

**Published as ‘Shane McCarthy: Loop System’, *Mousse Magazine* 37, February 2013: 142-145.**

Maeve Connolly: I'd like to begin by focusing on your work *beautiful expectation* (2011), which has a theatrical quality, suggesting a scene of unfinished construction. So the viewer is presented with a projected digital drawing and also other items, such as a ladder, power sander, electrical tape and cable, suggesting that the installation process has been interrupted or suspended. Is this notion of the 'scene' encountered by a viewer an integral part of your practice – is it something you have continued to work with?

Shane McCarthy: Yes, the situational context remains an important aspect to the work, but one that is becoming less overt. It operates more subtly as the viewer may not immediately know they're encountering a scene as distinct to an art work. The constructed nature of it and its associations and effects operate in a less formally theatrical way, in a less open way. The potential of familiarity or expectation it facilitates is an important structure placed on the pieces, and something I continue to work with.

MC: *Beautiful expectation* (2011), *coy signal* (2011) and *belief in sentiment* (2012) all use digital drawing to produce the illusion of neon. In each instance, the properties of light and language become intertwined, emphasising the power of both to attract or even seduce. Can you talk about what you have described as the 'promise' of neon?

SMcC: I regard neon as having a kind of overwrought promise that is inherent to it. It has a potential promise of getting something on the cheap in the case of an advertisement, or the expectation of encountering something meaningful, poetic or personal something meaningful, poetic or personal. This expectation is an interesting one - even if it may only be fleeting. The contradictory spaces that it occupies as a method of advertising as well as a well-worn medium of articulation in artistic practices, are in both cases the combination of light and language as a method of seduction or attraction. This contradictory space in which it lies and how we navigate its 'promise' or expectation of what it may hold is something that captivates me.

MC: Even though neon is often associated with advertising, your use of language is quite different – it doesn't seem to reference the mass circulation of signs and information. Instead, I think you draw

the viewer into a much more intimate process of reflection involving language and materiality – a kind of dialogue?

SMcC: My use of language does have many differences from advertising but it also shares some common structures in how its composed, and is an important element in contributing to this process of reflection you have described. One example is the pacing or pulsating of the animated neon as an element of repetition. This repetition mirrors a core structure of advertisement. So yes, I view this as a kind of dialogue (or perhaps a system that facilitates a dialogue) between its disparate elements, such as the ‘scene’, its material objects, language and meaning. One that is viewable both from within its structure and more abstractly as a whole by the viewer, encouraging reflection within its closed looped system. This hopefully causes an enfolding and unfolding of its concept.

MC: You have used the term ‘closed loop system’ in relation to your work – could you expand on this idea and its relevance to your approach?

SMcC: The concept of a closed looped system is an effective way to describe or talk about my work and practice. This idea of dialogues between the practice as a whole and the works within it (or in the case of a single piece; the elements within it) like that of the language, materiality or context the piece inhabits, is important to the approach of the work. To clarify I see both the individual works and their place within my practice in a broader context, as scalable. They sit within and alongside each other. They are both, whether it is the practice or individual piece, the sum of their parts as well as their separate elements. And like any other language based on a self referential system or a system of signs, it allows for the combination, contradiction, succession and segmentation of its parts as well as its whole. It allows for the enfolding and unfolding of both, in contradiction and in conjunction with each other, in a more specific way as well as one that is inherently predisposed to paradoxes.

MC: Ina Blom has developed an interesting analysis of Nam June Paik’s work (in her 2007 book *On the Style Site: Art, Sociality and Media Culture*) in which she argues that, for Paik, television is a light source with the capacity to reorganise social space and distribute ‘ambience and atmosphere’. I wonder if these ideas are of interest?

SMcC: The use of light to affect the ambiance and atmosphere of the social space of an enclosed art space is something I'm concerned with. Its role as a means of aesthetic or method of attraction in how an individual, shared or sharing audience engages with the work is an important role. So too is its use as an element of articulation within the looped system of the pieces.

MC: The digitally drawn objects that appear on screen in *beautiful expectation*, *coy signal* and *belief in sentiment cannot* be physically manifested, and I wonder if you see the idea of the 'impossible' as relevant to your work, in conjunction (or maybe in tension with) notions of possibility?

SMcC: Yes, the perpetuation of the possible and its tension with the impossible facilitates a shift in perspective. It brings into question the validity of the neon's physicality and pulse, its material elements and its perceived meaning.

MC: I was recently reminded (by the art critic Caoimhín Mac Giolla Léith) of the etymological relationship between 'grammar' and 'glamour'. The notion of putting a 'glamour' (or spell) on someone suggests an assertion of power, founded in part upon learning and a facility with language. I wonder if you see a connection between this notion of power and your own exploration of attraction and illusion, through light and language?

SMcC: Yes, both in the use of written language and a visual language. The idea of gaining power over the 'meaning', or oneself through the 'glamour' of language is something that I think is very interesting, but is an idea that may be facilitated by another party. The idea of implicit memory and the illusion-of-truth effect is the notion that a concept or statement can be validated or be recalled as a truth because of hearing, reading or encountering it repeatedly, and subsequently internalising it through a fallacy of memory (implicit memory). It will be later perceived as truth regardless of its validity. It's an interesting concept, but one that is only given through its relation, or perceived relation of meaning and its internalisation. This internalization however is only possible, it would seem, through a defined structure facilitated by another. Because of this relationship there is no danger of anything emerging within, that is not one meaning among others, for others. Where the power lies in that relationship and the actuality of it, is questionable.

MC: You are currently based in Dublin and you've developed an approach that seems almost

philosophical in its sustained focus on the interplay between concepts and material processes. I was wondering if there is anything about Dublin that you find especially productive?

SMcC: I can't say with certainty as I have lived here for the entirety of my working life. But the emphasis on a level of joint criticality and a communal engagement, around writing and work, seems to be very robust in pockets around the city. It may be the size of the city that facilitates that level of engagement, or maybe a result of the people that are situated here, but it's certainly something I find productive. But I imagine that this may not necessarily be specific to Dublin.