Playin' Outside.

New melodic and harmonic strategies in jazz improvisation after John Coltrane

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Miles Davis and John Coltrane at 90: Retrospect and Prospect
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Overview

1. Playing outside in post-bop improvisation
2. *Distant reading*: Comparing John Coltrane, David Liebman and Michael Brecker
3. Case study 1: side-stepping / side-slipping
4. Case study 2: constant structure
5. Case study 3: Superimposed chord changes
6. Case study 4: symmetric scales
7. Conclusion and outlook

Approach

MIXED METHODOLOGY

- musical analysis by listening experience and close reading of transcriptions

- computational analysis of digital solo transcriptions → „distant reading“ (Franco Moretti)
  - explorative : looking for interesting patterns within a larger repertoire / corpus of solos
  - evaluative: comparing results of close reading with a larger repertoire / corpus of solos

see *Jazzomat research project*: jazzomat.hfm-weimar.de

Playing outside in post-bop improvisation

- *melodic*

Chromaticism in the melody

- *harmonic*

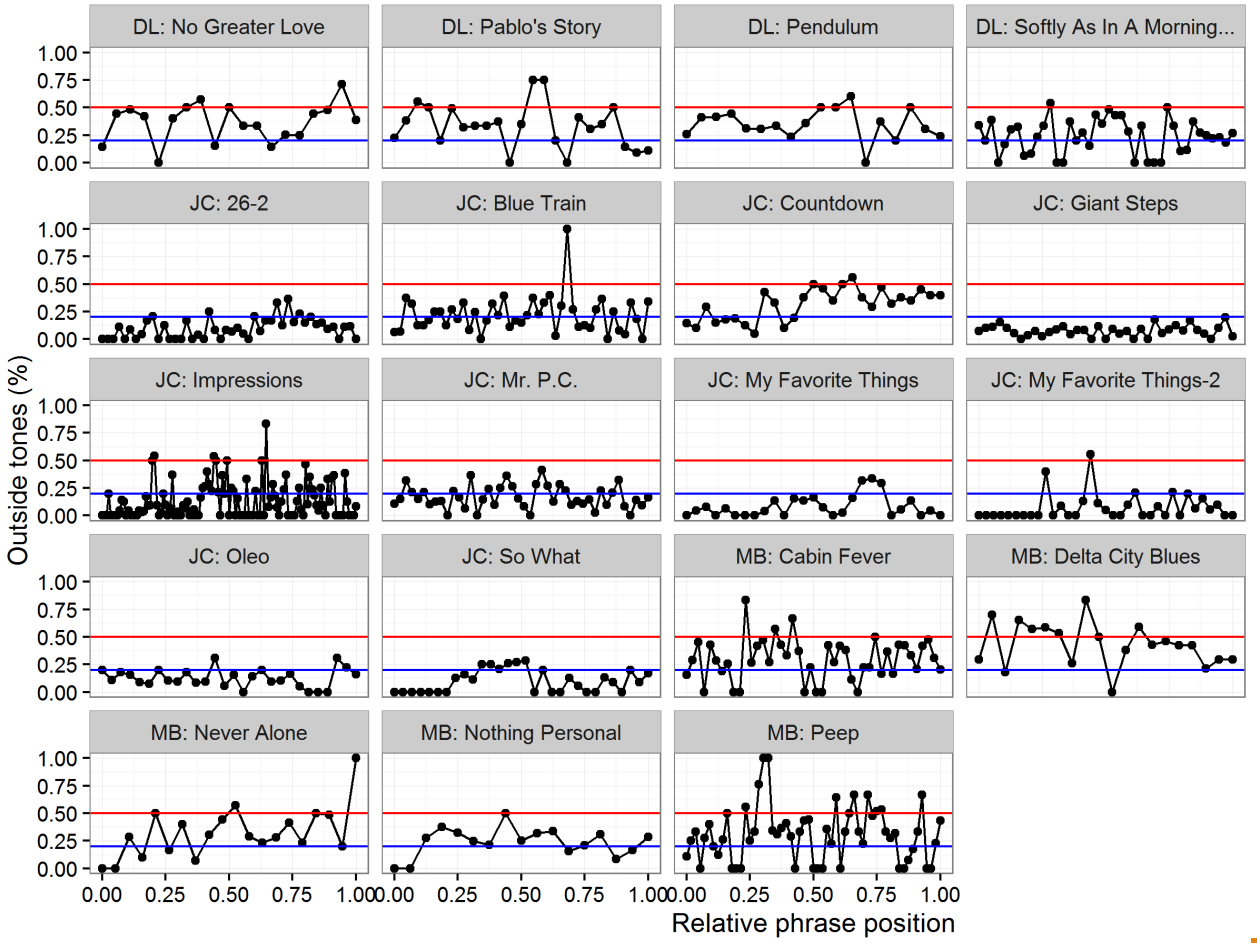
reharmonisation and substitution of the underlying chord progression

