

MONITORING DESIRE

by

Jill S. Magid

Bachelor of Fine Art
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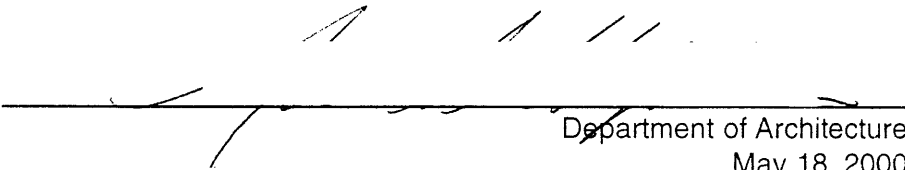
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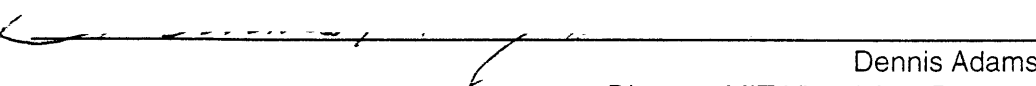
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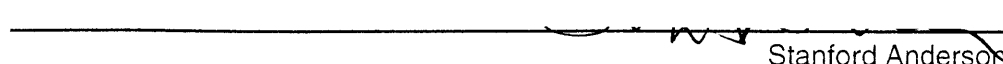
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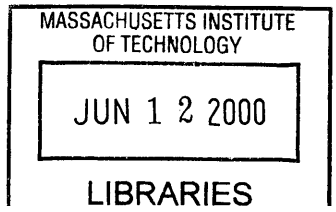
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Signature of Author:  Department of Architecture
May 18, 2000

Certified by:  Dennis Adams
Director, MIT Visual Arts Program
Professor of Visual Arts
Thesis Supervisor

Accepted by:  Stanford Anderson
Professor of History and Architecture
Chairman, Departmental Committee for Graduate Students



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Submitted to the Department of Architecture
On May 18, 2000 in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

My thesis project consists of producing and wearing a system of self-surveillance that has been subversively inserted into an already existing informational and electronic system. By bringing surveillance technology closer in and attaching it to the body, I have been able to personalize a form of technological mirroring through which subjectivity and the body are reconstructed. Inside the field of view of this reconfigured vision, the wearer/user is open to create and explore the erotic formation of fluid identities and their potential transgressive relationships.

Monitoring Desire was a performance at Harvard University's Science Center that, through a guerrilla act of appropriation, captured the image on the Center's informational monitor. The act of capture was performed by two women and took place within and between the Center's first floor and lower level lobbies. Components utilized within the performance consisted of a high-heeled shoe with a built-in surveillance camera and transmitter, the Center's informational monitor, and the monitor's remote control device.

The image produced by the camera on the shoe assimilated an abstracted view up the wearer's skirt with the surrounding architecture. This image was transmitted from the wearer downstairs to the second performer upstairs by way of the Science Center's informational monitor. The real-time video image mediated communication between both the performers and the spectators located on the separate floor levels.

In the course of this performance, our bodies, as reconfigured through our surveillance apparatus, came to effect our subjectivities as they were presented in public space. Through the act of hijacking the informational monitor, we performed our power to publicly re-present ourselves back into the space in which we were occupying.

Thesis Supervisor: Dennis Adams
Title: Professor of Visual Arts

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Chapter 1. THE SURVEILLANCE CAMERA

Reconstructing Representation

Through the investigation of various forms of self-representation, an individual subject forms a repertoire of personal identities. A fluid exploration of these identities enables the individual subject to experience spatial and interpersonal relationships in manifold ways.

I believe there is both a psychological and political value in reconstructing one's representation with the aid of technological systems. In this thesis, I will be presenting a system of self-representation generated by my appropriation of surveillance technology. Within this system that begins with the surveillance camera and ends with the monitor, the body stands in the center as both object and subject. Any body stepping into this intermediary position goes through the same morphology- is subject to the same disorienting vision. In this system, the body becomes something unfamiliar, is represented by an alien perspective, and plays with a new set of spatial laws.

The Role of the Camera

Surveillance cameras and other surveillance apparatus have become ubiquitous fixtures within public, institutional, and even many private settings. We rely on them to secure our safety, maintain appropriate behavior, or guard against violation of the law. So accustomed are we to the integration of this technology within our environment that we have become habituated to it. Moreover, we unconsciously prepare ourselves for its capture.

The specific type of surveillance camera I am using in the performance is referred to as a lipstick or bullet camera in surveillance jargon because of its shape and size. Designed to be discreet, the camera I have selected is sleek with a wide field of view. In my work, the bullet camera functions on two levels: as material and as tool. As material, the camera gets incorporated into fashion as a wearable accessory. As tool, the camera offers me a way to see the body in a new perspective.



Example of typical bullet camera. SuperCircuits Catalogue. p.21

The Camera As Body Accessory

Surveillance Cameras conventionally occupy a stationary position. From a fixed point, they monitor the space in which they have been installed. 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. 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.

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. Within this action I am able to redefine the manner in which it captures me, or more appropriately, the manner in which I capture myself. Through this appropriation I transform a system of security and disciplinary maintenance into a situation of pleasure and empowerment.

My system necessitates a screen through which the image can be publicly viewed. Who sees the image, what portion of the space is high-lighted through it, the social and architectural context of the monitor, and the performers proximity to it strongly effect the performance's reading. Therefore, a major part of my work involves finding an appropriate location for my system to work within.

Chapter 2. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Monitoring Desire was a performance that entailed the subversive insertion an autonomous system of surveillance into an already existing informational and electronic system. This guerrilla act, staged in Harvard's Science Center over the span of two floor levels, brought up questions around surveillance and its relationship to technological capture, representation, and the reconfiguration of the body. The following section describes in detail the site and performance outline.



