

Interruptions I

For seven actors and one performer

By Philip Schuessler



Interruptions I

For seven actors/actresses and one performer on toy piano and singing bowl

Staging Requirements

- Seven actors (six “heads” and one “moderator”
 - “Heads” – Jason, Yong, Lydia, Libby, Tim, Anna
 - “Moderator” – Mark
- Black “puppet” screen/curtain approximately 10 – 15 feet in length and 2 – 2 ½ feet high
- Dry-erase board or chalk board with stand or mount
- Pointer for moderator’s “trigger grid”
- Performer (off stage) on:
 - Toy piano
 - Singing bowl

Introduction

Interruptions I may be interpreted as an iteration of a rule-based game of dialogue distribution that features the establishing of and subsequent dissolving of those rules. The rules of the game are not made to necessarily be explicit, however certain aspects of the game, by sheer repetition and direction of the dialogue, may be expressed.

Rules

Triggers

The work features six actors/actresses that utilize dialogue or actions that function as triggers for the next person to speak their dialogue or act accordingly. Although the dialogue is fixed, these triggers were used to write the script and move the dialogue from performer to performer. There are six triggers in all: two are direct fragments of dialogue, two in the form of question, and two in the form of action:

1. **It is...** - any sentence that contains “it is,” “they are,” or any variant thereof
2. **I think...** - any sentence that contains “I think,” “they think,” “he/she thinks” or any variant thereof
3. **A question** - any sentence that is in the form of a question
4. **A response (as another question)** - any response to a question that is in the form of another question
5. **Action: a mistake** – any direction that is or may be interpreted by any actor/actress as a mistake
6. **Action: touch** – any direction that entails one actor/actress coming into contact with another actor/actress

The “trigger grid” below displays the six actors/actresses as triggering speakers and respondents. Speakers are displayed in rows and respondents are displayed in columns. Numbers in each box of the grid represents the triggers. Each speaker is assigned a trigger for each respondent.

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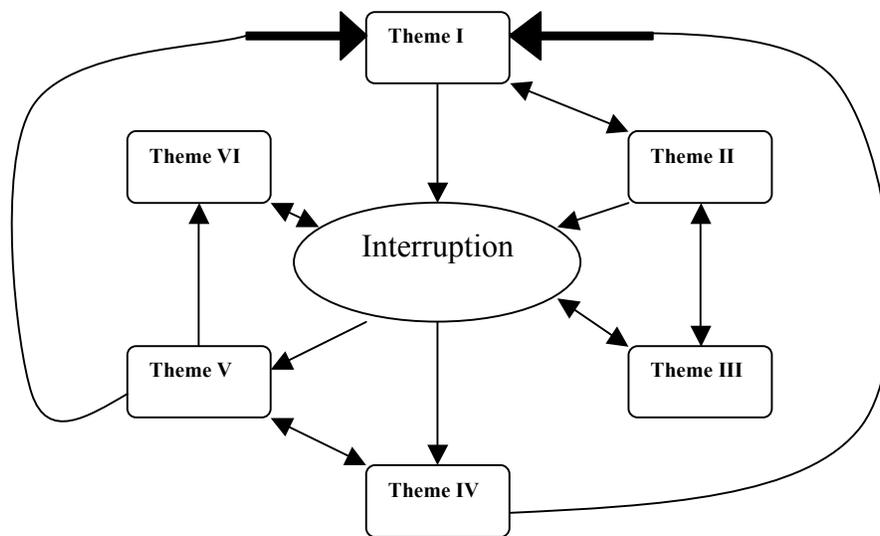
Addressee

Addresser	Anna	Yong	Libby	Tim	Lydia	Jason
Anna	1	2	3	4	5	6
Yong	2	3	4	5	6	1
Libby	3	4	5	6	1	2
Tim	4	5	6	1	2	3
Lydia	5	6	1	2	3	4
Jason	6	1	2	3	4	5

If, for instance, Anna were to speak any form of (1) “I think...,” it would trigger Yong to speak or act next. If, then, Yong were to (6) touch another actor/actress, it would trigger Lydia to speak or act. Once an actor/actress is triggered to speak or act next, there is no rule stating which trigger he or she is to use next.

