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**FEMINIST
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FEMINIST PORN BOOK

THE POLITICS OF PRODUCING PLEASURE

Edited by

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Interventions: The Deviant and Defiant Art of Black Women Porn Directors



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Vanessa Blue decided to become a porn director thanks to her grandparents. “My grandparents had a whole room dedicated to smut,” she explained. “Smut and two Lazy Boys.”¹ I had gone to visit Vanessa in her Woodland Hills condo to talk to the performer-turned-director and webmistress about her life and latest work.² She told me about how she grew up with porn in her home, so it was in no way a foreign concept to her. In fact, when she began to perform in the late 1990s, it was her grandparents in Nebraska who found out first. “I’m looking at this movie *Dirty Debutantes #61*, and that sure does look like you,” she recalled her grandmother saying, hilariously exaggerating her aged voice on the phone. “After that first scene and everybody found out, I was like fuck it. I might as well finish what I started,” Vanessa explained, shrugging her shoulders.

“But what exactly drove you to start making your own porn, not just acting in it?” I asked. “I always loved porn and I always wanted to make it and to be a part of it,” Vanessa asserted. “I liked watching people be free and enjoy themselves, and I liked shooting it. I always wanted to be behind the camera . . . [I thought] Let me see if I can become the director.” For Vanessa, being confronted by her grandmother about working as a porn actress forced her to think about what she really wanted. Her family did not celebrate her work in the sex industry but they understood it. What her family really wanted was for her to control her labor, rather than be controlled by someone else. If the sex industry offered

that opportunity, then she should take it. Her grandparents sternly told her: “We are not saying it is wrong that you do porn, it’s not. Just don’t let these people fuck you. Don’t stay there getting fucked. Figure out a way to make money off of it if that’s what you like.”

After many stops and starts, Vanessa Blue took her grandparents’ advice and taught herself filmmaking and web design. She built her own editing studio from her earnings as a porn actress, exotic dancer, phone sex worker, fetish model, dominatrix, and private escort. She has directed over twenty hardcore videos and dozens of digital short films, which are distributed by major companies like Adam and Eve, Hustler, and Evil Angel’s Justin Slayer International. She also distributes them herself through her suite of members-only websites and privately owned video hosting sites like Clips4Sale.com. Though working to make a living outside of the corporate adult-entertainment industry’s influence, she remains very much tied to it. Vanessa is a compelling example of the possibilities and limits of pornography as a space where black women vie to gain greater control over their labor but are nonetheless cleaved to the industry’s inexorable capitalistic apparatus.

For Vanessa, control doesn’t just mean achieving independence from porn producers who make a great deal of money off of her work as a performer while also treating her as a disposable working body; it means being able to decide when, where, and how she wants to employ her labor. It means avoiding unethical directors and producers who create exploitative and unsafe work environments, and treat her with little care, interest, or respect. There is a less tangible aspect to gaining control over the means of production in porn work as well: authorship. To create the terms of one’s own performance and to catalyze one’s own fantasies into the sex scene—these dimensions of a more autonomous sexual labor allow Vanessa to see herself as much more empowered behind the camera.

Moving behind the camera, then, is a kind of mobility that allows sex workers greater agency to traverse the barriers placed around them in the porn business. By highlighting this maneuver we can reveal the material factors that tend to restrict and bind the movement of sex workers, as well as the material forces that might facilitate their ability to claim a role in the means of production.³ Scholarship on feminist pornography, which is notably an emerging field based on an emergent genre and practice, tends to focus on pornographic media texts that are produced and consumed in ways that push against or subvert gender and sexual normativity; are designed by and for women, transgender or genderqueer and queer people; and that destabilize the established

binary model of female objectification for male viewing pleasure. Yet this vibrant movement to make new and different kinds of porn imbued with feminist politics, which began in the 1980s and blossomed in the 2000s, is not separate from the marketplace or from the politics of sexual labor.

Feminist pornography is a for-profit enterprise that relies upon sex workers to manufacture its subversive fantasies and build its consumer base. And like mainstream (heterosexual) pornography, its structure, networks, and modes of representation are regulated and sanctioned by the State, dependent on access to new media technologies, and embedded in the flows of global capital. Though feminism seeks to dismantle structural and discursive exploitation and oppression of women and marginalized populations, our feminist praxis is not external to or untouched by hegemonic systems of domination. Theorizing a feminist pornography then means thinking about a dual process of transgression and restriction, for both representation and labor.

