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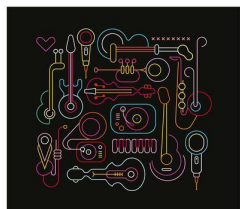
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FORM AND TIME IN *TROUT MASK REPLICA*

Peter Silberman

Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band's *Trout Mask Replica* (1969) surely is one of the strangest rock albums ever released. The off-putting combination of harmonic dissonance, out-of-synch counterpoint, abrupt changes of texture, surreal lyrics, and an obstinate avoidance of many of rock's standard style markers, coupled with the album's sheer length (twenty-eight songs originally on two LPs), ensures that few people listen past the first few minutes.¹

Captain Beefheart's abrasive voice, described by his biographer Mike Barnes as an "American avant-garde/roots version of Sprechgesang – a half singing, half speaking, melodic oratory,"² further alienates listeners expecting any sort of hummable melody. The critic Tim Page, quoting Charles Wourinen's comments on *Pierrot Lunaire*, sums up the listening experience that *Trout Mask Replica* provides by writing that it is "rather like trying to befriend a porcupine."³

But repeated listening reveals something else entirely. As Courrier writes, "For some, *Trout Mask Replica* is the worst record ever made. For others, a neglected masterpiece."⁴ In addition to their origin in rock and blues, Beefheart's songs show a wide-ranging set of influences, including the music of Stravinsky, Steve Reich, and Ornette Coleman. In many songs, the typical verse/chorus form of rock music is replaced by a series of self-contained and unrelated units, more common in music of mid-century Modernist composers who employ moment form such as Stockhausen and Stravinsky. And Beefheart continually plays with and alters the listener's sense of time in striking and original ways. Beefheart's skillful melding of characteristics of rock, blues, Minimalism, free jazz, and the mid-century avant-garde is unique. John Peel, the radio host and producer, aptly describes the groundbreaking nature of *Trout Mask Replica* as follows: "If there has been anything in the history of popular music which could be described as a work of art in a way that people who are involved in other areas of art would understand, then *Trout Mask Replica* is probably that work."⁵

This essay will investigate two parameters of *Trout Mask Replica*'s songs: form and time. In contrast to typical rock verse/chorus forms, I will show that many of *Trout Mask Replica*'s songs employ moment form, defined by Jonathan Kramer as a form that consists of a succession of "self-contained (quasi) independent section[s], set off from other sections by discontinuities."⁶ These sections need not relate to each other in any way, and the abrupt change from one

section to the next minimizes any sense of logical progression. Moment form compositions, such as some of the works of Stravinsky and Stockhausen, often use consistent proportions of section durations to relate sections that contain no other commonalities. I will demonstrate such proportional schemes at work in three songs from *Trout Mask Replica*: “Hair Pie: Bake 2,” “Steal Softly Thru Snow,” and “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica).”

Moment form songs in *Trout Mask Replica* create a unique sense of time by continuously repeating small melodic cells within each section. The number of repetitions of each cell is carefully controlled such that change occurs at the threshold of listeners’ expectations for change (approximately four repetitions). Further repetitions would negate this expectation, while fewer would destroy the sense of moment form.⁷ Abrupt discontinuities mark the end of one section and the beginning of the next section, which requires the listener to participate in repeated cycles of stasis followed by temporal interruptions, frustrating any hearing based on a single overarching temporal narrative. The constant interruptions that are the result of moment form prevent the listener from entering a state of flow (“losing oneself” in the music), and thus the listener maintains awareness of everyday clock time throughout each song.

Further, changes in the vocals in *Trout Mask Replica* (movement from one stanza or one topic to another, for instance) rarely coincide with changes between moments in the instrumental parts, producing two separate but simultaneous time frames. Finally, Frank Zappa, the album’s producer, recorded different songs in different places, each with a distinct sound print, creating an aural travelogue that heightens the sense of time passing as the album progresses.

The Magic Band and *Trout Mask Replica*

Captain Beefheart and His Magic Band was formed in Lancaster, California, in 1965 by the guitarist Alex Snouffer, and they originally played blues.⁸ The singer, harmonica player, and saxophonist Don Van Vliet (1941–2010) emerged as the frontman for this group and became associated with the name Captain Beefheart, under which he performed for the rest of his career.⁹ The band released a series of blues albums in the late 1960s and enjoyed a modest success performing around southern California.

By 1969 the lineup of the band had changed to include Bill Harkleroad and Jeff Cotton on guitars, Mark Boston on bass, John French on drums, Victor Hayden on bass clarinet and vocals, and Van Vliet on vocals and various woodwind instruments. Van Vliet served as composer and songwriter, but was hampered by his inability to read music. He composed by picking out melodies on the piano, whistling, and singing, and relied on French to transcribe his ideas. Van Vliet also incorporated riffs and harmonies suggested by band members and, in at least two instances, by Frank Zappa. Van Vliet’s *Trout Mask Replica* compositions thus are collaborations between himself, his bandmates, and Zappa. Therefore in referring to the creator of these compositions I will use “Beefheart,” by which I mean the entire set of collaborators.

Trout Mask Replica’s songs were created over a period of several months in late 1968 and early 1969 in a rented house in Woodland Hills, California, in which the entire band lived during this time.¹⁰ The album was recorded and produced by Zappa, Van Vliet’s childhood friend. Some songs were recorded in a studio, some in the Woodland Hills house, and one, “Hair Pie: Bake 1,” in the garden outside the house. Each location has its own sonic environment, which is readily apparent on the album.

