

MARCEL DARIENZO

Goldsmiths, University of London

Shot attempts: *F**k Po****cs!* *Performing is enacting indeed!*

ABSTRACT

This text is an experiment, an attempt to play with the style of theoretical language, and to harness the performative potential of the journal format. The invented concepts of 'shot attempts' and 'the you' are used in parallel to the artist's practice, to drive a quasi-theoretical explication of the artwork-viewer relationship. Academic convention lapses into poetic and artistic flourishes, and demands are made of the reader to question dichotomies (mind-body, subject-object) through a series of directives.

KEYWORDS

body in art
performance
contemporary art
experience
subjectivation
processes
art viewer

Perhaps what happened to me was an understanding – and for me to be true, I have to keep on being unable to grasp it, keep on not understanding it. All sudden understanding closely resembles an acute incomprehension.

No. All sudden understanding is finally the revelation of an acute incomprehension. Maybe what happened to me was an understanding as complete as an ignorance, and from it I shall emerge as untouched and innocent as before. No knowledge of mine will ever reach that understanding, since living is the only height within my grasp – I am only on the level of life.

(Lispector 2014)

To attempt to write about the undocumentable event of performance is to invoke the rules of the written document and thereby alter the event itself. Just as quantum physics discovered that macro-instruments cannot measure microscopic particles without transforming those particles, so too must performance critics realize that the labor to write about performance (and thus to 'preserve' it) is also a labor that fundamentally alters the event. [...] The challenge raised by the ontological claims of performance for writing is to re-mark again the performative possibilities of writing itself.

(Phelan 1992: 148)

SHOT ATTEMPTS

'Shot attempts' are artworks that submit the viewer-artwork relation to scrutiny, rather than putting forward their own content i.e. materials, language, themes, issues. They consist of artistic propositions that, instead of introducing a theme, fiction or idea that one may or may not relate to, propose a meta-situation – a loop from the viewer to their own experiences (past and present), where the viewer is cast anew as an *experimenter*. An example of this shift from viewer to experimenter is seen in the physical and social difference between watching a film in the cinema – where your body is supported by the theatre infrastructure, and attending an exhibition in a white cube with a noticeable lack of support – making your mobility one of the key elements for actualizing 'art'. When we think about how the body performs in such situations, we can better understand how the *experimenter* is implicated in the temporal invention of the work.

A focus on the agency of the viewer has long been part of artistic practices since the 1960's emphasis on *participation*, apparent in the work of Brazilian avant-garde artists such as Lygia Clark's *Caminhando* (*Walking*) (1963), where she invites the 'participator' to cut a Möbius strip; and Helio Oiticica's *Parangolés* (1964), where he created wearable paintings. Other examples of this attention to the perspective of the participant include the Fluxus investigations (e.g. Yoko Ono's *Grapefruit* [1964], a book of instructions for the reader to experiment), the International Situationist's *Dérives* (1958) – in which they invite you to get lost in the city, and the acts of sociability in Gordon Matta-Clark's *FOOD* (1972) – an artwork/restaurant, and the prominence that *staging* was given in Minimal Art. Although each of these examples differs in terms of their respective political and aesthetic aims, they share a focus on the abstract idea of the 'self' – the subject and its subjectivity. Implicated in this is the idea of 'we', this being everything that is able to occur between the object *and I*, the environment *and I*, others *and I*. It is important to notice that all the examples given above, seen as artistic propositions, promoted a radical shift from art as the making of objects to art as coextensive with experience. Nicolas Bourriaud talks about this shift in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002), but makes no mention of the earlier work that took place in South America, which was arguably the most radical. In relation to these historical examples, I argue that 'shot attempts' exist as a distinct moment between artwork and experimenter, a triggering situation, which eliminate the dualism of 'the other and I' by focusing on *you*, the abstracted notion '(the) you'.

