



Patterns and Games Class – Synopsis

Week 1 – Group Mind

The aim of group game work is to establish a pattern as a group and heighten in a unified direction. For the group to be successful, individuals need to be focused outward on all that others are contributing and committed to serving the group’s progression with their own contributions.

Key Teachings:

- Focusing outward and committing to leading by following fosters collaborative creation
- Group Mind is about immediate, enthusiastic acceptance that is surrendered, not earned
- Simplify through Agreement; Clarify through Repetition
 - The sooner everyone is on the same page, the sooner the group can heighten and evolve collaboratively
- *Everything* that happens on stage exists and should be incorporated into what’s happening
 - The only mistake a group can make is ignoring or marginalizing a contribution that is conceived as a “mistake”
- We acknowledge that everyone is necessarily “playing by their own rules,” but by committing to focusing outward and following we will look to an audience like we have ESP and create sharp, satisfying pattern/game work.
 - Seek symmetries
 - Empower asymmetries
 - Observe cause-and-effect
 - Establish rules of cause-and-effect with repetition
 - Reset, repeat, evolve

Week 2 – Focusing Group Scenes

Bringing characters into group games brings new opportunities for chaos. Simplifying character-based group scenes with emotional agreement, stage picture and sharing focus can help a team confidently navigate the chaos.

Key Teachings:

- Emotional behavior/perspective should be the core of all improvisation
- Agreement fosters collaborative building – many people united behind one emotional perspective will be able to heighten creative details to apexes beyond the reach of any single person.
- Agreeing to the *emotion* is more important than heightening the details with words
- Agree despite “sense” - If someone has a tumor, each person can have a tumor. If someone’s pregnant, each person can be pregnant.
- Mirroring/repeating language, details and rules heightens a group’s work while keeping it cohesive.



- Attention to stage picture (seeking symmetries and empowering asymmetries) can help quickly identify a scene's focus

Week 3 – Pattern Mechanics

Understanding the atomic structure of patterns can help a group collaboratively build complex and evolving molecules. Devotion to pattern analysis will foster Pavlovian pattern recognition.

Key Teachings:

- **Pattern** – a sequence that can be repeated / a structure that can be reused
- **Game** – a sequence of actions, related by rules of cause-and-effect, that heightens with repetition
 - Elevating pattern work into game play, we focus on two aspects. One, we want a *relationship* between the nodes of the sequence. And, two, we want a *progression* of subsequent relationships that heightens the sequence in a concentrated direction.
- Think of a pattern being defined by three “moves”
 - 1st move = **Offer** (*anything* is an offer)
 - 2nd move = **Sets** the pattern (of the myriad directions available after the *offer* the *set* move begins to define a single trajectory)
 - 3rd move = **Cements** the pattern (clarifies the pattern in a direction that can be repeated and heightened)
- The simpler a pattern is the faster it can be heightened, expanded and evolved.
- In games there are often many interrelated patterns at play
 - The more relationships between contributions one recognizes, the more opportunity exists for heightening
- Four rubric group games (One Person, To The Ether, Help Desk and Hey Everybody) help illustrate discrete pattern building techniques. Learning how to build these atoms enables a group to confidently engage any organic structure.
 - **One Person** – if everyone agrees and follows, then we can align and evolve no matter how many players are on stage.
 - **To the Ether** – heightening one perspective/idea? Build a progression thinking about elevating the relationship between A and B in C's relationship to B.
 - **Help Desk** – heightening an interaction? Follow, not just “the joke,” but the full swath of scene elements (dialogue structure, word choice, emotion, pacing, beginning, end, etc.). Build a progression, heightening elements that change between interactions and repeating elements that repeat between interactions.
 - **Hey Everybody** – heightening a collection of disparate elements? Establish stable ground for yourself as quickly as possible with a bold emotional reaction. Build the progression through repetition of the sequence – players contributing in-turn and heightening through their personal filter.



Week 4 – Heightening the Interaction

Establish and leverage patterns to heighten personal and scenic games.

Key Teachings:

- **The first time is random? The second time is purposeful. The third time is expected.**
- **Don't skimp on the emotion**
- **Don't rush the pacing.**
- **Don't rush the pattern.**
- **Don't ignore what you perceive as "bad" moves.**
- **Start at the beginning; remember the end** – you can make anything look good through repetition. Once we know we're heightening the interaction, we can want to start subsequent interactions on the funniest part of the first interaction. But starting at the beginning (heightening or repeating the first line of the initiating interaction) will build power heading into the funniest part. And while over-excited improvisers will often cut off the end of interactions as they rush to start the next, remember that repeating/heightening the final line of an interaction will set up the progression's edit.

Week 5 – Focusing and Clarifying the Chaos

The rubric group games – One Person, To The Ether, Help Desk and Hey Everybody – provide us with the atoms of building patterns. Through these tools we can take a chaos of a bunch of people on stage and collaborate to build atomic structure that can evolve into an organic element.

Key Teachings:

- **Sequence:** Though everyone may rush on to stage together, someone speaks first then someone speaks second, then third, etc.
- **Silos:** The series of "whats" defines the sequence. **Let your what define you** – that's your thing; your silo. Your agreement with your thing and your repetition of your thing breeds simplicity and clarity.
- **Beware the Bandshell of Death!**
- **Facilitate, don't dictate** – the game's facilitator is just another player, who happened to start the scene. The facilitator can and should find a personal filter and not feel the need to speak any more than anyone else.
- **Be active; avoid waiting** – With so many people on stage, if we're not engaged in our physical space then we just look like we're waiting for our turn to speak. If we find something static or repetitive to engage in actively, then the audience's attention isn't drawn to idleness.



Week 6 – Organic Group Games

Building patterns one step at a time, it doesn't matter what "type" of game we're playing. From any *Offer*, through agreements' simplification, repetitions' clarification and progressions' heightening a group can confidently navigate and focus "organic" games.

Key Teachings:

- **Playing is following.**
- **Trust the pattern** – don't overcomplicate. The sooner everyone is on the same page, the sooner we can heighten and evolve collaboratively.
- **Our toolset is vast, but with every move, we narrow the possibilities** – we seek to add on clarifying and simplifying what's already been established. As our moves progress it should become easier to know how to contribute, not harder.
- **Whatever happens happens; Our tools enable us to follow however the pattern progresses** – Whatever happened, that's the right thing. If there is not a clear progression from that point, reset the sequence.

Week 7 – Tertiary Moves

Group Games can also be built using Tertiary Moves in Two Person Scenes. Remember with Tertiary Moves, Players entering a scene in progress should always seek to heighten the games already in play. In this class, we'll see how employing pattern mechanics will increase the impact of tertiary moves (Walk-Ons, Environment Adds, We-Sees, etc.).

Key Teachings:

- There are a bunch of standard improv tips/tricks for entering a scene in progress as a tertiary player
 - *Walk-ons*
 - *Tag-outs*
 - *Environmental additions*
 - *Scene Painting/ "We See"*
 - *Split Scene*
 - *Pivot (Swivel/Barn Door)*
- **Tertiary Player Good Faith Mantra** - I will only enter a scene in progress to serve what has already been established. And I will react to those who enter my scene in progress on the assumption they seek to heighten what has already been established.
 - Any additions to a scene should *only* be employed to heighten/sharpen a game already at play.
- **Multiply but beware of mixing** – one walk-on likely calls for two more; doing a We-See after another player has introduced walk-ons likely will over-complicate the scene's pattern



Week 8 – Practice

Through committing to *focus, practice, and analysis*, patterns and how to cultivate and play to them will become more readily obvious and natural.



Patterns and Games Class – Class Curriculum

Introductory/General Notes:

This class is about leveraging the power of patterns – making improv easier, more collaborative, and ultimately more satisfying.

Spontaneous group acceptance/collaboration impresses an audience more than individual cleverness. Pattern work rewards an audience for paying attention and enforces the idea that the show was made especially for them. Establishing patterns allows an improviser to play Pavlovian-ly, *reacting* through cause and effect instead of *thinking* through “if this then what.”

The most important tool in playing patterns is simply *pattern recognition*. Becoming good at pattern recognition requires that you devote yourself to *analysis* – breaking down the progression of moves, slowing down and really *focusing outwardly* on *everything* that’s happening verbally and physically. As a result of devoted analysis and concentrated thought, you will come to the point where you are seeing and responding to patterns seemingly without “conscious” thought.

For some students, pattern work can feel like the key that unlocks improvisation. For some people, pattern work is hard stuff they’d prefer not to think about. The reality is the best improvisers learn how to both access their emotions *and* leverage patterns. This class will focus heavily on building scenes with patterns and games in mind, though of course emotion remains at the core of all improvisation. While you may get in your head during this class, **focus on following** – don’t waste brainpower worrying about how to make the “right” next move; focus and trust that you’re going to be better if you relax.

Week 1 – Group Mind

Objective: The aim of group game work is to establish a pattern as a group and heighten in a unified direction. For the group to be successful, individuals need to be focused outward on all that others are contributing and committed to serving the group’s progression with their own contributions.

1.0 Introduction: Introduce the class and yourself

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS – Standing around a circle, we often start by shaking it out as it gets us physically warm, gets us to check-in and shake off our days. We shake our right arm above our head for eight counts as we count aloud, then we do the same with our left arm, then our right legs and then our left legs. Then we do the whole thing again to a 7 count. Then six. Etcetera. Don’t count faster than you can shake. Make eye contact with everyone around the circle at least once as we go through.



