

Steve Reich & George Clinton's Parliament-Funkadelic: Momentary Musical Utopias

IAN BUNKER

KEYWORDS: Teleological, Temporality, Parliament-Funkadelic, "Mothership Connection", *Drumming*, Steve Reich, George Clinton

ABSTRACT: This paper explores ideas of musical temporality in the intersections between composer Steve Reich's work *Drumming* and Parliament-Funkadelic's song "Mothership Connection." Classical composers in the 20th century have increasingly experimented with non-linear time structures despite a tradition of teleological, or goal-directed, organization while genres of popular music have primarily relied on cyclical processes for musical organization. The paper discusses kinds of musical time, linearity, non-linearity, motion, and stasis. It examines Steve Reich, minimalism, analyzes Reich's composition *Drumming*, and discusses the music and meaning of George Clinton, Parliament-Funkadelic, and "Mothership Connection." Then the paper relates commonalities between Reich and Clinton in musical approach and aesthetic intention.

In showing the teleological nature of largely cyclically constructed music the paper aims to partially deconstruct the arbitrary duality of Western, teleological, linear musical organization with non-Western, cyclical, non-linear music. In connecting minimalism and funk, genres culturally codified as high vs. low art, and in finding parallel meanings, the paper aims to legitimize non-linear or cyclical musical organization as a fundamental structural principle of modern music and bridge the gap between the two in arguing that both genres use similar temporal arrangements to fundamentally seek the same goal of momentary musical transcendence.

STEVE REICH AND GEORGE CLINTON'S PARLIAMENT-FUNKADELIC: MOMENTARY MUSICAL UTOPIAS

Music exists in time. It occurs within a span of absolute time. Absolute time is clock time, the mechanical flow of seconds into minutes into days. Music is a moment in time, and listening to it becomes our experience of that moment. Music fundamentally alters our perception of time. Listening to music “we simultaneously experience musical time and ordinary, or ‘absolute,’ time.”¹ Musical time is the special unfolding of time within a piece of music that suspends our impression of absolute time. Musical time has its own temporality apart from absolute time. The difference between musical time and absolute time is “the difference between the time a piece takes and the time which a piece presents or evokes.”² We hear moments in music within their own relative temporality, not in terms of seconds or minutes.

There are many ways we experience musical time, and many ways time is organized in music. Listening to music, time can seem to speed up, slow down, or stop completely. Musical time “[. . .] is like sacred time: repeatable, reversible, accelerating and decelerating, possibly stopping.”³ Sacred time is a term borrowed from anthropology describing when ordinary time is suspended in ritual or ceremony: “experiences of a moment of time stretching indefinitely and infinitely are described in many languages and with many names. It is called the ‘eternal instant’ in the Russian legend, ‘the little point’ by Meister Eckhart, ‘kairos’ in Greek, ‘sakrama’ in Sanskrit, ‘dahr’ in Arabic, ‘satori’ by the Zen Buddhists, and ‘waqt’ by the Sufis.”⁴ This is the deepest level of consciousness accessed while listening to music. In essence, any concert, performance, or act of deeply listening to music is its own ritual, its own gesture of

1. Jonathan D. Kramer, *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1988), 3.

2. Kramer, 7.

3. Kramer, 17.

4. Henry F. Orlov, “The Temporal Dimensions of Musical Experience,” *The Music Quarterly* Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul., 1979): 377.

separating the time spent in music from the time spent outside of it.

Listening to music our experience of time changes. A piece of music may occur in the span of ten minutes, but while deeply listening it may seem as if no time has passed. I imply 'deeply' listening as an act apart from simply hearing musical sounds. The latter experience implies distraction and inattention, and may actually make time seem to drag. Embodying music through dance is another process, like deep listening, that suspends our ordinary temporal perception and subdues the experience of the mechanistic unfolding of seconds.

A transcendent moment in temporal perception is the experience of a moment with a twofold nature. One aspect is that "the moment was indefinitely extended, the other is that the span of time was instantaneously experienced [. . .]."⁵ One can fully experience a moment of suspended and instantaneous time in the act of listening to and enjoying music. Through active appreciation one adds time to their life subjectively by sewing moments of fullness into the temporal tapestry of life.

This is all to say that music can be pleasurable and deep. Beyond the sounds, the notes, melodies, rhythms, and tones, what defines a piece of music is how the sounds unfold in time. In this paper I am interested in different conceptual approaches to the temporal organization of music. How do the musical events transpire and what is the relationship between them? How have conceptions of musical form changed over the years and where do they lead? How does the relationship between the events create satisfying music? Tracing a path from early modernism through minimalism to funk music I will explore the temporal organization of works by Steve Reich and Parliament-Funkadelic that access the transcendent level of musical time.

TEMPORALITY: LINEARITY AND NON-LINEARITY

Primary to understanding music as a temporal art are the ideas of being and becoming, moving and stasis, of linearity and non-linearity. Musical sound exists in the moment

5. Orlov, 378.

and yet is perpetually arriving to become something else. Music “has a timeless existence apart from any performance, and yet it allows us to move through time (and allows time to move through us) as we listen.”⁶ How do we experience the time that moves through music? Do we experience the events within that time as related or separate?

Music relies on a combination of motion and stasis. Melodies move forward but may repeat, whole sections progress but may also repeat, fast sections are interspersed with slow ones, and moments of silence come in between moments of sound. Melodies and progressions imply motion, repetition implies stasis. Almost all music relies on both linear and nonlinear processes.

Linearity can be defined as “the temporal continuum created by a succession of events in which earlier events imply later ones and later ones are consequences of earlier ones.”⁷ The classic example of linearly-constructed music is a Beethoven symphony. The work as a whole is a narrative. It is teleological in construction, a flow forward in time that works by the accumulation and interrelationship of all its parts. The music of the fourth movement makes sense only by grace of the music of the first. A symphony’s linearity is what is so highly prized in the composition. The musical narrative, the unfolding of events in time, its unified structure and careful planning of musical moments leave the listener with a feeling of wholeness.

