

What Are Proper Responses?:

Hip Hop, Aesthetics, Race and Feminist Politics

Legier Biederman

It's wrong. Or is it really that simple? There are a growing number of female rappers who also employ a myriad of young black hoochies to dance along with them in their videos. What am I supposed to think and feel about all of this? What is the *proper* "young black feminist" perspective on hip-hop and popular culture? It's a complex question that produces contradictory impulses. We enjoy the music, but can't stand the lyrics. We look down on the scantily-clad hip-hop rapper, but we try to dress like her (and wish our bodies looked like hers).¹

Susan Smith-Pinelo

Since the 1986 release of Run DMC's album *Raising Hell*, hip hop music has been an important part of my life, but when I contemplate the sexist lyrics and images so prevalent in hip hop culture, I am left with an uneasy feeling.² My relationship to hip hop culture, not unlike my relationship to the rural town on the Mississippi River where I grew up, Helena Arkansas, has never been simple. Rather, they, like my feelings about 2 Live Crew, have been full of ambivalences and contradictions. In junior high, I let everyone know 2 Live Crew was my favourite group.³ (Perhaps you can recall the significance of your favourite band and what it meant to publicly affirm it in high school.) When I attempt to locate my relationship to their highly controversial album *As Nasty as They Want to Be* (1989), I've tried to understand what 2 Live Crew meant to me, as a teenager growing up in an isolated, right wing, often racist, hyper-religious community, where teenage girls were trained to become 'proper young ladies.' Rap music became the source of rebellion for me. Hip hop culture, which was not yet the commoditized mainstream route of resistance that it is now, offered another possibility, an alternative to the norm—the 'proper young lady' and the sexism that went along with it.

At an early age, feminist politics, whether or not I knew it then as such, played a decisive role in my life, especially regarding my aversion towards indoctrination as a 'proper young lady.' At the time, because I found in 2 Live Crew an alternative to the commonly held views in Helena that not only moralized and forbade

displays of desire but also open discussions about it, I was somehow able to escape (or temporarily ignore) the misogynist lyrics and resist the sexist identifications uttered by 2 Live Crew.⁴ Although 80 per cent of Helena's population was black, they did not set the 'rules' for social behaviour in Helena. Rather, the yardstick was established by the (relatively) wealthy white sector that reprimanded me when I didn't line up with the role of the 'proper lady,' and encouraged, or at least turned their shoulder, while their kids ridiculed me for breaking the 'rules' by having black friends over to my house. Maybe I found in rap music a promise for a different future, one that had not yet been imagined in Helena.

With the luxury of hindsight, I realize that I needed 2 Live Crew, and the possibility of the alternative culture that they promised, at that moment to resist the identity-eroding effects of normativity. Consequently, I was able to enact a certain misrecognition of the misogyny in this subculture. But, as José Esteban Muñoz has acknowledged, "such a misrecognition has its price, a price that people who attempt to identify with and assimilate to dominant ideologies pay every day of their lives: the denial of self."⁵ The contradictory subjectivity one is left with is not just a postmodern fragmented subjectivity, but rather it is the story of the minoritarian subject within the majoritarian hegemonic public sphere. Still, as Muñoz points out, this misrecognition can often be strategic. Identification itself can also be manipulated and worked in ways that promise narratives of self that surpass the limits—the racism, the misogyny, the homophobia—prescribed by both dominant culture and various subcultures.

While the subject, *pace* Jacques Lacan's often cited mirror stage, is conceived of as an effect of representation, many theorists reject Lacan's insistence on visuality as encompassing subjective experience for, among other reasons, its cultural and gender myopia.⁶ Against the evacuating effects of the image, which fragments and abstracts the body into a simulacrum, Marxist theorist Henri Lefebvre has argued for a more deeply spatial and embodied approach to understanding subjectivity.⁷ Lefebvre suggests that a "theatrical space" might be forged between the self and the image, which in Lacan's mirror stage gels into a reified paradigm of subjectivity that naturalizes and privileges certain 'looks,' those of white western heteronormative men, over others.⁸ The work of Susan Smith-Pinelo, the D.C.-based video performance artist I discuss in this paper, encourages an embodied response and opens up the theatrical space demanded by Lefebvre so as to break down the abstracting regime of the image imposed by Lacan's model of subject

