



ΑΡΙΣΤΟΤΕΛΕΙΟ
ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ
ΘΕΣΣΑΛΟΝΙΚΗΣ

Contemporary (American) Drama / Theatre Theatre of race

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Σκοπός ενότητας

- Theatre of race.

Key words:

- Race.
- Gender.
- Subhecthood.
- Double self.

Play to study

- Ntozake Shange. For Colored Girls who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf.

Περιεχόμενο ενότητας

- Discipline and punish: The case of Baraka's Dutchman.

When Amiri Baraka's play Dutchman opened at Cherry Lane Theatre on March 24, 1964, it, no doubt, simultaneously concluded one school of development in the black theatrical tradition and initiated another. For the first time a truly uncompromising nationalist play was making the news. Certainly there were cases in the past, as Errol Hill notes, where black dramatists wrote plays that dealt directly with black liberation (1986: 408-426). Yet, quality aside, at no other time in the past had audiences experienced such a stage manifestation of anger, such a celebration of difference.

Written in an especially turbulent period, when the civil rights movement in the U.S. and the anti-colonial uprisings in Africa filled the firmament with their apocalyptic prophecies, Dutchman stands out as Baraka's earliest and most unsettling response to the absolutist rhetoric of white ideology. As Werner Sollors writes in his interesting book on Baraka, with this play Baraka "became the nationally and internationally known 'fierce and blazing talent' who shocked and fascinated audiences with his 'murderous rage' and the 'black man's bitter gall'" (1978: 117). Surely there is more to the dramatic encounter of the 20-year-old middle-class Negro and the 30-year-old white bohemian lady on New York's

subway train than mere rage. Its biblical, mythical and absurdist associations invite a variety of possible significations that complicate Baraka's seemingly realistic and rage-ridden microcosm. Hugh Nelson, for one, convincingly claims that the whole play is a conversion of the "Flying Dutchman story" into a modern myth. Like the doomed ship, he writes, the impersonal train seems to operate "according to some diabolical plan. It goes nowhere, never emerges from its darkness ..." (1968: 54). Other commentators, like K. Benston and S.A. Williams, have noted the implication of the myth of Adam and Eve — and on occasion, associations ranging from Wedekind's Lulu to biblical seductress Lilith.

While it is obvious that Baraka drew upon all these precursor texts in the creation of Dutchman, I would like to offer yet another interpretation informed by what Paul Ricoeur characterized as the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (1970: 32). Or by what less generous critics called "Foucaultian paranoia." In suggesting the value of this approach for the study of Baraka's work I am not leaping on a fashionable bandwagon. I still remain unconvinced that it can accurately express his theatre, a theatre that is careful enough not to give itself up to the "erotic" pleasures of dissemination and thus carry the artist away from his strategic ideological purposes. As Baraka repeatedly pointed out in his essays and creative writing, art, to be effective at all, has to carry out its project within the bounds of meaning. Baraka wants "poems that kill/ Assassin poems, Poems that shoot/ guns. Poems that wrestle cops into alleys/ and take their weapons leaving them dead/ and tongues pulled out ..." (1969: 116). To abjure this clarity of purpose in favor of the deconstructionist's infinite signifier, is to celebrate bourgeois subjectivity. Furthermore, I am also aware of the great diversity that characterizes the positions held by the various advocates of this approach, a diversity whose roots run deep into Marxism, feminism, interdisciplinary studies and new historicism. Yet what makes this approach so interesting is its position vis-a-vis culture and particularly established institutions of culture as agents of subjection, as projections and manipulations of power. As Laura Brown and Felicity Nussbaum explain in the Preface to The New Eighteenth Century, deconstructionists "privilege the analysis of complex systems of power and control within dominant ideologies." Instead of assuming the unity and integrity of the dominant ideologies, they look for "gaps, fissures, and possibilities of incompletely articulated but emergent counter-ideologies." That is why they give pride of place to the examination of the relations between ideology, gender, race, and class in the constitution of social formations.¹ And as my Foucaultian title "Discipline and Punish" suggests, my

¹Laura Brown and Felicity Nussbaum, eds., The New Eighteenth Century: Theory, Politics, English Literature (New York: Methuen, 1987), 20; quoted from Joseph R. Roach's very illuminating article, "Theatre History and the Ideology of the Aesthetic," Theatre Journal 41.2 (1989): 156.

intention here is to argue that Dutchman is a theatrical project designed to expose and communicate the workings of oppressive ideology and at the same time visualize the possibilities of its reversement by a new generative process based on the dynamics of violence. This means that emphasis will be placed upon the treatment of the game of power and the way it delimits and forms vision and understanding.

