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BEGGING TO BE SEEN: BEYONCÉ'S »PARTITION«

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I. INTRODUCTION AND PROCESS

This chapter explores what's at stake for Beyoncé, a self-proclaimed »modern-day feminist« (Ellison 2013) when, in her 2013 song »Partition«, she portrays herself in ways consistent with patriarchal gender representations: as a wife, as eager to please her male partner, and as sexually provocative. The track opens with a live concert recording in which Beyoncé engages in call and response with the audience, encouraging them to greet her as »Ms. Carter.«¹ Furthermore, the promotional tour for the album *Beyoncé*, on which »Partition« appears, was titled *The Mrs. Carter Tour*. Conspicuously drawing attention to her status as Shawn Carter's wife and using her married name in this interaction is curious: in many ways Beyoncé epitomizes independence, strength, and self-determination of women in the entertainment industry. Beyoncé has been a polarizing figure in contemporary discussions about feminism both in journalism (Bennett 2014; Vagianos 2015) and scholarship (Weidhase 2015; Hansen 2017), which have been attentive to her use of her body and costuming.² Her manner and dress in performance are fre-

1 Carter is the surname of Beyoncé's famous husband, the rapper and music producer Shawn Carter (better known as Jay-Z).

2 While we raise some of the same questions as Hansen, we examine different aspects of the song's sonic qualities, and our conclusions center on ways in which Beyoncé musically foregrounds her agency, rather than her self-representation through video visuals.

quently provocative and sexualized, a strategy traditionally associated with patriarchal structures. Identifying as Jay-Z's wife, then, has particular resonance in light of the ongoing debates around whether (and how) Beyoncé's work advances women's equality. In this chapter we argue that Beyoncé's portrayals in »Partition« of both her private life and her public persona, understood through close attention to song structure and sonic details, constitute a particularly rich site for reexamining Beyoncé's own understanding of her feminism.

With its repeated inclusion of Foley effects³ and extra-musical association to create in the listener's mind a visual image of the song's narrative, »Partition« is a song that begs to be seen. The sequence at the outset of the song immediately conjures up a visual image of a huge concert, with Beyoncé on stage interacting with her crowd of adoring fans. Another field recording is played in the middle of the track: a dramatic sequence which aurally depicts Beyoncé on the sidewalk bombarded by paparazzi. The recording follows Beyoncé into the car, where the listener is privy to Beyoncé's private life. And what a steamy private life it is made out to be! The second half of the song describes a sexual encounter with a man, including lyrical depictions of her ripped blouse and smudged lipstick.

In many ways, this track sounds like two entirely separate songs, separated by this central field recording of Beyoncé on the sidewalk. The two sections of the song—»Yoncé« (0:10–1:49) and »Partition« (1:59–5:19)—each have their own standalone music video, emphasizing the autonomy of the two parts. The presentation of these two halves in a single, 5:19-long track on the album might seem curious, given the lack of stylistic or motivic unity, but we understand the two halves to be unified through the unfolding of a continuous storyline. The explicit references to various locations enable at least one possible understanding of an overarching narrative, summarized in Table 1.1.

3 Foley effects are reproductions of everyday sounds that get added to a dramatic sequence in post-production, e.g., footsteps, doors closing, glasses clinking, and so on.

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Table 1.1 Overview of the narrative of »Partition«

Section	Timestamp	Location	Cues
Intro	0:00-0:09	Live concert stage	Field recording of Beyoncé interacting with a large crowd
»Yoncé«	0:10-1:49	Backstage at the club	Narrative of Beyoncé and her crew evaluating her at »the club«
Transition	1:49-1:59	On the sidewalk	Foley effects: heels clicking on sidewalk, camera noise and chatter from paparazzi
»Partition«	1:59-5:19	In the car	Foley effects: car door slam, partition motor; Beyoncé issues instructions to the »driver«

Narratives in popular music often invite comparisons between the narrator of the lyrics and the actual artist as a person, and »Partition« is no exception. Part of what makes this song so intriguing is that the lyrics are quite personal, while Beyoncé herself, as a global pop star, remains inaccessible to most people. However, as Lori Burns notes: »It is all too easy—and often vastly oversimplifying—to approach the music as merely a reflection of the artist's personal experience« (Burns 2010: 155). Put another way, songwriters such as Beyoncé and her team,⁴ like poets or novelists, have complex storytelling devices at their disposal, and autobiography is only one of them; Burns correctly explains that to »entangle the artist's identity with the artistic message« (ibid.) is, at best, naïve, and at worst, an act that disempowers the songwriter herself as someone with artistic agency and decision-making skills.

