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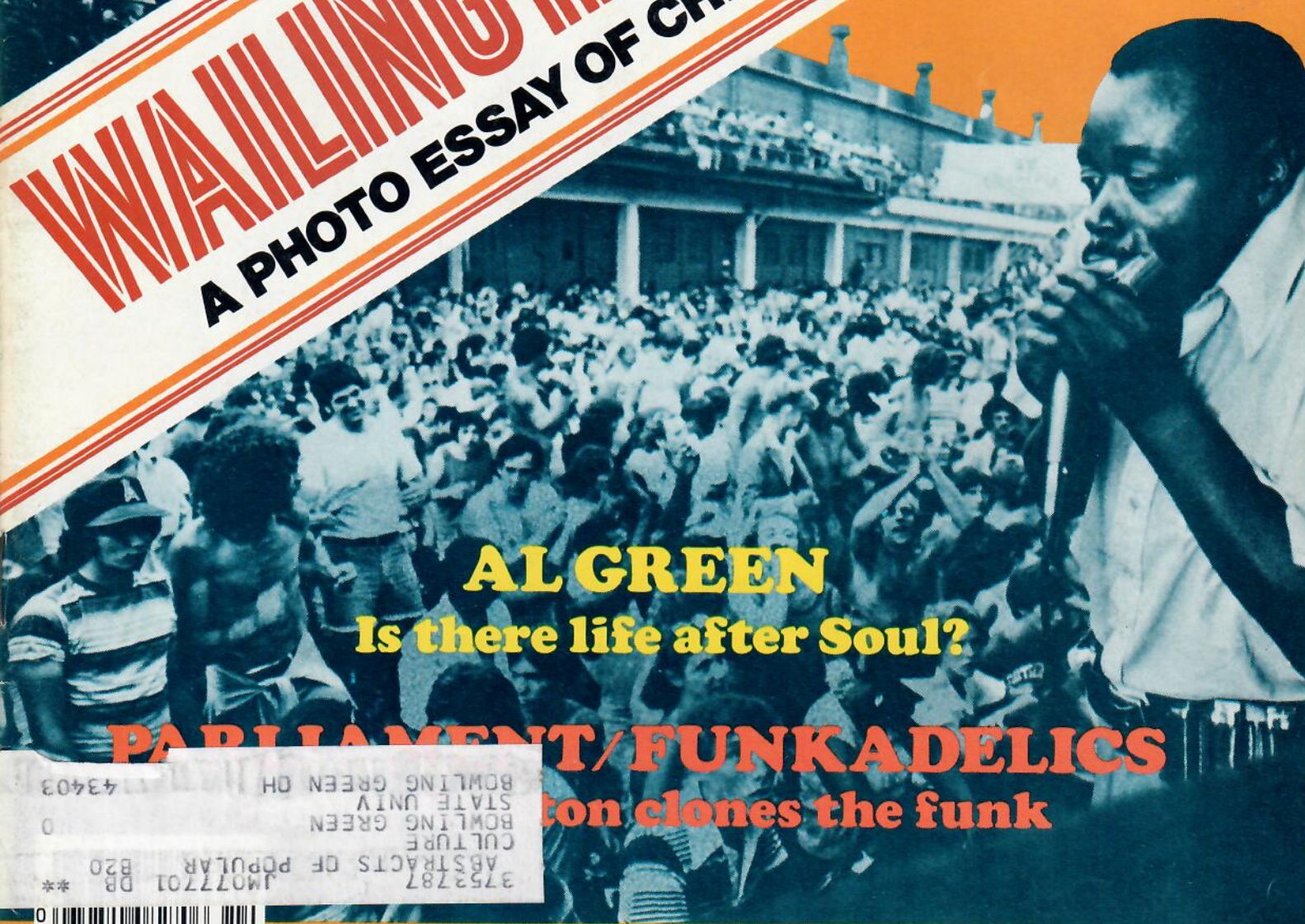
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Is there life after Soul?

