

# The Feminist Funk Power of Betty Davis and Renée Stout

Nikki A. Greene

I sell the shadow to support the substance.

Sojourner Truth

Tell them about how you're never really a whole person if you remain silent, because there's always that one little piece inside you that wants to be spoken out, and if you keep ignoring it, it gets madder and madder and hotter and hotter, and if you don't speak it out one day it will just up and punch you in the mouth from the inside out.<sup>1</sup>

Audre Lorde

Fine artists have historically looked to music (and musicians) as sources of inspiration for both subject matter and form. In twentieth-century American art, for example, artists like Romare Bearden, Jackson Pollock, and David Hammons, among many others, sought out jazz, in particular, to enhance their visual vocabulary, to inform their improvisational applications of materials, and/or to incorporate various themes of representation.<sup>2</sup> Many contemporary artists are making headway into transforming American art through the manipulation of signs and form along with more complex readings, writings, and visualizations of black identity in American popular culture and music than has traditionally been available, especially for art historians.<sup>3</sup> However, outside of the genre

of hip-hop, few scholars treat *female* musicians and fine artists directly as an evocative dialectic.<sup>4</sup> This essay offers an analysis of the visual cultures of black women's bodily self-presentations and mis-representations by engaging the career of funk rocker Betty Davis with the artistic oeuvre of Renée Stout.<sup>5</sup>

During the 1970s, Betty Davis was at the height of her short-lived career, and the provocative images of the confident performer wearing racy costumes continue to endure. The recent rerelease in 2007 of Davis's three albums has helped reignite an interest in not only her music, but also her visual bravado.<sup>6</sup> Davis projected a self-assured, sexually charged, musically creative singer-songwriter that resulted in a more limited audience and less commercial success. She never saw herself as an agent for women's liberation or race politics, but the persona of Betty Davis, vis-à-vis her image and her music, has taken on a life of its own as a symbol of sexual liberation.

While the music world has undoubtedly taken notice, her iconic status has not been lost on visual artists. In particular, Betty Davis's funk façade complements Renée Stout's daring full body cast, *Fetish #2* (1988), and her personas, Madame Ching and Fatima Mayfield, in unexpected ways. When asked directly about Stout's musical influences, Betty Davis was indeed at the top of her list.<sup>7</sup> Davis and Stout have respectively attempted to control the production and expression of original material throughout their careers, most especially in the visual representations of themselves. In so doing, both artists exhibit black feminist ambitions, deliberately or not. Furthermore, Davis and Stout demonstrate in music and art forms, what I call a "feminist funk power," a performative funk that forces the viewer to reinvent one's very conception of black female agency in light of their original physical expression of art forms.

### **Betty Davis: Working Out a Funk of Her Own**

Born Elizabeth Mabry on July 26, 1945, Betty Davis was raised in North Carolina, primarily in Durham.<sup>8</sup> She also lived with her grandmother in rural Reidsville, sixty miles northwest. Her mother and grandmother used to listen to the blues. She enjoyed the rawness and simplicity of musicians like Muddy Waters, B. B. King, Big Mama Thornton, Koko Taylor, and Johnnie Taylor. She didn't take music lessons, but she would write the lyrics and the melody would follow. Around the time that she moved to Homestead, Pennsylvania, a small town outside of Pittsburgh, she wrote her first song, "I'm Gonna Bake That Cake of Love." She was twelve years old.<sup>9</sup>

She moved to New York in 1962, at age sixteen, to live with an aunt and to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology, where she studied fashion design. She first supported herself through sales and clerical jobs. By age nineteen, she secured enough capital to open a private club called The Cellar. The following year, the Chambers Brothers recorded her first published song, "Uptown to Harlem."<sup>10</sup> She signed with Wilhelmina modeling agency at twenty-two, working in fashion shows, television commercials, and magazine spreads, including

*Ebony*, *Jet*, and *Glamour*. She enjoyed modeling because she was able to meet people and to travel. However, Davis never anticipated a long career in the industry. As she stated, “what I didn’t like about it was that it didn’t take any brains. It wasn’t challenging enough. . . . Then, too, I realized as soon as my looks even looked as though they were going to go, my career was over and I decided I needed more security than that.”<sup>11</sup>

It was around this time that she first met Miles Davis. She dated Miles for two years prior to their marriage in September 1968. Their relationship was short, but highly charged. They divorced after only a year. By all accounts, Betty’s connections to the music and fashion worlds along with her personal style and charisma had an immediate effect on Miles’s music and his turn toward electronic instruments in *Bitches Brew*.<sup>12</sup> He was undoubtedly overwhelmed by her beauty and sexual charm, but he also deeply respected and supported her for her musical talents. As he recalled in his autobiography in 1989, “Betty was a big influence on my personal life as well as my musical life. If Betty were singing today she’d be something like Madonna; something like Prince, only as a woman. She was the beginning of all that when she was singing as Betty Davis. She was just ahead of her time.”<sup>13</sup>

Miles arranged her first studio session with Columbia Records, with himself as producer along with a cadre of experienced musicians in tow in 1969: Herbie Hancock, John McLaughlin, ex-Cactus member Jim McCarty, Mitch Mitchell who played drums with Jimi Hendrix in the Jimi Hendrix Experience, and Billy Cox who was Hendrix’s bassist in Band of Gypsies.<sup>14</sup> Miles later acknowledged in *Cosmopolitan* in 1976: “She’s a downright sexy bitch. She’s got more talent and guts than any single woman out there.”<sup>15</sup> This mix of praise for her physical attractiveness with her gifted song-writing and performance ability becomes part of the mystique surrounding Betty Davis, and part of what makes her *funky*.

According to Robert Farris Thompson, the word “funk” within black communities derives in part from the French *fumet*, “aroma of food and wine” in French Louisiana. The jazz term holds greater similarity to the KiKongo, *lu-fuki*, meaning “bad body odor.” An elder is often thought to have an odor, and as a result, “the smell of a hardworking elder carries luck. This Kongo sign of exertion is identified with the positive energy of a person.”<sup>16</sup> In jazz and Bakongo contexts, “funk” derives from “the integrity of their art, for having ‘worked out’ to achieve their aims.”<sup>17</sup> For through the bodily expression of funk, one gains a greater appreciation of the artist’s craft, and, by extension, her philosophy or insight.

