

Disciplined Excess: The Minimalist / Maximalist Interface in Frank Zappa and Captain Beefheart

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There are the minimalist pleasures of Emily Dickinson Zero at the Bone and the maximalist pleasures of Walt Whitman.

There's no single ideal listener out there who likes my orchestral music, my guitar albums and songs like I Wanna Take You Higher. It's all one big note. Ladies and gentlemen . . .

Like Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*, Zappa's music has often been accused of being far too noisy and of being too dense. Because of their density and complexity, his sound sculptures have alternately enthused and alienated critics and listeners. With more than sixty albums (including no less than twenty-one double albums and two triple albums) released over a period of twenty-eight years, and fifteen official bootlegs, Zappa stands out as one of the most prolific composers of the 20th century, a composer whose sheer musical output could stand accused of maximalist excess. His attention to different genres and creative practices (rock, jazz, blues, orchestral music, film, opera, etc.) have often been interpreted as a desire to explore the totality of past and present modes and styles in order to create strongly contrasting musical worlds. This desire to establish his reputation as an outsider in both the rock and the art music communities.

Certainly one of the difficulties in dealing with Frank Zappa's (or anybody else's) maximalist art arises from the attention to the development of maximalist aesthetics itself. That the history of maximalism in the arts is the subject of contemporary criticism is already indicated by the fact that the term is systematically absent from all lexicographical references, and, indeed, most discussions of contemporary music except when it refers to Milton Babbitt's maximalist serialism or Schoenberg's ideas of serial composition or, more rarely and even more loosely, to the New Complexity movement of Ferneyhough and Michael Finnissy. One of the rare exceptions to the rule comes from the American novelist John Barth, whose article first published in the *New York Times* in 1986, offers the following definition of literary maximalism:

The medieval Roman Catholic Church recognized two opposite roads to grace: the *via negativa* of the monk who sought the cave, and the *via affirmativa* of immersion in human affairs, of being in the world whether or not one is of it. I have borrowed those terms to characterize the difference between Mr. Beckett, for example, and his erstwhile maximalist colleague John Barth. Barth is himself a maximalist except in his early works. Other than bone-deep disposition, which is no doubt the greatest of all, what inclines a writer – sometimes almost a cultural generation of writers – to the Negational Path? (1)

For Barth, the distance that separates Joyce from Beckett (or Whitman from Dickinson, or Faulkner from Hemingway) is reduced to an aesthetic option (the desire to embrace richness and completeness, on the one hand, or aim for precision and brevity, on the other), but is immediately translated into social terms. Barth opposes maximalism to the so-called New American Short Story of the early 1980s, a tendency represented by Ann Beattie, Raymond Carver, and others who are both praised and damned under such labels as K-Mart realism, slick chic, postmodernism, minimalism and post-Vietnam, post-literary, postmodernist blue-collar neo-early-Hemingwayism. The politics in minimalist fiction echoes a number of similar accusations made against postmodern art in general, which has been linked with the expansion of capitalist hegemony. For Fredric Jameson, for example, this tendency is a symptom of the postmodern condition, a symptom of the interpenetration of aesthetic and commodity production which, far from parodying commercial culture in a modernist (e.g., Joycean) fashion, abolishes its very substance, thereby abolishing the critical distance that separates artists from their socio-economic environment. This interpenetration of aesthetic and commodity production is indeed the logical result of the gradual process of the commodification of culture brought about by Barth's *via affirmativa*. Another critic of postmodernism, Takayoshi Ishiwari, believes that the postmodernist tendency which is broadly called maximalism is characterized not only by a tendency to embrace the time's modes

also by a typically pomo attitude to the notion of the "authentic" :

Under this label come such writers as, among others, Thomas Pynchon and Barth himself, whose bulky books contrast with Barthelme's relatively thin novels and collections of short stories. These maximalists are called so because they, situated in the age of epistemological uncertainty and therefore knowing that they can never know and inauthentic, attempt to include in their fiction everything belonging to that age, to take these authentic and inauthentic as they are with all their uncertainty and inauthenticity included; their work intends to contain the maximum of words, to be the age itself, and because of this their novels are often encyclopedic. As Tom LeClair argues in the authors of these "masterworks" even "gather, represent, and reform the time's excesses into fictions that master literary conventions and thereby master the time, the methods of fiction, and the reader" (1).

