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RULES AND REGS RESIDENCY

The Nightingale Theatre, Brighton
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By: Martine Rouleau

Week 1: Artists and Tactics

When rules are mentioned in relation to art, one tends to think they must apply to our engagement with art as an audience. If we can't touch it, if we must contemplate it in silence and from a distance, it must be art. In that sense, these institutional rules that have been assimilated in our cultural consciousness are part of what Jacques Derrida calls the *parergon*: what is extraneous to the art but points to it, that which "inscribes something which comes as an extra, exterior to the proper field . . . but whose transcendent exteriority comes to play, abut onto, brush against, rub, press against the limit itself and intervene in the inside" (Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, p.56). We know that the rules are not the art itself, but they are so well integrated into our relationship with art that we might experience difficulty identifying art when the rules are lifted.



Megumi Kamimura. Photo: Kristian Wilding. Courtesy: copyright 2012 Rules and Regs.

Other than the classic "do not touch", rules can take various forms in and out of the art world, from a generalized course of action or behaviour to extreme practices of domination and control. Rules and regulations are necessary for society to exist and help maintain some form of order in our world, but they are often also an expression of dominant ideology and conformity. They keep chaos at bay, yet they can lead to the imposition of a deadening uniformity of behaviour when taken to extremes. We need them as a society, yet it is in our individual nature to try and bypass them.

Since structuralist theory has endeavoured to formalise the presence of disciplinary powers in society, from the carceral archipelago to the CCTV culture, we have come to recognise and even to accept the presence of mechanisms of control in our everyday life. To deny the existence of such structures is pointless but, as Michel de Certeau outlined in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, the question that remains unanswered is how an entire society can "manipulate the mechanisms of discipline and conform to them only in order to

evade them" (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiv) Some people actively try to undermine them with various strategies of resistance often associated with activism. As these practices often involve breaking the rules, they are not accessible to everybody. Evading the rules is more a question of understanding them and their purpose in order to adhere to them in such a way that suits one's own purpose. That is to say, rules are open to interpretation... up to a point, and interpretation is a practice accessible to all.

By observing the work of artists, we might learn a thing or two about the extent of interpretation. Not to put too fine a point on it: rules are rarely thought of as something that applies to artists. Surely, artists are the ones who, throughout history, have been encouraged to evade the rules. They will often engage with the rules of art and the rules of society by overlooking them, breaking them, playing with them, deconstructing them and using them as raw material for bigger, greater projects. Without that, Cubism, Expressionism, Futurism, Dadaism, Constructivism and Surrealism would never have existed.

That being said, some artists chose to directly engage with the rules as a constructive process. That is the premise of Rules and Regs' residency programme, which supports artists in the making of new work in response to a set of rules devised by a curator. The framework couldn't be more familiar and spare: the artists are given a set of rules that have been formulated in response to their practice with a view to providing them with a challenging opportunity for self-reflexivity and experimentation. At the end of a month of engaging with the rules in this supportive environment, the artists are expected to present individual outcomes.

The first Rules and Regs to bring together international artists, this current residency programme really highlights how this framework operates as a foil for the many different ways in which artists are adept at interpreting the rules. Hosted by The Nightingale Theatre in Brighton and curated by its artistic director and programmer Steven Brett, this edition of R&R brings together Theo Clinkard, dancer, dance-maker, teacher and designer based in Brighton; Megumi Kamimura, dancer and choreographer from Yokohama, Japan; Jan Machacek, performer and film maker from Vienna, and performer and visual artist Michikazu Matsune, also from Vienna. The rules that were outlined for them are: Do not work in a studio. Follow the yellow brick road. The audience is your compass. Now you see me, now you don't. Each rule has been carefully selected in order to provide a variety of perspectives and to touch upon different aspects of art practice: time and space, the narrative, the audience and the visual dominance of art.

It is fascinating to observe how the rules have been interpreted very differently by each artist. Theo Clinkard has engaged in reflection about how each rule anchors differently to his dance practice. Megumi Kamimura has been deconstructing the rules through linguistic exercises that then go on to informing movement. Jan Machacek has started by wondering what he relates to in the rules were given to him, taking a particular interest in reproduction and mediation of information. Michikazu Matsune has opted to pursue aspects of his practice that he wishes to develop further and to then see how the rules will come in.

As each artist has a very individual practice, it is not entirely surprising to notice the differences in interpretation of the rules. Yet, the distinctive views on the nature of the articulation between the external stimulus of the rules and the internal process of the practice are so many superb cases of interpreting the rules rather than merely submitting to them. Michel de Certeau would proudly claim that this belongs to the realm of the tactic: an action which insinuates itself within the space of the other, into the territory of that which it seeks to subvert, like a small virus infecting a vast computer programme. This tactic does not insinuate itself to destroy the rules or to take over. It claims no space for itself, relying rather on time -- "it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing'" (Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xix).

Perhaps all human beings are adept at interpreting and evading the rules on a day to day basis, but artists are highly skilled at turning interpretation into tactics, transforming even a set of rules into rich opportunities for the development of their practice. In that sense, R&R is an unparalleled chance to observe the development of tactics in the making. We might all know the rules and have accepted them as a given, but we could certainly learn from artists on how to engage with a rule so it becomes an opportunity.

Martine Rouleau

Writer detail:

I am a freelance curator, writer and lecturer based in London. My projects focus on collaborative processes with practitioners from various disciplines. I have worked with Tate Britain, Tate Modern, the ICA, the Brighton Photo Fringe and Electra Productions among others. I completed a PhD pertaining to collaborative processes involving artists, audiences and public art institutions at the London Consortium in 2009. I am a founding editor of the Static (<http://www.static.londonconsortium.com/>) website . I currently in the Art Education at the Arts Management and Policy MA programme of Birkbeck College. More about my work can be found at <http://www.martinerouleau.co.uk/>.

Venue detail:

The Nightingale Theatre
29-30 Surrey Street Brighton BN1 3PA

www.rulesandregs.org/ng12.html

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