

“The mind is a strange and terrible vehicle”: Fractured Time and Multidimensional Sound in *No Name in the Street*

The late 1960s and early '70s represented a politically pivotal, artistically productive, and yet noticeably uneasy period in James Baldwin's life and intellectual career. Moving among Turkey, France, England, and the United States, Baldwin was coping with the psychic weight of his alienation from both liberal white and militant black intellectual communities. The biographer David Leeming, referencing letters Baldwin wrote to his brother David in 1969, captures both Baldwin's unease and his sense that his ideas were too challenging within an ideological landscape “in which the whole discussion of race and America was taking place” (Leeming 304). Baldwin's position was complicated, as he at once became increasingly pointed and pessimistic in his assessments of the American racial state while also becoming the target, at times, of scathing critiques from black activists and intellectuals during the 1960s. Amiri Baraka, Eldridge Cleaver, and Ishmael Reed all generally questioned Baldwin's commitment to revolutionary struggle, and in the cases of Cleaver and Reed, more openly attacked Baldwin's masculinity through homophobic rhetoric.¹ Within this vexed historical moment, however, Baldwin was undeterred in his efforts to relate to and support the new revolutionary energy of post-civil rights black radical activism and of the Black Panther Party in particular. In effect, Baldwin rejected the calls of his critics as he wrote to his brother that “he had no intention of evading what he still saw as his mission” (Leeming 304).

For Baldwin, this sense of responsibility was driven by his recognition of the fundamental tension emerging, as Leeming puts it, from “beings within himself—the child dancing through life, the intelligence outraged at the nature of things, the madman often blowing the house apart” (304). Baldwin's testament to the indivisibility of the personal and political, as the 1960s pivoted into the unknown futurity of the 1970s, speaks to the need for new expressive forms, ones that might begin speaking to the question one of Baldwin's intellectual interlocutors, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., asked through the title of his 1967 book: *Where Do We Go from Here?* Indeed, it is this tension between King's query and Baldwin's corresponding aesthetics of critical and creative dissonance that defines the formal complexity and uncompromising political critique of his 1972 memoir *No Name in the Street*.

In this impressionistic, nonlinear, and recursive recounting of the civil rights and Black Power years, Baldwin considers the building confrontation between the energy of the black freedom struggle and what Vincent Harding has termed “the limits of this country's liberal version of itself” (212).² Harding, writing in the conclusion of his 1980 analysis of African American history *The Other American Revolution*, suggests that the transition from the 1960s to the '70s for black activists was an uncertain turning point marked by a weighing of the “costs of creating a just and ‘beloved community’ out of an unjust, racist, and deeply fearful society” (212). For Baldwin, the uncertainty underlining this turning point highlights the prospect that transforming the nation may be possible only in the most controlled and contained contexts. Grappling with the implications of this darker historical reality, it is not surprising

that Baldwin's awareness of the shrinking horizon of American racial progress is evocatively reflected through the form and not merely the content of his essayistic diagnosis of the period.

Baldwin mediates the aesthetic form and political content of *No Name in the Street* through his composition of narrative sequences that critically diagnose particular existential dimensions of black life during the period. The sequencing Baldwin accomplishes occurs through extraliterary points of reference in the framing of the text and also through the arrangement of narrative sections that are often constructed and built one upon one another in a nonlinear, yet accumulative mode. By interweaving form and content, Baldwin positions his first-person reflections on convergences of historical events, personal memories, and political thought as an opening through which he critically interrogates race and power in the United States and globally. Baldwin's intense focus on the felt, at times sensory intimacy of the particular moments he is describing distinguishes his rendering of these intersections. By expanding this sensory focus to the phenomenological dimensions of black historical memory and experience as well, Baldwin is able to use *No Name in the Street* to project a particular inclination towards the indeterminacy of time, historical awareness, and political consciousness through which the critical content of his narrative is in part relayed. Here Baldwin's attention to the literary acoustics of the text articulates this poetics of opposition. Indeed, Baldwin's attunement to a darkening post-civil rights reality marking the latter half of the 1960s and early '70s is distinctively conveyed through his manipulation of the sound of his writing—certainly through the tonality of his critical insight, and perhaps more intriguingly, through a conceptual incorporation of sound as a literary mode and critical method that expands literary form.

There are many dimensions to Baldwin's formal articulation of sound in the essay, and perhaps the most clearly heard and critically resonant manifestation emerges through his orchestration of both the tonal and epistemological registers of the blues.³ His extension of this black musical and literary framework through nonlinear, temporally fragmented, narrative movements amplifies the distinctive critical pitch and timbre of his outlook. Indeed, Baldwin's writings in the years roughly spanning the publication of *The Fire Next Time* (1963) through *No Name in the Street* (1972) reflect the convergence of his sensitivity on the registers of music and sound alongside his critical awareness of an ephemeral national commitment to racial equality.⁴ This awareness is layered with the pessimism and possibility felt through Baldwin's increasingly dire outlook on the moral compass of white America, his focus on the disturbing backlash of white racist violence and political assassinations, his hope for a renewed black revolutionary spirit manifested through the spirit of 1960s' resistance movements around the world, and his understanding of a retrenched police state as a new horizon of antiblack racism.

We see Baldwin's formal approach through these years signaled through a brief statement he offers on the ethical dimensions of his style in a 1962 writer's forum in the *New York Times*. Briefly reflecting on his writing of *Another Country*, Baldwin explains the connection between his method and the approach of jazz musicians as they share the desire to express a "universal blues" pushing beyond empirical definitions of racial experience, instead "telling us something about what it is like to be alive" (Cross 48). Baldwin writes that the achievement of "writ[ing] the way they sound" reflects his understanding of Henry James's call for criticism to capture and convey "perception at the pitch of passion" (49).⁵ James's sensibility frames criticism as an art form in and of itself, one that reflects the imbrication of generalized levels of experience within a more precise subjectively rendered perspective of the critic. This dialectical movement between "lending an ear" and projecting truth becomes an improvisational movement for Baldwin, as the processing of his participation in and observation of the civil rights and Black Power movements becomes, by the early 1970s, possible only through his reliance on orchestrating the disjointed intersections

of personal memory and collective historical consciousness. Baldwin's focus on working through the overlapping layers of temporality, subjectivity, and racial identity necessitates an alternative engagement with these issues, one that dissects and reimagines more liberal notions of progress and universalism through not only the content but also the texture of his prose. Baldwin's improvisational rethinking achieves more than simply breaking with a mode of thought and creating a new reality, as was the case among many contemporaneous black artists who took their charge as Black Arts Movement innovators to articulate sharper breaks with previous black expressive traditions. Baldwin's approach instead explores the interstices between remembrance and futurity as a narrative state of being which critically relates known pasts and a sense of the unknown future through his aesthetic crafting of literary vignettes that trouble these temporal and historical relationships. Baldwin conveys both the political ends and the style of his writing through more inchoate formal approaches that move beyond ideas of linearity and equivalence.