The first thing Baraka does in Dutchman is to construct an appropriate playing area in which one sees and is seen, in which one becomes a subject and object of knowledge, where one is formed and kept in line. To this end, he resorts to the built-in opportunities of the realistic design whose stage microcosm allows no gaps, no waste, and no margins. The entire play takes place within the oppressive realm of the subway train that visualizes in a theatrical context the characters' imprisonment in limited and limiting roles. This prison-like topos is all there is. There is no outside. All stage signs are contained in a manner as controlled, scenic, and well-attended as possible: the location of bodies and their distribution as well as the location of onlookers who, although in the shadows, constantly appear at the edges of power's glow, reminding those involved that there is somebody always watching. It is essential for Baraka that every moment is supervised and every event recorded. Surveillance must be permanent in its effect. It must induce in Clay a state of conscious and permanent visibility that will assure the automatic functioning of power.

Within the parameters of this spatial and optical system Lula is assigned the task of entertaining her audience — presumably white — by publicly inscribing on Clay's body her power. It is her task to theatricalize the workings of the "meticulous procedures that impose rights and obligations." (Foucault 1979: 150). As Clay tells her in the first act, "You act like you're on television already." That's because "I'm an actress," is her answer (1979: 83).

After all, a ritual with no witnesses would scarcely have any meaning. The aim is to make an example by arousing feelings of terror at the spectacle of power letting its anger fall upon the helpless victim. Thus seeing and being seen by others becomes a necessary condition of this encounter. Lula enjoys the "gaze" of the others for it confirms her power. Like a typical actress in a realistic play she wants to pretend that people cannot see her. Clay, on the other hand, is constantly bothered by the presence of the onlookers. "I didn't even notice when those people got on," he exclaims (87). And when more people, and thus more potential "gazers", come closer to them, Clay says in exasperation: "All these people, so suddenly" (90). "Do they frighten you," Lula asks? Most probably they do. Clay desires invisibility in order to avoid the audience's gaze and thus enter, undisturbed, into an interracial encounter with her.

The prison-like set, however, that Baraka devised, with its narrow field of vision, makes this impossible. Once Clay's body enters the stage space, it inevitably enters

representation and a “political field,” as Foucault says (1979: 25). It is not just there, an unmediated presence, a free-floating autonomy but rather a) a signifying element in a dramatized fiction about theatre politics, social history and race relations, b) a part of a theatrical sign system whose conventions of gesturing, voicing, and impersonating are apriori referents for both performer and audience, and c) a sign system governed by a particular type of theatre.² Clay cannot enter the semiotic microcosm of this design without his history and color and go on and pretend that he is an anonymous beauty “smashing along through the city’s entrails” (84). History, society, and the conventions of white art weigh him down. Unless he decides to undo the tyranny of the theatrical referent by problematizing its self-evident truths and by mocking and rocking its complacencies with his own unpredictable extremism, his “own feeling of violence, dismemberment, creative anger and revolution” (Harris 1985: 18).

But this is hardly the case. Clay is here portrayed as the author’s “black puritan,” the “half screamer,” the “respector of power” — just like all middle-class Negroes, who “do not express,” as E. Franklin Frazier describes in his work Black Bourgeoisie, “their resentment against discriminations and insults in violent outbreaks, as lowerclass Negroes do. They constantly repress their hostility toward whites and seek to sooth their hurt self-esteem in all kinds of rationalizations ... ” (1968: 185-86). Clay enters white space willing to let Lula (white America) take possession of him from the very start:

²For an excellent analysis of this point, with reference to feminist theatre, see Elin Diamond,

“Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Toward a Gestic Feminist Criticism,” The Drama Review 32 (1988): 82-94.

