

**CONVERSATION PIECES**

February 13-17, 2006

Elana Mann and Adam Overton  
California Institute of the Arts  
Gallery A402

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## STATEMENT

### WORKSHOP SCHEDULE

Mon, 13 Feb 2006  
*A Dialogue on Conversation* with Elana and Adam  
and with UCLA linguist C. J. Koenig  
opening reception, followed by a locked-door mixer  
5-7pm

Tues, 14 Feb 2006  
*Foreign Exchanges*  
with artist & mediator Dorit Cypis  
followed by a Valentine's Day Dance  
with DJ Difficult & DJ Skinny Little Richard  
5-7pm

Wed, 15 Feb 2006  
*C.A.: Conversationalists Anonymous*  
with special guest Sara Roberts  
5-7pm

Thurs, 16 Feb 2006  
*Experiments in Conversation: Thinking, saying and beyond*  
with special guest Bitá Sharif  
5-7pm

Fri, 17 Feb 2006  
*Ask Me Something: An Introduction to Dyads*  
with special guest Paz Fernandez  
12-1pm

How to cross that divide, that gulf between me ... and you? Through words perhaps? Or maybe via mischievous grins. Is it understanding that I seek? A chance to be heard? Or is conversation just a way for me and you to burn off some steam, to wind down? Sure, this can be a great way for us to get to know each other better, yet is it simply our common tastes and similar diction that's helping pass the time so enjoyably? Or is it my manner of speaking, and your manner of listening, that draws us closer? We're getting closer, right? Is that the point? Is this another one of your performances, you ask? Well, now it is, but just then it wasn't - or was it? Well I don't think *I* was, but I'm not sure about you anymore. Are you thinking what I'm thinking? Can you ever? Is that what I even want? 'Tis poetry that unfurls between me and you, two personal poetries that only moments (or years?) ago were being mangled into a mess of words and gestures dripping from our minds down to our tongues and limbs... Know what I'm saying? I'm here ... you're here. Let's make the most of this: Let's dance, improvise and entertain. How else, how else? Is there anything we've missed, or anything you're not telling me? Have I said too much? Your turn...



## CONVERSATION PIECES

Elana Mann & Adam Overton, Jan 2006

Note: The performances described below simply depict a state of heightened awareness during conversation, coupled with a very basic but minimal set of physical actions. The "performances" per se should never be in excess, and the objective is neither to mock, damage, or disturb, but to observe, and respond...

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### Conversation Piece No. 1a

*Listen, Speak, Lean*

While conversing, take notice as your role shifts from listener ... to speaker ... and back again. Shift your weight according to your current role, for instance, if sitting you might cross and then recross your legs, and if standing you might shift your weight from one foot to the other. Proceed with the conversation, shifting weight accordingly.

### Conversation Piece No. 1b

*Lean, Listen, Speak*

While conversing, perform the *inverse* of *Conversation Piece No. 1a* by automatically shifting your current role as listener or speaker only when your body or leg has grown weary in its current position and you feel compelled to shift your weight.

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### Conversation Piece No. 2a

*[dis]Agreement (with you)*

While conversing, take notice of whether or not you are in agreement with the person you are speaking with. Shift your weight from side to side, and/or slouch or straighten your posture, according to your current level of agreement or disagreement. Proceed with the conversation, shifting accordingly.

### **Conversation Piece No. 2b**

*[dis]Agreement (within)*

While conversing, take notice of whether or not you are in agreement with what you are actually saying. Shift your weight from side to side, and/or slouch or straighten your posture, according to whether or not you truly believe yourself.

Proceed with the conversation, shifting accordingly.

### **Conversation Piece No. 2c**

*Unconditional Surrender*

While conversing, take notice of whenever you might be in agreement or disagreement with the person you're talking to. Upon reaching any sort of climax in your (dis)agreement, immediately shift to the opposite position. For instance, if in agreement, begin playing Devil's advocate. And if in disagreement, short-circuit the conversation by agreeing, perhaps saying something like "You know what? You're right."

Proceed with the conversation, and shift accordingly.

Variation 1: For a moment [or longer], truly believe what your partner believes, whether you disagree with them or not. Step in to them and believe, trying to understand the life and experiences that have led them to this very moment of "knowing." Listen and speak from this place.

Variation 2: For a moment [or longer], believe what you believe as clearly and adamantly as possible. Step deeply into yourself, trying to understand the life and experiences that have led you to this very moment of "knowing." Listen and speak from this place.

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### **Conversation Piece No. 3a**

*I say what I say, but mean what I mean*

While conversing, try to notice whether you or whoever is speaking seems to be saying exactly what they mean, or is saying one thing, but meaning something else - examples in the latter case might include the use of metaphor, irony, innuendo, exaggeration, or lies.

Proceed with the conversation, shifting your weight from side to side, or slouching or straightening your posture, according to the current level of "transparency."

