

James Richards

Migratory Motor Complex

25.07.19 — 13.10.19

Migratory Motor Complex (2017) is the third in a series of multichannel sound collages by James Richards, an artist perhaps better known for his work in video. The work stems from a period in which James began exploring how sound or music might operate in a visual art setting, and how something as fluid and intangible as digital audio could create highly physical, emotional and associative effects.

Whilst mixing broadcast sound-effects, field recordings and more abstract electronic noise, the work also has a strong foundation in harmonic musical composition. This has been developed through collaborative studio improvisations with vocalist Kirsten Evans and film composer Samuel Williams.

Through a process of intuitive responses both Evans and Williams were invited to react to the artist's cues: elements such as sampled melodies; fragments of text by writers Chris McCormack, Judith Grahn and Ian White, and earlier drafts of the work itself - are played or sung along to in the studio, thus evolving new interpretations and versions that echo and expand the original elements of the work.

These vocal and musical retorts were recorded by James and then gathered, manipulated and threaded together into a virtuosic, six-channel audio installation. *Migratory Motor Complex* takes its title from the unconscious rippling pattern of electro-mechanical activity that occurs in the digestive tract. It's a process that sweeps through material that cannot

be digested. In the same way, this piece channels the detritus connecting the disparate passages of the work, combining waves of haunting, elegiac reflection: drifting choral vocals mixed with distant melodies; the regular rise and fall of breath; utterances and whispers that morph into percussive ruptures that are a challenge to assimilate.

Alongside the corporeal, *Migratory Motor Complex* also reflects the technological. Pre-recorded or found sound appears to be emitting from the crackling surface of old vinyl records or the glitching of digital hard drives; wind blows hard into a microphone producing rhythmic distortions, all serving to emphasise the physical qualities of the audio's transmission and reproduction.

Unlike cinema or standard surround sound the work has no discernible front or back, beginning or end and thus enhances our physical presence in the encounter. The audio moves around the space of the City Dome; material appears in soft focus and then sweeps from speaker to speaker getting sharper and crisper in detail, further emphasised through the seating configuration.

Migratory Motor Complex is accompanied by a specially commissioned text. *Voce de Testa* by Chris McCormack explores a range of vocal pressures: the deepening of the male voice during puberty, the castrati in early music, and how these changes has been incorporated into different musical traditions. Personal rumination and observation alternate with excerpts of

historical and instructional documents to create a poetic narrative that sits alongside the sound.

James Richards (born Cardiff 1983) lives and works in Berlin. Recent solo exhibitions include: *Speed II* (with Leslie Thornton), *Malmö Konsthall* (2019); *Migratory Motor Complex*, Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff (2018); *Music for the gift*, Santa Maria Ausiliatrice, Venice (2017); *Requests and Antisongs*, ICA London; *Crumb Mahogany*, Bergen Kunsthall and *Radio at Night*, Museum of Contemporary Art Bordeaux (all 2016); *James Richards*, Kunstverein München (2015) and *Not Blacking Out Just Turning The Lights Off*, Chisenhale London (2011).

James Richards is represented by Cabinet, London, Galerie Isabella Bortolozzi, Berlin and Rodeo, London / Piraeus.

Migratory Motor Complex was curated by Hannah Firth and produced by Chapter for Wales in Venice at the 57th Venice Biennale of Art 2017. The exhibition was commissioned by the Arts Council of Wales and Wales Arts International with support and collaboration from the Welsh Government and British Council. The touring exhibition is made possible with support from the Art Fund.

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1. James Richards, Migratory Motor Complex,
six-channel audio installation, 2017.

Courtesy the artist and Rodeo London /
Piraeus, Bortolozzi, Berlin and Cabinet
London.

Artist: James Richards

Voice: Kirsten Evans

Composition: James Richards

Additional Music: Samuel Williams and Kirsten

Evans

Technical and design collaboration: Matt Fitts,
The Block

Technical Manager: Dean Woolford

Project Manager: Catherine Angle

Project Director and Curator: Hannah Firth

Commissioned by: Wales in Venice

Supported by: Art Fund and the Royal Welsh

College of Music and Drama

