

'The film looks like how Ornette sounds':
Shirley Clarke's music documentary *Ornette:
Made in America*

Rosa Nogués

Shirley Clarke's documentary film *Ornette: Made in America* (1985) is no ordinary music documentary. The film — a portrait of the free jazz music legend Ornette Coleman — follows the jazz musician over the course of 20 years, and yet, it offers neither a biographical narrative nor a celebration of his musical achievements. Clarke, the American independent filmmaker responsible for films such as *The Connection* (1961) and *Portrait of Jason* (1967), came to prominence in the 1950s for short experimental dance films and documentaries made in collaboration with Willard Van Dyke, D. A. Pennebaker and Richard Leacock, proponents of what would become the direct cinema movement. This experience would prove instrumental in Clarke's life-long approach to filmmaking, which was concerned with the critical examination of the limitations of representation and the claim to truth of documentary filmmaking. *Ornette: Made in America* is thus framed by the question as to the nature of the documentary process itself, as well as that of the relationship between film and music, questions which permeate all of Clarke's filmmaking practice. Her particular approach to documentary was especially critical: 'no such thing [as a documentary] exists' (Rice, 1972, p. 22), making *Ornette: Made in America* a particularly unusual type of film, lying as it does within the realm of documentary filmmaking, yet at the same time clearly problematizing its place within it. In addition, although the film centres around the figure of Coleman and his approach to music and provides a lot of footage of one particular performance, the film is neither a strictly biographical exercise, nor an inquiry into Coleman's oeuvre and musical achievements, and least of all, a film about the performance that opens and closes the film. And yet, it is the music of this performance, which underlies the whole length of the film. Not only do we hear this music through most of the film, but it is also the skeleton around which the film takes shape.

Music is naturally the central element in *Ornette: Made in America*, but rather than having an expository or diegetic function, music is that which drives and frames the film. And given that Coleman's music is based on freedom of form and improvisation, Clarke's film attempts to do exactly that with its non-linear structure, quick editing style, and jumps between documentary and staged sequences, as well as between film and video footage. The object of the documentary is thus the music itself, and the ongoing question and objective in the film is precisely how to reflect, portray and document the nature of Coleman's music. In an interview with Jacques Derrida in 1997, Coleman described his approach to music in the following terms: 'the idea is that two or three people can have a conversation with sounds, without trying to dominate it or lead it' (Murphy, 2004, p. 322). Clarke's film reflects precisely this collective and spontaneous ethos, as a disjunctive unity of images, narratives, sounds and music.

Coleman was an outsider in the jazz world: the innovation that he introduced into jazz, rejecting the traditional harmonic structures that had characterized it up until the post-war bebop era, completely freed improvisation and provoked as much animosity as admiration amongst fellow musicians. Clarke, like Coleman, also never escaped her position as an outsider in cinema. A pioneer filmmaker whose work anticipated important trends in both film and artistic practice in the second half of the twentieth century, she was a central figure in the New American Cinema and the wider independent film scene that emerged in New York in the 1950s and 60s. And yet her name has been relegated to a minor position in the historical accounts of the period (in relation to a male pantheon of figures such as Jonas Mekas, John Cassavetes and Ken Jacobs, for example). Even when her name is mentioned, the central role that she played both in the foundation of the Filmmakers Cooperative (what would become the New American Cinema) and its development — in terms of activism for wider distribution and screenings of independent films — is not acknowledged.

Made in America: Questioning the American Dream

Ornette [Coleman], Archie [Shepp] and Cecil [Taylor]. Three versions of a contemporary Black Secularism. Making it in America, from the country, the ghetto, into the gnashing maw of the Western art world. The freedom they, the music, want is *the freedom to exist in this*. . . . The freedom of the given. The freedom to exist as artists. (Jones, 1969, p. 197).

