

# PORN ARCHIVES

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Tim Dean, Steven Rusczycky,  
and David Squires, editors

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# CONTENTS

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | ix

INTRODUCTION Pornography, Technology, Archive |  
Tim Dean, 1

## PART I Pedagogical Archives

- 1 Pornography, Porno, Porn: Thoughts on a Weedy Field |  
Linda Williams, 29
- 2 Pornography as a Utilitarian Social Structure: A Conversation  
with Frances Ferguson, 44
- 3 The Opening of Kobena, Cecilia, Robert, Linda, Juana, Hoang,  
and the Others | Nguyen Tan Hoang, 61
- 4 Pornography in the Library | David Squires, 78

## PART II Historical Archives

- 5 “A Quantity of Offensive Matter”: Private Cases in Public  
Places | Jennifer Burns Bright and Ronan Crowley, 103
- 6 Up from Underground | Loren Glass, 127
- 7 “A Few Drops of Thick, White, Viscid Sperm”: Teleny and the  
Defense of the Phallus | Joseph Bristow, 144

PART III *Image Archives*

- 8 *Art and Pornography: At the Limit of Action* | Robert L. Caserio, 163
- 9 *Big Black Beauty: Drawing and Naming the Black Male Figure in Superhero and Gay Porn Comics* | Darieck Scott, 183
- 10 *Gay Sunshine, Pornopoetic Collage, and Queer Archive* | Robert Dewhurst, 213
- 11 *This Is What Porn Can Be Like! A Conversation with Shine* Louise Houston | Mireille Miller-Young, 234

PART IV *Rough Archives*

- 12 *Snuff and Nonsense: The Discursive Life of a Phantasmatic Archive* | Lisa Downing, 249
- 13 *Rough Sex* | Eugenie Brinkema, 262
- 14 *"It's Not Really Porn": Insex and the Revolution in Technological Interactivity* | Marcia Klotz, 284

PART V *Transnational Archives*

- 15 *Porno Rícanos at the Borders of Empire* | Ramón E. Soto-Crespo, 303
- 16 *Butts, Bundas, Bottoms, Ends: Tracing the Legacy of the Pornochanchada in A b . . . profunda* | Melissa Schindler, 317
- 17 *Pornographic Faith: Two Sources of Naked Sense at the Limits of Belief and Humiliation* | John Paul Ricco, 338
- 18 *Parody of War: Pleasure at the Limits of Pornography* | Prabha Manuratne, 356

PART VI *Archives of Excess*

- 19 *Fantasy Uncut: Foreskin Fetishism and the Morphology of Desire* | Harri Kalha, 375

20 *Stadler's Boys; or, The Fictions of Child Pornography* | Steven Ruszczycky, 399

21 *Stumped* | Tim Dean, 420

APPENDIX *Clandestine Catalogs: A Bibliography of Porn Research Collections* | Caitlin Shanley, 441

FILMOGRAPHY | 457

BIBLIOGRAPHY | 459

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS | 481

INDEX | 485

## This Is What Porn Can Be Like!

### A Conversation with Shine Louise Houston

Mireille Miller-Young

Mireille Miller-Young visited San Francisco for a conversation with the porn producer and director Shine Louise Houston. On April 29, 2010, they met at Houston's home to discuss her award-winning feature film *Champion* and her independent porn company, *Pink and White Productions*. Houston had planned to attend a screening of *Champion* in Buffalo, New York, the month prior but had to cancel. The following is an excerpt from a longer interview with the author and Shine Louise Houston. The transcript was prepared by Jade Petermon.

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Mireille Miller-Young: Thank you for having me over. We were disappointed that you couldn't attend our conference in Buffalo last month, "At the Limit: Pornography and the Humanities." But we were very happy for the opportunity to screen your latest film, *Champion*; as a fan of your work, I was excited to see it. The movie has been out for a while now, since 2008, and has been well received. There seems to be a consensus that it's your biggest cinematic achievement thus far. How do you understand the film's success?

Shine Louise Houston: There are two sides to that issue: the professional side and the popular side. All three of my feature films made the festival circuit when they were released, but this one got Movie of the Year at the Feminist Porn Awards in Toronto. It's doing well in professional venues. On the popular side, most people who write or blog about it are very positive, claiming it as something new in pornography. But it doesn't sell that well. I have to say, though, to me it's not something new; it's just going back to seventies porn. That era of porn has been an important touchstone for me.

Miller-Young: Do you mean that cinematic quality was higher then?

