

## THE RONDO HATTON REPORT, DECEMBER 21, 2009

The inaugural edition of The Rondo Hatton Report features an extended baker's dozen of submissions from un-shy people on several continents, confessing all for your dining and dancing pleasure. There's something for everyone here, and if by the end of it you're thinking '*I could do that!*' well, so much the better. *The fact of the matter, it's made for you.* We're not fussed about your academic or other credentials. We just want to know what gets you off, and why. Chances are, we'll sympathise. Just give it to us straight, in whatever style you choose. *Get down with your bad self, so to speak*, and join us for the next edition, due in March.

The texts are supplied as a single pdf file. Those wishing to *fondle & fetish* a paper version can download and print at their leisure; conservers of the carbon footprint can view online. Thanks to all who contributed this time. Content is in alphabetic order by *author*; there is no editing, and no overdubs. Views expressed are the opinion of the writer and the responsibility of the reader. *You is what you am.* Hopla!

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PC: 'King Kong' Mmmm. Judging by the number of 'tribute bands' playing this piece, I imagine this song means lots of things to lots of people. The first thing I think of is the *Uncle Meat* version, and an early attempt at Zappa formulating a 'virtual performance' from numerous takes. What I find interesting about this piece is that it is essentially an example of a so called 'rock' group playing fairly free form Jazz, with Ian Underwood sounding like Ornette Coleman or Archie Shepp. When listening to the experimental nature of '*King Kong VI*' in particular, I still find it fascinating that Zappa is not credited as a greater influence on the Jazz Rock movement. In fact I often compare Zappa to John McLaughlin with my students, and how the latter's music is considered part of the jazz heritage because of his work with Miles – not just for its musicological content! For me, *Uncle Meat* and *Hot Rats* is far 'jazzier' than the early *Mahavishnu Orchestra* albums. Back to '*King Kong*', I think it is also an archetypal example of Zappa's Project/Object, as it appeared to be a key piece early on in his career (appearing on *Uncle Meat*, *Lumpy Gravy* and *Ahead of Their Time*). I love the reggae treatment the track gets at the start of *YCDTOSA Vol.3*, before the arrangement goes on to fuse a variety of Zappa's bands from the early 70's to early 80's.

MD: Completely agree that the influence of Zappa's "free form modal jazz" must have been liberating for rockers and jazzers alike – and that Zappa's position towards the jazz heritage would deserve to be reconsidered. I have been watching different versions of "*King Kong*" on Youtube and I am playing the 1968 BBC version while writing this note. "*The name of this song is 'King Kong'. It's a story of a very large gorilla, who lived in the jungle - and he was doing okay, until some Americans came by and thought that they would take him home with them. They took him to the United States, and they made some money - by using the gorilla - then they killed him.*" Zappa's introduction to the song was meant to shock the audience and create an atmosphere for his own personal brand of socio-cultural critique, foregrounding the sinister of violence and colonization that lurk beneath the thrills of a well-known action story. Zappa's cautionary commentary was also meant to prepare listeners for the musical shock packed by the

opening bars. So far, the only cover band I've heard that lives up to the sheer power unleashed by the song's opening bars is the Ed Palermo version, which begins with a HUGE (and potentially sinister) gong sound that drowns the first riff, allowing it to emerge progressively until it establishes the beat to which we can potentially DANCE to until we forget what the song is allegedly "about": the modal vamps interrupts thought, or at least, renders it circular; and one doesn't have to read Adorno to recognize that dancing or nodding or stomping your feet to live music is incompatible with syllogistic thinking: this is the price to pay for the adaptability of the piece which lends itself as it does to impromptu gatherings, which included Zappa playing with John Lennon and Yoko Ono at Filmore East in June 1971. I have always wondered about the significance of the hospital ward in the 1968 BBC version. Somehow, it would seem to anticipate the tragic fate of the Montreux casino, which caught fire in the midst of Don Preston's *King Kong* solo, although the fire, luckily, had no casualties. Be that as it may, the ward appears as a kind of warning that the kind of music the *Mothers of Invention* were playing at the time could be dangerous and as monstrous as the creature in the Schoedsack & Cooper movie, an atmosphere of threat and victimization aptly conveyed by Motorhead Sherwood's uncompromisingly unsophisticated and fierce soloing, which provided the wild, musically uneducated element in the song, which constantly struggles with the more academic themes developed throughout the piece. I also like the reggae treatment – to me it introduced an ironic element into the song, creating some distance between the (at least for an audience whose vast majority was familiar with the original "variations"). The sense of distance and irony created by the reggae "reduction" may amount to some as a watered-down version of the original and more radical version, although it opens up some useful SPACE (the original 3 / 4 beat was rather claustrophobic) for more sonic amusement (including Ed Mann's samples (If we had time, we could compare Zappa's compulsive use of reggae with Serge Gainsbourg's, but I digress ...)) Ed Mann once told me that every time Zappa gave a piece the reggae treatment, it was because he was getting tired of it (I also find Zappa's "xenochronic" collages of different versions of the song in YCDTOSA quite revealing in that respect.)

PC: I also think that the extended version on *YCDTOSA Vol.3* is particularly revealing. In the sleeve notes Zappa confirms the pervasiveness of the piece when stating “just about everyone of our touring bands has played its own customised version of this song”, but more importantly, when considering your point above regarding the 1968 BBC recording, it is interesting to note that the *YCDTOSA Vol.3* version combines a 1982 concert recorded in Metz, France, with the infamous 1971 concert at the *Rainbow Theatre*, where the MOI used hired equipment due to the fire a week earlier at Montreux! Conceptual Continuity at it’s scary best. This recording also brings to mind the sheer stylistic diversity that Zappa imparted on the piece, which includes Reggae, 70’s Jazz-Rock, Jazz Waltz and Fast Swing to name but a few. I also find the issue of SPACE very interesting, and this version juxtapositions both the ‘claustrophobic 3 / 4 and the more open 4 / 4 both horizontally (as the piece progresses) and vertically (The opening reggae backing is in 4/4 while the theme commences in 3 / 4). I think I am correct in saying that the first recorded version of “*King Kong*” was on pt 2 of *Lumpy Gravy* (at around 8.00), and this version also polyrhythmically combines a 4 / 4 backing with a 3 / 4 theme, in some ways setting the scene for our discussion above. Zappa’s relation to the readings of Adorno are really interesting, and if he is considered part of the ‘popular music’ canon, how can his music comply with Adorno’s theory that all popular music is ‘standardized’? More than any other composer I know, Zappa was acutely aware of how music could dupe the listener into believing that ideologies such as love songs can create a “*desire for an imaginary situation which will never exist*” (Zappa and Occhiogrosso, p.89) and the various treatments of ‘*King Kong*’ alone are anything but predictable. Not time to discuss this now – but fascinating nevertheless. What I love most about the ‘virtual performances’ of the *YCDTOSA Vol.3* in particular is the means that he engages in the practice of hypermediacy, acknowledging multiple acts of representation and making them visible. For me at least, this engages the listener closer to the music, almost enabling us to experience it from the *inside* in a similar way that we can watch movie scenes such as the infamous Norman Bates shower scene in *Psycho* through the eyes of the protagonist! Just a final remark, is Zappa’s sarcastic description of ‘*King Kong*’ similar to the inherent subject matter of ‘*Welcome To The United States*’? Just a thought.

## **2. THE BARD OF BALTIMORE**

**Kanguy Chow**

For quite a while when I was growing up, I used to assume that Frank Zappa was a stage name. It seemed too cool, too unlikely to be his real name. His uncanny ability to zap my assumptions about music, the universe and everything else was surely too significant to be mere coincidence. I was convinced he must have made it up. But then on a holiday to Italy one year I saw a company called Zappa Tours which – to my disappointment – turned out to be a local bus company, absolutely nothing to do with him, and I realised that Zappa was, after all, an ordinary Italian name.

