Bea McMahon and Brendan Earley
True complex

Brendan Earley
from *True complex*
2008
Installation shot, Void
courtesy Void

Walking though *True Complex* at Void, I was struck with the thought that the two works (one by Bea McMahon, one by Brendan Earley) in adjacent galleries shared much of the same conceptual framework: a miasma of restraint, restricted self-expression, a dystopian acceptance of failed utopian promise. And beyond this shared sensibility, I sensed (or projected; no matter which) echoes of another work, by one of the last modernists: *Alphaville*, Jean-Luc Godard's 1965 dystopian nouvelle-vague future noir: the étrange aventure of detective Lemmy Caution, the naïf Natasha, and computer brain Alpha 60 ruling his eponymous realm with perfect logic.

Brendan Earley has been examining legacies of modernism throughout several exhibitions over the last years (especially see *Towards a large white building* at Temple Bar, 2006). In Void, Earley made reference once again to Ireland's circuitous and fragile links with the modernist project: it is true that Wittgenstein stayed in Ireland, but his architectural building design is visible only elsewhere. Earley's two modest sketches of the Wittgenstein designed house are minor partners in his major installation of a room-sized structure made up of multiple levels, corners, sides, bases and tops of seemingly eternal ongoing and self-sustaining flat-pack construction.

<The meaning of words and of expressions is no longer grasped. An isolated word or an isolated detail in a drawing can be grasped, but the meaning of the whole escapes us. Once we know ONE, we think that we must know TWO, because ONE plus ONE equals TWO. We forget that we must first know what PLUS is.>

'Legacy' can be understood as referring to something handed down from a previous generation, and also as an allusion that this thing being handed down is outdated or discontinued. Earley's work carries both such senses of 'legacy', that of the legacy of the Wittgensteinian project, – < *to minimize unknown quantities* > – being expanded and unfolded: like a 3-D schematic (an exploded diagram) gone awry. A schematic functioning only aberrantly – beyond its own constraints yet still within the strict directions of its inherent functionality…

< Silence. Logic. Security. Prudence. >

Bea McMahon's work in Void was made in part of a two-channel projection, titled *The invisible state* and *In the visible state.*

<The essence of the so-called capitalist world or the communist world is not an evil volition to subject their people by the power of indoctrination or the power of finance but simply the natural ambition of any organisation to plan all its actions.>

The invisible state features fragmentary scenes shot by the artist, an atmospheric architectural study featuring a blend of apparent archival footage and contemporary surveillance-style footage. The study is of a site wherein architectural design of a public complex in Dublin in 1968 was centred around an ethos of societal control, security and repression of individual and group expression.

<This dump of yours isn't Alphaville, its Zeroville.>

In the visible state features atmospheric footage of an iconic semi-babbling cloth-capped Irish male, in a rural setting, mumbling fragments about land being taken,

developers taking over, and a general sense of loss of birthright, of land, of control.

<The truth is that the essence of man is love and faith, courage, tenderness, generosity and sacrifice. The rest is the monolith created by your blindly ignorant progress.>

Both *Alphaville* and Bea McMahon's work in Void are tales of lives and thoughts within an arena existing under the hegemony of the ideology of control: and further, beyond this, such ideology of control is made inevitable within what is a hegemony of logic, and even of logicism. McMahon's background of mathematical study prior to her art practice opens clear routes to the idea of logicism: a school of thought in the philosophy of mathematics which puts forth the theory that mathematics is an extension of logic and therefore some or all mathematics is reducible to logic.

< So no one here knows the meaning of the word conscience any more>

Alphaville posits a unnerving fabled society under the hegemony of control – and of a logicism which has scaled up to the degree of a whole society being dominated by perfect logic. And its equally unnerving that in McMahon's invented worlds, such hegemony of control, and the hegemony of such logicism, seems innate, inevitable, invisible, and disguised – within memory, within loss, as progress.

< Everything has been said, provided words do not change their meanings, and meanings their words. >

All quotes < > are translated extracts from *Alphaville*

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