

Dancing at the Museum

Parataxis and the Politics of Proximity in Beyoncé and Jay-Z's "APESHIT"

Liedeke Plate

The curatorial turn, with its shift of attention from the individual (autonomous) artwork toward the exhibition and the role of the curator in its creation,¹ has brought about a renewed focus on the museum as a political space; a space for experimentation and for transformation, for knowledge creation, and for social regeneration. In this article, the rhetorical figure of parataxis will be developed as a concept to inquire into what happens when performers dance at the museum, and how such dancing can be an agent of social change. For this, I focus on the music video "APESHIT" (2018) and bring rhetorical theory in dialogue with recent theory on proximity, to build on Mary Louise Pratt's notion of the contact zone as a social space "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today."² Filmed at the Musée du Louvre and released to promote the new album of R&B singer Beyoncé and her husband, rapper Jay-Z, the music video produces the art museum as a contact zone by bringing black dancers and singers into its space and staging relations between the performers and some of its iconic pieces. Exploring the ways in which the politics of proximity, contiguity, and access in "APESHIT" interface with those of representation to challenge the white colonialist narrative of the museum, this article seeks to understand how dancing affects the social space of the museum and what kind of knowledge dancing at the museum produces.

"APESHIT"

In June 2018 Beyoncé and her husband Jay-Z (together

known as the musical duo the Carters) released their video clip “APESHIT” to announce and promote their new album, *Everything Is Love*. The music video, which would be nominated Best Music Video at the 61st Annual Grammy Awards in February 2019 and win Best Art Direction and Best Cinematography at the 2018 MTV Video Music Awards, among other accolades, was first shown at the end of their second On the Run II Tour show at London Stadium on June 16, 2018, where it was followed by the announcement that a new album was out. It was subsequently released on Beyoncé’s official YouTube channel and made available through Jay-Z’s Tidal streaming service. Directed by Ricky Saiz, who works as a designer for the streetwear brand Supreme, the six-minute clip shows “Queen Bey” and her husband take possession of the former royal palace, like the “music royalty” they are, and sing about having made it—financially but also by being inside this bastion of white cultural power: “I can’t believe we made it / This is what we’re thankful for.” Following its release, the music video quickly spread through social media, inevitably amassing a wealth of commentaries and exegeses in the process.³

“APESHIT” opens with a night shot of a crouching, winged man outside the Louvre. The camera then shifts to the museum’s interior and shows Eugène Delacroix’s ceiling painting, *Apollo Vanquishing the Python*, followed by flashes of Andrea Solario’s *Madonna with the Green Cushion* and Paolo Veronese’s *Jupiter Punishing the Vices*, before zooming in on the Carters standing in front of the *Mona Lisa* in the Salle des États. From there, we move to the Daru staircase, atop of which Beyoncé and Jay-Z stand in front of the winged *Nike of Samothrace*, and later see Jay-Z rapping in front of Théodore Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa*, while Beyoncé and her dancers perform in front of Jacques-Louis David’s *Coronation of Joséphine*.⁴ As it leads past the museum’s iconic masterpieces, splicing extreme close-ups of paintings, panning shots highlighting the place’s grandeur, and tracking shots zooming in on the artists with scenes of dancing and displays of wealth typical of hip-hop culture (e.g., a Lamborghini and expensive designer clothes and jewelry), the video invites reflection on what it means to be inside the Louvre and to view the works again, or for the first time.⁵ Engaging with the space of the museum as though the clip were a virtual tour and speaking differently to different audiences, Beyoncé and Jay-Z, as I will call the collective of creative, sometimes anonymous artists responsible for the music video, act as the curators of a new museum experience, inviting their audience to linger in close proximity to art that may be, or appear as, new.⁶ At intervals, details of paintings revealing black presence are shown, for instance the black men in Géricault’s *The Raft of the Medusa* and the black servants in Veronese’s *The Wedding Feast at Cana*. Most of the time, however, the video shows images that display the absence of black bodies and culture in the museum, an absence that is revealed, challenged, and in part repaired through the presence of Beyoncé, Jay-Z, and the dancers in the Louvre and their unapologetic occupation of the museum’s space on their own terms. This restoration of black presence to the museum is made

particularly explicit in Beyoncé's posing as heir to Marie-Guillemine Benoist's model Madeleine in the painting formerly known as *Portrait of a Black Woman*.⁷ Wearing an expensive Versace dress and smiling confidently into the camera as she is seated next to her husband, Beyoncé portrays a new black womanhood and brings a new black presence to the museum in her presentification of art history, substituting a rich and successful black woman for Benoist's bare-breasted slave-turned-servant.

