

# Deirdre Logue

## Double Double

**G44** Centre for  
Contemporary  
Photography



## Surface Tension

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Leila Timmins

In *Marxism and Literature* the cultural theorist Raymond Williams writes, " ... [the] affective elements of consciousness and relationships [are] not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought."<sup>1</sup> Much of what can be understood about Deirdre Logue's work must be felt. Within her practice there is no affective turn from a time or place where feeling and thought are separate, but instead feeling is the only way of knowing and the only way forward. For over twenty years, Logue has been making intimate self-portraits and performances for the camera that explore excesses of emotion, queer subjectivities and the experience (at times painful) of living within a resilient but imperfect body. Taken as a whole, there has been little deviation from the mean—Logue alone with a camera performing either small, repeated gestures (often physically strenuous or violent) or brief confessionals spoken directly to the camera. The serial exploration with incremental variation has allowed for a careful and intimate portrayal of the artist in front of the camera, but also dislodges any notion of authenticity and artificiality as the poles of self-representation.

<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, "Structures of Feeling," in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 132.

Logue's 2016 work deviates from her previous work more than one might expect. Still present are the classic performative gestures and homemade aesthetic of hand-held cameras, but the frame of these videos is tight, capturing only fragmented elements of the body in close-up. The work is leaner too, pared down to its essential elements and stark in its clarity. Unlike her earlier work, which maps the body through its excesses and shortcomings, often with maximalist gestures and a confessional tone, here we see a new resolve and a calm simplicity. Recorded in large part on location during a 2014 residency at the Klondike Institute of Art and Culture in Dawson City, the works are shot between the gallery, the studio and the house Logue lived in while she was there.<sup>2</sup> Responsive to these sites, the works engage the materiality of these spaces from the perspective of the camera positioned on the floor. Entering these works from the ground, we are belly to the floor, which in many ways feel prefigured by the low vision of Logue's earlier work *Hobbs Obliques* (2012), a short video that explores a domestic space by pulling a camera on a three-wheeled dolly by an orange string through

<sup>2</sup> *Set Upset* was made at Film Farm a few months after the other videos but similarly deals with balance, suspension and the weight of the body in relation to the ground.



Deirdre Logue, *Set Upset*, 16mm and HD video (still), 2016



Deirdre Logue, *(Art) Gallery*, two channel HD video (still), 2016

the ground floor of a house, the dolly bumping against the walls and over the uneven transitions from carpet to linoleum. These new works similarly picture interior domestic spaces, but instead of exploring visually, the works attempt to understand the space through sensation and sound. Floors creak under the weight of the body shifting from one foot to another, knees balance on basketballs, socks slide across polished floor or stick against rough floorboards. We hear laboured breathing and the whir of the furnace turning on, the unending static from the camera's mic. We see every muscle in Logue's feet bulge and strain, then lengthen and relax in staccato rhythms. There is a materiality to this accumulation of senses, mapping each room through its textural and sonic qualities. The tactility of the strange but quotidian actions reverberates beyond the screen—you can "feel" the tight pull of a wool sock as it tugs along the uneven wood floor or the cool burn of bare arms sliding on polished concrete. We respond through the weight of our own feet on the ground and the rise and fall of our breath. Logue's hyper-embodied attention to her surroundings collapses the sensual and intuitive, feeling and knowing, in a unified way of understanding.

The relatively recent turn in feminist theory to incorporate elements of affect theory resonates here. Re-centring the body as the key theoretical touchstone, scholars have moved away from text and discourse to prioritize the body's potential to both affect and be affected. Within this framework, affect is positioned as a productive concept for understanding the transformations and potentialities of the connections between bodies. Or, as Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead note in their introduction to *Affecting Feminism*, "it is a material intensity that emerges via the 'in-between' spaces of embodied encounters, circulating power not primarily as a mode of discursive regulation but rather as the potential to 'become otherwise'."<sup>3</sup> This desire to become otherwise is palpable in Logue's work, where the repetitive gestures can just as easily be read as a neurotic twitch that needs to be shaken off. In *Clicks and Hisses* (2016) we see, in agonizing close-up, Logue's wool-socked feet pull and strain across the studio's rough wood floor, a feeling she admits irritated her

before making the work. Beyond the sensory nature of the work, there is an unsettling itchiness that is hard to define.

