

AM Rules, OK? A User's Manual*

Preface: These rules have evolved over a period of nearly 40 years, that is, since 1976 when the magazine was founded. Some of the most important rules, however, are unwritten. In fact, it is only when the rules are challenged that they need to be stated at all – as much for our own as for our contributors' guidance. They are set out below in alphabetical order, thereby abandoning any form of hierarchy, whether in terms of importance, difficulty or other ordering system, in favour of a certain randomness from which, of course, a new order may emerge.

A is for:

abbreviations, acronyms and ****:

AM uses abbreviations and contractions only when necessary, the reason being that we wish to avoid any obfuscation or mystification. This is part of **AM**'s original remit: in the very first editorial it was stated that the magazine would be committed to plain speaking, and would avoid **jargon** (see below) wherever possible.

The same rule applies for **acronyms** as for **abbreviations**; **acronyms** are spelled out fully in the first instance while the abbreviated form is used thereafter thus: Arts Council England, for example, will subsequently be referred to as ACE, the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, as the DCMS and so on. You will be able to infer from these examples cited that **AM** often has reason to refer to both these bodies since, as our status as a National Portfolio Organisation or NPO indicates, we are in receipt of a grant of £40,000.00 – incidentally the smallest sum that can be awarded.

Clearly then, **AM** has a public service remit.

One of the few exceptions to the rule for **acronyms** is the Museum of Modern Art, New York, for which we use the acronym, with a lower case 'o', in the first instance and thereafter, without spelling it out. This is because MoMA is the mother of all Museums of Modern Art. It opened on November 7, 1929, nine days after the Wall St crash, moving to its final purpose-built location on West 53rd St in 1939, on the eve of the 2nd World War in Europe. Until it was dismantled in 1983, the original display in the museum designed by Philip Johnson constituted the Ur text of Modernism, each room a chapter, each wall a page. All other iterations are derivatives – from the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMoMA) to The Glasgow Museum of Modern Art (GoMA). MoMA itself, and the infamous diagram on the paper cover of the seminal 1936 exhibition, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, curated by its first director Alfred Barr were, for better or worse, the texts that set, and arguably still set, the parameters for debates about Modernism and its historical, political and cultural legacies.

asterisks: these are seldom used either to refer to something outside the text or as a form of self-censorship. The simple rule is: say what you mean and mean what you say. 'Fuck' is a good old Anglo Saxon word, whether used as a verb or as an expletive, and should offend no one. Likewise 'shit'. This is not the same as saying that we support the gratuitous use of swearwords. But to give a recent example, Jennifer Thatchers' interview with Pablo Bronstein in the October 2014 issue of **AM** (AM380), is a case in point – it would have looked like a star map had we substituted **asterisks** for swearwords: 'I haven't been asked to give a tutorial for the past five years. Shocking isn't it? I mean for fuck's sake, I'd probably do it for free! But they don't want me', being one example; 'Goldsmiths was a bag of shit', being another. For the same reason we would not have recourse to namby-pamby alternatives such as 'the F

word'. 'Cunt', however, is more complex. If used as a noun it is not offensive, but if used as an adjective to describe a person it is offensive. It has something to do, perhaps, with the unequal balance of power between the sexes. It may be possible in the future for the word to be reclaimed in the way that 'queer', 'black' and 'nigger' have in certain contexts. In any case this is one of the reasons why rules have to be kept under constant review.

B is for **biennales, black and white** and **bylines**:

biennale, with a lower case 'b', is the generic term we use for all biennial exhibitions. As in the case of MoMA, the reason for this is historical: the Venice Biennale was the first of its kind and is thus the mother of all biennial exhibitions, the first being held in 1895. All others such biennial exhibitions therefore derive in some sort from it. Using the Italian form is a reminder of this history. Like all subsequent versions, its origins were political and propagandist, though not so overtly commercial as today. Ostensibly a celebration of the silver wedding of King Umberto 1st and his wife Margarethe, it was in reality an attempt to reassert Italy's cultural dominance over France.