The physicality of funk matters here. In Angela Y. Davis’s *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, the author outlines the careers of female blues artists, Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday who “embodied sexualities associated with working-class black life.”<sup>18</sup> In the vein of blues music, Davis’s lyrics in “They Say I’m Different” makes a reference to work in rural North Carolina as a child and to the blues of John Lee Hooker:

They say I'm different  
 cause I eat chitlins.  
 I can't help it I was born  
 and raised on 'em, that's right.  
 Every mornin' I'd have to slop the hogs  
 And they'd be gettin' off  
 humpin' to John Lee Hooker.<sup>19</sup>

Indeed, the “legacies” of black, female performers fully engaged in the articulation of their authority, with or without a man, resulted in less critical acclaim. Their music was deemed “low culture, unworthy of critical scholarly investment by their contemporaries, with the exception of Langston Hughes.”<sup>20</sup> Similar to the treatment of the blues women who preceded Davis, scholars of music history seem more comfortable with the exhaustive examples of men who dominate the genre of funk music. Thus, the paradigm through which most understand funk music is through the prism of masculine vibes and voices.<sup>21</sup> From this foundation, the music of Betty Davis emerged.

Davis put together her own band in early 1974, comprising her cousins from North Carolina, drummer Nickey Neal, and bassist Larry Johnson. Her cousins found Fred Mills (keyboards) and Carlos Morales (guitar). They played the Reidsville and Greensboro R&B scene before going on the road with Betty. She choreographed, styled, and rehearsed the band *her* way. Neal told Oliver Wang in a 2006 interview: “It was shocking, because we was half-dressed, mostly as a sex-oriented thing. Everything was directed to her.”<sup>22</sup> Her lyrics also reflected a confidence in her sexual prowess. In the song from her debut album, *Betty Davis*, she included a controversial song, “If I’m In Luck I Just Might Get Picked Up,” which was banned by the NAACP in Detroit.<sup>23</sup> Not everyone could handle hearing such straightforward boasting with lyrics like “I said if I’m in luck / I just might get picked up / I said I’m fishin’ trick / and you can call it what you want then.” Most recently, anthropologist and musicologist Maureen Mahon provided the most thorough and critical examination of Betty Davis’s music and the impact of her style on the genre of funk music. She highlights how the singer “took pleasure in her frank and public exploration of a black woman’s sexual agency, but she did so in a context that offered limited opportunities for black female-centered expressions.”<sup>24</sup> Her album covers convey this active management of her style and sexualized representation.

Since the graphic design and artwork of album covers continue to be celebrated—despite their diminished presence on the market—their importance as physical objects and as commodities remain pertinent. Album covers were traditionally part of the experience of the music itself, and as one music reviewer wrote, “an integral part of the package.”<sup>25</sup> Over the last three decades, especially since the introduction of compact discs and digital music files, admirers of album cover art have written about its passing in articles, displayed the dynamic images in small exhibitions, and compiled selections in books.<sup>26</sup> A predecessor

of the music video, the vinyl discs, photographs, and liner notes, held within the square envelopes alongside, were the most direct visual and tactile connection any consumer could have with the artist outside of concerts. This contact with the artist, however elusive, provides a sense of intimacy. Davis's direct displays of her body through her provocative dress and suggestive poses make her album covers much more closely related to sexual fantasy and fetish.

Historically, the word "fetish" blossomed within the European imagination as early as the fifteenth century. The Portuguese word *feitico* means "witchcraft," and the Latin word *fastidium*, means "artificial."<sup>27</sup> Sigmund Freud's succinct psychoanalytical definition of "fetish" as an object of compromise for the mother's missing penis seems didactic and yet sufficient for understanding its use in relation to Betty Davis. At the heart of this compromise lies the assumption that disavowal and affirmation of the castration of the mother's penis can exist simultaneously. The fetish functions as a substitution of the penis that the young son does not want to relinquish, and so "the horror of castration has set up a memorial to itself."<sup>28</sup> This memorial stands in as a "token of triumph over the threat of castration and a protection against it."<sup>29</sup> Women, as potential mothers, carry the undue burden of the problems of sexuality and identity in Freudian analysis, making their bodies the sites for such disavowal and affirmation. The divided attitude of the fetishist applies to his use of the fetish as well, for the object can operate, according to Freud, "in reality or in his imagination."<sup>30</sup>

Karl Marx provided an alternative interpretation of fetish as commodity. Marx and Freud both examined the value of the sign inscribed onto an object respectively either as an undervaluation or overinscription of the value of the object. Through a Marxian lens, Laura Mulvey elucidates, the fetish object conceals its lack through surface, often, or notably, through a "seductive sheen."<sup>31</sup> For example, with a commodity fetish, new packaging or erasure of the worker's touch would qualify as sheen. For Freud, the fetish acts as a substitute for the thing missing *and* represents a memorial. Betty Davis offered a combination of both. As a cultural writer described in 1974: "In her music and in the physical aspect of her relationship with her audiences, she merchandises an aggressive brand of sensuality. But aggressiveness and sensuality are what the age demands, and Betty has come along with her music just in time to feed its fantasies."<sup>32</sup>

Questions of the fetishistic gaze can be—and were in the 1970s—applied to Betty Davis. The "seductive sheen" of provocative costumes, exaggerated movements, and even her loud voice was made available on her first album *Betty Davis*. The album cover showcased a triptych of the Afro-ed singer, smiling adoringly in short jean shorts and a multi-colored top tied to expose her midriff. She models thigh-high, metallic silver, high-heeled boots. The boots are significant since shoes are the second type of classic fetish to lingerie. When worn, high-heeled shoes transform the female body by forcing the back to arch, which thrusts the bosom forward and emphasizes the sway of the hips and buttocks. The height of the shoes also elongates the curve of the calf, creating "an

alluring long-legged look.”<sup>33</sup> In her third album cover, *Nasty Gal*, Betty Davis reclines on the floor in a black teddy and fishnet stockings, while grasping a high-heeled mule.

