



"Actes intermédiaires" de la 3^{ème} Conférence Internationale de Zappologie (ICE-Z 69)

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"ANTI-ZAPPA, OR, NOT GETTING THE POINT :
THE "FRENCH PROBLEM"

Marco Belluzi (I)

**UNE PRÉSENTATION DE "NEW MOTHER, OLD DUST",
UNE RE-CRÉATION DE "200 MOTELS"**

NEW MOTHER, OLD DUST

Musical Phantazie on Frank V. Zappa's '200 MOTELS' Original Soundtrack
(United Artists, 1971)

A shameless description for the
3rd International Conference of Esemplastic Zappology (ICE_Z)
Paris, 5th - 6th July 2008

by
Alessandro Tozzi & Marco Belluzzi

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INTRODUCTION

In primis et ante omnia [first of all and before everything], let's give ourselves up to the ineffable pleasure to thank you all for having given two wandering musicians as we are, such a high-level opportunity to introduce this specimen of our work.

In the - culturally speaking - remote land we are from, we are not accustomed to have many occasions even to perform our music; what do you think about talking about it?

For this reason, and again, here we are to state our gratitude to Another Great Italian (namely Francesco Gentile, who unfortunately couldn't take part to this meeting), who brought us in touch with you, whose benevolence we hope to reward with our attempt to tickle your curiosity through this brief lecture.

All right, now let's turn serious.

BACKGROUND

The primitive idea of this work comes from the outside.

About three years ago, Alessandro Pizzin, at the time chairman of *Debra Kadabra* (Italian Frank Zappa Appreciation Consort) and our real FZ-Guru, suggested us to take into consideration '200 MOTELS' (the movie, its *milieu* and, of course, chiefly, its soundtrack) as a likely source of well-connected ideas to 'refresh' our repertoire.

It's to be said that, as members of the Frank Zappa Tribute Band 'The Grand Wazoo', we used to deal almost exclusively with the usual chain of separate pieces taken from the Zappian *corpus*.

No doubt this was, to a great extent, pretty satisfying for Alex (especially with reference to his long-lasting love affair with Zappa's music, begun, according to him, with an *'unforgettable performance of 'Zoot Allures'*, heard in Bologna in 1984,) as well as for me (struck - so to speak- 'on the way to Damascus' when 'hired' by Alex himself as a keyboards player for 'The Grand Wazoo').

But it wasn't enough.

We needed new challenges.

Moreover, the idea of a composer and a director combined into a single person was a most promising one for us; convinced as we were of the great 'theatrical potential' of Zappa's

music.

Nevertheless, well...it can't be denied that the first contact made us slightly sort of PUZZLED.

We soon realized that the strong *freak* feel that pervaded the movie - kind of an American cultural *koinè* with which we were not, fully familiar, both for generational and geographical reasons - would have been somewhat misleading if we had made the mistake to concentrate on the '*dada*' side of the work, disregarding the deep and subtle connections between the editing the soundtrack.

But here, oh dear! what an ASTONISHING AMOUNT OF GREAT MUSIC!

We had reached a real turning point in our investigations inside the prismatic world of FZ's music.

We were facing something so strongly 'paradigmatic' of his way of '*organizing the material*' - as Zappa himself put it - that even a mere analysis, would have led us straight to the real core of his compositional method.

Soon we decided to 'reduce' a good deal of the more-than-eighty-minutes long Zappa's material¹ to a 'molecular' level - so to speak -; extrapolating a number of different structures (themes, rhythm- or accompaniment patterns, textures) in order to undertake a sort of experiment of 'metabolic recombination'

Here the original music, as previously put into a blender, would have been rhythmically modified, re-orchestrated, often placed in new 'musical environments' or sometimes left in their primeval form, to obtain a completely different 'organism': a single 40-minutes-long piece built according on its own architectural rules.

We called it 'NEW MOTHER, OLD DUST'²,

Alongside the usual 'tension→release' principle, the compositional guidelines are based on two main points:

1. To avoid the original soundtrack's exact 'order of appearance' of the music selected (Only exception: the almost literal performance of 'Strictly Genteel', towards the end of the piece).
2. The insertion of harmonic/rhythmical backgrounds derived from other works by Zappa, (it could be named 'xenophony'), in order to bring to the extremes our quest of a 'poetical continuity' that could parallel the 'conceptual' one so frequent in Zappa's production.

Just one more - due - short annotation, before going into details.

In some of the few occasions we had to make NMOD public (three live performance plus a couple of private listening sessions in all), the most lunatic fringe of the so-called Zappa-fans, didn't make a mystery of considering it, OUTRAGEOUSLY DISRESPECTFUL, to say the least.

Nothing more far from our intentions, of course.

We gladly leave you the hard verdict.

¹ All transcription has been conducted on the double-CD version of 200 MOTELS (Rykodisc, 1997 – 2002)

² Just to satisfy your morbid curiosity, we do declare this weird nonsense - henceforth labelled 'NMOD' - is nothing else but one of the possible anagrams of 'TWO HUNDRED MOTELS', with self-evident reference to the compositional process described above.

A CLOSER LOOK

The first example, we are going to listen to, deals with the very beginning of NMOD. It is the only section of this work that isn't actually based on materials taken from 200 MOTELS.

Its REALLY SERIOUS Baroque mood, we figured would have supplied the perfect for whom we choose as Prologue of our drama (indeed one of our favorite FZ-characters): the deranged boy of 'Teen Age Wind'³.

His immortal words gave us - if we assume that 'out of discord comes the fairest harmony' - the best answer to what had been the overwhelming question since the very beginning of our work: 'SHALL WE TAKE OURSELVES SERIOUSLY?'

CUT 1

[NMOD ~ 00:00 – 01:40]

RECITATIVE (Soprano solo)

*'It's a miserable Friday night
I'm so lonely
And nobody'll give me a ride
To the Grateful Dead concert . . . Oh rats!*

MADRIGAL (Choir)

*If I was at the concert now, I'd be RIPPED!
[...]
I could tighten my headband for an extra rush
During Jerry's guitar solo
Then I could go to a midnite show of...*

Furthermore, it provides a good textual link to

CUT 2

[NMOD ~ 01:41 – 05:33]

...200 MOTELS!'

We think to the previous fragment as a good instance of the compositional process we adopted in NMOD, especially with reference to its 'listening impact'.

No doubt that many of you recognized a quotation from 'I'm Stealing The Towels'⁴ soon after the beginning, or a varied version of a melody taken from 'Dance Of The Just Plain Folks'⁵ at the end of the guitar solo (shortened here for the sake of brevity).

Nevertheless our intention was to concentrate on the overall effect: ultimately the main guiding principle of the entire work.

On the contrary, let's now take a closer look to the next example.

³ You Are What You Is (1981)

⁴ 200 MOTELS - CD 2 - Track 1 ~ 00:41 - 00:51

⁵ 200 MOTELS - CD 1 - Track 6 ~ 01:36 - 02:00

A fairly spooky introduction is followed by a short motive in double notes from 'Dance Of The Just Plain Folks

It has been conveniently expanded and transposed according to the harmonic changes in order to supply a wavy accompaniment to a melody which is nothing else but the main theme of 'Would You Like A Snack'⁶, spread on a different meter-pattern (9/8 + 6/8 measures).

Our intention was to provide a proper dissipation of the energy gathered during the previous section.

I hope you would agree that this well-known theme definitely deserves the almost-literal quotation occurring soon afterwards.

But, alas! it is not time to relax yet.

After a super-short fanfare from 'Strictly Genteel'⁷, an entire part of 'Dance Of The Just Plain Folks' bursts in (Hey, we REALLY like that piece!), irreparably destroying the bucolic idyll.

Another fragment from 'Strictly Genteel'⁸ flares up, and a sinister B natural-augmented triad leads us to a rest full of presages...

CUT 3

[NMOD ~ 06:09 – 08:38]

Our worst fears have come true.

A weird, half-Italian minstrel is standing under our balcony, plucking his electric *Cimbalom*, trying to utter a boozy version of "This Town Is A Sealed Tuna Sandwich"⁹ - "Honey, have you seen my CHAMBER POT?" -

CUT 4

[NMOD ~ 21:32 – 22:47]

Phew! But for that blessed synthesizer, I'm afraid that torture would have never stopped...

Alright...Here we come to the last example of our brief lecture.

It refers to the ending section of 'New Mother, Old Dust', which is roughly divided into two parts.

The first one shows clearly the process of superimposing and/or interlocking material derived from '200 MOTELS' and music coming from the 'outside' (i.e. from different Frank Zappa's compositions) we mentioned in the Introduction¹⁰

Do you remember? We dared to call it 'xenophony'.

⁶ 200 MOTELS - CD 1 - Track 11

⁷ 200 MOTELS - CD 2 - Track 15 ~ 03:26

⁸ 200 MOTELS - CD 2 - Track 15 ~ 04:34 - 04:37

⁹ 200 MOTELS - CD 1 - Track 4

¹⁰ See page 3

Here, in particular, the almost complete reassembling of ‘Tuna Fish Promenade’¹¹ stands on the harmonically adapted opening vamp of ‘Inca Roads’¹², whence we took as well a handful of useful fragments, used - alongside a sprinkle of notes from ‘Lucy’s Seduction Of A Bored Violinist & Postlude’¹³ - as connectors between the different sections of the piece.

A (shortened) keyboards solo leads us to the second part.

It could be considered very much like a theatrical ‘final scene’, and it is entirely based on a wide choice from the music of ‘Strictly Genteel’¹⁴.

As we stated in the Introduction, it the only piece we decided to grace with the title of ‘Preserved in The Original ‘200 MOTELS’ Position’.

Who, after all, would have forgone its bombastic allure; its unbearable, wonderful, contemptuous strut?

In short: who wouldn’t have yielded the temptation of giving this strong, unequivocal ‘NO’ as a final answer to the Great Question we choose as *motto* of our adventure? ¹⁵

In order to convey - apart from the usual bucolic or baroque-like sketches - an overall sense of vitality and strength, we tried both to deprive ‘Tuna Fish Promenade’ of its Late-60’s-Freak aura, and to soften the ‘Cosmic-Brotherhood’ tinge present in part of ‘Strictly Genteel’¹⁶

In the ‘full-blown’ version of NMOD, they are preceded by a long, rather ‘calm’ (though pretty jocular) section which needed to be balanced with something more - how could I say? - HEAVY (+ METAL, if you like).

Maybe, to clarify the meaning of what above-stated, a short rub-up on the first part - the one we actually considered - of the original version of ‘Tuna Fish Promenade’, wouldn’t be unhelpful to put this song in relation with its ‘deranged’ counterpart in NMOD.

**TUNA FISH PROMENADE
(NMOD CUT)**

[200 MOTELS - CD 1 - Track 5 ~ 00:00 – 01:42]

And now...

CUT 5

[NMOD ~ 28:01 – END]

¹¹ 200 MOTELS - CD 1 - Track 5 ~ 00:00 - 01:42

¹² One Size Fits All (1975)

¹³ 200 MOTELS - CD 1 - Track 19 ~ 03:12 - 03:40

¹⁴ 200 MOTELS - CD 2 - Track 15

¹⁵ See page 3

¹⁶ This tinge, on the other hand, fits perfectly the poetics of the movie.

EPILOGUE

OK, that's all, guys.

Or, to put it better: that is by no means ALL you can find inside NMOD.

Stuff like 'Magic Fingers', 'Echidna's Arf', 'Redneck Eats', 'Andy' or 'Penis Dimension' (just to make a rough list), have been equally attractive for the bottomless stomach of this insatiable monster.

Moreover, it definitely couldn't be 'ALL' - in the widest sense of the word - , also because NMOD is not a final achievement but a starting point.

It is an experiment conceived to pay an homage to - and, in the meantime, to affirm our trust in - that 'combinatorial system' which, in our opinion, is one of the most innovative and peculiar features of Zappa's compositional thought, and, what's more, we are sure it could offer an even greater number of possibilities of development, since it force the composer to concentrate on a sort of 'objectification' of the compositional process.

This means trying to detect the inner features (metrical patterns, intervallic structures¹⁷, etc.), of certain 'basic' musical components, like themes or textures, and transfer them, with a process of real 'conceptual continuity', to the compositional level, without turning to what have been called a 'facilitation'.

This can be considered as a pre-existing 'technique' or 'style' (be it the Twelve-tone Composition Theory or Good Ol'Rock and Roll), applied to a piece without a really active (i.e. critical) attitude of the composer.

This kind of attitude is, in general, rooted in the spasmodic attempt to guess 'what people (or The Academy) wants', leading the composer to the deceitful belief of being REALLY UP-TO DATE.

On the contrary, he is most often nothing else but the etheronomous product of those repressive tendencies, which aim to snuff out every individual creative potential.

With NMOD we tried to react to this '*status quo*'.

We cherish as well the hope this piece would stimulate other musicians to apply its compositional features their material; be it original or not.

This would be a way to keep on 'throwing pebbles' into the pond of the deep-rooted conventions of the music establishment.

A way to create an alternative to the dull commands of the General Consent.

Thank you.

¹⁷ Delimited sets of pitches according to the difference in their frequencies.

Andy Hollinden (USA)

**"EVERYTHING IS NOW:
HOW FRANK ZAPPA ILLUSTRATES THE UNIVERSE"**

Everything Is Now: How Frank Zappa Illustrates the Universe

Andy Hollinden

In 1977, I made a life-sized Frank Zappa dummy for my 11th grade high school art class. Four years later, in the fall of 1981, Frank came to play at Indiana University. This would be the perfect opportunity to get rid of the Zappa dummy, I thought, since its novelty had worn off, and after once getting wet, it was starting to stink.

During the concert, Frank came over to me, grabbed the dummy by the hair, held it aloft as he walked around the stage, and then laid it across Tommy Mars' keyboard rig. I thought that was the end of the matter. I would never see or smell the Zappa dummy again.

Through an odd series of events, I eventually found myself teaching and developing courses on the history of blues and rock 'n' roll music for the Indiana University School of Music. My class on the life and music of Frank Zappa debuted in 1996. When I first spoke with Frank's widow, Gail Zappa, about my plans, I told her about the Zappa dummy, and she said, "You made that?"

In 1999, I was invited to the Zappa home in Los Angeles to meet Gail and tour the Zappa tape vaults. Imagine my shock when I entered Frank's rehearsal facility, Joe's Garage, and looked up to see the Zappa dummy staring down at me. Twenty-two years after I'd made the thing, and eighteen years after I'd handed it to Frank, there I was face-to-face with it once again. This was easily the strangest, most surreal moment of my life. I literally felt I was in three different times at once. Simultaneously I was a high school kid making the dummy in 1977, I was a college student watching Frank holding up the dummy in 1981, and I was a 38-year-old college professor standing slack-jawed looking up into that dummy's face. Time stopped, and I fell mute. By the way, this is exactly what the song title "Dummy Up" means.

I tell you this story partly to introduce myself and partly to make each of you momentarily revisit in your minds that point in your own lives when Frank Zappa and his music became so important to you. My guess is that at this very moment, each of you can, if you choose, recognize the feeling of being in two or more times at once, that *everything is now*.

One key to understanding Frank Zappa's music is knowing that he believed the true nature of the universe to be one of a simultaneous *now* in which time is non-linear. As he wrote in Them Or Us (The Book)

Non-linear time is the clock and calendar of ALL the Arts... Time does not go from here to there, or from then to now. Everything is happening all the time. It always has. It always will... Time is one big lump of stuff. Any one time is equal to any other time... The future has already happened.¹

In *200 Motels*, Zappa had Rance Muhammitz announce, "It is entirely possible for several subjective realities to co-exist. It is possible that all things are a deception of the senses."² This concept of parallelism is the key to understanding Zappa's willingness to accept ideas of time travel³ and precognition. Talking to Don Menn, Zappa said

(T)his is one of the better explanations for why people can have premonitions, because instead of looking ahead, they're just looking around. You don't have to look ahead to see the future. You can look over there.⁴

If we take this belief in non-linear time as the basic foundation of Zappa's music and as its core, unifying factor, we need to ask ourselves, *How would this manifest itself? How could Zappa illustrate the universe to us humans who generally perceive his music in linear time, in one reality at a time?* The best way would be to somehow force the listener to perceive multiple simultaneous realities.

We can compare the parallel realities of a non-linear universe to the associative workings of the human brain. Given free reign, the mind will not follow a linear, time-based chronology but flow from topic to topic across bridges of associations unique to each individual. More so than any other composer, Zappa played with the listener's associative process through the insertion of numerous cultural reference points and Zappa-specific conceptual continuity clues. Often conceptual continuity clues are fairly easy to spot, as in repeated references to poodles, plastic, pigs, prunes, or Potato-headed Bobby (and these are only ones that begin with the letter P!).

