Conspiracy Dwellings

Conspiracy Dwellings:
Surveillance in Contemporary Art

Edited by

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CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS

P U B L I S H I N G

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EDITORIAL

OUTI REMES AND PAM SKELTON

Conspiracy Dwellings: Surveillance in Contemporary Art brings together a collection of essays by theorists and art practitioners focusing on artworks made in the midst of conflict or from the position of a commentary or a critique. It presents a collection of nine essays by Anthony Downey, Christine Eyene, Liam Kelly, Robert Knifton, Verena Kyselka in interview with Outi Remes, Maciej Ożóg, Paula Roush, Matthew Shaul and Pam Skelton.

These authors provide a global selection of responses to surveillance, considering the works of artists from South Africa, Mexico, the former German Democratic Republic, Poland, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. The essays in this collection span the period of time from the 1970s to the present day, through a variety of topics that all converge on the subject of surveillance. These include its impact on behaviour, architecture, urban space and citizenship lived and personal experience, resistance, positionality, censorship, control and state power, civil liberties, human rights and ethics. Some of the authors comment on the ubiquitous phenomenon of surveillance cameras in the midst of our cities or digital software that is used by radical technologies that promise to revolutionise invasive surveillance techniques in the future; whilst others explore surveillance in relation to tabloid and reality-television culture and as a vehicle for creativity, voyeurism, social networking and self-promotion.

The Surveillance Studies Network in the United Kingdom uses the term "dataveillance society" to describe the country's 4.2 million CCTV cameras in which its inhabitants make, on average three hundred CCTV appearances a day.[1] Advanced technologies and current policies allow daily

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[1] David Murakami Wood, ed., *Report on the Surveillance Society: For the Information Commissioner by the Surveillance Studies Network,* 2006. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/02_11_06_surveillance.pdf (accessed October 28, 2009) also: Sir Paul Kennedy, *Report of the Interception of*

data collection and the monitoring of work, travel and telecommunications, radio-frequency identification (RFID tags, mobile phone triangulation, store loyalty cards, credit card transactions, London Oyster cards for travel, satellites, electoral roll, NHS patient records, personal video recorders, phone-tapping, hidden cameras and bugs, worker call monitoring, worker clocking-in, mobile phone cameras, internet cookies and keystroke programmes.[2] Councils, police and the intelligence services make five thousand requests every year for approval to access records of communications data such as private phone, email and text records.[3] In 2009, more than seven percent of the country's population is logged on to the national DNA database.[4]

While these new technological advances become commonplace we ask to what extent is surveillance an accepted and acceptable form of mass observation. In the United Kingdom CCTV cameras are taken for granted in a shopping mall or a railway station, but where should the line be drawn and how far does surveillance have to go before it worries us, and at what point is the citizen considered a threat to the state. While surveillance serves as an accepted means against crime prevention, this collection invites further discussion on the impact and social costs of these systems to deliver what they promise. According to forty-four research studies on CCTV schemes by the Campbell Collaboration, CCTV has a modest impact on crime and is mainly effective in cutting vehicle crime in car parks, especially when used alongside improved lighting and the introduction of security guards.[5] Today, in post 9/11 times and in the midst of economic recession, political uncertainty and suspicion, we welcome debate about the use of surveillance in defining democratic and human rights and liberties, but acknowledge its creative potential in widening and introducing new dimensions to the canon of art in relation to debates which focus on the gaze, the panoptic, interactivity, the position of the

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Communications Commissioner, 2009, http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/hc0809/hc09/0901/0901.pdf (accessed October 28, 2009).

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., 504,073 requests for communication data were made in 2008. The requests do not include content, only data such as numbers and time of calls.

[4] Surveillance: Citizens and the State for the Lords' constitution committee, see: http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2009/feb/06/surveillance-freedom-peers (accessed October 26, 2009).

[5] Brandon C. Welsh and David P. Farrington for *Camberwell Systematic Review, Effects of Closed Circuit Television Surveillance on Crime*, 2008, http://db.c2admin.org/doc-pdf/Welsh_CCTV_review.pdf (accessed October 26, 2009).

viewer, artistic self-construction, and in providing non-institutionalised exhibition space for new artistic talent in web-based projects.

