Me and My House

JAMES BALDWIN'S LAST DECADE IN FRANCE

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Cover art: (*top*) Baldwin waving in front of his house.
Photo by Walter Dallas. (*bottom*) Baldwin's study
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To Gosia, Tracey, Sandra, and Paola

And in memory of Evelyn Grendell Jordan,

Thomas Jordan, Neil Lawrence Jr., Sedat Pakay,

Radhouan Ben Amara, and Brenda Rein

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

AD	"*Architectural Digest* Visits: James Baldwin"
CR	*The Cross of Redemption*
ETNS	*The Evidence of Things Not Seen*
GR	*Giovanni's Room*
IB	*If Beale Street Could Talk*
JAMH	*Just above My Head*
JB	*James Baldwin: The Last Interview and Other Conversations*
LM	*Little Man, Little Man: A Story of Childhood*
NKMN	*Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son*
NNS	*No Name in the Street*
PT	*The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction 1948–1985*
TMHL	*Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*

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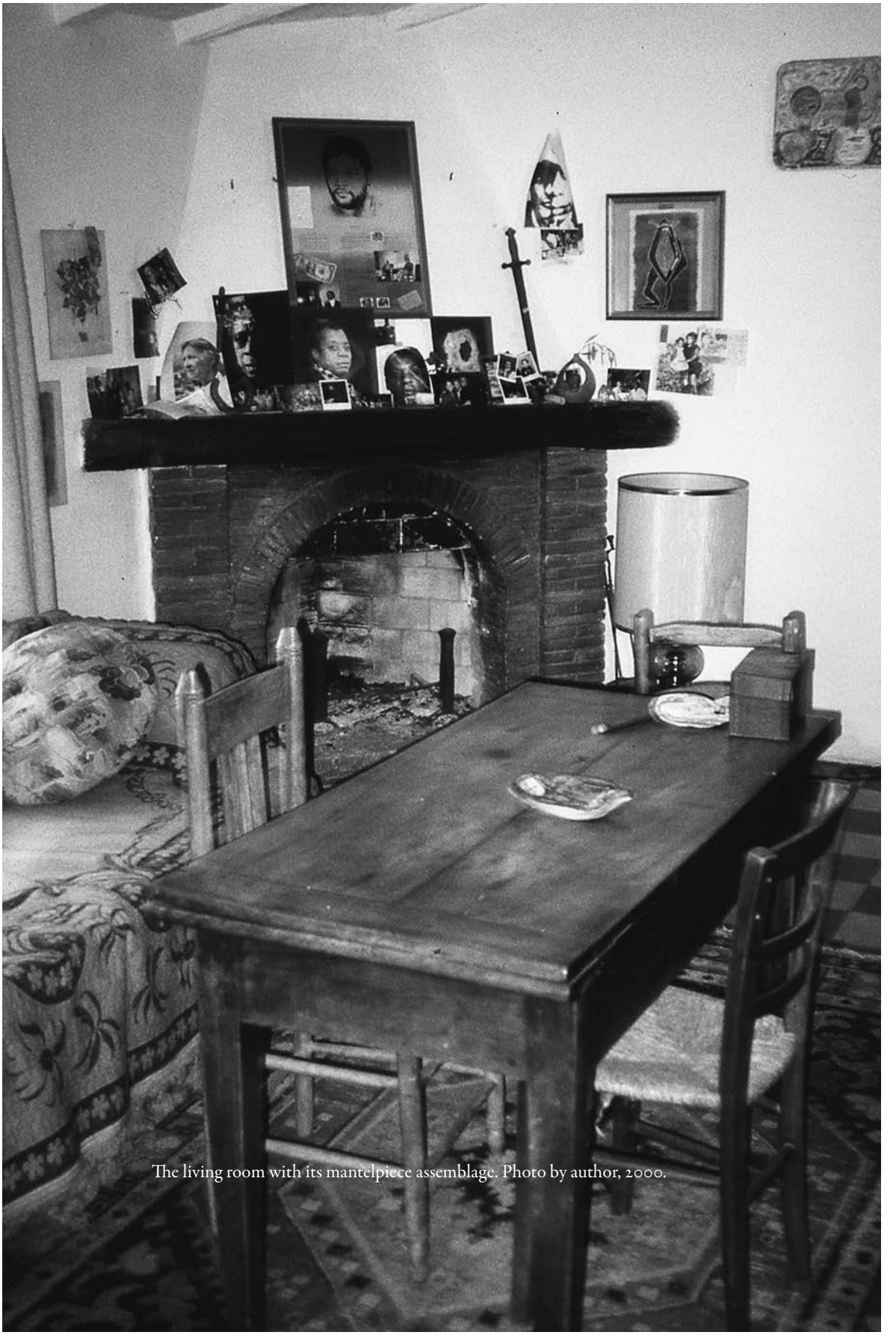


The living room with its mantelpiece assemblage. Photo by author, 2000.

INTRODUCTION

If I Am a Part of the American House, and I Am

Vitrines, Fragments, Reassembled Remnants

> If I am a part of the American house, and I am, it is because my ancestors paid—*striving to make it my home*—so unimaginable a price: and I have seen some of the effects of that passion everywhere I have been, all over this world.
> **—"Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone"**

THE MATTER: HOUSE

I first walked through James Baldwin's former house on the edge of St. Paul-de-Vence, an ancient town in the South of France, in June 2000, while having only the vaguest notion of how his works and life story would soon fill my life. Inside, the stone house was quiet, cool, and shadowy, with the partially shuttered windows letting in slender shafts of sunlight filled with dust motes. As I walked across the sunny stripes on the floor, the melancholy air of the place struck me, no doubt because I was thinking of those whose home

it once was, when it was filled with creativity and life. They were long gone by the time I paid their space a visit: James Baldwin, of course, but also his beloved younger brother David, who inherited the house after his passing; the beautiful dancer Bernard Hassell, who was their friend and house manager and who died there of AIDS; and many others, famous or not, who came to visit and stay a while. It also made me think of those who once tended to its grounds, surfaces, and objects, like Jeanne Faure, its previous owner and a close friend of Baldwin's, or Valerie Sordello, who cooked splendid meals in the kitchen and served them to Jimmy and his guests at the table outside, under an arbor. There must have been gardeners or groundskeepers, too, whose names and identities I would never know (I recalled Mohammed, the Muslim groundskeeper from Baldwin's last play, *The Welcome Table* [1987], who was based on an actual person, "Baldwin's own onetime gardener").[1] Of all the spaces, I was especially mesmerized by what was then, thirteen years after Baldwin's death, left of his upstairs living room. Quiet, somewhat dusty, with hints of that omnipresent Mediterranean moisture that curled some of the photos tacked to the wall over the mantelpiece, that space beckoned for some inexplicable reason.

To my literary-critical imagination, that living room seemed to hold the most stories, memories, and traces of human habitation. At first glance, it appeared a simple-enough space containing objects one would expect—a rustic wooden table and three chairs (each different), an orange-brownish-pinkish throw blanket over the couch with puffy round pillows, a Turkish (perhaps) rug under the table breaking the pattern of the checkered tiled floor. On the walls were photos, posters, and framed art, not to mention a storm of pictures and objects adorning the mantelpiece in the corner, dominated by a green, yellow, and red Nelson Mandela poster. After a few moments silently taking it all in, my eye and ear, as if honed by my earlier passage through the other parts of the house, began to discern visible and invisible, audible and inaudible, imprints, images, noises, and sounds. One could not stand unmoved, after all, while being at what must have once been the very heart of Baldwin's vibrant home. To me, it seemed as if the dark brick fireplace, now blackened with brushstrokes of once vigorous flames, filled with cold ashes and irons, could roar back to life at any moment; a fire poker resting in the nearby corner seemed ready to tend to it. A lamp with a purplish glass base, left on the floor for a moment, looked ready to be lit up again; I imagined how its glow would help me to see what was inside a black, rectangular cardboard box on the well-worn tabletop. The longer I stood there, the more the room filled with possibility and wonder and, yes, with desire and need.

I was a polite, slightly timid, first-time visitor then, yet I was also dying to open that box. I would not dare do it, however, which I now admit with some regret (I just brushed my hand against it), for I behaved as if I were in a museum, no matter that the house was far from being one (and will never become one, having since been lost to developers). I also yearned to pick up and feel the weight of the blue-green ceramic ashtray in the middle of the table that may have belonged to Baldwin. I could not be sure of that, of course, but still had to resist a powerful temptation to ask, maybe even beg, to take it with me. (Imagine having that fetish in my study!) Or that plain wooden whistle or, if not, perhaps the white and red kitchen towel lying next to it in a casual grouping on the table. Just one small token . . . something material to hold on to, to bring back from my visit. That temptation shamed me, but while in its grip I realized, too, that I could not bring myself to take anything unless it was given freely. But there was no one to grant me that wish, just shadows, imagined voices, and golden dust motes.

An important discovery I did not register in that moment, not until some years later, was that I had been caught up in a powerful and collective Baldwin-related sensation (if not affectation) that would travel through time and space. I was merely a predecessor to, or perhaps also appeared after, some others who had come, and would continue coming, to the site of Baldwin's house to find that material something that reading his work alone could not provide. Those of us who were lucky and privileged enough to be able to make it to St. Paul-de-Vence were gripped by that same powerful need or longing to save something material from the site.[2] All of us—scholars, intellectuals, writers, readers, and simply those who love Baldwin—not only searched for a physical keepsake, but also yearned to fulfill a dream of being somehow connected to the writer in ways that go beyond the literary magic that takes place on the pages of his texts. On some level, we must all believe that the precious matter of that particular black life, which ended in that house in 1987, could somehow be salvaged and preserved, especially in light of so few remnants of his existence, and the conspicuous absence of a writer's house-museum devoted to him in his home country.[3]

A few years ago, Baldwin's great-niece, Kali-Ma Nazarene, a talented photographer, traveled to the house and took haunting black-and-white pictures after it had been emptied of furniture, books, and all but a few broken chairs. Her trip to France had been set in motion by a dream in which the writer appeared to her and asked her to "meet me in Paris in two weeks, I can't stand it here."[4] Others, like Douglas Field, Thomas Chatterton Williams, and Rachel Kaadzi Ghansah, have written about the undeniable pull of this particular

place, which compelled them to jump over fences, dig up pieces of china from the dirt around the partially demolished structure, or search desperately for other remnants, anything they could carry to take with them. In all of their accounts, this material hunger is palpable, as is the fervent imagining, or even inventing, of Baldwin's past and his possessions on the basis of available evidence, hearsay, and that thirsty desire to be close to him.[5] Perhaps reading Baldwin makes one greedy for the matter related to his life, for we have nothing else left of him but his published works. Perhaps the preponderance of digitized photographs and recorded interviews with James Baldwin online only magnifies this yearning for objects, for the solidity of *things* whose weight and concrete endurance might afford us a connection with him that is more substantial, more intimate, more worked for than the impersonal touch of a keyboard or a fleeting image on a screen.

This need to link literary, or metaphorical, representations of Baldwin's person and life story to matter, or tangible and enduring objects such as an ashtray or pieces of china dug up from the site of his house, stems from what Ian Hodder refers to as the human "entanglement" with things that have the power to "stand in the way . . . [and] force themselves on human action."[6] "Human existence is thingly, irreducibly so," Hodder contends from the purview of archaeology, social sciences, and humanities. He adds that "spiritual energies flow through icons and relics and awaken our devotion . . . [and] familiar things are absorbed into our sense of identity. . . . [They] provide a psychological comfort after tragedy and loss . . . [and] stimulate our cognitive capacities."[7] Baldwin's absence has been a source of grief since his death at sixty-three in 1987, while the pilgrimages to the site of his house that so many have since made confirm his continuing power over his readers' imagination and desire. And if we think of objects and things as "stuff," as Daniel Miller does, we realize, too, that structural "relationships between things rather than the things themselves" matter most, and that "systems of things, with their internal order, make us the people we are," and that is because "culture comes above all from stuff."[8] Hence our desire and need to collect remnants of Baldwin's domestic life in the face of its gaping absence and irreversible eradication. What's more, we are driven to preserve the material site of his house, or simply set foot inside the structure as long as it lasts, for we need to constitute what is still missing in the United States and even in St. Paul-de-Vence: wider recognition and concrete reminders of one of the most important twentieth-century American writers—someone who continues to help us become "better than we are," as he says in a clip

from Karen Thorsen's documentary *The Price of the Ticket*. So, yes, Baldwin is all about us as humans and thus attached to and as things, and matter, too.[9]

THE MATERIAL: LIFE

In his last interview with Quincy Troupe, recorded at his house in St. Paul-de-Vence not long before he passed away, Baldwin complains about the ways in which his life story has become someone else's tale: "It's difficult to be a legend. It's hard for me to recognize *me*. You spend a lot of time trying to avoid it. . . . The way the world treats you is unbearable, and especially if you're black. . . . And you are not your legend, but you're trapped in it."[10] At the end of his life, Baldwin sees himself as a "very despairing witness," estranged from "myself and my generation," who feels "more and more homeless in terms of the whole relationship between France and me and America."[11] Within the soundtrack to *James Baldwin: From Another Place*, a 1970 art-film gem that the late filmmaker and photographer Sedat Pakay made about him in Istanbul and released in New York in 1973, the writer rather optimistically acknowledges the profound advantages of his transatlantic location and optic: one always sees one's home better "from another place, from another country." No matter that many of his contemporaries did not appreciate or care for that vantage point; he uses it deftly to focus on the vexing social and cultural issues at the center of the national house that is the United States. What he discusses only many years later, though, is that, while sometimes enviable and in his case always prolific, that remote and exilic authorial vantage point is often a lonely, painful, and usually misunderstood location. Yet that location was also what he needed, for it allowed him to hide his private and domestic life from public view.