Science Center, Harvard University. Main Ramp leading into first floor lobby.

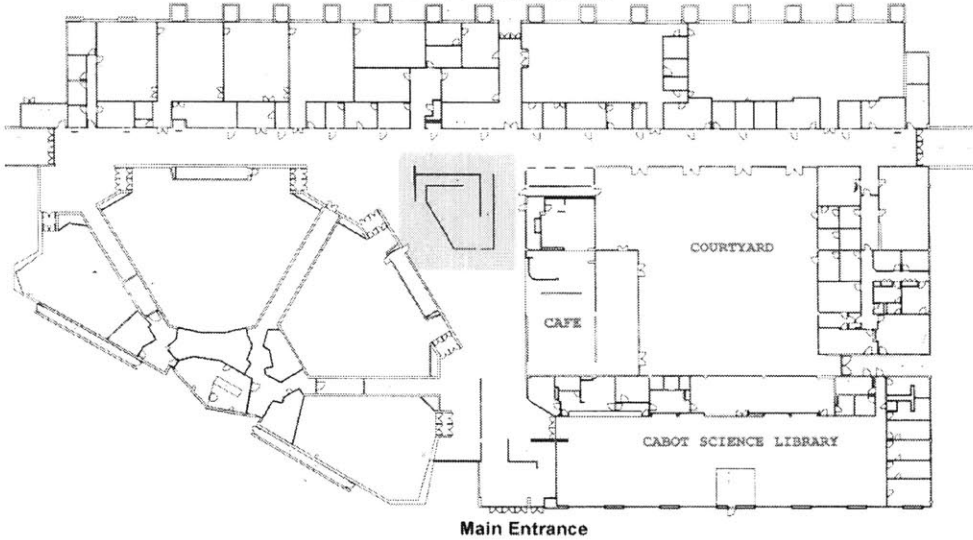
Site: The Science Center, Harvard University

Entering the Science Center one is channeled through a long ramp into a main lobby. At the end of the ramp, central to the lobby, is a large video monitor suspended a few feet above eye level. This monitor functions as an informational bulletin board for daily events around campus. Located beneath the video monitor is a computer workstation. By their close proximity, the monitor and workstation together function as a central informational space within the Center. The lobby space before the monitor is thus a natural space of congregation.

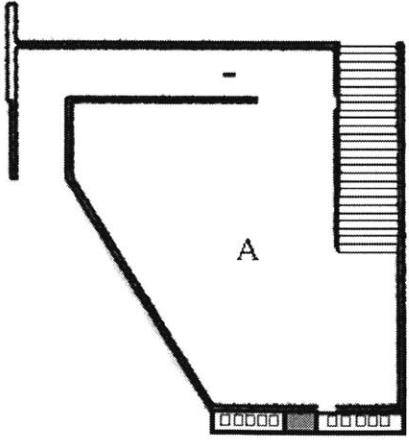
The channel-like entranceway of the Center is flanked on the right by the main cafeteria of the building and on the left by a large lecture hall. Directly behind the monitor and the computer station is an atrium that opens up from the basement below the lobby to the second

floor. A balcony encircles this atrium so that from all angles of the lobby one can look down into the recessed space. The recessed space is like a smaller lobby that is surrounded by computer labs and classrooms. These labs and classrooms have very large windows that look out into the central room.

**SCIENCE CENTER
FIRST FLOOR
Site of Performance**



Plan of Science Center provided by Center's Building Facilities Dept.



View over the balcony to lower lobby.

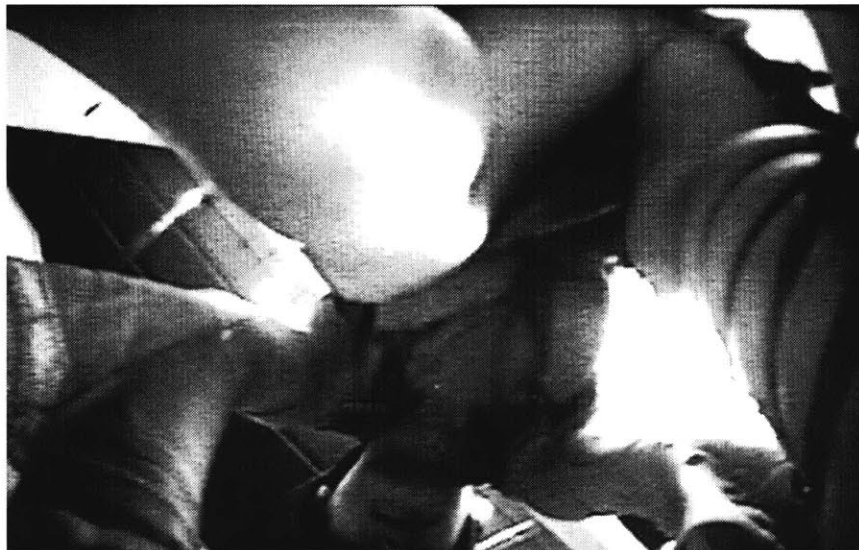
monitor ————— B

- Main Lobby and Lower Lobby of Science Center.
- Position A**= Performer wearing shoe-camera
Site of shoe-camera exchange.
- Position B** = Performer viewing monitor with remote control.

Capturing the Monitor



The change of the channels. Top: Harvard's regular broadcast. Below: Our transmitted image from the camera-shoe.



