

## **Mirrored to the Core, a reflection by Katy Richardson.**

A text on the video artwork, *Mirrored to the Core*, by James Paddock and Collaborators

*Mirrored to the Core* (MttC) is a speculative fictional account that considers what might happen when two voice-hearing lovers (schizophrenics) telepathically link up. We see the surreal theatricality of the nature of heard voices, a continuation of Paddock's experimentation with layered narrative where it is not only dialogue that takes place between the two characters, but also heard voices of the mind.

The work's roots lie in Paddock's young life, when he would hear original orchestrated compositions that were like nectar in his head. These were one form of the 'voices' that he would go on to hear throughout his life, as many other voice-hearers do, not just manifesting as voice but also as music and sound.

When opera director Rosalind Parker, who works around neurodiversity and the voice, approached Paddock to make a video artwork that was also an opera, Paddock had already written MttC. Yet Paddock saw potential in what had been brought to the table – the possibility of a gritty yet colourful opera with a serious thoughtful edge. With Parker's operatic zeal, and the experience of Jerome van den Berghe (musical director of West End musical theatre) the theatricality of heard voices was brought alive. Alongside Paddock, Parker and van den Berghe in the collaborative team, some of whom have lived experience of mental health issues and neurodivergence, are Chris Keenan (director of photography and editor) and Richard Gott (regular sound recordist on Paddock's projects). The opera singers, identified and brought on board by Parker, are Lizzie Holmes and Alex Aldren, whose voices were recorded in London. The opera lines they sang were written by Paddock and set to music by van den Berghe, making use of the naturally occurring rhythm present in Paddock's original script (a phenomena known to be associated with voice-hearing). After an extensive auditioning process, Paddock, Parker and van den Berghe cast Zing Akinshegun and Jacob Tsering in the roles of the lovers. The shoot took place on location in Birmingham, with costumes designed by Paddock in collaboration with Ranier Wang and Rebecca Buley, students from The Winchester School of Art. These brightly coloured costumes, with their unusual combinations of colour and style, hint at psychosis and tether the characters somewhere between now and an unspecified futuristic time. Yet, while unusual, the costumes are crisp and clean – another refusal of the schizophrenic stereotype.

In this work, Paddock considers the possibility that the two voice-hearing lovers' subconscious minds might communicate prior to their physical meeting in the conscious world. This gentle, loving, accepting communication presents an alternative to the inaccurate, stereotype of the schizophrenic which persists in society. Instead, MttC allows a glimpse into the voice-hearer's subconscious realm, joyfully revealing this privilege while also using it to reflect and subvert the narratology of the operatic form. This contrast between the theatricality of the heard voices and the grittiness and mundanity of the everyday world highlights the grittiness of the life of working class people who, in this instance, also hear voices. We see the two characters contemplate their existence via contemporary topics, such as whether 'love at first sight' is still possible alongside the monetisation of love by dating apps (which Paddock sees as a form of neo-liberalism). Via the subconscious-driven world of voice-hearing, Paddock is able to go further into his questioning of how human attraction and love occurs, suggesting that unseen communication is already in place between the two lovers on-screen, and is guiding the two physical bodies to meet.

The locations in MttC are carefully chosen to suggest thematic concerns in the work. Using only free-to-access locations, we see these loving, thinking voice-hearers placed in a variety of settings which encourage us to think beyond the zeitgeist. The first of these is an amphitheatre, architecturally railed, asking us to think about working-class access to state-owned thought and the arts. The lovers return to this location at the end of the film, having journeyed through parks, city streets, a gallery in which is considered the poor 19<sup>th</sup> century authorship of the schizophrenic and its impact on the voice-hearer today, and an underground car park which places the lovers in a space of subconscious, of sub-mundane, of below-the-surface. This return to the original location references the often circular narratives of opera, theatre and literature, allowing us to read a form of Hero's Journey into the structure.

In Paddock's multi-layered video artwork we are offered an original take on the operatic form, using its traditions to reference some of the experiences of voice-hearers. But more than that, MttC subverts at every turn our preconceptions about voice-hearers and presents instead two characters who are kind, loving, thinking people, with access to an additional realm of experience. Informing this complex work through his lived experience, Paddock's artwork is a unique narrative that uses the potential of video to reflect the inner world of the voice-hearer.