The covers operate, in part, as fetishistic memorials as described by Freud. The boldness and craft with which Betty Davis presented her sexuality, again, contributes to her funk power. The pornographic magazine *High Society* wrote as much: “Sex is the name of the game on all fronts, but is the world ready for an honest, straight-talking no-shit female entertainer who can play the dozens with the best of them? In some quarters she’s just too hot. She spells DANGER. She affronts, offends and loves every minute of it.”<sup>34</sup> The public picked up on the alluring revulsion of Betty Davis. As singer Rick James put it: “When I first saw her album cover, I fell in love. Because she was the only girl, the only woman, who was totally cutting edge. I mean, she was what funk was . . . She was funk! She was just free with her stuff, man.”<sup>35</sup>

Margaret Rose Vendryes, an artist and art historian, treated the fetishization of black, female singers of the mid-to-late twentieth century in a series of thirty-three and one-third paintings of album covers titled *The African Diva Project*.<sup>36</sup> She began the series in 2003, and each painting showcases a full-figure portrait of “divas” on 12-inch-square canvases, including jazz, R&B, and pop singers, like Abbey Lincoln, Aretha Franklin, and Whitney Houston. What is more, she replaced every face with a specially chosen African mask painted on paper that she then superimposed onto the canvas. A scholar of African and African American art, Vendryes purposely grants these portraits of re-envisioned LP covers new life. In most African masking traditions, masks are worn and danced by men. In the *African Diva Project*, the masks stand in for the women, and she provides “these dynamic female performers agency and protection replacing their psychological mask with a literal one.”<sup>37</sup> In *Kwele Betty - African Diva* (2011), the artist’s version of Davis’s sophomore album cover, *They Say I’m Different*, she rids the singer’s hands of the three steel rod props and enlivens the kneeling, open-legged singer with a Kwele *kuk* mask. Donned in her original red-striped, silver metallic leotard and fur-lined, blue suede ankle boots, Betty Davis transforms into an activated masked dancer, *Kwele Betty*. Therefore, in much the same way that Davis took control by writing her own lyrics and choosing her own style, Vendryes endows *Kwele Betty - African Diva* a power not normally available to women, and captures how Davis masked herself in order to survive.

Vendryes further enlivens the surface of the canvas through the inscription of the titles of the songs within the beige, matte, wax background. “Game Is My Middle Name,” “Anti-Love Song,” and “Your Mama Wants You Back” are a few of the titles that give voice to the figure. Much like the lyrics or the descriptions of Betty Davis’s concerts, reading the words in the painting transfers the viewer’s experience from a strictly visual one that can be reached by language, disrupting a potentially casual viewing. *Kwele Betty - African Diva* reflects the complexity of the beauty and dignity of a hard-working woman—a



**Figure 1:** Margaret Rose Vendryes, *Kwele Betty - African Diva*, 2010. Oil and cold wax on canvas and paper, 30 × 30 inches. Reproduced by permission of the artist.

funky woman—who operated for as long as she could within a male-dominated arena of the music world. Particularly as a songwriter, Betty Davis exercised a skill and authority that few other women did during this time. In fact, Davis went head-to-head with Motown Records around 1971 when she wrote most of the songs that appeared on the Commodores’ demo for the label. The group landed a deal, and Motown wanted to also sign Davis as a writer. However, in an effort to maintain control of publishing rights, the deal went from a seven-song agreement to a one-song deal that eventually failed altogether. From her perspective, “they wanted everything . . . my publishing, they wanted writers’ money. It meant giving up everything, practically.”<sup>38</sup> Therefore, the album cover in relation to her music came to represent “Betty Davis” on her highest frequency in order to be heard and at her brightest—with *seductive sheen*—in order to elicit a gaze, even a fetishistic one.

Frieda High W. Tesfagiorgis affirms the need for a new discourse that specifically centers black women artists and their works as necessary because the critical models that currently operate within the discipline of art history (white, male hegemonic apparatuses) do not appropriately reflect black women artists, forcing them to pursue their own goals in the margins of the discourse.<sup>39</sup> She aptly points to conceptual artist and philosopher Adrian Piper's term of the "triple negation" of "Colored Women Artists" wherein Eurocentric discourses discriminate against them in terms of their race, gender, and profession.<sup>40</sup> Such negation marginalizes these artists. The perseverance to work within—or despite—these restrictions produces a self-determination for artists. Howardena Pindell and Faith Ringgold exemplify women who challenge the mainstream discourse of "low" art (crafts) versus "high" art (painting) by incorporating both of these qualities within their pieces.<sup>41</sup> Stout as a painter and mixed-media artist benefits from this aspect of their practice and the opening it has created for her within the art world. Consequently, Renée Stout and Betty Davis both beg for recognition and a thrust out from invisibility specifically due to their "triple negation" as black woman artists. A feminist funk standard serves to alleviate this neglect.

### **Renée Stout: Fetishizing the Funk**

Renée Stout began her career as an artist who also wrestled with commodity fetishism. After graduating from Carnegie Mellon University in 1980, she honed her skills a professional sign painter, adeptly mastering most convincingly the reflections of the textures of glass, plastic, and cardboard in order to encourage purchases. She confronted the superficiality and slickness of the surface as promoted through the style of photorealism. The value of the commodity empties itself through the gloss of the paint and hyper-reality—a hyper-visibility—of its representation. Stout's move toward portrayals of her own body is a direct reflection of both sexual and commodity fetishes.

Born in 1958 in Junction City, Kansas, Stout coincidentally grew up in Pittsburgh about the same time that Betty Davis moved to the area.<sup>42</sup> Stout owned all three of her records as a teenager, and she remembers fondly listening to Davis's songs along with the music of Sly and the Family Stone and Parliament-Funkadelic.<sup>43</sup> Over the years, she has grown to appreciate the ways in which Betty Davis was able to empower herself that would later help Stout in her own career. Stout foresees a delayed appreciation for her aesthetic much in the same way as Davis:

People were not ready for her. So, all of a sudden, she's a footnote in musical history. . . . They're starting to reexamine her music and how she may have influenced Miles. . . . And it makes me sad because she was misunderstood then. . . . I think it's going to be the same way with my work: "Oh, that's

weird . . .” And then one day, way down the line when I’m eighty or ninety, it’s like, “Oh, we get it now!” [laughter]<sup>44</sup>

Much of what Stout’s audiences view as unusual in her artwork has to do with her messages of deep Africanity, especially in her seminal piece, *Fetish #2*.