Contemporary strategies of playing outside

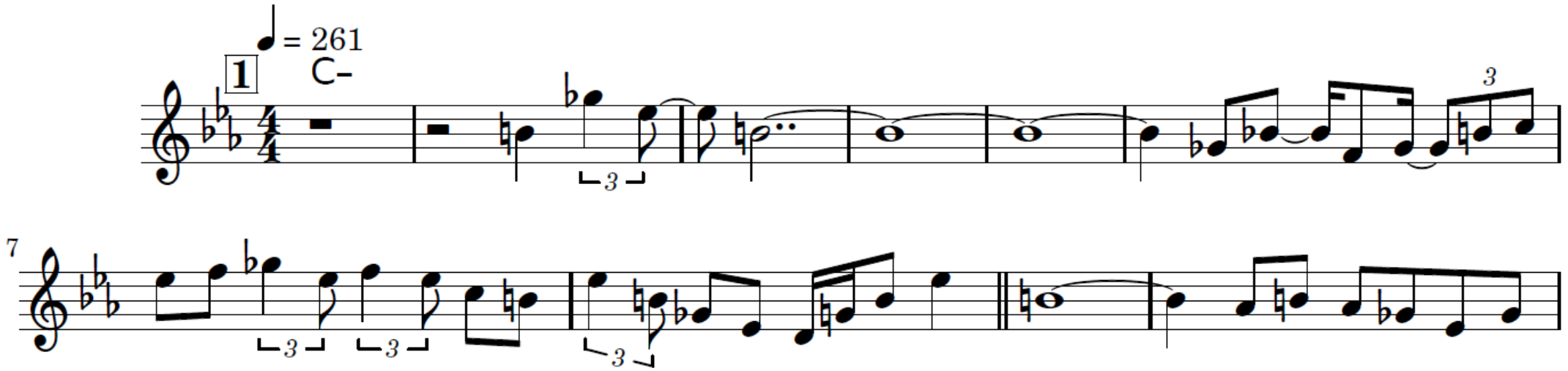
Concrete concepts

- tonal displacement: side-stepping / side-slipping
- reharmonisation (Coltrane-changes, directional units)
- constant structure
- ‚outside scales‘: chromatic scales, symmetric scales