In light of this, Burns proposes a framework, which informs our present analysis, for narrative interpretation that does not rely on simple assumptions of a one-to-one relationship between the narrator in the lyrics and the biography of the artist. This framework, which builds on prior work by Simon Frith and Susan Sniader Lander, is summarized in Figure 1.1. Perhaps the most important move made by Burns here is the separation between the Real Author and the Implied Author.⁵ The Real Author's (and the Real Reader's)

4 The credits of the song on the CD *Beyoncé* mention several persons without specifying their specific contributions to the song: »Written by Beyoncé Knowles, Terius Nash, Justin Timberlake, T. Mosley, J. Harmon, Dwane Weir P/K/A Key Wane, Mike Dean.«

5 Allan Moore's later use of the term *persona* is quite similar to Burns's separation between the Real and Implied Author. Moore also cites Frith, via Philip Auslander, as an influential source: »A song is performed by a particular individual, who is normally named, an individual who has an observable historical position and identity, the song's *performer*. ... all performers assume a *persona* when singing and, however close that

placement outside the boxes of the framework is a reflection of the fact that the motivations and identity of the Real Author/Reader are unknowable, and thus outside any methodology. The analyst may discuss the Implied Author instead—a subject composed of the analyst's own perceptions of the author's sensibility, values, and ideologies, as gathered through material such as interviews, autobiographical materials, and so on. On yet another level is the Narrator and the Narratee. These two subjects exist only within the narrative in the lyrics themselves, and not outside of them; they are informed only by the information present in the lyrics, and thus these subjects are analyzed through concepts of voice and modes of contact. Though these separations may seem cumbersome, in fact, Burns's framework allows for powerful analytical insights that neither detract from the agency of the artist, nor pretend to know the private, inner thoughts of the artist. Our analysis focuses primarily on what Burns would identify as the Narrator, but also occasionally invokes the Implied Author as well. In lieu of these technical terms, we refer to the Narrator as 'Yoncé as a way to distinguish the persona represented in this song from Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, the Implied Author.

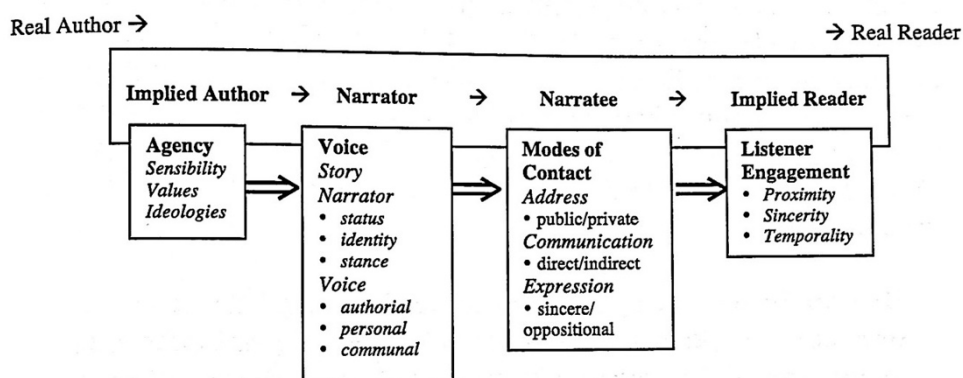


Figure 1.1 Lori Burns, critical terms for interpretation of voice (2010: 161).

In »Partition«, 'Yoncé guides the listener through a tour of her public and private lives, beginning at a live concert, going to a club (or preparing for a club visit), and then following her into her car where the listener seems to sit on her shoulder even during her intimate moments. The differences in musical style, then, relate to the narrative itself. In this chapter, we examine how the sound design throughout »Partition« supports the narrative of the track. We propose an understanding of »Partition« in which the lyrics and music

persona is to the identity of the performer, it can always be distinguished from it« (Moore 2012: 180-1). Moore also further distinguishes between a persona and a protagonist, the latter being the persona with which the audience is meant to identify.

work together to create sonic spaces—i.e., aural representations of imagined physical spaces—in which setting 'Yoncé illustrates control and mastery of various situations and over the process of audio production itself. After thorough analysis of 'Yoncé as the narrator of this track, we address the easy conflation between 'Yoncé the Narrator with Beyoncé the Implied Author by proposing that »Partition« can be understood within a sphere of feminist dialogue. By juxtaposing illustrations of the Narrator's (Yoncé) mastery with self-identification as a wife and lover, Beyoncé, as an Implied Author, sends the message that her status as a feminist is not compromised by her sexualized image and her relationship with her husband.