black and white: AM, as our strapline for our 30th anniversary cover proclaimed in October 2006, is '*Black and White and Red all over*'. While it is true that originally **AM** was published in black and white and on newspaper stock for reasons of cheapness, it is also true that it reflected the design of left-leaning publications like *The Nation* in the US and *The New Statesman* in the UK; it was also an aesthetic decision based partly on the magazine's emphasis in 1976 on what was generally categorised as Conceptual Art. The magazine deliberately echoed Lucy Lippard's definition of Conceptual Art in her seminal book, *Six Years...*, published in 1973, as work in which 'the idea is paramount and the material form is secondary, lightweight, ephemeral, cheap, unpretentious and/or

“dematerialised”.’ While **AM** is still fundamentally black and white, there are now many more shades of grey in between than there were in 1976. This is a reflection both of developments in printing technology since then and of the increasing complexity of today’s political and critical terrain.

bylines: it has become noticeable that most of our contributors now describe themselves as writers. It used to be thought that writers wrote books or essays, while reporters reported, journalists wrote regularly for newspapers and journals, and specialists became columnists (like Henry Lydiate, for instance, who writes our regular Artlaw column); the rest of us were engaged in writing some form of criticism, some even boldly describing themselves as critics. But no longer: today everyone is a writer and no one is a critic

C is for **capitalising:** the use of capital letters should be kept to a minimum. (See **lower case** below.)

D is for **decisions, decisions, decisions:** you would be surprised how much time the editorial team spends deliberating on whether an **exclamation mark** is justified or whether to allow an **abbreviation**, or whether to translate a word or title, or use **italics** to indicate a less familiar foreign word. Then there are more ethical decisions about whether to rewrite a sentence in order to render its meaning clearer – or because it would read more accurately, more felicitously or more simply – or whether instead to suggest to the writer, when sending their proof to them, that he or she rephrase the sentence themselves, which takes longer – a consideration when you are up against a deadline (see **editing** and **proofs** below).

E is for **editing, en-dashes, exclamation marks, English** and

ethics:

editing is all about allowing the writer's voice to come through while ensuring that his/her meaning is clear where it needs to be (see **decisions, decisions, decisions** above). Some writers require only the lightest of touches, others require more input from editors. Good editing is an art that conceals art. It is, or should be, of mutual benefit. If not, then the process should be abandoned in the interests of both. It is very rarely that a text is abandoned at the proof stage – or **spiked** in it is known in the trade – because care is taken early on in the commissioning process to avoid things coming to such a pass.

en-dashes

- An '**en**-rule' can be used as punctuation in a sentence (to signal a pause, for example), with a single space either side. (From **AM**'s internal *House Style Guide*)

These are used principally in **interviews** (see below) to simulate direct speech; they appear more naturalistic than colons or semi-colons and reflect sudden changes in direction that occur in speech more than in written texts; similarly, **exclamation** marks are not used as a rule, since it is usually obvious from the tone and context whether the sentence is exclamatory. An **exclamation mark** is therefore regarded as redundant because it tends to assume too much about the speaker's meaning and, by the same corollary, it tends to over-determine the reader's response.

English English is not a reference to Alix Rule and David Levine's concept of International Art English (IAE), that Marcus Verhagen has defined in a forthcoming article^s for **AM** as: 'a garbled art world idiom combining a quasi-bureaucratic tone with a blithe vagueness and rote references to critical **theory**', which, like the institution of the **biennale** itself, is a symptom of the globalisation of the art world. Rather, by **English English** is meant the avoidance of

American English as a form of resistance to this same globalising process. Not, it is hoped, as a last ditch attempt to cling on to the dregs of British cultural imperialism, but merely to uphold difference in the same way that Australian English now has its own Aussie rules. Always check the default **spellcheck** setting on your computer, it has a tendency to revert to US spelling.