Form

Trout Mask Replica's songs consistently avoid any sort of standard rock or pop music form.¹¹ Most songs have no verses, no choruses, and no repetition of any formal section once that section has ended. Instead, twenty of the twenty-eight songs on *Trout Mask Replica* consist of a series of unrelated blocks that change abruptly from one to the next.¹² Each block has its own melodic material, its own drum beat, and in some cases a different metre and/or tempo from the blocks that precede or follow it. In most cases there are no obvious similarities between adjacent blocks besides instrumentation, and no way to predict what any future block will contain based on previous blocks. Melodic organization is primarily contrapuntal with little sense of a key or even a tonal centre in many instances.¹³

Kramer, based on the writings of Stockhausen, calls an unconnected block of this type a “moment” and this sort of form “moment form.”¹⁴ Kramer describes a moment form composition as containing the following:

... a series of minimally connected sections – called moments – that form a segment of an eternal continuum. The moments may be *related* (motivically, for example) but not *connected* by transition. Moments, then, are self-contained sections, set off by discontinuities, that are heard more for themselves than for their participation in the progression of the music. ... Since there is no linear logic that connects moments, their order of succession *seems* arbitrary. Actually, the order may or may not *be* arbitrary, but it must seem so on the surface if the piece is to be heard in moment time.¹⁵

Kramer lists a number of paradigmatic moment form compositions, including Stockhausen's *Kontakte* (1958–60), *Mixtur* (1964), and *Momente* (1961–72). He goes on to identify moment form compositions by Messiaen, Webern, Stravinsky, Lutoslawski, Zappa, and others. A number of moment form works are melodically and rhythmically quite static, each moment consisting of merely a sustained texture, while in others some sort of activity takes place during moments. Kramer analyzes Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* in detail, which he considers to be a typical active moment form composition. Within each of its moments small motivic units are repeated and varied slightly, and each succeeding moment introduces new motivic units while discarding the old ones.¹⁶ Finally, moments sometimes contain some sort of process that begins at the outset of a moment and concludes at its end. Kramer writes: “If a moment is defined by a process, that process must reach its goal and must be completed within the confines of the moment.”¹⁷

The moments in Beefheart's songs are active, containing repeated melodic units that I will call “cells.”¹⁸ Figure 22.1 contains a lead guitar and bass transcription of moments 1 through 7 (out of ten total) from “Bills Corpse.”¹⁹ The transcription shows each moment (labelled moment 1 through moment 7), its beginning timing, and the cells that it repeats along with the number of times that cell is played.²⁰ I chose metre signatures based on the length of cells, the drum beat, and what seemed like logical rhythmic grouping in the lead guitar.²¹

Cells vary slightly on each repeat, which contributes to the informal feel of this recording. For my transcription I've chosen the most typical version of each cell in cases in which slight changes occur. There are two instances on the recording that may be errors (not shown in the transcription). The bass gets out of synch with the rest of the band and starts moment 2's bass line two bars early (during the last repeat of moment 1), and then also begins moment 3 early, during the last repeat of moment 2. Moment 4 takes one repetition to settle down,

The musical score for "Bills Corpse" is divided into seven distinct moments, each with a unique time signature and a repeated melodic cell. The score is written for lead guitar and bass.

- Moment 1 (0:00):** Four repetitions. Time signature: 12/8.
- Moment 2 (0:15):** Two repetitions. Time signature: 4/4.
- Moment 3 (0:22):** Four repetitions. Time signature: 4/4.
- Moment 4 (0:29):** Three repetitions. Time signature: 6/8.
- Moment 5 (0:37):** Four repetitions. Time signature: 4/4.
- Moment 6 (0:49):** Two repetitions plus an extra cell. Time signature: 9/8.
- Moment 7 (0:49):** Four repetitions. Time signature: 3/4.

Figure 22.1 “Bills Corpse,” transcription of Moments 1–7

such that cells are not clear until the second repetition. Perhaps the band members lost track of how many times to repeat moment 3 and were surprised at the beginning of moment 4.²²

Several aspects of “Bills Corpse,” as shown in Figure 22.1, are worthy of mention. There are no transitions between moments, as befits a moment form composition, and few melodic connections between moments (although there are inter-moment rhythmic motives such as dotted rhythms and a crotchet followed by a quaver in compound metre). No consecutive moments have the same perceived metre and metric modulation occurs several different ways as identified in the example. Tonality is ambiguous. Moments 2, 4, and 6 suggest a tonal centre of A, while 3 and 5 seem to centre on G, A’s lower neighbour. But moments 1 and 7 contradict the local emphasis on A, emphasizing respectively C and D, and F \sharp .²³ Even the pitch collection is unclear. Moments 1–4 suggest A Aeolian, but succeeding moments add a B \flat , a C \sharp , an F \sharp , and a D \sharp .

“Bills Corpse’s” is typical of all moment form songs on *Trout Mask Replica*, consisting of a series of moments, each containing a repeated melodic cell. Each moment ends abruptly, and each ending serves as the beginning of the next cell.

Beefheart’s repetition of cells within moments deserves further explanation because constant repetition evokes Minimalism, and Minimal music may have been an influence. Barnes describes an account of Van Vliet listening to Steve Reich’s *Come Out*, and notes that the words “come out to show them” from that composition appear in *Trout Mask Replica*’s “Moonlight on Vermont.”²⁴ When the recording of *Come Out* ended, the needle

began skipping, and Van Vliet continued to listen to its sound; repetition of small units also recalls a skipping record needle. Repetition also may be an artefact of Van Vliet's compositional process. He picked out many of his cells on the piano, but since he didn't read music or have any piano training (according to drummer John French Van Vliet didn't even know the names of the piano keys) he needed to repeat cells many times in order to remember them and for French to be able to transcribe them.²⁵

Why does a moment end when it does? *Trout Mask Replica's* moments almost always contain two or four statements of a cell, with an occasional eight-statement moment. Figure 22.2 shows the number of cell statements in each moment for three songs: "Bills Corpse," "Hair Pie: Bake 2," and "Steal Softly Thru Snow," all of which use mostly four statements of each cell, rarely going beyond that amount. The number four seems significant

		"Bills Corpse"								
<i>Moment:</i>		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Number of cell statements:		4	2	4	3	4	2	4	2	4
 				10		11				
<i>Moment:</i>										
Number of cell statements:		no repeated cell		narration only						
 		"Hair Pie: Bake 2"								
<i>Moment:</i>		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Number of cell statements:		8	9	4	2	4	4	4	4	4
 				10		11		12		
<i>Moment:</i>										
Number of cell statements		8	4	no repeated cell						
 		"Steal Softly Thru Snow"								
<i>Moment:</i>		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Number of cell statements:		4	8	2	8	4	4	4	4	5
 				10		11		12		13
<i>Moment:</i>										
Number of cell statements		2	2	4	narration only					

Figure 22.2 Number of cell statements per moment

as a limit to repetitions. Margulis, drawing on the work of Lidov, explains that “When the repetition extends beyond the three-or-four mark, Lidov postulates that it acquires a new function ... and ‘cancels out its own claim on our attention and thereby refers our focus elsewhere, to another voice or to a changing aspect.’”²⁶ Margulis’ explanation suggests that after four or so repetitions listeners stop paying attention to what is being repeated, perhaps out of the expectation that the repetition will continue and that the musical action is elsewhere. As an example, accompaniments tend to be more repetitive, and thus less interesting to listeners, than the melodies they accompany. Beefheart’s moments perhaps take advantage of our limited appetite for repetition. Four cells is just enough repetition to make us attend to each cell, but not so many that we become bored.

