

g e o r g k l e i n

# turmlaute.2: watch tower TOWER TRILOGY

Why we build towers? The artistic discourse on the meaning of towers as symbols of power in our society begins with the "hunger towers" or dungeons of the Middle Ages, continues with the watchtowers of dictatorial regimes and ends with the bank towers that are prevalent throughout the world today.



Audio | Video | Installation | Organisation | Interaction

GDR Watch Tower Schlesischer Busch  
Berlin Kreuzberg-Treptow  
15<sup>th</sup> march – 15<sup>th</sup> april 2007, daily 2-8 p.m.  
Intern. Festival MaerzMusik | Kunstfabrik e.V.  
12<sup>th</sup> nov. – 30<sup>th</sup> dec 2009, 6-10 p.m.  
L'art au Garage, Rue des Lilas, Paris

[www.europeanborderwatch.org](http://www.europeanborderwatch.org)

European Border



Watch Organisation

- > Ground floor: reception/registration of European Border Watch
- > First floor: visual showroom with 6 embrasure screens, camp bed and telephone
- > Second floor: acoustic control room with interactive surveillance technology and voice

The background of the project is a test run in November 2006 in Texas, where, at the instigation of Governor Rick Perry, webcams were installed along a short section of the fence on the US-Mexican border whose images could be accessed by anyone worldwide.

## Texas Border Watch Test Site



Who's guarding the border? It's you – via webcam

The test phase at the US-Mexican border was frighteningly successful. According to the

announcement at [www.texasborderwatch.com](http://www.texasborderwatch.com) during the month-long trial run "more than 200,000 viewers subscribed to the site, and more than 25 million hits were recorded, generating more than 13,000 emails." Web users who spotted illegal immigrants crossing the border could inform the authorities directly "by telephoning a number free of charge".

The European Border Watch Organisation (EUBW) was founded on the basis of the Texan model and has established its recruitment centre in the Berlin border watchtower and in the web with their own website. EU citizens can register there as web patrols, in order to take an active part in the extensive monitoring of EU external borders via the Internet. **Registration** takes place on the ground floor; blue EU flags at the entrance create an "official" atmosphere. The EUBW's **visual showroom**, with a camp bed and an old telephone, is situated on the first floor, and the second floor houses the **acoustic control room**, in which the interactive surveillance equipment is mounted.



### First floor: Visual Showroom

The dark showroom on the first floor only has narrow embrasures as window openings, six of which are converted to viewing screens for the installation. Webcam images of ostensible border events are seen on them which only show desert, ocean or forest. Various border images are simulated in a preliminary trailer: the Bug river on the border between Poland and Ukraine, a view of the Carpathian Mountains, or the ocean beach between the Canary Islands and northwest Africa but also a webcam image of the US-Mexican border – the only genuine border photo – allegedly from the partner organisation, Texas Border Watch. The webcam streams, which are colour-coordinated and almost never show a human being, seem rather meditative or, from the standpoint of the border guard and observer, boring. Minor image interference is incorporated into the video streams, with a particular interference characteristic devised for each "webcam".



The video images are interrupted by an EUBW trailer, with its logo and a demonstration of the in-house surveillance software WEP 2.0, which supposedly makes it possible to zoom in directly on a section of the European external border via satellite by specifying the exact coordinates. In this way the viewers learn which section of the border is shown. In the sixth embrasure, looking out onto the park in the former death strip, the same "procedure" is followed.

### Second floor: Acoustic Control Room

In the control room on the second floor a standing acoustic field is generated. The basis of the sound is a recording of the natural vibration of the concrete tower. The continuous sound represents the continuousness of the surveillance and changes only gradually over the duration of the installation in the spirit of an "interactive variation." The field can be modified from the outside by means of a laser sensor and a surveillance camera which react to "incidents" – i.e. movements of uninvolved passers-by or traffic in the vicinity of the tower.

If the passer-by crosses the middle surveillance zone, a voice also emerges from the horn loudspeaker hanging at head level in the centre. The various snippets of sentences come from an interview with a border guard who did his military service in this tower in GDR times and, over 18 years later, recounts how they worked and what unusual events occurred ("... yes, definitely," "... so what we made, they were such wires, they were self-firing devices, but they weren't lethal . . .", "but somehow the woman probably, – she didn't make it"). The sentences in the Saxon dialect are difficult to understand and sound like a police loudspeaker announcement.

The second floor has continuous windows that are covered with green transparent sheeting. As a result, on the inside all colours are altered, the viewer's own face is pale green and all contrasts are strangely weakened. To outside it's like a view through a military night vision equipment.

### Public Relations Strategy

The publicity for the installation became part of the artistic work and was fully integrated into the project. Using a website (see: [www.europeanborderwatch.org](http://www.europeanborderwatch.org)) created for the installation, which appeared to be very serious, as well as electronic and written invitations, EU citizens were invited to actively monitor the European external borders. In addition, an invitation to the opening of the Berlin registration centre of the EUBW was sent to the press and everyone accessible to us via the Internet.

Responses were collected by reply mail and the feedback form on the website and were pasted into the comment book that was made available in the tower. For on-site visitors there was a special **guided tour**, with a welcome at the entrance on behalf of the European Border Watch and a green informational handout with a web patrol registration form on the back. In the video showroom *George Klein* appeared as a guide to the EUBW and explained the satellite webcam system and the goals of the organisation to the visitors, inviting them to lie down on the camp bed and, with this overview of all EU external borders, to choose a surveillance area. While the visitors were still in the acoustic control room on the second floor, they were referred to the comment book on the ground floor.

### Video documentation engl. 9min.(short)/30min.(full).

Assistants: Svenja Moor (Kunstfabrik am Flutgraben), Amrei Buchholz (PR), Marina Szimkowski (guard), Alf Dobbert (web design)

In coop. with **MaerzMusik | Berliner Festspiele** and **Kunstfabrik am Flutgraben, Kulturamt Treptow-Köpenick Berlin, L'Art au Garage Paris**