Tonality is a huge component of linear musical development as well, as tonal music works in a fundamentally teleological way. The dissonance of a dominant chord creates the expectation of its resolution to the tonic, or home key. The expectation of this resolution creates a kind of temporal magnetism, meaning that the direction of the music is shaped by this pull. The music in between these clear points of tension and release function as ways of increasing or prolonging the expectation of resolution. Even though “nothing really moves in music except vibrating parts of instruments and the molecules of air that strike our eardrums [. . .] people who have learned how to listen to tonal music sense constant motion: melodic motion, motion of harmonies toward

6. Kramer, 19.

7. Kramer, 20.

cadences, rhythmic and metric motion, dynamic and timbral progressions.”⁸ The implied motion of parts moving forward in time creates the overall effect of a goal-directed piece of music.

By contrast, non-linear music does not set up goals and expectations. While progressing in time, it does not create the feeling of forward momentum. It is music that simply ‘is.’ Non-linear time is “is the temporal continuum that results from principles permanently governing a section or piece.”⁹ The use of cyclical structures is a fundamentally non-linear process. Non-linear music does not function as a structured narrative so much as a series of endless beginnings, an idea tinged with Western conceptions of Buddhism and ‘the eternal now.’ This non-directed time may also be called vertical time: “a single present stretch out into an enormous duration, a potentially infinite ‘now’ that nonetheless feels like an instant.”¹⁰ Despite the fact that the music is progressing in time, it makes us feel like it’s out of time. This necessitates a change in our perception of the music. The listener is forced to step back and listen without expectation.

Classical music with strong linear elements was written mainly to be heard consistently from beginning to end in a concert setting. Experienced as a whole, the narrative structure of the music could be appreciated on a deep level. But recording technology allows the listener the ability to access the music, at any part, wherever they should please. The question is whether the work makes sense when randomly accessed. If one starts listening to the piece in the middle of the third movement does it sound continuous?

Arguably, modern listeners are not even programmed to hear continuity in the same way. Modernity has fundamentally changed our sense of expectation. The modern listener is often used to hearing music discontinuously. Recording technology has fundamentally changed the way we listen to and experience music. It has completely changed the way we think about music. Music is no longer bound to the concert ritual. The music can be freely accessed at any time, repeated at a whim, and listened to in any number of environments where other ambient sounds mix freely.

8. Kramer, 25.

9. Kramer, 19.

10. Kramer, 55.

IAN BUNKER

Recordings also give the modern listener access to music from other cultures around the world. New temporal models mingle with the old in modern consciousness and “as the distinction between composer, performer, and listener is being redefined by technology, [. . .] the nature of time, and hence of meaning, in music is also changing radically.”¹¹ Technology creates the ability to compose directly for the recording. A recorded track posits its own temporality, existing in its own time-sphere and can be played or accessed at any point. Recording technology has reduced the importance of teleological structures in Western music.

The history of Western music from the late Romantic period onward can be thought of as the deconstruction of teleology. Western European art music from the Enlightenment towards the end of the Romantic period tended to take a narrative form, paralleling creative evolutions in literature, as well as stemming from advances in science and philosophy that all pointed to an increasingly causal and teleological world. The narrative construction of Western art music, both operatic and instrumental, is so pervasive that to nineteenth century Europeans it would have seemed “a structure of time as pervasive as a fact of nature [. . .].”¹² But composers from Debussy onward developed new temporal arrangements in their music, from the stringent non-repetition of the twelve-tone school to the obstinate ostinatos of Stravinsky.

The idea of non-linearity in music exists largely by contrast with forms inherited by narrative tradition of the Western canon, the body of literary and musical works important to shaping Western culture. Non-goal-directed music has deep roots in the experience of Western composers trying to expand upon their musical tradition. Composers such as Debussy and Stravinsky wrote music in which “we first encounter true harmonic stasis: no longer the tension-laden pedal points of Bach but rather segments of musical time that are stationary and have no implication to move ahead; no longer textural constancy as an overlay to harmonic motion but now the freezing of several parameters into miniature

11. Kramer, 80.

12. Susan McClary, “Rap, Minimalism, and Structures of Time in Late Twentieth-Century Culture,” in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, edited by Cristoph Cox and Daniel Warner (New York: Continuum 2004), 291.

eternities.”¹³ This is music composed with a different set of artistic parameters, built with an alternative conceptual approach.

For Debussy, it was the exposure to non-Western music that would prove to be a catalyst to his change in thinking about musical time. Attending a concert of a Javanese gamelan orchestra at the World's Fair 1889 Paris Exhibition, Debussy “heard sonorities that were allowed to be themselves, that did not exist primarily in functional relationships to other sounds that were not participants in an upbeat-downbeat compositional world.”¹⁴ Debussy's music is among the first in the Western tradition to explore alternative temporalities. Debussy was “just the first of a distinguished line of Western composers drawn not only to Asian musical practices, but also to the philosophies and theologies that sustain them [. . .] the list would also include a virtual Who's Who of 1960s minimalism.”¹⁵ Exposure to ideas and musical practices outside of Western culture increasingly developed and changed Western music.

Another oft-cited example of non-teleological (i.e. non-Western) music is Balinese music. Balinese music “contains rhythmic cycles which repeat seemingly (to Western ears) without end, but the Balinese do not think in terms of specific durations to be filled by ‘meaningful events.’”¹⁶ The music is shaped cyclically rather than linearly. Each layer has a line and direction on a micro level, but because of the repetition the music as a whole is heard not as progressing but rather perpetually existing on its own terms.