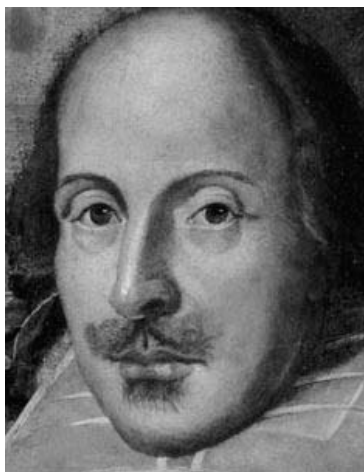
But realised too, when I checked it out, that its original meaning as a hoe – a primitive garden implement used primarily to break up clods of earth and remove weeds – was exactly right as a metaphor for his work. Frank seems pretty on the mark, as well – he was unashamedly ‘frank’ about everything – and the name’s original (German) meaning of ‘free man’ is very appropriate. What with Vincent (meaning ‘conquering’), his parents clearly named him right, because he behaved the same.

Most people reading this will probably know that his birthday, too, falls on a significant date. December 21 is the winter solstice, a highly regarded date in all pre-Christian cultures, traditionally the date of the birth – and more particularly the rebirth – of gods, prophets and demons. As the shortest day of the year, it’s usually been marked by celebrations and festivals to welcome the return of the sun. The exuberant Roman festival of Saturnalia peaked around this date, as well.

The date of Jesus’s birth, mentioned nowhere in the Bible, is supposed to have been decided on by the early Christians to allow them to piggy-back on (and later hijack) the euphoria of the existing pagan celebrations held at that time of the year. So Zappa fans will need no convincing that his birthday, too, is extremely auspicious. If a great genius is to come into the world, let it be on such a day.

The parallels do not stop there. As an angst-ridden teenager, trying to defend my turf against incredulous parents, I used to try and make connections between Zappa and Shakespeare (they were literary folk). I would cite his creative use of language, the extraordinary breadth of his musical reference, his prolific output. Okay, so I was desperate. But my belief that he was the Shakespeare of his age, in another guise, has not dimmed with the years.

Shakespeare, needless to say, was another man who checked out too soon, doing so too not only in the same month that he was born, but – also like Zappa – just a few days before his 53rd birthday. Coincidence? Well, probably. But then you realise that in the best-known portrait of him, the woodcut used on the front cover of the *First Folio* editions of his work – prepared soon after his death by people who had actually known him – he is shown sporting the trademark moustache and imperial combination. That can freak you out a little bit. Frankie.



### 3. ZAPPA'S MUSIC IS A SPHERE

Guillaume DAUZOU & Sabrina BERGAMIN

Nobody knows where his « grand œuvre » starts and where it ends. The only way to get into that sphere is to randomly pick up a song, an album, a note or a lyric and let the music go through the ugliest part of your body. That's what the first album « Freak Out » says Freak « OUT » « OUT » « OUT ». You have to freak out to get into the sphere ! One of the most important things to understand is that his music is not a *matter of temporality*. Every single note of a Zappa piece refers to another, no matter when it was written, no matter why, no matter for *whom*.... The sphere is typically a *picture in volume* of the AAFRNAA concept. That's the very proof Zappa was both dadaist and surrealist. On the one hand, according to the dadaist/conceptual-continuity, every single thing (music, movie, happening...) he did had been planned, like an infinite causality. And on the other hand, like the surrealists did, everything done or performed by Zappa is recorded, dated, traced, referenced. It's as if he wanted to catch and keep the perfection of the present moment.

Now, it's easy to picture ourselves, through a single song, being the witness of a live performance, of a private joke between musicians and in the same time experiencing a hazardous reference to a jazz standard. Let's take an example from this gigantic spider web. I'm facing my laptop with 1219 Zappa tracks staring at me ; I push the shuffle button to enter the sphere....and the winner is.... « It ain't necessarily the Saint James infirmary », from the « Guitar » album (cd version). This guitar solo is part of the Zappaian sphere. So, let's dive into it and let's try to discover the connections between this solo and other parts of the sphere. I give you a taste :

*Below, my example presented as a list of items :*

*In Zappa's sphere*

- « It ain't necessarily the Saint James Infirmary »
- Solo from « Pound for a brown »,

- Recorded in Stadio Communale, Pistoia (Italy), Thursday July 8, 1982 on a 24 tracks analog by Bob Stone with the UMRK Mobile
- Zappa with his famous Custom Stratocaster (seen on the cover of SU&PYG)
- Steve Vai : Stunt guitar
- Ray White : Rhythm guitar
- Bobby Martin : Keyboards
- Tommy Mars : keyboards
- Scott Thunes : Bass
- Chad Wackerman : Drums
- Ed Mann : Percussion
- From the CD version of Guitar (1995)

In other spheres

- « It ain't necessarily the Saint James Infirmary »
- from « It ain't necessarily so » by George Gershwin from « Porgy and Bess » 1935 (0:10-0:29, 4:18-5:03)
- from « Saint James Infirmary Blues » credited to Joe Primrose (Irvong Mills) 1928 ? (0:32-0:53)

The first step is over. I now pick up randomly one of the items..... the title where this solo comes from : « Pound for a Brown » !

We're back in 1969, the 4 sided album Uncle Meat has just been released, and « A Pound for a Brown on the Bus » is a 1:28 min instrumental. This piece has been named after a joke between Jimmy Carl Black and Bunk Gardner (remember Don Preston telling the whole story at the 20th Zappanale ?) > this song also appears on Ahead of their time, Zappa In New York, The Yellow Shark, YCDTOSA #4 & #5...

You can dig as deep as you like, there's no end, like there's no beginning to this work. If you think about it you might find out the next step that leads you to the head of the pin, and perhaps to one of the numerous facets of the Big Note.



#### **4. AUTHOR/RECIPIENT RELATIONSHIPS IN FZ'S MOVIES**

**Manuel de la Fuente**

Cinema is a cultural product which is the result of an industrial process. This implies a particular relationship between the author and his audience. Making movies is not a mere fact of entertainment, but also a way of thinking about the communicative and political implications of the medium itself. Therefore, the filmmaker takes a position from the moment he/she expresses his/her own point of view. Frank Zappa understood this throughout the eight full-length films he made, he never stopped reflecting on the role of the artist in society and the channels he had at his disposal for communicating his ideas. "Does humor belong in music?", a journalist asked Zappa in a scene used later by the musician as a title of one of his films. "It belongs in everyday life", Zappa replied, "unless the Republicans want to take it away". For Zappa, humor is a basic tool to respond to neo-con discourse and his tireless search for ways to transfer his humor to the audience would become a tool to confront political and religious fanatisms.

In order to reach this aim, Zappa uses a complex audiovisual language in his first movie, *200 Motels* (1971). The aim is to show his point of view, his subjectivity, and he emphasizes this throughout the movie. So we can hear Zappa's voice over saying in the first sequence of the movie: "Touring can make you crazy, ladies and gentlemen. That is precisely what *200 Motels* is all about". And in the final sequence, Howard Kaylan looks at the camera and says: "After all (...) it's Frank's movie. We're the Mothers, but it's still Frank's movie". So, Zappa points out that the plot will deal with his personal experiences as a musician on tour, and also that he is the sole author of the film. And he makes both things clear in his first finished movie. In his first project for cinema, *Uncle Meat* (completed twenty years later), he introduced it as "The Mothers of Invention movie" (in the credits and in the first line of the script). But in the credits of his first film he makes it clear that the authorship of *200 Motels* is exclusively his own: "Frank Zappa's 200 Motels".

However, Zappa does not merely make a written claim to sole author status. He wants to formulate a direct relationship between the artist and his audience. Hence the

characters in *200 Motels* speak to and look directly at the camera, they address the members of the audience and converts them as recipients in different media formats: they will watch a movie, but they will also attend a rock concert (watching the band's performances of the songs) or view an animated movie on dental hygiene (a parody of the US government movies in the 50s & 60s such as *Duck & Cover*) or a TV show in which contestants must come up with synonyms for the word "penis". These constant disruptions constitute an infraction of Hollywood's classic cinema principles (which have been described by Noël Burch as the Institutional Mode of Representation) turning the film into an incipient taste of what was to become the music video genre. Zappa himself would openly state this at the beginning of *The True Story of 200 Motels*. Zappa's movie is part of the tradition of avant-garde cinema in the 20s, laying the foundations for the emergence of video-clip as the main product for promoting popular music in the 80s.

