

Mirrored to the Core essay by Rosalind Parker

Mirrored to the Core is a love story. On one level it is beautifully, and profoundly simple, heartfelt and direct, telling the story of encounter and attraction between two adults as they meet, spark chemistry and embark on a relationship, on another level the work is explosive in its approach to artistic conventions and interdisciplinarity between creative praxis and health.

This art-installation piece, the vision of artist James Paddock is constructed around a short film, collaborated on with opera director Rosalind Parker, director of photography Chris Keenan and sound recordist Richard Gott.

It is a story of encounter between two adults with lived experience of schizophrenia whereby their meeting tracks the parallel interactions of conscious minds, played by filmed actors, and the deeper currents of recognition simultaneously sparked between their subconscious voices, represented by cascades of vocal lines performed by opera singers Lizzie Holmes and Alexander Aldren, woven into musical filmic soundscape composed by Jerome Van Den Berghe. The musical language of the piece rises and falls into prominence, at moments inhabiting the non-diegetic world of film, at times erupting into the narrative as the subconscious presence does in the internal worlds of the characters.

This love story is a piece about the celebration of the imagination, and therein it the imaginative, the surrender to that release which comes when the conscious mind allows itself to flow more freely into the other guiding currents at work in our bodies and psychic selves.

In this sense, despite the specificity of its subject matter of the formative role that the lived experience of schizophrenia can play in shaping the encounters of those who have the condition, it is a piece that many of us can identify with, and in it find a spark of ambition for our own lives, often so preoccupied by cerebrally driven structures, rationally planned orders and routines.

Embarking on this journey to realise artist James Paddock's vision, it felt right that collaboration and cross media interdisciplinarity amongst art forms - opera, film, visual art installation, fashion, composition, and theatrical dramaturgical process- in addition to interdisciplinary conversations across the arts and sciences, specifically arts with mental health and neurology, come to the fore. Boundary crossing is, in all senses, at the helm of the work.

The artistic language of the piece works in two central rhythmic axes: that of counterpoint, and that of lyricism. In the presence of the subconscious, and so the guiding textures of the soundscape, movement of the actors and handling of the cinematography, the story often unfolds with lyricism, flow, in motions which weave, move choreographically and organically through different shots, voices, narrative colours and textures.

In contrast to this at times we find piece working with the language of juxtaposition and counterpoint, finding intertextuality between what is conscious and subconscious. This duality is reflected in the edit and in the interiority of the characters as they navigate between acted conscious and felt operatically scored subconscious.

Schizophrenia, as with many non-neurotypical conditions, particularly those which can be associated with complex relationships to mental health, carries the weight of stigma which comes with misunderstanding. As the language around the condition shifts and changes with the research, policy and funding implications, so too does the importance of re-claiming this language by those with lived experience. Note I do not use the term sufferers.

The role of art to do this is invaluable. Moreover, *Mirrored to the Core* is inspirational in that, not only does it give the central stage to a story of two adults with lived experience of schizophrenia, but it renders their condition a central thrust in the narrative - their recognition, their deep compatibility, their love. Furthermore, in the opening out of the role of their subconscious voices in this, the doubleness of their interior presences guiding them through this love story renders them neither saccharine, nor traumatised. There is no pity or problematic evoked in the audience in this open portrayal of the interior dialogue of our protagonists.

It is a gritty, wry, creative landscape we find ourselves in at the outset of the piece, twisting with humour, and allowing itself to surrender into the visceral release which the operatic soundscape and lyricism of cinematography and choreography enables in portraying what it is to surrender to that experience of attraction which is visceral, felt, bodily rather than cerebral, rational and conscious.