

Deirdre Logue: Beyond Her Usual Limits

“What I really want to say is private.”
-Deirdre Logue, *Per Se*

Worry

‘To worry’ is a familiar concept. ‘I’m worried about Sally.’ ‘The traffic worries me.’ ‘I worry I’ll make a mistake, say the wrong thing, choose the wrong path.’ I worried about this text long before I ever sat down to write it.

Deirdre Logue worries. She tells us so in her video installation *Why Always Instead of Just Sometimes* (the title itself a statement of disquietude): ‘I am 38 years old / and sometimes / I worry so much / I worry / it will kill me.’ Splashed across a home movie of a young Logue, dancing and shaking her head—less a gesture of refusal than one of ingenuousness—Logue’s text suggests she’s been worrying longer and harder than most of us. She worries so much, she worries about worrying. Her worrying, she worries, could mean the end of her.

Worry articulated in emotive terms—of concern, anxiety, preoccupation—is common enough. Among the definitions of ‘worry,’ however, is its less familiar use as a verb meaning to harass; to pull, tear or lacerate. ‘Fido worried his bone.’ Worrying can also connote a constant toying or fidgeting. ‘She worries her bracelet when nervous.’

This kind of worrying—a physical, even destructive gesture, as something that is *done* rather than simply felt—is no less familiar to Logue. In fact, this kind of compulsive embodiment is much closer to the worry that Logue has us confront. Worry not only as a gesture, but as way of moving through the world. Worry as essence, as second nature.

How to communicate without words

Logue never tells us what she’s worrying about. In fact, she rarely speaks at all. In *Why Always Instead of Just Sometimes* (1997-2000), the artist’s voice appears in but two of the twelve parts. In *Rough Count* (2006-ongoing), we hear only the constant drone of Logue counting thousands of pieces of confetti—worries themselves, perhaps, but not actual proclamations. In *Enlightened Nonsense* (1997-2000), she doesn’t speak at all.

Instead, she turns to prelinguistic strategies of communication. Her mouth, in particular, is used to several ends other than speaking. She floods it with milk, licks the ground, cracks her jaw, sucks on her fingers. In so doing, she not only points to the urgent drives beneath the linguistic (to nourishment, protection, affection), but also to the curious circuitry of the body. The mouth alone stands as a site of comfort, connection, sustenance—things we all need, but don’t always know how to ask for.

Words, Logue suggests, aren’t always helpful. They get us into trouble. We don’t say enough. We say too much. We say the wrong thing. In *Per Se*, the first segment of *Why Always Instead of Just Sometimes*, Logue speaks only to tell us she can’t really talk. What she wants to say is ‘private,’ she ‘doesn’t really understand it’ or know ‘how to say it the right way.’ The gap between the affective force of experience and the capacity of language to convey that

Communications at O..., 08-9-4 11:19 AM
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experience is prohibitive. She cannot name what she needs to name, because it is unnameable. Words are useless. Instead, she will show us.

Self-immolation

Across all of her works, Logue operates within a closed system of self-reflexive gestures. Drawing on herself, compulsively bandaging her hand, submerging her head in ice water, counting thousands of scraps of confetti—these are not motions that register clearly on the lexicon of everyday action, yet their resonance is uncanny. We recognize something in these gestures—an urgency, a confusion, a familiar weight on the chest.

The relative opacity of these actions speaks to the difficulty of both accounting for the self, and reconciling that self with the exterior world. Translating the sum of our symptoms, neuroses and tics into something that can be understood by the self is a daunting prospect; how, then, to organize that self for consumption by others?

In *Enlightened Nonsense*, Logue situates her body, the threshold between private world and public self, as the site of several minor traumas, physical and otherwise. A basketball collides with her head, burrs nestle in her pubic hair, she collapses to the ground. Each action loops back on itself, revealing a visual tautology—trauma as repetition, repetition as trauma. In *Scratch*, the artist tells us, 'My path is deliberately difficult / my reasons endlessly repetitious / but it is through this that I know myself.' While Logue embraces these challenges, the appearance of scar tissue elsewhere in her work (*Patch; Always a Bridesmaid, Never a Bride of Frankenstein; Beyond the Usual Limits, Part 2*) suggests that this path is not without its price.