One of the clearest inspirations for Zappa can be seen in *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929). Zappa shows different characters in the role of filmmaker or cameraman, in a similar way to Vertov. In his film, Vertov showed the cameraman filming the city (image 1) using superimposition effects – we see the same effect in the scene where Rance Muhammitz (an *alter ego* of the filmmaker) gives orders to Mark Volman in Zappa's film (image 2).



(1) *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929)



(2) *200 Motels* (Frank Zappa, 1971)

In the same way, there are a number of visual and narration effects in *200 Motels* (repetitions, association of ideas, symbolism, etc.) that we can find in Vertov's film. While Vertov portrayed a day in the life of a Soviet city, Zappa portrays the stereotypes

of a typical American town where his group go for a concert – Centerville, which is categorized by having mainly “churches and liquor stores”. Of course the ideas behind both movies are different, but there is a common construction model which places Zappa’s film in the tradition of non-narrative and experimental cinema of the 20s. One feature of this type of film making is the explicit way the filmmaker exposes his subjectivity: in Vertov, we see the eye of the observer (image 3), replaced in one of the final sequences of *200 Motels* by Zappa’s own eye (image 4). Both eyes are seen in similar sequence: rapid flashes of actions interspersed with the eye of the observer. By doing this, the filmmaker reinforce his point of view and reveals the subjective condition of cinema. And besides, he places the recipient in a position of someone who is constantly questioned, someone who is active in the communication process.



**(3) *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, 1929)    (4) *200 Motels* (Frank Zappa, 1971)**

This appeal to the addressee becomes even more explicit in his next movie, *Baby Snakes* (1979). While a tour of rock concerts was the starting point in his first movie, the rock concert itself is the main subject in this one – Zappa will complete his reflection on musical creation when he talks about the process of editing material in his third film, *The Dub Room Special!* (1982). Zappa sees the rock concert as a space for political action using humor and entertainment. His most political overt activities would arrive with his 88 tour (when gives out voting registration forms for his young American audience to vote during a presidential election year), but we already find this dimension of his work in *Baby Snakes*. There is one specially relevant moment in the movie when Zappa plays a performance on stage with some members of the audience, using humor to show the way music industry abuse their artists. In this performance, Zappa expresses his ideas,

in the same way he would do on stage throughout his career, which can be seen in *Does Humor Belong in Music?* (1985), with a number of songs criticizing the most reactionary stereotypes in US society.

But Zappa's *mise-en-scène* also improves the communication between the artist and his audience. This is new in films about rock music, and can be fully appreciated if we compare Zappa's film to *The Last Waltz*, the movie Scorsese made in 1978 about the farewell concert given by The Band. The *mise-en-scène* in Scorsese's film is eminently taken from a front view establishing a clear division between artist/group and audience (image 5); in Zappa's movie, however, this division is intentionally broken down, and in his *mise-en-scène* we see musicians with their backs to the camera and the audience in front of the camera. So, the members of the audience take a main role in the show (in the "audience participation" section, for example) because Zappa has diluted the barrier that kept him apart from the public at the rock concert (image 6). He even takes his personal bodyguard and makes him sing some verses of "Muffin Man". Zappa involves the audience in the show, which constitutes a reflection on the public dimension of the artist: the musician, the composer, is part of the society and, therefore, his work is not to celebrate nostalgia (as Scorsese does with The Band), but to encourage the public to take part in social and political action, in a process where the stage is taken as a symbol for this participation.



**(5) *The Last Waltz* (Martin Scorsese, 1978) (6) *Baby Snakes* (Frank Zappa, 1979)**

During the rest of his film production, Zappa will go into these ideas in depth, avoiding the temptation of falling into nostalgia. In his movies from the 80s (such as *Video from*

*Hell, The True Story of 200 Motels* or *Uncle Meat*), he will keep on reflecting on how the political class (his references to censorship and freedom of speech) and the industry (he shows the producers of *200 Motels* as censors) habitually wield power unfairly. He also offers the addressees the possibility to participate in what is going on all the time, in the same way he did in his music.

Zappa understands that cinema, like music, is a way to express ideas, a medium which one has to take into account the whole of the communication process, in which the audience is a basic part. That's why his movie production is tenacious and does not give in to difficult conditions imposed by the industry. At the same time, his audiovisual creations form a coherent whole from the beginning to the end of his professional career. His work delves deep into his ideas for social mobilization, the improvement of the US educational system and resistance to the extreme right-wing politics represented by Nixon's and Reagan's Republican party. Cinema is also a way to launch these debates in a society (the United States from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) which is, in Zappa's opinion, totally immersed in the politics of ignorance. A situation Zappa devoted his life to fight against, constituting the *raison d'être* of his work.

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## 5. MY DOGS ARE BARKING

Andrew Greenaway

I have often pondered whether I am fit to comment on the work of Frank Zappa. I was introduced to his music by a musician, who subsequently lost interest in it himself. The person I spent most of my youth listening to music with was my brother; he's never really cared for Zappa's music. So my 'getting into' period was a pretty solitary affair - in fact, one of my earliest significant exchanges about Zappa was with my late grandfather, who asked me who that ugly sod on my bedroom wall was. Most people at school liked Slade, Roxy Music and David Bowie; I never mastered any instrument, but I always knew Zappa had much more going on than all of them. When I started work, I found some people who liked the 'other music' I was listening to with big bro', but no Zappa fans. It wasn't until I started a day release course in London that I met someone who actually owned one of his albums (*Zoot Allures*) - though he confessed to not being able to listen to it all the way through in one sitting.

By this time, my own obsession was spiralling out of control and I would shortly be off to see my first Zappa concert. Such was my excitement after the show that I managed to convince a couple of friends to see him when he returned to the UK early the next year (January 1978). They weren't interested in seeing him again the following month, or the next year! But I sure was (and did). And of course I saw him in action some more-a: in 1980, on my tod; in 1982, with Mrs Greenaway designate (who swore "never again", which, what with my impending nuptials an' all, meant I missed out in 1984); and then, finally, in 1988 - alone again, naturally. It was then that I came across (almost literally) the first issue of the British fanzine, *T'Mershi Duween*. Fred Tomsett's spunky little organ led me to find and befriend many like-minded souls and helped expand my Zappa knowledge ten-fold. But does this mean I'm any more competent to comment on Zappa's oeuvre? In truth, the one person who truly understood what it all meant died in 1993 - though many have tried to eruditely analyse his cannon since, with varying degrees of success.

If nothing else, Ben Watson's *Negative Dialectics Of Poodle Play* (Quartet Books, 1993) demonstrates that you can link Zappa fandom to any of your own pet obsessions, as well as investigate to the nth degree all the little clues to Zappa's oft-professed Conceptual Continuity. While much has rightly been made of Zappa's canine fixation, what of his obvious foot fetish? In her book, *Being Frank* (California Classics Books, 1995), Nigey Lennon alludes to the erotic acts performed with a rancid sock and purple suede shoe during her 'road romance' with Zappa. A cursory glance at his catalogue reveals the foot-related titles: *Brown Shoes Don't Make It*; *Stink-Foot*; *Can't Afford No Shoes*; *Sinister Footwear*; *Damp Ankles*; *Botulism On The Hoof*; and, lest we forget, the collaboration with George Duke that is *Old Slippers*. Closer inspection of his lyrics finds mention of white gym socks, toe-nails, rubbers, sneakers, galoshes, and a thong sandal. Lennon claims that Zappa's shoe became the 'thong rind' in the song *Andy*, though Zappa himself said that particular lyric simply referred to a callous that builds up when you wear a sandal. Either way, there was obviously something going on in his somatosensory cortex, right? So what of another Gibson SG loving composer who has made similar cross-references to the old plates of meat in a fraction of Zappa's output? Someone who has written songs called *Same Size Feet*, *Step On My Old Size Nines*, *Shoeshine Boy*, *Pedalpusher*, and lyrics about the shoe store, his left foot sock and pulling his foot from out of his mouth? Does that make Kelly Jones of the Stereophonics (for it is he) a podophile too? I very much doubt it. Only Zappa intentionally left so many signs for obsessives like me to follow, and that is one of the things that makes his work so endlessly fascinating.