Ornette: Made in America centres around the 1983 performance of Ornette Coleman's symphonic piece *Skies of America*, written in 1965 for symphony orchestra and jazz ensemble. The performance was part of the inauguration of the Caravan of Dreams Performing Arts Centre in Fort Worth, Texas, Coleman's own hometown. The film begins, before we even see the title sequence on screen, with a shot of a young black boy leaving 'Felix Bar', immediately followed by a quick scene of the dramatization of a cowboy stand-off in the streets of Fort Worth. Then comes a longer scene where Coleman, in the middle of a small gathering outside, is being handed the keys to the city by the mayor. After this, the title of the film is shown on an LED scrolling sign in the middle of the city: 'Ornette: Made in America'. This introductory sequence initiates the blurring of the boundaries between document and fiction, reality and dramatization, which are going to determine the rest of the film. In addition, it offers a clue as to the ironic character of the film's title *Made in America*, and the particular critique that the film is going to perform in relation to it. In this sequence, the mayor of Fort Worth, as is typical in these types of events,

grandiloquently proclaims the merits, success, and importance of Coleman, praising him and claiming it as evidence of the reality and reach of the American Dream, that is, that, in the mayor's own words: 'success is possible for all who take advantage of the opportunities of our country'. This bombastic and misguided rhetoric about the virtues of the American social and cultural context, what he calls 'the American way of life', and its role in forging Coleman's musical career, success, excellence and virtuosity, will contrast starkly with the reality of Coleman's life and musical development as the film progresses. Despite the fact that the viewer is not provided with much detailed information about Coleman's upbringing or adult life, it becomes clear that he grew up with scarce resources in an impoverished part of town by the railroad tracks and that he encountered obstacles grounded in racism and prejudice every step of the way to the pedestal that Fort Worth's mayor is raising for him in 1983. Thus the title *Made in America* holds a particularly ironic resonance throughout the film.

The complex and conflictual nature of this notion of 'making it in America', which Jones' quotation above fully conveys, was not lost on Coleman. And, although he exemplarily plays his part during the commemorative key-giving ceremony, he was fully aware of both the process of reification and commodification that this 'made in America' entailed for him as a black musician, as well as the racist social, political and cultural context that produced it: 'The insanity of living in America is that ownership is really strength. It's who owns who's strongest in America . . . in jazz the Negro is the product. The way they handle the publicity on me . . . it gets to be that I'm the product myself.' (Spellman, 1967, pp. 130 – 31).

Not surprisingly, despite the celebratory welcome extended to Coleman, there are quite a few very visible empty seats in the auditorium during the performance, laying bare the fact that, despite his stature as, in the words of the mayor, 'a widely acclaimed figure in the jazz world', he remained an outsider for most of his career, especially in his hometown. Another interesting contrast is the fact that, as Coleman revealed in his interview with Derrida in 1997, writing *Skies of America* was a tragic event for him because of his poor relationship with the music scene. Since his early days in Texas playing the saxophone in rhythm and blues bands, Coleman attracted attention for his particular and innovative style of playing — 'the first truly original concept of saxophone playing since Charlie Parker' (Spellman, 1967, p. 79) — and encountered hostility from both fellow musicians and punters every step of the way to his residence at the Five Spot Cafe in New York City at the end of 1959, which was extended from two to ten weeks. The freedom with which he approached the music, the dissonant

nature of his sound, and the fact that he defied all previously accepted conventions about jazz, made him into a controversial figure within the jazz establishment at the time. This contrasts starkly with the humility and generosity with which he played and spoke about his music, as *Made in America* reveals. The difficulty and complexity of Coleman's relationship to the jazz world is only briefly alluded to in the film, and not by Coleman himself, but rather by his ex-wife, the poet Jayne Cortez, the musician James Clay, and his sister, Truvenza Leach. They bear witness to his position as outsider from the very beginning of his career as a musician: drawing suspicion from fellow musicians; provoking violent rejection (musicians would sometimes leave the bandstand when he sat in at club performances and he was physically attacked on a number of occasions, most famously by Max Roach); getting his instrument broken; and being considered mentally unstable (by Miles Davis for example) (Litweiler, 1992 and Spellman, 1967). Clarke clearly chose not to dwell on these infamous moments in Coleman's biography although they are well known and part of what Clay refers to as the 'Ornette mystique'. She was actively avoiding the kind of biographical exercise which would focus on these — 'I wasn't trying to make a "documentary" of Ornette' (Snowden, 1986).

It is worth dwelling for a short moment on the specific conditions that brought *Ornette: Made in America* to life because Clarke faced similar difficulties throughout her career as a woman filmmaker, that is, she was always considered an outsider and thus found it increasingly difficult to get her projects funded. Although the film was finished and released in 1985, Clarke's first proposal for a film about Ornette Coleman was submitted in 1968 to the Public Broadcasting Laboratory (PBL). The main terms of her proposal were to focus on the relationship between Coleman and his son Denardo, who at 11 years of age at the time, had been included by Coleman in his band as the drummer. The controversy that this decision generated was the first motivation for Clarke to document the relationship between father and son. She was granted a limited budget, shooting started, and not before long, PBL cancelled the project. After several attempts to get additional funding (from the BBC and a German television company, for example), Clarke gave up on the project, but managed to keep the footage shot thus far.

