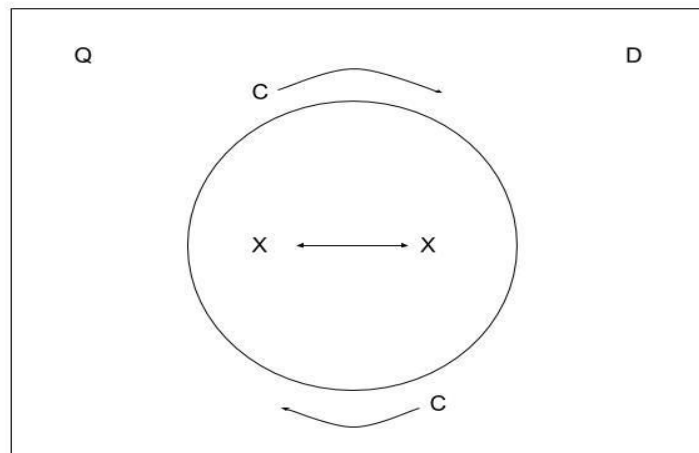


# SCORES FOR THINKING

## SCORE

**Setup:** Conversationalists in the center seated in 2 chairs a reasonable distance apart. Clarifiers circumbulate the conversationalists slowly, non-linearly, at their own tempo, pausing their movement when they see fit. Questioner and Director sit equal distance apart from the center. The piece begins when the Questioner asks a Question and ends when the Questioner determines the ending.



**CONVERSATIONALIST** *Discuss the questions given by the **Questioner**, while following directions from the **Clarifiers** and **Director**.*

**QUESTIONER** Your job is to direct the content of the conversation via questioning. You begin the conversation with a question. And you closely track the conversation trying to unearth/discover what implicit questions lie underneath; what can you ask that would help the questioning, question further? Also, at any point you may say "PAUSE" which causes all roles to stop uttering for 5 seconds.

**DIRECTOR** Your aim is to deepen the conversation at hand by (politely) asking the conversationalists to follow any of these directives:

- Less/More from a particular conversationalist ("X speak less/more")
- Make shorter statements / Make longer statements
- Speak louder/softer
- Use less/more jargon
- Sit, Stand
- Hold hands
- Move closer / Move farther away
- Close eyes / Open Eyes
- Switch roles (between clarifiers and conversationalists)
- Speak with: enthusiasm, curiosity, criticality, certainty, uncertainty, ambiguity, determination, scrutiny, hesitation

**CLARIFIER** *Your aim is to more fully and deeply understand what is happening. You REALLY want to understand (genuinely, earnestly). You must deepen the conversation by (politely) directing the conversationalists with the following prompts.*

REPETITION	"Can you repeat x?"
REPETITION W/ DIFFERENCE	"Can you say that again but differently?"
REPETITION W/ BREVITY	"Can you say that again in 5 words?"
DEFINITION	"What do you mean by x?"
UNDERSTANDING	"I'm not sure I understand x"
EXPANSION	"Can you say more about that?"

**Thought-Keeper** Your aim is to track important content of the conversation. Ideally the thought-keeper is typing from a computer which is live-projecting this content onto a screen that both performers and audience can see.

