Thesis Proposal
HUMA PhD Program
Concordia University
Aaron Finbloom
Advisors: Sandeep Bhagwati, Erin Manning, Nathan Brown

Structuring Dialogue –
Experiments in Transformative Inquiry

Introducing the Question

Dialogue can be transformative – it can transform the way we relate to ourselves, others and our world while providing greater insight into these connections. Given these transformative properties, various conversational practices have developed in effort to more readily and profoundly bring about such transformation. Examples include: religious practices, philosophy, therapeutic practices, dialogical facilitation, movement practices, performance art, theatre.

Despite the often positive potential inherent in such "Transformative Conversation Practices" (TCP), they rarely explicitly address some of the foundational problems of conversation. These problems can include: the potential for TCPs to disempower some individuals while empowering others, the possibility that a given TCP overemphasizes one set of thematic issues and doesn't touch on other vital subject matters, the possibility for particular grammatical conventions and rules of discourse to be used that limit the expressive potential of individuals, the potential for one person to speak over another, and the possibility that a given TCP utilizes embodied techniques that may restrict access to those who do not comfortably fit in with its physical prescriptions.

Following from these problems, some basic mechanical questions about conversation come to light: Who gets to speak? Who is expected to listen and for how long? What subject matters are opened or closed to a given conversation and what conditions motivate one topic over another? What behavioral parameters and rulings determine the syntactic and semantic guidelines that we use? Which contexts motivate what gestures, intonations and embodied positions? And these questions then begin to uncover even more foundational questions regarding conversation: What is dialogue and what constitutes its relation to speech? How much of dialogue is determined by its material apparatus of expression (voice, writing, gesture)? How is time constructed within dialogue? How is the self constructed and deconstructed in a transformative conversation? How does a given conversation frame the boundary between self and other? Who or what causes a conversation to move in the directions that it moves? How can conversation be both structured and emergent? How are speaking and listening co-constituted?

Not only are these foundational problems not adequately addressed by the conversation practices themselves; they are also not adequately resolved via textual analyses that examine a practice's aims, cultural consequences, social history, or its intellectual historical influences. Rather, in order to adequately address these underlying conversational problems and questions, what is needed is an active investigation of what I call a TCP's "Conversational Elements". These elements could be defined as: a TCP's underlying behaviors, attitudes, competences, actions, performative techniques

and material structures of conversation (for example: body position, room design, length of time between utterances, intonation, roles, turn order, etc).

This dissertation addresses such foundational conversational problems across a range of different TCPs. It attempts to explore and chart potential pathways towards viable solutions to the aforementioned problems by using both analytical academic and artistic research methodologies. Analytically, it aims to draw connections between the transformative potential of particular TCPs (using philosophical conversation practices and therapeutic conversation practices as prime examples) and their conversational elements. Artistically, it aims to design an innovative artistic practice based on conversational elements that are then used to design quasi-scripted transformative conversations ("Structured Dialogues"), and to provide a philosophical account of language that undergirds this practice. The research proposal will conclude with analytic explorations around my own artistic experiments in this field along with a research-creation proposal demonstrating the effectiveness of these techniques.

The scholarly inquiry that I will undertake will involve a diverse range of disciplinary methodologies. Part of my research will touch on anthropology as my work with conversation elements implicates some of the methodological considerations of Conversation Analysis (a field developed out of anthropology and ethnography by Harold Garfinkel in the 1960s). A large portion of my research will utilize theoretical and historical analysis as I will analyse primary source texts (Plato other relevant Ancient Greek Philosophers) supported by secondary sources from philosophers and historians

(Hadot, Nussbaum, Havelock) to inform my research of Socratic Dialogue in Chapter 2.

In Chapter 3, as I study linguistics and the philosophy of language I will implement methods of philosophical and theoretical analysis informed by contemporary theorists such as Derrida, Gadamer, Saussure, Austin, Butler and Sedgwick. The artistic exploration will start with close readings and analyses of scores, exercises and performance games by contemporary artists and musicians, most notably Tino Sehgal and John Zorn, but will also include many contemporary Fluxus artists and musicians such as Steve Reich, John Cage, Cheryl E. Leonard, Douglas Barrett, George Marciunas and John White (see Sauer and Saunders). These methodologies will be correlated with findings and examples from my own artistic research practice, which implement alterations, combinations, supplements and restructurings to given conversational practices in an attempt to investigate innovative avenues of conversation design.