Distant reading
Outside playing in solos by Coltrane, Liebman, and Brecker

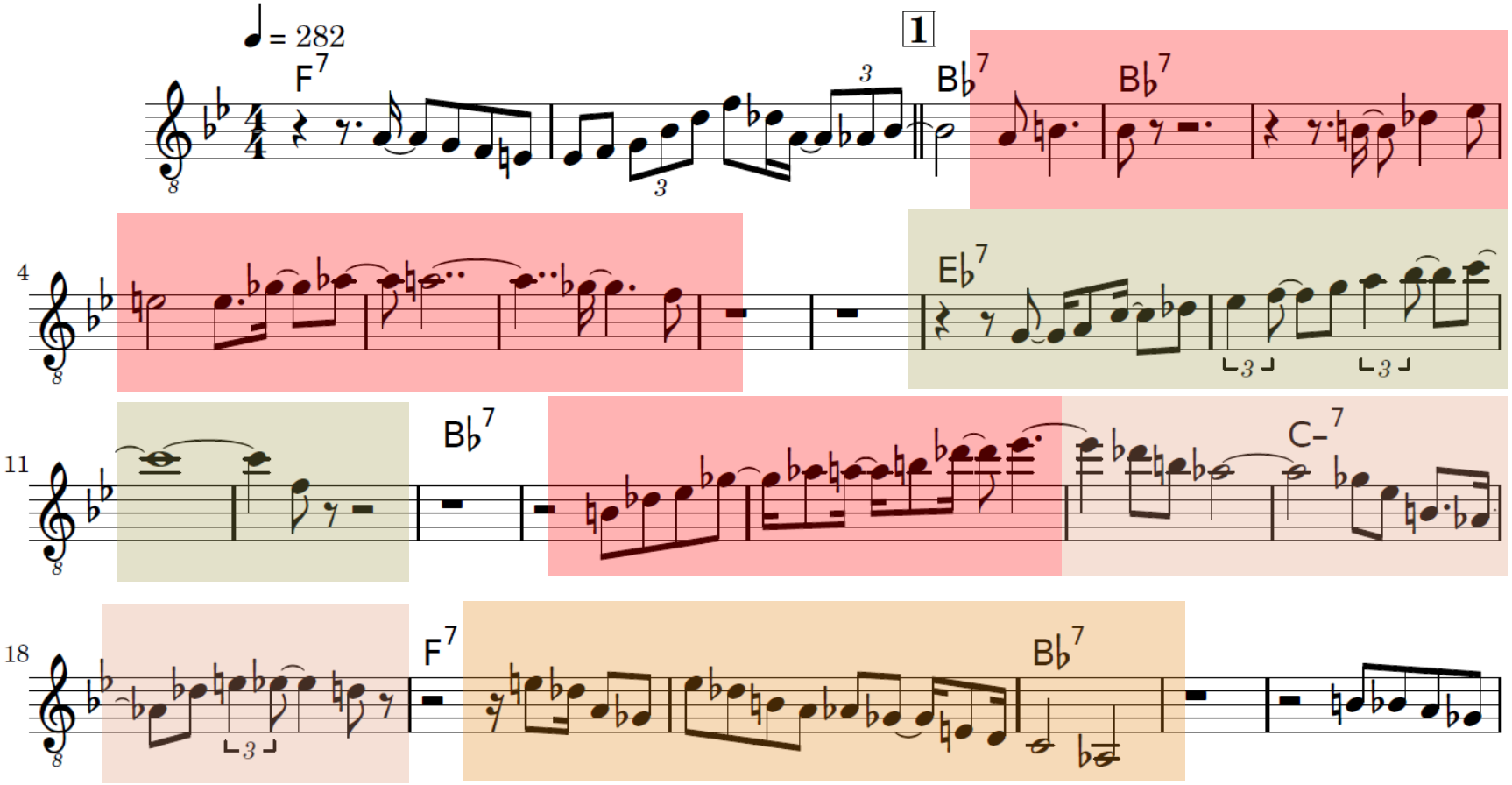


Side-stepping, side-slipping I: David Liebman



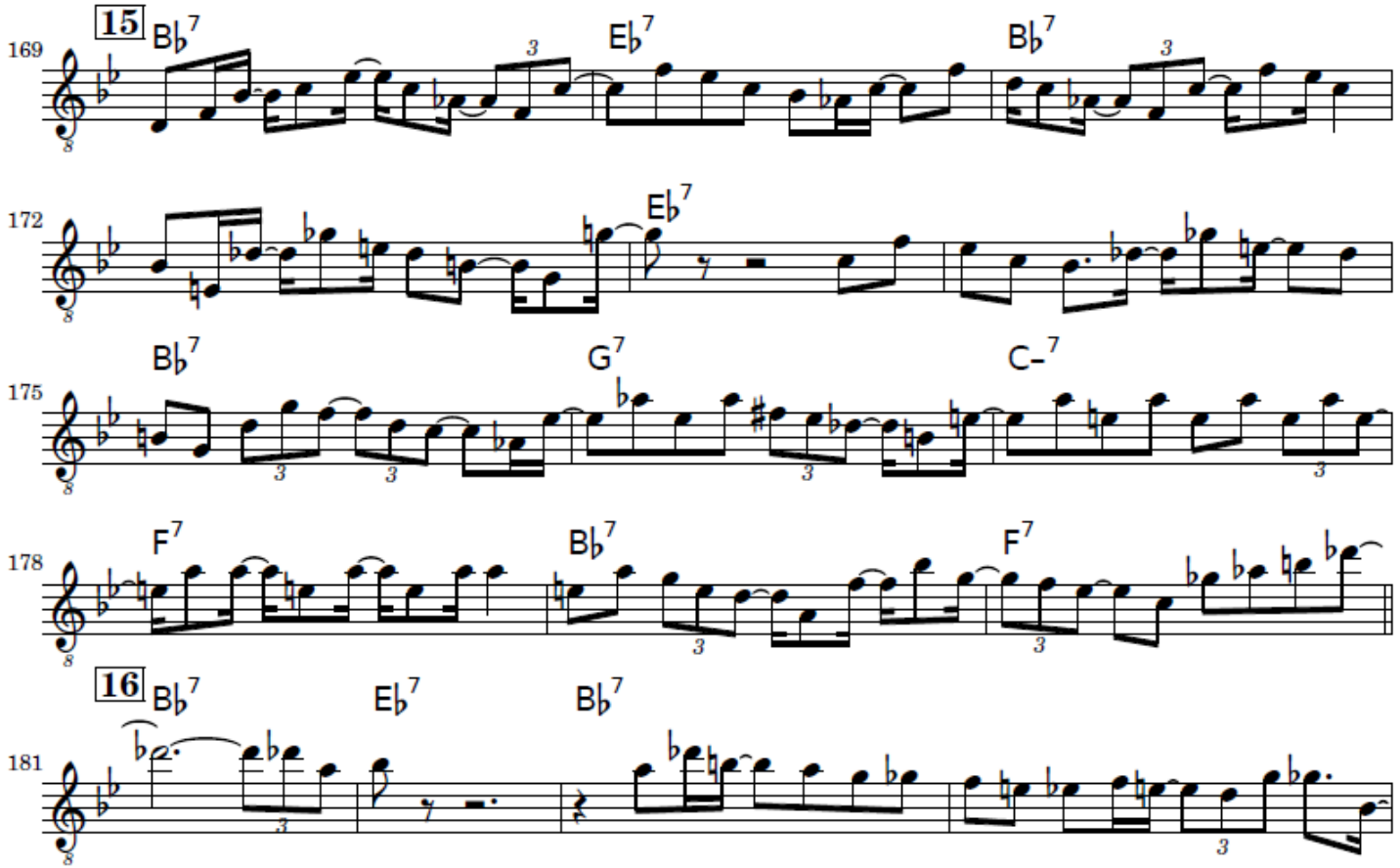
David Liebman, „Softly As In A Morning Sunrise“,
Quest/Standards (1988)

Side-stepping, side-slipping II: Michael Brecker



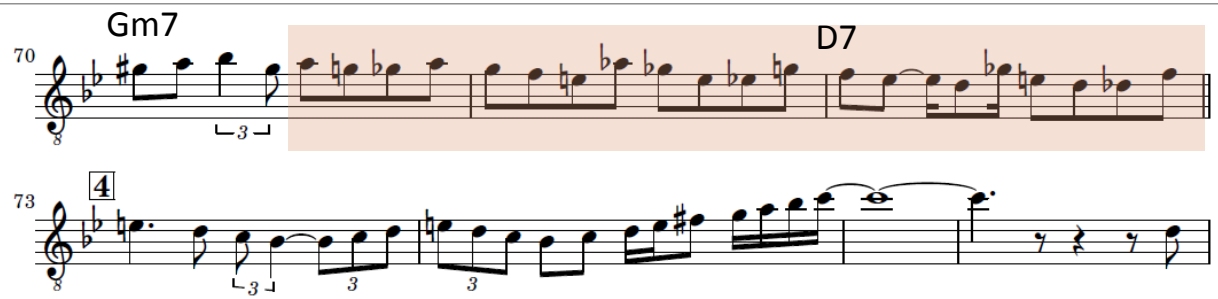
„Delta City Blues“, *Two Blocks From the Edge* (1998)

