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### **RULES AND REGS RESIDENCY**

The Nightingale Theatre, Brighton  
1 June - 1 July 2012

By: Martine Rouleau

#### **Weeks 3 and 4: Facing the Public**

June has come and gone, taking with it the last moments of the Rules & Regs residency at The Nightingale. The conclusion of the month-long residency programme took the form of two evenings of performances. Although not the ultimate goal of the Rules & Regs residencies, they are the public facing aspect of the project. They allow for an audience to witness the fruit of a month of labour and to be made aware of the work that Rules & Regs does. It is also certainly an important part of the process for the artists. After a period of intense reflexion and experimentation, there comes a point when the theoretical has to be applied and this application partly comes into its own because it encompasses the presence and participation of the audience. In other words, this is when the artists commit to trying something in front of their public.



Michikazu Matsune. Photo: Kristian Wilding. Courtesy: copyright 2012 Rules and Regs.

As was to be expected, some things had changed since the “Outside Eye” session that took place the previous week, but what was most striking was perhaps the aplomb of the artists performing works that had still been in their infancy a few weeks ago. The evening started with a combination of short, playful promenade type works outside The Nightingale with Michikazu Matsune, Theo Clinkard’s theatrical smoke and mirrors performance in the studio, and the first part of Jan Machacek’s word game. Although that meant that some waiting around the Grand Central pub was involved, it allowed for small groups or one-to-one experience as well as a much needed chance to discuss and reflect between the performances. This juggling act was made possible by rigorous time-keeping and seamless logistics handled by Steven Brett, host curator and Seth Kriebel, Director of R&R.

Shopping and Shocking

With *Buydentity Unknown*, Michi took his performances into a more convivial territory where a group of participants are invited to make shared decisions and to participate in playful transgression. *Buydentity* led us just outside a shop where the artist covered his head with a pair of tights, much the way a bank robber would in a Hollywood bank heist film, and invited one of us to do the same. We then entered the shop, carefully selected an array of organic produce, had a piece of cake, paid a bemused shop keeper for our purchases and left. Playing on cultural imagery and expectations, these simple participative performances took the participants only slightly out of their comfort zone, leaving a group of adults giggling like children. Yet, there is still a lot to think about in these works: the weight of appearances, the unspoken nature of what is acceptable versus what is not and the significance that can be infused into such a banal gesture as shopping.

### Haunting

It was a change of pace to then move on to Theo's work. Brought in to the darkened studio space one at a time, we were instructed to sit down, put the headphones on and wait. The first thing I noticed was that a stranger was sitting opposite me, on the other side of a long sheet of Plexiglas attached to the ceiling. Then the light changed and a hate-fuelled sermon decrying the sins of homosexuality was played through the headphones. To my great confusion, the smile on the stranger's face widened with the dramatic arc of the sermon. Surely, if he could hear what I was hearing, he would not be smiling. All became clear when I changed seats to adopt the position of "the stranger". This time, when the light changed, a languid rockabilly song filled my ears and just as I heard "I'm tellin' you I've got an itch. She's my witch" Theo in the guise of a horned faun materialised, performing what appeared to be a lap dance for the man sitting in the chair facing mine. I could hardly repress a smile myself, realising that I had just unknowingly been the recipient of such a spectral dance. The devising of this piece might have been a simple play on lighting and reflective surfaces but the effect was confounding and very efficient. If homosexuality is going to be vilified, Theo's response is to make its representation as stealthily seductive as possible.

### Making Sense

Jan started with his initial game of words and mirrors, asking participants to pick some words printed in reverse by using the mirrors to decipher them. Then the sentence was read out loud and recorded by the participants who could then get one of the words printed on their skin as a temporary tattoo. Later, we encountered Jan again in the studio where a simple microphone was set on a stand next to a little trolley carrying the paraphernalia used earlier: words printed in reverse with bright ink, a tub of acetone. Then, Jan asked us a simple question: "How are you?" Not knowing whether we should respond, it hung in the air for a few seconds and then, just as we were about to blurt out "Well, thank you" someone's recorded sentence came over the PA system as an answer. Responding to one non-sensical sentence after the other, he wove a commonplace conversation the likes of which he might have had during his stay in Brighton: a bit about who he is, what he is doing at the moment, demonstrating both how we can make sense of anything and how

much nonsense can go into everyday conversations. Finally, turning the transfer of words to skin on himself, he asked members of the audience who had certain words now printed on themselves to also print them wherever they wished on his body, leaving a trace of words from his ankle to his upper back that read “Let my sexy knives split”, which he read out for us, thus concluding the work with his own meaningful string of random poetry.

### Moving Response

Megumi introduced herself briefly and then proceeded to perform a variation on the exercise in tension that is very much part of her dance practice. Using the floor and her own body to create resistance and movement, she surprised and confounded the audience with an absorbing demonstration of strength and resilience, the effect of which was strangely compounded by droning beats coming from the DJ set taking place in the pub downstairs. She then breathlessly rolled out a long stretch of craft paper on which questions about the performance had previously been written and asked us to respond in writing, leaving us with our confusion and a number of markers. It was interesting to see people crouching on ground, thinking of ways to respond to this experience. Some used words and others used drawings, quickly filling up the stretch of paper with all manners of interpretations. When we were all back in our seats, Megumi reappeared and announced that she would now respond to our responses, adding props such as a wheel and a half-empty bag of sugar to the movement. The responses took the form of little vignettes punctuated by the artist referring back to our answers, choosing a prop, and engaging in another action. There was a pleasing immediacy and brevity to these responses and it felt like the beginning of a dialogue between the audience and the artist, which sadly ended quickly without offering us another chance to respond.

Although it is made quite clear that the public presentations are not the focus of the Rules & Regs residencies, it is also undeniable that, for the artists, it is the crest of a wave they have been surfing, the high point of an experiential arc. The moment an experimental process comes into its own can also be viewed in terms of career development. There is, in the process of the presentations, a consolidation of ideas into practice and a moment of public ownership of this new practice. In other words, the rules act as catalysts but, without the concrete outcome of the public presentations, they remain a mere framework for a thought experiment. What’s more, as Jan blithely pointed out the first time we met: “I’m a deadline junky”. A set goal within time limits is always a productive device in the context of residency that is so short and that demands such an intense shift in perspective.

The public presentations also offer a chance for both the artists and the public to observe the scope offered by R&R. In spite of the common rules, the individual practice of each artist and his or her approach to the framework were as different as could be. In the very selection of the artists there were common elements: 2 dancers, 3 artists from abroad, 2 of them who work with Brut in Vienna. Yet, these commonalities were not reflected in the performances. What did come across throughout was a sense of playful engagement with the rules, a confidence in the actual performance and... the adoption of two-part structures for all the works. Perhaps this is just a coincidence but it is tempting to think that there

might be more to it, that the work that came out of R&R reflects a binary experience: a before and after, a here and there, a self and an other, a residency and a performance, a beginning and an end.

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](http://www.rulesandregs.org/ng12.html)