## INTRO TO MY WORK

I have a mixed background as both a performer and artist on the one hand and as academic on the other hand (studying analytic philosophy in my bachelors degree and continental philosophy in my Master). My work is an attempt to find unique paths of reconciliation of these identities (thinker/artist), these actions (reflection/creation), and these practices (academic & artistic). Part of this work is done organizationally, as I founded (and continue to run) an experimental residency program for artists and thinkers called "The School of Making Thinking". Part of this work is done via a writing practice that attempt to think through the potential for embodied, material, dialogical, performative and artistic methods of thinking. And part of this work is the art practice that you will see here today, which is an attempt to create structured dialogues, or constructed conversations. This work looks towards conversation practices of transformative inquiry, practices where interlocutors aim to undergo a transformation (conceptual, affective or relational) and where this transformation occurs via a directed inquisitive line of questioning. This includes many therapeutic, religious and philosophical conversation practices. I create conversation pieces (or conversation scores) that draw partially from these practices, in effort to create performative conversations, conversations which remain improvisational in that the conversation content is never predetermined, and the interlocutors do not know what they will say before they say it (unlike traditional theatre whose conversational content is governed by scripts). Much like structured improvisation, my conversation pieces create sets of rules or guidelines for a conversation, some with partially scripted moments, but most with instructions that indicate: mood, frequency, duration, pauses in between words, switching between interlocutors, and a wide array of semantic directives derived from practices such as Philosophy for Children, Community of Philosophical Inquiry, Circling, Quaker Meetings, Non Violent Communication, and a wide variety of therapeutic practices. I believe this work is important, because the linguistic rules, para-linguistic conditions, gestures, embodied positions, and settings or environments which underlie a transformative conversation (or a conversation of inquiry) are frequently implicit. By making these explicit, by playing with these rules, gestures and conditions, we can begin to expand the pedagogical potential of these practices. My work aims to produce innovative conversational content by altering conversational structure. Because sometimes a very important dialogue cannot occur by sheer force of will. And a direct instruction

“speak about this topic” can provide for a much poorer conversation than one which structurally conditions a particular topic’s exploration. I also believe that my work begins to add an aesthetic component to conversation, such that a conversation can become repeatable in form, style and character.

Much of my work is composed predominantly for 4-10 conversationalists, and has been performed mainly in non-traditional performative settings - apartments, conferences, residency programs, classrooms, galleries. In addition to the performance itself, each piece has an accompanying verbal score, and over the past few years I have helped to create and expand verbal notation techniques for scoring live conversation (to compliment the script typically used in theatre practices). Currently the direction of my work is moving towards implicating a wider variety of technological interfaces - ableton live, shared google spreadsheets, speech to text technologies - to both increase the potential of dissemination of my pieces (some will soon be performed on online platforms), and to increase the ability to play with voices, timings, cuing, and live-recording, and live-writing and play-back, all of which digital technology can more easily afford.

## IMPROVISED PHILOSOPHY

I want to begin by giving a simple explanation of what is happening. The two people in the center are **conversationalists** have no preconceived script (and were only given, content wise, a general idea that the topic would relate to the conference). They are having a discussion based on the questions that are asked by the **questioner** whose role is to deepen the mode of inquiry, and also create pauses for internal reflection. As the questioner, I compiled questions from yesterday’s conference panels and chose one to begin the piece. The two people circling around the conversationalists are **clarifiers**, who are asking clarifying questions, asking for repetitions, and expansions upon or definitions of terms which are said. Seated opposite the questioner is the **director** who has a list of embodied and para-semantic directives they can give to the conversationalists which include: asking for one interlocutor to speak less or more, asking for longer or shorter statement, adjusting the volume of speech, indicating for performers to adjust their distance, adjusting whether interlocutors sit or stand, indicating eye closure or opening, asking performers to switch roles (between conversationalists and clarifiers), indicating for more or less jargon, and adjusting the mood of

the conversationalists to have either: enthusiasm, curiosity, criticality, certainty, uncertainty, ambiguity, determination, scrutiny, or hesitation. Finally, seated off to the side is a **thought-keeper**, who is tracking important thoughts of the conversation and compiling it into a live document.

This conversation piece is improvisational. In particular, it is a work of structured improvisation. I believe that entirely scripted conversation (as in theatre), can be likened to musical composition, in that the content of the language of both are given beforehand, and actors or musicians, "read" from a pre-given text. Conversation, on the other hand, is similar to musical free improvisation, where the content of what is said, or played, is not predetermined. Neither free improvisation nor conversation are "free" from rules or structure, as both are laden with implicit rules, activated differently depending on the cultural settings. This conversation piece is most similar to musical works of improvisation, as it deliberately plays with determinate and indeterminate elements, and structures their interrelation. The varying genres or styles of musical improvisation can be likened to the different language games or genres of conversation. One of these being "philosophy."

