

Theia Connell
flipped grip

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**CREATIVE
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An Urban Choreography of Civic Disobedience

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flipped grip
01.08.18–25.08.18

We spent every lunch and recess of Year 4 hanging from the monkey bars. Bony hips permanently inked with bruises from swinging back and forth with enough momentum to execute the 'double under.' Biting into salad sandwiches and roll-ups infused with the scent of metallic palms. The revered status of anyone who attempted the banned Cherry-Bomb disembark. Then in Year 5 it was 'suggested' that the girls be required to wear P.E shorts to play on the monkey bars. (Lost grip).

The overlay of social conventions upon physical sites can encode or prohibit certain forms of behaviour. As Lefebvre has described, 'space is not a scientific object removed from ideology or politics. It has always been political and strategic. There is an ideology of space. Because space, which seems homogeneous, which appears as a whole in its objectivity, in its pure form, such as we determine it, is a social product.' In *flipped grip*, Theia subverts prescribed ideologies of urban space, and flirts with the edges of decorous civic etiquette through the art of pole-dancing.



In Korea, where Theia filmed these videos, space is at a high premium in a densely populated country. To maximise the efficacy of the available land, specific environments have been constructed to perform isolated functions, e.g. the Noraebang (Karaoke room), Jjimjilbang (bath house), PC-bang (computer rooms), and DVD-bang (movie rooms). A technocratic order coordinates the city, where form follows functions.

In *Spatial Aesthetics*, Nikos Papastergiadis argues that a 'city that is dominated by monofunctionalism – with exclusive boundaries that separate classes, activities and values – is a repressive city.' Theia plays with the limits of this monofunctionalism in the public parks of Seoul, which offer a space for socially sanctioned callisthenics routines, but also offer a pocket of discretionary potential.

flipped grip places the sensual body into a public space. The dancers perform intimate gestures in a metropolitan context, and in doing so, extend the possibilities of civic experience. The gestural vocabulary of the functional exercise objects (swing, twist, turn, push, pull and slide) are reappropriated in an act of subtle transgression. Motions which had previously been encoded as publically appropriate exercise activities are here reconfigured to communicate an alternative function of the body. Sex, in the city.

Stomach roll
Muscle ripple
Point, flex, extend

However, in translating the pole-dancing movements to the sterile playground environment, the actions are stripped of their erotic agency. What remains is an awkward virile athleticism anchored in self-conscious



sexual undertone. Let's get physical, physical. *flipped grip* demands an intimacy from the audience through the spatial orchestration of the video screen, poles and flooring. It is not so much a suggestion of leaning into the work, as a requirement to 'please-lie-down'. Put your ear up close. Like a seashell contains the ocean, the modular pole holds record of the activity to which it has borne witness. Push. Pull. Pant. (Are you blushing? A flush of arousal/the glow of cardio).

In urban sociology, the term 'desire lines' refers to paths organically demarcated by layers of human-footfall. These informal lines materially capture a breach of the socially prescribed path available, as they override landscaped pathways with more direct routes. Academics have described desire lines as 'record of civil disobedience.' In *flipped grip*, Theia similarly captures how intimate bodily movements can be employed to defy the prescriptive routinisation of civic spaces. Desire is inscribed not in lines, but in the mark making choreography of an exercise routine. The parafunctional site/the poetics of the pole.

Miriam McGarry
August 2018

References

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Film credits

Dancers

Jang Hyun Soo
Jasmyn Kim
Hyun Jin Kim
Kyung Min Jeong
Ji Yun Lee

Choreography

Hyun Joo Kang (JK Dance Studio, Hapjeong, Seoul)
with Theia Connell

Videography

Felix Nybergh

Translator and film assistant

Nana Kimhwanhee

Editing

Felix Nybergh with Theia Connell

Theia Connell b. 1990, lives and works in Hobart. She completed a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Melbourne in 2010 (Art History/Anthropology), and in 2014 completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Visual Art) in Sculpture and Spatial Practice at the Victorian College of Arts, University of Melbourne. Theia is currently undertaking her Honours year at the University of Tasmania, where she has received an Arts Honours Scholarship and a Tasmania Honours Scholarship.

Since 2014, Connell has exhibited frequently across Australia and internationally in her capacity as a solo artist, as one half of a collaborative partnership (a form of working she often seeks out) and as a participating artist in curated exhibitions. In 2017 she undertook international residencies in Athens, Greece at the Snehta Residency, and the Republic of Korea, where she was a 2017 Asialink Arts resident at Incheon Art Platform. Connell is Co-Founder and Director of Visual Bulk, an experimental art space in Hobart, and will be participating in the 2018 SITUATE Arts Lab. You can see things at www.theiaconnell.com.

Miriam McGarry is a researcher and writer. She has recently completed a PhD of the impact of Mona (Museum of Old and New Art) on urban regeneration and cultural policy in Hobart. Miriam is currently the arts writer and editor for Chapter House Lane, and has previously been the secretary of Constance ARI.

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