

GOLDSMITHS CCA

EPISODES INTERVIEW WITH COREY HAYMAN

This interview contextualises *Plastic Sounds of Dark Matter*, artist Corey Hayman's solo exhibition of new work commissioned by Goldsmiths CCA (17 Jul–11 Aug 2019). The text explores Hayman's interest in connections between forms and materials that speak to afro-pessimism, the 'hauntology of blackness', notions of progress and capitalism.

Episodes is an ongoing series of solo presentations that cuts through the main programming at Goldsmiths CCA and provides a counterpoint to the larger-scale exhibitions. Spanning installations, screenings, discursive events and new commissions, the focus of this programme is to provide an experimental platform for emergent practices.

Interview conducted and edited by Andrew Price and William Noel Clarke.



Plastic Sounds of Dark Matter, Installation view, 2019.
Goldsmiths CCA. Photo © Mark Blower.

There is tension in the exhibition between theory and your use of animated children's TV character Rastamouse. How did you come to the idea to use Rastamouse? Can you elaborate on the ambiguous position of Rastamouse, as a 'commodity who speaks, and a black body caught in a matrix of cultural representation, consumption and entertainment'?

I've always felt conflicted about Rastamouse. His figure came to the forefront because my process is rooted in interrogating moments of tension. For those unfamiliar with the character, Rastamouse (a male, Rastafarian, crime-fighting rodent) is a contemporary children's character created by Michael Da Souza. The character was initially developed as the literary protagonist in a series of children's books, and its success saw Rastamouse become a popular children's animated stop motion TV series in the 2010s.

My interest in Rastamouse lies in his very creation. Da Souza, a Trinidadian-born Rastafarian created a character that he, his family, and the Black British community could relate to through language (i.e. patois) and visual references. A character steeped in something of Black British identity. The success of the show saw developments in music, toys and clothing. I was particularly interested in this ever-increasing commodification, and I recognised parallels in my readings and research into race. I began to imagine thinking from the position of Rastamouse; a black body bathed in capital, a figure tied to and given value due to his racial and cultural significance. I coalesced imagery of his construction of being with that of my own words and racial theory, and found in the imagined perspective of Rastamouse a useful mechanism for critical thinking.

Your practice is informed by critical and political theory and you identify specific perspectives that have influenced you and your work (e.g., 'Afro-pessimism, Glissant's right to 'Opacity' and Crenshaw's intersectionality'). Can you outline some of the key texts and ideas that influenced you in the process of making *Plastic Sounds of Dark Matter*?

I think my position as a practitioner is very much principled on the texts and perspectives that you've listed. In making *Plastic Sounds of Dark Matter*, a multitude of critical texts contributed to my thoughts on aesthetics of resistance, the sound system as an apparatus or tool in resistance, and the relationship between race and capital. Particular texts of note include Christina Sharpe's *In The Wake*, Fred Moten's

In the Break, and Kodwo Eshun's *More Brilliant than the Sun*. A PhD paper by Kashif Jerome Powell titled *Specters and Spooks* cemented my thoughts on the 'hauntology of blackness' and helped in my imagined position of Rastamouse.

I have to admit to a slight discomfort in attributing certain ideas of mine to texts. It's more organic than that. Odd phrases attach themselves to critical texts, and song lyrics are born of pivotal threads of critical exploration. For example, the pairing of Pinocchio's *I've Got No Strings* and the 'hauntology of blackness', which problematises black representation as a commodity

We recently showed your work as part of CCA Streams, our programme of online artist film during lockdown in the UK. It was great to be able to show *Still Life (Trojan Sounds)* (2019) again, the film element of your show. Are the ideas and texts that you have mentioned still informing your practice now?

The difficult and complex relationship between race and capital remains a prominent focus, but I have moved away from sound systems and waveforms. Rastamouse, through the thinking of presence and absence in the hauntology of blackness, permitted me a poetic tool with which to explore and create. The specificity of sound machines feels to me synonymous with my exploration of the character. My thoughts on hauntology are still influencing the positions that I write from and critically read from.