Most philosophical practice today is a private act of making sense of the world. One removes oneself from one's social sphere, one reflects and deliberates, revises and refines one's words, and only after this long and arduous process, are these words then disseminated to the public in a book, or delivered at a conference. So, if by improvisation we mean what Derek Bailey says (when quoting Steve Lacy) that "in composition you have all the time you want to decide what to say in fifteen seconds, while in improvisation you have fifteen seconds." THEN in this case, philosophy seems to be predominantly a non-improvisational act. For philosophers typically do not compose their thoughts in the moment they are presented.

However, I would like to argue that this quality of philosophical practice - its private, non-improvised, non-spontaneous quality - is contingent. Is merely one way of conducting philosophy.

I ask:

-why does philosophy necessitate this non-improvisational act?

-would it make more sense to say that improvised philosophy is perhaps bad philosophy rather than non-philosophy?

-and are we poor improvisors of philosophy merely because we have so very little experience with this practice?

Perhaps this conversational piece isn't making as insightful, deep, rigorous ontological or epistemological claims than if it were composed. And perhaps this piece is merely gesturing towards constructing concepts, or conceptually unconcealing dasein, or finding truth through *ideos* (or whatever other definition of philosophy you want to use), whereas if this were privately composed and revised then it would more fully exemplify these philosophical actions. I do not, however, think this reduces the philosophical importance of this piece. This piece is an attempt to show a possible philosophical practice, a practice in a nascent stage of development. A philosophical practice that is only just beginning, not fully formed, and is perhaps finding strength in areas that aren't easily recognizable.

Someone who grew up their whole life playing off of sheet music, might be a very poor improvisor. However, just because someone poorly improvises doesn't mean they are not improvising. Nor does it invalidate the experience of improvisation as a viable musical act.

I draw my inspiration from Socrates.

I believe, along with Michel Foucault, Martha Nussbaum and Pierre Hadot, that philosophy in ancient greece was primarily a lived practice. In cases where this practice was written (and this was only one mode of its dissemination) this writing was meant to instruct one in how to live, never merely to disseminate knowledge or arguments. Socratic Dialogue is one technique within this larger range of philosophical techniques aimed at transformation. Following Hadot, I believe that Socratic Dialogue is not a literary device, nor a textual apparatus. Socratic Dialogue was a live, vocal, semi-spontaneous philosophical practice. Problematically, we will never know how this was actually practiced, because the codification of these dialogues into the Platonic corpus come with revisions and altered intentions that shroud this original practice in mystery. Nonetheless, there are some speculations about it, which I will draw, which deeply inform my practice.

- 1) To have a philosophical dialogue, is to have a live "spontaneous" discussion, where one is able interrupt and question what is said. And this practice is perhaps more "philosophical" than text or speeches (both of which are monological) (Phaedrus, Protagoras)

- 2) The foundational state that philosophy addresses is the underlying assumption that we may actually not know what we think we know. Concepts that we assume we know the meaning of must be questioned.
- 3) The questioning of these concepts occurs through linguistic techniques.
  - a) Some of these are explicit- Socrates asking interlocutors to use short statement (brachylogia). Socrates insisting on the method of elentics - question and response.
  - b) Others are implicit. Asking for clarifications, giving examples, drawing analogies.
- 4) The determining factor that makes one a philosopher is not one's ability to write books or give speeches, nor is it determined by social status as one who is called a "philosopher," but rather is determined by one's desire to seek after wisdom (the original meaning of the word - philo, sophos), and one's willingness and capacity to engage in elentics
- 5) Philosophical dialogue is not purely organic, improvised, un-structured, and contingent; rather, a unique task of a philosopher can be to develop a dialogic structure, a methodology and set of techniques for interpersonal communication

I follow David Kennedy, Matthew Lipman and Anne Sharp, practitioners of a structured dialogical philosophical practice called Community of Philosophical Inquiry, predominantly practiced with children. They believe that a philosophical conversation is initiated by a problem, which creates a collective inquiry, which can be articulated as a "I don't understand." Clarification (which can come in the form of an example, a question, a reiteration, another term, a re-examination, or a new approach) is the constant re-formation of the shaky conversational ground that occurs via this declaration of "I don't understand." This constant process of question/answer, lack of clarity/clarification, hesitation/temporary certainty, this process continues to unfold over and over throughout a philosophical conversation, perhaps with the potential of endless repetition. Whether the conversation provides an ultimate clarity, or even a widening of the grounds of clarity, is not what makes it a philosophical act – for as Heidegger reminds us, every unconcealing provides a new concealment. What makes it philosophical is the attempt, the reach, the desire, for wisdom.