"I certainly have not told my story yet," Baldwin explained to an interviewer in 1984. "I know that, though I've revealed fragments."[12] His passing a mere three years later from a terminal illness confirms that this mysterious "story" of his had not had a chance to reach completion. By then his ailing body had been sending signals he should not have ignored, though he did exactly that, for he was full of plans and projects as usual. He had people to see and places to go, like the international summit organized to accompany Mikhail Gorbachev's "perestroika" in the Soviet Union in 1986, where he was a guest of honor and speaker on global race issues.[13] As he told another interviewer just a few years before, at the age of fifty-six, he had harbored great hopes for many

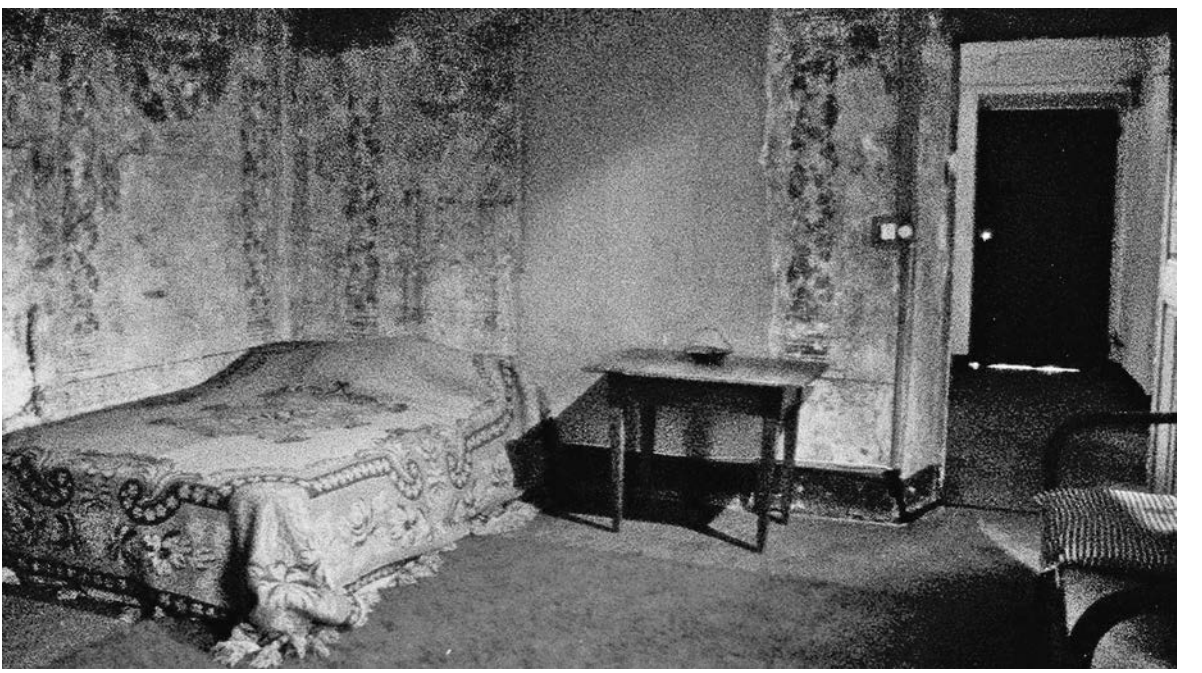
1.1. The empty upstairs living room at Chez Baldwin. Photo by author, 2014.

more prolific years of activity: "For a writer, I'm very young. . . . I've an appointment with the twenty-first century . . . when I will still be under eighty."[14]

After being largely dismissed and out of popular favor in the United States during his late years, and following his death in 1987, Baldwin has recently come into vogue. As if in response to our culture's contemporary yearning for charismatic spokespersons and leaders who might offer more than expertly marketed sound bites and images of oafish politicians, he has been brought back from exile as a kind of black cultural superstar. In academe, this return comes in the wake of new scholarship that has largely overcome tired old approaches that cleaved the writer's career into a "commendable" period ending with the publication of *The Fire Next Time* in 1963 and the decidedly less commendable one that followed and was soon lost, if not erased, from view. These new academic studies that I will refer to throughout the chapters that follow embrace all of his works, all the places where he lived, and all aspects of Baldwin's identity, thereby forestalling another division that used to plague his representation as either a gay *or* a black writer.

The new twenty-first-century Baldwin has been celebrated through public events such as the "James Baldwin: *This* Time!" Festival held in April 2014 at the New York Live Arts Theater, which also inaugurated the "Year of Baldwin" with exciting events held in his honor at the Harlem Stage, Columbia University, and other venues, most of which I attended.[15] The writer has also finally been given a landmark in the neighborhood where he grew up; a stretch of 128th Street between 5th and Madison in Harlem has been named James Baldwin Place, while the brick house in which he lived from 1958 to 1961, at 81 Horatio Street in Greenwich Village, now dons a commemorative plaque affixed during a public ceremony on October 7, 2015.[16] The plaque explicitly credits the writer with having had a significant impact on "ideas about race, class, sexuality, and morality" through his portrayal of the Village in his "bestselling novel *Another Country*," as well as highlighting his participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Inducted into the American Poets' Corner at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 2011, and inaugurated as the subject of a new scholarly journal, the *James Baldwin Review*, at several academic conferences in 2014, the "Son of Harlem" is suddenly back in favor in his home country, though it was the twentieth-century American politics of race and sexuality that forced him to become a wanderer and exile in the first place.[17]

The popularity and appeal of Raoul Peck's recent art film *I Am Not Your Negro* (2016) confirm both the resurgence of interest in the writer's life and oeuvre and the need for new interpretations concerning both.[18] Based on



1.2. The last room, with Baldwin's bed. Image from the documentary film *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket* (1989); courtesy of Karen Thorsen, Douglas Dempsey, and the James Baldwin Project.

1.3. The James Baldwin Place naming ceremony in front of Baldwin's former elementary school, P.S. 24, on 128th Street, Harlem, August 2015. Photo by author.

1.4. James Baldwin Place street sign. Courtesy of Trevor Baldwin, 2015.

"Remember This House," a treatment of a project Baldwin was planning to write on the lives of his assassinated Civil Rights Movement friends and historical icons—Medgar Evers, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King Jr.—Peck's film crafts its narrative in Baldwin's intimate voice-over. By mixing fragments of the manuscript of "Remember This House" that he was allowed to use by the estate with quotations from Baldwin's neglected later works like *No Name in the Street* (1972), *The Devil Finds Work* (1976), and *The Evidence of Things Not Seen* (1985), Peck crafts his own tale about Baldwin delivered in the actor Samuel L. Jackson's beautifully modulated voice. Deeply political and personal, this tale demonstrates Baldwin's brilliance and effectiveness in deploying autobiography and the genre of the essay as weapons of social justice. Accompanied by archival images from the 1960s to the 1980s, as well as more recent ones from Ferguson, where protests against police brutality have irrevocably confirmed that the twenty-first-century reality of U.S. black life has not changed that much from that of the 1950s, *I Am Not Your Negro* prompts one to marvel at the currency of Baldwin's diagnosis of the racist "problem" at the heart of American collective and individual history and psyche. It also inspires questions such as: What would Baldwin have said about the occupants of the current White House, or about the "Muslim ban"?

Those who read him with the attention he not only deserves, but also poignantly requires of his readers, agree, however, that he would be speaking out about it all: refugee crises, domestic terrorist attacks, thousands of drowned black and brown bodies floating in the Mediterranean (as if marking a twenty-first-century replay of the Middle Passage), "illegal" immigrants tortured and dying during their perilous passage through U.S. borders, trans kids deprived of bathrooms in their schools, not to mention the virulent revival of white supremacist, misogynistic, and homophobic narrative at the core of the U.S. national house. The perspective on Baldwin as a sophisticated, tough critic and theorist of identity, as a citizen of the world and a villager from St. Paul-de-Vence, where he in fact wanted to die and be buried, is missing sorely from Peck's film.[19]

The attention that *I Am Not Your Negro* pays to the political obscures and erases the political-as-personal: except for a mention, the vital role that Baldwin's sexuality and gender identity, not to mention his various domestic abodes away from the United States, played in his activism and art remains unacknowledged and suppressed. In light of this reduction of Baldwin's voice and person, Peck's film ultimately falls into promoting the "Baldwin brand" genre, where the writer appears as a race man, an ancestral sage de-

void of sexual and gender identity, whose words, often taken out of context, seem to convey a much more simplified and, indeed, divided vision of humanity than his writings actually convey. Baldwin was an intellectual genius whose wisdom and lessons belong to all humanity, and so in forgetting that, or simply not seeing that in his works, Peck's film excises a vital part of the writer. Yet again, Baldwin's complexity remains omitted, marginalized, and in exile.

Baldwin's recent return to his home country as a black cultural icon indeed obscures tragic and personal reasons for his first trip abroad. While fragmentary revelations of his life story can be found in all of his writings, the scattered pieces are not easy to assemble into a coherent whole, which I believe was a deliberate aesthetic choice on his part. In his 1977 essay "Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone," which provides the epigraph for this introduction and begins, "I am writing this note just twenty-nine years after my first departure from America," Baldwin mentions being "a part of the American house" on the condition of the price for it having been paid by his ancestors' "*striving to make it my home*" (PT, 642). The divergent semantics of "house" and "home" could not be clearer, with the former referring to the state and nation that built its power and wealth on the backs of African slaves, genocide of Native Americans, and exploitation of immigrants, and the latter referring to the private spaces of one's familial and domestic spaces, which, as of that essay's writing, the author seemed to be still in the process of trying to locate. Indeed, as Baldwin recalls his first departure from Harlem for France on November 11, 1948, he was not happy, and was experiencing "rain, fatigue, panic, the absolute certainty of being dashed to death on the vindictive tooth of the Eiffel Tower," and those sensations and the weather overshadow any possibility of "feeling the remotest exhilaration" upon his arrival in western Europe.

He was compelled to leave the United States because of who he was, too, for he "trusted no one, and knew that he trusted no one, knew that this distrust was suicidal, and also knew that there was no question any longer of his *life* in America: his violent destruction could be taken as a given; it was a matter of time." As he explains his younger self, *"By the time I was twenty-two, I was a survivor . . . with murder in his heart"* (PT, 642, emphases added). In light of this turbulent mix of self-destructive emotions accompanied by physical dangers to his body, Baldwin's landing in France meant a blank slate and starting anew; as he writes, "there I was, in Paris, on my ass." But it also meant, "*My* ass, mister, *mine*: and I was glad" (PT, 644). He continues somewhat

gloomily, somewhat humorously, commenting on having to reinvent himself in a new place and language. This unhappy yet fortuitous landing in a foreign city meant, then, that being finally away from the American national house, he was then free to figure out what kind of home he wanted to make for himself as a writer and black queer American who both chose and was forced to live in the world.

THE METAPHOR: BOOK

"Perhaps home is not a place but simply an irrevocable condition," Baldwin writes in *Giovanni's Room* in 1956, his narrator's voice metaphorically linking his literary characters' and his own experiences of exile to those of immigrants and migrants throughout the world (GR, 121).[20] David, the sexually conflicted and repressed white American, and Giovanni, a displaced southern Italian, meet in Paris, where they fall in love and cohabitate in a symbolically loaded "room."[21] For the American, in Europe supposedly to "find" himself, the room becomes a closet associated with homosexuality, from which he has tried to flee and which he cannot bring himself to embrace. For the Italian, who cannot ever return home, and who accepts his sexuality unequivocally (he calls it the "stink of love"), the room is a space of desire, liberation, and redemption. Because David and Giovanni share neither a story nor a spatial vision of their connection, and can neither understand nor see each other as products of the Old and New World cultures, their relationship is doomed from the start. Blind to the ways in which he has inherited from his ancestors—those whites-in-the-making who "conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains . . . to an ocean that faced away from Europe into a darker past"—American-bred tales of homophobia and racialized gender bipolarity, David loses his only chance for love and self-discovery and -acceptance. By breaking his heart and leaving him, he also causes Giovanni's tragic end (GR, 7). However sensational (and deliberately so, given its reliance on an actual event in New York), that novel's racialized and sexualized recounting of what Nina Baym has termed the "melodramas of beset manhood" is powerful evidence of the ways identity is undergirded, created, and represented in complex relation to both narrative and social spaces.[22]

More specifically, Baldwin's reliance in *Giovanni's Room* on tracing the ways in which social spaces, and private dwellings especially, tend to expose links between identity and its gendered, racialized, and sexual representa-

tions at home and abroad confirms his engagement with the "architectural features of narrative space."[23] Baldwin takes this type of spatial storytelling on a transatlantic journey in a scene where Giovanni counters David's naïve belief that one day he can simply go back home to America: "You don't have a home until you leave it and then, when you have left it, you never can go back" (GR, 154–55). When David continues to insist that his is a special case, that, as an American, he can avoid the consequences of his actions, Giovanni jokes, "You . . . remind me of the kind of man who is tempted to put himself in prison in order to avoid being hit by a car" (155). The metaphor of the prison is an apt one for the American national house and men like David, for its prescriptions for manhood have so fully colonized his mind and body that he cannot find "himself" anywhere because of the simple fact that he cannot envision or *accept* his identity in full. Thus imprisoned in/by his sexuality, he is left impotent as a subject—he simply *isn't*, though remaining a cliché as "an American." What David realizes at the end is that he will never be free of memories of Giovanni and their affectively loaded room, no matter how far away he manages to escape from both. Hence Baldwin's novel can be read as recounting the impossibility of white American male domestic desire.

David's homelessness—as a man exiled from American notions of patriarchal, thus heteronormative and white manhood because of his desire for sex with other men—can be read in the context of what Claudia Tate terms "the political desire . . . [for] the acquisition of authority for the self both in the home and in the world."[24] While Tate builds this paradigm for post-Reconstruction black female texts, it works surprisingly well for David's story in *Giovanni's Room* once we realize that this seemingly "all-white novel" is in fact all about race, gender, sexuality, and various domestic spaces that are both public and private, national and international. David's sense of exclusion from his home country, and especially from his father's rigidly defined "manly" house, is exacerbated by the impossibility of his ever truly "playing house." Try as he might (and as he did, for a brief time with his onetime American fiancée, Hella), he would never become a proper American "husband."