Outline of Action for Performance

1. My performance partner and I enter through the Science Center's main door. I wear the camera-shoe; she carries the remote control for the video monitor.
2. She stops in front of the monitor. I continue to the stairs.
3. I take my place at the top of the stairs.
4. She switches the monitor with the remote control to the channel of my transmission.
5. I begin my descent down the stairs.
6. She watches the images I am transmitting on the monitor for around 5 minutes.
7. She leaves the monitor and walks down the stairs.
8. She approaches me.
9. We walk around each other for a short time.
10. We stop. She bends down to undo my battery pouch (the leather straps around my ankle)
11. I take off her shoe; she takes of my camera-shoe.
12. For a moment, the shoe lies immobile between us.
13. We exchange the shoes. I help her put on the camera-shoe; she helps with me the other shoe.
14. She gives me the remote control.
12. We look at each other and separate.
13. I walk up the stairs
14. I watch her image on the monitor for the same amount of time that she watched me.
15. I turn off the video transmission. It goes back to the normal Harvard Broadcast.
16. I walk away from the monitor and pass the balcony.
17. She sees me and we both exit in the same way, on different floors.

The System of Transmission

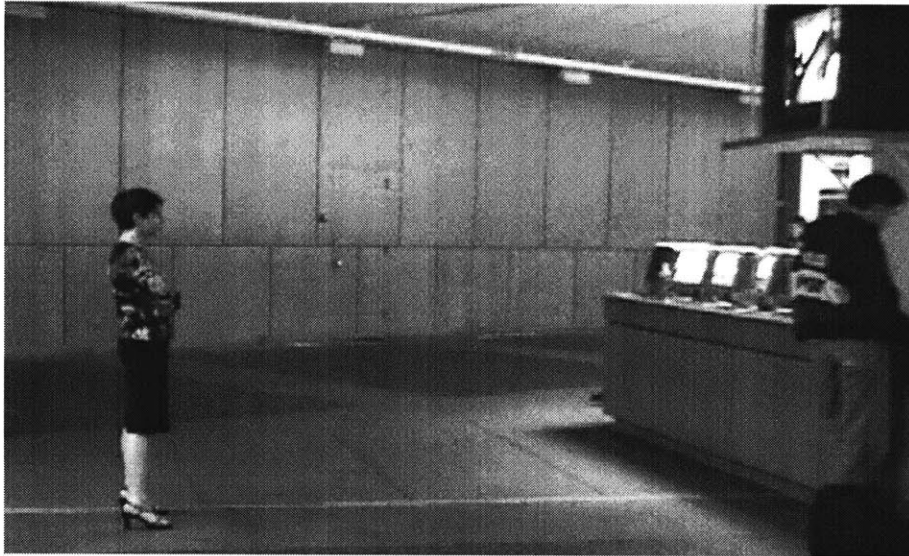
Our transmission of the video image to an open channel on the monitor was a guerrilla act. By inserting our autonomous surveillance system into the space of the lobby, we were able to explore our power to control it.

The system technically functions in the



Monitor. With transmitted image.

following manner: The surveillance camera is wired directly to the video transmitter, both located on the shoe. The video signal is sent from the transmitter to an open video channel on the monitor. The input for this channel, located on the back of the monitor, has been connected to a video receiver before the time of the performance. With the remote control device, ordered by taking the monitor's model number, we were able to control which transmission (ours or Harvard's) would be displayed on the screen.



Performer watching in main lobby.

Waiting

My performance partner watches the video monitor in the main lobby. Downstairs in the lower lobby, I wait. I move about the center of the space, conscious of how the surveillance camera might be capturing me. We as physical subjects are not visible to one another. The periods of our waiting and anticipation bracket the pivotal moment of our exchange of the shoes.

Physical Details of the Exchange

The leather encased battery pack is attached by leather straps to the wearer's calf. Because the act of switching shoes is central to the performance, I have added to the pack extra straps and buckles as a way of prolonging the time of the exchange. These additions also give more time for the performers to occupy the screen together. The



Watching the image as its being transmitted from below.

images formed through gestures of buckling and unbuckling of the shoe are some of the most visually disturbing of those produced. Here, our bodies are most exaggerated by the warped perspective. We come in and out of the frame in dynamic ways and intertwine with one another's bodies in strange yet intimate patterns. We reach around each other's feet and calves to aid one another with the donning of the shoes. At a critical moment in the middle of the exchange, the camera-shoe lies immobilized on the floor between us. Up until this point, a body had continually occupied the central axis of the image. With the shoe off, we temporarily sacrifice our control of the frame; the camera regains some of its autonomy. Still, even in this detached position, the lofty view of the autonomous surveillance eye is not fully recovered for we stand above it. Looking down from above, we will always appear somewhat heroic.



Video still. The shoe sitting between us.

Still, even in this detached position, the lofty view of the autonomous surveillance eye is not fully recovered for we stand above it. Looking down from above, we will always appear somewhat heroic.

Conventional Viewing Disrupted

Our bodies as transmitted through our surveillance system become reconfigured in space. Because the wearer of the shoe is always downstairs, out of the monitor's view, her 'reconfigured' bodily construction is always invisible to her. In the Science Center, the video image of my body and my physical presence are displaced from one another. The spectators have a choice: they can either watch me unmediated by the surveillance camera downstairs or can view my virtual image in the monitor upstairs. The closest connection to seeing both positions at once is to look at my performance partner watching the monitor and imagine that she is a kind of stand-in for me. Or, later, that I am a stand in for her.

This performance is structured around two women who are enjoying watching one another. This model of pleasure does not fit the dominant heterosexual construction of looking and viewing. The reading of the performance as being potentially for two women, between two woman, or designed by two women problematizes the spectator's possibly conventional notions of gender relations.

Bonding Through Representation

Through the mediation of technology I have produced a system of representation with its own internal language. This language is structured through images. By watching the monitor at the beginning of the performance, my performance partner observes my actions and learns which movements create interesting visual distortions. We are, in a sense, composing pictures on the monitor for each other and for the other spectators. In this language of images, we may not be giving new meaning to the body as much as we are formulating new questions around it.

