

Extra Visible Dimension: Lynne Marsh's The Philharmonie Project (Nielsen: Symphony No. 5)

by Rosemary Heather

Moving beyond the iconic architecture of Berlin's Philharmonie building, Lynne Marsh makes a two-channel video installation about what happens behind the scenes. In the process she reveals something not previously thought worthy of our attention—a space and the people it animates when they work there. Marsh's work about technicians filming the live video broadcast of the Berlin Philharmonie's performance of Carl Nielsen's *Symphony No. 5* could even be said to create this space; arguably, it didn't exist before she filmed it. Disclosing the mechanisms at work behind the spectacle, Marsh creates by implication a portrait of the broader system within which we are all enmeshed.

To understand this proposition, first consider what Marsh doesn't show. Viewers of *The Philharmonie Project (Nielsen: Symphony No. 5)* (2011) never see an orchestra performing. Instead, we are presented with a tightly focused performance of four technicians in a recording booth. Each has a specific role, calling out numbers corresponding to the bars of music and to the camera angles that film the

musicians as they play. A second video shows these camera shots in a dry run—the camera choreography in rehearsal before the concert begins. We see empty chairs and sheet music stands on a stage devoid of performers.

In the gallery, Marsh positions the two videos at either end—or side, recto/verso—of an angled platform that bisects the room on the diagonal. Set on a scaffold, the structure is the design of the architect team June 14 (Johanna Meyer-Grohbrügge and Sam Chermayeff). Audiences sitting on the top of the platform gaze down onto Marsh's video of the Philharmonie team working together as they film the 45-minute performance; on its underside, viewers see her video of the performance in dry run. The soundtrack unifies these elements, broadcasting Nielsen's *Symphony* as it is punctuated by the voices of the film technicians. The installation brings together two distinct moments that are musically synchronous. Together, they describe an event that is never made visible to us. It is only discernable in terms of its absence; or rather, in terms of the space Marsh defines with her work.

Translating the musical score, the technicians' work is a performance in itself. Like the camera shots they coordinate, they move together and overlap, performing almost as a singular entity—much like the orchestra. The scene conveys all the drama of its accompanying music. This is also true of the dry run video, which substitutes the intended subject—the orchestra playing—for the shot; as the framing choreographs incidental images of the empty stage, the camera becomes an extension of the music it articulates. The point of a symphonic work is to envelop the listener within a totalizing system of harmonic logic and dissonance. Marsh too envelops her audience within that system, while at the same time ensuring that its apparatus is, figuratively, laid bare. In *Philharmonie*, virtual space becomes intelligible via the very devices that

disseminate its contents. This space exists not in what the camera films or its extension as broadcast. It exists rather in the elements the artist brings together: the filmed spaces, performers and installation. Together these elements create a kind of extra visible dimension, one that points to the infrastructure of which it is an expression.

In his text *Notes on Gesture* Giorgio Agamben proposes that “gesture rather than image is the cinematic element.” In Agamben's terms, images are static whereas “the gesture always refers beyond itself towards a whole of which it is a part.” Marsh's work provides us with a precise expression of this idea. Shot from just below eye level, the footage focuses on the upper bodies and heads of the technicians working within the cramped space of the recording booth. Beyond the context she creates in the gallery, the artist offers no explanation about what they are doing. In the absence of knowing, we interpret their gestures. The musical score animates the performers, the camera frame emphasizing the intense focus of their concentration.

Agamben writes: “an idea is a constellation in which phenomena arrange themselves in a gesture.” The shifting plane of the cinematic image casts the end point as its organizing principle; narrative films will always carry viewers to the end of the story they tell. Artworks engage viewers in a process that leads to an other kind of conclusion; reading an artwork enlists an understanding of the mechanism by which you grasp its meaning. Similarly, as a time-based medium, film has the innate potential to dramatize this process of meaning unfurling, a gradual coming into understanding. The process is, however, not necessarily linear. Rather, phenomena gather into meaningful configurations—in Agamben's words, into constellations. The significance of this metaphor resides in the spatial coordinates it conjures up. Further,