Recently, Magdalena Zaborowska, in her book-length study *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade: Erotics of Exile* and Douglas Field, in his essay "James Baldwin in His Time," have both pointed to the important role of music in Baldwin's compositional process. Zaborowska, commenting on Baldwin's textual negotiation of same-sex love in *No Name in the Street*, notes his use of "the jazzlike genre improvisation that he began to embrace when he wrote *Another Country*" (217). Field similarly points to this fusion of music and the literary as formative to Baldwin's work, citing Baldwin's own description of his early sermon practice: "I could improvise from the texts like a jazz musician improvises from a theme. I never wrote a sermon. . . . You have to sense the people you're talking to. You have to respond to what they hear" (qtd. in Field 26). Building on Zaborowska's and Field's insights regarding Baldwin's attention to music as a critical and formal mode, I also want to consider how the blues, as both sonic inflection and broader cultural orientation, might offer one way of understanding the aesthetic composition of Baldwin's *No Name in the Street*. There is an important formal expressive distinction to *not* make here regarding the blues and jazz within Baldwin's understandings of these musical approaches. As we will see, the blues for Baldwin represent a capacious totalizing framework for black life in the United States. Not unlike Amiri Baraka, Baldwin understands blackness as an historical condition reflected in the expressive evolution and transformations of "blues people." Jazz, then, is a form stemming from the blues root with distinctive formal properties, but not distinctive enough to rupture the horizon of an expressive blues identity that stretches to contain these extensions of the root. Take for example Baldwin's short story "Sonny Blues," which in title, thematic arc, and aesthetic detail brings together the two forms as Sonny identities as a stridently aloof be-bop jazz musician who most clearly realizes his ability to communicate expressively and spiritually through a concluding moment of collective jazz improvisation on blues standards. The fact that Baldwin blurs any firm distinction between blues and jazz as expressive orientations and epistemological horizons reflects his desire for black creative freedom from generic containment.

Baldwin's construction of late or post-civil rights blues extends the form, building upon the interpretive insights of Ralph Ellison in his 1945 analysis of the work of Richard Wright:

The blues is an impulse to keep the painful details and episodes of a brutal experience alive in one's aching consciousness, to finger its jagged grain, and to transcend it, not by the consolation of philosophy but by squeezing from it a near-tragic, near-comic lyricism. As a form, the blues is an autobiographical chronicle of personal catastrophe expressed lyrically. (Ellison, "Richard Wright's Blues" 78-79)

Ellison's understanding of the blues suggests a flexible expressive range encompassing "both the agony of life and the possibility of conquering it through sheer

toughness of spirit" (94). At the same time, he points to the theoretical capacity of the blues to negotiate the critical tension resulting from the "thwarted ideational energy" in which words "are burdened with meanings they cannot convey" (Ellison 89). Baldwin's writing moves in the spirit of Ellison's analysis of the blues, most pointedly, perhaps, in his later essayistic reflections on the rapidly altering times of the 1960s, as he enters a complex political and critical space in which unburdening language, indeed, reviving it with a renewed attention to the formal and political qualities of "personal catastrophe" writ large, becomes an aesthetic and political goal for his contributions to black struggle through literary activism.

For example, in his 1964 essay, "The Uses of the Blues," Baldwin further contextualizes the expressivity of the blues as it exceeds its musicality, providing a corrective to the inability of the national consciousness "to accept the reality of pain, of anguish, of ambiguity, of death" (Cross 64).⁶ As an analytical tool for Baldwin, the blues diagnose a missing orientation, a profound lack within the critical imagination of mainstream America, revealing the "very peculiar and sometimes monstrous" character of American identity that is shaped by a blindness to, and avoidance of, the historical and political depth of pain, loss, and ambiguity (64). Baldwin's use of the blues suggests formations of national and racial identity beyond recognizable lines of racial demarcation, as the expressive and narrative capacity of the music contains a sense of joy that is unrecognizable as mere happiness; for Baldwin, the sentiment "is not a real state, and does not really exist" (57). This ambiguous joy of the blues presents an epistemological basis for an idea of black consciousness that rejects the American tendency to ignore and forget the difficult substance of lived experience, and the immanence of death. Demonstrating this aesthetic and political capacity of the blues, Baldwin closely reads Bessie Smith's "Gin House Blues," pointing to and almost riffing off of the irreverent, revolutionary stance of resistance she projects through the lines,

Don't try me, nobody
'cause you will never win
I'll fight the Army and Navy
Just me and my gin.

He states,

Well, you know, that is all very accurate, all very concrete. I know, I watched, I was there. You've seen these black men and women, these boys and girls; you've seen them on the streets. But I know what happened to them at the factory, at work, at home, on the subway, what they go through in a day, and the way they sort of ride with it. And it's very, very tricky. It's kind of a fantastic tightrope. They may be very self-controlled, very civilized; I like to think of myself as being very civilized and self-controlled, but I know I'm not. And I know that some improbable Wednesday, for no reason whatever, the elevator man or the doorman, the policeman or the landlord, or some little boy from the Bronx will say something, and it will be the wrong day to say it, the wrong moment to have said it to me; and God knows what will happen. I have seen it all, I have seen that much. What the blues are describing comes out of all this. (59)

Baldwin's intervention builds upon an idea of political action arising out of tragic circumstance, and in doing so contemplates the liminal, ephemeral quality of the "fantastic tightrope" black people are forced to walk daily. The blues present a certain totality or horizon for black life within and beyond its Manichean qualities that is inescapable for Baldwin. They offer a window into the truths of experience from those most dispossessed and thus unacknowledged, reframing these testimonies as viable sociopolitical perspectives on what it means to be an American in the face of the amnesiac panic projected through the seemingly authentic mainstream portrayals of American identity:

If you read such popular novels by John O'Hara, you can't imagine what country he's talking about. If you read *Life* magazine, it's like reading about the moon. Nobody lives in that country. That country does not exist and everybody knows it. But everyone pretends it does. Now this is panic. And this is terribly dangerous, because it means when the trouble comes, and trouble always comes, you won't survive it. (65)

As political form, the blues function as both an indictment of the general acceptance of "the fantastic disaster which we call American politics and which we call American foreign policy" and the possibility of correcting this blind faith by "begin[ning] to ask ourselves very difficult questions" (66).

Baldwin's signaling of a blues-based epistemological framework as the meeting point of aesthetics and politics animates works such as *Another Country* and "Sonny's Blues," in which the narratives revolve around the relationships his characters establish and maintain with a blues sensibility. In these cases, Baldwin calibrates the fidelity of his writing to the ways in which the narratives frame the actual lyrical and structural presence of the blues. Baldwin's reinvention and essayistic refashioning of the form a decade later propels the narrative structure of *No Name in the Street* forward, utilizing a renewed sense of the blues to chart the convergence of time and sound as an avenue toward new forms of political articulation.⁷

One way in which the long, two-part essay engages with these temporal and sonic contingencies is reflected through Baldwin's literary incorporation of the idea of anamnesis, defined in the context of sound studies as a convergence of "sound, perception, and memory," into the narrative composition of the work. Sound theorists Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue explain that the anamnesis effect "plays with time, reconnecting past mental images to present consciousness, with no will other than the free activity of association" (21). To register critical thoughts through such a nonlinear correspondence between sentiment and historical experience raises the stakes of Baldwin's essayistic critique of American, and more broadly Western, racial politics, as his work can be read not only as a significant memoir of his participation in the events of the civil rights and Black Power period but also as a formal break with the desire to convey black political resistance through the linearity of a progressively ordered autobiographical narrative. Baldwin's break reflects a belief in the capacity of form to expand the political sphere on its own terms, through the interaction between its internal temporal and imagistic rhythms and the sensibilities of the reader. Put another way, Baldwin's literary improvisations enlarge the critical space of the aesthetic dimension of *No Name in the Street*. This inclination towards literary improvisation creates new critical space revealed through a blues understanding of the productive cracks and fissures within black historical experience. As Nathaniel Mackey states in a 1996 interview with Peter O'Leary, "The African-American improvisational legacy in music has been instructive way beyond the confines of the venues in which it takes place and the particular musical culture in which it takes place, way beyond music itself. It's become a metaphor for all kinds of processes of cultural and social revaluation, cultural and social critique, cultural and social change" (290).

