



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 and 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.

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:

- 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

Week 4 – Rubric Group Games

Three rubric group games (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.

Key Teachings:

- **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 5 – 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:

- The rubric game mechanics can be applied to any initiation.
 - The combination of mechanics can facilitate organic game play.

Week 6 – Tertiary Moves

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:

- There are a bunch of standard improv tips/tricks for entering a scene in progress as a tertiary player
 - *Walk-ons*
 - *Tag-outs*
 - *"Cut-to"*
 - *Scene Painting/ "We See"*
 - *Split Scene*
 - *Swivel/Barn Door*
- 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 7 – Practice

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

Week 8 – Performance Prep

Run through the group's "Class Action" showcase set with notes.



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/development 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.

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 – Together (teacher included) everyone shakes out their limbs – right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg – in descending counts starting at 8 each and ending with 1 each.

NAME THUMPER – Going around the circle, each person (teacher included) associates their name with an action. 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.



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** – can't be in your head freaking out; have to be ready and waiting for your 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.

Week 2 – Focusing Group Scenes

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.

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

NAME THUMPER

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.
- 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.

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.

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**
- **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.
- 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 tableaux and then get to talk. Remember, Self Contained Emotional Statements. To start, players should align their emotional perspectives with the other players they are physically mirroring/complimenting.

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 groups, don't fall to negotiations, arguments or other lines of questioning** – 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."

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"
- **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

SELF CONTAINED EMOTIONAL STATEMENT CIRCLE

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.**

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)



Suggested Exercises:

WORD ASSOCIATION – Have Player One say any word. Have Player Two say a word inspired by Player One’s word. Have Player Three say a word that, in relating to the 2nd word, heightens the relationship between the first two words.

TO THE ETHER GAMES - Have Player One take stage and make a Self Contained Emotional Statement. Have Player Two come out and change *one thing* about Player One’s SCES. Have Player Three give a SCES that, in relating to the 2nd SCES, heightens the progression between the first two SCESs.

Lessons (for Word Association and/or 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.

Three rubric group games (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.

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

Suggested Exercises:



TO THE ETHER GAMES

Lessons:

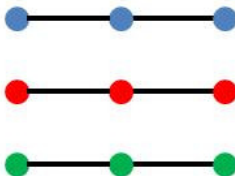
- **Categories** – related contributions that do not heighten/progress; can be reordered without consequence (“Coke/Kleenex/Band-aid” vs. “Kleenex/Band-aid/Coke”).
 - **A run of categories typically necessitates a “resetting” pattern pass**
- **Poles** – when two extremes are juxtaposed (hot/cold; love/hate) 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
- **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

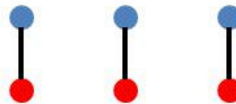
1. Standard



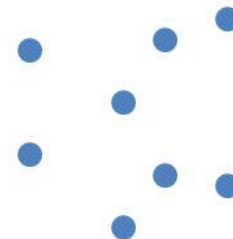
2. Resetting



3. Poles



4. One Person Scene





Week 4 – Pattern Mechanics (cont.)

Objective: Continue building pattern muscle memory by practicing the rubric group game mechanics.

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

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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EMOTIONAL REACTION CIRCLE – A player turns to her left with a mimed object. The player on the left reacts emotionally. What’s mimed and what’s said are not important – all that matters is the in-the-moment emotional reaction. Players should react without concern for “sense.”

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 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.

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.
- **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.

4.2 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 than feeling. **Hey Everybody game mechanics allow a group to quickly build a focused direction out of disparate parts.**

Suggested Exercises:

HEY EVERYBODY – A player initiates to bring a crowd on stage; “Team, take a knee.” Players 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:

- **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.
- **Play your part** – trust that if you continue heightening through your personal filter 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.

Variations:

- **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.

Week 5 – 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.

5.0 Warm-Ups: Build energy and concentrate energy.

Suggested Exercises:

CRAZY EIGHTS

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5.1 One Start, Multiple Ends: The rubric game mechanics can be applied to any initiation. And the combination of mechanics can facilitate organic game play.

Suggested Exercises:

1 SCES TO TtE, HD & HE – A player initiates with a SCES. Other players build on, working to set and cement toward a To The Ether, Help Desk or Hey Everybody game. Clear the stage. Then the same initiating player gives the same SCES and another of the rubric games is built on top. Clear stage, repeat.