The maneuvers by sex workers like Vanessa Blue to re-appropriate their images for their own profit and politics are necessarily shaped by the stultifying power of race in pornography's structural and social relations. While all of porn's workers are subject to the disciplining force of racialized sexuality, even the idealized white female porn star, women of color are specifically devalued within a tiered system of racialized erotic capital.⁴ Within this hierarchy black bodies are some of the most degraded, and their degradation mobilizes the very fetishism driving their representations. According to one adult video director I overheard at the Adult Video News Adult Entertainment Expo, "black chicks are fucking skanks."⁵ Not only does black-cast pornography tend to be organized around a view of black sexual deviance and pathology—often a low-budget affair presenting pimps and players trolling the 'hood for hoes and hookers—but black porn actors tend to be paid rates half to three quarters of what white actors earn. In this way, black labor in porn mirrors the exploitation of black labor in "legitimate" arenas like service sector blue and pinkcollar jobs where black workers confront systemic inequality, prejudice, and occupational health risks. Hence, in order to understand the ways in which black pornographers like Vanessa Blue come to self-authorship and to make critical feminist interventions in the porn industry—and what is at stake in this important move—we must take seriously the overwhelming restrictions placed on black women's sexual agency as performers and producers of porn.

In vital ways, black women pornographers take on material constraints to enact expansive, and even radical, views of black sexuality against deeply fraught imaginings of black being. They work to alter the

terms by which black women's bodies are represented as simultaneously desirable and undesirable objects. Desirable for their supposed difference, exoticism, and sexual potency, black women are at the same time constructed as undesirable, as these very same constructions threaten governing notions of feminine sexuality, heteronormativity, and racial hierarchy. In an industry where excessive sexuality would seem to be an asset, black women's presumed hypersexuality ironically only undermines their value in the desire industries.⁶ Whether located in the mainstream heterosexual market of pornography or on its marginalized outer limits, the disabling discursive construction of black female sexuality provides an inescapable text that black women behind the camera must confront and grapple with as they strive to author a pornographic imaginary of and for themselves.

Resulting from the new ease and affordability of making and distributing pornography with digital technology, increasing numbers of black women performers such as Vanessa Blue, Diana DeVoe, and Damali XXXPlosive Dares are getting into the production side of the industry. Building on the legacy of earlier black women who attempted to create a black women's sex cinema from inside the business, like Angel Kelly in the late 1980s, their work makes visible how pornographic authorship requires a new dimension of sexual labor. Not only are they becoming filmmakers in the traditional sense, they must fulfill a variety of roles: director, producer, editor, screenwriter, cinematographer, public relations agent, casting agent, acting coach, mentor, and distributor, to name a few. They must make themselves experts in new media technologies, ecommerce, and social networking in order to create, promote, and sell their films. Hence, calling them filmmakers, or even producers, does not capture the range of labor, expertise, or creativity involved in what they do.

Pornography created by black women attempts to expand their sexual representations, performances, and labor beyond the current limits of the pornography industry and the confines of pervading stereotypes.⁷ Vanessa's *Taking Memphis*, Diana's *Desperate Blackwives* series, and Damali's *Maneater: The Prelude* all display an interest in creating more dynamic roles for black actresses in porn. Their work helps us rethink pornography and feminist pornography as voluptuous sites for black women's intervention, imagination, and activism. Vanessa Blue's film work explores power reversals and role play while Diana DeVoe's large body of work tends to play with class by presenting black women as bored, conniving, upper-income housewives (just like the reality TV stars they parody), or as cute and stylish hip hop generationers that obvi-

ously counter the image of the abject, low-class “ghetto ho.”

Damali Dares, who is just getting started as a filmmaker, explained to me how her own sense of feminism motivated her to direct, produce, and star in *Maneater: The Prelude*, a film about a sexy detective who uses her sexuality to catch men who cheat: “Some guys would say I’m a man hater and I’m not. I just hate ignorant people, guys, or other females who try to take advantage of people. I’ve always been an activist and I’m always standing up for the underdog. So [the idea for the film] kind of came from both me as a person and also wanting to do that superhero type, save the world, one female at a time. It was really about empowering females.”⁸ As Damali describes, she was sometimes construed as a “man hater” for being outspoken about inequality and injustice, particularly, as she related to me, against sexism, racism, and homophobia. It is notable then that she turned an established antifeminist attack, “man hater” into “man eater” for a film that went on to be nominated for a 2010 Feminist Porn Award. Casting herself as the detective heroine who catches “guys who victimize women,” and as the cuckolded wife who becomes empowered by learning the truth of her husband’s infidelity (she walks out on him in the climactic scene of confrontation), Damali sought to use the dual role to portray women in charge of their lives, and in the process showed a dynamic figuration of black female agency—one that employs the good girl/bad girl binary and dismantles it.