Plate 0.1 Greg Daville, *Sunk,* from the *Urbicide* series, 2005. Digitally manipulated print. Courtesy of Greg Daville's Estate.

This book is an outcome of the surveillance exhibitions at South Hill Park Arts Centre in late 2007.[6] The exhibitions consisted of four shows. The Bracknell Gallery presented *Conspiracy Dwellings: A Portrait of a Model City*, the visual art project by Pam Skelton with invited contributions of new work from C.CRED, Tina Clausmeyer and Verena Kyselka, exploring the legacy of state surveillance in the former East German city of Erfurt. Pam Skelton's essay in this collection returns to the making of her video installation and the discovery of almost five hundred files from the East German Secret Police (Stasi), locating the conspiracy dwellings active in 1980-1989. Expanding beyond the regional boundaries, the essay and the exhibition consider home as a domain for the invasion of human rights and personal autonomy.

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[6] South Hill Park, Bracknell, United Kingdom, December 1, 2007-January 20, 2008.

Simultaneously, the Mansion Space Galleries presented three surveillance-related exhibitions: Greg Daville's *Rescued Items* exhibition presented two series of digital photography that explored failings and aspirations of visual, verbal, and written communication. Daville's *Rescued Items from Babel* (2003-2005) series consists of humorous self-portraits in staged environments of stored information, considering ways in which we store information at home, work and as a society. Daville's series *Urbicide* (2005-2007) considers safe space, reconstructing suburban architecture as a metaphor for the human condition with regard to planning, self-sabotage, and aspiration. Daville presents architecture without windows and doors; his spaces are safe but isolated.

Surveillance, the international group exhibition, co-curated by Outi Remes and Martin Franklin, explored political, visual, technical and social surveillance, featuring film and mixed media work by Mark Cocks, Alex Haw, Monica Heller, Sam Holden, Brede Korsmo, Kevin Logan, Victoria Lucas, Jonathan Moss, Walter van Ryn, Jodie Sadker, SLVA, Mike Stubbs, Carl Rohumaa, Cally Trench, David Valentine, Justin Wiggan and John Wild. In the Community Gallery, the *Arts and Minds* exhibition presented wall-based artwork by the patients of the Broadmoor Hospital, the West London Mental Health NHS Trust, created in the trust's adult education centre, occupational therapy units and ward, under close supervision and observation.

South Hill Park's programme included *Conspiracy Dwellings: Symposium on Surveillance in Contemporary Art* on January 18, 2008. The symposium and the four exhibitions have provided us with the opportunity to bring these debates together in this collection of essays.

Pam Skelton, Matthew Shaul and Verena Kyselka's contributions converge on the legacy of the Stasi in East Germany. Pam Skelton's essay "Konspirative Wohnungen // Conspiracy Dwellings: A Personal Report" considers with the benefit of hindsight, the unresolved and still problematic issues encountered whilst working with the Stasi Records archive. The project investigates the phenomenon of the Stasi conspiracy dwellings in Erfurt, a city in former East Germany. Avoiding the polarisation between victim and perpetrator, it draws attention to the architecture and structure of surveillance imposed on its citizens by the state. It demonstrates the complexity of memory, trauma and the blurring of the boundaries of victim and perpetrator, raising questions for artists and commentators of censorship ethics, federal data protection and German law.

Plate 0.2 Conspiracy Dwellings: A Portrait of a Model City, 2007. Installation view, the Bracknell Gallery, South Hill Park, 2007-2008. Photo by Judith Burrows. Courtesy of C.CRED and Pam Skelton.

Matthew Shaul and Verena Kyselka focus on life under the surveillance of the East German Secret Police. In "The Impossibility of Socialist Realism: Photographer Gundula Schulze Eldowy and the East German Secret Police," Shaul writes about Schulze-Eldowy's uncompromising observations of the day-to-day reality in Berlin-Mitte from the late 1970s onwards, focusing on her photographic series *Tamerlan* and *Berlin in Eine Hundenacht*. Through interviews with the artist, Shaul connects Schulze-Eldowy's powerful photographic works to their time of production and to the critical reception they received from the Stasi.

