

# REALLY DIRTY HISTORY

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Artist, lives and works in Munich, Germany

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Scottish textual artist/writer, London, England

**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, a club in Hildesheim.

**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** *F.S.K.* We started out as kind of a Munich art school band in 1980. We still play.

**AC** Does *F.S.K.* stand for something?

**SK** It stands for *Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle*, which means something like "voluntary self-censorship". It refers to the German organisation of the Filmindustry 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 *F.S.K.* 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** *F.S.K.* 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 1965, one of the first ever multi-media works made in Germany.

**SK** Where was it first shown?

**MM** It was shown only once, in a huge hall, in Munich. A huge multi-media installation with film, texts and electronic music.

**AC** Who is the artist?

**MM** It was actually three guys: Alexander Kluge, filmmaker and author, 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 very popular filmseries there, but maybe a little kitschy. He did the film part of *VariaVision*. The third guy is the electronic composer, Josef Anton Riedl, has his 80th this year, not very popular this days like it happens with contemporary „serious“ music

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

**MM** From the interviews I made with these guys, 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, others with the music. The installation used 16 screens for Cinemascope movies. And film roles, the tapes with music and word were running through 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, when everything was already deinstalled because each of them were already starting to get big in Germany, they managed to get a writer who saw it, to write an article about the project, but by that time everything was already deinstalled.

**AC** So how did you learn about it?

**MM** I found out about the work in the archives at the Hochschule in Ulm, some photographs and a small publication on it, and I was excited about the project. I wanted to know more about it so I talked to the protagonists, the research took quite a while.

**SK** What we haven't spoken about is the importance of Ulmer 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. Otl Aicher, who developed later corporate identity for so many German companies like Lufthansa , Sparkasse , Siemens, 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 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 für Gestaltung Ulm HfG Ulm 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. Many art schools were influenced by this model although it was there for ten years. They had maybe thirty people teaching, and a hundred students, only. Everybody lived there, there were condominiums for the teachers and students.

**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 of *Varia Vision*, 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 music composition of *Varia Vision*.

**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, compressors 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** ...Stockhausen?

**MM** He did work there but he mainly did his own thing at the WDR radio station in Cologne. It was kind of a competition between the Munich studio and the WDR studio in Cologne. Hans Jörg Wicha who was the master sound engineer and technician who built up the whole studio in Munich said to me. "No, no, no, no. We are bigger and we had the Siemens line behind us." Sure it's different from the WDR studio because Siemens had all these technicians who could do as the musicians wanted. The technicians, as always at that time, they had this military history behind them, working on wireless broadcast for example.

**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 I had the impression he did not like the music. He would say, "The music they made was interesting but some of it wasn't good at all. Not at all. But I did my own music". And then he would go and play some Schlagers!

**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 maybe they weren't into electronic music at that time and 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. So 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 für Elektronische Musik*.

**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** Yes. 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 ways for here.

**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 documentation or recorded material that they were the only source of information.

**AC** Did the three men see it?

**MM** One of them did, the others heard the radio play, and they seemed a little... "Ah yes, I think it deals with our work, but it's different. It's definitely different." They are these grand old men.

**AC** Did you manage to see their original film in *VariaVision*?

**MM** I haven't managed to see the film, only stills.

**AC** Were Siemens enthusiastic about your project?

**MM** I didn't get a feedback of them

**AC** Is there a parallel between the lack of public acknowledgement of migrants, refugees, and the lack of public awareness of the Studio, and *VariaVision*?

**MM** Well, in the sense that often the biographies of marginalized figures show that they are not rooted to some place, they always have to live somewhere else. The thread is broken.

**SK** One recurrent aspect of Michaela's work involves the rediscovery of certain neglected aspects of history. For instance she has looked at female figures in history, figures who have been overshadowed or underappreciated by the mainstream.

