

THE RONDO HATTON REPORT VOL VII, JUNE 21, 2011

Creeping back up now in the contribution stakes even if the ratio of *readers* to **writers** remains *disappointing*: with visitors from **every continent** there's potential for a rich variety of *shrub'ry*. Y'all have to be the change you hope to see -- fact of the matter, it's not *made for you*, it's **made by you**.

First time visitors are encouraged to *dive into the archive*: now in our **seventh edition**, there's enough material there to satisfy your linguistic needs for weeks. But each one of us brings a different insight to the party, and there's always more to be said. **It's not a competition**. We're always looking for someone with a new angle. Why maybe it's you, and *you don't even know it*. Feel free to step up to the plate.

As always, the texts are supplied as a single pdf file. Those wishing to *fondle & fetish* a paper version can download and print texts at their leisure; conservers of the carbon footprint can view online. Thanks to all who **contributed** this time. Content is alphabetic by *author*. Views are the opinion of the writer and the responsibility of the reader. *You is what you am*. Anyone wishing to correspond with a contributor may do so through the 'SUBMIT' page, and messages will be duly forwarded. You are **encouraged** to do so: please let the authors know that you appreciate their efforts - it will make them happy. *Hopla!*

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1. LINGUA FRANKA (Part 3): Once Again, Without The Net

Arjun von Caemmerer

“He that hath Ears to Hear, let him Hear”

A look askew at some of the FZ/JC cross-connections — not *The Big J* JC, but that middling JC of Los Angeles extraction: John M Cage.

4’33” and Civilization Phaze III

For this audient participant one of the chief and continuing attractants of Zappa’s music is the challenge it throws to not be merely a passive consumer. For Zappa’s various musics and their cross-links to cohere, there is a necessity for active attentive immersion, and repeated listening.

4’33” is Zappa’s incomparable contribution to ***A Chance Operation: The John Cage Tribute***, released November 1993. Coming directly from his heart to you, **4’33”** reeks *appropriot*, spontaneously eliciting from nonplussed audiences (anywhere and anytime the wind blows) Variations on the Theme of ***You Call That Music?***

Zappa makes clear the Kaiser-role of active **Listening** in determining whether what is heard is perceived either as noise or as Music¹.

Within *The Frame*², the time-bracket of **4’33”**, sitting up straight and paying attention, we just add water & Lo: it makes its own Sauce!

¹ A person with a feel for rhythm can walk into a factory and hear the machine noise as a composition. Anything can be music, but it doesn't **become music** until someone **wills** it to be music, and the audience listening to it decides to **perceive it as music**.

² The most important thing in art is **The Frame**. For painting: literally; for other arts: figuratively -- because, without this humble appliance, you can't **know** where *The Art* stops and *The Real World* begins. You have to put a 'box' around it because otherwise, **what is that shit on the wall?** If John Cage, for instance, says, *"I'm putting a contact microphone on my throat, and I'm going to drink carrot juice, and that's my composition,"* then his gurgling qualifies as his composition because he put a frame around it and said so. *"Take it or leave it, I now will this to be music."* After that it's a matter of taste. Without the frame-as-announced, it's a guy swallowing carrot juice.

From *The Real Frank Zappa Book* (Chapter 8: All About Music)

Because the various ‘movements’ of both **Civilization Phaze III** and **4’33”** are literally encaged within *The Frame* of the piano there is a strong resonance between these two works, and significantly, bookending either side of the 2 discs of **Civilization Phaze III**, recurs the imperative **“Listen!”**

From the starting track of Disc 1:

FZ: *The audience sits inside of a big piano and they **listen** to it grow.*

Spider: *People are going to sit inside of a piano. They’re going to **listen** to this piano go.*

John: *They’re going to **listen** to the piano grow?*

Spider: **Listen!...**

From the penultimate dialogue on Disc 2:

Mike: *Yo, I hear music*

Ali: *Musik?*

Mike: *Musik!...*

Ali: *Naa, ne dim Piano, im piano ist keine Party*

Mike: *Hey, **listen... listen...listen, shhh!***

Aleatory Music

With a nod to the musical processes that informed Cage’s compositions, one of the early music publishing companies that Zappa established was called **Aleatory Music**. But unlike Cage’s ritualism (exemplified in his casting of the **I’Ching**), Zappa’s use of chance goes right outside the square (and even the [4³] cube) resulting in music that is always a **One-Shot Deal**. Consider, for example, the organic and anarchic audience participation sections out of which grow such floribunda as *“I want a garden”* and **Make A Sex Noise**.

The Beat Goes On

Cage discovered that his attempt to hear pure silence — like the futile quest to reach absolute zero [0 degrees on the *Calvin Scale*, or minus 273 degrees Celsius {(4x60) + 33 = 4’33”!}] — was in vain: with this intention he isolated

himself in an anechoic chamber and became aware of hearing a beat which he thought initially was external. He subsequently realized that what he perceived was his own heartbeat. His subjective existence rendered impossible 'pure objectivity'. This inseparability of **Project** from **Object** links both to Cage's practice of Zen, and to Zappa's musical *modus operandi*: both attempt to annul the strictures of dichotomous structure. Both in the xenochronous cross-generational dialogues, reverberating between 1967 and 1991, and in the music of **Civilization Phaze III**, the *fractional divisions* of past and future, of imagined and real, of studio and live performance, are confronted and resolved.

