

FIVE PROLIFEROCITY PRINCIPLES

“I never came up with that ‘genius’ tag. Someone else did. I don’t like the genius business. It’s not me. Erroll Garner was a genius. Art Tatum. Oscar Peterson. Charlie Parker. Artie Shaw. Dizzy was a genius—the way he wrote, the way he played. I’m a utility man. I can do a lot of little things well. But I learned it all from others. Piano from Nat Cole. Singing from Nat and Charles Brown. I copied.”

“And then innovated.”

“The innovation was copying. Good copying. Great copying. But I wouldn’t put me up there with Bird and Diz.”

“And when they say you invented soul music, you’re going to argue?”

“Maybe I put together two things that hadn’t been put together before, but, hell, give credit to the church singers—Archie Brownlee, Claude Jeter--and the bluesmen--Big Boy Crudup, Tampa Red—where I got it from. I got enough credit. Let people know that it didn’t come from me. It came from before me. Way before me.”

Ray Charles speaking to David Ritz

The Mimesis Principle – *imitate what you love*

And imitate dance moves, hand games, drum rhythms, silly interactive repetitive "simon sez" stuff *even if you don't love it*, because you will come to love it after it is in your muscles and so easy and satisfying to do.

I didn't fully recognize the deep power of mimesis until I was 50 and bought a \$50 cornet to imitate Wild Bill Davison. When I was around 11 or 12 I fell in love with Wild Bill's lead cornet in dixieland ensembles, his very delicate but rough and tough soloing style, the ripping upward glissandos and low register growlings in the tags he did at the end of tunes. I wanted to do that for about forty years before I gave in to the urge. As a teen I was imitating drummers I loved, getting good at being Gene Krupa or Louis Bellson or Dave Tough (poking a sizzle cymbal behind a Wild Bill solo), or Kenny Clarke, Art Blakey, Vernell Fournier, Philly Joe Jones, Frank Isola – who didn't I pick up licks, tricks, 4 bar breaks from? But good friends – Pat, Pete, Bruce – played trumpet in our bands. Nobody needed my version of Wild Bill and I never thought of trying to make sounds through a trumpet or cornet.

But some deep and enduring obstacles to mimesis were also in place. Everybody in the classical world thinks you have to be good at it to play. Everybody in the jazz world thinks you have to be improvising and original and good at it to play. And so most people don't imitate recordings, they just listen to them, marvel, don't play.

Without analyzing all the foundations of the obstacles (see Allen Farmelo's chapter which follows this one), we have to recognize their existence just enough to ignore them! Children need 100%, unqualified, mimesis permission. You love it? Copy it. Here's how.

The "here's how" always needs work, simplification, breaking down craft processes into their component parts, making a groove doable. Making a sound. Can you create a tone on the instrument? If so, you are playing cornet! From there it is just

one success after another. There came a point, after a few weeks of playing cornet and learning the fingerings for the notes of a Wild Bill chorus, when I realized that I didn't know how to make the growling sound on certain notes so they would sound just like Wild Bill's. After getting conflicting advice from a few horn players I called Bill, then 83, on the phone and asked him the question. He said, "I do it with my throat. My growls are from there. And if you try different ways of doing that, you'll come across one." I tried it, and it worked. The important story about mimesis comes from Bobby Blue Bland. I asked him how he developed the distinctive rough sound in his voice when he was "crying" the blues. "I imitated B.B. King so hard I got hoarse" was the answer.

Imitate passionately. Originality comes naturally.

"The innovation was copying—good copying, great copying."

The Crafting Principle – *over and over*

Think of grooving skills – the specific moves made on a guiro or with a shaker or holding a drum pattern– as the formats and frameworks for proliferocity. Once you can hold any pattern automatically-semiconsciously-gracefully, e.g. playing the guiro part for salsa while holding a conversation with someone, you are ready to use that pattern as format, framework, matrix for any words or melodies or words-in-melodies that come to mind. This is crafting because just as a weaver or potter repeats motions over and over to make a rug on a loom or to throw a series of cups from a potter's wheel, once your groove is going, moving in time and repeating, endless production is possible. Creativity becomes a physical process. Creativity can flow because a part of the brain is grooving, doing, repeating, and simultaneously: 1) keeping consciousness of past and future on the sidelines, no time or space for comparing, criticizing; and, in the case of musicking or music-crafting 2) inviting you or someone else to add something to the groove. One pattern of sound invites another pattern of sound; a "call" calls forth a "response." When I'm drumming the option is always there to sing along with the drumming, to sing something "into" the groove. The crafting principle, doing it over and over again, lets the proliferocity principle of plenty plenty come into play.

"I'm a utility man."

The Proliferocity Principle -- *plenty plenty*

I started out using "prolificity" but in the dictionary, "prolific" the adjective becomes the noun "prolificness" or "prolificacy", neither suggesting as much fun as the adjective "proliferous" which has the zoological definition: "reproducing freely by means of buds and sidebranches, as corals do" and the botanical definition: "freely producing buds or offshoots, esp. from unusual places, as fruits from fruits." But "proliferous" is still an adjective, hence "proliferocity" the noun. This is one place where it is nice to have a ferocious six syllable word, two triplets, even if a one syllable metaphor, "juice," might do, or the fancy French two syllable, "jouissance".