In *Why Always Instead of Just Sometimes*, a 33-minute loop in 12 parts, Logue returns to the performative gesture as a means of developing a language of interiority. The work begins in earnest; the artist sandwiches herself between her mattress and box spring, we see a loop of a tomato being torn apart and put back together again, bicycles crash into one another repeatedly. We can read the impulse for containment; the compulsive, thwarted desire to make right even in the face of futility; a frustration that patterns repeat themselves at will.

As the cycle continues, however, Logue's actions become less directive, less outward. She fingers her mouth, dances alone, bandages invisible wounds. These are disquieting, introspective gestures. We sense retreat, even resignation. Logue eventually confronts the camera, speaks to it; she is anxious, 'full of cracks,' in 'a very bad mood.' She waits for the camera to respond. It does not.

The camera knows

With few exceptions, Logue appears unaccompanied in her work. The patent presence of the camera, however, is unambiguous; Logue may be the only one in the room, but she is decidedly not alone.

The purplish hue on the artist's face in *Per Se* tells us that she is watching the camera watch her. She stares not into the lens but the viewfinder, bracketing herself between camera and monitor. This feedback loop, so often charged with narcissism, isn't about the artist responding to herself. Logue doesn't stare into the camera to see her reflection. She does so because the camera is a faithful witness. Its response is benevolent, even if not always patient.

Communications at O..., 08-9-4 11:19 AM

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It is a good listener. The camera won't dismiss her or offer empty reassurance, won't blithely say, 'Oh, I feel that, too; we all do.' Because that is perhaps the biggest worry of all—that our worries aren't ours alone, that they are banal, pedestrian.

The camera doesn't flinch when Logue wraps her head with packing tape or writhes through her bed. In fact, it encourages her, gives her license to do all the things that might let the artist climb deeper inside herself, even if on uncomfortable terms. The camera is a microscope, an ambivalent friend.

Whole

As I write this, Deirdre Logue has counted 14,047 pieces of confetti—a dizzying number, to be sure, but she's only halfway through the bag. Her video installation *Rough Count* documents this process, amassing hours upon hours of video of the artist counting aloud. When she reaches the end of the bag, she will begin the process again, re-counting each piece to be sure she got it right the first time, didn't make any errors. Logue will repeat this process until she is satisfied that each piece of confetti is correctly accounted for.

While there is a logical conclusion to this work, Logue belies this possibility by speaking of the project in 'endless' terms. The artist quietly intimates that resolving the numbers is an unlikely prospect; satisfaction is elusive. Indeed, as Logue metes out each piece of confetti, she suggests not accomplishment (as in one step closer to completion), but reticence; each piece laid is another opportunity for error, brings her ever closer to beginning the process over again, to revealing her inevitable mistakes. Nonetheless, this existential crisis—going through the motions despite the certainty that errors will be made, calculations imperfect—is neither defeatist nor sanguine; instead, it suggests cautious resolve at the impossibility of satisfying the self, of inhabiting one's place in the world on simple terms.

While this work is marked by the same exigencies as her prior installations—repetition, limits, self-scrutiny—there is a calmness, a quiet optimism to *Rough Count* absent in the other works. Indeed, if each piece of confetti represents a gesture or action that sustains the self, then the bulk of them are affable, simple; it is a select few that beget hesitation and doubt. The artist will still spin, cathect, worry, but she will control the terms on which that takes place. She will fret as she sees fit. It is as though the artist has learned to stop worrying so much about worrying.

How to be Deirdre Logue

Logue's work isn't really *about* Logue, no matter how tempting it is to speak of it that way. These works are self-portraits, certainly—some more deliberate than others—but they're also mirrors to our own anxieties, to the limits and thresholds that structure our movement through the world. The gaps that Logue marks for us—between inside and outside, language and touch, consciousness and action—are constitutive of a larger field of cultural and social anxieties, not just individual neuroses. The resonance of her work is with a culture of solipsism, rather than solipsism itself.

Logue never does tell us what she worries about, nor does she need to. We have our own worries to worry about, she reminds us. I, for one, still worry about this text.

-Matthew Hyland

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