In Zen, 'final understanding', where one literally *comes to a conclusion*, is the realm where Listening stops; the domain where Music is not (and where talk about it begins). Thus the final verbal exchange of **Civilization Phaze III**:

Spider: *I think our strength comes from our uncertainty. If we understood it we'd be bored with it and then we couldn't gather any strength from it.*

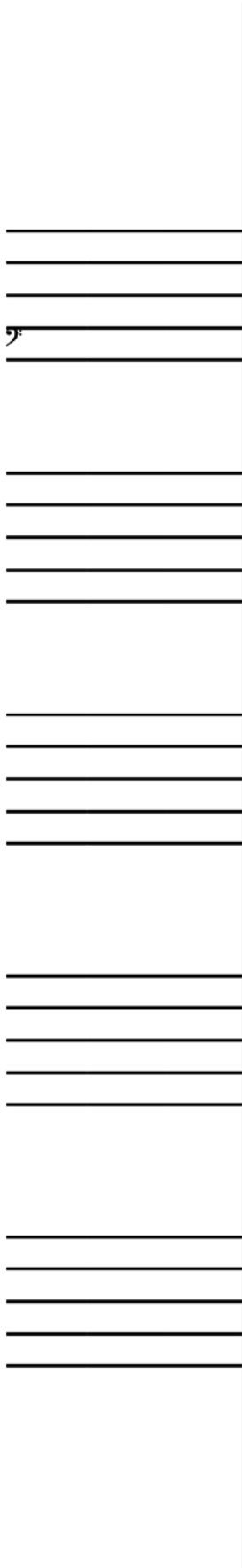
John: *Like if we knew about our music one of us might talk and then that would be the end of that.*

Waffenspiel re-iterates Zappa's view that *anything can be music*: in its Donner and Blitzen; in its dogs' barks carrying the echoes of Evelyn and Patricia and Fido; in the re-echoing urban firearms recalling the **Trouble Every Day** of Brixton & Watts; in the overshadowed, background, and distant 'music' music; in the rhythms of the machineries of the car and the crop-duster; and, in the rhythms of the Kitchen, wherein is found the accidental, the incidental, and the constructed.

Occurring after **Beat the Reaper** and **Outside Now** of the piano interior, **Waffenspiel**, the final track of Zappa's last Meisterwerk, 'ends' in the fecund silence of **4'33"**, a silence which holds our awaked and continuing listening.

Zeit Suite

1. **unCAGED** – Beyond the notes...
2. **The Blank Page #1** – A visual analogue of **4'33"**
3. **The Blank Page #2** – Of (more or less) similar statistical density
4. **Mycols's Approach to I (t')Ching** – The utility of chance operations in resolving the **Bromodrosis Variant March** (known to regular folk as **Joc{sic} Itch**)
5. **Mediant Scales** – For the author of **M**, adherent to "The Middle Path", betwixt and between *at(o)m* and *Atma*: **The John M Cage Memorial BBQ**;
6. **Xenochronic vAriations** – A triologue involving Zappa, Cage, and Iyengar
7. **Now, Outside** - when the coal-powered record player finally stalls, and when the iPod shuffles its last **Lil' Clanton**, and wherever and whenever music becomes illegal, with **4'33"**, still *Undaunted, The Band Plays On*.



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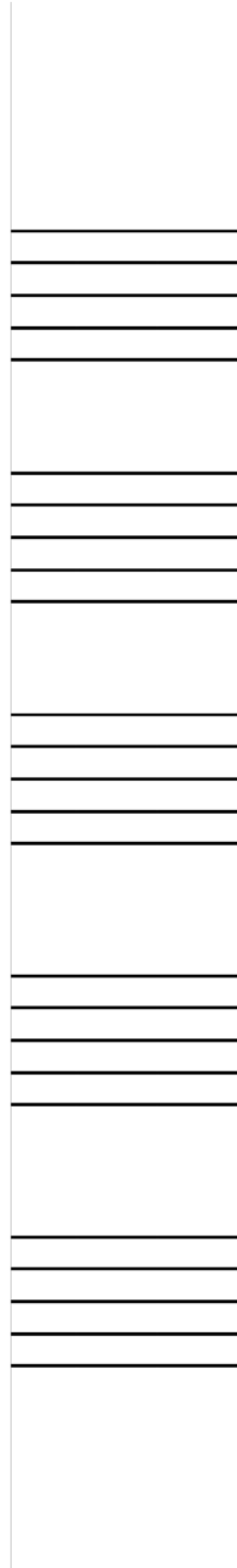
C

A

G

E

D...