II. EXCURSUS: GROUP WORK

At the very beginning of our analysis, the song was unknown to the majority of the group, so we decided to listen to it together and take notes individually, and afterwards share our impressions with one another. We decided not to establish a fixed method of investigation at first, preferring a brainstorming session in order to get to know the song and determine what merited a closer look. We discussed sonic elements, lyrics, and 'Yoncé as a Narrator. We also watched the two music videos accompanying each section of the song and read interviews and news about the album *Beyoncé*. Since the song has two different parts, we isolated and analyzed each one, listening closely and stopping the playback each time something grabbed our attention. We defined sections based on distinguishing sounds, identifying instruments, patterns, languages, lyrics, and references.

We agreed at this point to define a central formative question for the project, and we established objectives for our inquiry. Since we were primarily intrigued by the way the song suggests a narrative, we decided to make a list of the sonic and lyrical elements that contributed to that conclusion. We then worked individually, delegating tasks in order to speed up the process. Although our labor was divided, we worked towards the same objectives that we established through earlier discussion. Finally, we synthesized the topics and prepared a presentation, which became the basis for the subsequent and deeper research that comprises the present chapter.

Lastly, it is important to clarify that we appropriate Dai Griffiths' perspective that a song should be understood in all of its »literacies«: »musical, verbal, performative, technological, visual, cinematic, socio-cultural and political« (Griffiths 2009: 59). In that sense, we united our different back-

grounds and perceptions with the intention to transcend a clinical description, yet still avoid a shallow and subjective analysis.

III. ANALYSIS

»PARTITION«

As we will show, the first section of the track, »Yoncé«, has a complex relation to the timeline of the narrative of this track; in light of this, we begin our analysis with the song's second section, »Partition« which has a more story-like narrative in comparison. The transition following »Yoncé« (1:49-1:59) suggests a change of locations between the two large sections of this track. Indeed, of all the sections of this song, the transition most strongly evokes the sense of a sonic representation of a physical space, through the use of Foley effects.⁶ The listener hears sounds of a person in heels walking on the sidewalk while people shout »Yoncé«, camera shutters click and a female voice asks »are you happy to be in Paris?« The bass frequencies of the music from the first section are still audible in the background, treated with a low-pass filter. The resulting narrative impression is Beyoncé walking outside of a music venue after her concert among a horde of paparazzi, journalists and fans calling for her attention with the previous music still pumping from afar.⁷ A car door slams, and the sounds of the paparazzi become muffled. Inside the car now, the sound of a partition (as between driver and rear passenger) rising up silences outside noise completely. This sound collage, reminiscent of the audio techniques of a radio drama, is highly suggestive of a narrative. The theme of changing locations⁸ and spaces, which is introduced with the live concert recording at the beginning of »Yoncé« and reinforced in the

6 Foley effects are reproductions of everyday sounds that get added to a dramatic sequence in post-production, e.g., footsteps, doors closing, glasses clinking, and so on.

7 The music is used in a Foley effect manner as a signifier for the location of the narrative: to create the impression of being close to a music venue. We suggest this takes place after her concert, though the music needn't be coming from the same concert venue.

8 It would be worthwhile to examine to use of Paris as a location in Beyoncé's work. The city that appears to be a sidenote in »Partition« becomes central in the music video for her song »Apeshit« (2018). The video is shot in the Louvre, the camera shows details of black people in the paintings which are exhibited: they are only present as slaves and servants. Beyoncé and Jay-Z are shown in different settings within the museum and Beyoncé rhymes: »Can't believe we made it!« For Beyoncé Paris seems to be a double symbol for her personal and Afro-American emancipation and success. With this she addresses a tradition: Paris is a place of longing for US-American intellectuals and was an important city for Afro-American jazz musicians like Miles Davis in the 1950s (cf. Stovall 1996).

sidewalk transition, becomes a kind of *idée fixe*, informing the sound design strategies within »Partition« as a whole.

The overall structure of the »Partition« section is a compound AABA form (Covach 2005).⁹ The verses have an entirely different soundscape and sonic space from the choruses. While the verses clearly indicate the setting as inside a car, the choruses evoke the sensation of a more imaginary, inner space that we refer to as 'Yoncé's personal »bubble«. The bridge is a third, distinct space, which we call the »phone call«.

