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Trapping Ecosystems

Apeshit's *Fugitive Politics of Post/coloniality*

ABSTRACT On June 16, 2018, Beyoncé and Jay-Z released "Apeshit"—a trap-styled hip hop track featuring a chorus of "I can't believe we made it / Have you ever seen the crowd going apeshit?" The much-commented-on music video for the track was framed as a hip hop takeover of the world's most visited museum—Paris's Louvre—featuring pop's reigning power couple, marketed as "The Carters," making themselves at home with a collection of dancers in flesh-colored black, brown, and beige bodysuits. While the video was generally received through the split-screen frame of either a cutting decolonial takedown of this monument to Western civilization or the ultimate in money-flaunting bling spectacle, a more subtle and complex set of issues is at play. This article examines the deep historical ambivalences at play in this pop cultural artifact. Employing multi-modal methodologies that combine visual and musical arts perspectives articulated via the frames of postcolonial studies, this analysis theorizes the cultural "traps" in effect. Ranging from the track's "trap" sonic production and lyrical rhetoric of escape ("we made it"), to the historical trap of musealized colonial plunder and the Louvre's labyrinthine, oft-subterranean floor plan, to the "trappings" of consumption, bourgeois self-making, and aesthetic contemplation, we seek to illustrate how this socio-cultural text destabilizes Enlightenment universalism and its public/private split.
KEYWORDS *Apeshit*, *Trap Music*, *Hip Hop*, *Decolonization*, *Museums*, *Post/Colonial Studies*, *Fugitivity*, *The Carters*, *Beyoncé*, *Jay-Z*, *The Louvre*

> Trap: Atlanta slang for the specific dwelling or neighborhood where drugs, guns, or other illicit products or services are sold. The term is multifaceted and flexible. When used as a verb, "trapping" means hustling.
>
> -Sesali Bowen, *Bad Fat Black Girl: Notes from a Trap Feminist*

> apeshit /ˈeɪpʃɪt/
> *adjective* **VULGAR SLANG**
> wild with excitement or anger.
>
> -Oxford Languages (https://languages.oup.com/google-dictionary-en/)

> The blues impulse transferred....Through its many changes, it remained the exact replication of The Black Man In The West.
>
> -Amiri Baraka (1966)

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INTRODUCTION

On June 16, 2018, Beyoncé and Jay-Z released their album *Everything is Love* and its hit, "Apeshit"—a trap-styled hip hop track featuring a chorus of "I can't believe we made it / Have you ever seen the crowd going apeshit?"[1] The much-commented-on music video for the track was framed as a hip hop takeover of the world's most visited art institution—Paris's Louvre—featuring pop's reigning power couple, marketed as "The Carters," making themselves at home in the museum with a collection of dancers in flesh-colored black, brown, and beige bodysuits. The *Apeshit* video was generally received as either a cutting decolonial takedown of this monument to Western civilization, or simply the ultimate in money-flaunting bling spectacle. As reportage about the filming and the video's intimate scenes make clear, the museum was turned into a domestic space that night. Indeed, following the success of the video, Airbnb ran a contest whereby "two lucky people now have the chance to spend the night inside the Paris museum."[2]

In this article, we argue that *Apeshit* is not just about being at home in cultural institutions, but rather about how museums are trapping devices, cages, and containers—microcosms of our broader trapping ecosystem.[3] We believe that *Apeshit* is neither a decolonial takedown of Western racism nor a commercial money grab. It is not a performance *about*, but a performance *of* the deep and enduring contradictions of racial capitalism—what Greg Tate calls our inherited "split-screen worldview."[4] Building on the wealth of reaction, response, praise, and critique generated by the music video—including the multidisciplinary colloquy on *Apeshit* published in the *Journal of Popular Music Studies* shortly after the video's 2018 release[5]—this article offers a singular reading through the multivalent lens of *traps*.

Working with a colonial and postcolonial framework that views colonialism as still alive and well (i.e. post/colonial) and entrapment less as a metaphor than as a ubiquitous, even defining, material reality of our planetary present, we theorize *Apeshit* and its discourses through Fred Moten's "fugitivity," Anthony Bogues' "heresy," and critical frames proposed by Tate, Kyra Gaunt, and others.[6] Refusing to understand *Apeshit* as an experience of entrapment reduced to the specific and specialized space of the museum,

1. The Carters, *Everything is Love* (Parkwood/Sony/Roc Nation, 2018). In the following discussion, the italicized title, *Apeshit*, refers to the music video, while "Apeshit" refers specifically to the audio release. Related media and supplementary materials are gathered at this article's companion site: https://criticalexcess.org/apeshit/. This research was supported by the European Union through the European Research Council funded CIPHER: Hip Hop Interpellation project (ERC CoG 819143).

2. Dusty Baxter-Wright, "You can now spend a night inside the Louvre in Paris thanks to Airbnb. Channel your inner Beyoncé and Jay-Z," *Cosmopolitan,* April 3, 2019.

3. Arjun Appadurai, "The Museum, the Colony, and the Planet: Territories of the Imperial Imagination," *Public Culture* 33, no.1 (2021): 115–28.

4. Greg Tate, "Jean-Michel Basquiat, Flyboy in the Buttermilk," *The Village Voice,* November 14, 1989. https://www.villagevoice.com/2019/07/29/jean-michel-basquiat-lonesome-flyboy-in-the-80s-art-boom-buttermilk/ Last consulted September 26, 2022]. We explore Tate's work on these contradictions in the next section.

5. Carol Vernalis et. al, "Introduction: APES**T," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 30, no. 4 (2018): 11–70.

6. Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

As we will see, behind discourses of fugitivity and heresy lurk entrapment, commodification, and other material realities of imperial and colonial projects.

in this article we employ multi-modal methodologies combining visual and musical arts perspectives articulated to theorize what happens if we take *Apeshit* to speak to a more generic existential condition of entrapment.

In their recent work on trap music's Black aesthetics, Regina Bradley and Justin Burton have defined the sound of trap in relation to its evocations of Southern Black drug culture and associated images of poverty and danger that suggest trap's *valuelessness*.[7] Citing Nina Eidsheim's work on the Black voice, Burton explains trap's racial imprint:

> While sonic blackness, as Eidsheim is careful to caution, "is *not* the unmediated sound of essential otherness or the sound of a distinct phenotype," trap trucks in old, worn-out stereotypes that have for so long circulated through the US social, political, and legal systems that it gives the impression that its sonic blackness is, indeed, some kind of essential or distinct phenotypical product.[8]

Just as trap music traffics in "worn-out" sonic vocal stereotypes, so too does it take the cheap and ubiquitous sounds of drum machines—and refashion them into *irresistible hooks*. Indeed, the production on "Apeshit" features the hallmarks of trap: pitched bass, bright synths, hi-hat, and tight snare drum hits—elements that feature "the kind of artificiality that has come to be most closely associated with the Roland TR-808 drum machine."[9] As Bradley suggests, in trap aesthetics these musical elements have come to "sonically symbolize the relentless grind of hustling drugs"—a definition that extends Sesali Bowen's explanation in the opening epigraph above to the musical ethos of trap.[10] And, importantly, this ubiquity and artificiality forms the backbone of trap's ability to slip the snare of artistry. "Trap rap music wasn't confined to needing to be respectable," as Bradley puts it. The result is what Burton dubs "trap irony": how "sounding black in a post-racial society" is terrifically passé…and, yet, massively popular.

As we proceed, it will be important to keep in mind that the English word "trap" belongs to a particularly rich etymological family, including relations to the words: tread, step, stair, and snare.[11] Treads, for example, are kin to traps: to trap and be trapped always invokes the trace of one's footprint. Traps are also close relatives to stairs: ladders that lure with the promise of ascension. The proximity of entrapment and upward mobility (of professionalism, of consumerism) is suggestive of getting trapped. Yet traps are not simple mechanisms of subjection but rather luring engines that always work at a collective level, formalizing and expanding subjection as a general—yet selective—condition of

7. Justin Adams Burton, *Posthuman Rap* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Regina N. Bradley, *Chronicling Stankonia: The Rise of the Hip-Hop South* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Seneca Vaught and Regina N. Bradley, "Of the Wings of Traplanta: (Re)Historicizing W.E.B. Du Bois' Atlanta in the Hip Hop South," *Phylon*, vol. 54, no. 2, Special Volume: *Hip Hop Culture and Rap Music Aesthetics in the Post-Civil Rights South,* (Winter 2017): 11–27.

8. Burton, *Posthuman Rap*, 99. See also Nina Sun Eidsheim, Marian Anderson and 'Sonic Blackness,'" *American Opera* 63, no. 3 (September 2011): 641–71.

