

Before Becoming The
Music, The Music Was
Just A Word:
Jacques Derrida
Interviews Ornette
Coleman (remix)

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Translator's note: *The meeting between the saxophonist and composer Ornette Coleman and philosopher Jacques Derrida is documented here took place in late June and early July 1997, Coleman and during three concerts at La Villette, a museum and performing arts north Paris complex, which houses, among other things, the famous Paris Conservatory. Here Derrida interview Coleman about his views on composition, improvisation, language and racism. Perhaps the more interesting point of the sample is the convergence of their respective ideas on the "Languages" and experiences of racial prejudice. This interview was conducted in English a few days before the concert of Coleman, but since the original transcripts could not be located, Timothy S. Murphy has translated into English in the text published in French. Seth Kim-Cohen then copied a PDF file of the interview, found at www.ubu.com and, using www.babblefish.com, Kim-Cohen interview translated into French and then again in English, coming to the text below.*

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Jacques Derrida: The year in New York you're a program called presentation Ting Civilization2. Does the relationship have to do with music?

Ornette Coleman: I am trying to express a concept that you can translate something into another. I think the sound has a much more democratic relationship to information, because you do not need to understand the alphabet " Touhas most musicians think you're hiring them to keep that

music alive. And most musicians are not as tièmeoleman: GENDER music. This year, New York, I am setting up a project with the New York Philharmonic and my first quartet sans·Don Cherry-ousiasm more when they play the same things every time. So I prefer to write music that they have never played before.

JD: You want to surprise them.

OC: Yes, I want to encourage them instead of just asking them to accompany me in front of the public. But I find it very difficult to faire, because the jazz musician is probably the only person for whom the composer is not a very interesting person, in that it prefers to destroy what the composer wrote or said.

JD: SA vousy When the sound is more "democratic", what do you think of this as a composer? You write music in a coded form all the same.

OC: In 1972, I wrote a symphony called Skies of America and has been a tragic event for me because IEur gives the score. And [repeat] next rehearsal I ask them to show me what they found and we can go from there. I am with my musicians and my students. I truly believe that whoever tries to express in words, in poetry, in whatever form, can take my book harmolodic etnstantly protest against this accusation.

CB: Yes. People outside think it is a special form of freedom, but I think it 'is a limitation. So it took twenty years, but now I'm having a language of another part played by the Symphony Orchestra of New York and its leader. The other day as I was meeting with some members of the Philharmonic, they said, "You know, the person in charge of the scores needs to see that." I was upset, c It is as if you wrote me a lettre composer according to him, do it

with the same passion and the same elements. In PREPARATIO not had such good relations with the music scene [in the music] as when I was free jazz, most people thought that I just pick up my saxophone and played everything going on in my head, without following any rules but it was not true.

JD: But all your partners share your conception of music?

OC: Normally, I start up something that I have analyzed, I play with them, then I confirm that there was nothing that could irritate me. We must ensure that the Philharmonic will not be disturbed. Then they said, "The only thing we want to know is if there is a point in that place, a word to another," he had nothing to do with music or sound, just with symbols. In fact, I wrote the music for thirty years and I call harmolodic is as if we were making [manufacturing] our own words, with an idea prev. No such projects in New York, you must first write the music for yourself, then ask participants to read, agree, and even transform the original version?

CB: For the Philharmonic I had to write parts for each instrument, copy them, then go see the person in charge of scores. But with jazz bands, I write and I give the parts to the musicians in rehearsal. What is really shocking improviet someone had to read of what we want to model frame, then brings his touch to it.

OC: Yes, the idea is that two or three people can have a conversation with sounds, without trying to dominate or lead. What I mean is that you should be. . . smart, I guess that's the word. In improvised music, I think that musicians are trying to assemble a puzzle emotional or intellectual, at least a puzzle in which the instruments set the tone. This is especially the piano that was used at any time as an executive in the music, that despite its name,

most musicians use a "frame [frame]" as a basis for improvisation. I just recorded a CD with a European musician, Joachim Kiihn, and the music that I wrote to play with him, that we recorded in August 1996, has two characteristics: it is totally improvised, but at the same time, it follows the laws and rules European structure. And yet, when you bring to our days. What you're talking about the shape that morphs into other forms, I think it's something healthy, but very rare.

JD: Maybe you'll agree wimais it is more necessary and, indeed, the commercial aspect of music is very uncertain. commercial music is not necessarily more accessible, but it is limited. When you start to repeat, is ready, in writing, or do you leave a room for you hear it, it has a totally improvised air. First musician litntre the specific event that is the music concert and pre-written or improvised music? Do you think music prewritten prevents the event from taking place?

OC: No, I do not know if this is true for the language, but in jazz, you can take a very old piece and make a different version of it. What is fascinating is the memory Evu? Suppose we're playing and you hear something you think could be improved, you could tell me, "You should try it." For me, music has no leader.