Zappa's ambition "to be the age itself" clearly manifests itself in his penchant for works that seek to incorporate frequently ironical fashion "nearly all existing musical genres and modes, from straight blues-rock and doo-wop to *concrète*, free jazz and symphonic orchestral works. And Tom LeClair's definition of maximalism as an artistic style in its historical context and represents more than the sum of all past and present compositional styles would seem to be the development of Zappa's aesthetics. But we will see that the impact of maximalism on contemporary art can be seen in the decision of what to include or exclude in a literary text or musical score or even the rather dubious notion that the decision should be dictated by a Baudrillardian sense of "epistemological uncertainty." For Zappa's disdain for acceding to the distinction between the "authentic" and the "inauthentic," high and low art, as well as other aesthetic and generic hierarchies is an aspect of his commitment to the *via affirmativa* of contemporary music, one which allies him with other musical avant-gardists like Charles Ives—who was among the first to integrate elements of low music (gospel hymns, jazz, fanfare) into his high-art music—and Zappa's self-confessed master Edgar Varèse, with whom he shares not only an interest in bruitist and percussion-based orchestral pieces but also a penchant for gigantic compositional structures that exceed traditional formats.^[1]

According to David Jaffe, one of the very few composers to address the development of a "maximalist" musical approach in contemporary music "embraces heterogeneity and allows for complex systems of juxtaposition and collisions, in which all outside influences are viewed as potential raw material." The example of Charles Ives in his mind and Zappa's tribute to Ives in the fifth box set of the *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore* series confirms his interest in his predecessor's use of "multiple colliding themes" (*Real* 167) and fragments of (sometimes discarded) musical technique emulated in Zappa's "Call Any Vegetable" which, like many of Ives's compositions, seeks to create the illusion of several marching bands marching through each other :

In our low-rent version, the band splits into three parts, playing "The Star-Spangled Banner," "God Bless America," and "America the Beautiful" all at the same time, yielding an amateur version of an Ives collision. (*Real* 167)

Ben Watson rightly underlines the historical significance of Ives's "simultaneous musics" as probably one of the last of pre-digital "xenochrony" (a term coined by Zappa to describe the art of connecting apparently unrelated live idiosyncrasies which are liable to be fitted together and synchronized into further studio constructions) "while a boy [Ives] would sing one hymn while his father played the accompaniment to a different one" (3). Familiar with the aural collages of Zappa's *Freak Out* and *Absolutely Free*, Zappa's delight in merging fun and incompatible materials and rhythms cannot be considered as a simple manifestation of the modernist cult of the hypothetical extension into postmodern eclecticism, quotation and pastiche. Rather, the satirical spirit of Zappa's experiments originates in what Amiri Baraka describes as Coltrane's decision to "murder the popular song" and "weak Western forms" (quoted in Harris 174). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the doo-wop sendups of *with Ruben and the Jets* (1968), which Zappa claimed to have conceived "along the same lines as Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring*" ("If he could take the forms and clichés of the classical era and pervert them, why not do the same with doo-wop and regulations that applied to doowop in the fifties?" [*Real* 88]).

As indicated by both Baraka's comments on Coltrane and Barth's description of the K-Mart aesthetics of the "Short Story," the maximalist vs. minimalist axis inevitably invites a political reading. In another chapter of *h of Poodle Play*, Ben Watson discusses the work of the feminist critic Susan McClary, for whom Schoenberg's "atonal" technique is the expression of an "asexual" musical language that puts an end to the binarisms (major/minor) around which sexism articulates itself. McClary claims that minimalist music, being based on repetition-without variation, is therefore deprived of the sexual climaxes of, say, Beethoven's Ninth or Bizet's *Carmen*, simultaneously undermining the supremacy of the male models of phallic telos and verticality that characterizes a sexist culture. Compared with the sounds of Brian Eno's *Music for Airports*, Zappa's "The Torture Never Stops" would no doubt be condemned as too sensual and orgasmic to qualify as anything other than an expression of the male libidinal self. Whatever the merits of McClary's suggestion that female sexuality is fundamentally anti-climactic, it would be pointless to try and deny the accusations of sexism or even deny that his music and lyrics derive much of their energy from either the repetition (or shameless endorsement) of popular archetypes of masculine domination, rawness and obscenity. But Zappa's rejection of minimalism indicates his desire to shift the debate from the domain of sexual politics to largely political and

Reflecting on the popularity of minimalist music with established critics and foundations, Zappa suggests that the success of minimalist music is out of the necessity of being cost-effective (in the same way as, for instance, the success story of the theatre format is at least in part due to the fact that it lends itself to low-budget productions requiring only two or three sets and a few additional staging costs):

... it used to be that they would fund only boob-beep stuff (serial and/or electronic composition). Now they fund anything. Minimalism (simplistic, repetitive composition, easy to rehearse and, therefore, cost-effective). So what gets funded? *Minimalism*. Why? Because it can be FUNDED. Net cultural result? **Monochromonotony**. (Real 189)

Maximalism and the Baroque Fold

Matter that reveals its texture becomes raw material, just as form that reveals its folds becomes force. In the coupling of material-force is what replaced matter and form.