9. Burton, *Posthuman Rap,* 84.

10. Bradley, *Chronicling Stankonia,* 85.

11. The OED entry reads: "trap (n.) "contrivance for catching unawares," late Old English træppe, treppe "snare, trap," from Proto-Germanic *trep- (source also of Middle Dutch trappe "trap, snare"), related to Germanic words for "stair, step, tread" (Middle Dutch, Middle Low German trappe, treppe, German Treppe "step, stair," English tread (v.))."

indebtedness. As we will see, in *Apeshit,* being trapped equals both being lured and luring (alongside) others.

By interrogating the track's "trap" music production alongside lyrical and performative rhetorics of escape, we seek to illustrate how "Apeshit" destabilizes Enlightenment universalism and its public/private split. Further, the *Apeshit* video foregrounds the historical trap of musealized colonial plunder and the Louvre's labyrinthine, oft-subterranean floor plan, as well as the broader "trappings" of consumption, bourgeois self-making, and aesthetic contemplation. It would be, therefore, misleading to assume that all the references to traps and being trapped in *Apeshit* univocally refer to the museum as the space of seizure and to institutional power as a capturing force. *Apeshit* was recorded in the Louvre, the most-visited museum in the world and ground zero for the coupling of the civic and educational aspirations of the Enlightenment and European colonial expansion. If the history of the Louvre is the history of the public role of museums writ large, then it is interesting to see how *Apeshit* engages with these elements frantically, luring its audience into a tour that races from Egyptian sculpture and Greek marbles to da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* and other masterworks of European painting.

Through this tour, the song posits the Louvre and the visual projects of universal culture and colonial plunder as part of a mosaic sketching out the myriad ways in which bodies and subjectivities are formed (become form) through display, by being displayed, and more specifically by being displayed as motionless objects. Yet everything in *Apeshit* moves frantically, appears in permanent transition, enacts a radical fugitivity, a kind of heresy that cannot be turned into heritage—an escape that is not just spatial but also temporal. As we will see, *Apeshit* does more than "sampling" canonical works of universal (European) art history, instead making space for alternative aesthetic positionings emerging out of the vulgar act of "going apeshit" with others in unexpected ways, in unusual spaces. At stake, therefore, are the consequences of understanding how and why museums function as traps—from their colonial conception and historical emergence to their institutional workings and spatial engineering.

What happens if we understand *Apeshit* as a state of things, as a sort of weather report of how humans and things invest in world-making, in the production of interspecies radical sociality emerging from the fact of being collectively and irredeemably trapped? By following the state of frantic effervescence that *Apeshit* advances, we argue that only by considering museums and cultural institutions as trap houses within a damaged planetary ecosystem can we imagine radical ways of occupying spaces, being in common, and being at home. The issue is, then, to ask what is at stake in going apeshit? What does an apeshit condition of creating and living render possible?

That museums play a central role in the reproduction of what Ann Laura Stoler calls "imperial formations" is well established.[12] Museums rationalize knowledge production as part of the colonial enterprise and normalize systems of classification and techniques of inventorying that have been easily expanded, adapted, and misplaced at a planetary scale. In this article, we elaborate on these imperial formations by positioning the institutional

12. Ann Laura Stoller, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

traps at play in *Apeshit* in counterpoint with the sonics of trap music and the Southern Black performance cultures that animate, enliven, contest, and reconfigure the rarefied and sacralized Western (white) space of the Louvre. As we will see, this music that sounds artistic vulgarity, vacuity, Southern drug culture, its irredeemable Blackness—and, ultimately, its valuelessness—is ostensibly leveraged by these icons of pop royalty, to critique this institution and its invaluable Western inheritance.[13]

Of course, this critique is not without its own problems of privilege and complicity. As Joe Schloss puts it in a brief cameo in Kyra Gaunt's polyvocal *JPMS* piece, we can read *Apeshit* as either "using the trope to subvert itself" or "just a higher level of material possession" depending on our position.[14] Yet, we argue, *Apeshit*'s emergence in the current #RhodesMustFall and #BlackLivesMatter moment is revealing in its aesthetic and ideological detail and becomes a telling index of the Enlightenment's universalist project when read against the political economy of the art world and its capitalist, finance-driven logic. The innumerable traps we encounter in *Apeshit* are not just snares to be slipped, but stairs to be climbed, money to be made—from the capitalist trappings of the so-called rat race to the fraught legacies of chattel slavery and today's enduring fugitivities.

Further, as Gaunt's Black feminist critique makes abundantly clear, Beyoncé's sexualized performance of non-compliance in the Louvre's hallowed halls offers for our #MeToo moment "a kind of display of wealth in the resources of hip-hop sampling aesthetics while challenging gender normativity and white wealth all at once." Through its doubled performance of Southern Black womanhood and unapologetic hustle, *Apeshit* thus fashions its intersectional critique—its "trap feminism." As Sesali Bowen explains in her *Bad Fat Black Girl: Notes from a Trap Feminist*:

> Trap feminism says that Black girls who have ever rocked bamboo earrings, dookie braids, Baby Phat, lace fronts, or those who have worked as hoes, scammers, call-center reps, at daycares, in retail, and those who sell waist trainers and mink lashes on Instagram are all worth the same dignity and respect we give Michelle Obama and Beyoncé.[15]

Further, argues Bowen, trap feminism carves out a space for agency between the compounding double and triple standards around respectability politics, "elitist assumptions about Southern Black culture," and dismissive "good feminist" attitudes towards trap representations of women.[16] It is in this fraught and highly policed space that trap fugitivity emerges with its heretical, *apeshit* ethos.

13. It is worth noting here that, while neither Beyoncé nor Jay-Z is a trap artist per se, Beyoncé has engaged her Southern heritage (Houston, Texas) throughout her work as a recording artist.

14. Kyra Gaunt, "We Are No Longer Your Monkeys: Exploring the Critical Techno-musicology of 'APES**T'" in Carol Vernalis et al., "Introduction: APES**T," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 30, no. 4 (2018): 57.

15. Sesali Bowen, quoted in Natelegé Whaley, "Hot Girl Shit: Trap Feminism is Sesali Bowen's Vision for Black Women," *BitchMedia.org*. https://www.bitchmedia.org/article/sesali-bowen-interview-trap-feminism; *Bad Fat Black Girl: Notes from a Trap Feminist* Sesali Bowen, *Bad Fat Black Girl: Notes from a Trap Feminist* (New York: Amistad, 2021).

16. Bowen, *Bad Fat Black Girl*.

"FLYBOY IN THE BUTTERMILK": THE LOUVRE'S APES**T TOUR

On November 6, 2021, I (JGR) visited the Louvre intent on taking the museum's curated "visitor trail," titled "Beyoncé and Jay-Z's Louvre Highlights: Artworks featured in the 'APES**T' Music Video." Approaching the entrance from the east, I was greeted by a surprise. There, looming large beyond the museum's Richelieu Wing on the Rue de Rivoli was a massive billboard—an ad for Tiffany featuring a fifteen-meter-tall Audrey-Hepburned Beyoncé standing in front of a Tiffany-Blue Basquiat. Jay sat at left admiring his elegant wife with dreadlocks in disarray à la Jean-Michel Basquiat himself—art's original "Flyboy in the Buttermilk".[17]

With its unmistakable placement in this prime real estate, the ad for the luxury brand captured, almost too perfectly, *Apeshit*'s complex, contradictory racial play and kept the spotlight squarely on The Carters' 2018 video. The ad—like the spectacle of the *Apeshit* video—came ready-made with a headline grabbing backstory detailed in legacy print media, including *The New York Times* and *Vanity Fair*.[18] Like Bey and Jay's pop cultural incursion into the Louvre, the advertisement highlighted something of the gauche tactlessness of pandering to vulgar consumer value in the presence of fine art and its received invaluable ethos.[19]

In their 2017 article, "Of the Wings of Traplanta: (Re)Historicizing W.E.B. Du Bois' Atlanta in the Hip Hop South," Seneca Vaught and Regina N. Bradley point to just this tastelessness—of commerce sullying art. Writing of this historical discourse in relation to the perceived baseness of contemporary trap music, Vaught and Bradley explain: "We address the problem of 'trapping' in our analysis of the phrase 'the vulgarity of money getters' explaining how, in *Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois raised questions about the pursuit of wealth and power that have come to characterize the Atlanta Hip Hop scene from the 1990s to the present."[20] In connecting Du Bois's "vulgarity" critique to contemporary criticisms of Southern trap culture and its own money-getting "hustle," Vaught and Bradley track a thread of elitism rife with hypocrisies centering around the contradiction of social climbing as trap—a central luring engine of the colonial/Enlightenment project. As they suggest, trap music's intervention over the past two decades offers a cutting rejoinder to "the politics of respectability"—a socio-economic trap central to their consideration of "why so many scholars have dismissed the Black South in general and Atlanta in particular as an important site of cultural creativity."[21]

17. Tate, "Jean-Michel Basquiat."

18. Vanessa Friedman, "The Mystery of that Basquiat Painting—and Its Tiffany Blue," *New York Times,* September 1, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/01/style/tiffany-basquiat-jay-z-beyonce.html; Nate Freeman, "The Curious History of the Basquiat in That Jay-Z and Beyoncé Tiffany Ad," *Vanity Fair,* August 24, 2021, https://www.vanityfair.com/style/2021/08/basquiat-jay-z-beyonce-tiffany. Last consulted February 8, 2023. Among other juicy details, Tiffany's executive vice president of product and communications, Alexandre Arnault, has suggested that their trademark (literally) color—"Tiffany Blue" (robin's egg blue)—likely inspired Basquiat to use this color in the painting (titled, *Equals Pi*).