As the title suggests, "APESHIT" is an angry reaction to institutional racism and years of structural discrimination, oppression, and exclusion.⁸ Whereas the word "apeshit" is slang for wound up or angry behavior, after the behavioral tendency of apes to throw their feces when they are angry, "APESHIT" is "anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future," to use the words of the late American writer and feminist activist Audre Lorde; anger that is shown as well as transformed into something new, vital, and hopeful.⁹ In the visually stunning clip, details of the paintings are highlighted, the materiality of the paint is almost tangible, the splendor of the ceiling of the Apollo Gallery overwhelming. The sensuality of the brushstroke, the haptic-ness of the statues, and the magnificent splendor of the former royal residences are all emphasized, suggesting closeness and being-there. Within this space, a mesmerizing dancing unfolds that, through its correspondence to the artworks it re-presents, simultaneously questions and recovers the absence of people of color within the white colonial canon of the visual arts. As such, by bringing a black perspective to the museum, "APESHIT" performs decolonial work. This is accomplished through the clip's montage of images, scenes, and dance vignettes choreographed by Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui, who mobilized his theatrical style in an eclectic array of choreographic snapshots, with moves and gestures ranging from elegant and restrained to sensual, angry, and wild, and using contractions à la Martha Graham and hand twists that evoke chattel slavery.

In its invitation to reflect upon the works that are exhibited in the world's most famous museum, "APESHIT" can be seen as posing questions akin to those the art activist collective Guerrilla Girls has been asking museums since the 1980s, exposing and challenging sexism and racism in art and its institutions through billboards, performances, and other interventions.¹⁰ The implicit, covert reference in "APESHIT" to the anonymous feminist collective of artists, famous for the gorilla masks with which they secured their anonymity and their protest art exposing gender- and race-based discrimination in the art world and beyond, surely is not fortuitous. It is well known that the masks of the Guerrilla Girls emerged from a slip of the tongue—gorilla instead of guerrilla. In "APESHIT," the racist term of abuse, "gorilla," is reclaimed and turned into something to be proud of: "I'm a gorilla in the fuckin' coupe," Jay-Z raps as he quotes from a song by the American rapper Chief Keef, while Beyoncé—and later also Jay-Z—asks, "Have you ever seen the crowd goin' apeshit?"¹¹ Beyoncé and Jay-Z are known art



Fig. 1. Beyoncé and Jay-Z in the Louvre, screenshot from "APESHIT," 2018.



Fig. 2. Marie-Guillemine Benoist, *Portrait of a Black Woman* (a.k.a. *Portrait of Madeleine*), ca. 1800. Collection: Musée du Louvre, Paris. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

collectors and they have flirted with the world of “high art” before. For instance, in Jay-Z’s music video “Picasso Baby: A Performance Art Film” (2013), inspired by and featuring Marina Abramović and referencing artists such as Pablo Picasso, Mark Rothko, and Jeff Koons, among others; or when, in 2017, Beyoncé announced her pregnancy and, later, the birth of her twins on social media, posing as though she were Botticelli’s Venus or a Renaissance Virgin Mary in a floral wreath. Like such earlier references, the allusion to the protest art of the Guerilla Girls functions to inscribe “APESHIT” in a tradition while demonstrating the artists’ familiarity with that tradition—in this case, of feminist art activism. By simultaneously exhibiting their familiarity with the (private and corporate) museum party and knowledge of the performance- and event-based nature of contemporary art, “APESHIT” speaks of a desire to be taken seriously while at same time signaling to other audiences that they can appropriate whatever they want for their own ends—including White Western High Art.

The video clip’s evocation of the museum takeover further reinforces the impression that Beyoncé and Jay-Z (and their artistic team) are cognizant and savvy about the workings of the art world. Indeed, renting the Louvre for a night and bringing in their own crew for the purpose of creating the music video “APESHIT” speaks about a politics of proximity and access while highlighting the politics of representation. In the video, Beyoncé and Jay-Z are shown in the close and intimate proximity to art usually reserved for the rich. Presenting its viewers, who may not be able to afford the trip to Paris to visit the Louvre, with an experience of closeness and intimate proximity to art, “APESHIT” enables them to feel as though they are there. The dancing plays an important role in this, as I shall elaborate further on. Building on Martin Fuller and Julie Ren’s analysis of proximity at art exhibition openings, in the next section I first develop the rhetorical figure of parataxis as a concept to illuminate how “APESHIT” addresses and reconfigures the art museum’s politics of proximity and access.

Parataxis: The Louvre as Contact Zone

A crucial issue in contemporary Western societies is the increasing divergence in lifeworlds, with people living in the same places (cities, countries) yet experiencing totally different realities. These multiple realities—which, I must insist, are not just a matter of perspective or looking at things from a different standpoint but of ontology—require inquiry into the question of how they hang together, or could be made to hang together, and what role art and the art museum could play in that.¹² Indeed, today’s social and political polarization, the overt resistance to gender equality, diversity, inclusivity, and open borders, as well as the rise of unveiled misogyny, racism, and homophobia—all put pressure on the cohesion requisite for a society to function adequately. As I wish to argue here, by framing the issue as a matter of multiple realities that need to be made to cohere, we are led to focus on those incommensurable coexisting

