Signs of the times: the concrete poetry of Peter Alwast

Sometimes the house of the future is better built, lighter and larger than all the houses of the past, so that the image of the *dream house* is opposed to that of the childhood home.[1]

Like the house of the future described by Bachelard, the virtual and physical spaces that Peter Alwast constructs are amalgams of oppositional elements. Consistently, his work makes a feature of the interplay between memory and representation, promise and delivery, romance and realism, the vacant and the profound, the personal and the generic. This architecture is animated by such oppositions - it is schematic and open to interpretation, a space for sensation and perception, for reverie and dream.

Alwast's paintings and drawings feature imagery from both personal and popular sources, often including words and phrases that have been souvenired from television, the internet or song lyrics. These works have been exhibited as part of installations that play with transparency and structure, and construct illusory environments negotiated by the viewer. Similarly, in Alwast's animations, architectural forms are designed, constructed and rendered in virtual space. In a number of works, these spaces have been subjected to a transformative process of layering, abstraction, expansion and implosion.

In this new animation, *Night Sky,* Alwast constructs a virtual suburban environment that could be anywhere or, indeed, nowhere in particular. It features a style of digital animation that would not be out of place in a pitch for the development of a new "Planned Community" or, alternatively, being navigated in a video game. Cutting across this computer generated imagery, the flutter and

whirr of a Super 8 film projector marks out the passing of time. It also suggests a confluence of a nostalgic past and a projected vision of the future, in which all-but obsolete camera technology records the product of a virtual camera.

The film itself resembles a series of establishing shots preceding an event that never occurs. No figures occupy this virtual environment, yet their presence is inferred by the light that spills from windows and by the occasional whisper of a passing car. Seeming to stand in for these already-departed or yet-to-arrive inhabitants, an array of neon text dances amongst the stars overhead. The text blinks on and off, illuminating the empty scene with words of wisdom, comfort, trivia or banal social comment.

These fragments of text seem to have strayed from the airwaves, hanging loose in the night sky as disconnected thoughts or messages that illuminate an unspecified issue and provide comfort to no one in particular. We could take them to be truisms, intended to dispense inspiration or irony, or exceptionally obscure and abstract examples of advertising. Or perhaps these words and phrases have been embedded in the collective unconscious of this invisible community, and are now writ large in the city's slumber, looped and repeated, echoing in the night.

Peter Alwast's *Night Sky* is a window onto a world that mirrors our own. It is familiar and yet strange, like the parallel world of television where shocking confessions and the expression of innermost thoughts are routine occurrences. The words and phrases in this work have struck a chord and lingered. Peter Alwast has built a city for them, and there they hang in the air, awaiting your perusal. Like any good advice, they are freely given. And like any form of poetry, it is up to the audience to make of them what they will.

---

[1] Gaston Bachelard *The Poetics of Space* (1958) trans Maria Jolas, Beacon Press, Boston, p 61