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Class: Modern Dramaturgy
Play: Dutchman by Amiri Baraka
Date: February 6, 2019 (Due)

The Initial Response Form (IRF)

1. Positives

- [Goddamn, Goddamn, Goddamn](#)
 - The dialogue between Lula and Clay has it's edgy moments and I certainly wouldn't identify it as every being normal, but the moments when Lula tests Clay by saying direct racist remarks like "I bet you never once thought you were a black n*****" evoke a strong emotional response for me.
 - These moments vocally freeze the dialogue like a camera taking a photograph and force Clay to choose wisely what his next step will be.
 - These evoke a strong emotional response for me because I understand that these are things white people used to say without blushing and because black men are still being shot in the street like dogs in 2019.
- [The Cycle of Life](#)
 - By including the ending scene of the Young Negro entering the train, Baraka confirms the cyclical nature of this story and implies why he decided to title the play "Dutchman". I was surprised to find out the story by Wagner is a romance.
 - The train itself is serving Baraka as a modern day flying dutchman ship, and the cyclical nature of the story reminds me of the cyclical nature of White America to hunt and kill black men.
 - I believe this is a really powerful way to end the play and it would be wise to directly parallel the images of Lula approaching Clay at the beginning of the play with Lula and the Young Negro.
- [Well, I Don't Know What I Expected.](#)
 - Throughout the entire play the tensions between Lula and Clay are clearly building, but I never expected Lula to straight up murder Clay. Especially not in front of everyone.
 - I don't know how I expected the play to end, but I certainly didn't expect her to stab him and then tell the passengers to get his dead body off of her and then for the passengers to follow her orders and throw Clay off the train like a bag of trash.

- I think it is important for the production staff to work on capturing the shock-factor of this moment and avoid releasing any hints of it in marketing.
- [Somebody Blew Up America](#)
 - Baraka's poetic stage directions are so beautiful that they behoove directors and designers to do their best to accomplish the soul of them.
 - For example, on page 3, Baraka says the play takes place, "*In the flying underbelly of the city. . . The subway heaped in modern myth.*"
 - How does someone go about creating the flying underbelly of the city or a subway heaped in modern myth?
- Can I Sit Here?
 - Baraka says the train is empty at the beginning of the show, so when Lula asks if she can sit next to Clay, despite all other seating choices, I found it to be very funny.
 - Generally, I think it would be wise for directors and actors to take advantage of these small comic moments Baraka offers to them.

2. Challenges

- [Come On, Ride the Train](#)
 - Directorally, I think it will be an interesting challenge to determine when the passengers come and go during scene two as they are meant to come and go throughout as well as when specified in the script.
 - I think it is important to find a way to build this ever moving 'background' without losing focus on Lula and Clay. Perhaps there a good stopping points in the text during which a passenger might enter or depart.
- Creating The Underbelly
 - Baraka's poetic stage directions are so beautiful that they behoove directors and designers to do their best to accomplish the soul of them.
 - For example, on page 3, Baraka says the play takes place, "*In the flying underbelly of the city. . . The subway heaped in modern myth.*"
 - How does someone go about creating the flying underbelly of the city or a subway heaped in modern myth? I would love to play with sound design and how it sounds beast-like.
 - How abstract or realistic can this scenic design be? The lights? Props? Costumes? Casting?
- [You've Got Mail](#)
 - What is the message of this piece? Be complacent? Don't be complacent? Start a war? Go out and murder some white people so you don't have to write poetry or sing songs? Perhaps that's the point - to instill questions not answers.

- Either way, I think it might be important to consider what purpose Baraka had for writing this piece and how this piece might send the same or different messages now.
- [ALL the References!](#)
 - There are some specific references in the text younger generations of today might not be familiar with like Bessie Smith and Charlie Parker.
 - I think they will still understand what the references are about as long as the actors understand the references, but I would hope to explain some references in the program or in my lobby display.
- Classic Eve
 - This play perpetuates the stereotype of women as bringers of evil.
 - I think I'm willing to sacrifice this stereotype for the larger message of the play, but it is something to be aware of when producing *Dutchman*.
 - There is also a lack of recognition of black women as Baraka focuses on Clay, though he does mention Bessie Smith.
- What If I Just Left?
 - Working on this play and understanding all of the cultural references makes it a challenge to stay on board as dramaturg because I would prefer to drop out of my career as a theatre artist and become a full time activist.
 - Perhaps I can consider this production as my method of activism.
- Look At Me
 - If I were selected as the dramaturg for this production, I am a hispanic woman with white skin who would only know half of the experience.
 - However, when has anyone let that stop them in the past? Also, this is probably a poor excuse to not study something and gain a new understanding.
 - However, it is still important to recognize that no matter how much I understand about cultural or historical references, I can never fully understand the trauma or discrimination black people experience in their daily lives.