To abandon 'the other and I' is to undermine the object-subject dichotomy that is often implicit in making and viewing art, by using it as an image. 'The

you' is found in this representation of *your* subjectivity – the representation of what and how you choose to engage in the environments you inhabit. 'Shot attempts', therefore, initiate a situation in which social aspects are *cut* from the body, so that the experimenter can be confronted with an image of their own sociability. 'The you' arises from dismantling psychological processes, and proposes the death of the search for 'what I truly am', to evoke a realization of 'you' as constantly changing ideas and images, as a virtual nexus of true and un-true representations: 'you are hot', 'you are in love', 'you are too fat', 'you need a wife', 'you go to the gym', 'you wear this and not that shit there', 'you eat kale', 'you enjoy the sunset', 'you hang out in that bar', 'you order flat whites', 'you don't fart', 'you are vegan', 'you have never licked an ass', 'you suffer from depression', 'you have a big dick', 'you were hurt', 'you don't like orgies'.

FROM THE EMPTIED OBJECT TO THE DEATH OF THE SELF

I made *YOU C! YOU M! YOU S!* (2016) to try to grasp the relation of societal infrastructures to the idea of 'the you'. It expresses the late night sexual pleasure that infiltrates itself into the daylight and provokes thoughts of disruption or reveals possibilities hidden by the ordinary. The canvases attempt to reconfigure the way the institutional ambient, the societal structure of the gallery, is understood. On one hand, as the spray is not made on the walls of the white cube, a specific attention is given to the meaning of this object itself, and how it was transformed by the *figure* of the artist. On the other, the way in which speech is given to the object, in the imperative form, point to its existing as a mere functional sign for a viewer rather than an artwork to be interpreted. When we consider this artwork as producing a 'shot attempt', a 'hollowness' is induced that provokes a reflection about 'the you', namely who *you* are as an image – a reflection of social relations and structures.

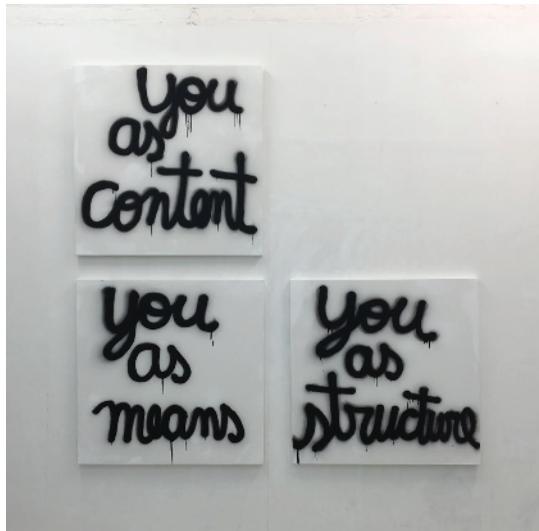


Figure 1: Marcel Darienzo, *YOU C! YOU M! YOU S!* (2016). Spray paint and gesso on canvas. 100×100 cm each.

1. He furthers: '[...] I use the word "conception" rather than "perception" because the name perception seems to indicate that the mind is passive in its relation to the object. But the word conception seems to express the action of the mind' (Spinoza 2010: 79).

2. See Damasio:

Spinoza uses 'idea' as a synonym for image or mental representation or component of thought [...] once you formed an idea of a certain object, you can form an idea of the idea, and an idea of the idea of the idea, and so forth. [...] The notion of 'ideas of ideas' is important on many counts. For example, it opens the way for representing relationships and creating symbols. Just as importantly, it opens a way for creating an idea of self. I have suggested that the most basic kind of self is an idea, a second-order idea. (Damasio 2004: 211, 214, emphasis added)

'The you' is always *performing*, as it is constantly redesigning/re-enacting its own representation; it problematizes the presence of the body in relation to the milieu of the gallery space, through the duration of its experimentation. But what remains of a body whose social-self-regulatory consciousness is left behind in order to open space for auto-reflexive experiences? I argue for the 'shot attempt' as a process where you do not simply assume a new position/perspective, but will doubt your first intuitions. In the movement of the 'shot attempt', I believe the mind-body dichotomy collapses, and in contradiction a sense of simultaneity becomes the core mechanism of the experience of the artwork.