15 years later, when Coleman was asked to perform at the inauguration of the Caravan of Dreams Performance Arts Centre in Forth Worth as the returning prodigal son, Clarke got her chance to finish the film. The Centre's director, Kathelin Hoffman, after viewing the earlier footage, decided to employ Clarke to document the inaugural performance. The film thus spans almost 20 years, with varied footage from various sources and in

different formats (both film and video) and both high and low resolution. This includes: 16mm reversal film from the material shot in the 1960s; several formats of video gathered from television broadcasts, home video recordings and club performances; and the Super 16mm used in 1983. In addition to this, the film combines documentary footage with staged dramatizations of Ornette's childhood memories.

The heterogeneous and eclectic nature of the original footage is one of the foundations of the film. Rather than attempt to disguise it and unify the visual language under an overarching narrative (of musical achievement or a biographical journey), the film emphasizes and dwells on the disjunctive character of the images on screen, self-reflexively bearing testimony to its own conditions of production. The film's visual fragmentation echoes the temporal disjunction that constitutes it, bringing to the fore the indeterminate and dispersed nature of the film. Flutter cutting, video effects, and frames within frames are used throughout the film, constantly frustrating the viewer's expectations of a stable and unified narrative. Early on in the film, it is made clear that it is the relationship between images and music that is the main driving force of the film, rather than that between images and narrative content. There are several thematic threads weaving the film together which function as archival records of the film's own heterogeneous constitution. As Hoffman remarked: 'Ornette and I were focused on making a film about the creative process of a pioneering artist. Shirley was focused on continuing the story she had begun in the '60s, of a musician and his relationship with his son. We wove these themes together in the shooting along with John Dolphin's interest in the story of a poor black kid returning home as a symphony composer; a classic "rags to riches"' (Milestone Film and Video, 2014).

Blurring the Lines Between Fact and Fiction

As if to underline the fictional nature of any attempt at narrative representation in documentary filmmaking — as in the 'classic rags to riches stories' alluded to above — Clarke intersperses staged dramatizations of scenes from Ornette's childhood throughout the film. And rather than aim for naturalism in these sequences, Clarke emphasizes their artificiality, with awkward acting on the part of the child actors and the constant acknowledgement of the presence of the camera, as subjects on screen are continuously breaking the fourth wall. For example, in the scene where young Ornette is leaving home to make a living as a musician, we see the present-day residents of Coleman's childhood neighbourhood look at both the child actor and the filming taking place, breaking the narrative pulse and forcing the viewer to consciously oscillate between both levels of representation.

By juxtaposing these stylised sequences with the documentary footage, Clarke is again exploring an ongoing concern in her film practice, the ambiguous relationship between the factual and the fictional at the core of cinematic representation. This was a fundamental problematic for Clarke that she gradually developed along the three feature films that she made between 1961 and 1967: *The Connection* (1961), based on the Living Theatre's off-Broadway production of Jack Gelber's homonymous play; *The Cool World* (1963), based on Warren Miller's novel of the same name; and *Portrait of Jason* (1967), a documentary portrait of Jason Holliday, a middle-aged gay black hustler longing for a slot in Greenwich Village's cabaret circuit. In *The Connection* Clarke offers a critical examination of the limitations of representation and the claim to truth of documentary film-making. This was seven years before Jim McBride's *David Holzman's Diary* (1968) was made, the film considered to have started the tradition of self-reflexive critical pseudo-documentary. Clarke's first feature is presented as the edited collection of the footage recorded by Jim Dunn, a documentary film director, and J. J. Burden, a cameraman, who at the beginning of the film informs us that he is the one responsible for putting the film together. In true *cinéma vérité* fashion, it purports to offer us a glimpse into the lives of a group of New York drug addicts waiting for their 'connection', the dealer with the drug supply for the day. It is this notion of film being able to capture an authentic experience of reality that, along the film, Clarke lays bare as fundamentally a misconception. In the same way as the play on which it is based, the film continuously blurs the boundaries between the factual and the fictional, leaving the spectator to negotiate the different levels of reality presented. Clarke turns the camera on itself, revealing how it is the camera that creates the reality it depicts, provoking and producing the action on screen. In her second feature, *The Cool World*, Clarke further explores the ambiguous relationship between the factual and the fictional at the heart of cinematic representation. The film combines fiction and documentary to portray a few days in the life of a black Harlem teenager at the start of the Civil Rights Movement. The highly stylised documentary depiction of Harlem, which serves as both the cultural and the political backdrop for the film's narrative, reflects a self-critical examination of the technologies of representation. In *Portrait of Jason* we find again a self-reflexive exploration of the question of cinematic representation, with the materiality of the filmmaking process coming centre stage. On screen, Jason Holliday's performance before the camera oscillates between humorous camp sketches — he plays part of his cabaret act to the camera — and overly dramatic scenes of emotional vulnerability. With few narrative transitions in between, it is again

