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Making Space at the Queer Intersections of Sex and Gender

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Abstract
In Giovanni's Room (1956), James Baldwin emphasises the Black queer space of architecture, particularly of lines, walls, and wallpaper. In particular, by using walls to highlight the existence of the poché, or in-between architectural pocket space, Baldwin generates an inside/outside space that facilitates a slippage and reclamation of subjectivity for his queer characters.
Throughout this novel, the characters seek shelter and are described as houses and walls themselves even as they are un-housed in spaces which, from an apartment building to the human body, are always permeable and temporary. Each wall of Baldwin's novel is, like Black space and queer space, a site of tension and entanglement. These walls are complicated by Giovanni's violent efforts to expand the architectural and symbolic space of his room. He takes a hammer to the walls not to escape into another apartment on the other side of the walls but, rather, to open the poché between walls.
The poché is a liminal and undefined inside/outside space (even on architectural blueprints, when/if it appears). Baldwin's use of the poché in this novel disrupts white and (hetero)normative expectations of space and classification, makes visible hidden histories, resists stability, and promotes inclusive assemblages.
Keywords: Queer studies; phenomenology; American literature

In the final third of James Baldwin's novel Giovanni's Room (1956), the nightlong vigil of the white American narrator, David, turns toward the morning that will bring the execution of Giovanni, his Italian lover, for the presumed murder of a queer man they knew in Paris. While David is uncharged and free in a house in the south of France, he laments, "My executioners are here with me [...] They are everywhere I turn. Walls, windows, mirrors, water, the night outside – they are everywhere" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 111). Throughout the novel, Baldwin emphasises the

queer space of architecture (or built spaces), particularly emphasising walls, listed first among David's executioners. At the level of language, walls are not rigid, but slippery. By using these walls to highlight the existence of the poché, or in-between architectural pocket space, Baldwin generates a Black queer phenomenological slippage and a reclamation of subjectivity. Baldwin's queer architectural spaces – including general architectural lines, walls, wallpaper, and the poché – facilitate an alternative to the restrictive, hegemonic, Eurowestern mode of subject formation. Reading Giovanni's Room through Black queer phenomenology and interior architecture attunes readers to the dynamically disruptive significance of Black queer space.

Following his semi-autobiographical novel Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953) and race-focused essay collection Notes of a Native Son (1955), Giovanni's Room (1956) disrupted Baldwin's emerging reputation as, and his publisher's expectations of, a Black writer. Unlike his earlier works, set in the United States and foregrounding Black and African American lives and experiences, Giovanni's Room was set in 1950s Paris, included no Black characters, and foregrounded queer characters and content. The novel is related over two sections and a single night by the white American David, who uses flashbacks to move readers from his Brooklyn childhood, through his self-exile to Paris, and to his overnight vigil in the south of France, which opens and closes the novel as a frame narrative. Thus, Giovanni's Room positions shape and architecture from the outset, and is itself constructed as a room in which David and Giovanni's relationship unfolds for the reader. While David's "flight" to Paris is motivated by the "dilemma" of his first homosexual experience (Baldwin, 1956, p. 10) and on arriving in Paris, David connects with a queer milieu, he nevertheless declares, "I was not of their company" (p. 22). In his second year in Paris, he meets and moves in with Giovanni, but truncates the relationship when his American fiancée, Hella, arrives in Paris. In the final quarter of the novel, David relates Giovanni's disappearance, arrest, and imprisonment, and concludes his overnight

vigil (the frame narrative) that spans Giovanni's final night before his execution.

Numerous scholars have referred to Giovanni's Room as a 'raceless' novel, but as Trudier Harris (2002, p. 24) notes, "David's race, his whiteness, is at the centre of the book." Throughout the novel, David conflates the rooms and bodies of his lovers Joey and Giovanni. Through racialised language of white supremacy, he dismisses both as "stinking" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 135), "filthy" (p. 142), and "dirty" (p. 168), and he racialises and others the body of Joey as "the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured" (9). Correspondingly, when describing Giovanni to his fiancée Hella, David claims white supremacy, asserting, "'he's got this thing about me, he thinks I'm God'" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 135). Giovanni's Room is far from a raceless novel. Because queer studies often focuses on white queer bodies, leaving "discussions of race," Dwight A. McBride (2020, p. vi) remarks, "at best glossed or at worst occluded," acknowledging the role of race in this novel is vital. Perhaps, if David and/or Giovanni were Black, critical discourse would have centred Blackness as the novel primary theme or message, as scholars including Marlon B. Ross (1999), Mae G. Henderson (2005), and Ernest L. Gibson, III (2019) have theorised. Depicting the relationship, instead, of a white American man and an Italian man, helps Baldwin engage – and compel readers to also engage – complex gender and queer identities, under, around, and through which complex racial identities always also exist.