### **Conversation Piece No. 3b**

*I said what I meant, but now mean what I Mean*

While conversing, perform the *inverse* of *Conversation Piece No. 3a* by automatically shifting your speech from 'saying what you mean' to 'saying one thing and meaning something else' (and then back again), only when your body or leg has grown weary in its current position and you feel compelled to shift your weight.

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### **Conversation Piece No. 4**

*What would Jesus [or Chris Johanson] say?*

While conversing, take notice of your perspective when listening, speaking or responding. At a certain point, decide to listen, speak or respond from someone else's perspective, for instance the perspective of one of your parents, a friend, a role model, a lover or anyone else who might have an extreme interest in (or distaste for) this conversation. Attempt to use this person's system of thought to represent your own feelings on the matter, as opposed to lying or misrepresenting yourself by simply imitating mannerisms.

Proceed with the conversation, shifting perspectives accordingly.

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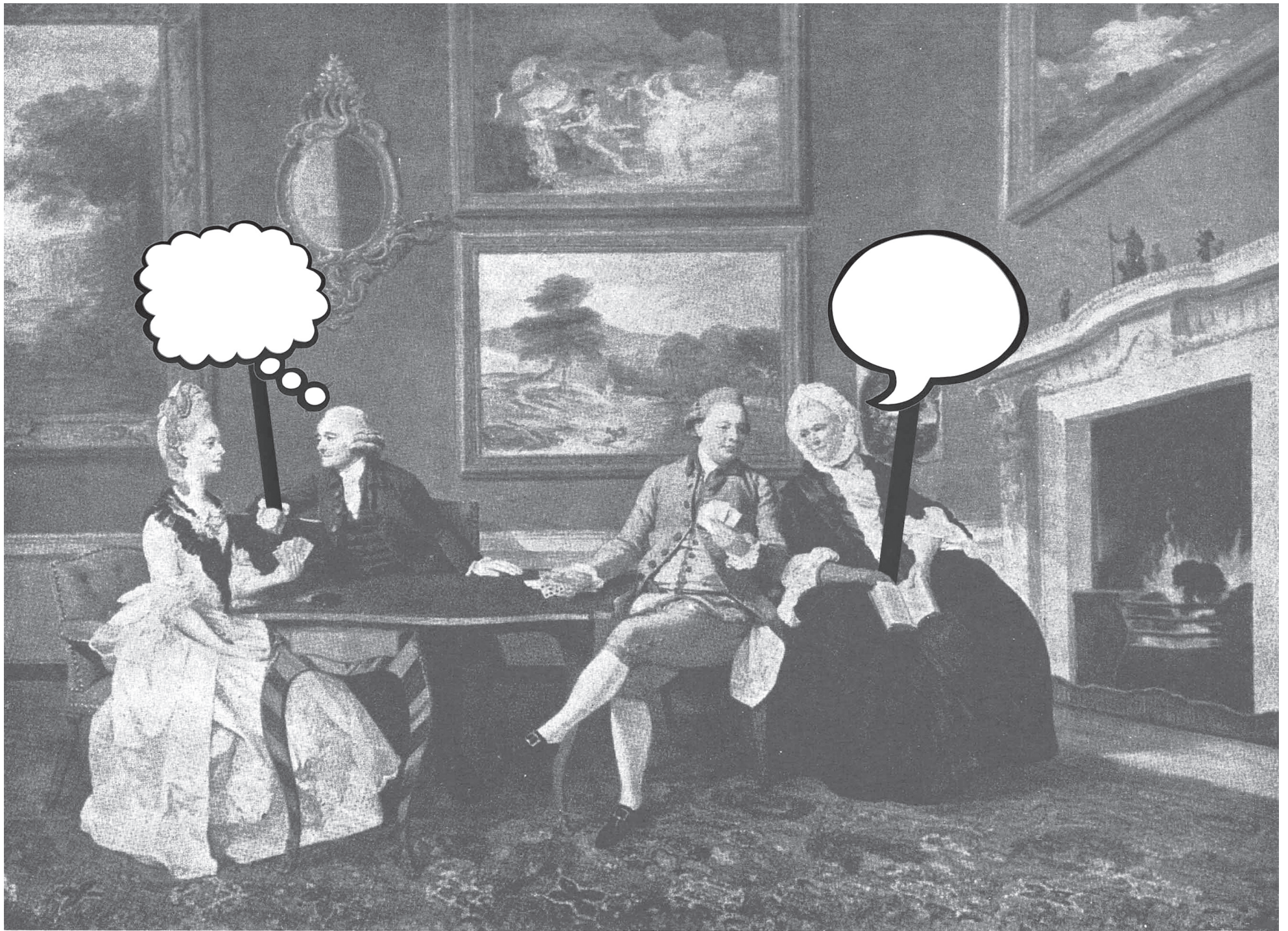
### **Conversation Piece No. 5**

*Bad Reception*

While conversing, pretend that you are speaking via a cell phone with bad reception. Imagine then that on occasion you are experiencing very brief "drop-outs" by actively not-paying-attention or "zoning out." Maintain normal eye contact during these glitches, and always re-connect at an appropriate interval so as keep on top of what is being said as best you can. Gradually extend the durations of these drop-outs until you finally encounter a misunderstanding.