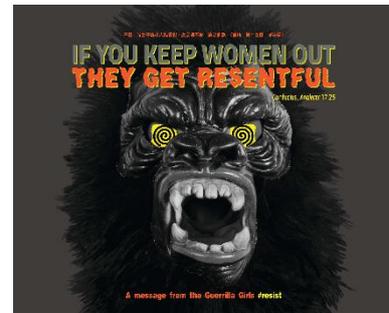


Fig. 3. Guerilla Girls, *If You Keep Women Out They Get Resentful*, 2018. © Guerrilla Girls. Courtesy of <http://www.guerrillagirls.com>

lifeworlds as material and contiguous worlds, and as contact zones in Mary Louise Pratt's sense of the term: as spaces "where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other..."¹³ Fuller and Ren have introduced the socio-spatial concept of proximity to discuss the art opening as a field-configuring event.¹⁴ Bringing the notion of proximity to the contact zone that the Louvre represents in "APESHIT," here I want to draw on rhetoric instead, specifically the rhetorical figure of parataxis, to tease out the ways in which "APESHIT" can help us think through the poetics and politics of proximity, contiguity, and nearness, and the possibilities for mutuality and social cohesion they entail.

In rhetorical theory, parataxis is a figure of juxtaposition, especially the juxtaposition of equal syntactic unities—words, sentences, phrases. A well-known example is Caesar's *veni, vidi, vici*—"I came, I saw, I conquered." Another comes from Shakespeare, in Hamlet's famous soliloquy: "To die: to sleep; / No more..."¹⁵ As these examples illustrate, in a parataxis the available means to connect propositions with one another are left out, often for the sake of rhetorical effect. There is a relation, perhaps even coherence, but this is not made explicit. As literary theorist N. Katherine Hayles explains,

*Parataxis does not necessarily mean that there is no relation between the terms put into juxtaposition. Rather the relation, unspecified except for proximity, is polysemous and unstable. Lacking a coordinating structure, it is subject to appropriation, interpretation, and reinscription into different modalities. This aspect of parataxis makes it into a cultural seismograph, extraordinarily sensitive to rifts, tremors, and realignments in bodies of discourse, as well as in bodies constituted through discourse and cultural practices.*¹⁶

Not surprisingly, therefore, the modernist literature scholar Susan Stanford Friedman sees parataxis as offering a nonhierarchical reading strategy for the study of international modernism.¹⁷

The concept of proximity that Fuller and Ren develop in their article, "The Art Opening: Proximity and Potentiality at Events," centers on the art opening's imperatives for being-there and the conditional indeterminacy of the potentialities proximity enables for its attendees, in effect allowing the artworks to recede to the background to form a mere occasion for relations between people. In contrast, here I mobilize the rhetorical concept of parataxis as a productive concept to theorize what happens in the museum in general, and in the music video "APESHIT" in particular, because it addresses not only the relations between people but also between people and things: viewers, dancers, and artworks. For it is proximity and access to the art exhibited in the world's most famous museum that is addressed and challenged in "APESHIT," and it is these artworks' meanings that are transformed through what are, in effect, human-nonhuman assemblages. Juxtaposition is, of course, an old and tried principle in museums. With the concept of

parataxis, however, the focus shifts toward the unarticulated conjunction: the connection that is missing yet intuited; felt viscerally, arrived at intellectually, but not stated.

It could be argued that this absence of connective is precisely what characterizes the current social condition; and hence, the problem art and art museums are asked to help solve. Parataxis can indeed be seen as a metaphor for society in times of sociocultural polarization. Whereas, for Georg Simmel, physical closeness paired with social remoteness characterized life in the modern city at the dawn of the twentieth century, this condition has since only intensified.¹⁸ In fact, parataxis, which is considered a modality of experience within social psychology, is sometimes regarded as the post-industrial era's dominant modality of experience.¹⁹ Parataxis in language would then be a symptom of a paratactic cultural formation.²⁰ Attention to the rhetorical figure of parataxis yields the important insight that the relation between the terms put into juxtaposition in parataxis is made tangible in the materiality of the words, their aural and visual resonances, and the viscosity of their scouring, colliding, or resonating sounds. This means that the sensory effects and how they register physically and affectively are crucial, making the body a prime locus of knowledge and understanding.

“APESHIT” makes its audience understand the material-corporeal dimension of the dynamics of paratactic relations and cohesion while virtually leading it through the museum. The dancing bodies engage with their environment through contiguity: within the video clip, their presence in the art museum establishes new, constantly evolving connections. Thus a brief shot showing two dancers sitting on the floor in front of Jacques-Louis David's *Portrait of Madame Récamier* asks the viewer to register the relationships between people and people, and people and things, as the arrangement of their brown bodies, dressed in (differently tinted) flesh-colored leotards, mirrors the raised ends of what is now known as a récamier (because of this very painting), while their joined white unfurled headscarves visually echo Juliette Récamier's antique-style dress, the extraordinary symmetry of the frame interrogating the social asymmetries of which it is composed.