Houston: Yes, both in terms of the cinematic quality and the thoughtfulness of filmmaking, the movies were better. Of course you have to wade through

bits of misogyny and racism here and there, but on the whole they were more interesting movies. One of my favorites from the seventies is called *Score*. It's a really well-done bisexual film with an interesting, odd story line. It has compelling characters. It incorporates nonconsensual sex in a good way. It's devious and funny and a little dark. I look at that and think, *This is what porn can be like!*

Technology has had a huge impact on the porn industry. Video, for instance, made a big difference. In the eighties and nineties, when video was everywhere and nobody knew how to light for it yet, you can see a divergence away from the quality of filmmaking present in the mid- to late 1970s. There are some gems in the eighties, but generally the creativity didn't approach the previous generation of films. But if we look back at seventies porn, why can't we follow its example? *Champion* is my first attempt to do that.

Miller-Young: In addition to impacting production, video transformed everything in terms of the consumption and privatization of viewing porn. The seventies is a very interesting period for me as a historian of pornography, especially of black women's performance and representation. Searching the archive of black erotica I found a woman named Desiree West. She was a major actor in the seventies. She wasn't as famous as Vanessa Del Rio, but she performed with John Holmes and did a number of provocative films. *SexWorld* is one you might know.

Houston: I haven't seen *SexWorld*, but I know the poster.

Miller-Young: It's an interesting example because it created an interface between desegregation and the sexual revolution. The *SexWorld* that gives the movie its title is a laboratory for exploring sexual fantasy. One of the experiments pairs a bigoted white man with a black woman as a way of showing him that his sexual desires run deeper than his prejudices. Even if flawed, the movie was an exploration of racialized sexuality that was uncommon in popular media before then. In the 1970s, black women were using pornography as a performative site to do a lot of new things. You begin to see certain actresses subverting their own performances, for example. I always wonder how those performances get recorded. Could you talk about what is important to capture in terms of the cinematic? Does it offer a space to use multiracial actors to explore desire in different ways?

Houston: I stick to the technical aspects. I've learned that the less I think about the sex, the better I can capture it. In a philosophical sense, if I try to spearhead racial content consciously, I'll always miss the mark. When I formulate cinematic ideas around race, gender, and representation, I superimpose too much of my own shit on the sex and I miss my goal.

So instead I look at the technical problems. Like, what happens when we use this specific focal length? What does it do to these people when I shoot the sex from this angle? If it doesn't work, I try to shoot the sex in a different way. I don't direct the sex. I don't tell them what to do. It's all about the process and trying to stay invisible. For the Crash Pad Series, I don't book the actors to avoid enacting my own personal biases. It's not like I'm not conscious of race and gender. It's just that there are so many layers in my brain. That's why I'm a visual person.

*Miller-Young:* I'm interested in the point you just made about expressing your ideas through the kinds of shots and angles as well as the depth, space, and time. It reminds me of the scene from your third film, *In Search of the Wild Kingdom*, featuring the two transmen of color, Will and Papi. There was an amazing shot from below looking up at Will's face. It was my first time seeing a transman in porn with such depth. His face was really well framed, and rarely obscured. I loved that. But I wonder about the choices you make in creating shots like that. Do those technical decisions express something about sex or gender or intimacy or racialized desire?

*Houston:* There is a big distinction, a line drawn in the sand even, between *Champion* and *Wild Kingdom*. I think my decisions and my learning curve took a huge leap after *Wild Kingdom*. This is the critical artist speaking, but I would say the first three movies are shit. I was surprised that people liked my first porn, *The Crash Pad*, so much. It must be empty out there if that has become a cult classic! The sex is hot, but now I think the series is crap. I wanted to have more fun with my next try, *Superfreak*, but I was sick. I had a one-hundred-and-three-degree temperature throughout the entire shoot. We slashed several scenes that I wanted to do, and instead I built it around just one scene.

I got a bit closer with *Wild Kingdom*. It's a mockumentary about a documentary film crew trying to film real lesbian sex, but we had some technical issues. I hated the lighting in that room and we didn't have enough time for set dressing. We shot the film in just six days, which caused problems during the editing process. But I really did like some shots, for example that shot of Will. I loved Will and Papi as a couple. They had amazing sex, but I was disappointed that I couldn't capture it the way I wanted. Around that time a friend of mine said to me, "You're close." I agreed, but I wasn't getting something; something was wrong.

*Miller-Young:* Did you figure out what exactly?

*Houston:* For one thing, we were shooting scenes at a ninety-degree angle, sometimes face and sometimes crotch. One of my friends pointed out that

fucking was a conversation, so we started shooting it like dialogue. And ever since I've cut sex scenes like a conversation. It worked. I finally figured out how to translate that experience.