Lula: Weren't you staring at me through the window? ...

Clay: Staring at you? What do you mean?

Lula: Don't you know what staring means?

Clay: I saw you through the window ... if that's what it means ...

Lula: That's why I came looking through the window ... so you'd have more than that to go on. I even smiled at you ... (74).

Lula is the director, protagonist and Grand Spectateur of her own play-within. Like Beckett's Godot, she is portrayed as the privileged principle whose rhetoric grounds Clay's stage presence and by extension devalorizes his mise-en-scene. All performances and all speech are conducted by her and return to her. Everything is viewed from within her formal understanding of the sign. What makes her so powerful is the fact that she, like the author-creator Derrida describes in his Writing and Difference, is armed "with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation, letting this latter represent [her] as concerns what is called the content of [her] thoughts, [her] intention, [her] ideas. [She] lets representation represent [her] through ... interpretive slaves who faithfully execute the providential designs of the 'master' (1978: 235).

Consider also in relation to this, Foucault's theory of power. In terms remarkably appropriate for Baraka's play, Foucault writes: "... power and knowledge directly imply one another ... there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (1979: 27). And in "Truth and Power" he writes: "Truth is not outside of power or itself lacking in power Truth is of this world Each society has its own regime of truth, its general politics of the truth" (1980:131). In other words, power is the tool of political relations of domination and subjection and something intrinsic to the act of interpretation. It penetrates the entire body politic and defines the systems which create the knowing subject, the object to be known, and the modalities of knowledge, and which make man an object of knowledge to himself.

From the very beginning Lula comes to us as the carrier of power/knowledge and power/truth. Her knowledge of Clay, and power over him, is extensive, because she (White America) has created him, she has invested him, marked him, trained him, tortured him, forced him to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs (Foucault 1979: 25). Lula is the one who establishes the moral and behavioural standards of performance within which Clay is expected to act. And Clay is anxious to play the role of voluntary partner in the

procedure because he knows that he is under surveillance both as an institutional self and as a representational stage sign. He has been assigned a cultural role by the white establishment and he has to act to the very best of his abilities in order to maintain his status in the right class of referents. When Lula starts her teasing ritual of control and pleasure, Clay is already “prepared for anything” (75):

Lula: I bet you think I’m exciting.

Clay: You’re O.K.

Lula: Am I exciting you now?

Clay: Right. That’s not what’s supposed to happen? ...

Lula: ... Would you like to get involved with me, Mister Man?

Clay: Sure. Why not? A beautiful woman like you ...

Lula: And I bet you’re sure you know what you’re talking about ...

Clay: Yeah, right ... (77).

Lula involves Clay in a signifying task whose ultimate purpose is to produce the desired meaning in the act of performance. Clay is locked within Lula’s narrative by virtue of his race/color. As his name implies, Clay is “the black American who allows himself to be molded into the image of white middle-class” (Lacey 1981: 76). Born out of the whites’ methods of punishment, supervision and constraint, Clay becomes the topos where white power is articulated:

Lula: Now you say to me, “Lula, Lula, why don’t you go to this party with me, tonight?” It’s your turn, and let those be your lines.

Clay: Lula, why don’t you go to this party with me tonight, Huh?

Lula: Say my name twice before you ask, and no huh’s.

Clay: Lula, Lula, why don’t you go to this party with me tonight?

Lula: I’d like to go, Clay, but how can you ask me to go when you barely know me? (81)

What is evident in such a form of dialogue — besides its cruelty — is its theatricality, the fact that it is a regulated practice. Lula is in a position to suspend, even terminate, the

conversation. After all, the text is hers. She signifies authority and knowledge. She is the one who gradually reveals details of the evening they will spend together. Sex is her ideal weapon for the manipulation of Clay and his transformation into a fetishized object whose referent will be ideologically bound to dominant models of black masculinity. As Foucault maintains in his History of Sexuality, “sex is the most ideal and most internal element in a deployment of sexuality organized by power in its grip on bodies and their materiality, their forces, energies, sensations and pleasures” (155).