Culture and tradition play a significant role in this different temporal organization. At the risk of over-simplifying broad cultural trends, it can be said that “ideas of cause and effect, progress, and goal orientation have pervaded every aspect of human life in the West.”¹⁷ In Bali, “activities are understood and appreciated not as means towards goals but rather as inherently satisfying in themselves.”¹⁸ Though this usually applies more to notions of pre-World War I European society, these same trends of a goal-directed, cause-and-effect society strongly apply to the US

13. Kramer, 44.

14. Kramer, 44.

15. McClary, 293.

16. Kramer, 24.

17. Kramer, 23.

18. Kramer, 24.

IAN BUNKER

as cultural inheritor of Europe. Our collective notion of history is a narrative progression. Technology continues to evolve in pursuit of the capitalist, goal-driven “American dream.” Our culture is deeply, inextricably teleological.

The way the history of music is written further shows this. The popular narratives of the historical trajectory from the Renaissance to the Post-modern, the development of music from monophony to polyphony, the evolution of notation, all are teleological conceptions. The modernist twelve-tone German school, Schoenberg, Webern, and Berg, worked to advance and break from the linear, tonal tradition exploring momentary and discontinuous time. The Darmstadt school of post-WWII Germany continued the Teutonic tradition of musical innovation with the development of Serialism. This is an example of the clear narratives music history textbooks trace. Musical trends, like lines through time, are continuously drawn toward the present.

Further continuing the tradition of musical innovation (again seeing history as a line forward in time) avant-garde musical thinkers experimented relentlessly with alternative structures of musical time. John Cage’s experimental piece *4’33”* puckishly forced the audience into the ultimate unwitting thought experiment. He instructs a performer to simply raise the lid of a piano, sit quietly, and then close the lid. What is going on during this silence? Why select a specific time frame for arguably nothing to happen? This is an instance of the ultimate non-directed time. The time span and what happens (or does not happen) is the whole point.

MINIMALISM: STEVE REICH AND *DRUMMING*

Minimalist or ‘process music’ relies on non-linear time. Though Minimalist music seems to be nothing but linear motion through time, “in such pieces the motion is unceasing and its rate gradual and constant, and because there is no hierarchy of phrase structure, the temporality is more vertical than linear.”¹⁹ While different stylistically, Minimalist composers share similar

19. Kramer, 57.

non-teleological temporal approaches in their reliance on repetitive forms and non-set time frames.

What also unites the Minimalists, despite the diversity in the backgrounds, attitudes, and music, is their access to recordings of non-Western music: the “four path-breaking American minimalists –LaMonte Young, Terry Riley, Reich and Glass—all immersed themselves in non-Western music, whether Indian raga, Balinese gamelan, or West African drumming.”²⁰ Their access to different styles of music from around the globe is an advantage that previous generations of composers did not have to the same degree. This is crucial in the study of post-modern musicians because for the first time in history “all music past and present, nearby and far away, were, thanks to recording and communications technology, simultaneously and equally accessible to any musician in the world.”²¹ Access to recordings opens a world of musical possibilities by showing the possibilities of the world beyond the narrow scope of one’s training and upbringing.

Steve Reich epitomizes the synthesis of Western education, musical exposure and training with non-Western influences. By the age of fourteen he had already “experienced three simultaneous musical epiphanies: he discovered Baroque music, twentieth-century music, and bebop.”²² At Cornell he wrote an undergraduate thesis on Wittgenstein, studied Hindemith’s textbooks and Bartók’s *Mikrokosmos* with Hall Overton, and at Juilliard he studied with Vincent Persichetti where he eventually wrote a serial composition for string orchestra.²³ All this is to say that Reich is considerably educated in Western music; yet for all this he found himself inexorably drawn to jazz, “infatuated with the modal jazz of John Coltrane, with its rhapsodic improvisations over long, static harmonies.”²⁴ Rock-and-roll and Motown soul also informed his musical life, and finally caused a break with his study of serial music.

Reich continued to develop his musical language, searching for a music that did not aim to operate by means of sheer complexity.

20. Robert Schwarz, *Minimalists* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996), 9.

21. Richard Taruskin, *Music in the Late Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 369.

22. Schwarz, 51.

23. Schwarz, 54.

24. Schwarz, 57.

IAN BUNKER

By 1968 he had already established elements of his musical style, as he announced in his essay “Music as a Gradual Process”, “What I’m interested in is a compositional process and a sounding music that are one and the same thing.”²⁵ The music itself is a process; its existence becomes a sound entity unfolding in time. Again, while this may seem linear temporally, really it’s as if one moment were stretched out long enough to observe all the particularities and nuances of its momentary existence. Listening to the musical moment “can be like looking at a piece of sculpture.”²⁶ We can choose to ignore the moment or embrace it, but in embracing it mentally “one can participate in a particular liberating and impersonal kind of ritual. Focusing in on the musical process makes possible that shift of attention away from he and she and you and me outward toward it.”²⁷ The shift in perception is away from the self and toward the musical moment, the ‘it’ described. This is ‘sacred time,’ time immersed in a momentary eternity.

Reich took his interest with alternative temporal structures to another level by studying with Ghanaian drummer Alfred Ladzcpko at Columbia University who encouraged Reich to travel to Ghana in 1970. There, he immersed himself with members of the Ghana Dance Ensemble, taking lessons by rote with master drummer of the Ewe tribe Gideon Alorworye, and recording as well as sitting in with the ensemble.²⁸ He found out that his music was already using many West African musical elements. Reich’s music was also polyrhythmic, rhythm-based, structurally repetitive, percussive, and “a ritualistic activity that subjected personal expression to communal process.”²⁹

In Reich’s essay from 1973 “Postscript to a Brief Study of Balinese and African Music” he discusses the issue of non-Western music being learned by Western composers.³⁰ He argues for a place where an admittedly Western composer can access non-Western music without appropriating or simply imitating

25. Steve Reich and Paul Hillier, *Writings on Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 34.

26. Kramer, 57.

27. Reich, *Writings on Music*, 36.

28. Schwarz, 71.

29. Schwarz, 72.

30. Reich, *Writings on Music*, 69.

them. Being conscientious of his role as an American composer being exposed to music from other cultures, Reich writes that one should endeavor to create original music “that is constructed in the light of one’s knowledge of non-Western structures.”³¹ Reich applies the lessons learned of West African musical structures with his own musical language in *Drumming* (1971).