Benedict Spinoza's definition of 'idea' is of relevance to this discussion, because it proposes the body as an attribute of thought: 'by idea I understand a conception of the mind which the mind forms because it is a thinking thing'¹ (2010: 79). Thus, we can infer that where the mind is formed of ideas of the body, thoughts derive from a modification of the body. The neuroscientist Antonio Damasio studied Spinoza's mind-body theory, and one thing that Damasio thought was particularly important was Spinoza's use of 'idea' in its relation to the understanding of the self as a second-order idea.² Damasio writes:

Why second order? Because it is based on two first-order ideas – one being the idea of the object that we are perceiving; the other, the idea of our body as it is modified by the perception of the object. The second-order idea of self is the idea of the relationship between the two other ideas – object perceived *and* body modified by perception.

(2004: 215, emphasis added)

Damasio proposes that the self originates precisely from the presumption that there is always a clear distinction between object and subject, and draws attention to the gap in between 'what an object is' and 'how the object is perceived by a subject'. Since 'shot attempts' propose the death of this specific form of relation, and look to an experience less mediated by dichotomized prescriptions, the idea of an *essential* self has to be eliminated, shot dead! (BAM! KABUM! FINITO! DONE!)

In an extension of Spinoza's thought, Damasio refers to the self as 'the broker' of conscious experiences – 'an internal and imperfectly constructed informer rather than an external, reliable observer' (2012: 177). This theory opens up an even more interesting space of investigation for 'shot attempts', as with no 'broker', what is left of/for the body? How can we think of body-mind processes without the object-subject distinction? Perhaps, what remains to be thought of are simply mechanisms of endurance: responses of the body to fully be active and activating, instead of just social machinery, or as philosopher Pal Pelbart describes it, a body 'reduced to its biological survivalism' (2013: 43). The body is *performing*, living through a hunch, an instinct that perceives and stimulates the surroundings in order to apprehend and boost the vitality of its maintenance – 'you as content', 'you as means', 'you as structure'.

FROM 'THE YOU' TO YOUR LIFE

To further the exposition of this text, it is urgent to depict 'the you': the images with which the body will be confronted, the social image of the self. What is a



3. Excerpts of *SOME NIHILISTIC SEDUCTION GOING ON* (2015) are available online at: <http://marceldariento.com/SOME-NIHILISTIC-SEDUCTION-GOING-ON>.

Figure 2: Marcel Dariento, *SOME NIHILISTIC SEDUCTION GOING ON* (2015). Performance, durational.

representation of the self? How does a representation propose for the self to give up on its subjectivity for a moment? Perhaps this draws from the apprehension of the body by techno-political infrastructures, advertised towards the total absorption of the self. Pelbart proposes that the self has leaked into and been reduced to the body's presentation, appropriating it as its battleground (2013: 40). This means that to abandon the self is the same as abandoning the body, turning it into a corpse full of scars, a carcass filled in desire, flesh and skeleton hungry for its surroundings.

In my performance piece, *SOME NIHILISTIC SEDUCTION GOING ON* (2015),³ I addressed these issues of 'the you' through sexualized ways of *performing* the body. When a viewer enters the space, they are met with a sign: 'BEWARE, THE PERFORMER MIGHT HAVE AN ANXIETY ATTACK WITH YOUR PRESENCE'. The performance calls attention to the bodily responses of the viewer, as confronted by this specific and highly commercialized way of moving the body – often used in popular culture with particular reference to female and gay-male bodies.

By extracting these specific movements, and re-presenting them as mechanical and repetitive through performance, my practice reflects and highlights the repetitive conditions through which one is able (or not) to comply with the constraints placed on both body and the self in 'Americanized' media culture. This notion connects to Pelbart's conclusion that life itself is at stake when the self and the body are compromised by neo-liberal capitalism. My reading of Pelbart's view here is that what is at stake are the various ways in which one can or cannot comply with such societal-political forces, as well as all the implications arising from her or his adaptability throughout life. Pelbart defines life as having different forms, which he terms 'a life', 'bare life' and 'beastly life' (2013: 45–46) – all of which can be considered as confronting the body 'shot' by art. But what is

life for a body that's been shot? Life is molecules and needs; it is the plane to transcend and act upon; it is as light is to photosynthesis. Life is the condition of existence.