On the day David meets and falls for Giovanni, that discovery is juxtaposed with a fleeting image of a black man, or one who appears black to him, seen from a cab window. Looking "beyond . . . [Giovanni's] heavy profile," and contemplating the fog hanging over the city as they drive through it, David sees the otherwise pearly soft mist "clinging *like a curse to the men* who slept under the bridges—one of whom flashed by beneath us,

very black and lone, walking along the river" (GR, 61–62, emphases added). That homeless black man—his absolutely dreaded other and the flip side of Giovanni—who may have stepped off the pages of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, is whom David fears he will become if he lets his secret out: "I was in a box for I could see that, no matter how I turned, the hour of confession was upon me" (64). The truth of one's identity cannot be escaped, even if one forces oneself to become a prisoner of a model version—and David's American whiteness so encages him that he cannot conceive of himself as free. As Baldwin explains in a 1984 interview with Mavis Nicholson, his protagonist's central failure is an inability to feel: "If you can't love anybody, you're dangerous."[25]

Read closely, like *Giovanni's Room*, many of the works throughout Baldwin's oeuvre can be seen as engaging various manifestations of domesticity: material and metaphorical, spatial and ideological, gender- and genre-related, religious and secular, and indeed literal and literary, as well as embodied and psychological. From the examination of African American home lives between the North and the South, and within the spiritually and erotically charged spaces of the black church and Harlem and New York City streets in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953), through that city's landscapes infused with interracial desire, contingent on southern and French homoerotic domestic locations, as well as queer homelessness in *Another Country* (1962), to the portrait of an artist as a black man with no place to put down roots in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968), to examinations of black families' and artists' tragic negotiations of private and public spaces within and without the United States in *If Beale Street Could Talk* (1974) and *Just above My Head* (1979), all of his novels explore various manifestations of what could be called the black house and home—the theme I pursue at length in this introduction. Deploying his experience as a lower-class child of Harlem, and later an accomplished writer who had to configure his domestic spaces around the challenges of his writing, activism, travel, and economic need, Baldwin infused many of his essays with metaphors of domesticity that confirmed his commitment to the private being always political and vice versa. Last but not least, his three plays, including the still unpublished *The Welcome Table*, and the staged and published *The Amen Corner* (1954, 1968) and *Blues for Mister Charlie* (1964), dramatized powerful instances of desire for utopian domesticity, and of family conflict as the backdrop for gendered and racialized intergenerational struggle and national identity.

Baldwin's need to sort out the autobiographical meanings of his own national house and of personal home spaces in essays, novels, plays, and even

the few poems he wrote at various points in his life arises as much from his desire to reconfigure his identity as a black queer American as from a larger intellectual project to reinterpret the concept and problem that W. E. B. Du Bois famously named the "color line." Along with that project, Baldwin's writings explored and exploded the meanings of "blackness" and "home" as historical, economic, social, and cultural creations and representations, products, and constructs located in social space. I read this project of his as rearticulating and redefining Du Bois's "problem of the twentieth century," or the "color line" from *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), by means of what Baldwin refers to in the essay "Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone" as the "demarcation line" between the things that "happened to me because I was *black* . . . and . . . things [that] had happened to me because I was *me*," thus hinting at theoretical approaches to identity that would arise in U.S. and European academes in the decades following the publication of his works (PT, 642–43, emphases added).

In that essay, which is as "fragmentary" in its depictions of his personal life as he makes clear it must be in that interview that I mentioned earlier, his task as a writer is to disentangle the *black* from *me*. He sets out to "perceive, define, a line nearly too thin for the naked eye, so mercurial, and so mighty" (PT, 643), or that tenuous space between the *black* and *me*, one that makes him "study the hieroglyphics of my circumstances," as the only way to "decipher my inheritance" (644). Within the few pages of its intense, frenzied prose, this short essay illuminates the meaning of "Ezekiel's *wheel in the middle of a wheel*, with the iron, inescapable truth of revolutions—we black folk say what goes around, comes around" (PT, 644). That is, the essay arrives at the realization that has cycled and revolved for Baldwin for nearly three decades as he has written diverse works and searched for answers all over the world, the realization that brings *home*, *blackness*, and *me* together in terms of his authorial experience, its perceptions, and its cost:

> There *was* a demarcation line, to be walked every hour of every day. The demarcation line was my apprehension of, and, therefore, my responsibility for, my own experience: the chilling vice versa of what I had made of my experience and what that experience had made of me. . . . I have been in and out of my country, in and out of various cauldrons, for a very long time, long enough to see the doctrine of white supremacy return, like a plague, to the continent which spawned it. . . . *Every good-bye ain't gone*: human history reverberates with violent upheaval, uprooting, arrival and departure, hello and good-bye. Yet, I am not certain that anyone

> ever leaves home. When "home" drops below the horizon, it rises in one's breast and acquires the overwhelming power of menaced love. . . . My ancestors counseled me to *keep the faith*: and I promised, I vowed that I would. (PT, 645–67)

Baldwin's national house, the United States, is where the larger history takes place and where he cannot live permanently ever again. Immersed in that history, a singular life like his has a cyclical quality of intimation, experience, and confirmation of thus extracted knowledge: "I suspect, though I certainly cannot prove it, that every life moves full circle—toward revelation: You begin to see, and even rejoice to see, what you always saw," he explains at the end of "Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone" (PT, 646). That first trip away from his native country and place of birth set up a pattern for the rest of his life.

Baldwin's lack of sustained domestic life in the United States, beyond his difficult childhood and youth, and his more successful attempts at it in other places, reveal that "anguish" is part and parcel of being homeless, in exile, and it follows one wherever one may travel away from one's birthplace: "[It] has your number, knows, to paraphrase the song, where you live. It's a difficult relationship, but mysteriously indispensable. It teaches you" (PT, 646). The U.S. national house, however hostile to black queer men with artistic inclinations like Baldwin, also contains the home where his family lives, and where he was born, where his people have made their place for better or worse for generations, where, indeed, one must keep the faith, and accept anguish as part of the bargain. Hence when the writer comes back "to the eye of the hurricane," he is still menaced and metaphorically homeless in the country of his origin, but he now has his craft—which he uses like a shield, and which enables him to stay a while. Now at last, having written works beyond his first novel, *Go Tell It on the Mountain*—"All my love was in it, and the reason for my journey" (PT, 646)—and having returned as an established literary figure, his personal story of "that dreadful day of November of '48 is redeemed" (646).

BETWEEN *HOME*, *BLACKNESS*, AND *ME*

In this book, *Me and My House: James Baldwin's Last Decade in France*, which explores the tremendous personal price of this authorial redemption and coincides with the thirtieth anniversary of the writer's passing, I bring together the three entities that undergird "Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone": *home*,

blackness, and *me*. I do so in order to explore the domestic and intimate parts of James Baldwin's story, and places where he lived and wrote in his late life, and to link his national house-rebuilding efforts—his critique in virtually all of his works of U.S. national identity as exclusionary and divisive—to the complex politics and poetics of racialized, gendered, and sexualized social space. And while the three key terms that I plant as the cornerstones of this project—*home*, *blackness*, and *me*—easily apply to all of his oeuvre, and do so as much as the parallel, organizational triad of terms I have chosen for the first part of this introduction (matter, material, and metaphor), I am especially interested in deploying them all to read, as well as to read them *through*, the works that Baldwin created during the last and most underappreciated decade and a half of his life, the period of 1971–87. These works comprise the young-adult novel *If Beale Street Could Talk*; an essay collection on popular culture and cinema, *The Devil Finds Work*; his last novel spanning Harlem, the American South, and Europe, *Just above My Head*; an essay-reportage on children's murders in Atlanta, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*; and his last unpublished but completed play, on which Baldwin collaborated with Walter Dallas, *The Welcome Table*. These later works, still underappreciated by critics and scholars, resulted from another prolific period in Baldwin's life that came after his Turkish decade of 1961–71, which was marked by creative experimentation and relative domestic stability.[26]

Baldwin spent the last sixteen years of his life living in a sprawling stone Provençal house in the village of St. Paul-de-Vence, then a rather remote and sleepy town, in the South of France. As the site of his late writing and the place where he donned the hat of homeowner and host to a rambling household, Chez Baldwin, as the house came to be called by local inhabitants and a multitude of visitors, became an organic part of the author's daily life. It was featured in autobiographic musings and letters, and inflected settings and characters in a variety of his published works, from novels and essays to magazine articles, and, most significantly, his last play. It also provided yet another healing location that, like Turkey before it, nurtured both the author and the man by offering a quiet haven in which to write and rest after the turbulent late 1960s, which were scarred by the assassinations of his Civil Rights Movement friends and his ailing health. The house also provided ample space(s) to entertain guests and host parties, and thus became a vibrant social hub that was as necessary to Baldwin as the long, solitary hours he spent at his typewriter in a secluded part in the back, which contained his study and living quarters.

Inspired by this space's material and metaphorical impact on the writer's life and works, *Me and My House* approaches Chez Baldwin as a central location and lens for reconstructing his biography during his final years in France, and for re-reading his late works that were created there. As the place where he finally put down roots, it also provides an indispensable context for reassessing the aesthetics and ethics involved in the representations of black domesticity in his works—themes that have not been explored at length and whose impact is key to recasting Baldwin's place in twentieth-century American letters from the vantage point of the second decade of the twenty-first century. It is in that house that Baldwin actually achieved what he identifies as his creative goal in a 1961 interview with Studs Terkel (marking his rising star as a black writer), gleaned from Bessie Smith's tragic and homeless "Backwater Blues," of "accept[ing] disaster" and "going beyond it." What is striking, too, is that by 1971, when Baldwin decided to move to St. Paul-de-Vence, as much as in 1948 when he first left the United States, this statement echoed his general situation as an African American writer who partially chose, and partially was forced, to live most of his creative life away from his homeland due to the doubled otherness of his race and sexuality.

According to Edward Said, who describes committed intellectuals as always having to contend with exile, Baldwin also owes his inability to reside in the United States to his "intellectual's consciousness . . . a spirit in opposition, rather than in accommodation." While saving his life, quite literally, as Baldwin claims in "Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone," his initial departure from his family in Harlem, his home life in various places abroad, and later his ambivalent arrivals in the national house on his trips back all marked him forever as a witness. According to Said, Baldwin's practice of "witnessing" as a black intellectual means he is in perpetual exile—in both *material* terms, due to his inability to live and work in the United States, and *metaphorical* terms, due to his dissenting mind and revolutionary writing—inhabiting a terrain that cannot be pinned down or domesticated. This kind of situation, Said explains, "grips me because the romance, the interest, the challenge of intellectual life is to be found in dissent against the status quo at the time when the struggle on behalf of underrepresented and disadvantaged groups seems so unfairly weighted against them."[27]

Said qualifies his rather romantic, heroic, and masculinized definition of Baldwin as an intellectual in exile with a detailed explanation of his practice of witnessing that is worth quoting at length for its accuracy in summing up

Baldwin's development and his late career, when he was out of favor with American cultural elites on both sides of the proverbial color line, no matter his vast accomplishments and intellectual prowess:

> Witnessing a sorry state of affairs when one is not in power is by no means a monotonous, monochromatic activity. It involves what Foucault once called "a relentless erudition," scouring alternative sources, exhuming buried documents, reviving forgotten (or abandoned) histories. It involves a sense of the dramatic and of the insurgent, making a great deal of one's rare opportunities to speak, catching the audience's attention, being better at wit and debate than one's opponents. And there is something fundamentally unsettling about intellectuals who have neither offices to protect nor territory to consolidate and guard; self irony is therefore more frequent than pomposity, directness more than hemming and hawing. But . . . such representations by intellectuals will neither make them friends in high places nor win them official honors. It is a lonely condition, yes, but . . . a better one than a gregarious tolerance for the way things are.[28]

Baldwin, whose origins (mere generations away from slavery), dire poverty, and complex family situation prevented him from ever attending college in the United States, was "relentlessly erudite" as a self-taught genius; as I show throughout *Me and My House*, Baldwin redefined the very meanings of "intellectual" and "exile" for the late twentieth century with his intense focus on identity as always forged at the crossroads of race, gender, class, sexuality, religion, language, and, indeed, domesticity and social space.

Key to that redefinition is the triad of terms at the center of my project: *home*, *blackness*, and *me*. Put more abstractly, alternatively, even alliteratively—the inextricable interweaving in Baldwin's life and works of *space*, *story*, and *self*—these terms help to explain the exorbitant price his vocation exacted from him as both a private individual and a public, transnational, black queer American intellectual. While his public persona has received much attention, his private and intimate battles and vicissitudes of domestic life have not been much scrutinized outside of the biographies. As *Me and My House* shows, it is impossible to fully assess Baldwin's long-term design and desire as a transnational, black queer witness to rebuild and refurbish—if not at times demolish and build anew—the racialized American national house, without a close examination of his private life and his longings for domestic havens, for a stable love life, and, at times,

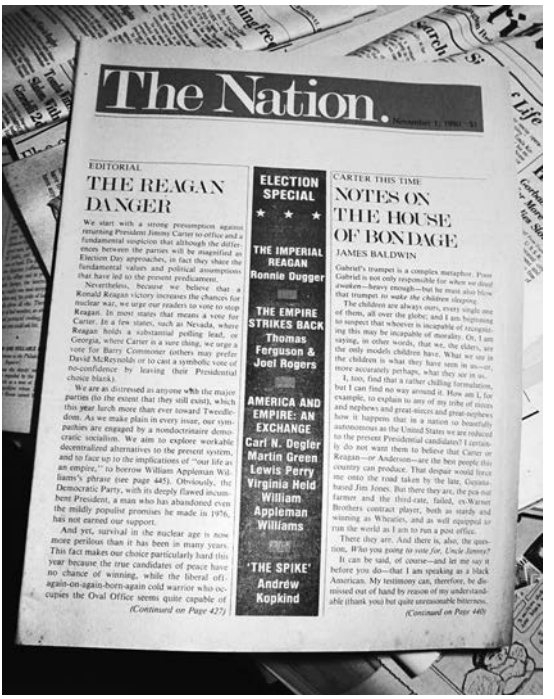
even for children and a partner/coparent, something he would admit to only the closest of friends.