19. Vaught and Bradley, "Of the Wings," 13.

20. Ibid., 13. The fragment quoted within the quotation belongs to W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015 [1903]).

21. Vaught and Bradley, "Of the Wings," 12–13. See also Kyesha Jennings, "City Girls, Hot Girls and the Re-Imagining of Black Women in Hip Hop and Digital Spaces," *Global Hip Hop Studies,* vol. 1, no. 1 (2020), where the author situates Bradley's work on "contemporary disrespectable women in southern hip hop," linking these discourses to "present historical understandings of the blues woman archetype" (56).

FIGURE 1. Basquiat meets *Breakfast at Tiffany's*—massive Beyoncé and Jay-Z billboard ad for Tiffany outside the Louvre (Photo: J. Griffith Rollefson, November 6, 2021).

In his game-changing *Village Voice* article, "Jean-Michel Basquiat, Flyboy in the Buttermilk," Greg Tate explores these hypocrisies and contradictions through an examination of the controversial—and wildly successful—Black artist. With an eye very much trained on Basquiat's financial success as central to his controversy, Tate explains the aesthetic stakes of being a "flyboy (trapped) in the buttermilk:"

> From the perspective of this split-screen worldview, where learning carries the weight of a revolutionary act and linguistic skills are as prized as having a knockout punch, there are no such things as empty signifiers, only misapprehended ones.[22]

Yes, Beyoncé and Jay-Z certainly profited heavily from Tiffany's promotional campaign, but the racial contradictions that the ad forces us to confront should help us shift our focus instead to the systemic regimes of thought that produce such a middle-less discourse —what Jason King characterizes as "a stalemate between warring ideals of race and class" in his contribution to the *JPMS* colloquy on *Apeshit*.[23]

Indeed, the *Voice* article's opening pullquote sums up these "split-screen" contradictions of racial capitalism, as Tate explains: "When Basquiat died last year at the age of 27 of a heroin overdose he was the most financially successful Black visual artist in history and, depending on whether you listened to his admirers or detractors, either a genius, an idiot savant, or an overblown, overpriced fraud."[24] It is this binarizing Gordian knot that we seek to interrogate (and slip) in the present article—a "split-screen" ideological trap wrought of the Enlightenment's interweaving social, economic, and aesthetic projects; projects that obscured deep structural inequities with the brilliant light of egalitarian, universalizing rhetoric. In *Apeshit* we have just one such trap that implores us to pick a side: are The Carters creative geniuses or overpriced frauds, decolonial activists or vulgar money getters? The answer, of course, is yes.

After passing through the mouth of the Louvre pyramid along with the throngs of people braving the morning cold and continuing Covid-19 pandemic to enter this monument to Western civilization (and its *others*), I was patted down and descended into the belly of the Louvre. I approached the audio guide station at the entry to the museum's Southern Denon Wing and inquired about the Beyoncé and Jay-Z tour that I'd read about. The attendant gently scoffed and offered: "That's not an official tour—it's just an online thing." While it seems there was once a "step-by-step" guided tour—indicated by the dead link offered by *Rolling Stone*—the attendant was wrong in suggesting that there is not an official tour.[25] The Louvre website still hosts a curated "Visitor Trail"—"Beyoncé and Jay-Z's Louvre Highlights: Artworks featured in the 'APES**T' music video."[26]

The Manichean question of *who's playing whom* was at the center of debates about The Carters in the Louvre, and the attendant's easy dismissal suggested the Louvre was done "going apeshit" and it was back to business as usual. Despite the fact that the video had helped the Louvre shatter annual attendance records by some 25 per cent—including

22. Tate, "Jean-Michel Basquiat."

23. Jason King, "Stuck In A Time Loop: Notes On APES**T," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 30, no. 4 (2018): 14–18.

24. Tate, "Jean-Michel Basquiat."

25. Daniel Kreps, "Louvre Creates Guided Tour Based on Beyoncé, Jay-Z's 'Apeshit' Video", *Rolling Stone*, July 6, 2018. https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/louvre-beyonce-jay-z-apeshit-video-696636/ Last consulted September 26, 2022.

26. The Louvre Website, "Beyoncé and Jay-Z's Louvre Highlights: Artworks featured in the 'APES**T' music video" https://www.louvre.fr/en/explore/visitor-trails/beyonce-and-jay-z-s-louvre-highlights Last consulted February 8, 2023.

a notable diversifying of its audiences ("*un peu de sang frais*?")—the institution was back to its central mission of curating heritage and an ethos of quiet contemplation.[27] With the massive Tiffany ad outside, however, it seemed that The Carters were not done "going apeshit."

Importantly, the tour begins by coming out of the winding subterranean spaces below the Louvre pyramid and ascending the grand staircase up to the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* (see Figure 2). This opening marks the beginning of the pilgrimage to the museum's most visited artwork: *The Mona Lisa*—the most valuable painting in the world according to the *Guinness Book of World Records* (as based on its insurance valuation). The tour's start is, thus, a performatively telling one, as visitors are put in a position to behold the heights of Western civilization from far below and then asked to literally ascend to its heights via the grand staircase. The Carters use this engineered performance of supplication and homage in the video to place themselves in the position of honor atop the marble staircase.

Even a cursory investigation into the Louvre's "APES**T" tour reveals traps at several levels. First, it lays bare the selective ways in which Black bodies are appropriated into the museum. Second, it foregrounds the difficult coexistence of the museum's social and educational roles and its function as a mass tourism-oriented cultural attraction. Third, it outlines the proximity of art institutions and global finance, highlighting the dependency of national museums on private investors.[28] Further, the museum store, Starbucks, and adjacency to the newly refurbished underground shopping mall that is Les Halles also suggests its design as that of a consumerist trap. The freedom one feels on winding out of the labyrinth and returning to the fresh air, open vistas, and sonic bustle of life outside is a visceral one.[29]

From the perspective of the APES**T visitor trail, being trapped is not being motionless, but rather being oriented in a particular direction, one that captures movement and reduces spontaneity to a prefigured pathway. If traps are correlative steps, if being captured and climbing the stairs of upward mobility are part of the same process, then being trapped acquires new meanings, as the Louvre, that ground zero of universal history and universalizing display, becomes the center of colonial/Enlightenment processes of entrapment.

27. Angelique Chrisafis, "Beyoncé and Jay-Z help Louvre museum break visitor record in 2018." *The Guardian,* January 3, 2019. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/03/beyonce-jay-z-help-louvre-museum-break-visitor-record. Last consulted September 26, 2022.

28. As just one notable example, the gallery space curating the Venus de Milo includes a plaque thanking the Japanese National Television Broadcaster, NTV, for funding renovations. See Nippon Television Network Corporation, press release: "Renovation of Exhibition Area in Louvre for 'Venus de Milo' completed with NTV Support," July 6, 2010. https://www.ntv.co.jp/english/pressrelease/20100706.html. Last consulted February 8, 2023.

29. Where we read the Louvre's architecture as evocatively "labyrinthine," in his contribution to the *JPMS* colloquy, "On APESHIT's Trapness," Gabriel Ellis describes it in relation to trap's "lavishness," writing: "For APESHIT to succeed as a celebration of The Carters' financial and cultural success that resonates on visual, narrative, and musical levels, the artists needed a sonic architecture that was as grandiose as the visual architecture of the Louvre. And right now, there is no sound in hip-hop that is more lavish than trap." Gabriel Ellis, "On Apeshit's Trapness," *JPMS,* 22.