It is unclear if the movements are motivated by a childlike exploration of her surroundings or a nihilistic compulsion, forced further through practice and repetition. The repetition of the gestures also belies the labour of the body in movement. In *(Art) Gallery* (2016), the two channels show Logue in a plank position on the floor, straining in one to push the body up with the arms and in the other, holding the body in suspension before its inevitable collapse. The mirroring and succinctness of the gesture feels like a nervous tick, the body working through its anxieties and irritations. There is a sense of an excess of feelings being managed, purged or corralled. They are what feminist scholar Sianne Ngai calls "ugly feelings"—shame, paranoia, envy, irritation—which, in contrast to more dynamic and powerful negative emotions like anger, are the non-cathartic states of feeling associated with situations in which action is blocked or suspended.<sup>4</sup> The core gesture in the works is always determined by this suspension. There is no climax or moment of resolve. We must sit in the ugliness where labour bears no fruit and gestures eschew greater meaning. What does the body do when it feels too much? Does freedom come from excess or its absence? Is there productivity in stasis? But it is also in the sparse clarity of the gesture, the inertia and boredom of it, coupled with the lean visual economy that amplifies the very materiality of the movement. With the intensity of the focus there is a transformation of the objectivity of the action into something subjective and embodied, which mirrors, as Logue would say, "the ultimate feminist gesture" surmised by a lineage of female performers and video artists: "to remove the female as an object and to create her as subject."<sup>5</sup>

Writing during the emergence of video art in the mid 1970s, the art theorist Rosalind Krauss famously identified narcissism as the genre's prevailing characteristic, defining the medium for its psychological rather than physical conditions, both for its structure of perpetual relation, and for artists' preoccupation with using the medium for self-representation.<sup>6</sup> The

<sup>3</sup> Carolyn Pedwell and Anne Whitehead, "Affecting Feminism: Questions of Feeling in Feminist Theory," in *Feminist Theory* 13, no. 2: 115–129.

<sup>4</sup> Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Conversation with the artist December 2016.

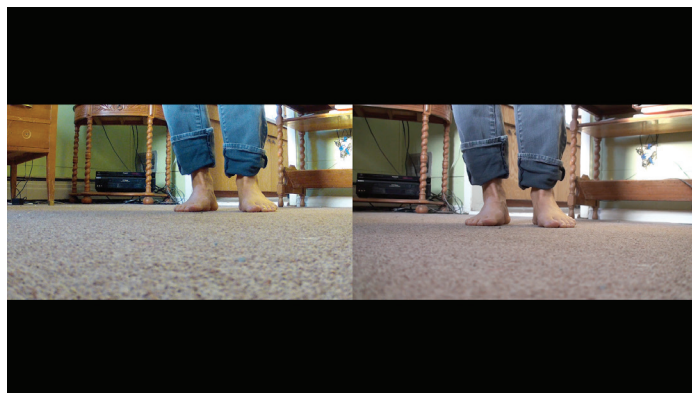
<sup>6</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism," *October* 1 (Spring 1976): 50–64

suggestion of the mind or psyche acting as a medium points to the enduring relationship between film studies and psychoanalysis, a recurring theme throughout Logue's career. Krauss, however, has also argued that the immediacy of the mirror-like feedback brackets off the subject in "the prison of a collapsed present."<sup>7</sup> Instead of the medium acting as an external object used to support artistic expression (such as paint or marble), the feedback creates a doubling where there is neither separation nor critical distance necessary to untangle self-investment. While Logue's enduring preoccupation with self-image operates within the stasis of a collapsed present, her work also breaks the atemporal bracket by aggressively turning the camera back on her audience. For Logue, the camera is not simply the device connecting her image with the screen but an active agent within the alchemy of production, constantly foregrounding its own materiality within the work. This animacy of her camera breaks the feedback loop into something that is not only reflective but also reflexive.

The split screen in *Double Double* (2016), created by two cameras set eye-width apart, captures an almost identical image differing only slightly in optical perspective. In this doubled vision, we see Logue for a moment as she turns the cameras on, angling them back at herself and setting them down on the brown, carpeted floor of the living room. Stepping back from the lens, Logue is cut off at the knees, creating a horizon line where the floor meets the wall. We are down low again, at what Logue has called "cat's eye-vision" as she reaches down and rolls up the pant legs of her jeans—the gesture doubled in the lenses—and begins to wiggle her toes, causing loud and disorienting creaks in the floor. Amplified and doubled back, the noise is more like the pop of a cracking jaw; a sound heard both from within and outside your head. The mics of the cameras, like ears to the ground, catch this double reverberation of the strange buckle and clack, simultaneously hearing what is happening above and below the floorboards. Instead of multiplying perspectives, however, this doubled image and audio, doubles down in a single codependent image, creating a sensory experience in excess of its original parts.

The aural aspects are low too—low frequency, deep rhythms, at times barely above a whisper and

<sup>7</sup> Krauss, "Video," 51.



