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Interview by Miriam PERIER ²

« My interest shifted to the cameras as representations- of power? Of security? Were they tools or simply gargoyles? I began to view them as architectural ornaments and treated them as such. After bejeweling a set of cameras near my studio, and realizing that before I did so, no one had noticed them who lived/ worked around there, I wanted to push this further. I approached the Amsterdam Headquarters of Police to see if I could jewel the cameras on their façade. They refused to entertain any sort of proposal to work with an artist. So I made myself a company, System Azure, and came back to them with the same proposal. They accepted, and hired me: Jill Magid Head Security Ornamentation Professional of System Azure. My role shifted from performer to installer.³ ».

- 2 C&C: *From what moment ? Through which questions ? Reflections and/or anxiety does a video camera become a tool for art?*
- 3 Jill Magid : I am interested in observation, in new ways of looking, and how the activity of looking changes my perception of the world as well as my position in it. Tools of observation and security systems are pervasive in today's society. I explore how these technologies were designed to be used, and furthermore, how they can mediate the formation of new relationships.
- 4 There are projects I make that incorporate existing surveillance or informational systems (Lincoln Ocean Victor Eddy (L.O.V.E), Evidence Locker, System Azure and those that employ surveillance technology towards their own autonomous and personal systems (The Surveillance Shoe). While the questions I pose within these works are often similar, the scale (and the wider effect) of the work is different.
- 5 When does inclusion or exclusion become a choice? What positions are available, and can new ones be created? Surveillance is complex set of actions and desires, mediated

by various technologies, and pervasive in today's world. I am interested in the technologies themselves, how we use them to shape vision, how they "see" and "remember", what they are capable of- including and beyond the limited scope of their prescribed functions. What happens when security devices are used to understand what it is we actually mean when we say security?

- 6 I believe that observation and concentration are forms of intimacy. Under observation, an object or subject is forever growing. It becomes more complex the further you look. There is a beauty in that, and a sense of connection. While observing, I gain a deeper understanding for what it is that I am looking at, and an awareness of myself as the subject who is looking.
- 7 Imagination and desire play a big role in my work. What happens if I try to hold something that appears to be out of reach? Or attempt to participate in a system that does not include me? What does this distant thing look like up close? If outcomes were clear or knowable from the outset, I would feel no desire to explore them. I am not an artist who has an idea and sets out to prove it. I am interested in process and experience.

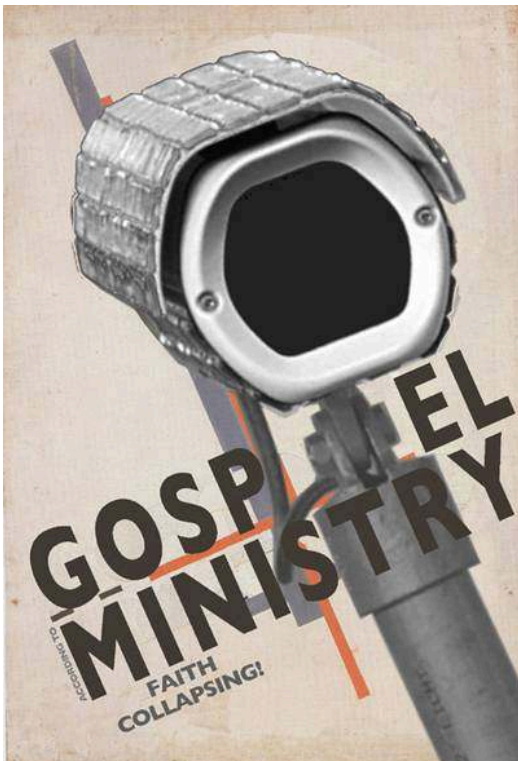
Statements ⁴

"To enter the system I locate the loophole"

"If my subject is too big, I will grow"

"If my subject is out of reach, I'll steal it in a mirror"

"I seek intimate relationships with impersonal structures. The systems I choose to work with function at a distance, with a wide-angle perspective, equalizing everyone and erasing the individual. I seek the potential intimacy of their technologies, the fallacy of their omniscient point of view, the ways in which they hold memory (yet often cease to remember), their engrained position in society (the cause of their invisibility), their authority, their apparent intangibility- and, with all of this, their potential reversibility."



- 8 C&C: Could you explain the genesis of some of the works you cited?

