Performing Funk: A Study of Texture, Counterpoint, and Agency

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The handout provides more information, musical examples, and bibliography.

What specific attributes in a musical texture "Make It Funky"? This project examines funk music from the 1960s and 1970s as a dynamic developing texture. Funk performers mobilize pentatonic figurative schemas to form a web of collaborative counterpoint, building from a pentatonic-referential base to form expansive and rhythmically complex blues-inflected, diatonic, and chromatic textures.

The multilinear textures of funk contribute to implications of virtual social agency, musically modeling an ideal collaborative space. This is a significant feature of Afrofuturistic music.

Key Terms

Figure A virtual structure of reference perceived at a level of preunderstanding by performers and listeners (Danielsen 2006). *Figure* maps onto *gesture* to form larger expressive units.

Metrical projection shift Drawing from Hasty's theory of metrical projection (1997), Attas explains projection shifts as "defining moments where listeners are likely to shift their focus from one projective duration to another because of changes in the musical texture" (2016).

Refractive counterpoint Adapted from Hatten (2018). Used here to refer to similar melodic content combined in different parts at displaced time intervals. Refractive counterpoint based on pentatonic figures is often encountered in soul, funk, blues, and rock music.

Conclusions for further research

A unique idiom of 16th note figuration shapes metrical qualities in funk music. Syncopated patterning in 16ths indexes to binary human movement (as in down/up guitar strumming), resulting in energized embodied motion that enlivens patterning at broader metrical levels.

Christopher Hasty's work on metrical qualities provides a useful analytical tool in modeling the multilinear rhythmic fabric in funk, contributing to a methodology for analyzing the funk song as dynamically developing texture.

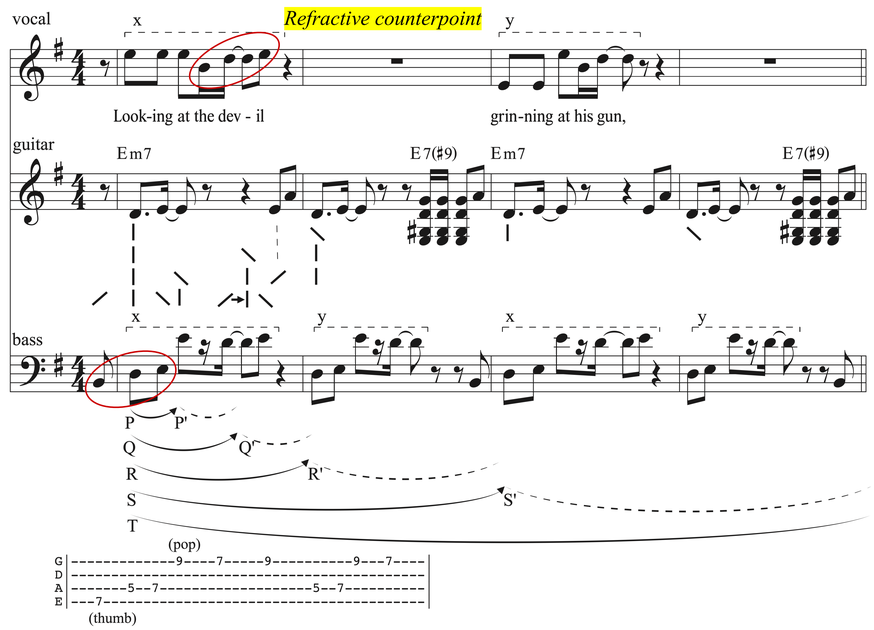
There is an embodied correlation between the fast rhythms of funky playing and the deployment of pentatonic figuration: the idiomatic ease of pentatonic moves facilitates the agile and percussive playing that characterizes funk.

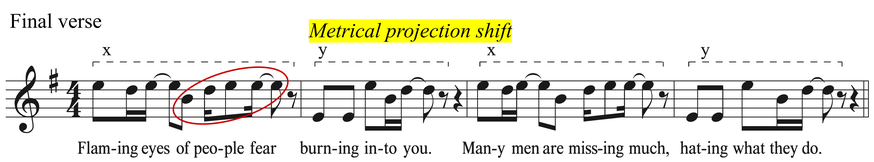
Pentatonic-referential figures appearing simultaneously at multiple metrical levels are a distinctive feature of the improvisatory counterpoint that permeates funk textures.

