The Improvisational Practice Cycle

Improvisatory activity, especially working with models, licks or exemplars, may be represented as a continuum of 7 stages (mirroring language acquisition), process of internalisation and degrees of use.

7 Stages:

1. **Attraction** – an attitude. From the heart, beauty. There are 2 types of beauty – jaw-dropping beauty and the “beauty of usefulness” – ie a minor II V I phrase or a particularly effective fingering.

2. **Reproduction** – a skill. Manufacturing the desired object exactly and reliably, literally becoming that thing in its most basic, material form. Notice how this stage requires attraction to have taken place alongside a commitment to accuracy. There is no improvisation here at all.

3. **Application** – a skill. Make it useful. Apply the desired object to real musical situations, beginning with the original context. This is skill building or training, becoming adept, thoroughly researching all possible applications of the object.

4. **Modification** – a skill and a process. More flexible application. The object remains pretty much the same, but may be adapted (modified) to suit different keys, tonalities, rhythmic contexts and tempos.

5. **Manipulation** – a process. Freely and deliberately changing elements of the object while still referring to it in its original form – ie altering the ending. Note that curiosity and improvisation are now necessary.

6. **Transformation** – a process. More extreme manipulation – the object may now remain as a prompt, a springboard or an echo. Gesture may become more important than the detail, contour more useful that the exact replication of intervals, feeling more important than the spelling or the concept itself, forming new materials. The deeper meaning interests us now.

7. **Readiness** – an attitude. You will have now absorbed both the beauty and the detail of the original, desired object, thoroughly, achieving reliability and adaptability and moving towards use that is informed yet personal, forming new material as a result of the improvisational practice cycle, which now begins again...

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