

Unit Model Games

Pete Gomes

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This set of games **builds** skills and basic techniques for improvising a film as an ensemble. Using a series of modes, Movement, Framing and Structure, the games help develop a group of players by practising and working together. The players in the ensemble consist of multiple roles – performers, camera operator, sound recordist and prompter and the games build skills and awareness to react in the moment and respond to decisions and choices made by each role.

The games are intended to be used within a workshop environment. Used as a set, they help develop skills for observation and awareness as a group. They allow for and encourage experimentation and exploration of different roles within the ensemble.

The sharing of different roles is actively encouraged. This helps build understanding of the choices made by each player. It helps the whole ensemble get a feel for this way of working and learn ways of interacting and playing with each other during improvisations.

These games build the basic techniques for interacting and improvising together and focus on different skills and modes of working.



PREPARATION

Preparing to play



The Games

The games are designed to be played and used as preparation for ensemble working across multiple roles and disciplines. The games work as a development stage towards making an improvised film project and enable an ensemble to improvise a film project together by exploring and experiencing interactions during improvisation. The set of games can be used to explore and test ideas and provide a way of developing and rehearsing a regular group of players.

Each game isolates different kinds of skills and techniques. In combination, they help build an ensemble of players who interact with, anticipate, read and respond to each other. Each game contributes towards learning a palette of possible techniques that can be practised and used during improvisation. As the ensemble develops, the games can be used in different configurations or adapted and customised for specific projects and needs of the players. These games are designed and formulated to encourage understanding and communication between disciplines. The games facilitate interdisciplinary ways of working and playing them enables understanding of how different roles might react and respond to improvisation within an ensemble.

The games allow the players to experience and explore different modes: **Movement**, **Framing** and **Structure**. Each set of games focuses on learning different skills: **Movement** games build skills in reading and anticipating changes to physical positions and tempo and choices across all roles; **Framing** games build skills for understanding choices and changes of emphasis across all roles; **Structure** games develop techniques for all roles in the ensemble to generate and use transitions and pauses during improvisations.

The Roles

In these games, the company – both cast and crew – will be referred to as the **ensemble**. Members of the ensemble will be referred to as **players**. Within the ensemble, the roles of performer/actor/dancer, camera operator, sound recordist, side-coach/prompter will be referred to as: **performer**, **camera**, **sound** and **prompter**.

Performers Role

A **Performer** or **Performers** create the action of the scene. This might include movement, dialogue or even extensive periods of being static and silent. The genre and medium of any performance will vary, depending on the nature of the ensemble. **Performers** can be in any configuration: solo; pairs; trios; or larger groupings. **Performers** can be practitioners from any discipline. These choices will influence the relation between performers who may enter or exit a scene or the rhythm and movement. When first exploring this practice, **performers** should keep the scenes as simple as possible. This can help an ensemble when playing games for the first time. Using simple **Performer** scenes when first experimenting enables the whole group keep track of decisions and choices made during the games.

Camera Role

Camera makes choices in response to the visual aspects of the scene. This includes choices for position, framing, distance, movement, height and angles. The possible variations can include tempo of movement and or emphasising a specific visual element within an improvised scene. **Camera** can improvise without technical equipment, and therefore may need to discuss and describe their choices in more detail as part of the ensemble discussion. Sometimes during an improvisation, a **camera** choice will be clear to other players in the ensemble. At other times, it may need some clarification. The **camera** role can choose to articulate their actions during an improvisation.

Sound Role

Sound decides which sounds in the scene are most relevant or interesting. **Sound** can follow the **performer** action in the scene, and can monitor, respond and position themselves in relation to the position and movement of **camera**. **Sound** may also decide to move, position and focus on anything they choose. **Sound** can move entirely independently of camera and can instigate changes that affect all players. **Sound** may follow any dialogue or sound from a **performer** and may need to get close to **performers** and **camera**. **Sound** can also instigate a shift, for example, by positioning themselves in a particular place, thereby inviting a response from the other players. Playing the games using two **sound** roles can also open additional choices for the whole ensemble. Using multiple **sound** roles can give alternative choices to both **camera** and also **performers** depending on the number of players available.