A rhythmic process is at work in several moments across the album. In each instance, the moment ends once the process is complete. Guitarist Bill Harkleroad explains: “We would play in various time signatures, often at the same time. For instance, one part might be in 3/4 time while another was in 4/4 time. Only when they touched down together after twelve beats would we move on to the next section of the piece.”²⁷ Figure 22.3 shows three such examples of rhythmic processes from “My Human Gets Me Blues” and “Hair Pie: Bake 2.”²⁸ In “My Human Gets Me Blues” the lead guitar plays six cells of four beats each (here written as a bar of 4/4 each) along with the rhythm guitar. At the same time, the bass and drums play eight cells of three beats each. I’ve written the bass part in 4/4 metre, but vertical lines separate the three-beat cells. The two simultaneous cells align after three bars (twelve beats) and again after six bars (twenty-four beats) at which point the moment ends. In “Hair Pie: Bake 2’s” moment 6 the lead and rhythm guitars play four cells of four beats each in compound metre (twelve quavers) while the bass and drums play six cells of four beats each in simple metre (eight quavers). I have transcribed the guitars’ part in a metre of 4/4, with slurs combining groups of three quavers into a 12/8 metre. Again, vertical lines separate cells. In this example, the two parts align at the end of the third bar and again at the end of the sixth bar, ending the moment. In “Hair Pie: Bake 2’s” moment 8 the rhythm guitar plays three cells of three beats each while the other instruments, represented in the example by the bass, play four cells of three beats each. This moment ends at the first instance in which the parts align, after three bars (Figures 22.3a and 22.3b).

In some songs moments create proportional schemes based on their durations, a hallmark of moment form compositions. Thus their endings are not arbitrary but serve to create such schemes. Kramer explains:

Moment time ... is characterized by sections that are internally static, at least relative to context. What this means is that there is no substantial contrast, change, motion, or surprise *within* sections. There are, in other words, none of the attributes of tonal motion ... that might distort our sense of absolute duration. The more static a passage, the more its perceived length agrees with its clock-time duration. More accurately, in music lacking duration-distorting motion with sections, the *perceived proportional relationships* between section lengths tend to accord with the ratios of objectively measured durations. While our actual estimate in seconds of a passage’s length may not be “accurate,” our understanding of the ratios between section lengths should agree with the “actual” measured proportions, given the absence of time-distorting contrast or motion. Thus I hypothesize that analyses which study duration ratios in static music from objective data are relevant to how such music is perceived.²⁹

"My Human Gets Me Blues" - 2:26 - 2:39
lead guitar's rhythm

bass's rhythm

Detailed description: This figure shows three systems of musical notation for the piece "My Human Gets Me Blues". Each system consists of two staves: the top staff is for the lead guitar and the bottom staff is for the bass. The first system is labeled "lead guitar's rhythm" and "bass's rhythm". The notation is in 4/4 time and features a repetitive, syncopated rhythmic pattern. The lead guitar part consists of eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass part features a similar but more syncopated pattern. The second system continues this pattern, and the third system concludes it with a double bar line.

Figure 22.3a Rhythmic processes in "My Human Gets Me Blues"

"Hair Pie: Bake 2" - Moment 5 (0:51 - 1:13)
lead guitar's rhythm

bass's rhythm

"Hair Pie: Bake 2" - Moment 7 (1:23 - 1:31)
rhythm guitar's rhythm

bass's rhythm

Detailed description: This figure shows two systems of musical notation for the piece "Hair Pie: Bake 2". The first system is labeled "lead guitar's rhythm" and "bass's rhythm" and covers Moment 5 (0:51 - 1:13). It features a repetitive rhythmic pattern in 4/4 time, with the lead guitar part consisting of eighth notes and the bass part consisting of eighth notes with a syncopated feel. The second system is labeled "rhythm guitar's rhythm" and "bass's rhythm" and covers Moment 7 (1:23 - 1:31). It features a repetitive rhythmic pattern in 4/4 time, with the rhythm guitar part consisting of eighth notes and the bass part consisting of eighth notes with a syncopated feel. Both systems conclude with a double bar line.

Figure 22.3b Rhythmic processes in "Hair Pie: Bake 2"

Given the absence of development of any sort within a moment, even in highly repetitive moments such as those in *Trout Mask Replica's* songs, and the lack of connection between moments, attending to the relative lengths of moments is an effective way to experience formal structure in a moment form composition. There is perceptual validity in assuming that proportional length is an organizational factor.³⁰

Figure 22.4 shows a simple proportional scheme at work in “Steal Softly Thru Snow.” The example lists each moment along with its length in seconds. With the exception of moments 7 and 9, all other moments participate in the proportional scheme. While the number of cell repetitions vary (see Figure 22.2 above for a count of cell repetitions), lengths of consecutive moments are either the same (ratio of 1:1) or in the ratios 1:2 or 2:1.³¹ Note that 1:2 and 2:1 ratios bookend this song and 1:1 ratios appear in its interior.