- 9 J.M.: System Azure began as a question: are public surveillance cameras tools to observe and survey space, or are they images: representations of an authority, signifiers of 'safe' spaces? I was curious about the meanings/roles of the cameras, as the visible manifestations of their larger operating systems—including the cameras, recording devices, guards, switchers, other integrated security networks, etc. Was the camera a fetish standing in for the system as a whole (that we imagine is there)? Like a gargoyle, can a surveillance camera be ornamental, an accessory of architecture? If so, how does the architecture to which the camera is affixed inform our perception of it? With my project System Azure *Rhinestoning Headquarters*, I wondered: What is the meaning of, or need for, nine large surveillance cameras on the façade of police headquarters? For this project I was hired by the Amsterdam Police Department as Head Security Ornamentation Professional and CEO of my company, System Azure. I glued fake jewels on the exterior surveillance cameras attached to police Headquarters. The jewels permanently cover their once beige (invisible?) camera housings. In the course of the project, I explored how far the ornamentation process could go, what it could mean for the police to be involved, and what other features of the police security system this action might also make visible.
- 10 In 1924, in his book *Ornament Erziehung*, Adolf Loos wrote :
- “Whenever I abuse the object of daily use by ornamenting it, I shorten its life-span, because then it is subject to fashion, and dies sooner. Only the whim and ambition of women can be responsible for this murder of material—and ornamentation at the service of women will live forever.”⁵
- The System Azur Manifesto
- “While an old Chinese saying claims “When the wise man points to the moon the idiot looks at the finger”, System Azure upholds the reverse: The wise consider the finger.
- Why? Looking at the finger is more interesting. The finger is reality. In considering the finger you consider how moon is being represented. Who is pointing this finger? Toward what is my attention being directed and why should I look there? What does this finger want me to see?
- With these questions in mind one can choose to see as the finger sees, to look at the moon in another way, or to look at something else entirely.
- While your security system is your eye from the inside, it is you finger from the outside. What ring are you wearing?”
- 11 C&C: What about « *The Surveillance Shoe* » ?
- 12 J.M.: Normally, a surveillance camera occupies a fixed position. Even when it can zoom, tilt, or spin, it observes from a singular vantage point. My work creates a very different situation for the security camera by making it mobile. I have displaced the camera from its static position and attached it to a high-heeled shoe.
- 13 The camera and shoe together form an assemblage with the person who wears them. Because the camera cannot, in this position, maintain its function as an autonomous eye, its identity as apparatus is altered. It is now literally and metaphorically tied to the individual who wears it.
- 14 After displacing the surveillance eye from its cool, fixed position, I turn it in on myself. I bestow an intimacy onto the role of the camera that was previously absent.
- 15 In Lobby 7 and Legoland (the video produced by the Surveillance Shoe) I was exploring the CCTV⁶ camera in relation to my body, and my body in relation to the space in which I was occupying. The CCTV camera is in a fixed position; it watches a space. The people move through the space- the camera's field of view – as extras in a film. The

camera thus preferences the space over the people walking through it. The space is a stage, and on that stage, I wondered if I could be an actor, a subject rather than an object of its gaze. I loved the image the camera could produce up close, the soft ambiguous images created, how my body morphed within its vision, how I could not recognize myself and how the space became part of my body. Playing around with these ideas and the cameras I stuck the camera in my sock, pointing up my leg and walked around with it. I could see the output on a small portable LCD screen. I realized that by moving my leg around I could carry space and the city with me, that I could control the buildings- they became mobilized – attached to my body – through the camera. One night I went out into the city and played with the skyscrapers, experiencing the city in a whole new intimate way. I wanted to capture that action, to make it readily available, so I built the camera-shoe. The design of the shoe had this kind of techno-fetish look, inspired by what I was looking at and reading the time of making this work.

- 16 C&C: *Your artwork seems to oppose the general and common (in France, and most probably in other countries as well) police injunction saying “Move along! There is nothing to see!”, by « Let’s move, everything can be captured!”, because everything can be subject of surveillance, because absolutely everything can be seen, including the surveillance tools (cf. System Azure). There is a sort of new education of the sight, the look (Michaux used to say that people in our country have not been correctly taught to look (« l’éducation des regards n’est pas bien faite dans notre pays »...)). Do you agree with this idea of “educating” how people look, observe, see? Is it the case in your work?*
- 17 J.M.: I think all art – whether it is poetry, literature, or visual, points to something in the world and says Look. In the case of my surveillance-related projects, I question the technology, and its output, in ways that may not have been asked before. This is not because of the limitations of the technology, but rather because it was designed with specific intentions that do not include my questions. By using the tool’s latent capabilities and communicating what I experience through it, I invite others to look at (or use) it in a similar way.
- 18 C&C: *Faced to the experience « Surveillance shoe » offers, one feels a little lost, powerless: what is this look without eyes ? This strange sight from the ground, and moving, confronting us to the city, space, and intimacy. If there is a metamorphosis, it seems multiple. Metamorphosis of the objects, functions and attitudes (including yours, as an artist capable of visibilizing what can not be seen with simple eyes). Could you develop your approach and reasoning not only in terms of the tools you used, but also in terms of your personal investment, the strange engagement of an artist in the artwork (concretely)?*
- 19 J.M.: I do not become powerless by attaching a technology such as the surveillance-shoe to my body. I use the conjunction of my body and the camera as a way of experiencing the city anew. I like that initially I do not recognize my body as it appears through the lens of the camera. That walking does not look like walking. I find that if I move in another way, I can affect the city, as it appears on my viewfinder, in previously unseen ways. Even after I remove the shoe, the city persists as a potential playing field. I do not give up my ‘simple’ eyes, but use the camera-shoe to extend them.
- 20 This is not to say that technological augmentation is the only way to create new relationships via observation. “Simple” techniques can be explored towards their own specific and intimate ends. For instance, while researching police observational techniques, I came across a method, called Cognitive Interviewing, which is employed

