

Untitled (Street Climbing Performances)

Nancy Popp



Untitled (Street Performances), 2005- 2008 are a series of actions marking specific, identifiable urban landscapes as a means of emphasizing the rupture of proscribed space. The action originated with an experience of extreme urban density in San Francisco in 2004 and the resulting impulse to escape it. From there it evolved into an exploration of the boundaries between public and private and the displacement of a body in relation to signage and architecture. The performance continues the investigations of earlier works examining interior architectural spaces as a metaphor for psychological positions (*Corner, 2007*), traditional gender roles and their limiting impositions, and the confinement of commitment (*Honeymoon 1 and 2, 2004, 2006*).

This performative subversion in an urban environment critiques the hierarchies and boundaries of overly-structured, regulated public space. Questions arise about the legality of the action and whether the street post is public or private property. The body becomes a temporary marker signifying transgression, an attempt to top the hierarchies inherent in the vertical landscape. Butclimbing a street pole is a seemingly ridiculous and pointless act. Its motivation is unclear, private or idiosyncratic. It references protest and activist events but in the absence of expected messages or platforms, seems absurd. In this way it becomes an ancillary gesture, one that does not reinforce the dichotomy of authoritarian control and anarchism but opens another view, a potentially different perspective, a slippage to the side which opens up new space from which to escape the binary of resistance.

The temporary minutes of marking the landscape are extended through video and photographic documentation, both of which are very different from the visceral experience of seeing the live performance and emphasize different qualities of the performance. While photographic documentation invites inspection of the idiosyncrasies in each urban location, video documentation emphasizes the stillness of the action in contrast to the movement of pedestrians and traffic on the street and the physical risk of the performance in real time. The moment of the action is also extended by affixing a vertical bumper sticker with a silhouetted image of a climb to the pole after the performance, serving as a historical place-marker and an extension of the rupture of public space to persons on foot.

The action also references the concept of *Axis Mundi*, a ubiquitous cross-cultural symbol represented by numerous human-made and naturally occurring vertical forms: a tree, a mountain, a cross, a maypole, a skyscraper or steeple. Serving as a vehicle for communication and a meeting point for the four directions, it crosses between religious and secular contexts and links multiple levels of existence to function as a marker for the center of the universe and a repository of knowledge. The symbol holds both masculine and feminine readings and supports the idea of multiple centers of the universe; the action, in its repetition in as many cities around the world as possible, reinforces this rhizomatic multiplicity.

Untitled (Street Performances) has taken various forms (live performance, photo and video documentation, stickers, wall drawings and stencils) and has been exhibited at Crazy Space, Santa Monica, CA; Phantom Galleries, Los Angeles, CA; Southern Exposure, San Francisco, CA; University of Baltimore, MD; the Independent Media Center, Urbana-Champaign, Illinois; PS 122 Gallery at DEMO Space 122, New York, NY and Pilot Projekt, Düsseldorf, Germany, Sea and Space Explorations, Los Angeles, CA; Chapman University, Orange CA; upcoming projects include The Contemporary, Atlanta, GA.

Nancy Popp works with performance, video and photography. Her projects investigate the body as site and sculptural object and the risk and vulnerability of serious play. She has shown with the Art Institute of Chicago, the Armory Center for the Arts, the University of Redlands, the Getty Center and in a variety public sites throughout the United States. She also performs with Corpus Delecti's Butoh Performance Lab and the LA Art Girls. Educated at Art Center College of Design, Pasadena and the San Francisco Art Institute, she lives and works in Los Angeles.