In an interview with Outi Remes, Verena Kyselka recalls her experience as an artist, living under surveillance in East Germany. In "Pigs like Pigment" Kyselka describes the creative life of the underground art scene in the 1970s and the 1980s and the determination of many artists to make art that did not conform to the official style of socialist realism imposed by the state. The underground art scene operated with knowledge that informers mingled with artists and sympathisers while providing insider reports for the Stasi. These reports often resulted in interrogations, inquiries, investigations, court proceedings and fines for artists who were suspected of "subversive" activity.

Christine Eyene's essay focuses on the role of the artist activist in apartheid South Africa. "Gavin Jantjes, *Freedom Hunters* (1976): Subtexts and Intertwined Narrative," brings the history of resistance art and political struggle into the debate through a focused analysis of *Freedom Hunters,* a print by Gavin Jantjes. Eyene employs the images of photographers Peter Magubane and George Hallett that are used in *Freedom Hunters* to re-construct a fragment of the history of apartheid in South Africa. Drawing upon the concept of the "polyphonic dimension," developed by art historian Amna Malik, Eyene considers Jantjes' work as a vehicle to convey the multiple narratives of violence, oppression, surveillance and censorship active in apartheid South Africa at that time and in so doing connects the source of apartheid to the remnants of Nazi ideology in South African politics.[7]

In "The Lives of Others: Artur Zmijewski's *Repetition* and the Aesthetics of Surveillance," Anthony Downey examines Zmijewski's controversial film *Repetition* (Poland, 2005). Zmijewski's film recreated the conditions of the infamous Stanford Prison experiment, conducted by research psychologist Philip Zimbardo in 1971. Following Zimbardo's model, Zmijewski recruited unemployed volunteers who were arbitrarily allocated the role of prison guards or prisoners and observed in a constructed prison built by Zmijewsk. Over a period of six days camera's recorded the inmates and the guards until the participants called a halt to the experiment on the seventh—it had got out of hand. The film exposed a disturbing aesthetics of surveillance by which according to Downey the viewer is co-opted into a contrived and disturbing scenario.

In "You'll Never Walk Alone: CCTV in Two Liverpool Artworks," Robert Knifton addresses the manipulation of narrative adhering to images, and the performance of identity within CCTV. On February 12, 1993 the toddler James Bulger was abducted and murdered. The moment of his abduction in the shopping centre by two older children was captured on CCTV. In 1994, using this widely reproduced CCTV footage, artist Jamie Wagg exhibited *History Painting: Shopping Mall* at the Whitechapel Open Exhibition. The press vilification of the artist for using this material raises a host of issues about art's engagement with CCTV, crime and surveillance. Knifton also considers Jill Magid's *Evidence Locker,* a work in which the artists recorded presence on Liverpool's CCTV network as she walks the streets of Liverpool is mapped and later retrieved. The artist requested access to this footage using "subject access request forms"

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[7] Amna Malik, "Conceptualising Black British Art through the lens of Exile," in Kobena Mercer, ed. *Exiles, Diasporas & Strangers* (London: Institute of International Visual Arts; Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008), 166-188.

which take the form of love letters to the CCTV operator. Magid's work combine's an uneasy set of contentions about the control exerted through watching, together with the desire to be viewed whilst submitting herself to the gaze.

Maciej Ożóg and Paula Roush also take up the seemingly paradoxical characteristics of surveillance in media practices and interactive technologies that co-opt the participation of user's in artworks that oscillate between the desire to be seen and the fear of observation. Maciej Ożóg's essay "Surveilling the Surveillance Society: The Case of Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's Installations" focuses on artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's use of digitally enhanced and augmented optical tools of surveillance and post-optic devices to create interactive installations that map a hybrid reality of surveillance culture. Lozano-Hemmer's public art work comments on the very nature of interactive technologies which draws attention to the present state of surveillance that is mirrored at the core of interactivity and the construction of its technology. Although based on principles of participation, activity and freedom of choice, interactivity Ożóg maintains, depends on voluntary exposure to technological observation.