The verses are technically sung, as each syllable occurs on a specific pitch, but the highly active rhythms and minimal pitch interest combine to create a sense of rapping despite the pitched syllables, much like what Adam Krims refers to as »sung style flow« (Krims 2000: 49-50).¹⁰ The sung style rap in both of the car subsections consists of three stanzas, each of which progresses the narrative further. To summarize the lyrics, the first verse immediately suggests a sexually charged encounter between 'Yoncé and a male companion, whom we assume to be her husband due to the explicit invocation of Beyoncé's married surname at the outset of the track. In the second verse, 'Yoncé addresses the driver again, and her voice's intensity and urgency grow as she notes the paparazzi trying to infringe on this private encounter. In the following stanzas the sexual situation unfolds further. As the heat escalates, 'Yoncé finally resigns herself to a change in plans, admitting that they won't ever arrive at the club they intended to visit, preferring instead to indulge this passionate moment with her husband.

The multitrack recording and the overall sound design depicts both physical and emotional aspects of the lyrics of the rap verses. The sonic density is slowly increased through the addition of new layers to the groove. In the first stanza, only the bass line and finger snaps accompany Beyoncé's voice; in the second, a bass drum is added; in the third, the treble and mid-range frequency are filled out with hi-hat cymbals and a synthesizer melody that doubles the bass line. This slow-tempo buildup paradoxically feels relaxed, due to the backbeat emphasized by finger snapping, yet urgent, due to the anacrusis syncopation in the bass line. This seeming contradiction may represent the comfort found in intimacy with a spouse, juxtaposed with the excitement and risk of indulging in rushed sexual behavior in an only semi-private environment. The space of the car is also depicted sonically. All instruments, including the voice, carry very little reverb, and the short re-

9 In compound AABA, »A« sections are verse-chorus or chorus alone; the »B« section is the bridge. In this track, the phone call is functioning as a bridge.

10 Krims uses this term and the term »sing-song« to describe rap that is still spoken, but with exaggerated rising and falling in pitch. Beyoncé's first rap, by contrast, is truly sung.

verb is evocative of recording in a small room. The bass drum is muffled, as though one is hearing it from an expensive and powerful car stereo system but from outside the car. Although it is not consistent with the logic of space—Yoncé is inside the car, not outside it—this sound design (yet again) functions as a signifier for the location of the narrative action, creating the sonic imprint of a car audio system. Furthermore, it may hint to the position of the (still present) fans and paparazzi who are imagining what is happening inside the car.

After each verse, the chorus begins suddenly, and the listener is transported to an entirely different sonic space with a floating atmosphere (see Table 1.2). A new bass line, played on an organ, takes on the pitches and rhythms from the verse bass, motivically connecting the chorus to the verse while imparting a new sense of sonic space. The bass drum and organ bass are muffled with a strong low-pass filter, placing the listener further away from these sounds.¹¹ An organ pad with fast tremolo reminiscent of the sound from a Leslie speaker is situated deep in the mix, where it only occupies mid-range frequencies. Bass, organ and vocals work together to create an intimate but somewhat suppressed ambiance. Beyoncé's vocals communicate a sense of closeness. We hear her breathing clearly. Her vocals are doubled in the left and right channels, and duplicated again in the center, where they are delayed by half a bar. Her voice is the only upper-midrange frequency element of the mix, floating above the low- and mid-range frequencies of the groove elements. The floating, dreamlike atmosphere is further enhanced in subsequent choruses with new layers of sound. For example, in the second chorus, a distant French horn plays a mournful melody with heavy reverb, and an arpeggiating synth pans through the stereo image. In the third chorus, the French horn is replaced with a wordless, ghostly female vocal, situated deep in the mix with heavy reverb. The chorus space is outside of time and space, there is no physical location. We understand this space as Yoncé's personal »bubble«. The bass is far beneath the listener's feet, the organ hovers somewhere next to the listener, and Beyoncé's voice is everywhere.

11 A low-pass filter eliminates higher-range frequencies, allowing only low frequencies to pass through. Because low-pitched sounds travel better through walls than high-pitched sounds, a low-pass filter gives the sense of hearing the affected sound from another room.