Similarly, many scenes invite the viewer to search for similarities and differences, connections and confrontations, inquiring into the ways in which the singers' and dancers' bodies enter in conversations with the artworks exhibited in the museum, for instance, between Beyoncé and the *Nike of Samothrace*, the *Venus of Milo* and Benoit's *Portrait of Madeleine* (formerly “known” as *Portrait of a Black Woman*). As in Beyoncé's previous visual album, *Lemonade* (2016), “APESHIT” reclaims an African heritage, notably through a shot in front of the Great Sphinx of Tanis, but also in the line dance in front of David's *Coronation of Joséphine*, where the framing of the shot makes it look as though it is Beyoncé who is being crowned instead of Joséphine—a transfer of the symbol of sovereign power from one daughter of a slave



Fig. 4. Dancers with *Portrait of Madame Récamier*, screenshot from “APESHIT,” 2018.

owner to another.²¹ Finally, the visual juxtaposition of a shot of Hermes tying his sandal and kneeling black men on a football field engage contemporary (American) politics in clear yet equivocal ways, as the evocation may be to the son—Hermes—listening to the orders of his father Zeus and/or to the figure of the idealized athlete. As these examples illustrate, throughout the clip the singers and dancers in the museum point toward that which is not (yet) there by positioning themselves in the middle of what is there. The combination of more and less self-evident presences evokes what is absent “automatically,” as it were.

The dancers in the museum also demonstrate that the paratactic style is additive, not subtractive. Through the *mise-en-scène* and montage, images are added to the museum. For example, Carrie May Weens’ *Kitchen Table* series (1990) is evoked in a scene also represented on the album’s cover, where two of Beyoncé’s ensemble dancers, Jasmine Harper and Nicholas Stewart, are shown in front of the *Mona Lisa*, with Harper picking Stewart’s hair in an intimate gesture that reclaims a space trampled by millions of tourists making selfies for black love. Or, to give another example, Faith Ringgold’s quilt *Dancing at the Louvre* (1991), which may have served as inspiration for “APESHIT.” Ringgold’s quilt indeed shows two black women and three little black girls in beautiful dresses dancing in front of the *Mona Lisa*, among other artworks. The story that frames the picture begins as follows:

*Marcia and her three little girls took me dancing at the Louvre. I thought I was taking them to see the Mona Lisa. You’ve never seen anything like this. Well, the French hadn’t either. Never mind Leonardo da Vinci and Mona Lisa, Marcia and her three girls were the show.*²²

The video clip filmed in the Louvre echoes and amplifies the scene depicted on Ringgold’s quilt. “APESHIT” indeed is as much a display of pleasure and joy and childish irreverence for the Louvre’s “masterpieces” as is the little girls’ dancing at the Louvre on Ringgold’s quilt. Both affirm the right of the black body to being (alive) in the museum rather than being matter out of place, as implied by the remark that the French had “never seen anything like this” and that “Marcia and her three girls were the show.”²³ In this way, both also contest the received ways of enacting the museum ritual while establishing that there are many ways of experiencing the museum and engaging with the artworks hung on its walls, ways which may involve silent contemplation but might also engage the body, the mind, and the senses in a variety of different manners. Thus, the evoked images contribute to the multilayered quality of “APESHIT,” adding a black presence to the museum while making it the video clip’s affective center. They also explicitly engage with the politics of proximity and access of the art museum while developing a poetics of parataxis that makes the Louvre a more inclusive space by having different histories presented in it.



Fig. 5. Cover of *Everything Is Love* by Beyoncé and Jay-Z, 2018.



Fig. 6. Faith Ringgold, *Dancing at the Louvre*, 1991. Courtesy of Pictoright Amsterdam 2019. Here reproduced on the cover of *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Quilts*, by Dan Cameron et al. (New York/Berkely, CA: New Museum of Contemporary Art/University of California Press, 1998). Photo: Liedeke Plate.

Dancing at the Museum

In their paratactic engagement with the colonial implications of the Louvre's collection, Beyoncé and Jay-Z also gesture toward a genealogy of black curatorial interventions in the Louvre. In 2006 the award-winning African-American author Toni Morrison was guest curator at the Louvre. She invited dancers, musicians, and slam poets to engage in conversation with one another and give expression to the theme of "The Foreigner's Home" in relation to the works in the museum, especially Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*, which was the center of Morrison's exhibition.²⁴ The colossal painting—it is 4.91 by 7.16 meters in size—originally titled *Scène d'un naufrage*, commemorates the historical event when the French navy ship *Méduse* hit a sandbank off the coast of northwest Africa in 1816. About 147 people were put off the ship on an open raft, only a few of which survived. The painting met with controversy at first, not least because of the abolitionist message that can be found in the young black figure at the top of Géricault's pyramid of hope and despair, waving to a distant ship, asking to be saved, not just from shipwreck but also from slavery.²⁵ Recently the painting has been lauded for its compassion and empathy, its "monumental attempt to force the spectator to feel the horror of these events and the suffering of these people," as they are cast adrift at sea. As art journalist Jonathan Jones put it in an article drawing out the parallels with today's migrants,

*The Raft of the Medusa breaks the border between art and life. It is literally so large that the action seems to burst into reality, spilling out of the frame. Standing before it you feel the sea surge towards you. In this disturbing experience of looking, the anguish of the people on the raft becomes vivid and immediate. We are there beside them. [...] Géricault makes us feel the loss of each of the dead and the pain of each of the living. This painting is an act of empathy for our fellow human beings.*²⁶