up to the spectator to negotiate who the real Jason Holliday is, where his act ends and he himself begins.

As Clarke put it: 'I was very curious about the whole discussion of documentary and dramatic films and what was truly true. I had a lot of ideas about what was *cinéma vérité*, what was real, what was documentary, and what was fiction' (Rabinovitz, 1983, p. 10). Having made documentary films during the 1950s in collaboration with Willard Van Dyke, D. A. Pennebaker and Richard Leacock, proponents of the direct cinema movement — characterized by a 'hyperbolic insistence on objectivity, spontaneity and non-mediation' (Green, 2006, p. 69) — it is not surprising that Clarke's filmmaking practice articulated such a sharp critique of the claim to truth of documentary filmmaking. *The Connection* was in fact the first film in a long tradition of documentaries, which appropriate the visual and stylistic conventions of documentary filmmaking to highlight the limitations of the documentary conceit, that is, that reality can be captured objectively and without mediation.

The Visualisation of Sound

Ornette: Made in America is likewise determined by the question as to the nature of the documentary process itself, yet more specifically, it is addressing the question of the relationship between film and music. Music is without a doubt the central motif in the film, but rather than having an expository or diegetic function, the music drives the film forward and frames it. It is, as advanced earlier, the skeleton around which the film takes shape. Clarke said the following about her approach to the editing of the film: 'I knew I was connecting to the way [Coleman] sounded because the first thing I laid down was the sound. . . . Then I decided what images were going to go with that particular sound. I shot every single piece we used without knowing what I was going to do with it' (Snowden, 1986). After transferring all the footage to video, Clarke edited the film on U-matic, 'playing the machine like one plays the piano'. Her editing pulsates to the rhythm of Coleman's music, the visual style is completely in tune with the music soundtrack. And Clarke acknowledged using improvisation in laying down the images in the editing process. She said: '[h]aving laid the spine down, which was his music, I edited to the music. That's where the rhythms and energy came from. The film looks like how Ornette sounds and has the same basic thinking' (Snowden, 1986).

It is not just in terms of the editing of the film that Clarke attempted to reflect the nature of Coleman's music. Her decision to maintain and emphasize the heterogeneous nature of the footage, and the disjunctive quality of the images on screen, clearly

mirrors the tonal and rhythmic eclecticism at the heart of the one musical piece at the centre of the film, *Skies of America*, and Coleman's music more generally. The eschewal of visual harmony evident in the film is clearly determined by Coleman's own theory of 'harmolodics' which dictates that 'harmony cease to exist as a primary concept' (Litweiler, 1992, p. 54) and that hierarchies be rejected to make all three basic musical elements, melody, harmony and rhythm equal in significance and prominence. Despite the obvious complexity of Coleman's conception of harmolodics — his definition of it as that which 'allows a person to use a multiplicity of elements to express more than one direction' (Litweiler, 1992, p. 131) — it resonates perfectly with Clarke's strategy in *Made in America*. By highlighting the heterogeneous nature of the different elements making up the film, she was clearly echoing Coleman's understanding of harmolodics, as well as his own approach to composition in *Skies of America*. The music was composed by Coleman in 1965 and recorded in London in 1972 with the London Symphony Orchestra, yet, due to contractual problems with the musicians' union in the UK, he was the only improviser on the album. In *Made in America*, it is Coleman's original vision for the piece that is revealed. Orchestral passages alternate with sections played by Coleman's band at the time, Prime Time, which comprised two electric guitarists, two electric bassists and two drummers. The jagged and disjunctive nature of the transitions between the two is evident and intensified rather than downplayed, and the symphony itself is a collage of new compositions and reworked old themes, a heterogeneous collection of music and sounds, which Clarke's film reproduces visually. One of the most recognizable tunes in *Skies of America* is 'School Work' (which appears on the album *Broken Shadows*, recorded in 1971), whose playful sax riff we hear again and again in countless variations throughout the film.