[§]This definition occurs in the course of a discussion of Wael Sawkey's satirisation of IAE in his piece *Dictums 10:120*, for the 2013 Sharjah Biennial. I have Verhagen's permission to quote him ahead of publication. ('Glocalisation', AM386)

ethics: taking an ethical stance is all about drawing lines, even when they increasingly seem to be drawn in the sand. Back in the 1970s the aesthetic and political battle lines were clearly drawn: there were clear choices to be made between formalism and anti formalist approaches, between left and right. Today, against the apparent triumph of neoliberalism in politics, and of globalised market values in art, it is harder to draw the lines, but that only makes it all the more necessary to attempt to do so, not least in order to resist the twin embrace of the market and of the institution. This is particularly pressing in the face of the 'embedded' critic, the ugly spawn of so-called media partnerships. In effect this means the avoidance of advertorial, which requires the drawing of a *cordon sanitaire* between editorial and advertising. Most of our contributors instinctively understand where the boundaries lie, but for those who don't – mostly PR companies – we do have a proforma we send out which reads as follows:

*The commissioning of features, reviews or any other material for publication in **Art Monthly**, is undertaken solely by the editors; direct approaches, either to the editors or to individual contributors, from advertisers, artists, collectors, curators, dealers or any other interested parties will not be considered.*

F is for **fact checking**, **first names** and **footnotes**:

fact checking: this is a no brainer, both for our own reputation and for that of our contributors. It is surprising how many assumptions

prove to be incorrect. There was not one 'Freeze' show but three; they did not take place in a warehouse space but in a disused building owned by the Port of London Authority; most of the artists later associated with the term YBA, first published in **AM** in 1998 (Simon Ford and Anthony Davies: 'Art Capital' AM213), were not shown by Charles Saatchi in the series of exhibitions that went under the rubric of Young British Artists (see **research** below). Or, to take another tack: 'All that is solid melts into the air' is not a quote from William Shakespeare but from Karl Marx, a great admirer of his.

first names: these are included in the first instance, second names only are used in all following instances for example: Karl Marx, Rupert Murdoch, Jackson Pollock, Andy Warhol, mainly for clarity but also because it should not be assumed that Marx can only mean Karl Marx. One exception to the rule is Picasso, since it would be somewhat arch to add 'Pablo'; in the case of Leonardo and Michelangelo, the first name alone is used in common with Italian usage, and because, while readers may be familiar with da Vinci, Buonarroti is not a household name.

footnotes:

- Footnotes should be kept to a minimum. The content should be incorporated within the body text wherever possible. If they are necessary they should appear at the end of the article.

This is because **AM** is not an academic journal. **AM** exists as a forum for debate, where ideas can be first tested.

G is for **grammar:** **AM** does not fetishise correct grammar, but good grammar facilitates good **syntax** and both enable good communication, which is what **AM** is all about. As our internal *House Style Guide* states, we:

- Use *The Economist Style Guide* for general grammar, syntax, and punctuation.
- Use *Chambers Dictionary* and *The New Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors* for spelling.

H is for **history**: it has been said that 'There is no such thing as criticism, there is only **history**'. Manfredo Tafuri was speaking specifically about architecture but it could also be applied to art, for while it may be an over statement, criticism that does not engage with history, especially the history of its own subject, is apt to lapse into mere *stilkritik*. It is dangerous to ignore history, not just because those who do are 'condemned to repeat it', to quote John Buchan (though there are other versions including one attributed to the philosopher George Santayana), but because it can lead to arrogance, including critical arrogance. Western triumphalism following the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, and the end of the Cold War, led to Francis Fukuyama's premature declaration of the end of history: his book *The End of History and the Last Man*, was published in 1992, but it developed a thesis first published in the international affairs journal revealingly titled, *The National Interest*, in the Summer of 1989. In the book, Fukuyama argues: 'What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalisation of Western liberal democracy as the (his emphasis) final form of human government.' Fukuyama is effectively proposing 1989 as Year Zero.