By having Jay-Z rap in front of this painting, "APESHIT" is repeating the curatorial gesture of "The Foreigner's Home," a repetition of moves that shows the rappers to be "there beside" the castaways, as though part of their group, the embodiment of "imperial duress," "colonial presence," and "recursive histories," to borrow Ann Laure Stoler's vocabulary, showing how colonial histories such as that of the *Méduse* remain active forces shaping present lives, conditions, and some of the most pressing issues of our times.²⁷ As can be seen in *The Foreigner's Home*, a film based on video footage shot by Morrison's son, Ford Morrison, during the two-week event at the Louvre, which was released at the beginning of 2018 and screened at various festivals in Europe and the United States,²⁸ the scene in which Jay-Z raps in front of Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* copies an earlier scene in "The Foreigner's Home," when French *rappeur-slameur* D' de Kabal performed his incantatory "nous sommes là, en jachère, en transit" in front of the same painting to a rapt audience. In *The Foreigner's Home*, as the camera zooms in on details of the painting—especially the black body which forms the pinnacle of Géricault's composition, but also the bodies

below, lying atop one another—Morrison elaborates on the meanings Géricault's painting holds for her, "a raft cut off from the colonial ship" with its "gestural implication of race" and "abandoned crew members afloat without oars, between despair and hope," which she therefore sees as "a metaphor for and embodiment of the foreigner's home." Given the meaning the painting holds for Morrison, the implicit reference "APESHIT" makes to her earlier intervention in the Louvre can be read as an homage to the *grande dame* of African-American literature by the Carters (artistic theft implicitly acknowledging value).²⁹ Showing Beyoncé and Jay-Z to be clever with unacknowledged sources,³⁰ it is also yet another way to make present a black cultural tradition in the museum, and thus to tell a different story within its space of "civilizing rituals."³¹

Interestingly, it is precisely because Géricault's Raft "forces rapt attention on bodies" that dance becomes an important trope in "The Foreigner's Home," which featured a collaboration between the American dancer-choreographer William Forsythe and the German video artist Peter Welz, entitled *Retranslation/Final Unfinished Portrait (Francis Bacon)*. As can be seen in *The Foreigner's Home*, Forsythe, clad in black and drawing on the floor with his body, "almost duplicating agony," as Morrison puts it, finds further echo in the film with the insertion of footage of Lil' Buck's street dance performance with cellist Yo-Yo Ma of *The Dying Swan* by Camille Saint-Saëns, a classic of white ballet created for and made famous by the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova at the beginning of the twentieth century, and here reclaimed for another, black tradition of street dancing, of bodily technique and form of expression, as Lil' Buck, also clad in black, re-choreographs the famous solo dance, transforming the undulating swan arms into hip-hop waves, the gliding effect of the ballet dancer's *pas de bourrée suivi* into slides, glides, and moonwalks, and the pirouettes of classical ballet into turns of a different sort. The dancing scenes emphasize the importance of dance to Morrison's project of exploring the ways in which art can contribute to a sense of feeling at home in the world. As she explained in an interview in *The New York Times*, dance was crucial to "The Foreigner's Home," "because in that field you have the body in motion, and you have the obligation of seeing the body as the real and final home."³²

Dancing at the museum—the idea is not new. For some time a diverse range of projects have been developed in which dancers move through museums as the pioneers of a different kind of engagement with art.³³ Morrison's "The Foreigner's Home" illustrates this, as does, for example, Krisztina de Châtel, who together with Marina Abramović produced a choreographed piece that was performed at the Van Gogh Museum on the occasion of an exhibition of the work of the Austrian painter Egon Schiele in 2005. More recently, in 2015, Tino Sehgal was guest for a year at the Stedelijk Museum, for which he created a new piece every month, and in the summer of 2016 a selection of his work was shown at the Leopold Museum in Vienna. Additionally, the Arnhem-based dance company Introdans regularly



Fig. 7. D' de Kabal rapping in front of Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa*, screenshot from *The Foreigner's Home*, directed by Rian Brown and Geoff Pingree, 2017

organizes workshops at museums in the Netherlands, such as Museum Arnhem, the Kröller-Müller Museum, and Museum Het Valkhof.³⁴ Time and time again it comes to the fore, not only how dance intensifies the materiality of the paintings by engaging in a dialogue with them on an imaginary level and creating a different kind of knowledge, but also how the contiguity of dance and painting evokes a different perspective, experience, and perception; and how this embodied knowledge, with its attention to emotions and the sensuality and materiality of being, encompasses forgotten or underappreciated dimensions. There is a difference, to be sure, between being physically present in the space of the live performance and watching a video clip. Yet, because of the performativity of dance and music, which combine to move and affect the viewer through the very mediation of their registration as music video, the intensifying and incorporating effect still occurs precisely because of the juxtaposition of dance scenes and art images. Contiguity is concerned with the space in-between words, which is the space of difference, Samuel Whitsitt explains.³⁵ In-between the dancing and the artworks, relations are formed and potentialities are enabled, both within and beyond words; connections which are felt and known corporeally, viscerally, and affectively. In other words, by tapping into a repository of knowledge that has been forgotten or otherwise overlooked or occluded, paratactic dancing at the museum remedies forms of culturally induced ignorance.