Themes and Interruptions

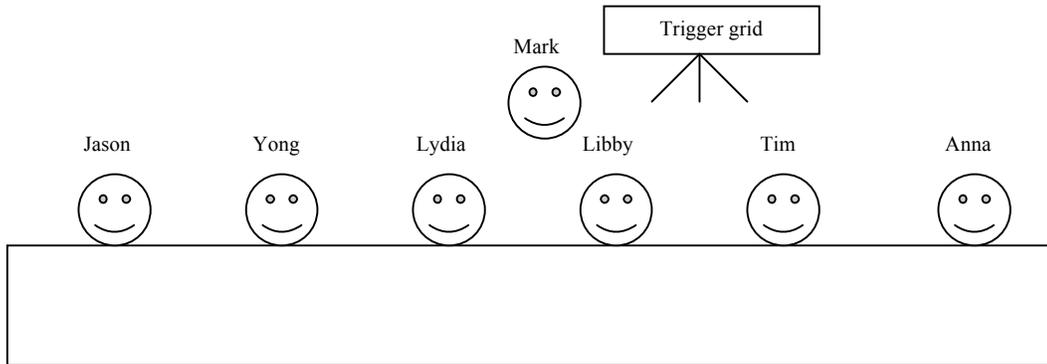
Concurrently, the dialogue moves according to thematic areas around which the performers discuss and to and from which they segue. The themes can be on any topic. For *Interruptions I*, themes were decided before hand. Themes move to and from each other based on the arrows in the diagram:



Interruptions are those things that interrupt the flow and segue of theme movement. In *Interruptions I*, interruptions come in the form of short musical interludes that are played by a performer off stage.

Stage Layout

The six actors/actresses are behind a black screen or curtain such that only their heads are displayed. Behind them, the seventh actor (Mark) stands with a display of the trigger grid from above. He holds a pointer and fastidiously points to the grid as it is featured in the dialogue.



Concepts for Exploration

Pathways/Segue/Transition/Theme/Constraint/Interruption/Regularity/Disruption/
Perturbation/Trigger/Discussion

1. Variation within formal constraints does not (necessarily) mask those constraints. (Does) (V)ariation feature(s) said constraints(?).
2. Different scales of circularity yield forms of regularity.
3. Awareness of constraint (on the part of performers and addressees) allows the disruption of that constraint in order to dilate the notions of variation and exception.

Form: **Theme** → **Interruption** → **Theme** /Discussion/ **Interruption** → **Theme** → **Interruption**

Interruptions I

Script – Length ca. 10 minutes

(Specific actions or movements within script are indicated in parentheses. Logistics for said movements may be choreographed from individual performance to performance)

Anna: *(holds a handful of pencils and laughs)* I was just thinking about a time when my uncle showed me a magic trick. I thought that it was funny.

Yong: What was the trick? [Pause] Wait! I know what it was! It was the trick where you pick a card and he drops the whole deck on the floor!

Jason: I think that is a silly trick!

Libby: Is that *really* a magic trick?

Anna: Isn't it a *kind* of magic trick?

Tim: Isn't it a *kind of* magic trick?

Anna: It is *the* kind of magic trick that was funny when my uncle showed it to me. *(drops the handful of pencils onto the ground)*.

Lydia: Was that a mistake or did you mean to drop those? [Pause] I think that you meant to do that!

Tim: Is it a mistake that she *meant* to do?

Anna: *(gets up, walks or reaches over to Lydia and touches her gently on the shoulder and smiles and then walks back over to where she was sitting)*

Jason: Lydia, it's okay if you thought that it was a mistake.

Yong: I like magic cookies. I think that they might be my favorite kind of magic!

Anna: What are magic cookies?

Libby: Aren't those the things on your computer that keep information about you stored away?

Yong: Actually, they are cookies that my grandmother baked for me when I was little.

Jason: *(gets up, walks or reaches over to Yong and touches him gently on both shoulders, smiles, and walks back over to where he was sitting)*

Anna: Yong, I think that Jason is particularly fond of sugar cookies.

INTERRUPTION I

Anna: *(looks around, slightly confused, noticing that no one else seemed to notice the interruption)*

[Brief pause]

Mark: *(authoritatively)* Yong! To five, please!

Yong: Magic cookies have sugar in them, Jason. They also have cheese in them.

Tim: Don't you mean they have *cherries* in them?

Jason: I think that *must* have been a mistake.

Libby: *(gets up, walks or reaches over to Yong and touches him gently on the shoulder and smiles and then walks back over to where she was sitting)*

Tim: Yong, it is okay to make mistakes. [Pause] One time, I made a mistake when I was walking outside at night with Lydia. We walked by some cherry trees and I said, "Hey, look at the cherry *cheese!*" Or, at least, I *think* that's what happened.

Lydia: I think that you meant to say that to make me laugh!

Tim: Well, you laughed, so it worked! Didn't you laugh?

Jason: I love walking outside at night. Is it just me, or does walking outside relax you?

Tim: It relaxes me...unless it is so dark that I don't see the curb and trip over the edge. [Pause] I don't like edges. I think that they are dangerous.