La vie dans les plis

As suggested at the beginning of this essay, one of the most visible contemporary avatars of musical maximalism is the complexity school of contemporary British music (a term which was itself coined against the new simplicity of the minimalist school), a style shared by composers who sought to push the limits of instrumental virtuosity, rhythmic complexity, and polyphonic models. To some extent, Zappa's taste for extremes of register, his penchant for density and abundance, and his increased performance demands (as well as his constant search for methodological and technological procedures to deal with problems traditional performance could not fulfill) ally his work with that of Brian Ferneyhough and Michael Nyman, the name but two of the godfathers of the new complexity style. There is no reason to believe, however, that Zappa's interest in the works of these composers. By contrast, his admiration for Pierre Boulez, which culminated in his collaboration with the French composer on *The Perfect Stranger* (1984), points to his affinities with an art which would be more neo-Baroque rather than as merely promoting various forms of density and complexity. In *The Fold: Architecture, the Baroque*, Gilles Deleuze cites Boulez, the author of the Mallarmé-inspired *Pli selon pli*, as a continuator of the Baroque in its emphasis on virtuosity and eccentricity and its tendency to create a mass of curves, convolutions, and folds. Deleuze, "[unfurl] all the way to infinity" (*Fold* 5).^[2] By citing Boulez as an example of a neo-baroque tendency in music, one which signals the birth of an extended chromatism and a polyphony of polyphonies (112), Deleuze identifies a major interface between Zappa and the realm of official culture. But perhaps the best way to do justice to the compositional foldings of Zappa's works is to resort to an architectural model. According to Yago Conde, "the architecture by folding is the ability to integrate unrelated elements within a new continuous mixture" (25). It would be a mistake to reduce the maximalist quality of Zappa's oeuvre to his penchant for density and exuberance, or to the seamless character of his later transgeneric experiments (which began after the merz-inspired, collagist period of his work or less with *Weasels Ripped My Flesh* in 1970) that allies him with the efforts of other neo-Baroque artists who sought to discover new ways of folding, akin to new envelopments (Deleuze 189) that reflect the composer's desire for fluidity and mobility over juxtaposition and rupture.

This tendency is most apparent in the Synclavier compositions, whose entry into the Zappa catalog was marked by the release of *The Perfect Stranger*, in 1984. The album contains three orchestral pieces conducted by Pierre Boulez and several pieces including "The Girl in the Magnesium Dress," a piece adapted eight years later by Ali N. Askin for the 1991 Los Angeles Modern's *Yellow Shark* concert and which was originally based on the rhythms indicated by the dust part of the guitar notes recorded by the Synclavier, which Zappa subsequently converted into pitched sounds (Menn 60). Zappa discovered that the Synclavier's G page, which contains the machine's inaudible inner codes and numbers used to generate G numbers that never surface at the level of the user-friendly part of the machine.) On a number of the sleeve notes to the album suggest that the light, ductile, silver-white metal dress is only the prelude to a bizarre and violent outcome will be the death of the lover, who is destined to be impaled upon the lethal spike that adorns the girl's back.

"The Girl in the Magnesium Dress" is about a girl who hates men and kills them with her special dress. Its construction features a lethally pointed sort of micro-Wagnerian breastplate. When they die from dancing with her, she takes them and wipes it off. (sleeve notes to *The Perfect Stranger*; unpag.)

But if we dare to look up the girl's deadly dress and try to make sense of the inner dynamics of the piece, the way the dust into audible pitched rhythms appears as yet another manifestation of Zappa's maximalist fold, one that blurs the boundaries between matter and sound, the literal and the figurative, the real and the virtual. The complexity of the polyphonies of the piece, the irregular rhythmic groupings and the overall absence of symmetry, combined with the phrasing of the lead melody all help to blur the outer limits of the piece as well as those of the girl's body.

of the Baroque fold in Zappa's music, Bernini's sculptures and elsewhere is to relay and prolong tradition, the latter has reached its limits. Here, Zappa's maximalist dress once again returns us to the body (and to the folds and convolutions of the skin) only to disrupt our most ingrained assumptions about how to deal with the opposition of inside and outside, both of which are subsumed into a reversible plication which comprises an inside as the operation of the outside (Deleuze 112).