That insistence on always connecting the public and the private, evident in "Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone," on always making the personal political, is clearly his invention and necessity as a survivor and exile as much as it may have been inflected by his reading of women writers, whose books filled his library in St. Paul-de-Vence. Coming as it does in his earlier works, which preceded the second wave of feminism by a couple of decades, and with even more force in his later ones, this approach makes his rhetoric chock-full of autobiographical, even autoethnographic, vignettes—an intriguing precursor to what feminist critics would later embrace as "feminine" modes of writing.[29] In that sense, Baldwin must be approached as a writer whose works engage with both genre and gender experimentation, and *Me and My House* explores this theme in relationship to the modes of domesticity that enabled and nurtured his art.

DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, OR WRITING BLACKNESS THROUGH SPACE, STORY, AND SELF

> It is terror that informs the American political and social scene—the terror of leaving the house of bondage. It isn't a terror of seeing *black* people leave the house of bondage, for white people think that they *know* this cannot *really* happen. . . . What the house of bondage accomplished for . . . the classic white American was the destruction of his moral sense . . . [and] his sense of reality and, therefore, his sense of white people had to be as compulsively one-dimensional as his vision of blacks. . . . White Americans have been one another's jailers for generations, and the attempt at individual maturity is the loneliest and rarest of the American endeavors.
>
> **—"Notes on the House of Bondage"**

In the essay "Notes on the House of Bondage," which appeared on the front page of *The Nation* magazine on November 1, 1980, Baldwin speaks "as a black American." Given that he often alternates this point of view with deeply autobiographical approaches, *Me and My House* juxtaposes Baldwin's personal, and in some ways not at all representative (though in others definitely so), story with that of "black domesticity" broadly conceived. In doing so, it argues for the centrality to narrative representations of identity within and without the United States of what Baldwin's works articulate as the always-



1.5. *The Nation* magazine with Baldwin's essay "Notes on the House of Bondage" listed on the cover (1980). Photo by author, 2014.

racialized social space, and specifically the realm of the domicile, which is private and intimate, gendered, sexualized, and inflected by religion, class, and region. Historically complex and contested, and often unspoken, given the hegemony of mythic-heroic narratives of American democracy, the realms of the house and home—conceived both as material structures located geographically and as a metaphorically personalized set of meanings and sense of place—have had a significant bearing on larger narratives of twentieth-century U.S. (national and imperial, as well as private and intimate) notions of identity.

In the essay "Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown" (1950), written as he was nearing his third year of exile in France, Baldwin passionately affirms that since black Americans' "blood is in their soil," they and their white counterparts are part of the same national family and home. He also sees them as on their way together, literally "in the same boat," to gain "their own identity" as a multiracial nation. At the same time, he emphasizes that the "American Negro" has a unique story to tell as well as a particular goal to "make peace with himself [herself] and the many thousands gone before him [her]." Baldwin cautions, though, that the whole nation must embark on the journey of self-discovery (PT, 39).[30] And while, given the American historical

record, one cannot expect "overwhelming changes" very soon, the national house must be shared, and its inhabitants must embrace their divergent stories of arrival, and acknowledge and contest the separate and unequal spaces behind its mythic façade of democracy and freedom. By 1980, in "Notes on the House of Bondage," he identifies whiteness as shackling national mythology and individual self-understanding.

Since slavery, the brutal, white man-made history of over a century of Jim Crow segregation, black codes, lynchings, and mob rule that targeted black bodies (along with Native Americans, Jews, Italians, Asians, and Mexicans) in American cities north and south have been etching tragic, racialized spatial knowledge onto the bodies and minds of African Americans, and all bodies of color, as well as on those marked "other" due to gender or sexual identity.[31] In her essay on the complex engendering of the racialized grammar of American identity that originated in the Middle Passage, Hortense Spillers refers to the "undecipherable markings on the captive body [that] render a kind of hieroglyphics of the flesh whose severe disjunctures come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color." Such erasure of humanity, cultural specificity, and, of course, individuality and visibility is part of what the Middle Passage brought about as the "dehumanizing, ungendering and defacing . . . project," in which "the human cargo of a slave vessel—in the fundamental effacement and remission of African family and proper names—offers a counter-narrative to notions of the domestic."[32]

Historically, in western cultures the rhetoric of domesticity has been embroiled with that of national culture, middle classes, affect, and life writing, and until fairly recently it was largely cast as the exclusive domain of women and the feminine. While the ways in which domestic burdens hampered female participation in political and social life outside of the home have been explored prodigiously by Friedrich Engels, they were also interrogated by Dutch-speaking Sojourner Truth, cosmopolitan Frederick Douglass, and anarchist Emma Goldman, not to mention Harriet Jacobs, Ann Petry, Gwendolyn Brooks, or Toni Morrison. More recently, they inspired the writings of the second wave of U.S. feminist and literary critics like Ann Douglas, Nina Baym, or Susan Gubar and Sandra Gilbert, to name just a few.[33] Following their critiques, scholars like Farah J. Griffin, Lauren Berlant, Melvin Dixon, Amy Kaplan, Ann Stoler, Brian Massumi, Ann Cvetkovich, Saidiya Hartman, Phil Deloria, Laura Wexler, and Kathleen Stewart, who toil in the fields of cultural, visual, and literary studies, history, or anthropology, have focused on the links among widely diverse domestic cultures and practices

within the broad fields encompassing the U.S. empire, transatlantic slavery, Native American studies, settler colonialism, and African Diaspora travel writing.

In African American studies, black feminist scholars like Spillers and Barbara Christian, as well as Hazel Carby, Patricia Williams, Valerie Smith, Barbara Smith, bell hooks, or Deborah McDowell, not to mention Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Nikki Giovanni, and Toni Morrison in their roles as poets, novelists, critics, and spokespersons, have argued for crafting new idioms and grassroots theoretical approaches to the dramatically different experience of domesticity's representation by slaves and their descendants. Often, as Christian does, they include warnings about the unequal gender representation, patriarchal machismo of Black Power nationalism, and mixed blessings of "the race for theory." The domestic sphere has also been interrogated in post-Reconstruction black women's writing by Claudia Tate; as pertaining to black geographies of struggle and women's literature by Karla Holloway, Katherine McKittrick, and Clyde Woods; and in terms of gender roles and dynamics, photographic representations across the color line, "safe spaces for women," and in relation to the emergence of house-based, racialized phenomenology and ontology by scholars like Siobhan Somerville, Shawn Michelle Smith, Charles Scruggs, Patricia Hill Collins, E. Patrick Johnson, and Robert Reid-Pharr.[34] All of these explorations—the vast number of publications on the emergence of the Victorian interior, white suburbs, or urban housing notwithstanding—confirm that interest and investment in all matters domestic are far from exhausted.

Surprisingly, however, the myriad roles that domesticity and its representations play in Baldwin's works have not yet been interrogated with any consistency.[35] One reason may be that he is a male writer, and thus part of African American literature's masculine "big three," along with Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, and literary critical approaches, until recently caught up in traditional binaries of gender and separate spheres, were not expected to be concerned with that theme.[36] Another reason may be his queer sexuality or bisexuality, and the scarcity of work on nonnormative domesticities—a juxtaposition of terms that to some may sound like an oxymoron.[37] Most obviously, perhaps, while images of his childhood home life haunt many of Baldwin's published works, and his major fictional characters and autobiographical personae in the essays often speak about the meaning of home and familial spaces and a longing for domestic havens, there are no material sites directly related to him in this country or anywhere else.[38]

Apart from the house he purchased for his mother on 71st Street in New York City in 1965, still owned by the Baldwin family, and the partial ruin of the only house he considered home in his late life—Chez Baldwin in St. Paul-de-Vence in France—there is no place to locate, study, reenact, or even stage a simulacrum of this author's domestic life.

My examination of Baldwin's approaches to domesticity in *Me and My House* shows that he understood very well that architecture and social space were indeed all about race—the critical lens gravely missing from the most famous western accounts—though not necessarily about "race" understood as a synonym for "black." For the literary and theoretical milieu in which Baldwin wrote and theorized about blackness and domesticity in the 1940s through the 1980s was filled with discourses on social space, identity, and narrative by such philosophers and literary theorists as Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre, Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, and Michel de Certeau.[39] While often concerned with class and materialist approaches to history, culture, and identity, these men were in fact constructing spatiality, and specifically the private space of the home, as a manifestation of whiteness as a presumed modern, unmarked racial category.

As I show in chapter 1, "Foundations, Façades, and Faces: Through the Glass Blackly," and in the four chapters that follow, Baldwin was one of the earliest theorists of whiteness and its desperate need for blackness as its reverse—echoing such important African Diaspora intellectuals as W. E. B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, C. L. R. James, or Édouard Glissant—and he also conceived of race as a complex site of difference, located experience, and subject of spatial politics and object of domestic desire decades before academics began articulating it in those terms. *Me and My House* carefully situates Baldwin's writing on domesticity in the rich, and often confounding and controversial, historical, social, and literary theoretical context of the international intellectual scene in which he moved between the 1940s and 1980s, at the same time as it refers to the latest work on race, geography, and social space by the aforementioned American and African American studies scholars, as well as those toiling in the field of architecture and architectural history (e.g., Darrel Fields, John M. Vlach, Dolores Hayden, Dell Upton, Mabel O. Wilson, Craig L. Wilkins, Dianne Harris, Lesley N. N. Lokko, Craig E. Barton, and William Gleason).

Steeped in this rich context of wide-ranging scholarship, *Me and My House* revolves around three large, loaded, and interlinked sets of concepts that illustrate the interdependence of cultural identity and the spatial and temporal contexts of home in which it unfolds as a process both material

and metaphorical: matter, material, and metaphor / home, blackness, and me / *space*, *story*, and *self*. These three conceptual triads refer, broadly and with much literary critical license, to the intersections of race, sexuality, and gender with the politics, poetics, and practices of social space, language, and narrative forms, as well as to various representations of identity in literary and other cultural texts that compose the rich context of Baldwin's works and life story. They function as an animated, rolling triangle, with sometimes *space*, sometimes *self*, and sometimes *story* and attendant contexts appearing as a fulcrum, thus demonstrating that, like identity and language, the politics of social space are socially constructed processes that are always in progress and always have material consequences, from the spaces of the nation to those of the home, the bedroom, and the human heart. Given its immediate contiguity with visual culture, the triad of *space*, *story*, and *self* can be seen as well as an optical device or prism that helps us see through and beyond (and indeed makes it possible to reject and refract, the way prisms do with light) the reductive binary rhetoric that for too long has dictated how Americans conceive of their identities and surroundings, how they describe and represent them, and how they imagine and talk about themselves as minds and bodies.

All three concepts are powerfully implicated in Baldwin's essay "Me and My House," which inspired the title of this book and first appeared in *Harper's* in 1955. Later renamed "Notes of a Native Son," the essay, constituting his first artistic manifesto, took him a dozen years to gestate following the events of 1943 that it describes. Its elegant harmonizing of autobiography, or life writing, passionate political argument, and brilliant social commentary has made it one of his most often-read and discussed texts. It also anticipates Baldwin's later authorial comment to Studs Terkel on Bessie Smith's homeless "Backwater Blues" as carrying a "*fantastic kind of understatement* in it. It's the way I want to write." That later comment links the writer's earlier thoughts on exile from the United States that inflected "Me and My House" (he was living in France on and off during 1948–57 and was about to leave for Turkey in 1961) with the necessity of being an exiled artist, much like Smith's singing persona. By 1961, then, Baldwin embraces Bessie Smith's blues message that the black artist must follow her or his vocation, even if its price is homelessness, abandonment, and despair, the price he anticipates already in 1955 in "Me and My House."[40]

The opening paragraph of that essay, much quoted by scholars, demonstrates the narrative entanglements of identity with social space and its practices and representations:

> On the twenty-ninth of July, in 1943, my father died. On the same day, a few hours later, his last child was born. Over a month before this, while all our energies were concentrated in waiting for these events, there had been, in Detroit, one of the bloodiest race riots of the century. A few hours after my father's funeral, while he lay in state in the undertaker's chapel, a race riot broke out in Harlem. On the morning of the third of August, we drove my father to the graveyard through a wilderness of smashed plate glass. . . . The day of my father's funeral had also been my nineteenth birthday. As we drove into the graveyard, the spoils of injustice, anarchy, discontent, and hatred were all around us. It seemed to me that God himself had devised, to mark my father's end, the most sustained and brutally dissonant of codas. (PT, 126)

At this point in his career, having published a novel and a play, and about to publish his first collection of essays that opens with this inimitable piece, Baldwin masterfully brings together his *story*, or autobiographical references to his childhood, relatives, and coming of age in Harlem in a large and impoverished family dominated by an unforgiving patriarch, with representations of *space*, or laconic reporting on current events in his home country and native city that has just witnessed a race riot. All the while, he is also contextualizing his father's funeral and its effects on his family and, most important, articulating the contours of his new *self* as a budding writer.

In this essay, the narrator's development and self-expression as an African American and an artist, and as a young man who must understand his lifelong struggle with his church and religiously fanatical stepfather—with whom as he admits he "got on badly"—are all linked to a moment of rapture that has everything to do with blackness, domesticity, gender, and religion (PT, 128). Carefully foreshadowed in the opening, that moment comes at the end of the essay, with the narrator affirming his break from his father's religious dogma—from the paternal "house" defined by a biblical citation from Joshua 24:15: "'But as for me and my house,' my father had said, 'we will serve the Lord'" (PT, 144–45). Baldwin now claims a right to his own "house" as a writer, the right to a separate life and identity, and the power to author his own story. He recalls preaching the same biblical passage as a teenager in the pulpit, and "proudly giving it an interpretation different from my father's" (PT, 145).