3. Questions

- Why is Lula ten years older than Clay? Is it to follow the stereotype of her being older and wiser? Does this mean she has been doing this for ten years, or was cursed ten years ago to wander the Earth in this way, or does it really matter? Did she have a bad experience with a 20 year old black man and has been murdering this 'type' ever since, or is this way too much of a realist approach to a story that might be more allegorical?

- What magazine is Clay reading at the beginning of the show? How can this prop tell the audience more about who Clay is trying to be? In this same regard, what books does Clay have with him?
- What are the “other anonymous articles” in Lula’s net bag?
- What is a net bag and why did Baraka choose for Lula to specifically have a net bag instead of a plain old purse? Is it because it looks like the nets that would have been aboard *The Flying Dutchman*? Is this another parallel for the trap Clay is in once he smiles?
- Why this day? Why Warren Enright’s birthday?
- On page 22, when Lula says, “Or walking up uninhabited Seventh Avenue in the twenties on weekends.” Does she mean 1920s or 20 degrees fahrenheit?
- What rhythm and blues song might Lula be singing snatches of on page 12 in scene one?
- What are the titles of Lula’s books? Are these Lula’s books or books she has stolen from other victims and therefore trophies?
- What perfume does Lula wear and why does Baraka specify this?
- How should one go about choreographing the people getting on and off the train throughout scene two as Baraka says people occasionally come and go?
- What song does the conductor sing and how is his soft shoe choreographed? Could the dance parallel the famous jim crow dance as a tribute and reminder?

4. Crack/Thread

- This play is difficult for me to watch because black men are still being murdered in the streets while police are labelled victims and black people are labelled criminals. We are living through genocide and yet most of us serve the systematic oppression just like the passengers on the train who dump Clay’s dead body. I think this play is important because it is so relevant and because people need to understand how it was and understand that it has not changed much.

5. Audio and Visual Moments

- [Train Scream](#)
 - There is so much opportunity for play regarding this particular sound cue at the beginning of the play.
 - I think it is important because train whistles are normally a caution signal to passengers that the train will be leaving soon and it is also a caution sign that danger is in store.
 - Like the style of the play, this particular sound cue is a perfect blend of realism and abstract reality.

- [The Cycle of Life](#)
 - The image of Clay and Lula at the beginning of the show paralleling the image of Lula and the Young Negro Boy at the end of the show are important bookmarks that give new meaning to this story.
 - Not only is Lula murdering this one black man, but she has most likely murdered many and she is going to murder another and another unto infinity.
- [Double-Pre-Slap](#)
 - The moment when Clay slaps Lula not only once but twice is important because it physical demonstrates a shift in power in their relationship.
 - Until this moment Clay has allowed for Lula's words to slide off of his back and used humor to diffuse tension.
 - This is a moment when he can no longer sit by complacent.
- Now Die!
 - I believe the moment Lula stabs Clay is the climax of the conflict and it would be wise for this moment to be clearly seen by all audience members.
 - It gives meaning to the play because it explains nearly everything Lula has said throughout the show that may not originally have made sense.
 - For example, when she talks about how Clay's friends will talk about him after they learn of his death and how their feelings towards him will shift because he was murdered.
- Tossed Out Like Trash
 - The image of the passengers tossing Clay's dead body out of the train like the trash is powerful and important to the play because it demonstrates how the passengers are Lula's *Dutchman* ghost crew.
 - Because Baraka specifically says the passengers are both black and white, this image shows how all can contribute to the systematic oppression whether they agree or not.
- [Do A Little Dance](#)
 - The soft shoe completed by the conductor is an important visual moment because it demonstrates that Lula does not kill the black men who serve her and entertain her properly.
 - It can also be used to parallel the famous minstrel show dance called Jim Crow.

6. Concretes

- Apple

- The apple could be a biblical reference paralleling the apple Eve gives to Adam from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which causes them to learn of negative concepts such as evil and shame in the story of “The Fall”.
 - In the story, because Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit and the serpent persuaded them to do so, God curses all three of them.
 - God sentences Adam/mankind to a lifetime of hard labour followed by death and no one can have immortality.
 - God also sentences Eve/womankind to the pain of childbirth and *supposedly* to subordination to her husband.
 - Then, God sentences the serpent to go on his belly and suffer open hostility of all of humanity.
 - After punishment, God clothes Eve and Adam, who have become god-like through their new knowledge of good and evil.
 - God then clothes the nakedness of the man and woman, who have become god-like in knowing good and evil, then banishes them from the garden lest they eat the fruit of a second tree, the tree of life, and live forever.
- This story of accessing forbidden knowledge could parallel Clay’s previously forbidden access to higher education and Lula could be punishing him for attempting to be a “Black Baudelaire.”
- It could also be autobiographical and the forbidden knowledge offered could be Amiri Baraka’s new knowledge of the systematic oppression throughout America and the world and how he no longer will be able to be complacent like Clay with this knowledge and needs Clay to ‘die’ so that Baraka can move forward and make real change in the world.
- In the famous words of James Baldwin, “To be a Negro in this country and to be relatively conscious is to be in a rage almost all the time.”
- Books
 - This could also be referencing the forbidden knowledge as mentioned above.
 - The books demonstrate Clay’s “type”: a complacent black man attempting success and education for himself despite the oppression of others or himself.
 - These books also easily parallel Clay with the young negro who boards the train at the end of the play. It is an easy way for the audience to identify them both as the same “type” Lula murders.
- Ghost-like Passenger Effect