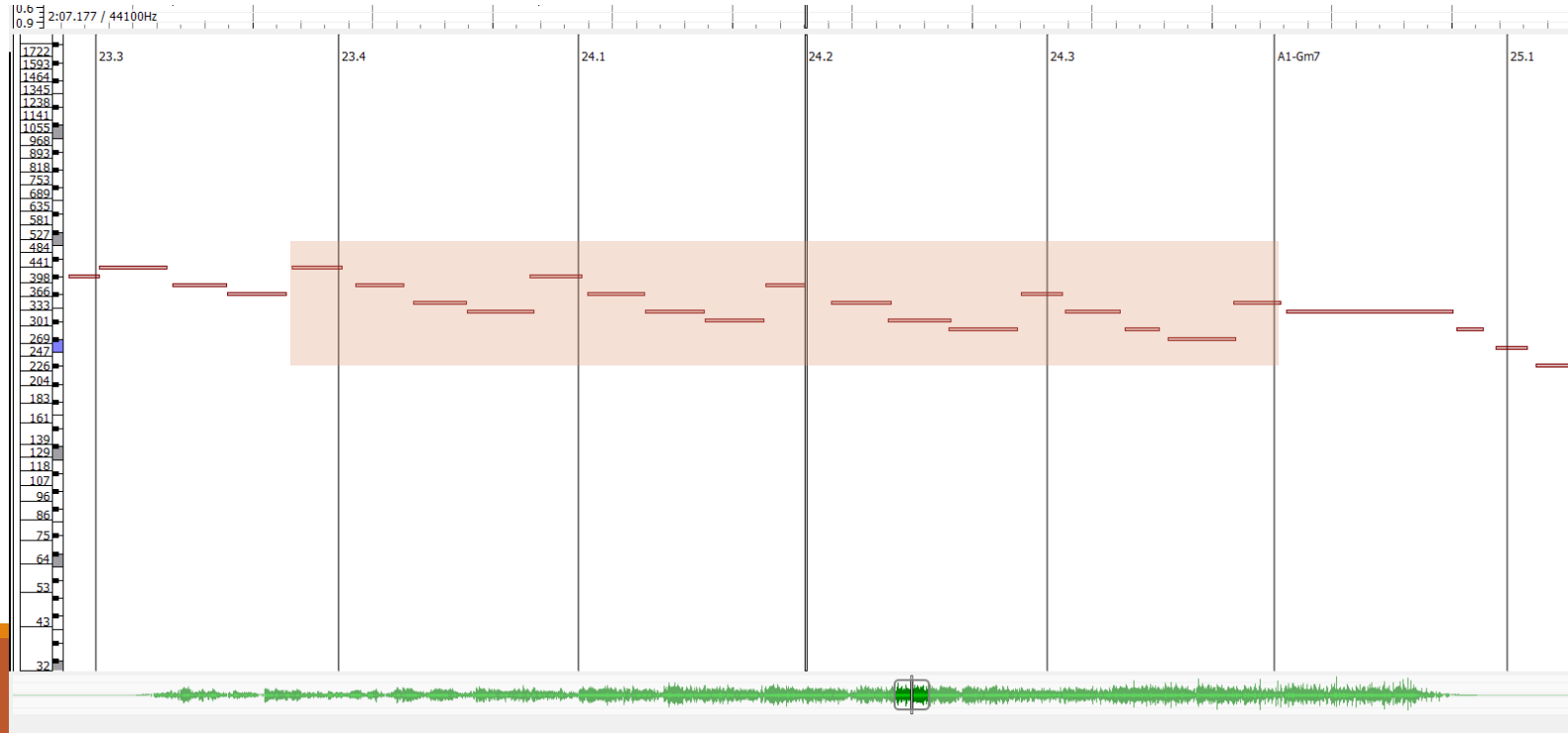
Michael Brecker
Constant structure



„Cabin Fever“ (Michael Brecker, *Tales From The Hudson*, 1996)