40 years on, **AM** has itself become part of art history which now provides both a context for our writers and a perspective from which to question the past – including our own – in the light of the present. A case in point is the subject of the grid which emerged with Modernism, but which became the archetypal non-hierarchical, non-subjective form associated with post Abstract Expressionist art in general, and with Minimalism in particular. The first issue of **AM** included an artist's page by Carl Andre in the form of a grid, *The Bricks Abstract*, which collated examples of outraged criticism of *Equivalent VIII*, 1968, which had been put on temporary display at

the Tate. The grid later became the subject of a famous critique by Rosalind Krauss in 1979. Morgan Quaintance, in a recent review of the work of Istanbul-based sound artist Cevdet Erek, added his own contemporary critique:

'While Kraftwerk may have paved the way for everything from British synth-pop to hip-hop and Chicago house, they also simultaneously locked synthesised music, in its popular form, to a rigid temporal grid. Theirs was a template of 4/4 time in which sequenced electronic instruments, known as 'slaves' in tech-parlance, would be driven by a 'master' synthesizer, which would itself be propelled by an internal clock. [Elizabeth] Freeman's concept, inspired by Michel Foucault, sees time as a man-made construction that superimposes an artificial grid of seconds, minutes and hours on existence. This grid makes it easier for our lives to be regulated and measured, and for our bodies to become docile productive units driven by managerial, time-vigilant masters or the diffuse entrepreneurial imperatives of neoliberal capitalism. Simply put, the clock is the beating heart of biopower.'

Morgan Quaintance, *AM* 375, April 2014 pp.28-29. Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer temporalities, Queer Histories*, Duke University Press, 2010, from the series: *Perverse Modernities: A Series* Edited by Jack Halberstam and Lisa Lowe, editor(s): Judith Halberstam, Lisa Lowe.

I, is for **I**, **international**, **interviews** and **italics**:

I, me, my: AM avoids 'the wonder of me' scenario as much of possible. The phrase comes from the movie, *Sea of Love*, named after the pop song, in which a homicide detective played by Al Pacino tells his boss that the victim was killed on a first date. When the captain asks how he knows this, Pacino explains that the guy had pulled out his collection of 45s, 'You know', he says, 'It's the wonder of me stage in a relationship'. **AM** exists to debate and discuss art, not ourselves – or at least, only incidentally and between the lines. The desire is not to impose the 'I', the writer, over a putative 'you', the reader, but to establish a genuine and equal platform for discussion and debate.

international: AM is a UK-based magazine but it has more of an international remit than is generally supposed. However, we are often called upon to explain our reviews policy, which is that we don't review solo shows outside the UK unless they are retrospectives of artists whose work has always been of interest to **AM** and to its readers. To single out this or that solo show in Beijing

or Johannesburg, Berlin or São Paulo would be merely arbitrary. Instead we developed the 'Letter from ...' format to allow writers to provide readers with some context for the work or works under review. We do, however, cover large-scale group and thematic exhibitions, which have a wider reach, as well, of course, as **biennales** and triennials – when possible and if appropriate.

interviews: **AM** only interviews artists since that is why we are all here, doing what we do. The rest, as they say, is 'administration'. The decision to approach an artist for an interview is, like our reviews policy, not taken arbitrarily. We usually require that the artist has already appeared in the magazine previously and that he or she is currently showing somewhere accessible to our readership. Again this is because the object of the exercise is to direct the reader to the work. In the case of established artists, the focus is as much as possible is on more recent work. This benefits the artist as much as the reader since it is more likely to elicit fresh insights rather than allowing both to re-traverse well-trodden ground.

Of course, the interview is a fiction created through a three-way process involving artist, interviewer and editor; the use of the **en-** referred to above, for instance, is part of this fiction implying direct speech. It is not about letting the proverbial tape run on and on for hours and leaving others make sense of the outcome, known in the trade as doing an HUU.

Finally, in every case, both interviewer and interviewee have full approval of the final text. What might be lost in terms of indiscrete revelations and asides is gained in terms of trust.

italics:

- Use for unfamiliar foreign words, eg *malerisch*, *stilkritik*, *cordon sanitaire*.
- More common words should be in Roman, eg *zeitgeist*, *trompe l'oeil*, *et al*, *arte povera*
- Do NOT use italics for emphasis in body text.