by the police and FBI in order to illicit information from an eyewitnesses to a crime. Questions are designed to stimulate a witness's memory about a suspect's appearance. According to some sources, with up to 40 percent more accuracy than other police interviewing processes. In the Cognitive Interview, the interrogator asks the witness to slowly recall and verbally describe each unique feature of a suspect's face, from the crown of his head to the tip of his chin. To me, this process contained an erotic potential. Taking the basic structure of the interview, I rewrote it as a request, that I sent to past lovers, to remember my face in detail⁷.

- 21 Methods and technologies of police surveillance and observation use cold, unattached, 'objective' devices to identify, locate and isolate targets. I am attracted to their specificity, authority, and desire for exactitude. Like drawing from life, there is a fineness to their work, dependent upon active looking- not on impression, before analysis or judgement. Ideally, the goal is objective observation of what is present before one's eyes. This kind of looking- with one's eyes or through technologies- can lead to an intimate engagement with a subject. Even when this is not the prescribed function.
- 22 *C&C: What about the city precisely? Your works suppose the city; they couldn't occur in the countryside...They imply and presuppose an urban area and we could even say huge agglomerations. What does the city mean for you? What importance does it have in your approach and work?*
- 23 J.M.: I have made videos in the countryside, at the edge of the city. In *Camera One Wester Park* I explored the mobilized camera- the conjoining of the observer with the camera, so that there is no separation between them. I wondered what would happen if a public surveillance camera could move from its 'omniscient' position to become intimately engaged with a scene it was observing, or had witnessed in the past. The piece begins with a camera at the height and static position of a surveillance camera and then floats down (I used a crane) to recount an event between a couple that happened on this hillside, in its field of view.
- 24 Unlike the fear that someone is always watching (The big brother model) perhaps there is also a fear that no one is watching. The system requires a sense of faith. I find that interesting. And if someone is there, is he or she observing in a deliberate, engaged manner, or through a passive, unaffected gaze? In my film mentioned above, the 'identity' of the camera was in question. There is a conflicting desire to feel watched and be protected and to be 'invisible' and private. I feel this conflict in myself and embrace it within my work.
- 25 It is true that much of the work I make requires the city; it is in the city that I have felt most inspired. For some of the works, I treat the city as a body with its own set of eyes (ie the security cameras). In *Evidence Locker*, the city becomes an enormous stage set with the city's police department as potential filmmakers and cameramen. Cities, rather than open landscapes, can often be more alienating. Everyone is blurred into one field-'the public'; the city is faster, taller, like a force that I, as a single being, can get lost in. I both love this and reject this, and feel a need to bring it closer, to somehow hold it or become held by it. I employ mediating technologies to do this.
- 26 Through my work, I am exploring security and identifying technologies, the systems of which they are part, and the languages used within them and to describe them. My work is not to pull these technologies out from the world, but to focus in on them, to slow down their reception, to create space for their contemplation. As a methodology. I

often take literally the promises they offer. This for example, was the case with *Lincoln Ocean Victor Eddy*- LOVE in police radiotelephony (www.lincoln-ocean-victor-eddy).

27 C&C: *What was this work about ?*

28 This January, I came back to New York after five years of being abroad. I stay in Brooklyn, and take the subway often. I prefer riding at night, when it is quiet. I like to be beneath the city when it's dark. Everyone is in transit, except the officers. I recently approached one and asked him to train me.