This nearly ninety-minute long piece is written for a unique ensemble. It is “scored for a nine-piece percussion band plus a piccolo player and two women vocalists singing ‘vocables’ (nonmeaningful syllables).”³² The music is structured around a repeating twelve-beat rhythm. Harmonically the piece is static, never venturing from F# major. But Reich’s ideas of gradual musical processes unfold dramatically in the piece in the form of timbral contrasts and hemiola patterns created by alternating emphases on various parts of the beat. This is music that challenges the listener to hear it as a series of events unfolding in time as well as a whole sound entity that offers up its sonic existence through gradual changes.

Drumming involves a necessary organic elasticity, as transitions must involve the performer’s discretion for this music to work. Reich’s directions involve comments such as “At [bar] 9 only drummers one and two continue, and after several seconds of getting comfortable in close unison, drummer two begins to slightly increase his tempo so that after 20 or 30 seconds he has finally moved one quarter note ahead of drummer one [. . .].”³³ Throughout the piece, Reich’s directions written in the score control the timing of events. His written directions create the musical phasing effect, propel the music, and are key to guiding the transitions. The rhythms and notes in the various musical cells or bars, as Reich refers to them, are meticulously notated, but the exact timing of events is instructed to be left to the performer’s feel. This is conceptually the same as writing rubato in a score, meaning it is up to the performer to realize this effect. A classical chamber ensemble will play a ritardando or accelerando in a similarly

31. Reich, *Writings on Music*, 71.

32. Taruskin, 379.

33. Steve Reich, *Drumming: for eight small tuned drums, three marimbas, three glockenspiels, male and female voices, whistling and piccolo* (New York: Hendon Music, Boosey & Hawkes, 2009), 2.

intuitive way, guided by the collective musical feeling.

The same higher level of collective consciousness, of group dynamics, is totally necessary to perform *Drumming*. Far more than simply reading notes on the page, the performers are instructed to feel out gradual tempo changes between each other and perform sectional transitions. But Reich has written the musical DNA of the piece, the flow between sections, the timbral changes, and the shifting pitch collections into a unique combination of written instructions and musical blocks that creates what is arguably a consistent, thought-out, long-scale, narrative, quasi-symphonic form. While this work can be heard as one continual stream of music, as it would in live performance, it can be divided into movements. These movements can be differentiated by the changing of instrumental timbres.

The first movement presents the accumulation and disintegration of complex polyrhythms between eight small tuned drums. This is a movement defined by the percussive timbre of mallets on drums. The switch between hard to soft sticks creates a sectional change within this movement. Building from a single note in the beginning, the music develops to a steady patter of percussion so persistent it is almost the sound of raindrops. This movement is the journey through stages of lower-pitched percussion.

The second movement switches to the brighter sound of marimbas and female singers singing vocables. The first section of this movement is defined by lower pitches in the marimbas. The next section presents higher pitches and a new repeating melody. The third section introduces a new collection of even higher pitches. Throughout, the vocalists weave in and out with their vocables. Gradually, the lower pitches disappear and only the high notes in the marimbas continue to sound.

The section then phases to the third section, the glockenspiel movement. A clear sectional transition can be heard in Reich's instructions to use rubber mallets on the glockenspiels at first, and then switch to wood mallets. The sound of the rubber mallets is more closely related to the timbre of the marimbas, and functions musically as a bridge to the bell-like sound of the wood mallets. Performers are instructed to whistle pitches, and the

piccolo is introduced. These two sounds merge with each other, and are both in roughly the same register as the glockenspiel figures. About halfway through this movement a new melodic pattern has reinserted itself, and the rhythm has flipped around. All lower pitched frequencies have dropped away. By the end of this movement all sound below F#7 has dropped away. Only the glockenspiel's high F# remains, repeating a consistent rhythm. This functions as a special moment in this work as a whole, a moment of pause and a clear destination.

Gradually the repeated F# is joined by the full instrumental forces of the ensemble for the intense finale movement. The marimbas and lower-pitched percussion join, each playing a single line. Each line grows in rhythmic intensity. The lines split and there are six lines playing instead of three. The lines split again and there are nine lines playing. Reich has indicated a series of phasing rhythms that increase the polyrhythmic complexity. The singers and piccolo come in again. The last page of the score is a full page of music: three glockenspiel lines, three marimba lines, three drum lines, one line for each aggregate polyrhythm created by each instrument, two lines for voices and one for piccolo. The piece ends as Reich instructs: "After these and other resulting patterns have been sung and played for a while, all performers end together."³⁴

The final section of *Drumming* is just like the finale movement of a symphony. All the themes have come back, somewhat transformed, and the piece ends with a dramatic, drawn-out coda. In *Drumming* the themes or motives may be thought of as instrumental timbres, and transformation is the new timbral contrast wrought by the interplay between the instruments previously not heard together. The single pulse on the high F# that connects this movement to the third is a reference to the music of the first movement, thus the fourth movement begins rhythmically similar to the first movement. It starts up again the same musical idea of a multitude being drawn from a single voice.

Though different on a number of levels than a symphony, conceptually '*Drumming*' fulfills a narrative structure similarly in four movements. The first movement explores possibilities in the

34. Reich, *Drumming*, 28.

sound world created by the phasing various pitches with strictly struck percussive. The second movement fulfills pitch expectations created in the first by focusing on the clear pitched tones of cycles of marimbas. The marimbas move higher in pitch as the movement progresses and the voices increase the listener's awareness of the higher registers. The third movement takes the listener even higher by phasing to glockenspiels which also increasingly ascend in pitch. The first three movements effectively trace a line upwards in pitch towards the glockenspiel's high F#7, which functions as a moment of clarity or a cathartic silence after the intense cycles of activity. The fourth movement then effectively re-starts the piece and fuses all the movements together musically.