I'm interested in exploring other arenas where race and capital butt heads such as sport, for example. Pulling at hauntology alongside afro-pessimism, I'm seeking a way for my practice to speak of the anxiety that lingers in the responsibility of black labour and representation.

One of the ways in which your work addresses racial identity is through music and sound. Can you expand on your interest in certain kinds of music? In the press release there is a reference to the 'formal qualities and cultural mash-ups' of sound machines as inhabitable places. Could you expand on this too?

Reggae has roots in politics and resistance, and because it is a key signifier for Rastamouse in the TV show, it felt right to explore and play with it. I was thinking of the voice of Rastamouse, the haunting territory of blackness it occupies, and the physical spaces I imagined this voice to occupy. The sound system, as a sound machine, spurred the physical and formal direction of the work, whilst research around dub music tied all my interests together.

Dub has an intrinsic way of playing with time. Its echo and reverb allows ghosts of sound to revive in the present. I think I just wanted to pair this haunting aspect with the theoretical terrain I was exploring with the character of Rastamouse. My music and sound choices, specifically for the film – Toots and the Maytal's *Pressure Drop* and The Specials *Ghost Town* – present connections whilst conversing with the work as a whole through their lyrical content.



Plastic Sounds of Dark Matter, Installation view, 2019.
Goldsmiths CCA. Photo © Mark Blower.

A recurring image metaphor of waves seems to condense multiple meanings through association and take on a new intensity through them. Can you expand on your thinking about the image metaphor of waves?

In my research I kept coming across imagery of waves referenced in texts on transatlantic slavery, afro-pessimism, music, Drexciya and voice. Although these waveforms are all different from one another, I began to pull at them as a visual aid to assist in my writing and thinking, coupling the visual element of one waveform with the contextual element of another. Much of this enmeshing helped formulate the perspective that I was writing from.

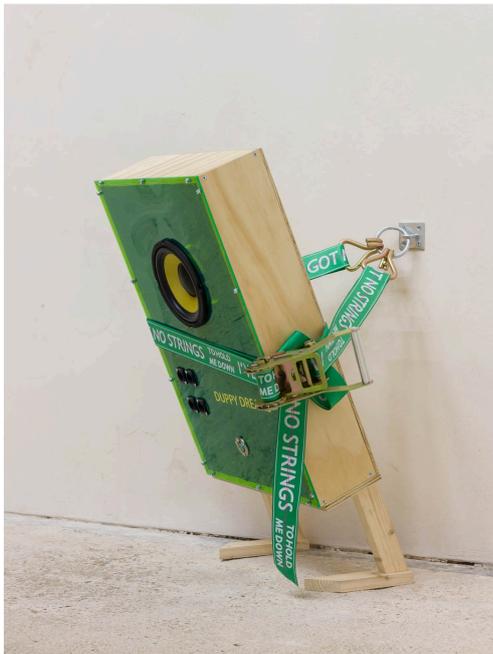
I used waves at both a visual and contextual level to interrogate the black progress narrative in relation to capital and labour, thinking through this as ups and downs, good times and bad; rough terrain to be endured.

You express your thinking in a poetic register through diverse textual forms. I'm thinking of the texts across the ratchet straps that cut through the space, and the aphoristic subtitles and free verse monologues in the film. Can you talk about the place of creative writing in your practice? Who are the creative writers who have influenced you and your work?

Creative writing has not always figured in my practice. Although I have used text in more rigid formats in past work – contracts, interviews and phrases – it

is only in the last couple of years that I have found a freedom to express ideas through my writing. I think this comes from a romantic belief that writers are somehow bestowed a power with words and knowledge of literary devices. I for one am not one of those wonderfully endowed. I think this changed on my MFA at Goldsmiths with experimentation. I found writing by accident. My writing permitted an expansive output at a time when I was reading and researching so much that the ideas I had were difficult to condense. In truth my use of it as a medium (so to speak) depends on what I feel for the direction of the work. Writing can be an effective release and a way for complexity to seep out of small words.