Prompter Role

The **prompter** takes an 'outside eye' on the improvisation and facilitates a game. A **prompter** is used to support the awareness and decision-making of the other players in the group, e.g. to remind players of the game's rules and purpose, or to challenge decisions and suggest alternative choices. The **prompter** is following and reading unfolding improvisations between players and the whole ensemble. During any game the **prompter** can sit outside the improvisation or alternatively may be part of the improvisation by combining roles such as **sound-prompter**, **performer-prompter** depending on the number of players available. The **prompter** role is equivalent to a 'side-coach' in theatre games. A side-coach¹ is a role often used in theatrical improvisation practice. A side-coach is attentive to the whole group and allows an improvisation to unfold. They can also use instructions or alerts to the whole ensemble or specific players during an improvisation at any point. They keep all players aware of the entire improvising ensemble. **Prompter** does not direct any scene and their role is not as a director. They may alert players to possibilities or they may also question or make provocations to specific players or the whole group. They can side-coach – prompting players during an improvisation and verbalise issues – 'Look to your right!', 'That performer is just about to move!', 'How about a faster tempo?'. Any calls made by the **prompter** should be simple, focused and clear. The **prompter** can alert the group to different decisions being made or offer alternatives. They can also usefully help open group discussion and help with problem solving. The **prompter** role will develop as the ensemble becomes more skilled at reading and anticipating each other during games and as a workshop progresses. The **prompter** role should be rotated throughout the ensemble with each player taking turns. The **prompter** role features in every game and should actively participate as part of the ensemble improvisation.

Terms used

A scene describes any content created by the **performers**. The games are organised into three modes: **Movement**, **Structure** and **Framing**. The **modes** are used to distinguish different types of skills and techniques. The games are designed to explore each mode. These different modes of improvisation are intended to be used in combinations by the players within any scene. Any combination of modes is a **sequence**. An example of a **sequence** might be the game **Me! Me! Me!** from **Movement** mode, combined with **Endings** from **Structure** mode. This specific **sequence** of modes might be practiced and used within different improvisations with different content. The ensemble can agree to improvise using a specific **sequence** of modes or with practise can improvise freely using any modes and combinations the players choose.

¹ Viola Spolin who conceived the role of side-coach for theatre improvisation, emphasised that the role is a fellow player, who keeps all the players aware of themselves and the whole group.

Location

The term *location* is used to describe the physical environment in which the games take place. This might be a studio or a film set, but equally, the games could happen in a selected indoor/outdoor location or in a more informal environment. Introducing a location can provide visual and aural stimulus and *sound*, *camera* and *performers* can react and respond in different ways. The *location* can spark players imaginations – a shaft of light may prompt the movement of a *performer* and *camera*, a noise from the street may prompt sound to move towards a window followed by *performer* and *camera* for example.

Experimenting with a location can be useful in shaping the development of a scene both visually and aurally. Using a simple interior location for a workshop at the first stage is recommended.

Playing the games and discussion

The games are intended to be experimental and experiential. It is hoped that they are approached with a sense of play and exploration and players feel no pressure to produce any kind of 'end product'. The games are useful in preparation for any project. And the ensemble will find that the games help develop techniques, terminologies and specific ways of working.

Discussion and feedback are integral to playing the games and key to developing the ensemble and refining player skills. Playing the games includes discussion and reflection by the ensemble about the choices and decisions made during an improvisation. Playing the games will develop a way of working that is bespoke to each ensemble, specific players and their skills.

Workshop set ups

The games are designed to be played with no equipment – so a 'camera frame' can be imitated using the forefinger and thumb of both hands to make a rectangle. A 'microphone' can be a hand held outstretched to indicate position and placement. Or basic prop equipment can be introduced, such as a broom handle as a 'boom pole' and a simple frame cut into cardboard as a 'camera'. The use of prop equipment can clarify and enhance all players' choices and decisions for positioning and movement.

By using no technical equipment, the ensemble learns ways of being and interacting together; building rhythm and focus between each player. This open and flexible approach can explore the dynamics of a specific ensemble. This allows roles to be easily changed, opens dialogue and discussion between different roles and builds specific skills that are applied during improvisations. These initial stages enable the ensemble to rehearse interactions, understand the kind of situations that arise, and build experience before introduction of any technical equipment. Where are players positioned? Where they are moving from and to? What is the focus of attention?

It focuses the ensemble on playing, group dynamics and experimentation and gives a feeling for this way of working.

Once the basic ensemble work and the players and roles have been established the ensemble can consider introducing technical equipment - perhaps introducing whatever mobile phone recording capability is to hand, before other higher specification camera and sound equipment, or specific technical set ups, are incorporated. Delaying the introduction of technical equipment during these workshops will keep the emphasis firmly on the way the players in the ensemble relate to each other and their environment. Initially building and concentrating solely on these core ensemble skills using these games is highly recommended.