(The Blank Page #1)

(The Blank Page #2)

Mycol's Approach to I(t')Ching

j o C h A n G E

j								
o								
C								
h								
A								
n								
G								
E								

(a choice of 64 pairs)

Mediant Scales

at m at m at m

m at m at m at

at m at m at m

m at m at m at

at m at m at m

m at m at m at

“Music is the best.” Frank Zappa
“The best of all music is silence.” BKS Iyengar
“Silence is not acoustic.” John Cage

for AvW

Xenochronic vAriations

I.
music is the best
the best of all silence is not acoustic
music is silence

II.
music is the best
silence of all music is silence
the best is not acoustic

III.
music is the best
of all music is silence
silence is not the best
acoustic

IV.
the best of music is silence
all music is not
silence the best
acoustic

V.
silence is the music is
best of all not music is
acoustic silence
the best

Now, Outside:

4'33''

Set to Repeat

2. CONFESSIONS OF A KUR ADDICT and the Branding of Frank

Urban Graffito

On September 20th, 2007, I was invited to write for what was undoubtedly the best Zappa weblog on the net, *Kill Ugly Radio*. I had never considered myself an expert when it came to Frank Zappa. I don't believe there is really such a thing. The only 'Zappa experts' were the fans themselves who gathered as a community periodically around this site during its awesome eleven year run. As Zappa fans go, the Zappa community at KUR ran the whole gamut – from the newbie dabbler into Zappa's oeuvre to the long-time rabid completist like myself.

From the very start, I considered writing for KUR an honor, and a responsibility I took seriously. My confrontational, blunt, argumentative, abrasive style was sometimes a bit much to handle. This style, based largely as a reflection of Zappa's own satire and sardonic nature, was developed a means to generate response in what was primarily a text-based medium of communication. And did we communicate at KUR. Some comment threads numbering well into the hundreds before interest in a particular post petered out.

Even before I began writing for KUR, I was already a frequent regular visitor to the website. It was the only site that I knew of created by and for fans of Zappa's music. KUR's Friday Boots were always a special treat. Those excellent KUR contributors to the Friday Boots series were instrumental in creating a mythic piece of KUR history. Later when I was compiling the various KUR Mixtapes, I learned just how many loyal fans had been collecting them, adding my compilations to their collections of Friday Boots.

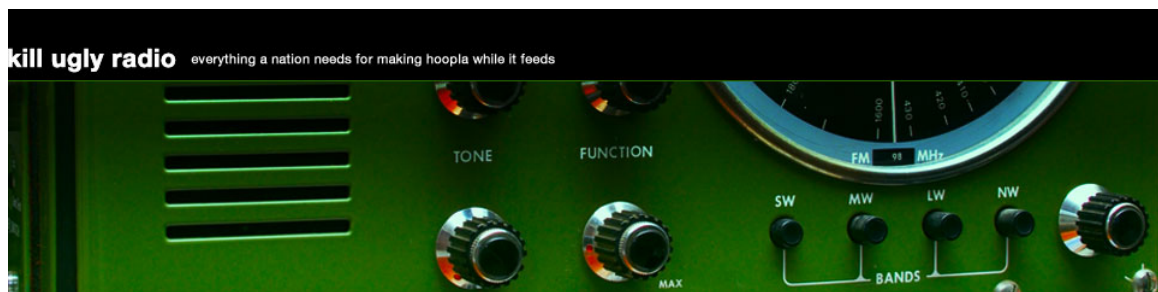
Then on December 11th, 2007, KUR received its cease-and-desist letter from the Zappa Family Trust and their bully lawyers. We were honored. It was akin to a gardener trying to get rid of an ant colony by attacking one ant at a time. Of course, we were well within our rights to use Zappa images, and to stream Zappa boots, under the "fair use" exemption of copyright law. What we didn't have on our side, though were well-paid lawyers, and the means to drag the

issue through endless costly litigation. We might have been on the side of the angels, but all we could do was adhere to the letter of the order (though the spirit of it mixed with water makes its own sauce).

We at KUR weren't the only targets of the ZFT. There were other websites, tribute bands, individual musicians, as well as various alumni. All received cease-and-desist orders. Some were molested even at their places of employment. Others were brought to court, and even upon successfully defending themselves (Zappanale) still found themselves facing costly appeals from the ZFT.

As a writer at KUR, I have long been privy to the actions of the ZFT and what they call the posthumous legacy of Frank Zappa – citing their whining cry of the oppressed – of “Identity theft” by any website, tribute band, or festival that celebrates the music of Zappa. What the ZFT have been doing since 1993 has little to do with Zappa's musical legacy. Rather, it's about the branding of a musical genius. Turning every aspect of Zappa, the iconoclast, the musician, into Zappa, the trademark, the cornflake box.

After eleven spectacular and entertaining years on the web, it's too difficult to watch this corporate face of Frank Zappa that the ZFT has branded. It's a hollow puppet because we all know who's pulling the strings. We can still hear echoes of Frank Zappa's brilliance in their posthumous releases – but it's getting increasingly difficult to make the distinction.



3. IN PRAISE OF THE SHUFFLE

Harry Keater

The December edition of the Rondo Hatton Report had an essay about the difficulty of coming up with an ultimate selection of Zappa tracks, either for your own delectation or anyone else's. I'm sure it's something many fans have run up against. Not only is it difficult to make a choice in the first place, the selection you end up making can and will change with your mood, the season and the particular state of closure of the aeons. It's a moving target.

Being of an older generation, and not particularly techie-minded in any case, I'm a late-comer to the iPod. And as a fan of high fidelity, I was also a bit sniffy about the loss of quality you have to put up with when listening to downgraded mp3 versions. (To that extent, though it pains me to say so, Gail Zappa is actually right to resist allowing downloads of her husband's music – of all people, he deserves to have his work listened to as close as possible to the quality he insisted on when making the original recordings. Because the sonic quality of his work is yet another dimension to the astonishing complexity of his compositions. To hear them in mp3 quality is like having to watch an HD quality film in a grainy Youtube version).