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GEORGE CLINTON

Ultimate Liberator Of Constipated Notions

by W. A. BROWER

"If you are not a reality whose myth are you?"
—Sun Ra

"A concept can just be thrown in the air around the funk and before it hit the ground you got two albums. You know? What I am saying is that a mafunkah will shoot holes in that bad boy 'fore it hits the ground, like you do in the ghetto."

—George Clinton

George Clinton (a.k.a. the Long Haired Freaky Sucker, Star Child, Dr. Funkenstein, just plain Dr. Funk, and now Mr. Wiggles the Worm—"ultrasonic, semi-bionic clone of Dr. Funkenstein," who was specially grafted for Clinton's latest on-stage extravaganza and recording *Motor Booty Affair*, Casablanca 7125) is no one's myth. Although the lineup from his newest production, which includes Queen Freakalene, Monkey Sea and Monkey Woo, Minus Mouf, Howard Codsell, Octave Pussy, Rita Mermaid and P-Nut Booty Jelly-fish sounds like a cast of renegade cartoon characters from a *Motor Bugged Out Affixation*, George Clinton is fo' real, alllllll the way, live and in 3-D. Dig—

Clinton walks around dressed like it's Halloween 365 days a year. He is Head Funken-telectual-In-Charge of P-Funk Labs from which such uncontrolled substances as the Bomb, the P. Funk, the Uncut Funk, the Pee, Supergroovalisticprosifunkstication, Flash Lights, DooDoo Chasers and Liquid Sunshine originate. Dr. Clinton told me, in an unguarded moment, that his work is dedicated to ego reduction and the eradication of mental ghettos. Clinton is also Head Referee of the Funk Mob, a voluntary association of barnstorming funkateers, who get their hard core jollies off funk'n' with folks' heads. Through the Dr.'s own funkreative mitosis, the First Family of Funk has grown to include Parliament, Funkadelic, Bootsy's Rubber Band, Brides of Funkenstein, Parlet, the Horny Horns, and Bernie Worrell's Woo. George Clinton is the main purveyor of the funk which, along with rock and disco, dominates the popular music market.

Recently, George Clinton has also become



THE DOCTOR

TOM ENGLAND/PHOTO RESERVE





MICHAEL WEINSTEIN/PHOTO RESERVE

THE ANTI-TOUR

a wizard of finance and a big reality in the record business. Everything he touches turns funky. The P. Funk Earth Tour made 30 million funky dollar bills in two years. A few months ago, Funkadelic's album *One Nation Under A Groove* (Warner Bros. 3209) went platinum funk.

The success of *One Nation* put Clinton in a funkified dilemma. For sure, *One Nation* was the Pee, a monstrous hit, but it came right on the heels of three years of touring with such huge productions as the Mothership Connection. The Mothership, an Apollo 15 lookalike from which the Dr. disembarked on stage, cost a stankin' quarter of a million all by its lonesome.

Clinton's problem was mounting a stage show that could outfunk the last two. His response to the situation says a bunch about how his mind funkions. "We had just come off that [major tour] one month before *One Nation* came out, which meant we had to do somethang. We had to go back out on the road and we couldn't go back in them same places. And the Brides was comin' out so they had to have some place to play.

"So we said, 'We'll take a tour of small joints where we can play three or four hours and we'll call it the *anti-tour*, which will de-program our heads from that big 20,000 seats. Let all the young members see what it's really like to have to play a gig, you know, where you have to play fo' real. And they could get off on it because they can play their shit. And best of all, in going to these cities under *One Nation*, playin' small places, we could get down with the people.'

"The people that get in, the *real* fans, will say, 'Them mathahfunkahhhaas played three hours and turned that mathahfunkah out!' With no props, no nothing." In Washington, D.C. (which he has dubbed a Chocolate City encircled by a Vanilla Suburbia) Clinton took the anti-tour into the legendary Howard Theatre. Instead of three hours the show ran nearly five. At 1:30 a.m. 2000 militants of the funk were damn near tearin' the roof off the sucker, hyperventilating to *One Nation* for the umpteenth time.