Black queer phenomenology shows how Giovanni's Room uses interior architecture to disrupt and resist (hetero)normative and white expectations of the normative classification of space – not only of sexually queer identities. 'Queer' is, etymologically, 'athwart' or 'transverse' (if a noun) or 'to twist' or 'to cross' (if a verb), making sexual orientation a spatial phenomenon. Phenomenology asserts that consciousness is always oriented toward an object in the world. Initial conceptions of phenomenology by Edmund Husserl (1954) argued for the possibility of objective and universal subjectivity. However, queer phenomenologists including Sara Ahmed (2006) and Black phenomenologists including

Frantz Fanon (1952), Charles Johnson (1993), and James B. Haile III (2017), joined by Black queer phenomenologist Christine Capetola (2019), show the impossibility of universal subjectivity. Rather than universal, these scholars show, such truths are coded for and by dominant identities – most often, for and by heterosexual white men at the exclusion of all other communities. The traditional goal of objective and universal subjectivity is flawed and impossible, especially, as Ahmed (2006, p. 159) describes, "some bodies more than others have their involvement in the world called into crisis." Bodies – and spaces – of queerness and colour experience this crisis. For Capetola (2019, p. 91), Black queer phenomenology is "both sensory and sexual, a result of the double queering (sexual and spatial)." In Giovanni's Room, Black queer phenomenology joins architecture to deepen this sexual, spatial philosophical work.

Black queer phenomenology fractures the white, heteronormative illusion of linear objective consciousness. Like Husserl, David believes we can bracket social, cultural, and traditional knowledges before we can encounter phenomena, while Giovanni, like Ahmed (2006, p. 33), disproves this "fantasy of a subject who is transcendent, who places himself above the contingent world of social matter," and questions this approach, particularly as it intersects with architectural spaces. David is conflicted between Eurowestern (disembodied, timeless) and Black and queer (embodied, situated) phenomenologies. He works to sustain what the queer elder Jacques calls his "'immaculate manhood'" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 30) through a disembodied distance, which Giovanni mocks, saying, "'You love your purity [...] You want to be clean'" (p. 141). This mental and physical distance leaves David "so cold and so perfectly still and far away" (p. 140). In contrast, Black and queer phenomenology curve alongside each other in their awareness of embodiment – and, particularly, of historicity, language, and situated narrative.

I pursue a Black queer phenomenological lens to situate the embodied consciousnesses of the novel in context and historicity. By studying the novel's queer interior architecture, I examine not only

moments of confinement but also, and more so, subjective slippage and Baldwin's disruption of white (hetero)normative classification for space and subjectivity. Since substantial work has been done in queer architecture, and as Black and queer phenomenologies often draw upon spatial metaphor, studying Baldwin's use of interior architecture through Black queer phenomenology addresses a significant gap in Baldwin scholarship and expands this novel's relevance – and the vital importance of Black and queer subjectivities – to scholars in literature, architecture, philosophy, and intersectional fields.

Architectural Lines

Throughout Giovanni's Room, David's desire for linear progress is disrupted both in narrative form and physical space. His linearity is subverted, twisted, and queered. From the opening pages of the novel, he is caught in "a maze of false signals and abruptly locking doors" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 10) generated by his sexual experience with Joey, also represented by the bedcovers "tangled around our feet" (p. 8). Ahmed (2006, p. 71) describes sexual orientation as a spatial phenomenon, with heterosexuality perceived as "in line" and queer sexualities as "off line." Space and sexuality, then, are always in dialogue. Interior architecture, viewed through Black queer phenomenology, shows how certain spatial constructions reinforce essentialist, white, and heteronormative notions (e.g., 'master' bedroom, 'children's' bedrooms). Because "blackness is, already, architectonic (and vice versa)," as Darell Fields (2000, p. xxvii) writes, David recognises himself and locates his sexuality in white space and white bodies – as in the "sailor, dressed all in white" (p. 91), who David sees as "blonder and more beautiful" (p. 92) than he ever was, achieving through his fair hair, white skin, and white clothes the ability to wear "his masculinity as unequivocally as he wore his skin" (p. 92). "It is the very exaggeration of whiteness that gives David his power," argues Harris (2002, p. 27), and through his relations with the physical and architectural spaces of his lovers, David seeks to secure unquestioning

acceptance of his white male power and privilege. Yet, the lack of his ability to find a "steady ground" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 104) leaves him ungrounded.

Baldwin merges space and sexuality, queering linearity when David recounts how, following his encounter with Joey, he gets "almost too drunk to walk" and crashes his car "on a straight, level piece of highway" (1956, p. 17). Even the linear trajectory of heterosexuality, when spatialised onto the roadway, is impossible for David to navigate. His car hits the racialized phallus of a "foam-white" telephone pole and, similar to the encompassing threat of Blackness/darkness felt when with Joey, David "went into a darkness I had never known before" (p. 17). He is pulled from this darkness by the hospital, nursing staff, and his father, who confine him in the white heteronormative linearity of a room with "a high, white ceiling and white walls" (p. 17). Even this sterile, scientific architecture of white heterosexual space is queer, however, for the lines of the room "bent, as it seemed, over me" (p. 17). As Gaston Bachelard (1958, p. 5) describes, "we shall see the imagination build 'walls' of impalpable shadows, comfort itself with the illusion of protection." These white ceilings and walls seem to affirm white, heteronormative, linear power and control, but they are only an illusion of protection, as David realises when the lines of the room destabilise and fold toward him. Nonetheless, he remains in this room until he appears to sublimate his queer desire, returns to existing 'in line,' and embodies "the still, cold center of the storm which was occurring in me" (p. 19). And yet, even in coldly seeming to master his queer identity in this white, linear room, however, David remains a vector of queer space – not a linear trajectory but a spiral, the mysterious flux in the eye of a storm.

