

John Court's Influence on my Practice

by Elayne Adamczyk Harrington (Temper-Mental MissElayneous)

About the writer

Elayne Adamczyk Harrington is a Sculpture & Expanded Practice and Critical Cultures graduate of Fine Art in the National College of Art and Design, Dublin, Ireland. She served the third year of her International BA Degree (Erasmus) in the University of Arts in Poznań, Poland. She is now a first year graduate of Professional Master in Education at the same institution in the School of Education. Also known as *Temper-Mental MissElayneous*, Elayne is an accomplished performer in the Irish Hiphop and poetry world. She is an Access student who came from homelessness into third level education at NCAD in 2015.

Artist Statement

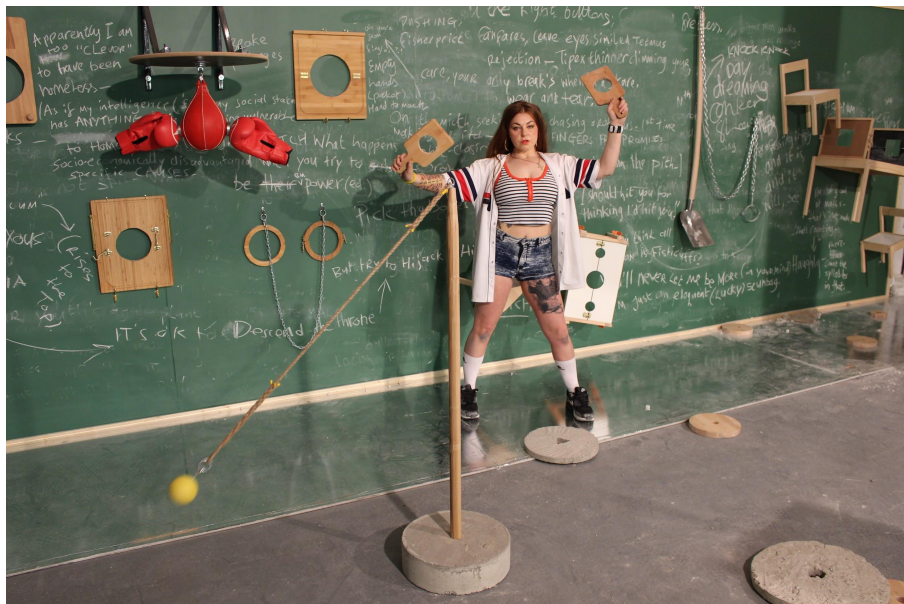
Elayne Adamczyk Harrington's work explores restriction and oppression with the ideas of judgement and punishment often manifesting in the context of class. The themes and issues that arise spring from the repressive nature of society and the constraint of its social systems. Some of the works refer to conditions and injustices such as addiction and alcoholism, access to education and homelessness in a direct way. Other artworks take a more layered approach in dealing with generational poverty, classism and working-class experience. The artwork utilises wood, concrete, metal, found items and mixed media to create objects, which at first glance appear to be utilitarian entities, domestic or recreational and innocent in nature. Reappropriated entities are reworked to covertly interrupt their original function, providing playfulness with an undercurrent of aggression. An integral aspect of the work is engagement and interaction from the artist which incites spontaneous verbal and kinetic articulations that transcend the narrative of the sculptures and evolve the work to performance, spatial activity, duration and endurance.

Throughout this writing I will refer to written records attained during my participation in a week of masterclasses led by John Court in Poznań at the University of Fine Arts in Poznań, which was a group project where object making was guided by Court with the employment of his own design strategies. This collective process served as a precursor to the international sculpture and performance conference *Sculpture In Process - Sculpture as a Factor in the Transformation of Place and Space* which was held at Brama Poznania in March 2019. The artist asserted during these masterclasses: “It is simply moving an object, but something *else* happens.” There is something turbulent yet quiet, sporadic yet steadfast all about the work - the work which “need not be a spectacle, for that’s not necessary” (Court, 2019). Indeed, I will refer to the work in its physical form, but the relationship between artist and object and the layers of meaning in the process will be of deeper significance. To regard the aesthetic of John’s work, one could say that the impressive structure grabs the viewer by the lapels. The platforming of his performances, is a continuum of which the incline and decline alike offer no recess for the eye or senses when partaking in the observation of the unrelenting silent spectacle. The artist can be prompted to constantly move by the object or the object can be continually set in motion by the artist.

Thoughts from the artist himself regarding expectations and conventions within the field of performance art will punctuate reflections upon my own ambitions in light of the development of artwork and art processes. I set out to touch upon the strategies, experiences, as well as materiality, site specificity and scale which are of particular interest in consideration of John Court’s practice. This research aims to address some crucial points around Court’s durational and endurance work as well as celebrate the inspiration derived from the chance to work with John.