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Table 1.2 Subsections within the »Partition« section

Timestamp	Subsection	
2:04-2:09	Introduction	
2:09-2:45	Verse 1	A
2:45-3:06	Chorus 1	
3:06-3:11	Transition	
3:11-3:47	Verse 2	A
3:47-4:08	Chorus 2	
4:08-4:18	Transition	
4:18-4:38	Phone Call	B
4:38-5:00	Chorus 3	A'
5:00-5:19	Outro	

At first glance, the chorus lyrics feature standard love song idioms with a sexual undercurrent. 'Yoncé addresses her husband in a submissive fashion. Her request to have her husband »take« her is passive, and her wanting him to »like« her similarly suggests that he has power over her emotions. The chorus ends with a puzzling line that interrupts the ordinary tone, resulting in perhaps the strangest of all the lyrics presented in this song, when 'Yoncé says that the girl her husband likes is »right here with me.« In a typical love song, a woman might address her lover, »The girl you like is right here with you.« How might we understand the meaning behind this unusual phrasing? We interpret this lyric as a sign that 'Yoncé is not literally speaking to her husband in these lyrics, but rather is showing the listener her inner monologue. What is »with« 'Yoncé is the image that her husband projects onto her, which she chooses to indulge. 'Yoncé's thoughts can be understood as directed not only toward her husband in the car with her, but also toward the public outside the car, as addressed in the first section of the track, in the »partition« sequence and by the sonic representation of a car stereo system heard from outside in the second section. One might say the public is present throughout the whole song and 'Yoncé wants to be liked by this public as well.

The issue of 'Yoncé's relationship with the public is emphasized not only in the lyrics of both the »'Yoncé« and »Partition« sections, but in the sound design as well. In one of the clearest examples of this, the song ends with multiple voices humming and buzzing, imitating the sound of a swarm of bees. These sounds are also present earlier in »Partition« when 'Yoncé mentions that she sees cameras flashing (3:17). We interpret the buzzing as a sonic symbol for the figurative »buzz« (media and fan interest) that surrounds 'Yoncé. Furthermore, the use of a buzzing sound might be understood as a reference to Beyoncé's fans, since she is nicknamed Queen Bey (pro-

nounced Queen Bee), and her fan club is called The Bey Hive.¹² The choruses taking place in 'Yoncé's personal bubble can be seen as inner reflections about her status as an over-exposed public personality. The listener, who has remained by 'Yoncé's side throughout the track even as she entered her private car with her husband, is even closer to her in the choruses—the swirling and omnipresent vocal gives the impression we may be actually inside her head. Even while 'Yoncé seems to want to shut the public out of this moment, she grants the listener access.

The journey from this imaginary head space to reality occurs during a transition, marked by a hard pounding bass line, the rhythms of which are doubled by the bass drum. The transition is used after every chorus in the »Partition« section. After the second chorus, the transition also includes a male voice. At the end of the second transition, a clear male voice asks, »Hello?« In response, a female voice speaks in French. The speech that follows is a French translation of an excerpt from the movie *The Big Lebowski* (1998), directed by the Coen brothers, from the point where the character Maude Lebowski (played by Juliana Moore) meets the main character *The Dude* for the first time. In the song, this French translation of the quote is uttered by a voice that is distorted with a band-pass filter, a technique that filters the low and high frequency of the sound signal and so mimics the sonic effect of a telephone line. In terms of the progression through different spaces during narrative of the track, we understand this as a phone call that interrupts the action taking place in the car and the intimacy of the listener's access to Yoncé's private space.

The phone call adds yet another layer of nuance to the interpretation of the 'Yoncé persona by explicitly—and paradoxically—invoking a soft, delicate, and sensual vocal timbre that articulates a feminist claim for the right to sexual pleasure. This brief sample makes a statement against the stereotype of feminists as frigid women who do not enjoy men or sex. Since the song constructs a contradictory and humanized persona of 'Yoncé, this perception may refer not only to this specific narrative but also to the whole image of Beyoncé herself. Beyoncé declares a feminist agenda, but is also regarded as a sex symbol. If the mantra of the chorus, which declares that 'Yoncé wants to be liked by her man, seems on the surface decidedly unfeminist, the phone call places the »Partition« section in the context of a larger dialogue about a woman's sexuality and freedom. The feminist message to the man that picked up the phone doesn't come directly from

12 On the official Beyoncé website, registration for her newsletter is advocated with the words »Join the Beyhive«. <https://www.beyonce.com/register/>, accessed 7 November 2018.

'Yoncé, but from another voice, in another language. This counterpoint to the images of a submissive wife and a successful artist appears as a kind of subliminal message or external intervention that contributes to the nuance of Beyoncé's feminism—an issue that permeates the singer's songs, presentations and speeches.

»'YONCÉ«

Turning now to the song's first section, the lyrics of »'Yoncé« introduce the narrator of the track and offer several layers of interpretation circulating around the complex of Beyoncé's public persona and private life, but in a different way to the »Partition« section. Throughout this first section, 'Yoncé's character becomes more complex. As the narrative develops, 'Yoncé oscillates between displaying inner self-confidence and asking for approval from outside observers. The first section, then, establishes 'Yoncé as a complex, multidimensional character, with paradoxically-related mentalities of both confidence and desire for approval.

