

James Brown: The 'Illogic' of Innovation

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For someone who has had such an enormous influence on contemporary popular music, James Brown's musical abilities were not highly regarded among his own musicians. This is particularly borne out in Fred Wesley's recent book *Hit me, Fred: Recollections of a Sideman* in which Brown's former bandleader provides the most comprehensive insight to date of the trials and tribulations of working with the 'Godfather of Soul.' Whilst Brown possessed an uncanny ability to take musicians from disparate musical fields and synthesise their talents into a cohesive ensemble, all this was achieved by a man who by most insider accounts was considered a near musical illiterate. Said Wesley in an earlier interview with Brown biographer Cynthia Rose:

He has no real musical skills ... yet he could hold his own onstage with any jazz virtuoso—because of his guts. Can you understand that? James Brown cannot play drums at all. But he would sit down on drums and get that look on his face like he's playin' 'em and you would just play along with him. Organ—he cannot play organ at all. A guitar's not an instrument you can bullshit on, you got to really know how to play a guitar. And I've seen him pick up a guitar and go #''£#'%!' and look at you just like he's playin' it, you dig?¹

Despite Brown's seminal musical pioneering during the mid-1960s, his 'educated' band members were of the view that his Funk prototype was simplistic and unsophisticated and therefore not always to be taken particularly seriously. Brown's autocratic style of leadership was often a demeaning and debilitating experience for his musicians, and from time to time they would respond to such maltreatment by belittling their employer's musical ability. Wesley recounts an amusing episode involving former trumpeter Waymon Reed, who the author cites as one of the most consistently confrontational members of the group:

In the dressing room, he took out his horn and for hours and more hours played parts of Count Basie's 'Shiny Stockings', pausing between licks to laugh real loud and say stuff like, 'That's real music', not the honky-tonk stuff we have to play on this gig.²

¹ Cynthia Rose, *Living in America: The Soul Saga of James Brown* (London: Serpent's Tail, 1990) 86.

² Fred Wesley, *Hit me, Fred: Recollections of a Sideman* (Durham: Duke UP, 2002) 105.

Brown's great bands of the 1960s were populated with a significant proportion of skilled jazz players, including Wesley, Alfred 'Pee Wee' Ellis and Maceo Parker (to name a few of the best known). The musicians' frustrations were compounded by the fact that playing with Brown was far more lucrative than what was generally offered in the jazz world, and that meant playing a subordinate role in a genre that was considered to be comparatively low-brow. As aficionados of the more cerebral bebop, their only desire was to try and eventually make it in the jazz big league, which is precisely where those that were able ended up. For instance, the cantankerous Waymon Reed went on to play with Max Roach and the Count Basie Orchestra (a group which Fred Wesley also later joined), whilst 'Pee Wee' Ellis assumed the directorship of Van Morrison's band.

In spite of these accounts of Brown's musical failings, I was curious to establish just how he managed to maintain the required level of agency not only to direct such talent, but also to synthesise such differences of musical opinion into the cohesive and enduring influence on popular music it would become. There is a certain irony in the fact that a man who was maligned among his peers for his apparent musical ineptitude would end up influencing the very musicians his personnel looked up to. Miles Davis changed the bebop world when he took the then radical step of incorporating Brown's rhythmic innovations in his music, a direction most notably discerned on albums such as *Bitches Brew*.³ Thus the James Brown story opens up an interesting inconsistency in the correlation between hands-on pragmatism and its relation to actual musical agency as well as providing a tale of ruthless determination over traditionally recognised 'ability.'

Drawing an analogy with Deleuze's conceptualisation of the 'Idiot' would, perhaps, be of some benefit in addressing this problem. Deleuze's character enables both naivety and innovation to productively coexist, and this was felt to be an appropriate concept to discuss Brown's idiosyncratic musical talent. This is not an attempt to speak ill of the 'Godfather of Soul;' on the contrary, this article proposes to illustrate how a certain type of naivety was necessary to realise one of music's most creative forces, one that exemplifies the necessity of the 'illogical' in the age of an informational regime that increasingly proceeds on the importance of 'factual' recognition. Recalling Deleuze's conclusion in *Cinema 2*, this is not entirely good news for creative thought.⁴