Figure 22.5 shows two proportional schemes in “Hair Pie: Bake 2.” After a duration ratio of 1:1 between the first two moments, moments 2, 3, and 4 employ the ratio of 2:1. Starting with moment 6, durations decrease (–2 seconds) and then increase by a greater amount each time (+2, +3, and +4 seconds). Moment 5, which does not participate in either proportional scheme, ends at approximately the midpoint of the song (1:13 out of a total time of 2:22). Thus moment durations in this song decrease steadily during the song’s first half, then in the second half briefly decrease then increase back to moment 11, which is approximately the length of moment 1. The song gives the impression of telescoping in to its middle section, then telescoping out again. Moments 5 and 12, which don’t participate

<i>Moment:</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Duration in seconds:	11	21	10	11	10	10	7	10	12	9
Proportion:	1:2	2:1	1:1	1:1	1:1		1:1		1:1	1:1

<i>Moment:</i>	11	12	13
Duration in seconds:	9	10	5
Proportion:	1:1	2:1	

Figure 22.4 Duration proportions in “Steal Softly Thru Snow”

<i>Moment:</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Duration in seconds:	19	18	9	5	22	10	8	8	10	13
Proportion:	1:1	2:1	2:1		1:2	(-2)	1:1	(+2)	(+3)	(+4)

<i>Moment:</i>	11	12
Duration in seconds:	17	3

Figure 22.5 Duration proportions in “Hair Pie: Bake 2”

in either proportional scheme, stand out in other ways. Moment 5 is the only moment with a different tempo (at least as played prominently by the guitars) and is in compound metre rather than simple metre.³² Moment 12, a sort of coda, consists of a single sound (electronically manipulated sleigh bells) instead of the band.

Time

Trout Mask Replica projects an unusual sense of time. Beefheart's moment forms frustrate any sense of a single time span encompassing an entire song. Also, multiple time frames exist in single songs, and within the album as a whole.

Kramer defines time as "a *relationship* between people and the events they perceive."³³ A listener's sense of time can change due to his/her perception of various aspects of the music. Musical events can make time seem to speed up or slow down, and listeners can lose all sense of time as they attend to music deeply.³⁴ There are different types of time that are qualitatively unique, and one can experience more than one type of time while listening to the same composition.

Writers on time tend to divide time into two categories, one relating to how we experience time and one describing time that is measured objectively, for example by a clock.³⁵ I will call these two categories psychological time and absolute time. While these categories are not mutually exclusive, much musical listening involves psychological time but not absolute time. While one could imagine listening to music while looking at a clock or while counting beats or bars throughout an entire composition, those experiences are relatively rare.³⁶ Most compositions encourage us to participate in their narrative ebbs and flows, departures and returns, detours and surprises, all of which draw our attention away from absolute time.

In contrast to many compositions, *Trout Mask Replica's* moment form songs combine both categories of time. As Margulis notes,

Listeners can be understood to parcel time into a special category, describable as narrative time ... Within this special span, they listen for musical directedness. But once a piece ends, ordinary time reasserts itself, and another performance of the same piece, when it starts again, marks a new period of narrative time. Highly compartmentalized pieces ... represent a special case in between these two extremes.³⁷

Since discontinuities between moments thwart any sort of overall narrative, psychological time must accommodate these interruptions and thus it is difficult to enter a flow state while listening. Each succeeding moment breaks any connection with the preceding one and jars the listener. Within single moments there is only repetition without development, so again it would be difficult for a listener to experience any sort of narrative even on a small scale. The listener is left to count cells, which, as noted above, mostly change at the point just before listeners expect that their repetition will continue ad nauseam (approximately four repetitions). Any experience of these songs must include absolute time, measuring the duration of moments by their number of cell repetitions rather than by a listener's sense of narrative. The proportional schemes described above also take advantage of listeners' awareness of absolute time.

I have yet to mention anything about Van Vliet's half sung/half spoken vocals. In general, the vocals do not line up with the moment form, but rather float on top of it in their

own separate time frame. Natural punctuation points in the vocals do not always match junctures between moments, nor is there much voice/instrument interaction.³⁸ Since the vocals are at times spoken, they often don't even line up with the band's beat. Kramer calls such instances of multiple, simultaneous time frames "multiply directed time."³⁹ A listener hearing any of *Trout Mask Replica's* moment form songs could choose either of two non-coinciding paths through the song, following either Van Vliet's vocals or the band. Each path suggests its own sense of time. The vocals provide a more conventional psychologically oriented narrative arc, while the band's moment form combines psychological and absolute time as described above.⁴⁰

Zappa's production on this album also adds to its disorienting sense of time. *Trout Mask Replica* was recorded in two separate places: Whitney Studios, a recording studio rented by Zappa, and the Woodland Hills home shared by the band. Zappa originally intended to record the entire album in the Woodland Hills house. He comments,

The original plan for the album was to do it like an ethnic field recording. I wanted to take a portable rig and record the band in the house, and use the different rooms in the house ... And we went over there and set it up and did the tracks that way.⁴¹

Van Vliet eventually insisted that the band be recorded in a studio. As a result *Trout Mask Replica's* songs inhabit different sonic environments. Those recorded in the studio are clearer and cleaner than those recorded in the house, which are indistinct and sound somewhat amateurish. House recordings were made in various rooms in the Woodland Hills house, including one song, "China Pig," in which Van Vliet sang in one room while former band member Doug Moon played guitar in another, and in the garden outside the Woodland Hills house. The outdoor garden location is evident as Van Vliet engages in a brief conversation with two passersby at the end of "Hair Pie: Bake 1."⁴²

Trout Mask Replica's studio recordings fall into two categories: those that include extraneous conversation between the band members or between band members and either Zappa or recording engineer Dick Kunc, and those that don't.⁴³ I will call the first category "live studio," meaning that they document a particular take including what was happening in the studio at that specific time. Figure 22.6 lists the various types of recordings on *Trout Mask Replica* – studio, live studio, house, and garden – and identifies which song belongs to which type. Note that "Fallin' Ditch" belongs to two categories, as its

Types of recordings on *Trout Mask Replica*

Studio: Frownland; Dachau Blues; Ella Guru; Moonlight on Vermont; Pachuco Cadaver; Bills Corpse; Sweet Sweet Bulbs; My Human Gets Me Blues; Dali's Car; Hair Pie: Bake 2; Well; When Big Joan Sets Up; Fallin' Ditch; Sugar and Spikes; Ant Man Bee; Wild Life; Hobo Chang Ba; Steal Softly Thru Snow; Veteran's Day Poppy

Live Studio: Pena; She's Too Much For My Mirror; The Blimp (mousetrapreplica); Old Fart At Play

House: The Dust Blows Forward 'N the Dust Blows Back; Neon Meate Dream Of a Octafish; China Pig; Fallin' Ditch; Orange Claw Hammer

Garden: Hair Pie: Bake 1

Figure 22.6 Types of recordings on *Trout Mask Replica*

opening dialogue seems to have been recorded at the house while the song that follows was recorded in the studio.