The shared ability we as performers have in this system to represent ourselves through our own specific, visual language forms a bond between us. By giving my partner the camera-shoe, she becomes an active 'speaker' of this language. While she speaks through her image to all of the spectators before the monitor, I feel a special link to her by having experienced the same form of representation. I identify with her image on the monitor, but I moreover identify with her behind the image for I have shared with her the camera-shoe and, therefore, the capacity to produce these images. In a sense, we speak without hearing ourselves; in a kind of sacrifice, we must experience these images through the production of the other for we are never afforded the image of ourselves. We speak, by way of our distorted images, to one another, continually fulfilling the other's desire to watch, experience, transmit and receive our shared visual language. In the moment of the camera-shoes' exchange, we leave it open to the other spectators to hear/see what we are saying.

Chapter 3. Looking, Spectatorship, and Gazing

"...the spectator's desire to see inside the closed space is inevitably aroused. And according to the logic of the masculine/feminine distributions of the voyeuristic drive, our expectation is that the man is peeping at a scene in which a woman is the spectacle" ¹



The approach down the stairs, toward the exchange.

Investigations on questions of who is looking, the meaning of that look, and how the activity of looking itself reflects and reinscribes heterotopic notions of subjectivity have been critical issues within feminist studies since the early 1970's. Inquiries into gender and specifically the position of the male versus the female spectator are central to these discussions. In my work, the analysis of spectatorship through male and female roles is sidestepped- even overshadowed- by a more intimate exploration of the possible relationships one woman can form with another woman on, or through, the screen.

¹ Mulvey, Laura. " Pandora: Topologies of the Mask and Curiosity" *Sexuality and Space*. p.57

The term 'active looking' implies a subject who looks and an object that is passively looked at. Active looking, as it has been applied to film theory, has been defined as the prerogative of the male in which the female is the object of his look. As film spectators, women are said to either identify with the male's active look, by way of a lesbian desire, or to occupy a position of narcissistic identification, meaning the female spectator identifies with the woman on screen and thus wants to insert herself in her place, as the object of his gaze.



above: Second performer with camera-shoe. To the right: Performer upstairs watching her through the monitor.



In my performance, my partner and I activate looking in a manner outside of these prescribed positions; we use the act of looking to intimately communicate between one another. While performance implies and arguably requires a performing and a viewing subject, our performative system layers the two: We are both performers *and* viewers. Furthermore, through this layering, multiple positions in between viewer and performer arise: We perform for one another; we rotate our roles; we perform together. We disturb any inscribed belief that looking, or voyeuristic desire, is specifically a male attribute.

While I have an overall interest in locating new ways of seeing the body and its multiple positions in space, I am specifically interested in the reconfiguration of women's bodies. Women and their bodies have long been associated with concealment and issues of privacy. There exist numerous metaphors of 'the woman as secret' or the hiding of her sex like a secret. These metaphors function to reinscribe the conventional and related dichotomies of man/woman, outside/inside, public/private. "Enigmas and secrets generate the image of closed hidden spaces which generate in turn the divided topography of inside and outside"².

² Mulvey, Laura. "Pandora: Topographies of the Mask and Curiosity." *Sexuality and Space*. p.58

The dichotomies of outside/inside and public/private are problematized in *Monitoring Desire*. The view from the shoe up the skirt captures the inside (of the skirt) and the outside (surrounding environment) within a singular warped space. The distortions that describe this space are created by the camera's placement and through its fish-eyed lens. With these two factors, I am exploring a reconfiguration of the body that is less about pornography or the making of erotic images as it is about constructing new perceptions of the female body. Capturing the view up my skirt, one would expect a series of erotic images. Yet, much of the images' titillating effect is dampened by the disturbing sensations produced through their distortions. One leg appears to be lame, making the body handicapped. Body parts appear



larger than usual, such as legs and hands as we reach down towards the camera. Standing straight up at the furthest point from the camera, our heads and faces seem like little balloons at the end of a string.



I am interested in the activity of seeing my body and other bodies go through a metamorphosis by way of this capturing apparatus. The camera, as we know, is not an objective eye but an eye with its own distorting practices. To morph my body through the body of the camera is a gesture with erotic potential. To look at and perceive the body in an unfamiliar manner is not only to activate looking but to realize the body under view is also acting upon you.

Video Stills from exchanging the shoe.

Chapter 4. Intersubjectivity

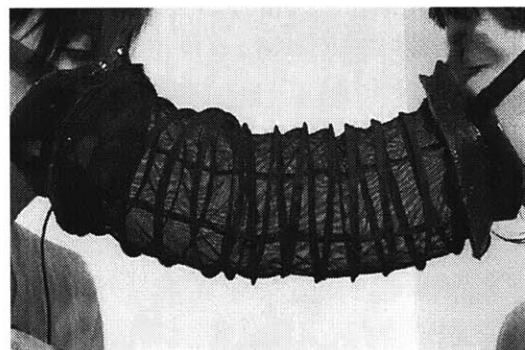
The capacity to enter into states in which distinctiveness and union are reconciled underlies the most intense experiences of adult erotic life. In erotic union we can experience that form of mutual recognition in which both partners lose themselves in each other without loss of self; they lose self consciousness without loss of self awareness.³

In Jessica Benjamin's book entitled The Bonds of Love I have found a way to interpret the kinds of interpersonal relationships I am attempting to generate through performances. I am particularly drawn to her theories on Intersubjectivity as a means to describe the pleasurable feeling of recognizing oneself through another and opening oneself for another to do the same.

Related Project: The Kissmask

In the following sections I will discuss Intersubjectivity in relation to *The Kissmask*, a project I completed in 1999. The *Kissmask* was designed and used as a way to initiate a first kiss between two women. This project inaugurated my investigation on the possibilities of creating intimate relationships between two performers through the incorporation of a technological system. This initial exploration led directly to my thesis work.