The closing words of his essay become a motto for his works to come. The art that will issue from the "House of James Baldwin" will result in new

mythologies of blackness, new stories, selves, and modes of dwelling in the world that the writer must forge on his own:

> It began to seem that one would have to hold in the mind forever two ideas that seemed to be in opposition. The first idea was acceptance, the *acceptance*, totally without rancor, of life as it is, and men as they are: in the light of this idea, it goes without saying that injustice is a commonplace. But this did not mean that one could be complacent, for the second idea was of equal power: that one must never, in one's own life, accept these injustices as commonplace but must *fight* them with all one's strength. This fight begins, however, in the heart and it now had been laid to my charge to keep *my own heart* free of hatred and despair. (PT, 145, emphases added)

The "acceptance" and "fight" Baldwin refers to in this brilliant coda to "Me and My House" may seem contradictory; yet like homeless despair and creativity in Smith's "Backwater Blues," they are also inextricably connected and, paradoxically, generative. It is through both accepting and fighting such a contradiction, or "intimation" as he calls it in the next sentence, that Baldwin's narrator can engage in his craft and the attendant labor of creating a separate self and new modes of dwelling through authorship. By embracing the contradictions of identity and finding a place to write about it, he is able to become "an honest man and a good writer," as he defines his mission in the "Autobiographical Notes" that open *Notes of a Native Son*, the first published volume of his essays.

EXPLODING THE COLOR LINE

By 1977, these ideas ripen into "Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone," where Baldwin returns to the paradox of "acceptance" and "fight," though he now sees it as "a demarcation line," or "my apprehension of, and, therefore, my responsibility for, my own experience: the chilling vice versa of what I have made of my experience and what that experience had made of me" (PT, 645). In both of these essays, spanning a dozen years, Baldwin rewrites and complicates for the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries the spatial implications of Du Bois's famous concepts of "double consciousness" and the "color line." Baldwin is, of course, indebted to Du Bois's rhetoric concerning the "problem of the twentieth century" and, in a sense, continues the older writer's project of black (male) intellectual and artistic uplift while finding his foothold as a man of letters between the self-consciousness and

hypervisibility forced upon his perceptions by the hue of his epidermis, or what Du Bois calls "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others."

At the same time, however, Baldwin complicates, questions, and ultimately explodes Du Bois's binary concept of "two-ness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body" by making that body located, spatially contingent, gendered, sexualized, queer or bisexual, and engaged in storytelling that entails rewriting and reshaping the story of his life as much as the story of his people.[41] By the 1960s, Baldwin increasingly explores being a black American as an overwhelming trial for the individual, and from that moment on he views blackness as a complex and ever-changing construct, representation, locality, and performance. From the race man, he becomes a "kind of poet," as he names himself in Pakay's film, one whose 1970s and 1980s works reshape Du Bois's double consciousness and color line, the former through the introduction of the located, dynamic, and ever-changing phenomenological "me" that complements, revises, and expands the "African" and the "American" of Du Bois's model; the latter, by insisting on the constructed nature, in both material and metaphorical senses, of the older intellectual's very space of the color line, which Baldwin sees as nothing more than a white invention, problem, and responsibility with all its grave and devastating implications globally, locally, and individually.

A superb example of how this works in both instances can be found in a fragment from "Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone," where Baldwin contemplates the relationship between his subjectivity as an African American and those of the French and African nationals, and where he declares the complex reality that things and people, not to mention our temporal and spatial interpretations of them and of ourselves, are never quite what they seem:

> I will owe the French a debt forever . . . because, during one of my passionately insane barroom brawls, I suddenly realized that the Frenchman I was facing had not the remotest notion—and could not possibly have had the remotest notion—of the tension in my mind between *Orléans*, a French city, and New Orleans, where my father had been born, between *louis*, the coin, and *Louis*, the French king, for whom was named the state of Louisiana, the result of which celebrated purchase had been the death of so many black people. Neither did any African, as far as I could tell, at that moment of my own time and space, have any notion of this tension and torment. But what I began to see was that, if they had no notion of

> *my* torment, I certainly had no notion of theirs, and that I was treating people exactly as I had been treated at home. (PT, 645)

This instance of spatial-temporal, geopolitical, and historical analysis goes hand in hand with life writing and self-criticism, both mightily admirable in someone of middle age—Baldwin was fifty-three when that essay was published—and of established authorial stature and considerable international fame. The narrator's admission of humility and what seems to be alienation in his predicament as a black American in the (post)colonial world, and his insistence on constantly revising his subject position, is revolutionary in both its acceptance of the self as a function of change and its spatial-temporal flux. This brilliant passage also anticipates—in the magical way artists sometimes intuitively, sometimes concretely, do ahead of theorists—the notion of cultural identity as a complex process entwining Africa, Europe, and the Americas.[42]

The depth and focus of Baldwin's vision in "Every Good-Bye Ain't Gone" come from his intense scrutiny of the world around him, his voracious reading and autodidacticism, and his often punishing self-examination as a writer for whom the reinterpretation of his own story was an ongoing project. Baldwin's remark about the African in the scene of his "passionately insane barroom brawls" links his African American narrator with his paternal ancestral roots in New Orleans *and* separates him from the diasporic African witness in France. Because the nameless African does not share the narrator's affective state, or "at that moment of my own time and space, [he did not] have any notion of this tension and torment," they cannot really know each other or share anything purely on the basis of their epidermal hues. As McKittrick writes, "The geographies of slavery, postslavery, and black dispossession provide opportunities to notice that the right to be human carries in it a history of racial encounters and innovative black diaspora practices that . . . spatialize acts of survival."[43] The only bond the African American and the African share in Baldwin's essay is that they are both such survivors. They do not share anything else, not even the reaction to the immediate situation in the bar, for each sees it differently and cannot comprehend the other's vision. In this rich context, the narrator's realization that the Frenchman he is confronting is even more clueless concerning the narrator's "tension and torment," and "could not possibly have had the remotest notion" about his feelings, amounts to a breakthrough equal to that which Baldwin mapped out in the conclusion to "Me and My House." Once again, his self expands his story in the spaces of confrontation with its earlier incarnations.

This description of a situation in which Baldwin's narrator finds himself estranged from everyone else around him, and thus rediscovers the fact of his uniqueness and alienation from all others and even himself, can benefit from a reading in the context of Julia Kristeva's approach to the concept of foreignness as gendered difference. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, she describes it as located in the metaphor of historical representations, as well as the visceral experience of the "foreigner": "Strangely, the foreigner lives within us: he is the hidden *face* of our identity, the *space* that directs our abode, the *time* in which understanding and affinity founder. By recognizing him [*sic!*] within ourselves, we are spared detesting him in himself. . . . The foreigner comes in when the consciousness of my difference arises, and he disappears when we all acknowledge ourselves as foreigners, unamenable to bonds and communities."[44] Baldwin was certainly familiar with French existentialism and Albert Camus's famous novel *L'Étranger* (*The Stranger*; 1942), in which a white Frenchman kills an unnamed Arab man in Algiers, and whose intertextual echoes we may discern in Kristeva's description. Baldwin's take on the foreigner is closer to Kristeva's than to Camus's, though, for it triangulates among the black American narrator, the (postcolonial) African, and the Frenchman, who are all caught up in the shifting postwar world, where all binaries are suspect and challenged. Thus while Baldwin's narrator in "Every Good-Bye" may be alienated, he recognizes himself as part of a community at home, in the United States. As someone who has lived both there and in the world, he can also read other people along with himself; he can envisage new, alternative communities.

In a subsequent passage from that essay, space, story, and self come together again as Baldwin embraces this knowledge and experience as a tool that can make life better for the next generation, or "the children":

> I have been in and out of my country . . . for a very long time. . . . This is not a bitter statement. It comes . . . out of love, for I am thinking of the children. I watch . . . French and Algerian children trying to become friends with each other, reacting to, but not yet understanding, the terrors of their parents, and very far indeed from having any notion of the terrors of the state. They have no way of knowing that the state is menace and shaken to the degree, precisely, that they, themselves, the presumed victims, or at least, the wards of the state, make manifest their identity. . . . They cannot possibly know that they, ex-slave and ex-master, cannot be used as their fathers were used—*that all identities, in short, are in question, are about to be made new*. (PT, 645, emphasis added)

In blending the autobiographical and cosmopolitan viewpoints, this passage repeats the tenets of the one in which the African American, the Frenchman, and the African meet yet cannot connect as if caught up in a bad joke.[45] Baldwin's inexact mirroring of the barroom scene onto the scene in which his narrator observes the French and Algerian children playing together while, implicitly, recalling the children of his own family back in the United States, elucidates his faith in humanity and the redeeming power of love for "the stranger" in the larger, human home. If we approach this passage as an approximate rewriting of the dire conclusions of Camus's novel, it can be read as making a clean and deliberate break with nihilism and existentialism, substituting Baldwin's vision of black queer humanism, or complex love, one that has the power to work both in the United States and in France, where the Algerians struggle to claim their postcolonial citizenship just as black Americans have been trying to claim theirs.[46]

The two passages from "Every Good-Bye" also further explicate the ways social space functions for Baldwin as a "field of vision" or, as Irit Rogoff explains it in *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture*, a realm of visual culture that has been constituted in traditional western philosophy "out of processes of negative differentiation—that whiteness needs blackness to constitute itself as whiteness, that masculinity needs femininity or feminized masculinity to constitute its masculinity in agreed-upon normative modes, that civility and bourgeois respectability need the stereotypical, unruly 'others.'"[47] Baldwin's barroom scene shows, first, how that model of binarily racialized perception works and holds his African American narrator hostage, and, second, how that narrator realizes its workings and refuses to be its victim by imagining and accepting the unique perspectives of all the characters involved in the scene. His realization illustrates the ever-present differentiated nature of space, which is "always sexual or racial . . . always constituted out of circulating capital and . . . always subject to the invisible boundary lines which determine inclusions and exclusions . . . populated with the unrecognized obstacles which never allow us to actually 'see' what is out there beyond what we expect to find."[48] These obstacles can be surmounted, Baldwin's narrator realizes, when he is able to see the playing children both as the ex-masters and ex-slaves *and* as the children of the new world, whose imagination and capacity for love can break down historical scripts, indeed, can make "all identities . . . new."

Baldwin's astounding capacity to remain hopeful arises from his faith in and mastery of language, whose embroilment with spatiality is at the center of what the feminist architect Leslie Kanes Weisman defines as semantic

mirroring of architecture and idiom: "Space, like language, is socially constructed, and like the syntax of language, the spatial arrangements of our buildings and communities reflect and reinforce the nature of gender, race, and class relations in a society."[49] This affinity between what Weisman calls the "man-made" environment and discourse describing and designing it can be linked as well to a broader concept of human geography as "bound up in, rather than simply a backdrop to, social and environmental processes," as Katherine McKittrick and Clyde Woods argue. As they explain in *Black Geographies and the Politics of Place*, as the "materiality of the environment is racialized by contemporary demographic patterns as shaped by historic precedents," it is clear that "black human geographies are implicated in the production of space"—a statement with which Henri Lefebvre might agree, no matter how little his own classically Marxist project of *The Production of Space* deals explicitly with the issues of race.[50]

The alliterative space, story, and self triad at the center of *Me and My House* avoids such omissions by celebrating Baldwin's rewriting of a spatially contingent self and highlighting how his oeuvre defies binary notions of mobile, transitory, and in-dwelled identity. By turning my multivalent analytic lens on the black domesticity that propels both his works and life story, I also hope to fill a gaping absence in twentieth-century American literary history.[51] Among many writers who have lived away from the United States, or traveled in Europe following World War II—Richard Wright, Frank Yerby, Ernest Hemingway, Chester Himes, Adrienne Rich, Edmund White, Audre Lorde, John Ashbery, and Samuel Delaney, to mention just a few—Baldwin's ways of dwelling seem the least examined, and his material legacy (places where he lived, his possessions, furniture, aesthetic tastes) the least known. While American culture has usually embraced the architectural and spatial manifestations of its rich literary heritage by either creating museums to visit or providing simulacra of spaces where the best of national literature was created, the preponderance of writers' houses open to the public today makes it strikingly clear that African Americans have not been counted as part of this heritage until very recently.

Frederick Douglass's house in Baltimore, Maryland, and Alex Haley's in Henning, Tennessee, are notable exceptions to this rule concerning American writers' house-museums. The American Writers Museum, which opened in Chicago in 2017, will perhaps change this perception by creating a space for Baldwin and other writers of color.[52] For now, however, the places that nurtured this black queer writer, the dwellings that nourished his many

selves, "all those strangers called Jimmy Baldwin," have not been, and most likely will not be, preserved outside this book. *Me and My House* examines the reasons for such erasures of Baldwin's domesticity in the context of his stylistic innovations, theorizations of gender and sexuality, and the rich and exciting new scholarship on this writer.

AT HOME WITH BALDWIN STUDIES

Much has changed in scholarship on Baldwin during this book's gestation, with the second decade of the twenty-first century ushering in his so-called renaissance. Given this explosion of popular and academic interest, we must avoid Reid-Pharr's dire prediction that, "as a subject established *within* the practice of literary and cultural criticism, James Baldwin . . . seems shockingly . . . dead," engaging instead in contextualized, black aesthetics–focused, and rigorously methodological and contextualized analyses.[53] Most of the scholars whose work has helped me to think through this project agree that early critical approaches to Baldwin's works unhelpfully pigeonhole him as either a gay or black writer, a novelist or essayist, a civil rights activist or expatriate, thus demonstrating how fragmented and misunderstood he was by white and black critics alike, many of whom could not divorce their judgment of his works from their views on race, sexuality, or his lifestyle.[54] Among earlier works, of note and lasting value are Rosa Bobia's *The Critical Reception of James Baldwin in France* (1998); Horace Porter's *Stealing the Fire: The Art and Protest of James Baldwin* (1989), which anoints Baldwin as a Promethean descendant of Henry James; and Trudier Harris's *Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin* (1985), whose feminist readings pave the way for subsequent gender-, sexuality-, and queer studies–based scholarship.

