



Haroon Mirza, *Pavilion for Optimisation*, 2013

Haroon Mirza: Waves and Forms

John Hansard Gallery, Southampton
19 October to 11 January

Haroon Mirza's *Pavilion for Optimisation*, 2013, consists of water falling from a showerhead into a half-full bucket. The water is pumped up from the bucket and falls back in again. The miniature waterfall is its own source, a feedback loop, pouring and drinking at once, somehow both itself and its opposite. A microphone records the water noise through a cable above your head, pours it into a white room into which you then walk. Inside, light from a single LED strip periodically diminishes and then extinguishes itself, leaving you in total darkness. At the same time, white-noise composed of recordings from the showerhead increases in volume until the light suddenly goes out and the sound is silent. This repeats. The experience confuses your senses.

Placing the source of the noise inside the gallery becomes impossible, like trying to catch your own echo. It always seems to come from elsewhere. It's difficult to maintain your composure. Mirza describes himself as a 'composer'. He knows that 'compose' has many meanings, especially in relation to art. Music is composed, but you can talk of the 'composition' of a painting or a photograph. A viewer/listener can also be more or less composed, depending on how moved they are - as in, 'compose yourself'.

Mirza, whose work with waves responds in many ways to 'decay', presumably also knows that 'compose' both is and is not the opposite of 'decompose'. (Try to imagine how you would de-compose a symphony.) This type of linguistic slippage is what causes a word like 'literally' to become an auto-antonym, its meaning composed of both itself and its opposite. You can try to resist this slippage, or you can literally go with the flow. Mirza's aesthetic is some productive mix of these two approaches. Another, archaic definition of the verb 'to compose' has this meaning: 'to settle a dispute'.

And so Mirza conjures unsettling disputes between our senses, our histories, and toys with the idea of settling them. Part of the immersive piece, *WAVES*, 2017, includes a video in which the looped stars of the European Union blink in different combinations, a commentary on Brexit beating in time with patterns of unnerving sound. One of the sources of the sound is a dark, padded box nearby in which a stream of water falls. Thanks to clever lighting, it looks like a double-helix flowing upwards. Mirza is suggesting that these twisted binaries are how we all literally exist.

Wavelengths and contradictions are inside our DNA. Matter is a mixture of patterns and particles, a continual process of becoming and dissipating, an unsolvable referendum nonetheless posed. It's also an echo - the atoms which make you were always already here, in some other composition.

Mirza's work is so tech-oriented and dissociative that it is overwhelming, almost sublime. There may be legitimate criticism in that it relies on a normative version of sensory perception. It wouldn't be the same to someone with impaired sight or hearing. As a friend of mine points out: unlike a painter, whose medium doesn't easily address itself to blind people, Mirza the multidisciplinary isn't inherently shackled by his materials. So why be exclusive? A second criticism might be that the works are more 'impressive' than 'moving', more baffling than beautiful.

But this difficult exhibition does end up being weirdly beautiful. This is best illustrated by *Solar Symphony Solar_Corb B/Solar Symphony Solar_Corb D*, 2014, two machines which create music from solar energy. They stand here in a large room with a windowed wall. The day I visit is overcast, so the music is soft. The brighter the sun, the louder the composition.

You imagine these machines left on a barren Earth, long since uninhabitable, as the expanding, flaring sun begins to engulf the planet. Brightening, the solar energy would cause the machines to make louder and louder music, music composed by what is decomposing it, made of both itself and its opposite. A protest against a dangerously changing climate, an unsolvable referendum, louder as the threat increases, right up until its final moment. The music is composed by sunlight, itself composed of wavelengths/photons, some midway point between matter and energy, patterns and particles, a feedback loop of becoming which is already doomed to dissipate, dopplering back out across the universe until reforming into some other life, at once both literally alien and literally the same. This is how we all, literally, exist. A doomed and unsure mixture of wavelengths, defining (composing) ourselves in response to increasingly bizarre threats to our ways of life, growing in brilliance right up until the moment that the light suddenly goes dark, the sound silent, the space empty. Does something of us survive this? Compose yourself.

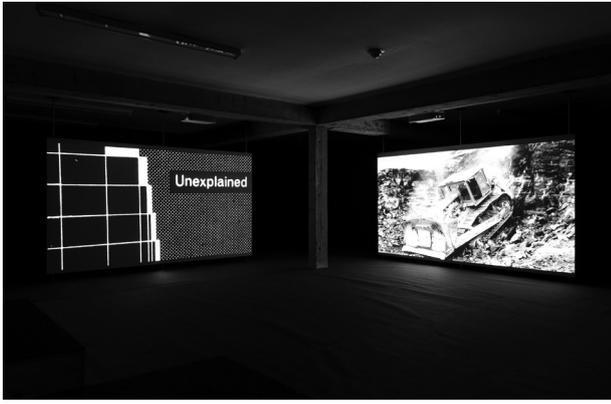
'Waves and Forms' travels to Aberdeen Art Gallery, 21 March to 7 June

Adam Heardman is a poet and writer based in London.

