

Conspiracy Dwellings: A Portrait of a Model City

Pam Skelton

with contributions by invited artists **C.CRED, Tina Clausmeyer and Verena Kyselka**

Private View: 30 November 2007, 6.30 – 8.00pm

1 December 2007 – 20 January 2008

Bracknell Gallery: Wed 7.00pm – 9.30pm. Thurs – Sat: 1.00pm – 9.30pm. Sun: 1.00pm – 5.00pm.

"To make something visible... if it were only as easy as it sounds! And yet, this project has succeeded in doing exactly that – in the same way advanced medicine creates images using cancer cell markers." Frederike Tappe-Hornbostel (German Federal Cultural Foundation)

In 2003 Pam Skelton began developing a visual art project that explores the legacy of state surveillance. Working with the German archivist and environmental activist Dr. Joachim Heinrich, she discovered the addresses of 500 Stasi conspiracy dwellings in the East German city of Erfurt which were active from 1980–1989 after making a request to the Central Archive for the Records of the State Security Service in the former GDR for the 'lost' file which contained them.

Set up to maintain secrecy in an environment of fear, observation and control, the 'home' proved to be an effective tool for spying on friends, colleagues and family. In this project the notion of home is dramatically upset as the domestic becomes yet another vehicle for the invasion of human rights and personal autonomy. Visualising a city as a three dimensional inscription of surveillance, Skelton's video installation reveals the blank spaces absorbed by the urban geography, linking the architecture of a city – its buildings, streets and neighbourhoods – in an unfolding spiral of control and deception.

Conspiracy Dwellings continues Pam Skelton's interest in histories, geographies and memory, particularly in the context of post-war Europe and how site can be understood as a receptacle of memory and repressed fears and desires. **C.CRED, Tina Clausmeyer and Verena Kyselka** were invited to contribute to the dialogue creating breadth and insight in the production of new works for the exhibition.

C.CRED is a London-based collective from which the *Permanent Ignition* project emerged in 2000 as a platform for collaborative forms of research on specific historical manifestations of dissent. For the *Conspiracy Dwellings* project the collective undertook a series of conversations with people based primarily in and around Erfurt, which have resulted in 'Permanent Ignition: The Stasi Tapes' – a polyphonic audio installation comprising several sound sources which correspond to specific themes recurring in the conversations.

Berlin-based artist and cultural scientist **Tina Clausmeyer** examined the former structures of surveillance and documenting the hidden network of conspiracy dwellings as they are today. She created a photographic database of these locations that takes the form of a visual counter-cartography of the city of Erfurt.

Verena Kyselka, who grew up in Erfurt, is an artist and freelance curator based in Berlin and Erfurt. Her family's experience of the Stasi and the consequences of being under surveillance have directly informed her wall based installation 'Pigs like Pigments' parts 1 and 2 and her new video work 'Dekonspiration'.

A multi-site installation of the project opened in Erfurt from 28 September – 16 November 2007. A catalogue with commissioned texts by Christoph Tannert and Gijs van Oenen accompanies the exhibition. For further information visit: www.conspiracydwellings.net

Conspiracy Dwellings: Symposium on Surveillance in Contemporary Art Friday 18 January 2008, 11am – 5 pm. Tickets £12. Telephone 01344 484 123.

The symposium explores the ways which contemporary art has addressed the issues associated with state control, surveillance, past and present at a time when global terrorism highlights its controversial status. Speakers include Frederike Tappe-Hornbostel, Pam Skelton and Verena Kyselka,

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CONSPIRACY DWELLINGS: A Portrait of a Model City

BIOGS of the artists and catalogue contributors

Artists

C.CRED [Collective CREative Dissent]

C.CRED started out in the late 90s as an artistic collaboration and developed, in the early 00s, into an artist collective in the broader sense of the word. Based in London, UK, but operating largely as a nomadic and event-based platform for the development of critical forms of dialogue and conviviality, self-organized modes of collective learning, and collaborative forms of social and political research and intervention, the overriding concern of the collective was to foster links between art and aesthetic practices and the wider socio-political contexts in which they are situated. Projects and exhibitions include: *Permanent Ignition: Turin*, BIG Torino 2002: BIG Social Game (Turin, 2002); 2002-2003); *Counter.Cartographies*, ISEA 2004 (Tallinn and Helsinki, 2004); Operation: *Counter.Cartographies*, Versionfest 05 (Chicago, 2005); *Plausible Art Worlds*, Basekamp (Philadelphia, 2006), *Borderwords through Beckett*, Beckett & Company, Tate Modern and Goldsmiths College (London, 2006); *Plausible Art Worlds*, Locally Localized Gravity, ICA (Philadelphia, 2007).

www.permanentignition.org and www.commonpoetics.info

Tina Clausmeyer

Based in Berlin and London, Tina Clausmeyer is a German artist and cultural scientist who has worked on projects and with institutions at the interface between art/politics and development cooperation in (post) conflict regions such as the Palestinian Territories and the DR Congo. She has been a participating artist and researcher on Conspiracy Dwellings since 2003. Besides this work she considered secret networks after 9/11 – the subject of the international conference she curated called *Towards a New Visualization of Secrecy: Representations of Secrecy within Contemporary Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in March 2007.

Verena Kyselka, is an artist and curator based in Erfurt and Berlin and lectures at the University of Erfurt. Her recent projects include The Green Island Human Rights International Artists' Workshop and Hweilan International Artist Workshop, Hualien (both in Taiwan). She was Artist-in-Residence at Soochow University Taipei (Taiwan), and the Academy of the Arts, University of Tasmania (Australia). Drawing on her first-hand experience of being under surveillance by the Stasi (East German secret police) and its consequences, she has produced such exhibitions as *Einschluss*, Stasi Remand Prison (2005) and *Lichtbrücke* Andreas Gegenüber (1999). Kyselka curated the Conspiracy Dwellings exhibition in Erfurt, Germany. www.verena-kyselka.de

Pam Skelton is a London based artist. She has been senior Lecturer in Fine Arts at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design since 1990. In 2002 she began developing Conspiracy Dwellings together with Joachim Heinrich. Since the early 1990s, her work has concentrated on memory, site and event in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe. Exhibitions and works include *Burning Poems*, Moscow Biennale (2007); The Anna Akhmatova Museum, St. Petersburg, Russia (2005); *Death is Part of the Process* Void Gallery, Derry, N.Ireland (2005), *Strangers to Ourselves* Aine Art Museum, Tornio, Finland (2004), *Perceptions* Museum of Modern Art, Dubrovnik, (Croatia, 2002), *Ghost Town*, The Brno House of Culture, Brno, Czech Republic (2001); *Private Views*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Dunaujvaros, Hungary (1999) and The Art Museum of Estonia, Tallinn (1998); *After Auschwitz Installations*, Imperial War Museum, London (1995). www.pamskelton.org

Catalogue writers

Christoph Tannert has lived in Berlin since 1976 and is a critic and curator, He studied the history of art and classical archaeology at Humboldt University in Berlin. Since 2000, he has held the position of managing director and project manager of Künstlerhaus Bethanien Berlin.

Gijs van Oenen is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at Erasmus University Rotterdam. He has also been affiliated to the University of Amsterdam, Webster University Leiden, and the Rotterdam Academy of Architecture and Urban Design. Currently he directs a research project at Erasmus University on 'interpassive mental fatigue', inquiring why people increasingly seem unable to act on norms they themselves adhere to.