Edited volumes as venues for diverse scholarship include the seminal *James Baldwin Now* (1999) by Dwight McBride and D. Quentin Miller's *Re-viewing James Baldwin* (2000), both reanimating Baldwin's oeuvre for the new millennium while employing cultural studies approaches.[55] *James Baldwin and Toni Morrison* (2006; edited by Lovalerie King and Lynn Orilla Scott) ponders his multivalent, ancestral influence on the younger Morrison and their ongoing dialogue and labor as pioneers who gained "a broad national and international audience for" the African American literary tradition,[56] while Douglas Field's *Historical Guide to James Baldwin* (2009) offers rich perspectives on his works and interdisciplinary resources for teaching him on all levels. Examining the significance of his transatlantic identity, involvement

with the theater, religion, music, activism, and immigration, Cora Kaplan and Bill Schwarz's *James Baldwin: America and Beyond* (2011) and A. Scott Henderson and P. L. Thomas's *James Baldwin: Challenging Authors* (2014) offer exciting forums for transatlantic scholarly exchanges. Michele Elam's *Cambridge Companion to James Baldwin* (2015) provides indispensable evidence of diverse and nuanced approaches by deftly locating Baldwin in the contemporary cultural landscape and across multiple academic fields.

Among single-authored books, Katharine Lawrence Balfour's *The Evidence of Things Not Said* (2001) and Lynn Orilla Scott's *Witness to the Journey: James Baldwin's Later Fiction* (2002) delve into new areas—Baldwin's relationship with legal discourses and the profound significance of his neglected late writing—while Clarence Hardy's *James Baldwin's God* (2003) examines Baldwin's deployment of scripture and black church practices. My own *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade* (2009) links his most productive period to an unexpected, complex, and unexplored location, and D. Quentin Miller's *A Criminal Power* (2012) applies the rich context of race studies, critical law studies, and prison literature to his works. Matt Brim's *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination* (2014) showcases the writer's embrace of and blind spots about his representations of black, gay love, while Douglas Field's *All Those Strangers* (2015) illuminates Baldwin's underresearched engagement with the Left, his FBI files, and his relationship to Africa. Edward M. Pavlić's *Who Can Afford to Improvise?* (2016) is a poetically realized reconsideration of Baldwin's improvisational style and musical influences by jazz greats, while Jules B. Farber's *James Baldwin: Escape from America*, *Exile in Provence* (2016) and Herb Boyd's *Baldwin's Harlem* (2008) appeal to nonacademic audiences with reminiscences from various celebrities and family members, interviews, anecdotes, and local events.

At times confounded by the sheer volume and versatility of the great man's output, these exciting studies nevertheless help us reassess the great complexity and richness of Baldwin's contributions, as well as his relevance today. Echoing them, Hilton Als wrote a vignette in the *New Yorker* about the impact that "Down at the Cross" (1962) had on that magazine, emphasizing Baldwin's profound devotion to his craft: "What sometimes got lost was an understanding of the sheer talent and imagination that had gone into the piece, the knowledge that change always begins with the word."[57] Positioned under a black-and-white photograph of Baldwin—sitting down, leaning over a table toward someone unseen, gesturing with open hands, the inevitable cigarette held in the right, his face both serious and on the brink of a smile; a glass of water and coffee cup in front of him, his body framed by the

fireplace and furnishings of his upstairs living room in St. Paul-de-Vence—Als's praise of Baldwin's authorial mastery displaces the writer in time by using a photo from the 1970s to discuss his seminal work from the 1960s, when he was in fact living mostly in Turkey.

While Baldwin purists may be distraught by this temporal and locational inaccuracy, I like it for showcasing the writer in his favorite element needed to do his best work; as he does in his books, we critics, too, can sometimes take productive liberties with chronology.[58] Als's critique is important, too, because it praises the author's style as inflected by sexuality: "Writing this piece ["Down at the Cross"], with, at times, a kind of gay humor and slyness, allowed Baldwin to expose the church's smoke and mirrors, intended to keep black people on their knees, held down by piety and ghetto-think." Als writes that Baldwin's words promised that "the world would be white no longer, and there would be no forgiveness for those who have equated race with power at the expense of others." To Marlon Ross, he "proffered the most devastating critique of the racist heteronorm in a wide range of genres," through a highly performative gesture of "allowing his sissified intelligence to be staged for the public eye through the exhibition of his out-of-gender person."[59] I see such performativity in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, whose Leo Proudhammer becomes an alternative, radical American hero/antihero—someone whom neither the white establishment nor Black Power could support.[60] As Dixon argues, in their multivalent thematics, Baldwin's novels revise a wide swath of African American literary history, from "Harlem Renaissance authors like Jean Toomer and Claude McKay . . . [to] Ellison, Wright, Jones, and Hurston."[61] While I agree, I also see him devising a craft that was both receptive to influence and uniquely his own.

The literary force of Baldwin's craft pervades new African American writing. In *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), Claudia Rankine ponders the price one pays for existing as a black person within a racist society. Evoking the tragic deaths of Trayvon Martin and many other black men, women, and children at the hands of police and others, and the never-ending spectacle of these deaths on the Internet, she counsels her readers, "[A] friend once told you there exists the medical term—John Henryism—for people exposed to stresses stemming from racism. They achieve themselves to death trying to dodge the build up of erasure. . . . The researcher who came up with the term, claimed the physiological costs were high. You hope by sitting in silence you are bucking the trend."[62] In 2013, Ta-Nehisi Coates, copying the form and style of Baldwin's *Fire Next Time*, writes about living in Baltimore while black in his National Book Award–winning *Between the World and Me*: "The streets transform

every ordinary day into a series of trick questions, and every incorrect answer risks a beatdown, a shooting, or a pregnancy. No one survives unscathed."[63]

Baldwin knew these costs well, and yet, as he told Yvonne Neverson in 1978, he had the capacity to imagine positive returns to the black artist's articulation of his or her own and their people's suffering, speaking of the "artist . . . [as] a disturber of the peace." This statement negates Addison Gayle's 1967 appraisal of Baldwin's message, that "salvation is impossible," anticipating that critic's rereading of the American black writer's central task a decade later as being the "master of the word . . . our most consummate politician," whose critics must devote themselves "not to spurious theories of art for art's sake, but to art for the sake of Black people everywhere."[64] Baldwin's vision's capaciousness accommodates political, moral, and aesthetic possibilities alike. He describes to Neverson "the beginning of the flowering which is something unprecedented" of the literary and visual arts by people of color all over the postcolonial world, thus confirming his interest in how their ideas of freedom, individuality, and creativity circulated outside the United States. That stance, as Ross notes, went both along with and against the separatism of some black nationalists who engaged in queer baiting.[65]

Though the likes of Eldridge Cleaver, Ishmael Reed, or LeRoi Jones / Amiri Baraka (until later) did not embrace Baldwin, he was in good company with African Diaspora artists active concurrently with him, such as Chinua Achebe, Gwendolyn Brooks, Ann Petry, Cecil Brown, Audre Lorde, Wole Soyinka, and Maya Angelou. Other writers who came of age around the time he achieved recognition and following his demise, such as Derek Walcott, Paule Marshall, Gloria Naylor, Nikki Giovanni, Quincy Troupe, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Jamaica Kincaid, Caryl Phillips, Zadie Smith, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, were often critical of race-based nationalisms and exclusionary and separatist notions of identity.[66] Usually grouped as part of the "big three" with Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, Baldwin lends himself to readings that not only place him as an outlier to this Olympian male trinity due to his class and sexuality, but also show him as deeply influenced by the writings and art of black women, whose visions of domesticity and the national house were often instrumental in crafting his approach.[67] And while it is impossible to prove that he read all the books by women writers, many of which I found in his surviving library, noting a few examples of such dialogic encounters makes it clear that Baldwin thought deeply about the typically feminine private and domestic spheres from the earliest moments of his career.

1.6. Chez Baldwin archive: Books by women writers (Morrison, etc.). Photo by author, 2014.

For example, *Go Tell It* and Gwendolyn Brooks's gripping novella tracing a black woman's life in segregated Chicago published the same year, *Maud Martha* (1953), read together exceedingly well. Opening up discussions on lower-class black masculinity in Baldwin's John Grimes, who tries to sweep and clean the omnipresent dust in his family's Harlem apartment, and femininity in Brooks's Maud Martha, who struggles against the mythic "roach," such readings help materialize the effects of never-ending dirt and poverty in segregated housing. In a similar vein, implying a need for a separate study, Ann Petry's *The Street* (1946) and *The Narrows* (1953) invite a reading with *Another Country* and *Beale Street*, while Gloria Naylor's *Women of Brewster Place* (1982) can be productively read in conversation with both *Beale Street* and *Just above My Head*. The protagonist of Toni Morrison's *Home* (2012) could be read alongside *Another Country*'s Rufus, as well as Hall and Leo from, respectively, *Just above My Head* and *Tell Me*.[68] Most important, in all of these works, Baldwin and his female contemporaries and descendants focus steadfastly on the realm of affect and emotion and its interactions with subjects who move in highly differentiated social spaces and fields of vision, whose perspectival access or lack thereof to domesticity often determines their demise or survival.[69]

Black writing requires heroic efforts, as Baldwin wrote about Lorraine Hansberry's strength and resilience in *To Be Young, Gifted, and Black* (1970), and he may have been describing himself: "It is not at all farfetched to suspect that what she saw contributed to the strain which killed her, for the effort to which Lorraine was dedicated is more than enough to kill a man."[70] Racism is deadly and spares no one; it is cruelly obvious why the name of today's civil rights movement group is Black Lives Matter.[71] Baldwin's strengths influenced many of his contemporaries and those who came to writing after his passing in addition to Rankine and Coates: Adrienne Rich, Amiri Baraka, Randall Kenan, Shay Youngblood, Alain Mabanckou, Brian Freeman, Suzan-Lori Parks, and many others.[72] His letter to his nephew and namesake in "My Dungeon Shook" (1963) can be read as a missive to the writers who followed him: "This is your home, . . . do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become" (PT, 336). Reminding the youth, "You come from a long line of great poets, some of the greatest poets since Homer," Baldwin reasserts the power of language and the power of art to change the world (albeit without giving women their due in this picture). And while his vision of America as a national house is far from optimistic, and his glimpses of private home spaces where those who do not fit normative narratives may find shelter are

rarely lasting, we need his rhetoric and stubborn faith in humanity more than ever. For while he was never romantic about his fellow Americans of all hues, he had faith in what some of them were capable of attaining.

VITRINES, FRAGMENTS, REASSEMBLED REMNANTS

> We have come to the end of a language and are now about the business of forging a new one.
> **—"Notes on the House of Bondage"**

> It's one thing to be aware of Miles Davis and quite another thing to know *where he comes from* and what sustains him. . . . The book, my book, and others come as a direct opposition of *the myth by Americans of black life and black music*. . . . The books prove them wrong, so they ignore the books.
> **—Baldwin, in Troupe, "Last Interview (1987)" (emphases added)**

At James Baldwin's last house in St. Paul-de-Vence, the mantelpieces, walls, and desktops were filled with many visual and textural arrangements that inspired his writing and nourished his complex aesthetic. His friend and interviewer Quincy Troupe remembers one of them vividly in a republished version of his last interview with the writer that took place at the house in November 1987, days before Baldwin's death:

> The many paintings and pieces of sculpture . . . a black pen-and-ink drawing of Nelson Mandela against an orange background, accompanied by a poem . . . an assemblage created by Jimmy's brother David in his honor. . . . The centerpiece was the citation of the French Legion of Honor . . . a sword and an old hunting rifle, both pointing toward the certificate . . . a black-and-white photograph of Jimmy, an abstract steel sculpture of an Indian . . . two crystal inkwells, a figure resembling a guitar, and an oversize ink pen. (JB, 80)[73]

I saw remnants of some of these collections when I visited that house in 2000, when I commenced my research. I wondered what stories they could tell, what new languages they were forging, as Baldwin lived the last years of his fierce creativity. When I returned to St. Paul-de-Vence in 2014, the house was empty, but I was fortunate to see what remained of Baldwin's possessions, and I surveyed a trove of objects that had been salvaged from Chez Baldwin before its loss to developers. These objects—the only archive of

1.7. Stacked artwork in storage. Photo by author, 2014.

James Baldwin's possessions other than his papers, which until recently have been kept under lock and key by his estate—had been kept in storage by a determined woman who could not bear to see them discarded, and whose story is among many that have inspired this book.[74]

The image opening this section displays a close-up of an arrangement that could have been the one Troupe describes—or what was left of it by 2000 when I took this photo—and was thus also likely made by Jimmy's younger brother, David Baldwin, who was a gifted artist in his own right and whose work adorned the house. A print of Richard Avedon's photographic montage hybridizing his own face and Baldwin's hung nearby, its edges curled with age and humidity. A colorful painting of a pregnant woman, created by David's son Daniel, Baldwin's beloved nephew whom he liked showing off in the village, served as a screen for the fireplace in the living room upstairs.

These leftover objects, art pieces, and adornments—books, journals, magazines, files of Xeroxed pages, vinyl records, and clippings that spilled over shelves and desktops throughout the house—were the only material archive remaining after James Baldwin's death in 1987. I was astounded that no one in his family wanted to claim them, but, then, scholarly desires for material preservation are more often than not at odds with those of estates, lawyers, and kin, not to mention archives and libraries. I am incredibly fortunate to have been able to see and document some of these material traces in this book on the inseparability of Baldwin's domestic and creative imaginations.

The eclectic archive that has inspired this project weaves in and out of Baldwin's writings, biographies, testimonies of friends and relatives, unpublished letters, interviews in various formats (including those on the Internet), and whatever remains of his widely conceived and still largely inaccessible legacy. As part of that legacy, I also engage with photographs that I took and impressions of his house in St. Paul-de-Vence in France that I wrote during my first visit there in 2000, as well as the leftover objects mentioned above that I was allowed to research in 2014 and thoroughly document in 2017. I include these discarded objects in this project to save and document whatever we may have left of the matter of Baldwin's life, while also honoring the inseparability of the material and metaphorical in his writings and life story. As I show in these pages, his connection to things and spaces is important for reassessing his complex legacy, especially his contribution to writing and rewriting the conundrum of black domesticity, whose full impact we have yet to acknowledge.