Morris observes that many of the ways we speak about time link time to a place or setting, such as “once upon a time” and “on time.”⁴⁴ Likewise, the reverse also can be true: different places can evoke different times. As an example, the house and garden recordings on *Trout Mask Replica* must have been recorded at a different time than the studio recordings. And *Trout Mask Replica*’s live studio recordings document a specific, unedited take compared to the other studio recordings, which do not suggest any particular take of each song. Since all locations can be heard and identified easily, listeners are brought to different places in time throughout the album by recognizing recording locations. Compared to either a conventional studio album, in which songs give no aural clues as to the time at which they were recorded, and a live album, in which everything was recorded during one specific time frame, *Trout Mask Replica* offers listeners a variety of times and places, thus asking the listener to continually travel back and forth in both time and place.⁴⁵

The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)

Trout Mask Replica’s most intriguing song is “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica),” which demonstrates all of the analytical features discussed in this essay. “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)” is a live studio recording, beginning with producer Zappa saying “you ready?” and ending with a brief dialogue between Zappa and Van Vliet discussing the recording just made. It is unusual in that the vocalist is guitarist Jeff Cotton rather than Van Vliet. Cotton’s narration (spoken rather than sung) was recorded over the telephone. Zappa combined this narration with a previously existing recording of his band, The Mothers of Invention, playing snippets of the song “Charles Ives.” “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)” is a typical example of Zappa’s practice of combining unrelated recordings that were made at different times.

Barnes describes the lyrics of “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)” as “based on the newsreel of the Hindenburg airship crash.”⁴⁶ Courrier describes the song as “a hilariously wild yarn of sexual terror cast in the famous soundscape of the Hindenburg disaster broadcast.”⁴⁷ Cotton’s frantic narration evokes the horror-stricken reporter in that newsreel, and the poor audio quality of the telephone suggests an old recording, harkening back to the Hindenburg’s crash in 1937. Alternately, the lyric “This is recorded through a fly’s ear” may have suggested the use of the telephone.

“The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)” is in moment form, although like many songs on the album the narration does not participate in the form. Cotton reads quickly through the words without any sort of break. The Mothers of Invention’s recording consists primarily of bass and drums with an occasional tambourine and saxophone honk. Van Vliet plays saxophone, which sounds as if it also was recorded over the phone. There are only two repeated cells, shown in Figure 22.7. The two halves of Cell 1 sometimes appear separately, so I have labelled them as Cell 1A and Cell 1B. The rhythmic values of Cell 2 are approximate. “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)” also makes use of silence (the band rests in several places, although Cotton does not), a rarity in Beefheart’s output.

Figure 22.8 shows a form diagram of “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica).” The diagram includes timings for each moment and descriptions of each moment’s content. I consider the frames of studio conversation to be integral parts of the song, so I’ve included them in the form. Zappa’s “you ready?” is moment 1 and the ending conversation is moment 10.



Figure 22.7 Repeated cells in “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)”

0:00 Moment 1 “You ready?”	0:02 Moment 2 Cell 1 13 times Cell 1A 1 time voice enters at 0:13.	0:24 Moment 3 silence	0:32 Moment 4 Cell 1 8 times	0:46 Moment 5 “boom” Cell 2 tambourine, drum and bass notes
1:04 Moment 6 Cell 2 Cell 1 8 times Cell 1A 2 times	1:19 Moment 7 Cell 2 sax honks drums	1:28 Moment 8 Cell 1 1 time	1:29 Moment 9 Moment “boom” tambourine and drums	1:40 Moment 10 new bass melody studio talk drum hit Cell 1B (four group of 2 cells each)

Figure 22.8 Form diagram of “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)”

As noted above, Cotton’s narration does not participate in this form with one exception, described below.

Figure 22.9 shows duration proportions in “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica).” As in the other moment form compositions previously described, Beefheart employs the proportions of 1:1 and 2:1, both of which are established by Cotton’s vocal entry in the middle of moment 2. Cotton begins to speak after eleven seconds in moment 2, splitting the moment in half (ratio of 1:1) and creating the ratio of 2:1 between moment 2 and each of its halves. Every moment is involved in a proportion of 1:1 or 2:1, although many of these proportions occur between non-consecutive moments.

“The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)’s” sense of time is perhaps the most complex on the album. As in many other songs on the album, the vocal part occurs in a time frame separate from that of the band. As in other moment form songs, the discontinuities frustrate any sense of overall narrative and the repetition of cells encourages absolute time to impinge on psychological time. The discontinuities in “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)” are even more noticeable than in other songs on the album due to the use of silence in the instrumental parts. The recording techniques coupled with the lyrics further fragment time. The studio conversations suggest one time and place (a recording studio in 1969), the lyrics another (New Jersey in 1937). At the end of the song (moment 10) when the band spills over into studio conversation it becomes evident that the band was pre-recorded, suggesting a third time and place (earlier in the same studio). Thus listeners must navigate between five time frames: two created by the form (a single stream of narration versus the band’s moment form), two by the recording techniques (two studio sessions held at different times), and one by the lyrics (the time of the Hindenburg crash).