formation. This de-abstracting of the subject becomes a means of insisting on the visceral specificity of the self as embodied, and in this insistence forges an opening where viewers can, potentially, disidentify with their abstracted codes of privilege—whiteness, masculinity, and other privileged positions that make up this Euro-American culture—as well as a space in which to refuse the naturalized privileges that attach to those codes.⁹ Disidentification theatricalizes naturalized identities, calling attention to them as performances that take place through bodily behaviours that have psychic consequences and visible social effects.¹⁰

Disidentification involves interrogating one's own specificity and one's alignments with certain naturalized aspects of privilege. For me, this involves interrogating privileges associated with 'invisible' whiteness, the legacy and shortcomings of earlier feminist work that was blind to its own 'whiteness,' which comes at a cost to others.¹¹ As I situate her work, Smith-Pinelo enacts a certain disidentification with 'proper black feminism'—feminism that supports and celebrates only 'positive' images of black women—as well as with the naturalized imagery of women in hip hop culture.¹² Her work embraces the contradictions with which our lived experience and relationship to the world are fraught—the lived contradictions, which, subjected to normalizing authority, run the risk of being pathologized.

Smith-Pinelo's performances, such as those from her 2003 *Hiphopcrisy Series* (*Asstronomical Proportions I, II, & III*, Figures 2, 3, and 5) create a critical uneasiness, but within this a uneasiness is a desire that unsettles the structures of class, race, and gender prescribed by the social body.¹³ Understanding the body/self as performative, as represented through performative acts, Judith Butler notes, points to the contingency of identity and social positionality on the context and effect of the performance itself. It also points to the particularity of the other bodies/selves one engages, in this instance on the coming to meaning of Smith-Pinelo's art via intersubjective engagement and interpretation.¹⁴ "The performative has this capacity of eliciting charged engagements," and, as Jones points out, "of politicizing our comprehension of bodies/selves (and of culture in general) because it specifically marks the body/self as contingent on body/other and exposes the investments behind every attribution of meaning and/or identity."¹⁵ The performative disrupts the fixity of otherness that is essential to colonial discourse.¹⁶

Both critics that merely hail Smith-Pinelo's work as a critique of the sexism in hip hop imagery¹⁷ as well as those that too quickly dismiss it, such as Roberta Smith, who called Smith-Pinelo's *Cake* (2001) "a dubious attempt to explore hip-hop's tendency to objectify women,"¹⁸ tend to moralize images in terms of a reductive dichotomy between good and bad, positive and negative, successful and unsuccessful and run the risk of oversimplifying our fraught relation to representation.¹⁹ Regarding the characterization of her work as a critique of the sexism in hip hop culture, Smith-Pinelo has said:

For me, it's more of an exploration as opposed to a straight out criticism because I am a big fan of hip hop, and I do own the albums and find the videos alluring and amazing, and yet at the same time I know that they are horribly violent misogynistic and racist ... [P]eople walk in, and they don't exactly know what's going on or what exactly my agenda is. They think that on the surface they do: 'Oh yeah, this is horrible,' Yet at the same time, they stay and enjoy it. It must not be that horrible or sensitive to them.²⁰

Her work allows for an ambiguity that upsets reductive dichotomies. As the essay's opening quote indicates, Susan Smith-Pinelo is concerned with the 'proper young black feminist perspective' on hip hop and popular culture and the contradictory impulses such a concern produces.²¹ Indeed, I would argue that, where the notion of 'proper' operates, it is always and only improperly installed as the effect of a compulsory system. Any effort to naturalize a certain response as proper must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory repetition that can only produce the effect of its own properness or naturalness.²²

In hip hop imagery everywhere today, the black female body is normally pictured as highly sexualized and often objectified, suggesting that sexuality, and nothing but sexuality, is the 'essential' nature of the black woman. But Smith-Pinelo's strategic use of visual fetishism, as in her 2001 *Sometimes* (Figure 1), exaggerates and fragments this usually naturalized imagery. *Sometimes* arouses and disrupts the viewer's normative expectations about distinctions that imply a rigid separation between self and other, and encourages the viewer to examine her own fantasies. Smith-Pinelo's work, such as *Sometimes* (2001) (Figure 1), traffics in ambiguity—leaving the question of meaning open and overtly throwing it onto the viewer.