In addition to the discipline-specific methodologies outlined above, my research also utilizes methodologies found within Research-Creation. Although I do share some of the criticisms of Research-Creation outlined by Manning and Massumi in *Thought In The Act* (see Manning and Massumi: 88), and although I also see my work undoing certain methodological assumptions within Research-Creation (for instance, the functional binary that research or theoretical practices are distinct from artistic practices), my research will take up a particular Research-Creation Methodology elucidated by Sandeep Bhagwati called "The AGNI Methodology." Following this approach, I will undergo **analysis**, as I will, "observe practitioners of an existing or

emerging art practice," (Bhagwati 2005) including artists such as John Zorn and Tino Sehgal (Chapter 4) and practitioners of TCPs such as Socrates and Matthew Lipman (Chapter 2). I will apply a **grammar** stage, by utilizing the insights from the analysis phase to, "determine underlying (unspoken) rules governing the practice," (Bhagwati 2005) as seen in the conversational elements that I will analyze in Chapter 1. This will then inform a development of **notation**, when in Chapter 4 I will consider various inscriptive methods of scoring TCPs (games, performances, scripts, etc). Finally, **implementation** or, "implementing works based on these notations," (Bhagwati 2005) will be thoroughly taken-up in Chapter 5 as I will explain my own work developing TCP scores and translating materials from the practices of music into conversation practice.

Relevance

Firstly, I like to argue that both the process and the results of my artistic experimentation with structured dialogue can offer relevant insights to an analysis of TCPs. By re-structuring the implicit rules behind conversation (via games, scores and exercises) one can find innovative approaches to transformative conversation that cut against stagnant traditions and offer novel methodologies and approaches.

More specifically, I believe this research will have positive impacts upon the conversation practices that I am researching. My research process has the potential to uncover and identify key technical, practical and performative devices that underlie TCPs (for examples see Chapter 1-2), by drawing connections between their

transformative aspects and their Conversational Elements. My analysis, in adopting this innovative methodology, will thus allow us to better see how these practices function and how they can be potentially improved.

Additionally, I believe my artistic research to be relevant to the field of theatrical and performative arts, as the integration of core components of transformative conversation has the potential to engender new and innovative performative techniques. In particular, I have found that my work has at times succeeded in translating (or transferring) various dialogical practices or methodologies into performative situations (practices that have previously resisted this kind of translation). Among such practices are: authentic dialogue, performative intellectual discussion, dialogue that implicates the real identity of the performer (rather than their role), and immersive dialogical practices (without an audience). My work is informed by similar practices in experimental theatre groups such as: Rimini Protokoll, Forced Entertainment, Wooster Group, Odyssey Works, Elevator Repair Service.

Finally, I believe my project can significantly impact research into pedagogical development. I do not explicitly use the term "pedagogy" throughout my dissertation, mostly because I believe the term politically mobilizes particular educative institutions that are typically associated with learning – such as schools, colleges and universities. Rather, I follow some of the claims made by Jacques Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* or Elizabeth Ellsworth in *Places of Learning: Media, Architecture, Pedagogy* which argue that the pedagogical encounter is the framework underlying all

communicative situations. In other words, we are constantly learning and re-learning how to have a transformative conversation, and each conversation we undergo, whether scored or unscored, whether facilitated or "organic", will involve both active and passive pedagogical techniques. One could ask which pedagogical institution would find my research relevant and beneficial? Given primary, secondary and tertiary education's concern for critical thinking and for creating active/engaged students, I believe that my work has vast potential for the classroom in both a traditional setting, but even more so for alternative schools and curriculums. That said, this dissertation will not thoroughly engage in this discussion, as my focus is around a theoretical and performative consideration of conversation as practice and artwork; however, these pedagogical considerations do need to be addressed given that the readers or participants who have engaged in my work are typically driven to ask the question of its relevance to pedagogy. I anticipate that this research will be in conversation with various contemporary scholars of pedagogy who share these underlying opinions such as Rotas, Snaza, Springgay and Gale.

<u>Terminology and Scope</u>

Dialogue

I situate dialogue as an interactive, performative encounter that resists monophony via an ever-present possibility of interruptions by following the works of Dmitri Nikulin and the Lev Yakubinsky. I then bolster their ideas of responsiveness in the context of

communication studies and systems studies to argue for dialogue as a unique spatio-temporal structuring of utterances and responses. This account strategically avoids Derridean critiques of the pure presence of vocality by not suggesting that dialogue need to be vocal (it can be gestural or written), but merely suggesting dialogue implicates a, "bearing of the body as the rhetorical instrument of expression." (Butler 1997: 152) Dialogue is defined by its: multi-directionality, speed, spacing, creation of utterances within a shared space of their distribution, and a co-emergence of a relationship of at least two entities capable of utterance, listening and response.

