Legacy, Wreck, and the Futures of Hip-Hop Feminism in *AfroDite Superstar*

Laura Helen Marks

> *I belong to the church of hip hop*. – Eisa Davis, "Sexism and the Art of Feminist Hip-Hop Maintenance" p. 127
>
> *[The sex industry] is the only place I've ever truly belonged…the potential is limitless*. – Jayme Waxman, *Naked Ambition* p. 43

Introduction: Pornographic Hip-Hop, Hip-Hop Pornography

Since 1989, the year that 2 Live Crew's album *As Nasty As They Wanna Be* caused them to be charged with obscenity, pornography and hip-hop have become connected in the media due to hip-hop's "pornographic" nature, and both mediums' allegedly inherent misogyny and degrading representations of women. Now, as rap stars increasingly begin to feature in their own adult films, it seems porn and hip-hop culture is closer than ever. However, just as hip-hop is often misunderstood to mean one particular representation, so pornography is too often dismissed by feminists as a site with no place for progressive or subversive representations of female sexuality. Black women have been bringing their voice to hip-hop for years, articulating themselves and their sexuality on their own terms, and a new generation of hip-hop feminists are reclaiming hip-hop culture as a space with feminist potential. Pornography has also been championed by many feminists, with women stepping up to the plate and becoming producers, directors, and writers of a variety of different adult genres. However, black women's voices have, until now, been conspicuously absent.

Cultured into a sexuality characterized "as a 'void' or empty space" (Hammonds 171), black women have historically chosen to remain silent about their sexuality in the face of demeaning and pervasive stereotyping of a deviant, bestial sexuality. However, much like hip-hop, dismissed by many yet simultaneously being redefined and reshaped by women who feel hip-hop is too potent a space to ignore, the adult feature *AfroDite Superstar* has shown that pornography is a space with black feminist potential. Furthermore, hip-hop culture has too often been conflated with rap music, to the point where many consumers believe rap music *is* hip-hop culture. *AfroDite Superstar* shows the diversity that hip-hop culture can produce, marking the release of an adult film that is truly a product and representation of hip-hop feminism.

AfroDite Superstar tells the story of AfroDite Jones, a Beverly Hills rich kid and daughter of a hip-hop media mogul, and her best friend Isis, an aspiring rapper. Performing at a hip-hop karaoke bar one night, C.E.O., a well-known record label executive, approaches AfroDite and offers her a shot at stardom. In spite of her protests that she's "not into hip-hop" and that Isis is the real rapper, he insists that she's the talent. Isis pushes AfroDite to accept, and together they embark on a journey to stardom, AfroDite as the "talent" and Isis as the lyricist. Renamed MC Dytie, given a full make-over, including blonde wig, and taught

how to come off as an authentic Compton girl, AfroDite soon realizes that she has become part of an artificial industry, as well as discovering that her father is bankrolling her career. The film concludes with AfroDite and Isis forming their own "supergroup" that projects their own vision, with Kali and C.E.O. in tow.

Through its merging of a hip-hop centered narrative with a feminist agenda, and pornographic sex scenes, *AfroDite* simultaneously addresses and subverts stereotypical representations of black women in hip-hop culture and pornographic culture. *AfroDite* is produced by *Femme Chocolat*, a new adult film company that aims to create "ethnically diverse erotica" that strives for positive and progressive representations of black sexuality. Continuing the hip-hop feminist tradition of cipher, dialogue, and wreck, *AfroDite* subverts not only a male-dominated hip-hop culture, but also the male-dominated world of pornography, suggesting that hip-hop and pornography cultures are spaces too powerful to be dismissed, too conflated to ignore, and too ripe with feminist potential to simply discard.

Cipher, Dialogue and Wreck: Articulating Voice in "Damaging" Discourses

In spite of female participation, hip-hop is often regarded as a genre in which women are degraded and spoken of in violent and sexually objectifying ways. Tara Roberts, one time hip-hop devotee, has found herself unable to reconcile her feminism with hip-hop culture. Roberts laments, "If you are a woman in hip-hop, you are either a hard bitch who will kill for her man, or you're a fly bitch who can sex up her man, or you're a fucked up lesbian. There is no fullness of womanhood" (70). Roberts is not alone in her disdain for the way black women are represented in hip-hop, yet many feminists of the hip-hop generation are finding a way to navigate this medium and find space for both feminism and hip-hop. Joan Morgan, a self-proclaimed hip-hop feminist, has had the same concerns, admitting, "in between the beats, booty shaking, and hedonistic abandon, I have to wonder if there isn't something inherently unfeminist in supporting a music that repeatedly reduces me to tits and ass and encourages pimping on the regular" (66). Yet in spite of Morgan's doubts, she finds herself in dialogue with hip-hop personified, stating, "Whether I like it or not, you play a critical part in defining my feminism" (70). Morgan's conflicted yet resolved attitude is echoed in Eisa Nefertari Ulen's understanding that "the beast is feasting on our girls. Now how do we slay it?" concluding, "We just gotta dig through hip-hop's pain to tap into its power" (Roberts 73).