JD: What do you think of the relationship bIn its structure. Thus, it is a repetition in the work, which is intrinsic to the initial creation, one that endangers or complicates the concept of improvisation. Repetition is already in the improvisation so when people want trap you between improvisation and pre-written, they are wrong.

OC: Repetition is as natural as the fact that the earth rotates.

JD: Do you think your music and how people act can or should change, for example, politically or even the fact that the very concept of improvisation verges on reading, because often what we mean by improvisation is the creation of something new, but something that doesn't read the prewritten framework that makes it possible.

CB: Right.

JD: I'm not an "expert Ornette Coleman," but if I translate what you do in an area I know best, that of written language, the unique event which is the language of the other produces a single time is nevertheless repeated music. I was in Texas, I began playing the saxophone and support my family playing on the radio. One day I walked into a place that was full of game and the prostitute there, people arguing, and I saw a woman being stabbed and then I thought I'd get out of there. I told my mother that I did not want to play this music more because I thought I'd add that all this suffering. She replied: "What's got his hands on you, you want someone to pay you for your soul?" I had sex past? Can or should your role as an artist and composer have effect on the state of things?

OC: No, I do think so, but I think many people have already experienced that before me, and if I start complaining, they will say, "Why are you complaining, we have not changed for this? someone you admire more than you, so why should we change it for you?" So basically, I do not think so. I was in the South where minorities are oppressed, and I identified with them through this, and when she told me it was as if I had been re-baptized.

JD: Your mother was very lucid.

OC: Yes, she was an intelligent woman. Since that day I tried to find a way to avoid feeling guilty about doing something that others do not.

JD: Were you successful?

OC: I do not know, but Bebop had emerged and I saw it as a way out. This is instrumental music that is not connected to a certain scene, which can exist in a more normal. Everywhere I was playing blues til there were many unemployed people who did nothing but play money. Then I took bebop, which was hapPENING GENRE especially in New York, and I told myself that I had to go. I'm about 17 years, I left home and headed south.

JD: Before Los Angeles?

CB: Yes. I had long hair like the Beatles, was in the early fifties. So I headed south, and just like the police, blacks fight above all, they did not like moais looking for music that I pouvais jouer without feeling guilty about doing something. So far I have not found it yet.

JD: When you arrived in New York as a young man, have you a premonition of what you'll find musically harmolodic, or did it happen much later?

OC: No, because when I arrived in New York, I was more or less treated as a southerner who does not know the music, who could neither read nor ewrite, but I never tried to protest that. Then I decided I would try to develop my view with the use of new technologies in your music?

CB: Since Denardo was my manager, I understand how technology is simple, and I understood its meaning.

JD: Did you feel that the introduction of technology has been a violent transformation of your project, or has it been easy? On the other hand, your project in New York on civilizations have some had too weird a look for them. They hit me in the face and smashed my sax. It has been difficult. In addition, I was with a group that played what was called "pipe-minstrel music," and tried to bebop, I made progress and I am committed. I was in New Orleans, I went to see a very religious family and I started playing in a "sanctified" church when I was little, I played in church all the time. Since my mother said those words to me, I was European are perhaps half a dozen. As for technology, inventors I've heard most are Indians from Calcutta and Bombay. There are many Indian and Chinese scientists. Their inventions are like reversals idéesy own design, without anyone's help. I rented the town hall Dec. 21, 1962, which cost me \$600.1 hired a group rhythm and blues, classical and a group a trio. The night of the concert there was a storm of something to do with what they call globalization?

OC: I think there is some truth in both, it's because of what you can ask your exemplaire elf if there were "primitive white men": the technology does seem to represent the word "white." Equality is not complete.

JD: You challenge the concept of globalization, and I think you're right.

OC: When you take music, composers who were the inventors of Western culture invention, which is sad because it's the equivalent of a sort of propaganda.

JD: How do you disrupt this "monarchy"? By combining your own creation with Indian music or Chinese, for example, in this project in New York?

OC: What I mean is that the differences between men and women or between races have a relationship to education and intelligence to survive. Be noir contact whatsoever with my native language, or rather that of my ancestors believed. Do you ever wondered if the language you speak now interferes with your real thoughts? Is a native language influences your thoughts?

JD: It is an enigma to me. I do not know. I know that something speaks through me, a language I do not understand that sometimes I translate more or less easily in my "language". I am of course a French intellectual, I teach in sch-speaking françaisees tools, but I feel that a journalists' strike, a strike by doctors and an underground strike, and the only people who came were those who had to leave their hotel and come to City Hall. I asked someone to record my concert and he committed suicide, but someone else has registered, has based its spirit house disquesil am, and I never saw again. Everything that made me realize once again that I did for the same reason that I told my mother that I don 'ome thing forces me to do something for the French language ...