Keep a log of your misunderstandings.

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29. THE DUTTON FAMILY

### **Conversation Piece No. 6**

*Fidget [again]*

While conversing, take notice of the other person's body language - nervous ticks, scratching, hand motions, shifting weight, smiles, blinking, darting eyes, etc. Whenever your partner begins to *repeat* one these activities, shift your weight from side to side, and/or slouch or straighten your posture.

Proceed with the conversation, shifting accordingly.

Variation: Instead of shifting your weight or posture, try to either change the subject or to ask a question whenever you notice the other person repeating a particular body motion.

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### **Conversation Piece No. 7**

*Pause*

While conversing, notice the rhythm of your voice, especially the amount of space between words, phrases and ideas, as well your typical response time when shifting from the role of listener to speaker. Experiment with delaying your responses and extending your silences to a point just short of where your partner will feel compelled to begin speaking again.

Proceed with the conversation, pausing accordingly.

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### **Conversation Piece No. 8a**

*A Collection of Habits (speech)*

While conversing, notice some of your more habitual conversation devices, for instance your greetings and farewells, the kinds of icebreakers you use, patterns in your joke- or storytelling, etc. Attempt to then prevent yourself from using any habitual devices by implementing tactics of mindful "sabotage." In other words, just as you sense a habit begin to arise, you might instead say it slightly altered, say it's opposite, change the subject, substitute silence, cough or spit, etc.

Proceed with the conversation, sabotaging accordingly.

### **Conversation Piece No. 8b**

*A Collection of Habits (gesture-inverse)*

The same as *Conversation Piece No. 8a*, except focusing on your various physical gestures, for instance hands gestures, shifting feet, slouching, eye contact, facial expressions, pitch, quality and loudness of voice, etc, and especially focusing on performing alternate or opposite gestures in response.

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### **Conversation Piece No. 9**

*Echo Eyes*

While conversing, notice your partner's eye contact. Is their tendency to lock eyes? Or to look away? Does this change depending on their role as speaker or listener? Mirror your partner's gaze by locking eyes and looking away in their rhythm.

Proceed with the conversation, gazing accordingly.

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### **Conversation Piece No. 10**

*Personal Space*

While conversing, take notice of the average amount of space between you and your partner. Experiment with moving closer to and/or further away from your partner, and holding these positions, to a point just short of where she or he might feel uncomfortable or compelled to move. Notice how these differences in distance might change the nature of the exchange. Proceed with the conversation, shifting accordingly.

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**Conversation Piece No. 11**

*Do as... or Is that the way you'd talk to your mother?*

Notice how in separate conversations you might speak differently to some people than to others.

Try the following:

Within the period of a day, speak the same way to everyone.

Within the period of a day, speak differently to each person.

Within the period of a day, talk to each person as if they were the last person you just talked to.

And so on...

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**Conversation Piece No. 12**

*Beginner's Conversation, or A conversation "composed of first pages"*  
[for H. Cixous]

Speak to someone you know as if for the first time, as if you've never known them.

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**Conversation Piece No. 13**

*"when he is alone, he forgets sometimes to walk, he just moves"*  
[for R. Ashley]

Initiate a conversation by moving in the direction of someone, moving next to them, as mindlessly and unpremeditated as possible. Perhaps it is someone you don't know, or someone who intimidates you. Do this quickly so as to prevent your mind from halting your stride.

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## FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

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## WEBSITES

Wikipedia.org

Search for entries on Conversation, Dialogue, Bohmian Dialogue, etc.

Conversation Analysis Transcription Module

[www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/schegloff/TranscriptionProject/](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/soc/faculty/schegloff/TranscriptionProject/)

Harrell Fletcher - [www.harrellfletcher.com](http://www.harrellfletcher.com)

Sara Roberts - [music.calarts.edu/~sroberts](http://music.calarts.edu/~sroberts)

Paz Fernandez - [www.pazarts.com](http://www.pazarts.com)

Dyads - [www.dyad.org/d03dyad.htm](http://www.dyad.org/d03dyad.htm)

Illumination Intensive - [www.warriorsage.com/ii.htm](http://www.warriorsage.com/ii.htm)

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## BOOKS

Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*

Charles Darwin, *The expression of the emotions in animals and men*

Flora Davis, *Inside Intuition: What We Know About Nonverbal Communication*

Jack Griffin, *How to Say It At Work*

Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension*

Chris Johanson, *Chris Johanson* (pub. Deitch Projects)

Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art*

Rosalie Maggio, *How to Say It*

Pauline Oliveros, *Deep Listening & Sonic Meditations*

Yoko Ono, *Grapefruit*

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## WORKS OF ART

Vito Acconci, *Theme Song*

Lygia Clarc, *Nostalgia of the Body, Mute Thoughts and The phantasmagoria of the body*

Lillian Fellmann and Jose Carlos Teixeira, *23 Hours*

## VERY SPECIAL THANKS

Audrey Chan  
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