**AC** Do people still use the Studio today, to make music?

**MM** It's a museum piece! It's in a museum. Why would anyone try to work with a museum piece? In any case, it wouldn't make sense for people to travel to use it. A lot of the components are broken, and its sounds can be reproduced with any computer nowadays, and it would be so complicated because it doesn't have a computer, just a punchcard system. If you want to have four different things all happening at the same time, it's really hard because you always would have to create a punchcard. So no, it's not used to make music. After the Ulm school closed in '68, it lay in a basement there for more than 20 years, and finally ten years or so ago it ended up at the Deutsche Technik Museum in Munich, and has been on display in the music department there since then. It's on display, in



a room devoted to electronic music, with an electronic drum set, some of the first electronic studios, the first Moog synthesizer...

**AC** Is the Studio similar to the Moog synthesizer?

**MM** Some parts may be. But no, not really in appearance. It originally took up eight rooms with so many different devices. It doesn't look at all like any musical instrument, in fact. There's no keyboard or anything like that. Only one instrument had keys, the Honorola, but the keys were not used as normal piano-keys. Bits of it look more like an industrial machine, or a chemical laboratory, or the part of a train station where they switch the tracks. It's nice to look at. Everything is done with bright wood, steel and enamel. If anything it really looks more like a series of synthesizers.

**AC** Did several people then play it at the same time, as a sort of orchestra?

**MM** No. Punchcards were used to trigger the different sounds at the designated moment, a little like a knitting-machine program. It really involved working on a single tone for some time to get the correct result. I didn't have that much time when I used it as part of the soundtrack to the film that is playing at *Ludlow 38*.

**AC** Did you create a punch-card?

**MM** No, no. The punch-card system was no longer operational, so I just went to one of the Studio machines and made a certain sound, recording it, then on to the next closet...then I finally had about 90 minutes of improvised music, but not really improvised, more like a child finding out what can be done. To get used to these sounds you would really need some weeks. I digitized the sounds, and edited together the parts I particularly liked, and with other momentary parts I would repeat and make a rhythm out of them, and then I had other sounds like a low "Ooooooh" or a high-pitched "eeeh". I took these samples, and treated each of them as a kind of instrument. I found this guy Hans Jörg Wichs who built most of the equipment of the studio, he came there, we switched it on and I did a one and a half hours of music, using the huge tubes, making sinus tones and white noise and so forth. We got working what is still there and then recorded with two microphones, with people from the museum walking through in the background, then I digitalized and cut out some samples, so you have all these kind of narrative sounds.

**Ac** How does your soundtrack compare to theirs?

**MM** I have only heard a very little of theirs. Only about 5 minutes. So far as I know, that is all that exists at the moment. It's quite different. But there is a lot of research going on now to find the original soundtrack. So they restore the original piece and show it next year. Some tapes of the original do exist. The

music they made is quite hard to stand, although it's impressive that at that time it was played in really big concert halls. Because it was really noisy, machine-music. Nowadays if you play these sounds to people, they say "Oh, what is that getting on my nerves?"

**AC** How does your music differentiate from their music in the film?

**MM** I didn't want to do a documentary. With me, I really only used sounds produced by playing parts of the Studio, to make new music from that. Their music was really hard to stand. I have only found five minutes of what they did. I tried to take these machine sounds, and combine them with real musical instruments: real guitar, real banjo, real cello, blending these with these sounds. As an electronic instrument, the Studio had a different function then.

**AC** In what way different?

**MM** Nowadays if you have a computer for sound you just mostly use it to replace another instrument. "I don't want to pay my flute-player so I make my flute this way." The original guys, the ones I interviewed, they didn't want to make this sort of sound, they didn't want to simulate anything. They wanted to invent *new* sounds. Everything was about new world, new space...astro ideas. They called the installation Space Cinema, which is interesting. Part of the narrative idea of the film is that these strange sounds meant something different to people then. The subject of *Varia Vision* was travel after all, and after all I wanted to make a homage.