It wasn't as if the performers weren't giving great performances. We weren't missing the mark on casting. It was a technical problem. When we started thinking about it like a technical problem, I could see the beauty on the screen. So now we have rules: thou shalt not zoom, thou shalt not slow pan, thou shalt have a fixed focal length. If you want a closer shot, you have to get closer!

Later we worked out a system for moving around a couple without crossing lines or breaking the flow of their scene. That was the big breakthrough and we saw the results for the first time in *Champion*. We were doing it in the Crash Pad Series for a while but we really figured it out in *Champion*. Also for *Champion* we used a 35 mm lens adaptor, which gave us a more cinematic aesthetic. I decided I wasn't going to spend two thousand dollars on an adapter just yet, so I built one instead. I finally felt like, *ah, there's the pretty!*

We consistently got more pretty and more intensity between couples in *Champion*. Even still, there are some people who don't like my style. One guy on the Pink and White Productions forum wants to see scenes cut between tight shots and full body shots. I don't like that, though, because it flattens the whole experience. I stay tight on purpose.

*Miller-Young:* Does that approach add depth or intimacy?

*Houston:* It adds intimacy, and it's easier to get interesting compositions. I always come back to the technical questions.

*Miller-Young:* Now that you are explaining it, I see the difference between *Champion* and the other movies. There is more consistency, focus, and a kind of a single plane that's different than a series of perpendicular shots. I think people picked up on the effect of that single plane when we screened your film in Buffalo, but they expressed it in a different way. The men in particular wanted to know why the scenes were so long and why they featured multiple orgasms. In a lot of porn, gay and straight, the scene ends after a man comes. But in your films, the actors keep coming and coming! Is the length of a scene a technical problem? If you don't direct the sex, what kind of directions do you give to get the pacing you want?

*Houston:* I just ask them what they have in mind. Honestly, before we start I'll say, "Give me an idea of what you are going to do." And that's it!

*Miller-Young:* I wonder then how you edit the sex scenes? *Champion* moves through the dialogue and the fighting sequences really fast, but the sex scenes

are long. Are the edits preserving the sex as it unfolds? Or do they change the duration of sex?

Houston: Here's the business side of directing—if you want to sell a movie, it has to be somewhere around eighty or ninety minutes. So, yes, I have to cut parts. In fact, my scenes are considered short by industry standards. A fifteen-minute scene is a short scene. I hate that the last scene in *Champion* is twenty-two minutes. There was so much stuff—about two hours of fucking—that I had a hard time editing it down.

Miller-Young: I want to ask about that scene. Some people seemed to think it was a little anticlimactic because it lacked the screaming and yelling. They were surprised after the ultraorgasmic moments of the earlier scenes.

Houston: It is anticlimactic. I was bummed about that. Dallas was supposed to be running the scene. Dallas is definitely toppish and that character was top in the ring—the sex was supposed to reflect that. It was also supposed to be about Dallas's orgasm, and I really tried to cut it to make sense to me, but it turned out more balanced. Dallas had a hard time cumming on film. Instead there was a great moment when Syd takes the lead and does an amazing squirt. I had to cut that, though, because the scene wasn't about Syd. Ultimately it was my least favorite scene because it didn't work how I wanted it to work.

Filming *Champion* raised a lot of questions about how to make porn. On the one hand, we asked ourselves, what is the narrative structure of an adult feature? But on the other hand, we were thinking about what sells. Well, on the business side, I needed four and a half sex scenes and couldn't go over two hours.

Miller-Young: Why did you cut the squirting?

Houston: Because Dallas was supposed to be more dominant in that sex scene.

Miller-Young: But they were trading in that scene.

Houston: Yes, the top-bottom dynamic wasn't as strong as I had hoped.

Miller-Young: If you edited to keep the consistency of a dominant-submissive narrative, that raises a question. How do you balance between giving people the freedom to do whatever they want and at the same time working toward a final product? I mean, if you're trying to capture real sex, you have to deal with the fact that sometimes people just don't come, or don't come in the way you want. This approach necessarily changes the money-shot formula, which insists on a climactic visualization of male pleasure. In straight readings of porn's history, the fundamental problem has always been trying to

capture women's pleasure on-screen. It sounds like the dominant-submissive dynamic helped you manage that problem in *Champion*, but then it also introduced new challenges. How do you prioritize trans pleasure, for instance?

Houston: Do you mean the editing process or the shooting process?

Miller-Young: Both, or either. Is it important for you to cultivate trans pleasure? Is it important for you to show women's pleasure?

