

Bruce Felter found this on the internet and I think it's a great way to look at improvisation.

## Conversation ~ Jazz Improvisation

### Conversation

- a. when people are conversing, they are thinking of the words they are saying *as* they are speaking; each word is not planned ahead of time
- b. people who speak well do not have to *cognitively* think of each word or sentence they are saying; it is seemingly an "automatic" process
- c. a conversation is not a "prepared" speech (as is, say, reciting an extant speech like the Gettysburg Address); what one actually says depends on what he/she is thinking, feeling, and, especially on what others involved in the conversation are saying; a good conversationalist reacts to what others are saying
- d. people learn how to speak by talking, listening to others talk, and studying pronunciation and grammar
- e. good conversationalists, who have command of their voice and vocabulary do not have to cognitively think of how to form each word; mouth shape, tongue position, air flow amount (e.g., more for talking loud or shouting), and pitch (e.g., pitch goes up at the end of a question and bends and becomes nasal when whining) become "automatic" with time and practice
- f. the more one speaks and listens to others, the more "automatic" and "natural" the conversation
- g. conversationalists use *language* vocabulary (i.e., words, expressions, etc.), especially vocabulary (slang, jargon, etc.) associated with their particular traditions

### Improvisation

- a. when jazz musicians improvise, they are thinking of the notes they are playing *as* they are playing; each note is not planned ahead of time
- b. jazz musicians who improvise well do not have to *cognitively* think of each note or phrase they are playing; it is seemingly an "automatic" process
- c. improvisation is not a "prepared" piece (as is, say, playing an extant classical piece like Beethoven's Fifth Symphony); what one actually plays depends on what he/she is thinking, feeling, and, especially on what the others in the jazz group are playing; a good jazz musician reacts to what others in the band are playing
- d. musicians learn how to improvise by playing, listening to others play, and studying instrumental technique and music theory
- e. good jazz musicians, who have command of their instrument and jazz musical vocabulary do not have to cognitively think of how to play each note; instrument fingering, embouchure, air flow amount (e.g., more for louder passages), and expression (e.g., pitch bending for desired effects) become "automatic" with time and practice
- f. the more one improvises and listens to what his/her bandmates are playing, the more "automatic" and "natural" the improvisation
- g. jazz improvisers use *musical* vocabulary (i.e., notes, chords, ), especially *jazz* and *blues* vocabulary (i.e., music stylistically associated with the jazz and blues traditions)

## Conversation ~ Jazz Improvisation

- h. conversation can convey cognitive thought and/or emotions
- i. the more one has listened to conversations of great speakers and thinkers (or read their writings), the more equipped he/she is to converse eloquently
- j. usually, the better one knows the subject matter of which he/she is speaking, the better the conversation can flow
- k. usually, the better one knows those with whom he/she is conversing, the better the conversation can flow
- l. sometimes certain people will “just click” and have an amazing conversation (even if they just met)
- m. bottom line: English is a language
- h. jazz improvisation conveys only emotional thought; although it does not communicate cognitive thought as does spoken language, most feel that music can express much deeper emotions (those beyond wording) far better than any written or spoken language; perhaps that’s why most societies place such a strong emphasis on music (in the United States alone, music is a multi-billion dollar industry)
- i. the more one has listened to the improvisations of jazz masters (or listened to their recordings), the more equipped he/she is to improvise eloquently
- j. usually, the better a jazz musician knows the music (notes, chords, stylistic characteristics, etc.) that he/she is playing, the better the improvised music can flow
- k. usually, the better a jazz musician knows those with whom he/she is performing, the better the improvised music can flow
- l. sometimes certain musicians will “just gel” and play amazing jazz (even if they just met)
- m. bottom line: jazz is a language