Structured Dialogue

My term "Structured Dialogue" mobilizes my aforementioned definition of dialogue, but focuses on a way of structuring this dialogue in a way that is fabricated, designed, constructed or somewhat intentional. This term is the semantic/linguistic equivalent of structured improvisation or comprovisation (see Bhagwati), which outlines practices that lie in-between two opposing (and perhaps fictitious) poles of the 1) inscribed, intended, pre-fashioned (musical composition or writing) 2) immediate, spontaneous, contextual (musical improvisation or conversation). Given that all conversation practices have structured and intentional aspects, my use of the term "Structured Dialogue" needs to describe a precise practice of conversation, and doesn't apply to all conversation as such. I will suggest and detail a conceptual movement from cultural practice to works of art (games, exercises, scores, etc), a movement implicated by qualities of particularity and structural intentionality (see Chapter 4).

Transformative Conversation Practices (TCP)

I define Transformative Conversation Practices as dialogue that radically alters our perception of and provides insight into the relations between ourselves, others and our world. I am establishing this term to focus on conversation practices that are investigative and experimental. Additionally, not all of the practices I am investigating fit into this definition of TCP. Some philosophical traditions may investigate our world; yet this investigation disregards our relationship towards it (i.e. it does not provide a reflexive glance towards the relation itself, and merely looks out towards the world with a logical, analytical or scientific lens). Additionally, some religious, spiritual or therapeutic conversational practices may be more focused on the alteration of our relations to each other and less on a process of inquiry. I will use theoretical considerations of Matthew Lipman's and Ann Sharp's "Community of Philosophical Inquiry" (see Lipman and Kennedy) to help strengthen my account of inquiry that underlies TCPs.

Conversational Elements

This term addresses those key methodological aspects of conversation that are tied to conversation's transformative potential. Some are embodied and include the spatial organization of conversationalists, bodily movements and gestures concurrent with speech, and vocal intonation. Others are identity markers and pertain to roles or

positions we take on within conversation (the most important being that of the facilitator). Others, again, are syntactic and include the spacings between sentences and emphasis on certain parts of speech, while some are structural and relate to the aims, intentions, desires and directives that a conversation undergoes. I will attempt to classify and codify this conversational grammar by close analyses of the practices themselves, with some aid from the ethnographic and anthropological discipline called Conversation Analysis (CA).[1]

Chapter 1

This section will attempt to breakdown conversation into various performative/structural conversational elements. In discussing each element, I will draw on key examples to show how each element can drastically affect the psychological, semantic and embodied conversational situation to unpack how these elements bolster transformation and inquiry.

Firstly there are elements which teleologically ground a conversational practice. This includes the aims, intentions and goals of a conversation (for example: removing pathologies, greater conceptual clarity). Following these, are the various grammatical

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[1] Given that Conversation Analysis, as a field, is determined by a very similar set of methodological considerations that underlie my term "Conversational Elements", I feel it somewhat necessary to explain why am I not strictly using Conversation Analysis as my main field of study to analyse conversation. Some of these reasons include: 1) the rigid transcriptive properties of CA are detrimental to the emergent and spontaneous qualities of dialogue 2) CA is quite limited in its ability to transcribe and therefore discuss gesture, intonation, body 3) CA cannot make determinative claims about practices in general (as CA makes claims only about particular conversations captured by transcriptive methods) 4) CA is deeply rooted in empirical research using scientific method; whereas my research methods embrace more the speculative and theoretical.

and linguistic devices used to work with these intentions. The most common are explicit semantic directives. Some examples within therapeutic practices include: "tell me about yourself," "how does that make you feel," "try to embody that," "let's try acting out this conflict". I will also discuss how various practices emphasize or de-stress particular parts of speech. Emile Benveniste's consideration of pronouns will be touched upon here, as well as particular contemporary facilitation practices that make use of "I" statements as an attempt to induce contemplative and non-violent conversation. Other important linguistic elements that will be discussed include negation and hypotheticals (particularly important within philosophical dialogical practices).

Another category I will discuss is the length of an utterance and the spacing of the gaps between one person's utterance and the next. Various philosophical and therapeutic practices play with an utterance's length, both with long drawn-out monologues (or talks at academic conferences), and very quick interrupted expressions (in drama therapy or sometimes within Communities of Philosophical Inquiry) each of which can have great benefits on conversation practices. I will utilize Dmitri Nikulin and Lev Yakubinsky here to discuss the dialogic potential of interruptibility and multiplicity. The spacing between utterances plays a profound role in Quaker Meetings where long pauses exist with drawn out silences in-between speech acts. I will also consider practices where multiple utterances occur simultaneously, a phenomenon that happens naturally in brief conversational moments, but also occurs artistically in works such as Linda Griffith's *Age of Arousal* and Glenn Gould's *Contrapuntal Radio*.