The fact that *The Rondo Hatton Report* has been instigated is wonderful in helping to broaden our knowledge and understanding of Zappa. But it'll be some feat (cough) if anyone becomes fully qualified to comment authoritatively on Zappa's work as a result. So let's simply enjoy stitching these small articles together and hope that the response from this particular community is especially gratifying.

### **Part I – Frank Zappa and the Blues Lyric Tradition**

Face it, a lot of Zappa's songs aren't really about what they seem to be about. They shouldn't be taken literally. Perhaps it's better to say a literal interpretation (while certainly entertaining) is only one possibility and not Frank's true intent. Some songs are straightforward; it doesn't take a genius to know what songs like "Cocaine Decisions," "You Are What You Is," and "Dumb All Over" are about. But many of them are, on the surface, bafflingly weird, puzzlingly incoherent, or crazily nonsensical. For example, Frank admitted that "Electric Aunt Jemima" was written about an amplifier, but I doubt even a hardcore Zappaholic could have discerned that independently. As such, it should come as no surprise when music writers dismiss Zappa's lyrics as meaningless – *they simply have no clue.*

Also, Zappa's songs can be about many things simultaneously. Percussionist Ed Mann told me this while discussing "Baby Snakes":

*I think it's a bunch of things all at once. I think it's a person's tongue, probably a woman's tongue. It's also analogous of a penis. It's a bunch of abstractions rolled onto one...Frank did a lot of that kind of stuff. Abstract. You have to be willing to really entertain the idea of what an abstraction is. I think there is real meaning underneath all of it, but it's not necessarily all of it direct; saying this is about this and here's the concreteness of it all. Entertain the idea that it can be a series of abstractions, but it does mean something.*

Hmmm, and I always thought it was a clitoris.

### **Ponies**



Many old blues songs were sung in code. While African American listeners understood the playful sexual imagery behind the jargon, white listeners were in the dark. Sigmund Freud famously said that sometimes a cigar is just a cigar, but to Bo Carter a cigarette wasn't a cigarette ("*Cigarette Blues*"), and to Johnny Temple a pencil wasn't a pencil ("*Lead Pencil Blues*"). Ditto that for blues references to jellyrolls, biscuits, dough rollers, honey, hambones, dead shrimp, coffee grinders, bullfrogs, bumblebees, ranges in kitchens, ashes being hauled - the list goes on and on. The lesson here is that often a blues lyric (like a Zappa's lyrics) isn't really about what it seems to be about.

In his signature song, "*Pony Blues*," Charley Patton sang:

*Hitch up my pony, saddle up my black mare  
I'm gonna find a rider, baby, in the world somewhere*

Patton wasn't singing about a pony. He was talking about a young woman, someone he could "ride." "Rider" is a common blues term for sex partner (as blues artists sang *I know my rider if I feel her in the dark* or *It's some black snake been suckin' my rider's tongue*). I don't recall Zappa ever mentioning Charley Patton, but he was definitely a fan of Howlin' Wolf. Patton personally taught the blues to Howlin' Wolf, and Wolf later recorded an electric version of "*Pony Blues*." Frank knew this record and, I believe, used the term "pony" in a similar fashion.

In *Them Or Us (The Book)*, Frank referenced his old *Captain Beefheart Versus The Grunt People* movie script, specifically the part about Cecil's pony ride attraction. From a blues standpoint, it's easy to see Cecil's pony fixation and Larry Fanoga's singing "I want to ride a pony. A pony ride for me" as abstract metaphors for sexual frustration and longing.

By the way, Frank actually typed up a list entitled *Captain Beefheart Ideal Cast*, and guess who he wanted for the role of Beefheart's dad, Glen. That's right – Howlin' Wolf!

## Pigs

In his song “*Pigmeat Is What I Crave*,” Bo Carter sang:

*I love that pigmeat  
Don't bring me no old hog*

This song is not an homage to eating pork. A pig (*pigmeat*) is a young woman, and Carter won't stand for an old one (*hog*).

With this particular blues terminology in mind, the statement *I hear you've been having trouble with pigs and ponies* as heard on *Lumpy Gravy* can be interpreted as “I hear you've been having girl problems.”

## I'm the Hoochie Coochie Man

It's also quite common for blues songs to contain verses in which the singer, even though surrounded by oppression and want, boasts of achieving power, status, or desirability. For example, in “*I Will Turn Your Money Green*,” Furry Lewis sang:

*Follow me, babe, I'll turn your money green  
I'll show you more money'n Rockefeller ever seen*

In “*Rolling Stone*,” Muddy Waters (another of Frank's blues heroes) sang:

*Well, I wish I was a catfish swimmin in a deep, blue sea  
I would have all you good-lookin' women fishin' after me*

In “*Voodoo Child (Slight Return)*,” Jimi Hendrix, another artist whose blues component is often overlooked, sang:

*I'll stand up next to a mountain  
Chop it down with the edge of my hand*

## **It's Over There**

To the blues singer, success, freedom, and good times were to be found elsewhere. Basically, "It sucks here, so I'm going over there where things will be better." It seems the thing that separated want from prosperity was geographical distance.

Peg Leg Howell sang:

*I'm goin' to Tishamingo to have my hambone boiled  
These Atlanta women done let my hambone spoil* ("Tishamingo Blues")

Anyone want to guess what getting your hambone boiled means?

Jimi Hendrix sang:

*Gotta leave this town  
Gonna make a whole lotta money  
Gonna be big, yeah* ("Hear My Train A Comin'")

## **I Got A Black Cat Bone**

To the notions of going away and boasting of future success, blues artists also added the concept of a power object. In "*Louisiana Blues*," Muddy Waters sang:

*I'm goin' down in New Orleans, get me a mojo hand  
I'm gonna show all you good-lookin' women just how to treat your man*

Frank loved "*Louisiana Blues*." He played it on the air when he and Captain Beefheart did a radio interview.

Similarly, in "*I'm a Man*," Bo Diddley sang:

*I goin' back down to Kansas to  
Bring back the second cousin, Little John the Conqueror root*

### **What's the Meaning of This?**

How does blues lyric tradition apply to Zappa? Here's an example: On one level, "Montana" is a seemingly silly song about growing dental floss, but, taking the abstract/figurative approach, "Montana" is a blues tale.

Frank's going away:

*Movin' to Montana soon*

In Montana, he'll be successful:

*Gonna be a Dental Floss Tycoon*

He'll be independent and free of oppressors:

*By myself, I wouldn't have no boss*

Like Charley Patton, he'll have a "pony" to "ride all along the borderline":

*Just me and the pygmy pony*

He'll carry a power object:

*With a pair of heavy-duty Zircon-encrusted tweezers in my hand*

And he'll be respected:

*Every other wrangler would say I'm mighty grand*

### **I'm Not Satisfied**

Most blues songs begin by establishing why the singer is blue and describing why he/she feels the need to go away in search of a better life. Admittedly, "Montana" does not do this. That part of the scenario only comes to the listener who has knowledge of Frank's life and personal career assessment.

First, he hated where he lived. In *Cruising Down Memory Lane With Frank Zappa*, he told David Fricke, "If it sucks, it's in Los Angeles." In *Drowning In The News Bath, Return Of The Son Of The Portable Crumudgeon*, he was quoted as saying, "L.A. is like a big cancer cell...I used to stick up for L.A., but I don't anymore because there's no longer anything going on here aesthetically that's worth defending."

Second, Frank thought himself a failure. He was clear about this. In *Does Humor Belong In Music?* by Mr. Bonzai, he said, "I would say that the basic characteristic of my life is failure. If there is one thing that I excel at, it's failure--I manage to fail at 100 percent of the things that I do." In *Revolt Against Mediocrity*, Steve Lyons and Batya Friedman, quoted him as saying, "I would say that my entire life has been one massive failure."

