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POETRY, SOUND, RESISTANCE
Kamau Brathwaite's Jazz Aesthetics

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Abstract – Brathwaite's is a poetry in which words are conceived as pure sound; it is a space inhabited by musical echoes coming from Africa and America, in which Caribbean music, jazz, and blues redefine themselves. This fascinating migration of musical expressions, which the author enacts in his oeuvre, translates the sense and meaning of a personal life suspended between different geographies and cultures. Brathwaite's trilogy entitled *The Arrivants* (1973) represents a complex investigation of the relationship between Africa and the Caribbean, in which the discovery of a dialogical relationship with the African continent allows Caribbean people to *rewrite* their own identity. Besides Caribbean music, a fundamental resource and language within the economy of Brathwaite's trilogy is represented by African American Jazz. Brathwaite defines jazz in contrast with the earlier blues of slave culture. To him, jazz is the sound, the voice, and the music of the 'emancipated Negro'; jazz has been from the beginning a cry from the heart of the hurt man, which can also be heard in the saxophone and trumpet of many performers. But the affirmation of such a genre does not come from the individual voice, but from the ensemble, the merging of the various instruments. In choosing jazz, Brathwaite chooses a cultural expression that represents a modern black experience in its movement from slavery to freedom, and from countryside to metropolis. Jazz provides a system of languages that voice the modernist sense of alienation, chaos, disillusionment and hope that characterises not only African American or West Indian literature but all subaltern cultures in the world. Such an approach blurs national borders, invoking a communal cultural/literary/musical experience of resistance.

Keywords: Caribbean poetry; Brathwaite; jazz; resistance; sound.

1. Introducing Brathwaite's poetry: on Africa and the Caribbean

In Kamau Brathwaite's poetry, words are conceived as pure sound, allowing a musical understanding and *inter-standing*[1] of – and *in* – reality; it is performance poetry which asks for an improvised response, preserving the uniqueness and unrepeatability of each listening. During the 1971 Conference of the Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies

[1] Brathwaite used the expression *inter-standing* during a 2008 conference in Kingston – *Crossroads ACS 2008* – to voice his desire to deconstruct and *resist* to the colonial logic of *under*standing based on a vertical approach to knowledge.

(ACLALS), hosted for the first time by the University of the West Indies in Jamaica (UWI Mona), Brathwaite urged writers "to abandon the exclusivity of an imported literary canon and to immerse themselves in the oral folk traditions of a predominantly African-descended populace" (Kalliney 2016, p. 92). In this sense, if another great Caribbean poet, namely Nobel prize winner Derek Walcott, in his intertextual approach seems to privilege literature over other discursive modes (as in the case of his 1990 long poem *Omeros*, with its debts to Western myths and models), Brathwaite's pages nourish not only of oral stories but also of musical sounds, i.e. timbres, melodies, and rhythms coming from at least two continents, namely Africa and America, trying to convey the sense of the fascinating *dia-logic* which connects jazz, blues, and Caribbean music (in particular calypso and reggae). This complex migration of poetical and musical expressions, which the author stages in his work, expresses the sense and meaning of a personal life suspended between different continents and cultures.

Born in 1930 in Barbados, Brathwaite attended Harrison College, where he won one of the prestigious state scholarships which in 1949 took him to Pembroke College, Cambridge, to read History. In England, Brathwaite felt "neglected and misunderstood" (Morris 1995, p. 117); indeed, he wrote poems which were systematically rejected by the Cambridge magazines. After graduation, he moved to Ghana (1955) for a long job experience; here Brathwaite attained "awareness and understanding of community, of cultural wholeness, of the place of the individual within the tribe, in society" (Morris 1995, p. 118). When he went back home, he discovered how he had never really left Africa: "that it was still Africa; Africa in the Caribbean" (Morris 1995, p. 118). The English exile was followed by a proper homecoming; the passage to Africa translated the Caribbean of his adolescence into a different place in which he felt a full sense of belonging to a space which was and still is involved in a continuous process of translation and dialogic interaction with the African continent. On his arrival back in the Caribbean he felt he had performed and accomplished the triangular trade – Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean – of his historical origins.