Zappa's use of cultural reference points is interesting in that each listener perceives them and processes them in his or her unique associative fashion. One good example of this is the unexpected entrance of operatic soprano Nelcy Walker in "Dog Breath, in the Year of the Plague" singing

Fuzzy dice
Bongos in the back
My ship of love is
Ready to attack⁵

The first half of "Dog Breath..." showcases a popular, R & B style and the second features Frank's composed "electronic chamber music." These two styles – representing both the low art/high art and the African-American/European dichotomies – neatly co-exist in one song. Walker's operatic intrusion is the only time the two juxtaposed styles come together. It is a very effective moment, and it works on at least three different levels. First and most obviously, it creates sharp contrast, a prime ingredient in Zappa's musical universe in which contrast provides unity. He said

That's the way I like to hear music, I like things next to each other that at first seem incongruous, but then when you step back into the whole thing you see it fits together properly.⁶

Secondly, Walker's operatic voice illustrates Zappa's use of timbre and how it conveys information. He explained

I've developed a "formula" for what these timbres *mean* (to me, at least), so that when I create an arrangement – if I have access to the right instrumental resources – I can put sounds together that tell **more than the story in the lyrics.**⁷

Thirdly, even the briefest inclusion of opera in this fashion will cause each listener's brain to fire across a unique web of neurons that are linked around the very

concept of opera. What does opera mean to you? Is it grand high art or insufferable bogus pomp? As you listen to the song, your thoughts and beliefs are prodded and goaded, operating perhaps on an unconscious level, but awakened nonetheless. It's up to you to acknowledge them, examine them, and compare them. A person can learn a lot about themselves by listening to Frank Zappa.

This concept of the brain's associative processes relates to another facet of Zappa's organizational technique – subliminal information. Frank spoke of a book on this topic that he read well before the formation of the Mothers of Invention, The Hidden Persuaders, by Vance Packard. While the effectiveness of subliminal advertising is questionable, Zappa definitely imparted information in ways not consciously perceived by the listener. He was influenced by the composer Pauline Oliveros who combined frequencies above human perception with frequencies below human perception to achieve a third result. Zappa commented

By combining something so high you couldn't hear it and something so low you couldn't hear it, it yielded something in the middle that you could hear. Whether or not you like what you hear in the middle is another question. The concept is brilliant.⁸

Zappa expanded upon Oliveros' discovery to include the combination of not just frequencies but also concepts, and he applied these techniques to the music of the Mothers of Invention. He said

(S)ome of the things that we do function on a related principle: Some of the ideas are below the level of human consciousness, and some of them are above the level of human consciousness. And in the middle is this peculiar by-product, which is the manifestation of what those ideas are...And some of the albums we've put out, the content of the album is completely irrelevant to the concept of the album.⁹

To my knowledge, Zappa never revealed specific examples of the ideas above and below human consciousness that he combined. I contend that what is above human consciousness is the concept of non-linear time and what is below is any information received subliminally that supports it. While lyrical conceptual continuity clues do help to illustrate the parallelism of the compositions and unity of Zappa's Project/Object, it is probably not correct to consider them subliminal. On the other hand, Zappa's deliberate repetition of rhythmic and melodic elements (especially when disguised) does fit the subliminal definition. The majority of Zappa fans are not musicians, but on an unconscious level they are capable of receiving Frank's non-verbal communications in which he pushes associative buttons, causes the listener to perceive multiple realities, and thereby illustrates the non-linear nature of the universe.

Didier asked that I illustrate my premise with audio and video examples. I would like to begin by playing for you part of one of Zappa's greatest early guitar solos, "Holiday in Berlin, Full Blown." Take note of the rising organ figure and Frank's opening melodic statement.

[play "Holiday in Berlin, Full Blown" excerpt]

This guitar solo-derived melody next appears (in variation) in *200 Motels*' "Strictly Genteel." Note how the previous example's rising organ figure is now played by the brass and retains the original key.

[play "Strictly Genteel" edited excerpt from *London Symphony Orchestra*]

Next, this same pattern appears in the opening statement of "Billy the Mountain." This time, though, the key has been changed to accommodate the vocal range of Mark Volman and Howard Kaylan.

[play "Billy the Mountain" excerpt]

Finally, this same harmonic pattern (back in the original key) and slightly varied melody reappear in "Inca Roads."

[play "Inca Roads" excerpt]

Zappa also used rhythm to illustrate his theory of simultaneous time. Talking with Bob Marshall, he stated

(I)t's a universe of rates. You have molecular rates. You have large-scale rates. You have the expansion of the Universe rate. You have the rate of atomic decay. You have the rate of aging. You have all these rates. So, it's a world of rates, and rates are time... You know, it's pretty consistent the way I look at stuff.¹⁰

Zappa used rates as harmonic building blocks in the same way that composers for centuries have used pitches to build chords, create dissonance, and achieve tension-and-release and harmonic motion. Zappa said

Well, my premise is that you can have harmony constructed out of rhythms. That's the way I look at it.¹¹

Zappa used conflicting rhythms (rates) to build tension, and when the disturbing, confusing or unfamiliar rate is removed, it provides release. He described an individual's "shutter speed" as

Your personal clock as indicated by your personal chemistry as opposed to the phases of the moon, all the rest of the cycles that are going on. That's your rate. Your biology versus the cosmology. You've become accustomed to that rate... If you're not at rate, you're uncomfortable... Stress is the difference between your calibrated rate and another rate at which you are forced to perform.¹²

Zappa also used unifying rhythmic motifs in much the same way he used melodic motifs to trigger subliminal associations. One good example of this is a distinctive quintuplet pattern that I call "The 5." Here it is as stated in "Penguin in Bondage," a song that refers to nuns and the bondage of Catholic faith.¹³

[play "Penguin in Bondage" excerpt]

The next appearance of “The 5” occurs in “San Ber’dino” and is now associated with Potato-headed Bobby. In Zappa-speak, “potato-headed” is a code word for Black.

[play “San Ber’dino” excerpt]

“The 5” happens again during “Advance Romance” and is once again associated with Potato-headed Bobby.

[play “Advance Romance” excerpt]

Not only does the use of this distinctive rhythmic motif underscore the unity of these three songs and trigger cross-current subliminal associations, but it also provides a conceptual clue for when Zappa later combined these two elements (the Catholic nun and the American black) to create Thing-fish and the Mammy Nuns.

Zappa also used drastically altered rates of rhythm to disguise recurring melodic motifs. Most often this took the form of playing melodies so fast that they are practically unrecognizable. For example, in “Inca Roads,” George Duke’s synthesizer melody (a long string of eighth notes reminiscent of “St. Alphonzo’s Pancake Breakfast”) is first played over the band’s quick 7/8 time signature.

[play “Inca Roads” excerpt #2]

This same melody returns at the end of the song played as septuplets by Ruth Underwood in which she plays one measure of George’s solo *per beat!*

[play “Inca Roads” excerpt #3]

So Zappa illustrated his theory of the non-linear universe and multiple simultaneous realities through conceptual continuity, associative triggers, subliminal melodic restatements, xenochrony, polyrhythms, and other rhythmic dissonances. He also very graphically presented the same through the editing of his video and film projects. In *200 Motels*, the previously mentioned scene in which Rance Muhammitz says “It is entirely possible for several subjective realities to co-exist” appears during a sequence in which Zappa edited back-and-forth between two scenes, one of Muhammitz sitting at a table with the old Mothers (Don Preston, Jimmy Carl Black, and Motorhead Sherwood) and another of him on the bandstand with the new Mothers (Mark Volman, Howard Kaylan, and Martin Lickert). This is a very effective, graphic example of illustrating simultaneous realities.

Another way Zappa forced the viewer to perceive two realities at once was to edit back-and-forth between two scenes so quickly that we can watch and absorb them both simultaneously. Frank used this type of “flicker-frame” editing extensively. Unfortunately, some people – those who are either unwilling or unable to adjust their rate of perception to match that of Zappa’s presentation – find it frustrating or irritating. The best example of this is in the performance of “Inca Roads” from Zappa’s TV special, *A Token Of His Extreme*.

[play “Incas Roads” video excerpt]

The complete “Inca Roads” performance confronts the viewer with a mind-boggling barrage of sonic and visual information. Zappa used many of his non-linear, universe-revealing techniques concurrently within this one song. One hears conceptual continuity clues (“booger-bear,” “Mother Mary ‘n Jozuf,”), cross-compositional melodic reference (the fourth appearance of the “Holiday In Berlin” guitar solo motif), subliminal melodic restatement disguised by blinding rate (George’s synth melody later played by Ruth in septuplets) – all while watching simultaneous visual realities presented in Zappa’s “flicker-frame” editing technique.

In a talk she gave at the University of Kentucky in March of this year, Gail Zappa said that Frank was “the most present person I’ve ever seen.” She pointed out that he was always *right now* and never thinking in the past or in the future. He was too busy for that. This explains his seeming disinterest in the “classic” albums for which fans are so fervently reverential and his dismissal of the notion of being remembered in the future.

Very few people are as busy as Frank Zappa was. We use memory as time travel and go “over there” all the time. We care about the future and Zappa’s place in it. It’s interesting that Zappa himself stayed in the present while he, more than any other composer, provided the listener with such an incredible maze of continuity, associations and subliminal information – a stupefying myriad of wormholes through which alternate simultaneous realities might be traversed. Don’t be hesitant to explore them. As Frank said in “A Token of My Extreme,”

I might be crazy
But there’s one thing I know
You might be surprised
At what you find out when ya go!¹⁴

Yes, a person can learn a lot about themselves by listening to Frank Zappa.

¹ Frank Zappa, *Them Or Us [The Book]*, Hollywood: Barking Pumpkin, pp. 19-20

² Frank Zappa, *200 Motels*, United Artists, 1971

³ “Now, if we take that as the basic premise, then time travel is no problem.” - Bob Marshall Interview, October 21, 1988

⁴ *The Mother of All Interviews* by Don Menn, Zappa! from the publishers of Keyboard and Guitar Player, p.64

⁵ “Dog Breath, in the Year of the Plague,” *Uncle Meat*, 1969

⁶ *Frank Zappa Interview Picture Disc #2*

⁷ Frank Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, New York: Poseidon Press, 1989, p. 171

⁸ Bob Marshall Interview, October 21, 1988

⁹ *Frank Zappa...He’s Bizarre* by Paul Eberle, L.A. Free Press, 1969

¹⁰ Bob Marshall Interview, October 21, 1988

¹¹ Martin Perlich Interview, 1972

¹² Bob Marshall Interview, October 21, 1988

¹³ ZAPPA: ...They tried to make me go to Catholic school, too. I lasted a very short time. When the **penguin** came after me with a ruler, I was out of there...

PLAYBOY: Is the irreverence and outrageousness in your music a reaction to being a good Catholic boy?

ZAPPA: Well, I think it was possible to do what I’ve done only because I escaped the **bondage** of being a devout believer. - Frank Zappa Playboy Interview, April 1993

¹⁴ *Joe’s Garage, Acts II & III*, 1979.

« Tout Est Maintenant : Comment Frank Zappa illustre l'univers »

Andy Hollinden

En 1977, j'ai fabriqué un mannequin de grandeur nature de Frank Zappa pour ma classe d'art en terminale. Quatre ans plus tard, en automne 1981, Frank Zappa venait jouer à l'université d'Indiana. C'était l'occasion parfaite de me débarrasser du mannequin de Zappa. Sa nouveauté s'était dissipée et après avoir pris la pluie, il commençait à puer. Pendant le concert, Zappa est venu vers moi, a saisi le mannequin par les cheveux, et le tenait en l'air en faisant le tour de la scène. Il l'a ensuite posé en travers du clavier de Tommy Mars et j'ai cru que c'était la fin de l'affaire du mannequin. Plus jamais je ne verrais ni ne sentirais le mannequin de Frank Zappa. Par une curieuse série de circonstances, je me suis trouvé à enseigner un cours sur l'histoire du blues et du rock à l'École de Musique à l'université d'Indiana. Ma classe sur la vie et la musique de Frank Zappa a débuté en 1996. Quand j'ai eu l'occasion de parler avec la veuve de Zappa, Gail Zappa, de mes projets, je lui ai parlé du mannequin et elle m'a répondu : "C'est vous qui avez fait ça?" En 1999, j'ai été invité chez les Zappa à Los Angeles, où j'ai rencontré Gail et visité les archives de Zappa. Imaginez mon choc quand je suis entré dans le studio d'enregistrement de Zappa, « Joe's Garage » et j'ai croisé le regard factice du mannequin de Frank Zappa. Vingt-deux ans après avoir fabriqué la chose et dix-huit ans après l'avoir donnée à Zappa, j'étais de nouveau face au mannequin. C'était le moment le plus étrange, et le plus surréaliste de ma vie. J'étais littéralement à trois moments différents de ma vie : j'étais à la fois un gamin de lycée fabriquant un mannequin en 1977, un étudiant d'université regardant Zappa se saisir du mannequin en 1981 et un prof de fac de 38 ans regardant ce même mannequin dans les yeux. Le temps s'est figé et je suis resté muet. À propos, c'est exactement ce que le titre de la chanson « Dummy Up » veut dire (figé et muet – et idiot - comme un mannequin).

Je vous raconte cette histoire pour me présenter et pour vous faire momentanément revoir le moment où Frank Zappa et sa musique sont entrés dans votre vie. Ma supposition est qu'à ce même moment, chacun d'entre vous, peut reconnaître le sentiment d'être simultanément, que « tout est maintenant ». Une clé à la compréhension de la musique de Frank Zappa est que celui-ci croyait en la nature simultanée de l'univers et un temps non linéaire. Comme il a écrit dans *Them or Us (The book)*

(citation) (1) notes en fin d'article

Dans *200 Motels*, Zappa demande à Rance Muhammitz d'annoncer ceci : « Il est entièrement possible pour plusieurs réalités subjectives de coexister. Il est possible que toutes les choses soient une tromperie des sens. » (2) Ce concept de parallélisme est la clé à la compréhension de l'idée de précognition et de voyage dans le temps (3) chère à Zappa.

(citation) (4)

Si nous prenons cette notion de temps non linéaire comme la fondation fondamentale de la musique de Zappa, nous devons nous demander, « Comment cela pourrait-il se

manifester? Comment Zappa pourrait-il nous illustrer l'univers, à nous qui percevons généralement sa musique comme linéaire, et présente en une réalité à la fois ? La meilleure voie serait d'une façon ou d'une autre de forcer l'auditeur à percevoir des réalités simultanées et multiples. Nous pouvons comparer les réalités parallèles d'un univers non linéaire aux travaux associatifs du cerveau humain. Livré à lui-même, l'esprit ne suivra pas une chronologie linéaire, basée sur le temps, mais ira d'un thème à l'autre par des ponts d'associations uniques à chaque individu. Plus que d'autres compositeurs, Zappa a joué avec le processus associatif de l'auditeur par l'insertion de nombreux points de référence culturels et d'indices de continuité conceptuels spécifiques à Zappa. Les indices de continuité conceptuels sont assez faciles à détecter : les références répétées aux caniches, le plastique, les cochons, prunes, ou Bobby à la Tête de Patate. L'utilisation de points de référence culturels est intéressante car chaque auditeur les perçoit et les traite d'une manière associative unique. Un bon exemple de cela est l'entrée inattendue du soprano d'opéra, Nelcy Walker dans "L'Haleine de Chien, pendant l'Année de la Peste"

(citation) (5)

La première moitié "d'Haleine de Chien ..." montre un style de R & B et les deuxièmes une "musique de chambre électronique" Ces deux styles – représentant l'art bourgeois et l'art populaire et les dichotomies Afro-Américain/Européen – coexistent dans une même chanson. L'intrusion de Walker est le seul moment où les deux styles juxtaposés se réunissent. C'est un moment très efficace et il fonctionne sur au moins trois niveaux. D'abord et le plus évidemment, il crée un contraste, un ingrédient primordial dans l'univers musical de Zappa dans lequel le contraste fournit une unité.

(citation) (6)

Deuxièmement, la voix d'opéra de Walker illustre l'utilisation du timbre sonore et comment il transmet des renseignements.

(citation) (7)

Troisièmement, cette inclusion d'opéra --même brève va permettre au cerveau de chaque auditeur de stimuler les neurones qui sont reliés autour du concept d'opéra.

Que signifie l'opéra pour vous ? Est-ce du grand art ou un art pompeux et insupportable ? Pendant que vous écoutez, vos pensées et convictions sont aiguillonnées à des niveaux multiples insoupçonnés. C'est à vous de les examiner et de les comparer. On peut apprendre beaucoup sur soi en écoutant Zappa. Ce concept des processus associatifs révèle une autre facette de la technique organisationnelle de Zappa – les messages subliminaux. Zappa a parlé d'un livre sur ce thème qu'il a lu bien avant la formation des Mothers of Invention, *The Hidden Persuaders* de Vance Packard. Alors que l'efficacité de la publicité subliminale est discutable, Zappa a transmis sans aucun doute des renseignements perçus inconsciemment par l'auditeur. Il était sous l'influence du compositeur Pauline Oliveros qui combinait des fréquences au-dessus et au-dessous de la perception humaine pour arriver à un troisième résultat.