Stout began thinking about African connections and collected objects in art, when as a ten-year-old girl, she first saw an example of an *nkisi nkondi* at the Carnegie Museum of Art in Pittsburgh. Their system of cataloging was not that sophisticated, as a visitor would not necessarily know the object’s original purpose. While the full meaning of the Carnegie *nkisi nkondi* nail figure alluded the artist in her youth, the recognition of its power stayed with her. Stout partially credits Robert Farris Thompson’s book *Flash of the Spirit* as one of her early influences in incorporating African elements within her work (the same book with the definition of funk quoted above). Stout referred to this book



**Figure 2:** *Nkisi Nkondi (Nail figure)*, c. 1880–1920. Wood, pigment, iron, ivory, cotton, and other materials, H: 31½ × W: 15½ inches. Reproduced by permission of the Carnegie Museum of Art.

after she moved to Washington, DC, in the mid-1980s. Thompson described *minkisi* (or the singular, *nkisi*) as packages, usually within small bags or small glass containers, which imbed the powers of a spirit with sacred medicines. The *minkisi* are then attached to the wooden figure, *nkondi*.

Two definitions of *nkondi* help to describe its purposes as either a record keeper or an object that “identifies someone who is a hunter, dealer, or spy.”<sup>45</sup> Through the insertion of nails or metal wedges with or without swaths of cloth, the priest keeps track of all inquiries, promises, and transactions within a community. String and cloth are tied to the nail in order to “remind the nail what to do.”<sup>46</sup> In some cases, the person is asked to lick the nail, allowing for his saliva to further enact the agreement. For the uninformed, the rusty nails, the fragments of cloth, the startling white-eyed gaze, and upraised arm of the original Carnegie *nkisi nkondi* more than likely elicited fear or dread. One could potentially void the sculpture of its significance by dismissing the object as mere “African fetish.”

In *Fetish #2*, Stout, in the way a doctor casts a broken arm or leg, layered plaster and gauze onto parts of her body—a shin here, a forearm there—leaving the cast to harden before removing it.<sup>47</sup> Small bundles of *minkisi*, attached to netting, adorn the figure’s chest, shoulders, and back. Therefore, Stout’s cast of her own body implies an interpretation of herself as a figure of empowerment since the sculpture serves as a life-sized *nkisi* figure, a vessel through which medicinal and spiritual powers are contained, controlled, and enacted.

As with some traditional *nkisi nkondi*, the artist reserves a space in the abdominal area to further spiritually activate the sculpture. In the center of her abdomen, a small case contains dried flowers, a stamp from Niger in the upper-left corner, and a photograph of an infant in the middle. The belly, or *mooyo*, is synonymous with life, and is essentially where the soul resides. The dried flowers mark the vibrancy of life extinguished yet preserved in perpetuity, much in the way of Joseph Cornell’s shadow boxes do. The outdated stamp suggests an African origin of the body and the idea of passage—the Middle Passage—over space and time. The baby photograph is not of the artist, but rather a representation of her very being at creation. The belly of *Fetish #2* functions essentially as a crossroads, the soul at an intersection between life and death.

*Fetish #2* made its debut appearance in 1989 in the “Black Art/Ancestral Legacy: The African Impulse in African American Art” at the Dallas Art Museum, but Stout and the sculpture gained more national exposure with its inclusion in the exhibition *Astonishment and Power: Kongo Minkisi & The Art of Renée Stout* at the National Museum of African Art in Washington, DC. In general, reviewers of the show received her works with great enthusiasm.<sup>48</sup> However, art critic Holland Cotter for the *New York Times* found that Stout’s Kongo-inspired work, located in the final galleries of the show, came across as lackluster, seemingly emptied of its effect. Cotter noted that in Stout’s art, “the charms and feathers seem to be deployed as decorative accents, the pouches are sewn from too-pretty fabrics, and the nails appear in discrete ornamental clus-



**Figure 3:** Renée Stout, *Fetish #2*, 1988. Mixed media (plaster body cast), 64 inches. Dallas Art Museum. Reproduced by permission of the Dallas Art Museum.

ters.<sup>49</sup> Cotter went on to state that Michael D. Harris, the artist and art historian who wrote the essays on Renée Stout for the exhibition catalog, did not succeed in his “attempt . . . to position Ms. Stout within a self-conscious post-modern framework.” In 1992 Stout’s career was still in its burgeoning stages. Cotter suggested that the show should have included work by a more mature artist like Betye Saar or provided Afro-Cuban examples to better bridge the gap between the Kongo objects and the North American context.

In a follow-up interview, Stout claimed that she was at first quite angry about the negative review in the *New York Times*. Later, however, she did not care as much because the newspaper’s readership was not her intended audience. She instead wanted to communicate with African Americans. She believed that African Americans would appreciate the work more: “I mine my own personal ancestry and African-American history in general. I want to present work that makes us take a closer look at that ourselves.”<sup>50</sup> While she yearned for this spe-

cific audience, she conceded that even folks from within her own racial background could not transcend issues of religion or spirituality. Even one of the docents at the National Museum of African Art questioned her creative process as bordering on “madness” since Stout appeared to deal with non-Christian or occult iconography. Since Stout views the Kongo objects as original elements of the African aspects of African American culture, she believes the mixed reaction to her art derives from the fact that “some of us are afraid of ourselves.”<sup>51</sup>

In my opinion, the element of the grimy surface on *Fetish #2* contributed to this fear. The patina gives the sculpture a darkened complexion so as to appear as skin, but also insinuates an element of debasement. The viewer must take in not only the fetishistic elements of Stout’s body as discussed above, but also the confusion on how to receive her messages of desire, sexuality, and religious sentiment through the outer surface of muck. In other words, Stout’s rough exterior of collected bundles of spare hair on *Fetish #2*, in particular, “degrades” the work. Debasement, or degradation, is a neglected and rejected aspect of visuality in both modern and postmodern art as noted by visual culture scholar Kobena Mercer.<sup>52</sup> However, since the devalued materials are altered within new contexts (i.e., photos, prints, sculptures), they are “re-signified by dis-articulating the signifying chain and rearticulating its semantic equations.”<sup>53</sup>

Additionally, as Michael Harris claims, *Fetish #2* is “ritual nudity, not the available female nude of Western art.”<sup>54</sup> Playing on Freud’s definition of “fetish” as one’s irrational displacement of longing for a real body into often contiguous objects, *Fetish #2* invites the viewer to transfer his or her yearning, sexual or religious, into the hollow shell so as to complicate the sculpture’s spirituality and to test its authenticity. Eroticized, and therefore, commodified by her own hand, she brings to the fore the question of the value of the female body, inscribed with desire by the viewer, which confirms a Kongo-inspired “working out” of funk.