P-Funk was mega-funk that night. The Dr. was decked out in red beret and fatigues, and looked more like Captain Zero, the Sardinista

guerrilla, than the Star Child, as he pumped the audience with stuff like: "Get funky... get loose... free your mind... let your ass follow... let your booty do its duty." The anti-tour was typical of Clinton's "anti-logic or expanded framework for logic." Instead of shooting for an even bigger production and possibly reaping a diminished return he did just the opposite and funk'd better.

The Dr. is big fun to talk to, being that he is an advanced student of mentalcourse—which is to say mindfunkin' and gamin' on ya as necessary. He studied signifying for ten years in a Plainfield, New Jersey barbershop which he ended up owning. In the process he specialized in conking heads, "... pre-Superfly... just scorchin' heads in the name of the cool."

When the bloods put the torch to Plainfield Ave. during the '67 riots, George Clinton's barbershop was the only thang left standing. By then Clinton had a Master's in street rhythms and consense, the highest form of game. He survived the '60s and went on to get his doctorate in poetic licentiousness from the Universal Corner... hanging out and eating reality sandwiches from Harvard Square to the Motor City. George Clinton is a deep dude. Dig...

The Dr. is from Cannapolis, North Carolina—if they've got olfactory glands strong enough to claim him. He spent his early years funk'n' up in the Chocolate City and in Chase City, Virginia, before his family settled in Plainfield. That's where he started Parliament in '55, lifting their name from a still-popular oral fixation.

"It was ego," says Clinton. "I was a little Leo. If I couldn't have a baseball team I wanted a singing group. You know, that was our only out... out of the ghetto... if you could sing, dance, or some shit." Ego is okay with the Dr. if it motorvates you to some goal beyond yourself. But, in itself, ego will "do-loop," that is to say, self-destruct. Self-destruction through dysfunctional ego rhythms is something Clinton manages to avoid by diggin' on the One.

He runs it down like so: "No one person can do it. No philosophy, no religion, no scientist,



PHOTO STRIPS BY
W. A. BROWER

no state. This shit takes a *whole* mathahfunkin' band and singers and everythang. To actually get out there takes planets because they are all connected . . . magnetic . . . revolving around. All this shit is connected. So any one mafunker sayin', 'Hey, I'm going to do it myself.' You know? Let the *sun* stop shinin' on that mafunkah. He be a dull mathahfunkah and that's all it is to it. He'll need a dynamite Flash Light . . . I'll put it that way. Ain't no one mafunkah can do this shit. And no one species . . . no one state . . . no one nothin'. 'Cause it's all on the One. I mean I am not one. I am *part* of one. We are all part of one.

"All this shit put together . . . all life . . . it takes it all. I mean anybody thinking that he is deep enough to be One is truly trippin'. You know what I mean? Truly trippin'. I mean, we ego trip on stage. We got a spaceship. But we park that mafunker when it's snowing cause it ain't got no snow tires.

"But it works. It works so good a mathahfunkah will say, 'Hey! How come you ain't got no Rolls Royces or Cadillacs?' I can do it three times better with that spaceship. That mathahfunkah don't go nowhere. You know what I am saying? It's the *same* trip. I mean, any amount of groupies I want would gladly walk up that ladder. And when I feel like using it . . . when I feel like getting off on it, I'll do it. And I ain't gon' feel no guilt. I might trip . . . lie to myself for a few minutes. I still got some of that shit. But I bet you it won't take me long to wake up. May not tell anybody. Might be in the bathroom and say to myself, 'You know you full of shit' . . . and flush it." In other words the Dr. is not above taking one of his own prescriptions, a good

them foreshadowed the liberation of r&b from its song form limitations and introduced freer instrumental styles. The funk, to a large extent, represents the assimilation of Hendrix and Sly's influences into the r&b mainstream. Funk is the antithesis of its main contender in the r&b world, disco.