The listener experiences a full journey through a diverse sonic world incorporating sounds both struck and sung, pitches with short decay and notes with sustained vibrations, moments of polyrhythmic super-complexity and moments of ethereal washes of pentatonic melodies. By the end of the piece the listener has run the gamut of sounds, and is transformed along with the music.

Listening to *Drumming* analytically requires an active remembrance but appreciating it requires a conscious forgetfulness. The glockenspiel movement elevates the listener beyond all lower pitches, achieving its musical effect because of the listener's memory of those pitches. But as the ear absorbs only those high sounds one must forget all lower pitches to appreciate the musical moment. Remembering the music of the beginning leads one to appreciate the music of the ending. But only by being entranced in the moment does the listener 'get it.' The pleasure of the microcosm subsumes the totality of the macrocosm, only to be replaced by it at the end.

How is this any different than traditional classical music? Culture has trained listeners to focus on their musical memory to hear classical works as "teleological or end-orientated, because all musical events result in a directed end of synthesis. The composition appears as a musical product characterized by an organic totality."³⁵ On this level, *Drumming* is fundamentally no

35. Wim Mertens, "Basic Concepts of Minimal Music," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. Edited by Cristoph Cox and Daniel Warner. New York: Continuum 2004, 307.

different than a symphony. It is a learned skill to construe linearity in a musical work. One can choose to hear musical events as a succession, remembering music occurring earlier in the piece and hearing subsequent music as a result. Or one can hear every phrase, gesture, or sound like it stands alone. One can hear causal linearity, or the lack thereof, into really any music. Listening to music and understanding different stylistic conventions is an acquired skill: “we would hardly expect a Martian to be aware of the linearity in Schumann or Beethoven, much less to be able to exercise free choice in relating to that linearity.”³⁶ It is primarily with practice and cultural familiarity that one hears teleological development.

The hypnotic state in which the work places the listener is the most crucial context in which the rest of the music should be heard. I hear the piece as an experiment in inducing the altered consciousness created through musical time. The “sacred time” of music truly emerges in the context of the work as a whole because the music has an additive hypnotic effect. *Drumming’s* linear structure merges with its non-linear aspects. While musically the work does not necessarily set up expectations to be fulfilled in later parts, mentally it does. Its non-linear, repetitive elements help create the hypnotic feeling. *Drumming* should also be heard in the context of its performance aesthetic. Performances felt like a kind of ceremony, the performers clad all in white linen, moving in tandem, facing each other, no one person in any position of ascendancy.³⁷ The visual component of this performance adds a great deal to the effect of this music.

Drumming is an important work because not only did it challenge basic avant-garde notions of “contemporary classical” music with its assertion of a non-teleological temporal ordering but also because it proposed a kind of social utopia informed by African musical practices. This kind of performance practice is very different from the hierarchical symphony orchestra presentation, where the conductor is like a military leader and the musicians his soldiers. This coincided with the work of English ethnomusicologist John Blacking. In the book *How Musical is Man* he argues for a “soundly organized humanity” in opposition to

36. Kramer 60

37. Taruskin, 379.

IAN BUNKER

the hierarchical organization of the Western musical tradition, in which only a small part of the population benefits from musicality at the expense of the rest. Reich's *Drumming* presents an alternative social and musical utopia.

GEORGE CLINTON, PARLIAMENT-FUNKADELIC AND "MOTHERSHIP CONNECTION"

George Clinton similarly creates utopian visions in the collective work of what would become known as Parliament-Funkadelic. Comprised of a rotating ensemble of musicians and bands, a "fifty-plus member aggregation of geniuses, lunatics, has-beens, wanna-bes, architects, saboteurs, and hangers-on [. . .]," the P-Funk experience nevertheless began as "a doo-wop group called the Parliaments in 1956 [. . .]."³⁸ After passing through the Detroit Mo-town gauntlet with little relative success, George Clinton masterminded the creation of two bands: Funkadelic and Parliament. Funkadelic was in conception a grungy, psychedelic funk/rock band dressed on stage as "a group of ghetto circus clowns, with an over amped rock sound that never seemed to end."³⁹ Parliament was more of a funk/R&B band with a smoother gospel flavor.

However, the two groups often featured the same musicians. The difference was in name only, but "playing as two bands, Funkadelic (playing 'rock,' which is associated with whites) and Parliaments (soul for black radio), the notion of 'double-consciousness' introduced by W.E.B DuBois in 1903 was exposed."⁴⁰ Collectively these groups are known as "Parliament-Funkadelic." Their subsequent fusion in the early 1980's into one performing force, "The P-Funk All Stars," as well as their shared mastermind and musicians, merit their consideration as one musical force: P-Funk.

The early addition to the line-up of "keyboardist Bernie Worrell, a child prodigy [. . .] who was trained in classical music at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston and Juilliard

38. Rickey Vincent, *Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996), 231-232.

39. Vincent, 234.

40. Vincent, 235.

in New York City [. . .] provided an eerie landscape of melodic sophistication and complexity that opened the doors for a fantastic form of fusion to occur.”⁴¹ Worrell’s knowledge and experience of the European musical tradition combined with elements of classic funk, blues, and gospel to create music with layers of complexity. Over the solid grooves of the band Worrell interjects keyboard parts with complex harmonies and a trained sensitivity to long-form development. Clinton’s decision to incorporate the keyboardist was based on Worrell’s versatility, he “could take any groove and make it Beethoven, Bach, or any jazz thing you want it to be, right within the groove [. . .].”⁴² The music of P-Funk represents the synthesis of European techniques and harmonies with African musical aesthetics and forms to create the archetypal African-American music.