Deconstructing the idea of ignorance as a natural given and simply the absence of knowledge in their book *Agnology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (2008), Londa Schiebinger and Robert Proctor have demonstrated through a range of convincing case studies how ignorance can also be actively produced in what is often the result of cultural and political struggle.³⁶ Agnology, as they have termed the study of culturally induced ignorance, raises the question not of how we know, but how and why we do *not* know. Which processes, mechanisms, and interests lie at the core of such ignorance? As scholars working on the senses have pointed out, there is a hierarchy of the senses in Western culture, with the distance senses (i.e., vision and hearing) valued as superior and the proximal ones, with their strongly affective dimensions, dismissed as inferior.³⁷ This undervaluation or plain rejection of the proximal senses as vehicle of knowledge, beauty, and ethics then forms one such domain of knowledge that is occluded, forgotten, or repressed in Western (white masculinist) culture. This is beautifully shown and countered in Dorota Gazy's "Education Dance" and "Court Dance," performances in a school and a courthouse, respectively, aimed at releasing and revealing emotions for which there is traditionally insufficiently room in these places, focused as they are on rational processes.³⁸ Because of its anchoring in the Cartesian mind/body dualism of Enlightenment rationalism, the ruination of the proximal senses as conducts of knowledge can be seen as a technology of whiteness and, as such, aligned with white innocence (as a self-image and self-fashioning) and "white ignorance," which Charles W. Mills defines as "the idea of an ignorance, a non-knowing, that is not contingent, but in

which race—white racism and/or white racial domination and their ramifications—plays a crucial causal role.”³⁹ In other words, countering white ignorance through (paratactic) proximity, “APESHIT” models a different way of engaging with one another and the world. As such, it shows dancers and choreographers to be important partners in an economy of knowledge that acknowledges the pluriformity of knowledge and recognizes diverse ways of knowing.

Conclusion

A music video created to promote Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s collaborative album *Everything Is Love*, “APESHIT” pursues an agenda of black uplift and reparation already manifested in Beyoncé’s visual album *Lemonade* (2016). While the very act of renting of the Louvre is itself a display of wealth (even though renting the Louvre costs a lot less than some of the clothes and jewelry they sport), the camera’s lush haptic visuals emphasizing being-there and closeness not only link wealth, status, and power but also speak of a politics of proximity and access while addressing, redressing, and challenging the politics of representation—who or what is represented in the museum, as well as how. The dancing plays an important role in this; first, because Beyoncé, Jay-Z, and the dancers bring a black presence to the Louvre within the video, and second, because through their presence, movements, and gestures, they reveal and repair the absence of black bodies and culture in the museum.

Yet dancing at the museum is important in yet another way, and that has to do with the way in which dance enacts and speaks of and to embodied knowledge: visceral, corporeal, and affective knowledge. Because of the performativity of dance and music, the music video produces different forms of knowledge that register in different ways in, on, and through the body. This includes knowledge about the articulations, connections, and relations between the images put in juxtaposition, between the dancer-performers and the artworks. Moreover, because social, spatial, and cultural proximities and distances are also physically felt and experienced, it is imperative that the bodily dimension is included in their conceptualization for social and cultural theory. Parataxis, the rhetorical figure of juxtaposition I have harnessed here for the purpose, enables just that. Because of its focus on the unarticulated conjunction between the contiguous terms, parataxis is a productive metaphor for the current social condition and, as such, a useful concept for thinking through the poetics and politics of proximity, contiguity, and nearness, and of the role the art museum can play in fostering social cohesion. Indeed, in the space produced in-between the dancing and the artworks, relations are formed and potentialities are enabled, both within and beyond words. These relations and potentialities are both actualized and future possibilities, including future intimacies, reciprocities, and redress.



Fig. 8. Beyoncé and her dancers dancing in front of Jacques-Louis David’s *Coronation of Joséphine*, screenshot from “APESHIT,” 2018.

Liedeke Plate is Professor of Culture and Inclusivity at Radboud University in the Netherlands. Her research focuses on mechanisms in art and culture that foster or hinder inclusive thinking, and ranges from questions of gender, reading and rewriting, cultural memory, and urban space, to the material turn in literary and cultural studies. She is author of *Transforming Memories in Contemporary Women's Rewriting* (Palgrave, 2011) and co-editor of, among others, *Technologies of Memory in the Arts* (Palgrave, 2009), *Performing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2013), *Materializing Memory in Art and Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2017), and *Doing Gender in Media, Art and Culture* (Routledge, 2018).