Such conflicted responses to hip-hop culture on the part of black feminists abound, yet black women continue to seek out space within hip-hop in an attempt to "tap into its power." Gwendolyn D. Pough, in her book, *Check It While I Wreck It*, offers a framework that opens up space within hip-hop for black women. Pough's concepts of cipher, wreck, and dialogue can be usefully employed when addressing *AfroDite* as a hip-hop feminist text. Pough analyzes female rappers using these tools, reassessing the feminist potential of hip-hop

culture and rap in particular. Charting a history of black women's voices as predecessors of hip-hop, Pough cites "cipher" as an integral part of women's hip-hop cultures, explaining the "Hip-Hop concept of a cipher as a place where people gather to create knowledge and exchange information" (41). More specifically, "The cipher is both a space that Black women create for themselves and a space in which they question themselves about what it means to be both Black and woman in the larger U.S. public sphere" (42). Integral to the cipher is its "constant motion, created throughout U.S. history whenever Black women – whether expressing themselves through writing, public oratory, music, or club activities – come together to discuss issues of importance to themselves and the Black community" (41). In this sense, the cipher represents a black female legacy of voices, one which is constantly evolving, constantly in dialogue, and persistently voicing black female concerns. The dialogue that occurs is a central component of this cipher, and one which is reflected specifically in hip-hop culture in the form of response raps, cross-referencing, intertextuality, and directly incorporating and dialoguing with black women's voices from the past. The disagreements and evolving ideas are what keep the cipher moving, as Pough explains: "[black women] question and critique each other in an attempt to form a dialogue that builds on and is true to the legacies of change left by Black women in the past" (69). Ultimately, Pough asserts, "the women of the Hip-Hop generation are building a home for themselves on ground that was cleared by the Black women thinkers, writers, and activists of the late 1800s and the early to mid-1900s and broken by those of the 1970s" (73).

These hip-hop concepts of cipher and dialogue converge in hip-hop culture, resulting in the ability to "bring wreck," a "rhetorical tool that builds on Black womanist traditions and a Hip-Hop present" (76). Bringing wreck, Pough explains, describes "moments when Black women's discourses disrupt dominant masculine discourses, break into the public sphere, and in some way impact or influence the United States imaginary" (12). While the impact of wreck can be "fleeting," wreck is important in its ability to "mak[e] small and meaningful differences" (76-7). Perhaps even more significantly, "as a way of thinking specifically about the potential inherent in Black feminist change, bringing wreck offers new possibilities for the potential of Black women's speech and action" (77). I wish to argue that wreck also provides a way of considering the feminist potential of mediums traditionally considered void of feminist worth and inherently degrading to women, such as pornography, and more recently, as Pough has argued, in hip-hop.

Hip-hop has been reclaimed by many feminists as a site too powerful to ignore; a discourse that is embraced by so many, it is a potent public forum for voicing a diversity of ideas and attitudes. Indeed, one of Pough's central goals is to "figure out ways to work with a culture that influences the lives of so many youth, specifically young Black women" (13). Patricia Hill Collins observes that

popular culture, and hip-hop in particular, is quickly becoming a discourse that feminists are using to reach certain youth communities who would not otherwise have access to feminist concepts. Hip-hop culture in particular "reaches far more women than the relatively small number of women of color who manage to find women's studies classrooms within colleges and universities" (*Black Feminist Thought* 191), Collins asserts, and so logically black women have acknowledged "the need to use the art form of rap as a forum to reach young women who have no other means of finding feminism" (*Black Feminist Thought* 192).