**AC** What do you mean by "narrative" here?

**MM** I was interested in the narrative stripe in certain sounds the Studio could produce, how they relate to a certain time, and how they go to build up a specific landscape. That's why I use music in my installations: because music really defines a certain kind of space. You can say something about journeying through sound in this way, and I was trying to use music to suggest this geographical dimension, a traveling situation. And a changed one. Any small computer that can make music nowadays has the capability of making some of the Studio sounds, if not the same quality. A whole closet was given over to these gigantic tubes which make a single "Whooooo" sound, that's all you can do with it. And then you have some huge switches that you can alter the pitch of that soundwave, and other big switches that you turn and they make a "Ccclllluccckkk" noise and then the tone goes up.

**AC** What do you mean when you say that *Varia Vision*, and the Studio and travel, all relate to lost?

**MM** A lost utopia, lost sounds, lost historical structures. And the feeling of getting lost. I used a number of texts, quotes really, quite a diversity, to develop this idea.

**AC** But there seems to be coherence throughout the film, it doesn't seem eclectic at all.

**MM** The soundtrack mixes the different quotes together with the Siemens Studio, and other music, together with other structuring devices. I organized this piece into five chapters, but you can't really notice this when you watch it, it's more like how you experience the process of travel — movement through a landscape where the changes occur softly and imperceptibly, changing but flowing into each other. In the second chapter of my film, there are direct quotes that were taken from *Varia Vision*. Then the middle section has some quotes from Pasolini's film "Big Birds, Small Birds". A father and a son are traveling and they meet a bird, Pasolini alter ego I would say, himself, who is a communist or anarchist, also a philosopher in a way. That film deals with the subject of the tramp, the classic idea of the tramp, Charlie Chaplin and so on, on the road, wandering... Then there are quotes from blogs, illegal immigrants recording how they traveled. "First to Turkey, then pay someone for illegal transport to Italy, and then tried to get to Sweden or Germany." Also in the last section there are quotes about birds migrating, their back and forward movement resembles the human situation. People in Asia or Africa move to Europe to work, people in Europe move to Asia or Africa on holidays. It all depends on the weather and the food situation, for birds and humans.

**AC** Your description suggests the soundtrack would be very confusing or chaotic, but there is a simplicity and urgency to it, that is the opposite of what I would have imagined.

**MM** Editing through the piece I mixed in directions, instructions spoken by a computer, for how to drive from one German city to another. The voice of the route-maker is a woman's voice from the net, called I think Sarah. Then there are quotes from Schubert's *Winterreise*, "Fremd bin ich eingezogen, Fremd zieh' ich wieder aus." As a stranger I leave, as a stranger I arrive. This repeats throughout the piece, like a musical structure.

**AC** Where did you take the other quotes from?

**MM** The soundtrack contains a lot of quotes from a variety of sources. The texts are from the Enlightenment to nowadays. I picked up a whole range of quotes over a wide range of time, including from people who had to leave Germany, in 1848 for political or religious reasons. They came from all sorts of sources, letters from Huguenots in exile, letters from immigrants to America, intellectuals who did not want to go along with the German government of that time.

**AC** So there is a lot of diversity within the quotes. Do they all have something in common?

**MM** They are written by or about people migrating...or wandering...or wanting to go away...or leaving. I edited all the quotes in the way that I changed everything in the first person, "I" or "we", and always in the present. This work from the sixties, *VariaVision*, its makers had more this French cinema, a Nouvelle Vague idea, a Godard idea about traveling — travel as freedom, and opportunity. But nowadays if you think about travel, it has much more a connotation of people always having problems, and often people having to leave, or worse, wanting to and not allowed to leave. Things like that. Funnily enough, one thing that struck me about quotes I selected from letters from the 1840's was that after editing the text in the first person, singular or plural present, not in the past tense, they give the impression that they were written today. It's incredible. Things from nearly 200 years ago and you think it's now. They all tell similar stories then.

