

Devising Game Stories as an Ensemble

Alison Lührs

Agenda

History of the modern ensemble

How to put it into action

A common language to get everyone creating together

Spoilers Ahoy

Destiny 2

Immortality

Control

Horizon: Forbidden West

Pentiment

The Last of Us Part 2

Destiny 2: Season 19

Snap Snap



Camera is on the critical slides you should take a picture of for later



I'm Alison!

Associate Narrative Director, Seasonal
Content

Destiny 2

Nearly 9 years at Wizards of the Coast
prior

MTG

Baldur's Gate III

Incubating Digital Titles

Studied Devised Theatre at WWU

12+ Years in Professional Devised and
Unscripted Theatre

How we make things



Moscow, June 22, 1897

Brunch at the Slavyansky Bazar







SCHERER, NABHOLZ & C^{IE}

À MOSCOU.

A still life photograph of a dining table. In the foreground, a dark wine bottle stands on a light-colored wooden table. To its right are two small, empty glasses. Further right, a wooden cutting board holds several pickles, some whole and some sliced, along with a piece of bread topped with a spread and garnishes. The background is a textured wooden surface.

Late that same night

At Stanislavski's family home

Москва. Художественный театр.
MOSCOU. Théâtre des arts.





The Ensemble

- A group of cross-disciplinary individuals
- Collaborative creation
- Working together consistently over years to develop a distinctive body of work
- Shared creative responsibility

The Work

- The method of creation AND the final product

BUNGIE®



A photograph of four large, cylindrical metal grain silos standing in a row in a grassy field. The silos are made of corrugated metal and have conical roofs. A metal walkway or conveyor system runs along the tops of the silos. The background shows a clear blue sky and distant hills.

Art Audio Narrative Design





So how do we create as
an ensemble?



Values

Relinquish Control

Be Kind, not Nice

Make a Case

Violent Choices

Will and Grace

You Aren't Your Ideas

Hold Yourself Accountable

Values of the Ensemble

Be kind, not nice

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Values of the Ensemble

Will and Grace

You Aren't Your Ideas

Hold Yourself Accountable

Preventing Blah

Design by committee

- Everyone's ideas get shoved in until it's nothing at all

Design by collaboration

- The Work is more important
- Shot-caller still necessary

Environmental storytelling
isn't big enough.

Every discipline is vector
for story.



STORY

The perceptual ability to see and understand logic systems as an arrangement of collected information

NARRATIVE

The discipline in game development largely responsible for implementation of story through dialogue and systems



Get Everyone In The Same Room

High level story is broken by the leads of each discipline

Build together by using
a common language



Mary Overlie

American choreographer, dancer,
theatre artist

“What are dance and theatre made
of?”

Created the Viewpoints as technical
language to discuss the artistic form
of performance parallel to specific
language used to describe painting.





Ann Bogart

Director

Collaborated with Mary Overlie in 1984, learned and refined the Viewpoints

Adapted the Viewpoints to create foundational philosophy of her company, SIT



The Nine Viewpoints

Space

Architecture, Spatial Relationship, Topography



Architecture

The physical environment, the space, and whatever belongs to it (including permanent and non-permanent features)





Spatial Relationship

Distance between objects in the space, the player to other NPCs, to enemies, or to the architecture.





Topography

The path a player traverses or follows


Shape

Shape, Gesture



Shape

The contour or outline of bodies in space, the shape of a body by itself, or relating to others/the architecture – think of lines, curves, angles, either stationary or in motion

The painting 'The Ecumenical Council' by Salvador Dalí depicts a religious scene on a desolate, rocky plateau. A man with long hair and a beard, wearing a white robe, is kneeling in prayer. Behind him stands a woman with long red hair, wearing a green robe and a white crown. To the right, a large, gnarled, leafless tree stands prominently. The background is a vast, hazy landscape under a cloudy sky. The text 'Now your eternal soul is mine.' is written in white at the bottom left of the painting.

Now your eternal soul is mine.



Gesture

Either behavioral gesture (realistic) or expressive (abstract or symbolic)

Time

Tempo, Duration, Kinesthetic Response, Repetition



Tempo

How quickly or slowly an action occurs, by the player, NPC, or aspects of the environment





Duration


How long an event occurs over time; how long the player or NPCs maintain a particular movement, tempo, gesture, etc before it changes





Kinesthetic Response

The player's or NPC's spontaneous reaction to a motion that occurs outside of themselves. An instinctive response to an external stimulus.

A close-up, cinematic shot of a woman with light skin and blonde hair pulled back. She has a slight, knowing smile and is looking directly at the camera. The background is dark with some out-of-focus light sources.

I see you.



MISSION UPDATED

Tidy up the coffee cups

OFFICE WORKER 1: Time is money!

JESSE: I will get it done right away.

Repetition

Repeating an action, motif, visual design, music signature, or line of dialogue.



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Architecture

Spatial Relationship

Topography

Shape

Gesture

Tempo

Duration

Kinesthetic Response

Repetition

SPACE

Spatial Relationship

- How large or small is the player in relation to the space?
- Are there lots of things for the player to pick up? Are they rewarded for engaging or punished? What does that convey about the space?
- What in this space is important to look at? Why? What does that convey?
- Do any objects in the space or the space itself have meaning to the player?

Architecture

- How airy or constricted is the space the player is in?
- What is the texture of the materials in the space? What emotion does that convey?
- Is this space warped in some way? Symmetrical? And what emotions and stories does that evoke?

Topography

- What might make a character go one way and not the other?
- How does the path a character travels tell us who they are?
- What is conveyed by how easy or difficult it is to move through a space?



SHAPE



Shape

- What is the outline of the figure? What does the emotion convey?
- What is the contour or outline of the NPCs in relation to each other?
- What is the contour or outline of our own player in relation to the other NPCs? The architecture?

Gesture

- Are the NPCs gesturing in a way that is evocative, exaggerated, expressive?
- What are their gestures and movements conveying about the NPCs inner states or emotion?
- Are these gestures public or private – do they know we can see them? How does their gesture change when they realize our presence?

TIME

Tempo

- At what speed does the level encourage the player to move through the space?
- Is there a lot of stuff in the way? Do we need to move slowly?
- Or are there are a lot of barriers and enemies that encourage the player to move quickly? How and why do we want the player to move fast?
- Do we want the player to stop moving? How can we encourage stillness, and why?
- What rhythm can we instill in the player's movement? What does rhythm convey?

Duration

- What does expanding or collapsing the duration convey?
- Are the NPCs performing an action? How slowly, quickly, etc? What does that convey?

Repetition

- What story are we telling when something happens twice or more? What do we emphasize?
- What story do we tell when we break

Kinesthetic Response

- How can we shape scenes around characters instinctively responding to stimuli (a cough, a laugh, a gasp, a flinch)
- What can we do to encourage that in the player? What story is told when we illicit a subconscious response?











DEC 18 1910





How we work is just as
important as what we make.

Thank you!