NCAD Degree Show 2019

The 2019 National College of Art and Design degree show was to happen just over two months after the project Marta Bosowska kindly invited me to participate in. Workshopping and masterclasses with artist John Court would unfold as part of the international sculpture and performance conference *Sculpture In Process - Sculpture as a Factor in the Transformation of Place and Space* which was held at Brama Poznan in March 2019. The NCAD graduate show featured my artwork in The Granary Building within the Sculpture Department. *Instrumental* was a complex classroom installation with an industrial playground aesthetic. It was a meticulously detailed exhibit of multiple mixed media sculptures. Over four series were employed in the display, many of which continued on the narrative of restraint, oppression, public denunciation and punishment as in previous works such as *Verbal Execution* and *Skladany*, the latter of which was developed in UAP during my *Erasmus +* International residency in Poznan(2017-18). I will discuss two of the pieces from my degree show exhibition *Instrumental* in light of the influence John Court has had on my work and my view of art and the institution.



Instrumental - works visible from left to right: green chalkboard, reflective gyproc, *Made to be Broken*, *Blow by Blow*, *Skladany* and *Bravo* from the *Curriculum Adulterate* triptych plus post-performance concrete and wooden disc components from *Hierarchy of Notions*.

Photo by author(private archive, 2019).



Hierarchy of Notions - 1300mm X 380mm - wooden fork handle, concrete and gravel base, concrete discs, Ikea table top beechwood discs.

Photo by author(private archive, 2019).

The University of Fine Arts in Poznań was a familiar institution, having spent a full academic year under the guidance of Janusz Baldyga as well as Marta, supporting my performance education throughout my *Erasmus* experience at UAP. I applied to The Mary Cawley Travel Bursary scheme in order to attain funding for my trip to partake in this opportunity. *Hierarchy of Notions* is a piece of utmost pertinence due to the fact that this work was in the making prior to this project. A description of the work and further expansion later will explain why:

The engagement with this object should be a continuum of interaction by the artist lasting 46 hours. The slots of the concrete discs are circular, some triangular and some square, harking back to the earlier Ikea triptych *Curriculum Adulterate* and the shape of the holes bored or cut into the furniture to receive the head and hands. Viewers of the work should interact with it. The sequence of mixed material discs are stabilised in order of succession on the concrete base via the post.

The durational and endurance aspect of the description and intended exhibition format were entirely influenced by my interaction with John and my participation with the workshop and performance at UAP and Brama Poznania. John encouraged my use of the verbal, improvisation and even elements of clown practice which he understood I had been pursuing in a performance art blended way through the pedagogy of another of my mentor's Jef Johnson. John emphasised the radical emancipatory, representational power and potential of the crossing of creative genres in the 'art world', particularly in light of Hip-hop as a cultural movement and rapping as communicative empowerment. He reminded me that this *was* 'socially engaged practice', even if not accepted as a traditional aspect of art. Naturally, I was struck by John's expansive insights and views around materials, engagement with others and with space as well as a politic and holistic sense of society and

the institution. I recall noting how he referenced his recent book, which I have quoted from in the *Durational Performance as Vision and Spectacle* essay. He said of *An idea of Performance, A Idea of Art*: "It's a collection of drawings and notes, I wouldn't be offended if you referred to them as doodles or scribbles." In that instant I recognised the radically unassuming attitude along with the type of tact and charisma that comes only with a working-class or predominantly autodidactic education. I was pleased to see shades of John's concepts and experiences apparent in my own developments with my art back home in Dublin...50% of which materials were still in the builder merchants yard at that point. I had ordered Leicester red bricks, plasterboard and reflective gyproc for my return to Dublin to resume my artwork and installation. His use of robust, raw and industrial material spoke to my own existing passions. He spoke of school and learning experiences being wholly negative and oppressive as well as his background on site and this validated my desire to bring industrial materials into the art institution or classroom in my degree show. When John made the following points, I leaned in even closer to hear more: "I call my art practice 'work', although I'm dyslexic and not keen on formal lectures, I use the verbal in my word." This was music to the ears of me, a rapper, lover of words as well as a former post-primary truant and arithmophobic. As an Access student in a higher education system that is predominantly middle class from top to bottom I marvelled at this encounter. I felt connected to this artist for many reasons, all of which would serve to expand my sense of myself as an artist and how I would think of sculpture, performance, space and certainly my place within it all.