**AC** And yet there is also the opposite of this: the sense of adventure in the Nouvelle Vague, its idea of travel as exciting, or the utopian aspirations of the Bauhaus. How do you reconcile this avant-garde sensibility with the idea that things don't change?

**MM** I do and I don't.

**SK SK** All the early Braun design came from there.

**MM** And Max Bill built the new architecture department on a hill overlooking the whole city. The Siemens Studio comes from same time that Braun were producing a very famous design object, the white record player and radio called Snowwhite's Coffin. The designers who designed the Studio designed Showwhite's Coffin. They were at the Hochschule. So the Studio shares this same history that is coming from the Bauhaus. A good one and a sad one.

**AC** Why did the school close down?

**MM** The American money was over, and the state should really have taken over, but a really right-wing politics that was strong at that time, with this former nazi judge, Filbinger, he didn't want to give the school money because everybody said it was an anarchist-communist place there, and in post-war Germany these people who had left during the Nazi period, they were not really welcome to return to Germany or to teach here. Even now it is only a conspiracy theory as to why the Ulm school was not continued, because it remains very influential to this day. One reason might be that they didn't solve the problem between art and design. They really got involved in this new design thing. So painting was discontinued. It's really the same problem the Bauhaus had at the

end: the tension between art and design, and what could art mean in that particular context?

**AC** So the particular expression of optimism of the original piece, or of the Bauhaus project, and certain manifestations of the avant-garde, were misplaced?

**MM** Maybe it's possible with the help of new art, new music, new technology, to invent a new thinking. Maybe. But doing research, I sometimes found it really quite depressing, this feeling that it's always the same. For instance, there was a private train system in the 19<sup>th</sup> century through Germany, for people who wanted to emigrate, to get to America. Mainly Jewish people from the Eastern part of Europe, Poland and Russia. They all went on this private train through Germany. And when they entered the German border, they had to go to some camps, and then had to undress, shower, give their clothes away, and their suitcases, to get cleaned. And then they had to pay. And then they got on the train again. And if they were not healthy, they would be sent back. I felt that if descriptions of that were in the present tense, people could think it's someone talking about the Third Reich, or illegal immigrants coming to Europe at the present time — people who are sent to camps, medically assessed, and sometimes sent back. "I left as a foreigner, I arrived as a foreigner." That could be said by a refugee now.

**AC** I'm not clear why Siemens commissioned the Studio in the first place, and gave avant-garde musicians access to it.

**MM** This is a really interesting part of the history, which is made clear in the interview transcripts. In Germany after the war, many big companies reinvented themselves, and Siemens has this infected Nazi story as well. So they commissioned a two hours black and white film, very well-made, beautifully done, about the new technologies Siemens was working on. It's shot all over the world, with images of landscapes, deserts, mountains, places where they were building water pumps, oil terminals, telephone lines, new technologies, things like that. The film has these men in white coats, eyeglasses, in laboratories, and they are "bringing new life to the world"!

**AC** Hence the desire for electronic music?

**MM** For the film Siemens wanted to have a contemporary soundtrack. They originally asked Carl Orff to do it and he said no, but proposed they use a student of his instead, who had been involved in *musique concrete*. That was the Riedl guy. And then he said we need to have a studio and then they started to build up a studio for this purpose.

**AC** You described your piece as a homage to the earlier work. But is it also a critique of or meditation on the historical circumstances that gave rise to the earlier work?

**MM** I really see it as a cover version, in the musical sense, of the earlier work. There is not so much what my piece has in common with *Varia Vision*, the sounds from the studio, some text quotes.

**AC** And like a cover version, you don't need to know the original to enjoy the homage. But would you be interested in making it into a book, where the wider context could be given?

**MM** I've already done a catalog, but it's more about my work, less about the research. We had to decide which way to go. And the museums wanted it to go that way. What I would like to do is turn the transcript of the interviews for *Rückspiegel* into a book, with maybe two or three photographs of my adaptation in it. That is what I would like to do next.

