SILENT GAME

Summary

The Silent Game is about implicit understanding among design participants through making patterns and conjecturing patterns in making forms. The game involves two kinds of acts: inventing patterns and guessing patterns. The game needs at least two players. Players take turns inventing patterns for the other(s) to guess, and guessing the patterns made by other players. Patterns involve selections of pieces and spatial relations among the pieces and are expressed only by placing pieces in the site. A player is assumed to understand the patterns if s/he can make moves to continue the configuration without objections from the other player(s). Patterns remain implicit throughout the game, and no verbal or any other kind of explicit communication is allowed. Therefore, the game is silent.

1. Game Rules

1. Technical Universe

Selection: The pieces in this game should not be predetermined. Selection rules are made implicitly during play.

Distribution: All technical rules concerning relations among pieces, and/or relations to the site are made during play.

2. Site

- Any two-dimensional board serves as a site in the Silent Game.
- The site as given may also have features.
3. Program
There is no explicit program.

4. Roles
This game has two roles: pattern-maker, and pattern-follower. Except for the first and the last turns, each player actually plays both roles in each turn: first guessing the patterns the other players had in mind when moving earlier and then following that pattern, then making a new pattern that the other players must, in turn, guess and follow.

5. Moves
Only one kind of move can be made:
- Place a piece on the site.

6. Goals
- The Silent Game has no explicit goals for players.

7. Protocol
- Only one pattern can be introduced at a time.
- Players must determine in advance the maximum number of pieces a player may add in each turn, or the number of times a pattern must be repeated when introduced. (As the site is restricted in size, players should not deploy pieces unlimitedly.)
- Players take turns making moves.
- The player who makes the first move may only introduce a pattern; the last player to play may only follow a pattern.
- Patterns may involve three things:
  1) The kind of pieces to be used. (Pieces are distinguished by size, color, and shape).
  2) Spatial relations among the pieces.
  3) Spatial relations between pieces and the site.
- Patterns are expressed only through placing pieces; no explicit description of any kind is allowed.
- At each turn each player can do the following:
  1) Guess the pattern introduced in the previous round,
  2) make new moves, following the guessed pattern, and
  3) in making new moves, introduce a new pattern;
  4) a player may pass at any time.
• If the pattern-follower makes an incorrect interpretation, the pattern-maker can simply say the word 'No'. The pattern-follower must take back the incorrect move and try again until the pattern-maker agrees.

• The game ends when one player decides to end.

8. Scoring
There is no scoring. For reasons of notation, patterns can be described as sets of rules on selection and positioning of pieces.
2. Example of Play

Players
Two players: A and B.
Players A and B agreed not to use more than twenty pieces altogether.

Round 1
A made a row of big nails connecting head to tail. (conceived as Rule-1), and then made another row of nails parallel to the first row (conceived as Rule-2).

B followed by adding another two rows, using big nails and middle size nails, parallel to the two existing nail rows.
Then, B introduced new relations, placing pieces perpendicular to two adjacent rows to make horizontal connections between them (conceived as Rule-3).
Such a horizontal connection between two rows was made either by a single nail, or by two 'overlapping' nails to span a distance longer than a single nail (conceived as Rule-4).
Round 2
A made more horizontal connections with nails.
Player A also added new rows of nails abutting only to the overlapped portion of horizontal connections (conceived as Rule-5).

B followed by making another row.
Round 3
A made two horizontal connections.

B also made one horizontal connection.
Round 4
A made vertical connections between horizontal pieces. (Unlike the horizontal connection between vertical rows a vertical connection must be a row of nails (as per Rule-1) that cannot be 'overlapped'.)

B added a few vertical rows.
Conclusion
Washers were placed to establish an 'end state'. Both players agree to stop.

3. Game Variants

The Constants
The basic structure of the game consists of three components:
1) There is a role of pattern-maker, and a role of pattern-follower.
2) All rules should be about selection of pieces and their formal relations.
3) Rules must be made 'in silence'.

The Variables
1. Site variation
A site with features is of particular interest to the pattern-makers for developing a hierarchy of rules. For instance, the site features will be the highest-level elements, which cannot be moved, then a class of second-level elements can be selected and related to the site elements, and then third level elements related to the second level, and so on.

The site can also use different kinds of grids. The grid serves as a means to relate pieces to the site, and relations among pieces can also be made more precisely with respect to the grid.
2. Protocol variation

The thrust of the game is its protocol rules, game variations therefore rely heavily on variations of protocols. One basic variation of the game lies in different patterns of assigning roles to players. Instead of playing both roles of pattern-maker and pattern-follower in each turn, one player can play exclusively as a pattern-maker or as a pattern-follower throughout the whole game. This single-role variation is simpler than the double-role variation described above in terms of interactions involved between players. In the single-role variation, the pattern-maker only exercises the skill of making rules to control the development of configuration as intended, and s/he has the power to determine the form to be made. Without an individual program, the pattern-follower's sole responsibility, on the other hand, is to successfully guess the rules and follow them as understood.

In addition to patterns made by adding pieces to the configuration, new patterns can also be made by "taking out", or displacing existing pieces. Such patterns can be called 'transformation patterns'. Transformation patterns must also be about selection of pieces (say, eliminate all red pegs connected to the yellow big slab); or about spatial relations among pieces (say, if the red peg connects to the yellow big slab, then it must be turned at a 45 degree angle).

4. Comments and Reflections

The game can be played meaningfully only if each player develops individual goals. The common program of this game is to make forms. A form can be conceived in many different ways: a very specific configuration such as the furniture arrangement in one's living room; any configuration which has a certain geometrical property, such as a circular form, a linear form, a symmetrical form; any pattern as a result of some positioning constraints: element-A must always be adjacent to element-B; element-C must always be in the center area; etc.

Forms can always be read in two ways: material and spatial. Therefore one can formulate two sets of rules concerning a pattern: material rules about pieces and their relations, and spatial rules about the properties and organizations of the interstices between physical pieces. Sometime the rule is so apparent that we can tell it immediately from observing recurrent patterns; sometimes more exploration is required to figure out the pattern. In general a pattern can be figured out in a systematic trial-and-error.
As a way of teaching the reading of patterns by way of this game, it is advisable to start with the game variation where one player plays only as pattern-maker and the other player only as pattern-follower. Then they can play a second time, exchanging roles. The purpose is to coach each player in both pattern-making and pattern-guessing skills separately. As a pattern-maker, the player's major concerns are about how to effectively control the intended configuration by giving a structure to it in the form of rules. As a pattern-follower the player's central task is to learn how to make plausible guesses. Once the players begin to acquire these skills they can start a game variation in which each party play both roles, and each party interacts with others in pursuing individual goals of form-making in a collective context.

The game variant with transformation patterns can be played in two stages: in the first stage players use only patterns that construct configurations, in the second stage they apply only transformation patterns. The game can also be played in a single stage in which transformation patterns are introduced as soon as possible.

2. Reflections
The game has no collective program, it has only individual goals. Since all parties must jointly make only one configuration on a same site, and nobody can fully control the final result, players must adjust their original individual programs in the course of play by taking other players' intentions into consideration. Very likely, different players have conflicting intentions of form making. Players must cooperate and try to understand each other's intentions. Cooperation is more plausible than competition, and players learn that unless they can understand and respect other players' intentions, and unless all players share certain rules as common ground, their efforts in pursuing individual goals will not be successful.