In "From Webcamming to Social Life-Logging: Intimate Performance in the Surveillant-Sousveillant Space," Paula Roush examines the relationship between webcamming and the subversion of surveillance in her artistic practice that explores webcam communities as a platform for cyberperformance curating. In these online communities, cam girls and female artists perform hybrid online-offline interventions to create an intermedial time space, characterised by the aesthetics of webcam "grab" a term proposed by Theresa Senft to describe the dynamics of web spectatorship. "Grab" is not characterised by voyeurism but commodity fetishism, which women webcam operators resist, due to their inevitable failure to please all consumers/viewers, all the time.

Liam Kelly is also, considering a hierarchy of dominance between "controller" and "controlled" in the binary between seeing and being seen. Kelly discusses the architecture and the emotional and physical environment of surveillance through the work of artists Willie Doherty, Locky Morris, Philip Napier, John Aiken, Dermot Seymour, Rita Duffy and Paul Seawright. Kelly's essay "Seeing You/Seeing Me: Art and the Disembodied Eye" examines the emotional fabric of the surveilled environment in Northern Ireland in the 1980s and beyond. Kelly considers the ways which these artists have interrogated and engaged with surveillance and intelligence gathering, landscape and the environment to present the city as a written text that can be deconstructed.

In its variety of approaches to art and its relation to surveillance, we hope that this collection will be of particular interest to artists, art and cultural professionals, scholars and art historians. We also hope that it provides a reference for anyone interested in the political and social implications of surveillance in relation to behaviour, technology, policies, habits and desire that both encourage and discourage artistic creativity and enable our daily life to be recorded.

KONSPIRATIVE WOHNUNGEN //
CONSPIRACY DWELLINGS:
A PERSONAL REPORT

PAM SKELTON

Introduction

> A tram rattles by; somewhere a dog barks,
> church bells ring, children, an airplane, birds
> and wind. This is the sound of normal life in
> Erfurt. Slowed and distorted, as if through
> cotton wool, the same noises can be heard in
> the local art gallery as audio tracks in the
> videos of English artist Pam Skelton. Façade by
> façade, picture by picture, the houses of Erfurt
> blend together in these videos. The viewer sees
> the city of the present and at the same time
> stands in its past. A code is written on every
> picture: the identification of a Stasi conspiracy
> dwelling. Guidance officers and informants
> would meet in those flats. And like the
> informers, those meeting points would be given
> names: 'Rose' or 'Nelke,' 'Gitta Frenzel' or
> 'Paul Dunkel,' 'Schiene' or 'Prag.'[1]

Konspirative Wohnungen // Conspiracy Dwellings is a visual arts project
that explores the legacy of state surveillance in former East Germany in
the last decade of the regime's existence from 1980-1989. The project has
revealed a network of almost five hundred secret apartments in Erfurt that
the former East German Ministry of State Security (Stasi) used for

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[1] Liane von Billerbeck, "Plazchen fur IMS, Ein Kunstproject uber konspirative
Wohnungen der Stasi entzweit Erfurt" (Places for Informers an Art Project about
Stasi Conspiracy Dwellings Divides Erfurt), *Die Zeit*, Nr. 46, November 8, 2007,
Feuilleton, 56. Translated by Henrik Potter.
http://www.zeit.de/2007/46/Plaetzchen_fuer_IMs (accessed November 23, 2009).

meetings with their informers. The conspiracy dwellings were "safe houses" rented or borrowed specifically for the purpose of surveillance. It was in these rooms that an informer was briefed and assignments given that would involve spying on friends, family or colleagues.

The study of the conspiracy dwellings developed from discussions with statistician and Stasi historian Joachim Heinrich that began in late 2002. My ongoing work on the relationship between specific sites and their histories had prompted these discussions and had resulted in this collaborative cross-disciplinary research with two distinct streams, an art project and a social scientific study. In September 2007 a series of audio/visual installations were displayed in the former East German city of Erfurt. This essay aims to confront some of the issues that arose in the process of working on this project and to consider the complexities and contradictions encountered whilst working with a politically sensitive archive and a contested past.

Plate 1.1. Pam Skelton, 2003. Stasi Headquarters, Erfurt, digital image. Courtesy of the artist.