Image of Thought

Deleuze develops the Idiot as a type of perspectival character that he would later term a 'conceptual personae' in a chapter titled 'The Image of Thought' in his *Difference and Repetition*. The Idiot character plays a pivotal role in Deleuze's quest to conceive of a philosophy undaunted by the presuppositions of a 'dogmatic' image of thought, 'what would it mean to start philosophy "undogmatically", or with an image that secretes no illusions of trans-

³ Craig Werner writes of James Brown's influence on Miles Davis in his book *A Change is Gonna Come: Music, Race and the Soul of America* (Edinburgh: Payback, 2000) 138. Davis nominated Brown as one of his favourite artists ('My favorite music is Stockhausen, Tosca and James Brown') and cited Brown as a major influence in redefining his approach to composition: 'Miles followed his interest in Brown's experimental funk down into a deep African-thing, a deep African-American groove, with a lot of emphasis on drums and rhythm, and not on individual solos' (p. 138).

⁴ See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).

cendence.⁵ Here an Image of Thought can be rather generally perceived as an institutionally dominant form of thinking.

Deleuze derives the Idiot from Descartes, offering that his invention of the Cogito is a means of avoiding the objective presuppositions of *a priori* human rationality. Whilst Deleuze maintains an obvious fundamental disagreement with Descartes over the cogito as concept, he says that the cogito implicitly appealed to the perspective of the untrained philosopher. For Deleuze, the philosophical breakthrough provided by Descartes' Idiot was contained in its implicit subjective presupposition; that is, an egalitarian right to think because to 'think therefore I am' implied a 'common sense.' One would rightly point out that Descartes' depiction of such 'common sense' as a natural and evenly distributed property amongst all human beings is also a presupposition, and it is for this reason that Deleuze divides presupposition into the objective and subjective. The philosopher praises Descartes' Idiot for espousing the latter as a form of 'private' thought to the more 'public' and uncontested institutional thought. Whilst Deleuze acknowledges the impossibility of avoiding pre-supposition, he argues that Descartes' concept ascribes a common property to sense: 'we would do better to ask what is a subjective or implicit presupposition: it has the form of "Everybody knows ...".'⁶ Thus, in this 'private' and subjective thought, Descartes assumes everyone knows how to be and to think.⁷ This foregrounds the role of the untrained thinker, the Idiot who does not have sufficient knowledge to uphold the dominant image of thought. Thus the Idiot enacts a resistance against the illusion of so-called objectivity, whose basis is merely instated via an institutionalised 'dogmatic' image of thought that is upheld for the sake of its own perpetuity. Deleuze favours an egalitarian philosophy that takes up the cause of subjective presupposition against an objective one:

It then opposes the 'idiot' to the pedant, Eudoxus to Epistemon, good will to the overfull understanding, the individual man endowed only with his natural capacity for thought to the man perverted by the generalities of his time. The philosopher takes the side of the idiot as though of a man without presuppositions.⁸

The Idiot therefore makes possible an escape from this dogmatic 'Image of Thought,' which, Deleuze contends, is a way of thinking that operates to reinforce dominant ways of thinking. Deleuze seeks to challenge a history of philosophy where thought has a 'natural' orientation towards truth, and that reason necessarily provides an elaboration of this truth. Deleuze is critical about its implications for an *a priori* nature of thought, with an assumed teleology, meaning and logic. For Deleuze, such a dogmatic Image of Thought leads to the monolithic institution of rigid thought. Perhaps we could view the frequent inability to engage interdisciplinary discourse within the academy as an indicative example. Needless to say, the Idiot is necessary for alternative thinking and in this respect is central to the continuation of resistance against a 'public' common sense. As John Rajchman notes in his excellent overview of the philosopher's project:

⁵ John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000) 36.

⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone Press, 1994) 130.

⁷ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 130.

⁸ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 130.

With such Idiots, the pragmatic presuppositions of philosophy shift, revealing new relations between 'private' and 'public'. One example (not mentioned by Deleuze) might be Wittgenstein, always ill at ease with his public professorship and with the emergence of a new analytic 'Scholasticism', who declared 'the philosopher is a citizen of no circle of ideas; that is just what makes him a philosopher.'⁹

Private thought is allowed to be mistaken, to be naive. Rajchman says this marks the shift in Deleuze's terminology from the Cartesian Idiot to Dostoyevskian Russian Idiot:

In *Difference and Repetition* Deleuze says in effect that the only way to 'start without presuppositions' in philosophy is to become some sort of Russian Idiot, giving up the presumptions of common sense, throwing away one's 'hermeneutic compass' and instead trying to turn one's 'idiocy' into the 'idiosyncrasies' of a style of thinking 'in other ways'.¹⁰

Brown as Deleuzian 'Idiot'

My proposition is to offer Brown as a type of Deleuzian Idiot, a man who would not make music the way he was 'supposed to.' Where Brown differs from many other self-styled illiterate musical naifs is that he continually challenged his peers—some of America's finest musicians—to deliver this vision, regardless of how unfeasible it may have looked on paper. Indeed, history is full of examples that similarly illustrate that the 'proper' way is not always one conducive to progress, and, furthermore, that such unfeasibility becomes innovation in retrospect. On the point of Brown's musical deficiencies, Cynthia Rose argues:

During the 1960s and early 70s, Brown's touch seemed so certain it dazzled new recruits as much as his towering ego bruised them. How did he—a man who relied on 'real' musicians completely to implement his ideas—pick and choose his accomplices with such unwavering success? [Former bandleader] Pee Wee Ellis says he had 'an inner ear'. Ellis drums a beringed finger on the desk before him and savours the very words. 'James has this instant ability, this basic mother-wit, which allowed him to apprehend a certain combination of things. And he could get close enough to accomplishing the spirit of it himself to figure 'if I can get this close, I can PUSH it the rest of the way'.¹¹

Today it is generally accepted that the untrained and the musically inept can partake in the production of music, culminating in a common sense that there is no right way of creating music. In this respect Brown emerges as one of the more celebrated figures of the movement enabling this type of thought, not only because his naivety was so audacious but also because it was subsequently rewarded with overwhelming commercial success. For the Idiot, nothing can stand unchallenged because his naivety necessarily exposes the illusion of any transcendental law as an immanent quality of his becoming. The only presupposition is the creation of concepts themselves. It is an intuitive process. Rajchman says that 'Russian Idiots' ultimately show:

not only that philosophical thought is unlearned, but also that it is free in its creations not when everyone agrees or plays by the rules, but on the contrary, when what the

⁹ Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* 38.

¹⁰ Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* 38.

¹¹ Rose, *Living in America* 60.

rules and who the players are is not given in advance, but instead emerges along with the new concepts created and the new problems posed.¹²

This is not simply about espousing the virtue of being a poor musician, or an untrained one. By removing the overarching rule of judgement that mediates a dogmatic image of thought, possibilities open up. The Idiot's most important quality is an instinct for orientation. By successfully orienting one's self, the Idiot is capable of perceiving new connections that have not been able to surface otherwise. This method obviously requires a particular audacity and James Brown is most certainly attributed with such a quality, as Fred Wesley duly testifies:

Mr. Brown would sometimes come to the gig early and have what we call a 'jam', where we would have to join in with his fooling around on the organ. This was painful for anyone who had ever thought of playing jazz. James Brown's organ playing was just good enough to fool the untrained ear, and so bad that it made real musicians sick on the stomach.¹³

This sentiment is echoed by long time Brown stalwart and drumming legend John 'Jabo' Starks who says:

James would come in and get the sticks and sit down behind the drums and say, 'well, this is the way I want you to play it.' And you still haven't figured out which way he wanted it to go. Your best answer was, 'OK, gotcha Mr. Brown.' So you'd sit right back down and play what you were playing anyway. Because he never really played! Hey, man, I'm being honest, James did not play anything! He even wanted to fool around with the guitar! And he couldn't!¹⁴

To give credit where it is due, Brown did provide some more than passable drums on several early recordings, of which the well known hit 'Night Train' is one of the most notable examples. The musician's judgement of Brown may appear overly harsh because it is subjectively posited within the context of the 'learned' musician. For Wesley, as with most of Brown's personnel, gigs with Brown were often just considered temporary employment between jazz gigs or more cerebral enterprises, and their attitude toward Brown's musicianship was adjusted accordingly. Thus the more prominent members of the James Brown bands did use their tenure with Brown as a stepping stone until they were able to fulfil a higher calling within the jazz world. This was perceived as the domain of the 'real' musician. Of course, it should be noted that this concept of the 'real' musician is itself a constricting presupposition and perhaps Brown's ultimate legacy was his forthright ambivalence toward such a distinction. Thus, while his personnel were occupied with dreams of being recognised as 'proper' musicians, Brown's innovations were to have direct aesthetic implications on the evolution of jazz itself, rendering any dogmatic image of the genre anachronistic.