THE ENSEMBLE

Working as an ensemble



The ensemble

This improvising film ensemble approach is non-hierarchical. This means that creative decisions and choices can come from any player during improvisation. Within group improvisation, players accept decisions and choices made by players and build upon them positively. Getting the ensemble to work together in this way is key. Allowing all participants creative input takes time, patience, discussion – and above all practice.

This set of games activates different ways an ensemble can begin to improvise and work together as a group. The aim is to develop an ensemble practice where all players become skilled at reading and responding to choices and decisions of the whole group and all other players during an improvisation.

Assessing the skills of the ensemble

Depending on the composition of the group, players may bring core skills from different disciplines. The ensemble may comprise of an experienced camera operator or sound recordist or group of improvising actors for example.

For players familiar with more traditional and hierarchical ways of making films, this way of working may be and feel very different. It may be worth discussing who amongst the players are already familiar with any kind of improvisation technique. If some of the players are more accustomed to working in a traditional hierarchical filmmaking process, this way of working could be quite challenging. Alternatively, they may find it very liberating. Any ensemble will therefore need to take individual players' backgrounds and levels of experience into account. Using initial discussion between players will help identify levels of experience in different disciplines. Improvising performers in the group may prove useful in helping the whole ensemble discuss some basic ideas and share skills. But this interdisciplinary approach and way of improvising offers significant challenges and new ways of working for every role and all players in an ensemble.

Working with the ensemble

The dynamics and organisation of the ensemble is worth articulating at the beginning of the workshops and also at regular intervals throughout the process. It is useful to agree on working parameters from the outset, so that the games, discussions about the games and the functioning of the ensemble can be conducted in a spirit of fairness, mutual respect, and play. The adoption of such an approach requires discussion and sharing. The ensemble is working towards reacting and responding with awareness and spontaneity. Each time the games are played builds skills and refines the dynamic of the group and players. Keeping track of these developments and changes and discussing them is key. Feedback and player responses are a crucial part of each game and feature as a key part of the process. These reflections will help all players understand how the ensemble is progressing. To get most benefit, and to enjoy the process, it would be ideal if a group of regular players worked together – revisiting and deepening their abilities to play the games as an ensemble.

Ensemble discussion

To develop a shared understanding and an ensemble practice workshops might begin and end with a gathering and a de-brief. These provide a regular forum for players to 'touch base'. This forum can be used to explore some mutually agreed guidelines for how the group will be organised: discussing the pros and cons of working in a non-hierarchical structure. How do we make sure everyone is heard? How do we encourage input from all players? What happens if there is too much

discussion and not enough play? What happens when conflicting ideas are being presented? It is useful to assign regular moments for the group to reflect and discuss decisions made during an improvisation and how and when the ensemble feels that it is working well.

Perfect solutions to these issues might not necessarily be found, and ensemble dynamics will always be 'a work in progress'. But it's useful to keep returning to these conversations, because on-going discussion around working processes will increase awareness and mutual understanding. Each player will begin to understand how the other players think, feel, behave and function in their roles. This increase in inter-connectedness will help to create an ensemble that communicates well, which in turn, is more likely to produce good work. So time spent dealing with ensemble dynamics is time well-spent.

Exchanging Roles

Sharing and playing different roles enables every player to experience their own and all other players different disciplines and skill sets. This enhances how the ensemble relates and interacts with each other during improvisations.

During an improvisation, each role of *performer, camera, sound, prompter* will be continually influenced by different things. Each role has differing priorities – a *performer* may focus on the progression of the scene, a *camera* may focus on a specific position or angle for example.

Adopting each role, helps the whole group become cohesive and work as a single unit – a *performer* begins to think about how a sound is moving or a *camera* might see and anticipate the best option for a *performer*. Working efficiently and together as a whole group is the main aim – an ensemble of players who read, react and respond to each other in a seamless flow. The focus for the entire ensemble is to develop a bespoke way of working together. Experiencing each role will help players anticipate what might happen next or help react or respond with confidence when reading another player. It builds awareness of each player's position and movement. Used within a workshop environment, the games create a learning space for building improvising film skills where *performers, camera, sound, prompter* are all improvising together.

Each player will have the opportunity to learn and understand their own role within the ensemble, and how this relates to the work of the other players. This might happen more in the early stages and as the ensemble progresses, roles can settle into individual specialisms. Each role is given equal value and respect. This ethos supports the distribution of creative opportunity. This approach also makes the emergence of dominant hierarchies within the ensemble less likely.