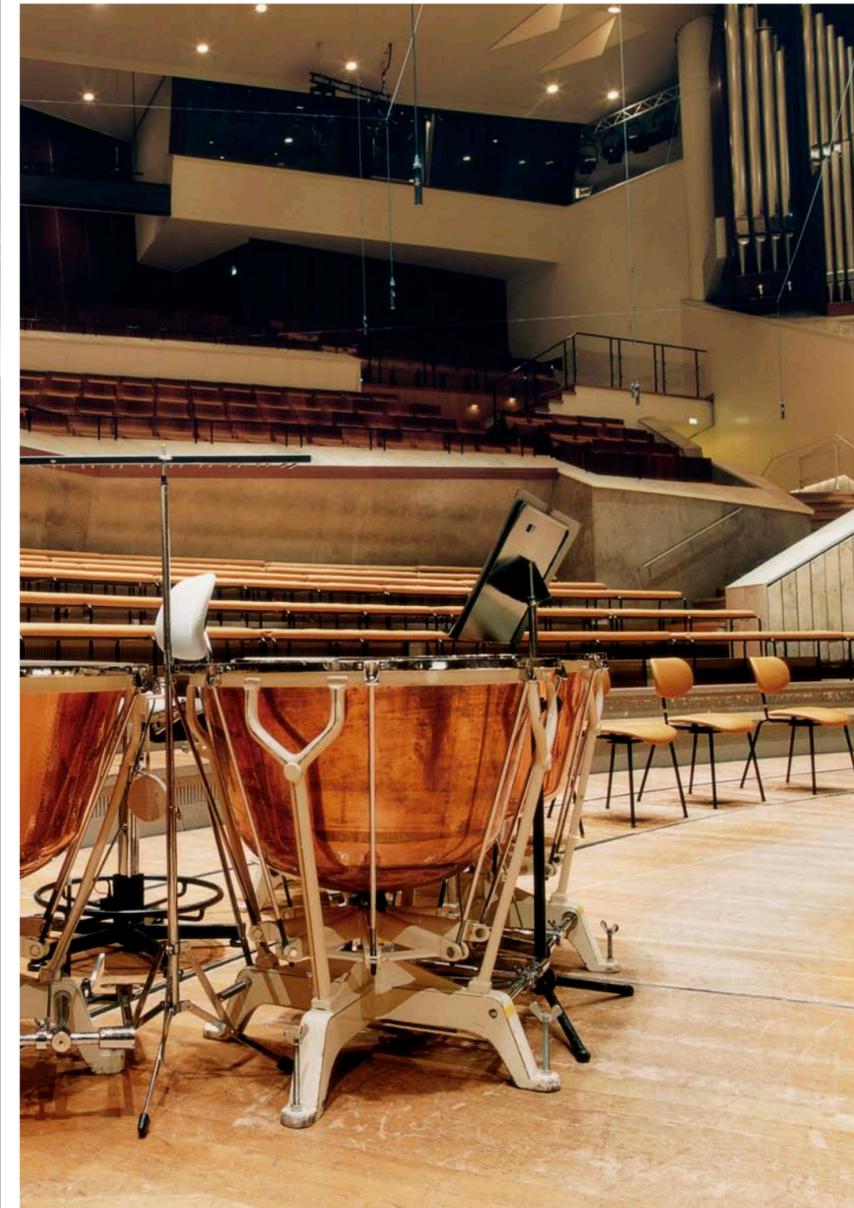
Agamben resolves his concept in the notion of a “gesture”; filmic space is embodied space. As with living beings, in every instance of its existence, a film intimates the moment of its demise. Marsh's artwork engages with this concept of gesture by finding, deep within the Philharmonie building, a space and performers that we can understand as the end points of a broader constellation. Meaning inheres in the apparatus of spectacle implied. By framing a symphonic performance at several levels of remove from the actual live event, Marsh articulates a space that exists as its result.

In *Philharmonie*, the space Marsh illuminates takes on a high degree of specificity. The tight focus of her camera frame offers a glimpse into a vista that, prior to *Philharmonie*, was left largely unconsidered. By implication, the artist depicts the vast apparatus of job segmentation, on which the entire system depends. Like every totalizing vision, this dystopia lacks air and sunshine; Marsh presents a vision of contemporary existence that, in place of the pleasures of everyday life, offers the (not inconsiderable) blandishments of job professionalism. If *Philharmonie* places us in an airless and tense universe, that is because the artist pictures with great clarity our modern condition of mediation. In the end, Marsh's vision is less dystopic than factual. She finds a way to express a truth about the world we all live in: *Philharmonie* is a lens through which we can view our own circumstances. It's a portrait of the embodied world as it is simultaneously disembodied by the constellation within which it functions.

Rosemary Heather is a freelance writer and curator based in Toronto. You can find an online archive of her writing at <http://rosemheather.com>.



Installation shot, photograph by David Brandt





Installation shot, photograph by David Brandt



video stills

The Philharmonie Project (Nielsen: Symphony No. 5)

by Lynne Marsh

Architecture by June 14 Meyer-Grohbrügge & Chermayeff with Alexander Menke

October 27 – December 17, 2011

PROGRAM –initiative for art and architecture collaborations

Concert Recording of:

Carl Nielsen Symphony Nr. 5 op. 50

Performed by the Berliner Philharmoniker

Conducted by David Zinman

January 15, 2011

Special thank you to the Berliner Philharmoniker Digital Concert Hall Team for their gracious participation

The exhibition was kindly supported by the Québec Government Office, The Bambi Foundation, the Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec and The University of Hertfordshire. In cooperation with the Embassy of Canada.

Lynne Marsh is a Canadian artist working between London, Berlin and Montréal. Documentation of her work can be found at www.lynnemarsh.net.

Right: video still; Opposite cover: production shot, photography by Uta Kogelsberger