The desire to make myself visible to myself through another woman led me to create the *Kissmask*. The *Kissmask*, which is actually two separate masks connected by a tube, was



Video Stills from *The Kissmask* project. 1999.

³ Benjamin, Jessica. The Bonds of Love. p.28

designed to be worn by two women simultaneously. The connecting tube functions by isolating the women's mouths and noses in an effort to capture the heated space of breath between them. The women, situated face to face by the design, appear like mirror reflections of one another.

The Insertion of Technology

A microphone sewn into the tube of the *Kissmask* recorded all of the conversation, breathing, and kissing that occurred inside. It is through these recordings that I have chosen to define and exhibit the piece. I thus emphasize the role of the tube as being a space of technological capture.

Both the *Kissmask* and the thesis performance construct situations in which two women form an intimate relationship involving a system of technological capture: The *Kissmask* captures sound while the appropriated surveillance system in *Monitoring Desire* captures images. While both systems incorporate the act of capture, the technological system used in *Monitoring Desire* compounds capture with the function of transmission. It was through this two-part process of capture and transmission that the performer's relationship in the thesis performance was developed. I am thus defining the difference between these two performances and their respective relationships by how active a role technology played within them. While the microphone sewn into the *Kissmask* functioned to simply record the women's intimate communication, the apparatus used within *Monitoring Desire* played a formative role in its development. In *Monitoring Desire*, the transmitted video signal thus replaces the physical tube of the *Kissmask* as the connecting material between the performers. Here, performers relate through virtual, abstracted bodies rather than by way of physical contact. Moreover, as a wireless system of capture and transmission, the apparatus in *Monitoring Desire* allows for the unhindered movement of performers within the site of the performance. With the replacement of the tube for an electronic signal, the performance expands spatially to include not only the space between the performers but also the surrounding environment.

From Alienation to Eroticism

With the *Kissmask* and my thesis work I am instigating a process that entails a movement between zones of alienation and eroticism. I begin with placing the women in a space of alienation where they (through masks or abstracted video images) are made strange to themselves. As alienated and unrecognizable, the women come to understand one another through the device that constitutes their mutual strangeness.

Chapter 5. The Exchange of the Shoe

The entire performance of my thesis is constructed around the exchange of a single camera-shoe. The social, political, and psychological implications of this exchange will be addressed in this section.



Performers help each other exchange the shoe in the lower lobby space.

The materials of the exchange are the two right shoes from two identical pairs of high heels. The right shoe from one of the pairs has been modified by the attachment of a 2 "x 1/3" ccd color camera in a black housing. This thin, tubular camera (referred to as a lipstick camera in surveillance jargon) is mounted on a pivot joint that juts out perpendicularly from the shoe less than an inch from the ankle. Its orientation is vertical with the lens pointing upwards, parallel to the wearer's leg. On the sole between the heel and toe a transmitter is fixed which measures less than an inch square. This transmitter attaches to the lipstick camera through a wire along



The camera-shoe assemblage.

side the shoe and is responsible for sending the video signal to the receiver next to the monitor in the lobby. The battery for the transmitter is attached to the heel. A battery pack for the camera is strapped to the wearer's calf. The pack connects to the shoe through a thin black wire running up the back of the leg, referencing the linear stitch detail of certain kinds of hosiery. The battery pack is concealed by a sewn leather casing inspired by fetish-wear designs. I have utilized this kind of design for the eroticism implicit in this style of dress, issues of control and discipline made apparent through its SM associations.

Techno-fetishism

By techno-fetishism I mean a kind of overvaluation of technology. As it relates to my performance, this type of fetishization would become visible as the performer's desire for the apparatus, for the camera-shoe itself. Her desire for the camera-shoe would thus appear as a purely aesthetic one. By desiring the shoe's *look* only, she unconsciously denies or conceals the social, political and psychological processes that the donning of the shoe necessarily involves. By fetishizing the camera-shoe in this way, as a seductive object with technological powers, the performer unconsciously separates the object of the camera-shoe from its social function.

Running parallel with this techno-fetish desire is the desire to become unified with the technology. Humans can erotically meld with machines to form complex subjectivities. The union of person and machine defines the Cyborg subject.

Cyborgs

By way of the appropriated surveillance apparatus, we the performers project a series of distorted body images through the Science Center's monitor. Disturbing in the sense of their abstractions, the images force us and the other spectators to reconsider our bodies and our changing identities. What is my body when it is projected in this way? Who am I in this position, from this perspective? As for the cyborg subject: "on the one hand, it participates in a decentering of traditional subjectivity, of the metaphysics of presence, of the organic or essential identity of the body; on the other, it offers a physical and bodily experience of what some feminists call strategic subjectivities."⁴ The cyborg subject has the ability to experience difference without opposition, to reject a science of origins, and to enable the experience of overlapping subjectivities. The opportunity to explore these overlapping identities in relation

⁴ Gray and Mentor. Prosthetic Territories. p.229.

to the system of the performance arises with the exchange of the shoe. Through the exchange, not only is the shoe transferred but, so is the social, political, and psychological processes the wearing of the shoe entails. The exchange thus effects our identities; we absorb aspects of one another's in the reformation of our own.