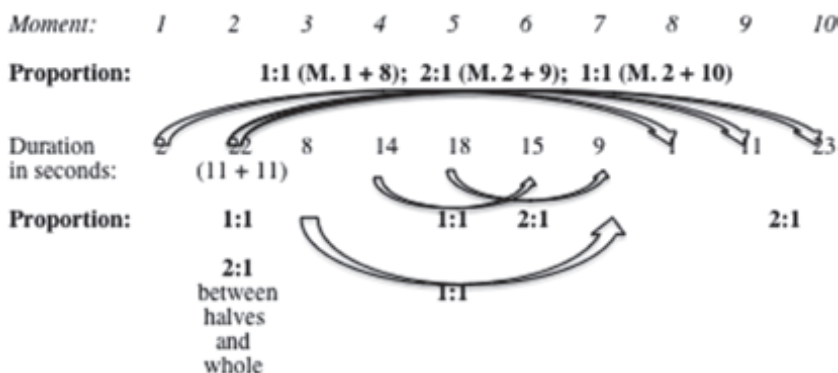


Figure 22.9 Duration proportions in “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica)”

Trout Mask Replica remains a remarkable achievement. Its songs’ forms are unique in the rock repertoire, and have more in common with those of avant-garde composers of its era than with contemporaneous rock or pop. *Trout Mask Replica* even employs the proportional schemes found in music of Stravinsky, Stockhausen, and other mid-century composers. The use of repeated melodic cells separated by jarring discontinuities creates an unusual sense of time, in which absolute time, as measured by the number of cell repetitions, intrudes into any sort of overarching musical flow. Further, listeners can choose from two different but simultaneous temporal strands as the narration/vocals and band rarely coincide. And Zappa’s production adds to the overall sense of temporal disorientation, moving the listener from place to place and thus from time to time with each succeeding song.

Courrier writes “Beefheart defined [his] sensibility ... as ‘music from the other side of the fence.’ By drawing that line in the sand, he continually puts his audience to the test in trying to define exactly how that fence separates his music from all others.”⁴⁸ But where is Beefheart’s fence? By absorbing so much from so many different influences, Beefheart has created something utterly *sui generis* – temporally disorienting yet timeless.

Notes

- 1 For example, see John Harris, “Mission: Unlistenable,” *The Guardian*, 8 April 2006, in which he describes his challenges listening to this album.
- 2 Mike Barnes, *Captain Beefheart*, revised ed. (London: Omnibus, 2011), 93.
- 3 Quoted in Kevin Courrier, *Trout Mask Replica* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 17.
- 4 Quoted in Kevin Courrier, *Trout Mask Replica* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2007), 43.
- 5 Quoted in Barnes, *Captain Beefheart*, 86. See also Chris Atton, “Listening to ‘Difficult Albums’: Specialist Music Fans and the Popular Avant-Garde.” *Popular Music* 3/13 (2012): 347–361 for a discussion of listeners’ reactions to and listening strategies for appreciating avant-garde rock albums.
- 6 Jonathan Kramer, *The Time of Music* (New York: Schirmer, 1988), 453.
- 7 Margulis suggests that after four repetitions of a musical object listeners begin to focus their attention on some other aspect of the texture, perhaps because they then expect the repeated object to continue indefinitely. Thus four repetitions is an optimal amount for a musical section that must establish a sense of stasis but still provide the impression that it will change. See Elizabeth Hellmuth Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 51.
- 8 The following information in this section about the band and its lineup, Beefheart’s compositional process, and the creation of *Trout Mask Replica* comes from Barnes, *Captain Beefheart*, and Courrier, *Trout Mask Replica*.

- 9 The name “Captain Beefheart” may or may not have been coined by Frank Zappa, Van Vliet’s childhood friend. See Barnes, *Captain Beefheart*, 18, and Courier, *Trout Mask Replica*, 31–2, for the many conflicting origin stories about this name.
- 10 David Sanjek, “Life in the Fast and Bulbous Lane: Captain Beefheart (1941–2010).” *Popular Music and Society* 35/2 (2012): 301–313, describes the band’s cult-like atmosphere, including Van Vliet’s abusive behaviour, during the making of *Trout Mask Replica*.
- 11 For an explanation of standard rock forms see John Covach, “Form in Rock Music: A Primer,” in *Engaging Music*, ed. by Deborah Stein. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 65–76; see Nicholas Stoa, “The Common Stock of Schemes In Early Blues and Country Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 35/2 (2013): 194–234, for standard blues harmonic schemes.
- 12 These songs are “Frownland,” “Dachau Blues,” “Ella Guru” (which superimposes a loose verse-chorus structure on top of the sections, the result of a section that recurs), “Hair Pie: Bake 1,” “Hair Pie: Bake 2,” “Pachuco Cadaver,” “Bills Corpse,” “Sweet Sweet Bulbs,” “Neon Meate Dream of a Octafish,” “My Human Gets Me Blues,” “Dali’s Car,” “Pena,” “Fallin’ Ditch,” “Wild Life,” “She’s Too Much For My Mirror,” “Hobo Chang Ba,” “The Blimp (mousetrapreplica),” “Steal Softly Thru Snow,” “Old Fart at Play,” and “Veteran’s Day Poppy.” In addition, some of the songs on Beefheart’s subsequent albums *Lick My Decals Off, Baby* (1970), *Shiny Beast (Bat Chain Puller)* (1978), *Doc at the Radar Station* (1980) and *Ice Cream for Crow* (1982) exhibit this form.
- 13 Brad Osborn, “Understanding Through-Composition in Post-Rock, Math-Metal, and Other Post-Millennial Rock Genres,” *Music Theory Online* 17/3 (2011) explores this type of through-composed form, and other similar forms, in an examination of avant-garde rock music recorded since 2000. He creates a taxonomy of through-composed rock forms based on the presence or absence of two factors: thematic unity and the grouping together of various smaller sections into coherent larger units. Beefheart’s songs belong to Osborn’s Group III, One-Part Polythematic songs; “one part” because the sections do not create any sort of higher-level structure, and “polythematic” due to each section’s use of unique melodic material. Osborn identifies this form as common in metal music as opposed to other rock genres. His examples, however, sound quite different from any of Beefheart’s music, and sometimes move between sections much less abruptly due to the presence of transitions, a structural feature that Beefheart avoids. Guy Capuzzo, “Sectional Tonality and Sectional Centricity in Rock Music,” *Music Theory Spectrum* 31/1 (2009): 157–174, investigates situations in rock music in which each formal section contains its own tonic or tonal center, The Beatles’s “Good Day Sunshine” being a paradigmatic example. Based on tonality alone the works Capuzzo investigates could be considered to be examples of moment form, although melodic features and other connections across sections contradict this interpretation.
- 14 See Kramer, *The Time of Music*, and Jonathan Kramer, “Moment Form in Twentieth-Century Music,” *The Musical Quarterly* 64/2 (1978), 177–195.
- 15 Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 50. Kramer’s ideas originate with Karlheinz Stockhausen, “Momentform,” in *Texte zur elektronischen und instrumentalen Musik* 1, Cologne, DuMont, 1963, 189–210.
- 16 See Kramer’s extended analysis in *The Time of Music*, Chapter 9, 221–285. Gretchen Horlacher, *Building Blocks: Repetition and Continuity in the Music of Stravinsky* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) investigates how these motivic units are varied, and how their relationships to underlying ostinati change throughout each section. See her Chapter 5, 165–206.
- 17 Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 50.
- 18 Barnes, *Captain Beefheart*, 73–4, compares Beefheart’s “Dali’s Car” to the opening of the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* and to other compositions by Stravinsky – *The Five Fingers* and the *Four Etudes for Orchestra* – and claims that Stravinsky was one of Beefheart’s favourite composers. Richard Middleton, “In the Groove or Blowing Your Mind? The Pleasures of Musical Repetition,” in *The Popular Music Studies Reader*, ed. by Andy Bennett, Barry Shank, and Jason Toynbee (Abington: Routledge, 2006), 15–20, distinguishes between two types of repetition, musematic (small units) vs. discursive (larger sections). He notes that musematic repetition is more common in folk and oral traditions, while discursive repetition is more common in written traditions. Much rock music combines both types of repetition – repeated riffs are

