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Course Syllabus (SU17) COLI 331: "World-traveling': Alterity and Liminality in Spike Lee's DO THE RIGHT THING and Amiri Baraka's DUTCHMAN"

Christopher Southward

Binghamton University--SUNY, csouthw1@binghamton.edu

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Binghamton University Department of Comparative Literature
COLI 331W: "'World-traveling', Or Being Other and In-between: A Look at Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing*
and Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman*"
Summer 2017; Instructor: Christopher Southward

This semester, we'll view Spike Lee's 1989 *Do the Right Thing* and Shirley Knight's 1966 cinematic production of Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* through the critical lenses of Maria Lugones' notions of 'worlds' and 'world-traveling,'¹ which she develops in *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*. Our task is to analyze a number of the problematics addressed in these visual works as discernible worlds of meaning and experience constituted by the libidinous investments, concrete practices, and ideological convictions of the human subjects who bear and circulate them.

Lee's timeless classic *Do the Right Thing* follows a day in the life of a blisteringly hot summer day on a Bedford-Stuyvesant block and reaches an emotionally charged crescendo in its treatment of such issues as race and race relations, culture and recognition, representation, memory and identity, belonging and legitimacy, policing and the politics of noise and sound, mental health, transgressive desire, gentrification, citizenship, the socio-economic distribution of wealth and opportunity, and the human right to self- and community-determination.

Experimenting with the dynamics of desire, race, class, language, and identity, Amiri Baraka's *Dutchman* ruptures these logical unities by compelling its characters to navigate the ontologically and ideologically unstable space that is both the product of their interaction and the field in which their existential crises unfold. The ruptures and reconstitutions of sense that result from the interactions of human agency in Lee's and Baraka's work are of the sort that Lugones deems indispensable for experiencing the limen² as a libiduously invested space of multiplicitous liberation,³ thus qualified because it radically questions the logical categories by which embodied⁴ worlds of sense⁵ cohere as they traverse it. She observes:

The experience of victims of ethnocentric racism of moving across realities, of being different in each, and of reasoning practically differently in each, can be understood as liminal. To do so is to understand its liberatory potential because, when the limen is understood as a social state, it contains both the multiplicity of the self and possibility of structural critique.⁶

Our directing aims for this course are to identify and describe with some degree of clarity and consensus, (1) the functioning in our visual texts of a range of contested worlds concretely inhabited and animated by invested human subjects, (2) the ideological and ontological stakes of depicted struggles and, (3) the manner and extent to which agents either impede or facilitate experiences of liminality⁷ as a critical and liberatory⁸ mode of existence.

***Required Texts:**

Amiri Baraka—*Dutchman*, 1964, print

Amiri Baraka—*Dutchman*, Prod. Shirley Knight, Dir. Anthony Harvey, 1966, video

Spike Lee, Dir.—*Do the Right Thing*, Universal Pictures, 1989, video

Maria Lugones—*Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003.

¹ Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition against Multiple Oppressions*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003, pp. 77-100.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 62. Also, Cf. pp. 60-63.

⁴ Cf. Lugones' qualification of the notion of "world" as necessarily "inhabited at present by some flesh and blood people" (*Ibid.*, 87).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 62.

⁸ *Op. Cit.*, p. 61.