The Dr. has two basic brands of the funk. The number one selling funk is Parliament, which draws heavily from the James Brown style. The current edition of Parliament nods in JB's direction, featuring the Horny Horns, led by JB alumni, Fred Wesley and Maceo Parker, and their punching, brass-heavy riffs. The Funkadelic, on the other hand, is basically a guitar band bordering black rock with its own cult-like following. Funkgeetarists Gary Shider and Mike "Kid Funkadelic" Hampton lay down supercharged heavy metal in the tradition of Hendrix. Whichever way the funk is going, the Dr. calls upon two of the finest keyboard players in pop music—Bernie "DaVinci" Worrell, a Funk Mob veteran and Walter "Junie" Morrison, formerly of the Ohio Players. Clinton is a master at layering each collaborator's contribution into a series of massive crescendos aimed at *Tearin' The Roof Off The Sucker*.

Like most all of what the Dr. knows, the concept of diversifunkation was born of cold realities. When Parliament ventured to Detroit in '67 it was basically a doowop group, aspiring to success in the Motown mold. They cut a mini-hit called *I Wanna Testify* and seemed on their way to plenty of that golden chicken scratch. Then came what the Dr. likes

"We are negotiating from the point of view that we are the biggest thang ever happened . . . one planet under a groove."

DooDoo Chaser.

As aforementioned, the best place to dig the Dr.'s medicine is all the way *live* when the Funk Mob takes it to the stage. A taste of the Dr.'s konfunktions is all but money back guaranteed to motorvate even the most constipated soul to either leave in disgust or get off of her/his/its ass and jamboogie. "Funk," Doc says, "is to be felt. It's to hit you in your primal area."

Believe it. If you don't feel this funk one way or the other you better get your family physician to check your bottom inside out because it just may be false, phony as play money, devoidoffunk and other et ceterasses. This is dancing music, be it the Freak, the Rock or the Wiggle. The Dr.'s funk is, first of all, plenty of feet in the bass drums and thumping ostinatos in the bass guitars. The sock cymbal is steady against them bootin' feet. The Dr.'s idea of bottom is to find a groove, even it out, and hold it dead, as they say, in the pocket. At base the funk is rhythmic, and being in the pocket is a rhythmic concept analogous to the classical idea of swing. Once time is in the pocket, the funk is ready to roll.

Funk is the rawest rhythm and blues happening today. It is minimalist gutbucket in the space age. It descends from the jump band school that spawned r&b, with doses of sock hop doowop and street corner harmonizing. It ascends directly from the sound of Papa James Brown, Godfather of Soul and precursor of funk. It incorporates the innovations of Sly Stone and Jimi Hendrix, who between

to call the "big blow."

"Dig," the Dr. says, "the label we was with, that had *I Wanna Testify* out, went out of business. And they had our name and we couldn't use it because the court wouldn't clear it. The problem was immediate. We had to survive. So the only thing to do was to take the musicians that we had and put them up front and the singers became backup. We just said that the musicians are the Funkadelic and the singers sing *with them* as opposed to *them* playing with the singers. They were friends of ours from Jersey; they came with us. The only shift we had to make was one of ego. Could we stand our brothers to be up front? It was just who's singing lead and who's not. That was easy to say because it was basically my group.

"So they couldn't stop us from doing that. In the meantime Parliament became free from that record thang. We had records out as Funkadelic by then. So we had two names because the Parliament was known. It made sense to me to get a separate deal on a separate label for them, not with any person's name on it, just the name Parliament. We had to do it for survival because a group gets shelved when it's only one group and they funk up or they don't get no hits. The companies just automatically think, 'Well, they thang ain't happenin'.' When you got two names you got a better chance. I have known that since '68. The only way to justify having two groups was to have different personalities."