Aside from this need for access, many women of the hip-hop generation feel that hip-hop culture is too important an aspect of their lives to simply dismiss, as well as recognizing a potential for feminist voices that cannot be simply ignored. Eisa Davis in particular has argued for the importance of black women retaining their place in hip-hop culture, stating, "I don't want to dismiss my culture, my language, my sense of community regardless of the form in which it comes….I'd rather listen and listen well" (132). Ultimately, Davis asks, even with all the misogyny and hate that she recognizes in hip-hop culture, "do we ignore the far-reaching, all-powerful effects of hip-hop?" (74), asking feminist detractors, "Why are you allowing yourself to be swept up and tossed out of a culture that is you?" (72). The potential that hip-hop culture holds for black women is endless, these hip-hop feminists suggest. I wish to suggest that the same thing can be said for pornography. Rather than simply dismissing these spheres, they should be wrecked, redefined, and renamed by black women in the spirit of their ancestors. Creating a feminist space *within* these discourses could potentially lead to a dismantling of what the words "hip-hop" and "pornography" have culturally come to mean, which could be realization of the harnessing of the energy of wreck that Pough so ardently calls for (13). Instead of dismissal, we should be seeking to wreck and redefine.

Black Female Sexuality: From Pornographic to Erotic and Back Again

The sexualization and objectification of black women in hip-hop culture has been one of the leading causes of outrage amongst women of the hip-hop generation, and no wonder considering the U.S. history of representations of and attitudes toward black women's bodies and sexualities. The history of black female sexuality in the U.S. is one characterized by stigma and silence. Established as part of a binary alongside white women, black women during and after slavery were fated to be regarded as deviant and bestial. In an attempt to resist these damaging stereotypes, rather than subvert through self-definition, the Black Women's Club Movement of the late 1800s promoted an image of black female sexuality modeled after the Cult of True Womanhood. Operating within these binary systems, however, merely shifted the perceived characteristics of black female sexuality into an equally restricting model. As Pough notes, "These kinds of restrictions set the tone for what was allowed to count as 'proper' Black womanhood and what had to be left out or silenced" (53). Indeed, silence was to

be the legacy that the clubwomen left behind, yet mingled with its binary opposite, excessive exposure. Constantly in conflict, these oppositional frameworks have not left much room for self-definition. As a result, black women's sexuality has been impossibly constructed as "simultaneously invisible, visible (exposed), hypervisible, and pathologized in dominant discourses" (Hammonds 170). To break free from these paradoxical constructions, a new generation of hip-hop feminists has argued that black women must define and articulate their sexuality on their own terms.

While black women have voiced the negative portrayals of black women's sexuality, as well as voicing the silenced atrocities black women have had to face throughout history, there has been a marked lack of attention to black women's sexual pleasure. Evelynn M. Hammonds notes, "In the past the restrictive, repressive, and dangerous aspects of black female sexuality have been emphasized by black feminist writers, while pleasure, exploration, and agency have gone underanalyzed" (177). Similarly, in a hip-hop context, Davis has demanded a more open-minded and complex approach to politics in hip-hop culture that does not dismiss the past: "I don't have to throw away all the old words and the people who say them in order to have a new conversation. I can't have a vision of political practice anymore that makes no space for pleasure, conflict, personal and collective responsibility to cohabitate simultaneously" (137). Or, as Joan Morgan asserts, "My feminism places the welfare of black women and the black community on its list of priorities. It also maintains that black-on-black love is essential to the survival of both" (70). In this way, representations and depictions of love, positive experiences of sex, and a self-defined articulation of sexuality in general, are absolutely necessary to the progression of black women in hip-hop culture. There should be no reason why pornography cannot be a part of this.

Pornography is a booming business in the United States, grossing a reported $10 billion in 2004, and with sales increasing each year (Kroft). While research has not been as thorough as it could be, statistics have shown viewership to be diverse, crossing boundaries of race, gender, sexuality, class, and nationality. With this in mind, many women have explored the potential of pornography for feminist goals, and several women pornographers have emerged, as well as "pro-porn" feminists such as Nadine Strossen, Laura Kipnis, and Wendy McElroy who have written extensively about the feminist potential of pornography highlighting the anti-feminist characteristics of censorship. However, in spite of these feminist voices in the adult industry, black women's voices have been conspicuously absent in the industry itself and in feminist analysis.

The relationship between black women and pornography is a problematic one. One might say, in fact, that there is no relationship, only a one-sided use and abuse of the other. Black women, according to the majority of research, are depicted in pornography as bestial, animalistic, dirty, and are

represented in sexually degrading ways. It is significant, then, that the director of *AfroDite Superstar* chooses to use the pseudonym, Venus Hottentot, alluding to Sara Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus," a historical figure who has come to symbolize the sexual objectification and abuse of the black female body in Western society and the cultural imagination. I will discuss the deeper implications of the use of this pseudonym in more detail later in this paper.