Deirdre Logue, *Double Double*, two channel HD video (still), 2016

always with the purr of static. Between the loud clicks and occasional beep of a timer, we hear the low and steady vacuous white noise of stasis and inaction. We hear the nothingness amplified to create its own presence.

But the hum of this static still points to absence—the absence of other people, cars or activity. The isolation of Logue and her camera is felt in these pauses, and the psychological effects here too are palpable. During the winter residency in the Yukon when daylight is scarce, Logue's sleep patterns were disrupted. In trying to find relief for this situational insomnia, she became interested in the reputed relaxation effects of pink noise. A sister of white noise, which encompasses the din of all noise on the spectrum, pink noise is characterized by low frequency and bodily sounds, such as a heartbeat. Used to help people fall asleep, pink noise also mimics the sound of microphone static, a constant presence throughout the work. The series delves into this interplay between machine and body, highlighting the corporeal nature of the camera and reminding us that neither can exist without the other.

Logue likes to occupy these in-between spaces, on the precipice of holding back and over-sharing, between mutual relation and codependency, between interior and exterior, between sleeping and being awake, between balance and the fall. She works hard to stay on this edge, caught between action and inaction. Curator Doug Jarvis defines this space in Logue's work as "the exquisite tension between the interior self and the anticipations of the outside world."<sup>8</sup> The tension in Logue's newest work however, has morphed. Less preoccupied with external scrutiny, Logue seems to lean in to feelings that are challenging or uncomfortable. Instead, the dynamic tension lies at the point of contact between Logue's body and the ground. It is not surprising that most of these works focus on the feet. Pictured in exquisite detail, we see each muscle carry the weight of the body and hold it in careful suspension. Each action, resisting gravity through balance or force, attempts to locate the body in relation to the floor. In *Home Office* (2016) the camera is set at an uncharacteristically high vantage point, capturing Logue from the knees down as she stands on a desk, pulls out the

<sup>8</sup> Doug Jarvis, "Introduction," exhibition catalogue for *Id's It*, [http://deirdrelogue.com/writing/dl\\_docs/DeirdreLogue\\_Id'sIt\\_Booklet.pdf](http://deirdrelogue.com/writing/dl_docs/DeirdreLogue_Id'sIt_Booklet.pdf).



Deirdre Logue, *Home Office*, HD video (still), 2016

inset writing board and stands with the balls of her feet arched up from the toes, balancing as if she were about to do a back dive. She holds the position, muscles quivering with resolute determination, for what feels like an uncomfortably long time, until she steps back from the ledge. Logue similarly attempts to stabilize her body in *Set Upset* (2016), creating an unsteady ground by kneeling on two basketballs. The body strains and slips, sliding across the balls until it comes back to rest with feet on the ground. The balance here is an attempt to hold oneself still—to resist gravity and the weight of the body, to feel the connection with the ground and to know oneself in relation to it. Logue understands the fallibility of the body and also its intuitive relationship to space. It is the distillation of a practice that has continuously attempted to find oneself in relation to another, mirrored back through the lens of camera. It is the certainty of a foot hitting the floor. The body feels, and it knows.

Cover Image: Deirdre Logue, *Clicks and Hisses*, HD video (still), 2016

**Gallery 44 Centre for Contemporary Photography** is a non-profit artist-run centre committed to photography as a multi-faceted and ever-changing art form. Founded in 1979 to establish a supportive environment for the development of photography, Gallery 44's mandate is to provide a context for reflection and dialogue on contemporary photography and its related practices. Gallery 44 offers exhibition and publication opportunities to national and international artists, award-winning education programs, and affordable production facilities for artists. Through its programs Gallery 44 is engaged in changing conceptions of the photographic image and its modes of production.

**Deirdre Logue** holds a BFA from the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and an MFA from Kent State University. Recent solo exhibitions of her award winning film and video work have taken place at Open Space (Victoria), Oakville Galleries, the Images Festival (Toronto), the Berlin International Film Festival, Beyond/In Western New York, YYZ (Toronto), and articule (Montreal). Logue has contributed over 25 years to working with artist-run organizations dedicated to media arts exhibition and distribution. She was a founding member of Media City, the Executive Director of the Images Festival, Executive Director of the CFMDC, founding member of the Media Arts Network of Ontario (MANO) and is currently the Development Director at Vtape. She is a champion of artist rights and has held numerous positions with organizations such as CARFAC National and the Independent Media Arts Alliance. Logue has been a member of the Independent Imaging Collective (the Film Farm) with Phil Hoffman since 1999 and directs the FAG Feminist Art Gallery with her partner, collaborator and artist Allyson Mitchell.

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