(citation) (8)

Zappa a étendu la théorie d'Oliveros pour inclure non seulement la combinaison des fréquences, mais celle des concepts et il a appliqué ces techniques à la musique des Mothers of Invention.

(citation) (9)

À ma connaissance, Zappa n'a jamais donné d'exemples spécifiques de ces concepts. Je soutiens que ce qui est au-dessus de la conscience humaine est le concept de « temps non linéaire » et ce qui est au-dessous est n'importe quels renseignements reçus subliminalement qui le soutient. Tandis que les indices de continuité conceptuels lyriques aident à illustrer le parallélisme des compositions et l'unité Projet/Objet, il est incorrect de les considérer comme subliminaux. D'autre part, la répétition délibérée d'éléments cadencés et mélodiques (surtout quand elles sont déguisées) correspond vraiment à la définition subliminale. La majorité des « fans » de Zappa ne sont pas musiciens, mais au niveau subconscient ils sont capables de recevoir les communications non-verbales de Zappa, de percevoir les multiples réalités et la nature non linéaire de l'univers.

Didier m'a demandé d'illustrer mes propos avec des exemples audio et vidéo. Je voudrais commencer par un extrait d'un des premiers grands solos de guitare de Zappa, "Holiday in Berlin. Full Blown." Remarquez l'orgue et la première ligne mélodique de Zappa.

[extrait]

La mélodie tirée du solo apparaît ensuite dans *200 Motels* "Strictly Genteel." A noter que la montée d'orgue est maintenant jouée par les cuivres et retient la clé de l'original.

[extrait révisé par *l'Orchestre Symphonie de Londres*]

Ensuite, ce même motif apparaît dans l'ouverture "Billy the Mountain." Cette fois, cependant, la clé a été changée pour aménager la gamme vocale de Mark Volman et de Howard Kaylan.

[extrait]

Finalement, cette même harmonie (en clé originale) avec une mélodie légèrement variée réapparaît dans « Inca Roads »

[extrait]

Zappa utilisait également le rythme pour illustrer sa théorie de temps simultané. En parlant avec Bob Marshall, il disait (I)

(citation) (10)

Zappa utilisait les « taux » (note du traducteur : des « fréquences de rythme » temps, tempo?) comme éléments de construction harmoniques de la même façon que les compositeurs des siècles précédents ont utilisé le ton pour construire des accords, créer la dissonance, la tension et le mouvement harmonique.

(citation) (11)

Zappa utilisait des rythmes contrastés (les « taux ») pour construire une tension et quand le « taux » déconcertant ou peu familier est enlevé, il fournit une relâche. Il a décrit la "vitesse d'obturateur d'un individu" comme « votre horloge personnelle »

(citation) (12)

Zappa utilisait aussi des motifs cadencés presque de la même façon qu'il utilisait des motifs mélodiques pour déclencher des associations subliminales. Un bon exemple de cela est un motif « quintuplé » très distinctif que j'appelle "Les 5." Comme dans "Penguin in Bondage," une chanson qui fait allusion aux religieuses et au servage de la foi catholique (13).

[extrait]

L'apparition "des 5" se reproduit dans "San Ber'dino" et se trouve maintenant associée à Bobby à la Tête de Patate. En parlance Zappa, "à la tête de Patate" est un mot codé pour Noir.

[extrait]

"Les 5" réapparaissent dans "Advance Romance" et est encore une fois associé à Bobby à la Tête de Patate.

[extrait]

Non seulement l'utilisation de ce motif souligne l'unité de ces trois chansons et déclenche le contre-courant des associations subliminales, mais il fournit aussi un indice conceptuel que Zappa a combiné plus tard : la religieuse catholique et le noir américain pour créer Thing-Fish et les Mammy Nuns.

Zappa a utilisé aussi des rythmes modifiés pour déguiser des motifs mélodiques récurrents souvent. Très souvent sous forme de mélodies jouées si vite qu'elles étaient pratiquement méconnaissables. Par exemple, dans "Inca Road" la mélodie du synthétiseur de George Duke (une longue succession de huitièmes notes évocatrices de "Saint Alphonzo's Pancake Breakfast") est jouée par-dessus le tempo rapide de 7/8 du groupe.

[extrait]

La même mélodie revient à la fin de la chanson jouée comme septuplets par Ruth Underwood où elle joue une mesure du solo de George *par rythmie!*

[extrait]

Ainsi Zappa a illustré sa théorie de l'univers non linéaire et des réalités simultanées multiples par la continuité conceptuelle, les déclenchements associatifs, les réaffirmations mélodiques subliminales, la xénochronie, les polyrythmies et d'autres dissonances cadencées. Zappa a présenté le même esprit dans les révisions de sa vidéo et projets de film. La scène de *200 Motels*, mentionnée ci-dessus, où Rance Muhammitz dit qu'il "est entièrement possible pour plusieurs réalités subjectives de coexister" apparaît pendant une séquence dans laquelle Zappa opère un va-et-vient entre deux scènes, la première montrant Muhammitz assis à une table avec les anciens membres des Mothers of Invention (Don Preston, Jimmy Carl Black et Motorhead Sherwood) et la deuxième montrant Zappa en scène avec la nouvelle formation des Mothers (Mark Volman, Howard Kaylan et Martin Lickert). Cette manière d'obliger le téléspectateur à percevoir deux réalités à la fois est possible par un va-et-vient si rapide que nous pouvons regarder et absorber les deux simultanément. Zappa a beaucoup utilisé cette technique "d'obturateur rapide" (« flicker-frame»). Malheureusement, certaines personnes – ceux qui n'ont pas envie ou sont incapables de régler leur perception sur celle de la présentation de Zappa – le trouvent frustrant ou agaçant. Le meilleur exemple de cela est dans le "Inca Road" de l'émission spéciale de Zappa à la télévision, *A Token Of His Extreme* :

[extrait visuel]

Le spectacle complet met le téléspectateur en face d'un déroutant barrage de renseignements soniques et visuels. Zappa a utilisé particulièrement beaucoup de ses techniques non linéaires dans cette chanson. On entend des indices de continuité conceptuelle ("booger-bear", "Mother Mary 'n Jozuf"), une référence mélodique trans-compositionnelle (la quatrième récurrence du motif du solo de guitare dans « Holiday in Berlin »), une répétition mélodique subliminale déguisée par la rapidité du tempo (la mélodie du synthétiseur de George jouée par Ruth en septuplés) – le tout, en regardant des réalités visuelles à travers sa technique "d'obturateur rapide" (« flicker-frame»).

Dans une conférence qu'elle a donnée à l'université de Kentucky en mars de cette année, Gail Zappa a dit que Frank Zappa était "la personne la plus présente qu'elle n'avait jamais vue." Elle faisait remarquer que Zappa était toujours présent dans l'immédiat et jamais dans le passé ou dans l'avenir. Il était bien trop occupé pour cela. Cela explique son désintérêt apparent pour les albums dit "classiques" pour lesquels les « fans » montrent trop de révérence et son rejet de la notion de postérité.

Très peu de personnes sont aussi occupées que l'était Frank Zappa. Nous utilisons la mémoire pour voyager dans le temps et nous allons "là-bas" tout le temps. Nous nous soucions de l'avenir et de la place qu'y tient Zappa. Il est intéressant d'apprendre que Zappa vivait dans le présent alors que, plus que d'autres compositeurs, il fournissait à son auditeur un incroyable labyrinthe de continuité, d'associations et de renseignements subliminaux – une myriade stupéfiante de « wormholes » (passages intersidéraux) par lesquels des réalités alternées pouvaient être franchies. N'hésitez pas à les explorer. Comme disait Frank Zappa dans "A Token of My Extreme"

Je pourrais être fou
Mais il y a une chose dont je suis certain
Vous pourriez être surpris
Par ce que vous découvrez quand vous y allez! (14)

Oui, on peut apprendre beaucoup sur soi en écoutant Frank Zappa.

¹ Frank Zappa, *Them Or Us [The Book]*, Hollywood: Barking Pumpkin, pp. 19-20

² Frank Zappa, *200 Motels*, United Artists, 1971

³ “Now, if we take that as the basic premise, then time travel is no problem.” - Bob Marshall Interview, October 21, 1988

⁴ *The Mother of All Interviews* by Don Menn, Zappa! from the publishers of Keyboard and Guitar Player, p.64

⁵ “Dog Breath, in the Year of the Plague,” *Uncle Meat*, 1969

⁶ *Frank Zappa Interview Picture Disc #2*

⁷ Frank Zappa, *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, New York: Poseidon Press, 1989, p. 171

⁸ Bob Marshall Interview, October 21, 1988

⁹ *Frank Zappa...He's Bizarre* by Paul Eberle, L.A. Free Press, 1969

¹⁰ Bob Marshall Interview, October 21, 1988

¹¹ Martin Perlich Interview, 1972

¹² Bob Marshall Interview, October 21, 1988

¹³ ZAPPA: ... They tried to make me go to Catholic school, too. I lasted a very short time. When the **penguin** came after me with a ruler, I was out of there...

PLAYBOY: Is the irreverence and outrageousness in your music a reaction to being a good Catholic boy?

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¹⁴ *Joe's Garage, Acts II & III*, 1979.

Simon Prentis (UK)

"AS ABOVE, SO BELOW : ONE SIZE FITS ALL"

AS ABOVE, SO BELOW: ZAPPA, FRACTALS AND 'ONE SIZE FITS ALL'

When Bob Marshall asks Zappa in 1988 to define 'conceptual continuity' in terms of the conversation they have just been having, he answers simply 'As above, so below'. This piquant little epigram, the comestible crux of the legendary Emerald Tablet and widely held by mystics of diverse persuasions to contain the key to all mysteries, is frequently glossed as meaning the following: "*That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above, corresponds to that which is Below, to accomplish the miracles of the One Thing*". A similar insight is expressed more poetically by William Blake in 'Auguries of Innocence' with his evocation of 'A World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower'; but in its day job as a magical incantation, the phrase distils the essence of a medieval mind-set attempting to articulate a quality that the mathematician Benoit Mandelbrot eventually termed 'fractal' – the property of self-similarity that underlies most naturally-occurring patterns in the universe. At different scales and in different domains the forms in which they manifest may appear to be entirely unrelated; but in the big picture they are simply special cases of the same formula or 'concept', all ultimately generable through the appropriate application of a recursive algorithm. It's about standing back far enough to be able to spot the pattern.

In hindsight at least, it's the fractal quality of Zappa's work which is its most definitive trait – the extraordinary diversity of his output only begins to make sense when you see individual songs or albums as special cases of the same methodology, with the specific expression being governed by the ambient noise, the 'when' determining the 'what'. Growing up in 'real time' with Zappa's output from Uncle Meat onward, it was usually the case that I was thoroughly confused by the apparent 'change of direction' as each new album was released; it would take a large number of listenings before I could overcome my desire for the new album to sound just like the last one, and understand that this derailment of expectation was precisely the point. What was less immediately obvious was the extent to which each new phase usually emerged from an aspect of something that could be found in earlier work; the extraordinary and apparently still unique characteristic of Zappa's oeuvre is the astonishingly diverse range of musical and other influences that inform the output macrostructure. As Ben Watson put it in his 2003 paper on the Phenomenology of One Size Fits All, "every part contains enough information to reconstruct the whole. You investigate any song or tune or lyric, and find Zappa's whole universe inside it."

But this is not the only sense in which it is appropriate to consider his work as being fractal. The original word comes from the Latin *fractus* meaning broken or fractured, and this too is a key characteristic of Zappa's work. Andy Hollinden once said to me that he thought of Zappa's albums as 'installments' in an ongoing work in progress, which is certainly a helpful concept in grasping the idea that, as Zappa himself said, it's actually all one album. Now that it's so easy to load all the CDs on an iPod, it's an instructive exercise to listen in shuffle mode as if it was indeed all one album, a monstrously expanded version of Lãther which assembles itself differently each time you listen to it. And it's amazing how this can throw up hitherto unexpected insights into fractal similarities between songs you would perhaps not ever otherwise think of listening to back-to-back. The corollary of this, however, is that none of the albums are really ever complete in themselves: they were only ever a 'best read at the time', not necessarily to be taken as the final word, though as consumers we may become

attached to a particular format. Zappa once told me he never used to listen to his own albums once he'd signed off on them, and this attitude can be seen at work in the way in which he constantly re-wrote and rearranged old material to suit new circumstances, often to the disappointment of his fans. The organizing principle of Anything Anytime Anyplace For No Reason At All means that anything will do; it's just a question of applying the appropriate attention. It's the concept that is continuous; the form is not. The use of iconic images such as poodles is merely the surface manifestation of a process that is about finding the similarities within apparent difference. And this is the process embodied most conspicuously in One Size Fits All, which is fractal down to its very toenails.

Coincidentally or otherwise, Mandelbrot's insight about fractal patterns was offered up to an unsuspecting and initially unappreciative world in 1975, the very same year that One Size Fits All was released to a chorus of appreciation that was equally muted. Not that the album didn't sell; it reached the giddy heights of No 26 in the US charts for a brief period before disappearing without trace, if remaining a firm favorite with fans. But although better received than Overnite Sensation, it was certainly not as successful as Apostrophe, and Zappa was not pleased, noting testily that he'd spent 4 months of 12-hour days in the studio, and he wanted people to hear it. Indeed, he took the highly unusual (for him) step of name-checking it on Zappa In New York with the express hope of 'guid[ing] a few curious listeners back in that direction to check it out.' Even assuming a commercial consideration, there must have been more to it than that; what was it he wanted us to check out?

When 'One Size Fits All' first hit the record stores, I had no idea that the title itself was a found object, like the ultimately-unused phrase Crush All Boxes – which Zappa allegedly spotted on the back of a garbage truck, or alternatively, on a dumpster at the back of the building where his lawyers had offices. Unaware that this formulation was actually a piece of marketing chicanery designed to sex up an otherwise transparent attempt to squeeze maximum profit from minimum effort at the expense of both consumers and workers (the same people, in reality), the full nature of the joke escaped me until the expression crossed the Atlantic and started to appear in retail outlets in the UK some years later. So I simply had to assume that he'd coined the phrase to express the essential concept of the album, which I took to be ways of seeing and the inevitable constraints they impose on their proponents. The thesis is straightforward enough; Inca Roads is a parody of the 'Chariots of the Gods' idea that life as we know it must have been influenced and/or informed by contact with extra-terrestrial beings; Can't Afford No Shoes deals with the perspective of people whose daily struggle for survival is so acute that such speculative questions are totally irrelevant. Pojama People lampoons those who are unable and/or unwilling to behold the nature of the problem in the first place. Florentine Pogen and San Bernadino are a matching pair of songs dealing respectively with the phenomenon of the poor little rich person and the rich little poor person, implying that the opportunities and obstacles that infest people's lives and our assumptions about them are not always what they seem; and Evelyn offers the balloon-bursting canine perspective on reality.

So far, so good; but what of Sofa and Andy? Whose perspectives do they represent? And what, in any case, was the relation of all this to the cover, which seemed to be illustrating Zappa's spoof creation myth, familiar to me from having seen him play at

that fateful concert at the Rainbow in 1971? Clearly, it was sending up the whole notion of God and the idea that some all-powerful being could have created the universe, a suggestion that most cultures on the planet seem to have found expedient to propagate at some stage in their development. But if the cover is all about the idea of God, with appropriately punning associations to his creation, symbolised by the sofa – thereby transformed into the ‘Divine divan’ – surely there should be some reference to this in the album. And of course there is; Sofa is God’s perspective. But the God who is singing in German to his creation is not the sternly distant deity of Abrahamic monotheism. In fact, he identifies strenuously with his handiwork, and not just the best parts of it either – the voice is at pains to point out its identity with all the cheaper cuts of reality, the dirt beneath your rollers, the cracks, crannies, secret smut and lost metal money. He is eggs of all persuasions, the fecund, self-replicating essence of life which contains within itself the seeds of everything that’s ever bin. So where is the voice of his creation, the self-identical consciousness to whom he is apparently speaking?

The only track that is otherwise unaccounted for is Andy. Despite Nigey Lennon’s somewhat eyebrow-tweezing claim that it is about her, most of those who have ventured to comment on this song seem strangely unconcerned to make any consistent sense of it. In the most recently published book about Zappa’s work, Kelly Lowe states rather incongruously that Andy is “either about Hollywood star Andy Devine, rock star Todd Rundgren, or an old road manager of Captain Beefheart’s”, though apart from the obvious point that the song mentions Andy Devine by name, he supplies no evidence for these assertions, nor any reasoning as to why they might make any sense. Kevin Courier advances the novel concept that the song is about “personal disillusionment with a possible drug burnout” citing the line ‘Have I aligned with a blown mind?’, but again, does not attempt to argue the case, and seems happy to put it down to ‘absurdist wit’. Ben Watson suggests more subtly that the theme is “human consciousness as innerness”, remarking cryptically that Zappa “faults the fake by reference to externals” but essentially confines his speculations to the implications of the song, and does not address the question of what its putative subject might have done to merit being selected for such an honour.