Baartman was taken from her South African home and exhibited in Europe as a sexual anomaly. The size of Baartman's genitalia and buttocks rendered her a source of curiosity, as well as evidence of African "primitive" sexuality (Gilman 213). Written reports of her autopsy were reprinted repeatedly during the decade that followed her death in 1815, and reflected "the comparison of a female of the 'lowest' human species with the highest ape (the orangutan) and the description of the anomalies of the Hottentot's 'organ of generation'" (Gilman 213). "Thus," Sander Gilman asserts, "the figure of Sarah Bartmann was reduced to her sexual parts" (213).

Gilman's choice of words is telling, echoing Andrea Dworkin and Catharine MacKinnon's interpretation of pornography as the depiction of "women's body parts…such that women are reduced to those parts" (Strossen, 118). In this way, Gilman is positioning the treatment of Sara Bartmann as exemplary of contemporary pornographic depictions of black women. Collins elaborates further, stating:

> The treatment of Black women's bodies in nineteenth-century Europe and the United States may be the foundation upon which contemporary pornography as the representation of women's objectification, domination, and control is based," adding that "African-American women were not included in pornography as an afterthought but instead form a key pillar on which contemporary pornography itself rests (*Black Feminist Thought* 136).

The pornographic framework Collins alludes to is one of violent objectification, yet pornography does not have to unavoidably operate in this way. Collins acknowledges Audre Lorde's concept of "the erotic" as a source of power, arguing that "when self-defined by Black women ourselves, Black women's sexualities can become an important place of resistance. Just as harnessing the power of the erotic is important for domination, reclaiming and self-defining that same eroticism may constitute one path toward Black women's empowerment" (*Black Feminist Thought* 128). The erotic, however, is the opposite of pornography, according to Lorde. While "the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" (569), pornography "is a direct denial of the power of the erotic, for it represents the suppression of true feeling. Pornography emphasizes sensation without feeling" (570). How, then, can the

erotic be visualized? How can black women practically render the erotic? I want to suggest that pornography, in contrast to traditional feminist ideas, can serve as a medium of the erotic, both in its visual rendering and in its potential for creating private articulations of the erotic in the spectator.

The notion of "spectacle" has been recognized by black feminists as an important component of black feminist mobilization. As Pough notes, "The spectacle becomes the key; one has to be seen before one can be heard. Spectacle and cultural representation (when more direct political access is not available) are the first steps in creating a disruption, the first steps in bringing wreck" (21). Hammonds concurs, stating that "The appeal to the visual and the visible is deployed as an answer to the legacy of silence and repression" (179). However, spectacle does not come without risk: "Spectacle… becomes a double-edged sword …. Spectacle is limited because it works only as long as the group attempting to impact the public sphere controls the gaze" (Pough 30). The issue of control is a complicated one, and as Pough argues, it serves as a limitation to the scope and longevity of wreck. Nevertheless, spectacle does serve a subversive purpose even if its impact is short-lived.

Pornography, as perhaps the ultimate in spectacle, can potentially be reshaped and redefined in order to serve subversive ends, and enable a public and private articulation of the erotic. The absence of black female voices in the adult industry speaks to the historical and cultural resistance to articulations of black female sexuality. Indeed, while black male filmmaker Lexington Steele has worked to provide positive representations of black female sexuality in his *Black Reign* series, black women have not yet had a significant impact on the filmmaking side of pornography. Furthermore, it seems that this absence, in light of a cultural silencing, is almost expected. Luisah Teish, discussing the sexual objectification of black women in pornography and media in general, questions "the Black artist's position," asking, "Is he standing by with only a prayer?" (117) Clearly Teish does not conceive of black women being the pornographic artists in question, nor does she envision the possibility of black women *using* pornography as a medium of resistance and wreck.

Resistance to pornography is telling of the inability to foresee a broader interpretation of this powerful and far reaching medium. As Angela Carter asserts, "Pornographers are the enemies of women only because our contemporary ideology of pornography does not encompass the possibility of change, as if we were the slaves of history and not its makers, as if sexual relations were not necessarily an expression of social relations, as if sex itself were an external fact, one as immutable as the weather, creating human practice but never a part of it" (3-4). In the same way, the very public representations that pornography allows do not have to be the end of those representations; pornography can serve as a reflection, a part of an ongoing discourse that is central to hip-hop culture and feminist progression. Hammonds points out that

"mirroring" is one potential way of "negating a legacy of silence" (179), while Morgan regards hip-hop, even in its ugliest forms, to serve as "the mirror in which we can see ourselves" (70). Pornography as an extension of hip-hop feminism can serve as a mirror that shapes and encourages diverse black sexualities, in turn creating public and private articulations of the erotic. Pornography and the erotic do not have to be mutually exclusive.