Frank was not satisfied. There's a song on his first album, *Freak Out!*, called "*I'm Not Satisfied*." Dissatisfaction has always been at the heart of the blues. The line *I can't be satisfied* is found in many, many blues songs. Big Bill Broonzy released "*I Can't Be Satisfied*" in 1930. In 1948, Muddy Waters had his first hit record with a song of the same title, and it opens with:

*Well, I'm goin' away to leave  
Won't be back no more*

I've always found Frank's feelings of failure nearly impossible to believe. I always wished he was exaggerating for dramatic or comical reasons. My reluctance to accept Frank's statements stems from my admiration for the man and love for his music. I hate the idea that he wasn't happy or felt like a failure. My personal dissatisfaction stems from my belief that, given the opportunity to do so, I could have convinced him otherwise.

## 7. FRANK ZAPPA AND THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

by John Loska

In 1978, at the Nova Convention, before reading *The Talking Asshole* section from *The Naked Lunch*, FZ stated that he was not fond of reading. He then went on to elaborate that there were exceptions, Burroughs' masterwork being one such. Yet his use of language was extraordinarily rich and varied, leaving one to ponder if he was being a little coy in his claims.

A number of years back, I came across the well-known expression 'Freak Out', and used in the same context as the modern usage, in John Cleland's infamous *Fanny Hill*, a novel published in 1749! I was aware that FZ's coining of the phrase in 1966 had found its way into the supplements to the Oxford English Dictionary issued through the 1970s and 80s. This usage, however, 200 years earlier was unrecorded. Should I inform the OED? Procrastination, and a desire not to see FZ lose his lexicographic notoriety saw me do nothing; however, a few years past I noticed that the latest edition of the OED had indeed allowed Cleland to displace Zappa as the earliest recorded usage. Perhaps a Lou Reed fan had informed them!

The other week, I was asked my understanding of the derivation of the word pop as in 'pop music' Now, pop music is a subject dear to all our hearts, and, to quote the sergeant talking to the group at the army base in the Spinal Tap movie, "when I say I'm a fan of your music, I don't mean yours specifically, but the whole genre of popular music!". For some reason, I had erroneously assumed that the word pop, was derived not from a simple abbreviation of popular, but through the parallel medium of pop-art and an inception in the late 1940s from a Paolozzi collage and its subsequent transferral to music. On this I was wrong; but I was also equally wrong in my perception of the time of the original usage. It would appear that as early as 1862 the novelist George Eliot used the expression pop (music). Further delving into the dictionary reveals the derivation 'poppite', as a frequenter of pop concerts (groupies?) And then, in all its magnificence, right before one's eyes, in volume XII of the Oxford English Dictionary, one comes across the quotation from the Westminster Gazette in 1902;

“THE ITINERANT MUFFIN-MAN WHO VEXES THE SOULS OF DEVOUT POPPITES ON SATURDAY AFTERNOONS”, which is about a perfect description of a Zappa matinee performance as one could wish for.

Ben Watson has shown us some interesting, if implausible, links between Zappa’s lyrics and the works of Shakespeare and Joyce, amongst others, in his book. I suspect we should take Frank at his word, but, if so, where on earth were all those remarkable ideas and the wonderful use of language from? Was he as natural with words and concepts as he was with music; an innate talent, notwithstanding – or perhaps because of – his inadequate education?

## 8. WHEN ZAPPA PLAYED LIKE COLTRANE

Philippe Mérigot

Something struck me in the second volume of the *You Can't Do That On Stage Anymore* series, the purple one, the Helsinki concert: the guitar solo on *Inca Roads*. Not because it is the one incompletely heard on *One Size Fits All*; but because it is a Coltrane-like solo. More precisely, it resembles Coltrane's solos on *My Favourite Things*.

Coltrane usually played the song in this way: he begins with the theme and make a first solo; then McCoy Tyner takes a long piano solo with the same pattern in ostinato. He is followed by another Coltrane's solo. I consider this construction as a mystic quest. Because he is a redeemed, Coltrane often speaks of redemption.

The first saxophone solo is like floating, as if Coltrane was wading in the melody to find some enlightenment. The solo ends by a salvo of irritated notes: the despair of a man looking for answers and peace.

The second solo consists of two parts: the first one is very aggressive and tortured, as triggered by the salvo of the end of the first solo. Coltrane seems to fight with his soprano saxophone, but he only fights with himself (perhaps we can see it as a metaphor of the previous years in his life, when he was drug addict). But after this storm he calms down, seems to stagger, takes a rest on the theme, and starts the second part. Pacified. He plays with the same virtuosity, but instead of the telluric chaos, he flies in the light of the cosmos, waving upon altissimo notes in the higher register.

The same opposition can be found on Frank Zappa's solo in Helsinki. It begins at 2:04, quite peaceful, but with virtuosity and some aggressive short phrases. At 3:12 Zappa seems more excited. Till 4:12, Zappa's solo can be compared with Coltrane's first solo.

At 4:12, Zappa's dark chaotic Coltrane-like solo begins, with aggressive phrases culminating in the higher register. At 5:00, he is like staggering, so he takes a break



around 5:20, and at 5:34 begins the light cosmic solo; crystal sound on the guitar, just like on the soprano, before the arrival on the theme.

The architectures of the two solos are the same. But Zappa is not a mystic musician; he does not look for redemption. Even though *Inca Roads* is a cosmic song (and *One Size Fits All* a cosmic album), the works of Zappa and Coltrane are not underlyed by the same comprehensive world view, the same *Weltanschauung*. Coltrane covers a path; his music is linear. Zappa denies linearity: "everything is now". So he condenses in a shorter solo the fifteen minutes of Coltrane's travel.

Most of the coltranian part of the solo is absent from the *One Size Fits All* version. Actually, it was cut at 4:32. So I definitely prefer the *YCDTOSA* version. And I prefer the Helsinki Concert to the *Roxy and Elsewhere* album, even if this is an heresy for the zappologists. I grew up as a coltranian fanatic.

## 9. LA DÉRIVE UNCLE MEAT

by Didier Mervelet

On the evening of the 3rd of December, I was down in Valencia, Spain, with my girlfriend. This pleasant situation had been designed by Manuel de la Fuente Soler, one of our friends in the global poodle team. In the course of two years, Manuel, who is a distinguished teacher in communication at the University of Valencia, achieved a fantastic zappological feat: the creation of Spanish subtitles for eight Zappa movies. A *cicle de pel·lícules* was organized to make this work public. It took place from November 5 to December 8, closing with *Uncle Meat* which I had the honor to present.

Our trip to Valencia had been a little bit special: the reason why I made us miss our plane in the morning is so painful that I am not yet in an appropriate emotional state of mind to reveal it, even though I know that skidmarks are welcome in the columns of the *Rondo Hatton Report*. Anyway, we made it to Valencia, first by being inevitably ripped by Air France when buying new tickets; secondly, by flying to Barcelona then taking a train for a 3-hour trip to our final destination. Manuel caught us at 7 pm at the station, just in time to get to the projection which was planned for 7:30.

As we all know, the show must go on. As I entered the COL·LEGI MAJOR LLUIS VIVES auditorium, all the bad vibes accumulated during the day had disappeared. I stepped on the stage strongly determined to accomplish my zappological duties.

I had previously made some homework in Paris. Until then I never had taken the time to watch this movie seriously. I had in mind some of its well-known sequences – the large extracts from the play at the Royal Festival Hall in October 68, the shots from the notorious Berlin concert a few weeks before the London date, the scene in the shower with the hamburger... but for me, it was just another UFO from the Zappa videography.

Seeing the film again in my living-room – unfortunately with no French subtitles – confirmed this feeling. It was just another mess of a never-finished non-movie. What

else could I say except that it was another failed attempt by Zappa to be acknowledged as a major filmmaker?

Seeing the film two more times, I found some relief. Actually, I discovered, don't laugh, that it was equipped with plots. Yes, plots, just like in a normal movie. And, please, three of them ! Delicately entwined. Let me tell you:

- First plot: the usual Zappa trick about "Zappa filming Zappa filming, balablah". The film opens with Zappa in his bathroom, blablah, finishes in the same room with cinematographer Haskell Wexler ordering "Cut the cam !", blablah.