Black women filmmakers who are not adult actors, such as Shine Louise Houston (*The Crash Pad*, *Superfreak*, *Champion*), Nenna Feelmore Joiner (*Tight Places: A Drop of Color*, *Hella Brown*), Abiola Abrams a.k.a Venus Hottentot (*Afrodite Superstar*), and Tune (*Day Dreamin*), also constitute part of this new black women’s sex cinema. Shine’s and Nenna’s work, which has garnered significant attention from queer and transgender communities of color, draws on performers and representations traditionally excluded from both mainstream heterosexual and alternative lesbian porn. Their work, rather, emphasizes the sheer range of embodiments, attractions, acts, and desires possible between black women, other women of color, white people, and genderqueer and transgender persons—figurations absent in most porn. This new school of black women porn filmmakers creates visual texts that forcefully intervene in the existing landscape of pornographic media and that prioritize complex views of desire and relation over static notions of race and gender performance. It also upsets ideas about consumption and the notion that black pornography can only ever be offered up for someone else’s fantasy—the purported white male gaze. Although their work addresses and appeals to a wide audience, these filmmakers create images that

necessarily address other black women. As black women making pornography from their own points of view, they also show the diversity of viewpoints, positionalities, and gazes of black women as spectators.

Yet black women porn filmmakers—both performers-turned-directors and non-performers—face a number of constraints. In my research in black women's representations and labors in pornography, I interviewed dozens of black performers active in the business since the 1980s. These ethnographic interviews and encounters provided the critical insights—the voices of these women are vital sources of knowledge about what pornography means to and for black women. When I began my fieldwork as a graduate student at New York University in 2002 there was no work being done on the topic, and there were no black women working as directors. Presently there are far fewer black women active in directing and producing their own videos or video series than black men, who have benefited from the patronage of white men who own the major and minor production houses, and their work is not as well-financed. Unlike the predominantly white male directors, producers, and distributors who run the porn industry, or many of the white female directors who have innovated a veritable feminist pornography movement since the 1980s, black women do not have the capital, privilege, or influence to truly compete in the multibillion dollar trade of porn. They either must rely on traditional “boy’s club” networks for production or distribution, or invent new modes to produce or distribute their work directly to consumers, which tend to limit their sales. A reason they have to become so good at many facets of making and marketing porn is that they often lack the resources to do otherwise. As Vanessa Blue explains, for black women sex workers, gaining access to the means of production often involves negotiating a set of barriers and exploitations that do not exist for others: “I see that there are no women of my skin tone [making porn], I see that there are very few white women doing it. But what’s stopping us from doing it? The more I talked to people about it, the more I found out the truth. I had to fuck a few people to get some more information, and I did.” As a woman of color in the sex industry, no one takes you seriously, Vanessa told me, and they are certainly not willing to invest in you without some personal gain.

The phenomenon of black female porn makers must be evaluated in light of black sex workers’ continued attempts to survive and succeed against tremendous barriers. Black women performers-turned-directors face an added stigma that other black women pornographers do not. Because they continue to perform in their own films they are implicated as sex workers in ways that black women directors coming from film

schools and other paths not related to the sex industry avoid. Directors like Vanessa Blue and Damali XXXPlosive Dares also maintain other kinds of ties to the sex business through their performer websites and exotic dancing. Thus producing porn is for them part of an overall strategy to extend their professional persona into a lucrative brand, one with many formats, audiences, and streams of income. Yet creating images constitutes an important intervention into porn's representational economy, which may be considered a kind of activism in addition to a savvy hustle.