"Trying to Be Part of Something That Doesn't Exist": *AfroDite Superstar*

Before analyzing *AfroDite* in depth, it is important that I stress my resistance to media and feminist categorizations of the film as "erotica." Even the director herself resists the term "pornography," yet notes that "Although the word 'pornographic' makes me physically nauseous, it is a matter of semantics and people can call it whatever they want" (McChesney). Nevertheless, the resistance to the word "pornography" remains. I see this move as merely maintaining the problematic definitions of erotica and pornography, two mediums that overlap in many ways. Attempts to relegate *AfroDite* to the erotica genre, to me, speaks to the denial of women's self-defined sexualities, particularly black women, who have had their sexuality shaped for them for far too long. Similar to this categorization of *AfroDite* is the complaint and criticism of the new trend in "hip-hop erotica" literature. I believe these two moves speak to the same thing: a discomfort with overt and diverse representations of black women's sexuality, a perceived degradation that has its roots in sexism, racism, and a history of silencing in response to racist, sexist stereotypes. To categorize *AfroDite* as erotica, when it clearly is pornographic in its depictions of sex, is to never allow pornography to be a space for positive representations of women or feminist articulations of sexuality. I do not see the benefit of this. I do, however, see the benefits of "bringing wreck" to the powerful, male-dominated spheres of pornography; of redefining what pornography can and does do, both in its representations and in its ability to prompt personal self-definition. Through an analysis of *AfroDite Superstar* I aim to show the potential for expanding, redefining, and reshaping pornography's assumed boundaries, and those of hip-hop culture. Ultimately, *AfroDite Superstar* serves as a testament to the positive outcomes that a simultaneous feminist reclaiming of both hip-hop and pornography can achieve.

Purely on a narrative level, with its frequent use of quotes from feminist icons such as bell hooks and Audre Lorde, and shout outs to Pebblee Poo, *AfroDite* is representative of the inclusion of black women's voices in hip-hop culture. Focused as it is on the artificial construction of womanhood in hip-hop culture, and subsequent formation of a "supergroup" that is headed by a woman and seeks to articulate a self-defined female sexuality, at first glance the film can be recognized as the sexually empowering film for women of color that *Femme Chocolat* claims.

The film has been praised for "speak[ing] with the voice of young African American women, a voice that hasn't really been heard before in porn" as well as "demand[ing] that women of color be allowed to define their own sexuality without all the usual stereotypes or negativity" ("Candida Royalle's *AfroDite Superstar*). However, it is perhaps easy to regard the narrative itself, as opposed to the pornographic scenes, as the method by which the film makers express their feminist agenda. As one critic notes in a review of the film, "*AfroDite Superstar* is a strange, witty, funny, and innovative film about gangsta rap culture, feminism, female empowerment, and self-acceptance," adding, "It also, almost incidentally, has a few sex scenes, but they aren't the main thrust of the movie and, apart from the final scene, aren't even all that integral to the plot" ("AfroDite Superstar"). Clearly this critic separates the innovation and feminism of the film from its pornographic scenes, not considering the important connections between feminism, gangsta rap culture, and pornography, not to mention the fact that much of the film's innovative feel stems from the combination of wit, feminism, rap culture and pornography. Indeed, the message of self-empowerment and the highlighted difference between commodified and self-defined sexuality that *AfroDite* conveys would be very different, not to mention stifled, if the pornographic scenes were not included.

Before addressing the pornographic and narrative elements of the film, it is important to note the initial ways in which *AfroDite* incorporates cipher and dialogue in order to bring wreck to pornography and hip-hop culture. An important way in which *AfroDite* speaks to Pough's "cipher" is the reclaiming and repositioning of names. The director's pseudonym, Venus Hottentot, alludes to the historical figure of Sara Bartmann, as noted earlier. In the same spirit of legacy, all the female characters in *AfroDite* are named after mythical goddesses: AfroDite, a hip-hop interpretation of Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of sexual love "ruling birth, life, love, death, time, and fate, reconciling man to all of them through sensual and sexual mysticism" (Walker 45); Isis, Egyptian goddess "from whom all becoming arose" (Walker 453); Kali, "the Hindu Triple Goddess of creation, preservation, and destruction" (Walker 488); and Pandora, "the Earth-goddess" and "first woman" (Walker 767). Significantly, the men in the film are named after their jobs: C.E.O., Road Dawg, and Criminal. These methods of reclaiming historical women has not gone unnoticed in critical response to the film, nor has the figurative use of Sara Bartmann's tragic history of sexual objectification gone uncriticized.