- Second plot: the political thriller (well, kind of). A musician called Biff Debris played by Don Preston needs a hit single to reach the youth market and thus change the world. Biff gets obsessed with "getting commercial", gets old and is then played by Stumuk, the baritone sax player credited on "Joe's Garage". Unfortunately, he fails to achieve his objective.

- Third plot: the love story. Back in 70, Phyllis Altenhaus, who works on the movie as assistant editor, falls in love with Biff when watching the 68 Royal Festival Hall rushes and seeing him turn into a monster. The scene first gives her the urge to vomit, but, with a little help from Zappa, she finally admits it actually gets her "hot". Phyllis and Biff quite happily get together.

Of course, there was this puzzling leitmotiv "He's using a chicken to measure it". What does Minnesota Tishman, first played by Carl Zappa then, getting old, by Massimo Bassoli, mean by that?

Anyway, my presentation went OK. Armed with my in-depth analysis of this "very difficult" film, as Manuel put it, I recall being ridiculously self-assured and peremptory. I had this little theory I was very proud of: considering the film was made of footage dating back to 1968, 1970 and 1982, the 1987 release date was totally irrelevant. I

solemnly declared 1987 was an "imaginary release date", just as Zappa was credited as "imaginary director" in the main titles. I loved that one.

I started off the post-screening discussion as self-assured as ever. A significant part of the audience had disappeared during the projection – a "very difficult film", as Manuel put it – but I didn't even notice it. I could have talked for hours, arrogantly answering questions and delivering new exciting zappological insights in between.

Then, a soft voice rose from the audience. It was Óscar Barberá Marco, director of the *escuela de Magisteri "Ausiàs March"* at the University of Valencia. Oscar is a good friend of Manuel's and, later in the night, we had a good time together in a fantastic downtown traditional restaurant.

Quite calmly, Oscar suggested that, maybe, *Uncle Meat* shouldn't be regarded as a film but rather as a piece of music, using the *King Kong suite* on the "*Uncle Meat*" album as a comparison. Maybe it was a bit useless to analyse it and, maybe, you had to take it as you take any major work by Zappa: in your face. Love it or leave it.

The discussion ended ok, no problem. But something had changed. I knew Oscar was right but felt uncomfortable with it. And then I got it: much too obsessed with the details of my dignified analysis, I had missed the main point. And the main point was : *Uncle Meat / The Movie* is a fuckin' piece of *grand art* ! Lost in the cascade of records Zappa released in the late 80's – 5 double compilation cds in 1988! – this "very difficult" film, which didn't even get any theatrical release, got unnoticed and uncelebrated. How stupid I had been to assume that 1987 was an "imaginary release date"! On the contrary, 1987 is for real: this is the year Zappa reached the last high point in his artistic creativity. The year he created his last masterpiece.

The time has come for me now, folks, to tell you the truth about "*The Yellow Shark*" (1992) and "*Civilization Phaze III*" (1993). Yes, I know, you love to hang around telling all your friends how wonderful those two last records by Zappa are, and how brilliantly

they close his discography. Well, you're wrong. They are the works of a sick and dying man, and maybe a little desperate on the side.

"*The Yellow Shark*" is an easy-to-use compendium of everything Zappa composed in the field of serious orchestral music. It is formatted for the ears of classical radio stations listeners.

"*Civilization Phaze III*" is a self-indulgent and redundant work. This posthumous piece, probably designed as such by Zappa himself, misses the point of opening new horizons. "Doo-bop" by Miles Davis, that's what I call "giving the finger to death" ! (This last remark is particularly aimed at irritating my good friend Ben Watson, who hates Miles Davis and his music).

Both records lack the legendary Zappa ferocity and offer only a parody of it – no, folks, *Welcome To The United States* is not funny.

So, I insist: *Uncle Meat / The Movie* is Zappa's last major original work. He's got everything you need to get down to your bad self. Do you a favor and get into it.

By the way, I was only joking about "He's using a chicken to measure it": I know what is measured with the chicken. The answer is revealed by Massimo Bassoli at the end of the movie. Think of something whose size may provide elements of sub-conscious tension.

My next submission for the *Rondo Hatton Report* will be about two other major uncelebrated last works by Frank Zappa: the found tape "Resolver/Brutality" and the piece known as *The Valdez Core*. Both unofficial and both consisting only of Synclavier music.

Of course, I may change my mind.

## 10. WAXING LYRICAL: WHY I LOVE FRANK

by Sarah Moore

I discovered Frank in my late 30's. A dear friend who is a hardcore Zappa fan – and indeed was a friend of Frank himself – had tried many a time to share his love of Frank's music with me. It just went over my head. I would wonder why it was that my friend was so enthusiastic. I didn't get it at all.

Then in a different lifetime, whilst still within this one, Frank struck me dead in my tracks. 'Oh My God!' There are two things in my life which on discovering them actually staggered me with the question 'Where has this been all my life?' Frank was one of them. When I reported my epiphany to the Zappa friend, he told me that Frank said once sagely said:

*"One day I hope I'm going to wake up and find a sufficient number of people outside of our hard-core audience have decided "These guys are great!" And I'm going to agree with them... I won't even bother to sit there and say, "What took you so long?"*

We all long for that day, don't we?

Strangely the number which hooked me was *The Dangerous Kitchen*. Perhaps an unlikely candidate for a Zappa introduction. It was hilariously funny and totally bonkers, but from then on I was intrigued to hear more. This song is like all of them, in that Frank reveals the everyday and mundane as being ludicrous and surreal. '*You can die from the danger, of the dangerous kitchen*'.

On hearing my excited news, and despite the sage words of Frank about the likes of me taking so long, my friend made me a great compilation which included amongst others *Don't Eat the Yellow Snow*, *Tinseltown Rebellion*, *The Blue Light*, *Montana*, and *Bobby Brown*.

With all these epic qualities it can only leave a girl in love with the man. I find Frank achingly sexy and can't bear the thought that we will never be lovers. It's his voice that does it for me. Both in song and the spoken word, the way he communicates to his audience, his band; such command, leadership, humour and humanity.

Why do I love him? A smile always spreads over my face whenever I listen to Frank. A smile of such admiration, it's incomprehensible that someone can be that original, witty and deep. Every time I have a moment with Frank, he leaves me feeling different.

*Camarillo Brillo*. "She carried on without a comma, that she was someone I should know". I laugh out loud every time I hear it, wonder where it all comes from, and marvel at the epic.

Frank possesses a lofty perception veiled in humour, and ultimately in humanity. Seductive and exhilarating musicality, I always feel a coming home whenever I listen to the blessed and luminous Frank.

## 11. ISN'T IT ROMANTIC, PUNKY?

Simon Prentis

So there I am, sitting around with friends over a bottle of wine one Friday night, watching an old Bogart film. We've decided to take in *Sabrina*, a *pseudo-noir* romantic comedy with Audrey Hepburn. Not exactly my first choice of entertainment for the evening, but I guess you need to remind yourself of the classics every once in a while. So far, so bad; but suddenly, in the tennis court, just as Bogie is making his move on the dame, the music starts to go all Zappa: and not just 'like' Zappa, but *REALLY* Zappa, a direct musical quote [and now, through the magic of cybercraft, anyone wishing to experience this moment for themselves can instantly view the relevant clip here: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCMn-TaHq\\_g](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCMn-TaHq_g) – skip straight to 2.44 if you find yourself getting bored...]

I struggle to place it for a moment, and then I remember: it's from *Punky's Whips*! What the \*&%\$?? What the hell is that doing in a Bogart film? My astonishment is such that I nearly fall off the sofa. My friends (who are not Zappa fans) want to know what the fuss is all about. When I confess, one of them says, 'Oh, but that's a really famous song. It's called, er – wait a sec – oh yes: "*Isn't It Romantic*"...'

This time I actually do fall off the sofa. Isn't that what Terry sneers, right at the start of the melody? That's what it's actually called? What hath Frank wrought?