The roles should be rotated in order to create opportunities for interdisciplinary experience. Developing an experience outside your own specialism or skill set – a sound recordist playing games as a *performer* for example, can open discussions and ideas between those specific roles. Exchange of roles will help communication during an improvisation. Exchanging of roles may happen more frequently during early stages. It is worth remembering to reincorporate this once the ensemble has settled. Exchanging of roles can be used as a tool to develop and refine approaches and ways of generating discussion. It can be useful as a technique to dislodge a specific problem or a player being too stuck in one way of working.

Awareness and Decision-Making

These games support the development of a set of skills that will be useful when filming and improvising. Some of the skills are technical, but the primary skills are the *awareness* and *decision-making* of the various players. These skills require practice.

Decision-making will happen on different levels: *logistical* (e.g. Where do I best position myself within this group of *Performers*? Where is my starting position?) and *creative* (e.g. What is the most significant sound in this scene? What scene do we need to see next? How does this scene end?)

Some decisions happen during the scene and some decisions happen between scenes. It is worth focusing ensemble discussion to reflect on decisions during a scene and how they might improve or change in other improvisations. During improvisations decisions are often made instinctively and quickly. It is therefore important that players stay alert to the action as it unfolds. Asking each player to reflect on the choices they make during improvisations will help refine the skills of the group.

The kind of awareness that is required is *disparate*. This is a wide focus that is able to observe multiple influences at any given time. This is done mostly through looking and listening, but also through the other senses and through emotional reactions.

For example, *camera* as a player might be reacting to light and moving towards it or *sound* might be drawn to a dialogue or footsteps. Each player has their own role, but it helps to understand the choices made by other players during an improvisation.

At first, some skills might feel rather mechanical, but with practise and experience, finer, more subtle skills will begin to develop, such as the ability to read other players and to sense what might be about to happen. These games provide a way of learning basic skills which can then be adapted, extended and refined. The finer collaborative skills take time to develop, but as they get used more frequently, players will find a way of working that is bespoke to their specific ensemble.

Performers in the Scenes

Deciding on the content for the scenes is not the purpose of these games. At the beginning, scenes should be kept as simple as possible, because there are so many other variables to consider. Improvisation requires a range of skill, thinking and feeling: players will need to be emotionally engaged; aware of their body language and physical positioning in relation to the location and other players; conscious of what has already happened in the scene; considering where the scene might be heading; aware of what the other players might be feeling and doing; considering other circumstances such as historical setting, light, weather and location. Some performers within the ensemble might have more experience of improvisation and be familiar with the improvisation processes or have an established practice within a discipline. If someone is unfamiliar with performing, they can be encouraged to have a simple, structured conversation in a scene, for example, an interview for a job or make simple physical movements. The primary purpose of the games is to understand and respond as an ensemble to the improvisation.

Early on, therefore, it's useful if the ensemble keeps the improvisations as simple as possible – short and clear – so that the focus is on the skills specific to each game. Maintaining simplicity in the content of a scene itself will enable players to read and understand the individual decisions and choices that need to be made. This will also help the *prompter* in guiding and questioning the ensemble during and after any game.

When players have mastered the individual skills, the content of the scenes can be less prescribed and more complex.

Repeating scenes

The repetition of scenes within these games is important because it gives players the opportunity to explore alternative choices that could be made during the scene. This gives all players the chance to experience the impact of these variations. How did it affect the scene? How did it change how the players felt? How will this variation affect what might come next? The repetition of the scenes need not be exact, and players should be aware that some of the spontaneity of the initial performance might be lost during the repetition.

You may just ask *camera* to adopt a different role for a scene to expose a problem or way of working. The purpose is not to develop strong scene content – although of course this may happen

along the way. With more experience you will find that the ensemble can produce dynamic and exciting improvised material. As players become more experienced individual games and skills may be combined.

Combining games and modes: Movement, Framing and Structure

Each mode *Movement*, *Framing* and *Structure* and the related games can be configured and combined in many different ways. Once all the games have been fully absorbed by the ensemble, *performers*, *camera*, *sound*, and *prompter* can use the skills and techniques learned from each mode to play and improvise freely using all players. Combining and experimenting with modes will further enhance communication and discussion within the ensemble.

In this stage the ensemble moves beyond playing the games towards developing preferred ways of working by combining and customising modes. Using a prescribed combination and sequence of modes can enable the gradual transition for the ensemble towards a bespoke and fluid improvisation. An example of using a specific sequence of modes could be: *A to B* game from *Movement* mode with an addition of a *Wipe* game from *Structure* mode. There are many possible ways of combining and sequencing modes once the games have been fully understood by the ensemble.

