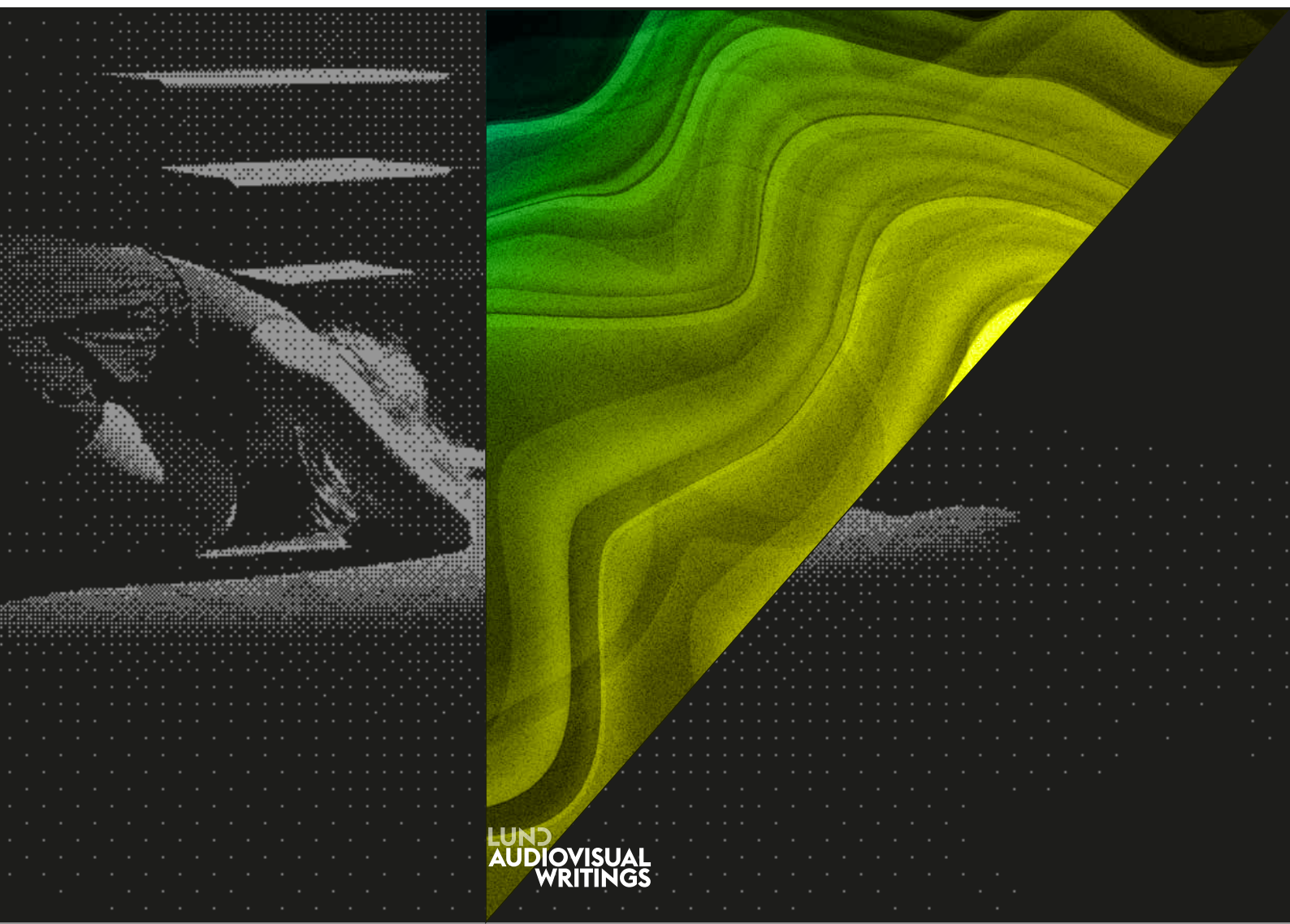


Cornelia Lund
Holger Lund

On the Spirit of the Funkhaus: Claudia Larcher's Video *Baumeister*

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On the Spirit of the Funkhaus:

Claudia Larcher's Video *Baumeister*

— Cornelia Lund, Holger Lund

No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man's.

— H.G. Wells, "The War of the Worlds," 1898 (The radio play version broadcast in 1938 caused a panic in the radio audience.)

Maybe soon the multitude of technological devices will be as unavoidably part of us as the snail house is to the snail or the web is for the spider. But then the devices would be rather parts of our human organism than parts of the nature surrounding us.