Illicit eroticism⁹ is my term for conceptualizing how black women sex workers employ their mythic racialized hypersexuality in the sexual economy.¹⁰ By utilizing a sexuality intertwined with notions of deviance and pathology, I argue that black illicit erotic workers are positioned as sexual outlaws who convert forbidden and proscribed sexual desires, fantasies, and practices (including prostitution) into a form of defiant "play-labor."¹¹ I also want to assert that this paradigm for negotiating structural and discursive forces of sexualized racism might include an added vector of activist production. That is, illicit eroticism should also capture how black sex workers advocate for more just conditions in the sexual economy or greater personal autonomy when it comes to one's sexual choices and labor. Hence, illicit erotic activism would include making porn that undermines, or re-imagines, the status quo of black representational politics and organizes labor to improve conditions for sex workers. Illicit erotic activism can thus theorize the involvement, incorporation, and interventions of black women in feminist pornography and as feminist pornographers.

Vanessa Blue welcomed me with a warm and mischievous smile. I followed her, barefoot and dressed in a colorful, flowing sundress, into her home office. Explaining that she was in the middle of some important edits for a new project, Vanessa sat down at her desk with a confident grace, like the conductor of an orchestra, eminently sure the various parts of the symphony will coalesce, forming a masterpiece. The room was cluttered with equipment, yet organized. On her desk a Mac laptop was open to the movie editing software Final Cut Pro; notes, technical books, hard drives, and DVDs occupied the rest of the desk surface. A high definition digital video camera stood on a tripod at the center of the room aimed at a canopy bed swathed in red satin and covered in velvet pillows. This was where she shot many of her videos. As Vanessa said, she likes "watching people be free and enjoy themselves." She was drawn to the idea of creating a space and environment where performers could take pleasure in their performances. "I knew I wanted to get behind the

camera,” she told me, “and I wanted to control the scene so that either I could get to fuck the way I wanted to fuck or produce the scenes that I knew this industry was missing.”

“What is the porn industry missing?” I asked. “As a performer,” Vanessa explained, “sitting on the set and watching the director leave the room and leave the cameraman to finish the scene, to direct and make those people fuck a certain way. . .” She shook her head in disgust. “I grew up with an appreciation for smut, and it broke my heart that smut was being made by people who really didn’t care.” Vanessa powerfully indicts the management of porn production, which has standardized the filming of sex scenes to the extent that actors often feel they are handled more as automatons than real people, and directed to have sex that is mechanical, perfunctory, and even unerotic. This kind of schema is thought necessary to provide the market with a constant stream of pornographic media options that satisfy every taste at the cheapest cost. It replicates exactly what sells and innovates only when other things sell better. This economy opens up the process to an uncaring and sometimes unethical regime for sex workers. “Fucking” the way she wanted would mean having more freedom to decide how sex should proceed; that the interaction would be more organic and dynamic, if not erotic. It meant *not* following the predictable porn formula, but following a new calculus from her own imagination. Vanessa Blue rejects the politics of disposability that turns porn’s workers, like women of color working under the conditions of neoliberal capital around the world, into “a form of industrial waste” to be “discarded and replaced.”¹²

“My fans will not want to hear this,” she explained, “but when I was working, it was a means to an end, and the end was to direct.” For Vanessa, acting was a way to transition from being a contracted worker in the uninspired milieu of gonzo porn, to being the creator of the image and the terms of sexual labor. Now Vanessa shoots films that she makes and she performs in roles that she designs. In the process of converting her labor from contracted to creative author, she presents black women’s sexuality in ways that highlight this drive for authorship and self-determination. She aspires to eschew the framework of the stereotyped black sexuality dominant in most porn, yet much of her work remarks on blackness in ways that show its inextricable connection to systems of power. Vanessa exposes how black feminist porn must contend with race, as black female sexuality is sutured to racial histories that inform our contemporary fantasies and sexual economies.

In her adult feature (full-length narrative) films, like *Dark Confessions*, *Taking Memphis*, and *Black Reign*, Vanessa emphasizes the sex-

ual autonomy of the female characters. Employing tactics that serve to humanize the performers and the characters, her camera closes in on and lingers on the faces, offering an embodiment beyond the often fractured “tits and ass” styling of so much porn. Vanessa creates a space for black eroticism and black subjectivity, centering themes of intimacy, mischief, power dynamics, and role-play. The presentation of cross and interracial intimacy pushes against the notion that relationships between black men and women, and black women and white men, are inherently alienating and objectifying.