The Stasi in Erfurt

The German Democratic Republic commonly known as East Germany was established as a socialist state created in the Soviet Zone of occupied Germany in 1949. The four decades of its existence (1949-1990) were defined by the Cold War, an era of antagonism between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. In 1950 the Socialist Unity Party (SED) established the Ministry of State Security (MfS), otherwise known as the Stasi, to protect the socialist German State from its enemies.

In 1991 the Stasi Records were opened to the former citizens of East Germany. This meant that, henceforth, the people had the right to apply to see their Stasi files. Access to these files would reveal the identity of those who had informed on them. In the early 1980s surveillance intensified as the regime became weaker, with the number of informers estimated at one in every sixty-eight people.[2] The informers often led double lives, oscillating between an ordinary everyday existence and that of a Stasi informant. Art, culture and religion were targeted as being of particular interest to the Stasi and people associated with these areas were routinely monitored. The average citizen experienced the Stasi as an omnipresent force creating unease, distrust, suspicion and self-censorship: they lived "in the belief that they was being furtively recorded and analysed."[3]

It is within this political climate that my project collaborator, Joachim Heinrich, had grown up. In the 1980s Heinrich was based in Erfurt, worked at the university and was a leading environmental activist in a group that was closely monitored by the Stasi. This had earned him the title "Enemy of the State," an appendage that could have led to his imprisonment. The damage that the Stasi inflicted on people's lives is described by Gerd Popper in James A. McAdams's book, *Judging the Past in Unified Germany* in terms which bear a general resemblance to Heinrich's experience:

> Over the years the Stasi had managed to destroy entire families by deliberately sowing mistrust between husbands and wives, parents and children. Under pressure from the MfS [Stasi,] teachers and school administrators had been persuaded to inform on their students in exchange for petty privileges and cash bonuses. University professors had been spied

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[2] This would amount to 174,000 informants and 91,000 full time agents in a population of only seventeen million.
[3] Barbara Miller, *Narratives of Guilt and Compliance in Unified Germany* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 3-4.

on by their colleagues and tips from collaborators had regularly resulted in harassment by the police. 'The Stasi systemically sought to destroy our personal and professional lives. It was criminal. Worse than that, it was evil.' (Dissident Gerd Popper).[4]

After unification Heinrich moved to Munich while retaining a professional base in Erfurt. Working with the environmental group's Stasi files in which he was named, he has since continued an ongoing study of the surveillance practices of the Stasi in Erfurt.

Plate 1.2. Pam Skelton, *Konspirative Wohnungen // Conspiracy Dwellings,* 2007. Video still (Old Town), a five channel video installation and public art project, Erfurt, Germany. Courtesy of the artist.

My first fieldtrip to Erfurt took place in July 2003. It had changed a great deal since my last visit there shortly after unification in 1991. Tourist brochures now describe Erfurt, the regional capital of Thüringia, as "possessing a charming blend of wealthy townhouses and reconstructed half-timbered buildings, overlooked by the towering spires of St. Mary's

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[4] James A. McAdams, *Judging the Past in Unified Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 56.

Cathedral and the Church of St. Severus." The city, renowned for its cathedral, university and connections to Martin Luther was carefully renovated after German re-unification. It is considered to be one of the finest medieval centre's in Europe. In contrast, Heinrich's city took shape as a hybrid space occupying both past and present and filled with memory. Our excursions around the city contrasted with the tourist itinerary described above. It consisted of visits to the derelict or transformed sites of the former Stasi Administration that to me appeared incongruous in their close proximity to the charms of the old town. We visited the room in which the environmental group's meetings had taken place; the flat where Heinrich had lived; a tributary of the river Gera that had been a main focus of the environmental group's campaign. Heinrich had brought with him a mysterious, unauthorised list made up, as it turned out, of a mixture of Stasi's conspiracy dwellings and other surveillance outposts. I studied the list with great interest. That week we visited some of the dwellings, notably Hotel Erfurt, situated opposite the station and Café Rommel where we drank tea.

My interest in these clandestine meeting places was not without misgivings. I was therefore keen to hear the opinion of others. In Heinrich's view the conspiracy dwellings were no longer a sensitive issue; the subject may not even especially interest the people of Erfurt. The feedback from the meetings at the Erfurt Stasi Documentation Centre and the Thüringen State Commission for the Stasi Documents (TLStU) was reassuring. They recommended that we submit a written application to the Federal Commission for the Stasi Documents (BStU) in Berlin to access the files.[5] However, this would be dependent on the retrieval of index F78 Strassendatei, a street map that contained the addresses of the conspiracy dwellings.