»'Yoncé« begins with an introduction that transitions from the live concert. The remainder can be divided into four main parts, three of them mainly rapped and one sung (see Table 1.3). Above a sparse texture—we hear only a dark electronic bass that descends in pitch (pitched-down bass), a bass drum which is slightly brighter than the bass, and high-pitched bucket drumming—'Yoncé raps about being in a club with several girls and boys, and describes how everybody is looking at her, whether in person or on Instagram. Full and forward in the mix, her voice sounds strong and confident. This confidence is emphasized by her flow: the pitch of her voice lowers at the end of each line, creating a downward inflection that suggests a kind of finality (Anderson 1977: 214).

Table 1.3 Subsections within the »'Yoncé« section

Timestamp	Subsection
0:10-0:21	Transition to »'Yoncé«
0:21-0:43	Verse/Rap 1
0:43-1:05	Chorus (confession + request) x2
1:05-1:27	Verse/Rap 2
1:27-1:49	Verse/Rap 3

While the song opens with great conviction, this self-assuredness is undercut at the end of the first rap, when 'Yoncé seeks outside approval by asking the »G's« to tell her how she is looking. This question is taken up again in the

following chorus and 'Yoncé's portrayal of reduced self-confidence is supplemented by her confession that her behavior is oriented toward her husband.¹³ As if to balance her flagging confidence, the sonic presence of the voice is enhanced by double-tracking and echoing, which, in this context, can be interpreted as representing her posse backing her up.¹⁴

The chorus can be divided into a two-part schema, which is repeated twice: 'Yoncé's confession that the effort put into her appearance is »all for« her husband, followed by a request for a response from her husband. Both parts are sung by Beyoncé, but the mixing of the track clearly distinguishes the call from the response. In the confession, Beyoncé's voice is mixed center; in the request, vocals are double-tracked and mixed to the sides, which again can be interpreted as her posse interacting with her. The confession and request differ in rhythmic profile, also: in the confessions Beyoncé imitates the rhythm of the strings and delivers her words solely on the beat, creating gaps on the off-beats that are only partly filled by the backing vocals (»ooh«) and the strings, while in the ensuing requests she delivers twice as many syllables in the same amount of time, with increased syncopation. 'Yoncé's confession is further highlighted through the strong textural contrast with both the request and the previous rap. The striking upward motion in the melody and in the string accompaniment of the chorus contrasts the downward-sliding bass and intonation of the rap posse. This upward motion can be interpreted to mimic the tonal inflection of the spoken voice when asking a question.¹⁵ Combined with the softer vocal delivery and the unanswered questions in the lyrics, the chorus distinctly lacks the resolve and self-confidence expressed by 'Yoncé in the first rap.

But as soon as the second rap begins, 'Yoncé's self-confidence returns. In contrast to the first rap, Beyoncé uses a more typical speech-effusive style, and she is supported by a male voice which lends depth to her flow as he doubles her end rhymes (see Krims 2000: 50). The male voice functions in the same way as the double-tracking, and therefore the posse, from the first rap. It seems as though 'Yoncé has recruited her husband, who was addressed in the chorus. Crucially, this second rap is about 'Yoncé's songwriting, her control over her music, and her refusal to acquiesce to the demands of the public and the music industry. In the first rap, the pitched-down bass

13 Here we are using »chorus« due to the subsection's sung vocals and climactic nature, even though the chorus in »'Yoncé« is not repeated, following the concept of the »independent chorus« (Osborn 2011).

14 An audible backup posse is customary in party rap, a style being invoked in the »'Yoncé« section (Krims 2000: 49-50 and 56-7).

15 Intoning a sentence with an end rise is frequently interpreted as making the sentence into a question (Gussenhoven/Chen 2000).