I'd been intrigued to hear that Germaine Greer had an iPod containing all of Zappa's compositions, and thought that I'd like to do the same thing too, if only I could get round to figuring out how to do it. Fortunately, that's what children are for. As a birthday present last year, I got my wish. Even accepting the loss of sound quality, it was a joy to have my whole collection of Zappa together in one place where I could listen to whatever I wanted to whenever I wanted without having to fuss with CDs and hi-fi systems. You just put on the headphones (yes, that's 'on', not 'in' – good sound-cancelling ones that fit over your ears do considerably improve quality, even with mp3) and select away to your heart's content.

Except that then the selection itself starts to become the problem. It's not that you don't want to hear the music again – you can never really get bored with it, even if you do get tired of *Dinah-Moe Humm* every once in a while – it's just that you don't always know what to select, or why. And you don't always want, or have time, to listen to a whole album. So do you just rely on tried and

tested favourites? There's always that choice, though you have to then trawl through the menu to find them (unless you're sad enough to make a playlist, of course).

But if you can't decide where to venture next, another option is the shuffle. And once you discover it, what an option it is. For starters, you never know what's going to come up first. Even though you (may) know the entire Zappa catalogue backwards, you can never outguess the shuffle algorithm. It's always going to start with something unexpected, and that's a real joy in itself. With over 1000 tracks to choose from, it'll keep you guessing, and if you love most of the music anyway, it'll usually be a pleasant surprise. (And even if it isn't, you can easily skip to the next choice). But it's not just the 'What's going to be next?' surprise factor. The real thrill is the 'spot-the-pattern' factor. Because the next selection is truly random (even though often it doesn't seem like that) you have the thrill of constructing a connection between the two, of seeing the commonality that links what may be pieces from entirely different genres.

This of course was one of the great thrills of attending a Zappa concert. You never knew what he was going to start with, and unless you'd been attending a whole series of them, and even then, you never really knew what was coming next. There'd always be that sense of expectation and thrill when he pulled an old classic out of a new composition, or put two pieces together that you would never have expected to hear back to back, or in that combination. Or to make sense that way.

My all-time favourite example of this is the apogee of the guitar solo from the 1977 Halloween concert known on bootlegs as *The Squirm* (and later released as *Bowling on Charon*) which in the concert recording, mutates before your very ears into *Big Leg Emma*. This truly magical transformation is pure alchemy in reverse (turning gold into crud) and takes you completely by surprise, snatching banality from the jaws of the sublime (*that Broadway word used when they rhyme*) in a way that is utterly awe-inspiring. The same note that, sustained through feedback in the harmonic climate of *Bowling on Charon* takes you to the far end of the universe, coasting effortlessly across

the delicate tracery of suggestive patterns sketched in between, melts seamlessly into an upper harmonic of the opening chords of a truly cheesy love-song parody.

This is the kind of thing that shuffle mode can come up with. Driving through the night with my trusty iPod in Zappa shuffle mode the other day, a particularly delightful transition was from *T'Mershi Duween* to *For Guiseppe Franco*. Nothing spectacular, perhaps, just that I'd never have thought of listening to those two next to each other, and my extreme fondness for *T'Mershi Duween* made me pay a little more attention to *FGF*, a track I hadn't really listened to with full attention yet. (As with the rest of *Trance-Fusion*, which I still haven't quite warmed to as an album, although chance encounters of the shuffle kind showcase individual tracks in ways that, out of context, open up the opportunity to hear them with fresh ears). And by the magic of coincidence, the very next track was *Hotel Atlanta Incidentals* from *Guitar*, which just happens to be a variation of the same solo – something I hadn't noticed until then.

But enough of my personal preferences. The point is, shuffle mode can, however artificially, create the possibility for genuine serendipity and unexpected insight in ways that more premeditated modes of listening to the *oeuvre* may not. Stick on the album you're expecting to hear, and unless you make a special effort, it will be what you expected to hear. Nothing wrong with that, of course. But with the shuffle, even though it's "the same old stuff", it's always subtly different. In 'The-When-Determines-The-What' stakes, this delivers results, big time. It's almost like being at a concert, with the thrill of the new emerging from the old. I heartily commend it...



4. HIT IT, FRANCESCO: When Zappa Played Zappa

Ella KUNIGH

When I first discovered the music of Frank Zappa, back in the days before the internet, one of the first things I did was to go to *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* in my school library. Surely someone of such extraordinary musical accomplishment would be listed in the great archive of music through the ages? Surely I could find out more about who this amazingly talented person was, just like you could read about Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Stravinsky? Because my ears were telling me that he was clearly in their league, and so clearly worthy of inclusion.

I was wrong, of course. Not about the man's musical genius: my respect for and admiration for that is undimmed through the years. He remains the pre-eminent genius of his time. But I was quite wrong to assume that Grove would have any information about him. My classical background had not prepared me for an understanding of just how conservative, behind-the-curve and generally fusty such an institution can be. But I did find an entry on a Zappa. Francesco Zappa. Yes, the very same one that Zappa himself discovered (or had pointed out to him) about ten years later. I briefly did think of getting in touch with him to tell him that he had an illustrious ancestor, but apart from the fact that I had no idea how to go about doing that, my teenage self shrank from the thought of the scorn I felt he might pour on me, should he bother to acknowledge such a correspondence in the first place.