— Werner Heisenberg

Art can emerge autonomously and more or less freely, or not autonomously, as a commissioned work, but that is far from meaning that it is not free. In the best of cases, a thematic incentive is provided that can lead to an engagement with something already existing and yet generates an independent work. ORF Funkhaus Dornbirn succeeded in providing just such an incentive, and Claudia Larcher's video *Baumeister* (2012) goes far beyond merely paying homage to Gustav Peichl's architecture. In what could be classified as something between architectural film, documentary film, and experimental film, Larcher, working with the composer Constantin Popp, combines the building, film, and sound in a reflected way that emphasizes form. The result was an artistic exploration of architecture that explores central aspects of Peichl's architecture.

Claudia Larcher chose the audiovisual medium of film, with all the risks it involves. For the question of how the static medium of architecture and the dynamic medium of film can come together in an adequate way is a problem that has already been the subject of numerous filmic visualizations of architecture, both successful and unsuccessful. Because film offers possibilities of grasping architecture and representing it that can suspend its static nature, this makes it attractive for representing a living spatial experience. Claudia Larcher chooses this approach, but on the basis of photographs. What at first might sound contradictory reveals an aesthetic method. Mistrusting the standard of 24 or more images per second, because it prevents the exact aesthetic control over individual images, the artist shot around 250 individual photographs of the architecture of the Funkhaus and then in post-production a selection was collaged, edited, and animated as photo-film. The turns, camera pans, and tracking shots are thus exclusively virtual. This approach allows her to go beyond architectural reality and to establish a new view of the existing architecture that oscillates between approaches from concrete art and filmic traditions of the surrealists, crime and horror film, and Stanley Kubrick.

But to begin: what kind of architecture is this? Peichl's radio buildings in Austria, also known as "Peichl-Torten" (Peichl Cakes), were intended as standardized buildings in the early 1970s. Based on a round shape, they have two floors, and can be expanded by adding various modules.¹ Fittingly for their function as radio centers, they can be classified to a realm of "technoid functionalism"² that does not hide its technical aspect, but on the contrary emphasizes it.³ Materials such as concrete, steel, and glass and the shapes of pipes, railings, ceilings, and floors indicate the radio building's technical character, quite in the spirit of Space Age design, an aspect that Claudia Larcher traces out, captures, and continues in her video.

The video begins with a floor shot as a rotating motif of rays or a sun, picking up the circular form of the building as well as its function, the emission of broadcast waves (see Figure 1). This function can also be found immediately in the soundtrack, which at the start mixes radio static with the electronic sounds that originally emerged in radio buildings: think here of Karl-Heinz Stockhausen and the first electronic studio at Cologne's WDR. Afterward, these representational images are abstracted by close-ups, so that we lose sight of their illustrative aspect, and the sequence takes on the feel of concrete art (see Figure 2). Such sequences, which make material, shapes, and/or colors absolute, can be found again and again in the video. They take up Peichl's focus on material, shapes, and colors as symbols of the power of the technical and explore these forces as transformational of space.



Figures 1 + 2
Claudia Larcher, *Baumeister*,
 video animation, HD, 16:9, stereo,
 8 min. 30 sec., loop, 2012

For at the same time, a turn takes place in the sequence mentioned from the horizontal slowly towards the vertical (see Figure 3). Such weightless turnings of spatial elements or entire spatial situations in slow motion (see Figure 4) recall Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968) and, as it were, situate Peichl's architecture in "outer space" (see Figure 5). In so doing, Larcher pursues film techniques like those used by the surrealists Buñuel and Dalí in *Un chien andalou* (1929), where unanchored leaps through time and space, which exceed actual architecture, are often used.

Here, Larcher's aesthetic recourse to Peichl's Funkhaus can be made more precise: using filmic and acoustic means, she moves

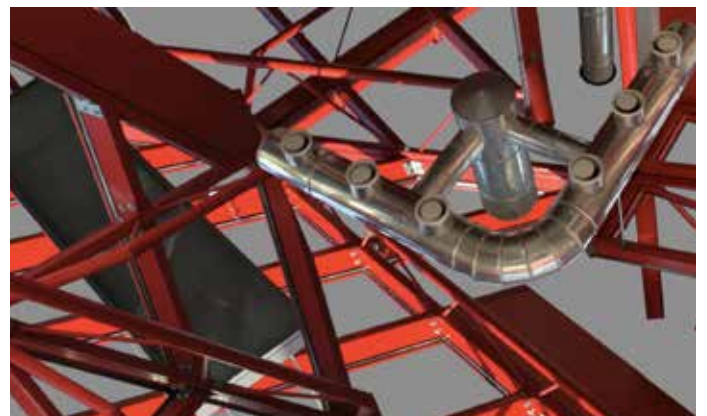
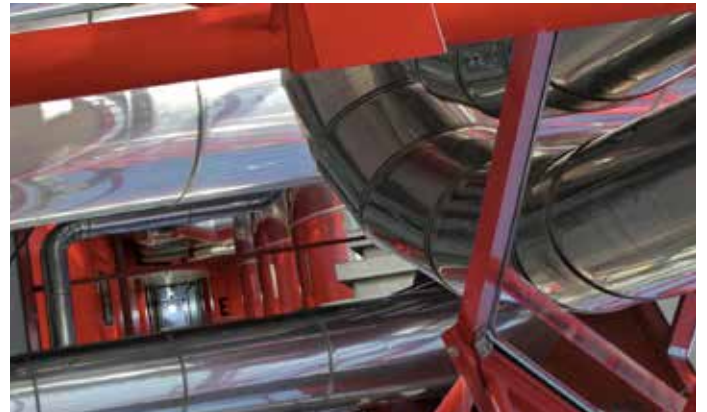
¹ See ORF-Funkhaus Graz, <http://stmv1.orf.at/stories/537159>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