Baldwin's extension of this "improvisational legacy" into the realm of the political, and his use of it as a theoretical and formal tool in assessing racial struggle and meaning in the civil rights and post-civil rights era(s), finds further illumination through Derek Bailey's outlining of the distinctions between idiomatic and free improvisation: "All improvisation takes place in relation to the known whether the known is traditional or newly acquired. The only real difference lies in the opportunities for free improvisation to renew or change the known and so provoke an open-endedness which by definition is not possible in idiomatic improvisation" (142). Bailey's idea of renewing or changing the limits of knowability through the "open-endedness" of free improvisation begins to capture part of the critical and formal interplay between vernacular tradition and formal innovation that Baldwin executes in his text. Furthermore, examining Baldwin's expressive exploration of the

intricacies of historical and racial consciousness amidst the waning of a recognizable, organized civil rights and Black Power movement allows for a more nuanced inquiry into the political and aesthetic meanings of the now commonly referenced periodization of the post-civil rights era.

The volatility and inner turmoil Baldwin felt during the late 1960s and early '70s was becoming increasingly heightened and reflected in his broader set of engagements with experimental aesthetic approaches across expressive forms. As both Leeming and Zaborowska have detailed, Baldwin's creative life in Turkey during the period in which he was completing *No Name in the Street* was shaped by his 1970 directorship of the Canadian playwright John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, which brought together Baldwin's pressing concern regarding the growth of the prison industrial complex with his broader philosophical critique of alienation within Western culture. Building upon the confessional, psychoanalytic style of directing and staging the play as well as the stark immediacy of the curtain-like arrangement of the prison bars dividing audience from stage, Baldwin's work on the play incorporated many elements of sound and music within the experimental production. Journalist Zeynep Oral, according to Zaborowska, "confirmed that sound was very important to Jimmy," noting that "Baldwin manipulated the stage design and props to juxtapose silence and noise" (180). Echoing Oral's observations, Charles Adelsen, writing a story on the play for *Ebony*, describes Baldwin's use of sound in the production as a means of emphasizing the darkness and discomfort to which the performance intends to speak:

[S]everal hundred people sit in the warm darkness of a theater and wait. The house lights have been killed; not even an exit light lessens the inky darkness. Then, jangling bells, a nervous drumming, sounds too loud to be heard comfortably scratch at nerve endings. (40)

The soundtrack or soundscape of the production emerged as a result of the serendipitous meeting between Baldwin and the creative musical improviser Don Cherry in Istanbul, briefly captured in Zaborowska's study, as Baldwin happens upon the Cherry family on the street, not far from his apartment, and excitedly explains to his good friend, the Turkish actor Engin Cezzar, who does not recognize or know of Cherry, "This is good luck. I was wondering what we would do with the music. That's it. We've found who is going to do the music" (178). At this point, Cherry had played alongside major figures in 1950s and '60s jazz, including John Coltrane, Archie Shepp, Albert Ayler, Sonny Rollins, and Ornette Coleman, and was particularly noteworthy, along with other new black music improvisers such as Marion Brown, for his desire to bring together world music and African American avant-garde sonic expression.⁸ Cezzar continues recollecting, in his memoir, that "we took them [the Cherry family] from the pavement, into the house, ate and drank together, and worked for fifteen days. He created wonderful music with a piano and a small trumpet" (179).

While we can't definitively hear the sonic record (Zaborowska details this fact in a footnote—to this point, no publicly available or archived recording is known to exist) we can begin to capture some sense of what Cherry's sound might have added to Baldwin's staging of *Fortune* by considering the aural expansiveness of his music as it is captured in the recording of his performance with the Turkish musicians Okay Temiz, İrfan Sümer, Selçuk Sun, and Maffi Falay at the U. S. embassy in Ankara in late November 1969.⁹ The sound of Cherry and his ensemble confronts the live audience situated in the representative space of U. S. global power in Turkey at the time with a distinctive sound, blending elements of free jazz improvisation and tonality with Turkish folk melodies and musical approaches through mostly short,

expressive sonic forays dominated by the shifting timbre of Cherry's cornet. Bright, dissonant, and inclined to wander amid frequent but not necessarily metered percussive punctuations, the music is both frenetic and bluesy. Working in an improvisational mode that recalls the collaborative efforts of Cherry and Ornette Coleman from the late 1950s through the mid-1960s as well as the later contributions of Albert Ayler and John Coltrane to the ever-evolving tradition of the New Black Music, Cherry, in the middle of a selection entitled "Ornette's Tune," breaks into a blaring and piercing sequence of notes that reject the established sensibility and compositional structure that had been briefly established. Sounds such as those created by Cherry, based on "energy playing" and acoustic effects and states such as resonance and vibration, rather than simply the mastery of Western compositional form, point to a much broader continuum of black expressive expansion. Thus the rupture projected through Cherry's sound presents a formal intervention that, in terms of its projection of dissonance, might be heard as a kind of aural corollary to Baldwin's jarringly fractured, aesthetic reconsideration of the possibilities for racial struggle and transformation in the wake of the civil rights movement.

Baldwin's engagement with practices of sonic experimentation and improvisation are highlighted in *No Name in the Street* as he recasts his earlier appeals to the possibility of interracial brotherhood across racial lines, prominently featured in his 1963 text *The Fire Next Time*, within a much darker tonality, a critical perspective akin to the haunting sound of minor chords. This post-civil rights blues reflects a twinned sense of defeat and revelation in the wake of the movement, and is structured around an idea of negation, a critical focus on the dialectical complexities of historical transformation, revealing what the critical theorist Max Horkheimer characterizes as "the breach between ideas and reality" (182). In disclosing the limitations of the world's common sense definitions of racial reality, Baldwin presents readers of this nonfictional prose with a series of "negatives" that, in a photographic sense, present inversions and reversals, and in the sense of more experimental photography, might render the ghostly, haunting traces and vestiges of meaning and presence in the faintest, yet most compelling outlines. These negatives, rather than existing as visual sites, operate synesthetically, blending elements of sound, image, and text. Flashbacks, echoes of memory, and the reflective tone of Baldwin's prose create a narrative acoustics projecting Baldwin's interrogations of the notion of a linear progression of U. S. civil rights and global racial history.

Baldwin's inquiry into the negative dimensions of this historical moment is also generated through the lingering sound of the text's title, epigraphs, and section titles. Given Baldwin's well-documented and often-remarked Christian religious upbringing, as well as his ultimate questioning and repudiation of that upbringing, the resonance of Job's search for and questioning of spiritual and ethical meaning in the pages of the Old Testament referenced in the essay's title and its scriptural frontispiece serves as a rhetorical framework highlighting the disputational arrangement of Baldwin's critique of race and power. The framing of the text is also suffused with song, and the interaction between Baldwin's inclusion of lyrics from the spiritual "Samson and Delilah," attesting to the need to "tear this building down" (lyrics we might rehear through Blind Willie Johnson's 1927 recording of the spiritual as a blues composition), and the orchestration of the two-part essay in accordance with the lyrics of the black spiritual, "Take Me to the Water" (as part one of the essay calls the song's title), invokes through its title the desire "To Be Baptized." While we can't necessarily pinpoint the specific sonic references Baldwin may have had in mind in taking the spiritual's title as a structural marker for the essay, the fact that Baldwin admired Nina Simone, who had recorded a version of the song in 1966 on the album *High Priestess of Soul*, offers one way of thinking about a certain convergence of political commitment and spiritual searching that both artists proposed in their works.

