

# 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

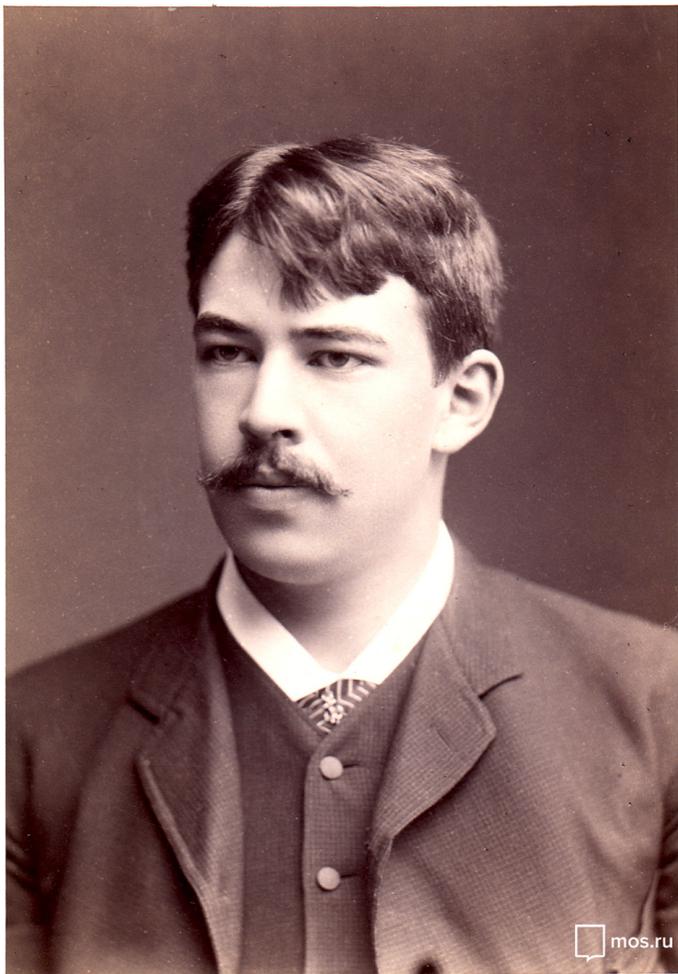
A top-down view of a breakfast table. In the center is a large, ornate golden plate with a black scrollwork border, containing two folded crepes topped with orange caviar and green herbs. To the left is a white platter with sliced salami, cheese, and a piece of dark bread. To the right is a white octagonal plate with blinis topped with cream and fruit. Below the central plate is a white bowl of oatmeal with strawberries and blueberries, and a glass of dark coffee. In the bottom left is a white bowl of orange caviar, and in the bottom center is a white bowl of rice porridge. A silver fork and knife are visible on the right side of the table.

# Moscow, June 22, 1897

Brunch at the Slavyansky Bazar







SCHERER, NABHOLZ & C<sup>IE</sup>

à MOSCOU.

A still life photograph of a wine bottle, two glasses, and a wooden board with pickles and bread on a wooden surface. The bottle is in the foreground, slightly out of focus. Two glasses are in the middle ground. The wooden board is on the right, with pickles, bread, and other items. The background is a 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®





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.

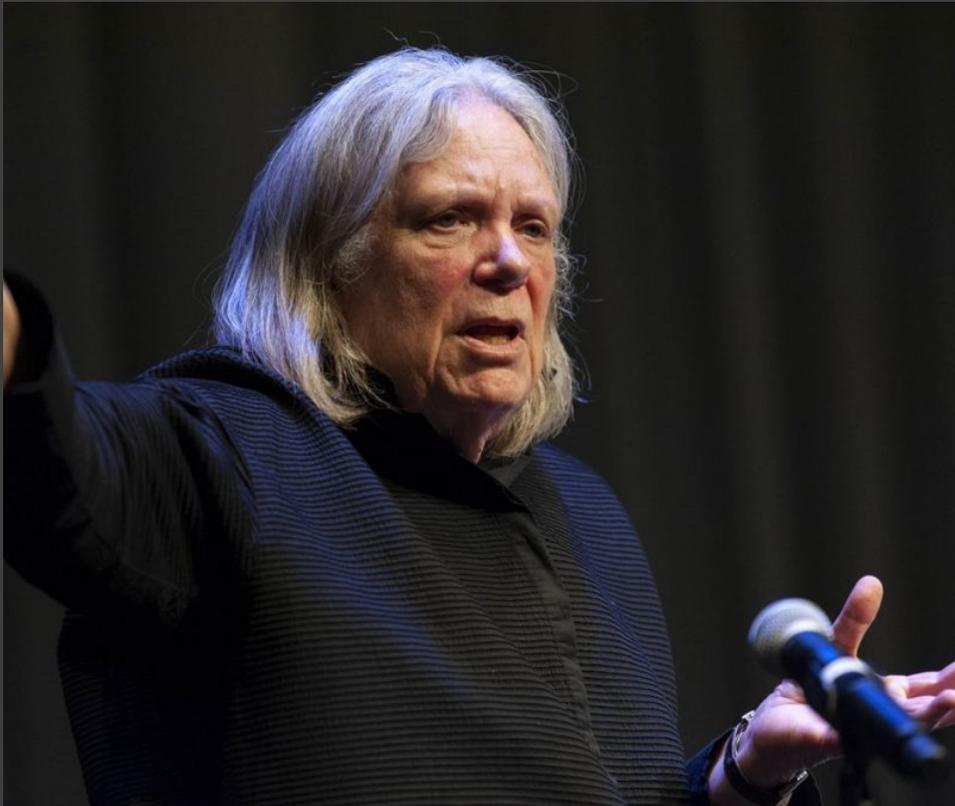


# Ann Bogart

Director

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

Adapted the Viewpoints to create foundational philosophy of her company, SIT1



# 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

A still from the movie 'The Matrix' showing Morpheus and Trinity on a cliff edge. Morpheus is kneeling in the foreground, and Trinity is standing behind him. A large, gnarled tree is on the right side of the cliff. The background is a vast, hazy landscape under a sunset sky.

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.



I see you.



MISSION UPDATED

Tidy up the coffee cups

F

**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.



# Repetition

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



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Architecture

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Spatial Relationship

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Topography

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Shape

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Gesture

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Tempo

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Duration

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Kinesthetic Response

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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 elicit a subconscious response?









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

Thank you!