- musematic while repeated choruses are discursive. Beefheart's music retains the riffs from the rock tradition but mostly dispenses with any sort of discursive repetition.
- 19 Since no score exists for any of the songs on *Trout Mask Replica*, I will provide partial transcriptions (lead guitar and bass) and timings of sections where needed. Interested readers can use the timings to find locations on the recording. My timings refer to the re-release of *Trout Mask Replica* on CD. Additionally, transcriptions of several songs, played electronically minus Van Vliet's singing, can be found on YouTube by searching for the user Tmec Rep. The same recordings can be accessed by clicking the YouTube link on the webpage themostevercompany.com (last accessed September 4, 2017).
 - 20 I have not transcribed the rhythm guitar, which generally plays something that complements the lead guitar. I also have not transcribed the frenetic and off-kilter drum part, which generally participates in the moment form, nor have I transcribed Van Vliet's half-spoken/half-sung narration, which usually does not (more on the narration below). There is no saxophone in this song.
 - 21 Trevor de Clerq, "Measuring a Measure: Absolute Time as a Factor for Determining Bar Lengths and Meter in Pop/Rock Music," *Music Theory Online* 22/3 (2016) suggests that the ideal length of a bar in rock music is about two seconds, based on perceptual and other studies. My bars last about that long.
 - 22 According to Courier, *Trout Mask Replica*, 98–99, the entire album was recorded in only two takes during one six-hour recording session, which may explain why errors remain in the finished version.
 - 23 "Bills Corpse" ends with a series of mostly non-triadic chords played by the guitars and bass. The last chord of this passage is a C# major triad, which seems unconnected to anything that precedes it, and hardly functions as any sort of tonal centre or resolution.
 - 24 Barnes, *Captain Beefheart*, 91.
 - 25 Courier, *Trout Mask Replica*, describes Van Vliet's laborious compositional process on p. 82–3. See also Barnes, *Captain Beefheart*, 72–3. Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind*, notes that repetition can signify certain types of behaviour (see her Chapter 3, 55–74). While Margulis discusses ritual, trance, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and early childhood activities, even simple behaviours such as struggling to play the piano could suggest certain types of repetition.
 - 26 Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind*, 51; interior quote from David Lidov, *Is Language a Music? Writings On Musical Form and Signification*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004), 35.
 - 27 Courier *Trout Mask Replica*, 39.
 - 28 Other examples can be found in "Hair Pie: Bake 2" Moment 9 (1:31–1:39) – lead guitar plays four cells of three beats each while rhythm guitar, bass, and drums play three cells of four beats each; "Hair Pie: Bake 2" Moment 11 (1:50–2:02) – rhythm guitar plays five cells of four beats (eight quavers) each while lead guitar, bass, and drums play eight cells of five quavers each; "Ella Guru" Moment 2 (0:19–0:35) – bass and drums play seven cells of four beats each while guitars play four cells of seven beats (although the guitars' first cell starts on beat 3 and its last cell ends on beat 2); "Steal Softly Thru Snow" Moment 1 (0:00–0:11) – lead guitar plays four cells of six beats while the rhythm guitar and bass play three cells of eight beats (drums unclear) before all instruments align at 0:08; and "Steal Softly Thru Snow" Moment 6 (1:03–1:13) – guitars and bass play four cells of four beats while drums play four cells of three beats plus a concluding cell of four beats. Structural polyrhythms of this nature are common in the music of Elliott Carter, although Carter's polyrhythms are longer and more complicated than Beefheart's. See Andrew Mead, "Time Management: Rhythm as a Formal Determinant in Certain Works of Elliott Carter," in *Elliott Carter Studies*, ed. by Marguerite Boland and John Link (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 138–167, for information on Carter's rhythmic usage.
 - 29 Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 54.
 - 30 Kramer, *The Time of Music*, lists several composers whose forms seem to be based on various proportional schemes. Kramer mentions Debussy's and Bartók's use of the golden section (see,