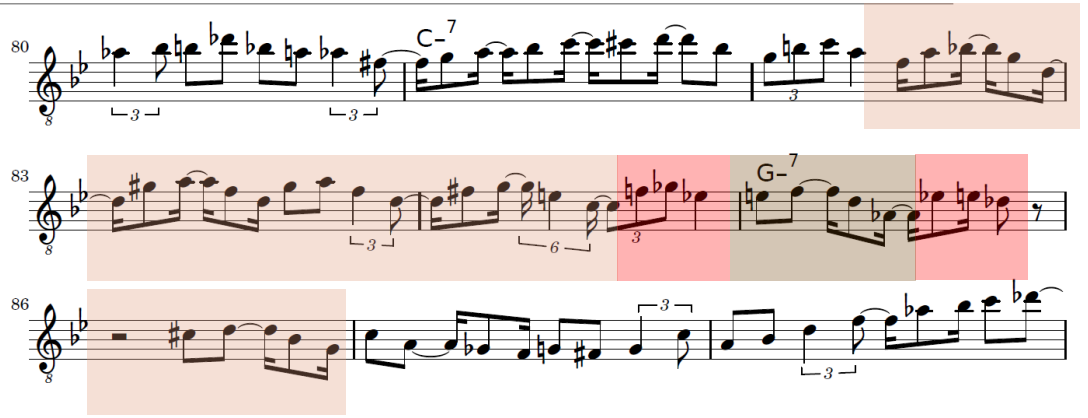
Michael Brecker
Constant structures

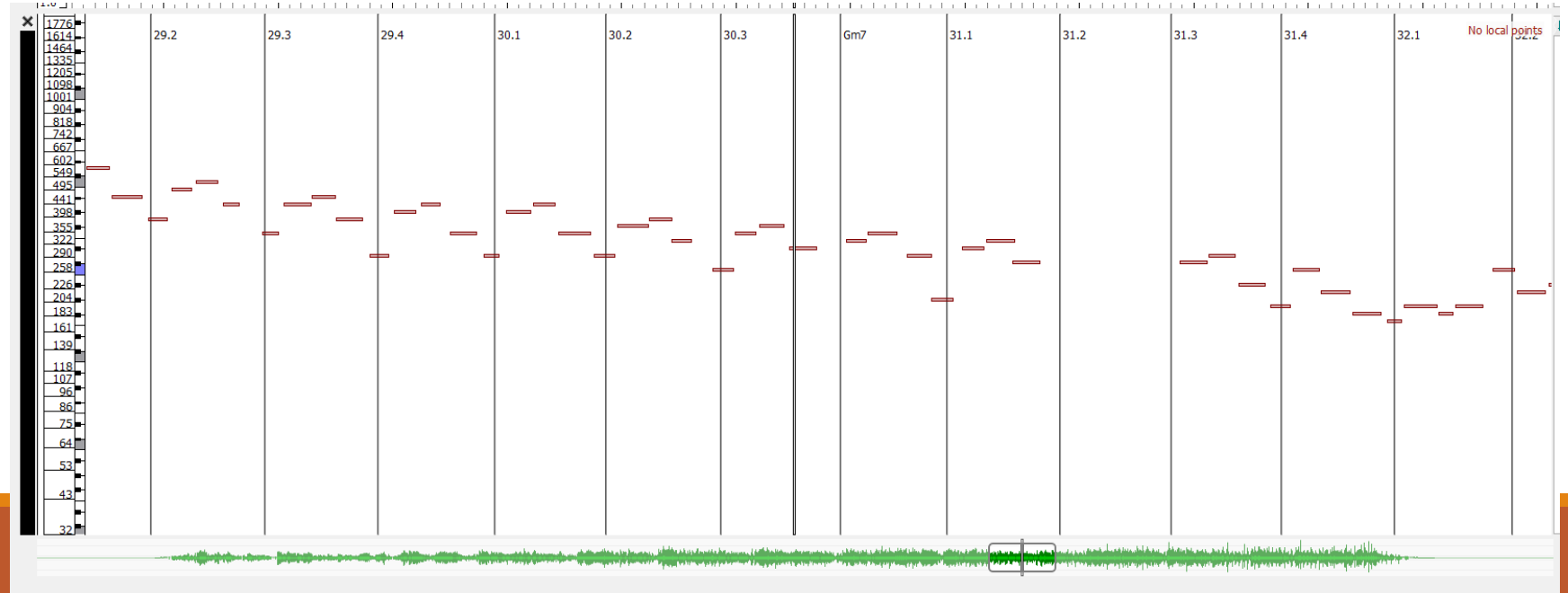




„Nothing Personal“, *Michael Brecker* (1987)

Michael Brecker
Constant structures

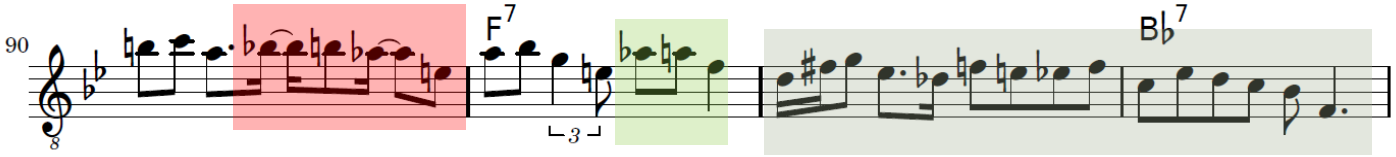


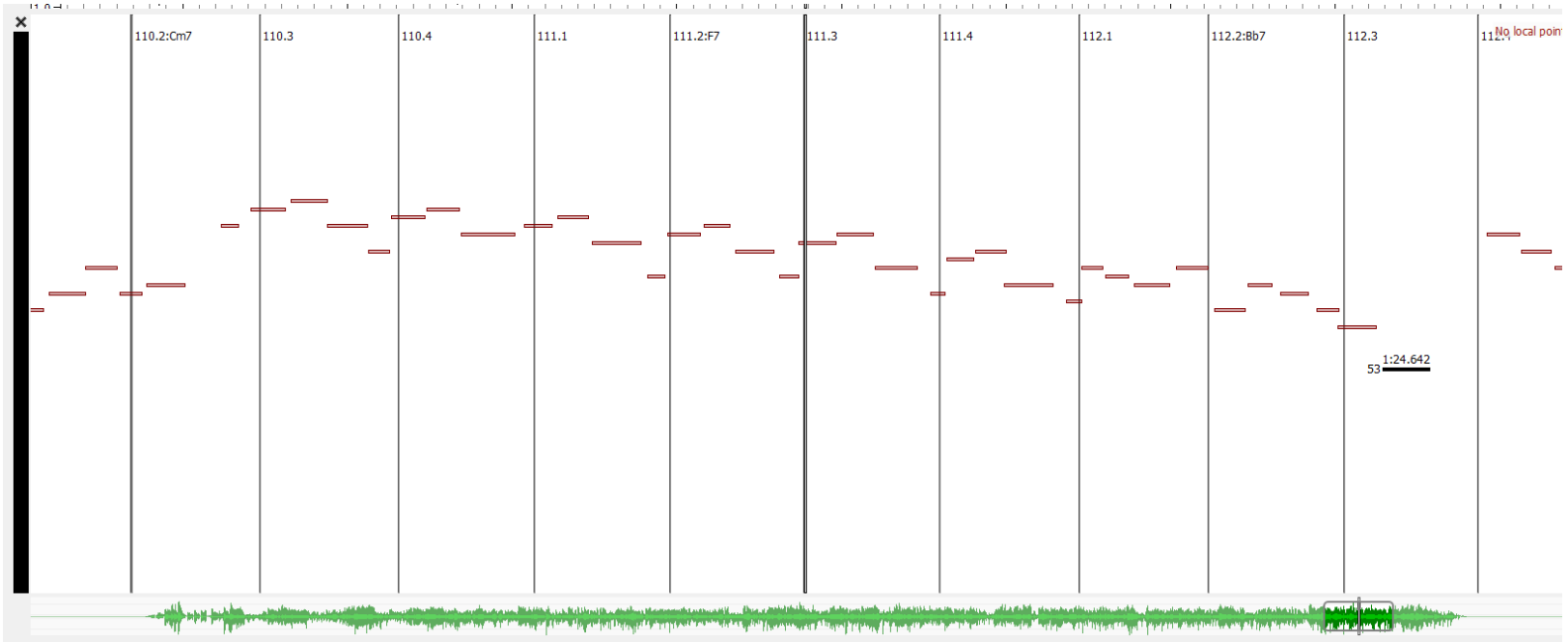


„Nothing Personal“, *Michael Brecker* (1987)

MICHAEL BRECKER
Constant structures as inside and outisde

„Delta City Blues“, *Two Blocks From the Edge* (1998)