In *Dark Confessions*, Vanessa employs the trope of the confession to elicit testimonials from couples about their fantasies, and as the box cover advertises, the fantasy is in “revealing their darkest desires.” Vanessa takes on the role of the confessor, sitting invisibly behind the camera as she draws out the sexual fantasies of five black male-female couples in this film, which is distributed by Adam and Eve, and marketed for a heterosexual-couples audience. Each interview, filmed in a medium range black-and-white shot, presents the couple sitting closely, holding or leaning on one another. The professional porn actors portray a familiarity and intimacy that is not usually present in most black-cast porn, where normally a series of sex acts are strung together with little plot, characterization, or opportunity for the actors to speak. Here the actors improvise from the outline of a script, yet their articulations are fluid as they play off one another to construct an image of a relationship that appears quite realistic. Vanessa probes them with questions: How did you meet? How’s the sex? What’s your fantasy? Like most reality-influenced genres, we, the spectator, become participants in this will to knowledge of sexual desire and invested in its actuation. Rather than re-produce regulatory regimes of power on the subject, the discourses of sex produced by the confessional in this film present black performances of intimate disclosure and relation.¹³

The fantasy of the female character in the first couple (played by Nyomi Banxxx) is to be interrogated—she wants her partner (played by Sean Michaels) to act like an FBI agent, dapper and smooth in a suit, with “minty fresh breath.” The scene has a film noir quality, a spare set with a spotlight projected on a mysterious-looking woman in a vintage 1940s hat and dress. The color is faded to almost black and white save for the red of her lips, and later, her panties. True to noir aesthetics, she’s smoking a cigarette, and the smoke plumes around her in the chiaroscuro of light and shadow reflected on the wall, perhaps mirroring the shadowy, forbidden nature of her desire. The fantasy here is the play of power through aggression and submission, mystery and impending action.

Sean's debonair FBI agent seduces Nyomi's evasive femme fatale—her smoking, turning away, eye rolling, and resistance to his caresses and kisses build up the tension. With striking tenderness he holds her by the shoulders and kisses her cheeks and neck softly, and then as she finally returns the kiss, they move into an intense sex scene on top of the Federal Bureau of Investigation desk.

This refreshing intimacy does not mean, however, that Vanessa Blue avoids hardcore representations of dominance and alienation. In fact, she confronts power head-on and plays with it, especially in short films made for her website *FemmeDomX.com*. Using S/M fetishism—particularly the fantasy of black women dominating white men—she *queers* racial and gender hegemonies by exposing their very constructedness. By creating fantasies that explode assumptions about what constitutes proper pleasure and pain for the black body, she suggests that social power is changeable and that racialized sexuality can be toyed with for her own ends.

“Kink” is an under-explored arena of black sexual culture, and a technology of the self that is, if acknowledged in the public domain at all, seen as the epitome of deviant sexuality.¹⁴ The performances in *Femme Dom X* video shorts are very different from the sensuality of the feature film *Dark Confessions*. They involve ropes, chains, whips, torches, clamps, gags, harnesses, and other tools associated with the historical, nonconsensual mutilation and punishment of the black body, but that are used in this context to expose power as a terrain of (consensual) play in fantasy. Here, black dominatrixes, Vanessa included, torture white and black men by making them crawl, beg, and subject themselves to all manner of abuse, including by painting their faces with lipstick and otherwise emasculating them with taunting acts. Ever playful, Vanessa's *EbonyTickle.com* uses “tickle torture” to show how even—here, in the excruciating and taunting tickling of female performers tied to her bed—kink can be mediated in ways that create a permissible environment where black women sexual outlaws can be seen to play with the ever dangerous position of subordination and powerlessness. With the performance of subjection as submissives in *Ebony Tickle*, or of merciless domination as dominatrixes in *Femme Dom X*, black actresses in Vanessa's film work illuminate the significance of racialized kink fetishism as an important market in the pornography industry for black women looking to capitalize on the sexual scripts available for them.