1.8. Daniel Baldwin's paintings in Jill Hutchinson's collection.
Photo by author, 2014.

In doing so, this book also honors Baldwin's call to honesty and confession, celebrating him as an extraordinary person and artist whose legacy, however incomplete at the moment, should be recognized as every American's ancestral right. Closely reading his various fragmented impressions of moments when the self comes into contact with social space to tell stories, the five chapters that follow are divided into subsections that work both independently and in tandem as assemblages of thematically and conceptually linked vignettes. Such an arrangement helps me to keep the main tripartite subject of this book in focus through chapters 2, 3, and 4, which correspond to the central conceptual triad of space/matter, self/material, and story/metaphor. The complex thematic, analytical, critical, and biographical constellations contextualizing this triad are examined in chapter 1, which focuses largely on the scholarly and theoretical underpinnings of *Me and My House*. The sensitive and personal nature of some of the biographical, and occasionally autobiographical, accounts in the subchapters, and in chapter 5, reflects and responds to Baldwin's insistence on always putting his individual, family, and ancestral stories inside his texts, while respectfully paying heed to the writer's own late, improvisational style through their arrangement.[75]

On the level of composition, or the human story I tell here in sincere hopes that it will also be read outside of academe, the book's arrangement was inspired by a Polish material cultural practice. Perhaps more simply, its structure is rooted in a children's game—inspired by underground collages we made as kids growing up in Poland during the Cold War in the 1970s. Called *widoczki* ("vitrines" or "hidden vistas"), these assemblages were mostly the purview of prepubescent girls and consisted of colorful scraps of various discarded items (candy wrappers, tinfoil, flowers, leaves, paper, fabric) carefully arranged at the bottom of a hole dug in the dirt in a secret spot. As the culmination of this game, the final composition would be covered with a piece of glass and then carefully buried, its place marked with a sign that would be clear to its maker but illegible to others who might find pleasurable sport in its destruction. Each of us would create several such recycled treasures in different locations around the neighborhood and then visit them regularly. We protected them passionately for, once dug up, they opened a world of escape and offered us proof that we were capable of making something beautiful that belonged to no one else.[76]

I would like to think that Baldwin would approve of framing his story via this playful vitrine metaphor, given his own predilection for foreign locales,

1.9. Vinyl records from Chez Baldwin in Jill Hutchinson's collection. Photo by author, 2014.

his love of children, and his passion for the visual arts. His fondness for collage was clear in many of the places he occupied—he had various assemblages of images, clippings, objects, and sketches wherever he lived, especially in Turkey and France in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. Many of Baldwin's friends with whom I have spoken in the decade and a half since my first visit to his house have confirmed that the writer was a consummate aesthete: he loved fine clothes, colors, and textures, quality fabrics, and interesting jewelry; his house was filled with tasteful furniture, rugs and throws, pillows, and knick-knacks. His love of music manifested itself in a large vinyl collection that has survived both him and his brother David, who lived in the house until 1996. A corkboard in Baldwin's office that I saw reproduced in a magazine had the jackets of his last books—*The Price of the Ticket* and *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*—pinned next to photographs of friends and family; a white cast of Blaise Pascal's death mask leaned against the wall underneath the board. Like many of us, Baldwin liked to fill his dwelling spaces with comforting objects. In an unpublished letter to David Leeming, written from Istanbul on December 27, 1965, he referred to them as "little gimcracks, like mirrors, and ash-trays."[77]

While reflecting his aesthetic predilections, Baldwin's love for collages and assemblages also mirrored his writing style, especially those works he created during the underappreciated decades of the 1970s and 1980s. By that time, the visual and material inspirations introduced to him by his Greenwich Village mentor and surrogate father figure, the painter Beauford Delaney, along with the musical rhythms, improvisations, and avant-garde harmonies he admired in blues and jazz pioneers like Bessie Smith, Miles Davis, Nina Simone, or Charlie Parker, inspired mature, complex, and sometimes experimental narrative forms. These daring stylistic and compositional arrangements could be discerned already in his third novel, *Another Country*, and they certainly animate his later work—*Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone*, *If Beale Street Could Talk*, *Just above My Head*, *No Name in the Street*, *The Devil Finds Work*, and *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*. They are especially powerfully executed in the syncopated dialogues and call-and-response riffs propelling his play *The Welcome Table*, whose genesis goes back to Turkey and whose setting is literally within the very walls of his house in St. Paul-de-Vence. (I return to that important, haunting work in chapter 3.)

Me and My House places the juxtaposition between self and domicile, individual and social space, body and architecture at its center, while setting out to examine the material and metaphorical, or literal and literary, traces of this writer's domestic life within and without the United States.[78] Traveling between and among actual geographic and physical locations; the pages of his published works, interviews, and unpublished letters; the memories he left with friends and family; and an archive of objects salvaged from his house in St. Paul-de-Vence, this book shows how Baldwin challenged, revised, and at times exploded the conventions of racialized domesticity in the United States, and of national and African American cultural and literary histories.

Me and My House also taps into the longing and desire to preserve, to the degree that a project like this allows, what remains of the *matter* and *stories* of the domestic life of James Arthur Baldwin (1924–87). A pivotal and unique figure in American literary, social, and cultural history, Baldwin left a scarce material legacy that is only now beginning to be memorialized: a meager collection of his papers is available at a handful of libraries, and some of his works (and certainly his letters) remain unpublished or out of print. And, as noted earlier in this introduction, while there are a few historical markers honoring him in New York City's Harlem and Greenwich Village neighborhoods, there is still no writer's house or museum devoted to

him anywhere. This absence and scarcity—not at all surprising given how few African American writers' houses are open to the public in the United States, and that, halfway through the second decade of the twenty-first century, the National Museum of African American History and Culture has only recently opened—only compound Baldwin's "homelessness." Much like those of countless other black Americans that the new museum honors without naming, his legacy remains in flux, the material traces of his life almost completely erased from his home country.

To this critic, Baldwin's literary mastery, in all its shapes and forms, and with all its demanding density and complexity, is unparalleled in twentieth-century American letters. As I show in this book, that difficult mastery was the result of a complex nexus of events and influences that would have taken a much longer lifetime than his to fully gestate and flourish. It came from a process that was seldom painless, often excruciating, and far from completion at the time of the writer's death from cancer in 1987, when he was only sixty-three. I have said this before, and more than once in my earlier work on this writer, but it bears repeating that Baldwin's writing life was a continuous fluctuating process, an ebb and flow of experimentation and honing of his style that repudiates the unhelpful cleaving of his oeuvre into pre– and post–*Fire Next Time* periods of ascendancy and decline that still, sadly, holds sway over some critics and scholars. At the center of this process, the part that took place over the last decade and a half of his life in 1971–87, stands his domestic abode in St. Paul-de-Vence. It is from that complex and materially and metaphorically loaded location that *Me and My House* sets out to reconstruct and prove the centrality of Baldwin's ideas on home, both to his writing and to his rich legacy as one of the greatest American authors, witnesses, and prophets.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Subsequent parts of this book frame the movement of my argument from the *matter* of Baldwin's actual dwelling in St. Paul-de-Vence, through the *material* of his life story and coming of age that he recovers and rewrites in his later years, to his *metaphorical*, or literary, creations of domestic spaces in the late works that he composed at his beloved last house.

Chapter 1, "Foundations, Façades, and Faces: Through the Glass Blackly, or Domesticating Claustrophobic Terror," explains key terms and theoretical concepts that emerge from Baldwin's rich musings on the meanings of whiteness and blackness; domesticity and public space; individualism and

national identity. These key terms are also cast against the Cold War and postcolonial, neocolonial, imperial, and transnational moments that provide the ever-changing backdrop for his works in the 1970s and 1980s. This chapter also shows how the majority of Baldwin's works engage two powerfully interlinked themes that are key to analyzing black domesticity in the twentieth-century United States: the necessity to survive *away* from one's home and difficult childhood, and the desire to create *alternative* kinds of domesticity and modes of dwelling for black bodies that do not fit normative gender, sexual, familial, religious, or social roles and designs. Against the backdrop of his complex biography, it examines some of the controversial terms qualifying his works and authorial persona, while also tracing the development of his late style and aesthetics and attending to past and recent Baldwin scholarship.

As the key location informing this project, Baldwin's last domestic abode dominates chapter 2, "Home Matter: No House in the World, or Reading Transnational, Black Queer Domesticity in St. Paul-de-Vence." While discussing the material remnants of the place, biographical information, interviews (including one with Lucien Happersberger, Baldwin's most important lover and his first domestic partner), texts he wrote about it, and the ways in which discourses on social space, race, gender, and sexuality interface with both fictional and life-writing narratives, this chapter also argues for approaches that deliberately blend the materialist and metaphorical aspects of the traces that Baldwin has left us as his complex legacy.

Chapter 3, "Life Material: Haunted Houses and Welcome Tables, or The First Teacher, the Last Play, and Affectations of Disidentification," explores the writer's home life in Harlem and his formative years as a student, budding reader, and writer coming of age as an artist under the care of his teacher, Orilla "Bill" Miller, with whom he corresponded until his death. It also considers his contributions to the rhetoric and theories of subjectivity in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* and *The Devil Finds Work*, by highlighting how Baldwin continued to wrestle with and revise his ideas on racialized gender roles and sexuality, and especially late twentieth-century black masculinity, which he first critiqued in the essay volume *No Name in the Street* and continued to expand upon throughout his subsequent works, culminating with *The Welcome Table*. By locating the origins of recent theories of identity, such as José E. Muñoz's disidentification, in Baldwin's works, it focuses on his theorizing of the ways in which race and racism intersect with other aspects of national identity and nourish American popular culture.

By exploring his last two novels, *If Beale Street Could Talk* and *Just above My Head*, along with the last essay volume, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, and a children's story, *Little Man, Little Man* (1976), chapter 4, "Building Metaphors: 'Sitting in the Strangest House I Have Ever Known,' or Black Heterotopias from Harlem to San Juan, to Paris, London, and Yonkers," reads Baldwin's meditations on the national home, or what he called "the house of bondage," as well as on black queer, utopian domestic spaces that he offers as alternatives, where nonnormative identities find shelter, albeit temporarily, within and without the United States. The chapter's explorations of the writer's late aesthetics and thematic threads go hand in hand with examining his autobiographical and autoethnographic experience of homelessness and exile as a black queer artist. Baldwin found no place among *either* African American activists who embraced heterosexist black nationalism or Afrocentrism, *or* mainstream white cultural establishments. Disillusioned with American culture and politics by the 1980s, he was reinvigorated by his late-life articulations of androgyny and a growing interest in performances of the feminine inspired by his glamorous, black women friends.

The concluding chapter 5, "Black Life Matters of Value: Erasure, Overlay, Manipulation, or Archiving the Invisible House," brings to a coda the many thematic and theoretical strands of this project, as well as anticipating Baldwin's virtual house-museum, which I will undertake as a digital humanities companion project for this book. While reflecting the sequence of domesticating Chez Baldwin as a space of creativity and sociability that also yielded to Baldwin's black queer "manipulations"—as he refers to them in a 1987 *Architectural Digest* piece—this section also signals what I see as the urgent task of rethinking how we preserve the material legacy of black lives today. What we understand as the *matter* of black lives, its materiality, traces, remnants, and refuse, must be read differently from the matter of white lives that have so far taken historical precedence in the national house. Hence while Baldwin's home library and leftover objects have been abandoned as worthless, the *New York Times* reports that the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University has recently bought Jonathan Lethem's entire archive, including "dead-tree artifacts" that are "charmingly weird," comic books, electronics, and a trove of drunken drawings of "vomiting cats."[79] (More about that in chapter 5.)

By contextualizing Baldwin's ideas within his biography, scholarship, and recent popular events devoted to his legacy, as much as in his complex literary works and my eclectic archive of objects salvaged from his dwelling, *Me and My House* offers an assembled portrait of a writer whose vision and

passion for social justice filtered through all kinds of intellectual and imaginary spaces—from nation, to city streets, to the privacy of the bedroom. His personal contradictions, challenges, and struggles, which his essays, interviews, and brilliant letters reveal as being always unabashedly political, show us that regardless of any current theoretical vogue or idiom, Baldwin's proud domestication of our shared humanity and his fierce embrace of himself—"black, poor, and homosexual," as an interviewer once put it—may be his most enduring gifts.[80]

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Leeming, *James Baldwin*, 376. *No Papers for Mohammed* was "based on Baldwin's own recent scare with the French immigration authorities and on the case of an Arab friend whom he had hired as a gardener and who had been deported to Algeria" (314).

2. I presented this project at the "'A Language to Dwell In': James Baldwin, Paris, and International Visions" conference at the American University of Paris in May, and during the meeting of the Digital Humanities Caucus at the American Studies Association meeting in November 2016.

3. See McKittrick, "Plantation Futures."

4. See Downs, "Not a Dream Deferred." See also Royal, "Kali-Ma Nazarene"; Royal, "Interview with Kali-Ma Nazarene."

5. Ghansah, "Weight of James Arthur Baldwin" (contains factual errors); T. C. Williams, "Breaking into James Baldwin's House"; Field, "On Breaking into James Baldwin's House."

6. Hodder, *Entangled*, 14.

7. Hodder, *Entangled*, 38–39. See also Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*, on the historical underpinnings of "intimacies across continents in relation to the more dominant concept of intimacy as the property of the individual, often configured as conjugal and familial relations in the bourgeois home distinguished from the public realm of work, society, and politics" (28).

8. D. Miller, *Stuff*, 52–54.

9. See also Homi K. Bhabha, "The World and the Home," in Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Space Reader*, 358–62, on the "unhomely" and being "unhomed"; these concepts, contextualized with Henry James's works in mind, fit Baldwin's situation as well. De Waal's *Hare with Amber Eyes* provides another interesting context as a memoir with a focus on material objects.