Another crucial element I will discuss is embodiment. The topic of embodiment is quite large, however it can be limited in scope to embodied elements that more easily facilitate transformative conversation. I will discuss contemplative and philosophical walking practices (notably Frédéric Gross's *A Philosophy of Walking*). I will also consider eye gaze within conversation, as a means of producing intimacy and focus. I will draw on Eric Havelock and Walter Ong to discuss repetitive embodied movements that can aid memorization processes contained within proto-philosophical and religious practices. I will also touch on vocal intonation and gesticulation, comparing Heidegger's assumption that mild mannered tones are necessary for reflective contemplation to contemplative practices which adopt more abrupt and sharp commanding intonations and gestures such as Zen Debating Practices.

Finally, an important aspect of conversation practices are the ways in which identities or roles can be put on, played and enacted. A mainstay of this section will be to consider the complicated role of dialogical facilitation; however, other roles or identities (and how they are manifested) are equally critical. Within the practices I am considering some roles including therapist, philosopher, or interrogator; and within each role lie sets of attitudes, power relations, assumptions. I also will examine theater games and drama therapy, practices which allow for these roles to be fluidly interchanged and adapted.

Chapter 2

The aim of this chapter is to 1) explicate why philosophical dialogue is a key exemplar of a TCP 2) breakdown and explicate key philosophic practices by their conversational elements, to show that these practices are partially defined by these elements.

The predominant philosophical practice I will be looking at in this section will be Platonic dialogue. Drawing on works by Pierre Hadot, Eric Havelock and Martha Nussbaum I will argue that Platonic dialogue was not only a textual operation, but also an embodied practice which presented a radically new societal/civic approach to knowledge. Using key passages from Plato's Protagoras and Gorgias, I will explicate how philosophical dialogue is constituted by particular conversation elements (i.e. two conversationalists with particular roles of interrogator and interrogated, using directives on how to structure their speech which include elements such as brachylogia) and how these elements manifest in creating a conversation of inquiry and transformation. I will conclude this section by looking at more contemporary philosophical dialogical practices including "Community of Philosophical Inquiry" and "Philosophy For Children" as discussed and pioneered by David Kennedy, Matthew Lipman and Ann Sharp.

Chapter 3

This chapter will be devoted to exploring a philosophy of language that accounts for the operation and function of conversational elements within TCPs. This account will critically examine structuralist as well as post-structuralist accounts of language (Saussure, Derrida). I will argue that certain marginalized aspects of language play a

vital and contingent role in how language operates and therefore deserve a more prominent role in a linguistic framework. In essence, language is embodied, material, contextual, and these factors always occur alongside and within language's semantic and syntactic operations. TCPs play with the contextual and the contingent in an active investigation of the relations between structure and content, and between technique and utterance. This section will largely build from research conducted on theories of deixis (Tanz, Benveniste, Rasula); however, I will also embark upon a more explicit analysis of language's performative contextuality via Austin, Derrida, Butler, and Sedgwick.

Additionally, in this chapter, I will build a more robust account of dialogue and use this account to bolster the connection between TCPs and conversational elements. This account attempts to unhinge dialogue's historic reliance on the presence of vocality (a contemporary argument we see still in effect today by authors such as Ong). Rather, in tracing a careful path alongside Derrida, I will attempt to locate dialogue's specificity within the speed and location (the spacings and timings) of utterances (whether textual, vocal or embodied). This account will be constructed via Rafaeli's account of interaction and responsiveness, with a reference to Yakubinsky's positioning of interruptibility. I will highlight how dialogue's generative interactivity and responsiveness operates *within* the embodied and contextual encounter of language, and further argue that this can extend out of this encounter towards the interplay of conversational elements, spacings, and techniques. In other words, dialogue is constituted by not only semantic generativity, but also a structural and performative generativity.

Chapter 4

This chapter aims to make the move from transformative conversation *practice* to a work of art. Generative tensions exist between the spontaneous elements of dialogue and the prescribed and intentional qualities of artworks. These tensions exist in the music practice of structured improvisation (or comprovisation) and I will use these terms to theorize and justify the ways in which a TCP can become explicitly and partially predetermined and intentional, and move towards an artistic practice.