In an anonymously written online article, "The Hottentot Venus vs. Venus Hottentot," a title that pits *AfroDite*'s director squarely against Sara Bartmann, the director's intentions are questioned and ultimately criticized: "Is this what Sara would have wanted? To be associated with porn, empowered or not? Is it the triumphant roar of the historically repressed finally expressing themselves sexually? Or merely further exploitation of that young Griqua girl whisked away to

be put on display 200 years ago?" ("The Hottentot Venus") These are useful and important questions, yet what I wish to suggest is that it is the pornography alone that causes such a reaction; a series of provocative questions that stem from popular and ignorant assumptions about what pornography is, what it does, and what it can do. Such assumptions are compounded by the author's suggestion that the adoption of this particular pseudonym is "a stunt. That as an art school grad, Venus has chosen a name that will be provocative, without really doing any research into how offensive a sobriquet 'hottentot' really is or the South African woman she's named herself for who suffered so much" ("The Hottentot Venus"). The suspicion that Venus does not know her history appears to lie in the fact that her chosen medium of expression in this particular case is pornography, and nothing else. It is a suspicion that is grounded in an inability to separate pornography from violation. Yet regardless of negative interpretations, the conscious adoption of Sara Baartman's pseudonym as a pseudonym, together with the incorporation of goddesses associated with love, sexuality, life, death, and power, highlights an intention to cipher; to carry on the voice of powerful women into new and fruitful spheres of feminist potential.

"I'm Famous": Uses of Spectacle

As discussed above, some hip-hop feminists have acknowledged the importance of spectacle to the mobilization of women in hip-hop culture, as well as recognizing its limitations. While spectacle provides a vehicle of representation in hip-hop culture, Pough notes that with "no semblance of the political projects inherent in other forms of Black public culture" there is a risk of "becoming stuck in forms of publicity that have limited usefulness" (30). Through its narrative commentary on the artifice and spectacle of mainstream hip-hop culture, combined with the pornographic spectacle of the film itself, *AfroDite* offers the viewer a complex representation of spectacle, its uses, and its risks.

In the first scene of a sexual nature, AfroDite, having completed her first music video as MC Dytie, settles back to watch herself in action. AfroDite has been shown several times in the film recording herself on camera as a kind of video diary, speaking directly to the camera, thinking aloud about her journey thus far. In this pornographic scene, she records herself watching her music video air on television. Excitedly exclaiming, "I'm famous," AfroDite lies back on her bed and begins to masturbate. Aroused by her commodified "famous" self, she simultaneously consumes this spectacle while rendering herself a spectacle for herself. At the same time, she is rendered a spectacle for the viewer of *the film*. The *AfroDite* spectator is presented with two contrasting spectacles: one that can be interpreted as shaped by the gaze of a consumer public – the music video; and one shaped by the gaze of the spectacle herself – AfroDite filming herself for herself. However, at the conclusion of the scene these varying meanings of spectacle shift considerably, as she leans toward her camera and says, "If I leak this on the internet, then I'll *really* blow up." The subsequent "leak,"

media frenzy, and "wardrobe malfunction" in which she "accidentally" exposes her breast on live television, speaks to the swiftness with which uses of spectacle can change, and the degree to which control of gaze effects these uses.

This leaves *AfroDite*, as a pornographic film, in an interesting and potentially precarious position. On the one hand it is framed and shaped by black women for a black audience, yet the degree to which authors maintain authority is open to question. Nevertheless, *AfroDite* can be a useful form of spectacle in its adherence to a political movement, that of hip-hop feminism, and its use of wreck in this scene to "bring those who witness it to a different understanding of Black womanhood, even if only momentarily" (83). Certainly this scene achieves this momentary shift in understanding through its contrasting and shifting representations of spectacle.