NAME THUMPER – Going around the circle, each person (teacher included) associates their name with an action or adjective – “Punching Patrick,” or “Pouting Patrick.” Go around once more so everyone knows everyone else’s name and action. Then play progresses with an individual doing their name/action and then another person’s name/action; that person then does their name/action and then another person’s name/action; etc. *You can introduce them to the starting chant – Everyone pats their thighs. You say, “I’m going to say, What’s the name of the game?”, and you’ll say, “Thumper.” Do it. You say, “I’m going to ask, Why do we do it?”, and you’ll say, “To get warmed up.” Do it. You say, “I’m going to ask, how do we do it?”, and you’ll say, “Fast!” Do it.*

1.1 Concentration: A lot can get lost on a crowded improv stage. We have to commit to ensuring we HEAR and ARE HEARD – listen and project.

Suggested Exercises:

CIRCLE OF SEQUENCES – A player points at another and says any word. That player points at another player and says another word inspired by the first. This continues until every player says a word and points to another player, with the final player to contribute pointing back to the first player to contribute. This is Sequence One; repeat it continuously until the group is comfortable with it. Establish a Sequence Two the same way, and then a Sequence Three. When players are comfortable with each Sequence individually, tell them that they now will be keeping them all going at once. Start with Sequence One and then tap the player starting Sequence Two on the shoulder, then tap the player starting Sequence Three on the shoulder.

Lessons:

- **Focus outward** – as is the case anytime we’re on stage, we can’t be in our head freaking out; have to be ready and waiting for our turn
- **Be sure you’re heard** – enunciate, make eye contact, and pointing helps
- **Each individual is 100% responsible for the success of the group** – if a sequence is dropped, even if you didn’t drop it, pick it up

Variations:

- **Names** – Make Sequence One “Your Name” and Sequence Three “Their Name” to add to potential confusion so as to force increased concentration



1.2 Focus Outward: There is a ton of material for us to mine in our improv if we are committed to *seeing it, hearing it and embracing it*. We don't need to be in our heads worried about *making* something happen once we learn how we can *follow* what's already happening to a collaborative end.

Suggested Exercises:

ACTION PASS – In a circle, a player turns to his left and executes an action, any action. The next player observes that action and attempts to recreate it EXACTLY in turning to the player to their left.

Progression:

- Do it once through. Then immediately have them do it again focused on slowing down and really noticing all the nuances of a player's action and working to repeat the action *exactly*.
- Call out people that are in their head and not focused outward
- Call attention to what makes them laugh – straight repetition, embracing something “accidental”
- Call out when someone tries to force the evolution for a laugh – this will happen after they get comfortable with a few “successes” under their belts

Lessons:

- **See head to toe** – take the time to really see all that players are giving you; Where are their toes pointed? How are their shoulders' squared? What face are they making?
- **See more than you're given** – the things a player does subconsciously or accidentally should be noticed and repeated; What did they do before and after the action?
- **There are no mistakes/There is no “right”** - there is only “what has happened” and “what's happening now.”
- **Repetition is heightening** - we don't *need* to create unrelated information when there is already material at play to mine. Collaborative evolution is a fun enough; don't force difference for difference's sake.

1.3 Group Mind: Having Group Mind is about immediate, enthusiastic acceptance. You need to show your fellow players that you respect and love their ideas, and trust that you can make a bold move and have your group respect and love it. “I trust you – I'm going to follow your ideas whatever they are, wherever they go, and I'm going to launch into my ideas and trust that you'll follow me.” It is, however, not up to the group to *earn* this trust. You must surrender to the group. *Give* it your trust. Only then will the group get anywhere.

Suggested Exercises:

I AM SUPERMAN – Everyone stands in a circle. One at a time, each player will enter the circle, say “I am [NAME] and for the next 30 seconds, I am Superman” at which



point the teacher will start a timer and the player does whatever they want until the time is up at which point everyone claps and the next player takes the circle. Players around the circle are NOT to interact with the player in the center. The player in the center should be encouraged to do something they've been told they need to do more of on stage. Do mime. Be emotional. Stand still. Doesn't matter.

Lessons:

- **Surrender to your group** – let go of ego, let your team know that you're ready and willing to commit to being awkward in front of them.
- **You don't need anyone** – you can be on stage alone for 30 seconds or for five minutes. Commit to yourself. Don't rely on meeting your scene partner center stage before the scene starts. You can be alone.
- **It sucks to be alone** – don't let your fellow players suffer on stage alone. Get out there and support each other.

MIRRORING INTO BUZBY BURKLEY – everyone must commit to following and looking idiotic together. Get them to let go, trust each other and the teacher. Start everyone in paired lines, facing off as if looking into a mirror at one another. Have them start mirroring each other – head to toe, leading by following, heightening subconscious contributions, etc. – and have them keep going as you give more instructions.

Progression:

- Start with mirrored pairs
- Allow people to move closer and farther apart
- Allow people to move left and right, overlapping other mirrored pairs
- Allow people to switch the player they're mirroring, making and breaking different groups
- Build to everyone moving around the room, switching mirroring, coming together, breaking apart – *committing to following the crazy*

Lessons:

- **If everyone is “doing it” then no one looks dumb “doing it”** – but the moment it becomes apparent that someone in the group is not committed then the audience doubts the entire endeavor.
- **When you are “playing” others want to play with you** – if you're having fun and committing the audience will follow you no matter how silly you look
- **That is the weirdest thing I'll ever have you do** – thank them for just doing what you asked them to without judgment; encourage them to remain that trusting throughout class



1.5 Simplifying and Clarifying: The sooner everyone is on the same page, the sooner we can heighten and evolve collaboratively. Our main tool of simplification is *Agreement* - the more players that mirror/agree, the less different stuff there is on stage to negotiate.

The more people you're playing with the clearer you have to be. Our main tool of clarification is *Repetition*. The first time something happens, it's random; the second time is purposeful; the third time is expected.

A group of people can take the stage and confidently navigate chaos by focusing outward, seeking symmetries, making differences matter and clarifying sequences of cause and effect through repetition.

Suggested Exercises:

KICK THE DUCK, REDROVER – “On the count of three, everyone will be playing a game without words. You will collaborate to establish focus and define the rules of your game. One, two, three, go!” This game starts with impossible chaos but becomes manageable and then successful as the teacher lays on instructions with each iteration and the group feels how to build collaboratively.

Progression/Lessons:

- Someone will use gibberish to direct other players' actions – Stop them and remind them to lead by following
- Ask “How did the game start?” They will tell you about the first move that was *made*. Remind them that the game started when you said “go.” Have them return to their positions and postures when you said “go.” Ask them to *focus outwardly* on what is already there at that moment.
 - **Seek Symmetries** – Are you standing near someone? Posed like someone? If you seem like you could be aligned with someone, align yourself with them; do what they do. This *agreement* fosters focus.
 - **Empower Asymmetries** – How do the different groupings relate? Make the asymmetries that exist *matter*. How does one group react to the other? What does one group do to another?
- Have the group shake it off, walk around the room and then, when teacher says “go,” start a new game focused on Seeking Symmetries and Empowering Asymmetries.
- Stop and ask them to walk you through what happened, with players explaining what they saw and what they did in response. Tease out “When X happened, Y happened.”
- “What rules were you playing by?” We want players to **observe cause-and-effect and seek to clarify the “rule” with repetition**. Make another X happen to make another Y happen. If you see X happen again, make Y happen again. Work to notice not only what is happening, but how what happens relates to what happened before. And pay attention to what happens after. Even if there is no inherent connection between the first set of moves, by working to repeat that sequence we begin to establish rules and clarify group direction.



- **Everyone is necessarily “playing by their own rules”** – but if each individual is committed to simplifying and clarifying then a group direction will emerge
- If something is not clear, don’t ignore it or play it half-assed, make it clearer – by heightening it or otherwise clarifying the move. If you’re lost, chances are the rest of the group is too. Don’t wait for someone else to clarify what’s going on; take responsibility yourself. The rest of the group will thank you.
- “Can you go back and start this game over?” When they’ve learned to seek symmetries, empower asymmetries, establish and repeat rules of cause and effect, it’s time to get them to **Reset the Game Sequence**. Have them go back to their initial starting positions and try to do the same game again *exactly*. It won’t be exact; it will evolve, but it will evolve organically because they are attempting to do it exactly.
 - **If you’re ever lost, return to what was done before** – engage a rule again. Restart the sequence. Going through a game again will build clarity *and* simplifies the amount of stuff in play.
- After they have a great game, they are likely to have a game become super sloppy because they got too excited and stopped leading by following.
 - **Trust the pattern** – don’t overcomplicate. The sooner everyone is on the same page, the sooner we can heighten and evolve collaboratively.
- **To be repeated again and again:**
 - Seek symmetries
 - Empower asymmetries
 - Observe cause-and-effect
 - Establish rules of cause-and-effect with repetition
 - Reset, repeat, evolve



Week 2 – Simplifying, Clarifying and Heightening

Objective: Bringing characters into group games brings new opportunities for chaos. Simplifying character-based group scenes with emotional agreement, stage picture and sharing focus can help a team confidently navigate the chaos.

- Agreement is our main tool in simplifying the amount of “stuff” on stage.
- Repetition is our main tool in clarifying the scene and each player’s contribution.
- Building off one another – setting a progression from one contribution to the next – helps us heighten scenes to crescendos/edits.