So it was quite a shock to me when he came out with the album *Francesco Zappa* in 1984. My first thought was that I could have told him all those years ago after all, and he might have been pleased! He might even have wanted to meet me! What a fool, more shame, etc... The next thought was disappointment. There was nothing to this album. It was, quite literally, Francesco Zappa's "first digital performance in over 200 years." And that's all it was. Or so it seemed. To judge by the evidence of the music, Francesco Zappa was a competent enough composer of the style of the time. Nothing to rock the boat, but that's not what you did then. You were catering to severely conservative tastes, and any tendency to excellence had to be kept well within the box, or you might be out on the street. And Francesco clearly knew his

market. Why, he even worked for the Duke Of York, who was, of course, brother to the King of England (George III, who later went mad... was it the music?)

And Zappa's 'performance' of his namesake's music was not exactly exciting. Where were the trademark derailments of expectation that you looked for in every composition? Apart from the fact that the whole thing was computer-generated, and that he'd assigned some mildly interesting instrumentation to the parts, there didn't seem to be any evidence of re-arrangement or augmentation in any way at all. As David Ocker's sleeve notes suggested, it was simply for enjoying with dinner, or for listening along to the next time you felt the urge to wear a powdered wig.

I'm still no closer to an urge to wear a powdered wig. But I recently got the album out and listened to it again. It's actually not bad as dinner music. It's even quite a good joke, in fact. It is what it is, eighteenth century chandelier music designed as 'digestive assistance' for the privileged. But listen to it again, and you can clearly hear Zappa's tongue in his cheek. Frank's, at least. There's a bounciness of tone, a ridiculousness of timbre, that gives more than a subtle hint about his attitude to late 18th century performance practice. And it's that attitude that counts. If you want to hear what Francesco's music sounds like if reproduced 'authentically' you can (surprisingly) find it on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plH2Ak0t5P8>

I certainly know which version I prefer. And maybe Dweezil could learn a thing or two from his father's attitude. It's one thing to reproduce the music of the past, but even with the genes, without the eyebrows, what's the point?



“Evil doings on the disco floor have their counterpart in the dungeon below”

This piece contends that, of the many peripheral Zappa sidekicks, Bruce Bickford is the most talented and original. After seeing the curate’s egg that is **Baby Snakes** I resolved to seek out Bickford’s work whenever I could, and finally got to see the man in person at London’s Horse Hospital last year. His latest film **Cas’I**, though utterly gripping, is paired with grating guitar-magazine demo CD metal, and made me wish that a composer of Zappa’s stature would step up to the challenge. As Bickford’s incredibly dense, teeming work is paired with Zappa’s own maximalist aesthetic to dizzying effect, I offer here a brief appraisal of Bickford and Zappa’s key work together, and offer some thoughts on how Bickford might “fit in” to Zappa’s overall project/object.

Aside from the clips in the concert films **Baby Snakes** and **The Dub Room Special**, Bickford and Zappa’s work together is comprised of the sadly unavailable video **The Amazing Mr. Bickford**, released in 1987 and the subject of little critical attention. There was, however, a minor controversy in 1994 when a high school teacher from Pennsylvania was reprimanded for showing the film to students: the results of a higher education.

As with Zappa’s audiovisual projects, an overall intent is never quite clear (why fold footage of people larking around in a dubbing house into your concert film?) Is this to be a portrait of Bickford, as the opening footage of Bickford in his studio and rambling about talismanic power would suggest? The soundtrack to this opening section, Pierre Boulez conducting **Naval Aviation in Art**, has always conjured the atmosphere of an orchestra tuning up, preparing to unleash something of devastating power.

We then see one of Bickford’s early films, **Last Battle on Flat Earth**, set to the first movement of **Mo n’ Herb’s Vacation**. Reminiscent perhaps, of the race war Charles Manson hoped to trigger, the film shows a murky battle between dark and light skinned humanoids, sculpted in Bickford’s trademarked, top-heavy, hulking style. We are right in close with the lumbering combatants, close enough to see Bickford’s fingerprints and

scalpel-marks on their bodies. But in Zappa's hands, the film is just a moveable block of carnage: as the music continues, the visuals change to a line animation featuring pulsating fast food and a creature that's clearly a peccary. Heavy on the woodwinds, the piece snakes around as the landscape and figures entwine in a fugue of bright yellows and murky reds.

The next sequence is set to **Dupree's Paradise**, a piece that Zappa wrote to evoke the depraved atmosphere of a late night bar in Watts. The film starts small-scale, with a man inside what looks like an artist's studio. The man possesses a totem that's part phallus, part toadstool, which he takes through craggy, verdant landscape and displays – seemingly unleashing a dangerous and unpredictable animistic power. An enormous demonic face bursts through a pinball machine, and a car chase ensues, through the distant-sounding, echoey, piano led section of the piece. Finally we reach a bar where depravity reaches a new high as the patrons slaughter one another. Bickford's animation brings out the more brutal aspects of Zappa's music; it takes place in a universe where the torture never stops.