In the 1968 proposal to the BBC, Clarke referred explicitly to the experimental nature of the project, declaring her aim to be the exploration of the way that new film techniques and electronic media can contribute to the visualisation of sound. The main concern, she stated, was how to film music successfully (Cohen, 2012a). Unfortunately she didn't get the funds, as Coleman was not sufficiently well known at the time. Later she said that, had she made that early film, it would not have been anything exceptional. Given the primary role that video experimentation and visual improvisation play in *Made in America*, in terms of attempting to capture and reflect the free and heterogeneous nature of Coleman's music, it is not difficult to conclude that Clarke would not have achieved the same results with film in 1968. It was only after spending over a decade experimenting with video that she was able to approach the filmic process in the truly

improvisational manner that her vision for the project required. Video provided an immediacy that film lacked in order to experiment with the image in real time, enabling the spontaneity in improvisation necessary to replicate Coleman's approach to music which 'should require no mediation' (Mandel, 2008, p. 126). Video also 'allow[ed] for an emotional response on the part of the person editing' (Snowden, 1986). This focus on the emotional engagement with the image again reflected Coleman's own 'emotionalism' in his improvisation (Litweiler, 1992, p. 54).

Between 1969 and 1983, when the latest footage of *Made in America* was shot, Clarke stopped making films and turned her attention to video. According to legend, the switch was the result of a chance encounter on the street. After learning that PBL had pulled the plug on the Ornette project, Clarke bumped into an acquaintance of hers who was carrying a Sony Portapak, the first video camera to be made widely available to consumers in 1969. With help from a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts — which at the time saw its budget multiplied from two to 20 million dollars as part of Nelson Rockefeller's re-election campaign to be New York State governor (Ryan, 1988, p. 42) — she bought cameras, monitors and tape decks with which she filled her penthouse apartment at New York's Chelsea Hotel. There she organised events and workshops and set up a collective that would come to be known as the Tee Pee Video Space Troupe which included members of video collectives Videofreex and Raindance, as well as Bruce Ferguson, Andrew Gurian, Frank Gillette, Dee Dee Halleck, Susan Milano and Clarke's own daughter Wendy.

Her workshops were attended by artists such as Nam June Paik, Shigeko Kubota, Yoko Ono, Harry Smith, and Steina and Woody Vasulka, amongst others. Figures such as Andy Warhol, the actress Viva (who was a neighbour), Alan Watts and Arthur C. Clarke also visited regularly. Central to these workshops was the imperative to experiment with the new technology, to play around with the cameras, synthesizers and monitors, to try things out, to improvise, and to play. Video was in these workshops a performative practice and not a recording medium. The emphasis was on the process and not on the production of a final object. In fact, tapes were mostly discarded. Thomas Cohen has likened the atmosphere and working ethos of these workshops as that of a jazz jam session which privileges improvisation and experimentation, an engagement with the expanding musical form and response to it — as well as to the other musicians — in real time, rather than the completion of a finished piece of music (Cohen, 2012b, p. 59).

Clarke was not just a jazz enthusiast; she had a lifelong commitment to jazz. The soundtrack for *The Cool World* (1963) was scored by Mal Waldron and performed by

Dizzy Gillespie and his quintet, and the quick editing style of the documentary scenes shot in Harlem clearly indicate the integrative approach taken to the relationship between soundtrack music and image, which is also evident in *Ornette: Made in America*. In *The Connection* (1961), the jazz musicians on screen — the Freddie Redd quartet, which included Jackie McLean — are playing themselves, and form an integral part of the on-screen action. Given that the film presents a film within a film — within a scathing critique of the direct cinema documentary style — the music is, on one level, strictly diegetic and does not betray the documentary ethos. Yet on another level, it is clear that it is the musicians' improvisations that in effect drive the dramatic development of the film forward and play a vital role in the denouement of the film.