Ilona Sagar: Deep Structure

S1 Artspace, Sheffield, 11 October to 14 December

There are points during Ilona Sagar's film *Deep Structure*, 2019, where research and reports from the founding of the iconic Park Hill estate are read out by former residents in broad Sheffield accents. This is interspersed with a less recognisable, superficially neutral accent that overlaps with the others into a poetic soup. It sometimes seems as though the film's narration is from the perspective of the estate itself, represented variously through lingering shots of concrete limbs, data visualisation and the image of a flexing three-armed creature. Sagar casts Park Hill as a body, an organism in its relation to other organisms, such as Hope Cement Works in the Peak District,



Iлона Sagar, *Deep Structure*, 2019

The Materials Science and Engineering Department at the University of Sheffield and the people who inhabit these sites. The many-voiced narration that continues throughout sometimes takes the form of questions, sometimes answers, sometimes description and sometimes the aforementioned recital of the archival data and consultation from when Park Hill was first built. By overlapping these different registers and codes for communicating information, whether numerical or emotional, data or poetry, Sagar makes an appeal to indulge in complexity and revel in the contradictions arising from a consideration of something as fraught and crucial as housing. When dominant cultural narratives encourage us towards simplification and segregation, Sagar's insistence on the inclusion of a multiplicity of voices and perspectives with an undemanding gentleness makes this work a rewarding interlude, shown in a space nestled within Park Hill itself.

Park Hill estate in Sheffield is a quintessential example of social housing realised through idealistic brutalism in the late 1950s and early 1960s, designated a failure by the 1980s, controversially Grade II listed in the 1990s and now undergoing a process of regeneration and reframing simultaneous with the preservation and rehabilitation, or in some cases demolition, of brutalist civic structures elsewhere around the UK. While some of the Park Hill apartments have remained as social housing, the majority have been released to the private market, and the way that the estate has been rebranded in order to appeal to the tastes and budgets of a different class of tenant throws its earlier reputation into sceptical relief, a reputation that the testimony included in *Deep Structure* serves to further complicate and contradict. At one point a voice states that where you are defines who you are and how you are seen, and then another reads from an ethnographic report suggesting that there is no measurable difference between the mental health of those living in high-rise apartments and those living in leafy suburbs. This layering of gathered information and direct experience challenges assumptions and received wisdom about how people interact with the built environment, questioning the efficacy and ethics of our tools and procedures for measuring the body and bodily experience. A voice asks, 'does data speak or is it seen?', inviting the viewer to question the primacy and assumed objectivity of data, which can, of course, only communicate whatever its interlocutors want it to.

Deep Structure is filmed across three sites, with a cast of actors and former residents whose bodies are placed in proximity to either the rugged Peak District landscape, the lab and factory or their dwellings. With

these sites as backdrops, Sagar conjures the vastly differing timescales of the peaks that can be seen on the outskirts of Sheffield from the vantage point of Park Hill and the human bodies that inhabit it. It should be noted that this two-channel film is also beautiful and tasteful, shown with a jumble of carpeted blocks for seating, an aesthetic irony that is not lost given the themes that are dealt with here. Shots of a short-haired figure of indeterminate age and gender, legs dangling over the edges of a boulder, are contrasted with figures dwarfed within the concrete stairways and streets-in-the-sky of Park Hill itself, rain dripping from a nose as if to form stalactites. Similarly, shots of a character in a lab coat handling scientific measuring beakers are cut with former residents reading out loud over pint glasses. These contrasting visuals evoke the particular way that Park Hill has been quantified, initially through pioneering consultation, then later through negative associations, and now in terms of fashionable apartments and work spaces, asking whether and how this is felt by those who currently live or who have lived there. Sagar's approach reveals the inherent absurdity of bringing ethnographic data to bear on the complexity of individual experience, with the frameworks we currently depend on to understand and justify social attitudes towards housing rarely encompassing, as one voice says, 'change on a human scale of unpredictability'.

Lauren Velvick is a writer and curator based in Lancashire.



Christodoulos Panayiotou, 'Act II - The Island', installation view

Christodoulos Panayiotou: Act II - The Island

Camden Arts Centre, London
29 September to 14 December

While not billed as a retrospective, this show includes wholly new conceptions alongside recent and older examples of many of the streams of work which the Paris and Limassol-based Cypriot Christodoulos Panayiotou has developed over the past dozen years. The result is 40-odd works which typically look like simple found objects, but turn out to be largely tailor-made from charged materials, and so are complex in themselves as well as in their inter-relationships with each other and the space. Many connections might be made, but I was struck by how often Panayiotou

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