Brathwaite returned to Europe, and more specifically to London, in the mid-1960s, where, as an intellectual and social activist, he founded the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM) with other Caribbean activists – interestingly, CAM grew out of a small informal meeting of West Indian intellectuals in Brathwaite's basement flat in London in 1966. The seminal debates that took place within the movement on the very shape and meaning of the "artistic production among members of the Caribbean exile community in Britain" (Dawson 2007, p. 73) involved key intellectuals such as Andrew Salkey, Stuart Hall, and John La Rose – in 1966 the latter founded New Beacon Books, the first Caribbean publishing house in England, which published seminal works by Brathwaite himself. As James notes, when CAM as an

organisation ended in 1972, not only had it “made a major impact on the emergence of a Caribbean cultural identity, [but it had also] changed attitudes within the host community” (James 2010, p. 210). CAM had had a major influence on other poets and activists, such as dub poet Linton Kwesi Johnson, in whose 1975 poem “It Dread inna Inglan” the poet/griot and his community speak in defence of poor George Lindo, a Jamaican worker living in Bradford who was wrongfully convicted of armed robbery.

Brathwaite’s trilogy entitled *The Arrivants* (1973) – which includes the three collections of poems *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969) – represents a complex investigation of the relationship between Africa and the Caribbean. As Brown puts it,

> the theme of the trilogy is that of re-birth, re-discovery, reclamation of identity for West Indian people through an examination of their roots in the African past. In all his work Brathwaite explores the ways in which an acceptance of those roots will begin to heal the negative self-images established by the experience of middle-passage, plantation and colonial life. (Brown 1995, pp. 9-10)

In short, the discovery of a deep and dialogical relationship with the African continent allows Caribbean people to *rewrite* their own identity. As Morris observes in the first volume of the trilogy, *Rights of Passage*, “we meet personas of the New World Negro, the dislocated African, forever on the move and with little memory of ancestral Africa” (Morris 1995, p. 119); it is basically a collection about the African diaspora and about the quest for the meaning of a difficult Caribbean present.

The second collection, *Masks*, portrays a return to the African past and stands as a poetic translation of Brathwaite’s personal experience, which here is presented in terms of a double mask. We have on the one side a journey within African history and culture, which is exemplified by the poem entitled “The Making of the Drum”, in which Brathwaite sings of the uniqueness and holiness of the voice of the African drum; on the other side, we have a journey performed by a Caribbean black man, who looks for signs of his own belonging to the African continent without finding any; in this sense, in the poem entitled “The New Ships” we read:

> I travelled to a distant town
> I could not find my mother
> I could not find my father
> I could not hear the drum
> (Brathwaite 1973, p. 125)

And yet the African experience will positively affect the poem’s protagonist, who will become stronger and self-aware.

The last section of the trilogy, *Islands,* focuses on the quest, discovery, and valorisation of the presence of African elements in Caribbean culture and

includes Brathwaite's most famous poem "Limbo", in which the image of this Caribbean dance recounts both the coloniser's oppression upon the slaves and the slaves' capacity of resistance, questioning this very oppression through music (conveyed again by the reference to the African drum) and dance:

> knees spread wide
> and the dark ground is under me
>
> down
> down
> down
>
> and the drummer is calling me
>
> limbo
> limbo like me
>
> sun coming up
> and the drummers are praising me
>
> out of the dark
> and the dumb gods are raising me
>
> up
> up
> up
> and the music is saving me
> (Brathwaite 1973, p. 195)

The kind of resistance evoked here projects towards radical art forms such as reggae – one is reminded of Bob Marley's 1970 song entitled "400 years", a powerful meditation on slavery – and dub poetry – we are referring in particular to Linton Kwesi Johnson's album *Bass Culture* (1980).[2] Commenting on the collection's triadic structure and on its dialogical aspect, Brathwaite affirms:

> [I]t was really a matter of raising an issue, replying to that issue and trying to create a synthesis. In other words, the first question which is in *Rights of Passage*, is: How did we get into the Caribbean? Our people, the black people of the Caribbean – what was the origin of their presence in the Caribbean? And the antithesis to that was – well, the answer to that which emerged was that they came out of migration out of Africa, so that the second movement on the trilogy was the answer to that question. We came out of Africa. Hence, *Masks.* And then, we came out of Africa and went into the New World. Hence, *Islands*. So

[2] On this aspect, see also Martino (2019). On Brathwaite's aesthetics, see also Martino (2012, 2015).