Yet this concern with the relationship between music, particularly jazz music, and film is at the heart of Clarke's filmmaking practice since her early days. Her characteristic quick and rhythmic montage style in *The Cool World* and *Ornette: Made in America* emerges in her experimental film loops of the 1950s. In 1958 she was one — the only woman — of a number of filmmakers (including Van Dyke, Leacock, and Pennebaker) commissioned by US State Department to shoot and edit a number of short film loops which were bound to be part of the US pavilion at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. The social and political context for the commission of the loops was that of a US government eager to present the image of a free, democratic, forward moving and modern society, and to dispel the image of a country still permeated by racism and riddled with racial conflict (which had been reinforced by the incidents in Little Rock, Arkansas, only a few months previously). With this aim, and after having closed down the one section in the pavilion which directly addressed the problem of racism in US society, the US Department relied on a roster of mainly black performers (Harry Belafonte being one of the better known participants at the time) to counteract the perception that the US was still the racist and segregated country that the crisis in Little Rock had revealed (Nilsen, 2011, pp. 126 – 135). Jazz was part of the ideological warfare, as it not only evoked the idea of freedom that the US State Department wanted the country to be associated with, but it also offered an image of racial integration that, again, the State Department was hopeful would help extricate any accusations of racism.

It is important to situate Clarke's film loops for the American pavilion within this context of racial conflict. Formally, these quickly edited film loops anticipate in important ways not only Clarke's visual style in her ensuing film work, but also her approach to montage as a kind of improvisation, an exploration of movement and rhythm in the image, as a 'visual equivalent of jazz' (Auerbach, 1998, p. 82 in Nilsen,

2011, p. 149). Indeed, her aim was to make them all 'jazzy' given that the State Department had instructed her that the one subject matter that she could *not* portray was precisely jazz (Rabinovitz, 2003, p. 100). Although these loops were made without sound, as wall decor rather than films to be watched, later experimental films such as *Bridges Go Round* (1958) (a loop that was rejected by the US State Department) and *Skyscraper* (1959), co-directed with Van Dyke, were edited to non-diegetic music and asynchronous sound. *Skyscraper* used the off-screen voices of the construction workers featured in the film. The film critic Henry Breitrose described *Skyscraper* as displaying an 'astonishing lyric quality . . . shots edited dynamically . . . the changes of tempo, the pauses, accelerations, retards and even visual glissandos . . . work with a remarkably complex correctness and grace. One is tempted to suggest that, like jazz, 'Skyscraper' simply "swings"' (Breitrose, 1960, p. 58).

Ornette: Made in America clearly reflects the development of Clarke's improvised and rhythmic approach to montage which she began to explore with the Brussels film loops, those 'little, jazzy, dance-like films'. And although her concern with the relationship between film and music spans her whole career, it is with *Ornette: Made in America* that Clarke's ideas about visual experimentation and improvisation, and the role of music in relation to cinematic representation all come together. The film openly defies the conventions of documentary and ironically reflects on them. The camera is often acknowledged and sometimes it is actually shown on screen. The footage, both film and video, was heavily manipulated at the time of shooting and in post-production, emphasizing the mediated nature of the documentary images. There are crude early video-game graphics and video effects, and at one point we witness a bizarre surrealist-like scene of Coleman riding a space rocket in outer space. Talking heads are enclosed in cartoon-like drawn television sets in a sort of childish defiance of the authority reserved for the speaker in this documentary convention. On several occasions we can hear Clarke's own voice giving directions or conversing with Coleman, asking him to discuss something in particular. And throughout the film, the intimate nature of the relationship between Clarke and Coleman leaves no doubt as to the subjective nature of that which is being represented onscreen. In the final scene of the film, although only Coleman is on screen, it is as if we were watching the two of them looking into each other's eyes. Coleman looks straight at the camera for what feels like hours: the intimacy that both his eyes and smile reveal leads our gaze behind the camera to Clarke herself.

'I'd rather be a man than a male'

One of the moments most revealing of this intimacy between Clarke and Coleman is located towards the end of the film, when offscreen Clarke asks Coleman to 'tell the castration story'. It is a significant sequence showing that Coleman is comfortable enough with Clarke to tell the story, to discuss his issues with sex — something that many of us would only do on the therapist's couch — and to reveal such an intimate aspect of his life and personality. Interestingly, this is the only moment in the film when the music we hear is not Coleman's own, rather it is the song 'AOS - Emotional Modulations' by The Plastic Ono Band, drawing attention to the special significance of this sequence. Whilst we hear Yoko Ono grunting and moaning to an atonal instrumental backdrop, Coleman recounts how in his early thirties, having always found it frustrating not knowing whether the many women who desired him and approached him did so just because he was a musician, he decided to ask a doctor to castrate him to do away with those kinds of distractions. The doctor dissuaded him and suggested circumcision instead, 'symbolic castration'. When Coleman finishes by saying that he decided that he was going to be a man rather than a male, it is clear that the nature of his struggle has to do with his sense of masculinity and how this is determined by a specific (white) fetishising and objectifying gaze. The castration story sequence resonates during the final scene in the film, when, after the performance of *Skies of America*, woman after woman (mostly white) come to Coleman in their fancy clothes, with big admiring grins on their faces and stars in their eyes, hug him and kiss him with little restraint. Ironically, when one woman in particular, claiming to be a journalist, asks to see him in his hotel room with the excuse of interviewing him, Coleman gives her the number of his room without any hesitation.

