

The Cohering Consequences of Groove

As I remember it, a wonderfully concise and breezy course paper with this title came to my attention somewhere in the early 1990s. Then it was revised as “The Completing Consequences of Groove,” and Allen Farmelo’s final version of this paper, “The Unifying Consequences of Grooving” was published at the MUSE website in 1997; that version appears here as Appendix F. If a discipline like “groovology” should emerge over time, this paper in its most developed form might be considered a defining moment, a conceptualization of groove theory or participation theory as a cybernetic or recursive system that makes the model diagrammed in “They Want the Music, but They Don’t Want the People” (Appendix E.) possible.

This chapter is intended as a concise and breezy summary of Farmelo’s final paper, a simple explanation of some diagrams, a “spinning” or a “spiralizing” of the CCs.

Figure 1. PDs ----> (groove) ----> CCs

The little “participatory discrepancies” of each participating performer create a groove and the groove generates cohering/cohearing/completing/ unifying consequences that Farmelo divides into four immediate unifications, described by everyone he interviews, and three possible further unifications that are described in the broader ethnographic literature. These seven Cohering (Co-hearing) Consequences can be diagrammed as Concentric Circles:

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| 1. Person | Character Consequences |
| 2. Song | Canto Consequences |
| 3. Band | Coro or Chorus or “inner Circle” Consequences |
| 4. Party/Performance/Scene | Choreo or “outer Circle” Consequences |
| 5. Environment | Co-evolutionary Consequences |
| 6. Supernatural | eChological Consequences |
| 7. The Universe | Cosmic Consequences |
| 8. all of the above all at once in present time | |
- i.e. Coincidental Circumstantial Collaborative Consensual Connecting Correlated
Cohering Co-hearing Completing Circulating Cyclical Consequences

Figure 2. The 8 CC’s

just imagine 8 Concentric Circles
somehow blended into a spiral
with your own person/character
vibrating in the center circle

1. Person and Character Consequences

“The first unifying consequence to emerge from the interviews is the completion of the individual person through a healing of the classical Western mind/body split.” Farmelo goes on to argue that this healing is a “retreat . . . to a state that precedes that separation.” In many ways we do get back to early childhood, to the prime or primitive, or back into the womb drum, as we groove, but I like “Character Consequences” for the No. 1 CC because time spent grooving is a healing advance from the alienation-cogitation-isolation/egoism-autism that characterizes industrial civilization; grooving is a set of skills honed in a process that releases us from alienated discourse and liberates us into participatory recourse, the ‘going around in circles’ of recycling feedback, sociability, conviviality, Bateson’s recursive vision, Blake’s four fold vision. In action-education or *paideia* this was called character building or *ethos* (the power of musicking to shape character) in Ancient Greece. The “light trance” that Farmelo and his interviewees describe can also be achieved by droning, om-ing, sounding in a sanga that doesn’t necessarily groove. Almost any path out of ego in this ego-driven and rapidly deteriorating world situation (Appendix G) can be seen as an advance, a healing, a strengthening, a building of character. Whenever we play alone, but especially when we tap a foot as we practice or perform, sing as we drum, yodel in and out of singing, use all four limbs on a drumset, play piano with two hands, pick and sing at the same time, etc. one person can generate a groove. And this invites others to join in.

All of the following CCs can be understood as reinforcing or feeding back into CC #1.

2. Song and Canto Consequences

“The second unifying consequence to emerge from the interviews is the unification of separate *musical parts* into *song*.” The pun “cohering/co-hearing” is not only more fun than “unifying” it is also more accurate. (Completing/com-pleading is a nice pun too, because on every page of this book we are pleading with you to groove.) The separate parts of a musicking ensemble not only become more than the sum of their parts, the main point and power of the “unification” concept, but they magically retain their separateness or apartness and the power of their participatory discrepancies. A single singer with a guitar creates “song” and “band” when the two processes of picking and singing come together. When separate people playing separate parts come together and cohere they are co-heard by each participant from a different vantage point. Each participant and co-hearer experiences the consequences of grooving differently. In the cantometrics system of analysis developed by Alan Lomax an attempt is made to describe and classify all the relevant aspects of “song” or “canto” in each culture’s performances. But what a task it is to sort out the variations in the variables along continua like “phrase length” or amount of “polyphony”! CC #2 and CC#3 are also complex creativity or creative complexity since the instant two or more players-singers-performers interact, the PDs and CCs are flowing in a crazy confluence.

3. Band and Coro Consequences

“Just as separate musical parts join to become one entity, song, separate musicians join to become one entity, band.” As Farmelo points out from a variety of angles in his extended discussion of “band,” any time two or more people play together a groove is being constantly negotiated. CC #3 is probably where almost all of the research into grooving will be done because all the issues of stimulus/response, call/response, sonero/coro,

bass/drums, i say/u say, the back and forth, give and take, of grooving as social interaction can be explored with digital recordings and analysis of micro-timing.

Coro Consequences, intraband responses, generate the “songs” of CC#2 and and the “healing feeling” of mind-body unification of CC#1.