Figure 1

Consequently, the unconscious or conscious sex/race fantasies that Smith-Pinelo's images arouse do not confirm a stable or centred subject position, but, rather, as I stage them, are experienced as an emotional disturbance that troubles viewers' sense of stable and coherent identity.²³

Sometimes is a tightly framed close-up of large breasts bouncing and bouncing and bouncing to the rhythm of Michael Jackson's *Working Day and Night*. It is a fragmented, highly sexualized image of her body. Teresa Wiltz has indicated,

The use of *Working* was a calculated choice because, to hear Smith-Pinelo tell it, artists are for sale, particularly female artists and their sexuality ... as she struggled to get noticed Smith-Pinelo felt like she—and more specifically, her anatomy—was on an auction block.²⁴

The juxtaposition of the image of Smith-Pinelo's bouncing black breasts, labelled ghetto by the gold nameplate on her necklace just above, and the voice of Michael Jackson, who is known for his attempts at eradicating the signs of his blackness and challenging normative masculinity, exposes the ludicrousness of fantasizing that we can ever understand black and white or male and female as secure categories.



Figure 2



Figure 3

Smith-Pinelo's *Hiphopcrisy Series (Asstronimical Proportions I, II, III, 2003)* draws on and complicates the codes of 'authenticity' and 'naturalness' of gender roles prevalent in mainstream hip hop imagery. *Asstronimical Proportions I & II* (Figures 2 and 3) both consist of three video screens each displaying tightly framed 'bootie shots' and 'crotch shots,' respectively. In *Asstronimical Proportions I*, Smith-Pinelo is clad in tight, shiny white spandex shorts filmed from behind shaking her ass and thrusting her pelvis. It images only her ass, cut off at her lower back and upper thighs, yet the music normally accompanying scenes of bootie shaking is glaringly absent. In *Asstronimical Proportions II*, which installed directly across from the previous (See Figures 4 and 5), Smith-Pinelo in the same little sexy outfit and slinky 'come-fuck-me' high heels, but this time she is sitting on a stool turned towards the viewer. The video tightly cropped, images only a fragment of her body, the crotch area, and begins with her legs together, which spread just before she begins to rapidly thrust her pelvis. As in *Asstronimical Proportions I*, the absence of the music to which she dancing is creates a jarring juxtaposition. Her fragmented, visual, bodily displays, decontextualized within the whitewalls of gallery spaces, theatricalize identity and, in doing so, denaturalize it, making me keenly aware of my subject position as raced, classed and gendered. As Jones has recognized, "she makes herself so excruciatingly available for projections that she exposes them at their foundations," reminding us that desire hardly affirms anything essential about blackness.²⁵ The titles of her work serve to heighten this, directly referencing parts of the black body that have been most fetishized in colonial discourse. (*Asstronimical Proportions I* literally images the black female butt, while *Asstronimical Proportions III* displays the black male crotch area, alluding to one of the deepest mythological fears in supremacist society: the large black penis.)



Figure 4



Figure 5

Almost thirty years after its beginnings as a cultural revolution—the zeitgeist of your average South Bronx youth of the day in music, dance, fashion and art—hip hop is not only a billion dollar subset of the music industry but one whose taste-making influence makes billions more for every other lifestyle and entertainment business imaginable.²⁶ Indeed, one is often led to believe that most hip hop labels are independently, and most often black owned.²⁷ Moreover, MTV’s visualization of music has had far-reaching effects. “Not the least of which is,” according to Tricia Rose, “the increase in visual interpretations of sexist power relationships ... the increased focus on how the singer looks rather than how he or she sounds, the need to craft an image to accompany one’s music, and the ever greater pressure to abide by corporate genre-formatting rules.”²⁸ MTV, the most powerful video outlet,²⁹ has its own standards and guidelines to which videos must adhere; however, MTV’s sexual policies have a history of being rather vague. For instance, although MTV aired Wrecks-N-Effect’s “Rump Shaker,” which consisted of a series of close-up distortions of black women’s bikini clad gyrating butts and breasts, it refused to allow Tribe Called Quest to say the word prophylactic in the video for their song “Bonita Applebum,” an honest emotional portrayal of teen dating and desire, with mild references to sex that were cast in safe-sex language.³⁰