Example: Player 1 enters, holding a mimed map, looking up and around and says, “Man, New York is so intimidating; where's the Empire State Building?”



- To The Ether Game – Player 2 enters on all fours, wiggling their nose and says, “Man, this maze is crazy complicated; where the hell’s that cheese?” Player 3 enters with arms pressed to his sides, wiggling his whole body and says, in an angry character accent, “Man, these fallopian tubes are all dark and twisted; where the fuck that egg at?”
- Help Desk Game – Player 2 enters and says, “I’ll help you…” Player 3 watches that interaction, enters after Player 2 finds reason to leave and mirrors certain aspects of the interaction while heightening others
- Hey Everybody Game – Player 2 enters and says, “Hey, you gots all of New York at your disposal, we’ll get you where you need to go,” effectively calling on additional players who find their own place and filter while respecting Player 1 as the facilitator

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.
 - **TtE Core** – heightening one perspective/idea? Build a progression thinking about elevating the relationship between A and B in C’s relationship to B.
 - **HD Core** – 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.
 - **HE Core** – 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.

5.2 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.

Lessons:

- **Variance** – vary the emotional energy, scene length, scene type, cast size, etc.
- **Callback** – revisit and heighten games from earlier in the run



Week 6 – Tertiary Moves

Objective: Players entering a scene in progress should always seek to heighten the games already in play. Heightening those games with concentrated pattern mechanics will increase the impact of those tertiary moves (Walk-Ons, Cut-Tos, Tag-Outs, We-Sees, etc.)

6.0 Building patterns with tertiary moves around established games: Practice seeing the opportunity and deploying the moves to set and cement patterns

Suggested Exercises:

TERTIARY OPPORTUNITIES – have two players start a scene. Stop when you, the teacher, identifies the scene's game. Ask a third player to enter the scene to heighten the game you've identified with a tertiary move (definitions below). Repeat to visit and revisit different tertiary moves.

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

Lessons:

- **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.
- **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 Moves

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.

“Cut-to” – when players doing a scene refer to a particular moment (from the past, future, etc.), a player comes onstage and announces “Cut to: that moment” and we see the moment. A comfortable ensemble can perform the “cut-to” (also called *flashback*, *show me*, etc.) without telegraphing the move by shouting “Cut to.” As with walk-ons, a “cut to” should be followed by a “cut back.”

Tag out – a “tag out” allows the audience to see how a character from a previous scene will react to another character/scenario/etc. To perform a tag out, a player enters a scene in progress and literally tags the player that he/she will replace on stage. As with walk-ons, a “tag out” should be followed by a “tag back in.”

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.

Polish Moves

Mapping – taking a familiar scenario and mapping it over an unfamiliar situation. For example, player one is a businessman being bothered by player two, a salesman. If in trying to get the salesman to leave him alone the businessman uses language that we all recognize from a “break-up scenario,” such as “it’s not you it’s me,” the scene will be infinitely more interesting. If the salesman reacts to this break-up with the same emotion that any boyfriend or girlfriend would, then we really have a scene.

Split Scene – two (or more) separate scenes continue at the same time (usually on opposite sides of the stage), sharing focus back and forth. While they do not exist in the same physical space, the scenes affect each other as the focus shifts.



Breaking the Plane – players define where their characters are in relation to each other by choosing where to “look” for that character. For example, in a baseball scene, rather than throwing the ball across the stage to each other, Player A throws the ball toward the audience, as if Player B is in that direction from Player A. Player B, standing parallel to player A, then receives the ball from the audience. Another example is a scene in which a woman looks out her bedroom window and talks to a man on the street below. Rather than trying to convey this physical scenario while looking at each other across the (level) stage, the woman faces out to the audience and looks downward as she talks (as if the man is in a hole in the stage), and the man faces the audience but looks up as he speaks, as if the woman is in the ceiling of the theater. Similarly, an improviser can watch his fellow player go up a tall winding staircase by watching the ascent while the ascending player is really standing on the same level stage. Rather than be confined to a set-less stage, "breaking the plane" allows improvisers to create a more interesting stage picture.

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



Week 7 – Practice

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

Week 8 – Performance Prep

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