4. Party and Choreo Consequences

“The fourth unifying consequence of grooving is solidarity between a band and an audience during a live performance. The event becomes bigger than the sum of its parts.” The circles get much bigger, more inclusive, and when dancing by individuals, couples, lines, or circles of dancers, swirling or spiraling, proliferates the PDs and feeds back CCs 1 thru 3 to musicians *ad infinitum*, an “audience” or co-hearing group *becomes* a party/community. It may be a matter of opinion, taste or preference for individuals or whole communities/cultures as to the emphasis or premium put on dancing, but CC4 is the biggest and most important middle layer of the 8 CCs for me and, I think, for most people living in prime societies, because dancing inspires the best CCs 1,2 and 3, while linking us to the CCs 5, 6 and 7 found under the heading of “Ethnological Speculations” in Appendix F. Why speculate about “others” cross-culturally around the world when we can activate, actualize, put everyone in motion with nature, spirit and the cosmos? Right in our own backyards!

5. Environment and Coevolutionary Consequences

CC#5 points CCs 1 thru 4 toward the survival of the species in all their glorious diversity. Could we have a “species parade” with each full moon to celebrate the arrival of seasons, the passing thru of migrating species, the transformation of crawling caterpillars into dancing butterflies? Could we make every day Earth Day? Could we celebrate totems and observe taboos and recreate the rites of natural passage with song and dance? I suppose I am speculating along with Allen Farmelo, but in a very definite direction of what is most missing in our lives -- identifying the ecological niches that most need filling in every locality.

6. Supernatural and eChological Consequences

CC#6 brings us to the mystery of sound in the surround. All sound is echo or resonance, vibrations, reverberations bouncing off material conditions. I like the word “supernatural” with the accent on super as more natural, or very natural and the way in which the mystery of sound spreading out 360 degrees in all directions from a source can create our oneness with nature. Just as it takes moisture particles in the air and the sun at a certain angle to the viewer in order for one particular person in a particular time and place to see a rainbow, so it takes a sound source echoing for one person to enter into the sound and be surrounded or swallowed by it. It is perfectly natural, very natural, super natural for the sound and groove to be inside me and for me to be inside the groove and the sound. Just as CC#1 merges mind and body into one, so CC#6 resolves spirit and matter into one. We can chose to coevolve via sound and groove with one species at a time, with all the species in an ecological system, and with . . .

7. Universe and Cosmic Consequences

. . . . Cosmic Consciousness. We have Bill Blake's famous formulation of the "four fold vision" (Sec. 6 Ch. 2) and AA founder Bill W.'s invocation of "the fourth dimension," and bassist Red Mitchell on "the fourth level of consciousness" all testifying to the possibility of living in the moment and loving our sense of being at one with the universe.

CC # 8 is more than the sum of all of these parts, much value added, being part of something much, much bigger than we are, and musicking-dancing has certainly been a part of this Path for a long, long, time.

Shouldn't every child be encouraged daily to feel the groove, be in the groove, participate with others in learning the skills of grooving?

As I've been writing out this counterpoint and renaming of Farmelo's very carefully documented and more scholarly exposition, I keep thinking of:

the "circles and angles" conclusions of Tiv Song (1979); Robert P. Armstrong's theory of The Affecting Presence that inspired my effort to pattern the Tiv metaphorical base of expression; John Collins' clear explanation of, and circular transcriptions for, African drumming as well his expositions of all the ways advanced physics conceptualizations and African drumming practices intertwine (African Musical Symbolism in Contemporary Perspective: Roots, Rhythms and Relativity available at a German Goethe Institute website); discussing the many issues of "participation" and "commodification" with Steve Feld in Music Grooves; Han Thung's inner structures of Tai Chi diagrammed as yin & yang "figure 8" mobius strips; and finally, Elisabet Sahtouris' Earthdance and Starhawk's Spiral Dance that connect both the dots and the lines -- for when the concentric circles are put into motion they can quickly become a spiral.

All these wheels/cycles/spirals oppose the wheels of destruction (Bateson diagram in Appendix G.) and help us put sand in those wheels.

Pat Campbell:

What will school principals think of the cohering consequences of groove? The concentric circles seem to encompass the basic goals of a strong curriculum: strong sense of self and building character, song (like dueting, co-hearing with another, the many ways of one on one mentoring), band (learning group dynamics), party (finding pleasure in cooperation), ecological niches and rituals, the mystical essence of life itself, the cosmic universe both beyond and in us. They may find it all quite daunting, especially in the midst of their own pressing goals and the already over-packed curriculum, to consider the philosophical reach of the groove concept. They might also find – if they step into some of the music classes where children are in the process of learning, finding the groove and the basic rhythms, pitches, self-organizing patterns – that chaos may sometimes rule before a local order emerges. Instruments and voices may be wavering. Bodies may be flailing in uncertain moves that take time to grow more certain; children may bump into each other before they get in synch. But take a minute to explain, reinforce the message that musical actions of the chaotic kind do resolve, much like the harmonic tension that leads to a cadential resolution. Beg for time and patience, ensure that order of an expressive kind is on the way—order and yet also the goal of local grooves that can generate new and evolving kinds of community. "Time spent grooving is a healing advance": this translates as action that leads to social balance and personal health, a principle goal of schools and society and school principals everywhere.