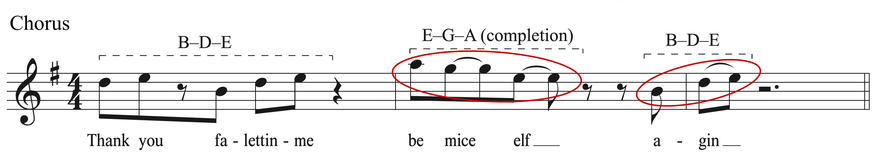
Metric qualities (Hasty 1997)

- *Beginning*
- *Continuation*
- *Anacrusis*
- *Anacrusis–Becoming–Beginning*

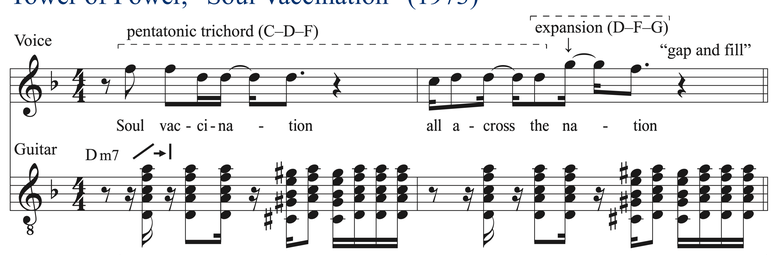
Sly and the Family Stone, "Thank You (Falletinme Be Mice Elf Agin)" (1969)





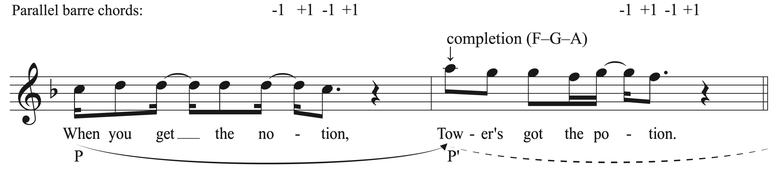


Tower of Power, "Soul Vaccination" (1973)



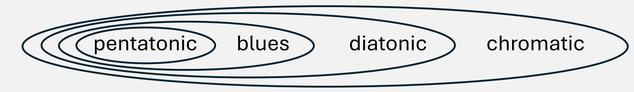
Syncopated pentatonic melody

Up-strumming and lateral guitar moves stabilize 16-note projection



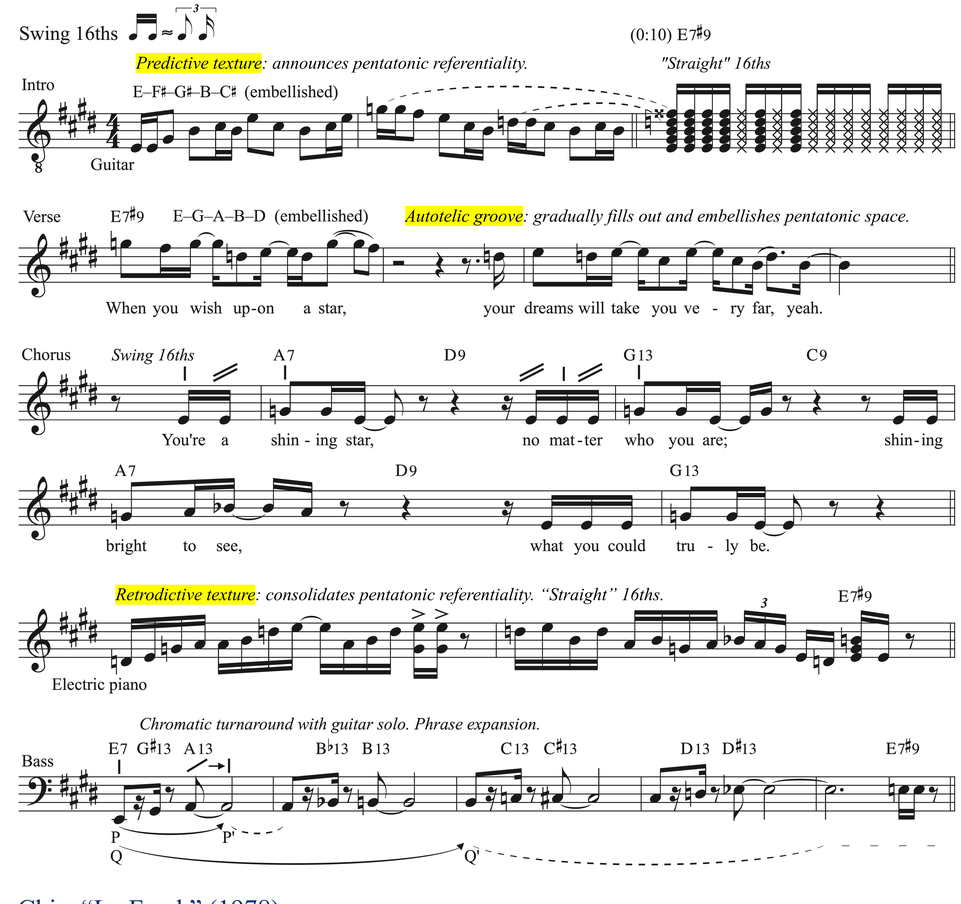
Pentatonic completion coincides with downbeat stability