It is significant that, out of the many exchanges in the aftermath of the inaugurating performance that the film could have finished with, Clarke decided to finish with this one. It reveals one of Clarke's ongoing concerns in her filmmaking practice: the construction and performance of masculinity, and specifically, black masculinity, as determined by a white supremacist society. In the case of *Ornette: Made in America*, the focus is on another paradigmatic figure of black masculinity: the jazz musician.

Jazz musicians also get a screwed-up sex life. . . . When the musician goes out and plays for the public on a bandstand, ninety percent of his audience in the nightclub is sexually oriented. . . . So therefore it ain't music, it's sexual attraction. . . . You don't know how many times I've come off the bandstand and had girls

come up to me and hand me a note with their address on it. . . . Sometimes I say to myself, 'Well, shit, if this is what it's all about, we should all be standing up there with hard-ons, and everybody should come to the club naked, and the musicians should be standing up there naked. Then there wouldn't be any confusion about what's supposed to happen, and people wouldn't say they came to hear the music' (Spellman, 1967, p. 139).

Clarke's decision to end with the question of Coleman's relationship to masculinity is not coincidental, given that the challenge that he posed in 1950s jazz circles was not limited to his music. As David Ake (1998) has argued, he represented a new concept of masculinity that ran against the dominant performance of jazz masculinity as a hyper-heterosexual masculinity — take for example Miles Davis or Red Garland and their representation of 'jazz-musician-as-boxer masculinity' (Ake, 1998, p. 34). This critique of the traditional jazz masculinity that Ornette presented with his long straight hair, thin body, long beard, homemade clothes, gentle demeanor and vegetarianism was no small thing. Since its (somewhat mythical) origins in Storyville, the red-light district in New Orleans, jazz has not only been a predominantly male space, 'creat[ing] and recreat[ing] notions of manhood' (Ake, 1998, p. 27), it has also always been intimately connected with sex. Of course this is the result of a particular 'race-zon[ing] by the white supremacist state' that rezoned New Orleans' sex district 'smack dab in the middle of a black working class neighbourhood, revealing the state's construction of 'blackness [as] hypersexual' (Tucker, 2008, p. 5). Ornette had no doubt about it, 'the jazz scene hasn't really changed that much since it left the New Orleans whorehouses. The nightclub is still built on the same two things: whiskey and fucking' (Spellman, 1967, p. 139). So it wasn't only the music that he was questioning and turning on its head, he was also posing the question as to what it meant to be a man in jazz, 'it was not simply a matter of not knowing what to play, but who to be' (Ake, 1998, p. 40).

One of the spaces where this hyper-heteromuscular performance was honed was in the jazz jams, or cutting contests, where musicians competed in terms of virtuosic performance and mastery of their instrument. Coleman, despite the difficulty inherent in achieving the particular sound he does from the saxophone, consciously avoided engaging in the virtuosic style of playing which was the norm in the post-bebop period. At one point in *Made in America*, the jazz critic Martin Williams recounts how one night at the Five Spot Cafe he heard Coleman play the blues like Charlie Parker, he says, 'and I have never heard anyone else other than Charlie Parker do that that way', but as the rest of the film clearly shows, Coleman's focus was not on individual proficiency

but on the interaction and communication between the different instruments, the whole ensemble. He spoke of his own musicianship with an astounding humility, as is revealed during one scene in the film, when he is talking to a grown-up Denardo about his playing and says: 'I'll tell you the truth, I think you do it much better than I do.' His choice of instrument was also revelatory, a white plastic saxophone, again eschewing the fetishisation of the instrument and its mastery typical of jazz performance at the time. He was clearly claiming a different form of masculinity for himself — 'I'd rather be a man' — away from the dominant hypersexual masculinity with which jazz musicians identified and which Coleman recognized as being produced by the racist context of US society, 'made in America'.