Alternatively, the ensemble can freely improvise using any modes they choose. The idea is to develop your own preferred ways of working. All the games include suggestions for variations. The ensemble is encouraged to adapt and experiment with the games to emphasise different roles or customise them for their own needs.

THE GAMES

This way of working can be exciting, a lot of fun and also very challenging. It may help if players think of the process as more like being in a band than making a film. During workshops the term 'jamming' can best describe the process. The ensemble needs to be alert to when it is 'in flow' or 'in a groove'. The more the players practice; the better the results. The more the players work as an ensemble; the more comfortable they will be with the improvisation. These games work as preparation for a project and a way of trying out and testing roles within a group. They also develop core skills for making an improvised ensemble film project and rehearse different ways of being and working together.





MOVEMENT

These games explore the interplay of movement dynamics between different players.



A to B

Off & On

Follow my Leader

Me! Me! Me!

Stop - Start



These games explore the interplay of movement dynamics between different players.

A to B

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter.

Purpose of game and skills learned

Players learn skills for anticipation of movement, positioning and variation of tempo.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

Performers decide their beginning and end positions. These decisions are shared with the ensemble before the scene begins. During the course of the scene, *Performers* will find actions that enable them to move from the beginning position 'A' to end position 'B' during the improvisation. The main challenge in this game lies with *Camera* and *Sound*. During the scene the *Camera* and *Sound* decide how to respond to the action.

VARIATIONS

When this game is repeated, the same basic action should be performed to take the *Performers* from beginning to end, so that *Camera* and *Sound* can try alternative responses. Play the game at different tempos. Other variations include: *Sound* can share beginning and end positions and *Performers* and *Camera* respond; *Prompter* can call an alternative end position 'B' during the improvisation and the ensemble must then adapt.

Reflections

Were there any problems or unexpected opportunities? Did *Sound* stay with *Performers* throughout? Did *Sound* choose a position and focus on something away from *Performers* and *Camera*? What did *Camera* and *Sound* do if *Performers* went in separate directions? How did this affect the 'filming' of the scene? How did each choice affect the unfolding of the scene? How do these varying *Camera* and *Sound* decisions affect the way the audience might experience the scene? How is the atmosphere affected? The emotional quality of the scene. How did changes in tempo help or hinder players' decisions and choices?

These games explore the interplay of movement dynamics between different players.

Off & On

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game gives Performers experience in decision making in relation to *Camera*, *Sound* and other *Performers*. These decisions are made outside Camera 'frame' when a scene is already in progress.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

A scene is set up with one or more *Performers*. *Sound* and *Camera* make decisions regarding the recording of the scene as it goes along. Another *performer* then decides how best to enter the scene.

VARIATIONS

When this game is repeated, *Performers* might try different ways of entering the scene. Other variations can be *Performers* use *Sound* to enter the scene. *Prompter* can call for *Performers* to find different ways to enter or leave the scene during improvisation.

Reflections

How do *Performers* observe *Camera* and *Sound* before entering the scene? What informs their choice? Are *Camera* and *Sound* both moving in a specific direction? How do *Camera* and *Sound* respond to an arrival? How can a *Sound* position provide an entry point for a *Performer*? When the new *Performer* comes on, how does it affect the other *Performers*? How does it change the scene? What are the technical challenges of this new arrival?

These games explore the interplay of movement dynamics between different players.

Follow my Leader

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game develops disparate awareness within the ensemble. It allows players to experience being a leader by taking action, or being a follower by responding to action.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

In this game, one player takes the lead, and the other players respond. When playing this game for the first time, the leader should be nominated beforehand. The leader instigates an action during a scene and the other players respond.

VARIATIONS

In the first instance the order of players taking the leader role might be agreed in advance. In more advanced versions of this game, a leader is not nominated beforehand, but different players take on and relinquish the leadership role throughout the course of the scene. The other players in the ensemble need to be aware of where in the group leadership lies at any given time. Other variations can be *Prompter* can call 'leader' and 'follower' changes during improvisation, *Prompter* can call changes in tempo or any player can call changes.

Reflections

How is action instigated by a *Performer*? What different kinds of action are available to the *Performer*? If *Sound* or *Camera* are leading, how do they instigate action? What kind of actions are available to them? What are the smallest movements or gestures that can indicate leading? How does the leadership role change hands during a scene? Is it relinquished or stolen? How?

These games explore the interplay of movement dynamics between different players.

Me! Me! Me!

