

***Frank Zappa and the And*. Edited by Paul Carr. Surrey: Ashgate, 2013. 247 pp. ISBN 978-1-4094-3337-8.**

Zappology, a potential name for the study of Frank Zappa's life and work, is in rude health. The appearance of Ashgate's Paul Carr-edited collection *Frank Zappa and the And* follows numerous publications from leading (self-described) 'Zappologist' Ben Watson, as well as a range of academic and non-academic books and articles on Zappa, many of them written by contributors to the current volume (though Watson is notable by his absence). The unusual range and breadth of Frank Zappa's work, which went from underground to pop, concrète to classical, theatre to film, and satirical to surreal, makes for obviously juicy study. Its 'ontological depth' (p. 13), in Carr's words, has meant that Zappa has inspired polemicists and defenders alike from across the spectrum. Some praise its postmodern variety and pragmatism, whilst others anxiously seek to reclaim Zappa for the modernist vanguard. Some laud his politics, whilst others lament the absence or lapses of politics in his music. Others still push Zappa towards the posture of high art, against those who emphasise his mesh of institutional and cultural crossings.

Such interpretative variety is present in the current volume, which wisely seeks to avoid the pursuit of any 'unified interpretative code' (p. 13). Instead, a sequence of thirteen chapters (Carr's Introduction included) ranges widely and with variety of scope across topics including technology, modernism, the avant-garde, the mediation of Zappa's death, religion, comedy, horror, Zappa's films, influence (on and of Zappa), politics, and Zappa's production of Wild Man Fischer's *An Evening With Wild Man Fischer*.

The breadth of this sequence is impressive, with a number of incisive theoretical perspectives and useful themes being brought to bear on Zappa's music. The framing concept of the book, the 'And' of the title that serves as a connecting bridge to a particular thematic focus within each individual chapter, in this way opens the discussion up to a variety of standpoints. This is helpful, as even with its additive frame the book struggles at times—perhaps unavoidably, considering the intensity of its focus on Zappa and also the power of Zappa's concepts *Big Note*, *Xenochrony*, *Project/Object* and *Conceptual Continuity*—to avoid repetition across its chapters. At the same time, one sometimes also struggles to keep up with Zappa chronology when reading the book, despite the conceptual continuity (!) in evidence across the chapters. It might not have been a bad idea to provide a simple timeline of Zappa releases somewhere in the book as a reference point for potentially confused readers. Such a timeline would help a book that presumably hopes to interest audiences both specialist and non-specialist alike (a desire helped by the generally clear expression and argument of many of the chapters, some semiotic complexity in the Introduction notwithstanding). Paul Carr's excellent chapter on Zappa's technological displacements of 'time, space and place' is one of the few to set out a clear and detailed chronological narrative.

The creeping repetition present in the book might have been alleviated by the pursuit of a broader range of subjects. Gender, for one thing, only really gets addressed

in any detail in three chapters (1, 5 and 6), despite its prevalence as a marker in Zappa's work, and even there doesn't inspire the most edifying or extended discussions. Pop music *as such* also seems to me to be a little neglected. Whilst many chapters discuss Zappa's pop practices and tastes, these are almost always framed in terms of genre play, satire, subversion and so on. Martin Knakkegaard's formalistic (and sometimes unclearly laid out) chapter on modernism in 'Brown Shoes Don't Make It', for instance, draws up some shaky, loaded oppositions between popular music and modernist art (see pp. 168-9), and also insists on Zappa's 'disfigurement' of pop materials. The worry is that Zappa's experimental practices, his subverting bricolage and his technological and compositional innovations, function as alibis for some of these experimentally inclined writers. What about the pure pop pleasures (if such things exist) of Zappa's guitar solo in 'Watermelon in Easter Hay', for example, or the many other moments in his work of similar aesthetic richness? Pleasure is much discussed in Claude Chastagner's fascinating if problematic (see below) analysis of Zappa's resisting politics, but this is chiefly only in the light of one track, 'How Do You Like My New Car/Happy Together'. David Sanjek's mention of *Ruben and the Jets* is one of the only places where the pop side of Zappa is given much shrift, and even there it is couched in dismissals of the genre being 'pasted' (pp. 159-161). It is not that I'm looking for blanket journalistic praise, far from it; critical interpretation and analysis is crucial in a book of this kind. I would simply suggest that the popular music side of Zappa's work, at a remove from or in addition to its couching in satire and modernist subversion, sometimes feels neglected here.