Another instance in which the uses of spectacle are highlighted is in the conclusion of the film. The budding attraction between AfroDite and C.E.O. is finally realized, and she kisses him. C.E.O. then invites her to meet him in his room in a few minutes; she spends this time adjusting her appearance. Standing in front of the mirror, applying extra lip gloss, AfroDite eventually pulls off her blonde wig, removes her breast-enhancing bra padding, and fluffs out her afro. Looking into the mirror she states firmly, "Be a woman in love with yourself." Mirroring, as Hammonds points out, is one form of self-definition open to black women attempting to express their sexuality; a way to "see themselves" and provide "an answer to the legacy of silence and repression" (179). Spectacle can serve these purposes also, yet mirroring provides a more explicitly self-defined sexuality since a mirror necessarily involves the spectacle gazing at herself; gazing into a mirror is a self-contained discourse. Employing the mirror in *AfroDite* further complicates the notion of spectacle as, whether the film viewer is looking at her or not, she is holding and shaping the gaze. It is a form of "the subverted gaze" that Mireille Miller-Young considers in her discussion of black women in pornography, In Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks: Interracial Desire and Black Women in 1980s' Video Pornography. Miller-Young notes that the interrogation of "spectatorship and consumption of [interracial pornographic] film texts by blacks and other people of colour, women and queers would certainly force us to rethink how the subverted gaze might alter the politics of cross-racial/gender/sexual desire and *pleasure in consuming 'oneself'*" (44 my italics). The act of mirroring can certainly be seen as a form of "pleasure in consuming oneself" as well as one way to appropriate or subvert the gaze so that it will render spectacle "useful."

Ultimately, *AfroDite* brings wreck on both a "real" and a metaphorical level. When she realizes she is "the label's biggest joke" she walks out with the understanding that she "was trying to be a part of something that doesn't exist." Not only is her media mogul father bankrolling her staff, but Kali is revealed as the brains behind the label, the clothing line, and the clubs. C.E.O. explains to

AfroDite, "the industry wasn't feelin' a woman running all these different corporations: clothing line, label, club – all of them Kali's dreams. She got all the dough, but never the glory." In response to the marginalization of women in hip-hop, AfroDite forms her own "supergroup" called "Truth," of which she is the C.E.O., Isis is the rapper, and Kali's true input is acknowledged. Such a conclusion to the film brings wreck to the artifice and sexism of commercial hip-hop, reclaiming that space to form a female-centered voice rather than dismissing hip-hop altogether. This narrative reshaping of hip-hop culture parallels what the film does for pornography, as the film reclaims space within the adult genre as opposed to dismissing it as inherently degrading to women.

Conclusion: Futures, Possibilities, Risks

AfroDite stands as a text that exposes feminist potential within pornography and hip-hop culture in an age where the two mediums seem to be colliding in ways deemed bad for women. As feminism progresses in ways that are detached from academia, these "untapped" spheres must be taken into account as spaces in which to bring wreck. Furthermore, as women increasingly seek out identities that are self-defined rather than "correct," the fluidity and diversity of what an individual might consider "feminist" or "empowering" has to be recognized. However, the recognition of hope and potential must also be paired with an understanding of the risk involved, as Collins notes:

> How wondrous and fearful it must be to step out into that space of possibility where you define yourself on your own terms, to craft a new multiethnic, gender-bending, biracial, sexually dynamic, fluid personal identity that is seen and respected by all sorts of people who seem so different from oneself. The responsibility and potential freedom that this promises are boundless. Yet it is obvious that these new personal identities can never occur without fundamental structural change that makes such identities possible for everyone. (*From Black Power* 196)

Collins' warning echoes Pough's concern regarding harnessing the power of wreck, and is a concern that should not be taken lightly. Nevertheless, increasing instances of wreck tied to an explicit feminist agenda within such powerful spheres as pornography and hip-hop, hold a potential that, risky, fleeting or otherwise, are necessary and powerful.

End Notes

1. For a discussion of the import and relevance of the 2 Live Crew controversy in relation to race, gender, and politics, see Kimberlè Williams Crenshaw's "Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew."

2. Most notably, Tera Patrick, Stormy Daniels, and Jenna Jameson. Independent film makers Mason, Belladonna, Tristan Taormino and several others have also made their mark in the adult industry. Carly Milne's edited collection, *Naked Ambition: Women Who Are Changing Pornography*, is a useful resource of first-hand accounts of the adult industry written by the women who work in it.
3. There is research on pornography viewership, all of which becomes outdated extremely quickly. However, relatively recent statistics can be found at *Family Safe Media*. Certainly, any statistics that can be found show a diversity of viewers from across the world.
4. See Strossen's *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights*, Kipnis' *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*, and McElroy's *XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography*.
5. See Gloria Cowan and Robin R. Campbell's "Racism and Sexism in Interracial Pornography: A Content Analysis" and Tracy A. Gardner's "Racism in Pornography and the Women's Movement." Also, Mireille Miller-Young's "Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks: Interracial Desire and Black Women in 1980s' Video Pornography." For a reading that allows for a subversive angle in films typically regarded as racist and/or sexist, see Linda Williams' "Skin Flicks on the Racial Border: Pornography, Exploitation, and Interracial Lust."
6. Several reviews have suggested that *Afrodite Superstar* is softcore, or erotica, rather than pornography. See The Star, Porn Movies For Women, and The Blowfish Blog.
7. See Nick Chiles' *New York Times* article, "Their Eyes Were Reading Smut."