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1. Paul O'Neill, "The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse," in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, eds. Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick (Bristol: Intellect, 2007), 13–28.
2. Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* (1991): 34. Here I deliberately return to Pratt's concept of the contact zone and not that of James Clifford, as elaborated in his "Museums as Contact Zones." Although the latter brings Pratt's concept to the space of the museum, his focus is on dialogue between people over the use and meaning of anthropological objects. In contrast, Pratt's original concept is more flexible and broad. Literary and linguistic in origin, it explicitly opens up to "contacts" beyond those taking place in words. Indeed, in looking for "the pedagogical arts of the contact zone," Pratt identifies a range of activities that I see as relevant to what happens in the art museum, including a variety of "exercises in storytelling... experiments in transculturation... and in the arts of critique, parody, and comparison (including unseemly comparisons between elite and vernacular cultural forms)." Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," 40. See also James Clifford, "Museums as Contact Zones," in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 188–219.
3. Beyoncé and Jay-Z, "APESHIT - THE CARTERS," published by Beyoncé on YouTube, June 16, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kbMqWXnpXcA>. Social media sharing and exegesis are obviously part of the clip's strategy.
4. The painting's full French title is *Sacre de l'empereur Napoléon Ier et couronnement de l'impératrice Joséphine dans la cathédrale Notre-Dame de Paris, le 2 décembre 1804*, which translates as *Consecration of the Emperor Napoleon I and Coronation of the Empress Josephine in the Cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris on 2 December 1804*. In French it is usually shortened as *Le Sacre de Napoléon*; in English, *The Coronation of Napoleon*. Here I chose to shorten it otherwise, in order to emphasize the coronation of Josephine, who was the daughter of a Martinique slave owner. As I discuss further on in the article, Beyoncé seems to transfer the crown to herself by dancing in front of the painting.
5. Here one may also be reminded of the African-American artist Carrie May Weens's *Museum* series (2006–present), which includes a photograph of her standing outside the Louvre, clad in black and with her back turned toward the camera—a photograph that symbolizes her exclusion from the French museum.

6. It is interesting to note that the Louvre, which reportedly was quickly convinced to allow the filming of "APESHIT" because its synopsis "showed a real attachment to the museum and its beloved artworks," subsequently capitalized on the music video by materializing the latter's curatorial gesture in its thematic trail "Jay-Z and Beyoncé at the Louvre," which was added to its offerings of guided tours in the wake of the clip's release on YouTube and its positive—and productive—reception. More interesting still is the Louvre's twenty-five percent increase in visitors in 2018, an increase that the museum's president partly attributes to "APESHIT." Emily Zogbi, "How Much Does It Cost to Rent the Louvre? What Beyoncé and Jay Z Might Have Paid to Film New Video," *Newsweek*, June 26, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/how-much-does-it-cost-rent-louvre-what-beyonce-and-jay-z-might-have-paid-film-996660>. See also "Beyoncé helps Paris Louvre attract record visitor numbers," *France24.com*, January 3, 2019, <https://www.france24.com/en/20190103-beyonce-helps-paris-louvre-attract-record-visitor-numbers>. For the Louvre's thematic trail, see <https://www.louvre.fr/en/routes/jay-z-and-beyonce-louvre>.
7. See the exhibition "Le modèle noir: De Géricault à Matisse," on show at the Musée d'Orsay in Paris, March 26 – July 21, 2019, which for the first time in history reveals the names of the black models on famous paintings, from Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (Joseph is atop), to Laure on Manet's *Olympia* and Benoist's portrait of her servant, Madeleine.
8. See also the last strophe of Essex Hemphill's "Visiting Hours," a monologue narrated from the perspective of a black attendant at the National Gallery in Washington, DC:

And if I ever go off,
you'd better look out, Mona Lisa.
I'll run through this gallery
with a can of red enamel paint
and spray everything in sight
like a cat in heat. (21)

- Essex Hemphill, "Visiting Hours," *Ceremonies: Prose and Poetry* (San Francisco: Plume Press, 1992), 20–21.
9. Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism," *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (1984; repr., New York: The Crossing Press, 2007), 127.
 10. For more information on the Guerrilla Girls, see www.guerrillagirls.com.
 11. Chief Keef, "Faneto," *Back from the Dead 2*, RBC Records, October 31, 2014.
 12. I derive the idea of multiple realities that in one way or another "hang together" from Annemarie Mol's *The Body Multiple: Ontology in Medical Practice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).
 13. Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," 34.
 14. Martin Fuller and Julie Ren, "The Art Opening: Proximity and Potentiality at Events," *Theory, Culture & Society* (forthcoming), advance online publication, March 6, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276419834638>.
 15. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act III, scene 1, lines 60–61.
 16. N. Katherine Hayles, "Postmodern Parataxis: Embodied Texts, Weightless Information," *American Literary History* 2, no. 3 (1990): 398.
 17. Susan Stanford Friedman, "Cultural Parataxis and Transnational Landscapes of Reading: Toward a Locational Modernist Studies," in *Modernism*, eds. Astradur Eysteinnsson and Vivian Liska (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2007), 35–52.
 18. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in *Simmel on Culture*, eds. David Frisby and Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1997), 174–185. See also Fuller and Ren, "The Art Opening," 3.
 19. Cf. Bob Perelman, "Parataxis and Narrative," *American Literature* 65, no. 2 (1993): 313–324.
 20. Hayles, "Postmodern Parataxis," 396.

