and openness to musical perspectives outside metal, are hardly out of place. In these terms, djent may thus be considered to reside comfortably within the lineage of progressive metal as outlined by commentators such as Sam Dunn and Jeff Wagner.[44]

There is also an alternative approach to situating djent, however, which relates to the technological circumstances of the music's evolution. Specifically, djent can be regarded as a standalone post-digital form, whose musical identity, while founded upon key metal tropes (such as the distorted power chord riff), is at the same time uniquely the product of its practitioners' engagement with digital tools and the musical aesthetics these engender. In particular, this can be seen in the centrality of digital amp modelling software and programmed drums to djent's sonic identity, and more generally in the DAW-engendered electronic music traits that can be detected in many djent recordings. Robert Strachan, recognising this fact, has gone so far as to conclude that djent is an example of a 'cyber-genre', whose characteristics are 'simultaneously resultant from, and reflective of, the contexts of digitization', and to which the 'widespread availability of computer-based production technologies' is integral.[45] Where recent metal music is concerned, this description is not applicable only to djent, but also to the music of many contemporary metal-oriented artists, whose output in various ways reflects the consequences of the new digital tools for genre-situated musical practice. It is a relevant perspective, for example, on the work of Genghis Tron, whose use of Ableton Live facilitated their stark metal-EDM fusions in the mid-2000s, and Igorrr (Gautier Serre), an architect of 'cybergrind', whose accomplished death metal pedigree was radically re-contextualised through DAW-based micro-edited genre mash-ups.[46] It is also applicable to the work of veteran metal artists Korn, who on their album *The Path of Totality* (released in 2011, hence coincident with djent's emergence into the mainstream) purposefully re-aligned their metal outlook with the emerging North American dubstep scene, necessitating the radical re-thinking of their idiom through the paradigm of the DAW.[47] These, together with djent, illustrate the ways in which metal, like many other forms of late twentieth-century popular music, has inevitably become implicated in new forms of post-digital musical practice in which genre constructs appear to have become largely redundant.

Notes

1. See Robert G. H. Burns, *Experiencing Progressive Rock: A Listener's Companion* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018); Allan F. Moore and Remy Martin, *Rock, the Primary Text: Developing a Musicology of Rock* (Routledge, 2018); Steven Gamble, *How Music Empowers: Listening to Modern Rap and Metal* (Routledge, 2021).

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2. See Matt Shelvock, 'The Progressive Heavy Metal Guitarist's Signal Chain', in Russ Hepworth-Sawyer, Justin Paterson and Rob Toulson (eds.), *Innovation in Music* (Future Technology Press, 2013), pp. 126–38; Mark Marrington, 'From DJ to Djent-Step: Technology and the Re-coding of Metal Music since the 1980s', *Metal Music Studies* 3/2 (2017): 251–68; Robert Strachan, *Sonic Technologies: Popular Music, Digital Culture and the Creative Process* (Bloomsbury, 2017).
3. See Joel McIver, 'Periphery', *Metal Hammer* (Summer 2012), pp. 60–3. The definitive Meshuggah riffing sound can be heard on the 1995 album, *Destroy, Erase, Improve*, on tracks such as 'Future Breed Machine' and 'Soul Burn'.
4. For further discussion see Burns, *Experiencing Progressive Rock*.
5. Such elements can also be seen to reflect the influence of earlier progressive metal bands such as Rush and Dream Theater. For an involved discussion of Meshuggah's rhythmic approach, see Jonathan Pieslak, 'Re-casting Metal: Rhythm and Meter in the Music of Meshuggah', *Music Theory Spectrum* 29/2 (2007): 219–45.
6. As showcased by guitarists Dan Weller and Graham 'Pin' Pinney.
7. Burgess has used the expression 'artist' producer to describe this kind of autonomous DAW-based practitioner. See Richard J. Burgess, *The Art of Music Production: The Theory and Practice* (Oxford University Press, 2013).
8. See Acle Kahney, 'Tesseract's Acle on the Birth of Tesseract and the Djent Movement', *MetalSucks* (6 October 2010). www.metalsucks.net/2010/10/06/tesseracts-acle-on-the-birth-of-tesseract-and-the-djent-movement (accessed 29 June 2021).
9. Rob Laing, 'What Is Djent?', *Total Guitar* (May 2011), p. 51.
10. Djentle Music, 'Interview with Sander Dieleman from Got-Djent.Com', *SoundCloud* (2010). https://soundcloud.com/djentle-music/sets/interview-with-sander-dieleman (accessed 12 August 2021).
11. For further discussion see Shelvock, 'The Progressive Heavy Metal'.
12. *Ibid*., pp. 129–30.
13. See Anon, 'Drum Software: High-Powered Sample Players for Today's Electronic Drummer', *Modern Drummer* (April 2009), pp. 30–1. This article also includes discussion of Toontracks' Superior Drummer and EZ Drummer, which were popular tools for djent drum programming.
14. See Laing, 'What Is Djent?'.
15. See Boyinaband, 'Interview: Misha Mansoor of Periphery [Part 1]' (2011). www.youtube.com/watch?v=qXNeoBaZH9w (accessed 23 August 2021).
16. Ken Micallef, 'Navene Koperweis', *Modern Drummer* (January 2012), p. 34.
17. Ben Meyer, 'Jay Postones', *Modern Drummer* (August 2015), p. 61.
18. *Ibid*.
19. Laing, 'What Is Djent?', p. 52.
20. Joel McIver, 'The League of Djentlemen', *Metal Hammer* (April 2011), pp. 66–7.