OC: But you know, in my case, the U.S., they call the English that blacks speak "ebony": they can use an expression that means something other than English in their lessons. The black community has always used language meaning. When I arrived in California, he was the first time I was in a [middle] where a white man was telling me that I could not rest did not want to play there more. Clearly, the state of things in terms of technology, "See Coleman, Town Hall, 1962.'S ANOTHER lan GE Financial, social and penal view was worse than when I was in the South. I've been knocking on doors that remained closed.

JD: What impact has your son been on your work does elledes European and American inventors, but the word "inventor" took a sense of domination race is more important than there somewhere. Somewhat a descendant of slaves, I have no idea what my original language was. If we were here to talk about myself, which is not the case, I would say that differently, but like, it's the same for me. I was born into a family KIND of Algerian Jews who spoke French, but it really was not their native language. I wrote a little book on this subject, and somehow I'm still talking about this qAsse. I only understood much later, through stories that told me who I was, so to speak. And even with regard to your mother, we know who she is and she is in some way through the narrative. J'aiACS] and your own words or those that people try to impose what you do? The problem of choosing the title, for example, how do you do that?

CB: I had a niece who died in February this year and I went to his funeraland when I saw him in his coffin, someone had put a pair of glasses on her. I wanted to call one of my songs She was asleep, dead, and wearing glasses in his coffin. And then I changed the idea and called "Blind Date".

JD: That the tide has imposed on you?

OC: trying to guess what time you were in New York and Los Angeles, it was before civil rights were granted to blacks. The first time I went to the United States in 1956, there eu call the "monolingualism of the other." Pasni began to ask me many questions, and I did not follow, so I decided to go see a psychiatrist to see if I understand. And he gave me a prescription for Valium. I took the valium and threw it down the toilet. I do not always know where I was, I went to a library and checked every book imaginable on the human brain, I read them all. They said that the Cervantesu had a conversation. They did not say this, but it made me realize that to ed'encrage and know not

only depends on the place of origin. I understand more than what we call the human brain, in the sense of knowing and being, is not the same as the human brain that makes us who we are.

JD: It's always one thing: we know from what we believe. Of course, in your case, it's tragic, but "Whites Only" signs everywhere, and I remember how that was brutal. You've experienced it all?

CB: Yes. Anyway, what I like about Paris is that you can not be a snob and a racist at the same time here, because it will not. Paris is the city I know where racism is never in your presence, ilJ'essayais to understand that someone had put glasses on a woman dead I had an inkling of what it meant, but ist universal, we know or think we know what we're through the stories told to us. The fact is that we are exactly the same age, we are born of Samoya year. When I was young, during the war, I am never to France before the age of 19.1 living in Algeria at that time, and in 1940 I was expelled See Derrida. THE OTHER lan GE of the school because I was a Jew, in the wake of racial laws, and I did not even know what had the prosthesis of origin. Chapeau?

OC: No.

JD: How can you understand or interpret your own verbal statements? Are they something important to you?

OC: It interests me to have a human relationship with you in a musical relationship. I want to see if I can put into words, sounds that have to do with human relationships. At the same time, I would be able to talk about the relationship between two talents between two actions. For me, the human relationship is much more beautiful, because it allows you to get the freedom

you want for yourself and for each other. That is very difficult to understand the feminine side of life when he has nothing to do with the men's side. GENDER.

JD: Do you think your songwriting has something fundamental to do with your relationship to women?

OC: Before becoming known as a musician when I worked in a department store one day during my lunch break, I came across a gallery and had someone painted a rich white woman who had absolutely everything you may want in the world, and had the highest expression alone in the world. I had never faced such a solitude, and when I got home I wrote a piece I called

JD: "Lonely Woman." So, the choice of a title has not been a choice of words, but a reference to this experience? I am asking these questions on language, on words, because for me to prepare for our meeting, I listened to your music and read Derrida, Jacques. *Monolingualism of the other or Atlantic*, 1959 - City Hall, 1962. New York: ESP, 1963. and Joachim Kiihn. *Colors: Live from Leipzig*. New York: Harmolodic. The scholars have written about you. And last night I read an article that was actually a conference presentation given by one of my friends, Rodolphe Burger, a musician whose band is called Kat Onoma. It was built around your statements. To analyze how you formulate your music, it started from your STATEMENT, the first of which was: "For reasons that I am not sure of, I am convinced that, before becoming the music, the music was just a word. 'Do you remember saying t's something that you hear. That does not mean that there is no racism, but one is obliged to conceal the extent possible. What is the strategy of your choice of music for Paris?"

CB: For me, being an innovator does not mean being smarter, richer, this not a word, this is an action. As it has not been done, it is useless to talk about.

JD: I understand you prefer to [do] to the floor. But what do you do with words?

(Recorded by Thierry Jousse and Genevieve Pereygne.)