So let’s consider more carefully what Mr Devine’s portly presence might be bringing to this song. The lyrics begin with a question; ‘Is there anything good inside of you, if there is, I really want to know...’ Who is this question addressed to? It seems most unlikely that Zappa would be so urgently concerned about the moral rectitude of a roadie whom almost nobody else would either have heard of or care about, or even that of Todd Rundgren, who he clearly had little respect for. Andy Devine was of course a famous B-movie cowboy actor with a distinctive raspy voice, and latterly a popular guest on TV shows, but he cuts a distinctly cheesy swathe through life. Why would anyone want so desperately for him to show a sign that there was something – anything – good inside of him?

The answer is, of course, that they wouldn’t. For if you close your eyes to the printed lyrics and open your ears to the sound of what’s being sung, you begin to notice that there’s a parallel reference going on. The song is not about Andy Devine. It’s about ‘the divine’, the supernatural entity otherwise known as God. Note too, that Zappa spells Devine in the lyrics as two words *de vine*, both with an initial lower case. We will probably never know at what stage the phrase ‘And the divine’ morphed into

Johnny Guitar Watson's superbly slurred 'Andy Devine' (with those deliciously cheezoid overtones; is there a *vine/wine* implication lurking there too?), but from our knowledge of Zappa's fondness for such phonetic mutations (*Zut alors* transforming to Zoot Allures, to take but one example) it's a highly characteristic manoeuvre, a chance semantic fracture that blooms into a separate fractal universe. Andy is a song addressed to God, and true to form with all his most 'serious' themes, Zappa clothes it in the garb of absurdity. As if aware that the thrust of the song is likely to be misunderstood, he even throws us a heavy-handed hint: 'Do you know what I'm really telling you, is it something that you can understand?' There's another clue to the religious aroma too, in the fact that Zappa pointedly signs off the album on Easter Sunday, the traditional date of the Resurrection.

So Andy, then, is a 'religious' song – perhaps the ultimate religious song in the sense that it deals with a crisis of belief and a mind coming to terms with the absence of God. Let's not forget that Zappa was brought up as a Catholic, and only became disabused of such specious notions in his late teenage years. The song sketches a cartoon version of the disappointment and anguish of discovering that belief in God is misplaced. It's the plaintive, desperate plea of a mind unwilling to face up to the prospect of existential emptiness, an illustration of how scared you can be when it gets too real. Until you get over it, of course; for as Blake puts it in the less-well-known coda to the *Auguries of Innocence*: "God appears, and God is light / To those poor souls who dwell in night; / But does a human form display / To those who dwell in realms of day." It could be a motto for the album.

With that in mind, let's see how this interpretation plays out in context:

*Andy de vine had a thong rind
It was sublime, but the wrong kind...*

Even though I felt sure that Andy Devine represented the concept of God, 'thong rind' had always bothered me. I didn't know what a thong rind was, for one thing. Jumping to exactly the sort of unsubstantiated conclusion that any Zappa obsessive worth their salt is unfortunately prey to, I assumed it referred to some kind of failed structure for the universe, a cosmic Moebius strip like the peeled rind of an orange that didn't work out, in much the same way that God is seen to reject an early model of Saturn with square rings on the front cover of the album. Luckily for me, I eventually got a chance to ask the man himself [though stupidly, I never thought to confirm the Andy Devine thesis. However, I noticed on going through our correspondence for this paper, that I had mentioned my delight that the song was 'an antidote to specious areas of teleological concern', and that he did not demur]. He faxed back a reply which informed me that a thong rind was "*the mutated condition of the skin in the region between the toes irritated by the friction of a thong sandal*" but then continued: "*The deeper philosophical meaning of the line refers to that special disappointment one might experience after seeing an attractive woman only to discover she has poorly maintained feet – as if she had just dug her way to the surface performing as an extra in 'Superman vs the Mole People'.*"

It's my contention that this elaborately fractal metaphor encodes the moment at which a rational person begins to doubt a system of belief which insists on the perfection of God and his creations. You could perhaps argue that the song still

refers to Mr Devine and his poorly maintained feet. But it makes much more sense to assume that we're talking about God and the manifestly imperfect nature of creation which appears not to be under his or anyone else's control. Hence the ensuing concern: Have I aligned with a blown mind? Wasted my time on a drawn blind? If God exists, and yet creation is imperfect, is it because the mind that made it is faulty (in which case God is not God) or because there is nothing there? Either way, it's not looking good... Which is why, bang on cue, we get Sofa, which is God's (and Zappa's) answer. God is not 'out there', he is everything, everywhere (and we are his sofa, because shit happens...) It's OK. Despair not. Dwell in realms of day.

But, you might ask, why would Zappa, a self-confessed 'devout pagan', devote a whole album to the notion of God? And what has this got to do with fractals and the Emerald Tablet anyway? Because at the end of the Inca Road it's the crux of all ponderings concerning the behavioural significance of persons of short or any demeanour: if you haven't ever asked yourself the G-question, you're always going to be in danger of falling for it, unless you're a dog, in which case you just bark. The way in which you deal with the question of how and why we come to be alive, and whether that question needs answering, will determine not only how you deal with everything else, but if you sign up to the religious solution, will impact adversely on other people as well. But it's not just the religious solution. Any and all conceptual boxes carry the seeds of their own destruction, and the potential for conflict with others. Whether you obsess about flying saucers or escape to trailer-park heaven, the extent to which your vision precludes all others will blind you to the pan-chromatic resonance of the miracles of the One Thing.

In referencing the Emerald Tablet for Bob Marshall, Zappa was pointing up the essential identity of all processes, which are ultimately mere fractal subdivisions of the Big Note. At that level, the Universe is indeed the one size – it fits all – and the album both celebrates that fact through Sofa, the 'arousing waltz' that forms its triumphantly bravura conclusion, and simultaneously sends up the partial perspectives that preclude such an understanding in the songs that precede it.

It's also probably the finest studio album with the finest studio band you ever heard in your life, but then I probably don't need to tell you that.

Dr Richard Hemmings (UK)

"CONCEPTUAL WAZOOS : KAZOO CONCEPTS : WHIZZLE-WHIZZLE"

Conceptual Wazoo: Kazoo Concepts: Whizzle-whizzle.

In a recent online article published by *The Onion*, it was revealed that Frank Zappa was a new entry into the Top 20 of "popular culture obsessions", taking up a position alongside *Star Trek* and *The Simpsons*. The article entitled, "The knights who say 'nerd': 20 pop-cultural obsessions even geekier than *Monty Python*" comments that "because Frank Zappa was so prodigious, so eclectic, and so keen on parodying modern music, fans of his work can dive in so deep that they rarely listen to anything else," (with the possible exception of doo-wop and Varèse) and that "fans often aspire to become as smart and skilled as Zappa, so that they too can, with authority, mock a culture that they perceive as excluding them". Certainly once you begin to understand Zappa's music, normal popular music (i.e., the stuff in the charts) starts to sound too safe, too boring. There's only so much Coldplay one can take before strapping a bomb to ones self and running into HMV becomes a justifiable act. Zappa's music appeals to the inner nerd because it provokes thought. The "Project/Object" is a sprawling mass of interconnectivity and unpredictability, making it difficult to penetrate, especially if you're only used to standardised radio friendly music. Like the *Simpsons* and *Star Trek*, Zappa albums often feature loveable characters (e.g. Rhonda, Uncle Meat), challenging plots (e.g., Gregory Peccary, Billy the Mountain) and profound moral advice (e.g., "Don't mess with Billy", "Don't eat the yellow snow"). Sometimes, even the instrumental albums would contain a story printed inside the gatefold cover or dustsheet, an example being, *The Grand Wazoo* (1972).

In my own capacity to commit acts of geek-like behaviour, I have chosen to focus this essay on "wazoo" continuity. For the purposes of show biz, the first half involves a laughable etymological study. This is followed by an attempt to show how *The Grand Wazoo* album cover triggers waves of "conceptual continuity", tracing themes as and when they occur on the material surface. This section is taken from my PhD thesis, where I made a connection between "conceptual continuity" and "obscure complexity" [1]. The term "obscure complexity" is used by the cryptographer Carl Ellison to describe number sequences which appear random, not because they are but because the person examining them doesn't understand the process that's generating them. To someone who understands the process, the sequences might not seem random at all, just complicated. Likewise, a Zappa album makes much more sense once you understand Zappa's ordering processes and have a grasp of the continuity links that connect it to the rest of the oeuvre.

Not long after Zappa disbanded the first incarnation of The Mothers in 1969 he began working on a number of jazz/rock projects. Some of the music from this period was released on *Waka Jawaka (Hot Rats II)* (1971) and *The Grand Wazoo*. Recently, two more "wazoo" related releases, both recorded in 1972, have found their way out of The Vault. First came *Imaginary Diseases* (2006) which features a selection of performances by the 10-piece Petit Wazoo group. This was followed up by *Zappa Wazoo*, which captures the 20-piece Grand Wazoo Orchestra blasting its way through some of Zappa's big band charts. Both releases capture a fascinating period of Zappa's writing and are a welcome addition to the catalogue as a whole. Zappa's skills as a composer and arranger are clearly evident, as are the inevitable hand signals used to steer the band through the improvisational sections.

So what does the word "wazoo" mean? Zappa had his own ideas which we'll look at in a moment; however, "wazoo" is such a strange word it benefits from a little analysis.

Predictably, the Internet throws up a number of wild definitions ranging from "crazy person" [2] to "high priestess of the Babylonians" [2a] whose role in society was to offer some kind of high-class escort service. In America, "wazoo" is commonly used as slang for "bottom", broadly applying to the fleshy rump of the buttocks or more specifically to the ever giving, ever receiving anal orifice itself. We can ponder for a moment that Zappa could have sung, "Broken Hearts are wa-zoos" but he didn't, maybe because "wazoo" has only recently become associated with assholes. It was entered into the Oxford English Dictionary in 2006.

In some contexts, "Wazoo" is used to imply irreversible bad fortune, as in the sentence, "my status at the High School has gone up the wazoo". Although this could be a euphemism for "up the ass", the expression "up the wazoo" has similar connotations to "up the Suwannee". The Suwannee is a major river in the United States, flowing through southern Georgia and northern Florida. It was the source of inspiration behind George Gershwin's first big Tin Pan Alley smash, "Swanee" (1919) [3]. The story goes it was discovered by Al Jolson, the black and white minstrel, who overheard it at a party and whom subsequently used it in his Broadway musical *Sinbad* alongside other classics such as "My Mammy". Jolson's warbling vocal intonations are immediately recognisable as the inspiration for the voice of the Evil Prince from *Thing-Fish* (1984).

When something goes "up the wazoo" or "up the Suwannee", it means ones luck has run out, analogous to going up or down shit creek without a paddle. Why the Suwannee should get such a reputation isn't clear but one can assume it has its fair share of dangerous rapids that could total your sailing dingy. Equally, sometimes things go down the pan, meaning that they have been flush down the lavatory. Thus, "wazoo" could be a substitution for the word "lavatory". In truth, "wazoo" can pretty much mean anything you want it to, depending on how you use it.

The actual origins of the word "wazoo" are harder to pinpoint. From a phonetic standpoint, "wazoo" sounds like the sort of word a drunk person might slur, inebriated to the point where intoxication of the brain means they are no longer able to co-ordinate the complex mouth movements required for enunciation (i.e, speech). Stroke victims and those who have suffered brain injuries can also find speaking difficult. My own grandfather lost part of his ability to speak after he was involved in a car accident. Although it was frustrating for him at times, his inability to say words properly was a source of humour in my family. We would imitate his speech by saying, "whizzle-whizzle... whizzle-whizzle... whizzle...".

One Internet source suggests that "wazoo" stems from the French for bird, l'oiseau [4]; however, this paints the uncomfortable picture that The Grand Wazoo is really Big Bird from *Seasame Street*. A similar sounding word "kazoo" is also of French origin. Although kazoos have existed since Roman times, the word first appeared in written form during the mid 14th Century, in the scholarly works of the Italian cleric and raconteur, Ethelred [5]. The kazoo, called the *chasoux royale* throughout the Dark Ages, was essentially a French instrument well into the 14th Century and was played by noblemen to entertain guests at banquets. Ethelred recalls a story of the Dauphine, the future Jean II, who at a banquet was serenading an attractive young lady called Isabelle on his chasoux royale. Just as he was going in for a little kiss he sneezed in her face causing her to fly across the table, knock over the roasted pig, and land in a pile on top of various clerics and noblemen. Ethelred writes:

"and when her spirit returned and she did awake, she spake with voice aquiver and eardrums split asunder so that she did shout: "Good my Lord, I do but live by the grace and by thine every word; and thy words do fill me with joie and wonder and awe. Pray then, sire, was that last word not KAZOO?" [6]

It is not just that the words wazoo and kazoo rhyme and are likely to be of French origin that connects them. In both cases, vibrating surfaces produces sound. The kazoo achieves its buzzy sound by using the human voice to vibrate a thin membrane. Simply blowing air through a kazoo produces no sound. Wazoos (if we apply the "arsehole" definition) produce sound by forcing air between two surfaces, i.e., the buttocks, causing them to oscillate. (NB: Reed instruments such as the bassoon and the oboe produce sound in a similar way.)

The Grand Wazoo's sleeve design features a battle scene set in ancient Rome, but Zappa's concept of time as a spherical constant, where everything coexists at the same time, means this is no ordinary battle. Against the backdrop of a crumbling Roman coliseum and what appears to be a huge monument engraved "The Grand Wazoo", a jazz/rock horn section (consisting of Norman soldiers and Egyptian pharaohs) fights off an army of Roman violinists. Instead of gunfire, they exchange hostile notes. The winged emblem across the top of the monument recalls the eagle symbol of the Holy Roman Empire, an icon much associated with Nazi Germany. The battle scene recalls the "traditional" verses the "modern" discourse of The Mothers' stage play *Progress* [7] and the fusion of orchestral and rock music of *200 Motels* (1971). Alongside the music of *The Grand Wazoo* album, Zappa provides the listener with some reading material: "The Legend of Cletus Awreetus-Awrightus and The Grand Wazoo", a typical Zappa nonsense story, parodying the music industry, life on the road and groups trying achieve chart success.

At the time of the Grand Wazoo Orchestra's inception, music journalists pondered the meaning of the name. Harvey Siders wrote in *Downbeat*, "It's a typical 'Zappellation', made up of one part gibberish, one part satire, and the rest - just plain old put-on" [8]. Zappa supplied a number of possibilities. During the story of Cletus Awreetus-Awrightus, the Grand Wazoo is described as "an oversized primitive-but-effective megaphone" used to address "QUESTIONS" [9]. A few years later, the song "Cosmik Debris" from *Apostrophe* (1974) featured the line, "with the oil of Aphrodite and the dust of the Grand Wazoo...", suggesting it might be a dessert or maybe a Sirocco-like wind. In the notes to a Synclavier track released in 1995 and also called "The Grand Wazoo" [10], Zappa gives it a completely different meaning: "Anybody in any one of those lodge organisations with a stupid hat on - actually the guy with the biggest, dumbest hat is the Grand Wazoo".

You may think my hat funny but I don't - I'm the Grand Wazoo; the keeper of the mystic scroll and roll parchment from the lodge. And I'm a Veteran. Every day on coffee break at the hardware store, I tell Fred what to expect because we play pranks during the initiation. [11]

This short piece of text perfectly describes Zappa's relationship with new members of his fan base. Zappa is the Grand Wazoo (despite the text having been read by Captain Beefheart) and the concert arena is the lodge. The band make up the experienced members of the lodge since they regularly take part in the band rituals (rehearsals, gigs, tours, groupies) and the audience is characterised by Fred - always aware to expect the unexpected at a Zappa concert. The secrecy surrounding lodge organisations, their dependence on ritual ceremony, pledges of allegiance and secret handshakes, induces paranoia in the outsider and a sense of comradeship amongst those within. The Grand Wazoo's big, stupid hat may be a symbol of his status, but it is a symbol understood and respected only by those privileged enough to join the lodge [12].