2.0 Warm-Ups: Revisit names, build energy and concentrate energy

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

ROBERT PAULSON – (inspired by *Fight Club*) In turn around a circle, each player introduces him/herself to the class with a character based on their first name and a word sharing the same first letter as their first name. For example, “I’m Pistola Patrick” as I dance back and forth on my toes while shooting pistols into the air. Then everyone mirrors the character while all saying, “Our name is Pistola Patrick.”

21 – The group (without teacher) huddles in a tight circle and together counts to 21 with players contributing one number at a time. If two people speak at once, the group must start over.

Lessons:

- Breathe; Don’t rush to speak; Share focus.
 - “Did I tell you that you had to do it fast?”
- We are walking backward, making each subsequent step based on the trajectory laid down behind us
 - Don't rush to 21, just build each move on top of the one before it
- Don't emphasize failure; there are no “mistakes” on stage, only what happens
 - The audience only knows you’ve “messed up” if you tell them you have



2.1 Self Contained Emotional Statements: Emotion should be the base of all the improv we do. A “Self Contained Emotional Statement” establishes a stable starting point without dictating a direction and therefore is the initiation most conducive to patterns’ possibilities.

Suggested Exercises:

SCES CIRCLE I – Around a circle, everyone makes a Self Contained Emotional Statement. It can be as simple as “I love it here,” “I hate the arts,” or “I’m uncomfortable.”

Lessons:

- It’s a statement. Not a question shifting the responsibility of providing information to your partner. There’s a period. It’s definitive.
- It’s an *emotional statement*. Emotional reaction is one of our three key tools; let’s get to it. You need to feel and, for the reaction, you need to give that feeling a direction. Give X the power to make you feel Y.
- Being self-contained, the statement places you on solid ground without dictating the scene to your partners. Mick Napier urges us each to “take care of yourself” without confining the scene. Allow your partner the choice of whether to mirror you in some fashion or to take on something entirely their own. Being self-contained is increasingly an imperative the larger a group you have on stage.
- Ideally you are connecting your emotion to an *active* element on stage, something that you can see, touch, and otherwise have your emotion triggered by. “I hate the arts” is okay, but “I hate this painting” is stronger, because more of that painting will evoke more hate. “I’m uncomfortable,” is good, but, “I’m uncomfortable with this sleeping arrangement,” is better because now you will consistently be affected by something on stage with you.

SCES CIRCLE II – In a circle, one person leads with a Self Contained Emotional Statement. Then progressively each person to the right heightens the perspective by agreeing with it – essentially with a “Yes, and.” “I love the beach.” “Yeah, I love the white sand.” “Yeah, I love getting my tan on.” Etc. The initiator gets the final addition. And then the person to their right starts a new SCES.

Lessons:

- **Repeating Agreement is funny** – what’s better than one person who believes something strange? Two people who feel that same way.
- **Agreement fosters collaborative building** – many people united behind one emotional perspective will be able to heighten creative details to apexes beyond the reach of any single person.



2.2 One Person Scenes: We simplify by minimizing the number of perspectives on stage through agreement. We build collaboratively through enthusiastic acceptance. Emotional reaction is most important piece of content.

Suggested Exercises:

ONE PERSON SCENES – Groups of 5 or 6, line up along an assembly line conveyor belt. Have them mime *something* coming down the line. When you say, “Go,” someone will voice a SCES which everyone else will agree with and heighten through repetition. Their miming is just an activity for their hands; it is NOT what the scene is about.

Feeling about the activity (“*Look at the crap our company sells,*” “*Yeah*”) is better than talking about the activity (“*Here you go,*” “*Now put the head on it*”), but students should feel free to share feelings about something totally unrelated to what they’re engaged in physically (while on an assembly line, “*Oh, that Game of Thrones show pisses me off,*” “*So mad*”).

Lessons:

- **The clearer the *emotional* perspective the better** – if you don’t think it’s clear, clarify it by heightening the emotion
- **Like 21, don’t rush to speak** - You have something to do with your hands. You also have an emotional perspective to fill your face with.
- **Agreeing to the *emotion* is more important than heightening the details with words** – remember an enthusiastic “yeah” will always be funnier than a rambling monologue
- **There are no questions in agreement** – when students start asking questions and negotiating the feelings rather than just heightening them with agreement, the scene stagnates with students unsure of what to commit to or when to contribute.
- **Share the air space** - Put periods at the end of your sentences.
- **Agree despite “sense”** - If someone has a tumor, each person can have a tumor. If someone’s pregnant, each person can be pregnant.

Variations:

- If an emotional perspective is heightened to its apex, the group can follow another emotional perspective, but push them to explore the heights before changing.
- Feel free to break them away from the conveyor belt to a new environment, but beware this will cause them to talk about what they’re doing and/or drop physicality – *You can use the resultant chaos as a transition...*
 - *Or...* you can transition with, “Bored of the conveyor belt? Let’s work on building your own stage pictures with agreement.”



2.3 Focusing Stage Picture: Staging an environment in a group game breeds potential complications as players abandon pattern for roles and over-prioritize explaining who they are and what they're doing. But attention to the elements of stage picture can help focus a group scene and facilitate quick collaborative heightening.

Suggested Exercises:

STAGE PICTURE TABLEAUS – One by one, players enter stage, fleshing out a picture with static poses and/or repetitive motion. Teacher gives a suggestion of a location, for example, “Apple Orchard,” “Beach,” “Race Track.”

Progression/Lessons:

- Players tend to want to fill in all the possible roles in a location. An orchard has pickers, trees, baskets, landscapers, squirrels.
- Ask “Where’s the focus?” They won’t know.
- **Build deliberately with agreement** - There’s no reason we can’t all be trees. A scene about five trees and one squirrel will be easier to find and heighten faster than a scene where six separate entities struggle for reason to exist.
- **Seek symmetries; empower asymmetries**
- Ask “Is this a One Person, Two Person, or Three Person Scene?”
 - Have them point out the groups, defining focus
- Ask “Who should talk first?”
 - Point out Upstage/Downstage distinctions for focus
 - Point out who can see who, and so who has to take their cues from who

Variations:

- Push them to define more and more abstract environments; i.e., NASA, Hell. Often improvisers, unsure about their environment, won’t commit to physical choices. They need to engage their environment confidently; with confidence *anything* they create will belong. NASA Mission Control? Just turn some dials, *see* your monitor. Commit.
- Speed loading – have everyone crowd the space quickly upon hearing the suggestion, making bold choices and seeking symmetries faster.

ONE, TWO, THREE PERSON SCENES – Player build tableaus organically and then get to talk. Once everyone is in position, one person provides a Self-Contained Emotional Statement and others agree. Depending on how one’s aligned physically, they can simplify by also matching their emotional perspective with those other players. The number of physically-aligned groupings and emotional perspectives indicates how many “PERSONS” there are in the scene.

Lessons:

- **Simplify and find focus through agreement in stage picture and emotional perspectives**
- **There’s no reason we can’t always do One Person Scenes** – even if our physicality is different



- **When you do have more than one PERSON, don't fall to negotiations, arguments or other lines of questioning between groups** – exploring juxtaposed emotional perspectives is all the scene we need

Variations:

- Have everyone pick someone to agree with *before* the suggestion is given – players can mirror/compliment one player's physicality and another player's emotional perspective; it can be fun to surrender to being forced into aligning with a perspective despite "sense"

2.4 Simplifying By Leveraging Backward: Mirroring/repeating language, details and rules heightens a group's work while keeping it cohesive.

Suggested Exercises:

INVOCATION – Players stand in a half circle. On the count of three, a "god" appears before them that they will worship in three phases: First, they will describe it physically; "Oh, God, with your fowl beak." Second, they will address its less tangible qualities; "Oh, God, who tastes like everything." Third, they will ask it to do unto them; "Oh, God, henpeck my enemies."

Players don't have to go in any order and

Notes:

- **Players don't have to go in any particular order and more than one contribution can be made by players on each round**
- **Players play in a "bandshell of death" for this game** – Note that in on-stage games we want to build more attractive tableaux
- **We're not "one upping" each other with crazy contributions; we're collaboratively building, expanding on each other's details, making call-backs and heightening the emotional perspective**

Lessons:

- **Be clear about what "it" is** – don't be vague for artsy sake; the sooner everyone knows what "it" is the sooner everyone can dig deep into the details
- **Unite behind an emotional perspective on "it"** – "what we hate about Microsoft" will collaboratively heighten faster than "what we know about Microsoft." Mixed emotions about a subject will hinder heightening.
- **Simplify with mirrored language** – switching between phases is clearest when there's a defining cadence to phase one ("Oh, God") and a new cadence to phase two ("Sweet, Jesus).
- **Callback** – What does a detail from phase one signify in phase two and can be used for in phase three?
- **Establish rules of reaction** – Y follows X: "...who is never afraid," "You're a chicken who's not chicken;" "...who never stops going," "You're a chicken



who'll always win at chicken." I'm the guy who: said, "Eyes as red as flames" so I'll say, "Heart as black as coal."

- **There are no mistakes** - seek to fold in everything; don't drop things that seem out of place



Week 3 – Pattern Mechanics

Objective: Understanding the atomic structure of patterns can help a group collaboratively build complex and evolving molecules. Devotion to pattern analysis will foster Pavlovian pattern recognition.