If you cannot suggest or convey your emphasis by means of the sentence construction, or by the context in which it appears, and/or by the overall the tone of your writing, then the sentence probably needs to be rewritten.

One of the words most often italicised is *real*, both as an adjective and as a noun: the *real*. We consider our readers to be well able to understand that the notion of the real is problematical and that its use will not be taken at face value, especially in the context of **AM**. The same rule applies for the noun *truth*, the adjective *true* and the adverb *truly*.

J is for **jargon** and **judgement**:

jargon: is to be avoided wherever possible (see **abbreviations** above).

Judgement: the issue of **judgement** exercises writers and readers a great deal: we are either too afraid to exercise it or we are accused of being wrong when we do. It is not like the good old days when Clement Greenberg pronounced on art using only his famous 'eye'. Ah, those were the days when critics ruled! Such nostalgia is misplaced.

In fact we exercise our judgement all the time: the decision to review/interview an artist is already a judgement call; the work or artist in question is clearly of sufficient interest to warrant a review or interview. The interest lies in why the work is being singled out from others or, to appropriate John Baldessari, why 'This Not That?' Those who call for a value judgement are simply playing to the market.

K is for **Kill fee**: this is paid when a piece of writing is 'spiked' (see **editing** above). For all sorts of reasons we don't want to pay it.

L is for **Lower case**: there is a general drift towards the use of

lower case in preference to upper case, or **capitalising** (see above). This is more prevalent in publications of the left, politically speaking, in mainstream media. For instance, you will find lower case deployed more often in the *Guardian* than in the *Daily Mail*, particularly in the case of references to the government or the prime minister. For *Daily Mail* readers it is no doubt seen as disrespectful; for **AM** it is a way of re-examining hierarchies. The word 'art' used to be capitalised, for instance, as did the word 'renaissance', but the simple use of the definite article – the renaissance – rather than the indefinite article – a renaissance – makes it clear that the renaissance being referred to is the one usually considered, not least by contemporary Florentines themselves, to have begun in Florence in the 15th-century, rather than just any renaissance.

NB: caution should be exercised when referring to trademarked objects such as Kleenex, Biro and Jiffy Bag; **AM** narrowly avoided being sued for £20,000 for not using initial caps in the case of the Jiffy Bag.

M is for **Marxism:** although the magazine has often been referred to as a Marxist mouthpiece – though notably not by bona fide Marxists – it is not ideologically bound. While emphatically of the left, politically speaking the magazine's politics were never, and still are not so rigidly defined ideologically as to invite factionalism or exclude opposing views. On the contrary **AM** exists to offer a critical space in which alternative, and sometimes opposing, political and aesthetic positions can be articulated and even, on occasion, reconciled. One such example occurs in a recent interview between Jonathan Harris and the artist Mark Boulos. Referring to love as the greatest 'taboo' in contemporary art, he said:

'We will happily talk about sex or perversion or any amount of abjection, but not human tenderness. So I wanted to explore love from feminist, queer as well as psychoanalytic perspectives. Love as the basis of queer politics, for

example. The necessary ethics of communist politics, beyond Marx, may be something that comes from christianity and other elements: love and *agape*. I first became interested in the New People's Army when they performed the first gay wedding in the Philippines. That love could suture a gap in theoretical Marxism, a gap in its ethics. Materialism doesn't offer enough reasons for why we should support it. Between Marxism, feminism and christianity, the common denominator is love.'

N is for **nothing**: – as in, I can't think of anything for 'N'.

O is for **obituaries** and **ongoing**: as in the case of **interviews**, we only publish **obituaries** of artists. Moreover, we only publish obituaries for artists whose work we have covered in the magazine. To do otherwise would be to act in bad faith. If we didn't support the artist's work in life we have no business doing so after their death. By the way, people do not 'pass on', 'pass over' or, indeed 'pass' in **AM**; they die.

ongoing: a word to be avoided at all costs. To quote from John le Carre's *The Russia House*:

'You may *continue*. You may *endure*. You may even prevail. But you jolly well won't "on-go" while I'm in the driving seat.'