The Grand Wazoo works at a hardware store. In reality, clandestine organisations represent a cross-section of society, from ordinary members of the public to those in positions of power such as politicians and the police - the figures of authority Zappa

targeted on *Absolutely Free* and *We're Only in it for the Money*. The lodge is amusing to Zappa because it exchanges one set of lifestyle codes - the restrictive social codes of a moral society - for another equally "unfree" set, those of the secret society. Zappa is exposing the average American's need for escapism from the repressions of the workaday life. But it is the private (often sinister) goings-on, possibly of those conspiring against the interests of the masses, which Zappa is most interested in. His desire to reveal the closely guarded secrets of the state authorities, the decisions made behind the "closed doors" of the boardroom, the record company head office and, of course, the bedroom, are well represented in his body of work [13].

Nothing is more paranoia inducing than the knowledge that someone is being secretive. The "secret whispers" heard by the jock in "Status Back, Baby" [14], "the secret underground dumps (where they keep the pools of old poison gas, and obsolete germ bombs)" in "Billy the Mountain" [15]. During live concerts, Zappa would often announce, "The secret word for tonight is...". The secret word could be anything. In a concert from 1988 it was "Ring of Fire" due to a chance meeting with Johnny Cash earlier that day. The album *Fillmore East, June 1971* features the secret word "Mudshark", after the exploits of rock stars with marine life at the Edgewater Inn. The secret word could also be a sound, as on *The Yellow Shark*, which features the Ensemble Modern firing toy ray guns upon Zappa's cue. Secret words at concerts and the Grand Wazoo's stupid hat at lodge meetings are both codes, the significance of which is only understood by those present at the time, indoctrinated into the proceedings. The cryptic nature of "conceptual continuity" poses problems to the uninitiated in a similar way.

Watson comments in *Poodle Play*, that each time Zappa was asked about some "puzzling" feature which might reveal a hidden truth, a new set of questions would occur serving to complicate matters further. Because we can't ask him anything these days, we are left sifting through the materials he left behind in search of clues, speculating, imagining and stuffing up the cracks in our knowledge with our own contributions to Zappology, our own additions to "conceptual continuity" and our own cover band versions of Zappa's songs, be they forwards or backwards. This essay has only scratched the surface and should be consumed as an entertainment product for those who have outgrown the ordinary forms of popular music studies as championed by universities and other businesses.

1. Ellison, Carl, "Cryptographic Randomness", <http://world.std.com/~cme/html/randomness.html>

2. <http://www.slangsite.com/slang/W.html>,

2a. <http://www.health-mediainfo.net/Other-Health/94587.htm>

Yes - these are far fetched but I think they're as plausible as anything else.

3. George Gershwin (music) and Irving Caesar (words), "Swanee", 1919.

4. <http://www.health-mediainfo.net/Other-Health/94587.htm>

5. Hutchinson, Robert D., "The Kazoo: A Historical Perspective",

<http://www.hmtrad.com/catalog/articles/kazoo.html>

6. Ibid.

7. Frank Zappa, "Progress", *Ahead Of Their Time*, 1993.

8. Siders, Harvey, "Meet the Grand Wazoo", *Downbeat* 9/11/72.

9. This recalls Charles Ives's "The Unanswered Question". In commentary relating to the piece, Ives outlined the symbolism of its parts which included a solo trumpet asking "The Perennial Question of Existence".

http://www.musicweb-international.com/Ives/WK_Unanswered_Question.htm

10. Frank Zappa, "The Grand Wazoo", *The Lost Episodes*, 1996.

11. Ibid.

12. Zappa occasionally wore funny hats as distancing tool to prevent others taking him too seriously. There is a famous 1970s photograph of Zappa wearing a dunce's hat.

13. Frank Zappa, "Cocaine Decisions", *The Man From Utopia*, 1983.

14. Frank Zappa, "Status Back Baby", *Absolutely Free*, 1967.

15. Frank Zappa, "Billy The Mountain", *Just Another Band From L.A.*, 1972.

Paul Sutton (UK)

**“GOD BLESS AMERICA!”:
FRANK SINATRA AND THE MOTHERS OF INVENTION**

“God bless America!”: Frank Sinatra and the Mothers of Invention.

There is nothing quite so out of date or out of place as the immediate past of one's own culture. So, in a sixties culture replete with historical and cultural exoticism (the Old West and the even older East, not to mention the brave new world of psychedelia), Zappa's preoccupation with the banalities of fifties American suburbia is conspicuous. Rock was not yet old enough to be nostalgic, and the original pioneers were consigned to Vegas while Dylan and the Beatles constituted a new degree zero. Zappa was, in the sleeve notes to *Cruising with Ruben and the Jets*, to characterize his retrospection as 'a bunch of old men with rock and roll clothes on sitting round the studio, mumbling about the good old days', but in light of the role the fifties was later to assume in the American "Culture Wars" Zappa's implausible sentimentality assumes the form of a prescient and devastating critique.

It was good to be an American in the fifties. Or, rather, it seemed good to be an affluent white American in the fifties. The film *Singin' in the Rain* is framed by a journalist asking the now successful Gene Kelly character about his early career. His account of a rigorous conservatory and ballet school education is immediately undercut by the main body of the film which shows him to have been a vaudeville hooper. However, there is no sense of his having been caught out in a snobbish and self-loathing lie. Gene Kelly is no Tony Hancock. The Suez Crisis was to show a similar autonomy from Old Europe. The "melting pot", which had begun as the wishful thinking of Jewish immigrants had by this time become a potent political idea, largely through the efforts of the film industry which those very same immigrants had founded. A new, more vigorous and more democratic culture was in the ascendant. While the CIA promoted abstract expressionism, the State Department arranged tours of the Soviet Union by the likes of Louis Armstrong and Ella Fitzgerald sang the "Great American Songbook". Frank Sinatra meanwhile, having been a scandalous teen sensation in the forties, reinvented himself as a mature artist, collaborating with the likes of Nelson Riddle on a series of song suites.

Notwithstanding the cultural potency of these figures, not to mention the post-war economic boom which permitted a measure of social democracy, America was at breaking

point. Louis Armstrong withdrew from his 1957 tour of the Soviet Union in protest at Eisenhower's pussilanimous response to Jim Crow.

'The words to the songs on this album were scientifically prepared from a random series of syllables, dreams, neuroses and private jokes that nobody except the members of the band ever laugh at, and other irrelevant material'.

In *The Real Frank Zappa Book*, Zappa essays his own tendentious history of the world, 'with rock and roll as the historical focal point' (p. 200). As his fondness for bold type and italics (not to mention the piquancy of his language) attests, Zappa's particular form of historical scholarship is defiantly unaccredited. It is not, however, unsophisticated, but attentive to considerations anthropological, economic, technological and sexual. His account of the form ostentatiously eschews such legitimating concepts as authenticity and progress, presenting us instead with a debunking materialism such as to satisfy even the most vulgar of Marxists or Freudians. 'In the beginning, "The Big Bucks" were made by low-life chiselers who screwed doo-wop groups out of their royalties' (p. 202). Doo-wop fans fared no better: 'I think one of the causes of bad mental health in the United States is that people have been raised on 'love lyrics' [...] You're getting the bulk of your 'behaviour norms' mapped out for you in the lyrics to some dumb fucking love song' (p. 89). Early rock and roll was largely written and performed by anonymous professionals tailoring their product to the perceived needs of the market. The so-called British Invasion brought with it an emphasis on the self-contained group, who not only played on their own recordings, but wrote them. The record companies 'discovered that millions - perhaps billions - of dollars could be made by selling circular pieces of black plastic in a cardboard sandwich with a stupid picture on the front' (pp. 201-202). However, such is the novelty of the new music that it is neither possible, nor, given the disposable income of its audience, necessary, to exploit it systematically. It is the very bemusement of middle-aged executives ('old cigar-chomper guys') that allows 'at least some music of an *unusual* or *experimental* nature' to get recorded and released: "'I dunno. Who knows what the fuck it is? G'head - put it out there! Who knows? I dunno'" (p. 203). Eventually, though, 'old cigar-chomper guy' gets the bright idea of hiring '*one of those hippie bastards*'. '*We'll make him an A&R man - let HIM talk to these stupid fuckers with the tambourine 'n incense. He understands this shit -*

he's got the same hair' (p. 204). These 'hip young guys with Perrier breath' are in a position to anticipate, and dictate to, the market, thereby expediting the recuperation by corporate capital of the technological and formal advances of the sixties. 'No musical innovation will ever succeed on a large commercial scale without the full involvement of the industries which profit tangentially from it: clothing and 'merchandise'' (p. 203). This process culminates in the figure of the stereotypically conformist teenager, Debbie. When the people in the '*Secret Office Where They Run Everything From*' found out about Debbie 'she was immediately chosen to become the *Archetypal Imaginary Pop Music Consumer & Ultimate Arbiter of Musical Taste for the Entire Nation*' (p. 192). Zappa does not, however, confine his materialist critique to the industry and its consumers but, in sexual as well as economic form, extends it to performers. Instrumental virtuosity is explained in terms of the quest for 'that elusive cross between a waitress and an industrial vacuum cleaner' (p. 169).

[T]here are a lot of reasons why musicians like to play solos on stage - but the usual reason in rock and roll is to get The Blow Job. One way to ensure that you look like the greatest thing going when you play **your big solo** is to make sure you end the solo by going *up the scale*, then grab that last note and repeat it as fast as you can. The statement is the same on any instrument: "Oh, I'm squirting now!" <*Clever subtext to the audience.*> (p. 169)

Zappa is characteristically torn between an amused, anthropological curiosity and a weary solicitude for musical integrity.

These tensions are encoded in the music itself. Notwithstanding his profound affinities with Webern, Boulez *et al*, there is much that is disingenuous about Zappa's identification with, and elaboration upon, a largely European formalist aesthetic. To be sure, he has acknowledged such precursors as Ives, Cage and Nancarrow, but not with the persistence with which he has invoked the European tradition. Yet Ives's deployment of simultaneous time signatures and melodies, Cage's prepared piano (his teacher Schönberg described Cage, not entirely kindly, as 'an inventor of genius') and Nancarrow's assiduous and lifelong punching of compositions into piano rolls all bespeak a homespun experimentalism much more consonant with Zappa's practice than the state-funded high modernism of the Darmstadt School. Moreover, Zappa shares his compatriots' disregard for the Darmstadt taboo on melody; indeed, so flagrant is Zappa in this respect that it is all too easy to imagine Homer Simpson humming one of his tunes, a distinction unique amongst the

contemporary composers whom Pierre Boulez has chosen to conduct.¹ Zappa's musical raw material, whether classical fanfare or cinematic cliché, is always already socially compromised, as irreducible to purely formal terms as a cigarette end or bus ticket in a Kurt Schwitters collage. This is especially so in light of the mutations undergone by compositions in (lavishly documented) concert performances. Zappa was wont to subject his elaborate musical constructions to the principle of 'Anything, Any Time, Anywhere - for No Reason at All'. Also known as 'PUTTING THE EYEBROWS ON IT', this involves the rapid-fire deployment of 'Archetypal American Musical Icons' of the kind the audience has 'groaned over [...] in old movies on Channel 13 for years':

These 'stock modules' include the " *Twilight Zone*" texture [...] the " *Mister Rogers*" texture, the " *Jaws*" texture, the *Lester Lanin* texture, *Jan Garber-ism*, and things that sound exactly like or very similar to "Louie Louie". (pp. 163-167)

Such an approach is inimical to both formalism and expressionism. Like Walter Benjamin, Zappa is a snapper-up of those unconsidered trifles which constitute the social unconscious.

We [...] are less on the trail of the psyche than on the track of things. We seek the totemic tree of objects within the thicket of primal history. The very last, the topmost face on the totem pole is that of kitsch.²

The Project/Object is to late twentieth century America what *The Arcades Project* is to late nineteenth century France: 'Cruising for Burgers' is Californian *flânerie*.

The beginning of Zappa's career was to set the tone for much of what was to follow. An early mentor, Paul Buff, had built a recording studio, complete with a five-track tape recorder and a mixing console with 'Boris Karloff knobs on it' (Zappa, p. 42). Zappa took over the studio, renaming it 'Studio Z' and 'beginning a life of obsessive overdubbing' (p. 43). Hearing about an auction at a film studio, he bought some scenery and assembled a simulacrum of a laboratory, adding to it his own 'totally implausible, two-dimensional, cardboard rocket ship' (p. 54). However, his attempts to make a mad scientist film - *Captain Beefheart vs the Grunt People* - drew the attention of a corrupt officer in the San Bernadino Vice Squad and Zappa was entrapped into producing a pornographic audio tape, for which he was, despite not having actually handed over the offending article, arrested

¹ See particularly 'Cletus Awreetus-Awrightus', on *Grand Wazoo* (1972), in which parping horns play a bumptious and insidious melody to the accompaniment of Zappa's notably oafish scattling. *Simpsons* creator Matt Groening is a longstanding and vocal admirer of Zappa.

² Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (London: Belknap, 1999).

and imprisoned for ten days. This episode is surely the most seminal external contribution to the Project/Object: Zappa as both real and fictional mad scientist provokes the concern of the corrupt and dissembling legal authorities who secure an arrest for the crime of faking sex. As Barry Miles observes, justly if somewhat censoriously:

Frank was a different person when he came out. He no longer believed anything the authorities had ever told him. [...] the entire American education system had failed him; it was a grubby lie from start to finish, the reality was that America was a corrupt, grubby little fascist state [...] he spent the rest of his career shoving his pornographic tape down America's throat time and time again. He was determined to show Americans what their country was really like. (Miles, pp. 87-88)

The vehicle for his anger was an R&B covers band called the Soul Giants, whom he joined and renamed the Mothers. As their prospective record company, MGM, realized, "mothers" is a contraction of "motherfuckers", jazz slang for "fine musicians", so the band's name was nervously but appositely expanded to the Mothers of Invention. The themes of aggression, sex, technique and construction implicit in the name are in evidence from their debut, *Freak Out!*, notwithstanding the modishly psychedelic connotations of both the title and the cover's garish colour scheme. Taking its cue from folk, blues and Beat culture, psychedelia was self-consciously serious, legitimating itself with reference to political, artistic and "spiritual" ambitions, rather than to merely commercial ones³. To even open *Freak Out!* and peruse the cover the is to perceive the schism between Zappa and his "heavy" contemporaries. The sleeve notes to albums by the Byrds, for example, observe the jazz model of judicious and knowledgeable essays composed by sympathetic critics. *Freak Out!* confronts the reader with a collage of hype, trivia, technique and a manifesto. On the back cover Suzy Creamcheese opines:

These Mothers is crazy. You can tell by their clothes. One guy wears beads and they all smell bad. We were gonna get them for a dance after the baseball game but my best pal warned me you can never tell how many will show up ... sometimes the guy in the fur coat doesn't show up and sometimes he does show up only he brings a big bunch of crazy people with him and they dance all over the place. None of the kids at my school like these Mothers ... specially since my teacher told us what the words in their song meant.

This unique blend of aesthetic ambition, commercial calculation and political provocation was to become characteristic of Zappa and is reflected in the music on *Freak Out!*. Much of it is dumb fifties teen music estranged by both context and execution. 'Go Cry on

³ I refer here to psychedelic ideology, not practice. Zappa was to address the difference on *We're Only In It For The Money*.

Somebody Else's Shoulders', for example, is a doo-wop lover's complaint the painful sincerity of which is undercut by an extended pachuco voiceover.

Rather like a British sociologist of the "Cultural Studies" persuasion, albeit with different intent, Zappa is typically sedulous in notating the ephemera of lived experience. Love, putatively "natural" and "romantic", is here, and elsewhere in Zappa's work, presented as mediated and vitiated by its seemingly incidental accoutrements - high school rings, root beer, khaki trousers and pompadours in this song and, in later work, various pharmaceuticals, mod-a-go-go stretch elastic pants, fuming incense stenchers and fake Mexican ponchos.

Absolutely Free is the album on which Zappa's pungent experimentalism begins to permeate his satirical rock songs. While Freak Out! presents the listener with a series of discrete courses, its successor is more of a mouldy and rancid smorgasbord. It is, nevertheless, an extraordinarily coherent piece which, both methodologically and thematically, anticipates much of Zappa's later work. On the cover, the word "Mothers" (the prophylactic 'of Invention' is minimized) in multi-coloured fairground lettering is the sole concession to the psychedelic tastes of the day. The album's title is in undemonstrative small white capitals on a black background, just above a polarized black and white portrait of Zappa with wife Gail indistinguishable on the right. Below, rather pointedly, is a collage of photographs of the rest of the Mothers, in normal black and white. At the bottom, the Mothers' monochromatic austerity is challenged by the clamour of a cartoonish collage of slogans, buildings and cars. The title re-appears as "ABSOLUTELY FREEEEEE" in large clunky red lettering, the sentiment being further vitiated by the many smaller slogans such as "WAR MEANS WORK FOR ALL", "BUY!", "BUY AMERICA" and "THIS TREE IS UGLY AND WANTS TO DIE", as well as by the traffic jam below. Formally and thematically, the design is closer in spirit to Jean-Luc Godard than to any of Zappa's rock colleagues⁴.