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game develops a disparate awareness of what is happening in the scene.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

In this game, *Performers* compete with each other to get attention from either *Sound* or *Camera*. There are many ways to do this, which *Performers*, given the opportunity, will discover for themselves. The primary decision-making lies with *Sound* and *Camera* – these players need to follow the action and decide where to position themselves at any given moment.

VARIATIONS

A variation on this game is to ask *Performers* to do the opposite. How can they compete to get the least amount of attention? Other variations include *Prompter* can call changes between *Sound*, *Camera* and *Performers* or emphasise different players during improvisation.

Reflections

How does *Camera* or *Sound* decide which action or *Performer* to focus on? Do *Camera* and *Sound* operate as a combined unit, or as separate players? Are there moments of convergence or separation? What are the artistic choices to be made? What are the technical choices? What did the *Performers* discover? What was the quality of the focus in the room? Is it possible to notice more than one thing happening at a time? How?

These games explore the interplay of movement dynamics between different players.

Stop - Start

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game develops disparate awareness in the players. It also makes the players aware that their technical decision making can have an impact on the quality of the scene and how it is experienced by the viewer.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

This game is different to Follow my Leader because it requires stillness from certain players and movement from others. This game is played in two stages:

1. The **Camera** is still and the Performers move.
2. The **Camera** is moving and the Performers are still.

Sound needs to observe and react.

VARIATIONS

The development of this game is when stages 1 and 2 are combined. Vary the tempo for **Performers** and **Camera** and try extremes from fast to slow. Other variations include repeat using **Sound** and **Performers** as still or moving. **Prompter** can also call changes from still to moving during improvisation.

Reflections

How is the switch managed between a still and a moving **Camera**? Is it always instigated by the **Camera**? How can **Performers** instigate a switch? How does still or moving **Sound** change **Performers** choices? How do these changes affect the quality of the scene? What does a different tempo do to the game. What other games or modes can work in combination with this game?



STRUCTURE

This group of games brings the processes of film assembly and editing into the improvisation.

Signals

The Pause

Changing Places

The Wipe

Endings



This group of games brings the processes of film assembly and editing into the improvisation.

Signals

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game develops the ability of each player to signal to the other players during a scene. This allows a shift in direction to occur while the scene continues to run. A player uses a signal of intention to let others know what they are about to do. A signal of instruction is used to advise someone else what they might do. Both types of signal can be used to adapt the performed content of the scene. Signals can also be used to adapt the technical logistics of the scene.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

Before playing this game, the ensemble needs to decide on a set of signals that everyone can understand. These must be simple, clear and unambiguous visual or sound gestures. During the game, listening and eye-contact is paramount so that signals are not missed. Everyone in the ensemble needs to be aware that signals can occur from any player at any time.

VARIATIONS

The natural evolution of this game will happen as the players begin to 'read' each other. When this happens, instinctive collaboration increases. The aim is that with practice an ensemble can be so 'in sync' with each other that signalling is dispensed with altogether.

Reflections

Once the game has been played a few times, the ensemble can discuss how to deal with any issues that arise: Which signals worked best? What can players do if multiple signals are given simultaneously? Are some signals specific to one role? What happens if some players don't see a signal, or misunderstand a signal? What other cues or indicators helped during the improvisation? What if a player disagrees with a given instruction? In some cases, it is recommended that a Pause is deployed in order to resolve any confusion.

This group of games brings the processes of film assembly and editing into the improvisation.

The Pause

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

A pause is designed to temporarily halt the improvisation. This can be for discussion, decision-making, for changes to be made. A pause is indicated by a verbal or visual cue, a raised hand, for example. This is agreed between the ensemble in advance of improvisation. A pause during an ongoing improvisation can be resumed and continued, allowing time for changes in position for *Camera*, *Performers* or *Sound*.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

To start with, allow the *Prompter* to call the pause. When the pause is called, all players should find a way of coming to stillness. This needn't be abrupt, allowing for the completion of individual actions if necessary. Players should take note of the current movement, direction, tempo and positions of other the players in the ensemble. The *Prompter* proposes an adaptation and the scene can resume.

VARIATIONS

More advanced versions of this game should allow for more than one player or all players to deploy a pause at any time.

Reflections

How can the *Performers* maintain the energy of the scene during a pause? Is it best to use a freeze or a soft pause? When is a pause useful? When is it not useful? What kind of adaptations can be suggested during a pause?

This group of games brings the processes of film assembly and editing into the improvisation.