In the autumn of 2003 Heinrich submitted the application to the BStU and established a partnership with the Frederick Schiller Universität in the nearby town of Jena. This affiliation would subsequently bring sociological

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[5] The BStU is an independent authority that is responsible for administering the Stasi Records. It is an archive which reputedly holds a labyrinthine 180 kilometers of records. The BStU was set up to protect the interests of the victims of the GDR and administrates applications to access files. It offers researchers a unique resource for study. The TLStU and the Erfurt Stasi Documentation centre are State outposts of the BStU. http://www.bstu.bund.de. (accessed December 10, 2009).

expertise to the project and would result in the publication of the book *Gehëime Trefforte des MfS in Erfurt.*[6]

Heinrich's research focused on a study of the conspiracy dwellings files. His detailed analysis of the files was to shed new light on the process of recruitment, maintenance and their pattern of distribution in Erfurt. For example, his work revealed that the Stasi preferred to rent rooms directly from reliable comrades, many of whom were the widows of communist party members. Candidates were required to be forty to sixty years old, male or female, married or single, without children in the household and either sympathetic to the Communist Party or members of it. The number of individual rental agreements made with the Stasi amounted to approximately sixty percent.[7] The tenant or owner of the flat was known as the "informer of the conspiracy dwelling" (Inoffizieller Mitarbeiter de Konspiration, abbreviated as IMK). These people were not involved in spying; their role was to liaise with the Stasi guidance officer to guarantee secrecy and ensure that the preparations prior to each meeting with the informer went smoothly. The flat must be left empty—refreshments such as coffee and cakes, beer and tobacco, must be prepared in advance and left ready on the table. Only the Stasi guidance officer would know the identity of the informer who would come to the flat on a designated day and time.

Work in Progress

In July 2004 I was able to study copies of the conspiracy dwellings files together with an early version of the street index database that Heinrich had prepared. It was a sobering thought to consider the extent that internal security played in the paranoid delusions of a state that was in fear of its own population. The files contained copious descriptions of the premises, information about the facilities and plans of each property. They also contained photographs of the façades and views from the buildings. Windows, entrances and stairwells of the conspiracy dwellings, and even nearby bus stops, were often marked in pen.

I did not want to draw attention to individual narratives of blame or guilt and it was important not to implicate any of the residents who lived

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[6] This is translated as "The Secret Meeting Places of the Stasi in Erfurt," *Gehëime Trefforte des MfS in Erfurt*, ed. Heinrich Best, Joachim Heinrich, Heinz Mestrup (Erfurt: TLStU, 2006).

[7] Joachim Heinrich, "Topographie KW Erfurt" in *Gehëime Trefforte des MfS in Erfurt*, ed. Heinrich Best, Joachim Heinrich, Heinz Mestrup (Erfurt: TLStU, 2006), 12-51.

in the flats. Heinrich and I both agreed that the addresses and exact location of the conspiracy dwellings should remain unknown. Whilst I was at least clear about this, I was concerned about the apparent lack of guidelines available on data protection for the Stasi Records. I was also puzzled by the vagueness of our project collaborators and advisors who seemed reluctant to discuss the sensitive issue's that underpinned this study. Had the Thüringen State Commission for the Stasi Records and the researchers at the Frederick Schiller Universität whom I had consulted explained the laws of data protection regarding the Stasi Records I would have been alerted to the potential pitfalls that awaited the project.