This late arrival at creative writing explains why I don't really have any direct influences. I do however admire the creative writing of Hannah Black, Audre Lorde and Fred Moten. I think Hip Hop is a huge influence on me and the prominence of word play in it. I try to write by pulling from all these knowledge pools, along with theoretical research, to articulate (for want of a better word) as best as I can.



Corey Hayman, *Reggie*, 2019.
Goldsmiths CCA. Photo © Andy Stagg.

The sculptural works incorporate materials and forms that speak to music and entertainment culture but also to architecture and the city. Can you talk about the relationship of the work to the urban fabric, its use, disuse, policing and the privatisation of public space?

I wanted the sculptural elements to work with the visual and contextual elements of the film, but also to stand alone. *Reggie* (2019) and *For Display Purposes Only* (2019) reference audio units and the physical spaces that house reggae and dub, such as the waves of sound trapped within these objects. Alongside this, I was thinking about infrastructures of

sound, commodification, and spaces that I occupy; my own urban fabric.

I was obsessed with a scene in the British cult film *Babylon* (1980) for some time. The scene revolves around a moment of racial tension in Deptford in which the main character, Blue and his crew, return to their garage to find their sound system destroyed by hostile neighbours. I was visually captivated by the damaged scoop bins and exposed audio equipment, thrown against the hard and cold garage under a railway arch of South London. For me the scene hones in on the fact that nothing exists in a vacuum. The tension at the crux of race and capitalism has an environment that is all too familiar – one we live in.

In *I Wanna Talk Like You...Too* (2019) I played with adopted and covert languages. On the one hand there is the Council's deceitful and assimilative technique for the negation of fly posters, and on the other, an assumed assimilation of Rastamouse to that of Mickey Mouse and Disney. Both are lashed together using a ratchet strap on a meshed surface typically used for securing space and authority.

The installation consists of a number of elements. Can you touch on some of the formal decisions made in bringing these different elements into proximity in the exhibition space? For example, the relationship between the film and the screening environment, or the interplay between the sculptures and the ratchet straps?

Formal decisions were made for the purpose of echo and resonance. From a contextual viewpoint, I was thinking of the audio waveforms inhabiting these sound machines. In the screening environment, I wanted this to be replicated in a looser form – a housed unit for the film amongst other sculptural units. The exposed screening structure shared material elements with the sculptural works and complemented the enquiry into the formal structure of *Rastamouse* in the film.

I wouldn't describe the ratchet straps as purposeful echoes. They hold something within themselves. I was fixated on their embodiment of tension. I think of the relationship between race and capital as a tense one; fraught with friction, and so I saw in the ratchet straps an element of play. Coupled with text, they physically and strongly converse with the elements they hold, restrict, and enact a pressured force. In many ways, the ratchets straps are an emotive mechanism.

From coronavirus to worldwide unrest sparked by the killing of George Floyd, the beginning of the new decade has been tumultuous to say the least. We believe it's important that we all keep

engaged with artists' ideas and perspectives in these difficult times. We wanted to ask you, what do you see as the task for artists in the context of today?

Tumultuous is an understatement. The events of 2020 have exposed a plethora of socio-political and economic issues worldwide and will no doubt provide stimuli and substantial introspection for all artists, particularly those whose practice directly draws from these realms.

Having said that though, I don't think it's my place to speak on the task that artists collectively should embark on today. You know, each to their own. I suppose the only task I would safely ascribe to artists in the context of today would be to those who typically operate within socio-politics. And that is

for their practice to scream louder in its politicised critique, to push harder on the institutionally acceptable, and to harness the power of wild imagination to cut through the bullshit so others can see it too. A friend once told me that I shouldn't have to educate the viewer. I still somewhat agree with him. But 2020 has shown us that there is much that people remain ignorant to, and if as artists we can use our visual and poetic languages to expose these ignorances, we should.

2020 has been an uncomfortable year and no truths come from comfort. For those artists that don't frequently operate in a covert political manner, I would suggest the task lies beyond their practice but with the individual; to actively work at educating oneself and to look inwardly at the responsibility we all hold in supporting others.



*Plastic Sounds of Dark Matter, Installation view, 2019.
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