Many female hip hop artists, such as Salt ‘N’ Pepa in their 1988 music video for “Shake Your Thing,” use public displays of their own body to challenge notions of female sexuality and mock moral claims about proper modes of women’s expression, as well as to defy the moral and sexual restrictions placed on women. Indeed, in 1988, this was a strategic mode of resistance in that it glamorized the black female body and challenged the white historical classification of it, especially the black female butt, as a sign of sexual perversity or inferiority.³¹ While affirming black female beauty, they also tend to naturalize it. These images fail to interrogate the process by which the classification of binaries (ugly, beautiful) work, and thus preserve the logic of female sexual objectification.³²

In today’s hip hop, which is dominated by mostly white, normative music companies and the ‘all about money—bling bling—attitude,’ I’ve become more sceptical of these highly naturalized images of beautiful, sexy black women. For example, Rob Marriott has recently characterized Lil’ Kim as, “an empowered sexual vixen, welding the mysterious pussy like a weapon ... the self-described Queen Bitch,” who has given “the silent legions of dispossessed women—

stripping, ho'ing, and hustling ... an urgent, uncensored voice."³³ First of all, this statement is extremely misogynistic and exoticizing, especially in Marriott's fetishization of the "mysterious pussy." Furthermore, Lil' Kim, the empowered sexual vixen, is not immune to these kinds of statements or to normative vanity issues. For example, her furrier Hector Extravaganza would often say, "[b]ut how the hell you gonna be modeling with no fucking titties! You better get yourself some titties!"³⁴ After a breast enlargement, numerous other cosmetic surgeries followed. Moreover, in a culture where female artists who wear big baggy clothes, such as MC Lyte once did, have been called lesbians and man haters—highly insulting labels given the homophobia often encountered in dominant hip hop culture—it's hard to think of these naturalized sexy images of women as progressive or critical. My point is that these images that are often characterized as giving a voice and visibility to black women are highly constructed and corporately edited images that are made to appear natural.

However, Smith-Pinelo's performative work keeps meaning in motion and refuses, at least, any easy reification of particular naturalized identities and proper meanings. Her work overtly solicits spectatorial desire through erotic acts, and consequently the viewer (in this case me), generally finds it difficult to ignore the implication of her own desires in her interpretation of the work. The performative thus has a particular efficacy in throwing conventional, naturalized modes of interpretation, both in terms of identities and art history, into question. Her work insistently performs bodies/selves in such a way to activate spectatorial anxieties and/or desires, while at the same time calls into question what it might mean to call something natural (or, for that matter, unnatural).³⁵

Smith-Pinelo's exploration/exploitation of the phenomenological space of viewing highlights what Merleau-Ponty has called intersubjective engagement:

My body as a visible thing is contained within the full spectacle. But my seeing body subtends this visible body, and all the visibles with it. There is reciprocal insertion and intertwining of one in the other. Or rather, if, as once again we must eschew the thinking by planes and perspectives, there are two circles, or two vortices, or two spheres, concentric when I live naively, and as soon as I question myself, the one is slightly decentered with respect to the other.³⁶

Smith-Pinelo's work performs, solicits, and projects open-ended gender and race in such a way as to encourage the experiencing subject to interrogate her or his own structures of selfhood and otherness, subjectivity and objectivity,

masculinity and femininity. Her works probe the limit between the body and the world that Merleau-Ponty explored as the ‘flesh of the world,’ marking this flesh as specifically, but not inherently, gendered and its embodied experience as always highly charged, sexual, and—by definition—intersubjective. Smith-Pinelo’s work enacts the phenomenological notion of flesh as connection rather than boundary, constructing and deconstructing bodies in such a way as to interrogate their psychic/material structuring of our relationships of self and other.