A little googling establishes that it is indeed a *really* famous romantic song, one that's been covered over the years by everyone from Chet Baker to Rod Stewart. First inflicted on the world as the centrepiece of a 1932 film called *Love Me Tonight*, it actually forms the musical backdrop to little piece of cinematic history: a highly evolved travelling shot (for the time) in which the tune is passed from scene to scene in a sequence that starts out in a tailor shop with the oleaginous Maurice Chevalier, takes a ride in a taxi cab, hijacks a troop train, serenades a gypsy encampment (*Chunga*, anyone?), and ends up being sung on the balcony of a fantasy castle by the ever-pneumatic Jeanette MacDonald... But why take my word for it? You can see it for



yourself right here (although don't tell me you weren't warned to bring a sick-bag)  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGNQ7TrVDrg>.

How come I didn't know? I clearly have a severely deficient musical education, but then I've had a strong aversion to such *schmaltz* from early youth, and with the embarrassing exception of *The Sound of Music* have thenceforth avoided all contact with artifacts of that ilk, once memorably described by Uncle Frank as "*the ultimate form of absurdist comedy*" – though he doesn't seem to have derived much enjoyment from it. So where did it enter his life? It's probably not too much of a stretch to imagine that it might have been the turntable of his mother's "genuine lo-fi" record player, on which (as he writes in his 1971 tribute to Edgard Varese in *Stereo Review* magazine) she used to play a 78 of *The Little Shoemaker*. [Extraordinarily, someone has posted a seemingly unrelated clip of themselves doing just that: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5E15-YvsCkA> so we can gauge for ourselves the likely degree of his disgust with her taste in music.]

As it happens, the Gaylords' version of *The Little Shoemaker* spent 19 weeks in the US charts in 1954, the year Zappa turned 14, and also – coincidentally or not – the year that *Sabrina* was released, with *Isn't It Romantic* on the soundtrack. This is the context for FZ's transforming encounter with Varese's music as he excitedly replaced the wretched *Little Shoemaker* with his precious copy of EMS 401, "*turned the volume all the way up and placed the all-purpose Osmium-tip needle in the lead-in spiral to Ionization...*"

But there is reason to think that it wasn't just *Sabrina* where he would have heard *Isn't It Romantic*. As those of you who make it through the *Love Me Tonight* clip will note, the tune has lyrics. And in the original studio recording [which – of course – you can listen to here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2PxTF2vgAmg&NR=1>] you discover that the lyrics are highly relevant to the *Punky's Whips* theme:

*I've never met you, yet never doubt, dear  
I can't forget you, I've thought you out, dear*

*I know your profile and I know the way you kiss,  
Just the thing I miss on a night like this.  
If dreams are made of imagination, I'm not afraid of you, my creation,  
Without a blush I give my lips to you to take,  
Why should I quake? We're not awake...*

Though couched in 'old-school' language, that's the essence of Terry's homo-erotic fantasy over the publicity photo of Punky Meadows, right down to the detail about the profile, the lips and the giving thereof. Zappa was not just making fun of Bozzio; he was using the opportunity to settle a score in extravagant style, as the lyrics and the music attest. Once it appears, in *Punky's Whips* the melody is given the *Holiday in Berlin* treatment, the band parodying the ditty's smug certainty in a deliciously out-of-tune rendition that drips with contempt, ending with the emphatic stabbing thrust of the final augmented chords. A little piece of revenge served very cold indeed.

The question that intrigues me is: did the rest of the band know? Or was this just a private joke that Zappa inserted into the song, having them play the melody, even getting Terry to name-check it in passing, just to amuse those who did? It wouldn't be the first time. I've never forgotten the shock of finding out – when he told me about it one day – that the out-chorus of *Dancing Fool* contains a Japanese phrase put there just because it amused him, and which no-one would – or could – have noticed otherwise, because of the way it's sung. You'd just never expect it.

But this is one of the great delights of his music, that you can know and love it for so long, and still find yourself being surprised. I've been listening to *Punky's Whips* for 30 years – ever since attending 5 straight performances at the Hammy Odeon in 1978 – and had never known about *Isn't It Romantic*. Likewise, not being a jazz aficionado, I'd not heard Lionel Hampton's *Midnight Sun* (though with his love of vibes, I'd long thought Zappa must have been influenced by him). So until Andy Hollinden told me about it last year, I was completely unaware it was the inspiration for that distinctive descending fur-trapper motif from *Nanook Rubs It* (right after "who was strictly from commercial") which

had always seemed so quintessentially Zappa. And of course it is, though more as evidence of his virtuoso eclecticism.

Because the references are so incredibly diverse. As he once said, "*There's no-one who could hear what I do who has any idea of what went into it and what it really means and what it really says. Statistically, the odds are just too great.*" But that doesn't matter. The music is enough on its own, the rest is just a bonus. You hear what you know. Growing up with a background in classical music, I'd heard all the Stravinsky and Holst in *Absolutely Free* (for example) straight away, and just assumed that everyone else did too. But they don't, necessarily. Backstage with Ray White after the ZPZ concert in New York last year, the discovery fresh in my mind, I told him about the *Midnight Sun* quote. He was just as astonished as I had been. But while we were talking about it, Scheila Gonzalez, Dweezil's sax player, strolled by and said "Oh yeah, *Midnight Sun*. Everyone knows that, don't they?" As someone who has actually played with Lionel Hampton, I guess she had an advantage.

And that's why everyone who thrills to their own private insight or obsession (all of us, in fact) should contribute to *The Rondo Hatton Report*. Even though it's obvious to you, it may not be to everyone else. And we'll enjoy you sharing the luurve. Crowdsourcing conceptual continuity clues. You know it makes sense.

PS By way of a coda, anyone who loves 'Punky's Whips' should check out this superb piano rendition by Ian Tanner, which helps highlight the pooched-out succulence of the atonal arrangements that pepper this fabulously complex song. Comedy music? Bah!  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2X712X3Lvg0>

## 12. FRANK ZAPPA VERSUS THE PEOPLE

Pacôme Thiellement

The album *Sheik Yerbouti* (1979) can be seen as one of the strongest and most misunderstood political gestures in Zappa's work. This misunderstanding reaches a peak with the song *Broken Hearts Are For Assholes*, an unfriendly song, hard to justify from an ethical point of view, in which a man (also married, a father and an international celebrity) takes it upon himself to rail against people who are unlucky in love, the abandoned, and all those suffering from unreciprocated feelings in today's society. This album and this song constitute a political recalibration of the overall meaning of Zappa's work, emphasizing the significance of the poetic manifesto 'Plastic People'.

This increased emphasis directly confronts that of American and British political hegemony, which ranges from the politics of public relations – the 'manufacture of opinion' for the irrational masses in the manner of Edward Bernays, Freud's nephew (who sold cigarettes to women by presenting them as phallic symbols) – to Abraham Maslow's 'hierarchy of needs'. From this emerges a market for 'lifestyles' which directly inspired the political campaigns of Reagan and Thatcher, marked by a net focus on the theme of 'individual freedom' (permitting a return to the uninhibited liberal political economy advocated by Hayek, and, above all, protecting the interests of private corporations). From *Sheik Yerbouti* onward, Zappa's songs address themselves directly to this new electorate, a 'floating' electorate (the famous 2-3% which "changes everything"), the part of the population primarily concerned with 'self-realization', and now the main electoral target for politicians first of the right and then of the 'left' (the right does not need inverted commas – the left, almost always).

The work begins with *Zoot Allures*; both the song *The Torture Never Stops*, which can be seen as an epic introduction to this new phase of his work, and of course the briefer *Disco Boy*, a veritable trailer for *Sheik Yerbouti* and the albums that follow it. If, for advisers to the political establishment in the years 1980-90 (who did not hesitate to present themselves as a 'new elite'), the egoistical 'self-creation' of the voter must be at

the heart of politics, and a candidate must play on this 'creation' like a virtuoso on his violin – Zappa's work functions as a device which destroys the preconceptions of the listener, both aesthetic and political. We are all familiar with Zappa's famous phrase "politics is the entertainment branch of industry." In this context, entertainment (good entertainment) becomes, conversely, an enterprise designed to wholly re-politicize the listener. Of course, all this was inaudible to listeners of the time, who merely saw Zappa raging against pop (*I Have Been In You*), punk (*I'm so Cute*), disco (*Dancin' Fool*) and proto-bobo (*Jewish Princess*).