It is a question of someone—if only one—with the necessary modesty not managing to know what everybody knows, and modestly denying what everybody is supposed to recognise. Someone who neither allows himself to be represented nor wishes to

¹² Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections* 38.

¹³ Wesley, *Hit me, Fred* 110–11.

¹⁴ Quoted in Russell Simins and Eric Gladstone, 'The Man with the "Good Foot,"' *Grand Royal* 6 (1997): 42–44.

represent anything. Not an individual endowed with good will and a natural capacity for thought, but an individual full of ill will who does not manage to think, either naturally or conceptually. Only such an individual is without presuppositions.¹⁵

Brown was completely fulfilled by his own standard of achievement, which is perhaps an enviable quality. But this level of bravado and self-belief was also borne from pure lack of choice; Brown's amazing innovations *had* to be made because he was bereft of the musical and cultural capital of his peers. He thus used his experience as the 'common man' to successfully reach out to the suitably disadvantaged, which more than accounted for his superstar appeal within Black America. The Idiot is self-assured because he is not bothered with an orientation toward any image of thought that cannot see him. Why *can't* we do this? The tribunal at the gates of reason necessarily gives way to experimentation because the experience of the poverty-stricken childhood that Brown endured proved that the transcendental had no way of solving the immanent problems at hand. For this reason, the Idiot's instincts for ruthless survival can be perceived as cruel and callous, and by all accounts Brown was most certainly that way with his peers.

It is for championing such a character that Deleuze's critics have accused him of appearing as an apologist for this coldness and proceeding with a sort of Stoic 'indifference.' But Deleuze revokes judgment at every stage, as it is often a necessary indifference to dogma that offers liberation from oppressive regimes of thought, which allows the type of creativity that we celebrate in a figure such as Brown. This is not an absolution of callous behaviour but it does illustrate that innovation in thought is often accompanied by the very type of 'ill will' which Deleuze has attributed to the Idiot. Perhaps we can say that a type of corrective justice works of its own accord, and in this respect, rather than being bitter, his past employees are rather more concerned about their being associated with Brown's music at all. Wesley, for instance, professes embarrassment about some of the most popular Brown compositions with which he was involved:

I was getting credit for a lot of the music, as most people were looking at the music as James's and mine together. While I admit that I did most of the implementation of the music, the concepts were practically all his. It didn't sit right with me to be getting credit for music, especially since, frankly, I didn't think it was all that great ... I got this sick feeling when anyone told me how great 'Pass The Peas' was.¹⁶

Wesley's surprising admission only strengthens the perception of how thought is reflected against public presupposition, in this case of 'proper' music. It is this inescapable belief in the illusion of the transcendental that most of us unfortunately are plagued with that obscures what we have actually 'become'. Under the same logic, Wesley is subjected to the discomfort of being pigeonholed as Brown's bandleader and not recognised as a musician in his own right. Despite the criticisms noted in the article, it must be pointed out that Wesley is not one given to sour grapes, and retains a balanced and ultimately sanguine perspective throughout his memoirs. The author's pointed remarks on Brown's musicianship ('I never saw anybody play so bad with so much confidence and determination'¹⁷) do serve to emphasise the tenuous

¹⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 130.

¹⁶ Wesley, *Hit me, Fred* 172.

¹⁷ Wesley, *Hit me, Fred* 111.

nature of such ‘proper’ musicianship and that it is Wesley’s own maintenance of such a distinction that provokes his incredulity of Brown’s unorthodox musical ability. Yet despite an often rocky period of tenure, Wesley is conciliatory when he describes James Brown’s inimitable depth of passion which he says brought the music a new level of energy and enabled it to ‘[take] on a new power.’¹⁸ In fact, most accounts from Brown’s more notable ex-employees offer similar confessions of incredulity at Brown’s compositional process mainly because such unorthodoxy was not actually supposed to *work*:

I’ve got to give James credit ... because he allowed me to be creative—he made it possible for me to be ultra-creative. Take a tune like ‘Doin’ It To Death’ (in 1973). I would never, ever, in my wildest imagination have thought of doin’ something like that. But him givin’ me a basic idea caused me to create that. It’s my creation, but it’s what he gave me to create with. He would give you these little, unrelated elements, sometimes not even musical, and say ‘make something out of it.’¹⁹