- respectively, Roy Howat, *Debussy in Proportion* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983] and Ernő Lendvai, *Béla Bartók: An Analysis of His Style* [London: Kahn and Averill, 1971]) and Stockhausen's use of the Fibonacci series. In his extensive study of Stravinsky's *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*, Kramer observes that in the first half of this composition (up to Rehearsal 42) moments are related by durations that have the proportion of 3:2 based on Stravinsky's metronome marks, while after Rehearsal 42 proportions change to 1:1 and 2:1. Brian Matthew Williams, "Time and the Structure of Stravinsky's Symphony in C," *The Musical Quarterly* 59/3 (1973), 355–369, finds ratios of 2:3 and 3:2 in Stravinsky's Symphony in C.
- 31 I have allowed a one-second margin of error in calculating these ratios, as does Kramer, *The Time of Music*. I consider durations of 19 and 18 seconds to be equivalent, and likewise the ratio of 11 to 21 seconds to be equivalent to 1:2. My rounding of durations up or down a second is akin to quantization in electronic music and MIDI.
 - 32 This moment was shown in Figure 22.3b. The guitars play four cells of four beats each in compound metre, while the bass and drums play six cells of four beats each in simple metre. The bass and drums continue the tempo and metre of Moment 4.
 - 33 Kramer, *The Time of Music*, 5.
 - 34 An individual's losing awareness of time while pursuing an absorbing activity is the basis for the concept of "flow." See Mihály Csikszentmihályi, *Beyond Boredom and Anxiety: Experiencing Flow in Work and Play* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1975).
 - 35 For example: musical time and ordinary time (Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind*); Einsteinian time and Newtonian time (Michael Rofe, "Dualisms of Time," *Contemporary Music Review* 33/4 (2014), 341–354); narrative time and its opposite, which is not given a name (Lawrence Kramer, *Interpreting Music* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011]); qualitative time and quantitative time (Robert Morris, *The Whistling Blackbird* [Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010]); experienced time and measured time (Lewis Rowell, "The Study of Time: A Quarter-Century Perspective," *Indiana Theory Review* 17/2 (1996): 63–92, after the theories of Henri Bergson); musical time and absolute time (Kramer, *The Time of Music*); psychological time and ontological time (Williams, "Time and the Structure of Stravinsky's Symphony in C").
 - 36 Musical experiences that involve absolute time often involve something else as well – editing a recording, dancing to choreography, waiting out a rest while playing in an ensemble, etc. By "listening to music" I mean merely that – just listening, not doing anything else.
 - 37 Margulis, *On Repeat: How Music Plays the Mind*, 133.
 - 38 One obvious exception is "Steal Softly Thru Snow" in which lyrics don't cross moment junctures and new lyrical ideas coincide with the beginnings of moments. Van Vliet even ends by singing the local tonic, a rare event in *Trout Mask Replica*. The voice and band are much more integrated in this song than they are in the other moment form songs.
 - 39 Kramer, *The Time of Music*. See also Jonathan Kramer, "Postmodern Concepts of Musical Time," *Indiana Theory Review* 17/2 (1996): 21–61, for further discussion of multiply directed time.
 - 40 Van Vliet's lack of synchronization with the band seems to be the result of his unorthodox recording process, as described by Courier, *Trout Mask Replica*, 97–98, who quotes both Zappa and Van Vliet. "'Ordinarily, a singer goes in the studio, puts earphones on, listens to the track, tries to sing in time with it and away you go,' Zappa explained. '[But] Don couldn't tolerate the headphones. He wanted to stand in the studio and sing as loud as he could – singing along with the audio leakage coming through the three panes of glass which comprised the control-room window. The chances of him staying in sync was nil – but that's how the vocals were done.' Beefheart couldn't fathom what Zappa was so upset about. 'I was playing – just like the whales,' he [said]. 'I don't think there is such a thing as synchronization ... that's what they do before a commando raid, isn't it?'"
 - 41 Barnes, *Captain Beefheart*, 83–84. *Trout Mask Replica* appears to have been modelled on a previous album recorded and produced by Zappa, 1969's *An Evening With Wild Man Fischer*, on which street musician Larry Fischer also was recorded partly on location. See David Sanjek, "Frank Zappa and the Freaks: Recording Wild Man Fischer," in *Frank Zappa and the And*, ed. Paul Carr

- (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 149–166, for a discussion of Zappa’s relationship with Fischer, and the recording of that album.
- 42 The different recording locations mimic the moment form found in individual songs by juxtaposing different sonic environments as songs juxtapose different moments.
- 43 See Michel Delville, “Zappa and the Avant-Garde: Artifice/Absorption/Expression,” in *Frank Zappa and the And*, ed. by Paul Carr (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 185–200, for a discussion of spoken dialogue in Zappa’s recordings.
- 44 See Morris, *The Whistling Blackbird*, 336, for this view of time. See also Steve Larson, *Musical Forces: Motion, Metaphor, and Meaning in Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), 64–66. For a thorough discussion of the metaphors we use to explain musical time, including metaphors that involve space, see Chapter 5 of Arnie Cox, *Music and Embodied Cognition: Listening, Moving, Feeling, and Thinking* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016).
- 45 Paul Carr, “Zappa and Technology: His Incorporation of Time, Space, and Place When Performing, Composing, and Arranging Music,” in *Frank Zappa and the And*, 133–148, concludes that many of Zappa’s own recordings manipulate time and place in the same manner, by combining live and studio recordings on the same album and even on the same track. Zappa called such fusing of different times “xenochrony,” meaning “alien time.” Paul Carr, “Introduction – The Big Note, Xenochrony, and All Things Contextual: Frank Zappa and the And,” in *Frank Zappa and the And*, 9, describes xenochrony as “a studio technique [Zappa] incorporated to horizontally fuse often unrelated tracks recorded in incongruous times and places. After initially experimenting on Captain Beefheart’s ‘The Blimp’, Zappa continued to employ the technique on albums such as *Lumpy Gravy* and *Sheik Yerbouti*, with *Joe’s Garage* arguably representing the most interesting example, where all of the guitar solos aside from ‘Watermelon in Easter Hay’ are transported from other recordings. ... this technique has the capacity of simultaneously combining otherwise incongruent times, places and spaces, adding another dimension to his tendency toward self-reference.” For more on Zappa’s manipulation of time in his recordings see James Gardner, “Zappa and the Razor: Editing, Sampling, and *Musique Concrète*,” in *Frank Zappa and the And*, ed. Paul Carr. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 67–84. James Borders, “Form and the Concept Album: Aspects of Modernism in Frank Zappa’s Early Releases,” *Perspectives of New Music* 39/1 (2001): 118–160, examines aspects of modernism, including aspects of time, in Zappa’s early albums.
- 46 Barnes, *Captain Beefheart*, 100.
- 47 Courier, *Trout Mask Replica*, 4.
- 48 Courier, *Trout Mask Replica*, 8.