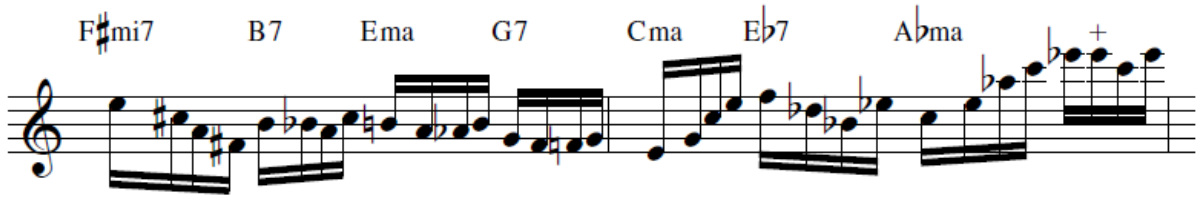




„Nothing Personal“, *Michael Brecker* (1987)

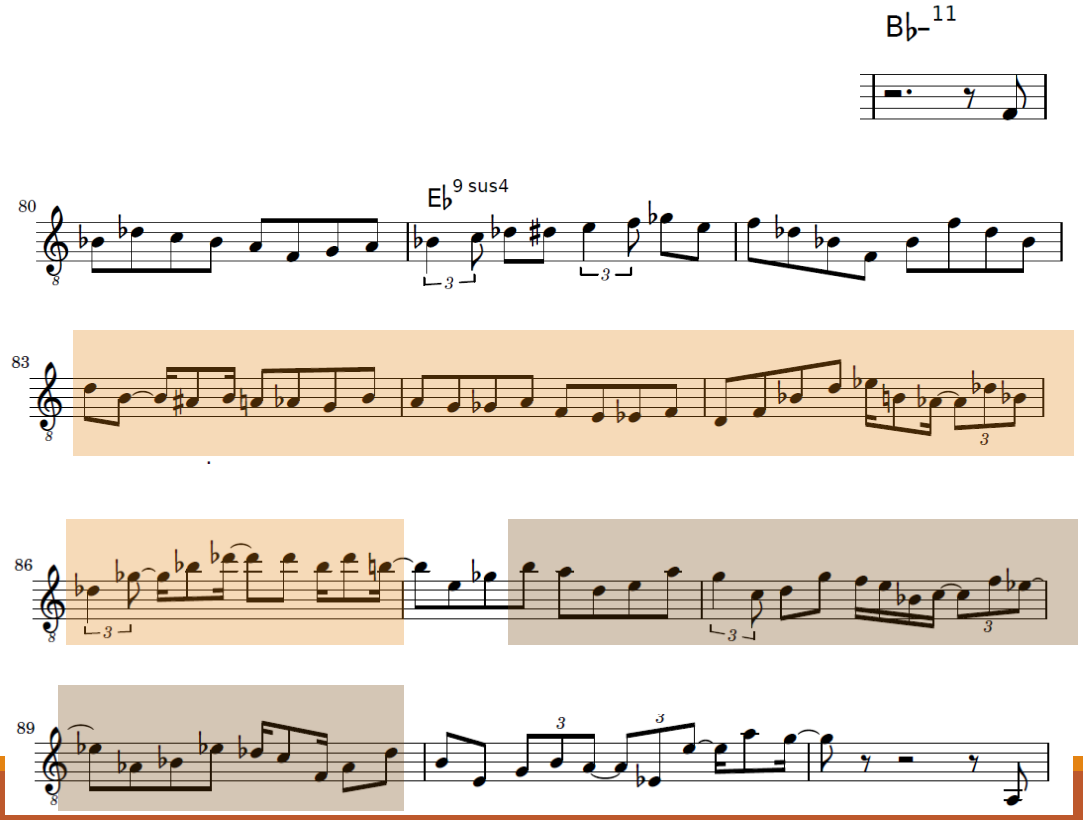
MICHAEL BRECKER
Superimposed chord changes: Coltrane-Changes

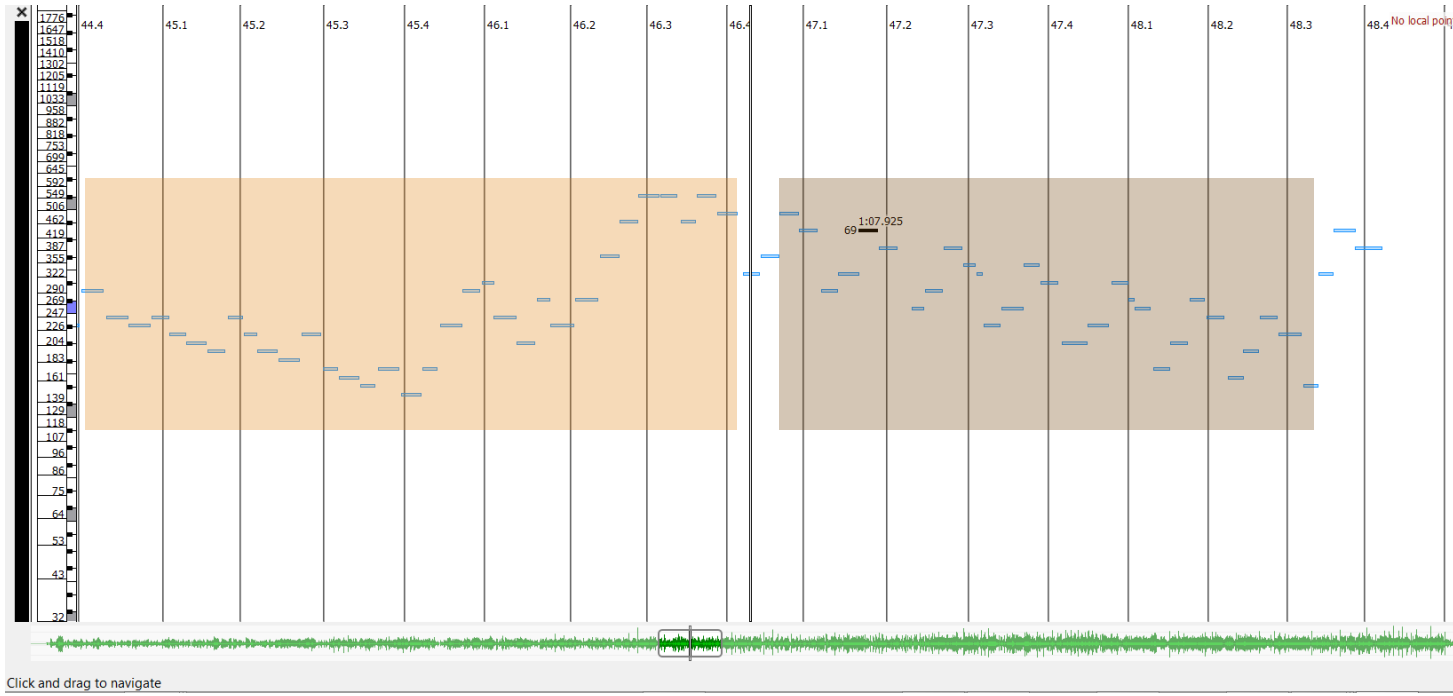
Ari Poutiainen, *Brecker and Patterns. An Analysis of Michael Brecker's Melodic and instrumental Devices*, 1999, p. 27f