29 My practice is research and performance based. I began to accompany this officer on multiple nighttime posts. Our meetings became ritualistic and were structured around the shift. They crossed three city levels: the view from my 5th floor, subletted apartment, his parked car on street level, and the platforms below it. We worked in the following manner: He would arrive half-hour before his nightshift and wait in his car. I would come downstairs and join him in the car, until he went down for his assignment. He would then call me from headquarters with this information before traveling to his post. I'd then take the subway, to his assigned platform, which was different every night. Together on-duty, we'd complete various tasks of the job. He was not sure if he could trust me, and I was not sure if I should trust him. We continued to meet despite this. I offered to take him to see art, in exchange for training me. He agreed to the latter but refused the former. Time, he said, is money. We both kept diaries of our encounters. This text serves as my resource.

30 It is important for me to note that this project arose in an uncalculated manner, out of various personal needs stemming from my feeling of being lost in the city, newly returned, insecure in my personal and work life. My actions were intuitive, without immediate purpose beyond the need to ground myself through an intimate connection to my place and time. The way it unfolded moves beyond this personal incentive to encompass the city and the country-and how it is being run, at this point in time.

31 In the case this project, I put myself once again before the camera as performer. This time I engage the guard directly, during training. Progressing from my previous work, I see some similarities between the officer and the security camera: Like a CCTV camera, the officer is stationary; in uniform he loses individuality; he represents the larger system of power in which he plays a part; as a presence of security he becomes part of the architecture. Unlike the camera, he is not confined to vision alone. He is clearly subjective; he can choose to cut the system short, dealing directly with our relationship before the information returns to the central power of headquarters. Existing within and beyond the system, our relationship exists in a larger field, within and outside of control. In terms of what is recorded, a camera and an officer do not have the same system of retrieval. What is the image/evidence that remains- without the backup of recorded video? How to encompass and communicate beyond straight documentation? This is a challenge for me to express: How to deal with memory and the transgression of our boundaries, the experience of our overlapping subjectivities.

Extracts from *Lincoln Ocean Victor Eddy*^a

p. 3 : « Inside the booth, on the monitor, the trains look beautiful. He says they're black and white but they're not. It's subtle, but they're pink and green and yellow. I love the stability of the cameras and how the trains become colored disks and flares inside them. I ask if I can take the footage. He says no but I know that, eventually, I'll get it.

p. 14 : There are birds in Nostrand Station. Lots of them. They sing loudly and their song fills the station. I can't work out where they come from. They glide along the

ceiling and swoop down onto the platform. The station smells like piss and if full of birdsons.

p. 16 : He is a pure continuum.

p. 19 : For him I am time to be logged, a moment that comes or does not come, with a beginning and an ending, that is gone when I leave this apartment. For me he is constant. He will follow his schedule for at least ten more years. He is my stability and I am his vacillation.

p. 34 : 6 THURSDAY

Adam Boy Charley David Eddy Frank George Henry Ida John King

Lincoln Mary Nora Ocean Peter Queen Robert Sam Thomas Union Victor

William X-ray Yellow Zebra

Dear Officer F,

See you tonight.

Lincoln Ocean Victor Eddy

John Ida Lincoln Lincoln

p. 53 : When he finally sleeps, he goes into his room and turns on the fan. He needs to relax. He cannot relax in a foreign world he would not know where he was and would always be on guard. He needs things to stay as they are. /It's boring/, he knows, but boring is safe.



Rhinestoning Headquarters. Police surveillance cameras ornamented with fake jewels
Installation view, Permanently installed at Amsterdam Police Headquarters, 2002.



Surveillance Shoes
high heels, surveillance camera, wireless transmitter, 2000.

Legoland
Video made by Surveillance Shoe,
5 min, 2000.

NOTES

1. For further information on the artist and her work, see: <http://www.jillmagid.net/Home.htm>
2. With the collaboration of Antonia García Castro et and Estelle Durand. The French version of this article was published in Cultures & Conflits, 66, pp. It is also available on the journal's website: www.conflits.org.
3. About « System Azure », see <http://www.jillmagid.net/Home.htm>
4. These sentences are taken from Jill Magid's website : <http://www.jillmagid.net/Home.htm>
5. Loos A., « Ornement et éducation », *Malgré tout*, Paris, Ivrea, 1979.
6. A CCTV camera is a professional surveillance camera.
7. See Composite, 2005 : <http://www.jillmagid.net/Composite.htm>
8. Extracts of the novel by Jill Maggid are available at: <http://www.lincoln-ocean-victor-eddy.net/Novella/>

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Jill Magid is a visual artist working with a variety of media, including literature, video, sculpture and performances. She is currently a resident artist at Eyebeam in New York City and teaches Design Prototyping at Parsons The New School. Jill Magid teaches a sculpture class at Cooper Union.