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AC Michaela, where did you first meet Stefan?

MM We met at an opening of Isa Genzken's. Afterwards we went to the dinner, something like that, and we happened to be sitting next to each other.

SK But I originally encountered Michaela through her music work with the band she is in. They were playing in a club where I worked part-time as the stage manager, while I was a student.

MM Where was that?

*SK** *Vierlinden.**

MM Ah ok! You were there when we played that? I didn't know that! That was one of the craziest gigs we'd ever had. The most chaotic concert.* *

AC What is the name of the band?

MM *FSK.* We started out as kind of a Munich art school band in 1980. We still play.

AC Does *FSK* stand for something?

SK It stands for *freiwillige Selbstkontrolle*, which means something like "voluntary self-censorship". It refers to a German authority that classifies a film, and decides how old someone should be, to see the film.

AC Have music or sound been a recurrent feature in your visual art?

MM Not all of it, by no means, but since 2002 I've done a series of installations which do all involve music.

SK Obviously not all your work has a musical element, but wouldn't you agree that music is a kind of thread that runs through much of your work?

MM Yes, for sure.

AC Is *FSK* just an arbitrary name for your band, or does the subject of self-censorship inform the content of the music?

MM I would say that self-censorship is the entire concept behind the band, because we never looked for an "authentic" music language. We in a way censor the notion of our "self" and try to invent the band new every time. Some people have written about us as an appropriation project.

AC When you say appropriation do you mean that you use samples of other people's music?

MM No, not appropriation in that, but appropriation in the sense of adopting discourses and musical styles that already exist, that already belong to others, that are not authentic to us. From the very first moment it was an appropriation gesture, a strong desire not to be perceived as "suffering" musicians.

SK *SFK* are working against the idea of generic originality.

AC Does the desire to work against the idea of generic originality also apply to your current work on display at *Ludlow* *38* in particular?

MM In a sense, yes, because this particular piece is not about me. It's not in my "handwriting". It's really a kind of homage.

AC *A homage to whom, or what?

MM A homage to a lost work, *VariaVision-Unendliche Fahrt* < Endless Journey. The whole story centers around that work, which was done in 1962.

SK *Where was it first shown?

MM It was shown only once, in a two thousand square meter hall, in Munich. There was not only film, but additional components: text and electronic music. It is one of the first ever multi-media works made in Germany.

AC *Who is the artist?

MM It was actually three guys: Alexander Kluge, who has recently had his 80th birthday. He wrote the text. Then there was Edgar Reitz, who is very well-known in Germany for *Heimat*, a popular film there, but maybe a little kitschy. He did the film part of *VariaVision.* The third guy is the electronic composer, Josef Anton Riedl, also in his 80's now, but kind of forgotten. The whole thing was pretty much lost but it was one of the first installations.

AC In what way was it an installation, rather than a film that included words and music?

MM From the interviews, it is clear that the idea was not to have cinema in the classic sense, with the screen here and the audience there. Instead, the audience had to go wandering through the hall, where there were multiple speakers with words coming out, along with the music. The installation used 16 screens for Cinemascope movies. And the tapes were running through the whole room, the film was as well, everything was running through and looping. And there were some islands to sit down. It cost one million Marks, which at that time was a huge amount.* *

AC Who funded it?

MM It was paid for by the German Railway System, so the subject was travel of course. It consisted largely of images and text about travel by train < and more generally about traveling. It was done for the International Traffic Exhibition in Munich. A quite avant-garde project for a traffic exhibition!

AC *If the format was so original and avant-garde, I'm surprised it isn't better known today.

*MM *It was totally lost, the whole thing completely forgotten about. And one reason for that is that there was only ever one review of it. They had a kind of press view for *VariaVision *and on the day, none of it worked. None of it. They spend a million marks in making it, and then they have the press thing and it's a catastrophe. Which is kind of funny! So they didn't get any review at the time. But afterwards, because they were each already starting to get big in Germany, they managed to get a writer they knew who saw it, to write his impressions of the work.

*AC *So how did you learn about it?

MM I found out about the work in an archive. I found a reference to it in the archives at the Hochschule in Ulm, with some links to the work, and some photographs and a little other material on it, and I thought: "This is something for me!" Then I looked more into it, and found out some more. It was a lot of work, a year and a half of research. That was the background.