In the same way as the true subject of Zappa's piece becomes not the girl itself but the dress she is wearing, the dress, eventually confronted with its own absence of limits, gives way to the aesthetics of the baroque garment, which, freed from its instrumental destiny and is no longer subordinated to the body that wears it.[4] The baroque costume does not even prolong the shapes and movements of the body and becomes its own movement, "wrapping the body in its always multipliable folds" (164). The baroque fold and its sculptural extension in, say, Bernini's Saint Theresa, can be interpreted as a body of infinite folds, curved lines and surfaces that twist and weave through the changing of space. Whereas Bernini's goal was to give three-dimensional expression to the body possessed by religious ecstasy (a state of abandonment often interpreted as a form of eroticized suffering), Zappa's *Girl in the Magnesium Dress* is a secular baroque art that seeks to conquer formlessness by allowing a profusion of matter to overflow the frame.

For Deleuze, the baroque embodies "the law of extremum of matter, i.e. a maximum of matter for a minimum of form." In a footnote to the closing chapter of his study, he claims that there are therefore a lot of affinities between the kinds of minimal art where "form no longer limits itself to volume, but embraces an unlimited space in all directions." Deleuze cites Robert Morris's felt folds and Christo's wrapped buildings as examples of minimalism's closeness with the baroque. The complex and often paradoxical dialectics of minimalism and maximalism in their relation to the body beyond the scope of this essay; one must nonetheless point out that Zappa's Dionysian aesthetics, which contrast with the carnivalesque body, remains radically opposed to the more austere, Apollonian landscapes of architectural modernism. Zappa's performance of John Cage's 4'33", in which he let the composition sheets fall from the piano, is a return to the body to interrupt the illusion of absolute silence and timelessness created by Cage's blank intervals.[5] As Yves Bonnefoy remarks, the Baroque is "neither illusion nor insight"; instead, it "puts illusion to the test." The illusion is converted into "a space of hallucinatory presence" (quoted in Deleuze 170), a tendency reflected in the physicality of sound and the creation of material musical objects. Like Bonnefoy's baroque, which exists in the conjunction of maximum presence and extreme absence, Zappa's magnesium dress can be seen as so many microevents that signify both the absence of matter and the essence of immateriality. They are, to quote Deleuze, "similar to the musical monad, an eternal object of pure Virtuality which actualizes itself in the [sound] of its own Possibilities which realize themselves in vibrations and fluxes" (109).

Zappa's eagerness, in *The Girl with the Magnesium Dress*, to let the hardware of the computer generate the form of his compositions, in particular, is as typical of the contemporary avant-garde's attention to the material conditions of production as it is characteristic of the baroque's tendency to "foreground matter" (166) to the detriment of form. But the technological fold effected by Zappa's electronic compositions also raises the question of the contrast between the material and the immaterial made to Zappa's maximalist art. Was Zappa using the Synclavier as a maximalist "desiring machine" liable to "disrupt the conceptual vectors of his oeuvre *ad infinitum* by combining 'various elements and forces of all types'" (Deleuze xxiii)?[6] And should Zappa's work then be regarded as a late modernist collage or a postmodern "rhizome" of heterogeneous genres and styles (which would therefore exemplify what Deleuze and Guattari have described as the "deconstruction of traditional notions of subjectivity into a network of multiplicities, a heterogeneous aggregate of parts functioning like 'natural machines'")? These considerations seem less important than the suggestion that Zappa's investment in computer technology was a necessary stage in the folding and unfolding trajectories of a transomorphic art which has challenged generations of listeners and left them speculating about the origins, influences and limits of his work. The notion of the construction of the Project/Object (a formulation meant to describe "the overall concept of [his] work in various guises" [139]) was the creation of music that coalesced the technical infallibility of the machine and the personalities of its creators. In this respect, the coexistence of Synclavier pieces and works written and executed by Boulez's Ensemble Intercontemporain in *The Perfect Stranger* (1984) anticipates Zappa's later mixed experiments which typically hesitate between the mechanical, the authenticity of organic execution and the necessities of accurate performance (in the sense of Boulez). Thanks Boulez for "having the patience to demand accurate performance of the *killer triplets* on page eight."