Mo and Herb's Vacation's second and third movements continue to soundtrack the same narrative. Uniform-clad thugs appear, beating and mauling over the queasy, dissonant strings. It's hard to tell where one narrative ends and another begins, we see one of those sinister Lynchian businessmen, buxom women, and soon hideous severed horses heads and men hurling each other into a cellar, in an orgy of violence. As the music accelerates, the montage becomes faster too, as bottles are broken and bright foamy liquid poured from barrels into mouths with increasing frequency.

During a lull in the music, a hideous yellow jester head grows - two faces merge into one, then turn into a bridge between two banks. What follows is one of Bickford's greatest feats of clay, as everything shimmers, ripples and transforms and we catch glimpses of hideous, wolverine faces. Hideous skeleton with sinew, people growing out the ground, foreshadowing **Prometheus' Garden**. Sirens wail as the third movement comes to a climax, and feet and faces all merge in a dark-brown clayish cluster-fuck. Freeze frame.

The next piece is **The Perfect Stranger**: a more inviting, less overpowering sound-world, with its woodblocks and bells. The visuals don't let up though: there's a bearded man who's perhaps a stand-in for Bickford himself. A zoom inside his head reveals a hideous homunculus *in cranio*. A Melies moon, with all manner of sinister fluctuations going on inside him, materialises next. This idea of teeming multitudes inside, or below the surface, is an organising principle of Bickford's.

We see a fleshy, morphing substance become a pyramid with an eye atop it, and a grotesque, many-armed, many-mouthed businessman. Although Zappa was too canny for David Icke style conspiracy theories, the cranky provocations about the HIV virus that began during the **Thing-Fish** era resonate here. An orgy transforms itself into a ship on a purple stretch of water, a purple porcine head turns into a movie camera, the word "cas'l" turns into a writhing orgy of faces. One face biting a nose turns into a still of Zappa's nose and the film ends...*leave my nose alone, please*.

Zappa deploys his side-players for a variety of reasons: The GTOs bolster the groupie culture that he wanted to explore during the Flo and Eddie era and beyond, Wild Man Fischer provides the spontaneous lunacy that the restrained, aloof Zappa could not fully supply himself. Bickford, I believe, is part of Zappa's ongoing investigation into xenochrony, which, as every Zappa fan knows, is the "experimental re-synchronisation" of different musical performances to create a new musical effect. Zappa and Bickford's collaboration is a form of audiovisual xenochrony.

Xenochrony reveals a dialogic side to Zappa's work, his ability to allow others spontaneity and creativity to break out of his own creative stranglehold, that contrasts with his autocratic side. The video is "written, produced and directed" by Zappa, but the content could only really be Bickford's.

Xenochrony isn't iconoclasm for its own sake, merely a clumsy tool that produces only dissonance. It creates a polyrhythm. It constructs the illusion of an intuitive approach, whereby neither artist knows what the other intends, and yet correspondences continue to occur. Bickford's animation moves and transforms with a pace and rhythm of its own, running counter to that of the

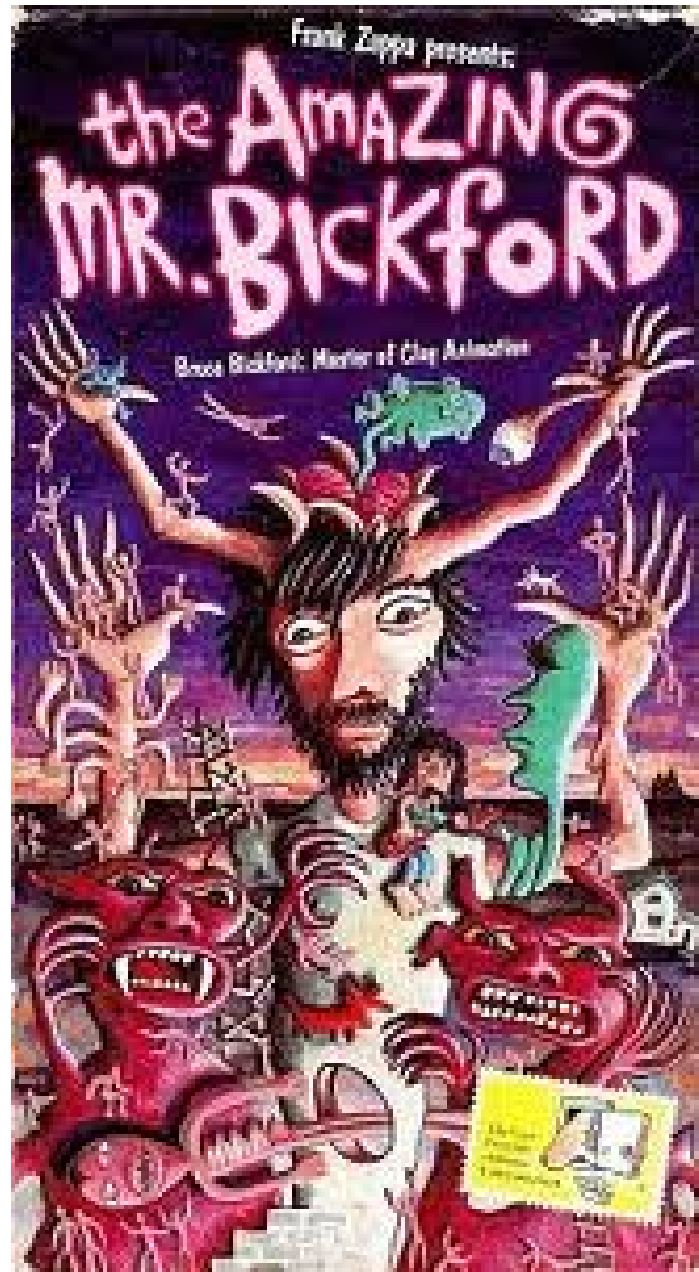
musical accompaniment. Though the films and compositions were originally created for different purposes, music, lyrics and imagery frequently match up, creating unexpected associations.