Vanessa Blue's illicit erotic activism is about the use of what may be generally understood as super deviant sexualities to empower black women's sexual performances in pornography. For Vanessa, black wom-

en's performances of submissiveness or domination can be enjoyable acts, and ones that might encourage black women spectators to explore their own "darkest desires." And while her interest is not in presenting a narrative of racial progress, overthrowing patriarchy, or in making sexually emancipatory or pleasurable texts outside the marketplace, her intervention is, I argue, quite progressive. This work asks us to think about what we might learn from pornography's most marginalized: how our pleasure is indeed tied to historical realities of our pain. What does it mean that some of the most preferable work for black sex workers in porn—since fetish work often does not require penetrative sex, but the performance of a dominant or submissive role in non-penetrative sex acts—is tied up with these brutal legacies of sexual expropriation and sexual myth? Could taking pleasure in the most deviant articulations of black sexual deviance offer a radical tool to negotiate and transform how power acts on our bodies and communities? Black women's objectification in pornography has a long history, emerging from New World slavery as a pornographic, voyeuristic, sexual economy. Yet since the earliest photographic and film productions of sexually explicit material made for sale in a pornographic market of images, black models, and actresses could be seen to return the objectifying gaze, and gesture to their own subjective understandings as sex workers and as sexual subjects.¹⁵ If black women's sex cinema offers a new frontier to present the inextricable bind between sexual labor and sexual fantasy, the task is to explore it as a new kind of voice in pornography, one that is never divorced from the marketplace, but in fact, shines a light on the ways in which black women's sexualities are intimately linked with the project of authorship against, and in line with, inexorable myth.

Unconcerned with delineating what constitutes a positive or negative representation of black female sexuality, Vanessa Blue offers a view into how representations of black women's sexuality remain caught up in confining, binary scripts. This relentless binary, which is problematic for all women but especially so for women of color whose sexualities have been deployed as a primary mechanism of colonization, expropriation, and genocide, exposes the impossibility of rendering an authentic view of black women's sexualities in any media, let alone pornography. Black feminist pornography instead provides a space where black women performers can try on roles and stage imaginaries against expectations of decorum and normativity. This presents a powerful image for black women spectators, too. They might identify with the image and connect it to their own sexual identities or experiences. Although there is little research on black women's consumption of pornography, knowing

that a black woman created these films might foster a sense that they are invited to view a very different kind of image.

Nonetheless, a large segment of Vanessa Blue's work is not directed toward black women viewers, but instead white and black men. As a sex worker whose film work is tied to her professional persona and brand and who, in the absence of investment or opportunities to be hired to direct for major companies must launch her own "do-it-yourself" media—from short fetish videos to live webcam shows—she must necessarily address the primary market for black-oriented pornography. Like Diana DeVoe and Damali XXXPlosive Dares, Vanessa and other black women performers from the mainstream heterosexual porn industry make money by cultivating a white, black, and brown male fan base. Their authorship is always tied to the need for savvy self-promotion. This fact means that their work differs sharply from black women sex filmmakers who are not sex workers.

Abiola Abrams aka Venus Hottentot brought her background in film studies, art, and creative writing to her collaboration with pioneering feminist pornographer Candida Royalle for *Aphrodite Superstar* (Femme Productions, 2007). Royalle's Femme Productions produced the film and guaranteed its audience would be women and couples interested in her quasi-softcore aesthetic. Coming to the film as an unknown entity in the mainstream or feminist porn world, Abrams was freer to use goddess imagery, a critique of hip hop's misogynist violence toward black women, and black feminist poetry throughout the film than if she had been a sex worker needing to assure fans would buy the film and keep her employed.¹⁶ In fact, she went into the project not seeing it as pornography for the purposes of titillation and masturbation, but as a "sex film" which would offer a political statement about the richness and complexity of black women's fantasy lives.¹⁷ But her reliance on established porn actors to carry the film, such as India, Mr. Marcus, and Justin Long, as well as the inexperienced leading actress's performance (Simone Valentino), meant that the film would be marketed as a couples or woman-friendly porno even while it circulated as a feminist art statement of sorts. This fact underscores and expands upon Angela Carter's insistence that pornography "can never be art for art's sake. Honourably enough, it always has work to do."¹⁸

Black feminist and queer filmmakers coming from outside the industry produce for a different market and face a different set of expectations from their audiences than black performers-turned-producers of porn. For the former, consumers are largely women, transgenders, and queer people looking to find authentic images of themselves and their

sexual communities, representations lacking in most porn. This sense of authenticity is underscored by the fact that the sex workers employed for these films are part of these very same communities, often renowned performance artists and actors from the San Francisco Bay area, the queer porn San Fernando Valley. Both Shine Louise Houston and Nenna Joiner use queer people of color from their own circles of friends and collaborators in their films, and market, in part, to those same circles. Although the consumption of their work extends much farther afield, this community-based approach also presents a kind of political intervention. While black performers-turned-directors employ filmmaking as a facet, albeit politically charged, of their strategic sexual labor, black women filmmakers who are not performers do not engage illicit erotics in the same way. Rather than use their own sexualities for commoditized gains, they propel the sexualities of others to enact fantasies of their own design, fantasies that intervene in the narrowed landscape of possibilities for black female sexuality under racial capitalism.