David travels to France because he feels his self may be "something [that] has been misplaced" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 21), something off line, aslant, and disoriented. Looking for a "steady ground" in Paris (p. 104), he finds instead a "long, dark, curving street" (p. 155) and a world where "insistent possibilities," he laments, "had become visible [...and] stormed all over me" (p. 42). David travels from heteronormative, linear,

unidirectional space to queer, curving, recursive space. These "entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, [...and] alternate routes," Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998, p. 558) describe, generate "the queer world." David, following the increasingly curved and disorienting lines of Paris, moves into queer space. Similar to how Ahmed (2006, p. 9) argues that spaces are "like a second skin that unfolds in the folds of the body," David finds both Hella and Giovanni on the same street, in the same architectural-physical impression of one body-space upon another body-space. Walking down the street of Raspail, David shares, "I could not fail to remember that Hella and I had walked here, Giovanni and I had walked here" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 94), and he finds Giovanni not only in the queer space of his room but in the public lines of the city street, for "with each step, the face that glowed insistently before me was not her face but his" (pp. 94-95). Whereas David earlier had to veer off road, or into a cavern, to actualise his queer identity, on the curving lines of Paris's streets, he need only continue to walk forward along the same (yet ever nonlinear) line of travel.

By offering an American narrator and by writing the novel during his time in France, Baldwin defamiliarises the physical architecture of Paris. In the dialogue of space and sexuality, some bodies – particularly the heteronormative and white – are welcomed, while other bodies – particularly the queer and Black or brown – are marginalised. While Giovanni lives, as he says, "'out. Far out. It is almost not Paris,'" his room near Nation is only about five kilometres from his workplace near Saint-Germain-des-Prés (Baldwin, 1956, p. 44). Most of the characters' movements occur within a five – to seven-kilometre-wide circle of central Paris, a circle double-bounded within both the Boulevards of the Marshals and the Boulevard Périphérique. Both of these enclosures follow Paris's defensive Thiers Walls, built in the 1840s and dismantled in the 1920s, with the Boulevards of the Marshals ringing Paris inside of where the Thiers Walls stood and the Boulevard Périphérique tracing a parallel ring outside of those walls and about one hundred metres from the Boulevards of the Marshals. Within this tightly confined space,

compressed further by the population surge in Paris's metropolitan area during the novel's timeline (Paris increased its population by about 20% from 1950 to 1960, gaining one million new residents), Baldwin's characters are architecturally disoriented.

Throughout the novel, David and Giovanni seek shelter, moving between rooms, housed and un-housed – even as David occupies increasingly expansive spaces, while Giovanni's spaces are ever smaller. David moves from his hotel to Giovanni's room, Hella's room, and finally southern France. Giovanni moves from his room to Jacques's room, Paris streets, a barge tied along the Seine, a prison cell, and finally an execution chamber. In the period of Giovanni's Room, Paris still showed numerous signs of its Nazi occupation during World War II, and, across the ocean, some Black American descendants of enslaved peoples still had living ancestors who were prohibited from owning or renting property. In these contexts, having even a small room is an achievement. When David denigrates Giovanni's room as "'hideous,'" Giovanni declares, "'Paris is not like New York; it is not full of palaces for boys like me [...] How long do you think it took me to find the room I have?'" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 117). Giovanni links the precarity of his sexual identity and his ethnic/national status – as what David later dismissively calls "a foreigner" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 150) with "a blackness [that] comes and goes before his eyes" (p. 156) – to the precarity of his architectural-physical emplacement. Meanwhile, David has taken "flight" (p. 21) from American space and from the "black opening of a cavern" in Joey's body (p. 9) to immerse himself in white queer European space, nonetheless bringing the power, privilege, and entitlement of white heteronormative American identity – and expecting its continuance – in Paris, the so-called City of Light.

Walls

The queer closet needs no introduction, but in Giovanni's Room, Baldwin goes beyond such more obvious metaphors to demonstrate an embodied, situated way of existing in the world, or a Black queer phenomenology,

through his use of walls. Walls may appear static, as objective phenomena. However, set in a city ringed with historical and modern defensive walls, and largely enacted within the walls of Giovanni's apartment and the frame of David's overnight vigil, Giovanni's Room shows that, as Henri Lefebvre (1974, p. 147) writes, interior walls "no longer have any spatial or bearing role," and exterior walls "no longer have any material substance: they have become mere membranes barely managing to concretize the division between inside and outside." The physical wall becomes metaphor, where its membrane might promise solidity but, on closer examination, is, like queer space in general is for Aaron Betsky (1997, p. 20), "shot through with tensions, fissures, and contradictions." Baldwin demonstrates this phenomenological instability throughout the novel.