An example of Zappa's commitment to the materiality of sound and the physicality of performance, Zappa's *Magnesium Dress* also establishes the body as the supreme maximalist receiver and generator of meaning. The profusion of grotesque and abstract(ed) bodies and body parts in the works of Frank Zappa and his old collaborator Don Van Vliet (aka Captain Beefheart) – from the latter's *Trout Mask Replica* with its horrifically exaggerated, phallic noses that appear on the cover of Zappa's *Ruben and the Jets* – represents what Bakhtin has called the "epitome of incompleteness" (Bakhtin 26), an unfinished unit transgressing its own limits, often through eating and drinking, sexuality, as exemplified by Zappa's penchant for sexually- and scatologically-charged lyrics. The stress, the excesses and potentialities of the body's folds and orifices, "on the apertures or the convexities, or on various offshoots: the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the potbelly, the nose. This unfinished body (dying, bringing forth and being born)," Bakhtin adds, "is not separated from the world by clearly defined limits, but is blended with the world, with animals, with objects" (26-27). Zappa's and Beefheart's lyrics are full of similes

coming out of themselves to meet the world of animal and objectist reality. The point where body and thing (literally or figuratively) is where the unfinished chain of growth, proliferation and metamorphosis comes to a halt. The potential of the integrated body, the body emptying itself to become like nothing and preparing itself to go on again, devouring the universe and being devoured by it.

Subject, Meaning, Pleasure, Body

Like the human body, criticism is pervious to its objects, and just as maximalist art develops out of and contains the body as a point at which subject and object interpenetrate and reconfigure each other, so any bid to write can only accept a similar suspension of its traditional limits and certitudes. The maximalist body-in-progress occupies the liminalities of the edge (between discourses, ideas, styles, genres, bodies, objects, genres and styles, ideas and discourses), opens a space in which the neglected (and sometimes repressed) pleasure may again be asked of poetics.

When in 1977 Roland Barthes announced the death of the author, the basis for his extrapolation was a sentence from Balzac. Writing, for Barthes, is 'That neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the neutral identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.' (Death 168). Neutral, bodiless, oblique and identity, the death of the author would seem to render moribund the entire textual scene. Before Barthes the author in that of the reader at the very end of his text, it is impossible to see in his vision how the literary source of pleasure, or of anything else for that matter. Critical premises are never innocent, of course, and the Barthes deconstructs the authorial subject seems in retrospect directly proportional to the crassly ideological assumptions from Balzac:

This was woman herself, with her sudden fears, her irrational whims, her instinctive worries, her impetuousness and her delicious sensibility. (Death 167)

If ever there was an attempt to write determinately, this must be it; and one can only sympathise with the death of the sentence as writing by expunging any traces it may harbour of an authorial subject. Suitably dehistoricised and finished with it, the sentence-formerly-written-by-Balzac is ripe for repossession by the newly nascent reader. This procedure makes satisfying sense in relation to a particularly strident example of nineteenth century 'realism' in the maximalist context, when confronted for example with something from *Finnegans Wake* or, to skip modernism, Zappa? And how would the transference of agency from author to reader work in such a context to impinge on pleasure? We have been arguing that, as a maximalist paradigm, the body is immanent (and sometimes exor) Without trying to say *whose* body is present *where*, such an assumption immediately seems to put us at odds with the idea of writing as disincarnate. Conversely, to accept the death of the author as implicitly true of maximalism would be an inconceivable mastery of such art on the part of its audience. Or it would simply imply a neutrality of no, which is difficult to conceive of in relation to the sublime irritant of maximalism. In the face of its excess, the reader (whether literary or musical) *needs* a body, and this is the short explanation for why Zappa as author is ever present while Joyce the author, with his bad eyes and perforating ulcer, is a cult amongst readers of Joyce.^[8] This is a double bind: while the presence of the body in maximalist art may help the audience to take pleasure in the work, at the same time a sense of political agency, it may also contribute to the deferral of such pleasure. There is something about pleasure that must wait until the body in the work has finished taking its own; that the work is a tireless body devouring itself endlessly. For Barthes, the death of the author would seem to precipitate a deferral of meaning and the pleasure traditionally contingent on it:

In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed (as the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption from meaning.

This sounds suspiciously like the postmodern sprawl which may offer us a mild and strangely technical amusement, but it teaches us indifference. Maximalism is a much more confused and urgent situation, where it is no longer clear what is contingent on meaning or the other way around. Under such conditions, nothing is exempted, everything is included; maximalism had taken root during the interval between the death of the author and the birth of the reader as we know them; the body of maximalism is heavily pregnant with a meaningful pleasure that is also a pleasurable meaning, a unwieldy body that the audience must grapple.