> the trilogic form is based upon the question, an answer and resolution of that answer into a third book. (Brathwaite in Mackey 1995, p. 13)

Nelson reads Brathwaite's commitment to the triadic dimension as a musical organising principle and sees the author ready to experiment with a nine-movement symphony. In his essay entitled "The Music of Kamau Brathwaite" (2007), he tries to apply notions derived from classical musicology – such as form, melody, rhythm, tempo, and harmony – to the analyses of the work of the Caribbean poet. I would argue that the strength of Brathwaite's works resides, however, in its capacity to question every attempt of systematisation, to look forward to an active and committed response by the reader/listener. Brathwaite's music comes out of the interplay of popular and folk musical forms of any kind: African music, blues, reggae, calypso, ska, and most importantly jazz.

The complexity of Brathwaite's writing is given by the writer's constant attempt to convey ideas of possibility and unpredictability, exceeding, in this way, the reduction of his poetry to a nostalgic gesture of return to Africa. As Edwards puts it, Brathwaite's is a "vision of West Indian culture as a polyvocal conversation that must be defined in terms of the process of creolization" (Edwards 2007, p. 8), and as such it strongly connects with Bakhtin's ideas "regarding social discourses as dialogised heteroglossia" (Edwards 2007, p. 8). This explains Brathwaite's choice of jazz – the most dialogical of musical genres – as a fundamental resource and language within the economy of his trilogy. Even though jazz is not a strictly Caribbean art form, it is the one which more closely connects to important aspects of everyday verbal exchange, namely improvisation and turn-taking.

African American jazz is, in short, a fundamental stylistic resource and language within the economy of Brathwaite's trilogy. In an essay entitled "Brathwaite and Jazz", James notes how "Brathwaite brilliantly employs the resources of sound and rhythm to create contrasting musical styles, with a broad range he has identified as one of the characteristics of jazz" (James 1995, p. 65). And indeed, for the poet, jazz does not get stuck to a single statement but "has a series of statements" (Brown 1989, p. 84); jazz is the most dialogical of musical genres as it is inhabited by a multiplicity of styles and voices which project towards other voices and forms of listening.

In the poem "Folkways" from *Rights of Passage*, the poet articulates his verses through the rhythm provided by a boogie-woogie blues, offering in this way a powerfully musical piece in which one can almost hear the sound of the ride (a cymbal) of a jazz drum set:

> Come
> come bugle
> train
> come quick

bugle
train, quick
quick bugle
train, black
boogie-
woogie wheels
fat
boogie-
woogie wagon
rat tat tat…
(Brathwaite 1973, p. 33)

This form of writing – broken, syncopated, absolutely un-linear – is seen by Mervin Morris (1995) as the literary analogue of the jazz technique known as the blue-note (the flattened third or fifth or seventh), a note that makes you hear an adjacent semitone. The transcription of the boogie-woogie in the passage quoted above conveys this idea even though Morris sees a more direct example of the use of the technique in sections of "New World A-Comin" (in *Rights of Passage*) such as the following:

O who now will help
us, help-
less, horse-
less, leader-
less, no
hope, no
hawkins, no
cortez to come.
(Brathwaite 1973, p. 10)

In this passage, the emphasis lies on the idea of absence and deprivation. This kind of technique is largely employed in the first collection of the trilogy, which, as already seen, focuses on a sense of fragmentation.

2. Brathwaite's jazz aesthetics

Brathwaite's involvement with the world of jazz dates back to when he was a student at Barbados' Harrison College: it was a form of enthusiasm which brought him into conflict with the taste of the Island political hierarchy. In the late 1940s, indeed, Brathwaite and some school friends attempted to create a public audience for bebop jazz. First, he started writing jazz reviews in the school paper. Second, they presented a jazz programme on the local radio. The programmes were stopped after two sessions because of the numerous protests; Brathwaite confessed:

> We didn't get beyond two programmes, though. The first one I did; and even as I was on the air people were phoning in, asking what was going on and generally getting Rediffusion frighten. (Brathwaite in Rohleher 1981, p. 5).

In the 1940s, jazz was not certainly considered as a kind of music for respectable people, especially in Barbados. The majority of Barbadians were then enthusiastically loyal to Britain, and jazz was not perceived as a musical form that emulated 'proper' British culture. Nevertheless, Brathwaite's interest in jazz survived the disapprobation of his contemporary cultural elite.