This conversation piece performed here, uses certain conversational techniques that push a conversation in these philosophical directions:



- The role of the clarifier, who pushes the question/response process deeper via expanded clarifications and repetitions.
- Mixing writing into the practice, which creates the opportunity to fold an external observation (a somewhat removed compositional act) both into the present improvised conversation, and to create a documented trace of the improvised act. To mix external and internal.
- Prompting responses which do not close down the question/answer cycle.
- Breaking up how many people are speaking. By only having 2 people who are the main conversationalists this allows a more in-depth dialogue to form around the subjectivities of 2 persons.
- Altering how much/little jargon is being used. For sometimes philosophical jargon can move a conversation into greater subtleties and precision (through its refined language), however other times it can be used in place of a more rigorous and thorough understanding.

Moreover, this piece implements para-semantic cues which I draw from a wide variety of reflective/relational/religious conversational practices. These can also greatly aid a philosophical inquiry. I will elaborate a few of them:

- Eyes closure which helps reduce external stimulus and can provide additional focus.
- Physical touch which can foster intimacy and comradeship and alter the conversational mood to bring about more connected claims or claims which build off one another
- Sitting/standing can alter one's embodied relation to oneself and one's dialogical partner along with increased/decreased distance to one's interlocutor. This distance, and our embodied positions while speaking, can affect one's thought patterns. As the body becomes more relaxed or energetic so too can the thoughts produced (a claim I believe Nietzsche would agree with). Increased or decreased distance to one's interlocutor can alter the affective connection of the conversation.
- Alteration of mood. As Heidegger points out, we are always mooded. However, philosophical dialogue is not dominated by a singular mood. Sometimes a heightened criticality can place a conversation into antagonism, or perhaps could cut into an unexplored direction. Sometimes ambiguity is needed in place of certainty.

- Duration of utterances. Long utterances give an interlocutor a greater chance to develop their thoughts. However, shorter utterances allow for a greater degree of interchange between interlocutors.
- Silences. Gaps or silences can allow for a much needed pause, and give interlocutors a chance for internal reflection.
- Movement – various movements promote thinking (NOT just sitting)
  - a) Circumambulation is widely regarded as a religious practice as well as a thinking practice – the movement of gathering a multitude of perspectives around one visual stimulus in the center provides a physical analogue for this in one’s thinking practice
  - b) Walking – many philosophers had their walking paths (Hegel, Nietzsche, Kant, Aristotle). Forming a walking path can provide a regulated physical movement that helps thought gather vibrancy and direction.

**To conclude and summarize.** This conversation piece pulls apart some of the implicit conversational content that underlies a philosophical conversation and begins to aesthetically play with this content *while* conversing. The conversationalists in the center are the “free” improvisers, who without any instruction would just “play”, would just converse. The Questioner, acts as a typical conversation facilitator or classroom teacher, by attempting to direct the conversational content, to push questioning further and further. To draw a connection to Gadamer (in *Truth and Method*) - “the art of questioning is the art of questioning ever further—i.e., the art of thinking” The clarifiers make explicit some basic Socratic functions of conversation, by prodding individuals to really understand what they are saying, to repeat something in a way that is perhaps more understandable, to define a term better. The Director modifies para-semantic content, for all philosophical conversation has embodied qualities, varying distributions of utterances, mooded content, etc. And the choice of these para-semantic qualifiers need not be the ones typically chosen – seated in chairs, at a reasonable distance, mild toned intonations, giving long monological statements. Differing reflective traditions and practices have shown us that contemplation can occur within a wider variety of para-semantic structures. Finally, there is the thought-keeper who folds back-in the compositional element into the improvisational, who makes live transcriptions. This

live-writing practice creates a documentation of the performance, which gives it a life outside of itself.