### Personifying Funk

Even in Miles Davis’s relatively short description of his ex-wife, he notes that Betty was “ahead of her time” not just when she was singing, but rather “when she was *singing as Betty Davis*” (emphasis mine). One must acknowledge that Betty Davis’s concerts, music recordings, and album covers embody, or at least contribute to, a “Betty Davis” character that she constructed for the purposes of expressing and promoting her music. By her own admission, she is an introvert by nature; she initially wanted only to write songs.<sup>55</sup> However, as a business woman (owner of The Cellar) and fashion model, she learned and intuitively understood early on that marketing her brand of funk would be the only way to maintain *any* presence in the music industry. Consider the following recounting of an almost literal in-your-face confrontation between Davis’s on-stage erotic play and her eager, yet hesitant audience as described in *Penthouse* in 1976:

Betty Davis plays her body the way most musicians play instruments, shoving hot crotch into the faces of the dazed front row, turning tender buns to the zonked mummies on the side, pushing firm thighs against the organ player's bulging zipper. He thrusts back eagerly. She sits on her haunches, the microphone gives out static as it bumps suggestively against her legs. Meanwhile, the audience is deathly still, all eyes focused on the angle of the dangle. Betty Davis looks straight into the eyes of one unbeliever—she takes her time—and then snorts, “*Now* do you want me?” *Crash!* The table explodes in ice and liquor as the unbeliever, hypnotized by the sultry witch onstage, momentarily loses control of himself.<sup>56</sup>

Davis's fierce resolution to self-manage her image and sound shows *this* Betty Davis at her funky best, defining for me, the meaning of “feminist funk power”—simultaneously playing into and undercutting the scrutiny of the gaze for her own means. Betty Davis's body, voice, lyrics, and concert performances were commodities by which the viewer and listener could consume her within the boundaries delineated on her terms. Those boundaries were not always clear to her fans due to her convincing portrayals. In her own words: “When men come back to see me after a show, they expect to see that same person they saw on stage, but there are two of me. That person up on the stage is valid. That's part of me. I've been fortunate enough to take it on a positive level. If I didn't, I would probably be a big whore. The music is physical and it's about sex. I've been able to be creative with it. It has to do with what a performer wants to project.”<sup>57</sup> This is the type of funk attitude and authentic demonstration of how women artists can innovate as part of a creative process without compromising. I would argue that this is a direct illustration of Vendreyes's intended power to be possessed by “Kwele Betty,” a power that exerts itself beyond the boundaries of gender or race.

The “character” of Betty Davis operates along the same axis as contemporary characters that Pam Grier and Angela Y. Davis occupied during the 1970s, albeit on opposite ends of the spectrum. For Grier and Angela Davis, they became fictitious professional and political constructions, respectively. They function as imaginary, fantasy-inducing players within the public sphere, which took on a life of their own. On the one end of the scale, Pam Grier represented a sexually liberated vixen, “baad bitch” or “sassy supermama,”<sup>58</sup> while on the other end, Angela Davis came to represent a political revolutionary. Both women were categorized and marked by circulated images, still and moving. Betty Davis, as a performer whose photographs, lyrics, and recordings leave a trace, lies somewhere in the middle of the continuum as a contemporary figure within the cultural and political landscape of the 1970s.

Pam Grier's images were directed and produced through the lens of film production companies. Patricia Hill Collins notes that “as a ‘Black Bitch,’ Gri-

er's performances combined beauty, sexuality, and violence. . . . She becomes a 'Bad Bitch' (e.g. a good Black woman), when she puts her looks, sexuality, intellect and/or aggression in service to African American communities."<sup>59</sup> Angela Davis has articulated that she lacked power to control her various images as governmental and media outlets like the Federal Bureau of Investigation and *Life* magazine demonized Davis. The projection of her character ranged from criminalized, violent "Bitch" to iconic fashion plate. She ironically went unnoticed when she disguised herself in a glamorous wardrobe while on the FBI's most wanted list. She wore a wig, long false lashes, and heavy makeup. Glamour—straight hair, cosmetically enhanced face—is antithetical to revolutionary.<sup>60</sup> Perhaps since glamour was familiar terrain for Betty Davis as a model, she did not think of her visual aesthetic as political or revolutionary. Angela Davis realized even at the time how her image as a black woman, wearing a large afro, carried great import. She acknowledged as much, stating, "while the most obvious evidence of [the FBI's] power was the part they played in structuring people's opinions about me as a 'fugitive' and a political prisoner, their broader and more subtle effect was the way they served as generic images of black women who wore their hair natural."<sup>61</sup>

Kobena Mercer has echoed such sentiment, indicating that hair is as visible as skin color and "the most tangible sign of racial difference."<sup>62</sup> According to Mercer, as early as the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when "scientific racism" developed alongside the slave trade, "blackness" as signified as skin, hair, and skull and bone formation has meant the negation of black beauty and superiority in relation to European "whiteness." Betty Davis felt that it was her right to express herself—mind, attitude, body, and soul—in whatever manner which was true to herself. When Island Records tried essentially to "negate" Davis, she left the company: "They wanted to cover up my legs and my hair. They said that on the next album I do, no legs."<sup>63</sup> A source of pride in heritage and a site for creative adornment, hair often times carries the weight of inner conflict with regard to black identity.<sup>64</sup> Betty Davis's sex appeal was viewed as threatening because of her body and hair, and, as a result, unmarketable by music executives and undesirable in parts of the black community, as evidenced by the NAACP's official ban against her song.

Stout engages in a game with the viewer as a way of working out womanhood in an exaggerated manner, often entailing role play documented in photographs and paintings, and installations in gallery and museum spaces through deployment of personas, a phenomenon I call "self-fetishism." Stout's two characters, Madame Ching and Fatima Mayfield, have contributed to her approaches to her work as well as to the changes and continuities of her style over time. Many of the works executed under the guise of these personas are organized along early ethnographic style of cataloging, reflective of Stout's early exposure to the natural history and ethnography sections of the Carnegie Museum. For example, in *Objects of Divination* of 2005, Stout exquisitely draws every item as if each were a part of an anthropological checklist. Stout takes



**Figure 4:** Renée Stout, *The Thinking Room*, (2005 - ongoing). Installation at Hemphill Fine Arts and the artist's home, Washington, DC. Reproduced by permission of the artist/HEMPHILL.

part of herself and, in effect, channels it in order to access her own psyche and longings. She enjoys the ambivalence of the viewer not knowing whether an ethnographic-inspired drawing, a handwritten text on display from a journal, or even a self-portrait painting is a depiction of Stout, Madame Ching, or Fatima: "I'm trying to remove myself from being a woman and looking at what it means to be a woman, and constructing these personas that are powerful. And why do people react to them? *Because people react to my personas in a way as if they really exist.* And it's like what is there to see . . . ? So I'm playing this little game, and in a way . . . leaving something."<sup>65</sup> To help get into character, Stout adorns herself with wigs and costumes that she holds in her "Thinking Room" on the second floor of her Washington, DC, home.