Houston: Of course, that's the whole purpose. But if we're talking about orgasms specifically, there are scenes where one person comes and the other person doesn't. That can be hot. But let me clarify the process: We shoot a lot of raw material. The narrative comes out when we start editing that material and piecing it together. We worked that way for the Crash Pad Series especially, and I learned a lot from that process of experimenting with the edits. So much so that I started new projects just so I could explore new things. But as far as my personal ethics and standards on set, it's important that people do what they're going to do. I want them to control the on-set experience as much as possible, so that it is pleasurable, but I don't give up control in the editing room. Sometimes those standards come into conflict and I'm slightly disappointed with the final product, like the last scene in *Champion*. All I can say is that it happens.

Miller-Young: Do the performers ever feel like they didn't deliver?

Houston: Some people get bummed if they don't come. I had one performer apologize! But it was still a good scene and, anyway, talking about goal-oriented sex, sometimes the goal is something other than orgasm.

Miller-Young: I'm still fascinated by the freedom you give performers, partly because in mainstream hetero porn there is pressure for women to fake it. Why don't you ask people to fake it? If you need to consider market demands—four and a half sex scenes in ninety minutes—why not just direct the sex? Is there some kind of political, aesthetic, or artistic rationale for only shooting real orgasms?

Houston: I don't want to watch people having fake orgasms. I've watched a lot of porn with fake orgasms. It's always laughable! I spoofed that kind of porn in *Wild Kingdom*. That movie expresses my sentiment—it's ridiculous, it's silly, and I don't want it on my set. Of course, someone I'm shooting could fake it on their own. There have been times when I decided, hmmm, I'm not going to ask.

Also, there's a rationale on the business side because we have a smarter audience. Especially in Internet porn. Probably 50 percent of the people who visit our website are women, so you have to think about who is watching my

movies. I keep my audience in mind, but I still come back to what got me started—I make movies that I want to see. That way, at least, I know one hundred other people who will want to see it too. Not everybody will want to see what I want to see, but a few people will.

*Miller-Young:* The popular conception of women as porn consumers is that they usually want an elaborate fantasy, something that emphasizes a story line and deemphasizes hard-core sex. But you think that women consumers want to see authenticity in porn? What is your reading of the female consumer?

*Houston:* I think the idea that women just want fantasy is bullshit. Maybe soft-core fantasy hit a particular market in the eighties, when Candida Royalle and other folks were producing porn for women and couples. But then I think about the generations that are coming up now. We've played with sexuality and power so much since the eighties that this generation is a bit savvier about separating sex from sentimentality. I think the popularity of the Crash Pad Series is that it works around this premise: it's just fucking! We don't need a love story, or any elaborate story line, because hard-core fucking is just sexy. However, I do want porn to be pretty in a way that I don't think it generally has been since video took off in the eighties. All the beauty left and, as I already mentioned, part of my mission is to bring it back.

*Miller-Young:* But even if your movies move through the dialogue quickly to focus on the sex scenes, the narrative is still an important aspect of the quality of your work.

*Houston:* It is. I came out as a narrative filmmaker after college. I went to San Francisco Art Institute, where they take a very experimental approach to making movies. It's a cheesy story, but my commitment to narrative came while I was watching *The Matrix*. It made me realize that I want to tell a really good story. Now my goal is to find the intersection between telling a story and capturing really hot sex. The next movie I make is called *Snapshot*. It's a kick-ass suspense thriller. But before I can make it there are some structural changes that I have to make to my business.

*Miller-Young:* I'm interested in the business side of pornography. One aspect of my research investigates the political economy of specific businesses within the structure of the adult-entertainment industry. Black men have been directing for a while and, compared to black women, have had an easier time getting their projects financed and distributed. When I started the research in 2002 there weren't any black women directing! Now that there are, I'm interested in how people like Vanessa Blue, Diana DeVoe, Venus Hottentot, and you do it. Can you tell me how you have been able to raise capital, learn the industry, and get distribution?

*Houston:* A friend of mine started an online group for local porn makers. I met Tony Comstock there and he asked me to help him find models and equipment. I didn't know who he was, but I said, *sure, why not?* So I helped him get a location and equipment, then worked as his production assistant. In the middle of the shoot two of his investors show up—one was Christophe Pettus from Blowfish. So Tony introduced us and later I showed him a short demo I'd made by myself to raise money. But the whole thing was a mess. The optical drive on my new computer went out, so I couldn't burn him a disk. Instead I dumped it to tape and in the process erased the sound. I was sweating bullets while he traded his attention between the demo and his e-mail. I was sure I'd fucked up the deal. When it finished, though, he asked: "How does seven thousand dollars sound?" It sounded great! That's how the partnership with Blowfish started, and before we finished production on *The Crash Pad* Christophe offered to pick up the total budget and distribution—about eight thousand dollars. That's what it cost to do the first volume. We made the next three movies with Blowfish, too, but now are moving toward self-funding.