21. As Beyoncé tells in an interview in *Vogue*, researching her ancestry she recently learned she descends from “a slave owner who fell in love with and married a slave.” Beyoncé, “Beyoncé in Her Own Words: Her Life, Her Body, Her Heritage,” *Vogue*, August 6, 2018, <https://www.vogue.com/article/beyonce-september-issue-2018>. See also note 4.
22. Dan Cameron, Richard J. Powell, Michelle Wallace, Patrick Hill, Thalia Gouma-Peterson, Moira Roth, and Ann Gibson, eds., *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1998), 129.
23. See also Gloria Wekker, who writes that her mother, “in later years, would often speak of the uncomfortable sensation that wherever we went, we were the main attraction.” Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 8.
24. See Toni Morrison, “Étranger chez soi,” in *Toni Morrison invitée au Louvre: Étranger chez soi*, Toni Morrison, Jean-Marc Terrasse, Juliette Becq et al. (Paris: Christian Bourgeois, 2006), 22–24.
25. Ibid. See also Albert Alhadeff, *The Raft of the Medusa: Géricault, Art, and Race* (Munich and London: Prestel, 2002) and Martine Le Coz, *Le nègre et la méduse* (Paris: Éditions du Rocher, 1999).
26. Jonathan Jones, “The 200-Year-Old Painting that Puts Europe’s Fear of Migrants to Shame,” *The Guardian*, August 11, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2015/aug/11/the-200-year-old-painting-that-puts-europes-fear-of-migrants-to-shame>.
27. Ann Laure Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Time* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016). See also Wekker, *White Innocence*, in which she similarly explores the way in which the colonial past endures and remains a force in the present, building on Edward Said’s notion of the “cultural archive.”
28. *The Foreigner’s Home*, directed by Rian Brown and Geoff Pingree (ICE Lens Pictures, 2017), www.theforeignershome.com.
29. It should be noted that the performances by Morrison and Beyoncé and Jay-Z are hardly the only ones that have been made in front of Géricault’s painting, which is, as a matter of fact, frequently the center of interventions at the museum; for instance, when the members of the activist group “Libérons le Louvre” [Let’s Free the Louvre] collapsed in front of it in March 2018, to denounce the museum’s partnership with the French oil company Total.
30. This is in line with critiques of Beyoncé’s work that can be found in, for instance, Nicole Montagne, “Een nieuwe hiërarchie: Over Beyoncé en de kunstkritiek,” *De witte raaf* 197 (January/February 2019): 1–3. Montagne rightly outs Beyoncé (and her artistic team) as a serial plagiarist. While I take Montagne’s point that we should critically look at practices of using unacknowledged and unauthorized sources and giving insufficient credit to the creative people involved in what is eventually presented and seen in the media as Beyoncé’s (work, talent, creative genius), I also think this line is intellectually unproductive. Rather, what is needed is a rethinking of the politics of citation in a read/write culture. As I have argued elsewhere, copyright law is limiting the role of the arts in the necessary processes of reparation and transformation, and it is doing so precisely for those sociopolitical spheres that are damaged by the copyrighted art and media works it protects. At the same time, there is no denying that Beyoncé and her husband are making big money out of these “borrowings” and “references,” as they evidently are well aware and flaunt in the video clip. The financial aspects are therefore neither to be overlooked nor underestimated. I thank my colleague Martijn Stevens for

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- drawing my attention to Montagne's article just as I was finalizing this text.
31. Carol Duncan, *Civilizing Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995).
 32. Alan Riding, "Rap and Film at the Louvre? What's Up With That?," *The New York Times*, November 21, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/11/21/books/21morr.html>. See also Morrison, "Étranger chez soi," 24.
 33. In tandem with this development, a range of theoretical reflections and critical studies has similarly emerged. See, for instance, André Lepecki, "Zones of Resonance: Mutual Formations in Dance and the Visual Arts since the 1960s," in *Move: Choreographing You – Art and Dance Since the 1960s*, ed. Stephanie Rosenthal (London: Hayward Publishing, 2010); Erin Brannigan, "Dance and the Gallery: Curation as Revision," *Dance Research Journal* 47, no. 1 (April 2015): 5–25; and Cosmin Costinaş, Ana Janevski, eds., *Is the Living Body the Last Thing Left Alive? The New Performance Turn, Its Histories and Its Institutions* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2018).
 34. In 2003 my students and I took part in an interdisciplinary workshop for Dance and the Visual Arts at the Museum for Modern Art Arnhem (MMKA, now known as Museum Arnhem) as part of the course "Gender en de kunsten" [Gender and the Arts]. In 2005 the students in my "Cultural Theory" class visited the performance that was part of the Schiele exhibition at the Van Gogh Museum.
 35. Samuel P. Whitsitt, *Metonymy, Synecdoche, and the Disorders of Contiguity* (Limena: libreriauniversitaria.it, 2013), 8.
 36. Londa Schiebinger and Robert Proctor, eds., *Agnotology: The Making and Unmaking of Ignorance* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).
 37. Laura Marks, "Thinking Multisensory Culture," *Paragraph* 31, no. 2 (2008): 123–137.
 38. See <http://dorotagazy.com>.
 39. Charles W. Mills, "White Ignorance," *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, eds. Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (New York: SUNY Press, 2007), 20.