**AC** Does your work as an artist ever merge with your work as a member of the band?

**MM** Sometimes it does happen that there is a show and the band is also invited to perform. But we wanted to avoid having a situation where people start to divide the music up into "he has done this and she has done that", but this is also inevitable because my husband is also in the band and he writes the lyrics and he likes to talk a lot and so it is often referred to as "his band".

**SK** I think that's one of the reasons Michaela decided to have her own career as a solo musician.

**AC** Does he have an input in the art you make?

**MM** I would think so because we talk every day. For years, the band was the intellectual platform for me, because everyone in the band was involved in aesthetics or art, writing or philosophy. So when we start, we always talk politics, and when we are on tour we always go to the museums and look at exhibitions.

**AC** Where was the installation originally shown

**MM** It opened in Ulm last May, then at Cubitt London in November, now it's at Ludlow in New York, and in March it moves to Linz-

**AC** Can you describe the work that isn't included at Ludlow?

**MM** The other piece is called *Rueckspiegel*, Rear Mirror, because I liked the idea of traveling, but not just traveling, also looking back while moving forward. So

you have two time axes at the same time, in the rear mirror. With this second piece, it consisted of video interviews. I originally wanted to do it all as one piece but it was too complex so I made two works. One is the in a way the documentation, a collage of the 5 interviews, and then the other work, the homage *Speicher*. I used the same actors for both pieces, so if both are installed together, you have the same voices. At the end of the interviews with the old men, I did a text-collage of the interviews, and had five much younger actors come in and recite the texts while I filmed them. Five monitors with each of the actors speaking the words of one of the protagonists. The English version of the piece, which was previously exhibited in London, I made it with the same people. We couldn't show *Rueckspiegel* here because you can't show two works with sound so close together. So I just have one piece here, but with the transcription of interview-collage on a shelf. In *Rueckspiegel*, with the five monitors, only one person is speaking at a time, so all the other screens are black, except occasionally a drawing appears. In London and here, there is only the film *Speicher* installed, the interview piece *Rueckspiegel* is represented only by the transcript on a shelf.

**AC** Stefan, where did you first see this work?

**SK** I originally saw it staged, in Munich, where actors were speaking the parts, with the film playing behind them.

**MM** The subject is dislocation, so the use of accents was helpful to this. You can imagine it was much more complicated to produce it in English than in German. It relates to the ideas of travel, immigration, wandering, foreignness. I wanted at least two speakers who were non-native German speakers. I used one person with a really strong Dutch accent, very optimistic and light sounding. And I asked a Greek friend of mine, a philosopher who works in a record shop, and has a quite dark voice. I really wanted the dialogue relating to the tramp idea. And the others are actors from Munich. I like the accent of people like Dietrich playing big roles in Hollywood movies — but with this strong accent!

**AC** How much did it cost to make the installation?

**MM** Hard to say how much it cost to make, because there is so much work in it — a year and a half. The money came partly from the German Cultural Foundation. Most of the money went into the film production, and the book we made. I did the soundtrack with the Bavarian Radio, the public radio, and they funded the audio part. They paid the actors for the German work, for the studio, and gave me a salary. They have these huge beautiful old studios, and I arranged that I could use it in association with them.

**AC** But why would a radio station fund a film or an art installation?

**MM.** The radio station has a department for audio play and media art, so they have a long tradition there to collaborate with artists. I was able to use the sound-track I made there to use within an art piece, and they were able to broadcast it as an audio play. And they did. And it was actually chosen as the best audio play of 2008 in Germany.

**AC** Was there money as a prize?

**MM** It's not money but it's an honor. Also, in Germany we don't have one radio station, we have this federal system, Bavarian Radio, Berlin Radio, Hamburg Radio...and so each of these stations, if they like it, they can broadcast it in the future, which will make some money.

**AC** It's unusual to have an artwork which can be broadcast on radio, staged in a theater, installed in a gallery, published as a book, it can be one installation, or two,...