In her work, the body/self is particularized, but the meanings of the particularities are never fixed; they depend on their context of production and reception. The museum and gallery settings are key here. Indeed, how does her work function inside the museum and how would it function in a hip hop video or as billboard image? Although it inevitably depends on each viewer, I would argue, her work exploits on the museum/gallery space as a site of critical interrogation. The museum/gallery space with its pristine white walls is a denaturalized space in which to find highly sexualized hip hop imagery.³⁷



Figure 6

In *Asstronomical Proportions III* (Figure 6), six young, shirtless, black men, standing in place, are posed frontally and cropped at the waistline and upper

thighs; the video, which is projected onto two facing walls so that the guys are facing each other, exposes the fronting of tough stylish guys, as, merely, highly constructed—as Rebecca Schneider so eloquently put it “problematizing Truth (capital T) by showing up the show of its cultural erection.”³⁸ The guy in the centre, wearing, ironically, American flag boxers, is the confident one, aggressively standing with one leg slightly in front of the other. He occasionally slaps one hand into the other and sometimes hitches his thumbs in his pockets, while the others are less sure of themselves; as the video proceeds each becomes fidgety, highlighting a sense of uneasiness that is never seen in mainstream videos, as well as exposing the fact that these naturalized images are constructions. The guy wearing the UNC basketball shorts under his saggy jeans scratches his arms, pulls up his pants, and twitches his hands. The guy on the far right spends most of his time standing awkwardly, barely moving. He just crosses his arms. The guy on the far left, in Tommy Hilfiger—a key signifier of ghetto style—tries to move his hips, arms and hands to a non-existent beat, but just ends up looking fidgety. The naturalized images of tough thugs and sexy females that we are bombarded with every day, everywhere from MTV to advertisements on buses and billboards flying by on the freeway, seem anything but natural in this context.

Asstronomical Proportions III not only denaturalizes glamorized gangsta style, but also questions the naturalized vilification of black men. As many have argued, the demonization of young black males—their portrayal as inhuman or dangerously superhuman, like the police fantasies exercised again and again in the beating of Rodney King—in popular media, by black and white leaders, and among law enforcement officials, is an important part of creating the moral justification for the perpetuation of brutal and dehumanizing state policies. Representations of young black inner city males and ‘their ways’ that consistently devote insufficient attention to larger structural forces have paved the way for conceptions of the black male as inherently violent and in-human. In this fearful fantasy, hip hop style has become a code for criminal behaviour, and censoring the music has begun to look more like fighting a crime.³⁹ Moreover, many hip hop artists have uncritically played into this naturalized style, using their hard images and often misogynist lyrics to stir up controversy and appeal to larger audiences. *Asstronomical Proportions III* shows the theatrical nature of masculinity and explodes the naturalized images of tough ganstas that have been utilized for the justification and perpetuation of dehumanizing, racist politics. It also denaturalizes

the rigid identity markers that have, in part, fuelled the homophobia and anxiety-ridden hypersexism for which rap has developed a reputation.

Smith-Pinelo's works, as they function in the museum, make clear that gender, sexuality, race, and class are not simply about taking on 'masks' that effect or challenge identities, but about a continual system of intersubjective exchanges that take place across and through the body as it is articulated through technologies of (re)presentation. Gender is not about seeming to 'be' masculine or feminine (anatomically or otherwise); race is not simply appearing to 'be' a particular colour and thus to 'have' a particular set of personality characteristics. As Peggy Phelan has suggested, "part of the meaning of race resides in the perpetual choice to acknowledge or ignore its often invisible markings," markings that, themselves, vary in meaning and significance according to their interpretive evaluation.⁴⁰ As well the social and psychological effects of such readings would vary even more widely according to their contexts and engagements. In her heightened particularization of her body/self in representation, Smith-Pinelo exploits visibility, the very visibility that functions to position her as other, to produce an ambivalent body/self that engages the viewer in a complex, phenomenological exchange.