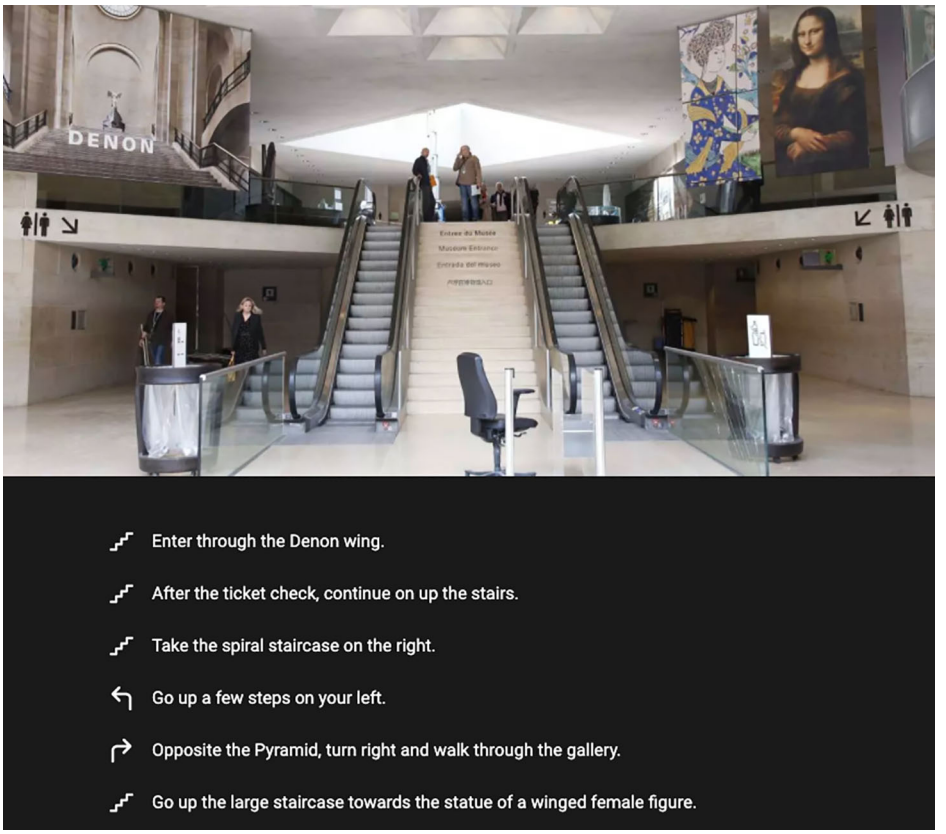

FIGURE 2. Screen capture of step 1 of "Beyonce and Jay-Z's Louvre Highlights: Artworks featured in the 'APES**T' music video" (at https://www.louvre.fr/en/explore/visitor-trails/beyonce-and-jay-z-s-louvre-highlights).

READING *APESHIT'S* TRAPS: FUGITIVITY AND (IMPOSSIBLE) CONTAINMENT

The first thing we should consider in reading *Apeshit* in its Parisian context is that The Carters' track is very much a sequel to Jay-Z and Kanye West's hit track "Niggas in Paris" from the 2011 album *Watch the Throne*.[30] That "luxury rap" album is rife with rhetorics of escape and also centers its critique of the Western inheritance in Paris—the "City of Light." Where the 2011 track offered "If you escaped what I escaped / You'd be in Paris getting fucked up too," the 2018 track offers "I can't believe we made it / This is why we thankful." Even more to the point, where the 2011 track framed the excursion as "Got my niggas in Paris and we going gorillas," the 2018 track centers the dehumanizing primate image both in the "Apeshit" title and in the recurrent question of its hook: "Have you ever seen the crowd going apeshit?"[31] As Gaunt notes in her trenchant intersectional contribution to the *JPMS* colloquy, titled "We Are No Longer Your Monkeys": "The

30. J. Griffith Rollefson. *Critical Excess:* Watch the Throne *and the New Gilded Age* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2021).

31. Apropos of this "apeshit" wildness, another continuity between the two tracks is Kanye's much-commented-upon line "that shit cray!" on the 2011 track and Jay's interjection "she went crazy!" on the 2018 track.

'ape' shit of being dis-liked or dehumanized by associations with monkeys follows us everywhere denying us voice and power."[32] Because of the ubiquity of this racist trope, Bey and Jay's "apeshit" critique immediately conjures a larger critique of colonial dehumanization and containment. Gaunt concludes: "It is amazing how well this music video performs its critical work of confronting the pricelessness and dehumanization of the bodies of black women and their lives."[33] Notably, Gaunt here captures the dual valence of "pricelessness" in *Apeshit*—that is, the *valuelessness* of Southern Black women and culture counterposed with the *priceless* artworks of European masters.

Debates about the decolonization of museums have emphasized the spatial singularity of these white boxes as well as the suffocating historicity reducing the objects and beings trapped in these cultural environments to single things—to parts of the display rather than multivalent actors in cultural networks, rites, and practices.[34] Yet such centrality of the museum space begs the question of whether art institutions still fulfill their historical role in sustaining a modernist ethos that emphasized education and progress (while silencing centuries of plunder and dispossession) as part of a universal human enterprise. The simian wordplay in the music video presents a catalog of antiracist critiques pitting this historical legacy of subhumanization against this superhumanizing space dedicated to the transcendent power of art—replete with the requisite pedestals, white walls, and brilliant light. The genealogies of human zoos are also highlighted through the many references to capture, which are, nevertheless, never a case of full subjection, of unconditional surrender.[35]

The rhetoric of "going apeshit" in a space such as the Louvre throws into high relief the ideological disciplining necessary for proper comportment in such spaces—from the art gallery to the concert hall: the quiet contemplation of (white) art. Josephine Baker (and her "Banana Dance") comes to mind as a disruptive figure in jazz-era Paris, who remade and revolutionized standards of beauty and bodily comportment while remaining subversive at the fringes of what was considered to be "acceptable" at the time.[36] In a kind of maneuver that resembles Baker's subversion, with the line "have you ever seen the crowd going apeshit?" the video injects the (Black) popular into the Louvre's (white) artistic space and calls into question how our human bodies should appreciate these purportedly great and *moving* works of art. That is, can we not just be emotionally and intellectually *moved by*, but also physically *move with* art that inspires us in the Louvre?

32. Kyra Gaunt, "We Are No Longer Your Monkeys: Exploring the Critical Techno-musicology of 'APES**T'" in Carol Vernalis et al., "Introduction: APES**T," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 30, no. 4 (2018): 55.

33. Kyra Gaunt, "We Are No Longer Your Monkeys," 62.

34. Ishmael Reed, *Mumbo Jumbo* (New York: Doubleday, 1972). Reed presents an artful critique of the colonial/Enlightenment project's universalizing musealization: "Europe can no longer guard the 'fetishes' of civilizations which were placed in the various Centers of Art Detention...Dungeons for the treasures from Africa, South America and Asia."

35. The genealogy of human zoos comes to mind here through its proximity with the development of mode(l)s and technologies of display. See Pascal Blanchard et al., eds., *Human Zoos: Science and Spectacle in the Age of Colonial Empires* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008); Caroline A. Jones. *The Global Work of Art: World's Fairs, Biennials, and the Aesthetics of Experience* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

36. Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000).

Can we smile, laugh, and dance as part of our contemplation and appreciation? *Apeshit* thus suggests a critique that works as both an indictment against colonial/Enlightenment ideologies and an invitation to be moved in mind *and* body. It sings, raps, and dances against these histories and their legacies in a way that collapses the mind/body split at the heart of colonial/Enlightenment aesthetics.

As we turn to look more closely at the sights, sounds, lyrics, and movements of the video, this context should serve to guide our understanding thereof. Ultimately, the reason that Beyoncé and Jay-Z in Louvre might strike us as gauche is that the spectacle threatens the "split-screen worldview" that Tate perceives—Gaunt's "pricelessness." As with Baker and Basquiat before them, we are encouraged to read Bey and Jay through this duplicitous frame as either geniuses or overpriced frauds. Instead, we conceive of *Apeshit* as a complex and often contradictory piece of work that might help us better confront the contradictions of this worldview.

While the press coverage of *Apeshit* focused almost exclusively on the sections of the video featuring Beyoncé and Jay-Z inside the Louvre, it is important to recognize that its first shots are *outside* the museum. It begins with a black screen and the exterior sounds of Paris: the oscillating siren of a French police car in counterpoint with the tolling bell of a nearby church. The black screen fades into a close-up nighttime shot of a shirtless Black youth squatting on the steps of the Louvre. Head bowed, he folds his hands anxiously as we take in his torn blue jeans, white sneakers, dreadlocked hair, and the disconcerting surprise of his tucked-back, white angel wings. Here, we move to interior shots of lavishly gilded ceiling frescoes, painted details of fine fabrics, and tight shots of masterful brushstrokes from the Louvre's permanent collection. Footsteps echo through the now quiet, empty, and vaguely menacing halls as the tolling bell is focused to coincide with the methodical video cuts and eerie sound design. The opening 37 seconds thus craft for us an audiovisual space that is at once intriguing, beckoning us in for an exclusive, nighttime VIP tour, and hauntingly claustrophobic, creating a distinct sense of foreboding.[37] We should not be here.