The occasional reluctance to discuss Zappa as a pop practitioner in the book is accompanied by a tendency to over-emphasise Zappa's exceptionalism, and also, at times, to build hagiographies to this exception. (Zappa surely at least bears comparison to figures such as John Zorn or Heiner Goebbels or even Damon Albarn.) Hagiography haunts the book in other ways too. Whilst you don't go to a collection like this for takedowns, it would have been nice to read a dissenting voice or two, for example on the idea that Zappa's stylistic eclecticism might embody some troubling cultural tendencies in Western societies towards universalising mastery (as a displacement of nineteenth century universalism, where the hegemony of single Western styles of music was presumed). Or even just to read some critique of the conventional reception of Zappa.

But despite these calls for more dissent and also for more attention to the pop side of Zappa, this is an enjoyable and erudite collection with only a few weak spots. The aforementioned Knakkegaard chapter could do with a little refining in terms of setting out the form and lyrical structure of its track early on, as could Nick Awde's piece on Zappa and satire (which might be simply too broad a conceit for a single chapter in this book). Chastagner gives a sensitive description of what he sees as Zappa's personal politics of resistance organised around deviant Deleuzian 'modest events' (p. 116), despite his occasionally moralising tone, but this position's weakness vis-à-vis collective concerns and action needed more working out. Manuel de la Fuente provides a less insightful account of Zappa's potentially contradictory libertarian politics (a term

strangely absent from both his and Chastagner's chapters), chiefly though his location of Zappa in an anti-right-wing camp, when as Chastagner shows the situation is a little more complex than that, but otherwise provides an interesting overview and interpretation of Zappa's film work. Finally, Geoffrey I. Wills' chapter on the cultural influences that shaped Zappa's music, particularly his 'Story-Songs', devolves into a laundry list of possible links. Wills' rhetorical manoeuvring in attempting to persuade the reader of these influences becomes less and less convincing and interesting as the chapter goes on.

These slightly problematic sections are as I said exceptions in a frequently strong book. Richard J. Hand on Zappa and horror and Kevin Seal on Zappa and religion provide clear and concise archaeologies of the importance of these themes across Zappa's oeuvre. Hand argues that Zappa's work, despite appearances, has a 'profound relationship' (p. 17) with the carnivalesque subverting power of cheap monster movies and the profaning dressing up rituals and disorder of Halloween. Though the carnivalesque argument is stretched a little thin at times in the chapter, Hand provides a useful angle on Zappa's aesthetic politics and a detailed overview of pertinent works nonetheless. Seal, on the other hand, counters Zappa's seeming sense of religion as 'pure folly' (p. 49) with a perceptive reading—despite some shaky psychologising of the artist—of Zappa's investment, as read through Zappa's *Big Note* and *Conceptual Continuity*, in a 'unifying force or energy', which for Zappa, Seal argues, can be identified most readily in or as 'Music' (p. 65).

Carr's aforementioned chapter on 'time, space and place' in Zappa's music, where a number of theoretically insightful concepts, from 'virtual performance' to 'virtual live performance' (pp. 137-9), to Zappa's *Xenochrony*, Kealy's 'Art Mode' (p. 135), Bolter and Grusin's 'hypermediacy' (p. 138), and Moorefield's 'reality of allusion' (p. 142), are either put forward or drawn upon to describe how Zappa's use of technology displaces, manipulates and fuses the titular phenomena of the chapter, is a highlight of the book. (The chapter is complemented nicely by the clear and insightful—despite a slightly disjointed conclusion—writing of James Gardner on Zappa and the 'razor' in an earlier chapter.) Michel Delville's wide-ranging, thickly drawn and theoretically astute account of Zappa's links with the avant-garde is another. Delville analyses the subtle distinctions between the Mothers of Inventions' avant-garde dimensions and those of Zappa's later solo career, and shows how Zappa's integration of his art with his life (p. 189), his use of various modes of collage (p. 190), his blurring of institutional genre lines (p. 193), and the 'semantic ambivalence' of his lyrics (pp. 195-6) all index his 'resistance to the neutral, affectless realms of Jamesonian postmodernism' (p. 199), placing him in the avant-garde tradition instead.

Remaining chapters from Paula Hearsom (the only female contributor) on the journalistic mediation of Zappa's death and Sanjek on Zappa and Wild Man Fischer keep up the generally high standard of the book. Despite a slightly muddled opening, the former examines fruitfully and forensically the 'cultural memory writing' (p. 216) in evidence in obituaries of celebrities, concluding that obituaries 'consolidate our cultural memories of a person' (p. 214), and that 'posthumous fame becomes a shaping dynamic

of collective memory and of a musical legacy' (p. 215). The latter, meanwhile, overcomes some pedestrian early-goings to offer a series of perceptive conclusions about a possible reading of Fischer's Zappa-produced album, and about Fischer himself.

These and the other strong chapters help to build an appropriately politically and philosophically layered, integrated but eclectic mosaic on Zappa which should prove a further boon, despite some problems, to the already thriving subdiscipline of Zappology.