Barthes attacks the author as a final signifier which caps meaning, the demise of this authorial subject, however, does not in the first instance produce a wild expansion of sense; rather it unravels meaning to its degree zero, the point at which it is rendered systematically exempt. While one formulation of this particular emptiness might be the depthless of the postmodernist text, another might be something much closer to classical minimalism as articulated in the work of artists such as Frank Stella, Donald Judd, Steve Reich or Terry Riley, where unravelling is to be viewed as reduction, just one more element to be forced out of the text (once again, to be understood as literary, musical or visual).

fascinations of minimalism is its determination, against all the philosophical odds, to make nothing, an aesthetic pits art against death. And one of the key discoveries of minimalism is that dead art doesn't exist: one can only approach the point. If we think of this point as a Barthesian degree zero of meaning, it is very difficult to answer the question of reduction? One would need to consider how it is exactly that a code is wrested from a subject. If, however, we think of the minimalist point of maximal reduction as coincident with the maximalist double contingency (the point at which meaning and pleasure becomes impossibly ambiguous), one can indeed posit an answer. Just as the last reduction of experience is the body, so the degree zero of meaning is also the body, somehow a transference is effected between the links in the signifying chain and the somatic significance of the body. One can kill an author, but a text (that is, a text more than nothing) will always have a body.

The minimalist body residing at the point of double contingency is, as we have suggested above, pregnant with potential. The maximalist anatomisation of the body produces a body-in-progress to set alongside the body-in-progress of Zappa's Project Object. Even though it was intended as an act of revolution, Barthes's execution of the Autobiography runs the risk of installing a neutral territory empty of meaning and thus void of political discourse. The maximalist body-in-progress, by contrast, functions as a guarantor of political content. It is clear, for example, in review of his work that its political content has always depended on its physicality and that this has much more to do with its maximalist than its minimalist references to blow jobs, noses and feet. Maximalism is politically embodied and thus stands as a vital counter-ideology conjured up by Barthes and translated into the anti-practice of political quietude by certain strains of postmodernism.

The degree zero of meaning lies beyond the body in an unimaginable nothing, it is bodilessness, and in the end, the Author may begin to look like something of an Aunt Sally. With this in mind, perhaps, we should consider Barthes, on the French painter Bernard Réquichot, which goes a long way to acknowledging this body beyond the body, a crucial location at the crossover point between the impossible zero of minimalism and the inconceivable evenness of maximalism.

Minimalism into Maximalism Will Go

William Blake articulated the coincidence of minima and maxima with his famous quatrain:

To see a world in a grain of sand
And heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
And eternity in an hour.[9]

and, as a child, Salvador Dali would press on his eyeballs to make the angels come, imitating the gesture of his mother, countering his fear of the dark with benign intrauterine hallucinations. That we are all relatively myopic is certainly true, but the imaginings which begin where the penetration of our senses tapers off, when one sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, suggest another, thus creating a maximalist concentration of focus and endurance, which is also a nexus of perception.

Minimalism in painting and the minimalist use of repetition in music seek to restrict our sensory receptions to a manageable tolerance. How can one go on listening to or looking at the same thing? For Vico and Nietzsche and any other philosopher of the eternal return, repetition does not pose a problem, since its pulse is so infinitesimally slow; in the absence of an observer, objects and events can pass themselves off as unique. History itself would be a minimalist work if it were not accelerated to a rate which allowed us to experience it again and again; if we could be outside it and eternal, it and finite, history for us is too full, and must remain for the time being a maximalist paradigm. Music, painting, literature, however, are there to be endured.

In his essay on Bernard Réquichot, Barthes argues that quite often in a single painter [there is] a whole history of the work (Responsibility 228); by changing the levels of perception, for example with the aid of a magnifying glass, one can see in three square centimetres of Cézanne (228).[10] What determines our experience of a work is the level at which we isolate, enlarge, and treat a detail, you create a new work (223). Minimalist music, according to Jonathan Sterne, is designed to effect a similar perceptual shift:

the small number of events over time tends to focus the listener's attention intensely on each event, in all its detail, resulting, from the minimalist point of view, in a music of parts rather than a whole. (quoted in Potter 5)

This is not pointillism, where each constituent dot remains a functional part of the whole, submissive and subservient; it (an)atomises its material, distilling particles which have different properties, which depart from the original whole. Each particle may be a composition, or something else. The minimalist cell is a new maximalist body.