"We make and are made by our spaces," Betsky (1997, p. 20) declares, and David links the bodies and subjectivities of Giovanni and, later, Hella and Sue, with the walls of their rooms. When Giovanni first takes David home, David sees the walls as indistinct, "the outlines of clutter and disorder" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 64); this clutter is not yet resolved into concrete protection (or, conversely, danger). However, later that afternoon when David wakes, he sees, "Before and beside me and all over the room, towering like a wall, were boxes of cardboard and leather," and this "disorder," which he describes as "Giovanni's regurgitated life," appears as a "mortal and unavoidable danger" to him (Baldwin, 1956, p. 87). While David remembers Joey's room as holding within a "sweet disorder" (p. 19), he critiques both Giovanni's room and body as, respectively, "so stinking and dirty" (p. 135) and a "dirty body" (p. 168). Our spaces define us, and we them; thus, David is both attracted to and repelled by Giovanni's physical and architectural space, particularly once he commits to living within Giovanni's walls. And, if our walls – arguably the most solid and reliable architectural feature of indoor spaces – cannot resolve into linear angles of strength, stability, and support, we, like David, may feel imperilled, particularly if we model David's insistence on needing to "'find out'" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 81), to know and be certain, and

to retain a reflection "rather like an arrow" (p. 3) in its linear ancestral and lived experience of white privilege and domination.

After leaving Giovanni once Hella returns to Paris, using and then discarding him as he did with Joey – to whom he was "very nasty" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 10), resulting in him and his family fleeing the neighbourhood to where "I never saw him again" (p. 10) – David wants to assert his dominance with Hella and reclaim the power and privilege of the white heterosexual male. For, as Harris (2002, p. 27) writes, "his whiteness is the center of his manhood." David blurs the physical and architectural when he describes Hella "as though she were a familiar, darkened room in which I fumbled to find the light" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 121). Striving toward symbolic light in this City of Light, he realises a desire not merely to dwell within another's light but to be the dominant light, declaring, "I wanted to force her to relinquish reins" (p. 122). He is gratified when they lie together and he "felt her moving, rushing to open the gates of her strong, walled city and let the king of glory come in" (p. 123). Rather than lie surrounded by the walls of another's life, in a space of potential socioeconomic, sexual, and racial precarity – even equality – with Giovanni, David opts to embody "the king of glory" (p. 123), wanting "a woman to be for me a steady ground" (p. 104), even as he finds pleasure, elsewhere, in flowing beyond walls.

Queer architecture, instead of constructing a new space, appropriates an existing liminal space, often in disorienting (or re-orienting) ways, and in his moments of queer pleasure, David transforms solid images of walls into images of flowing and dissolving beyond walls. Thus, when thinking of falling in love with Giovanni, David shares, "I felt myself flow toward him, as a river rushes when the ice breaks up" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 83), and later, David remembers Giovanni and, simultaneously, "all that moved like a flood in him when we lay together at night" (p. 97). While David acknowledges queer fluidity within himself, he creates a porous wall between him and Giovanni, declaring, "'the Italians are too fluid'" (p. 36). Yet, such ethnic stereotyping falls flat. Ahmed (2006, p. 172) describes queer phenomenology as a

"disorientation device," and Haile III (2017, p. 496) describes Black phenomenology as working through the body, and revelation and disclosure, to reject notions of universal subjectivity. Together, Black queer phenomenology opens an oblique, nonlinear space where we see even the linear solidity of a wall as a queerable phenomenon. We avoid trying to bring phenomena back 'in line' when slippage occurs. Rather, we encourage slippage and new patterns.

Wallpaper

Even as walls reveal themselves in Giovanni's Room as queer, changing, and threatening to David's white heterosexual masculinity, so too does the wallpaper disorient his hegemonic notions of privilege and security. The wallpaper in Giovanni's room is "a constant reminder of the deviant nature of David and Giovanni's relationship in the room," Andreas Sung Unstad (2022, p. 40) argues, making heteronormativity the architectural background and psychological foreground of David's struggles and feelings of entrapment. As he cleans the rented house during his nightlong vigil, David returns to descriptions of Giovanni's brick walls – and of the wallpaper covering them. He recalls, "Giovanni had had great plans for remodelling the room and there was a time, when he had actually begun to do this, when we lived with plaster all over everything and bricks piled on the floor" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 71). Just fifteen pages later, David echoes the above reference to Giovanni's remodelling almost verbatim, with the addition of 'always,' to heighten the impact of the repetition: "He had always had great plans for remodelling this room" (p. 86). However, while in the earlier reference David spoke of plaster and bricks, in this later reference, he focuses instead on the wallpaper. He shares:

> One of the walls was a dirty, streaked white where he had torn off the wallpaper. The wall facing it was destined never to be uncovered, and on this wall a lady in a hoop skirt and a man in knee breeches perpetually walked together, hemmed in by roses. The wallpaper lay on the floor, in great sheets and scrolls, in dust.
>
> (p. 86)

Giovanni's wallpaper physically manifests how Black queer phenomenology engages slippery hybridity as opposed to the linear vacuum of traditional phenomenology.

In traditional phenomenology, phenomena are often linear, bounded, and clear – such as wallpaper pressed flat onto the walls, "hemmed in" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 86), and studied both in isolation and in minute detail. In Black queer phenomenology, however, phenomena are tangled, with blurred edges – a network of bodies coming into and out of relationship. Accordingly, this wallpaper, torn from the walls, lays "in great sheets and scrolls" (p. 86), leaving traces on the walls, floor, and humans with whom it comes into contact – blurring itself and its relations in the dust that covers and becomes part of every body in this space. In this Black queer milieu, spatial bodies are porous and tangled, always in relationship. Queer space, Elizabeth Grosz (2001, p. 8) argues, often requires "converting existing spaces [...] into new forms for new functions." Thus, not only is Giovanni's self-described "'maid's room'" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 46) repurposed from a virginal, female, solitary space to a home for two men in sexual relationship, but Giovanni and David's relationship and literal remodelling of the room dismantles and converts the heterosexual imperative of male-female courtship embedded in the wallpaper.