Funk stretched the time limits of soul music, at least on recordings. Soul musicians were often limited by the standard of the three-minute single; this forced a condensation of otherwise long-scale forms into minute distillations non-representative of otherwise more complex temporal arrangements. Though it had been invented decades before, the “longer time-scale enabled by the LP format was not immediately made available to African American musicians.”⁴³ By the early 70’s, however, the cultural grip of the 78 RPM single had been loosened and artists were able to record longer-playing forms. This is to say that all along musicians had been playing long form structures, carefully arranging and balancing the timings of moments. Recordings of live performances of gospel and soul-music attest that “such performances had always involved extended exercises in applied musical teleology during which the cyclical structure of the composed ‘song’ was merely a pretext.”⁴⁴ This is an important difference that recorded versions of songs tend to obfuscate.

Whether meticulously planned or collectively improvised,

41. Vincent, 234-235.

42. Tony Bolden, “Groove Theory: A Vamp on the Epistemology of Funk,” in *Journal of American Studies* Vol. 52, No. 4 (2013), 20.

43. Robert Fink, “Goal-Directed Soul? Analyzing Rhythmic Teleology in African American Popular Music,” in *Journal of the American Musicological Society* Vol. 64, No.1 (2011), 206.

44. Fink, 207.

IAN BUNKER

African American music is teleological because “insofar as any kind of African American music derives from the gospel drive of the downhome church, one could argue that it partakes in a mechanism of uplift that implies goal direction at an almost metaphysical level.”⁴⁵ There are clear formal ideas at work in practice, clear goals and expectations set up through the accumulation and repetition of ideas, contrasting music may delay expectations, but it all works towards a moment of musical synthesis and climax that fulfills the expectations and brings the music together. While not encoded as a tonal progression, the accumulation of rhythms, textures, and riffs builds toward a point. Part of the confusion over linearity vs. non-linearity in Black music comes from the artificially constructed stereotypical duality of the European/teleological vs. African-American/non-teleological:

In a discourse still dominated, like musical academia itself, by the white racial imagination, African American popular music is not supposed to have goal direction [. . .]. Musical blackness is expected to be different, to be about existential freedom, about the joy of the intensely felt moment [. . .]. Our music must exhibit goal direction, this line of reasoning goes, while their music is free to groove.”⁴⁶

Parliament-Funkadelic’s “Mothership Connection” both grooves and becomes. Comparing the recorded version on the album “Mothership Connection” with a live performance from Houston 1976 will reveal the long-form linearity in performance built out of the aggregation of cyclical processes. While seemingly simple in construction on a theoretical level, the song relies on a complex array of performance practices to become a multi-faceted teleological construction.

The song is divided into two sections, or two primary grooves. The first section is essentially in a major key, featuring notes of the

45. Fink, 207.

46. Fink, 185.

G-flat major pentatonic scale. An accumulation of riffs develop over which Clinton voices the role of “Star Child,” the cosmic funkateer. The drums, bass, and guitar lay out a groove in 4/4 time that repeats every couple bars. The keyboard plays counterpoint to this solid foundation, playing background textures, sometimes joining in unison and other times providing musical responses. The horn section plays an interlocking musical response to the rhythm section. The vocal section sings: “if you hear any noise it’s just me and the boys hittin’ it.” Clinton continues to lead the song, spouting funky aphorisms and developing the P-funk meta-narrative.

There is musical development within this section, not just a static groove. After the back-up vocals sing a couple choruses, the horns play another part featuring prominent upper chord tensions, 9ths and 13ths, as if prefacing the subsequent sections of this piece. The rhythm section continues to develop their seemingly simple part. There are minute variations that play with rhythm, ornamenting the line, delaying the beat. The horns blend their riffs, adding the tail phrase featuring upper tensions with the head of their original phrase. Then Clinton sings: “We have overcome, for I am here.” This signals the sectional change. The second section smoothly shifts gears to the relative minor: the G-flat minor pentatonic mode. The horns play an ascending line to hold a D-flat over the iv chord, C-flat minor, creating an upper tension 9th. The keyboard plays sustained washes of sound. The harmonic ascension signifies the lift in spirit. The backup vocals sing “Swing down sweet chariot and let me ride.” This is repeated and harmonized.

The album version of this song goes back to the first groove, letting back-up vocalists embellish the vocal vamp. After this section of music progresses for a couple minutes, Clinton sings: “When Gabriel’s horn blow you better be ready to go.” For a brief moment, all the music stops while the drummer holds a crash on the hi-hat which flips the beat and transitions to the second groove, now re-imagined with a sparse texture. The keyboard holds a G-flat minor ninth chord then proceeds to move to the high registers. The bass and drums have re-established a steady beat again over which Clinton chants, now with vocal effects, “Swing low, time to

IAN BUNKER

move on, light years in time, ahead of our time, free your mind and come fly with me, it's hip, on the mothership." The vocals come in again with "Swing down sweet chariot and let me ride," over which the keyboard holds a G-flat in the highest register. The back-up vocals now develop with full three part gospel harmony. Over this vamp the song fades out.

The album version fades out here, leaving the listener hanging in the repeated cycles of the music. However, what the recording cannot demonstrate is what the song ideally builds towards. The recording of "Mothership Connection" cuts out just after 6 minutes, so one needs to turn to a video of a live performance to understand what is really happening in the song. A video of a concert in Houston from 1976,⁴⁷ reveals the teleological aesthetics in performance.

The live performance differs from the album version in its insistence on the minor key section. It is about one and half times as long as the album version. The first section is downplayed, played through once almost as a preface to the ecstatic build of the second section. This section grows energetically even as it lowers in volume. Clinton says "It's gonna' take energy to get the mothership up in here tonight." Clinton passes the lead to Glen Goins who takes over as an incredible vocal soloist. He directs the energy of the music to high points, instructs the band to break it down again, then builds the song back up again with, "I think I see the mothership comin', I think I see the mothership comin', I see the mothership comin'." The horns and the rest of the band play with increased force and energy in an extended coda. This extended musical apotheosis is accentuated by a model of a spaceship actually descending on stage. This is the moment the song has been building to the whole time. The album version leaves out the point of the song.