But that's not to say that these black women auteurs do not deploy their own embodiments, and specifically the deviance attached to their black female bodies, in the pornoscape. Shine Louise Houston, for instance, launches her body into her texts in unexpected and subversive ways. In *Superfreak* she appears as the ghost of notoriously naughty funk singer Rick James, whose 1981 hit "Super Freak" describes "a very kinky girl, the kind you don't take home to mother . . ." Inhabiting James' spirit, Shine brings to life a trickster figure bent on turning one character after another into a "superfreak." Using her own body to set in motion the pleasure inducing, orgiastic scene, Shine moves from cultural producer (whose role is to represent or depict sex) to sexual laborer (whose role is to trade/on sex) to sexual intellectual (whose role is to critique sex labor and sex representations, as I do) to superfreak (who performs all of the above). This schema, offered by L.H. Stallings in her radical theory of black erotic rebellion called the "Politics of Hoin" opens up ways of thinking about black women pornographers as not so much divided by their interests in porn as united by a shared politics—porn as a site of possibility for black women's own intervention and critique.¹⁹

What does it mean to be a superfreak? For black women the politics of respectability has overwhelmed our ability to think of sex apart from the threat of harm to our womanhood and to our communities.²⁰ Through the prioritization of normative gender and sexual codes, behaviors, and relations we have sought to recuperate our *selves* from myths associated with black sexual deviance, and the systemic violence attached to those myths. Pornography offers a site to see how those myths attach to fan-

tasies and to labor arrangements, but also, to make visible the pleasures taken in the queerness of deviance.²¹ These pleasures are articulated by those who do sexual labor, those who depict sexual acts, those who offer intellectual critiques of them, and by those that do all of the above. In fact, these directors show the important overlaps between sex work and cultural production and cultural critique. Their body of work exposes the defiant sensibilities and subversive politics of black feminist pornographies as they enact a charged eroticism that is full of voluptuous potential.²²

This nascent cinema powerfully indicts the antiporn feminist viewpoint—if one is preoccupied by pornography’s objectification of women one needs only to look to women’s pornographic filmmaking to see how women might make use of objectification as a technology of feminism. Claiming subjectivity, critiquing representation, constructing new sexual languages, and aiming for new forms of economic survival and mobility, the many agents of feminist pornography are at the vanguard of the feminist movement. A movement stultified in its reformist program of (neo)liberal rights struggles, it routinely leaves out the critical sexual/cultural workers who are trying to offer a revolutionary paradigm of gender and sexual rights and relations while at the same time entering into the means of production. Black feminist pornographers are on the front lines of what I see as one of the most exciting directions in modern feminism—one that can make plain (and explicit) the inextricability of racialized genders and sexualities to any new modes of capital and methodologies of creative self-fashioning we feminists undertake. Just as black feminists have challenged the mainstream feminist movement to be accountable to race, class, and nation as they act intersectionally and contingently with gender,²³ black women bring a special insight to feminist pornography: one person’s fantasy is another person’s work, and the workers have fantasies of their own.

Notes

1. Vanessa Blue, personal interview with the author, August 13, 2008. All quotes from Vanessa are drawn from the same interview.

2. I refer to my research interlocutors by their first name rather than their last name only to create consistency between those who employ last names in their professional personas and those who do not.

3. This aspect of my argument is informed by Jane Juffer’s work on the domestication of and women’s access and uses of multiple forms of pornography and erotica. However, she advocates for prioritizing “material transgression” and “material factors that restrict movement” across boundaries for they allow “the ability of women

to literally enter into the means of production, to step across the threshold of an adult video store, to access an online sex toy shop, to buy a volume of literary erotica over the feminist sex positive “valorization of individuals’ subversive abilities to appropriate texts”, where as I see a dual focus on material and textual appropriation and constraint as productive for my purposes here. “There is No Place Like Home: Further Developments on the Domestic Front,” *More Dirty Pictures: Gender, Pornography and Power*, 2nd edition, edited by Pamela Church Gibson (London: British Film Institute, 2004), 56.