Lydia: Was that a categorical rejection of the edge? [Pause] *(gets up, walks or reaches over to Tim and touches him gently on the shoulder and smiles and then walks back over to where she was sitting)*

INTERRUPTION II

Anna and Lydia: *(look around, slightly confused, noticing that no one else seemed to notice the interruption)*

[Brief pause]

- Yong: Isn't it obvious that Tim dislikes edges?
- Libby: Is it the edge's fault that you find it dangerous?
- Anna: I would consider gravity as a kind of edge. (*picks up handful of pencils from the ground and 'accidentally' drops them on the floor*) Whoops!
- Lydia: I think that *curbs* are what Tim is afraid of, not *edges*!
- Tim: Well, I *think* that I don't see the difference!

INTERRUPTION III

Anna, Lydia & Tim: (*look around, slightly confused, noticing that no one else seemed to notice the interruption*)

[Brief pause]

- Mark: (*clear throat*) Jason! To one, please!
- Anna: Is anyone else hearing—?
- Jason: (*interrupting*) Julius loves to walk on the edge of my iron balustrade at home. He's a little annoying brat, but I love him.
- Yong: Who is Julius? [Pause] Aahh, wait! I know. He is your cat!
- Jason: Oops! I meant that *Morton* loves to walk on the edge. [Pause] *Julius* is my parakeet.
- Yong: So what you are telling me is that *Julius* does *not* walk on the edge.
- Jason: No. I think that I am saying that *Morton* *does* walk on the edge.
- Libby: If it is any consolation to you Yong, I have a *parrot* that walks on the edge—

INTERRUPTION IV

- Libby: (*look straight UP, very confused*) What the hell?
- Lydia: (*gets up and touches Libby gently on the hand in a consoling manner, then returns to where she was seated*)
- Yong: What does *consolation* mean? Doesn't it mean that you win a prize?

- Libby: *Consolation* is a source of comfort.
- Lydia: Like in our economic system, Yong. It holds an inherent mechanism for insuring comfort for those who don't benefit directly.
- Anna: Umm...I think there might be a mistake in there somewhere.
Yong: I do not think of the words *economy* and *consolation* together.
- Anna: How about *econsolationomy*?
- Libby: (*laughs*) Yes! An economy of comfort! Everyone wins a prize! It is magic!

INTERRUPTION V

- Libby: (*looks up again, confused*) Now wait just a damn second here! I know that someone else *had* to have heard *that*!
- Anna & Tim: (*quietly and matter-of-fact*) I heard it...
- Lydia: (*reaches over and touches Libby again then sits next to her*) I heard it.
- Mark: (*quickly*) Yong! I think!
- Yong: I used to walk outside at night when I could not sleep. I think that it was comforting for me.
- Anna: Back in Wisconsin, the moon would get so huge at night in fall, that if I walked outside at night by the lake, I would not even look up at it because I could see it reflected in the water, and I still squinted my eyes from the brightness. The brightness had a bluishness to it, and it quivered and would break up slightly when the leaves from the oaks that hung over the water fell on the surface.
- [A long pause]
- Mark: (*clear throat loudly*) Lydia! Go to three now!
- Lydia: Well, what are we supposed to do with that? What are *we* supposed to do with that? What are we supposed to *do* with that? What *are* we supposed to do with that? What are we *supposed* to do with *that*? What are we—?

INTERRUPTION VI

- Lydia: [Pause] --with that? (*plodding, contemplative*) I...think...that—

- Tim: *(interrupting)* I think that our conversations here are making shit for sense!
- Lydia: *(continuing as if not hearing the interruption)* –an economy of magic is a swell idea.
- Libby: *(touches Lydia gently on the shoulder)*
- Tim: Does anyone else agree with me here?
- Jason: Did you say, “shit for sense?”
- Tim: Don’t you agree?
- Jason: If that’s what you said, then I will agree that there is a little bit of sense to that.
- Yong: I do not think that “shit for sense” makes sense.
- Anna: I think that they are saying that our streams of conversation are not really going anywhere.
- Yong: Well, I kind of think that our conversation is doing fine. Let’s see...we have talked about magic, and cookies...and walking outside...and...other stuff.
- Anna: And...sooo...what are we talking about now?
- Libby: Aren’t we talking about what we are talking about?
- Yong: ...and cats! We were talking about cats for a little while...I think.
- Anna: We’re talking about what we’re talking about?
- Tim: And how much sense does *that* make?
- Anna: Shit?
- Tim: Yes! That’s what I said! [Pause] *(reaches over and “pokes” the nearest person gently as if waking that person up from a nap)*
- Libby: I think that we should “get back on track.”
- Jason: “Back on track?”