To be human today is to be totally intertwined with technology, specifically with the technology of image-capture. I am exploring this captured space under the eye of surveillance as a platform for the formation of new identities. In the performance, we as performers realize the potential of our appropriated surveillance technology to function as a vehicle for our empowerment. We chose to step into the line of this appropriated vision in order to frame ourselves differently; In doing so, we represent ourselves as gigantic and present the space around us as literally tied to our movements. Our bodies, as represented in this manner, are then reconstituted back into the space of the Science Center through the video monitor. With the ability to reconstitute myself, I enjoy the power of self-representation. As Donna Haraway points out, "cyborgs can take pleasure in machine skill and thus have embodied reasons not to demonize it in favor of some mythical organic origin or unity."⁵ She implies that cyborgs see technology and their own intimate/organic relationship with technology as a freeing or empowering quality which enables them to perform the everyday. It is the quality of having an "intimate knowledge of their boundaries"⁶ which allow cyborgs to fluidly occupy the technological world we live in. Acutely aware of their cyber-bodies, they are able to continually reconstruct themselves through and in relationship to the changing boundaries within the technology of everyday life and its networks of power. If "our bodies are maps of power and identity" than cyborgs offer a new map, a new way to conceive of power and identity...".⁷ Within our performance in the Science Center my performance partner and I give each other the possibility of being subjects with changing identities. By giving her the camera-shoe, I am passing on the identity-potential the shoe defines. I am not saying that the shoe makes the person, but I am saying that the donning of the shoe sets into motion a transformation within the wearer. The woman who wears the shoe-camera is immediately in a position of exposure and technological abstraction. From her experience watching me on the monitor upstairs, my partner is aware that through the exchange it is now she who is being broad

⁵ Gray and Mentor. "The Cyborg Body Politic and the New World Order". *Prosthetic Territories*. p230

⁶ Donna Haraway, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1980's". p.125, as quoted by Gray and Mentor.

⁷ Haraway, p.125

cast. She becomes conscious of this new identity by altering her bodily movements, by performing herself for the camera.

With the camera-shoe and its power to transmit, the wearer is not only in a position of being looked at but also in a position of being looked *through*. In putting herself in the line of capture, she becomes the screen between the camera and the projected image. Her representation is transformed through the monitor. One of the paradoxes of this exchange is that, by putting on the shoe, the wearer is given simultaneous power and vulnerability. The power exists as her ability to capture and publicly re-present herself anew. Her vulnerability surfaces through her exposure. To be in both situations simultaneously suggests an erotic position.

Transferring Identities



The remote control device being exchanged for the shoe.

I would call this exchange more of a transfer than a ritualized act of gift giving. A traditional reading of the gift, as found in anthropological discourses, involves the use of ritual to re-constitute fixed identities. In this sense, giving is not about social transgression but rather about stabilizing social boundaries by making them visible.

However, this exchange can be thought of as a gift in another sense. Instead of confirming fixed social identities, the giving of a gift can allow for their transference. The giving of a gift could thus function as a way in which to offer another person an aspect of one's identity, or likewise, to absorb from someone else an aspect of his or her identity. This process of overlapping identities through the act of giving, or receiving, a gift opens up the possibility of forming erotic relationships. The eroticism of this kind of gift giving thus lies in its potential to transgress social boundaries and to formulate new transgressive relationships.

The system of our performance enables us, as performers, to try on different identities and to share aspects of our identities with one another. We explore different positions within the system as we move through its prescribed course. This course is structured around a circular, time-based motion. Through our movements within the space, we complete a circle, both spatially and metaphorically. I complete the movement of the system before the monitor where my performance partner began; she completes it in the lower lobby. The fluctuations of our positions within the space also effect our identity-positions. To move through this circle over the course of the performance is to welcome the different roles afforded by each position. We make one revolution around the exchange. Time is tracked through real time video imaging on the monitor. We take turns watching this performance unfold upon the monitor. In a sense, we are the time-keepers (the ones controlling the beginning and end of transmission) around the origin and completion of the circular motion. It is only at the point of the exchange when time becomes invisible to us.

The exchange is the only portion of the performance that neither my partner nor I are watching the monitor. This moment exists as a kind of bracketed space in which neither one of us is the position of voyeur. We are no longer performing for one another. We exist as completely inside of the performance, temporarily blind to the image produced through the mediating apparatus. The position of first spectator before the monitor is relegated, or transferred, to those watching. Perhaps one could argue that here, within the bracketed space, is where the gift truly lies.

The people within the Science Center who have located themselves as spectators before the monitor watch our exchange as we cannot. Because the technologically mediated performance is, at this point, for them only, they become more aware of their necessitated participation as viewers within the spectacle. Their position is undeniably part of the prescribed system of the performance. During the movement of the performance they, like us, occupy fluid positions: Initially, with my partner before the monitor, they exist as secondary spectators; during the exchange, they are the first and only spectators.

For us as performers, the mediation of the technology and how we are being captured during the exchange is based on memory. We can imagine how we may appear on the monitor upstairs by our knowledge of our system, and by having watched what the other looks like in that frame. We perform based on that memory for our viewers.

As part of our own prescribed system, we explore new positions and eventually within the act of exchange meet one another in the erotic participation of a singular position. Our system is not one of constituting or validating a singular identity. We do not use one another to reflect an identity back onto ourselves.

The exchange between us removes the element of ownership from identity by making identity fluid. Identity, in a constant state of flux, is passed around- passed from one to the other and could keep going if someone else then took the shoe from her. The ability to feel "held" within this transference is due to the existence of the system itself- the system of the performance which functions as a transitional space for the exchange to occur. The bond we share is that of being within the same system. Within this system we are free to move and explore possible experiences linked with each position.

Social Mediation Through Video

In 1970, artist Dan Graham performed a piece entitled *Body Press* that dealt with the social mediation of video capture. The performance of *Body Press* was constructed around two performers, a male and a female, who stood back to back in a mirrored cylinder. Each performer pressed a video camera against his or her own body. They then rotated the camera around their respective bodies in a spiralling fashion beginning with the feet and then moving up until eye level was reached, at which point the cameras were exchanged behind them. The process then resumed, this time down the body.