Pentatonicism as image-schematic *container* at local and large-scale levels:

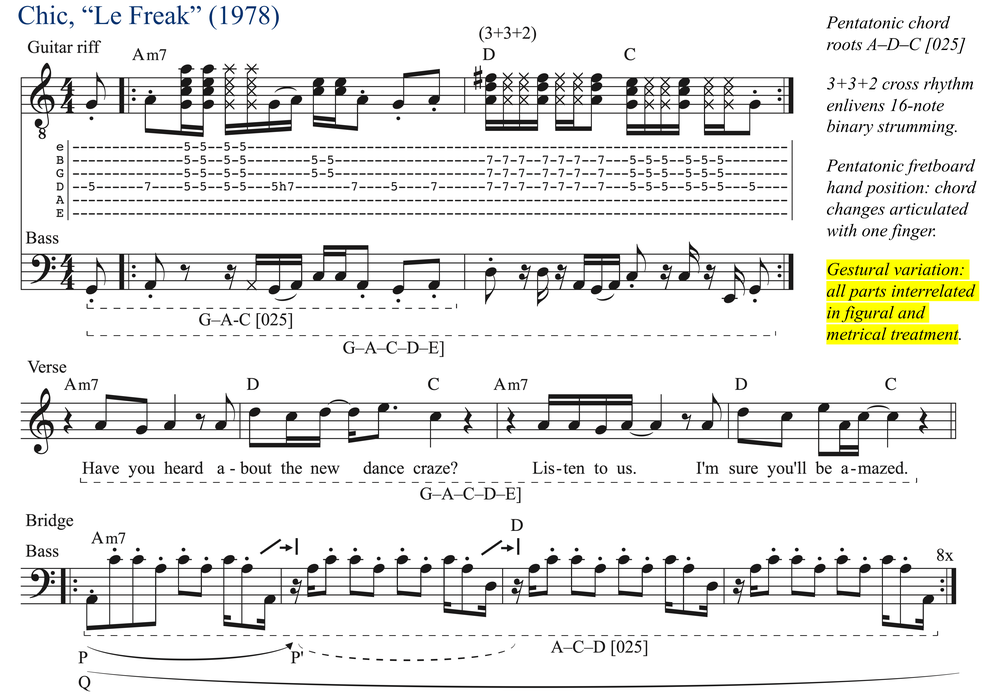


containment — *a culturally grounded low style* ⟷ *expansion* — *a transcendent high style*

Earth, Wind & Fire, "Shining Star" (1975)



Chic, "Le Freak" (1978)



Pentatonic chord roots A–D–C [025]

3+3+2 cross rhythm enlivens 16-note binary strumming.

Pentatonic fretboard hand position: chord changes articulated with one finger.

Gestural variation: all parts interrelated in figural and metrical treatment.

Metrical projection shift: Half-time harmonic rhythm with gradually ascending strings focuses attention on broader hypermeter.