With the emergence of funk as a real power in the market, Clinton began generating con-

P-FUNK ALIVE

Parliament-Funkadelic doesn't need a psychiatrist. Its split personality passes for normal in George Clinton's world.

Parliament throws a musical costume party of ghetto stereotypes (like pimpish villain Sir Nose D'Voidoffunk) and fanciful escapes (the Mothership). Funkadelic is a less-nonsense ensemble of potent, entrancing instrumentalists.

Not surprisingly, Parliament has been better-known. Its modern burlesque makes good, easy copy for writers and its comic book-like plots enlist a huge young, mostly black following.

The current Parliament show, based on *The Motor Booty Affair* album, is exemplary. Fake seaweed and fishnets festoon the stage. Singers wear fish, octopus and crustacean garb. A four-foot yellow bird hovers above Sir Nose. A two-story skull snorts smoke. Clinton commands stage and band as Dr. Wiggles, clad in top hat, bleached wig, sunglasses, green leotards and tinfoil tail. Any other time he would wear the wig, glasses and spacesuit of Dr. Funkenstein.

But P-Funk is not Kiss in blackface. A better comparison would be the Mothers of Invention. That group, too, spawned several top-notch players—Frank Zappa, Ian Underwood, George Duke—within its satiric mythology.

Clinton might have sensed a short-selling of P-Funk's musical prowess because last fall he dressed the band in military fatigues and mounted a tour of redress, playing three hour sets in small halls.

One powerful germ of a rhythm section—drummer Tyrone Lampkins, percussionist Larry Fantangelo and bassist Boogie Mosson—fevers P-Funk. In Plainfield, N.J., the band's birthplace, the locals call the bedrock style "playin' on the one." Horns, keyboards and repeated lyric taglines all ricochet off the foundation of an incessant, hypnotic beat.

The sound recalls a domestic reggae and its consistency allows P-Funk to segue songs into seamless hour-long selections. Earlier Funkadelic albums such as *Hard Core Jollies* and *America Eats Its Young* come closest to capturing the live show's magic. But one would really need a Keith Jarrett-sized album package or a video cassette to approximate its extravagant scope.

Given unflagging rhythmic support, the band is free to evoke its tangled roots. George Clinton knows his musical history, from *Amazing Grace* to outer space. Onstage, he conducts nearly 20 players to achieve the variety of sounds he has heard since his childhood in a Newark housing project.

There is a pervasive church influence. Clinton and singer-guitarist Gary Shider strut the stage's lip like preachers in full tizzy. Though their words—"If you ain't gonna get it on, take your dead ass home," for instance—do not recall the pulpit, their conviction does.

Male and female vocal quartets, inserted in the group by Clinton, are throwbacks to the streetcorner singers who formed the original Parliaments in Clinton's Plainfield barber-shop.

But while many doo-wop hands faded with the rise of acid rock, Clinton was buying his players the Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper*, Cream's

tracts for members of the Mob as solo acts or groups as the major labels bid for their piece of the funk. Thus there are five female singers playing various characters and popping in and out of a Parliament-Funkadelic show. Two of them open the evening as the Brides of Funkenstein while the other three (who back them) are billed as the Bridesmaids. The Brides record for Atlantic, while the Bridesmaids have become Parlet when recording for Casablanca. To manage his funky conglomerate Clinton employs Leber and Krebs, the people who handle Aerosmith, Ted Nugent and Bealemania... all biggies. Yes, the Dr. and his family are a big reality in the record business.

The Dr. has it in his head to be even bigger. Parliament-Funkadelic returned stateside in December from three months in France, Holland and Germany, and now the Dr. talks about the possibility of "one planet under a groove." Moreover, Clinton claims, "We are negotiating higher—I mean *higher*—than anything that's ever been done, black or white. We are negotiating from the point of view that we are the biggest thang ever happened. But we know we have to do it five times bigger than anybody, just to be equal."