The question already is: how to escape? Here, the quintessential uniqueness of this place conceived to gather what's worth being systematized, inventoried, classified and gathered from the planet (a place simultaneously localized, planetary, and world-shaping) appears as a prototype. The Louvre becomes the starting point of a genealogy of trapping ecosystems. In *Apeshit*, everything seems to escape seizure while invoking a bigger trap, a vaster frontier that keeps trapped beings (human and not) in unprecedented proximity. This, *Apeshit*'s broader backdrop, is fugitivity.

Fred Moten has defined Black fugitivity as "a desire for and a spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed. It's a desire for the outside, for a playing or being outside, an outlaw edge proper to the now always already improper voice or instrument."[38] In a similar key, *Apeshit* presents the Louvre as part of a global ensemble

37. Vernalis also characterizes this scene as "haunted" in the body of her contribution to the *JPMS* colloquy. Vernalis, "Tracing the Carters Through the Galleries," *JPMS,* 26.

38. Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018): 131.

of disciplinary and managerial institutions that are transcended by a "desire for the outside"—by the necessary escape from a trapping ecosystem simultaneously sanctioned by and sanctioning racialized exclusion and belonging.

Yet it would be misleading to see in the clip a simple occupation of the museum space. The point is not to be inside or outside the museum. Rather, a more general inquiry about the strategies and the means of occupation (of occupying space, of being occupied by institutional power) seems to be the key to understand cultural creativity in apeshit conditions. *Apeshit,* therefore, establishes a transit into and out of the museum at its outset, revealing that the museum is just another trap nested inside a larger trapping ecosystem. A more-than-human intensity and scale come into focus here, for the issue is no longer who and how one gets to be included in cultural institutions, but rather what kind of agency is left aside in trapped environments. At that level, *Apeshit* problematizes the easiness with which racial difference can be easily incorporated and curated into the museum's display, while the access of racialized bodies to the art institution remains subjected to selective and exclusionary regulation. The clip relied on excess and hypervisibility to take on the tourism-oriented and "popular" politics of spectatorship that make "old" colonial differences perfectly compatible with the need to cater for broader audiences and to attract new funders and donors at a global scale. *Apeshit* plays out a constant movement between institutionalization and fleeing, calling out for ways of further expanding and "undisciplining" presence and proximity—between bodies and (art) objects, but also in a transhistorical way, across different temporalities.

Anthony Bogues' musings on "heresy and heritage" within radical Black sonics provide us with a more fertile entry point than debates on institutional critique to the visual and musical genealogies *Apeshit* conjures.[39] For Bogues, heresy is the excess that always remains when "tradition" is appropriated, rebranded and canonized as "heritage." As he suggests, the Black sonic archive destabilizes and opens up heritage, rendering it available for further edition, for further sampling. Such "playing" is not exactly a reverse, a new state of things that keeps appropriation and "proper and proposed" normalization away for good. Rather, it implies an inexhaustible potential for continuously challenging the closure—the linearity that is claimed when ownership and heritage are invoked. From this perspective, the heretical "I can't believe we made it" stands for more than a simple celebration of an "intrusion" into the institution of high culture. This "making it" is not about irreversibility, about accessing the stronghold of (European) universalism—the exclusionary canon of Western art history.

Indeed, the sampling of iconic masterpieces placed side by side with the figure of Beyoncé ended up bringing a more drastic transformation to the Louvre than the other way around. The configuration of a "Carters" visitor tour poses for us a broader conversation, one that exceeds representational debates about how Black individuals are excluded from mainstream cultural institutions. This is especially true because the space

39. Anthony Bogues, *Black Heretics, Black Prophets: Radical Political Intellectuals* (New York: Routledge, 2016). Bogues has expanded on the relationship between Black sonic and heresy in a recent interview. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R90OWGpd-80. Last consulted February 8, 2023.

of the museum is already being "sold" and it hardly stands for the space of privilege and the battleground of (cultural) politics it traditionally occupied. "I can't believe we made it" is not about "being accepted" but rather about "hanging there" in proximity with genealogies of Black heresy—waiting to escape. Such "hanging there" is conditional, but more common than ever due to the financialization of cultural production.

"PUT SOME *RESPEK* ON MY CHECK": TRAP FUGITIVITY

After the internal move of the opening video sequence, the "Apeshit" track begins in earnest, confirming our sense of danger. A rush of white noise transitions us to a wide shot that slowly closes in on Bey and Jay standing with their backs to the CGC – Mona Lisa and we are introduced to the opening of the menacing trap-styled hip hop beat. The beat is built around the impending doom sounded by an alternating monotony of synth tones (centered on a rising E to C minor 6th interval) and the repeated threatening sound of a Black man's voice repeating "yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." Harmonically, the musical gesture is remarkable for the way that it inverts and reconfigures a simple major triad (C-E-G) into an unrelentingly creepy minor riff with the addition of a B. The effect is a menacing cluster around the B-C minor 2nd—sonic symbol of the imminent danger *par excellence* (think: the theme to *Jaws*).[40] With the added (racial) signifier of what Matthew Morrison has termed "Blacksound"—the always already trapped "intellectual performance property" of the Black voice—the beat is wholly in keeping with trap music's aesthetics of containment and ever-unresolved tension.[41]

As the sonic menace of *Apeshit*'s trap fugitivity sinks in, the camera continues its slow creep towards the pair who continue to stare into the camera's gaze. The shot is both an impossibly disrespectful one and the ultimate selfie, as the Carters never turn to behold the masterwork looming over their shoulders and the camera subtly shifts focus from the painting to the immaculately dressed power couple. Here, the scene changes to a shot at the foot of the grand staircase, with the couple in a similar selfie position—in front of the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* atop the staircase.

It is in this shot that we first see the dozen dancers dressed in flesh-colored bodysuits that accompany The Carters throughout the video. They lie supine, scattered across the stairs as lion roars and monkey screeches are added to the sonic texture. As the trap beat is filled out with deep bass, hi-hat, and syncopated snare figures, they lift their legs and

40. Maeve Sterbenz hears the track as an "ambiguous" duality of G major and E minor but echoes my harmonic analysis about lack of clarity and competing, sometimes "intimidating" forces. Maeve Sterbenz, "Ambiguity in "APES**T,'" *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 30, no. 4 (2018): 19–21. The tonal environment here is reminiscent of what Mark Richards calls an "axis progression." For instance, his example of a harmonic environment emphasizing aFCG, perfectly captures my analysis of "Apeshit" ambiguity and menace if transposed up a 5th (to eCGD). Mark Richards, "Tonal Ambiguity in Popular Music's Axis Progressions," *Music Theory Online* 23, no. 3, September 2017.

41. Matthew D. Morrison, "Blacksound," in *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy,* ed. Tomás McAuley, Nanette Nielsen, Jerrold Levinson, and Ariana Phillips-Hutton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199367313.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780199367313-e-62. Last consulted February 8, 2023.

FIGURE 3. Screen capture of *Apeshit* (dir. Ricky Saiz) placing The Carters in a position of power and prestige atop the grand staircase.

torsos in concert.[42] The basic visual rhetoric of the video is established as we see details from other artworks counterposed with Bey and Jay in the "expensive fabrics" of Beyoncé's lyrics, and the dancers continue to explore the sacralized space with movements unbefitting the museum's preferred bodily comportment of quiet contemplation.

It is with this sonic and visual backdrop that Beyoncé presents the track's hook with the lines "Stack my money fast and go / Fast like a Lambo" while Quavo (of the Atlanta trap trio Migos) underscores the lyrics with hype man responses such as "fast, fast, go!" The lyrics instantly conjure up filmic images of heist getaway scenes—and neatly prefigure the Louvre art heist narrative of the 2021 Netflix series, *Lupin*, which also features a Black (fugitive) protagonist (but a Ferrari instead of a Lamborghini). In the second iteration of the "Apeshit" hook, however, Beyoncé introduces a narrative of inversion through the sly slippage "Fast like *my* Lambo." The inversion of "*my* Lambo" echoes the visual rhetoric of replacement established by the camera's shift of focus from the great artists and artworks of these bygone eras to the Black excellence of these contemporary artists. Indeed, in the hook's second couplet Beyoncé breaks the fourth wall with a stage dive ("I be jumpin' off the stage, ho / Crowd better save her"), thus foreshadowing a mutuality of art and contemplator expressed through her shift from the hook's final line, "Have you ever seen the *crowd* going apeshit?" to "...the *stage* going apeshit?" As if to show us what "going apeshit" looks and sounds like in practice, the end of each iteration of the hook is punctuated with a wild and unruly "Rah!"—a wholly inappropriate utterance in the hallowed halls of the Louvre.

42. Gaunt adds some detail to the scene, writing: "On the steps below the stylized pair are solemn bodies strewn intermittently down the entire staircase as if lying in wake. The choreography is by forty-two-year-old Flemish/Moroccan dancer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui under the mindful direction of Beyoncé's main choreographer, JaQuel Knight." Kyra Gaunt, "We Are No Longer Your Monkeys," 56.