Works Cited

AfroDite Superstar. Dir. Venus Hottentot. Femme Chocolat, 2007.

"AfroDite Superstar." *The Blowfish Blog* 12 Sept. 2007. 28 April 2008 http://blog.blowfish.com/videos/afrodite-superstar/384

"Candida Royalle's *AfroDite Superstar*." *Porn Movies For Women*. 28 April 2008 http://www.pornmoviesforwomen.com/afroditesuperstar.html

Carter, Angela. *The Sadeian Woman And the Ideology of Pornography*. NY: Penguin, 2001.

Chiles, Nick. "Their Eyes Were Reading Smut." *New York Times* 4 Jan. 2006. 28 April 2008 http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/04/opinion/04chiles.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=their+eyes+were reading+smut&st=nyt&oref=slogin

Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. NY: Routledge, 2000.

---. *From Black Power to Hip-Hop: Racism, Nationalism, and Feminism*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 2006.

Cowan, Gloria and Robin R. Campbell. "Racism and Sexism in Interracial Pornography: A Content Analysis." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 18 (1994): 323-338.

Crenshaw, Kimberlè Williams. "Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew." *Words That Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech, and the First Amendment*. Ed, Mari J. Matsuda, Charles R. Lawrence III, Richard Delgado, and Kimberlè Williams Crenshaw. Boulder: Westview, 1993. 111-145.

Davis, Eisa. "Sexism and the Art of Hip-Hop Maintenance." *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*. Ed. Rebecca Walker. NY: Anchor, 1995. 127-141.

"Pornography Statistics." *Family Safe Media*. 28 April 2008 http://www.familysafemedia.com/pornography_statistics.html

Gardner, Tracey A. "Racism in Pornography and the Women's Movement." *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*. Ed. Laura Lederer. NY: William Morrow, 1980. 105-114.

Gilman, Sander. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 (1985): 204-242.

Hammonds, Evelynn M. "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence." *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures*. Ed. M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty. NY: Routledge, 1996. 170-182.

"The Hottentot Venus vs Venus Hottentot." *Women 24* 4 Jan. 2007. 28 April 2008 http://www.women24.com/Women24/LoveSex/SexAndSizzle/Article/0,,1-3_16635,00.html

Kipnis, Laura. *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America*. Durham: Duke UP, 1999.

Kroft, Steve. "Porn in the USA." *CBS News* 5 Sept 2004. 28 April 2008 http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2003/11/21/60minutes/main585049.shtml

Lorde, Audre. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." *Feminism and Pornography*. Ed, Drucilla Cornell. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. 569-574.

McChesney, Megan. "Erotica's New Hue Is Femme Chocolat." *The Star* 30 March 2007. 28 April 2008 < http://www.thestar.com/living/health/article/197512>

McElroy, Wendy. *XXX: A Woman's Right to Pornography*. NY: St. Martin's Press, 1995.

Miller-Young, Mireille. "Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks: Interracial Desire and Black Women in 1980s' Video Pornography." *Pornification: Sex and Sexuality in Media Culture*. Ed. Susanna Paasonen, Kaarina Nikunen, and Laura Saarenmaa. Oxford: Berg, 2007. 33-44.

Milne, Carly, ed. *Naked Ambition: Women Who Are Changing Pornography*. NY: Carroll & Graf, 2005.

Morgan, Joan. *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminist Breaks It Down*. NY: Touchstone, 1999.

Pough, Gwendolyn D. *Check It While I Wreck It: Black Womanhood, Hip-Hop Culture, and the Public Sphere*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2004.

Roberts, Tara and Eisa Nefertari Ulen. "Sisters Spin Talk on Hip Hop: Can the Music Be Saved?" *Ms. Magazine* February/March 2000. 69-74.

Strossen, Nadine. *Defending Pornography: Free Speech, Sex, and the Fight for Women's Rights*. NY: NY UP, 2000.

Teish, Luisah. "A Quiet Subversion." *Take Back the Night: Women on Pornography*. Ed. Laura Lederer. NY: William Morrow, 1980. 115-118.

Walker, Barbara G. *The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets*. San Fransisco: Harper & Row, 1983.

Williams, Linda. "Skin Flicks on the Racial Border: Pornography, Exploitation, and Interracial Lust." *Porn Studies*. Ed. Linda Williams. London: Duke UP, 2004. 271-308.