While the cover alludes to the debased public world of traffic and advertising, the songs within largely address themselves to the romantic enchantment of the popular song. Indeed, the album is a punk détournement of the kind of song suite with which Zappa's

⁴ See especially *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle* (1967) and *Weekend* (1968).

fellow Italian-American and namesake, Sinatra, had made his comeback⁵. The riff of the album's opener, 'Plastic People', is based on that of Richard Berry's 'Louie Louie'. Already a garage rock classic (thanks to the Kingsmen), 'Louie Louie' was itself lyrically inspired by 'One for my Baby (and One More for the Road)', the Arlen/Mercer standard made famous by Sinatra⁶. In both songs a self-pitying barfly bemoans his loneliness to an unfortunate barman, a situation repeated in Absolutely Free's closing song, 'America Drinks and Goes Home'. The FBI seems not to have been aware of the impeccable "American Songbook" provenance of the Kingsmen hit and, in response to public outcry, including the intervention of Matthew Welsh, Indiana State Governor, conducted a 31 month investigation only to conclude that 'because the lyrics of the recording, "Louie Louie" could not be definitely determined in the Laboratory examination, it was not possible to determine whether this recording is obscene'⁷. There can be no such doubt about the obscenity of 'Plastic People'. A processional drum roll precedes the announcement of the President of the United States who, we are told, 'has been sick'. The song then goes on to catalogue a series of social ills: surveillance, consumerist self-loathing and a police attack on hippies at a LA club.

The album's second song, 'Duke of Prunes', draws its inspiration from an even earlier period of popular song. Consider 'By the Light of the Silvery Moon', the Edwards/Madden song of 1909:

By the light of the silvery moon,
I want to spoon,
To my honey I'll croon love's tune.
Honey moon, keep a-shinin' in June.
Your silv'ry beams will bring love's dreams,
We'll be cuddlin' soon,
By the silvery moon.

The writers had perpetrated a similar song, 'Shine On, Harvest Moon', in the previous year. They were, however, far from being solitary offenders, as is attested by the tetchy chorus of the Perkins/Burr song of 1921, 'Stand Up and Sing for Your Father an Old Time Tune':

Oh, I'm sick of all these ditties about "moon" and "spoon" and "June"
So, will you stand up and sing for your father an old time tune?!

⁵ See, for example, Frank Sinatra, *Frank Sinatra Sings for Only the Lonely* (Capitol Records, 1958) which contains 'One for my Baby (And One More for the Road)', discussed below.

⁶ *Love That Louie: The Louie Louie Files* (Ace Records, 2002) contains these and 22 other anticipations, versions and successors of 'Louie Louie'.

⁷ FBI report @ www.smokinggun.com/louie/louieclose1.html.

The writers, in their own pursuit of lucrative novelty, invoke a time before the pressures of the market made such specious particularization necessary. They object, not to the love song per se, but merely to inadequate examples thereof. Zappa, however, offers a stringent *reductio ad absurdum*:

A moon beam through the prune in June
Reveals your chest I see your lovely beans
And in that magic go-kart I bite your neck
The cheese I have for you, my dear
Is real and very new [...]
And so my love I offer you
A love that is strong a prune that is true⁸

In the next song, *Call Any Vegetable*, the human love object disappears completely. The shedding of tears and the ejaculation of semen is superseded by the extrusion of shit. Zappa thereby satirizes not just romantic idealism, but a tradition of digestive utopianism which stretches from the Kellogg brothers and Horace Fletcher to the new age mountebanks of contemporary California.

⁸ Zappa is not alone in his impatience with the popular song. In the performance of 'Moon in June' recorded by Soft Machine for John Peel's *Top Gear* in June, 1969, singer Robert Wyatt substitutes for the usual romantic conventions his own stream of consciousness as he sits in the studio. After thanking John Peel, commending the tea machine down the corridor and Radio 3's enlightened programming and playfully referring to keyboardist Mike Ratledge having 'squeezed a solo in somehow', he concludes:

Music-making still
Performs a normal function
Background noise for people
Eating and talking and drinking and smoking
That's alright by us
Don't think that we're complaining
After all it's only leisure time, isn't it?

Pacôme Thiellement (F)

**"DE LA GUERRE : CONTINUITÉ CONCEPTUELLE, FREAKS,
POLICES DU CERVEAU ET MUTATIONS UNIES"**

DE LA GUERRE

Continuité Conceptuelle, Freaks, Polices du Cerveau et Mutations Unies : les concepts fondamentaux de Frank Zappa

Une des spécificités de la musique de Frank Zappa, par rapport à tout ce qui a pu être fait dans le cadre du rock, de la pop, du jazz ou même de la musique classique, c'est qu'elle ne cesse de renvoyer à une métaphysique implicite, plusieurs fois citée comme méthode de composition et comme conception du monde, et nommée *continuité conceptuelle*. Nous ne connaissons pas très bien, au jour d'aujourd'hui, les circonstances qui ont amené Zappa à formaliser un plan dans lequel il a voulu rendre cohérente sa discographie, mais nous savons que la continuité conceptuelle a été élaborée dans les premiers temps de son œuvre et a valu pour l'ensemble du projet, du moins pour la période qui va de 1963 à 1988. « C'est un seul album, explique Zappa dans une interview de 1968, la matière de chacun des albums est reliée organiquement et si j'avais tous les *masters* et je pouvais prendre une lame de rasoir et les découper dans n'importe quel sens et les mettre dans un ordre différent, cela serait toujours une seule et unique pièce de musique que vous pourriez écouter. Ensuite, je pourrais reprendre cette lame et tout recouper et remettre dans un autre ordre et ça aurait encore du sens. Je pourrais faire ça de vingt manières. La matière est définitivement, organiquement, reliée. »

Quelle est cette matière ? « Ma matière, dira Zappa à David Walley dans *No Commercial Potential* en 1971, est le même que celle de tout le monde : le temps, les flux et les reflux du temps. » Mais ce qui importe, c'est la façon dont cette matière est agencée et ce qu'elle provoque, par choc et court-circuit, dans le cerveau de l'auditeur. Le projet de Zappa comprend toutes sortes de possibilités et d'implications annexes, et l'une d'entre elles est celle de parler et de se préoccuper de tous les détails et indices compris dans sa discographie. Un peu comme le « colin-maillard cérébral » d'Alfred Jarry, annoncé dès son premier livre, *Les Minutes du Sable Mémorial*, et dont le lecteur est l'instrument principal. De la même manière qu'il faut imaginer Jarry conscient du Collège de Pataphysique qui se créera un jour comme une annexe à son œuvre, il faut imaginer Zappa complice de la zappologie ou de la zappaphysique – et de ses nombreuses exégèses. Si nous nous retrouvons aujourd'hui à parler de la musique de Zappa et de ses idées, cela fait également, intégralement partie du plan, de son plan. Mais à quoi sert ce plan ? Quelle est l'utilité concrète du projet de continuité conceptuelle ? *La continuité conceptuelle est une arme*. La continuité conceptuelle est une arme contre les polices du cerveau qui ont modelé, en amont, un auditeur-étalon de pop music, le consommateur lambda. Quelqu'un m'a dit une fois (impossible de me souvenir qui) : « Je suis un artiste lambda. » C'était très drôle, et très fin. Nous sommes tous des artistes lambda, des hommes lambda. La continuité conceptuelle est censé détourner cet homme lambda de ses aspirations originelles. Elle aide à prolonger l'expérience déterminante de la société des freaks dans le temps et encourage à la formation des mutations unies. Elle est similaire à un processus alchimique en ce qu'elle dissout l'expérience personnelle de l'artiste (Zappa) et de son environnement social (les Freaks), la transforme en œuvre d'art discographique, et intercède à sa transfiguration dans le cœur ou le cerveau de l'auditeur. Le processus d'immortalité, analogue ici à la pierre philosophale, tient dans la possibilité que l'esprit Zappa transmigre dans la peau de son auditeur dans le but de poursuivre son œuvre de chaos et de reconstruction. Le lecteur, écrit Nabokov dans *Le Don*, n'est personne d'autre que

l'« auteur – réfracté dans le temps ». En écoutant Zappa, nous devenons ces monstres qui perpétueront cette tradition secrète que les Freaks ont, un jour, incarné de façon exotérique.

Le point de départ de cette opération guerrière est *Freak Out!*, le premier album des Mothers of Invention. C'est un album impératif ; un album de *recrutement*. *Freaking Out* y est défini comme un « procédé par lequel un individu se détourne des standards imposés et restrictifs de la pensée, de la manière de s'habiller comme des étiquettes sociales, dans le but d'exprimer de manière créative sa relation à son environnement immédiat ainsi qu'à la structure générale de la société. » Ce disque a valeur de manifeste et de matériau documentaire pour le projet. La double pochette de *Freak Out!* contient d'ailleurs suffisamment d'éléments (citations, anecdotes, définitions, et même une carte des lieux *freaks* de Los Angeles) pour comprendre que les Mothers ne sont pas simplement un groupe de pop, mais également les représentants d'une manière d'être qui précède l'enregistrement du disque et qu'un certain nombre d'individus incarne déjà. Ceux qui sont *déjà des Freaks* sont Vito Paukelas, Szou Paukelas, Carl Orestes Franzoni, Beatle Bob, Pamela Zarubica... Les Freaks sont la société où Frank Zappa s'est formé et à travers laquelle il a vécu lorsqu'il construisait le plan de son œuvre. À travers les Freaks, par les Freaks, il est devenu Frank Zappa. Ils ont servi de catalyses, voire de détonateurs. Ils apparaissent dans *Mondo Hollywood* de Robert Carl Cohen : ce sont de joyeux subversifs, des hommes libres, des danseurs et des activistes. Il y a un élément primitif en eux, une volonté de retourner à la base de l'homme, de déployer un élément dionysiaque présent dans l'homme : par la danse, la sculpture, l'excentricité et surtout l'art de vivre. Mais ils ne s'appelaient pas les Freaks ; c'est Zappa qui les a appelé les Freaks. Une de leurs spécificités, et que leur reprendra Zappa, c'est la détestation du L.S.D. Pour les Freaks, tout usage de stupéfiant est contraire au projet émancipateur, qui est d'agir directement dans la réalité, sans l'aide d'aucune substance modificatrice. « Ils ne voulaient pas changer le monde, dira Gail Zappa (qui fut également une freak à cette époque), ils voulaient le voir *tel qu'il est*. » S'il y a un art freak, c'est donc d'abord, avant tout, le *documentaire*. Même si son imaginaire est directement, indiscutablement, celui du *film d'horreur*.

Le nom de ce mouvement est une référence directe au film de Tod Browning, *Freaks*, que Frank Zappa citera en plusieurs occasions comme son film préféré. *Freaks* est un film dans lequel le réel excède la fiction de toutes parts, la réalité de son tournage parasitant le déroulement naturel de l'histoire écrite. Car même si les *freaks* en question jouent un rôle dans un film, la plupart des scènes préparées par Tod Browning servent surtout à les « montrer » (monstre et monstration sont d'ailleurs étymologiquement reliés). Qu'est-ce qu'un *freak* ? Une personne coupée de la communauté des hommes par quelque difformité ou étrangeté qui le singularise et le positionne physiquement comme spirituellement. Ce qui les distingue, c'est en premier lieu cette difformité qui taille immédiatement le regard du spectateur : cette étrangeté lui démontrant la complexité du projet de la nature, la diversité de ses plans – n'impliquant pas tous la forme canonique de l'homme, la forme de l'homme-étalon. Les *freaks* apportent une idée de la beauté qu'on ne connaissait pas avant eux. Ce qu'on appelle d'ordinaire un homme beau ou une femme belle, c'est la personne la plus ordinaire : une synthèse perceptive absolue. Un test a été fait en compilant sur un ordinateur un nombre incommensurable de visages et en demandant à la machine d'en faire une somme. Ce à quoi elle a abouti, dans les domaines féminins comme masculins, c'est à ce qu'on appelle d'ordinaire quelqu'un de beau. Le beau mec, la belle nana, n'est que le plus petit dénominateur commun de l'humanité, le visage le plus simple et le plus synthétique. Et la preuve de cet insidieux processus, ce sont les *stars*. S'il y a une politique de Zappa et des Freaks, elle est directement esthétique : elle tente de nous détourner de nos a priori

esthétiques. Elle tente de nous faire voir autrement ce que nous voyons, et de nous montrer la beauté ce que nous n'avons pas l'habitude de considérer comme « beau ».

Ce qui sépare l'homme du freak, ce qui empêche l'humanité de se transformer en un gigantesque freak show, c'est cette conscience de soi que Zappa a appelé police du cerveau et qui opère les synthèses (perceptives, mais aussi logiques) qui déterminent en amont notre manière de penser et de voir. « Who Are the Brain Police ? » est la seule chanson que Zappa a décrite comme la conséquence d'une inspiration, d'une « dictée ». Ce n'est peut-être pas la seule qui lui soit venue comme ça, c'est cependant la seule dont il ait jamais parlé ainsi – a fortiori à plusieurs reprises. « À cinq heures du matin, dira Zappa, quelqu'un ne cessait de chanter cela dans ma tête et me le fit écrire. J'admets avoir été effrayé lorsque je l'ai finalement jouée et chantée à haute voix. »

La police du cerveau, c'est la *conscience* ; mais on n'a pas encore avancé dans la compréhension du sens de sa présence tant qu'on ne s'est pas demandé pour qui elle travaillait. Elle travaille toujours pour quelqu'un d'autre que pour nous. Dernière née dans l'économie du corps, la conscience ne sert que de réceptacle à des ordres qui lui sont extérieurs : elle l'informe ensuite sur ce qu'on attend de lui, et tente de le convaincre de s'y soumettre. La conscience naît par rapport à un être dont nous pourrions être *fonction*. « Un tas de gens font la police dans leur propre cerveau, ce sont des soldats citoyens. J'ai vu des gens qui, volontairement, s'arrêtent, se jugent et se punissent. Il n'y a pas besoin d'agence centrale puisque les gens pratiquent ça volontiers sur eux-mêmes. » (Zappa) Il y a une conscience extérieure à nous-même toujours à l'œuvre dans la façon dont nous vivons et pensons. Et le travail d'un artiste est bien de fissurer les limites de cette conscience et de suspendre ses conséquences visuelles, auditives ou intellectuelles. La conscience de soi du rock, par exemple, suppose que nous trouvions « bizarre » tout morceau qui n'est pas en 4/4, ne fait pas trois accords, n'a pas pour instrumentation principale la guitare, la basse, la batterie, ne se compose pas de couplets, d'un refrain et d'un pont.

En mettant en scène sa propre matérialité, soudain soumise à une dissolution inquiétante (c'est le sens des paroles de la chanson, décrivant le disque en train de fondre), l'album implique directement la destruction du primat de la conscience qui seule conditionne un tel type d'écoute. Le matériel proposé renvoie non seulement au point de vue de l'auditeur, mais le documente également sur le contexte de son propre enregistrement, lui explique les conditions de sa présence au monde. La nature documentaire d'un album sera d'ailleurs une constante du travail de Frank Zappa : qu'on pense aux G.T.O.'s et à Wild Man Fisher. Privilégier l'aspect documentaire dans la production d'un album relativise la nature des propos contenus dans celui-ci, les destitue de leur volonté d'universalisation, de leur « discours de vérité » en présentant soigneusement leur lieu d'énonciation, mais simultanément encourage à une lecture exemplaire, incitatrice, pleinement subversive. Le premier album des Mothers of Invention est quasiment un documentaire sur cette société que Zappa a rejoint et dont il a extrait la quintessence dans ses premiers disques, tous, absolument, *éthiques*. Carl Franzoni est le dédicataire de la première chanson, « Hungry Freaks Daddy ». Les Freaks jouent, chantent et dansent sur la dernière face du disque. On les retrouvera encore dans *Absolutely Free* et, dans une certaine mesure, dans *We're Only in it for the Money* (qui est avant tout dirigé contre ceux que Zappa et les Freaks considèrent comme leurs ennemis et des imposteurs, les hippies), *Lumpy Gravy* et *Uncle Meat*. Ils disparaissent complètement de la discographie de Zappa, et d'une certaine manière, le projet des Freaks disparaît également à partir de 1968-1969. La dissolution de la première formation des Mothers of Invention et la création du projet *200 Motels* encourage alors Zappa à produire en 1971 une circulaire explicitant les présupposés de son œuvre et informant les journalistes, les lecteurs et les auditeurs de l'existence d'un projet sous-tendant l'ensemble, la continuité conceptuelle. *La*

continuité conceptuelle naît au sein des Freaks, comme principe occulte de composition, mais elle n'est désoccultée que lorsque la société des Freaks disparaît, comme promesse de retour à travers les mutations unies produites par l'écoute de ses disques.