Locating this move in the tenuous 'in between' of the composed and the spontaneous, necessitates a certain kind of conversation artwork – one that is open, situative and contextual. Aftering drawing on authors such as Bhagwati, Cage and Eco to theoretically situate this kind of work, I will then discuss various forms that conversation can adopt in this movement towards become art which include: exercises, games, scripts, graphic and verbal scores, and performances. I will draw mainly on avant garde music examples to delineate the differences between these forms (examples including: Douglas Barrett's *A Few Silences*, John Zorn's *Cobra*, Cheryl E. Leonard's *Music for Rocks & Water*, John White's *Newspaper Reading Machine*). I will then discuss foundational difficulties that arise in "translating" these scores into transformative conversational scores (i.e. in turning dialogical practices into structured dialogues). These include: the difficulty of remembering and implementing rule-structures while simultaneously maintaining investment in the conversation itself, the problem of maintaining focus and cohesion when certain ludic, theatrical or embodied elements

come into play, and problematic feelings of the inorganic or unauthentic. I will conclude this chapter by using Tino Sehgal's *This Progress* to shed light on how a successful structured dialogical work of art operates.

Chapter 5

The final chapter draws from the prior chapter's explication of conversation as art practice, and gives an in-depth account of how my own art practice developed to utilize structured dialogue with TCPs.

My own practice originates out of my unique interdisciplinary background: my B.A. and M.A. in philosophy, my desires to push the pedagogical and material boundaries by which philosophy operates, a longstanding interest in more casual dialogical modes of inquiry (philosophical and therapeutic), and avant-garde theater, music and performance practices. My first works around 2010-2011 involved an explicit focus on questioning, and utilized structured directives (in dance maps and booklets) to add embodied and performative elements to questioning. In 2011 I began the development of a quasi-textual conversation-mapping game called *The Philosophy Conversation Game* which led my work to begin embracing more complicated rule-structures accompanying word games and performances. This took shape as performative lectures and workshops, culminating in an immersive theatre piece delivered at the "Performance Philosophy Conference" at The School of the Art Institute in 2015. My work with Bhagwati in 2015-16 led me to the development of conversation scores as we

began to translate key schemas and motifs from contemporary musical scores into structured dialogue. The level of complexity and specificity that this involved has culminated in my 2016 comprehensive examination called *Deictic Dialectics* which utilized six performers cast over three dialogical structures within an hour-long performance piece. Alongside this trajectory, I have also begun to consider the larger implications of this practice of structured dialogue, which led me in 2017 to organize a School of Making Thinking Session called *Dialogue Experiments* and to teach a course at the Center For Expanded Poetics called *Designing Constructed Conversations*.

Some considerations which have come out of these works that are influencing my current practice are: 1) making scores that allow for conversation content to build from one section of the score to the next without letting the performative enactment and score structures lose too many conversational threads 2) the question of training and how it may be worthwhile to bring in skilled "professionals" to be a part of my pieces (in the way in which Tino Sehgal a very rigorous process of selecting his "interpreters") 3) discoveries of even wider ranges of tools and techniques to inform my practice

There is still discussion amongst my advisers as to whether this dissertation will accompany a research-creation performance in the spring of 2019 or as to whether the dissertation (and the practice surrounding it) are themselves sufficient works of research-creation. As discussed in my proposal defense, I will continue producing and documenting work in the coming year, and will make a decision in January 2019 as whether to produce a final performative event in Spring 2019.

Timeline

Chapter 1 "Conversation Elements"
      Feb 1 2018   First draft sent to Sandeep
                          (Revision sent to Nathan)

Chapter 2 "Plato & Philosophical Dialogue"
      May 1 2018   First draft sent to Erin
                          (Revision sent to Nathan)

Chapter 3 "Contextual Linguistics"
      Aug 1 2018   First draft sent to Nathan
                          (Revision sent to Erin)

Chapter 4 "From Practices to Art Works"
      Nov 1 2018   First draft sent to Sandeep
                          (Revision sent to Nathan)

Jan 1 2019 decision made as whether to create a final research-creation performance

Chapter 5 "My Structured Dialogue Practice"
      Feb 1 2019   First draft sent to Sandeep
                          (Revision sent to Erin)

Introduction
      April 1 2019   First draft sent to Sandeep
                          (Revision sent to Nathan)

Dissertation Preliminary Submission
      May 15 2019   Submitted for Review to ALL

Dissertation Defense
      August 1 2019

Final Dissertation Submitted
      September 1 2019

<u>Relevant Works</u>

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