The various movements of Baldwin's essay are also literally mapped along geographic lines within the text as the narrative shifts among New York, London, Paris, Montgomery, Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay area, and Hamburg. Through this array of historical and geographic reference points, the text also ideologically maps the historical forces and events which have inflected Baldwin's understandings of domestic, psychic, and global processes of racial formation through the civil rights and post-civil rights eras. Baldwin's attention to critically analyzing ideological movement through dizzying, and at times dissonant, representations of space and time resonates with Ralph Ellison's description in his Prologue to *Invisible Man* of black consciousness emerging within "a slightly different sense of time" in which one is "never quite on the beat" but is attuned to the value of the breaks in temporality as innovative and critically useful sites of critique (Ellison 8). The value of Ellisonian invisibility, much like the Du Boisian double consciousness that Baldwin's work embodies, lies in the insight gathered from being able to recognize the existential break represented by black humanity in the United States and aesthetically manipulating that break in order to forge a critical perspective that, in its form and texture of presentation, takes on qualities of this outsider status.

Baldwin establishes his narration of an evolving sense of black historical consciousness and political critique through the dissonance of the opening pages as they present a collage of interwoven memories blending fragments and traces such as the connection he remembers making between "ideas and velvet" at age five, the terror he feels regarding his father throughout his childhood and adolescence, the strong sense of solidarity with both his mother and brother in the face of "the man we called my father," and the "miraculous" quality of a newborn baby that seems to embody several levels of allegorical (national and racial) meaning. The imagery of the baby is meant to linger through the totality of the text, as Baldwin explains the complex nature of the miraculous as a certain horizon of life, through an intimate, precise, and yet depersonalized meditation on the bodily reality and existential needs of an emergent life:

A newborn baby is an extraordinary event; and I have never seen two babies who looked or even sounded remotely alike. Here it is, this breathing miracle who could not live an instant without you, with a skull more fragile than an egg, a miracle of eyes, legs, toenails, and (especially) lungs. It gropes in the light like a blind thing—it *is*, for the moment, blind—what can it make of what it sees? . . . Presently, it discovers it has *you*, and since it has already decided it wants to live, it gives you a toothless smile when you come near it, gurgles or giggles when you pick it up, holds you tight by the thumb or the eyeball or the hair, and, having already opted against solitude, howls when you put it down. You begin the extraordinary journey of beginning to know and to control this creature. You know the sound—the meaning—of one cry from another; without knowing that you know it. You know when it's hungry—that's one sound. You know when it's angry. You know when it's bored. You know when it's frightened. You know when it's suffering. You come or you go or you sit still according to the sound the baby makes. And you watch over it where I was born, even in your sleep, because rats love the odor of newborn babies and are much, much bigger. (6-7)

Baldwin's attention to the sound of the baby, the formulation of its "cry" in accordance with its various emotional states, suggests on one level a certain calibration among sound, vitality, power, and struggle, as the sonic is positioned as a space through which the most direct claims regarding life and death might be signaled. Simultaneously, however, these utterances also mark the proliferation of babies in the Baldwin family through a hopefulness in and protection of the miracle of life as well as an interminable chain of responsibilities locking his mother, himself, and his siblings into a perspective on caring for new life in the face of perpetual threats to its existence, a situation which, as Baldwin's evocative second-person prose conveys, "you have either grown to love [the baby] or you have left home" (7). A level of metaphorical sound emerges in Baldwin's arrangements of his childhood memories

and reflections on his familial power dynamics as the lyricism of this rendering suggests a correlation between Baldwin's critical understanding of his upbringing and the particular existential unease he feels regarding the possibility of racial reckoning. If we are to read Baldwin's reflection as an acknowledgement of the difficulty of maintaining the miraculous quality of life when facing a delimited horizon of experience (due to both socioeconomic circumstance and familial power dynamics), then Baldwin's flight from his father's Harlem household may resonate with the political form of the work overall in its initiation and recursive attention to the generation of an evolving critical perspective on race relations that is enabled through Baldwin's mediation of expatriate flight and the solidarity of return.

This opening sequence establishes a formal tone of loss, dislocation, and the attempt to suture the historical rupture brought about through the loss of a post-civil rights political reality, one in which, Baldwin might argue, the children have been abandoned. Baldwin's narrative movement progresses as he frames the ephemerality of his early childhood memories only to abruptly turn to the more present context of the late 1960s and early '70s, focusing on his understanding of the ways in which his consciousness has been shaped by Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination. This new time in which "something has altered in me, something has gone away" is marked by Baldwin's loss of faith in the idea of America, as he states that, "One could scarcely be deluded by Americans anymore, one scarcely dared expect anything from the great, vast, blank generality" (Baldwin 10). Baldwin's sense of political estrangement is further captured by his observation that "the marchers and petitioners were forced to suppose the existence of an entity which, when the chips were down, could not be located—i.e., there *are* no American people yet" other than "those descendants of a barbarous Europe who arbitrarily and arrogantly reserve the right to call themselves Americans" (10).

Baldwin's opening blends the tonality of black power indictment with a contemplative framing of American identity as more of an unfinished question. His fracturing of a distinctive, easily categorizable Black Arts Movement and Black Power critical sound stems from the fact that his position as a social critic through the 1960s is often configured in opposition to the Black Arts Movement, yet his writing in *No Name in the Street* clearly intersects with more reflective critiques emerging from that era of literary and critical production. Repositioning Baldwin's long essay within a fluid landscape of post-civil rights era black radical thought begins to more complexly render what we imagine the Black Arts Movement to have represented. For example, Larry Neal, writing in a 1966 issue of *The Liberator*, in the third of a series of essays on the role of the black writer that also addressed the writing of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, points out that Baldwin's role as a black writer should be understood as bearing a dialectical rather than oppositional relationship to the efforts of Black Arts Movement writers committed to revolutionary change. Although he is critical of Baldwin as often falling back on a "supernatural kind of love," and of his "pleading with white America for the humanity of the Negro," Neal ultimately points to Baldwin's ability to "lay bare the corrupt morality of America as an essential stage in the unleashing of a dynamic new force among the younger black writers of the 1960s" (59). Neal's claims regarding Baldwin need to be judged with the understanding that they are being offered before the writing of *No Name in the Street*, and thus might be slightly reimagined in a manner that complicates the ideological deficits that Neal is framing. Neal's discussion of Baldwin suggests that even in its perceived "limitations," Baldwin's writing charts a new path forward and demonstrates the strength of one half of the aesthetic-political synthesis Neal desires for black writing—outlined by the bringing together of Baldwin's keen social commentary with Ellison's grounding in the modalities of black cultural expression. Neal terms Baldwin's contribution to black literary political engagement as a "commitment to some kind of social dynamic" and his reflections convey a great deal of deliberation as Neal seems to intuit the

complex possibility against a sense of constraint within Baldwin's writing (60). He understands that few beside Baldwin have the critical and analytical tools to diagnose racism and race relations, but that Baldwin's observations are rendered in an effort to "save America" (61). Hearing Baldwin on multiple frequencies enables Neal to be heard outside of the more narrow critiques of Baldwin penned by Amiri Baraka and Eldridge Cleaver, for while Neal still desires a more politically radical sensibility within new black writing in the 1960s, he is unequivocal in asserting the centrality of Baldwin's sound as a constituent aspect of a Black Arts Movement continuum of resistance-based cultural politics.

