

Pigs in a Pen

An improvisation game piece for at least three performers

By Jamie Howell

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Based on the pen and paper game of 'Pigs in a Pen' (aka 'Boxes')

The aim is for each team to try to score the most points by enclosing shapes created by the performers' standing positions. Game play is facilitated by a number of moves which operate according to a set of rules. The content and nature of the performed material is left open to the performers.

Preparation

- Decide number of performers (3+)
- Divide performers into teams (*equal as possible*)
- Give each performer a stack of 'chips' marked for their team
(*e.g. two sets of small bean-bags, each of a different colour*)
- Make sure every performer can access their chips easily whilst performing
(*e.g. a wide necked bag on a belt, or a hip-height table with a bowl*)
- Agree numbered rounds, their length and who is to start each one
(*try to give each performer at least one turn at starting a round*)
- Create performance layout (*examples on sheet 2*)
The performers stand in a grid formation such that each player forms a corner of at least one geometric shape with some of the other performers. The exact formation will depend on the number of performers but the arrangement should be as even and regular as possible. The distance between any two players should be as consistent as possible across the whole grid and should be enough to allow each participant to perform comfortably while not being so large as to lose the sense of standing in clea

Performance

1. All performers begin in ready position
2. Starting performer for first round begins by engaging adjacent performer
3. All other performers free to perform any permitted move
4. Performance continues until allotted time for a round is up
5. Start again and repeat for the agreed number of rounds
6. After the final round all performers return to the ready position
7. The final score is counted up and the piece is over

Moves

Ready:

- Do not perform
- Observe other performers in case they attempt to engage you
- Make a clear distinction between ready position and a pause in performing
(*e.g. Instruments held in a non-playing position when in ready position*)

Engage:

- Turn to face an adjacent performer (along a shape side - not across)
- Perform to that player

Respond:

If you are engaged by another performer, you may:

- Refuse the engagement and continue with your current move, or,
- Accept the engagement by turning to face the engager and performing a duet with them

Open up:

If you are engaged in a duet, you may open up the improvisation to the performers at the remaining corners of a shape of which the duet partners form a side. To do this:

- Face in towards the centre of the shape
- Continue to duet with your partner

If a performer opens up, the performers at the remaining shape corners may:

- Refuse the engagement and continue with your current move, or,
- Accept the opening up by turning to face the centre of the shape and joining in with the improvisation

Enclosure:

If the performers at all the corners of the same shape are facing inwards and improvising together as a result of an open up move, then the shape has been enclosed and the last performer to have joined in wins a point for their team.

- After the last performer joins in, performers at all the corners of the enclosed shape must continue to improvise together until the winner declares the point by dropping a chip into the centre of the shape.
- During the time between the enclosure and the chip dropping, the performers involved must improvise together and are forbidden from executing any other moves
- When the chip is dropped, all performers around that shape must return to ready position before continuing.

General Points

- Any player may break off a duet or larger group improvisation and perform an alternative move - including ready - at any point, unless they are waiting for a chip to be dropped after an enclosure in which they are involved.