As I relate with the signifiers that produce Smith-Pinelo's black, highly sexualized female body in, for instance, *Sometimes* or the signifiers that produce the overly masculinized black male body in *Asstronomical Proportions III*, my own embodiment is caught up in an exchange of representational identities, in a circuit of identifications, incorporations, and desires. My femininity is shown in its contingency; my heterosexuality, in my attraction to Smith-Pinelo's body, not the 'appropriate' object of female desire; my whiteness, in my desire to look like her, cannot situate Smith-Pinelo's blackness as entirely other; or the many other possible readings that would amass to her body/self for other subjects.⁴¹ Her work makes me, the viewer, ever more aware of my own state of simultaneous intersubjectivity and interobjectivity, with the latter understood as "a structure of engagement with the materiality of things in which we recognize what it subjectively feels like to be objectively embodied."⁴²

Susan Smith-Pinelo's work foregrounds what Vivian Sobchak identifies as "the dual structure of passion and the subjectively-grounded reversibility of body and world" that demands politicized subjects, subjects who recognize their own immanence, their own possibility of being objectified in relation to the world.⁴³

Such a recognition compels us to experience ourselves not only in the world, but as also belonging to it and thus affecting it: as fully contingent bodies/selves who are responsible for the effects our behaviours and perceptions have on others and attentive of our reactions to and interactions with other subjects and objects in the world.⁴⁴ This understanding of the body/self is profoundly socialized and politicized. If one views themselves as imbricated in Smith-Pinelo's self-enactment, then one recognizes the importance of their behaviour in terms of how she acts (comes to mean) in relation to them. This is a question of understanding one's own subject position, as well as others', in this world. When one perceives and attributes meaning, this alters who Smith-Pinelo 'is' in this world, and when she projects herself towards viewers, she transforms our identifications. Smith-Pinelo's work theatricalizes naturalized identities, marking them as performances that take place through bodily behaviours, but that nonetheless have psychic and social consequences. In doing so, she exposes and troubles desire, and, consequently, reveals the constructedness of all concepts of the natural and proper at their foundations. Her artwork compels me, and I hope you, to rethink the ways in which we make sense of contemporary visual culture, as well as to reevaluate the way in which we comprehend subjectivity itself.

Legier Biederman is an art theorist and curator based in San Francisco. She received her MA from Tulane University in 2001 and is currently a doctoral candidate in the Department of Art History -at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her research is concerned with issues of representation, especially as it relates to the construction of subjectivity and focuses on recent international mega-exhibitions, including Documenta II, and the construction of the global subject.

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¹ Susan Smith-Pinelo, "Artist's Statement," <<http://www.fuseboxdc.com>> (1 December 2006) (emphasis added).

² I must remind the reader that autobiography is not an essential truth that sets up an isomorphic correspondence between the author and the text, but, rather, as Nancy Miller and Keith Moxey have acknowledged, "autobiography is a 'self-fiction,' yet one that allows the reader to comprehend the purposes of the author's writing." Keith Moxey, *The Practice of Persuasion: Paradox & Power in Art History* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), 138. See also, Nancy Miller, "Getting Personal: Autobiography as Cultural Criticism," in *Getting Personal* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991).

³ In June 1990, the members of the rap group 2 Live Crew were arrested and charged under a Florida obscenity statute for their performance in an adults-only club in Florida. The arrests came just two days after a judge had ruled that the sexually explicit lyrics in 2 Live Crew's 1989 album, *As Nasty As They Wanna Be*, were obscene. 2 Live Crew members were soon acquitted of charges stemming from the live performance, and, in 1992, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed a Florida State Court ruling in 1990 that declared *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* to be legally obscene. The obscenity judgment, along with the arrests and the subsequent trial, as well as the outcry from the American Family Association, prompted an intense public controversy about rap music, one that merged with a broader debate about the representation of sex and violence in popular music, about cultural diversity and about the meaning of freedom of expression. See, among others, Kimberle William Crenshaw, "Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew," in *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment*, eds. Mari J. Matsuda and Charles R. Lawrence (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 111–32. There were also numerous copyright controversies that sprang up around 2 Live Crew, which are often undiscussed. One involved George Lucas, who sued 2 Live Crew member, Luther Campbell, a.k.a. "Luke Skyywalker," for name appropriation. Soon after changing his stage name to "Luke," Campbell released a highly political solo album titled *Banned in the USA* which references Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the U.S.A.*

⁴ I remember being thirteen or fourteen and blasting 2 Live Crew from my boom box after school while wearing my favorite shirt, which depicted evolutionary history with three images: an ape's footprint, a footprint of a man's dress shoe, and a footprint of a woman's high-heel shoe.

⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, "The White to be Angry," in *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 95. In his chapter on Vaginal Cream Davis, Muñoz recounts a similar story regarding his own identification with Punk Rock as a teenager, despite the homophobic and racist lyrics often encountered in Punk music, as well as in the Punk scene.

⁶ Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in the Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949), in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (London and New York: Norton, 1977).

⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (1974), trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991), 184, 188. Steven Pile, *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 160–161.

⁸ See Steven Pile's, *The Body and the City*, 160–161. Also, see Amelia Jones' discussion of Lefebvre in "The Obscenity of Whiteness (Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Who's the Fairest of them all?)," in *Whiteness*, ed. Tyler Stallings (Laguna Beach, California: Laguna Art Museum Exhibition Catalogue, 2003), 94–95.

⁹ The identity labels I use here, such as "white" and "black" are meant as provisional. Indeed, although race is imaginary, as of yet, racial thinking is inevitable and has political and social effects on living subjects.

¹⁰ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications*.

¹¹ I am drawing on José Esteban Muñoz's formulation of disidentification and Amelia Jones' slight re-articulation of it. See José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications*. See also, Michel Pêcheux, *Language, Semantics, and Ideology* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982). For Amelia Jones' re-articulation of disidentification see her "The Obscenity of Whiteness (Mirror, Mirror on the Wall, Who's the Fairest of them all?)." Judith Butler also discusses disidentification, see her *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 219.

¹² bell hooks' essay, "Facing Difference: The Black Female Body," on Lorna Simpson brushes against this celebration of 'positive' black feminism. See "Facing Difference: The Black Female Body," in *Art on My Mind* (New York: New Press, 1995), especially 99–100.

¹³ Although most of the time Smith-Pinelo uses her own body in her work this is not always the case. While earlier she utilized her own body because, as she indicated to me, she was "cheap and never late," she is more concerned with a body type. Susan Smith-Pinelo, interview with author, May 28, 2003.