10. Troupe, "Last Interview (1987)," 189. See also "Introduction: What Is Domestic Space?," in Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Space Reader*, on the changing meaning of the term, given that "the immense reach and influence of global and transnational economies have provoked a contrary desire for the local and the domestic quote which has increased the scrutiny of the home" (4).

11. Troupe, "Last Interview (1987)," 190–91. See also Standley and Pratt, *Conversations*, 79, 64–82.

12. Standley and Pratt, *Conversations*, 242.

13. Baldwin was accompanied by his brother David. See Clemens, *Can Russia Change?*, 204n41, 286n61; Clines, "Peter Ustinov Talks of Gorbachev's Chat."

14. This interview, conducted by an unidentified woman, is available on YouTube, posted July 31, 2009, by Afrikanliberation. I've been unable to locate its source. Baldwin identifies his age as fifty-six years old; hence it must have been made in 1980: "James Baldwin—Interview—Pt. 1."

15. See M. Elam, "Review," and her assessment of his complex legacies on 203–4.

16. See photos of the Horatio Street event, sponsored by the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation and the Two Boots Foundation: "James Baldwin Plaque, 81 Horacio Street," October 7, 2015, https://www.flickr.com/photos/gvshp/sets/72157657300335823.

17. Created in 1993 by the actor and director Samuel Légitimus, "Collectif James Baldwin de Paris" operates a website and a Facebook page; Karen Thorsen, the director of *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*, has initiated a complex public humanities database called "The James Project," whose website links events and venues that include "Conversations with Jimmy" at colleges, universities, and town halls in conjunction with showings of her documentary. I am among the scholar-advisors for http://jamesbaldwinproject.org/.

18. I peg Peck's production as an "art film" because its narrative design, visual composition, and overall effect echo much more Sedat Pakay's endeavor than Karen Thorsen's, these two masterworks from 1973 and 1989, respectively, being the eminent genre placeholders for an art film and a documentary in the Baldwin cinematic canon.

19. Hélène Roux Jeandheur, interview with the author, August 28, 2017.

20. See also Dayson, "Another Country."

21. See Zaborowska, *Other Americans, Other Americas*.

22. Cass Adair, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Michigan, drew my attention to the *New York Times* accounting of that event: Frank S. Adams, "Columbia Student Kills Friend and Sinks Body in Hudson River," August 17, 1944. See also Zaborowska, *Other Americans, Other Americas* and "From Baldwin's Paris to Benjamin's." See also Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," and Brown and Clark, "Melodramas of Beset Black Manhood?"

23. See Gleason, *Sites Unseen*, 26–27.

24. Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*, 8.

25. Nicholson, Interview with James Baldwin.

26. See Zaborowska, *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade*.

27. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xvii.

28. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, xviii.

29. See Homans, *Women Writers and Poetic Identity*; Ostriker, *Stealing the Language*; Gilbert and Gubar, *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*; Showalter, *Sister's Choice*; DuPlessis, *Writing beyond the Ending*; Yaeger, *Honey-Mad Women*; Benstock, *Private Self*. For examples of early scholarship on black womanhood, see Christian, *Black Feminist Criticism*; Nfah-Abbenyi, *Gender in African Women's*

Writing; Boyce-Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity*; Pryse and Spillers, *Conjuring*; McDowell, *"The Changing Same"*; B. Smith, "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism"; Wall, *Changing Our Own Words*; Combahee River Collective, *Combahee River Collective Statement*.

30. See also Zaborowska, "'In the Same Boat.'"

31. The deep imprint of this history on the minds of those who consider themselves and their country "white" was clear during the U.S. 2016 presidential election.

32. Spillers, "Mama's Baby," 67, 72. "Domesticity appears to gain its power by way of a common origin of cultural fictions that are grounded in the specificity of proper names, more exactly, a patronymic, which, in turn, situates those persons it 'covers' in a particular place. Contrarily, the cargo of a ship might not be regarded as elements of the domestic, even though the vessel that carries it is sometimes romantically (ironically?) personified as 'she'" (72).

33. Engels and Untermann, *Origin of the Family*. See Matthews, *"Just a Housewife"*; Hansen, *African Encounters with Domesticity*; Briganti and Mezei, *Domestic Space Reader*.

34. See also Spillers, "Mama's Baby," which sketches a broad picture of the foundational "grammar" of American social space patterns since the times of slavery: "The point remains that captive persons were forced into patterns of dispersal, beginning with the Trade itself, into the horizontal relatedness of language groups, discourse formations, bloodlines, names, and properties by the legal arrangements of enslavement" (75). See also Green-Barteet, "Loophole of Retreat"; Ellis and Ginsburg, *Cabin, Quarter, Plantation*; Vlach, *Back of the Big House*. I continue this thread in subsequent chapters.

35. The few exceptions are Dixon, *Ride Out the Wilderness*, which has a brilliant chapter on Baldwin that traces how John Grimes's evolution in *Go Tell It* interrogates spatial concepts of the "mountain" and "threshing floor" (123–33) and Baldwin's "underlying theme that exposes the claustrophobia inherent in the limited space claimed by religious, sexual, or racial exclusivity" (133); Reddinger, "'Just Enough for the City'"; Mills, "Cleaver/Baldwin Revisited." See also Doug Field's rich essays "Looking for Jimmy Baldwin" and especially "On Breaking into James Baldwin's House."

36. See also Harris, *Black Women*, 206; Wall, *Worrying the Line*, 15.

37. See Reed, "Imminent Domain"; McKinney, "Leibovitz and Sontag"; Gorman-Murray, "Queering Home or Domesticating Deviance?" All three concern white queerness. Reid-Pharr's *Conjugal Union* is a brilliant exception, as is Johnson's *Sweet Tea*. Other studies include Tongson, *Relocations*; Shah, "Perversity, Contamination, and the Dangers of Queer Domesticity"; D. Morton, *Material Queer*; Retter et al., *Queers in Space*; Bell and Valentine, *Mapping Desire*; and Johnston and Longhurst, *Space, Place, and Sex*.

38. Yet another reason is the reluctance, if not outright refusal, of mainstream American culture and political discourses to embrace all the diverse inhabitants of the national house, and thus change how we imagine domesticity, especially given the passage of marriage equality in June 2015.

39. See Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*; Foucault and Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces"; Benjamin, *Illuminations* and *Arcades Project*; and de Certeau, *Practice of Everyday Life*.

40. Publications on home and domesticity often elide race, taking whiteness as a universal and unmarked category, for example, Cieraad, *At Home*; the best approach the concept from an interdisciplinary black studies perspective that links urban and rural locations, literature and architecture, like Gleason's *Sites Unseen*, Hayden's *Power of Place*, or Vlach's *Back of the Big House*.

41. Du Bois et al., *Souls of Black Folk*, 11.

42. See Gilroy, *Black Atlantic*; Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*; West, *Race Matters*; as well as Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, and Lowe's recent take on transnational material culture, *Intimacies of Four Continents*.

43. McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 2.

44. Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, 1, emphases added. Kristeva's model reflects the etymology of the word *foreigner* as having a feminine gendered dimension in original Greek.

45. See Appiah, *Ethics of Identity*, on cosmopolitanism as contingent on "a world of cultural and social variety as a precondition for the self-creation that is at the heart of a meaningful human life" (268).

46. See Clark, *Black Manhood in James Baldwin*, 34, 48.

47. Rogoff, *Terra Infirma*, 34. See McBride's "Can the Queen Speak?" on "the critical hazards of privileging the category of race in any discussion of black people. When we give 'race,' with its retinue of historical and discursive investments, primacy over other signifiers of difference, the result is a network of critical blindnesses which prevent us from perceiving the ways in which the conventions of race discourse get naturalized and normativized" (371).

48. Rogoff, *Terra Infirma*, 35. See Kennedy, *Race and Urban Space*, 8–10.

49. Weisman, *Discrimination by Design*, 2.

50. McKittrick and Woods, *Black Geographies*, 3, 4.

51. See Eva Hoffman's notion of "triangulation" in *Lost in Translation*; also Zaborowska, *How We Found America*; and Wilkins, *Aesthetics of Equity*, 107–8. I return to this theme in chapter 4.

52. See http://americanwritersmuseum.org/ (accessed December 11, 2016). Of more than fifty houses and museums featured on the site, only two belong to African Americans (Douglass's and Haley's).

53. Kaplan and Schwarz, *James Baldwin*, 127.

54. See, for example, Bloom, *James Baldwin*; Crouch, *Notes of a Hanging Judge*. See also these rigorous earlier volumes: Kinnamon, "Native Son"; O'Daniel, *James Baldwin*; Standley and Burt, *Critical Essays on James Baldwin*. The latter two offer essays that may seem controversial or even shocking today.

55. See also Chametzky, *A Tribute to James Baldwin*; Standley and Pratt, *Conversations*.

56. Lovalerie King, introduction to King and Scott, *James Baldwin and Toni Morrison*, 1.

57. Als, "Snaps: 1955–1965," 26.

58. The very same photograph opens Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s essay, dated June 1, 1992, "From the Stacks: 'The Fire Last Time,'" published in the *New Republic* on August 2, 2013.

59. Als, "Snaps: 1955–1965." See Ross, "Some Glances at the Black Fag," especially his comments on race and segregation on page 169. See also Ross, "Baldwin's Sissy Heroics"; this piece uses my reading of the groping incident in NNS without acknowledging it.

60. Leo can be seen as rewriting western modern characters like Joyce's Bloom or Stephen Dedalus, or even Ellison's in *Invisible Man*.

61. Dixon, *Ride Out the Wilderness*, 7.

62. Rankine, *Citizen*, 11. See also Terrie M. Williams, *Black Pain*, which, in the guise of a self-help book, engages some of these issues.

63. Coates, *Between the World and Me*, 22. I admire this book but disagree with Morrison that Coates fills the vacuum left by Baldwin. He borrows very heavily from *Fire*, and the very phrase he uses for his title comes from Baldwin's preface to the 1984 edition of *Notes of a Native Son* in which the writer interrogates his search for identity as an artist ("between that self and me, the accumulated rock of ages," ix). More borrowings can be traced to the opening pages of ETNS.

64. Standley and Pratt, *Conversations*, 171; Gayle, "Defense of James Baldwin," 206; Gayle, "Function of Black Criticism," 40.

65. Standley and Pratt, *Conversations*, 171; Ross, "Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm"; Ross, "Camping the Dirty Dozens."

66. Some writers use Baldwin as an inspiration for their characters. See Jonathan Lethem, *The Fortress of Solitude* (New York: Vintage, 2004); and Sarah Shulman, *The Cosmopolitans* (New York: Feminist Press, 2016), which quotes from several of Baldwin's books.

67. See also Ken Warren on Baldwin as straddling a literary historical divide in *What Was African American Literature?*, 74–75.

68. See Avilez, "Housing the Black Body."

69. See the "Emotions" special issue of *PMLA* (October 2015). See also Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, on the origins of perspectival access to space (47–48).

70. Hansberry, *To Be Young*, xiv.

71. Black Lives Matter Organization, http://blacklivesmatter.com/.

72. See Elam and Alexander, *The Fire This Time*; Kenan, *The Fire This Time*; Alexander's concluding chapter, "The Fire This Time," in *The New Jim Crow*; Ward, *The Fire This Time*.

73. See also Boggs, "'James Baldwin: The Last Interview and Other Conversations' by James Baldwin."

74. See chapter 5 on the recent sale of the Baldwin papers by his estate to the Schomburg Center for Research on Black Culture in New York in April 2017; New York Public Library, "Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture Acquires Papers."

75. See also Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*.

76. See Truszczyńska, "Widoczki znane też jako sekrety": "Ta zabawa to jak widać również trafny opis stosunków mających miejsce w 'dorosłym' życiu—mnóstwo emocji i napięć stworzonych wokół czegoś wymyślonego" (my translation: "That child's play . . . was an accurate description of relationships that took place in grown-up life—lots of emotions and tensions that were created around something that was made up").

77. Zaborowska, *James Baldwin's Turkish Decade*, 41.

78. Dixon's *Ride Out the Wilderness* is among my early inspirations, along with Ralph Ellison's *Shadow and Act* passage that Dixon includes in his introduction: "If we don't know where we are, we have little chance of knowing who we are, that if we confuse the time, we confuse the place; and that when we confuse these we endanger our humanity, both physically and morally" (Ellison, 74; Dixon, 2).

79. Schuessler, "Inside an Author's Oddball Trove of Artifacts."

80. This passage opens *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*, directed by Karen Thorsen.

1. FOUNDATIONS, FAÇADES, AND FACES

1. Thorsen, *James Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket*.

2. He also talks about his birthplace in Thorsen's documentary.

3. Undated interview with Mavis Mainwaring Nicholson on *Mavis on Four* on UK's TV4. The interview was re-aired to commemorate Baldwin's death in December 1987: Nicholson, Interview with James Baldwin.

4. See Cornel West's foreword to Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow*, where he describes her book as "the secular bible for the new social movement" and praises Alexander's uses of "(the great James Baldwin!)" and his *The Fire Next Time* in her searing concluding chapter (ix, x).

5. Transcript, in Standley and Pratt, *Conversations*, 3; interview on WFMT Chicago, broadcast on December 29, 1961. Terkel's *Giants of Jazz* affirms Smith as the Empress of the Blues.

6. See also Pavlić, *Who Can Afford to Improvise?*, especially 6–7, on the "importance of listening, of hearing, and of music," and on how a "song is discourse as experience." Also, on page 232, Pavlić refers to the same quotation from the Terkel interview.

7. Standley and Pratt, *Conversations*, 3, emphasis added. There are slight discrepancies between its published transcript and the interview soundtrack as it currently appears on the Internet: Tony Macaluso, "Studs's Interview with James Baldwin Published," republished on *Neo-Griot* (blog), December 8, 2014, http://kalamu.com/neogriot/2015/07/05/history-audio-james-baldwin-interview-by-studs-terkel/; "James Baldwin Interview: Black Man in America (1961) with Studs Terkel." When I quote from the interview, I usually rely on the transcript included in *Conversations*, but at times I also note the soundtrack's more spontaneous flow, marking it with words in brackets that have been edited out of the printed version. I do so, for