Michael Brecker
Superimposed chord changes

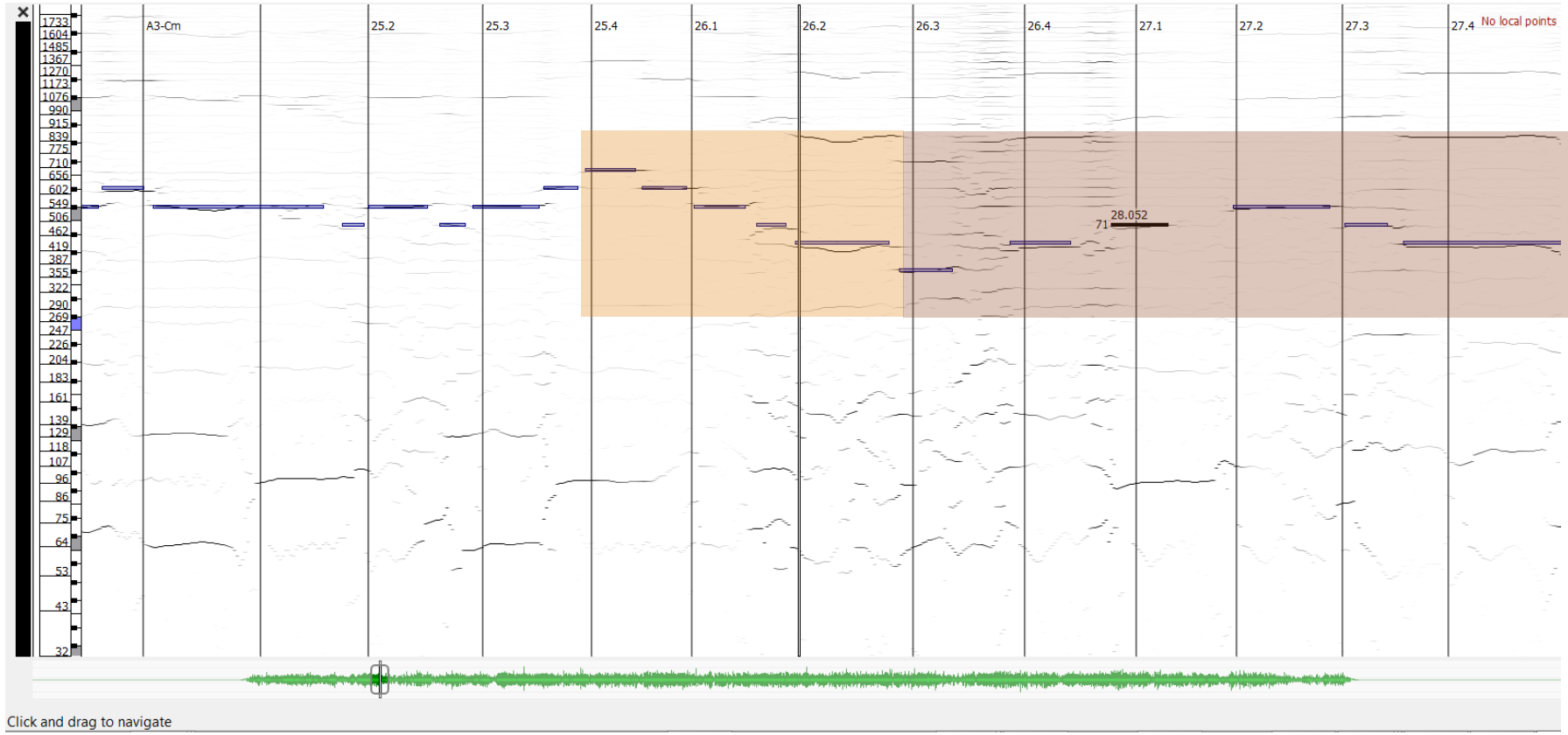
Michael Brecker, „Peep“, *Now You See it… Now You Don‘t* (1990)



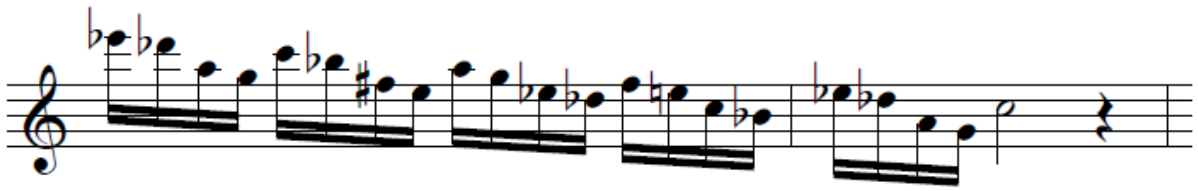


Symmetric scales: Whole tone scale

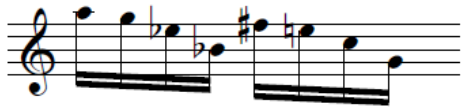
David Liebman, „Softly As In A Morning Sunrise“, *Quest/Standards* (1988)