In her thirties, Stout began channeling Madame Ching, a black fortune-teller from Stout's hometown of Pittsburgh. Stout continues to visit root stores herself. She sees them as part of our culture that is being lost as younger generations become less exposed to them. Madame Ching was an older woman, a mother figure, someone who could guide a young person through life, helping her make decisions. She warranted people's respect. Stout parted ways with Madame Ching when she reached her forties for Fatima Mayfield. A character based on a local purveyor of healing herbs and potions, she served a different purpose for Stout. As she acknowledged: "Fatima, all of a sudden emerged because she makes no apologies about who she is, what she wants, what she feels. So that's why all of a sudden Madame Ching disappeared because she was not the image I needed to have to project onto. She was too much of what I thought a woman was before until I realized who a woman should be for herself. And Fatima was that."<sup>66</sup> Stout broke away from needing the motherly qualities of Madame Ching to wanting the bolder, more confident Fatima Mayfield.

For Freud, fetish is a *sexual* aberration, an abnormality. The questions left for the viewers of Renée Stout are the following: Upon viewing her body, is it abnormal for the onlooker to desire it? Does placing the viewer's desire into her own body through the fetishistic gaze make the object itself an aberration? Perhaps the answer is yes and no. In *Fetish #2*, Stout made a reclamation and personalization of an African past, which lives on through spiritual, artistic, conceivably even sexual practices. By decorating the sculpture with hair, portraits, and currency (stamp), she marks it with traces, from herself and others, transforming the object into a fetish.

Renée Stout harnesses feminist funk power through her experimentation with various media and through this kind of self-fetishism, acutely demonstrated in *Fetish #2*. Just as Betty Davis did not want the record companies to change her or her image, so Renée Stout allows personas like Fatima Mayfield to take over. Fatima doesn't just provide her with agency, but she stands in as an agent of sorts. Sometimes she may say something so forthright or aggressive that her friends will remark, "That's Fatima talking." Fatima can say something so outrageous because they are "uncontrollable" agents. This "out-of-body" agency dispossesses Stout of her power in an effort to retain it.

Betty Davis refused to be invisible. While Davis was resistant to the women's movement, she nevertheless lived out some of its precepts.<sup>67</sup> She fiercely fought to write and to produce her own music. She courageously displayed her body, hair, and voice in whatever fashion she deemed fit. She did everything within her power to maintain her own funkiness—that is, her workmanship, her learned wisdom in the music business, her (copy)rights to her lyrics—in order to succeed. She challenged the status quo. That is what made her “ahead of her time,” a modern-day *nkisi nkondi* or “Kwele Betty.” Renée Stout followed in her footsteps through Madame Ching and Fatima Mayfield.

Thus, while neither Betty Davis nor Renée Stout have officially claimed for themselves the moniker of “black feminist artists,” the deft manipulation of surface and personalities unveils their latent psychosexual authority along with her physical and metaphysical presence(s) within their respective work that clearly mark their approaches, as I have argued throughout, as feminist forms. I view the use of their bodies and the need for personas to be a reflection of how they use their womanhood to leave physical traces for the viewer to interpret. These traces are complicated by the devices of masquerade they employ for personal distancing, which enable their survival. The blurred lines between reality and fantasy—during a concert or within a museum installation—forces the viewer to determine how they are supposed to consume or acquire them. These multifaceted treatments permit more nuance in interpretations of both Davis's and Stout's work, and greater flexibility to extend one's definitions of their identities as black, female artists.

## Notes

1. Audre Lorde, “The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action,” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches by Audre Lorde* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984), 40–44. Paper delivered at the Modern Language Association's “Lesbian and Literature Panel,” Chicago, IL, December 28, 1977. First published in *Sinister Wisdom* 6 (1978) and *The Cancer Journals* (Spinsters, Ink, San Francisco, 1980).

2. See Nikki A. Greene, *The Rhythm of Glue, Grease, and Grime: Indexicality in the Works of Romare Bearden, David Hammons, and Renée Stout* (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2010); see also Mona Hadler, “Jazz and the Visual Arts,” *Arts Magazine* 57 (June 1983): 91–102; and Chad Mandeles, “Jackson Pollock and Jazz: Structural Parallels,” *Arts Magazine* 56, no. 2 (October 1981): 139–41.

3. See, for example, Richard J. Powell, *The Blues Aesthetic: Black Culture and Modernism* (Washington, DC: Washington Project for the Arts, 1989); Kellie Jones, “To the Max: Energy and Experimentation,” *Energy/Experimentation: Black Artists and Abstraction, 1964–1980* (New York: Studio Museum in Harlem, 2006), 14–34; Krista Thompson, “The Sound of Light: Reflections on Art History in the Visual Culture of Hip Hop,” *Art Bulletin* 91, no. 4 (December 2009): 481–505; Robert Farris Thompson, *The Aesthetic of Cool: Afro-American Art and Music* (Pittsburgh: Periscope, 2011), and *Seeing Jazz: Artists and Writers on Jazz*, foreword by Clark Terry, introduction by Robert O'Meally, afterword by Milt Hinton, compiled by Marquette Folley-Cooper, Deborah Macanic, and Janice McNeil, ed. Elizabeth Goldson (San Francisco: Chronicle Books in association with Smithsonian Traveling Exhibition Service, 1997).

4. Ayana Moor and Nikki S. Lee have dealt with hip-hop and its culture in installations of texts, drawings, photographs, prints, and videos. See Ayana Moor, “Still,” *Meridians* 8, no. 1, (“Representin’: Women, Hip Hop, and Popular Music”): 205–10; and Cathy Covell Waegner, “Performing Postmodernist Passing: Nikki S. Lee, Tuff, and Ghost Dog in Yellowface/Blackface,” in *AfroAsian Encounters: Culture, History, Politics*, edited by Heike Raphael-Hernandez and Shannon Steen (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 223–42.