3.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and recall the importance of emotion

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

MY THREE RULES (like DUKES OF HAZZARD) – Everyone in a circle. Here are my three rules.

- Rule #1: To go to your right or left, you turn to that person and say their name.
- Rule #2: To return the sequence right back to the person who just spoke to you, say their name.
- Rule #3: To pass the sequence to any player beyond the player on your direct left or right, you lock eyes with that person and – in a character voice – say their name.

Have a player start with one of the rules. The first time they will play with “my rules” without establishing any rules for when to deploy each move.

- “What determined whether, when it got to you, you kept it going in the same direction, changed direction or passed it across the circle?” “I don’t know.”
- “What happened before the first time someone reversed the direction?” “We had gone around a full time.”

They will also confuse the rules – trying to reverse the pass by saying the name of the person who passed to them.

- **There are no mistakes but that which we acknowledge as mistakes** – what ever happened is the right thing to have happened; make it look good (and “right”) by making it happen again.

Have them play again, mindful now of tracking what happened so they can do it again.

- First time it’s random
- Second time it’s purposeful
- Third time it’s expected

We establish “rules” in retrospect: If this happens then this happens. Rules help use react Pavlovian-ly through our games/scenes; making us compelled to do what’s next instead of having us think up something new to make happen next.

Our rules are not confining – **“tools” not rules.** Let them evolve. Understand everyone is playing by the rules in their own head but if we all commit to following and seeking to simplifying (with agreement) and clarify (with repetition) then the process of continuous following (like Kick the Duck Red Rover) will organically heighten.



It doesn't have to be played that tight. And it won't possibly be the first few times through, and likely won't ever. While you can end the warm-up without them doing this activity great, rather than make them feel like they failed, focus on:

- **It's a concentration warm-up** – It's purposefully a tough activity to get us concentrating.
- **What's important is that each person is trying to make each other's moves matter** - Everyone's playing by rules in their own head, and if everyone's concentrated on working to establish and clarify rules, then it's possible for the group to be playing by similar (if not the same) rules and then suddenly the game is fun for all involved.

3.1 Pattern Into Game:

Pattern – a sequence that can be repeated / a structure that can be reused

Game – a sequence of actions, related by rules of cause-and-effect, that heightens with repetition

Elevating pattern work into game play, we focus on two aspects. One, **we want a relationship between the nodes of the sequence.** And, two, **we want a progression of subsequent relationships that heightens the sequence in a concentrated direction.**

“Aliens.” “Breakfast cereal.” “Spain.” If repeated, this is a pattern. You can imagine wallpaper with any pattern reused/repeated.

“Dot.” “Line.” “Triangle.” This sequence builds with a progression – with the rule that each subsequent contribution is a geometric figure with another point. The concentrated direction now makes the fourth player's contribution clear – whereas it's not clear what to contribute after “Spain” (other than to repeat “Aliens”).

- Note too, that the fourth player know s/he has to provide a four sided figure, but can now devote full creativity toward that narrowed set of options – “Square,” “rectangle,” “rhombus.”

Patterns that facilitate game play can be defined by three “moves.” A “move” is defined as “a single node of a pattern.” The “move” needn't be “one line” or “one player's contribution,” and the “moves” of any given pattern may be redefined in retrospect as new contributions are added. Through analysis and practice, a player learns to recognize and define the distinct moves that define a pattern.



Evolution of the pattern -

- 1st move = **Offer** (*anything* is an offer)
- 2nd move = **Sets** the pattern (of the myriad directions available after the *offer* the *set* move begins to define a single trajectory)
- 3rd move = **Cements** the pattern (clarifies the pattern in a direction that can be repeated and heightened)
 - E.g. Orange (1); Apple (2); Kiwi (3)
 - E.g. Orange, Peel (1); Melon, Rind (2); Apple, Skin (3)

We start with a blank stage. Our first contribution defines one point among infinite possibilities. Our second contribution says “with all the myriad options available to build off the first contribution, I want to head in this direction.” The third contribution confirms for the group, “yes, we’re moving in this direction at this pace,” and from that point it should be so clear to the rest of the group what direction we’re headed that they’ll be compelled onto stage.

It is easiest and most instructive, to illustrate this pattern progression into game using To The Ether games around a circle.

Suggested Exercises:

SELF CONTAINED EMOTIONAL STATEMENT CIRCLE – The more emotional the better. See/interact with the active aspect of the scene (what you’re doing, what’s around you, where you are, how you are, etc.). Really do make it self-contained.

TO THE ETHER GAMES WALKTHROUGH – You, the instructor, stand in the middle of the circle of players. Have Player One make a Self-Contained Emotional Statement. Have Player Two change *one thing* about Player One’s SCES – the noun, verb, voice, pacing, *emotion*.

- Ex: “This baby is heavy,” “This teenager is heavy,”...
- “What changed?” “What’s the relationship between what has changed?” “What’s on the other side of [teenager] from [baby]?”

Have Player Three give a SCES that, in relating to the 2nd SCES, heightens the progression between the first two SCESs.

To The Ether games are the simplest in terms of pattern components but are the most varied in terms of their final form. Drilling To The Ether games with post-game analysis of the progression of moves will help students build pattern muscle memory.

Lessons (To The Ether):

- **The Offer is anything. The Set move seeks to establish a relationship with the Offer move. The Cement move seeks to heighten the relationship between the Set and Offer moves through its own relationship with the Set move.** The *progression* of Offer, Set and Cement moves define the rules to the relationship between nodes in the sequence.
- **Trust simplicity** – stick the same language; don’t allow personally-clever A-to-E connections ground the group in confusion



- **Serve the group** – *you* don't have to be funny for the group to be hilarious; be willing to *set* the pattern for another to spike; the 2nd move will never be as funny as the 1st or 3rd but it is necessary to facilitate the big payoff.
- **The sooner a pattern is cemented, the sooner everyone can play** – when players feel *compelled* to continue a pattern you know it has been established with a clear progression

3.2 Possible Pattern Paths: The fun of collaborative creation is confidently following wherever it goes. A commitment to making moves in the context of all that precedes them can help a group shape that creation without controlling it, focusing the group's progression for maximum heightening and impact.

To The Ether games, despite seemingly rigid, illustrate many different ways for the pattern to be followed organically.

Lessons:

- **Poles** – when two extremes are juxtaposed (hot/cold; love/hate) it can be difficult to find a contribution to continue the progression; upon hearing “poles” players should seek to *set* up another poled pair to establish a progression across pairs.
- **Categories** – related contributions that do not heighten/progress; can be reordered without consequence (“Coke/Kleenex/Band-aid” vs. “Kleenex/Band-aid/Coke”).
 - **A run of categories typically necessitates a “resetting” pattern pass**
- **Resetting** – when a pattern's trajectory has reached an apex, players should think to start a second related pattern so that the game is heightening iterations of patterns
 - Womb/World/Heaven; Testies/Sweat sock/Hell
 - “I hate school”...“I hate prison”; “My teachers...”...“My guards...”
- **Rule of 3s is not mandatory** – while the rule of 3's does facilitate funny, you don't need factors of three; patterns don't have to be played all the way down the line before they are edited
- **Pattern Ending Edits** – ideally a pattern heightens to a beautiful point and earns an edit; not-ideally a player makes a move at the expense of the pattern and fails to earn an edit leaving a dead scene; but there are moves that can successfully earn an edit while disrupting the progression
 - **Contextual Alignment** – when it becomes *clear* what the whole pattern to that point has been about
 - “My nose ring hurts,” “My ink hurts,” “My brand hurts,” “My fixed-speed bike hurts.”
 - **Throwing a Pattern on Its Head** – if the pattern is heightened in a *clear progression* subverting that progression can be funny
 - “I love it,” “I love it,” “I love it,” “I loathe it”
- **Don't forget emotion** – if nothing else heighten emotion/character; that can earn you an edit even if all else fails to cohere.

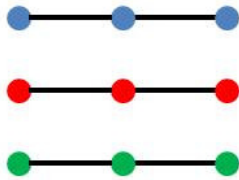


“To The Ether” Variations

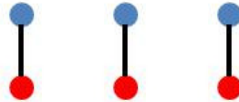
1. Standard



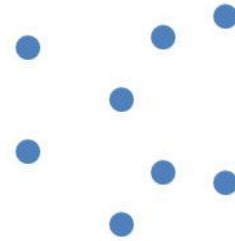
2. Resetting



3. Poles



4. One Person Scene





Week 4 – Heightening the Interaction

Objective: See the power in establishing and leveraging patterns to heighten personal and scenic games.

4.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy, concentrate energy and emphasize the importance of emotional reaction.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

STORY STEALING – Everyone in a circle. One at a time, players enter the center and tell a true, personal, 30 Second Story. Once everyone has told a story, the teacher tells the class that players now have to enter the center and recreate someone else’s story. Every story should be revisited once by another player.

Lessons:

- **Don’t mock; mirror** – this is not about making fun of each other, it’s about making each other look good by remembering their story
- **Remember specifically** – remembering a few specific details will be more powerful than remembering everything generally
- **Remember reactions** – our emotional reactions are improv gold; focus on those when setting other player’s stories to memory
- **See what’s not shown** – recreating what our fellow players initially did subconsciously is great fun. How do they stand? How do they move? What do they sound like?
- **Memory is a muscle** – It can be hard to remember, but the more you train yourself they better you’ll be (If you’re a list keeper, try to not depend on a list for a while). We can only leverage what we remember; the more we remember the more we can leverage.