This is where Brown had a superlative ability to forge new connections, to make the music work regardless of its orthodoxy. This is what Deleuze attributes to the great artist, as one who can make new and unforeseen connections. Deleuze would argue that this is the basis of an experimental and ‘nomadic’ thought that has no regard for upholding doxa. This parting admission from Wesley (recounting the genesis of Brown’s 1972 single, ‘Get on the Good Foot’) is testimony to this:

A horn line like that—NEVER would I think of it. It was just nowhere in my psyche. But this is what James gave me to work with. So now I got to take that, and put it along with a silly bass line—what I think is a ridiculous bass line. But you take his little weird elements and put them together into something which sounds like something and there you are, changing music.²⁰

Indeed those with more than a cursory knowledge of Brown’s work will already know that this track was not only an RnB chart-topper and one of Brown’s biggest hits, but it also had the distinction of being recognised as the record that inspired ‘breakdancing.’ This illustrates that judgement about proper musicianship can ultimately hinder conceptual progress. For Brown, conceptual progress was made with his predominance of repetition, the foundation of his legendary concept of ‘the one.’ Brown had an uncompromising belief in repetition that was suitably distinguished by its unprecedented duration, often extending a one-chord vamp not only across the two available sides of a seven-inch single, but also as the content of successive releases. This predilection for repetitive, undulating incantation (often of a single phrase) was particularly upsetting to a Western compositional aesthetic that prized melodic and harmonic progression. For this reason Brown found himself at the centre of many disputes with his label. Syd Nathan, boss of Brown’s first record company King, thought so little of his A&R man’s latest discovery that Ralph Bass was almost fired upon hearing Brown’s first disc, a record that would ‘incidentally’ become Brown’s first million seller.

¹⁸ Wesley, *Hit me, Fred* 107.

¹⁹ Cited in Rose, *Living in America* 92–93.

²⁰ Rose, *Living in America* 92–93.

I get Syd on the phone. He's yelling: 'Bass, what kind of shit you on?!' I don't know what he is talking about. 'That's the worst piece of shit I've ever heard! He's just singing one word.'²¹

Deleuze would enthuse that the genuinely new requires a shock to thought that allows thinking to proceed. Reminiscent of another of twentieth-century music's great Idiots, John Cage, who famously said, 'I have nothing to say and I'm saying it,' the new requires an espousal of concepts without a discourse. It is for this reason that many genuinely new artists cannot be understood in the context of the present and are somewhat monotonously declared to be 'ahead of their time'—a description which has similarities to Deleuze's concept of the 'untimely,' 'neither temporary or eternal.'²² In spite of my fervent praise of Brown's uncanny ability, I am not ascribing to him some type of teleological vision of the way music should be made. In fact, Brown freely offers that funk was not the result of some foresight or that he was intending to take music in a particular direction:

'Funk was not a project', he growls. 'It happened as part of my ongoing thing. In 1965, I changed from the upbeat to the downbeat. Simple as that, really. I wasn't going for some known sound, I was aimin' for what I could *hear*. "James Brown Anticipation" I'd call it. You see, the thing was *ahead*.'²³

True to the sheer pragmatic function of the Idiot, Brown did not mistakenly attribute presuppositions of intent or align his work to some transcendental project that would undermine its very newness. You cannot try and capture the future—it must be allowed to become in its own unpredictable and often illogical way. In fact it was later when the self-perception and knowledge of his legacy became an internalised concept, an object of introspection, that it became increasingly difficult for Brown to uphold that illusion of what he should be. Perhaps we can say that this is how stars become parodies. They lose that innocent sense of invention or, as Deleuze would say, thought without an image. In this respect, Brown's appeal to the 'common man' saved his career as that legacy sufficiently endeared his work to a new generation of other musical non-literates who would sample him in the future. In addition to Brown's musical side we also have his extraordinary legacy of dance which served to provide even further 'minor' and micropolitical functions given that bodily responses are fundamental to any political change.

The reason I am so enamoured of Brown is that he was one of those characters who, like the Idiot, were able to enact change without conforming to a predetermined pattern. He exemplifies how a subjective presupposition can overcome the objectivity of 'public' thought and of what 'music' *should* be. This is precisely why Deleuze prizes naivety and why he says that the work of the artist is not to represent, but to create connections. Deleuze similarly wanted to be seen as a naive philosopher, to make connections through concepts. Yet the maintenance of an environment conducive to the illogic of human thought should not be perceived as a given. It is for this reason that Deleuze was very much concerned with the future of thought in the informational society.