5. For a discussion of the music of Betty Davis, see Cheryl Keyes's essay in this volume.

6. Light in the Attic Records rereleased three albums as LPs, compact discs, and digital files: *Betty Davis* (Just Sunshine Records, 1973, 2007), *They Say I'm Different* (Just Sunshine Records, 1974, 2007), and *Nasty Gal* (Island Records, 1975). The previously unreleased recording, *Is It Love or Desire* (1975), was originally titled *Crashin' for Passion* and was released in 2009 for the first time by Light in the Attic Records.

7. Renée Stout, interview with author, August 18, 2006.

8. Cheryl Keyes also provides a more thorough outline of the biography of Betty Davis.

9. Betty Davis, interview with Jessie Thornton, *The Sounds of Young America*, June 26, 2007; posted February 22, 2009, <http://www.maximumfun.org/blog/2007/06/podcast-tsoya-betty-davis.html>.

10. Dave Frechette, "Bold Soul Sister," *Black Music* (November 1974): 46.

11. *Ibid.*

12. Several sources note the change in Miles Davis's demeanor, dress, and musical composition. See John Ballon, "Liberated Sister," *Waxpoetics* (April/May 2007): 114; Neil Spencer, "Miles Davis: The Muse Who Changed Him, and the Heady Brew That Rewrote Jazz," *The Guardian*, September 10, 2010. In a film documentary, Carlos Santana talked about the deep impact that Betty had on Miles: "Musically, philosophically, and physically, she was extreme and attractive. So, I could see why Miles changed so drastically." *Miles Davis Electric: A Different Kind of Blue* (Eagle Rock Entertainment, 2004, DVD).

13. Miles Davis with Quincy Troupe, *The Autobiography of Miles Davis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 290.

14. John Ballon, "Nasty Gal," compact disc liner notes (Seattle: Light in the Attic Records, 2009), 3.

15. Miles Davis as quoted in "Raunchy Lady," *Cosmopolitan* (September 1976): 21; Ballon, "Nasty Gal," 8.

16. Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983), 104–5.

17. *Ibid.*, 104.

18. Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), xiii.

19. Betty Davis, interview with Jessie Thornton.

20. A. Davis, *Blues Legacies*, xiii.

21. The scholarship surrounding funk music continues to expand, and there is an ever-growing recognition of the role women played in its development. For more on how the music and personae of Sun Ra, George Clinton, and James Brown, among others, have had a cultural, sociological, and political impact on American culture, see Tony Bolden, ed., *The Funk Era and Beyond: New Perspectives on Black Popular Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), and Rickey Vincent, *Funk: The Music, the People and the Rhythm of the One*, foreword by George Clinton (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996).

22. Nickey Neal, interview with Oliver Wang, August 23, 2006; as quoted by John Ballon, "Nasty Gal," 3.

23. When she found out that the NAACP (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) called her record company to complain, she admitted that she didn't know the organization at all. After asking a friend what the acronym stood for, she responded with this quip: "They're not trying to advance me. They're trying to stop me from making a living. They stopped all my air play in Detroit." "Ballsy Betty Davis: Bawdy Bombshell Talks with Sue Richards and Robert Weinstein," *High Society* (October 1976): 94.

24. Maureen Mahon, "They Say She's Different: Race, Gender, Genre and the Liberated Black Femininity of Betty Davis," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 23, no. 2 (June 2011): 148.

25. Jim Sullivan, "Lamenting the Passing of Album-Cover Art," *Boston Globe*, April 8, 1990, B35.

26. For more examples, see David Browne, "The Incredible, Inevitable Shrinking Album Cover," *New York Times*, August 14, 2011, 17; and Barbara Mahany, "Exhibit Showcases Art of the Album Cover," *Chicago Tribune*, May 24, 2009, 6.1. Mahany reviews an exhibition, *Cover as Canvas*, which featured 213 vinyl album covers displayed throughout the Northbrook Public Library near Chicago. For jazz and R&B album cover compilations, see *The Color of Jazz: Pete Turner Photographs* (New York: Rizzoli, 2006); Gilles Peterson and Stuart Baker, *Freedom Rhythm & Sound: Revolutionary Jazz Original Cover Art 1965–83* (London: SJR Publishing in association with Soul Jazz Records, 2009). Most recently, the exhibition *Fantastic Voyage: Celebrating African American Music and Album Cover Art* showcased covers from 1926 to 1996 at the Martino Gallery at the Maryland Hall for the Creative Arts (June 14, 2013, to June 26, 2013).

27. Pamela McClusky offers a succinct history of European involvement with the Kongo people from the fifteenth to the twentieth century. She provides a good analysis of the true meanings and purposes of *nkisi* and *nkondi*. She ends her chapter, coincidentally, with Renée Stout, as one of the examples of how African American artists in contemporary art use Kongo cosmology within their work. See Pamela McClusky, "The Fetish and the Imagination of Europe: Sacred Medicines

of the Kongo,” in *Art from Africa: Long Steps Never Broke a Back* (Seattle, WA, and Princeton, NJ: Seattle Art Museum and Princeton University Press, 2002), 143–67.

28. Sigmund Freud, “Fetishism,” *Visual Culture: The Reader*, edited by Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 325.

29. *Ibid.*

30. *Ibid.*, 326.

31. Laura Mulvey, “Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture,” *October* 65 (1993): 10.

32. Vernon Gibbs, “Betty Davis: Singing to the Max,” *Essence* (July 1974), 30.

33. Valerie Steele, *Fetish: Fashion, Sex & Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 111; as quoted in Jean Petrucci, ed., *Longing: Psychoanalytic Musings on Desire* (London: Karnac, 2006), 105.

34. “Ballsy Betty Davis,” 58.

35. Rick James, interview with Robbie Mescudi, 2004; as quoted by Ballon, “Nasty Gal,” 5.

36. Vendryes showcased the divas recently at a solo exhibition, *33-1/3: Pushing the Needle, Selections from the African Diva Project*, at Tucker Contemporary Art, New York, New York, May 29–June 16, 2012. For her scholarship, see, Margaret Rose Vendryes, *Barthé: A Life in Sculpture* (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2008).

37. “African Diva Project,” margaretrosevendryes.com.

38. Betty Davis, as quoted in Oliver Wang, “The Music and Mystique of Betty Davis,” *Betty Davis*, CD liner notes (Light in the Attic Records, 2007).