plays only on the first beat of every second measure with a short anacrusis. The role of the pitched-down bass becomes much more prominent after Beyoncé raps »drop the bass.« Following this line, the bass sounds on every downbeat, and the anacrusis begins on the upbeat to the fourth beat. Musically, this elongated anacrusis pushes the song forward, and increased bass activity adds energy to this second rap. Furthermore, this change in sound also demonstrates that 'Yoncé is in full control of her music, the shaping of its sonic qualities and thus the crucial part of music production: the music acts on her demands. This direct relationship between lyrics and sound is repeated again when Beyoncé raps the line »high like treble«, which has a twofold meaning. This phrase could refer to Beyoncé's position in the music industry and among fans. This line can also be understood instead as the words »highlight treble«—a second demand, to amplify the high frequencies. The music again responds, as an echo is added on the highs of Beyoncé's voice at this moment, and a high-pitched rave synthesizer is added. These two lyrics and the sonic reactions to them reinforce to the listener 'Yoncé's control over her music. Another aspect of control in this second rap is 'Yoncé's refusal to submit to the pressures of the music industry. The lyric »Radio said speed it up, I just go slower« exemplifies 'Yoncé's attitude toward such pressures. The sound design can be interpreted as reinforcing the defiance in her statement. Prior to this lyric, there are rhythmic, muffled vocal samples, reminiscent of a clamoring group of people, blended with the beat from the first rap. These samples were first presented in the transition from the live concert (0:10–0:21). The muffled vocals promptly disappear after Yoncé declares how she reacts to outside demands. Thus, like the buzzing from the »Partition« section, the vocals can be perceived as voices from the public, trying to reach 'Yoncé, but vanishing as soon as they grasp the futility of their endeavor. 'Yoncé controls her artistry and maintains a degree of independence even as she acts within the global music industry.¹⁶

This second rap ends with the line »'Yoncé all on his mouth like liquor,« which is the only lyric in the third rap, the last of the »'Yoncé« section. Although Beyoncé claims that she has no clue what this line is about, some of her fans posit that Beyoncé is alluding to oral sex.¹⁷ Beyoncé repeats this line

16 This interpretation is backed by the credits of the album *Beyoncé*, too. All songs are written in teams but Beyoncé is always mentioned first. Furthermore, in contrast to highlighting herself as Mrs. Carter in the opening sequence of the »'Yoncé« section, in the credits she calls herself »Beyoncé Knowles«, her maiden name (see footnote 4). With this choice she once again marks artistic independence.

17 In a director's screening of her visual album at the SVA Theater in New York City on December 12, 2013, Beyoncé told the audience, »[Terius »The Dream« Nash] just started saying ›'Yoncé all on his mouth like liquor,‹ and I'm like, ›What does that mean?!« Be-

throughout the third rap, supported by the male voice from the second rap. Intensity grows in the music: the rave synthesizer from the second rap starts again, enhancing the mental image of the liquor and drunkenness referenced to in the lyrics; the pitched-down bass is nearly constant, silent only for a moment before it starts again; the bucket drumming increases its activity, playing every eighth note. All of this musical intensity pushes the song forward, heightening the listener's expectation of an imminent climax. At first the song seems to satisfy this expectation when the synthesizer starts playing the same pattern one octave higher, but the rest of the instruments fall back into the minimal groove of the earlier rap parts, undermining this climactic moment. Without ever reaching a climax, the rap transitions abruptly to the »sidewalk« scene, changing the setting of the narrative.

This brings us, again, to the creation of 'Yoncé's persona and of sonic spaces of the narrative. In the last measure of the final rap of »'Yoncé«, one can already hear footsteps, which foreshadows the sidewalk field recording that plays directly after the last measure of »'Yoncé.« The music of the last rap from the »'Yoncé« section continues during this transition, processed with a filter that makes it sound muffled, as though the listener is outside the club but can hear music coming from inside. The transition presents the first and only sonic cue that 'Yoncé was possibly at her concert or in a club in the previous section.

In summary, in the »'Yoncé« section, 'Yoncé acts self-confident and strong, yet still in need of external approval. After her confession that she is doing all this for her husband, a male voice literally supports Beyoncé's rapping in the following music, and thus metaphorically supports 'Yoncé, the narrator. 'Yoncé signals that she is in full control of her music and that she is not willing to submit to anybody's demands, an interpretation that is supported not only through the lyrics, but also the sound design as the music obeys her commands.

While the creation of the 'Yoncé persona is relatively easy to perceive sonically, the interpretation of the sonic space is more difficult and more speculative, since no sound clearly illustrates a typical club scene or any other physical space. But almost more severe than the missing sonic references is one lyric from the following »Partition« section, when 'Yoncé changes plans and says that they won't make it to the club. This confuses the timeline of the narrative in this song: why is 'Yoncé complaining about not making it to the club in the »Partition« section if she was already in the

yoncé's pronunciation of »liquor« sounds very similar to the phrase »lick her«. For an example of this discussion, see the Genius lyrics website <http://genius.com/2552315> [accessed 26 October 2018].

club in the prior »Yoncé« section of the song? Is it possible that she never was in the club? If so, why is she singing about being there in the »Yoncé« section? She may, of course, be referring to two different clubs, one she visits with her »Gs«, and another that is her destination with Jay Z. While the overall sonic structure of the piece suggests an ongoing narrative, the ambiguity of the lyrics in the »Yoncé« section is conspicuous for discussing actions taking place in the »Partition« section.