Further, the wallpaper depicts an (almost certainly) white man and woman in eighteenth – and nineteenth-century clothing. The man's "knee breeches" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 86) align him with the nobility and bourgeoisie opposed to the French Revolution (led by the working-class sans-culottes, or without-breeches). Thus, the wallpaper implicitly argues for social and economic inequality, stratification, and the western European empire that resulted in generations of enslavement. David, from his privileged perspective, describes these figures as "distant, archaic lovers trapped in an interminable rose garden" (p. 87). However, David begins his narrative by defining his identity through the colonial conquest of his ancestors, and he closes the novel after contributing, at least indirectly, to the execution of his male partner. Baldwin thus

encourages readers to doubt how 'archaic' this idealised depiction of privileged, white heterosexuality is, since the character responsible for the physical destruction of its embodiment on this wallpaper, through his 'remodelling', is put to death by the government.

Brick Walls

While Giovanni's impending execution looms over the novel from the walls of the frame narrative, the threat of death is present earlier in the interior narrative and is invoked by the brick walls of Giovanni's room. Following an argument about what David calls Giovanni's "'hideous room,'" the men set about "putting the loose bricks Giovanni had taken out of the wall into a sack" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 117). When Giovanni asks David about his fiancée, and David replies that she is coming to Paris soon, David realises they each hold a brick in their hands, and, "It really seemed for an instant that if I did not go to him, we would use these bricks to beat each other to death" (p. 118). David's use of "we" is disingenuous, for at this stage in the novel, readers have witnessed numerous instances of David's – not Giovanni's – tendency toward violence. As a youth, David "was very nasty to Joey" (p. 10) after their sexual encounter, forcing the family to leave the neighbourhood; and on arriving in Paris, he meets Jacques, an older queer man, then proceeds to "force Jacques, on pain of humiliation, to pretend" (p. 28) that they were indeed friends, "exploit[ing]" him with "rough, male candor" (p. 28), and later wanting to disfigure Jacques's face so as to "make it impossible for him ever again to smile" (p. 40). David often dehumanises queer Parisians, from denouncing the "utter grotesqueness" of the boy who wears "makeup and earrings" as parallel to "the sight of monkeys eating their own excrement" (p. 27), to the larger group of "les folles, [...] screaming like parrots" (p. 26), to the older queer man who "looked like a mummy or a zombie" (p. 38) and to whom David refers, repeatedly, through the dehumanising pronoun "it" (pp. 38-39).

David's portrayal of queer individuals as animals parallels, as Mikko Tuhkanen (2007, p. 128) argues, "the recurrent representation of the racially other as beasts of mimicry in discourses of colonialism." Just as his attraction for Joey turned hostile, David finds, after realising that "the beast which Giovanni had awakened in me would never go to sleep again, [...] there opened in me a hatred for Giovanni which was as powerful as my love" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 84). David was confident, earlier, when occupying the role of the white master purchasing the darker-skinned human/animal. He first sees Giovanni standing at a bar as if he were "on an auction block [...] in effect, for sale" (p. 28), watched by others "as though Giovanni were a valuable racehorse or a rare bit of china" (p. 32); and David publicly purchases Giovanni, in a show of white power and wealth, by "put[ting] my ten thousand franc note on the bar" (p. 32). However, when David realises (his relationship with) Giovanni has roused a "beast" (p. 84) within him, linking his body to the bodies he regularly dehumanises, he does not interrogate his white privilege but instead continues to degrade Giovanni and fantasise about committing physical violence to him. Like his degrading use of "it" (pp. 38-39) for the queer elder, when David leaves Giovanni for the last time, he diminishes Giovanni to physical body alone, to a separate container of space without agency or self-direction. In the final paragraph of the two characters together in Giovanni's room, the word body appears five times, but Giovanni only once.

In addition to the walls of Giovanni's room, Baldwin depicts the character Sue as a brick wall and also complicates this metaphor by showing her instability. When David learns that Hella is coming to Paris, he meets a sexual acquaintance, Sue, at a cafe. In their teasing conversation, Sue describes herself as "'built like a brick stone wall'" and "'impenetrable,'" to which David counters, "'Doesn't it,' I dared, 'depend on the weapon?'" (p. 96). David's choice of 'weapon', instead of 'tool', a more expected word for architectural renovation, or 'wall', to echo Sue's noun and admit the range of possibilities held by this phenomenon, demonstrates the violence of his white masculinity, particularly when

considering the racial connotations of a woman compared to a brick structure for American readers. While the Black funk and soul band the Commodores made the physical description "a brick house" ubiquitous in their 1977 song "Brick House," versions of this expression were in use by the 1930s. Always a compliment for men, the phrase could imply a sexually desirable or undesirable woman. When David continues Sue's sexualised image of the penetrability of (her) walls, musing on "'stone walls and how they could be entered,'" he tells Sue, "'you can't just go on being a brick stone wall forever'" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 97). While David repeats, and seems to draw confidence from, his self-image as a "lean, hard, and cold" body (p. 168) with a mind filled with "hard places" (p. 17), he is "disquiet[ed]" (p. 99) by Sue's hardness. Even when seeking to forget his queer identity and Giovanni through a heterosexual liaison with Sue, where he could "be inside again, with the light and safety, with my manhood unquestioned, watching my woman" (p. 104), Sue's physical architecture defies easy placement on a male/female – and, thus, heterosexual/homosexual – binary.