Clay: The party!

Lula: I know it'll be something good. You can come in with me looking casual and significant. I'll be strange, haughty, and silent, and walk with long slow strides.

Clay: Right.

Lula: When you get drunk, pat me once, very lovingly on the flanks, and I'll look at you cryptically, licking my lips.

Clay: It sounds like something we can do ...

Lula: You'll go around talking ...

Clay: Great. Great.

Lula: And everyone will pretend they don't know your name, and then ...

Clay: And then what? ... Go on with the chronicle. Then what happen to us? (85-86).

It is Clay's body that is at issue here, “the body and its forces, their utility and their docility, their distribution and their submission” (Foucault 1979: 25). Lula, by seizing Clay's body in the ritual of theatrical pleasure/torture, reduces him to a prop, a dweller at the margins of discourse who merely confirms her games or corrects her when she is wrong:

Lula: Your grandfather was a slave, he didn't go to Harvard.

Clay: My grandfather was a night watchman. (82).

For Lula, Clay is just a socio-political “case,” an object of observation and manipulation/exploitation. She treats him as a describable and analyzable object with its singular traits, particular evolution and peculiar capacities. Her mise-en-discours creates a thin, almost transparent surface through which shine a discourse woven of and about a

variety of cultural sub-texts. “Uncle Tom” (92), “buttoned down” negro, “middle-class bastard” (91), “liver-lipped white man” (91), “would-be Christian” (91), and “black Baudelaire” (83) are some of the images that Lula employs to reinforce her cultural narrative. Through these popular stereotypes Lula exercises tremendous power over the behaviour of Clay. “How you know so much about me,” Clay naively asks her (78)? “... You’re a well-known type,” she says (78); “I know you like the palm of my hand” (82). Power and knowledge cross. By knowing him Lula immediately places him in a network of relations of power with those who claim to be able to extract the truth of his confession through their possession of the keys to interpretation. Produced in the first instance by Lula’s techniques of power, Clay, the subjected subject, becomes an object of knowledge to the institutions of power. He loses control over the forces of his own mind and body and thus his capacity to situate himself as an “I,” a linguistic subject in a dialogical relation to a “you.” His speech lacks the minimal signs of identity that ground the situation of utterance. Thus, the semiotic relationship, that presumes that the speaking subject is present to control the functioning of the sign system, is here devalorized. As Lula remarks: “Everything you say is wrong ...” (82).

Clay, by assuming a pseudobourgeois role, assumes with it an alien history and culture that result in his total subjection. In every move he makes, he distances himself from the reality of black experience in America, from his authentic text. As Lula points out:

...What’ve you got the jacket and tie on in all this heat for? And why’re you wearing a jacket and tie like that? Did your people ever burn witches or start revolutions over the price of tea? Boy, those narrow-shoulder clothes come from a tradition you ought to feel oppressed by. A three-button suit. What right do you have to be wearing a three-button suit and striped tie?
... (82).

For both, the onlookers and Lula, Clay is a pure theatrical show that seeks to restore the illusion of being through the act of playing predefined roles, through the act of hearing and assimilating the words of others. His theatricality has nothing spontaneous about it, since it comes into play in direct proportion to the threat of nothingness. It is the “not me” masquerading as “me,” it is the absence of presence, or better, the presence that is inhabited by the traces of some/things that are not themselves. Even his artistic involvement is a sham.

Baraka explains the meaning of the black middle-class writer’s literary pursuits in his essay “The Myth of a Negro Literature.” His statement is particularly relevant in the case of Clay:

Literature, for the Negro writer, was always an example of “culture” To

be a writer was to be “cultivated” in the stunted bourgeois sense of the word. It was also to be a “quality” black man. It had nothing to do with the investigation of the human soul. It was, and is, a social preoccupation rather than an esthetic one” (1966:107-108).