- I believe it is important to fulfill Baraka's stage directions regarding the passengers.
- Additionally, I think it would be a nice touch for the passengers to appear and leave in a ghost-like manner to replicate the ghost seamen of the Flying Dutchman ship.
- I would be curious to play with how aware the passengers act on the subway (do they know Lula is planning to kill Clay or are they hoping she will fall in love with him?) and what can Lula do that will break their curse and set them free (if the rules even work the same way)?
- Either way, there visual is important and because Baraka specifically says the passengers are both black and white, which shows how all can contribute to the systematic oppression whether they agree or not.
- Lula's Notepad
 - The notepad and pencil Lula takes out at the end to make a note is a concrete because it might show something has changed in the pattern of Lula's experience murdering black men.
 - The note Lula makes *notates* this experience is different and she has to make a note to remind her of the shift so she can do better next time.

7. Echoes, Repetitions, Returnings

- Apples
 - See description in Concretes.
 - However, there isn't just one apple. Baraka has Lula eat and offer multiple apples throughout the play.
- Uncle Tom
 - Lula mentions Uncle Tom several times throughout the show in various iterations.
 - Harriet Beecher Stowe's 1852 novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, centers on the character Uncle Tom.
 - The term "Uncle Tom" is also used as a derogatory name for someone who is complacent and subservient especially when that person is aware of their own lower-class status based on race.
 - This could be Amiri Baraka's poking at complacent black men (especially but not exclusively) who need to wake up and be revolutionaries for the cause.
- Murder
 - There are several references to murder and an actual murder during the show.

- Lula tells Clay in the beginning of the play that he is a murderer and he brushes it off as nonsense, but later tells Lula he could kill any of the passengers in the train in a heartbeat.
- Lula alludes to all those she has murdered in her past at the beginning of the play and Clay talks about how so many famous black artists such as Charlie Parker and Bessie Smith could have saved so much time making art if they would have just murdered some white people.
- This could be about our society's obsession and curiosity about murder, murderers, motive and justice, which is also reflected in the musical *Chicago*.
- This could also be another calling from Baraka for black people (and others) to stop being complacent when they are being murdered in the street like dogs.
- This could also shed light on how murder can be justified in many different ways and this could especially shed light on how when a white person kills a black person it is generally called self-defense, but if a black person kills anyone it is called murder, criminal, savage, etc.
- Sexuality
 - There are many references throughout the show regarding sexuality from both Lula and Clay.
 - Clay is willing to go blindly into a social relationship with Lula despite her odd behavior if it means he will enjoy some sex as a result.
 - Clay also lectures Lula about how she thinks she knows everything about being a black person just because she's slept with one black man.
 - The reason Baraka includes sexuality might be because sexuality is another way many people escape reality and refuse to face the oppression surrounding them.
 - Sexuality is also a way some people might be able to gain power in a society that oppresses them.
- Beginning and Closing Image
 - There is a visual repetition with Clay and Lula paralleling the visual of Lula and the Young Negro at the end.
 - There are no other passengers on board, it is just the two of them and this is their opportunity to break the curse and/or pattern.
 - The cyclical nature seems hopeless, but perhaps when Lula makes a note in her notepad it shows that maybe it is not completely hopeless if we wake up.

8. **Summary (WTPN)** - Why This Play Now? Advocate for why you would do this play at this time for today's audiences.

- Because in 2019 unarmed black people are being shot in the [streets](#), in their cars, [in front of their families](#), in their [homes](#), in the [park](#) where they are playing as children, in their [grandmother's backyard](#) because they were holding a cell phone, and they are being [incarcerated on mass](#) in a systematically oppressive genocide. As marijuana is legalized, many people (most of whom are black) are [still locked in their cell](#) for 25 to life because Bill Clinton said addicts, survivors, and entrepreneurs who have experienced employment and housing discrimination, who are black, should be held to a criminal justice system that parallels *baseball*. [“Three strikes, you’re out!”](#)