I felt at home with John and I wanted to honour his process as much as he does. I noted during the building process of this project he mentioned how he is "not precious about much related to art other than the process", as we drilled, joined and lugged heavy material for this object that he reminded us we were "making not for art, but for process." I opted for a 3 hour segment from 11pm-2am during our 24hour scheduled collaborative durational work as well as a second slot from 3-4pm during the conference the next day. The action of continuous motion for a day and a night on a site that would host both the work and the theory side by side was upon us. The group transported this large object which would drive the durational piece and which we would collectively drive in a rotational manner, as in one by one and also in a circular motion, in a single direction. John encouraged constantly At one tired moment before we had even begun, upon arrival at the performance location and in the instance of a few hardcore splinters he cheerfully remarked: "It's not about pain - hospital is not a part of the work." A humorous but incisive point. I brought some props to embellish or address some aspects of my own performance that I expected might reveal themselves throughout this durational piece. Boxing gear including a skipping rope, 16 ounce boxing gloves, wraps, gumshields and armed with all the verbal gusto of a repressed rapper, an exiled poet ready to unearth their oral skills in a new and seemly complimentary way. This is durational. For as long as I have breath in my lungs I can orate. Who will stop me...it is a continuous motion and it is through the

lyrical that I make literary moves. The discipline of the physicality of the boxing along with the constant mental rotation ushered away echoes of lifelong feedback consisting of: "Be succinct, have brevity, write this way, speak that way." No. Now, I have time. Now, I have a place. Now, there is space.

John's 2017 publication is very much so composed in this same spirit. It is a poetic composition, thick with comprehensive accounts of his years of work plans from 2010 to 2015. It is an artist's delight and a scholarly insight into his prolific contribution to the world of performance art. The stamina of his art emanates from the pages, rich with commentary on John's practice by fellow artists and theorists. It bears reflections, handsome visuals and sophisticated plans, remaining faithful to the uncomplicated and concise honesty he champions. After this impactful project, the study of this very book assisted me in delving deeper into his pedagogy and practice and gave me the final burst of passion that would propel my critical culture essay and my quotation of his performance work which he used to teach and engage us as learners and as practitioners during our week of development and action. The Courtian degree show feature entitled *Nth Degree* was an exstallation featured publically on the institution grounds in Red Square and described as so:

A wooden sculpture and a smaller accompanying metal version which quote John Court's single direction continuous motion object. The objects must be activated in an 8 hour performance. This durational process will incorporate the use of additional objects, as listed below in materials to extend the range of action in a context that speaks with my other works.



Nth Degree - 2000mm X 800mm/1000mm X 500mm - 4 x white deal lats, BWP plywood, mild steel (flat and round bar), Props: lack 10oz boxing gloves, blacks wraps, black gum shield, white 10oz boxing gloves, white gum shield, wooden handled leather skipping rope, wooden handled black vinyl skipping rope.

Photos by author(private archive, 2019).

In the spirit of the durational, I performed daily during the graduation exhibition, including for NCAD Show Live which is described by the university to offer a unique opportunity to see a scheduled programme of performances, workshops and discursive events by graduating students working in the medium of live art each year for the degree show. I presented *Miscellaneous* - a live, ad libitum performance that uses the body of the artist, voice, play and engagement with a series of appropriated objects and sculptural works. The fluid and unscripted process is always unique to its particular space and audience. The work explores restriction and oppression with the ideas of judgement and punishment often manifesting in a class context.



Photos by author(private archive, 2019).

I will end in pointing to an example of the live as presented in a digitised mode. *Awaken* documents object and process in a contemporary context. It combines powers of Hiphop, the spoken word and fine art allowing the work to realise something new. The imposition of bars, of frames, of fixed format is there, but does the work offer the same sense of endurance as the Courtian model? The objects never break, the artist never falters, the actions are fixed in a constant motion, but is repetition purposeful to the same degree to which continuity is? Are they the same? Repeated patterns surely differ from continuous motion in one direction, yet both present a perspective that can allow a range of progress. Progressive is the way forward.

Temper-Mental MissElayneous. Produced by Lerloons. Written 2016. Video shot and directed in June 2019, in Elayne Adamczyk Harrington's undergraduate degree installation work entitled *Instrumental*.

[Awaken - MissElayneous Prod. Lerloons](#)

Elayne Adamczyk Harrington (Temper-Mental MissElayneous) is now a graduate of the 1st year in Full-time Postgraduate of Professional Master of Education (Art and Design) at NCAD, School of Education.

“Elayne Harrington is a consummate artist and wordsmith who has extended the definition of poetry on the island of Ireland. A gifted communicator and a riveting performer, she catalyses the energy of her audience through chant and rhythm, in lines that are charming, uplifting and radical.”

- Professor of poetry, Paula Meehan

“...one of the country's most exciting and provocative solo performers in any musical style.” – **RTÉ**

"Elayne is a superb communicator, with a creative, playful and responsive approach to her work and it's delivery." - **Gareth Kennedy**

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