39. See Frieda High W. Tesfagiorgis, “In Search of a Discourse and Critique/s That Center the Art of Black Women Artists,” in *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism*, ed. Jacqueline Bobo (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 146–72. More recently, art historians have published book anthologies that treat African American women artists, namely, Lisa Gail Collins, *The Art of History: African American Women Artists Engage the Past* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), and Lisa E. Farrington, *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). The exhibition and accompanying catalog, *Black Womanhood* (Hanover, NH: Hood Museum of Art, 2007) has similarly analyzed images of women within the African diaspora, including Africa, Europe, and North and South America. In modern and contemporary music, important examinations of women and the blues, rhythm and blues, jazz, and more recently hip-hop has become indispensable for the historical record of women’s roles in shaping these music genres and the music industry. For examples, see A. Davis, *Blues Legacies*; Hazel B. Carby, “‘It Jus Be’s That Way Sometimes: The Sexual Politics of Women’s Blues,” *Radical America* 20, no. 4 (1986): 9–22; Patricia Hill Collins, *From Black Power to Hip Hop* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); and Tricia Rose, *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1994).

40. Adrian Piper, “Triple Negation of Colored Women,” in *Next Generation: Southern Black Aesthetics*, edited by Lowery Stokes Sims (Durham: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 239–48; Tesfagiorgis, 147.

41. For a survey of Howardena Pindell’s and Faith Ringgold’s work, see *Howardena Pindell: Paintings and Drawings* (St. Louis: ExhibitsUSA, 1992); Faith Ringgold, *We Flew over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); and [www.fairthinggold.com](http://www.fairthinggold.com).

42. Renée Stout’s official website provides a brief biography along with examples of recent works and exhibitions: [www.reneestout.com](http://www.reneestout.com). For more anecdotal information on Stout’s childhood read Stephen Bennett Phillips, “The Early Life and Career of Renée Stout,” in *Readers, Advisors, and Storefront Churches: Renée Stout, A Mid-Career Retrospective* (University of Missouri–Kansas City Belger Arts Center for Creative Studies, Kansas City, MO, 2002), 1–16.

43. Renée Stout, interview with author, October 19, 2011.

44. Renée Stout, interview with author, August 18, 2006.

45. McClusky, “The Fetish and the Imagination of Europe,” 154.

46. *Ibid.*, 156.

47. When she set out to cast her body, she had never created a three-dimensional sculpture of this kind before. In hindsight, she recognized that if she had conceptualized the process more efficiently, she would have fashioned some type of structure first. An apparatus onto which she could have constructed the cast of her whole body would have been easier. A friend assisted her in casting her face and back. After finishing the separate parts of the body, she assembled them together to stand on its own. She poured sand into the feet to weight the sculpture. When installed in the gallery space in the Dallas Art Museum and in the National Museum of African Art, the curators decided to insert a rod and dais to better secure the sculpture upright. Stout, discussion with author, August 5, 2008.

48. James Curtia, “Astonishment and Power: Kongo Minkisi & the Art of Renée Stout,” *ARTnews* 92 (October 1993): 171; Robert Farris Thompson, “Illuminating Spirits: *Astonishment and Power* at the National Museum of African Art,” *African Arts* (October 1993): 60–69; and Hank Buchard, “The Mystical, Powerful Minkisi,” *Washington Post* (April 30, 1993): N56.

49. Holland Cotter, "Art View: Art That's Valued for What It Can Do," *New York Times*, July 18, 1993.
50. Curtia, "Interview: Renée Stout," *Art Papers* 18 (July/August 1994): 2.
51. In response to one woman's reticence, Stout added: "I feel that because she was a Christian, the fact that I was examining African-based spiritual belief systems made her uncomfortable. She was probably questioning herself." Renée Stout quoted in Curtia, "Interview": 3.
52. Kobena Mercer, "Tropes of the Grotesque in the Black Avant-Garde," *Pop Art and Vernacular Cultures; Annotating Art's Histories* (London and Cambridge, MA: Iniva [Institute of International Visual Arts] and MIT Press, 2007), 136–59.
53. Mercer, "Tropes of the Grotesque," 154.
54. Michael D. Harris, "Ritual Bodies—Sexual Bodies: The Role and Presentation of Body in African American Art," *Third Text* (London), no. 12 (autumn 1990): 81–95.
55. Betty Davis, interview with Jessie Thornton.
56. Vernon Gibbs, "The Put-on Who Puts Out," *Penthouse* (March 1976): 51.
57. "Ballsy Betty Davis," 94.
58. Stephane Dunn, "Sexing the Supermama: Racial and Gender Power in *Coffy* and *Foxy Brown*," in "*Baad Bitches*" & *Sassy Supermamas: Black Power Action Films*" (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 107–32.
59. Patricia Hills Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 124.
60. Angela Davis, "Afro Images: Politics, Fashion, and Nostalgia," in *Soul: Black Power, Politics and Pleasure*, ed. Monique Guillory and Richard Green (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 27.
61. *Ibid.*, 28.
62. Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," in *Out There: Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures, Documentary Sources in Contemporary Art*, vol. 4, ed. Russel Ferguson (New York and Cambridge, Mass.: New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1990), 249.
63. "Ballsy Betty Davis," 94.
64. Artist David Hammons has explored the complex relationship to black identity through hair since the 1970s. See, for example, Kellie Jones, "In the Thick of It: David Hammons and Hair Culture in the 1970s," *Third Text* 44 (autumn 1998): 17–24. In Ellen Gallagher's 2001 exhibition *Preserve*, she used *Ebony*, *Our World*, and *Black Stars* magazines, among others, to extract and superimpose images from and onto wig advertisements; see Robin D. G. Kelly, "Fugitives from a Chain Store," in *Ellen Gallagher: Preserve*, ed. Jeff Fleming et al. (Des Moines, IA: Des Moines Art Center, 2001), 15.
65. Stout, interview 2006.
66. *Ibid.*
67. "I can't relate to Women's Lib at all. One reason is that although there have only been a few men in my life, they've played important roles. I can understand women wanting equal pay—in fact I'm all for it. However, I think that too many Women's Libbers have joined the Movement because they can't have a relationship with a man. As far as I can see, those chicks aren't coming from anyplace that's valid. Germaine Greer and Gloria Steinem are coming from a valid place but they're exceptions." Betty Davis as quoted in Frechette, "Bold Soul Sister," 47.