John le Carre, *The Russia House*, Penguin Modern Classics edition p.130

P is for **parentheses, politics, proofs** and **punctuation**:

parentheses: we seldom use them. That is what subordinate clauses are for. A sub clause makes a simple sentence into a complex one; **parentheses** or brackets simply dodge the issue.

politics: see **Marxism** above.

punctuation: we are not purists – witness our free use of the **en-** in **interviews**, for instance; in this we do not follow Lynn Truss whose *Eats, Shoots and Leaves*, has a subheading: *The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. At **AM** we try to keep punctuation as simple as possible.

proofs: all contributors are sent proofs; no major changes – even last-minute changes on page – are made to a text without consulting the writer. So no shocks when the magazine hits the

stands.

Q is for **quotes**: all the quotations I have used are taken from issues of the magazine published over the course of a single year, from October 2013 to October 2014 – October being the month in which we were first published back in 1976 – the point being that I am not favouring one writer over another but rather that I could have quoted relevant examples from any issue of **AM**: from Gilda Williams on a new perspective on Andy Warhol (*AM378*), for instance, or Sally O'Reilly on art criticism (*AM296*), Colin Perry on art's problematic relationship with the oil industry (*AM369*), or on Omar Kholeif on the West's continued appropriation of Egyptian culture and mythology (*AM381*).

R is for **research** and **reviews**:

research: the consequences of not undertaking the appropriate research can be embarrassing for the writer and, despite the disclaimer on the back cover, financially catastrophic for the magazine. Danger lurks in the internet where the corollary of easy access is carelessness (see **fact checking** above).

reviews:

already covered under **international** and **interviews** above; see also **ethics**.

To reiterate: criticism is not a substitute for looking at work but an aid to a critical engagement with the real – no **italics** or **scare quotes** (see below) – thing. At the same time **AM** is still committed to its original task which is to cover 'contemporary art and the issues that surround it', in other words, art in context.

S is for **scare quotes** and **[sic]**: the same rules apply as for **italics**. The biggest offenders are the same: 'real', the 'real' and 'really real'; 'true', 'truth' and 'truly'.

[sic]: for those interested in the arcana of editing, the Latin adverb meaning 'thus' is short for *sic erat scriptum*, 'thus was it written', and is inserted immediately after a quoted word or passage to indicate that it has been transcribed verbatim from the source text. It is usually intended to demonstrate that any error contained therein is not the fault of the editors. It can be a powerful, even a cruel weapon, which is why we seldom use it, preferring to quietly correct the mistake. When it comes to quotations from press releases, however, it is open season, though we cannot better BANK's famous *Fax-Back* project of 1999.

T is for **theory:** **AM** is not a theory-driven magazine. That is not to say that those who write for **AM** are uninfluenced by theory, on the contrary. While the views expressed in **AM** are informed by theory – how could it be otherwise – it is our view that theory can become a form of exegesis that takes on its own trajectory, away from the work under discussion. It could be said that **AM** favours applied theory.

U is for **übercurators:** (One word, prefix only in *italics*) coined in an editorial in **AM**, in 1999, it speaks for itself. They wield far too much power.

(‘In His Hands he’s got the whole wide world’, Editorial, *AM*228, Jul-Aug 1999 p26; used also in JJ Charlesworth, ‘Curating Doubt’, pp1-4, p3 *AM*294, 2006.)

V is for **value:**

(see **ethics** above re market value)

At £4.80 a copy and £36 for a year’s UK subscription, **AM** is exceedingly good **value**.

W is for **writers:** it seems that we are all writers now (see **bylines** above).

XYZ

I am going to end here. There is only one more rule to add and that is:

All rules must be kept under permanent review and, when appropriate, either amended or, on occasion, jettisoned.

©Patricia Bickers
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* This is an edited version of a paper given at the 'Art Writing symposium' held at The Drawing Room on October 10, 2014

Convenor: Colin Perry

Speakers: Patricia Bickers, Omar Kholeif, Sally O'Reilly, Gilda Williams