Given the fact that Neal's writing in 1966 precedes the more definitively radical contours of Baldwin's thought as it was taking shape during the late 1960s and early '70s, there is nonetheless a crucial connection between Neal's consistent inquiry into the intersections of political and historical consciousness and the sensory through the 1960s and '70s, and Baldwin's focus on the specific phenomenological states created and lingering through the resonance of historical loss. Immediately after condemning the failed promise of America through the lens of King's murder, Baldwin reinvents a notion of loss as temporal discombobulation, a blues-like sensibility containing the possibility of reassessing the political present through the memory of dislocation. The temporal dimensions of Baldwin's dislocation are notable in the way they are signaled through a specific historical event, but blend into a more diffuse sense of memory and historical consciousness:

The mind is a strange and terrible vehicle, moving according to rigorous rules of its own; and my own mind, after I had left Atlanta, began to move backward in time, to places, people, and events I thought I had forgotten. Sorrow drove it there, I think, sorrow, and a certain kind of bewilderment, triggered, perhaps, by something which happened to me in connection with Martin's funeral. (10-11)

Baldwin's sense of time is calibrated through the symbolic and very real presence of the suit he wore to King's funeral and vowed to never wear again. He begins unfolding his meditation through an orchestration of memory and time that follows the trajectory of racial meaning emblazoned across the suit, by reflecting on his contact with an old childhood friend in need of a suit, who reads a newspaper column mentioning the fact that Baldwin will never wear this suit again. The passing of the suit from Baldwin to his childhood friend, "drenched in the blood of all the crimes of my country," becomes a flashpoint through which Baldwin levels a harsh critique of his friend's black middle-class disavowal of a critical black political consciousness, ending in a diatribe against this friend's lack of political consciousness—most directly noted through his friend's disdain for antipoverty efforts and, most disturbingly to Baldwin, an unwillingness to condemn the American involvement in the Vietnam War (14).¹⁰ This encounter ends with a sense of frozen time created when Baldwin, fed up with the friend's lack of political awareness, and his assumption that he can, in his words relayed by Baldwin, "stand up and tell you what I think we're trying to do here," proclaims, (with a few drinks in him, admittedly) "You stand up, motherfucker, and I'll kick you in the ass!" The first-person plural that the acquaintance speaks of and that Baldwin rejects reflects the idea of black people having a post-civil rights investment in the idea of American national identity and foreign policy to the extent of supporting an imperialist aggression against darker skinned people in Southeast Asia.

This narrative space created through the temporal freezing opens onto Baldwin's critically reflective mode that adjusts the almost caricatured Black Power-inflected outburst against black people "aiding the slave master to enslave yet more millions of dark people," with an added dimension of philosophical inquiry into the scene: "For that bloody suit was *their* suit, after all, it had been bought *for* them, it had even been bought *by* them: *They* had created Martin, he had not created them, and the

blood in which the fabric of that suit was stiffening was theirs" (19, 21). The textual, political, and historical opening of this scene emerges through Baldwin's sense of the blues as it situates his rage and the sense of rupture, the ideological gulf he recognizes between himself and his childhood friend, as a product of his friend's inclination to remain politically "untouched" by the complex levels of injustice and oppression suffusing the nation and resedimenting its racial fissures, ironically *through* narratives of assimilation, and before his eyes. Baldwin's critique of his friend's identification with an idea of middle-class American comfort is linguistically distilled, phonically highlighted as it were, through the sound of Baldwin's emphasized "*their*" and its self-serving modulation and maintenance of King's meaning and legacy, a resonance that both undergirds the solidity of the "*their*" as an emergence of middle class black consciousness in the interregnum between civil rights-era and post-civil rights-era America, and one that, as it does so, puts into greater national relief how King's radicalized presence in his final years has been ignored, forgotten, and cast aside as irrelevant and irritating to the construction of this mode of black middle-class affiliation.

Baldwin's critical lens dilates in several ways during the transition he orchestrates at the midpoint of his narrative, moving between his account of arriving at the Montgomery, Alabama airport in 1957 to cover the civil rights movement throughout the south, and his perspective on the pivotal, later years of the 1960s—years marked for Baldwin through their revelation of the irredeemable aspects of American racial hypocrisy. This dilation is notable in the way that it opens up several interrelated critical registers, pushing ideas of racial antagonism and resistance into framings that allow for further ideological expansion. In this narrative transition, Baldwin describes arriving in the airport and feeling the "concentrated, malevolent poverty of spirit" as a palpable force inhabited and wielded by the small group of local whites intent upon closely watching him as he makes his way to the exit (78). Baldwin's characterization of this malevolence as marking the "cradle of the Confederacy" as "one of the most wretched [towns] on the face of the earth" subtly inverts Frantz Fanon's Manichean binary of the colonizer and the colonized, retroactively coloring these early experiences of Baldwin's within the civil rights movement.

Rather than simply applying Fanon's theories to a U. S. context, as many other critical theorists of race at the time did, Baldwin instead reconfigures this binary dialectically, showing how wretchedness, as the perception of how black bodies are to be defined within contexts of colonization and segregation, can be improvised upon to demonstrate the soulless character of white men, "imagining that they were holding back a flood," and policing a racial dividing line that, for Baldwin, is fungible, due to the irrefutable evidence of racial amalgamation displayed across the spectrum of black people in the South: "Girls the color of honey, men nearly the color of chalk, hair like silk, hair like cotton, hair like wire, eyes blue, grey, green, hazel, black, like the gypsy's, brown like the Arab's, narrow nostrils, thin, wide lips, thin lips, every conceivable variation struck along incredible gamuts—it was not in the Southland that one could hope to keep a secret!" (79). Baldwin's observations challenge the racial dividing line by posing the visual evidence of interracial mixture and fluidity against the context of American apartheid. His blending of phenomenological and epistemological aspects of race theory builds on what Fanon, in his close attention to the narrative elements of the struggle and refusal of hegemonic systems of colonization and racism, refers to as a "counter move," an orientation towards reimagining possibilities for existence outside of systems of oppression. This countermove echoes aspects of Baldwin's articulation of a blues sensibility in its assertion of the knowledge that, as Fanon argues, "We cannot go resolutely forward unless we first realize our alienation" (163).

Fanon and Baldwin both present seemingly Manichean dualities as more emergent senses of historical consciousness that reflect convergences of the past within the present, rather than indicating "a past where [the people] no longer exist" (163).