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- ¹⁴ Judith Butler, "Critically Queer," in *Bodies that Matter*, 223–242. Amelia Jones discusses this in her "Acting Unnatural: Interpreting Body Art," in *Decomposition: Post-Disciplinary Performance*, eds. Sue-Ellen Case, Philip Brett, and Susan Leigh Foster (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000).
- ¹⁵ Amelia Jones, "Acting Unnatural: Interpreting Body Art," 13.
- ¹⁶ See, for example, Homi Bhabha, "The Other Question: Colonial Discourse and the Stereotype," *Screen* 24, 4 (1983), 18.
- ¹⁷ See Franklin Sirmans, "Gold to Me," in *One Planet Under a Groove: Hip Hop and Contemporary Art* (Bronx New York: Bronx Museum of the Arts exhibition catalogue, 2001), 29.
- ¹⁸ Roberta Smith, "Out of the Vociferous Planet and in the Orbit of Funk and Hip-Hop," *The New York Times*, January 18, 2002, Friday Late Edition, E2, 46, column 1.
- ¹⁹ This kind of reductive logic has driven essentializing identity politics, as well as the censorship of art and music. It is a logic in which rethinking and challenging dominant culture and ideology is not an issue. See bell hooks, "Sexism and Misogyny: Who Takes the Rap? Misogyny, Gangsta Rap, and The Piano," <<http://eserver.org/race/misogyny.txt>> (1 December 2006). See also, Tricia Rose, "Rap Music and the Demonization of Young Black Males," in *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* (exhibition catalogue, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1994), 149–158. See also, Kobena Mercer, "Just Looking for Trouble: Robert Mapplethorpe and Fantasies of Race," in *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, eds. Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993).
- ²⁰ Susan Smith-Pinelo, interview with author, May 28, 2003. In quoting Smith-Pinelo here, I am not attempting to resolve the question of the ultimate or proper meaning of the text, for post-structuralist theory has shown us via the "death of the author" that individual intentions never have the last word in determining meaning, rather individual readers play an active role in interpreting a multivalent and open-ended text. See Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986) and Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" (1969), in *The History of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- ²¹ Susan Smith-Pinelo, "Artist's Statement" (emphasis added).
- ²² See Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 13–30. I am drawing on Butler's discussion of gender as an imitation with no original, no proper gender to one sex.
- ²³ My interpretation of her work has been influenced by Kobena Mercer's writings on Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of Black Men. See Kobena Mercer, "Just Looking for Trouble: Robert Mapplethorpe and Fantasies of Race," in *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate*, eds. Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1993), 92–110.
- ²⁴ Teresa Wiltz, "Art and the Body Politic," *The Washington Post*, December 8, 2001, C01.
- ²⁵ Amelia Jones, "The Post-Black Bomb," in *Tema Celeste: Contemporary Art*, March/April 2002, 52–55.
- ²⁶ Greg Tate, *Everything But the Burden: What White People Are Taking from Black Culture* (New York: Broadway Books, 2003), 8.
- ²⁷ However, since 1990, most independent labels are owned by 6 major white record companies: CBS, Polygram, Warner, BMG, Capitol-EMI and MCA, all of which allow independent labels to function relatively autonomously. See Russell Sanjek and David Sanjek, *American Popular Music Business in the 20th Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), and Reebee Garofalo, "Crossing Over 1939–1989," in *Split Image: African Americans in the Mass Media*, eds. Janette L. Dates and William Barlow (Washington: Howard University Press, 1990), 57–121.
- ²⁸ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, 9.
- ²⁹ I think it is important to mention that basically all TV video outlets are owned and controlled by the same company. Viacom owns VH1, MTV, and in 2004 acquired BET.
- ³⁰ Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, 14, 15.
- ³¹ See Tricia Rose, *Black Noise*, 167–168. See also bell hooks, "Selling Hot Pussy," in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 61–78, and particularly 61–64. See also Susan Willis, *A Primer for Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), and Wendy Chapkis, *Beauty Secrets: Women and the Politics of Appearance* (Boston: South End Press, 1986).
- ³² See Patricia Rose's chapter, "Bad Sisters: Black Women Rappers and Sexual Politics in Rap Music," in her book *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).
- ³³ Rob Marriotti, "What Price Queen Bee?," in *Vibe: Hip Hop Divas* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001), 134, 132.
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, 136.
- ³⁵ Jones, "Acting Unnatural: Interpreting Body Art," 13.

³⁶ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," in *Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, ed. Claude Lefort (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 138.

³⁷ I would argue that viewing her work online, such as at <<http://www.rovetv.net>>, removes it from the critical space of the museum, and thus her work becomes not unlike other entertainment websites and her imagery is potentially naturalized. As well her work can be downloaded and used for as many ends as there are downloaders. See Jennifer González's discussion of the web based art and the avatar, in "The Appended Subject," in *The Feminism and Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Amelia Jones (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 534–544. I do not intend to privilege a certain space for a correct interpretation. Her work can be misread in any place.

³⁸ Rebecca Schneider, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 117.

³⁹ See Tricia Rose, "Rap Music and the Demonization of Young Black Males," in *Black Male: Representations of Masculinity in Contemporary American Art* (exhibition catalogue, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 1994), 149–158.

⁴⁰ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 7.

⁴¹ Jones discusses these ideas in relation to the work of Laura Aguilar and Lyle Ashton Harris in "Dispersed Subjects," in *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998).

⁴² Vivian Sobchack, "The Passion of the Material: The Prolegomena to a Phenomenology of Interobjectivity," in *Carnal Thoughts: Bodies, Texts, Scenes and Screens* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, forthcoming). Cited in Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject*, 239.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 340.