As the poet himself confessed during an interview with Kwame Dawes:

> I had been out of the Caribbean for most of my grown-up years in England and Ghana. So that the only music that I used to listen to was this (not really true – but jazz is what most influences the poetry, certainly of *The Arrivants*). And therefore, whatever jazz was doing meant poetry to me. (Dawes 2001, p. 36)

The poet translated his interest in the genre in the 1968 essay "Jazz and the West Indian Novel" in which – starting from his reading of the novel *Brother Man* (1954) by Roger Mais – he created an alternative Caribbean aesthetics, based on polyphony and polyrhythms that enabled him to experiment with alternatives to Eurocentric culture. In addition to the supremacy of sound, Brathwaite identified three fundamental features for a novel to be considered a jazz novel: first, it had to be rooted in an African presence; second, it had to express protest; and third, it had to manifest the communality of West Indian societies.

Brathwaite focuses on this particular kind of music, because – unlike the ballad, which is a mostly pastoral expression – jazz is an urban folk form that "has wider and more overt connections and correspondences with the increasingly cosmopolitan world in which we live, than the purely West Indian folk forms […]". Most importantly, "jazz in several quarters, is already *seen* to be, or to represent, an alternative to the 'European' tradition" (Brathwaite 1996, p. 107). In considering jazz simultaneously urban, folk, and cosmopolitan, Brathwaite was evidently erasing the division between high and popular culture.

It is important to stress – as Alyn Shipton does in his introduction to *A New History of Jazz* – that jazz has always been capable of generating a powerful response from people of different ethnicities, genders, and social backgrounds:

> Of all the musical forms to emerge during the twentieth century, jazz was by far the most significant. In the early years of the century, it spread first throughout the United States of America, and then quickly to the rest of the world, where its combination of syncopation, unusual pitching, vocal tones, and raw energy touched the hearts and minds of people across the entire spectrum of social and racial backgrounds. Its message was universal, and it stood for something new,

> something revolutionary, something risqué that overturned the old orders of art music and folk music alike. (Shipton 2008, p. 1)

Jazz implies "improvisation" (Bailey 1992, p. ix), interaction, and interplay; in this sense, it is concerned with the redefinition of the self in dialogical terms; it is an art-form which, being strongly rooted in concepts such as enunciation and performance, confers centrality to listening. Very often, in jazz there is no score to read or respond to, what the musician is asked to do is to listen to his/her body and to the body of others in order to read and translate sounds in other sounds, in a horizontal, democratic dimension, which conceives no verticality, no authority. Jazz becomes in this sense a model for a free and freed social interaction, and for the construction of a polyphonic self within this very social dialogue; jazz is a language capable of speaking *across* cultures, it is about stepping "across" lines (Rushdie 2002, p. 407) and borders, it is a language which refuses to "sit still" (Gioia 2001, p. 474) and which very often coincides with the idea of migration itself. As Watson perfectly puts it, "jazz has always been a generous and a malleable music […] it has always reached out beyond race, culture and nation, and beyond doctrine and dogma. Jazz has always been a hybrid music as complex as its history" (Watson 2022, p. 290).

But jazz can also exceed its boundaries; jazz was and still is also able to address and be addressed by other art forms such as painting,[3] cinema,[4] and, of course, literature (Locatelli 2011, pp. 9-10). Moreover, they are all forms of *writing*, modelling systems though which we approach and confer meaning to reality. As Lange affirms in the introductory notes to *Moment's Notice*, a collection on 'jazz' poetry[5] and prose, edited by Lange himself and Nathaniel Mackey:

> The reception jazz has garnered and the influence it has exercised have extended not only far beyond the geographic boundaries of its country of origin but far beyond the boundaries of music itself. Jazz is at the same time a musicians' music […] and a music which, much more than most is more than music. Jazz has become iconic, its own often iconoclastic impulse notwithstanding. […] It is particularly unsurprising that a music which so frequently and characteristically aspires to the condition of speech, reflecting critically, it seems, upon the limits of the sayable, should have provoked and proved of enormous interest to practitioners of the art of the word. (Lange1993, p. i)

[3] The American painter Jackson Pollock listened to jazz for inspiration to become one with his canvas. He submerged himself in the music in order to reach a higher state of mental clarity where he could not be distracted from his unconscious relationship with the paint that dripped from his brush.

[4] There have been a multiplicity of films in the history of Hollywood and European cinema which have focused on jazz as their subject: from Clint Eastwood's *Bird* (1988), which reconstructs the life of Be Bop hero and alto saxophone player Charlie Parker, to Bertrand Tavernier's *Round Midnight* (1986), which features tenor saxophone player Dexter Gordon, to Pupi Avati's *Bix* (1990), which offers a biography of ragtime-era trumpet player Bix Beiderbecke.

[5] On jazz and poetry, see also Martino (2022).