The temporality of revolutionary awareness is both definitive and suggestive, as it, in Fanon's phrasing, "will suddenly call everything into question," within "that zone of hidden fluctuation where the people can be found," and where "their souls are crystallized and their perception and respiration transfigured" (163).¹¹ The poetics inscribed within Fanon's "zone" reflects an inclination to exist within and to create breaks in time through recognizing the fluidity of historical consciousness rather than its representation as static and temporally bounded. The contingent possibilities of the present and its futurity as Baldwin and Fanon attest to in different yet overlapping ways does not simply exist on the physical level, it inflects the existential components of both white supremacy and the black subjects' resistance to it.¹² The investment in a poetics of searching for possibilities of enactment through language is tied to the ability of both writers to modulate the sound of their critical approaches. The autobiographical register, fused within the mobilization of vignettes, creates a narrative architectonics in which the sonic is prevalent as an orientation that destabilizes the existing claims and assumptions of American social order. It is not incidental that Fanon frames his critical intervention by his engagement with the musical poetics of Fodéba Keïta's composition, "African Dawn." In providing the example of Keïta's musical poetry, Fanon, anticipating the epistemological grounds from which Baldwin's perspective takes shape, highlights the use of phenomenological registers such as the sonic, as tools that enhance the organic approaches to resistance emerging from the immediacy of struggle and transformation. As Fanon says, "We should not therefore be content to delve into the people's past to find concrete examples to counter colonialism's endeavors to distort and depreciate. We must work and struggle in step with the people so as to shape the future and prepare the ground where vigorous shoots are already sprouting" (168).

Fanon's reading of Keïta's musical, poetic redefinition of the terms of struggle, and Baldwin's metaphorical use of the sound of the blues as American racial analytics converge on the distinction Jacques Attali makes between music and noise, a productive opening that hinges upon the ability of noise to disrupt the more established social orders reflected in the field of music—disruptions that are "prophetic because they create new orders, unstable and changing" (19). Considering the conceptualization of sound through these interlocking levels of black critical thought proposes a way of sensing how resistance to coloniality might correspond to the "different sense of time" Ellison invokes in his theorization of a blues epistemology. Both as formal orientation, in Baldwin's writing, and as a site of performative resistance, in Fanon's conceptualization, ideas of blackness configured through sound, space, and time help to frame the relationship between postcolonial and diasporic subjectivity and resistance as one of interacting "structures of feeling," that is, manifestations of black historical and political experience that emerge as ephemeral phenomenological orientations that gather a profundity through an ability to not be traced through the linear contours of empiricism.

Against this backdrop of narrative acoustics, Baldwin, following his reflection on his experiences reporting on the civil rights movement, transitions into the second part of *No Name in the Street* through a series of reflections upon the telling linkages between domestic and international formations of neoliberal governance taking hold within the afterlives of colonialism and Jim Crow:

Anyone . . . who has worked in, or witnessed, any of the "anti-poverty" programs in the American ghetto has an instant understanding of "foreign aid" in the "underdeveloped" nations. In both locales, the most skillful adventurers improve their material lot; the most dedicated of the natives are driven mad or inactive—or underground—by frustration; while the misery of the hapless, voiceless millions is increased—and not only that: their reaction to their misery is described to the world as criminal. Nowhere is this grisly pattern clearer than it is in America today, but what America is doing within her borders, she is doing around the world. (86)

Baldwin suggests that the terms of black freedom must be philosophically grounded within an understanding of social transformation that moves beyond a reliance upon governmental structures and mechanisms, an orientation that instead frames the cost of freedom as the continual awareness of and engagement with the depth of a certain "history of a system of thought" (87).

This point is elaborated as Baldwin recounts his 1963 encounter with Malcolm X and notes the time in the following way, "when the Black Muslims meant to the American people exactly what the Black Panthers mean today, and when they were described in exactly the same terms by that High Priest, J. Edgar Hoover, and when many of us believed or made ourselves believe that the American state still contained within itself . . . the power to change itself in the direction of honor and knowledge and freedom" (92). This critical look into the past, that draws together past and present (the "so-called Nixon administration") as well as betrayal and possibility, underlines Baldwin's skepticism about structures of American racial democracy and his desire to explore avenues and forms of redress that might mystify the disciplinary gazes of racial ordering and subjection. Baldwin's hope in the political possibilities of the post-civil rights years revolves around the ability of the "excluded" to "forge a new morality, to create the principles on which a new world will be built," as he suggests that the energy and attention of the nation that had been previously focused on expanding equal rights for black Americans could no longer be relied upon to insure that these efforts would continue in good faith, or be furthered in the face of new forms of racial division and subjection (90).

Increasingly, the spectre of black consciousness, the "new morality" to which Baldwin refers, was being framed by the media as a disruptive threat to the tenuous idea of American racial inclusion. Thus, Baldwin's position reveals the fissures between equal rights and the liberal tolerance and goodwill of mainstream American values. Rather than representing an ending to an era, Baldwin's conceptualization of the idea of "post-civil rights" instead offers a flashpoint or opening into new times of struggle in which the points of engagement expand to more directly address the reformation of social inequality and interracial fear existing on multiple levels, despite the prevalence of claims regarding the reconstruction of the racial state seemingly ushered in by the civil rights movement. For Baldwin, the fear and misrecognition marking these new times of racial confrontation represent a "new balance" or "unprecedented inequality" of black pride, in which selfhood is "no longer controlled by the white man's fantasies," as "the white man no longer knows who he is, whereas the black man knows them both" (190). The new temporality of black consciousness emerges through a recursive sense of narrative and historical time that Baldwin sutures through at once, reflecting upon the nearly decade-long expanse of time that has passed between his first encounter with Malcolm X and the time at his writing of *No Name in the Street*, and at the same time showing the critical excavation of that moment's relevance to the seemingly "new times" of the present. This reconfiguration of black identity deployed by Baldwin in the post-civil rights era represents a positive fracture, a creative destruction of mindsets that contain and constrain through physical, epistemological, and temporal force by fashioning alternate modalities of narrative time, space, and meaning.

Baldwin's conceptualization of a post-civil rights reality is also further elaborated through indirect levels of ideological meaning that are generated through the imagining of the sound anchoring his textual diagnosis and critique. We can hear such movement through the haunting strains of the spiritual lyrics, "I told Jesus it would be all right / if He changed my name," that initiate the second section of the essay, entitled, "To Be Baptized," as Baldwin suggests that the force of baptism is

both a spiritual and political moment of reckoning. The idea of changing one's name thus speaks to the literal reality of such renaming by Malcolm X, and also suggests a more general growth into the "new name" of a black radical consciousness that questions the possibility of achieving substantive redress and unqualified equality within the American racial state. This literary, critical soundscape within which a multiplicity of historical moments and theoretical reflections are represented is a formal tool Baldwin uses to express the simultaneity of the historical past, present, and future within his political consciousness. The sound of his prose lies, in this case, not simply in the words emerging from his narrative voice, but also in its approach to expanding sequences of narrative time, calibrating the movements of the essay with a renewed sense of freedom articulated through Baldwin's thought.

Baldwin's writing of *No Name in the Street* also demonstrates a more metaphorical relationship to sound in that Baldwin's essay helps define a tradition of black radical thought that was emerging in response to the limitations of rather than that possibilities for racial equality in the United States. Baldwin's status within this tradition is somewhat particular, and specifically noteworthy because his deeply critical diagnosis of the U. S. racial state converges with the upsurge in late 1960s' and '70s' black nationalist thought, but only as it has evolved through Baldwin's previous decades spent attempting to work towards an ideal of interracial American identity (as in *The Fire Next Time*)—the sense that both black and white citizens, despite the historical flashpoints of racial antagonism, are ultimately bound together through a commitment (one that is, nonetheless, led by a spirit of black resistance and enlightenment) to "make America what America must become" (10).