**MM** With regard to the film, the soundtrack is more than important to it. Normally when you go to a movie, it's first of all about what you see. That's always the case with art. The most important sense is sight. At least that's what we think, though it isn't necessarily the case, it's just that we are not so aware of the other senses and what they are contributing.

**AC** The film contains only two images, both kind of abstract , but in different ways. What are they images of?

**MM** One of the shots is taken from Bavaria, when I filmed it, it was last winter, and it was night, and snowing very heavily. I traveled through the countryside where there was no light at all, and I just drove through the night with this heavy snow lit by the headlamps of the car and falling onto the windshield and it gives this strange sense of movement, it looks like you are underwater, or traveling through outer-space. This shot dissolves from time to time into another black and white image, of a little drawing rotating on a turntable, shot with a macro camera. It's black paper with white thread, that makes a series of lines, a kind of wave, which looks like a sonic landscape, if you can imagine, and the camera moves up and down the lines, blending into them. The drawing is gently turning, and the camera blends into the lines, so a kind of abstract movie is made, relating in a way to the modernist notion of abstraction. The movie contains only those two different camera shots.

**AC** What was the film imagery used in *Varia Vision*?

**MM** Different films of travel, mostly done out of a train window, or at stations sunsets, and then some railway tracks. They had 12 different themes. I used these themes or chapters in my work. I took the chapter headings they used,



"Saying Goodbye", "Arriving", "Traffic", "Seasons", things like that, I have a Vocoder voice saying these words in my piece. That is as much as I know.

**AC** Did you limit the imagery in your film in homage to this aspect of *VariaVision*, or to put the emphasis on the soundtrack, or...?

**MM** Just to allow you to get drawn in, to allow you to take your time, also.

**AC** I saw a significance to the snow, in terms of journeying, vulnerability, traveling in space

**MM** And also a feeling of being somehow getting lost, disorientated... I didn't want it to be too much of a narrative at this level, I wanted so that time could really be a quality there.

**AC** You say that the soundtrack can exist without the visual level, could the film also operate silently?

**MM** The images, without the sound, are nothing. I prefer the soundtrack with the film to the audio play, not just the soundtrack alone, so there is certainly a visual dimension. For the the radio play is not so different, because most people who listen to radio are driving their car, so they anyway have a kind of situation I show in that film. I also like the idea of an expanded concept of art, that the radio is part of the piece, because the art institutions have always a limited crowd of people who go there. But after it is played on the radio, different people come to the institutions no longer just the same crowd.

**AC** So Stefan, was the theatrical performance the only time you saw it ?

**SK** No, I also saw it as an installation at Cubitt in London.

**MM** Which was very different to the theatrical performance. With a theater you just have one day to install it, one rehearsal.

**SK** The Cubitt and Ludlow versions are much more fine-tuned.

**MM** And so was the first version, which was at the museum in Ulm. But the Cubitt and Ludlow installations are much more about how you work with the room. The Cubitt installation was quite different to the Ludlow installation, because Cubitt was only one room. I like to adjust quite precisely to the specific environment, and Cubitt allowed me the opportunity to divide room and have kind of white cube, and one black box, cinema. It's always different, wherever it shows, and I like that. The wall-drawing at Cubitt was not so long and not so repetitive as at Ludlow. It was only a small part of the machine. When it goes to

Linz, I will try to have both pieces together, in adjacent rooms: the interview piece in one room with a wall-drawing.

**MM** For more than twenty years I have used the sewing machine as an artistic instrument, and it has something quite important for me, because it takes away the handwriting, the signature, the authentic. So it's kind of a political decision to use this machine. Also I see it as one of the first computers, because it makes a zero and a one. It doesn't make just a definite line, it also makes a knotted line, so you have two threads, one above, one below, so the whole drawing is a kind of construction.