4.1 Help Desk Games: A pattern can be based around a series of interactions. This game rubric can be especially helpful in making scenes that had been bogged down in transaction, negotiation and/or conflict look good.

Suggested Exercises:

HELP DESK – Have a player assume a character and introduce a place of business; “The Help Desk is open for business.” A second player comes in and interacts. Players on the wings pay attention to language, reactions and the scene’s progression. A third player will enter the scene (replacing the second player) to heighten the interaction – repeating some parts exactly and heightening other details/reactions. A fourth player will



participate in a third interaction – keeping the same the things that stayed the same and heightening the things that heightened.

Lessons:

- **Start at the beginning; remember the end** – once we know we’re heightening the interaction, we can want to start subsequent interactions on the funniest part of the first interaction. But starting at the beginning (heightening or repeating the first line of the initiating interaction) will build power heading into the funniest part. And while over-excited improvisers will often cut off the end of interactions as they rush to start the next, remember that repeating/heightening the final line of an interaction will set up the progression’s edit.
- **Don’t rush the pacing** - Lines that came out naturally the first time can be hurried once they’re known. The cadence of the dialogue is part of the pattern. Stick the dialogue’s natural rhythm – it’s part of the pattern and you’ll be rewarded in laughs if you try to match your fellow players’ delivery as well as their words.
- **Don’t rush the pattern.** After they “get it” players like to rush moves to get to the funny part. But use, don’t ignore the pacing of patterns. The build up to the “funny part” is part of the funny part.
- **Don’t skimp on the emotion** - Player Two might have been simply overwhelmed during the Offer dialogue, but Player Three and Four heighten the emotion of being overwhelmed characters. Emotions connect players and audience, and heightened emotions will ensure an earned edit even should all else fail.
- **Don’t ignore what you perceive as “bad” moves** – you can make anything look good through repetition. By employing the mechanics of a Help Desk game, you can make a boring scene exciting, you can make an unfunny move hilarious, you can make an uninspired character the star of the show. Remember: The first time is random? The second time is purposeful. The third time is expected.

Variations:

- **For more than terrible scenes** – in heightening/repeating *any* interaction, utilize the Help Desk pattern mechanics. Have players do any two person scene and have a third person initiate a Help Desk *Set* move.
- **Heightening Context** – a married couple complains about their house; a couple of mice complain about their hole; a couple parasites complain about their host. These juxtaposed vignettes can leverage Help Desk mechanics and make for an interesting stage picture. Use a *Split Scene* (see *Tertiary definitions*).
- **Tag Outs** – if we approach our Tag Outs with the same patience and concentration to patterns as our Help Desks our Tag Outs can be more robust. Be sexier than a Tag Out, use a *Pivot* (see *Tertiary definitions*)



4.2 Help Desk Tool with Tag-Outs/Pivots: Players love using “tag outs” to see how a character from a previous scene will react to another character/scenario/etc. The Help Desk “tool” helps us heighten in service of the *emotional* stakes like we would with a tag out while also harnessing the power of pattern.

A “pivot” is a form of tag out that just looks sexier to the audience.

Suggested Exercises:

HELP DESK TOOL DEPLOYED THROUGH TAG-OUT & PIVOT - Two players engage a normal scene while other players watch from the wings. They watch to understand what characters react to, so as to be able to heighten that character’s reactions in a new scene through a Tag-out/Pivot.

We seek to **elevate characters’ defining behaviors** –

- Player One is an enthusiastic baseball commentator; Have him do color commentary at his accountant day job; Have him narrate as he video tapes his son’s birthday.
- Player One is an obnoxious tourist in France. Bring him to a series of more Third World, destitute countries.
- Player One is good at fixing cars but doesn’t like to. Take him on a space walk to fix a space station.

The key using Help Desk is to leverage the sequence/pattern of the interaction.

Don’t just jump to the funny moment like players often do with tag-outs, start at the beginning to milk the power of pacing. Seek to follow the sequence of the initial interaction, keeping some aspects of the dialogue/perspectives the same while heightening others.

To practice, have players force a Tag-out or Pivot onto a Two Person Scene.

Lessons:

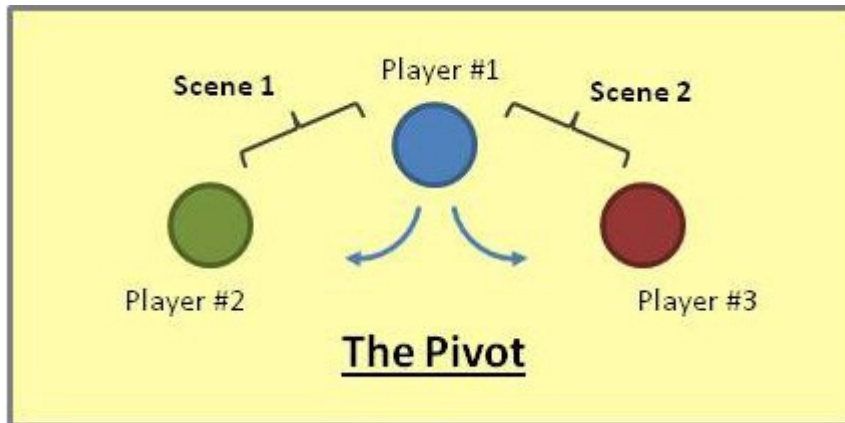
- **MATCHING: Being a bigger version of Player One; Do what Player One did bigger** – always a trusty default (You were excited by snails? I’m going to be *really* excited by snails).
- **Wherever You’re Taken, Trust In You** – If Player Three takes Player One’s snail lover to see the animated movie Turbo, Player One is expected to heighten his *excitement*. Player One can relax in knowing that wherever he’s transported he just needs to trust in his emotional reactions.
- **Elevate the Details** – A player who fears action figures can be terrified of *all* little versions of things. A player obsessed with her eyebrows can obsess over everything she trims. A tenant complaining to her absentee landlord can also complain to an absentee God.

Definitions:

- **Tag Outs** –To perform a tag out, a player enters a scene in progress and literally tags the player that he/she will replace on stage.



- Pivot (Swivel/Barn Door)** – Rather than Tag Out and Tag Back In, the Pivot allows two scenes to happen without players having to leave stage. For example, Player 1 is telling Player 2 all about his success in last night’s date. Player 3 enters stage on the other side of Player 1 from Player 2 to initiate a look into the actual date. Player 1 can *pivot* between scenes from his central position – turning to Player 3 to do the date scene and then turning back to Player 2 to continue exalting his date prowess. Players 2 and 3 do not have to leave stage when they’re not in play, they just have to remain frozen or neutral.



4.3 Help Desk Tool with Split Screens: The Split Screen enables a team to heighten relationship dynamics in a way that makes for a sexy stage picture. Several different scenes can coexist on the same stage. **We want to execute split screens in service of heightening the relationship stakes.**

- Elevate the situation** – Spies stealing secrets? Have mountaintop-sitting, spiritual gurus stealing life’s secrets. Have Moses steal the Commandments.
- Elevate themes** – In lifting the *reactions* from the originating scene’s players and situation, we give those reactions wider applicability and telegraph to our fellow players that we are heightening the *theme* represented in those reactions. (A sailor’s wife awaiting her husband’s return could be nicely heightened with a dog awaiting his master’s return from the store).
- Mapping** - Lay the dynamic structure of one genre over the particulars of another genre to heighten thematic and narrative depths. Two male improvisers talk about cars or sports while really talking about women and/or sex. Play the emotional dynamic of a young man asking a father for his daughter’s hand over the particulars of a teenager asking his dad for the car keys – “Boy, what are your intentions with my sedan?”

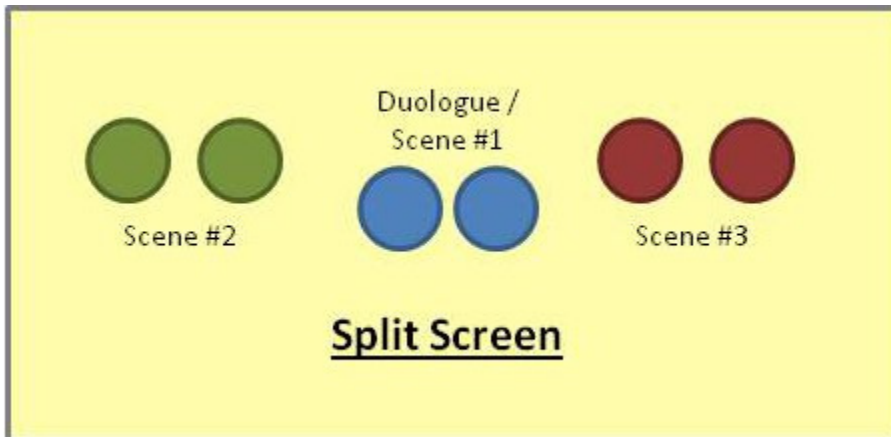
The key using Help Desk is to leverage the sequence/pattern of the interaction WITH A WHOLY DIFFERENT SET OF CHARACTERS. While heightening the themes/scene game of the initial pair, leverage the pattern’s sequence. Set a progression for the details that



heighten between split scenes. Keep some aspects of the dialogue/perspectives the same while heightening others.

To practice, have players force a Split Screen onto a Two Person Scene.