Body Press. Dan Graham. 1972
Pavilions. p.34

The orientation of the images produced in *Body Press* depended on the contour of the performer's body. In this work and other related ones, Graham described his interest in showing the spectator the optical vantage of the skin.⁸ Through the performance, we the spectators are made aware of the tension between the camera's eye and body and the performer's eye and body.

⁸ Graham, Dan. Pavilions. p.20

Video, says Graham, "is a present time medium."⁹ From 1970 on, he explored video as a conductor of images, occurring in real time, to communicate between one viewer and another, between the viewer and his delayed image, and/or between one space and another space.

In *Body Press*, the camera functions as an autonomous eye. In contrast, my thesis work the camera becomes more of a prosthetic device. Graham uses the camera as a device for recording the body, what the skin might see if it had eyes moving in spirals along its surface.

⁹ *ibid.* p34

Chapter 6. THE GULLIVER EFFECT

The human body has been used throughout history as a primary unit of measurement. How we approach architecture and the way in which we use objects rely heavily on the scale of our bodies in relation to them. By representing objects in a different scale, such as gigantic or in miniature, one can have the power to disturb the conventional ways in which this object is viewed. Disturbances in scale can be disorienting, even horrific, in their unfamiliarity.

In Jessica Morgan's "the Poetics of Uncovering"¹⁰, the author discusses the psychological and metaphysical associations made through the representation of objects as gigantic. While the representation of an object in miniature feels whole, an object represented as gigantic appears to be a *part* of the whole.



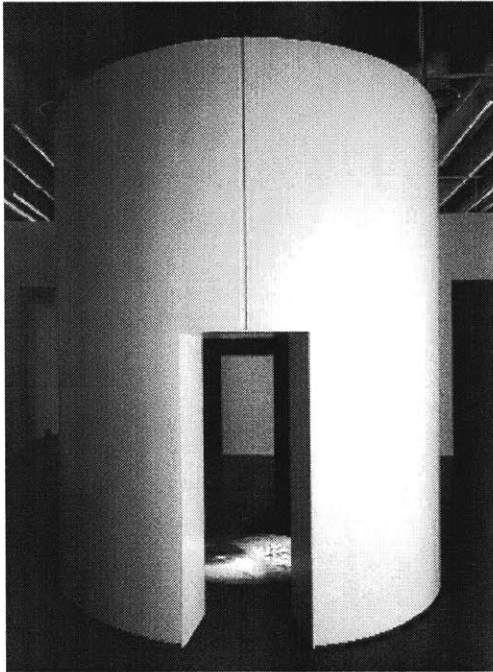
Video Still. View from camera-shoe in the lower lobby.

As gigantic, the object defies representation in its totality. Unable to view the entirety of something, we cannot fully recognize its form and are thus left to complete it in our imagination or to remain alienated it.

Playing with the body as a gigantic object is a tactic made available to me through the lens of the surveillance camera. Due to its fish-eye lens and placement on the shoe, the surveillance camera alters the scale and proportion of the body. The wearer appears as a gigantic

¹⁰ Morgan, Jessica. "The Poetics of Uncovering", Mona Hatoum. p.1

form in a warped perspective. The transformation of bodily scale in the video image are in continual flux. As body parts move closer or farther from the lens they become abstracted in unpredictable ways. The strange changes of my gigantic physique disturb any conventional representation of my body.



Corps Etranger. Mona Hatoum. 1994.
Catalogue Image.

The Foreign Body

Representing the body in an unfamiliar way allows us to examine it in a new light. This was a tactic that the artist Mona Hatoum explored in her piece *Corps Etranger* (1994). In this video installation she offers the body in parts rather than as a whole.

Corps Etranger stood in the gallery as a cylindrical pavilion. On the floor of this narrow pavilion was a projection consisting of a series of entries, penetrations, and resurfaces of the artist's body through her orifices. Projected as larger than life, the shiny, wet surfaces and interiors of her body fragments evoked uncomfortable, possibly threatening feelings within the viewers.

These passages within the viscera of the body were pre-recorded. We are never afforded an image of her body as whole, nor do we feel her specifically as the subject. So close up, this body could be anybody's body. In my performance, the physical presence of the performers does not allow them to control their privacy or anonymity. The viewer must constantly negotiate between the actual person in the space and the technologically mediated person on screen. For me, if Mona Hatoum's images in *Corps Etranger* had been projected in real time, if she had been in the next room receiving the endoscopy, the piece would have taken on an entirely new meaning and a greater intensity.

This kind of live camera work had appeared in her earlier works, for example in *Don't Smile, You Are On Camera* done in 1980, a piece I find more akin to my own investigations on the body. In this live performance, an audience faced a large monitor. The artist walked amongst the audience while closely scanning its member's bodies with a video camera. The images

taken by the camera appeared on the large monitor overlaid with another simultaneously occurring series of images. These other images were being taken by a camera in a room out of sight where in two people scanned each other's naked bodies. Audience members watched as their clothed bodies meshed with bare skin, naked breasts, shoeless feet, etc. They would experience perhaps a feeling of transparency by being physically clothed yet represented as exposed through another's image.

In my performance, *Monitoring Desire*, my partner and I project another kind of transparency. Where we appear as "properly" dressed or concealed by our clothing in the physical space, we are exposed in the virtual image on the monitor.

Chapter 7. MECHANIZING THE BODY

In his video work, artist Gary Hill uses the body as a sculptural object. I am interested in how, in the following work, Hill has mechanized the body with surrogate eyes. In the following section, I will discuss this piece in relation to my own work.