The Wipe

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

A wipe is when the **Camera** frame gets completely filled during the course of filming. The players are improvising possible options for a structuring and assembly process, and this technique for moving from one focus to another. For a wipe to happen, the entire frame is filled – using something physical in the scene, for example, a body part, a book or an item of clothing such as a **Performer's** jacket or dress. These 'wipes' offer choices for possible transitions in an assembly process.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

The **Performer** needs to practise filling the frame momentarily by walking past, standing up, or moving an object during a scene. The **Camera** can also create a wipe by moving onto something that fills the frame.

VARIATIONS

Use a wipe to start or end a scene. Agree on a set number of wipes to include in a scene. Go to extremes. Designate **Performer** or **Camera** to make a wipe.

Reflections

What happens if **Camera** and **Performer** try to create a wipe at the same time? How is this resolved? Is the experience of a wipe the same for **Camera** as it is for **Performer**? What happens when players changed roles? Does the speed of the wipe matter? Or the direction of it? How can **Performers** use ongoing and regular wipes as part of an improvised scene? How does the ensemble and all players know when a wipe has been used? Why is it useful? What other games or modes can be combined with wipes? Why are they useful? Can **Sound** make any additional actions if a wipe is created?

This group of games brings the processes of film assembly and editing into the improvisation.

Changing Places

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game requires *Camera*, *Sound* and *Performers* to create transitions or editing points between two different *Camera* positions. The purpose of the game is to give players experience in identifying options for changing *Camera* angle and *Camera* position.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

During a scene, a pause is called by the *Prompter*, who suggests how *Camera* angle or position might change. Once this adjustment has been made, the scene can now continue, either by using a gesture, such as a click of the fingers, or a word, for example, 'go', 'play' or 'action'.

VARIATIONS

Suggest that any player can call a change of places. Designate specific players such as Sound to call change of places. Experiment with an agreed fixed number of changes in a scene. Go to extremes and attempt multiple changes of *Camera* position. Work at different tempos. Designate different roles to call the pause and change of *Camera* position. Change position for the arrival of a new *Performer* in the scene.

Reflections

How does the change of *camera* position affect the scene? What are the other options available? And how would these affect the scene? How can *Sound* position indicate possible options for a change in *Camera*? How can *Performer* position indicate possible options for a change in *Camera*? What other modes and games can be combined with this?

This group of games brings the processes of film assembly and editing into the improvisation.

Endings

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game gives players experience in knowing how and when to end a scene. Before playing the game, the ensemble should discuss how they can tell when a scene has ended. An agreement of broad principles needs to be reached among the players, particularly because each scene will be of different length and end in different ways.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

Before starting, players decide on an end word, for example 'cut' or 'stop' or a gesture, like clapped hands or a 'winding up' gesture. These should indicate whether the ending is abrupt or gradual. To start with, the prompter calls the ending.

VARIATIONS

When the players are used to the game, any player can call the ending. The ensemble should work towards an unspoken agreement of an ending. The game can be repeated until no gestures or end words are required or used by the ensemble.

Reflections

In discussion afterwards, the person who called the ending should be given an opportunity to explain their decision. How did it impact the other players? The ensemble can also discuss whether there was an opportunity for an earlier ending, or whether there were reasons to allow the scene to run on a bit further. How do we know when a scene has finished? Is it because the main action of the scene has happened and we have witnessed its repercussions in full? Or because we have witnessed the main action of the scene, and we are now aware of what the subsequent scene might be? Is it because the scene is no longer engaging? How can we tell when a scene is no longer engaging? When the ensemble can end a scene together without any calls, how does it happen? What are the cues and indicators from others players and roles? Most scene endings happen due to performance indicators, but are there any occasions when there are **sound** or **camera** related endings? What might these be? What other techniques can end a scene? How can a wipe end a scene?



FRAMING

These games encourage Performers to be active participants in relation to Camera and Sound

Wait for it!

Now you see me

Close up and personal

Voices off

Silent witness



These games encourage Performers to be active participants in relation to Camera and Sound

Wait for it!

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game is to enhance the *Performer's* awareness of the position and movement of *Camera* and *Sound*.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

A scene is created by the *Performers* with opportunities for movement and/or dialogue. *Camera* and *Sound* move in the location. *Performers* need to be aware of where *Camera* and *Sound* are moving from and to, and wait until they are in 'frame' or position before saying or doing anything that is significant. To begin with, the game can be attempted with a single *Performer* in the scene.

VARIATIONS

A more advanced version of this game is to use multiple *Performers*. Other variations can be *Sound* and *Camera* operate independently, and *Performers* react and wait for either *Sound* or *Camera*. Try a scene sitting down using limited movement and multiple players. Prompter can guide or alert players during improvisation or suggest changes in tempo.