SPLIT SCREEN –To perform a split screen, Player 3 and Player 4 start a new scene in a different area of the stage from Players 1 and 2. This new scene should heighten the relationship stakes of the initial scene with new characters and/or circumstances. For example: In the initial scene, Democratic campaigners remain optimistic despite clearly being in a red state. In the split screen, two Apostles remain naively optimistic about what people in Sodom are willing to give up to follow Jesus.





Week 5 – Focusing and Clarifying the Chaos

Objective: The rubric group games – One Person, To The Ether, Help Desk and Hey Everybody (that will be taught tonight) – provide us with the atoms of building patterns. Through these tools we can take a chaos of a bunch of people on stage and collaborate to build atomic structure that can evolve into an organic element.

The Hey Everybody rubric game illustrates how we can come together in a mess and work out order.

5.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy and concentrate energy.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

THAT’S THE WAY WE GET DOWN: Players stand in a circle. Player One says, “Hey, [Player Two’s name].” Player Two says, “Hey, what?” All players say, “Hey, [Player Two’s name].” Player Two says, “Hey, what?” Player One says, “Show us how to get down.” Player Two says, “No way.” All players say, “Show us how to get down.” Player Two says, “Okay.” Then Player Two proceeds to dance in whatever fashion while singing, “D-O-W-N. That’s the way we get down.” Then everyone copies Player Two’s dance and sing, “D-O-W-N. That’s the way we get down.” Then Player Two says, “Hey, [Player Three’s name].” Repeat. ***The Lesson:*** Boldly go and boldly follow. Without self consciousness or judgement.

5.1 Hey Everybody Games: The potential for trouble in a “Hey Everybody, get out here” initiation is high. Players may rush out on stage to support the initiation with disparate reactions that then battle for dominance; chaos ensues and awkwardness follows. Or, though players may rush out on stage to support the initiation, they await to take their cues from the initiator who becomes the facilitator in a stiff and slow series of interactions that typically revolves more around thinking and problem solving than feeling. **Hey Everybody game mechanics allow a group to quickly build a focused direction out of disparate parts.**

The Key is the Sequence and Silos.

Sequence: Though everyone may rush on to stage together, someone speaks first then someone speaks second, then third, etc. **The first time it’s random, the second time it’s purposeful, the third time it’s expected.**



Silos: Everyone's first responsibility is to have A reaction – agree, disagree, comment, be disparate – it doesn't matter what as long as there is a what. The series of "whats" defines the sequence. Then, **let your what define you** – that's your thing; your silo. Your agreement with your thing and your repetition of your thing breeds simplicity and clarity. For example, if in reaction to "Hey everybody, staff meeting time," you say, "Oh, I was expecting donuts," in the next pass of the sequence, heighten your exact thing ("I imagined there'd be sprinkles") or a tangentially related thing ("Whaaaaat? No coffee either?"). Remember that repetition alone is heightening; first response is "Can you speak up?" second response can be "Can you speak up?"

Suggested Exercises:

RIGID HEY EVERYBODY – Everyone sits in chairs arranged in a semicircle. The player in the middle is tasked with providing a "why," "what" or "where" for the gathering ("Time to decide batting order," "The secret council of elders convenes," "So glad we can all fit in the old tree fort"). Players contribute quickly in succession – reacting, agreeing, emoting – to establish the sequence of contribution. The initiating player restarts the next sequence by heightening through the filter of their initiation. Players contribute in the order of the initiating sequence, heightening through their personal filter/silo.

Lessons:

- **Don't wait; react** – wait and nothing will happen or you'll be stuck negotiating. The sooner a player reacts, the sooner they're taken care of, and there's one less player to "figure out."
- **Facilitate, don't dictate** – the game's facilitator is just another player, who happened to start the scene. The facilitator can and should find a personal filter and not feel the need to speak any more than anyone else.
 - If the facilitator contributes a line that begs direct acknowledgement ("What'll we call our product?"), know you don't have to engage his/her conversation; you can and should stick your silo first and foremost.
- **Play your part** – trust that if you continue heightening through your personal filter/silo at your established place in the group's sequence then an edit will be found. You may not be "the funny one" this time, but your consistency will allow what is funny to pop. (*see Improv Does Best "Pattern Save" videos*)
- **Define the sequence in retrospect and don't ignore mutations** – If one person contributes twice in the first pass, that's okay; they should stick that sequence. If one person falls out of order the second pass, that's okay; they should seek to clarify with the third pass.

LOOSE HEY EVERYBODY – Everyone starts on the wings. A player initiates to bring a crowd on stage; "Team, take a knee." Players **immediately** join and players make choices quickly in succession – reacting, agreeing, emoting – to establish the sequence of contribution. The initiating player restarts the next sequence by heightening through the



filter of their initiation. Players contribute in the order of the initiating sequence, heightening through their personal filter.

Lessons:

- **For more than contrived scenes** – any scene where a group needs to focus chaos can be aided by Hey Everybody dynamics. Have one player initiate a scene with a SCES and have a crowd join that scene quickly, and quickly establishing a sequence of contributions. Restarting and repeating a sequence of contributions can focus even the most disparate parts.
- **Break free from the Bandshell of Death!** – don't just stand in a half-circle and talk; engage environment, change your posture and levels, etc.
- **Be active; avoid waiting** – With so many people on stage, if we're not engaged in our physical space then we just look like we're waiting for our turn to speak. If we find something static or repetitive to engage in actively, then the audience's attention isn't drawn to idleness.
- **Remember tableaus** – outside of the band shell it's easier to miss each other's contributions and/or contradict each other. Remember with tableaus how to cede attention to those who are more centrally positioned.

5.2 Setting and Following: Transition from the rubric to organic games.

Each of the rubric games starts with a Self-Contained Emotional Statement. So the key in determining what path the group may be going down is the move after the Self-Contained Emotional Statement – the Set Move.

Suggested Exercises:

ITERATIVE SET-FOCUSED BUILD – Get a player on stage to provide a Self-Contained Emotional Statement. For example, “I love these stars.”

- Q: “If a second player wanted to make this a **One Person scene**, what would s/he do?”
 - A: **Agree**. For example, “Oh, my heart, that's Orion!”
- Q: “If a second player wanted to make this a **To The Ether scene**, what would s/he do?”
 - A: **Tangentially heighten a detail**. For example, “I love the planets.”
- Q: “If a second player wanted to make this a **Help Desk scene**, what would s/he do?”
 - A: **React**. For example, “Jesus, you take one 101 class and think you're Carl Sagen.”
- Q: “If a second player wanted to make this a **Hey Everybody scene**, what would s/he do?”
 - A: **Do whatever**. For example, “Oh, my god, what's that noise?”



INTERACTIVE BUILD – Everyone on the wings. One player enters stage and initiates with a Self-Contained Emotional Statement. Another player enters with one of the four “joins” – Agree, Tangentially heighten a detail, React, Do whatever. A third player adds on top – in whatever way s/he feels would establish/cement a progression. If/when warranted, allow a fourth, fifth, etc. player to add on top.

Instructors should both build these slowly and spend time post iteration to dissect the build.

- Building slowly – “What is happening? / How can we heighten what’s already happening?”
- Dissecting on the back end – “You were the third addition; what did you see and what did you seek to heighten?”

Lessons:

- **Our toolset is vast, but with every move, we narrow the possibilities** – we seek to add on clarifying and simplifying what’s already been established. As our moves progress it should become easier to know how to contribute, not harder.
- **Whatever happens happens; Our tools enable us to follow however the pattern progresses** – Whatever happened, that’s the right thing. If there is not a clear progression from that point, reset the sequence.
- **Be varied** – Traditionally, as soon as a class gets a solid laugh with one type of pattern, they seek to recreate that same pattern. Encourage them to break their habits by employing a recently-unseen tool.
- **The variations are vast** – like chess, improv games are “undefined” games – **but** – again like chess – **we make every move based on each move in the context of all moves that came before it.**
 - Example #1: “This baby is heavy,” “This teenager is heavy,” “This middle aged man is heavy,” “This elderly father is heavy,” “These ashes are heavy.”
 - Example #2: “This baby is heavy,” “This baby is fat,” “And from this moment on this baby has body issues,” “This book is heavy,” “This book is thick,” “And from this moment on this book has multiple issues,”...
 - Example #3: “This baby is heavy,” “Parents these days; they leave all the parenting to us,” “Waah,” “This baby is whiny,” “At home they get whatever they want, and we’re left to deny them,”...
 - Example #4: “This baby is heavy,” “This baby is phat,” “This baby is baaaad,” “This baby’s got the umpf to make my yoow go pow,” “This is Social Services; we’re here to take your baby away.”
- **No, you don’t have to play so rigidly** – Play. Follow. And a good team will make whatever happens look good. But please recognize the power in the rubric game tools – tight patterns will build stronger and faster to a more powerful edit.



Week6– Organic Game Play

Objective: Building patterns one step at a time, it doesn't matter what "type" of game we're playing. From any *Offer*, through agreements' simplification, repetitions' clarification and progressions' heightening a group can confidently navigate and focus "organic" games.

6.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy and concentrate energy.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

6.1 "Rules" Reminder: "Rules" in this context aren't unbreakable constraints defining engagement. Here, "Rules" are relationships of cause and effect that, once established, can help improvisers *react through* instead of *think through* scenes. In a Word Association for example, if a "use" always follows an object – for example, "Pen," "Write" – then it'll be easier to know what to say when some says, "Brush."