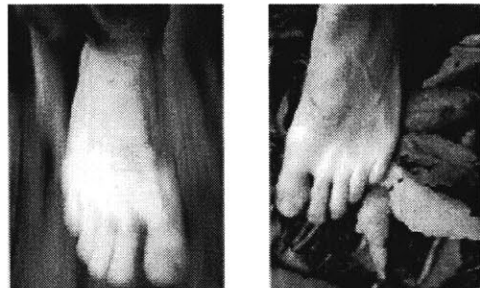


Gary Hill, *Crux*. 1986. With cameras on his extremities. Gary Hill. p.41

Crux. 1986. In this work, Hill placed five video cameras at the end of each of his body's extremities: wrists, ankles, behind his head on his neck facing out. "Dressed" in this way he explored the landscape of Bannerman's Island on the Hudson River in upstate New York. Hill's emphasis was on the landscape and his body's (fragmented) occupation of it.

The installation of the work consisted of five monitors displayed on the wall set up as a crucifixion. Hill discusses in relation to other works as well the simultaneous distance and presence that video offers. The frame is a very important aspect of this piece in terms of how it fragments and objectifies parts of the body- like a metonym, taking the part for the whole. Hands, feet or head appear as autonomously participating in the world about them.

In Gary Hill's own words: "In effect, [my] body films its own absence..."¹¹ In a photograph of Hill in the landscape with the cameras and video equipment on his back, he appears like an imprisoned robot. He is covered with wires and carries a heavy pack on his back. While the cameras are recording perspectives that Hill's own eyes could not see, they do not seem to "free" Hill or even empower him. By referring to the Cross through his title and in the his installation of the monitors, he places himself as a victim or martyr.



Gary Hill, *crux*. 1986. View of feet from cameras on body. Gary Hil. p.42

¹¹ Hill, Gary. Gary Hill. p42.

My Body Framed as Central Axis

While in Hill's piece, the cameras register a fragmented body and a fragmented landscape, my work emphasizes the body as whole. In the monitor, my whole body is centralized; it exists as the pivotal axis of the frame. The space or context of the body within the lower lobby is dependent on the movement of it as a centralized axis. Unlike Hill, my body films its own presence rather than its absence. While Hill is emphasizing his extremities as lenses looking out at the world, I am emphasizing the camera as a lens looking in at the body.

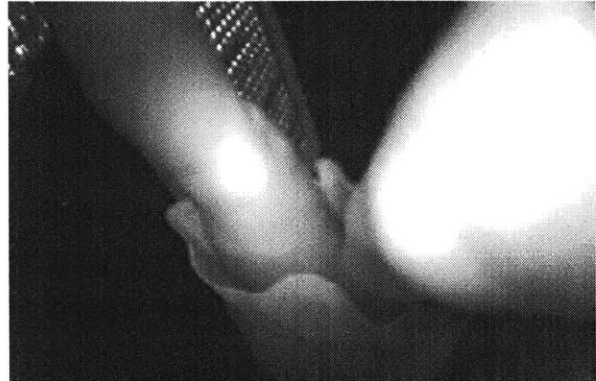
By placing the camera on my shoe to look up into the shadows of my miniskirt, I was able to make images that simultaneously distorted the interior space beneath my skirt and the exterior space around the skirt's circumference. What the 'lens' of the skirt reveals is a nested space within a larger spatial context.

The Image Up-The-Skirt

The transgressive gaze up the skirt is difficult at first to get beyond. The space outside of the skirt becomes active to the viewer only after the voyeuristic novelty of this perspective passes. Because the image's distortion and the body's appearance of being crippled, it does not take long for the image to lose its overtly sexual quality. Emphasis gets passed to the strangeness of the space surrounding the body. The space appears to be tied to the body, even as a victim of it.

The "Lame" or Static Leg

One leg is always bound within the frame. This is the leg to which the camera is



Images from *Seducing Architecture*. Jill Magid. 2000.

attached. Because of its placement, the camera seems to anchor my body in place. While this appendage appears as fixed, everything else-including my other leg- is in motion. There is a strong inversion in that while the one leg appears to be stable like architecture, the actual architecture becomes mobile. It is as if the space in which I move is on a scroll, and with the kick of my "free" leg, I am able to unroll it.

Unlike Hill's *Crux*, the static leg never separates to become its own autonomous object. It is always clearly attached and linked to the whole body. To conceptualize the body as walking normally and unhindered by a bound appendage is difficult. I feel that the continual presence of the static leg grounds the viewer and does not allow him/her to forget that this perspective is physically tied to the body. The camera never feels to be separate. It becomes bodily itself. The mobile leg thus sets the pace for how fast or slow the objects and spaces pass by.

Concluding Remarks

Surfing the web, getting cash from the ATM machine, at the convenient store down the block, in a public park or walking through an institution's main lobby, I am, as you are, always under surveillance. Consciously or not, we constantly perform for the camera's eye.

As stated above, a cyborg, "takes pleasure in machine skill..."¹². He or she does not mourn nor demonize the fact of technological capture but rather finds strength within it. My relationship with the apparatus of capture has become intimate, and through this intimacy, my boundaries more fluid. With the creation of my own autonomous surveillance system, I have given myself a capturing tool. In its frame, I have reconfigured my body as gigantic and strange. Others were pulled into and experienced this strangeness with me. We exercised our pleasure and power in this process.

Monitoring Desire was another step within a long investigation. The potential of this performative surveillance system -in terms of how the body is reconfigured, how representation is altered and effected, how architecture is activated and warped, and how we mediate communication through its screen-has only been initially explored with this performance. I feel prepared to re-enter the conceptual parameters of this performance in order to break them apart. To take their varied aspects and develop them each into new, highly focused, artistic investigation.

¹² Gray and Mentor. "The Cyborg Body Politic and the New World Order." *Prosthetic Territories*, p.229.



Video Still. The Exchange of the Shoe.

Note: All video stills not taken from camera-shoe were taken from the performance of Monitoring Desire. Video Documentation by Frame and Zone.



Video Stills. Studio Shots from Camera-shoe.





Video Stills. Camera-shoe shots of lower lobby, Science Center.



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