

Rules were made

for ensemble performance or installation

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Program Notes

Rule-making is omnipresent: self-induced, legislated by a government, and imposed by economic actors. It can restrict access to information and medical care or seek to subvert truth. It can also provide safety and opportunity or seek to right an injustice. In this work, the participants set the rules. They either find a statutory balance or restrict the performance so severely that it grinds to a halt.

Setting

The performance space (e.g. stage or gallery) should contain a modifiable, centrally located display (chalkboard, dry-erase board, projection from a computer, etc.) and 3-5 objects from which almost anyone can coax sounds and/or create physical structures (building blocks, dominos, resonant bowls, Orff instruments, a toy piano, etc.). Performers may include their instruments among the objects or introduce them as they enter.

Ground Rules

- Any participant may contribute one or more rules by putting them on the display.
- All rules should be stated as prohibitions (e.g. “No singing”).
- Rules may not be removed from the display—except as designated below.
- If the display is deemed full, new rules may be “squeezed in”—the difficulty of reading and reconciling all the rules is part of the performance.
- Participants should interact with the objects in any way that does not violate any rule.
- The piece proceeds until
 - nothing can be done with the objects that does not violate a rule,
 - the rules are so strict such that no one wants to participate, or
 - participants no longer wish to contribute additional rules and agree to stop.

Curation

The gallery curator or ensemble director decides/enforces the following:

- Whether participation is restricted to performers in an ensemble or open to the public.
- Removes anything from the display that is not a rule phrased as a prohibition.
- In an installation setting, the curator may choose to erase all the rules when no one is in the performance space.
- In a concert performance, a maximum duration can be set beforehand. If the piece has not ended by the agreed upon time, the ensemble director would signal in advance to the active participants and they would end the piece as if they no longer wished to contribute rules and had agreed to stop.