P-funk is essentially performing the feeling of gospel music. Despite the secular context the meaning of mental and emotional freedom is implicit. This song basically goes to church, comprising "the secular counterpart of the 'the spirit' – what Albert Murray calls 'paroxysms of ecstasy' – in black church worship."⁴⁸ This music is teleological, as everything builds to this moment of glorious

47. <http://is.gd/doWcUF>

48. Bolden, 9.

transcendence. The low parts of the vamp create the expectation for the high parts. This is music that is planned improvisatorially, intuitively, and collectively, but works as a line forward in time to achieve the same functional synthesis as a finale movement.

On the microcosm, in funk music's insistency on "The one," or keeping a mechanistically perfect tempo, each bar becomes a re-iteration of the 'eternal now.' In-between 'the one' endless patterns of variation and improvisation can occur, but 'the one' or the downbeat always comes back in on time. But as grooves cycles continue to repeat, they gain insistence and increase in meaning. The music is always going somewhere, even if it sounds like it's just repeating.

P-Funk represents not just a musical style but a mystical, quasi-religious philosophical system. Clinton and his entourage "ritualized The Funk into a metaphysical phenomenon of self-development not unlike the mystery systems of Africa and the Caribbean."⁴⁹ While Clinton has not specifically attributed religious meaning to his music, the experience of a live performances can invoke the deep ritual feeling of altered time and consciousness (even without drugs). The costumes, props, and huge number of musicians combine to visually create "an alternate reality, 'dressed in diapers and leotards, as genies and wolfmen ... looking like a cross between Star Trek and Sanford and Son.'"⁵⁰ The visual element in performance combines with the music to create an immersive, mind-blowing experience.

P-Funk's mythological world of spacefaring, time-traveling Afro-nauts functions on the double level of being so playfully silly that it gets away with performing strikingly deep political and social work. The preposterous nature of P-Funk was a smokescreen that enabled them to subversively introduce and reinforce positive portrayals of black identity and an Afro-centric sci-fi utopia. P-Funk "drew such far-reaching scope for their silly stories and cartoon characters that one can conceive their works as folklore, and perhaps some of the first post-industrial black American mythology."⁵¹ Clinton's synthesis of tropes from Black

49. Vincent, 253.

50. Vincent, 254.

51. Vincent, 256.

religion elevates the meaning of the music. While the chariot of the spiritual is allegorical and a religious symbol, in the case of P-Funk the chariot is a spaceship that actually comes down from space. “The Year of the Mothership Connection (1975) began the era of P-Funk as a truly spiritual form of black music in the tradition of jazz, soul, reggae, or gospel.”⁵² Funk music uses the same “process of ‘raising consciousness to the higher parts of the spirit’ through ‘ecstatic trance’ that has such a strong lineage in the music and rituals of the Caribbean: Vodun, Santeria, Rastafari, the spiritual gospel music of the mainland, and in secular sounds of jazz and funk.”⁵³

P-funk’s powerful meaningfulness vis-à-vis the black experience is only a subset of their larger potential meaning. The Funk posits a “Cosmic Oneness,” an interconnectivity and fusion of mind/body, intellect/intuition, and self/group dualities.⁵⁴ The band as a collective entity is a utopian vision of a modern tribe. Funk is a form of spiritual or emotional self-help by way of equipping “a listener with a method of transcendence: by locking into the rhythms, one can overcome daily battles [. . .].”⁵⁵ Listening to funk can be therapeutic in that it allows one to embody cycles of kinesthetic pleasure and remove one-self from the mental ravages of a perpetually goal-seeking Western culture dominated by the persistent, monotonous click of absolute-time. Funk music provides refuge to another plane of thought, where musical goals are met on their own time-frame.

In addition to providing pleasurable escape and re-focus through music, Clinton’s philosophy goes even spiritually deeper. Carved across the archway leading to the oracle of Delphi were the words “Know Thyself.” In Buddhism there is the idea of every individual as a potential “Bodhisattva:” that is, every individual has the same potential for self-realization and freedom as the Buddha. Forms of Christianity believe that the spirit of God dwells in all men and women. P-Funk likewise continues the theme of knowledge of self. Clinton recites the following lines on

52. Vincent, 240.

53. Vincent, 263.

54. Vincent, 258.

55. Vincent, 260.

the song ‘Good Thoughts, Bad Thoughts’:

The infinite intelligence within you knows the answers
 Its nature is to respond to your thoughts
 You rise as high as your dominant aspiration
 You descend to the level of your lowest concept of
 yourself
 Free your mind and your ass will follow
 The kingdom of heaven is within.

-Funkadelic, “Good Thoughts, Bad Thoughts” (1974)

REICH AND CLINTON: MOMENTS OF MUSICAL UTOPIA

On the surface, Steve Reich and George Clinton are cut from very different cloths. They are very different individuals in their background and the musical genres they represent. However, both men have a lot more in common than might be immediately thought. Clinton and Reich can both be seen as trying to escape from the existential oppression growing up in 1950’s Cold War America. Both individuals disliked fundamental aspects of their national culture and particular culture and sought alternate forms of expression. Both artists challenge hegemonic structures and attitudes by creating new forms of musical expression.

Reich was seeking an escape from and an alternative to the rigid intellectualism of serialism and the inheritance of Western tradition and ways of thinking. Reich grows and evolves through non-Western music to find components to his answer. His music relies on non-Western concepts and time groupings. Clinton observed the damaged, fearful American cultural condition “growing up in Washington amid Cold War atomic bomb scares and massive searchlights raking the night sky.”⁵⁶ Clinton also sought to expand his music from constraints of his tradition, the time limits of the Motown sound, and the conservatism of a Christian upbringing. Clinton was seeking an evolution of Black

56. Ken Hollings “The Solar Myth Approach-The Live Space Ritual: Sun Ra, Stockhausen, P-Funk, Hawkwind” in *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Modern Music*, edited by Rob Young. London; New York: Continuum, 2002, 104.

music towards an Afro-futuristic utopia.