²¹ Geoff Brown, *James Brown: Doin' it to Death* (London: Omnibus Press, 1996) 56.

²² Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 130.

²³ Rose, *Living in America* 59.

Control Societies in the Informational Age

At the end of his second *Cinema* book, Deleuze warned readers of an emerging 'psychological automatism,' where thought becomes subordinate to the type of inherent systematisation that accompanies the Informational Age.²⁴ Perhaps we could rather generally correlate this to the problems that lie ahead of us if we model human thought after that of computer and cybernetic thought, where we could potentially become slaves to the 'password' and the 'correct' answer. The problem for Deleuze with this type of adherence to the informational is that logic is now written into the system, to be obeyed rather than understood, and for this reason he feels that this type of cybernetic inspired image of thought could present a society of control as we process information to extract from it valuable 'facts.'²⁵ This development has to be understood within the context of Deleuze's championing of the cinema as a means of experimental thought in the twentieth century. When Deleuze stresses the role of cinema on human thought it was because the cinema gave us an understanding of the brain. It was also because we never determined the cinema to act like a human brain: it was allowed to influence us of its own accord. The cinema, by the very nature of the rather mundane function that was initially expected of it, was allowed to inspire the creation of concepts without the strictures of dogmatic presumption. We can contrast this with the level of determination that today's control societies build into technology, the software that works on binary logic which rejects all but the necessary facts, including such personal data as pin numbers and credit histories.

On the other side of this rather pessimistic outlook, the musical among us are perhaps more optimistic, as musicians have generally made use of technology without being hindered by a slavish adherence to any dogmatic image of thought. Musicians have been comfortable taking up technology and using it in a rather naive way, allowing them to do illogical things for which the technology was never intended. Despite the continuing criticism directed at new media based music cultures (whether this be DJ culture, the use of sampling, or even just the thought of a human-technological musical assemblage at all), much of this boils down to a type of snobbery that has its remnants in the old nature/culture divide. There is nothing particularly productive that will emerge out of such debate, nothing that will contribute to the creation of new thought anyway. Deleuze certainly would not be perturbed by any such use of technology, musical or otherwise, unless we start to let machines set the trend for a determination of thought itself. Whilst some may cite this as being a bit old fashioned, Deleuze's argument is a caveat for those of us who prize the informational as a means of replicating human thought or consciousness. Despite the enthusiasm for what technologies such as Artificial Intelligence and Artificial Life can afford, the most highly prized and yet the most compromised aspect of human thought is its illogic. Perhaps I have little to fear in this respect, as key thinkers in the field such as Roger Penrose, whose insistence that consciousness is not algorithmic, continue to argue that machines will never emulate human consciousness, precisely because it is the human capacity for abstract thought that machines cannot emulate. As has hopefully been borne out by this discussion on James Brown, human illogic is not erroneous, and it is not to be judged as such. Indeed, it is illogic that is the key to the production of the new.

²⁴ Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 264–65.

²⁵ Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* 149.

As demonstrative of this, Brown's greatest gift was his stubborn refusal to 'learn' the logic of the 'proper' musician, and such indifference to dogma provides modern music its 'becoming.' Now I am not excusing the fact that some of James Brown's output (indeed, the vast majority of it since the mid-1970s) has consisted of tired retreads. By way of explanation, perhaps it demonstrates that the Idiot must always be resigned to an ephemeral existence. While it takes an incredible amount of self-belief to bring an idea into the world, the Idiot is also accompanied by a lethal lack of self-reflection, and the benefits of this 'power' are subject to diminishing returns when confronted with the sheer toll of ill will that necessarily proceeds its conception. In this respect, the reader can only empathise with Fred Wesley's view that Brown did in fact squander the chance of building a music empire due to the poor treatment of his musicians. The main point here is that things cannot be determined: they must become. Despite what he may have become, Brown's idiosyncrasies emerged from his own form of 'illogic,' the same illogic that led to some amazing musical innovations. The James Brown story provides sufficient reason to remain vigilant about an informational age, where the contemporary trend toward a logic of the password may find such illogic an increasingly rare indulgence.