These words allow us to investigate jazz beyond the spatial boundaries of its origins; jazz indeed – as we have seen with Brathwaite – had a major impact in Anglophone literature. In a 2015 interview, Canadian author Michael Ondaatje focuses on his involvement with jazz as a teenager in London – when he used to dance in jazz clubs thrice a week – and affirms:

> The rhythms of music in some ways has [*sic*] been the biggest influence on my writing. It's not Wordsworth, it's Ray Charles. […] When I'm writing the pace of a paragraph or a long, long sentence that takes over a page is closer to music than any other thing I know. (Louisiana Channel 2015, 00:28-01:13)

Brathwaite – who knew about the 1950s London jazz scene – importantly defines jazz in contrast with the earlier blues of slave culture. Jazz, in the poet's view, is the sound of resistance:

> Jazz […] is not 'slave' music at all. It is the emancipated Negro's music: hence the brash brass colouring, the bravado, its parade of syncopation, its emphasis on improvisations, its swing. It is the music of the freed man who having left the countryside of his shamed and bitter origins, has moved into the complex, high-life town. (Brathwaite 1996, pp. 268-269)

In this sense, for Brathwaite jazz represents the perfect expression for "the rootless, 'cultureless' truly ex-patriate Negro" (Brathwaite 1996, p. 269). Jazz has been "from the beginning a cry from the heart of the hurt man, the lonely one" (Brathwaite 1996, p. 269). We hear this in the sound of "the saxophone and of the trumpet" (Brathwaite 1996, p. 269) of many performers, from John Coltrane to Don Cherry. But the affirmation of such a genre does not come from the individual voice but from the ensemble, the merging of the various instruments. This is particularly relevant in free jazz ensembles such as the Liberation Music Orchestra by double bass player and activist Charlie Haden.

In an interview which took place in Kingston in 2008, the poet answered to a question concerning the specificity of his choice in these terms:

> It just happens to be jazz; but I was seeking for a musical form which allowed me to hear the speaking voice, which allowed me to see the individual within the community, and which allowed me free improvisation within a tradition and jazz does it. (Martino 2009, p. 121)

Brathwaite's poetry concentrates on specific aspects of jazz. It has the accessibility of folk music – it has indeed popular roots – and expresses experiences of common life in their dissonance, fragmentation, and syncopation. Jazz – with its focus on *how*, on the way something is said more than on what is said – is not content so much as style, as it adapts and transforms melodies and musical forms. It can be considered as a natural development of the oral tradition, for it is fundamentally dependent on

performance: its experience is not created in the transcriptions on scores but, as we have seen, in the very moment of playing, in the here and now. For this reason, jazz is continuously creative, it leaves room to improvisation but makes sense only within the ensemble, within the communal sensibility. In choosing jazz, Brathwaite chooses a cultural expression that represents a precise modern black experience in its movement from slavery to freedom, and from countryside to metropolis.

According to Francis (2007), two different kinds of dissonance are at work in jazz: a dissonance of form, characterised by an absence of harmony and playing the wrong note, and a dissonance of content, corresponding to a story told that is discordant with the prevailing, mainstream representation. For instance, a cruel or sad story accompanied by a melodic rather than a disconsolate blues is quite unsettling. Armstrong was one of the major representatives of this last form of dissonance. His manipulation of classical forms and instruments had a profound impact on Brathwaite. Armstrong was indeed a skilled and technical musician, but he did not apply his technique in a traditional Western way. Armstrong's attitude provided Brathwaite with the awareness that Western models could be dispensed with. The trumpeter's impact clearly manifested itself in Brathwaite's collection of poetry *Black + Blues* (1976). It is an ode to the musician. It takes its title from Armstrong's remake of Fats Waller's "Black and Blue". The collection also includes a poem entitled "Trane", which is a tribute to one of the most important musical voices in jazz history, i.e. tenor and soprano saxophone player John Coltrane, author of the iconic jazz album *A Love Supreme* (1965):

> Propped against the crowded bar
> he pours into the curved and silver horn
> his old unhappy longing for a home
>
> […] but no stars blazed across the sky when he was born
> no wise men found his hovel . this crowded bar
> where dancers twist and turn
>
> holds all the fame and recognition he will ever earn
> on earth or heaven. he leans against the bar
> and pours his old unhappy longing in the saxophone.
> (Brathwaite 1976, p. 14)

The poem witnesses Brathwaite's capacity of appreciating jazz in its multiple – and even in the most dissonant and complex – forms. His interest also addressed the later Coltrane, the one concerned with spirituality and free forms, and free jazz players such as Albert Ayler, to whom he dedicated a poem entitled "Clock".