You know someone is in a groove when they are prolific. If melodies, poems, sketches, flow through a person, flow out of a person daily, constantly, or whenever they decide to turn on the spigot – you can be sure they know how to groove. I have known for a few years now that if I wanted to write 144 poems in a day or compose 144 melodies or, easiest of all, put the processes together and do a gross of songs in a day, it would be fun to do. I could sing new songs into a tape recorder and make that 144 quota by noon if I got up before dawn. And if a subgenius like me can do it, anyone can do it. Anyone can have a lifetime of poetry. Anyone can crank out songs endlessly or do jingles for advertising agencies on demand. Anyone can follow some simple crafting principles and become prolific – budding, branching, offshooting, and from some unusual places.

plenty plenty and more plenty

The Blind Pig Principle – *even a blind pig finds an acorn once in a while*

When I was growing up and got too pleased with myself for doing something right, my father would say "even a blind pig finds an acorn once in a while." If you are doing something over and over and plenty plenty of it, one cup or rug or song may be slightly better or remarkably better than the ones that came before it or the ones that will come after.

Fortunately or unfortunately, you really have nothing to say about this, nothing to think about this, no way to plan a better one, no need to spot a better one. Others will say, or think, or plan, or spot. And perhaps pay, or distribute, or replicate, or do something with the better things you do. But you don't want to think about "better" and you certainly don't want to think about worse. You are not the oak or the acorns; you are just a blind pig.

Root hog or die. Root hog and die. Root hog and live life to the fullest.

When I told my pops how I was using the Blind Pig Principle to encourage practice, action, creativity, etc. he added "a blind pig might even find a truffle once in a while." And then after some further reflection, "but a white man would take it away from him." As cracker barrel philosophers go, my pops is a pretty good one at 90.

"It came from before me. Way before me."

The Law of Compensating Errors

Like the blind pig principle, the Law of Compensating Errors was passed on to me by my father as part of the family wisdom. As the ecocatastrophe unfolds with more and more errors, the intentional "dilution of pollution" strategy of the owning classes must be countered, and so the Law becomes more of a Prayer: "Gaia, may the manmade messes cancel each other out."

In grooving, however, the compensating errors are always necessary to create any groove at all, so the Law is truly a law and not just a guiding principle. If everyone plays exactly with the metronome, or exactly "as written," or completely and exactly "together," the sound will be mechanical, lifeless, stiff, square, no groove. The errors, imperfections, looseness, "the necessary slippage" (Feld personal communication), must

be very nearly constant and sometimes even growing in order to keep a groove going. In my scientific work as an ethnomusicologist on the way to groovology, I called these compensating errors "participatory discrepancies" – the little gaps or slight differences in timing and tuning that create excitement and mystery, involve us, pull us into the music and put the music inside us. (Keil 1994, Progler 1994) There is no need here to go deeply into the theory and methods of measuring "Participatory Discrepancies" (PDs)(see Section 3), because nature gives what we need to each of us. Just as no two faces, or two signatures, or two voices, or two sets of fingerprints are alike, no two people have exactly the same sense of time or "timing" or "time-feel" or "groove." And so it is that any time two or more people get together to music, the marvelous Law of Compensating Errors comes into play.

Think of these five principles as linked practices. No sequence. No hierarchy. Do them all together. Keep them in balance.

Each principle is quite simple – imitate what you love, repeat stuff over and over, do a lot of it, find people to play with who complement and compensate you, and always let still other people sort out acorns from truffles from fruitless rooting around. You are not an oak or acorn. You are not a sorter. You are a rooter and a tooter.

"Tell Me What'd I Say"

Pat Campbell:

Basics, primordial methods, these principles are not new to teachers, but they come brightly packaged and infused with the energy of a musician-teacher and teaching musician. Consider them from the perspective of music education practice.

Mimesis— imitation—is not a dirty word; it is a natural means of learning, with children listening and watching, then doing. (Teachers were once taught that teaching by rote was inferior, that literacy was the point of pedagogical activity in music. This was when the eye reigned supreme over the ear, when imitation was scorned as a low-end learning mode. It is only recently that listening has been elevated to a higher-order skill again, one that requires complex reception and cognitive processing strategies that pave the way to imitation as an ultimate assessment of understanding.) Children surely “do” music—sing it, dance it, play it on keyboards, recorders, violins, trombones, clarinets, djembes— repeatedly, and the musical skill they develop is their craft which, once truly gelled, flows with a measure of their personal expression. The more they sing and play, the more proliferous these musical children become, comfortable with their skills, branching out to rubato, dynamic expression, and little twists and turns in the rhythm, as the style allows. With the encouragement of their teacher, they get good at their music making, too, so that it is more than a fluke, a one-shot, a blind-pig’s luck. Children can grow in singing and playing with increasing success, in the knowledge that they are there “in the groove.” Aaron’s tune is not quite Erin’s tone, Jenny’s time may not be Kenny’s groove, but they are closing in on each other’s participatory discrepancies, coming along in their growing musicianship.