



Future Projections: Lynne Marsh

thursday, august 28, 2014



Future Projections 2014 marks the first major transatlantic commission that the Goethe-Institut and TIFF --both concerned with the intersection of art and film-- are collaborating on. "Anna and the Tower" by Berlin-based Canadian artist Lynne Marsh is set on location in the air traffic control tower of a refurbished airport, Magdeburg-Cochstedt, south of Berlin. It

was newly opened in 2010, but at the time of filming there were still no scheduled flights. The airport and tower await an economy to come, at some point in the near future. The work features Anna, a young air traffic controller, who becomes the work's protagonist. If you miss it at TIFF14: the Biennale de Montreal has picked up the installation and will show it for the rest of the year.

Jutta Brendemuehl: What did you feel & think when you first saw the airport? How did you experience this venue, history-laden for my generation of "divided" Germans, but perhaps less or differently charged for you as a transplanted Canadian artist visiting in 2013?

Lynne Marsh: What struck me on my first visit to the tower was the amazing open vista onto the sky and landscape. The airport is in the middle of the countryside without any sign of towns nearby. You can see the weather approaching for kilometres. And during the entire day of my first visit there were no planes. The airport was not abandoned, it was new and waiting. The first reference to pop into my mind was Beckett's 'Waiting for Godot'. There was a strong sense of loneliness and isolation, yet the view allowed you this incredible connection to the outside.

I met Anna on duty that day as the air traffic controller. The contrast was extraordinary. Fresh out of her training, her enthusiasm and optimism for her profession was palpable in our interview. Perhaps for me the former East-West divide is mostly articulated in the desires and aspirations of this airport - transformed from a soviet air-base into a western commercial market experiment. The work calls forth the present tense condition of the history-laden site, where the economic model is lacking stability.

JB: The first piece of yours I saw a few years ago was "Plänterwald", an installation probing an abandoned East Berlin amusement park, eerily overgrown and frozen in (a past) time. The piece struck me as oscillating between an ethnographic documentary of a forgotten tribe and Theatre of the Absurd. One main reason why we commissioned you with a new project for TIFF Future Projections 2014 was that interest of yours in transitioning, in the theatricality of becoming, and the thrill of the as-yet-to-be-actualized. How is this reflected in "Anna and the Tower"?

LM: Yes, "Anna and the Tower" is all about the 'as-yet-to-be-actualized'. She performs her desire to control air traffic and the airport's aspirations for air traffic. She attempts to 'will these into being'. Her performative 'speech acts' (the dialogue of ground-to-air commands) can be seen as a conjuring of planes or as a hallucinatory vision. In the end we don't see the planes arrive, however, Anna speaks of a storm and the storm arrives.

"Anna and the Tower" is a continuation of my interest in how the conditions of a site expose the continual play between its present narratives and histories. I engage the people who work in and inhabit these places and choreograph their labour as a way to perform the place and its conditions.

JB: To say that as an artist you are concerned with time and space might sound banal - but in your case it is quite literally true, as can be seen in your rigorous examinations of architecture, its patterns, structures, textures, as well as shifting, suspended or anticipated time. In this framework, why your decision to realize "Anna and the Tower" as a 3-channel video projection?

LM: Theatrically, "Anna and the Tower" can be seen as a work with three acts - day, dusk and night. These are representative of the passing time Anna spends in the tower. The spatial separation of 3 video sequences along three conjoined screens emphasises a notion of expanded time - time passing yet looping in suspended animation - and highlights the atmospheric differences as the exterior light changes. Each 'act' has a different performative mode - changes in the use of the camera and the relationship between the performer and the camera.

I invite the viewer to move along the space of the screens sequentially, emphasizing a shift and repositioning. The architectural screen structure mimics the windows of Anna's tower, refolded to form a sculpture / stage / set. Projections of static lights illuminate the screens adjacent to the live action video emphasising the theatrical staging and referring to the

medium of projection.

JB: What role do the ambient sound in two of the sections and the hypnotic trumpet music in the dusk part of the piece play?

LM: The ambient sound in the first and third part is the amplified recording of room tone in the tower during the day and night. It's a combination of the wind acting on the widows and the technological buzz of the equipment. Its amplification creates a kind of intimacy with the inside.

The solo trumpet appears when the camera perspective is outside the tower, looking in at Anna through the glass and the reflected landscape. It serves to distance the viewer from the image as a more 'cinematic' experience, emphasizing the surface of the glass as a screen and the separation of inside and out. The trumpet also extends the narrative threads by creating a sense of longing.

The trumpet is played and recorded in the tower by Karsten Iwanow, Anna's father. During our initial interviews Anna spoke about how her passion to become an air traffic controller grew out of her first encounters with ATC through her father's obsession with flying and flight simulations. I asked about her father's profession and she told me he was a professional trumpet player. So I asked if he would come and play some improvisations in the tower.

JB: While people have appeared in your previous works --from the guards at "Plänterwald" to the silent white-clad figure in "Stadium"--, I feel that you have reached a new quality and intimacy in the relationship with Anna, who titles the piece (a first). **How did you relate to and deal with her as a performer?**

LM: After my first day in the tower with Anna we continued a conversation about how we might work together. We decided to **use the tower as a kind of studio to try out performance ideas.** She is a dancer and sent me video clips of her rehearsing. I sent her clips of early performance artworks where the performer directly addresses the audience / camera. We worked together on a script of air traffic control dialogue, imagining a choreography of flights passing, landing, taking off etc. During the filming of the script I spoke the pilot's lines to Anna through an earpiece from another room below, so Anna and I were communicating remotely, although in the piece the viewer only hears Anna's directions.

JB: Watching "Anna and the Tower", images of fairy tales came to mind, with Anna reminding me of a more potent Tinker Bell...

LM: **Anna and the Tower shares some characteristics with fairy tales or German Märchen (wonder tales).** The number three is a common motif, framing episodes that lead the heroine on her quest toward emancipation and discovery. Typical traits such as magic or conjuring, secret languages and the setting in faraway lands without definite locality all feature in the work. **It is a tale of a young woman in a tower on her own who, in the absence of contact and outside communication, calls on her own powers of agency to command the potentialities of her situation.**

Lynne Marsh is an internationally acclaimed artist whose practice lies at the intersection of moving image, performance and installation. Marsh invests specific sites and architectures—the spaces of spectacle—through location-based filming and behind-the-scenes views. She explores how the camera's performance reconfigures social spaces and their ideological orientation, inviting viewers to step on stage, to seize an active role.

Solo exhibitions of Lynne Marsh's work have been held at Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin; Steve Turner Contemporary Los Angeles; the Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal; Danielle Arnaud contemporary art, London; and PROGRAM, Berlin. Her work has also been included in group exhibitions and screenings at Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels; Kunstverein Wolfsburg, Germany; the 10th International Istanbul Biennial; Oakville Galleries, Canada; 53 Art Museum, China; National Gallery of Canada. She lives and works in Berlin and London.

"Anna and the Tower" has its world premiere during TIFF 2014.

Co-commissioned by the Goethe-Institut and TIFF.

Presented in collaboration with Scrap Metal Gallery Toronto.

by Jutta Brendemuehl

image: "Anna and the Tower", Video installation, 2014, Lynne Marsh, Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Donald Browne, Montréal

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