Symmetric scales: dominant diminished scaöe

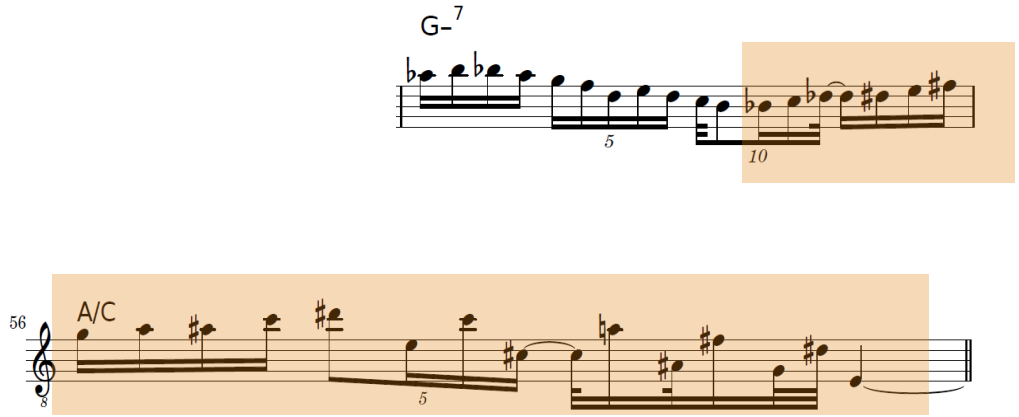


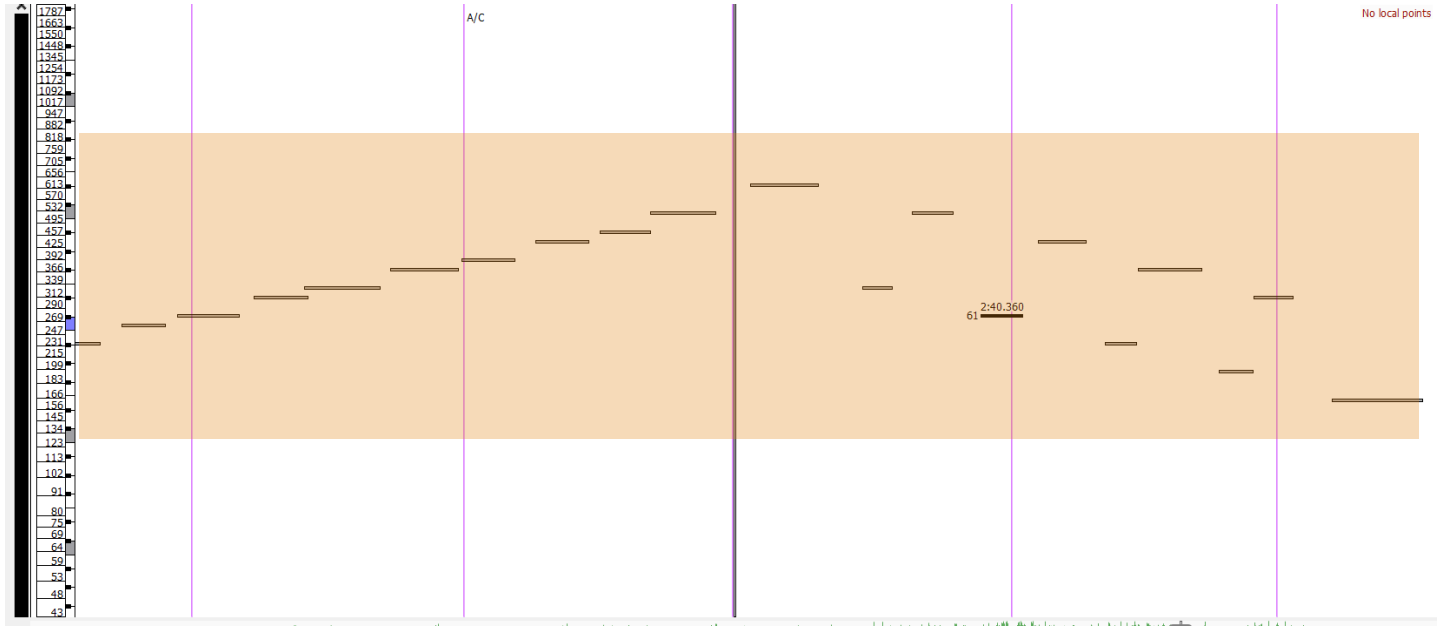
John Coltrane, solo on „Moment‘s Notice“, end of 2nd chorus, bars 34-35
C-dominant diminished



Michael Brecker, solo on „Peep“, 3rd chorus, bar 8
C-dominant diminished

Symmetric scales





Michael Brecker, „Naked Soul“,
Tales Form The Hudson (1996)

Conclusion

- strategies of playing outside prominently established by John Coltrane became standard devices of post-bop improvisation
  - Tonal displacement: side-stepping/side-slipping, intervallic denial
  - Reharmonisation: Coltrane-changes, superimposed chord changes
  - Constant structure
  - ‘outside scales’: chromatic scale, symmetric scales

- connecting several strategies in one phrase became an important tool to create drama and express creativity

Outlook

- further analysis of post-bop and contemporary saxophonists with close and distant reading

- question of context:
  - rhythmic precision, metric and formal placement of outside strategies
  - Context of the band: interplay and harmonic freedom

- constant structures – motivic improvisation - interplay of melody and rhythm: superimposed harmony and rhythm

Thank you for your attention!

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