With typical raw intuition, Don Van Vliet may have stumbled across this process and formulated it for the a musicians in what he called his exploding note theory. When learning Flavour Bud Living prior to the album *Doc at the Radar Station*, Captain Beefheart guitarist Gary Lucas took for his model an earlier version performed by John French on the *Bat Chain Puller* tapes. Van Vliet wasn't pleased and sent Lucas back to his new theory : « you play every note as if it has only a tangential relationship to the preceding note and the (Barnes 273). Each constituent part of the piece becomes semi-autonomous, it may detach itself from its syn and become a tiny but expanding centre of new experience a paradigm. Our argument at this point trespasses classical dichotomies of formal philosophy which pitted Spinoza's monism against the monadology of Leibniz. Flavour Bud Living if played according to Van Vliet's exigencies would perhaps be a monad, not wino suggested, but separated from its neighbours by a translucent veil, rendering relations oblique at best. Spinoza only one substance : God. Everything else is merely a mode of this oneness : Whatever is, is in God, and nothing can be conceived without God. (*Ethics* I.xv). In our musical model, God would be the unified work which imparts parts and arrogates to itself the exclusive right to exist. In critical parlance, this may be what we mean when we say self-contained. In Leibniz's best of all possible worlds, by contrast, God has created a maximum of individual substances ; the world is exemplary precisely because it has been created on maximalist principles. In critical performance as too religious, Van Vliet may have thought that it made his composition sound too monistic too much like a substantial God who is ineluctable essence and cannot be subdivided. He must have heard to French's playing, a worshipful submission to a single spirit in the piece which checks its capacity to stimulate detail.

This theological cleavage is again audible in Peon, which was performed by Bill Harkleroad and Mark Bell. *Lick My Decals Off* from 1970, and then re-recorded by the same duo in 1976 for the debut album of the group. *Decals* version one of the first things we notice is how loud the bass is in relation to the guitar ; they are not on the same dynamic level and this discrepancy tends to emphasise both inexactitudes of timing and the piece's asymmetry. It sets up a space for the ear to engage in creative decomposition. It would be interesting to know how deliberate this was and at whose insistence it was allowed to stand. The guitar itself sounds excessively dry and trebly, with a lack of its resonance. There is a staccato sinfulness about the unison bends which appear after a definite pause about halfway through the piece ; and when Harkleroad plays the final descent each of its eight notes sounds as if it has to say. The Mallard version by contrast is ushered in with a few seconds of twittering birdsong. This pastoral continues throughout, filling in the gaps between the notes, rounding off the edges, assuaging its peristaltic the bass are mixed together now and the former has a mellow jazz tone traceable to the soft-stroking fingertip of a nit-picking nail. The reverb is up and those unison bends are played with a tasteful tremolo. Glissandi are introduced into the gaps with a mollified attack, most notably on the fourth of those last eight notes, which slips sideways to its neighbour, executing the self-sacrifice of melody, an offering to the oneness of the whole. Don Van Vliet said : Flavour Bud Living put the whole thing in heavy syrup (Barnes 273), and with the Mallard Peon we are helping of the sticky.

If the mechanical aid to the shift of perceptual level in painting is the magnifying glass, in music it is the tape machine. It not only records sequences of sound but allows them to be played back at different speeds, helping the ear to follow. Don Van Vliet's assessment of *Decals* pinpoints the link between its aesthetics and the speed at which it is played.

What the music is going at is complete absence. That's the way we did it. You can't think about that music while it's moving so fast that if you think about it it's like watching a train go by and counting the cars. (Barnes *Captain* 331)

Here there is no danger of minimalist endurance and the consequent effect is one of total absence. Except for the fact that Van Vliet is indulging in hyperbole ; though there is an accelerated rate of event in the music, which certainly does not allow the ability to concentrate on any one moment. It is like the scary succession of ideas during insomnia, which does not let down a single thought or image and endure it long enough to enter the expanded realm of dream, to count slowly rather than those impossibly speeding railway cars. It is very difficult to shift the level of our perception of time, more so than was the case with its predecessor, *Trout Mask Replica*. This music is antithetical to minimalist music in the very intriguing that Van Vliet should associate it with an experience of emptiness, total absence. If slowed down it would begin to provoke those minimalist moments of escape into new multitudes, or at least some odd points of interest and ear's proactive penetrations. Or perhaps we should think of it rather as fairy music, that is to say the kind of music that comes after shifting our level of perception of something which has been pressing on our eardrums, a minimalist piece of music. Could Captain Beefheart be a sonic equivalent of Dali's angels ? Perhaps it is *coming from* as well as *going to* something, revelling in what Samuel Beckett has called the cyclic dynamism of the intermediate (Dante 16), a phenomenon which is usefully set alongside Van Vliet's definition of painting as fulfilling the absence of space between the object and the viewer (Barnes *Captain* 331) and which also suggests the technical phenomenon of interference, caused by the interaction of two or more wave systems. In any case, we begin to see here the logic of repetition within the minimalist aesthetic. Is it more there to slow down the rate of progression of a piece of music than to begin to repeat its parts ?[12]