SK What we haven't spoken about is the importance of Ulm Hochschule, important for post-war German design. People like Dieter Rams, Tomás Maldonado, Max Bill, Otl Aicher—so many key people are associated with it.

MM Yes. This institution was funded by the CIA. And with Aicher, even today he is involved in the corporate identity of Siemens, Lufthansa, DeutscheBank, so many of the biggest German companies. He was married to Inge Aicher-Scholl, the sister of Sophie and Hans Scholl. They decided to have a take on the tradition of the Bauhaus, to reeducate Germany through aesthetics and design. They started a foundation and got from the US government one million marks, to run the school. It was like a private promulgation of the Bauhaus. They had all these people who had left Germany because of the third Reich, that came back from America and taught at Ulm. People like Josef Albers. Ulm is quite a small city so it was really something.

AC Why do you think the CIA was interested in funding a school that was perceived as anarchist-socialist?

MM Because they wanted to have influence in Germany, I suppose. I only learnt about the money aspect from doing research and interviews. If you trace it back, back, back, the money comes from the CIA, but officially it comes from the American government, for a kind of cultural effort.

*AC *Why were you doing research in an archive there?

*MM *I had been invited to do a show at the Ulm museum, a very nice museum. They invited me to do a new piece and I started to do some research in the famous archive of the Hochschule there

*AC *What is that archive famous for?

*MM *Because so many famous people had worked at the school! It was really the post-war Bauhaus in Germany. The school had a sense of keeping on with the Bauhaus, a story that had been interrupted through the Nazi time. It was the most influential art school in post-war Germany. They had maybe thirty people teaching, and a hundred students, only. Everybody lived there, there were condominiums for the teachers and students. Many art schools were influenced by this model although it was there for ten years.

*AC *But why was there documentation in the archive of an Ulm art school of an installation in Munich?

*MM *Because Reitz and Kluge, who were two of the guys who *VariaVision*, ran the movie department at the Ulm school, and also ran an electronic Studio that had been originally founded by Siemens in Munich. The Studio had been used by almost all of the international avant-garde composers, and was used for the soundtrack of *VariaVision*.**

*AC *What did the Studio consist of?

*MM *The individual components weren't originally designed to be used to make music. The components that produced the sounds, white noise and so forth, were originally designed as devices to measure voltage, the thickness of glass, things like that. But they were used in the Studio as parts of a musical instrument and the Studio was perceived as having a musical function. Siemens had made a foundation for that, and they invited everyone to it. So many people from the avant-garde. But only have a few recordings remain, by people like Pousseur, Cage

AC ŠStockhausen?

MM He did work there but he also tried to do his own thing at the WDR radio station. It was kind of a competition and the Studio people didn't want to talk about this WDR thing. "No, no, no, no. We are bigger and we have the Siemens line behind us." But it's different because WDR didn't have as much money as Siemens, and Siemens had all these technicians who could do as the musicians wanted. The technician who built everything, as always at that time, he had this military history behind him, working on wireless broadcast. But you can't really talk to these sort of people about what they have done before.

AC What did the technician make of the avant-garde music?

MM He liked the musicians. He was totally fan of them as people. But not the music. He would say, "The music they made wasn't good at all. Not at all. But I did my own music". And then he would go and play some Schlagers! So, he was still a tricky guy.

AC With so many internationally renowned musicians, it's odd that Siemens didn't continue to fund it.

*MM *Siemens didn't want to continue paying for an electronic studio because it was costing too much money. So they decided to donate it to a music school. But the Munich and Berlin schools didn't want to have the Studio, because traditionally trained musicians couldn't operate it themselves. And it was very slow to get results. You needed sound engineers to operate it. And it took up eight rooms. So it was difficult, and slow, and expensive, and it was big. Even the music department of the Hochschule didn't want to have it, because they weren't into electronic music at that time. So nobody else wanted to have it. So eventually it ended up at the film department of the Hochschule at Ulm. They made quite a lot of soundtracks to films using this Studio. They also sold music to Warner brothers, to Hollywood, that's all they talk about!

AC Did the Studio have a title?

MM *Siemens-Studio für elektronische Musik*. Later they just called it *Studio for Electronic Music*.

AC *Does your film have a title?