With these slippages across abstract and personal, artist and contemplator, stage and crowd, Beyoncé focuses our attention on a number of traps in the bourgeois construction of aesthetic appreciation. Furthermore, she does so in a way that is an immanent critique of popular music—she destabilizes *the hook*. In both practice and discourse, "the hook" is an essential and revealing feature of pop. Its verbatim repetition—sometimes *ad nauseum* —is the call that beckons us inward and sets the trap. As we all know, a properly baited hook becomes an earworm. Yet as we also know, a hook needs to be properly disguised so as not to call attention to itself. Here's where the metaphor of the hook reveals its paradox. From this angle, the Louvre emerges then as a stage and magnifier granting extra coverage for the hook.

The "Apeshit" hook is thus notable for how Beyoncé manages to have it both ways: it is both static and (through its development) destabilized. By changing the hook—and playing on this pop paradox—Beyoncé calls attention to its construction and beckons us in further to examine that construction. It is our argument that this musical and lyrical play becomes a meta-discourse on traps, its self-reflexive highlightedness serving as a metaphor for and discourse on fugitivity. As we suggested earlier, this video about art and value is rife with Enlightenment contradictions. By performing these ideological contradictions and keeping them in playful suspension, *Apeshit* performs trap fugitivity. Its self-reflexivity offers us a chance to observe that the paradox of the pop hook is premised on our un-self-reflexive buy-in—our complicity or desire *to be hooked*. As such, we might say that entering the manifestly menacing sonic spaces of trap music are ways of knowing the hook with eyes wide open.

After the first iteration of the hook Beyoncé begins her first verse seated among a heap of heavy white fabric that echoes the *Winged Victory of Samothrace* behind her. The verse picks up on the hook's focus on payment, with another automotive escape image:

> Gimme my check
>
> Put some respek on my check
>
> Or pay me in equity
>
> Watch me reverse out of debt (*Skrrrt!)*

Here, Quavo echoes the fast Lambo line with the onomatopoeic "*Skrrrt!*" emulating the getaway car's peel-out escape. The lines evince a critique of exchange value, asking not just for her contracted payment, but for her due in respect—or, failing that, a share of ownership that will demand respect. The idea of putting "some respek on my check" expands on debates on inclusion by underscoring the need of grounding recognition in a more exhaustive debate about structural racism, gender parity, Southern value(lessness), economic privilege, and unpayable debt.

Despite its romantic celebration of creativity (and the gig economy's neoliberal precarity) the art world still has the art market and finance capital at its core. As Dubrovsky and Graeber have recently put it, "The art world might be said to represent a kind of experimental ground for the hammering-out of a certain ideal of freedom appropriate to

the current rule of finance capital."[43] The consequence is that the history of debt is also the history of the (in)efficiency of the art world, of how creativity was set to work as part of a logic of unpayable and irreversible indebtedness that only pays out for a few. Debt can be seen as an inevitable result from social interaction, a natural consequence of the solidarity behind sociality.[44] Precisely because of this, the centrality of finance within the art world and our incapacity to imagine an alternative art world displaced from that center renders art spaces into a central agent for the fossilization of debt and the production of its irreversibility.

But art is also the place where debt can be put to work otherwise. Challenging debt's irreversibility becomes, then, a way out of the trapping ecosystems we live in. In fact, the engagement with the (colonial) tradition of art history in *Apeshit* implies an engagement with the collapse of a debt-driven art system that borrows from the kind of excess and bling we find in hip hop—especially trap. Indeed, the fact that both the Louvre and Tiffany have come to rely upon this kind of surplus value in their engagement with The Carters should give us pause to consider the state and direction ("*Skrrrt!*") of things. The trap fugitivity that *Apeshit* performs for us in sight and sound is thus a mastery of the trap, an unsalable and untransferable (yet shareable) ability acquired only through first-hand experience. Trap fugitivity emerges here as a tuning of the trap to one's own advantage and a hard-won feeling of being at home in the trap. As Jay puts it on "Nice"—track 4 of *Everything is Love*: "I have no fear of anything, do everything well / I have no fear of jail, *I was born in the trap* / I have no fear of death, we all born to do that." He concludes: "It's just life, I'm just nice, tonight I might raise my price."[45]

On "Spanish Joint" the Virginia-born, Apollo-affirmed neo-soul artist D'Angelo sings: "Gotta get out / Gotta get out of here / I'm in the dark / and the light looks sincere."[46] Through his extravagantly nuanced funk he presents us a vision of the doubly bound trap. His construction "the light *looks* sincere" offer a visceral reminder that the allure of light, too, can be deceptive. By flipping the script on light and dark and recognizing the Enlightenment museum as the real trap, Bey and Jay help us see how the dark offers its own affordances—if one knows how to use it. Similarly, on the track "Ghettos du Monde" by Oxmo Puccino, the Parisian MC raps about his 19th *arrondissement* 'hood, beginning:

43. Nika Dubrovsky and David Graeber, "Another Art World, Part 1: Art Communism and Artificial Scarcity," *E-Flux* 102, September 2019. https://www.e-flux.com/journal/102/284624/another-art-world-part-1-art-communism-and-artificial-scarcity/ Last consulted February 8, 2023.

44. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten thus differentiate between debt and credit, pointing out that "credit is a means of privatization and debt a means of socialization." Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (London: Minor Compositions, 2013): 61. To be in debt, to be indebted, is to be linked to others through a chain of reciprocal favors and interest. Debt, however, can also be consolidated and naturalized as credit, in which case it stops being reversible and becomes normative.

45. The Carters, "Nice" on *Everything is Love* (Parkwood/Sony/Roc Nation, 2018).

46. D'Angelo, "Spanish Joint" on *Voodoo* (Virgin/Cheeba Sound, 2000).

Qui pousse ici, durcit plus vite à ce qu'on dit...

Venir du ghetto: une certaine fierté, psychologie de pierre

Si t'en sors, garantie indestructible.

[People who grow up here harden quickly, or so they say...

Come from the ghetto: a certain pride, psychology of stone

If you make it, you're guaranteed indestructible.][47]

Despite stereotypes about the ghetto, Oxmo's warm and humanizing portrait of his diverse Parisian ghetto—and ghettos the world over—reminds us that this "psychology of stone" comes with another valence: "second sight," the gift of double consciousness.

Achille Mbembe elaborates on this second sight and its "infrastructures of survival," explaining:

> To get out of the hole and to break through the wall, the captured subject must actively engage in a relation of multiple doubles and multiple selves. He or she must develop an extraordinary capacity to become imperceptible, to continually shift from one self to its alternate, to inhabit the tiniest of cracks and fissures... These micromovements, these micropostures were essential because survival depended on being able to inhabit multiple selves, often at the *same time*.[48]

Indeed, Mbembe connects these "repertoires of practices of survival" to Moten's definition of Black fugitivity and its "desire for and...spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed"—its "outlaw edge."[49]

We propose, then, that *trap fugitivity* is this sonic and performative spirit of transgression that sees through the sincerity of the "proper and proposed"—of respectability politics, of elite culture, of political correctness—and sings, spits, dances, and dreams in the trap. While we can recognize elements of trap fugitivity in countless iterations of Southern Black trap music and performance, *Apeshit*'s performance of transgression at ground zero of Europe's Enlightenment project helps us identify the insincerity of that trap. It exposes the "split screen" and finds a home in the trap. Indeed, this is why the video's external shots—including forthcoming shots from *Paris's marginal banlieues*—are so telling. By drawing In fact, in an early touchstone of hip hop scholarship, George Lipsitz gestured to how these Black fugitive practices of survival might be applied on a planetary scale, writing in Chapter 2 of *Dangerous Crossroads,* "Diasporic Noise: History, Hip Hop, and the Post-colonial Politics of Sound" that "the ability to find that identity of passions and turn it into a diasporic conversation informing political struggles in similar but not identical circumstances has enabled peoples of African descent to

47. Oxmo Puccino. See also, Rollefson "Gheddos du Monde," 235.

48. Achille Mbembe, "The Trauma of the World and the World as Trauma," paper delivered at the conference "Recognition, Reparation and Reconciliation," December 14, 2018, https://recognitionreparationand reconciliation2018.co.za/videos-saturday/ Emphasis in spoken/performed original. See also Rollefson *Critical Excess*, 164

49. Fred Moten, *Stolen Life* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018): 131.

survive over the centuries; it may now also hold the key to survival for the rest of the world as well."[50]

"RAH!": THE ELOQUENCE OF OBJECTS THAT SPEAK

It is after the shots atop the grand staircase that Beyoncé first joins the dancers, evincing a modicum of equity and solidarity by holding hands and winding their hips in front of Jacques-Louis David's large-scale masterpiece *The Consecration of the Emperor Napoleon and the Coronation of the Empress Josephine in Notre-Dame Cathedral on 2 December 1804*. The dancing in the quick cuts that follow grows in intensity and gauche swagger and elicits a nice bit of pearl clutching tension by cutting to a close-up shot of another David (his 1799 *The Intervention of the Sabine Women*) as Beyoncé elaborates her "lavish" life, in a verse replete with "expensive fabrics," "expensive habits," "weed," sex," "ice" (diamonds), jets, and other accoutrements and name brands of *haute couture*.