When a group builds organically together, each individual is by necessity playing by their own rules. But if each individual is striving to establish rules based on what's already been introduced and to clarify rules through repetition, then the individuals begin working as a group.

Simplification and Clarification help *many* players heighten *collaboratively*. We Simplify through Agreement. We Clarify through Repetition.

Suggested Exercises:

DUKES OF HAZZARD (like MY THREE RULES) - Everyone in a circle. Here are the three rules to start the game:

- Rule #1: Turning to your left or right with a "Swoosh" sound and arm-swing movement passes the sequence on to that player to the left or right.
- Rule #2: Putting your arms up in an X shape to the person trying to pass the sequence to you and making a "[sharp braking]" sound reverses the direction of the sequence.
- Rule #3: To pass the sequence to any player beyond the player on your direct left or right, you turn your hand into the Dukes Of Hazzard's Dixie-Horn music, "Do-do-doodle-do-do-do-doot-doodle."

Have a player start with one of the rules. The first time they will play with "my rules" without establishing any rules for when to deploy each move.

- "What determined whether, when it got to you, you Swooshed, X-ed or Dixie-Horned?" "I don't know."



- “What happened before the first time someone X-ed?” “We swooshed three times.”

Have them start again fresh, this time focused on establishing rules of cause and effect that determine when to use moves. The first time a move is used it might be random, but if players are paying attention to what happened before and after that random occurrence then they can seek to recreate that sequence and make the random purposeful, then expected. As players seek to recreate sequences it will certainly evolve as individually conceived rules are clarified, and the whole set of sequences heightens through attempts at repetition.

“Woosh,” “Woosh,” “Woosh,” “Rrrrrt,” “Woosh,” “Woosh,” “Woosh,” “Rrrrrt,”
 “Woosh,” “Woosh,” “Rrrrrt,” “Woosh,” “Woosh,” “Rrrrrt,” “Woosh,” “Rrrrrt,”
 “Woosh,” “Rrrrrt,” “Do-do-doodle-do-do-doot-doodle.”

It doesn’t have to be played that tight. And it won’t possibly be the first few times through. But if everyone’s concentrated on working to establish and clarify rules, then it’s possible for the group to be playing by similar (if not the same) rules and then suddenly the game is fun for all involved.

Lessons:

- **Playing is following.** As kids we made up silly games in-the-moment. We did that because we followed our friends impulses and our friends followed ours. We just focused outward on fun and weren’t in our heads judging. Your pre-puberty, non-judgmental selves are still accessible. Follow the fun to find him or her. Play with a “Me, too” mentality not a “Nuh, uh” mindset.
- **Fold it all in.** Just because you thought the game was to pass across the circle three times doesn’t mean you can give up trying to play along with the group the moment something didn’t work out as you expected. Remember, **there are no mistakes**. If everyone is committed to clarifying, then we *will* get on the same page.
- **Trust the pattern** – don’t overcomplicate. The sooner everyone is on the same page, the sooner we can heighten and evolve collaboratively. Playing this game, a group starts to have *fun* with very simple mechanics simply because they know how to play and can just play. We tend to overcomplicate unnecessarily. And then we end up in our heads trying to figure out how to navigate all our complications. Keep it simple and have fun with it.



6.2 Following Progressions and Rules to Stage-Ready Organic Group Games: The rubric game mechanics can be applied to any initiation. And the combination of mechanics can facilitate organic game play.

Depending on progress of the students through the curriculum to date, feel free to use or skip through the sequence of Suggested Exercises to follow. IF WEEK 4 HAS BEEN SUCCESSFUL, SKIP TO “ORGANIC GAME REVOLVER” below.

Reminder/Explanation -

1. Initiate with a Self-Contained Emotional Statement as the Offer

- The Self-Contained Emotional Statement establishes an effect and a cause, aligning you with an emotional perspective. It’s a solid foundation on which to build the possibilities. Connecting your emotion to an active element in the scene – Not just “*I love the arts,*” but, “*I love THIS painting*” – enables a Pavlovian reaction.
- It’s a *statement*, not a question shifting the responsibility of providing information to your partner.
- It’s an *emotional* statement, giving X the power to make you *feel* Y.
- Being *self-contained*, the statement places you on solid ground without dictating the scene to your partners. Being self-contained is increasingly an imperative the larger a group you have on stage.

2. Seek to Set the progression with one of four ways to join the scene

- **Heighten with Agreement** – “*I love the stars.*” “*They’re so bright, sparkly and perfect.*” Agreement allows multiple players to collaboratively heighten one emotional perspective.
- **Heighten Tangentially** – “*I love the stars.*” “*I’m more a planets man myself.*” Tangential heightening enables juxtaposition of emotional perspectives and exploration of theme.
- **React** – “*I love the stars.*” “*Your astronomy prowess isn’t getting me in bed.*” Emotional reactions establish a scenic game to heighten in one scene or juxtaposed scenes.
- **Disparate Initiation** – “*I love the stars.*” “*Whoa, you hear that?*” We don’t have to “make sense” of disparate initiations we can heighten through repetition of the sequence; first time is random, second time is purposeful, third time is expected.

3. Seek to Cement the progression

- **Clarify the game(s) by following the moves already made with a move that heightens in the established direction**

4. Follow, Heighten and Evolve the established game(s)



- **Do more of what was done. Do what was done again bigger. Do what was done again with a different context.**

5. Have fun

- On stage you have to focus outward and follow the moment. Hard work and concentrated thinking off stage are necessary to become better improvisers, but you can't perform to your best ability in your head. **There is no reason to get up on an improv stage other than to have fun.**

Suggested Exercises:

1 SCES and 4 Set Moves Tutorial: Have one player get on stage and give an SCES – ex: *“I’m afraid of my face.”*

Then prompt a player to come up to join that SCES **with an Agreement line** – ex: *“If I see a mirror, I’ll scream.”* In agreement this player could say, “I’m also afraid of your face,” or “I’m afraid of my own face.” Remind players that anyone can have what anyone else has; if one player is pregnant, everyone can be pregnant.

Then prompt a third player to come up and join that original SCES with a **line Tangentially Heightening a Detail** – ex: *“I love this fully mirrored room,”* or *“I’m terrified of my voice.”* There is certainly bound to be some overlap between Agreement and Tangential lines, but the nuance is that with Agreement two players share the same perspective, with Tangential two players have related but not identical perspectives.

Then prompt a fourth player to come up and join the original SCES with a **Reaction line** – ex: *“How dare you? I’m the best plastic surgeon around.”* This is the type of move we employ most often when starting any typical “two person scene.” What we’ll learn is how to build a group game on top of this interplay between characters.

Finally prompt a fifth player to come up and join the original SCES with a **Disparate line** – ex: *“I’d kill for an apple right now.”* The juxtaposition of disparate initiations can be fun. These scenes and games will continue stronger if this second initiation is also a SCES.

Lessons:

- **Clear moves breed clear games** – get everyone on the same page and everyone can play; set up a clear progression and the group will be compelled to play
- **The rubric game mechanics are tools to shape any game** – the core mechanics give us a way to relate and progress moves, they don’t dictate a game.
 - **One Person Core:** If we simplify the number of perspectives on stage, we can together heighten that/those perspective(s).
 - **TtE Core** – Building a progression of heightening from one contribution to the next gets players moving in a shared direction
 - **HD Core** – Repeating an interaction (with some details staying the same while others heighten in a progression) gives players and the audience a shared basis for heightening



- **HE Core** – Establishing and repeating a sequence of contributions as well as establishing and heightening silos will help keep a potentially chaotic situation clear

SCES and Set Move Lay-ups: Have players split into two lines with one on either side of the stage. One line will initiate with a SCES. The other line will join with one of the 4 Set Moves – whichever they want. After these two lines are given, the players are wiped, each to go to the back of the other line.

SCES, Set and Cement Move Lay-ups: The player at the head of one line initiates with an SCES. The player at the head of the other line joins with one of 4 Set moves. Then either player now at the head of the lines can join the scene in working to establish the progression of the game. This third player can – but does not have to – enter after only two lines are given. For example:

1 – *“I’m afraid of my face.”* 2 – *“If I see a mirror, I’ll scream.”* 3 – *“Look at the polish on this floor; No, don’t – aaaahhhh.”*

1 – *“I’m afraid of my face.”* 2 – *“I love this fully mirrored room.”* 3 – *“I love it, too; Everywhere you look, there you are.”*

1 – *“I’m afraid of my face.”* 2 – *“How dare you? I’m the best plastic surgeon around.”* 3 – *“I’m afraid of my breasts.”*

1 – *“I’m afraid of my face.”* 2 – *“I’d kill for an apple right now.”* 3 – *“Did someone say they had an apple? I’d slaughter the innocent for one.”*

Remember: Simplification and Clarification. [A third person must only enter a scene to serve what has already been established.](#) To add a third perspective or to be a third totally unrelated person risks over-complication. Simplify with Agreement, by adopting one of the two perspectives already in play. Clarify with Repetition, by heightening the emotional reaction and stakes already in play.

ORGANIC GROUP GAME REVOLVER – Players divide into two lines on either side of the stage. **The rule is that you can’t enter stage until the player ahead of you in line enters stage.**

First a suggestion is given. Then one of the two players at the top of the two lines enters and initiates with a Self-Contained Emotional Statement. Now, one of the two players now at the top of the two lines enters and provides a “join” – agree, tangentially heighten a detail, react, do whatever. *Now*, one of the two players at the top of the two lines has to enter if the scene is going to be heightened into a game with more players. **A player cannot enter the game before the person ahead of them in their lines does.**

The key is every student is forced to take part in the game. They can’t just stay idle waiting because in this exercise they are forced into their turn.