Holding on to the assumption that the song »Partition« features an overall narrative that oscillates between public and private spaces it must be stated that the references are most unclear in this part and are open to another interpretation of where »Yoncé« might be taking place. Because of this troublesome lyric, we suggest that Yoncé might be in a private space during this first section, maybe at home or in a dressing room at a venue, dressing and primping in front of a mirror, while imagining her appearance in the club, rather than actually being there. With the new interpretation in mind, it now seems that Yoncé is rapping alone in the first rap, looking in the mirror and hyping herself up. The double-tracking and the echo of her voice represent not her posse, but rather Yoncé speaking to herself. The same is true for the chorus, which is again a dialogue between Yoncé and her reflection in the mirror. At the end of the first rap, she directly addresses an unspecified male persona, who enters her space and raps together with her until both of them leave the space, enter the sidewalk and go into the car. The fact that the music keeps playing could be interpreted as the music that she was listening to during her preparations, but it could also be a yearning memory of the moment where Yoncé and the male persona were intimate with each other, which remains in her thoughts as they enter the car.

Despite the inclusion of the lyric at the outset of »Yoncé« that explicitly mentions being in the club, we find that this second interpretation seems more coherent than our initial assumption. The idea that the »Yoncé« section occupies Yoncé's head space fills the missing references in the sound design, and reconciles our narrative with the lyric about not making it to the club. We invite readers to draw their own conclusions, however; the only thing we can do is make an »invitation to hear a particular sample of music in a particular way« (Moore 2012: 3). Ultimately, we wish to show that an interpretation is a dynamic construct that can change as the analyst(s) acquire new information.

IV. CONCLUSION

»Partition« means separation. The title of this track might be taken here as a metaphor for the separation of her public and private life. The life Beyoncé depicts in this song is hurried and full of pressure: situations change quickly, oscillating between public and private, 'Yoncé must keep up and respond to manifold demands. 'Yoncé is proactive: the voices inside her, and her own drive, urge her forward while demands from fans, the press, and her lover continually interrupt her life. By presenting these images of her private love life and her public appearances together, Beyoncé integrates these portions of private life into her public persona. This song exemplifies this technique while simultaneously reflecting on it.

»Partition« flaunts how desired 'Yoncé is—by her fans, her husband, the press, and the music industry. The song is a fast-paced montage of pleasures, but also of the many demands placed on 'Yoncé: the lyrics show that the press wants 'Yoncé to answer for her seemingly contradictory feminism and display of sexuality; her husband wants her sexually; her fans want to be entertained by her; the music industry urges 'Yoncé to produce a certain sound in her music. While dealing with all these requests, 'Yoncé also wants something from herself: to be attractive and desirable to her husband and the public. 'Yoncé's narrative also makes Beyoncé's feminist concerns explicit with a provocative quote that demystifies female sexuality and reinforces sexual pleasure as a natural desire. Though 'Yoncé is not speaking these words aloud herself, we believe she is addressing the pressure to be desirable and sensual while also advocating gender equality.

Defying the stereotypes of black female pop stars, 'Yoncé's sexuality is used to depict her devotion to her husband as well as to her status as an empowered, successful, adored, feminist artist who is in full control of her music and image. In this sense, Beyoncé as an imagined author is using the 'Yoncé persona to transcend the stereotype of the sexy female pop singer. Her body and sexuality are not simply meant to titillate. By incorporating into this track her interactions with her husband, the music industry, her fans, and the public, Beyoncé makes her display of sexuality highly personal, even while she is depicting another character ('Yoncé). In a talk before her director's screening of her visual album at the SVA Theater in New York City on December 12, 2013, Beyoncé states, »I think 'Yoncé is Beyoncé. Mrs. Carter is Beyoncé. Sasha Fierce is Beyoncé. And I'm finally at a place where ... I don't have to separate the two anymore. We're all one. It's all pieces of me, just

different elements of a personality of a woman, because we are complicated.« Furthermore, with »Partition«, Beyoncé argues that sensuality, sexuality, and marriage can coexist with progressive feminism without fear of contradiction. As difficult as this may seem, in this track 'Yoncé and Beyoncé show us that she can navigate these demands and more, and do so with grace and strength.

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