

Lynne Marsh

BERLIN, GERMANY

PROGRAM



Philharmonie Project (Nielsen: Symphony No. 5), 2011, Video installation
(Architecture by June14 (Meyer-Grohbrügge & Chermayeff))

Herbert von Karajan, writing in 1956 to the jury selecting the design for the Berlin Philharmonic building, noted how Hans Scharoun's proposal catalyzed the audience's 'complete concentration' on the musical event. Things have changed – distraction is today's catchword. Both extremes appear in Lynne Marsh's *Philharmonie Project (Nielsen's Symphony No. 5)* (2011), which follows the Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall video team: four people who capture the orchestra's performances for broadcast on the Internet.

The team is never seen by the public, either during performances or on the Philharmonic's website. Marsh inverts this formula with two projections. First, she filmed the technicians in their booth as they were coordinating various remote cameras in the hall to a playerless 'dry run' of the Philharmonic's performance of Carl Nielsen's 'Symphony No. 5' (1922). Second, she captured the shots of the remote

cameras themselves, which deftly represent the musicians and their instruments by empty chairs on a lit stage, peopled only by the occasional stagehand.

The two projections – which were screened in synchronization – turn the symphony into a visual-aural tug-of-war between the technicians, who sputter curious codes, and the architectonics of the hall, filled with sound yet devoid of musicians. To augment this staging, Marsh worked with the architectural team June14 (Johanna Meyer-Grohbrügge and Sam Chermayeff) to construct a floor-to-ceiling industrial platform which splits the black room into oblique halves. The technician projection could be seen from aboard the large slanted surface of the platform; the camera movements were shown under the partition's cave-like interior, cast through spidery piping and tubes. The atmosphere was both brooding and precise; hushed felt on the top of the partition blanketed the underside's stolid piping. The staging referenced both the organics of the Philharmonic building and the dualism of Nielsen's two-movement symphony. It likewise translated music into spectacle, overpowering sound by sight.

Power thrives on illusion. The moment a 'control centre' is exposed, authority becomes slapstick, even humdrum. Marsh's technicians could have been saccharine – a cloying, sanctimonious exposition of behind-the-stage labourers. Or, worse, gloating in techno-fetishism. But she avoids either trap by wielding distance from her subjects. The team is so unspectacular as to be stripped of any aura. But this distance is alluring. Their language – camera numbers, directives – arrives as syncopated psychobabble. The partition's naked industrial beams – a would-be scaffolding – connote instability, as just one material fumbling for dominance among others.

These conflicts were the show's strength. What the exhibition lacked in playfulness, it made up for in its dynamic *mise en scène*. Classical music is a struggling art form; the Internet and cinema, lingering in the background like forces of mass culture about to overtake an orchestra, added a further dimensionality to what was Program's final show. The *Philharmonie Project* bears out the relevance of something Kracauer wrote, four years after the debut of Nielsen's symphony, about picture palaces in Berlin: here, distraction is 'raised to the level of culture.'

—by *Pablo Larios*

About this review



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