The technique of xenochrony also facilitates a collision of atmospheres, created by the material's "special qualities", like room tone and timbre – Or the fingerprints and scapel-marks on Bickford's models. Zappa loved the sound of old recordings, remarking on their ability to contain "trapped air." Bickford's footage contains similar temporal markers, not least in its own delicious material qualities. In **The Amazing Mr Bickford**, the atmosphere of the orchestral recordings combines with the grain of Bickford's 16mm film, resulting in a palpable tactility. Coming at the start of the video (the words further resonate because of their earlier use in **Baby Snakes**), Bickford's "evil doings on the disco floor have their counterparts in the dungeon below" relates to the melding of his work with Zappa's: Both thrash around on their own, but occasionally "psychic contact" means that there is a correspondence: a moment where music and imagery escalate together.

Sergei Eisenstein sought to synthesise sound and image, creating an intellectual effect. Looking at Eisenstein's collaboration with Prokofiev, you can see a plan that combines storyboard and musical score – When X happens on-screen, Y happens on the soundtrack: the two build together to create an intensity. In contrast, Zappa puts the separate elements in dialogue with each other, with the intent of creating a *physical* sensation. **The Amazing Mr Bickford** is a sensory overload.

Bickford's animation helps to draw out what is Stravinskian in Zappa's orchestral compositions: With its focus on the fecund burgeoning of nature, and the tit-for-tat economy of primitive violence, **The Amazing Mr Bickford** picks up the atmosphere of **The Rite of Spring** intuitively, and runs with it. But at the same time, Bickford's animations smear any respectability that a performance with the LSO might be thought to aspire to: the monstrously cartoonish faces and phalluses serve as a physical graffiti-tag that counterweighs the precious aspirations of poodles in tuxedos. Zappa and Bickford, despite their different outlooks and working methods, are perfect

collaborators because both are meticulous and single-minded about their craft; a craft that seeks to show the virtue of the ugly and indecorous.



6. CRYSTALS AND TURDS: Perfect Strangers?

Paul Sutton

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.³ 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)

³ 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.

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.⁴

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 mad scientist is not just an abuser of power or debunker of idealism: he is an alchemist, a transformer of matter. As can be seen from Zappa's and Boulez's differing approaches to nomenclature, it is in this respect that the former diverges most from his European models. Boulez's terms are immaculately abstract, while Zappa's – barking, pumpkin, muffin – are not just concrete but animal, vegetable and industrial. Such abstractions as Zappa does employ – gratification – tend to have a distinctly creaturely taint. Far from being a factor in an equation, matter for Zappa remains grossly and intimately corporeal. His work is richly bespattered with gobbets of shit, piss, spunk and snot (but not blood, sweat and tears, which are altogether too ennobling for Zappa's purposes)⁵. I should like at this point to essay a 'phenomenology of spurt'. Freud has this to say of pooting forth:

The contents of the bowels, which act as a stimulating mass upon the sexually sensitive surface of the mucous membrane, behave like the forerunners of another organ, which is destined to come into action after the phase of childhood. But they have other important meanings for the infant. They are clearly treated as a part of the infant's own body and represent his first "gift": by producing them he can express his active compliance with his environment and, by withholding them, his disobedience. From being a "gift" they later come to acquire the meaning of "baby".⁶

⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (London: Belknap, 1999).

⁵ The sobbing of Sam Cooke, the sweating of Bruce Springsteen and the self-harm of Richey Edwards all variously bespeak 'authenticity'.

⁶ Sigmund Freud, 'Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality', in *On Sexuality* (London: Penguin, 1987), pp. 103-104.

Shit is also, of course, filthy lucre. 'It is possible that the contrast between the most precious substance known to man and the most worthless, which they reject as waste matter, has led to this specific identification of gold with faeces'⁷. This antithetical valorization is taken up by Dominique Laporte when he describes musk as 'a brown secretion that has an oily consistency when fresh and is hard and brittle when dry'⁸. Laporte's *History of Shit* is also a history of the evolution of the French state. He notes that 1539 saw two seminal royal edicts, concerning linguistic and urban hygiene respectively. Control of language helps to constitute the nation state, while regulation of hygiene helps to constitute its increasingly privatized bourgeois subject.

However, there is more to the phenomenology of spurt than the negotiation and exploitation of taboo. Hegel writes of the need of consciousness both to externalize itself and to internalize the other. This he addresses both ontogenetically and philogenetically.

Even the child's first impulse involves this practical modification of external things. A boy throws stones into the river, and then stands admiring the circles that trace themselves on the water, as an effect in which he attains the sight of something which is his own doing.⁹

He then goes on to mention 'barbaric' practices such as scarification and footbinding and the modes of self-utterance emanating from 'spiritual education'. It does not take a Freudian to object that a child's first impulse, still less a small boy's, is seldom as wholesome as Hegel suggests. Nevertheless, the sticky and noxious pastimes of the infant do lend themselves to Hegelian exposition. Such substances as snot and shit lie at the limits of corporeal integrity and, as such, are particularly susceptible to dialectics. At the moment of picking, snot is right on the cusp of self and other.