² Architekturzentrum Wien. "ORF—Landesstudio Salzburg" (September 14, 2003), <http://www.nextroom.at/building.php?id=2406>, date of access: November 23, 2017.

³ Ibid.

the Funkhaus as a transmission beyond its architectural staticness, setting in motion an architecture that itself is used to set waves in motion. But not in having the building spin through the Vorarlberg landscape, but precisely the way in which work in Funkhaus is done, from the inside out, with elements of the interior space that are animated. The only hint of an “outer spacey” exterior takes place near the end of the video, when pipes and railings are treated like free-floating constructional elements and like satellite wings hover in diffuse space (see Figure 5). But immediately afterward, the film comes to an end, returning, like a circle back to its initial motif, the ground shot of rays. The excursion to satellite space alluded to is brought back to earth, where it began, and is oriented towards it (see Figure 1). And in this way, the inverse parallelism can work: just as the Funkhaus emits broadcast waves, Larcher makes the Funkhaus move from its place as a transmission of architectural waves.

Architecture is the composition of a location, for gods, spirits, or people. Initially, people seem to be absent from the video. As in Larcher’s earlier videos *Heim* (2008) and *Empty Rooms* (2011), there are no people present as actors. All the same, something human is present, in a subtle, more indirect way. The location, the Funkhaus, includes indications of human use: seating, toilets, a studio space with headphones and a microphone, all of this points to functions, towards the building’s being made and furnished for people. Yet despite the absence of visually present individuals, the strongest human presence



Figures 3–5
Claudia Larcher, *Baumeister*,
 video animation, HD, 16:9, stereo,
 8 min. 30 sec., loop, 2012

develops in the soundtrack. Very early on, at first scarcely audible, a female radio voice mixes with the noise and electronic sounds. It becomes clearer over the course of the video, gaining clarity when the camera passes by the studio, before then again fragmented. This radio voice deals with architecture. In a self-referential turn,

at issue in a video about the architecture of a Funkhaus is a radio voice speaking about architecture, albeit of a very different kind, for wood is mentioned as a material. This material opposite—Peichl's building is entirely free of wood—focuses our attention on the artificiality and technical aspect of the Funkhaus. The visual absence of a speaker or any other individual in Funkhaus might initially seem uncanny. The soundtrack adds to this effect, offering reminiscences of soundtracks from films by Hitchcock or Argento, spreading a sonic spookiness easily evoked by abandoned technological architecture. Towards the middle of the video, the moment of the spectral is triggered when we realize what the radio voice is talking about: architecture. By this point at the latest, the absence of a visual human presence and its acoustic presence can be interpreted more clearly. Just as the Funkhaus is not visually but only acoustically present in its broadcasts, especially in radio broadcasts, no individual appears in the video, but a voice that is only audible.

This approach makes it possible to understand the video itself as a search for the voice of the Funkhaus, which achieves its greatest degree of clarity close to the studio, but visually cannot be grasped. Visually, it only can grasp the architecture, and here it is clear to see that the architecture is perhaps not only in an artificial-technical sense part of the voice of the Funkhaus, but in a media-based sense, thought in McLuhan's terms, the voice of the Funkhaus itself. And Claudia Larcher's video not only shows this, but for its part is a component, a form, a realization of the voice of the Funkhaus. Its character can now be defined with greater precision: transgressing space and time, immaterial (human/visual and technical/architectural for the receivers of broadcasts), and at the same time all too material (human-acoustic and technical architectural on the side of production). In so doing, Larcher's video not only shows the site where broadcasts emerge, but also its characteristics, its doubleness in a material and immaterial aspect. To show that latter, which lies beyond the brute reality of elements of construction, it has to introduce a de-realization: spatially-temporally through turns in space, leaps between spatial levels, spatial hovering, but also acoustically with electronic sounds that do not correspond to any natural object. In this way, not only can it reveal the voice of the Funkhaus, but also show the spirit of the building itself: and this in the double sense of the word: the air of the technological-space age that dominates at Funkhaus, as well as the magically unreal spectral quality that inheres in this very attitude.

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