Of course, it is not by chance that the segment on "living a lavish life" takes place in front of David's celebration of Napoleonic grandeur. The image of Bey dancing in front of the Empress Josephine touches on the interwoven histories of universalism and coloniality, recalling Josephine Bonaparte's Caribbean origins and her role in the reintroduction of slavery to the Americas (and the resulting sugar-powered, Napoleonic wealth). Yet, unlike in David's painting, Beyoncé's exclusively female crew rejects the gender dynamics at play in Napoleon's crowning of Josephine, instead recalling "the other Josephine" (Baker), the Saint Louis-born dancer who ruled 1920s Black Paris. Beyoncé's verse ends with the script flipping macho-feminism of "Get off my dick," before transitioning to a bridge that consolidates the women's solidarity imagery in sung lyric.

The bridge's musical material is something of a liquid respite from the incessant menace of the trap beat, dropping the percussion figures to foreground calming ethereal tones that support Beyoncé's lyrical transition back to the hook:

> Gimme the ball, gimme the ball, take the top shift
>
> Call my girls and put 'em all on a spaceship
>
> Hang one night with Yoncé, I'll make you famous
>
> Have you ever seen the stage goin' apeshit?

The images in this section also reflect this sonic relaxation as dancers sway and Bey leans in for an intimate, domesticating shot with Jay, while the lyrics pick up on the theme of escape. In the first line, the escape takes on a gendered valence, demanding a place of leadership in a (men's) basketball game. In the second line, Beyoncé asks her girlfriends to join her in escaping earth's (racist) gravity on a voyage to space—a construction that echoes decades of Afrofuturist fugitivity in art and music.[51] And in the third line, she

50. George Lipsitz, *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place* (New York: Verso, 1994), 35.

51. The "spaceship" line also picks up on Afrofuturist threads of Beyoncé's feature track on *Watch the Throne,* "Lift Off," where she sings "Now we gon' take it to the moon, take it to the stars...'Bout to take this whole thing to

offers a chance to "hang"—and escape obscurity. It is in the fourth line that she implicates herself in the crowd's vulgar revelry as she and "the stage" go apeshit together.

Here, the sound design prepares another sweeping upsurge of white noise that seems to prepare the hook but, instead, provides a deceptive transition to a break in the musical action. As Beyoncé performs her "apeshit" behavior—grimacing, shaking, and throwing off her matching Michael Cromer Munich leather jacket and hat (to reveal her custom MCM bustier)—the music drops out. In an extended 45-second break from the "Apeshit" musical track, we return to the lonely sound of the tolling bell as the *Apeshit* video returns to the slow zoom of the opening Mona Lisa gallery shot. Here, just at the moment where she would growl "Rah!" in the audio track, the video instead cuts to a wide shot composed of two dancers seated on the floor with interconnecting white headscarves flowing to emulate the shape of the two-backed *chaise longue* in David's 1800 portrait of Madame Récamier.[52] The video image pits the privileged white femininity of a young socialite (and, the Louvre tour website tells us, bride of the Bank of France governor) against the objectivizing image of two Black women *as furniture*.

The image calls to mind Moten's critique of Marx's (impossible) "speaking commodity"—of which Marx writes: "Nevertheless the table continues to be wood, an ordinary, sensuous thing. But as soon as it emerges as a commodity, it changes into a thing which transcends sensuousness...it stands on its head, and evolves out of its wooden brain grotesque ideas, far more wonderful than if it were to begin dancing of its own free will." Moten critiques Marx's privileged reading as "a discourse of his own to put into the mouth of dumb commodities before he reproduces what he figures as the impossible speech of commodities."[53] His point, of course, is that Marx is wrong here: commodities *do* speak.[54] Chattel slavery made this all too clear. The fact that, for Marx, the "speaking commodity" figure is impossible, reveals the fundamental flaw of the Enlightenment project. By the rules of Western subjectivity she/it should not exist, but we know she/it does exist because we know chattel slavery and its racist legacy of dehumanization. Be it a table or a fainting couch, the two dancers perform the part of the grotesque "speaking

Mars." Further, Afrofuturism remains crucial for the task of making sense of the process of strangeness that presides over decontextualized and plundered artifacts, a process that clearly resembles that of spaceships abducting objects and beings for their study. Recent anticolonial critiques in this vein include the museum heist scene from the blockbuster film *Black Panther* and the video for Janelle Monae's *Q.U.E.E.N.* with Erykah Badu, which includes a similar center of art detention. The video featuring plundered Black bodies and artifacts, opens: "Welcome to the living museum, where legendary rebels throughout history have been frozen in suspended animation." See H.L.T. Quan, "'It's Hard to top Rebels that Time Travel': Democratic Living and the Radical Reimagining of Old Worlds," in *Futures of Black Radicalism,* ed. Gaye Theresa Johnson and Alex Lubin (London and New York: Verso, 2017): 173–94.

52. Indeed, the two-backed "chaise lounge" (or "fainting couch") has come to be called a Récamier because of this notable painting. Jamie Gibbs. "Fainting Couches Revived," July 29, 2011https://www.atticmag.com/2011/07/fainting-couches-revived-2/ Last consulted February 8, 2023.

53. Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 9; Karl Marx. *Capital: A critique of political economy*, vol. 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Books, 1990 [1867]): 163.

54. J. Griffith Rollefson, "The 'Robot Voodoo Power Thesis,' Afrofuturism and Anti-Anti-Essentialism from Sun Ra to Kool Keith," *Black Music Research Journal* 28, no.1 (Spring 2008):105–107; Carlos Garrido Castellano, "Conceptual Materialism: Installation Art and the Dismantling of Caribbean Historicism," *Third Text* 28, no. 2 (2014): 149–62.

FIGURE 4. Screen capture of *Apeshit* with dancers emulating the shapes and colors of the two-backed *chaise longue* in David's portrait of Madame Récamier (1800).

commodity" perfectly. The dancers' voicelessness throughout the video speaks volumes in this extended break, as we see their Black, Brown, and Beige bodies objectified in the Louvre's rarefied spaces. The bell tolls for them lying on the grand staircase and in silhouette throughout the vaulted hallways.

Notably, it is also in this break that we get our first images of Black people in spaces *other than* the Louvre. As the camera moves through a shot of the gallery's high glass ceilings, we hear the subterranean sounds of the Paris Metro that transition us to a very different space: a low and claustrophobia-inducing ceiling defaced with lighter burns and graffiti tags. One tag seems to read: "Papys la Rue" (street grandpa). As the camera moves ominously around the space and we see the obscured bodies, legs, and sneakered feet of young Black men, it looks to be full of mailboxes, suggesting the entryway to a large *cité* (housing project) on the outskirts of Paris. The video cuts back to the Louvre and closeups of the loving embrace depicted in Ary Scheffer's 1835 painting, *The Shades of Francesca da Rimini and Paolo Malatesta Appear to Dante and Virgil*. Again, this image of the Louvre's white bodies is counterposed with an interior shot of two Black bodies embracing, echoing Scheffer's composition of woman comforting man. Despite its brevity, from its objectifying (human) furniture shot to the humanizing (Black) embrace shots, the 45-second break does important work in contextualizing the museum in its broader Parisian environs. The break extrapolates for us, explaining that the trap is not just the Louvre, but our wider trapping ecosystems—here exemplified by our ghettoizing housing projects.

The beat comes back, as Beyoncé completes her apeshit "Rah!" and we return to the now-familiar visual images of Bey, Jay, and dancers in the Louvre. As the hook reprises

and prepares us for Jay's rapped verse, we are introduced to a new piece from the Louvre's collection: Théodore Géricault's 1818, *The Raft of the Medusa*. The camera slowly climbs the back of a Black man with arm heroically outstretched, rising out of a tangle of suffering bodies trapped on a raft, adrift at sea. The image of Black resistance and resilience—which the *APES**T* tour website suggests may be read as an anti-slavery work—serves as a defiant introduction to Jay's swaggering verse.[55] Exterior shots of him in front of the iconic Louvre pyramid lead to images of young Black men taking a knee in solidarity with the contemporaneous Black Lives Matter protest of Colin Kaepernick and other professional athletes.