**AC** You already know the lines you want to make, or you make it up as you go?

**MM** It's really like driving, turning around the paper

**AC** So this is another form of journeying

**MM** Well yes in a way. And the machine also decides the direction I will take. But in this case, the drawing in the film, it's much more of a kind of abstract, just lines, I start with a straight line, and then it starts to get a little shaky, and then I go along with the shakiness, and this produces waves,

**SK** And the drawings are as much structurally about film-making, and how narratives are constructed: for every narrative on the surface, there is also a narrative that you can't see, a subconscious body that travels along with the visible loop, a second thread that is an integral part of the stitch. The idea of the thread as a storyline and the threads in the sewing machine.

**MM** And there is even a third element of the drawings, in the way the threads make the loop. I like how the paper distorts and warps, because sewing is normally about. One woman said to me "Oh, I see it, this is the female work" and I said "I don't think about it as female work alone, in history the tailor was a man." This only changed after the industrial revolution and you had a sewing machine in your own home.

**AC** Are the drawings you are including at Ludlow visually similar to the wall-drawing?

**MM** Not really. There's one ink drawing from some shots of the Studio, which the wall-drawing is one section of. Another is a very small piece with small details of the Studio. And then there are two paper works made from collages out of newspapers, sewn together. It acts as a kind of landscape, from above. Another drawing is also a collage, made from a newspaper for musicians.

**AC** Are the shadows cast onto the work by history specific to this work or are those shadows so strong and omnipresent that they inevitably affect the significance of much work made now?

**MM** I think it's everywhere. Every big company has this strange story. Even the department stores have the same story: they were formerly Jewish owned and then just taken away and then other people take them over. If you dig, you always get to that same point.

**AC** And with the next generation of artists, do you think that will be gone or is it still so powerful that it will continue?

**MM** Since it was there, it will always be there. If you look for it, you will see it. When Kohl came to power, he said "I will get rid of this history. We are now a new, nice Germany. We are younger than that. We are without guilt." But as soon as you look for back, you find it.

**AC** Do you find any parallels between then and now, say, with the treatment of immigrants?

**MM** No. I think there is a big awareness of the fact that so many people became migrants because they had to leave Germany and other countries like America took them. But still, you have young guys in Germany being fascist, like in every other country now.

**AC** There are multiple elements in the work that relate to the Nazi period: there is an evocation of people fleeing, or being involuntarily transported, from that time; there's the reason for Siemens' commissioning the film; there's the technicians involved in the making of it; and then there's the history of the art school, how it was initially funded, and why it ceased to be funded. Is the relationship between the Third Reich and the avant-garde widely known about in Germany?

**SK** I think it's good not to expand too much from the particular here. When I came to Munich for the handover from the former director, there was a big mural that MM had made, *Atelier Europe*. It was about creative industries and their relation to economics, and MM made a mural of the bohemian figures in Munich, ranging from Andreas Baader to King Ludwig II. That was really impressive in itself, but also interesting for me because I wanted to get a bit of the history of the city and the artists living in that city. It's quite rare for artists of Michael's status to remain locally based in a city like Munich, because there is a tendency to move to Berlin. So having an artist who not only lives and works in Munich, but also makes work that deals with the historical context of that specific city, was interesting to me. And there is an element of this also in the works on display at Ludlow, where the focus is on a certain modern moment in

German post-war history, a certain region of that moment, in particular the film-making of Reitz and Kluge as predominant figures of German post-war film-making.

**MM** In any case, this is just what I say, it's just my interpretation. You are not going to find by doing any research that Siemens did the Studio because of their Nazi history, it's just very obvious they had this history and afterwards they donated money to the avant-garde scene, to just get a new image. Half the people of course were soldiers for the Nazi regime, and if you are working for the military in new technologies...the subtext is really interesting because the avant-garde is growing out of these things. These sounds produced by the Studio were meant to be the biggest freedom you could listen to, all the people I interviewed drew the comparison between it and the freedom of outer space, "it blows your mind". Sure it was the sixties, and there was an emphasis on liberation. But on the other hand this is technology with a really dirty history.