With time, these things become clearer. Thus *The Shock Doctrine*, Naomi Klein's 2008 book highlighting the relationship between torture and unbridled liberalism in the ideas of Milton Friedman, in which successive disasters are required to hold the population in check. Between 1976 and 1984, the consequences surface in the popular music that Zappa explores: the relationship between a disco beat and torture (a subject explored obsessively in the movie *Baby Snakes*), which we can now interpret as people trying to come to terms with a lifestyle imposed from above. This work is ongoing: mesmerizing rhythms remain a constant in nightclub music, as does torture on the political horizon; sovereign is he who can exercise violence with a clear conscience.

A few years ago, the British documentary film-maker Adam Curtis characterized the twentieth century as the "Century of Self", a period punctuated by the terrifying figures of Edward Bernays, Anna Freud, Donald Ewen Cameron and Abraham Maslow. Curtis' hypothesis is that the issue of individual satisfaction has become increasingly central as a motivation for voters, to the point where attempts to ignore the purely selfish individual vote are now doomed to failure (which partly explains the accelerated rightward drift of Clinton and Blair). Zappa's work in the late 70s and 80s meets this problem head-on, presenting itself as a monstrous deconstruction of the pseudo-spontaneity of 'individual desire' and its transformation into 'lifestyle'.

The aim of Zappa's work is liberation from preconceived notions and structures. So Zappa's music allies political subversion with traditional Eastern thought in an unmediated fashion: the struggle against preconceptions plays both at the commercial level (you love because you are programmed to do so) and the individual (you are not what you are). If "broken hearts are for assholes", it's because we have absolutely no excuse. We retain a sentimentality toward ourselves which we believe is personal even though we may have been inoculated politically and commercially. To realize that our hearts are conditioned and determined, and to move from a passive (emotional, sentimental) to an active (intellectual, creative) engagement with music is the first step towards enlightenment.

### 13. ARE YOU HUNG UP?

Hugo Vanneck

My introduction to Frank's work was *We're Only In It For The Money*. I was an oversexed 15 year old who forever felt undersexed and had just discovered LSD. Up to then my only listening pleasure had been "*At The Hop*" by Danny and the Juniors, "*Tom Dooley*" by The Kingston Trio and "*The Battle of New Orleans*" by Johnny Horton, all belonging to an elder brother. He had them on an old Akai reel-to-reel valve tape recorder with picture speakers that you hung on the wall. It sounded really good. I lugged this heavy fucker on the bus from my tiny village to the nearby small town where the owner of the album lived and recorded it, together with *Ummagumma* by Pink Floyd. Now, some 40 years later, I still listen to Frank's album but haven't listened to Pink Floyd for 30 of them. Along the way I've also acquired another 60 odd of Frank's albums.

What was the appeal? This was 1970, when hair seemed very important, and here was a guy telling me that it didn't matter if it was long or short or sprayed or partly greyed and assured me that one day we could take our clothes off when we danced and wouldn't be ashamed if we were fat. Nobody else was saying that, at least, not where I was in the English countryside or at the grammar school I attended.

The very first words on the album, "Are you hung up?" cut right to the chase as far as I was concerned. Both LSD and Frank Zappa's music seemed to delve into the matter of being hung up. At a subconscious level I had noticed that this was a defining quality of much of the world I lived in and a lot of energy was required just steering around people's hang-ups. At home, with my painter mother and the passed-on memory of my very dead but also very unconventional father, there were no forbidden subjects of conversation and no religion. But outside it was a positive minefield of both. And Frank was pointing at it.

So, I recorded the album, lugged the Akai back on the bus to the village and listened to it endlessly for the next 2 years. Here was a piece of work that pointed at what was

wrong with people, made vicious fun of their shallowness, was positive about human possibility, all set to some extraordinarily good music, the likes of which I'd never heard before. Of course, for a long while I thought he was telling other people to look at themselves but the truth of "I bet you'd do the same if they was you", eventually sunk in.

"Ever take a minute to show a real emotion?" No? Well, maybe you should consider what the 'ugliest part of your body' actually is. The punch line of that song set me off on a long road that I am still travelling. All along the way Frank has been providing incredible insight into the human condition, into my condition. If I were to list every little nugget of wisdom Frank has uttered in his music I would be here for hours, and hours, and hours. So, let me leave you with this:

UNBIND YOUR MIND  
THERE IS NO TIME  
Boin-n-n-n-n-n-g  
TO LICK YOUR STAMPS  
AND PASTE THEM IN  
DISCORPORATE  
AND WE'LL BEGIN  
FREEDOM! FREEDOM!  
KINDLY LOVING!  
YOU'LL BE ABSOLUTELY FREE  
ONLY IF YOU WANT TO BE

So there!



#### 14. ON "OH NO" FROM WEASELS RIPPED MY FLESH

Ben Watson

The rain pours down on the nothing new. The hardcores meet and compare lists. They really get uptight if you try and move the smoke. Syncretic potential left as inert and useless as the stiffness atop a Pritt Stick left without a cap. But I was left without a cap on *my* gluesome mental apparatus and it runs everywhichway, like Andreas Rausch's young Frank sniffing the world thru a gasmask with the filter torn away. Bob Dobbs says rock crit went down the pan because *Rolling Stone* scribes didn't learn from *Finnegans Wake* to treat their copy as an object examinable by all the senses, like an album. He never saw *Bananafish* magazine, then. Tomb ouch noose in the Frisco Auditorium. The smell of storage mold on my copy of *Pass The Peas* by the JB's. Driving string beans to Utah, the righteous actuality of practical action by the unideological proletarian. Handle each of my prose objects as you object to the linguistic pile-up under my name. Fantasy, thy name is rubble. Double Trouble before they dropped the Go Go bomb for peepee-Funk perfume. Wynona Carr's "Please Mr Jailer" as the *Ur-Illinois* Enema Bandit, another grotesquerie to file under Grotesquery. My quarry questioned what I had in my pants. It really did. It made me think. It made me drink the goddamn ink! My loafer gaze. My pocket booty. My ethos.

Oh No, I Don't Believe It. Your culture. Your pathos. Your hornrimmed glasses. Your pants from Gap. Your broolly from Knirps. You wear a white suit and you're going to save the world. My melody lilts a mocking bird atwirp asing amok among the after rafters. The rain sprayed lightly down, down on the formic heap. Here you are, ant, respond to it. And the response was: I'm hip, and but of course I am offended by you making me pay attention to tiny letter sequences beneath my very nose hairs. Hot and cross and Dave "Baby" Cortez. If you have no daughters, give them to your sons. Tongue kissing! Lip smacking!! Vanishing cream!!! Gradualness-of-vanishing being based on the idea of Not-Being already being there, only *not yet noticeable*. "No" as the space between every positive character printed or screened. Your name reversed begins with it, John Lennon.

Yoko Ono had once an ounce of correctitude. The reduction of Modern Art to a cartoon scribbled in black-and-white, fr'example. Each statement that would stand being written down in black on white is a white toothed shark swallowing you up head-first, Hirst. The simplicity of the sign in simon purity: Hans Haacke exhibiting the Exxon logo as the ultimate example of cutting-edge Minimalism. Cut out my sample with the pinking shears, Griselda! Okay Yoni as the world's pin-up 60s vulva. Black felt tip as key to a garden of delight. No no no, take me you hole.

But your black is my white, my vice your versa. Annie Had A Baby! The novelty reply-song as the very icon of discourse, like a sign in V.N. Volosinov. In reflex light the power to slay the Gorgon, only in dialectic can we make sense: *Sgt. Pepper* meaningless without *Money*. "Oh No" versus "Imagine" before the song was written; antithesis dangling, looking for its faeces. And the whole song born from a single name: Ono. Welcome to the Palindrome, Frankie.