For the real black artist, Joyce A. Joyce maintains, “art is an act of love which attempts to destroy estrangement and elitism by demonstrating a strong fondness or enthusiasm for freedom and an affectionate concern for the lives of people, especially black people” (1987:343). The problem with Clay, the artist, is that he lacks group identification. He is alienated from his ethnic roots. And when Lula tells him to “get up and scream at these people,” “scream meaningless shit” in their faces (91), she is more or less asking him to abandon his pseudo-bourgeois play (performance) and take up action (praxis), transform himself from a figure of institutional reform to a “dada man,”³ a rebel of unchallenged authority. But like most of Lula’s performance acts, this one is no different from her general bohemian/surrealist attitude. She does not really propose the ruination of white truth. She invites (for the fun of it), yet resists deconstruction. At best she wants Clay to exchange one role for a more degrading one, that of the super masculine guy, and thus give her the opportunity for more theatrical power games. For, as Foucault claims, power needs resistance as one of its fundamental conditions of operation. It is through this articulation of points of resistance that power spreads through the social field and makes its presence/potency felt. With a rebellious Clay, Lula will be able to demonstrate, once again, her disciplinary methods. At the same time, however, it is through resistance that power is disrupted, opens up.

And this become evident when Clay stands up at the end of the play, tells Lula to “sit the fuck down” (92) and goes on to deliver an impassioned and now-famous reading of black artistry, impregnated with brutal street idiom, black rhetoric, style of diction, expression and kinesic. For the first time we get the impression that Clay is no longer playing a “good” role and that he is about to liberate himself from the haunting dictates of white discourse and go on and project a new code, as yet unknown to us, with possibilities that have been excluded from the prevalent discourse. For one thing, his long black narrative shows a character who has an intrinsic understanding of culture and signification. He is aware of the system’s

³In the powerful poem “Black Dada Nihilismus” Baraka summons up the demon of blackness to

“choke” his white friends and thus liberate himself from their haunting dictates. He even goes as far as to command the “rape” of white girls and their fathers. The Dead Lecturer (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 62-63.

structure of domination as much as he is aware of the disruptive potential of Blackness. “You don’t know anything except what’s there for you to see,” he tells Lula in indignation; not “the pumping black heart.... And I sit here, in this buttoned-up suit, to keep myself from cutting your throats” (93). What Clay maintains is that Lula’s knowledge of him and his culture is fragmented and incomplete because it is based on a superficial image of Blacks purposely and purposefully propagated by the white establishment.

Through his deconstructive address Clay poses himself as a speaking subject, no longer circulated or fooled by white discourse. “You fuck some black man,” he angrily remarks, “and right away you’re an expert on black people. What a lotta shit that is. The only thing you know is that you come if he bangs you hard enough. That’s all” (93). Challenging the very fabric of white representation and understanding, Clay momentarily separates his black text (and himself) from the white context and transgresses each and every naturalized limit posed by the prefabricated white race ideology. “Belly rub is not Queens,” he tells Lula; “Belly rub is dark places, with big hats and overcoates held up with one arm. Belly rub hates you” (94). For the first time Lula is forced to see the real “I” behind the mask. And when he says “just let me bleed you loud whore, and one poem vanished” (94), Clay openly voices his disgust (Baraka’s disgust) over the poetry of his white peers: meaningless luxury, lacking direct and positive expression. Clay wants to move from the harmless surrealism of the white world to the scream of black art and the purifying violence of physical warfare: “... all it needs is a simple knife thrust ... all it needs is that simple act. Murder. Just murder! Would make us all sane” (94).

What is interesting here is Baraka’s attitude towards beauty/sanity. One could legitimately ask: Is the author really proposing an aesthetics of violence or murder and equating sanity/beauty with the most violent forms of transgression, as the above statement seems to imply? Is there really a place in his dramatic field for a new concept of sanity/beauty/subjectivity? What are its socio-political implications?