Jay's verse begins with rapid-fire wordplay on trapped animal imagery. Conjuring up a lyrical zoo, he proceeds:

I'm a gorilla in a fuckin' coop/coupe

Finna pull up in the zoo

I'm like Chief Keef meet Rafiki

who been lyin'/Lion King to you?

Pocket watchin' like kangaroos

Tell these clowns we ain't amused

'Nana clips for that monkey business,

Four-five got change for you

In the first couplet Jay plays on the racist imagery of Black man as "gorilla." Depending on one's hearing, the word play on "coop/coupe" might fit just as easily alongside the trap of the zoo ("coop") as the trappings of a sportscar ("coupe"). Indeed, the latter hearing—a beast in a fine automobile—echoes the broader cognitive dissonance of Black people going apeshit in the Louvre.[56] The second couplet moves from the danger of Chief Keef's murderous "drill rap" to the child's play of Disney's Rafiki—the mandrill shaman from *The Lion King*.

Notably, this duplicitous "monkey business" moves from the trap of gorillas, lions, kangaroos, and monkeys caged in a zoo before the next couplets examine the trappings of power—of "motorcades," "presidential…planes," and "the residential" wing (of the White House). Jay's verse ends with a critique of the official recognition of the Recording Academy, which nominated him for eight awards in 2018 but awarded him none. In

55. As the Louvre's *Apeshit* tour explains: "In 1818, the artist Théodore Géricault decided to paint a contemporary subject for the next annual art Salon in Paris to distinguish himself from traditional history painters. He opted for an event that had caused a scandal two years earlier: the shipwreck of the Medusa, a French navy frigate sent by King Louis XVIII to reclaim Senegal from the British. The ship was commanded by an incompetent captain who ran her aground off the West African coast then left 150 people to drift on a makeshift raft, where they had to resort to cannibalism to stay alive. Only ten survived." Louvre Website, https://www.louvre.fr/en/explore/visitor-trails/beyonce-and-jay-z-s-louvre-highlights. Last consulted September 26, 2022.

56. The coupe image also conjures the cover art to Miles Davis's album *Jack Johnson*—artwork that depicts the prize fighter and famously transgressive (fugitive) baaad Black man in a fine automobile. Miles Davis, *Jack Johnson* (Columbia, 1971).

the video we see Jay rapping the first half of the couplet—"Tell the Grammys fuck that 0 for eight shit"—after which Beyoncé (again) calls attention to the constructedness of the whole affair lip syncing his final line: "Have you ever seen a crowd goin' apeshit?" for the camera. The line, of course, suggests that real appreciation and reward happens not on the red carpet, but in the trap fugitivity of live performance, with real and active participation from one's audience—not in "the proper and the proposed" elite context of Grammy officialdom.

Beyoncé's final verse returns to the opening shot in front of *The Mona Lisa*. Looking slyly into the camera with her lips barely moving she raps with the lightning fast and triplet-heavy flow known as "Migos style."[57] Now rapping in this trap style popularized by her Migos collaborators on "Apeshit," Bey takes on the mantel of her own Southern Black heritage heresy elaborating on her opulent lifestyle of "chains," "planes," and "Alexander Wang," while maintaining with gauche swag: "I don't give a damn 'bout the fame." Notably, the performed contradiction leads to lyrics that suggest a new type of escape —that of going to the dealer to "cop it all," "Sippin' my favorite alcohol," getting "lit," and "drinkin' my inhibitions off." Notably, in these images of drug dealers and substance-fueled escape, the lines locate Bey's own trap feminism—and a paradoxical *escape in the trap*.

In a dizzyingly fraught sequence of rapid-fire lyrics and quick visual cuts, Bey here reaches the heights of trap fugitivity. Closeup images of Black servants and flowing wine from Veronese's opulent *The Wedding Feast at Cana* (1563) are intercut with shots of the young Black men in Paris's housing projects as Beyoncé raps: "All of my people I free 'em all." The scene's Venetian exuberance generates a sense of ambivalence by tapping into the genealogies of Black (slave) labor that lie behind the splendor of *La Serenissima*—Venice's posh nickname. More importantly, it also draws a line directly to those young Black men whom we later see posed with arms outstretched in an external shot—again emulating artworks within the Louvre. In trap fugitivity, the trap is a site of escape, a space for Black agency (within or without the veil).

As the final hook begins, we see The Carters go apeshit, celebrating wildly with their collaborators on the music video—the voiceless young women and men who populate the traps inside and outside the Louvre. In what might be the most remarkable shot, one of the body-suited dancers picks out the hair of a shirtless Black man. He is seated in front of *The Mona Lisa*. The image is a study in cognitive dissonance as this private and intimate act is injected into the public space of the museum.[58] As the trap beat continues to sound the imminent danger and menace of its sonic Blackness, we zoom in on The Carters who look back into the camera with unconcealed suspicion. Jay turns to Bey, waiting for her approval as the tolling bell returns. She now hesitantly turns to look at Jay and, together, they turn compliantly to gaze upon *The Mona Lisa* as the camera finally shifts its focus from the pop stars to the "proper" artwork. The bell continues to toll.

57. Burton, *Posthuman Rap,* 79.
58. Ibid., 31.

CONCLUSIONS: LOGISTICS AND THE *APESHIT* STATE OF THINGS

In sum, we propose that *Apeshit* presents us with a meta-discourse on trapping ecosystems. Beyoncé and Jay-Z's incursion into the Louvre opens up fertile space to think of "trap" beyond the immediate reference points of musical genre and museum space. Trap fugitivity is a specific way of being in a totalized contemporary world of traps. From traps and ladders to hooks and snares, we have explored the luring mechanisms of social control that nevertheless also offer the possibility of positioning others by stepping into spaces where they are not supposed to be—the possibility of trap fugitivity.

We should not be here—yet here we are. *Apeshit* is premised on the idea that Beyoncé and Jay-Z (and all their friends) are not supposed to be in the Louvre. But this sense of trap fugitivity reminds us, nothing is *supposed* to be here. The Louvre is a white box, an echo chamber, a stage. Recorded in 2018, after the peak of the so-called refugee crisis in Europe, *Apeshit* put its finger on the role of cultural institutions, which are depicted as *ur* trap houses. In times of selective exclusionary politics, *Apeshit* reveals the flows of objects and beings, of capital and rhythms as part of a counter-history of the trapping ecosystems of which museums are a part. *Apeshit* reveals the interconnectedness of cultural traps and broader trapping ecosystems. From this point of view, *Apeshit* compels us to rearticulate the question of how to decolonize museums and the culture industries as part of a broader agitation—an "apeshit state of things" that implies frantic movement and uncensored, uncensorable heresy taking place as a response to the collapse of art worlds and cultural worlds as we know them.

With *Apeshit*'s movement in mind, what if museums are less display cabinets than cargo centrals? What if the history of museums *is* the history of logistics (and vice versa)? In Moten and Stefano Harney's, *The Undercommons,* logistics "remains, as ever, the transport of objects that is held in the movement of things. And the transport of things remains, as ever, logistics' unrealizable ambition."[59] The museum sanctioned a state of things where humans and things moved, yet differently; the desire for collecting and displaying was always the desire for categorizing otherness (to render it understandable, palatable, controllable) through meticulous close observation. Logistics feature clearly in *Apeshit,* from celebrations of mobility to references to caged animals and zoos.

In *Apeshit,* logistics emerge as an ambivalent and complex process. The Carters choose the Louvre to create impact, profiting from an established route of fugitivity. At the same time, the museum transforms choreographed agency into a tour, a set of steps meant to increase numbers, to reinvent the white cube by exploring its more neglected angles. *Apeshit* reveals that the museum is not the final depositary of plundered objects, but rather the ultimate reason legitimizing plunder itself. It is simultaneously the reason behind and the driving engine powering "logistics." Picture here oceans filled with containers full of creativity awaiting the next biennial, the next curatorial hit, the next museum highlights. These containers mobilize people in turn—not just spectators, but also an undefined mass of precarious workers, underpaid staff, art participants and a long

59. Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013): 92.

et cetera. Now, imagine that this movement has little to do with globalization. Imagine, instead, a process that was set into motion when museums like the Louvre were created.

What, then, if colonial dispossession was not so much about containment as it was about shipping? In other words, what if we understood the "coop" and the "coupe" as part of the same plan—and part of the same planned obsolescence? It is here that Jay's experience in "trafficking" reveals itself as expertise in logistics. By following *Apeshit*'s frantic movements into and out of the museum, we can reimagine museums as cargo holders and, stripping their walls of their carefully curated timelessness, we can refigure collecting as an activity caught between containment and selective mobility. Museums "trapped" lives and bodies in/as objects. Going apeshit is what is left beyond, the only way out of this entrapment that Amiri Baraka once dubbed "The Black Man In The West."[60] *Skrrrt!* ■

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