Sue is made of brick walls, wrapped in "a hardness and a constriction" (p. 99) which keeps David from assuming the "king of glory" (p. 123) status he will later try to assume with Hella, and which keeps his "manhood" (p. 104) in question. During their sexual encounter, David complains that Sue does not need (nor want) him to rule her, for her brick walls have been "created already by too many men like me ever to be conquered now" (p. 99). Like his earlier word choice of 'weapon', David opts for a word connoting dominance and oppression in 'conquered'. Sue is a brick wall, and her ongoing lived experiences of trauma have solidified – and, paradoxically, disembodied – her, leaving David, again, outside. With Sue, as with Giovanni and Hella, David sees space as a passive container, rather than, as Robert Alexander Gorny and Dirk van den Heuvel (2017, pp. 1-2) describe, an active and "interrelational reciprocity between embedded configurations of bodies and matter." Space is not 'out there', separate from us. We cannot distinguish between 'space' and 'self'. Space is self is space. David's attempts to dominate

characters and their spaces, and his persistent failure to do so, queers white heteronormative structures of power and affirms the reciprocity between architecture and subjectivity.

In this novel, brick walls become fluid and penetrable, objects of lust and disgust, and bricks themselves move from symbols of security to those of weaponised love and desperation. After Giovanni loses his job, he and David remain in his room, even as David "felt that the walls of the room were closing in" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 105). In this confined literal and symbolic space, while characters persist in connection, they are both aware of their existence's tightening boundary. Giovanni begins another desperate and never-finished renovation project:

> He had some weird idea that it would be nice to have a bookcase sunk in the wall and he chipped through the wall until he came to the brick and began pounding away at the brick. It was hard work, it was insane work, but I did not have the energy or the heart to stop him. In a way he was doing it for me, to prove his love for me. He wanted me to stay in the room with him. Perhaps he was trying, with his own strength, to push back the encroaching walls, without, however, having the walls fall down.
>
> (p. 114)

Caught between brick walls of increasing pressure and recognising that he has "'never reached'" David and that David has "'never really been here'" (p. 137), Giovanni works to physically expand the architectural and symbolic space of his room.

His earlier, unsuccessful efforts to clean and remodel his room to encourage David to stay are, as Gregory Luke Chwala (2013, p. 19) argues, efforts of "making it more 'white' for David." Thus, Giovanni covers his apartment windows with "a heavy, white cleaning polish" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 85), and he tears off the wallpaper to leave behind walls now "a dirty, streaked white" (p. 86). David, in his own room in the south of France, makes and occupies an unclean space among his "dirty clothes" (p. 67), "dirty socks" (p. 69), "dirty glasses" (pp. 69-70), and "a tangled mess" (p. 70) of a bed. Yet, he misses no opportunity to belittle Giovanni's efforts to improve or whiten his room. David forecloses the embodied possibilities of a queer relationship with Giovanni by conflating (and foreclosing) the architectural possibilities of Giovanni's room, declaring, before leaving to

join his fiancée, "'What kind of life can we have in this room? – this filthy little room" (p. 142). After all, the novel ends with Giovanni's death and David's abstraction into being "trapped in time" with his "journey to corruption [...] already, half over" (p. 168). However, in pushing back and chipping his way into these brick walls, Giovanni exposes a queer space of possibility – the poché – that, while perhaps ultimately ineffective for these two men, offers a pathway for readers and subsequent generations.

The Poché

Giovanni attempts to break through the brick walls of his room, not to escape into another apartment on the full other side of these walls, but, rather, to open the poché, or 'pocket space,' between walls. Architecturally, the poché, which appears as negative or blackened space on a blueprint, is often employed in buildings of stone or masonry to represent the space taken up by thick walls themselves and/or the in-between space (perhaps for functional reasons, such as ductwork and wiring, or for unknown or ornamental reasons). Thus, the poché can designate solid or empty space, as both appear in the same way on a blueprint. In the Baroque period, plans often included and manipulated the poché to generate geometrically shaped rooms that made the wall-space between rooms almost as shaped and engaging as the room-space itself.

For non-original inhabitants of buildings with areas of poché, the resulting interior space is liminal and often undefined. While not referring to the poché, Grosz (2001, p. 93) describes "in-between" architectural space as "the only room to move, the only position from which to insinuate a rift or hole into the self-defined term that establishes binary privilege, and thus into the orbit of the binary structure itself." In a field dominated by known physical phenomena, architecture's embrace of the poché offers a turn toward queer phenomenology and its inclusion of liminal embodiments and subjectivities. Giovanni, then, is not trying to escape his room. Rather, through his remodelling projects, Giovanni

"worked, to make this room for you [David]" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 137), attempting to make and find room to include, shelter, and support a life with David. Further, in the blueprint's literal depiction of known space as positive or white space, and its depiction of the poché as negative or blackened space, Giovanni's effort also presents the violence sometimes necessary to fracture dominant white truth and subjectivity to make room for Black truth and subjectivity.