> Buildings shelter life by sustaining a collective sense of time, a form of cultural synchronisation. Buildings act as a reassuringly stable witness of whatever we do by surviving longer than us and evolving more slowly.[8]

Mark Wigley in the above quote evocatively illustrates the quality of reassurance that buildings can induce. Buildings can be seen as our protective skins and the domestic space of the home is normally a place of security, a retreat from the rest of the world. In *Conspiracy Dwellings* the home has lost it "homely" quality. Discussing this with cultural geographer Jessica Dubow she notes that they are disturbing, precisely, because the camera stands as a vehicle of mediation between the conventions of architecture and the representation of state power. Dubow suggests that it is the keeping of secrets, of turning away, that makes the conspiracy dwellings "a place of surface…a disengagement with probing."[9]

The conspiracy dwellings were located throughout Erfurt, dispersed in the housing estates in the suburbs that converged on Moskauer Platz, Berliner Platz, Roter Berg and Rieth in the north; Herrenberg, Wiesenhügel and Melchendorf in the south. They were to be found in the Old Town, in the city centre shopping precincts, the bourgeois villas south of the railway station and the tower blocks of the Juri-Gagarin-Ring that flanks the inner ring road of the city. Many of these streets and estates were named after the cities and heroes of the Soviet Union that commemorated the four decades of housing projects undertaken by the East German state.

I spent the summer months of 2004-2007 documenting the buildings. My day would begin early with a large-scale map of Erfurt and a spreadsheet containing a list of the addresses. The first task was to locate

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[8] Mark Wigley, "Insecurity by Design," in *In-Security, Cahier on Art and the Public Domain*, vol. 6 (SKOR, 2004), 105.
[9] *Pam Skelton and Jessica Dubow in Conversation*, April 29, 2009, Institute of Contemporary Interdisciplinary Arts, University of Bath.

each of the street names on the map and to mark them with a coloured felt
tip pen.

Plate 1.3. Pam Skelton, 2006. Annotated section of photocopied map of Erfurt.
Courtesy of the artist.

   The next step was to transfer this information onto enlarged
photocopied sections of the map; these provided me with my itinerary.
Each day I would set out with a monopod, (a one legged tripod) a
compact video camera and provisions in a backpack to document the
conspiracy dwellings.
   In the Old Town and city centre areas, I discovered that the conspiracy
dwellings were mainly located in rooms above shops, or in offices and
public buildings. In the suburbs they were mainly hidden in estates of
anonymous flats in quiet leafy streets. A number of roads had been
renamed after German unification and some housing blocks containing
conspiracy dwellings had been demolished.

we did not act freely
in casual encounters with our neighbours

Plate 1.4. Pam Skelton, *Konspirative Wohnungen // Conspiracy Dwellings,* 2007. Video still (Juri-Gagarin-Ring), a five channel video installation and public art project, Erfurt, Germany. Courtesy of the artist.

I became aware of the various positions that the act of recording induced. My intervention represented the position of the objective observer, the voyeuristic lens of the camera, the eye of the informer and the all-seeing Stasi. In practice, the unease I experienced while pointing the camera arose or subsided depending on how potentially intrusive my viewpoint might be. I often felt as if I was spying on a community. Although I was not secretive, the acts of documenting the dwellings were still not fully transparent. Someone might ask me what I was doing, but this happened rarely. Most of the time I was left to the practicalities of filming and navigating the city on my bicycle. The bicycle was my preferred means of transport as it enabled me to get to know the city in detail. As I cycled, I became aware of the distinct character of each of the districts I visited. I also noticed that the conspiracy dwellings were often grouped in close proximity to each other and that the highest densities were clustered in the Juri-Gagarin-Ring.

Plate 1.5. Pam Skelton, *Konspirative Wohnungen // Conspiracy Dwellings,* 2007. Video still (Juri-Gagarin-Ring), a five channel video installation and public art project, Erfurt, Germany. Courtesy of the artist.

Alongside the documentation of the conspiracy dwellings, the applications for funding continued, as well as the search for possible exhibition venues in Erfurt. These processes were supported by some of the most active and influential arts workers in the area. In particular Frank Motz, the director of the ACC Gallery Weimar, the artist and curator Verena Kyselka and Frank Hiddemann then the curator of the Evangelischer Kunstdienst without whom the exhibition and public art project in Erfurt would not have taken place.

Konspirative Wohnungen // Conspiracy Dwellings: an exhibition

The public art project and exhibition directed and managed by Verena Kyselka opened on September 28, 2007 at Kunsthaus Erfurt in three of its gallery spaces and at five satellite venues: Erfurt Town Hall, Berliner Platz Public Library, Radisson SAS, Erfurt, glassbox Gallery, University of