Characteristically, Zappa finds in the groupie Laurel Fishman a perfect encapsulation of the interchange between humanity and nature (not to mention an adumbration of the potential pottylatch between artist and

⁷ Freud, 'Character and Anal Erotism', in Freud (1987), p. 214. See also Henry James, *passim*.

⁸ Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit* (London: MIT, 2000), p. 104.

⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 36.

audience). Zappa recounts that, in 1970, after a concert, she presented the assembled Mothers with a gift:

It was a piece of *her own shit*, which looked like it had been *hand-molded into a perfect sphere*, sitting in a mason jar. She claimed that *was exactly how it had left her body*. I couldn't imagine how that could be true – I thought I saw *palm prints* on it. (pp. 212-213)

Zappa simultaneously insists upon the shittiness of that most perfect of geometrical forms, the sphere, and upon the artificiality of the putatively 'natural' turd.

Zappa presents himself as the alchemist of all this 'undifferentiated tissue' (the term is from Burroughs's 'Talking Asshole' routine from *Naked Lunch*, a piece which Zappa performed). Being both physically amorphous and ontologically ambivalent, the various forms of poot are especially amenable to both physical and conceptual transformation. Substances mutable in themselves are made more so by their deployment within the Project/Object. Slime, hot poop, numies, napalm, sleep dirt, poot, yellow snow, plastic, pancake batter, decorative icing, cheese, chocolate syrup, mashed potato – well, as Freud observed, 'Sometimes a cigar is just a cigar', but these morsels of goo can also stand in for each other, money, mass production and craft production. The dominant meaning, however, relates to the question of cultural value. The 'decorative filler material' of *You Are What You Is* consists of Zappa's thoughts on the subject of cheese ('cheesy: inferior, second-rate, cheap and nasty': OED):

Contemporary Americans [...] have an almost magical ability to turn anything we touch into a festering mound of self-destructing poot. [...] *[L]ethal emissions generated by the ripening process of this piquant native confection* [...] droozle out of your digital clock radio.

A far cry indeed from the clean and crystalline structures emerging from IRCAM, but this characterization of commercial culture by Zappa could almost be a self-description. To be sure, Zappa's art is neither lethal nor self-destructive, but it is certainly ripe, piquant, festering and droozling, and all the better for it.

7. MERRY-GO-ROUND MADNESS

Bim Yoder

Whether or not the possession of the album *An Evening with Wild Man Fischer* is “Clue #1 in determining if a person's Frank Zappa worship has progressed too far” (according to a post on a website announcing Larry Fischer's death last week), as a Frank Zappa fan you will no doubt either have checked him out long ago, or feel you ought to have if you haven't. What you find may not necessarily induce you to put him on your list of all-time favourites. But it's interesting stuff, nonetheless.

With the original vinyls now changing hands for upwards of three-figure sums, it's unlikely that you'll be shopping for a copy on Ebay. Fortunately, Gail Zappa's tentacles have not yet extended to the exclusion of Wild Man Fischer from YouTube, so you can refresh your memory of Merry-Go-Round (for example) here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CHqR1RqI5r8>. That one stuck in my head for months when I first heard it, and still does now. It has a strangely fascinating power, a sort of hypnotic simplicity tinged with madness, rather like the experience of eating *fugu*, an otherwise bland and uninteresting blowfish that can be fatal if it's not expertly prepared.

Like many people suffering from schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, Wild Man Fischer could be dangerous to those around him, famously attacking his mother with a knife and once throwing a jar at Moon Unit Zappa, the event which supposedly brought his relationship with Zappa to an end. There are those who feel uncomfortable about Zappa's 'exploitation' of someone so clearly on the edge of mental disturbance, and think that his showcasing of him on his Bizarre label was as much about mockery as it was about a sympathetic understanding. But at a time when pop music was all about safely manufactured product (is anything different today? Lady Gaga? I think not...) Zappa's championing of someone so definitively different was both challenging and liberating. After all, he didn't just stick him in the studio, he took him on the road: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ygvhYE5veKU>

Zappa's spin about The Beatles as he introduces him in this clip may be his own invention (WMF can be heard protesting that “It's just a song..”) but in showcasing the talents of someone who was demonstrably a 'left-behind of

the Great Society', Zappa was graphically exposing his audience both to the notion that real life is not as smooth as 'they' would have you believe, and that not all art has to be as cute as the Beatles. Through Wild Man Fischer, Zappa was presenting 'outsider art' to the world before the term had really been invented.

Larry's ability to hold a tune through his manic outbursts means he doesn't really need Zappa's help to make him listenable, but the tracks with the Mothers behind him have that extra resonance. My own favourites are *The Taster (fancy version)* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBlqB8dhgZM> and *The Circle* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7HjjFFqJHg>. This is the period during which they were recording *Ruben and the Jets* and *Uncle Meat*, although Zappa's guitar on *The Circle* is in some ways more reminiscent of his solo on *Out To Get You* with Grand Funk Railroad. He probably treated them both the same way.