Reflections

How is it possible to be aware of *Camera* and *Sound* while maintaining focus on what's happening in the scene? Is it difficult to wait for *Camera* and *Sound*? Is this more difficult when there are multiple *Performers*? Why? How and where might this technique be useful when improvising a film scene? How does the tempo of *Performers* including dialogue and response affect the scene?

These games encourage Performers to be active participants in relation to Camera and Sound

Now you see me

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game is to enhance the *Performer's* awareness of the position and movement of *Camera* and *Sound*.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

During a scene, *Camera* frames an action involving a *Performer*. Another *Performer* enters the frame in the background or the foreground, giving *Camera* and *Sound* something new to shift the focus onto. This is different from Off & On game as it offers choices to *Camera* and *Sound* during an improvised scene.

VARIATIONS

When *Camera* and *Sound* are feeling confident with this game, *Performers* can try using this on multiple occasions throughout the course of a scene. *Prompter* can alert players to possible choices when using multiple *Performers*.

Reflections

What are the challenges in this game for *Performer*, *Camera* and *Sound*? How can the *Performer* introduce options for *Camera* or *Sound* or both that enhances the scene? How does this change the scene and positioning of players? How might this game be used when improvising a film? What kinds of scene would it work in? What other games would work in combination with this? How else can it be adapted?

These games encourage Performers to be active participants in relation to Camera and Sound

Close up and personal

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game allows *Performers* to shape the development of the scene offering or controlling different options available for *Camera* and *Sound*.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

During a scene, *Camera* frames an action involving a *Performer*. Another *Performer* enters the frame in the background or the foreground, giving *Camera* and *Sound* something new to shift the focus onto. This is different from Off & On game as it offers choices to *Camera* and *Sound* during an improvised scene.

VARIATIONS

When *Camera* and *Sound* are feeling confident with this game, *Performer* can try using this on multiple occasions throughout the course of a scene. *Prompter* can alert players to possible choices when using multiple *Performers*.

Reflections

What are the challenges in this game for *Performer*, *Camera* and *Sound*? How can the *Performer* introduce options for *Camera* or *Sound* or both that enhances the scene? How does this change the scene and positioning of players? How might this game be used when improvising a film? What kinds of scene would it work in? What other games would work in combination with this? How else can it be adapted?

These games encourage Performers to be active participants in relation to Camera and Sound

Voices off

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

Sound and *Performers* explore how to work together in a scene and shape the improvisation. This game help players realise that not everything in the scene needs to be in front of *Camera* or even in the frame.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

Create a scene with a fixed *Camera* position. *Performers* and *Sound* are told where the edges of the frame are. *Performers* remain in the scene throughout, but make choices about when to be in front of *Camera* or completely away from and 'off' *Camera*.

VARIATIONS

Try this with *Camera* moving. Repeat using a varied tempo for both *Performers* and *Camera*. Other variations are *Camera*, *Sound* and *Performers* can move and position themselves anywhere. Try different combinations of fixed and moving players. *Prompter* can also call changes for players during improvisation.

Reflections

How do *Sound* and *Performers* working together change other player choices? What changes when someone leaves the frame but continues performing? What happens to our perception of the physical or vocal performance when it is no longer in frame? How might this game be applied when improvising a film? What kind of scene might this suit? What other game combinations can work well with this?

These games encourage Performers to be active participants in relation to Camera and Sound

Silent witness

Who participates

Performers, Camera, Sound, Prompter

Purpose of game and skills learned

This game explores what happens when the *Camera* chooses something that is peripheral to the scene. Again, this is to help players realise that not everything in the scene needs to be in front of *Camera*.

GAME OUTLINE - HOW TO PLAY

Using two *Performers* to begin with, create a scene in which the *Performers* can choose to be in the *Camera* frame or outside of it. However, once inside the *Camera* frame, only physical or emotional action is permitted – nothing vocal. Anything vocal from a *Performer* has to happen away from *Camera*. Sound can work with any *Performer* or any other sounds away from *Camera*.

VARIATIONS

Repeat using only one *Performer*. Try it with multiple *Performers*. Try allowing *Camera* to make framing decisions and movement.

Reflections

What are the implications for *Sound* in this situation? Can *Sound* provide additional *Performer* options? As a *Performer*, what was it like to be in the frame but unable to speak? What options, other than talking, were open to you? How did it affect the quality of the performance? What was happening off-camera? Where was the main focus of the scene? Did it shift? Why? What happened when there were several *Performers* in the scene? How might this technique be deployed in the making of a film? What impact might this framing have? What other games can work in combination with this?