The close scrutiny of minimalist repetition invites the listener to re-hear music. After a certain number of hearings, the listener and the music arrive at a point of double contingency where it is impossible to decide whether the music is

a concomitant of meaning or vice versa, where art is reduced to art matter and incorporated into the body-in-from Vico to Bruno the Nolan and still concerning himself with the poetics of *Finnegans Wake*, Beckett remains maxima and minima of particular contraries are one and indifferent (*Exagmination* 6). Joyce's writing, like *Baby*, moves too fast whereas minimalism moves too slow, but both are maximalist in that they tap into freedom normal perceptual range, at the low end or at the high end, where extremes of contraries meet and structured into an urgency of matter. Blake's fairies, Dali's angels, and the dreamer of *Finnegans Wake* are all avatar body-beyond-the-author which presides over this point of double contingency, plying its excruciating pleasure metaphors, since they inhere at a point of concentration, equivalent to Zappa's Big Note, where the space to see one thing in terms of another is no longer available. The shift of the level of perception is now revealed re-materialisation of the language, of the music, in which what you hear is what you hear *and* everything else disrobed of the acculturated vestment designed to fast-track pleasure at the expense of its painful other. It is [made] in an environment hostile to dreamers – announced by Zappa in the communiqué published by the *IT* 1971, and its dreamer, along with everything else, is to be taken as literally as possible.

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[1] Varèse used 400 speakers to perform his *Poème électronique* at the 1958 Brussels World's fair.

[2] Like its famous cousin, the rhizome (a seemingly endless series of nodes and intersections which, in contrast to arborescence, has no main trunk from which the branches and roots grow), Deleuze's baroque has no actual

[3] We are grateful to Karen Mac Cormack for drawing our attention to Conde's writings.

[4] See also Barthes's definition of the baroque as "a progressive contradiction between the unit and the width, in short, the extension is not added but multiplied, in short, the width of an acceleration" (*Essais* 108).

[5] *A Chance Operation: The John Cage Tribute* (Various artists, 2CD, KOCH International, 1993).

[6] Opposed to the (negative) Lacanian dialectic of lack and desire, Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* proposes "desiring-production," which they define as a "pure multiplicity, that is to say, an affirmation that is irreducible to unity" (46).

[7] This, incidentally, is by no means a contemporary, or even a modern, phenomenon. The best-known manifestation of this, the Renaissance, François Rabelais, had already understood that only an aesthetics of corpo-reality is liable to new perception while allowing the body to become its own food for conceptual thought and artistic experimentation. Maximalism allies itself with the grotesque as it is essentially linked with bodily excesses. As Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque insistence on bodily functions and the liberation of instinct, far from being degrading, is meant to liberate the energies of mankind. Indeed, Rabelais's grotesque realism "has a regenerative effect as the reduction of a life to primary bodily functions digs a bodily grave for a new birth, conceiving of new possibilities arising from the nether regions."

[8] It also, perhaps, helps to explain the continuing resistance to the post-structuralist critique of character in Joyce. Though HCE, ALP, Shem, Shaun and Issy have been subjected to various deconstructions since the 1970s (see Margot Norris's *The Decentered Universe of Finnegans Wake*, Roland McHugh's *The Sigla of Finnegans Wake*, and Bishop's *Joyce's Book of the Dark*) they still figure strongly in most attempts to read the text. As presence and pseudo-personalities, subjective traces, they imply the literary character, which in turn, at however many deconstructive levels, implies a body, whether that of the author, the reader or some ontologically uncertain element residing in between.

[9] From "Auguries of Innocence" (Blake *Collected Poems* 585)

[10] The opening lines of Captain Beefheart's "The Blimp" (*Trout Mask Replica*) seem to endorse Barthes's reference to its own perceptual exigencies: "Master master/ This is recorded thru uh fly's ear/ 'n you have to see it."

[11] Douglas Gordon has attempted something similar in video with his slow-motion projection of classic film. *Psycho* challenged the audience to endure a marathon viewing, while offering them the chance to see the film in a new way.

[12] That Van Vliet was conversant with at least some American minimalist music is evident from his quotation of "Come Out" in "Moonlight on Vermont": "Come out to show them." (Barnes *Captain* 94-95)

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