
MALWARE

A MALware Technical Report
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TECHNICAL REPORT

Kamau Brathwaite & the SE/30

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Researching at the Media Archaeology Lab provided a unique look into the materiality, ergonomics, and difficulties associated with Kamau Brathwaite's Sycorax Video Style that will be, just to point to two outcomes, informing Brent Cox's imminent presentation (Apr. 8, 2022) at a conference at University of Cambridge dealing with Poetic Thought, and Amanda Hurtado's in progress chapter on Kamau Brathwaite.

During our time we worked with a MAC SE30 computer of the same style and era we understand Brathwaite used for producing at least some of his Sycorax Video Style. We also wanted to use a similarly period-specific printer, the Stylewriter, to print mock-up transcriptions of Brathwaite poems. Unfortunately, we could not get the printer to work. However, I highlight this difficulty because I think it significantly points to the unique challenges posed by the SVS, because backwards engineering "exactly" how Brathwaite made his poems proved to be, at least for this trip, an impossibility. That impossibility, and the general difficulty getting dated technology to work, rhymes with the critical attitude that would seek to explain once-and-for all the difficulties posed by the SVS for readers, publishers, and poetry. However, the style, like the witch for which it is named, did not appear, but rather submerged itself into a decaying piece of equipment. This is also

documented in Brathwaite's own oeuvre, where his printer, finally, breaks. So in this sense, we were given a unique experience of precisely the difficulties Brathwaite himself faced by committing to using these technologies long after they were considered contemporary. It is this retro-futuristicity that typifies the SVS.

We were able to make connections between certain aspects of the writing software on the Mac SE-30 (Word, Quark, and Aldus) and the SVS, such as discovering the way that Brathwaite likely constructed the signature lines and frames associated with the style. In addition, we noted that "style" itself is a word that pervades these softwares, suggesting that there were more ways that Brathwaite "listened" to what the computer was "saying" than is often written about. This is true, of course, of the name of the printer itself (StyleWriter). After a good amount of time attempting to re-create poems, we decided that our most ethically sound engagement with these texts was a new transcreation consisting of an improvisatory collaborative poem using material from Brathwaite's books, our respective writing practices, conversation, and the formatting software on the computer. This poem, itself a "poetics" and reflection on Brathwaite's style, technology, and poetry more generally, was reformatted by each of us using the computer. We

will now go forward with these files, perhaps further
alter them with other means, and eventually publish
them as a research document that is also a poem.