- Tim: Yes, I think so too. You know, talk about one of our topics.
- Lydia: Like magic or cookies or cats? [Pause] Or the economy? Those are our “topics” right?
- Jason: I’m thinking that we didn’t talk enough about the magic.
- Libby: Magi were older Zoroastrian priests who lived in what is now present-day Iran in the 5th and 6th centuries BC.
- Lydia: Libby is...*(freeze momentarily)*[Pause]...putting on her “encyclopedia hat.”
- Libby: Magi is...*(freeze momentarily)*[Pause]...where the term *magic* comes from.
- Lydia: Did the Magi invent 52-card pickup?

INTERRUPTION VII

- Lydia: *(looks up and then to the left and then up again then speaks slowly, deliberately, confused)* I...think...that –
- Tim: Does anyone want to talk about what is going on here?
- Jason: I think that I need to go home and feed Morton. *(gets up to leave)*
- Libby: *(Libby gets up and grabs Jason by the arm)* Wait!

INTERRUPTION VIII

- Tim: *(both Libby and Tim look up and then to the right and then to the left, confused)* This is getting ridiculous! What *is* that?
- Jason: *(sits back down)* What is *what*?
- Lydia: Up in Maine, I had a cat named Rodger. He had six claws on each of his front paws. Sometimes, I would call him Wolvy! He liked to crawl under piles of laundry and then jump out and tackle your socks! And he would make weird warbly sounds when he got excited. It made me laugh very much!

[Another long pause]

- Mark: *(big sigh)* Yong! Move to three now!

Yong: Well what are we supposed to *do* with that, Lydia? What are *we* supposed to do with *that*? What are we—

INTERRUPTION IX

Yong: [Pause] (*looks up and then behind, confused*) –with that? (*slowly*)
I...think...that –

Anna: I think that it is a nice sound.

Yong: (*continuing as if not hearing the interruption*) –an economy of confusion is a swell idea.

Jason: Look, I'm sorry to interrupt this *intriguing* conversation, but it is mandatory that I go home to feed Morton now. (*gets up to leave*)

INTERRUPTION X

Jason: (*looks around confused, shakes head and exits stage*)

Yong: I think that it is a nice sound too.

Anna: Why did Jason leave?

Libby: I think that we didn't talk enough about the magic for him.

INTERRUPTION XI

Mark: Libby! Go to IS now!

Libby: [Pause] And now he's not here to respond to –

Lydia: (*interrupting*) –what you think.

Tim: Did Roger have an appetite for any strange foods?

INTERRUPTION XII

Tim: [Brief pause] (*sigh loudly, showing frustration*) Let me rephrase that. Based on your description, Lydia, I think that Roger might have had an abnormal diet.

Lydia: Well, now that you mention it, Roger was particularly fond of cookies.

Libby: Why would you say that Roger had a strange diet?

Anna: Are you basing your hypothesis on the Heiler Theory?

Tim: Eric Heiler had a Structural Paradigm Theory for Subverted Feline Behaviors. Roger had six claws per front leg. This falls into Heiler's third stream of the Paradigm that says that animals that have extrapalatory digits may be subject to genetic redundancies due, in part, from exposure to quantum levels of high fructose corn syrup.

Mark: *(immediately drop pointer and storm off stage in frustration)* That's IT! I'm done!

[Another long pause]

Libby: Tim, where are *we* supposed to *go* from *there*?

Anna: That is... *(freeze momentarily)* [Pause] ...obviously not a feasible paradigm. It is... *(freeze again, for the same amount of time)* ...apparently up to us to decide. [Another pause] For *us* to decide?

INTERRUPTION XIII

Libby: [Pause] For us to *decide*?

Yong: I think... *(freeze momentarily)* [Pause]...so.

INTERRUPTION XIV

Jason: *(walks back out on stage, touches Yong on the shoulder, then exits stage again)*

Anna: *(watches Jason touch Yong)* Oh. I think... *(freeze momentarily)*...he's right... *(gets up and follows Jason off stage)*

Yong: *(watches Anna, gets up and touches Tim on the shoulder, then follows Anna off stage)*

Lydia: Decide?

INTERRUPTION XV

Lydia: [Pause] I think...

INTERRUPTION XVI

Tim: [Pause] It is...

INTERRUPTION XVII

Tim: *(gets up and touches Lydia on the shoulder, then follows Yong off stage)*

INTERRUPTION XVIII

Lydia and Libby: *(watch Tim intently leaving the stage)*

Libby: It is...

Lydia: It is...

Libby: It is...

Lydia: It is...

Libby: It is...

Lydia and Libby: It is...it is...

END