During the period in which Baldwin was composing *No Name in the Street*, however, the tenor of Baldwin's voice in articulating what he understood to be the central concerns facing black people in the U. S., and the dispossessed of the world more broadly, exhibited a heightened sense of critical pessimism—that is, an increasing understanding of the lack of viable avenues for transforming the entrenched and recalibrated racial divisions existing both domestically and globally, yet still finding a pressing need to analyze these limits—limits expressed, for instance, in Baldwin's 1968 essay, "Black Power," signaling a fundamental inability of the nation "to do anything to make the lives of its black citizens less appalling" (Cross 82). In cautiously assenting to the views of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture), Baldwin contends that "all black Americans are born into a society which is determined—repeat, determined—that they shall never learn the truth about themselves or their society, which is determined that black men shall use as their only frame of reference what white Americans convey to them of their own potentialities, and of the shape, size, dimensions, and possibilities of the world" (82-84).

Baldwin's sense of the narrative logic of racial subjection, a logic that operates both externally as violent force and internally as psychic deficit, functions as a guiding principle behind an American complex of physical, phenomenological, and psychological dimensions of racial identification, representation, and control. He elaborates on the early stages of this process of racism through historical narration in comments offered during his 1969 appearance before a House Select Subcommittee convened to consider establishing a national commission on "Negro History and Culture." Baldwin testifies to the subcommittee regarding what he refers to as "the nigger we invent;" a reflection of the process of miseducating black children to understand their self-definition as featuring "no past and really no present and certainly no future" (Cross 90). Furthermore, it is during this period that Baldwin speaks out publicly and unapologetically on behalf of Angela Davis and the Soledad Brothers. In his missive, "An Open Letter to My Sister Angela Y. Davis," and his "Speech from the Soledad Rally," Baldwin clearly argues for the need to understand the possibilities of "the enormous revolution in black consciousness" signifying either "the beginning or the end of America" (Cross 211), and the critical weight of the realization that

"we are the victims and we are the results of a doctrine called white supremacy" (Cross 101). Finally, in the brief but pivotal 1969 essay "The Price may Be Too High," Baldwin lays the anticipatory groundwork for a later intertextual linkage with *No Name in the Street*, as he reflects upon what it means to convey "Sambo's truth": the floating yet sedimented idea of black identity moving between the "private disaster" of black "public discontent" and "the pretension not to know the reason for Sambo's discontent," offered by the collective governmental and social sectors of the nation (87).

The idea of "Sambo" reverberates throughout the haunting conclusion of *No Name in the Street*, as Baldwin invokes the meaning of its absence within the new times of late 1960s' black consciousness. Before reflecting upon the critical weight of this absence, Baldwin frames the context of uncertainty and radical possibility within this historical moment:

In this place, and more particularly, in this time, generations appear to flower, flourish, and wither with the speed of light. I don't think that this is merely the inevitable reflection of middle age: I suspect that there really has been some radical alteration in the structure, the nature, of time. One may say that there are no clear images; everything seems superimposed on, and at war with something else. There are no clear vistas: the road that seems to pull one forward into the future is also pulling one backward into the past. I felt, anyway, kaleidoscopic, fragmented, walking through the streets of San Francisco, trying to decipher whatever it was that my own consciousness made of all the elements in which I was entangled, and which were all tangled up in me. (178-79)

This new, fractured sense of time, history, and consciousness becomes defined, in Baldwin's mind, through the distinctive architectonics of this remembrance of the San Francisco Bay area in 1968 and his framing of the tension that gives rise to a present in which linear ideas of historical accounting and social transformation cease to be useful.

This sense of tension animating black historical consciousness is perhaps most clearly evident in his recall of pre-flower-child San Francisco and his several-page replaying of the central questions emanating from both white and black student communities. Baldwin recreates the present of the asking of these questions through the distinctive sound of the voices asking the questions—the glimmers of ideological positioning that becomes disclosed through the audition of the questions. From the white students we hear questions such as:

Would black people take it amiss if the white kids came into the neighborhood, and—fraternized is probably the only word—with the kids in the pool halls, the bars, the soda fountains? Would black people take it amiss if some of them were to visit a black church? Could they invite members of the black congregation to their white churches, or would the black people feel uncomfortable? Wouldn't it be a good idea if the black and white basketball teams played each other? (179-80)

Baldwin's conceptualization of late 1960s' historical time and consciousness is specifically reflected in his rendering of the difficulty white liberal youth encounter in attempting to achieve a level of introspection within an historical moment in which a renewed sense of black militancy emerges. This dissonance reflects a broken "historical wheel" of racial retribution, marked by the impossible desire of "the flower children" to reject the fruits of their inheritance of white privilege, as such a legacy "could be laid down only at Sambo's feet" (185). Baldwin's remixing of the historicized "coon" imagery of Sambo within a rapidly radicalizing moment of late 1960s black consciousness dispenses with the sound of minstrel song that might accompany a synesthetic recall of this stock racist type, in favor of a darker tonality conveying Baldwin's understanding that the flower children's attempted repudiation of white power cannot be so easily accomplished, due to Black Power's removal of Sambo's visage and sonic presence from the racial imaginary of black youth. Baldwin's analysis of the flower children's need for Sambo, rather than simply reflecting a

white reliance on racist stereotypes, more deeply signals their vexed position, posed between a genuine desire to act upon "their moral obligations to the darker brother" and a reluctance to accept the broader critical standpoint arising from many of those "darker brothers" based on the fact that "the black situation in America was but one aspect of the fraudulent nature of American life" (183).

The discrepancy between black radicalism and white liberalism that Baldwin cites in this meditation is clearly frustrating, as Baldwin notes that both sides of this equation are "targets of the very same forces" (what Baldwin refers to as the Fourth Reich) yet "certainly were not together" as the black youth were "not putting their trust in flowers," due to the fact that "this troubled white person might suddenly go home" (188). The loaded narrative history of American race relations and racism seem to permanently inflect the soundscape through which new meaning is attempting to emerge. Sound is an important sensory modality to consider this problematic through, as it begins to reflect the reverberating, resounding permanence of white fear with a more emergent sense of black refusal that, in its convergence, represents a deeper historical problematic than can be addressed at a broader systemic level. Baldwin seems to desire a level of critical, philosophically introspective listening, which Jean-Luc Nancy describes as an inclination "toward the opening of meaning" (27). For the antagonistic force within Baldwin's heavily layered existential argument is "the fraudulent and expedient nature of the American innocence which has always been able to persuade itself that it does not know what it knows too well" (188). Thus, in his diagnosis of white fear in response to the perceived threat of black revolutionary self-defense, Baldwin points out that the visceral apprehension felt by many whites in respect to black people taking up arms, misses the larger point that "People who treat other people as less than human must not be surprised when the bread they have cast on the waters comes floating back to them, poisoned" (192). The failure of American self-reflection and critical listening, a conundrum increasingly found in Baldwin's critical lens with the 1963 publication of *The Fire Next Time*, represents a seemingly insurmountable impasse to which, in *No Name in the Street*, Baldwin is able only to outline a corrective by suggesting that the nation listen more carefully to the sound of this poisoned bread.