Clinton is aiming for a distribution deal for his own label, Uncle Jam Records. He would like to take over United Sounds Studio, the original home of Motown, since he lives in Detroit and prizes the quality of the bottom tones that studio is known for producing. He plans to add a second recording facility in Miami close to the deep sea fishing scene, his main hobby. The distribution deal also involves animated cartoons and movies. *Motor Booty Affair*, in fact, is supposed to be the soundtrack for a movie which would be one of the first projects covered by the agreement.

Does the Dr. worry about the inherent personal vulnerabilities that come with that kind of power? Will he become a target? "Not really," he grins, "because again, it ain't me, you know, it's the funk, and I am careful not to let it get into *that* rhythm. It only self-destructs you when it's personality... dominant personality. Right now it's all flattery and amazement and shit. But that'll wear off and it'll just be the funk. I ain't gon' provoke it, is what I am saying. And that's not a dangerous position. It's a good position to be in as long as you don't do it really out of rhythm and you can back up what you say with some good funk."

"It's the same concept that Muhammad Ali used, 'I am the baddest mafunkah around.' You know what I am saying? When you knock out enough people you can even get knocked out yourself and people still say, 'Cool.' But you got to know when to back off, when you did a thing enough, 'cause the novelty wear offa anything."

Clinton is way ahead of the game when it comes to keepin' the novelty from wearing offa his thang. Many of the major groups in pop music augment their performances with fantastic special effects and props. Players appear and disappear in large clouds of pastel colored smoke, or play their axes suspended in air. The Dr. takes multi-media dramatization to its logical conclusion, creating his own funky operettas. Every Parliament-Funkadelic recording is programmatic in concept. His themes include: *Standing On The Verge Of Gettin It On*, *Maggot Brain*, *America Eats Its Young*, *Funkentelekt* vs. *The Placebo Syndrome*, *Chocolate City*, *The Mothership Connection*, *The Clones Of Dr. Funkenstein*, *Hard Core Jollies*, *One Nation Under A Groove*, and now, the *Motor Booty Affair*. On stage the First Family perform these themes with the aide of rather graphic scatological and sexual imagery, special effects, costumes and scenarios.

The Motor Booty Affair takes the funk underwater. "It's basically the same themes that we have been doing for a while," he explained. "Two meanings. One is that Sir Nose and Dr. Funkenstein is rivaling. And the other is Psychoalphanadiscobetabioaquadolooop, which is a rhythm that is compatible to dancing in the streets and not getting funky up. It's the same rhythm you can have under water and not get wet. That's about how deep you have to be in this world and not really get funky up."

"I go fishing all the time. I go down to the Bermuda Triangle... Bimini. So I been planning to do this one for a long time. Music from the deep, underwater boogie." The Dr. becomes Mr. Wiggles the worm, "slidin' through the molecules of wetness like an eel through seaweed." The Brides become Wiggles' ladies, Giggles and Squirm. One Bridesmaid becomes Octave Pussy. Another becomes Rita Mermaid, and so on.

On stage, Clinton leaves most of the singing to the five ladies, Gary Shider and the Funkateer of longest tenure, basso-profunkdo Ray Davis. Clinton's funktion is to run down the rap, the rhythm, the onomatopoeia. The Dr. cuttin' loose with the funk is poetic licentiousness on the bizarre side, and that aspect of his "rhythm and business" has caused consternation in some quarters of the black community. The Rev. Jesse Jackson, whose organization, People United to Save Humanity (PUSH) has launched a national self-improvement campaign, "Push For Excellence," among inner city youth, has raised questions about the impact of Clinton's lyrics on the impressionable, youthful segment of the audience. But the Dr. sees himself as a deprogrammer in a culture that is telling its youth, particularly black youth of the urban underclass, that they can't handle themselves, that they are dysfunctional, and that the system is their solution. Rather than exploiting sex, Clinton defetishizes, satirizing an already demeaned subject. He views his slogans (e.g., "Get off your ass and jam") as exhorting youth, in language they can clearly understand, to burn down the ghettos in their minds. Thus each production portrays blacks in an alternative reality—dealing in space, underwater, or whatever. Apparently the impetus to project alternative realities is an imperative in black culture. The analogies to be found in Sun Ra and the Nation of Islam are too uncanny to be coincidental.