This discussion raises the question as to whether this idea of life corresponds to Deleuze's 'body-without-organs', described by Pelbart as 'life undoing itself from what imprisons it, from the organisms, the organs, the inscriptions of diverse powers upon the body' (2013: 44). However, I argue that there is a key difference, in that 'shot attempts' benefit from all coexisting forces within and images produced by the body. In this sense, 'shot attempts' are not 'undoinings' in the Deleuzian sense, but are instead confrontations with the very rendering of life through experience. Through 'shot attempts', the body can indulge in each of its different facets as much as it pleases, but there is no prerogative to undo convention and habit. Instead, the target of a 'shot attempt' is to make the body face all of its socio-political fabrications, through an act of radical reflexivity. 'Shot attempts' operate as sudden understandings that are the revelation of an acute incomprehension; they assume meaning as a tool to reconfigure and explore a world. They are the encounters with the images of *your* body *you* overlook, or perhaps do not bother to grasp. Nihilism, appropriation, exhaustion, awareness and dislocation are common tools used by artists that result in situations such as 'shot attempts'.

PERFORMING 'THE YOU'

The idea of a body *performing* is inextricably synchronized with its enactment – that explicates why presence has long been understood as the ontology of performance. *Performing* is fostered by 'what it is' rather than 'what it appears to be' or 'what it has become'. 'To perform' in its continuous tense must be understood as a philosophical state that highlights both the construction of self and body as well as the in-the-moment existence of being. To limit one's experience to the means of the experience might mean to fuck with politics and propose the *shot body's* sudden detachment from social structures, a possibility to experiment *yourself* – 'the you'. Limit as potency. No mediations. 'Shot attempts' are experiences in which the body loses its status as signifier and is confronted, in an impoverished state with all its former signified production. This is highly powerful and potent. In this regard the one *performing* is always both the *experimenter* and the work itself. *Performing* 'the you' is to enact a representation of yourself while simultaneously confronting the unfolding of self. *Performing* 'the you' is to vandalize Rene Magritte's *ceci n'est pas une pipe* (1929), with spray paint; adding to add: 'c'est vous bitch, une pipe'.

Understanding the viewer as the content of the work highlights the act of *performing* itself because it is based on presence. To be present, one has to strip down to the point of vulnerability, in which object and subject no longer exist. Object–subject relations secure and reduce things in the world to palpable, tangible measures. In other words, each object provides a unique view from which to interpret the world. One way of achieving such vulnerability is to kill the subject in order to kill one's weaknesses. One example of this could be an actress/actor acting by destroying their own self in order to open up a space become anew, to assume the very idea of the social image of the self – 'the you', as the means of becoming. In that case, *performing* is

against the interpretation of existing things. 'Shot attempts' render interpretation powerless, because they go against the signals and rules that dictate modern-day understandings of the world. 'Shot attempts' instantaneously claim the body as content, location and future of the work. The world is not perceived as information to be absorbed, but rather as actions to be fulfilled. What do you do with the potency and hunger of *your* body being confronted by *your* daily (im)possibilities?

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CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

The artist Marcel Darienzo was born in São Paulo, Brazil, and currently lives and works in London (UK). His artistic research practice spans across visual art, performance, dance and theatre. Darienzo is a MFA Fine Arts Candidate at Goldsmiths, University of London, holds a BA in Fine Arts (Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado – FAAP/SP), and is also trained as an actor (Teatro-Escola Célia Helena). He has shown his work in national and international group exhibitions; including: *Cabaret der Kunstler – Manifesta 11* Zurich, Switzerland; Goldsmiths Gallery, London, UK; *Galeria expandida*, seLecT Magazine; *das capitaniás do seu corpo*, Museu de Arte Brasileira/Lutétia, São Paulo, SP; #44 e #45 Art Annual, Museu de Arte Brasileira/FAAP. Recent publications include a script in the catalogue: *I am not Tino Sehgal*, Nahmad Projects, London, UK. Darienzo was awarded the first prize in #44 Art Annual and has realized an art residency programme in TAKT Berlin, Germany.

Contact: Goldsmiths, University of London, 8 Lewisham Way, London SE14 6NW, UK.

E-mail: mdariento@gmail.com

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