MM *The name of the film and the name the total installation are the same: *Speicher*, which means storage. It could also mean the top of the house where you store things, the attic, on the other hand it is also the memory of a computer. So I liked the name for this reason, because it has to do with the first electronic idea, and the history and *VariaVision.* I tried to do a homage to that work.

AC *Does your film have a specified duration?

MM It can be viewed at any point, there doesn't have to be a definite beginning or end.

AC *So it could itself be thought of as an endless journey in itself?

MM *The whole *VariaVision *system was installed like a loop, maybe 50 minutes long, roughly the same length as my own piece.* *The different parts of the installation are each a homage in this way: the film, which uses the Studio as part of its soundtrack, as well as some of the text from *VariaVision* as a voice-over. Then there are transcripts of my interviews with the Kluge, Reitz and Riedl, as well as two other guys, someone who had built the Studio, and another guy who taught cybernetics at the Hochschule and later became one of the first computer artists in Germany. A transcript of the interviews is part of the installation, along with some drawings, which are sort of soundscapes. The installation includes also of a wall-drawing of a part of the Studio, a relay station.**

AC How do these works relate to the film?

MM In a, how do you say, a...

AC ...poetic way?

MM Or a loose kind of way. Like you saw with the wall drawing, that it can be a part of a machine to make music, but it can also be a part of architecture, a landscape. I like the idea that you either have the connotation that it also could be an architectural setting like an industrial location, or a switch plan for electronic circuits, like a guide you might find in the back of a computer. I like the in-between of these interpretations, that it can be both.

AC *Your installation consists of these several distinct elements. Are you concerned that a viewer coming into the gallery, with little or no knowledge of the historical background which informs the piece, or how the different elements relate to each other and to the earlier work, is going to miss out on this particular significance of it, that it is a homage to something the viewer is ignorant of?

MM It's like every art piece. It has so many different layers. The homage to the old work is taking up some stories, some of the narrative, but you don't have to know it at all, if you just listen to the soundtrack they will get involved in something else. That I don't mind. It has a number of options.

AC Each of the parts of your installation at *Ludlow 38* has a direct relationship to music. Is this because of your musical education and being in a band?

MM It's not as straightforward as that. After high school, I went to college and started solo cello, and after two years I was totally fed up with being trained like a race-horse or something. This was not my sense of music. They wanted you to rehearse six hours a day and if you had other interests in your mind, even just going to the cinema, that just wasn't possible. So I started to get involved in contemporary music, avant-garde things, and through that I came in contact with all these artists. So finally I switched over. That was in 1978 and it was a coming-out thing for me. I'm from a family that really wanted to produce opera singers. Both my parents wanted that. I have four brothers and sisters, and we all had to learn at least two instruments, at least. They wanted us all to get involved in music and I was suddenly throwing it all away. My parents didn't like me giving that up, but they also didn't like that I was changing over to art. They were thinking "Why doesn't she become a lawyer or something?" And the first punk concert, in fact first pop concert, I ever attended was one where I was actually performing on stage!

AC If your background was so much in music, was it difficult for you to get into art school?

MM No, I had already made some drawings and written descriptions of the kinds of performances I intended to do.

AC And music was a component of those performances?

MM Yes. I was involved in a course at the art school, which combined art and music. So it wasn't so difficult for me.

AC And your parents now, are they interested in the work you are making?

MM Sort of, yes, but I am not inclined to convince them! If there is a show, they are proud, but they are not really familiar with that kind of discourse. And the music I make is too loud.

AC Do the different components of *Speicher* amount to one single installation or do you consider them to be separate works?

MM I would say they all blend into each other. The film has footage of a drawing, the wall-drawing is of the Studio that is part of the soundtrack of the film... But they can be understood as separate entities too. I change it each time, according to the conditions. The specific shape of Ludlow explains why it is configured in this way for here.

AC If it's been on display all that time, it's funny no one thought to investigate the background to it before.

MM There is one music historian who wants to write his doctorate about the Studio. But he's not interested in the same area as me, his concern is with how each machine actually worked, things like that. That was not my interest.

AC What was your interest?

MM I was interested in this idea of the avant-garde, that was driving the whole thing. This new horizon, imagined by these people who, when they wanted

to use the Studio, really thought about it. So I decided to get in touch with these old guys get them to talk to me about *VariaVision*, and the Siemens Studio. And I did get in touch with them, the three guys. There is so little d