While Giovanni's most concerted literal effort to generate poché occurs in the final third of the novel, Baldwin includes more subtle instances of poché-making, or the making of an in-between and unknowable third space, throughout. Watching Joey, the "brown" boy (Baldwin, 1956, p. 8), sleep after their lovemaking, David feels a horror as "a cavern opened in my mind, black, full of rumor, suggestion, of half-heard, half-forgotten, half-understood stories, full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in that cavern. I was afraid" (p. 9). While racial categories, like walls, may seem to serve as what Lefebvre (1974, p. 87) calls "visible boundaries," these walls only help to generate "an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity." For David, who shares the racial marker of his "blond hair" in the novel's fourth sentence (Baldwin, 1956, p. 3), and who reiterates his white ancestry and fair complexion numerous times across the novel, the prospect of entering into a racially (and sexually) ambiguous continuity through this relationship is distressing, and David turns from this physical poché. Even in the final pages of the novel, David's own body – which he has worked hard, as Giovanni notes and ridicules, to maintain as "'covered with soap'" and so "'clean'" (p. 141) that it "gleams" (p. 1) – becomes, like Joey's, a "mystery" (pp. 9, 168) and a poché. Still, David does not embrace this poché, but after once referring to "my body" (p. 168), he separates himself from the architecture of his body and objectifies the structure as "this body" and "it." David recognises that his body is "the incarnation of a mystery," one that "I do not know" (p. 168), an embodied poché, but he turns away from the queer possibility of this space.

Throughout his life and his narrative, David experiences – but minimises – unsettling, disorienting poché moments, or pocket spaces, in relationships and in himself. Despite remaining in "constant motion" to avoid subsequent same-sex encounters after Joey flees to another town, David admits, "Even constant motion, of course, does not prevent an occasional mysterious drag, a drop, like an airplane hitting an air pocket," and he casually shares that "there were a number of those" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 20). David prides himself on successfully navigating through 'drops' from known space into queer space, even as these episodes of poché sometimes cost his various partners their safety, as with Joey; their career, as with the "fairy who was later court-martialed out" of the Army (p. 20); or life, as with Giovanni. These episodes of poché are "'drops' on the vertical hierarchy of morality," Harris (2002, p. 21) argues, where David's white privilege and power allows him to sacrifice his lovers "without ultimate regret" (p. 25). Though his mind is filled with "sharp, sheer drops" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 17), and Sue, upon meeting David at a café, insightfully describes his long absence (due to his infatuation with Giovanni) as when he "'rather dropped out of sight'" (p. 95), David works to convince himself that these 'drops' are but small moments of turning 'off line,' falling aslant and disoriented.

However, David's references to the 'pocket', the literal translation of poché, and references to poché-like moments are often sexually charged and communicate significant importance to his conception of self, space, and world. Sometimes, these moments are heteronormative and misogynistic, as when David's mother, who died when he was five, appears in his dreams as a "body so putrescent, so sickening soft, that it opened, as I clawed and cried, into a breach so enormous as to swallow me" (Baldwin, 1956, pp. 10-11). Even as he ostensibly longs for heterosexual relations and marriage as "something to be moored to" (p. 5), David more often interprets the architecture of the female body as a mortal threat. When having intercourse with Hella, he fears for his life, for "when I entered her I began to feel that I would never get out alive" (p.

158), and when with Sue, David wonders, "how soon I could be free" (p. 100).

However, David's poché-like moments of queer sexuality are often also charged with discomfort. As David falls out of love with Giovanni, he watches as "Giovanni's face [...] hardened before my eyes, began to give in secret places, began to crack" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 75). Giovanni's body becomes, like his room, a space where the poché and these threatening 'drops' might appear. This devastating double-ness of being both interior and exterior, positive and negative, echoes later in disgust. David admits that his hate and his love for Giovanni were both "nourished by the same roots" (p. 84). This in-between, or both-and, feeling for Giovanni is followed, five pages later, by David's remembrance of how he himself occupies a pocket of in-between space with Giovanni in regard to his nationality, for when Giovanni "was displeased with me, he said I was a 'vrai américan,'" and, "when delighted, he said that I was not an American at all" (p. 89). Architectural spaces and physical bodies are mutually co-constitutive, and David's body echoes the poché of the spaces he inhabits – a possibility he sees as increasingly threatening regarding his life in Giovanni's room.

Giovanni's room itself becomes a poché, an in-between space of possibility, mystery, and danger that David – though initially intrigued, like a tourist – can abide less the longer he remains there, away from his accustomed white heterosexual privileges and comforts. Giovanni's room was once a site of queer possibility and the delight of the nonlinear poché, where "life [...] seemed to be occurring beneath the sea," awash in "a joy and amazement which was newborn every day" (p. 75). As Giovanni's body begins to lose appeal for David, however, so does his room and the experiences of poché it might offer the men. Now, Giovanni's room seems to offer only a tangle of material objects that echo the bodily processes that David, one who is deeply concerned with his body and inhabited spaces remaining "clean and neat" (p. 66) and "clean and orderly" (p. 68), finds repulsive. Across the room, David fixates on the faecal image of "a single brown and wrinkled potato," the bloody image of "red wine [that]

had been spilled on the floor," and the urine-like images of "yellowing newspapers," with the phallic symbol of "a yellow light which hung like a diseased and undefinable sex in its center" (p. 88). In Giovanni's room, and in its queer spaces, possibilities, and poché, David sees his queer body and its processes. As an architectural embodiment of queer sexuality, Giovanni's room becomes like the "black opening of a cavern" (p. 9) of Joey's body; and as he did after sexually using Joey, David flees from Giovanni and his room, leaving him to that ultimate poché of death.