Baraka is obviously not a “pure aestheticist,” at least in its Western sense. If Clay’s statement is judged to be “sane” by Baraka, and if he is demanding that it be taken to be such by others, it is certainly not in the sense that it conforms to some ideal form of sanity or beauty propagated by “Western rationalism” and the “great intellectual legacy of the white man” (94). It is obviously not “beautiful” or ‘sane” in the sense that it possesses a harmonious or organic form with the norms of the established order of things. Its “sanity” conforms to none of the major tenants of white aesthetic traditions. What Baraka finds significant about the sanity he attributes to Clay’s statement is that it can be used to reveal the inadequacies of white traditional categories that throughout the ages used theatre and discourse, in general, as site of prohibition — subject to protective separations of the clean

from the dirty, the beautiful from the ugly etc. Now through violence and dismemberment Baraka wants to open up a new space of analysis or judgement demanding different categories, rules and strategies of interpretation. "And then," as Clay points out to Lula, "maybe one day, you'll find [that Black people] actually do understand exactly what you are talking about, all these fantasy people. All these blues people. And on that day, as sure as shit, when you really believe you can 'accept' them into your fold, as half-white trusties late of the subject peoples, They'll murder you, and have very rational explanations. Very much like your own ..." (94-95). Baraka is here signifying on the "sane" poetics of his white Fathers, the same way John Coltrane, Bessie Smith and Charlie Parker did with their music. As Clay makes the point: Whites say "I love Bessie Smith;" and don't even understand that Bessie Smith is saying, "Kiss my ass, kiss by black unruly ass Kiss my black ass. And if you don't know that, it's you that's doing the kissing" (94).

Baraka knows that he can't get rid of discourse, of the things he learned while he was hanging around the Village with his Beat friends. After all, their language preceded him and shaped his thoughts. The best he can do with his projective hermeneutics is to signify on the white proto-text by repeating backwards the sequence of words in an activity of "murderous" exploration. And by signifying on the text to retrieve its "blackness" as it develops within a new space in the white representation of race that representation makes unrepresentable.

In other words, Baraka's "mad poetics" is aimed at giving its own text a voice by provoking a breach, as Foucault argues in his Madness and Civilization, "without reconciliation where the world [will be] forced to question itself" and the possibilities of the "other" (1973: 288). And this is what Clay is asked to do: banish the white author/director from the privileged panoptical position, desemiotize the binary logic of his/her representational modes of operation and go on and project a new understanding of theatricality in terms of which nothing white will hold. Only then, Baraka argues, would Clay's performance involve his body and his voice in a single signifying practice. Voiced thinking, thinking as an act, thinking qualified as performance. This is the moment the concept of the subject in the writings of Derrida becomes imaginable. It is a concept Derrida also locates in the theatre of Artaud who writes in his Theatre and Its Double: "The theatre ... rediscovers itself at precisely the point where the mind requires a language to express its manifestations" (1958: 12; Derrida 1978: 7-17). At that moment, signs no longer represent; they lead to action. Within this theatre the actor can no longer situate himself at a distance, remove himself from the affects and effects of performance. As an interpreting subject he has to be both a theatrical and a non-theatrical subject.

Clay, however, is not ready yet to "quit stuttering and shuttling" and act like

Malcolm, “black and strong in his image (1969: 112). For all his knowledge and awareness, he is not ready to assert his “Black feeling, Black mind, Black judgement” (1966: 248), which means he is not willing to side with the “insane” black signified and talk of contradictions, issues of class, race and subjectivity. The more he speaks the more his inspiration becomes expiration — the end of desire and signifying: “Ahhh. Shit. Who needs it? I’d rather be a fool” (94). Despite all the talk of inversion, he is not inversive enough to select, at any cost, a mode of action commensurate with his beliefs. He feels safer with his words, “and no deaths ...” (94). By choosing words over action Clay decides to fall back to regulated closures and white representational mechanisms. Lula is still a source of temptation that prompts him to say: “Looks like we won’t be acting out that little pageant you outlined before ...” (95). His words and rhythms, after a brief interim, try to find their way back to the legitimate world of the white signified, thus forcing the play to move backwards negating its final argument. The progress of the principal character proves to be illusory. It still obeys the pull of a linear, continuous narrative whose telos resides with Lula — the source of meaning and understanding.