« La spécificité du travail des Mothers est la continuité conceptuelle structurante du groupe. Il y a, et il y a toujours eu, un contrôle conscience d'éléments thématiques et structurels traversant chaque album, chaque concert, et chaque interview (...) Les premiers brouillons furent réalisés en 1962-1963, les expériences préliminaires début et milieu 1964. La construction du Projet/Objet commença fin 1964. Le travail est en cours (...) Nous faisons partie du Projet/Objet. Le Projet/Objet incorpore tout médium visuel, la conscience de tous ses participants (public compris), toutes nos déficiences perceptives, Dieu (comme énergie), la Grande Note (comme matériel basique de construction universelle), etc. Nous faisons un art spécialement conçu pour un environnement hostile aux rêveurs (...) L'attention donnée à chaque parole de chanson, à chaque mélodie, à chaque arrangement, à chaque improvisation, la succession de ces éléments dans un album, l'esthétique des pochettes qui est une extension du matériel musical, le choix de ce qui est enregistré, réalisé, interprété dans un concert, la continuité ou les contrastes d'un album à un autre, tous ces aspects sont des éléments de la Grande Structure (...) Un des préceptes qui guident notre travail est : Quelqu'un dans le public sait ce que nous faisons, et cette personne prend son pied là-dessus à un niveau dépassant sa plus sauvage compréhension. »

La *continuité conceptuelle* est le *modus operandi* de la récupération d'un passé (celui des Freaks et des différents moments d'illuminations qui suivront mais leur seront associés, des épiphanies qu'on pourrait nommer « freakophanies ») dans le détournement du présent. En sauvant le passé dans toute son énigmatique aspérité (l'élément « folklorique » à l'œuvre dans *Uncle Meat*, dans *200 Motels*, dans *Babysnakes*), à travers la perception d'une ressemblance mystérieuse qui sert de point d'appui, la *continuité conceptuelle* transforme le présent par une collection d'anamnèses au sens gnostique : par la récurrence de thèmes micro-structurants, l'auditeur se souvient soudain de son identité réelle, de son vrai soi, qui est le *freak*. Un exemple : en concert à New York, en 1977 pour Halloween, l'ancien bassiste des Mothers of Invention Roy Estrada débarque pendant *King Kong* avec son costume de pape mexicain du concert de Londres en 1968, un masque à gaz entre les mains. Et Zappa alors lui dit (alors qu'*Uncle Meat* – le film – n'a encore jamais été diffusé) : « Qu'est-ce qu'il fait ? Il mange. Regarde-le manger, et pendant qu'il mange, demande-lui ce qu'il fait. » Ce n'est que dix ans plus tard et la vidéo de *Uncle Meat* montée, achevée, diffusée, que la séquence s'éclaircit. Ces paroles sont celles que Zappa dit alors à Phyllis Altenhaus alors qu'elle est censée observer Don Preston et se sentir attirée par lui. « Il m'excite tellement lorsqu'il se transforme en monstre » dit Phyllis en regardant une vidéo de Don Preston, celle-là même du concert au Royal Festival Hall de 1968. Cette excitation sexuelle face à la monstruosité est, bien sûr, une variation sur *King Kong* (le film) et la relation entre le grand singe amoureux et la jeune comédienne jouée par Fay Wray. Soit le détournement de la jeune femme belle, ou de la star, de ses aspirations esthétiques premières, et sa découverte d'une beauté nouvelle que la police du cerveau l'empêche de voir : celle du monstre. La *continuité conceptuelle*, c'est donc, *in fine* : bander pour les monstres, désirer les singularités tératologiques, pas les beaux gosses. Ou encore, comme Zappa le dit en concert sur *Tinseltown Rebellion* : « Si vous êtes dans la salle et que vous êtes mignons, peut-être même êtes-vous beaux, sachez qu'il y a plus de vilains enculés comme nous que de gens mignons comme vous, alors faites gaffe. »

Freak Out incite en outre déjà à rejoindre les *United Mutations* (Mutations Unies), terme désignant cette société harmonique qui s'incarnera dans un premier temps comme le *fan club* officiel du groupe, servant à trier les lettres envoyées par ceux-ci de manière à s'informer le plus complètement sur leurs modes de vie et les problèmes qu'ils rencontraient dans leur

entourage immédiat. Il n'est pas inutile de lire la circulaire envoyée aux fans pour comprendre à quel niveau se situait les enjeux de cette tentative d'unification : « Seriez-vous intéressé dans le fait de rejoindre ce qui serait une sorte de fan club des Mothers ? Le nom officiel de l'organisation est les « Mutations Unies ». Nous l'appelons ainsi parce que nous sommes certains que seul un nombre limité de gens (des gens « spéciaux ») serait intéressé dans une participation active. Cela vous coûtera trois dollars et vous devez répondre à un questionnaire qui accompagne l'envoi. Répondez brièvement à ces questions : Qui est Dieu ? Une perception extrasensorielle ? Oui ou non ? Décrivez. Comment définiriez-vous votre environnement social ? Si vous le pouviez, que changeriez vous et quand ? De quoi avez-vous peur ? Quelle sorte d'aide attendez-vous des Mothers ? Sur un autre papier, décrivez votre rêve préféré, ou un cauchemar, avec une précision clinique. Envoyez ces deux feuilles de papier avec trois dollars à notre adresse, et en retour nous vous renverrons des infos utiles sur les Mothers, et un petit paquet contenant des choses susceptibles de vous intéresser ; merci. » En retour de courrier, les inscrits recevaient la lettre suivante : « Bonjour et merci d'avoir répondu à la proposition initiale. Il nous est nécessaire d'en savoir un peu plus sur vous. Etes-vous en période de mutation ? Que pouvez-vous faire pour nous aider ? Combien de cerveaux humains contrôlez-vous et pourquoi n'en contrôlez-vous pas plus ? Comment contrôlez-vous vos sujets ? Est-ce que d'autres personnes sont au courant ? Comment évitez-vous d'avoir des ennuis ? Pensez-vous en groupe ? Y a-t-il un autre opérateur auprès de vous ? Qui ? Est-ce que lui ou elle appartient à notre association ? Si non, pourquoi ? Décrivez vos relations avec vos parents. Comment les Mothers peuvent-ils vous aider ? »

Nous n'avons pas la moindre idée de ce que Zappa a bien pu faire des réponses envoyées par ses fans, et si les fans ont bien répondu à toutes ces questions, et même si les fans étaient vraiment censé répondre. Bien sûr, ces formulaires ont une dimension parodique, ils pastichent le fonctionnement d'un organisme comme la scientologie, mais ils ne s'arrêtent pas là et informent, sous couvert d'humour, sur la dimension secrète du projet. En tant qu'elle invente son public, une œuvre d'art nouvelle conspire consciemment, volontairement, impitoyablement, au détournement harmonique d'une partie de l'humanité. Elle combat contre les instincts de son auditeur, qui ont été perverti par les polices du cerveau, et tente de le rappeler à son freak intérieur, par des anamnèses aussi brutales et comiques que les coups de bâton du maître zen. Les mutations unies sont la fin explicite de la musique de Zappa, le contrôle de l'Univers par les monstres en est la résultante connexe. Votre présence ici prouve que ce projet n'a jamais été abandonné, et que la mort de Zappa n'est qu'un accident. La guerre psychique continue pendant les festivités. Je vous remercie.

OF WAR

Conceptual Continuity, Freaks, Brain Police and United Mutations: Frank Zappa's basic concepts.

One of the particularities of the music of Frank Zappa, compared to anything that could be done within the framework of rock, pop, jazz and even classical music is that it never ceases to refer to a metaphysical implied several times cited as a method of composition called *conceptual continuity*. We do not know very well today, the circumstances that led Zappa to devise a plan in which he wanted to bring coherence to his discography, but we know that continuity concept was developed in the early days of and his work has earned for the entire project, at least for the period from 1963 to 1988. "This is one album, Zappa said in an interview in 1968, material from each album is organically linked and if I had all the master copies and I could take a razor blade and cut in any direction and put them in a different order, it would still be a single piece of music you could listen to. Then I could take this blade and cut in another order and it would still have meaning. I could do this twenty different ways. The material is definitely organically linked."

What is this? "My subject, tell Zappa to David Walley in *No Commercial Potential* in 1971, is the same as everyone else: time, flux and reflux time. "But what matters is how this material is arranged and the impact and short-circuit it causes in the brain of the listener. Zappa's project includes all sorts of possibilities and implications, and one of them is to talk and worry about all the details in his discography. Just as the "colin-maillard brain" of Alfred Jarry, as announced in his first book, *Les Minutes du sable Memoriel*, in which the reader is the main character. In the same way that we must imagine Jarry aware of the College of Pataphysics which will be created as an annex to his work, we must imagine Zappa as an accomplice to zappologie or zappaphysique - and its many exégèses. If we talk about Zappa's music and his ideas, it is also an integral part of the plan, his plan. But what is this plan? What is the practical usefulness of the conceptual continuity project? *Conceptual continuity is a weapon*. The conceptual continuity is a weapon against the brain police that have shaped the average pop music listener, the average consumer. Someone told me once (I do not remember whom): "I am an average artist λ " It was very funny, and very shrewd. We are all artists λ , men λ . The conceptual continuity is meant to distract the man λ from his original aspirations. It helps extend the experiment determining the freaks of society over time and encourages the formation of *Mutations Nations*. It is similar to an alchemical process because it dissolves the personal experience of the artist (Zappa) and its social environment (Freaks), transforms a discography into a work of art, and intercedes in the transfiguration of the heart or brain of the listener. The process of immortality, analogous to the philosopher's stone, is in the possibility that Zappa's spirit transfers to the listener in order to continue his work of chaos and reconstruction. The reader, Nabokov wrote in *The Don*, is none other than the "author - refracted through time." In listening to Zappa, we become these monsters who perpetuate this secret tradition that Freaks have one day incarnated so exoterically.

The starting point of this war is Freak Out! The first album of the Mothers of Invention. It is crucial an album, *an album of recruitment*. *Freaking Out* is defined as "a process by which an individual moves away from standards and imposed

restrictions of thought and social labels in order to express his creative relationship with its environment, as well as the general structure of society.” This record is a manifesto and documentary material for the project. The double record cover of *Freak Out!* contains enough evidence (quotations, anecdotes, definitions, and even a map of ‘freak’ places in Los Angeles) to understand that the Mothers were not just another pop band, but also the representatives of a way of life beyond the recording and a number of individuals. Those individuals who were already Freaks were Vito Paukelas, Szou Paukelas, Carl Orestes Franzoni, Beatle Bob, and Pamela Zarubica ... The Freaks were a society that shaped Frank Zappa and through which he built the plan for his work. Through the Freaks, and by the Freaks, he became Frank Zappa. They served as catalyses or triggers. They appear in *Mondo Hollywood* by Robert Carl Cohen: they were happy subversive free thinkers, dancers and activists. There is a primary element in them, a willingness to return to the basics, to deploy a Dionysian element present in human nature: dance, sculpture, eccentricity and especially the art of living. But they were not called Freaks; it was Zappa who called them Freaks. One of their specificities, which Zappa shared was an aversion to LSD. For Freaks, any use of drugs is contrary to the emancipatory project, which is to act directly upon reality, without any mind altering substance. "They did not want to change the world, said Gail Zappa (who was also a freak at the time), they wanted to see it as it is." If “freak art” exists, it is first and foremost, a documentary. Even if its imaginary source is directly and indisputably, the *horror film*.

The name of this movement is a direct reference to Tod Browning film, *Freaks*, which Frank Zappa called, on several occasions his favorite movie. *Freaks* is a film which went beyond real drama, the reality of its production corrupting the natural course of the script. Even if freaks play a role in a film, most scenes prepared by Tod Browning were used primarily to "show" (monster and de“monstration” and elsewhere are etymologically linked). What is a freak? A person cut off from the community of men by any deformity or strangeness which singles out and positions him or her physically and spiritually. The difference is that this deformity attracts the gaze of the viewer: this strangeness demonstrates the complexity of nature, the diversity of its plans - which do not all have the perfect and canonical human shape. The freaks provide an idea of beauty that we did not know before. The so-called good looking man or beautiful woman is most ordinary people: a synthesis perceptive absolute. A test was done on a computer compiling a vast number of faces and asking the machine to determine a synthesis. What resulted, in women as well as in men, was what we usually call beautiful. The lovely guy and the beautiful girl were just the lowest common denominator of humanity, the simplest and the most synthetic. And the proof of this insidious process, are the Hollywood stars. If there is a Zappa and Freaks agenda, it is aesthetic: it tries to divert us from our *a priori* aesthetic. It tries to make us see differently, and show us the beauty that we do not usually regard as "beautiful".

What separates man from freak, which prevents humanity from turning into a giant freak show, it is this self-consciousness that Zappa called the ‘brain police’, which operate the syntheses (perceptive, but also logical) and determine the way we think and see. "Who Are the Brain Police?" Is the only song that Zappa has described as the consequence of an inspiration, a " dictation ". It is perhaps, not the only time that this has come to him like that, however, it is the only one he has ever mentioned; "At five o'clock in the morning, said Zappa, someone kept singing it in my head and I wrote it

down. I admit to have been frightened when I finally played and sung it aloud. "

The brain police is *conscience*, and there is no further progress possible in understanding the meaning of its presence until one asks for whom it is working. It is still working for someone else rather than for us. Last born in the "economy of the body", consciousness is only a receptacle of orders which are external: it then informs on what is expected of it, and tries to convince it to abide by them. The consciousness arises in relation to a being that we could be just 'functions'. "A lot of people police their own brain, they are citizens soldiers. I saw people who voluntarily stop, feel and punish. There is no need for any central agency since people willingly impose it on themselves." (Zappa) There is a consciousness outside ourselves still at work in the way we live and think. And the work of an artist is to crack the limits of this awareness and to suspend it's visual, auditory or intellectual aspects. The self-consciousness of rock, for example, requires that we find "bizarre" any piece that is not in 4 / 4, is not in three chords arrangements, is not using the main instruments -- guitar, bass, drums, and is not composed in verses, with a chorus and a bridge.

In featuring its own materiality, suddenly subjected to a troubling dissolution (this is the meaning of the lyrics, describing the record as beginning to melt), the album directly implies the destruction of the primacy of conscience which alone determines this kind of listening. The proposed material refers not only the viewpoint of the listener, but also to the context of its own recording, and explains the conditions of its presence in the world. The documentary nature of an album will be a constant work of Frank Zappa: the GTO's and Wild Man Fisher come to mind. Focusing on the documentary aspect of an album puts into perspective the nature of what it contains, dismisses its commitment to the universal, its "discourse of truth" and simultaneously encourages an incentive and fully subversive reading. The first album of the Mothers of Invention is almost a documentary on this community that Zappa joined and from which he has extracted the essence in his first records, all absolutely *ethical*. Carl Franzoni is the dedicatee of the first song, "Hungry Freaks Daddy." The Freaks play, sing and dance on the last side of the record.. They are still present in *Absolutely Free* and, to some extent, in *We're Only in it for the Money* (which is primarily directed against those Zappa and Freaks regard as their enemies and impostors, the hippies), *Lumpy Gravy* and *Uncle Meat*. They disappear completely from Zappa's discography, and somehow, the Freak project also disappears in 1968-1969. The dissolution of the first Mothers of Invention and the creation of the *200 Motels* project encourage Zappa to produce in 1971 a newsletter explaining the presuppositions of his work and informing journalists, readers and listeners of the existence of a project underlying his whole work, *the conceptual continuity. The conceptual continuity born out of the Freak community, as an obscure principle of composition, is only "désocculted" when Freak society disappears, and as promised to return through the United mutations produced by listening to the records.*

"The specificity of the work of the Mothers is the structuring conceptual continuity of the group. There are, and there has always been a conscious control of thematic and structural elements throughout each album, each concert, and each interview (...) The first drafts were made in 1962-1963, preliminary experiments in beginning and middle 1964. The construction of the Project / Object began in late 1964. Work is underway (...) We are part of the Project / Object. The Project / Object incorporates any visual medium, the conscience of all its participants (including the public), all our perceptual disabilities, and God (as energy), the Great Musical Note (as basic

construction material of the universe). We are an art specifically designed for a hostile environment for dreamers (...) The attention given to every word song, every melody, every arrangement, each improvisation, the succession of these elements in an album, the aesthetics of the record covers which are an extension of the music, the choice of what is recorded, directed, and performed in a concert, continuity or contrasts from one album to another, all these aspects are elements of the Main Structure (...) One of the precepts that guide our work is: Someone in the audience knows what we do, and that person enjoys ("digs") is above a level beyond his wildest understanding. "

The *conceptual continuity* is the *modus operandi* of the recovery of a past (the Freaks and different moments of illumination that will follow, including epiphanies that we could name "freakophanies") in the diversion of the present. In saving the past in all its enigmatic "roughness" (the "folk" aspect is present in *Uncle Meat*, in *200 Motels* and in *Babysnakes*), through the perception of a mysterious resemblance which serves as a fulcrum, *conceptual continuity* transforms the present by a collection of anamneses in the gnostic sense of the term: by the recurrence of micro-structuring themes, the auditor suddenly remembers his real identity, his true self, which is the *freak*. For example: a concert in New York in 1977; for Halloween, the former bassist of the Mothers of Invention Roy Estrada arrived during *King Kong* with his Mexican pope costume from from the London 1968 concert, holding a gas mask. And Zappa then told him (then just *Uncle Meat* - the film - has never been released): "What is he doing? He is eating. Look at him eating, and while he is eating, ask him what he is doing. "It was not until ten years later and the completed montage of the video of *Uncle Meat* was aired that the sequence became clear. These words are those that Zappa said to Phyllis Altenhaus who was supposed to look at Don Preston and feel attracted to him. "It excites me so when he turns into a monster," said Phyllis watching a video of Don Preston, during the same 1968 concert at the Royal Festival Hall. Sexual arousal when faced with monstrosity is, of course, a variation on *King Kong* (the movie) and the relationship between the great ape in love and the young actress played by Fay Wray. The diversion of the beautiful young woman, or the star, its first aesthetic aspirations, and the discovery of a new beauty that the brain police prevented his brain to see: the monster. The *conceptual continuity*, therefore, *in fine*: getting aroused for monsters, the desired teratologic singularities, not for "golden boys". Or, as Zappa says in *Tinseltown Rebellion*: "If you're in the room and you're cute, maybe even beautiful, know that there are more ugly people like us than cute people like you, so watch out!"