Both artists were interested in social justice. Reich's earlier works "Come Out" and "It's Gonna Rain" show a non-overt but still present bent toward political justice. In the days of Civil Rights it is meaningful that Reich chose black voices to repeat and phase, even if they were only a nod in the right direction. Given tapes by Truman Nelson, a civil rights activist, Reich was asked to write a piece for the benefit of the Harlem Six retrial. Reich loops the voice of Daniel Hamm, one of the young men on trial, saying how he had to "come out to show them" the "bruise blood" to prove he had been beaten by police. Reich's work "It's Gonna Rain" is a comment on the nuclear scare, looping the voice of preacher Brother Walter talking about the end of the world. Clinton's work advances the Civil Rights struggle by simply creating his musical Afro-utopia without caring about mainstream a.k.a. white popularity or even understanding. Throughout Clinton advances positive notions of blackness, reclaiming the view of Africans as the founders of civilization as well as capable of science-fiction adventures.

Both *Drumming* and "Mothership Connection" are teleological in the macrocosm but rely on cyclical forms throughout. Reich's *Drumming* develops a state of mental, emotional, spiritual freedom achieved through collective buildup of rhythms. "Mothership Connection" seeks an ecstatic musical freedom through the accumulation of vamps, vocals, and collective building of energy. Both pieces are primarily in the F#/G-flat pentatonic mode. Reich is the leader of his musical process as the designer of the score, but relies on the performing ensemble to realize the nuances. A P-funk song is its own elastic, perpetually becoming reality. It is built collectively and relies on changing soloists to direct the musical flow. Both pieces rely on the successful interplay between soloist/composer and the ensemble. The ensemble has its own important function, subsuming the top-down hierarchy of the Western tradition.

Modern listeners are no longer as culturally trained to hear linear development in the same way as listeners a century ago. Technology has opened the ears and minds of Westerners and trained us to hear music in the moment as well as in a narrative. We are not bound to the expectations of the tonal tradition, but we

are subconsciously conditioned by them. In many musical contexts the temporal magnetism of the dominant chord still demands resolution to our ears. But we are also comfortable with music that while not teleological in a tonal sense still sets up musical goals and fulfills them within a cyclically-based structure. Part of this of cultural training is the influence of Asian music, but perhaps in larger part is the influence of African American music on our collective psyche. Reich and Clinton present works that demonstrate the “gradual but pervasive African-Americanization” of twentieth-century musical culture.”⁵⁷ This African-Americanization of musical thinking has affected everyone. Because of its increasing prevalence in collective consciousness, “black pop music would seem to be the element most clearly responsible for converting our collective sense of time from tortured heroic narratives to cycles of kinetic pleasure. As Prince sings, “There’s joy in repetition!”⁵⁸ But there is also linear development as repeating cycles accumulate and progress.

The music of both Reich and Clinton seeks the goal of removing the listener from absolute time. Reich’s music places the listener in an ideal musical time: the piece creates its own time-stream where every musical movement within stands on its own and exists in relation to other events. Like viewing a sculpture, the listener can focus on the immediate music or hear the music as a whole. Minimalist music subsumes the self by focusing the mind on the present of its musical surface. Funk music likewise causes the individual to transcend individual existence by accessing the human psyche’s eternal now by propelling the mind and body through polyrhythmic grooves. This can resonate in the mind alone or when embodied induces dance. Through dance one loses oneself in the moment. Even if it’s just the head, funk’s grooves cause the body to move. The body’s movement can then become the crux of the experience. The pleasure is in the embodiment, in taking the human perceiver away from the flow of time. While grooving to the music the seconds do not pass with mechanical certainty. P-Funk’s harmonies and lyrics elevate the mind and the spirit as well.

57. McClary, 295.

58. McClary, 295.

Both Minimalist and Funk music offer moments of salvation from the ravages of the modernity on the human consciousness. The goal-seeking, never arriving, never present cultural programming Westerners inherit combines with the endless stream of distracting, discontinuous moments the Internet, media, and technology offers up to truly damage the inner consciousness. Minimalist and Funk music provide refuges to other planes of thought, other spaces of temporal organization, where moments are allowed to cycle pleurably, develop and grow on their time, and ultimately reach a transcendent place where everything is right on time, everything is fulfilled, and everything is moving while standing still, a momentary musical utopia.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bolden, Tony. "Groove Theory: A Vamp on the Epistemology of Funk," *Journal of American Studies* Vol. 52, No. 4 (2013).
- Kramer, Jonathan D. *The Time of Music: New Meanings, New Temporalities, New Listening Strategies*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1988.
- Fink, Robert. "Goal-Directed Soul? Analyzing Rhythmic Teleology in African American Popular Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* Vol. 64, No.1 (Spring 2011): 179-238.
- Hollings, Ken. "The Solar Myth Approach - The Live Space Ritual: Sun Ra, Stockhausen, P-Funk, Hawkwind" in *Undercurrents: The Hidden Wiring of Modern Music*, edited by Rob Young. London; New York: Continuum, 2002.
- McClary, Susan. "Rap, Minimalism, and Structures of Time in Late Twentieth-Century Culture," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. Edited by Cristoph Cox and Daniel Warner. New York: Continuum, 2004.
- Mertens, Wim. "Basic Concepts of Minimal Music," in *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. Edited by Cristoph Cox and Daniel Warner. New York: Continuum 2004, 307.
- Orlov, Henry F. "The Temporal Dimensions of Musical Experience," *The Music Quarterly* Vol. 65, No. 3 (Jul., 1979): 368-378.
- Reich, Steve and Paul Hillier. *Writings on Music*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Reich, Steve. *Drumming: for eight small tuned drums, three marimbas, three glockenspiels, male and female voices, whistling and piccolo*. New York: Hendon Music, Boosey & Hawkes, 2009.
- Schwarz, Robert. *Minimalists*. London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1996.
- Taruskin, Richard. *Music in the Late Twentieth Century*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Vincent, Rickey. *Funk: The Music, the People, and the Rhythm of the One*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996.