I suggest that jazz may be considered a model for Caribbean culture, an instrument through which it is possible to redefine and reshape cultural

assumptions imposed by Europe, and a free performative language that creates a fundamental sense of community. Creativity in the Caribbean is closely related to music. When asked to define the relationship between poetry and music in an interview, Brathwaite answered:

> Poetry is music, as far as I'm concerned. It is another form of music. It is oral, verbal, vocal music. That's my simple answer to that. I can't say more than that. Poetry is a form of music, a form of music, a form of music. (Martino 2009, p. 119)

Interestingly, the very iteration of the words during the interview aimed at conveying the very idea of music which is present in any verbal enunciation.

According to Brathwaite, poetry means speaking to the community that is playing, making music *with* the community; it is based on the relationship between the centre and the periphery, the call and the response. Brathwaite's concern for concepts such as that of community, collectivity, and people leads him in the early 1980s to write a seminal essay entitled *History of the Voice. The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry.* Here Brathwaite makes reference to Eliot, writing that "what T.S. Eliot did for Caribbean poetry was to introduce the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone" (Brathwaite 1984, p. 30). T.S. Eliot exerted an important influence on Brathwaite – especially the Eliot inspired by jazz (as in the *The Waste Land*) and by ways of saying that were far from Standard English. In the above-mentioned essay, Brathwaite defines his idea of national, or "nation", language as follows:

> [N]ation language is the language which is influenced very strongly by the African model, the African aspect of our New World/Caribbean heritage. English it may be in terms of some of its lexical features. But in its contours, its rhythm and timbre, its sounds explosions, it is not English, even though the words, as you hear them, might be English to a greater or lesser degree. (Brathwaite 1984, p. 13)

This is one of Brathwaite's most referred to formulations in the field of postcolonial studies to explain the difference between *English* (Standard English) and *englishes*, i.e. the multiplicity of languages emerged as a response to the language of the coloniser to express an everyday world of differences, dissonances, and experiences which Standard English cannot express.

In 1986, Brathwaite published a collection entitled *Jah Music* in which he expanded some ideas presented in *Black+Blues* (1976), where his interest in Caribbean folk culture had brought him to look at reggae, besides jazz, as a source of inspiration. In short, improvisation enabled him to discover other ways of representing dissonance, exploring local music patterns of calypso, reggae, and Caribbean folk music:

> As I get to know more about the Caribbean the emphasis shifts from jazz to the Caribbean, to calypso, to reggae, to our folk music, […] so that it appears to be a moving away from jazz, as it is, in one sense, and an effort to explore more fully the nature, the musical patterns, of the local scenes. (Brathwaite in Mackey 1995, p. 29)

This also explains why Brathwaite has become a point of reference for Dub poets such as Mikey Smith and Linton Kwesi Johnson, whose poetry is defined by a constant effort to speak for and give voice to subaltern communities.

In a 2008 interview, Brathwaite pointed to the importance of relationships; all art, he insisted, is a way "to deepen a relationship, to repair a relationship, to celebrate a relationship, to mourn a relationship" (Brathwaite in Martino 2009, p. 122). The point for Brathwaite is that we should try to be *in tune* with the other, and yet

> [t]he problem is that the tunes have become so discordant that there is a great challenge of the spirit and of the arts to create a new harmony. Because I don't think we can return to the original plain chant, the original simple harmonics. We have gone into a-chronology and disharmony. But still we are trying to find a new super-harmony which will once more reunite, reconnect the sensibilities. […] As things become more dissonant the state of society becomes more important and society begins to impinge upon the freedom of expression of the arts. So that what happens now in the 21st century is that the responsibility of the artist, and the attention and the energy of the arts to me is tending towards the resolution of the problems of society. (Brathwaite in Martino 2009, pp. 122-123)

It is possible to conclude by stressing how Brathwaite, who died on 4 February 2020, left us an extremely precious legacy, i.e. a jazz aesthetic that stands as a resistant and subversive space and as a perspective to rethink the idea of poetry and our being in a community. His aesthetic provides a system of languages that voice the modernist sense of alienation, chaos, disillusionment, and hope that characterises not only African American or West Indian literature but all subaltern cultures in the world. Such an approach blurs national borders, invoking a communal cultural/literary/musical experience of resistance.

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