21. Basick has a particular association with djent, as can be heard on its 2012 Basick Records 'sampler' at https://basickrecords.bandcamp.com/album/basick-2012-free-sampler (accessed 12 August 2021).
22. McIver, 'The League of Djentlemen', p. 67.
23. For example, Animals as Leaders frontman Tosin Abasi has cited the influence of contemporary jazz players Kurt Rosenwinkel and Adam Rogers, while Periphery's Misha Mansoor references 'fusion' artists such as Allan Holdsworth and Guthrie Govan.
24. Kalin Pashaliev, 'Interview: Misha Mansoor of Periphery', *The New Age* (22 September 2016).
25. Looping is also a feature of the track 'Behaving Badly' on the same album. Tosin Abasi has referenced electronic artists Siriusmo, Reso, and Flying Lotus as influences.
26. This particular album, which was essentially a Tosin Abasi solo project, was also notable for its being wholly built on sampled drums, here programmed by Misha Mansoor who produced, mixed and mastered the recording.
27. See Chimp Spanner's SoundClick profile at www.soundclick.com/artist/default.cfm?bandID=77752 (accessed 12 August 2021).
28. See, for example, the track 'Blades' (2012). For further discussion of Hacktivist see Gamble, *How Music Empowers*.
29. Other notable rap-djent bands that emerged during this period were Devastator (later named DVSR), hailing from Australia, and Issues, originating from Atlanta, Georgia.
30. A follow-up album, *Djent Goes Christmas*, was released in December of the same year.
31. The Mad Israeli, 'Senseless Rambles – Djent', *No Clean Singing* (2011). www.nocleansinging.com/2011/11/06/senseless-rambles-djent (accessed 19 July 2021).
32. *Ibid*.
33. John Hill, 'It's Time for Djent to Djie', *Vice* (8 October 2014). www.vice.com/en/article/r3xdb6/its-time-for-djent-to-djie (accessed 9 July 2021).
34. *MetalSucks* on occasion provided djent artists with a forum to discuss their work, such as Kahney, 'Tesseract's Acle'.
35. Guitarist in the band Galactic Pegasus.
36. Among Neilstein's more amusingly titled articles were 'I hate myself enough to check out the djent-rap band Hacktivist's new song and video for you' and 'The latest metal micro-genre bastardization: Dubstep+Djent=Djentstep'.
37. See, for example, Dom Lawson, 'TesseracT', *Metal Hammer* (April 2011), pp. 64–5; McIver, 'Periphery', pp. 60–3; Dom Lawson, 'Progs of War', *Metal Hammer* (March 2015), pp. 66–8.
38. Lawson, 'TesseracT', p. 65.
39. Jamie Thomson, 'Djent, the Metal Geek's Microgenre', *The* Guardian (3 March 2011). www.theguardian.com/music/2011/mar/03/djent-metal-geeks (accessed 3 February 2017).

40. *Ibid*.
41. Djentle Music, 'Interview with Sander Dieleman'.
42. See Kerrang!, 'Kerrang! Podcast: Periphery' (2011). www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJFe8Vlw22I (accessed 2 August 2021). See also McIver, 'Periphery', p. 60.
43. Djentle Music, 'Interview with Sander Dieleman'.
44. See Sam Dunn, *Metal Evolution: Episode 11 – Progressive Metal* (Banger Films, 2012); Jeff Wagner, *Mean Deviation: Four Decades of Progressive Heavy Metal* (Bazillion Points Books, 2010).
45. Strachan, *Sonic Technologies*, p. 135.
46. Two recordings of interest here are Genghis Tron, *Board up the House* (2008), and Igorr, *Savage Sinusoid* (2017).
47. For a detailed discussion of Korn's strategy on this recording see Mark Marrington, 'The DAW, Electronic Music Aesthetics, and Genre Transgression in Music Production: The Case of Heavy Metal Music', in Russ Hepworth-Sawyer, Jay Hodgson and Mark Marrington (eds.), *Producing Music* (Routledge, 2019), pp. 52–74.