If a player had a good idea they can’t execute on, that’s good fodder for discussion.

Improv is a great hobby for people who like to talk in bars about what they could have done.



Players One and Two should give the space/opportunity for Player Three to come on (being actively engaged in the environment will help), **as opposed to just immediately engaging in more lines of dialogue.**

Editing is a move in and of itself. In the revolver, as in the showcase, allow a “move” to be the edit. We don’t want players not editing when called for because they are thinking about how to initiate the next scene.

6.3 Organic Montage: Use the combinations of game mechanics to facilitate a varied run of games.

Suggested Exercises:

ORGANIC GROUP GAME MONTAGE – A run of group games, edited and continued by the group. Everyone get on the wings. Anyone is able to contribute the SCES, the Set Move, to add on in seeking to cement a game and/or to add in serving to heighten a game.

As an instructor, you have to pay attention to the progression of made moves so as to be able to talk about how each successive addition affected the trajectory of the scene.

There are no mistakes, but there are complications; every new add becomes something else that needs to be folded into the pattern. Encourage simplicity.

You can direct, by stripping back a game that went awry to the last moment it was stable, or by side-coaching a player into a particular move. But I try to keep this to a minimum as you don’t want to kill their momentum, only open their eyes.

There are so many paths these games can take that it is tough to outline any “standard” paths. But here are a few examples from workshops that worked particularly well:

EXAMPLE 1 -

Player One enters miming a rod and saying, “What a great day for fishing.” Player Two enters with a pronounced hunchback and says, “Ah, what a great day for fishing.” Player One looks at Player Two with a large resigned sigh and says, “Hi, Bob.”

A progression of fishermen enter, each with an even more exaggerated physical and verbal disability, and a variation of “What a great day for fishing.” With each entrance Player One gets more and more deflated but still manages a polite “Hi,” naming each entrant.

Player Six enters stage as a happy fish, saying, “What a great day for swimming.” Player Seven enters as a disabled fish...

EXAMPLE 2 -

Player One enters as an old lady proud to say, “Yep, everything I need is in this one bag.” Player Two joins and says sadly, “I think my mother hates me.” Player One responds, “Best get your bag packed.”

Player Three enters on the opposite side of Player One as Player Two, pivoting attention to Player Three and signalling that Player Two should leave. “I think my wife hates me,” Player Three says. “Best get your bag packed,” Player One responds.



Player Four enters on the opposite side of Player One as Player Three, pivoting attention and Player Three leaves. “I think my baby hates me,” Player Four says. “Best pack that baby’s bag,” Player One responds.

EXAMPLE 3 -

Player One enters in fear. “Oh, my god,” she says. “I can’t see anything in this cave.” Player Two enters in mirrored agreement, also scared of the dark cave. Together they freak out. And they worry aloud about the threat of bats.

Player Three enters as a bat and says, “Marco.” Player Four also enters as a bat and says, “Polo.” As the bats play, the initiating players heighten their freak out.

Players Five and Six enter as other scared people.

Players Seven and Eight enter as bats. Player Seven says, “Red Rover, Red Rover, send Thomas on over.” The people all scream...

Lessons:

- **Vary the Joins** – vary the joins to vary the games. Haven’t seen a To-The-Ether-inspired join? Do one.
- **Vary the Pacing** – vary the emotional energy, scene length, scene type, cast size, etc.
- **Callback** – revisit and heighten games from earlier in the run



Week 7 – Tertiary Moves

Objective: Group Games can also be built using Tertiary Moves in Two Person Scenes. Remember with Tertiary Moves, Players entering a scene in progress should always seek to heighten the games already in play. In this class, we'll see how employing pattern mechanics will increase the impact of tertiary moves (Walk-Ons, Environment Adds, We-Sees, etc.).

7.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy and concentrate energy.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

21

SELF-CONTAINED EMOTIONAL STATEMENT CIRCLE – The more emotional the better. See/interact with the active aspect of the scene (what you're doing, what's around you, where you are, how you are, etc.). Really do make it self-contained.

7.1 Two Person Scenes: Patterns can be built within and on top of two person scenes.

Suggested Exercises:

TWO PERSON SCENE LAY-UPS – Split the class into two lines, with one on each wing. One line is the initiation line, they come out and give a SCES. The other line enters stage and can engage with any of the four “joins” (agree, tangentially heighten, react, do whatever). **The key is having both players really engage in the environment so that after they each saw one line the scene can sit with silence without either player awkwardly looking like they're waiting to speak again.** The danger is that students get so used to Two Person Scenes, that, unless they're told otherwise, they'll never provide an opportunity through silence for a Player Three to be the one that contributes the third line. **Engaging environment and emotion should help them confidently allow a moment of silence after the first two lines.** Even if Player Two's line *demand*s immediate attention (“What the fuck are you doing?”), instruct players to let their non-verbal emotional reactions do the talking for them.

TWO PERSON SCENES – Given the opportunity for more lines, students need only heighten their personal games (how they feel about who they are, how they are, where they are, what they're doing) and their scenic game (how they feel about who their scene partner is, how their scene partner is, what their scene partner is doing, etc.). *This is the core of the 201 class: Feel. Feel about something. Repeat and heighten.*



7.2 Two Person Scenes & Tertiary Opportunities: Practice seeing the opportunity and deploying Tertiary Moves (Walk Ons, Environment, We Sees) to set and cement patterns.

Tertiary Player Good Faith Mantra - I will only enter a scene in progress to serve what has already been established. And I will react to those who enter my scene in progress on the assumption they seek to heighten what has already been established.

Walk-ons – we can enter a two player scene in progress as another character, offering a move that contributes to the progression of the game(s) at play. Two high school boys are feeling self conscious in the hallway so Player 3 enters as a mean girl to point out their foibles. Two players are arguing over the value of the movie they just left, so Player 3 enters to agree with one of them and rile the other. If there is one tertiary move an improviser knows, it's the Walk-on. Unfortunately, too few improvisers know to Walk Off. *You're a tertiary character; the scene's not about you.* A Walk-on should only be used to heighten/sharpen a game already at play. An entering character must acquiesce to those already on stage and strive not to be the focus of the scene.

Embodying the Environment – we can be set pieces; we can be crowds.

Scene Painting/ "We See" – we can come in from offstage to describe (and physicalize) a previously unseen "visual" aspect of the scene. For example, a pompous character is painted with a monocle, "#1 Boss" button, etc. For another example, a scene with a child bemoaning having to do his/her chores is painted with a window showing a beautiful day outside, an Everest of dishes to clean, etc. This type of move is typically executed by a player entering the scene, not as a character, but, with a verbal aside directed at the audience. "These people are in clown costumes." "We see this man has a hole through his torso." These are *Detail* moves, but they work best when they are delivered emotionally and when they connect with a character's emotional behavior. Sometimes, while contributing his verbal add-on, Player 3 will wave his hand generally over or toward the area of stage he's referring to; but a better Player 3 will often define what he's describing in *mime* as well as words. In conjunction with "We see this man has a beard," this Player 3 shows how big and bushy the beard is by cupping and fluffing it with his hands before exiting the scene.

Suggested Exercises:

TERTIARY OPPORTUNITIES – Have two players start a scene. When other players see the opportunity, they can enter the stage with a Walk On, with a We See, or to Embody the Environment.

Lessons:

- **Multiply but beware of mixing** – one walk-on likely calls for two more; doing a We-See after another player has introduced walk-ons likely will over-complicate the scene's pattern
- **Don't forget the sequence between tertiary moves** – a group excited to do walk-ons can beat them over the head, neglecting to revisit and heighten the scene contributions that led up to the original tertiary move.



- Why did Player 3 initiate the [walk on] and/or what was the SOMETHING that occurred before the [walk on]?
- How did the established players react to the [walk on]?
- What led to the [walk off] and what happened once it occurred?
- *Then work to reset and restart the game's pattern and heighten through iterations.*

TERTIARY MONTAGE – Have players force tertiary moves onto a run of two person scenes.

7.3 Introduce the Showcase/Montage: Get a run of games in before class ends.

Suggested Exercises:

SHOWCASE/MONTAGE – A run of group games, edited and continued by the group. Everyone get on the wings. Anyone is able to contribute the SCES, the Set Move (“Join”), to add on in seeking to cement a game and/or to add in serving to heighten a game.

Encourage them to vary the scenes:

- All players / just three players
- All the joins
- Pivots/ Split Screens
- Tertiary moves
- Short/ Long
- Loud/ Quiet

Give them notes.



Week 8 – Practice & Performance Prep

Objective: Run through the group’s “Class Action” showcase set with notes.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Tell students not to wear flip flops, hats, or clothing with logos/etc. on them. Players, especially ladies, shouldn’t wear anything that would keep them from being able to follow and do anything any other player does.

You can run, of course, whatever format you want, this is the format I have used –

One Person Scene
To The Ether
Help Desk
Hey Everybody
Organic Group Game Run

I certainly remind students though that “there are no mistakes in improv,” so if early games are not pure rubric games, fuck it, follow. The audience doesn’t know what any of this stuff is “supposed to” look like anyway.