"The language," Clinton says, "helps deprogram you, too—and it's marketable. It's really the rhythm. Actually, the only communication that can penetrate the semantics and the structure, the straightjacket of what's happening with the logic and language of today, is to do it the way we do it, which is the same language but with our own rhythm and a few words Xed out because certain words have emotional value. This other shit is cold and calculated and no emotion. So when you say 'shit'... no matter if you sayin' it to be funny, it penetrates."

It's the same attitude toward language that permits "nigger," which has its own odious history, to be a term of endearment when uttered by the proper party with the proper rhythm. The sense of double entendre which

P-FUNK ALIVE

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Disraeli Gears and anything by Jimi Hendrix. And he was passing out tabs of acid.

The psychedelic influence is revealed by P-Funk's guitarists, from Eddie Hazel to the late Glen Goins to Shider and current soloist Michael Hampton. Usually working with fretting and picking hands only inches apart, Hampton resurrects acid rock's tired stylings with smoldering, bluesy jams on *Maggot Brain* and *Cosmic Slop*.

P-Funk is a true fusion band, merging black genres with each other and adding rock's guitar prominence and one-beat power. As one Funkadelic song asks in its title, "Who says a funk band can't play rock'n' roll?"

Nobody who has seen P-Funk's Saturday night cartoon.

—sam freedman

pervades Clinton's lyrics, like the various vocalisms with which they are delivered, are as old as the blues.

"So," Clinton reasons, "I try to give them something interesting, give them what they want. I just don't be up there, talkin' about, 'I'm into my music... I'm for peace and happiness and there is a message in my music and I hope the brothers and sisters...' That one has a patent on it and people don't even hear it. But when you say 'Promentalshitbackwash-psychosis Enema Squad (The Doodoo Chasers) comin' to tidy the bowl of your brain, giving you music to get your shit together by,' muthafunkahs have to say what the funk?—and just that *what* is cool. That's enough, 'cause then they have got to think about it. It's not telling you what to think. All we do is say, 'think.' We don't preach and we don't guru, other than, 'Hang loose for the night.' It's that basic motherwit shit. It's a party tonight and if they don't get nothin' else out of it but the party, that's cool. And the rest of it they talk about until they get something else out of it. It's multi-sided."

George Clinton puts his money where his motor mouth is. Dig: "When you think about it, it's another thing when groups come in the community and take out all the money and keep moving. And just to make sure we ain't gettin' absorbed into the *they*, we dedicate from now on, throughout the rest of our career, 25¢ on every ticket we sell to the United Negro College Fund. All our groups gonna do it and gonna challenge all the other groups to do it. Those people are the ones that buy our records and come to our concerts and *they* trying to phase out black colleges anyway—too much vibes and rhythm in it. We think we *should*, because the only people that's gonna be able to do anything about what is happening is the young people. And the *thang* for them to do is think. We can't tell them what to do. We don't know no answers. But giving them a chance to think is one thang that we can do."

"It's all relative, you know, 'cause I have found so much about the funk that I had no idea of. It's got such heavy meaning. In a German dictionary it's got the rhythm of life from the heartbeat, of amoebas coming out of the water. So that's a deep definition of the shit of the funk. 'Cause I had it as a good excuse after I did the best I could do. The next best thing to saying funk it. Now I done the best I could do and I ain't jumpin'. And to me that's a rhythm and I guess that's the rhythm of life. Cause if you got a funk, a good one, you ain't gon' commit suicide."

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