Black Queer Space

Depictions of the poché, while often used in its literal architectural sense, also function as a symbolic means to reveal and interrogate David's – and by extension, white heterosexual male – interpretations and repressions of Black, queer, and female sexualities. In the final pages of the novel, David begins to resist the illusion of a-historical identities, constructing instead a more Black and queer phenomenological orientation to being. When, in one of their final conversations, Hella begs David to tell her "'the truth,'" David cannot speak (Baldwin, 1956, p. 161). As morning ends his vigil, David stands in front of the mirror of his rented house. While his opening reflection, in a window, was crisp and "gleams" in his confident narration of his ancestral and present power (p. 3), his closing reflection, in a mirror, "forces me to turn and face it," and he realises, "I do not know what moves in this body" (p. 168). Unsettled from his drive toward a pure, objective state, David is implicated in Giovanni's death and is "under sentence of death" himself (p. 168). His body's "lean, hard, and cold" nature, which was earlier a source of pride, is now the unknowable "incarnation of a mystery" (p. 168).

David seems to acknowledge his queer identity – and the act of acknowledging it and living it – as a path forward at the end of the novel, for "the key to my salvation, which cannot save my body, is hidden in my flesh" (p. 168). Yet, Chwala rightly notes that David still reaches for whiteness (his "flesh") to justify and affirm himself, even as he knows any

salvation it might bring is tenuous and partial. David's specific affirmation of his white skin gives him only uneasy comfort, for Giovanni's naked body, seen by David as he leaves Giovanni's room for the last time, is deathlike: "his body was dead white, his face was wet and grey" (p. 144). Thus, when David's "body is dull and white and dry" (p. 168), this whiteness seems even more funereal in its dryness. In the novel's penultimate paragraph, David turns from the mirror and "cover[s] that nakedness which I must hold sacred, though it be never so vile" (p. 169), embodying the Biblical story of sin, and subsequent embarrassment of the body, in the Garden of Eden.

David's turn from the mirror, as well as his imagining of Giovanni's final moments and his embodiment of the subsequent morning, queers both men's trajectories away from the linear or known and into a Black queer phenomenology of space. David imagines Giovanni, poised on the edge of the poché of death, with "the whole world falling away from him" before "the earth tilts" and Giovanni "is thrown forward on his face in darkness" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 168). Perhaps, as Njelle Hamilton (2010, p. 45) argues, "David's entire project throughout the novel, as the novel's ending at the guillotine suggests, is to crucify/lynch his homosexual self/other or mirror image: Giovanni, the dark gay boy." Certainly, David's meticulous imagination of these final moments implicates him and the reader in a voyeuristic objectification of Giovanni and his death – if not in the act of beheading itself, by dismembering Giovanni's final night into a frame narrative, and in the perpetuation of white supremacy, for Giovanni and his "dirty body" and his "darkness" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 168) are murdered while David and his "lean, hard, and cold" body, even with its "corruption" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 168), are free in a large house and, in the final sentences, are untethered under an open sky.

Yet, David remains in a Black queer phenomenology of space even when stepping out of the rented house in the novel's final paragraph. He sees "the horizon [...] is beginning to flame" (Baldwin, 1956, p. 169), this linear border erupting into recursive, tangled pockets of light. In the final sentence, he takes the blue envelope announcing Giovanni's execution

and tears this flat, linear object “into many pieces” (p. 169), which move into the wind. The wind, also, follows no linear direction with the pieces of envelope but queerly, simultaneously “carr[ies] them away” and “blows some of them back on me” (p. 169). David, the envelope, and the wind tangle, moving off line and aslant, in a queer space. This image echoes the “paper-thin wafers” (p. 39), on the shirt of an older queer man, who David describes as “something walking after it had been put to death” (p. 38), earlier in the text. David moves towards, and is physically entangled with and implicated in, the ambiguity and hybridity of queer space and the poché, and the novel ends.

In the closing paragraph to the final essay of the last collection published during his lifetime, ‘Here Be Dragons’ (1985), Baldwin discusses the fluidity of identity. Baldwin writes, “we are all androgynous, not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other – male in female, female in male, White in Black and Black in White” (1985, p. 690). Considering the interior architecture of Giovanni’s Room through Black queer phenomenology, we see how these indoor spaces, particularly walls, are not objective phenomena empty of cultural and embodied history. Rather, walls slide and twist into a queer hybridity and a Black historicity. Here, we can chip into the wall to reach the in-between space of the poché and the potentiality – if not actuality – for openful, inclusive space. In this fluid and androgynous space between walls, we might be oriented in numerous directions, but if we bring our full subjectivity to witness both what is inside, outside, and both – and all – at once, we can generate a more robust and inclusive future.

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