

Chapter 5

Ornette Coleman's Improvisation on the Decolonial Horizon

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on how Ornette Coleman's element of improvisation can appear as unorthodox noise and messy in his music. Reflecting on Coleman is important because he suspended the classical Western music composition methodology and offered a decolonial horizon as a site of new art methodology. Coleman's musical method of no method is guided by writing the life to come through his improvisation, which is a testament to the black refusal of the Western aesthetics style and standard. This chapter explores how his harmolodics theory enables improvisation to be deployed as a decolonial horizon of Black lived experience and of life beyond Westernised modernity in its totality. Decolonisation through his use of the white plastic horn that inscribes refusal of the written classical score. Suspension of the Western episteme and its inscriptions of modernity as the father of all knowledge is a preoccupation of decolonial thinkers. Coleman is also so preoccupied.

INTRODUCTION: FREE LIKE FREE JAZZ

While Ornette Coleman's musical improvisation can appear to be noise and messy, he suspends the classical Western methodology and offers a decolonial horizon as a site of new life. Coleman was writing about the life to come through his improvisation, a testament to the black refusal of the sovereign father of the empire. Through his harmolodics theory he positioned himself at the decolonial horizon where he can disarm the father. Harmolodics enables improvisation to be deployed

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as a decolonial horizon of black lived experience and life beyond the ruins in its totality. Coleman's used the white plastic horn to inscribe black life from the ontology of the horn and through his refusal of the written classical score. Most decolonial thinkers are preoccupied with suspending Western episteme and its inscriptions of modernity as the father of all knowledge. The problem with formulating dismantling horizons from where modernity started as a problem is whether the problem has grown to the point of problematising the horizon that should be dismantled. If the apparatus is problematised, it becomes a reproduction of the colonial problem in the form of the work of a son or daughter who is dedicated to continuing their father's work. It becomes a father and son-daughter apparatus of colonial recreation and representation which feeds the mind with Westernised standards as the standard of the father, which is what Coleman is "delinking" from. The standard referred to here is a standard on its own. It is the one that Europe sets as the grand standard to determine the standard of beauty, the standard of taste, the standard of fashion, the standard of art, the standard of education, economy, success and the standard of life.

The monstrous colonial father figure is Europe as a dominant father to the world who must look after and develop his children – the Global South must survive by eating its children. This *cannibalistic* site happens at the structural, systemic level that is positioned to adopt the black body as the adopted mute stepson. It is from the entanglement with the anti-chase of the Western Father that Coleman seems to curve his path, leading to new panoramas at the musical level. At the level of music that Coleman will be forever known for, free jazz, and/or harmolodic funk, he remains an important figure whose deconstruction of the jazz music scene rendered him as someone beyond only a jazz artist or a jazz musician who is a saxophonist – but also a thinker. A thinker whose thinking provided a leap of the imagination to take shape in new symptomatic horizons. Coleman is a decolonial thinker with a horn, to be exact. His saxophone transcends the project of modernity and its standards in the form of what I will call black refusal. Black refusal is the very foundation of the decolonial aestheSis in music in the post-colony. Thus, Coleman's improvisation can appear as din distortion and non-concrete composition. However, it is his engagement to this suspension of the horizon of the European Father who is speaking the "American grammar" (Spillers, 1987, p. 68). He is turning his eyes to a new grammar of horizons. In this essay, the focus will be on the kind of decolonial horizon that characterises Coleman's harmolodic oeuvre. His music transcended the limits of entertainment, as well as the political. His music has been a horizon ascribed as the radical turning point in understanding jazz and speaking through the instrument. Speaking to the instrument goes beyond only playing prepared notes on the instrument. Rather, it is about the instrument and the body of the saxophonist becoming one with the quest to understand life beyond the colonial horizon of modernity that haunted America and the rest of the Global South.

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