And when at the very end he realizes that nothing can be done and proposes to go, it is already too late; Lula, who has “heard enough” (95), is well into her final act. After refusing his final call to spend the night together (“No. We won’t. You’re right about that ...” (95)), she brings up a small knife and quite unexpectedly plunges it into his chest. Baraka very cleverly “puts us off guard,” as Lacey maintains, “with his fine sense of timing” (73). After masterfully rendering Clay’s outburst and preparing us for the expected clash of antagonistic forces, he hits us with yet another final dramatic reversal that is even more shattering. The atrocity of the stabbing is certainly the culmination of this demonstration of power that brings together a complex of power, truth and bodies. Lula, the master of ceremonies, acts to the very end of her assigned role. After all, she is the embodiment of everything that is murderous in white Western society. From her omniscient point of view, Clay’s momentary rage is deviant behaviour in need of normalization. Death is the logical end in this liturgy of punishment; it is a spectacular demonstration of the culmination of Lula’s calculated gradation of pleasure/pain. Clay, after confessing his “crime” — he hates whites — must be punished. Lula, the stage executioner, no longer needs onlookers; she now needs accomplices. And she knows where to find them: among her spectators, whom she knows very well. She knows their prejudices and biases, their expectations and cultural preparation. So when she creates an agreement with the “citizens” (95), she carries out the act. The “others”, who have already gotten up from their seats come out of the shadows, drag Clay’s body down the aisle, they throw him off and then “get off at the next stop” (95). With their participation the playing area becomes a space of corporal presence in which the distinction between actor and spectator is broken down; spectators become actors, participants in the theatre of cruelty, a part of the play of forces, and not outside it or simply

inactive witnesses to the ongoing drama. They can now intervene physically, enter the space of the ritual and take up in another sense its violence.

With Lula's act the anonymous choric observers are offered yet another opportunity to act on behalf of the system, totally blind to the history of abuse. They all believe in the legitimacy of their means and ends. The application of power on Clay's body is a "justified" act of punishment since it redresses the "wrong" done to society. It further shows to those watching what will happen if they don't obey. As Foucault maintains, "in this liturgy of punishment, there must be an emphatic affirmation of power and of its intrinsic superiority. And this superiority is not simply that of right, but that of the physical strength of the sovereign beating down upon the body of his adversary and mastering it" (1979: 49). In other words, Clay's body becomes the place where the vengeance of the system is applied. The collective complicity in the murderous act is meant to function as a deterrent, a recompense to white society (since it safeguards its policies) and a lesson — decreasing, in this way, the possibilities of the "crime" being repeated. It makes everyone aware of the unrestrained presence of the System, a presence that does not re-establish justice but reactivates power. Anything outside this power is sacrificed to symmetry and homogeneity. With the end of the play, and the end of punishment, Lula re-instates the pre-existing order, after instigating its temporary crisis, and brings home what Foucault claims in his Discipline and Punish: "Each individual has a place and each place has its individual" (143).

With Clay gone, "a young Negro of about twenty comes into the coach with a couple of books under his arm. He sits a few seats in back of Lula. When he is seated she turns and gives him a long slow look. He looks up from his book and drops his book on his lap. Then an old Negro conductor comes into the car, doing a sort of restrained soft shoe, and half mumbling the words of some song Lula turns to stare at him and follows his movement down the aisle. The conductor tips his hat when he reaches her seat and continues out the car" (95-96). With the introduction of these new faces, Baraka maintains the time of play as repetition. Power will once again retheatricalize the theatre of cruelty, unless, of course, the "network of relations," as Foucault notes, that permeates the entire body politic, is inverted and its records re-arranged (1979: 26). And this will happen a year later, in Dutchman's follow up, The Slave where, once again, Baraka will resort to the potential power of formal realism to capture the exercise of power, the production of meaning and their final dynamic inversion by Walker, the Black nationalist. Using the "very tools the White man gave the Negro" (Baraka 1974: 5) — images, ideas and forms — Baraka will be able to foreground the pragmatic thrust of the then uncanonized "Black aesthetic" and call for an art that will "cause the blood to rush" (Baraka 1966: 214-215).

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