Ornette: Made in America was Clarke's final film. Three years after its release, she started to show symptoms of Alzheimer's disease, and died ten years later in 1997. The film epitomises Clarke's lifelong engagement with filmmaking: it offers both a critical reflection on the nature of the documentary image, something which was a concern of hers throughout her career, as well as a portrait of an idiosyncratic and radically experimental artist, Ornette Coleman, and through him, Clarke herself. It manages not only to convey the freedom in Coleman's approach to improvisation, and to reflect the heterogeneous and disjunctive quality of his music, it also replicates the self-reflexive nature of Coleman's music and character, revealing along the way Coleman's rejection of the limitations imposed on him by a racist American society and his self-fashioning against its constrictions. If his music creates the space for freedom, which Jones alludes to in the opening citation of this text, Clarke's film addresses the question of how this freedom can be 'made in America' by a man like Ornette Coleman.

Bibliography

- Ake, D. (1998). Re-masculating jazz: Ornette Coleman, 'Lonely Woman', and the New York jazz scene in the late 1950s. *American Music*, 16(1), 25 – 44.
- Auerbach, M. (1998). Film notes: a collection of stunning classics and originals. *LA Weekly*, April 2 – 8, 82.
- Baldwin, J. (1985). *The price of the ticket: collected non-fiction*. London: Michael Joseph.
- Bogle, D. (2003). *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, & Bucks: an interpretative history of blacks in American film*. New York: Continuum. 4th edition.
- Breitrose, H. (1960). Films of Shirley Clarke. *Film Quarterly*, 13(4), 57 – 58.
- Capper, B. (2013). Ultimate participation video: Shirley Clarke's Tee Pee Video Space Troupe. *Art Journal*, 72(1), 43 – 63.
- Cohen, T. F. (2012a). *Playing to the camera: musicians and musical performance in documentary*. London: Wallflower Press.
- Cohen, T. F. (2012b). After the New American Cinema: Shirley Clarke's video work as performance and document. *Journal of Film and Video*, 64(1 – 2), 57 – 64.
- Green, J. F. (2006). This reality which is not one: Flaherty, Buñuel and the irrealism of documentary cinema, In G. D. Rhodes and J. P. Springer (eds), *Docufictions: Essays on the intersection of documentary and fictional filmmaking*. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, 64 – 86.
- Gurian, A. (2004). Thoughts on Shirley Clarke and the TP Videospace Troupe. *Millennium Film Journal*, 42.
- Jones, L. R. (1969). *Black music*. London: MacGibbon & Kee.
- Litweiler, J. (1984). *The freedom principle: jazz after 1958*. Poole: Blandford.
- Litweiler, J. (1992). *Ornette Coleman: a harmolodic life*. New York: W. Morrow.
- Mandel, H. (2008). *Miles, Ornette, Cecil: jazz beyond jazz*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Milestone Film and Video (2014). *Kathelin Hoffman Gray reminisces about Ornette and Shirley*.
- Murphy, T. S. (2004). The Other's language: Jacques Derrida interviews Ornette Coleman, 23 June 1997. *Genre*, 37(2), 319 – 329.
- Nilsen, S. (2011). *Projecting America, 1958: film and cultural diplomacy at the Brussels World's Fair*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company.

- Rabinovitz, L. (2003). *Points of resistance: women, power & politics in the New York avant-garde cinema, 1943 – 71*, 2nd ed. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Rice, S. (1972), Shirley Clarke: image and images. *Take One*, 07/02/1972, 22.
- Ryan, P. (1988). A genealogy of video. *Leonardo*, 21(1), 39 – 44.
- Snowden, D. (1986, January 21). Jazz portrait 'Ornette' 20 years in the making. *Los Angeles Times*. Retrieved from http://articles.latimes.com/1986-01-22/entertainment/ca-31685_1_ornette-coleman
- Spellman, A. B. (1967). *Four lives in the bebop business (Cecil Taylor, Ornette Coleman, Herbie Nichols, Jackie McLean)*. London: MacGibbon & Kee.
- Tucker, S. (2008). When did jazz go straight? A queer question for Jazz Studies. *Critical Studies in Improvisation/Études critiques en improvisation* DOI 10.21083/csieci.v4i2.850
- Wilmer, V. (1977). *As serious as your life: the story of the new jazz*. London: Allison & Busby.