This sonic formation resonates through transatlantic time and space for Baldwin, marking his vision of an intensified double consciousness reflecting the "two undefined and currently undefineable [*sic*] proper nouns," that is, Afro-American. The dissonance of the hyphenated term comes to signify an arbitrary, confused linkage that remains troubled in the sense that neocolonial Africa represents only a "cradle and potential" as long as European exploitation persists—even in the wake of colonialism (192). Baldwin's unfolding of meaning through interlocked historical and global points of reference demonstrates his particular narrative logic in projecting a revived awareness of the unending American and global crisis. His featuring of the story of his friend Tony Maynard's unjust imprisonment in a German jail, while awaiting extradition to the U. S. to face seemingly trumped up murder charges, creates a space in which to focus on black incarceration as a condition that may move across the Atlantic, and that, for Baldwin, seems to reflect, not so dissimilarly to Aimé Césaire in his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955), the intensity of racist practices and logic as a transhistorical, global, epistemological force. The Maynard case puts into relief a defining factor of the post-civil rights era—the ways in which law enforcement and incarceration have become the new modes of racialized social control in the wake of hypervisible Jim Crow practices of segregation and racial violence. This continuity of control, management, and subjection is, in Baldwin's eyes, perhaps most effectively challenged by the Black Panthers' presence and their articulation of a new force, "which set itself in opposition to that force which uses people as things and which grinds down men and women and children, not only in the ghetto, into an unrecognizable powder" (166). Baldwin is perhaps at his most hopeful in considering the

possibilities of this revolutionary force, not necessarily through the specific goals it might achieve but rather through the recognition of its potential for generating new energy that can create ruptures within teleological myths of American racial progress, moving forward instead with the understanding conveyed by “one of my brothers” that “the spirit of the South is the spirit of America” (164). Thus, Baldwin’s prophetic writing, in its utilization of sound as a critical framework, and, ultimately, in its inability to conclude—“This book is not finished—can never be finished by me,” extends the reach of the present in which he writes, across multiple temporal and critical frames at once, and still may indeed contain the analytical scope, weight, and method that is needed to sift through the shifting meanings of the long post-civil rights era within which we still sit (196).

Notes

1. The central issue of Baldwin’s homosexuality, and its relationship to his intellectual production, has now been addressed rather extensively from a variety of critical positions. See, for example, Zaborowska; Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2003); Maurice Wallace, *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideology in African American Men’s Literature and Culture, 1775-1995* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002); and Marlon Ross, “White Fantasies of Desire: Baldwin and the Racial Identities of Sexuality,” in *James Baldwin Now*, Dwight McBride, ed. (New York: New York UP, 1999), 13-55.

2. I use the term “black freedom struggle” to denote an historical perspective in which the expanse of civil rights movement organizations and Black Power-influenced formations are considered as part of a broader continuum, rather than as discrete historical stages. Such a perspective is crucial for assessing Baldwin’s contributions during this period, as his writing and activism allowed for greater ideological fluidity along this continuum, and, arguably, did not depend upon his having to reconstruct his stances in order to appreciate and connect with various political points along such a continuum.

3. By “blues epistemology,” I am referring to the long tradition of black critical inquiry into the various meanings of the blues. This tradition encompasses, but is certainly not limited to, perspectives on the distinctive musicological and thematic qualities of the blues provided by Zora Neale Hurston, Sterling Brown, Ralph Ellison, Albert Murray, Gayl Jones, Langston Hughes, Amiri Baraka, Sherley Anne Williams, Houston Baker, and August Wilson. These writers all share an appreciation for the expressive power of the form, and its ability to convey various intricacies of black historical consciousness.

4. Although many critics have commented in passing, or in part, on Baldwin’s attention to music (indeed it is inescapable), there are relatively few studies that singularly treat this aspect of his intellectual background and approach outside of close readings of specific creative works. The studies that seem most oriented in this direction of theorizing the various conceptual aspects of Baldwin’s relationship to black music are D. Quentin Miller, “Using the Blues: James Baldwin and Music,” in *A Historical Guide to James Baldwin*, Douglas Field, ed. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 83-110; Walton Muyumba, *The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation, and Philosophical Pragmatism* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2009); Moten; and Josh Kun, “Life According to the Beat: James Baldwin, Bessie Smith, and the Perilous Sounds of Love,” in *James Baldwin Now*, Dwight McBride, ed. (New York: New York UP, 1999), 307-28.

5. The reference to Henry James comes from the essay “Criticism,” which is included in the volume *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (1893).

6. It should be noted that Leeming points to Baldwin’s early relationship with Beauford Delaney as a formative aspect of his blues sensibility. Leeming writes:

For the first time, under Beauford’s guidance, he began to undergo the “religious” experience of jazz and blues. Beauford played Ella Fitzgerald, Ma Rainey, Louis Armstrong, Bessie Smith, Ethel Waters, Paul Robeson, Lena Horne, and Fats Waller. And he talked about them in the soft caressing voice to which Baldwin would turn for comfort in the darkest moments of years to come. (33)

7. The 1960s were a flashpoint for reconsiderations of the social, historical, and political contexts of the blues. Baldwin’s essayistic inquiry into the meaning and uses of the blues can also be understood in the literary historical context of LeRoi Jones’s social and political history of black music, *Blues People*, published one year prior, as well as Ellison’s somewhat scathing review of Jones’s work.

8. For more details on Cherry’s music and his place within free jazz, see, Ekkehard Jost, *Free Jazz* (New York: Da Capo, 1974), and Valerie Wilmer, *As Serious as Your Life* (London: Serpent’s Tail, 1977).

9. This performance was originally released as an LP in 1978 on the Sonet label under the title *Live Ankara*. It has subsequently been rereleased as part of a double album entitled *The Sonet Recordings: Eternal Now/Live Ankara* by Verve in 1996.

10. The fact that this childhood friend of Baldwin's remains nameless in the account is perhaps significant insofar as it becomes another point of thematic interplay with the title of the work—as the “no name” or nameless quality of the acquaintance helps put into relief that the individual here is more broadly representative of a national and racial set of conditions that have shaped the dynamics of the moment.

11. Reading Fanon and Baldwin together opens up an unending series of questions and observations regarding critical race theory and narrative aesthetics. One level of this convergence in terms of Fanon's work that is particularly interesting is the way in which his poetic phrasing has been translated by various individuals, and in different historical moments. For instance, the 1966 edition of *Wretched of the Earth*, translated by Constance Farrington, renders the phrase I have drawn upon, “zone of hidden fluctuation” as “zone of occult instability.” For more on the issue of Fanon and translation, see Robert J. C. Young, “Frantz Fanon and the Enigma of Cultural Translation,” *Translation: A Transdisciplinary Journal* 1 (2012): 91-100, Web.

12. This point regarding the epistemological issues of racial consciousness and resistance emerges from both a long and contemporary tradition of writing on race and philosophy. Building on the work of these intellectuals and scholars in today's academy, my critical viewpoint is that understanding the philosophical substance of racial consciousness is relevant not only to mapping the contours of how ideas of race have functioned within a black critical tradition, but such an orientation also allows for a specific engagement with the much-debated question of identity politics. Once one begins to chart the depth and richness of black philosophical discourse through the past two centuries of American life (and this is not to limit the scope of the enterprise geographically, for as all scholars of the African diaspora realize, addressing the cultural and critical manifestations of black thought within any location within the diaspora can never be limited entirely by that particular black space, as the spatiality of black freedom transcends national lines and moves much more enticingly and ephemerally through diasporic space) it becomes increasingly clear that the various articulations of black national and pan-African consciousness that move through these years are often as much tied to contemporaneous discussions of matters of essence, phenomenology, identity, and expression within broader Western philosophical discourse as much as they are reflective of any sense of ethnic and racial particularity.

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