4. On erotic capital see: Adam Green, “The Social Organization of Desire: The Sexual Fields Approach,” *Sociological Theory* 26, no. 1 (2008): 25–50. Employing erotic capital to read hierarchies in the sex industry specifically see Siobhan Brooks, *Unequal Desires: Race and Erotic Capital in the Stripping Industry* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010).

5. See my article: “Putting Hypersexuality to Work: Black Women and Illicit Eroticism in Pornography,” *Sexualities* 13, no. 2 (2010): 219–35.

6. “Desire industries” is drawn from Siobhan Brooks, *Unequal Desires*.

7. On black women’s representations in mainstream pornography see my forthcoming book *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women, Sex Work and Pornography* (forthcoming, Duke University Press, 2013). See also the cutting edge work of Jennifer Christine Nash “The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography” (PhD diss., Harvard University, Cambridge, 2009) and Ariane Cruz, “Berries Bittersweet: Visual Representations of Black Female Sexuality in Contemporary American Pornography” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2010).

8. Damali XXXplosive Dares, personal interview with author, March 24, 2010.

9. See Mireille Miller-Young, “The Hip Hop Honeys + Da Hustlaz: Black Sexualities in the New Hip Hop Pornography,” *Meridians: Feminism, Race and Transnationalism* 8, no. 1 (2008): 261–92.

10. I use the term sexual economy drawn from the work Adrienne Davis: “Don’t Let Nobody Bother Yo’ Principle: The Sexual Economy of American Slavery,” in *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*, edited by Sharon Harley and the Black Women and Work Collective (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 103–27.

11. Robin D.G. Kelley, *Yo Mama’s Dysfunktional: Fighting the Culture Wars in Urban America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997), 45–46.

12. Melissa W. Wright, *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

13. On the confessional as site for the production of sexual truth see Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, translated by Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books 1990 [1978]).

14. Anne McClintock, “Maid to Order: Commercial Fetishism and Gender Power,” *Social Text* 37 (Winter 1993): 87–116. There is a paucity of research on black women or men and “kink” or BDSM, but a few popular articles and blog essays or interviews exist. See: Daisy Hernandez, “Playing with Race,” *Colorlines* magazine, December 21, 2004. http://colorlines.com/archives/2004/12/playing_with_race.html; Anna North, “When Prejudice is Sexy: Inside the Kinky World of Race-Play,” *Jezebel.com*, March 14, 2012. <http://jezebel.com/5868600/when-prejudice-is-sexy-inside-the-kinky-world-of-race+play>; Andrea, “Interview with Perverted Negress,” *Racialicious.com*, July 10, 2009. <http://www.racialicious.com/2009/07/10/interview-with-the-perverted-negress/>.

15. This is part of my argument in my larger work. See *A Taste for Brown Sugar*:

Black Women, Sex Work and Pornography (forthcoming, Duke University Press, 2013).

16. Abiola Abrams, personal interview with author, April 10, 2009.

17. Abiola Abrams, personal interview with author, April 10, 2009.

18. Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman* (London, Virago Press, 1979), 12.

19. L.H. Stallings, "Superfreak: Black Female Masculinity Spectacle/Spectator in Lesbian Pornography," Paper presented at Race, Sex, Power: New Movements in Black and Latina/o Sexualities, University of Illinois, Chicago, April 2008.

20. On the "politics of respectability" see the classic work by Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). Related to respectability politics is black women's "culture of dissemblance"—their strategies of masking, avoiding, and resistance against racialized sexual stereotyping. See Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West: Preliminary Thoughts on the Culture of Dissemblance," in *Words of Fire: An Anthology of African-American Feminist Thought*, edited by Beverly Guy-Sheftall (New York: New Press, 1995).

21. On deviance as a site of potential for black (sexual) politics see Cathy Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance: A New Research Agenda for the Study of Black Politics," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 1, no. 1 (2004): 27–45.

22. Here I am thinking of L.H. Stallings, *'Mutha' is Half A Word: Intersections of Folklore, Vernacular, Myth, and Queerness in Black Female Culture* (Columbus: Ohio University Press, 2007).

23. On intersectionality see Kimberle Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (1991): 1241.

voices.org/bentvoices/lurie_loving%20you.htm.

11. Eli Clare, "Sex, Celebration, and Justice: A Keynote for QD2002," keynote speech, Queerness and Disability Conference, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, CA, June 3, 2002, http://www.disabilityhistory.org/dwa/queer/paper_clare.html.