Freak Out also encourages fans to join the United Mutations (*Mutations United*), a term referring to the community which will be a first step as the official fan club, used to sort the letters sent by them so as to learn more on their lifestyles and the problems they faced in their surroundings. It is useful to read the newsletter sent to the fans to understand on what level stood the challenges of this attempt at unification: "Would you be interested in the fact that joining would be a kind of fan club of the Mothers? The official name of the organization is "Mutations United." We call it that because we are confident that only a limited number of people ("special" people) would be interested in active participation. This costs three dollars and you must answer a questionnaire that accompanies the shipment. Answer briefly these questions: Who is God? An extrasensory perception? Yes or no? Describe. How would you define your social environment? If you could, what would you change and when? What do you fear? What kind of help do you expect of the Mothers? On another sheet of paper,

describe your favorite dream or a nightmare, with clinical precision. Send these two sheets of paper with three dollars at our address, and in return we send you useful information on Mothers, and a small package containing things that might interest you, thank you. "By return mail, fans received the following letter:" Hello and thank you for having responded to the initial proposal. We need to know a little more about you. Are you in times of change? What can you do to help us? How many human brains do you control and why not more? How do you control your subjects? Are other people aware? How do you avoid trouble? Do you think as a group? Are there any other "operator" with you? Who is it? Does he or she belongs to our association? If not, why? Describe your relationship with your parents. How can the Mothers help you? "

We do not know if Zappa was able to reply to his fans, or if the fans responded well to all these questions, and even if the fans were really supposed to respond at all. Of course, these forms have a dimension of parody, they imitate the functioning of an organization like Scientology, but they do not stop there and inform, in the guise of humor, on the secret dimension of the project. As it 'creates' its audience, a new work of art conspires consciously, deliberately, ruthlessly, to the harmonic diversion of a segment of humanity. It battles against the instincts of its audience, who have been perverted by the brain police, and tries to remind his 'inner' freak by anamneses as brutal and comic as blows by the Zen Master. The *united mutations* are the explicit end to the music of Zappa, the control of the universe by monsters and the related result. Your presence here proves that this project was never abandoned, and that Zappa's death was just an accident. The psychological war continues during the festivities. Thank you.

Ben Watson (UK)

**"ANTI-ZAPPA, OR, NOT GETTING THE POINT :
THE "FRENCH PROBLEM"**

Anti-Zappa, Or, Not Getting the Point

Ben Watson in discussion/translation with **Didier Mervelet**

Third International Conference of Esemplastic Zappology, Paris 4-7 July 2008
Draft 2

I am afraid I must start with a sharp reprimand to the comrades of the Third International. In a revolutionary movement there are always backsliders, blackguards and lily-livered poltroons who think it easier to excise the revolutionary part of the programme in favour of "accessibility" or "market penetration", even if this destroys the whole point of us being here. I note that whoever was in charge of the posters for this event saw fit to drop the term "Esemplastic" from the conference title, even though the first two internationals - in London in 2004 and in Rome in 2006 - were specifically designated as "esemplastic", and organised by myself and Marco Maurizi in order to encourage esemplastic thinking. Calling this the "third" international whilst dropping the inconvenient term - and stooping to the banality of reproducing yet another photo of Frank Zappa's boring face - steals from our efforts whilst contributing nothing. It is another sorry example of the way all attempts at gaining power in this system without contesting it lead to the same old putrid nonsense. Moreover, these publicists are doomed to fail. In so far as you advertise using Zappa's face, you simply offend the Zappa Family Trust, provide a shabby example of bootleg commercialism, and guarantee that you attract people who will not understand a word of what is being talked about.

However, since we are here, and I have some time to explain the esemplastic position, I shall proceed. In addressing the Third International, I thought I should pay some attention to *local problems* within the International, albeit of course from an internationalist perspective. Down in France, things are done differently. I'm of course acutely aware that the Burden of Civilization entrusted to a Frenchman - or Frenchwoman - is probably one of the weightiest in the world. In this respect, you are only outdone by the Chinese. The Chinese, however, invented Maoism and the Cultural Revolution in order to "chuck out the chintz" [N.B. "chintz" is the Hindi for brightly-printed cotton goods and became a word for cheap decorative furnishings; in 1997, Ikea instigated a "chuck out the chintz" advertising campaign in Briatin, which proposed throwing away all our old sofas and lampshades and buying cool, new,

modern furnishings ... from Ikea, naturally ... the images in the TV ads of young people throwing their old furniture onto dustcarts were eerily like photos of Red Guards destroying "bourgeois elements" like plush sofas during the Cultural Revolution in 1968]. The nihilistic, anti-culture austerity of the Situationist International is an understandable response to *civilisation, the Frenchperson's burden*. There are, though, other ways out of the bizarre combination of *musée* and *pâtisserie* which is the French inheritance. One is rock'n'roll, or Anglo-American popular culture. Frank Zappa is the indisputable - if inscrutable - cherry on this particular cake, providing the most self-conscious and reflective moment of this culture. So much so that Frank Zappa fans are almost able to pretend that Frank Zappa can supply them with a new civilisation - an aesthetics, a politics, an orientation in the storm of modern life. There is, for example, no International Conference of Led Zeppelin Fanatics you can attend.

Frank Zappa's dialectic between anti-cultural nihilism and towering invention is uncomfortable and sharp. There is no middle road. You're stuck on the horns of a dilemma, and neither prong mollifies the other. The effect is unique, without comparison in the world of rock. The usual methods of dealing with artistic assaults and culture shocks - relegation to a genre or canon - are denied the hapless Zappa fan. Obsession engulfs the listener. He's invaded by the everyday tastes of a goateed scatologist. Life only means something if he finds out more about Zappa *everyday*. It's ghastly! We know the *oeuvre* better than he did, and resent his choices for the *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore* series. We end up with a love-hate relationship with Zappa which replicates the **annihilation of the listening subject** of the rest of commodity culture, something Zappa diagnosed and which he hoped to put right. This is the reason for **Esemplastic Zappology**, which supersedes the positivism of the "hardcore" fans who rule on the Internet, and suggests adopting Zappa's explosion of subject-object relations for our own purposes. Zappology not as apology for our miserable lack of creativity and invention, but Zappology as a method of analysing music, society, ourselves, the universe, everything. An assault on the *unpleasure principle* of bourgeois science! Instead of starting from cause-effect metaphysics and working towards the empirical evidence, we start out from the **spooky coincidence** and work towards a material explanation.

Now, I'm aware that despite organising the Third International of Esemplastic Conferences, Monsieur Mervelet, *Sécrétaire Générale des Fils de l'Invention*, claims

not to know what "esemplastic" means. No, Didier! You can't protest! I have your confession recorded on Mini-Disc, from the "1968 & All That" Conference held in London in May 2008. But it's here, comrades, in what might seem a minor matter of terminology, that the source of the problem is to be found.¹ To transcend the love/hate dichotomy regarding Frank Zappa - a sadomasochistic problematic familiar from the works of Michel Foucault - we need a *context* to place him in. The usual rock/pop canon - that proulgated by *Mojo* magazine - is too flimsy for Frank Zappa's volcanic tirade against celebrity culture and commercial organisations who sell music like they're marketing fashionable shoes. Zappa needs to be placed in an *esemplastic* context.

Esemplastic? It's Greek. "Shaping into one". The term was made up by the British Romantic poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and it describes the imagination, the power of *shaping into one*. He was applying what he'd learned from reading German romantic philosophy. "Shaping into one" is uncannily close to the "conceptual continuity of the output macrostructure", something Zappa first talked about in *Circular*, a newsletter for Warner Brothers sales staff produced in 1971², which insist his own work is a **unity**. The issue of the One is a fundamental to dialectics - Plato defined dialectics as getting the correct transitions from the One to the Many. It is only by becoming dialecticians that the Zappa fan can slay the monstrous Frank Zappa (one who rages on the Internet and - in my humble opinion - in the pages of the last *Pingouin Ligoté*). Frank Zappa's "One" is an ambitious one, and seeks nothing less than the reorientation of every known fact about the universe. Since this is precisely what dialectics demands - for every thinking subject - we are off to a head start.

I am about to quote the famous passage in which Frank Zappa provided an analogy so that people might understand what he meant by "the conceptual continuity of his group's output macrostructure". I say "famous", although when Gail Zappa needed a copy to quote from in her sleevenotes to *Joe's Corsage*, she had to ask

¹ The craven poodle dialectic of *Le Pingouin Ligoté* - I love, adore, worship my master, but I can't escape him so actually I hate him! I abominate him! I want to kill him! - replays the old French/Catholic relationship to God, and Jean-Paul Sartre's painful tango with the French Communist Party - a relationship which was actually theological rather than political.

² Subsequently included in the press pack which accompanied the release of the film *200 Motels* and the booklet which accompanied the second *Beat the*

Simon Prentis - who then asked me - so I ended up supplying the text for the Zappa Family Trust's release. Unpaid research work, by the way. But first a word about Esemplastic Zappology. Because it routes every instance of fact through the subject who's interested in that fact, it avoids the sterile positivism of non-esemplastic - or "hardcore" - Zappology, the craven, prostrate attitude to what "is" which produces such misgivings and resentment on the part of fans. Culture without us in it, a grey list of statements and releases by them out there in the limelight. In this case, I've actually only dusted down Zappa's quote because of its uncanny resemblance to something I read recently, a quotation in A. I. Oparin's classic from 1960 on the biochemistry of the origins of life. More than the guitar solos, more than the strange rhythms and weird intervals of the tunes, more than the bizarre infolding of everyday life, more than the provocative attitude towards sex and politics, what is **truly special** about Zappa is his ability to create *a paranoid listener who hears everything as a quote from somewhere else*. Zappa makes us realise that the idea of individual creativity is a bourgeois illusion: what everyone does - in both life and art - is to mash up and reformulate the stuff they've heard from everyone else, an alchemical retort to the collective steam-pressure. When three-year-old children make up a story, they use everything around them, however absurd the results: "My story is about a man." "What was his name?" "Tomato Ketchup.". That's because there's a bottle of ketchup on the kitchen table and it caught the child's eye. That is Zappa's method in a nutshell: stark surrealism sourced from the concrete and the banal, breaking through the transcendental consumerism which envelopes us.

In *Circular*, a "weekly news device from Warner/Reprise" for their sales staff on 20 September 1971, Zappa did an "imaginary interview". Zappa wrote:

This is a silly analogy, however ... *Imagine the head of a pin*. On the head of this pin is an amazingly detailed illustration of some sort. It might be a little thought or a feeling or, perhaps, an obscure symbol. It might just be a picture of a sky or something with birds in it ... but it's on the head of this pin, remember, and it's infinitely detailed. Now, imagine this pin is not a pin ... it's a musical note with a corresponding physical action, like the secret raising of an eyebrow to add special emphasis. Even in a

recording studio where nobody can see you do it.

Now, imagine enough of these abstracted pins (with the needle part chopped off to save space) to fill an area as large as the North American Continent and most of Central Europe, piled to a depth of 80 feet. Now, imagine this area is not geometric space. Imagine a collection of decades (the exact number to be disclosed eventually). Pause.

Do you know about Earth Works? Imagine the decades and the pile of stuff on them subjected to *extensive long-range conceptual landscape modification*. Housing. Offices. People live there and work there. They even make movies there. Imagine *you* could be living and working there and not even know about it. Whether you can imagine it or not, that's what the deal is. [*Circular 20-ix-1971*]

Zappa is trying to explain the *semiotic materialism* which lies behind the construction of his albums. As far as he is concerned, we live in a world manufactured by humans, and therefore dense with the ideas and images and objects humans have used to construct this world. His *oeuvre* turns a spotlight on this stuff, so that we examine it critically and question where it came from, who made it and why. The hardcore Zappa fans - with their exclusive attention to Zappa and his personal desires, intentions and actions - don't get the point, which is to apply to the world *outside* his albums the paranoid energies - the subjective investment - stirred-up by Zappa's *oeuvre*. Zappa's attempt to understand life in its historical and cosmic entirety needs to be applied to this entirety itself, or he's reduced to another fetish we can worship - or abominate - but never get beyond.

Okay, and the "spooky coincidence"? The strange correspondences which flicker throughout Zappa's *oeuvre* ... and which, lacking any interest in themselves or their own encounters with the world, the hardcore Zappa-fans persistently repress and ignore? It comes from Nikolay Umov, the Russian physicist who was born in 1848, and wrote popular books on the cosmos at the beginning of the twentieth century:

Imagine to yourself 5,000,000,000 beads scattered over the surface of the globe. They are as small in relation to it as are the small grains of sand to the desert. Let us suppose that each of these beads has, drawn upon it, a miniature map of the sky with the millions of stars which light it. Let us

further suppose that each bead responds, not just to one constellation on this map, but that it directs its axis to first one point in the sky and then to another. This tiny globe distinguishes things at an immeasurably great distance from itself. This is no fantasy or eastern fairy tale. These beads are the eyes of men scattered over the face of the earth. [N. Umov, quoted in A.I. Oparin, *Life: Its Nature, Origin and Development* (Moscow, 1960; translated Ann Synge, Edinburgh/London: Oliver and Boyd, 1961, p. 157)]

Now, of course these two texts are not identical. Nikolay Umov was participating in the intellectual and social ferment in Russia which gave us Vernadsky's biosphere, Volosinov's linguistics, Pashukanis's critique of international law, Lenin's analysis of imperialism, the Bolshevik revolution and Trotsky's internationalism: unlike the popularisers of positive science, Umov has a place for the dialectics of human perception, with its poetry and surrealism intact. In contrast, Zappa confronts a post-war social landscape of alienation and banality. His beads are not living eyeballs, but the accumulated human themes and signs which constitute our sad environment. Whether or not Zappa read Umov - he couldn't have read him directly, since *Uman* remained untranslated in the 50s and 60s, but he might have read a popular-science article riffing off *Uman*'s images - Zappa revives Umov's revolutionary holism, that joyful imagining of the Whole Deal which produces revolutionary indignation at petty restrictions. Zappa is mapping an alienated social system, but his idea that you *can* map it in its historical, changing actuality - one that includes you and me on the map too - generates a potent critical charge. However unacceptable that may be to Harry Albreich and other Parisian intellectuals who rail against Hegel as some kind of "Bosch" disease, this is nothing less than a revival of **dialectics**.

So Didier, are you any clearer about the need for *esemplastic* - rather than merely positivist and commercial - Zappology?

**La 3ème Conférence Internationale de Zappologie (ICE-Z 69)
a eu lieu les 5 et 6 juillet 2008
au Passage vers les Étoiles, Paris Onzième**

La zappologie s'élève peu à peu des draps collants et des aisselles fûmantes de la planète rock pour s'attaquer aux mondes imaginaires, bidons et inefficaces, de la politique spectaculaire et de la science sociale directive. La zappologie est une extension pratique de la joie-dans-la-musique à d'autres domaines. Elle dispose d'une vigueur et d'un potentiel de satisfaction animale que nuls autres mode, discipline, religion ou mouvement intellectuel ne peuvent revendiquer. La zappologie permet aux désaccords profonds et aux tensions sociales de coexister, de se répondre et de fructifier sur un mode simultanément sceptique, imaginatif, ludique et sérieux.

Ben Watson in *Le Pingouin Ligoté* n° 69+69, été 2004



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