



Photograph by Henry Chan

6 hours performance Untitled in 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art, Toronto, Canada on Thursday 30 October 2014 4pm to 10pm.

John Court: Teetering on the Brink by *Didier Morelli*

A classroom desk—adapted so that one of its legs extends far beyond the others. Completely wrapped up in hockey tape. A small pile of magnesium at the center of the room. The clock overlooking the room echoing your repetitive and somewhat senseless gesture. The chalkboard, that you cover up with illegible letters of the alphabet as you rotate. Rotation. Clockwork. Moving in circles, rotating over a single point, forward pull, inertia, and the adapted desk held up by your mouth. The sores forming themselves along your lips where you hold the desk up. Your neck, slowly becoming locked in place. You continue to rotate, turn, turn, turn, turn, turn. I can't quite make sense of it all—but I am drawn in by your commitment. Reliable. Resilient. Relentless. Revolving. I return over and over again to accompany you in this interminable action...

When I first heard of Court's work, I thought that his performances might run the risk of becoming acts of heroism, potentially overwhelmed by their focus on the accomplishment of a taxing physical feat. As I sat in his six-hour performance at 7a11d* International Festival of Performance Art in Toronto (Ontario) last fall, I was moved by the generosity and humbleness of his work. Focusing on his task, Court's clockwise rotation in a rehabilitated classroom became a point of convergence for the festival's community to sit down and appreciate his body at work. Intent in his action—a task to be executed and done exactly—Court created a strong bond between himself and the audience in his sincerity and in his generous sharing of this gesture with us. The rotating body became both soothingly meditative and difficult to bear.

The door is open. You give us all a chance to walk in and out of the room—to either spend time observing you or leave. It becomes difficult to do either of these things. The luxury of coming in and out—of passing through with such ease—is in direct opposition with your repetitive task. You are trapped in this Beckett tragicomedy you have set up for yourself. I can go when I please.

Like an athlete in training or a butcher sharpening his knives John approaches his actions with the utmost respect and passion. While these performances can seem like tasks to be accomplished, events to be worked through, they are also careful articulations of a politics, of his interests in language, art, aesthetics, and his craft as a maker. He focuses on minute details, which can often go unnoticed. It is important to sit down after one of his performances and take note of the traces left behind: the small piles of magnesium, burnt wood, chalk, and stone, or the traces of written text, feet, hands, and finger prints that continue to live on in the space. John's body is in constant motion throughout his performances—although sometimes the movement is difficult to discern because of its minuteness. This kinaesthetic quality of the work is important since it produces the conditions for new objects, sculptures, sites, and temporal spaces.



Photograph by Henry Chan

You finish and we all applaud you. But the applause feel completely wrong and misplaced. You are tired, dehydrated, disoriented, sore. You probably want to be left alone. And so in response we applaud. Loudly. To drown out the silence. The classroom now bears your trace, and long after you have left—long after the magnesium has been swept away and the chalkboard erased—people will continue to see you revolving there. Like a satellite in orbit, held in balance by the careful pull and push of centrifugal forces. Teetering on the brink of disaster.

Perhaps what best describes John Court is himself. Often performing in black plain clothes and a pair of comfortable black sneakers, with a shaved head and a focused look in his eyes, John Court performs no one other than himself. He is often stoic in his work, and this achieves a consistency that makes him unique. Attending a performance by Court leaves you with the feeling that you have seen many others by him. It also makes you want to attend every single one that will follow. The magnitude of each performance combined with the attention to detail make them all events on their own—singular and special, particular and interesting, peculiar and intriguing. While the actions are never necessarily overtly big, loud, or invasive, they manage to reach far beyond themselves and become landmarks on their own—collapsing experience and existence by carving out the surface of our communal time and space. The energy of an environment, of an evening, of a festival will change once John has performed—his presence alone a considerable force.

Didier Morelli is presently a PhD student in Performance Studies at Northwestern University. As an interdisciplinary artist, Morelli combines practice and research in both his academic and performative explorations. His live art practice includes endurance-based durational actions and contextually specific relational interactions.