*Miller-Young:* Pink and White is your own production company but Blowfish is the distribution company?

*Houston:* Yes, they were coexecutive producers and distributors.

*Miller-Young:* Making a movie is one thing, but getting it out there is the hard part. How has distribution affected your business?

*Houston:* Here again technology is changing the industry. Business is moving toward the Internet. People still buy DVDs, but companies have a new angle on how to distribute and sell. The next movie that I make will screen at festivals before it goes to DVD. That way it will reach a larger market of people who, after seeing it, might want the DVD. But in terms of online business, I do much better with the single *Crash Pad* Series website than I do on all my movies combined.

*Miller-Young:* That's surprising, considering the widespread recognition you received for *Champion*.

*Houston:* Yes, but it's an indication of how people watch porn. Plus, our online presence means we're becoming a force in the industry, for good.

*Miller-Young:* A force for good!

*Houston:* For good because the industry is very hard on smaller businesses. I should explain the way this works. I'm simplifying, but basically digital distribution for video on demand can happen in two ways. They buy content for a flat fee or they'll offer a contract that, on the high end, pays 20 to 25 per-

cent to the content creator. Honestly, I'm really tired of other people making more off my content than I do. That's one reason I'm starting a project called Point of Contact, which will act like a sort of hotbed for producers. We'll provide a tiny bit of micro financing; they upload the content to our website. We edit and distribute it; they get 40 percent lifetime royalties. And we'll stream content for a few people in Australia or Germany who cannot run their own websites for legal reasons. Basically, our percentage covers processing and bandwidth. Content creators get the rest of revenue and, even though we're not making a profit, it helps us in other ways.

Miller-Young: You benefit just by having more material on your site?

Houston: Yes, because it brings more traffic from other sites, it lowers credit-card processing costs, and it makes bandwidth cheaper.

Miller-Young: Let me make sure I understand: the software required to watch video on demand is owned by other companies, even if you have it on your site? Unless you have your own they take a huge cut?

Houston: They take 80 percent! That's why we're building our own software.

Miller-Young: Clips4Sale does that?

Houston: Clips4Sale now offers payout percentages but video-on-demand companies like SkinVideo will take your content for a flat fee and make money off it forever. Sometimes they'll give you 10 percent or 11 percent, but even porn stars who have clips on their own sites only make about 20 percent of the total sale.

On-demand companies like AEBN and Hotmovies.com: those are the big names, and they'll give you up to 25 percent. We got 25 percent because we have a name. Imagine what they are doing to other people! It's possible to create software for video on demand yourself, but some producers get reamed up the ass by these companies because they don't know the technology or are afraid of technology.

Miller-Young: I want to ask the porn stars I talk to about this issue. Why do they choose to use certain sites and what are they getting out of them? I think sometimes it's just easier, especially if they are not technologically savvy.

Houston: They do have benefits. The companies can be helpful. If you want a particular wording, for instance, they will accommodate your requests. Or maybe it breaks a price point for some people because those sites have a lot of traffic. But I wonder why some people who have the means don't develop their own technology. I find that power lies in owning the technology; it lets you control your own business.

It is true that people aren't making money like they were ten years ago, but there is another wave of development that's coming along on the Internet. There's a certain level of value in new venues, you just have to find the untapped markets.

Miller-Young: Earlier you said that 50 percent of your web audience is women. Is that also the target market for your films?

Houston: It's hard to tell from the information that we get from our management site, but it seems like a lot of straight men and a lot of queer folks like it.

Miller-Young: How do you cull the data on gender and sex?

Houston: We just get names and locations, which is why it's hard to tell. A lot are men, but they could be trans guys. Some names are gender neutral. The vocal people are always queer folks, but I'm sure there are lots of lurkers.

Miller-Young: That's interesting because it raises a question that is key to porn's, and queer folks', place in the world: who else is paying attention? Who is watching porn without, ostensibly anyway, belonging to its audience? The idea of lurkers hints at the possibility of censorship, but even beyond legal censorship, I wonder if the politics of respectability has affected you.

Houston: At one point, yes. I had just turned thirty or thirty-one and wasn't sure what to do with my life. I was working retail at the feminist sex shop Good Vibrations and wanted something else but couldn't decide what. Learn to make furniture? Go back to painting? I'd always wanted to learn about film, so maybe that? Somehow all the doors opened in the film direction, so I decided, *Okay life, if this is where we're going, let's go.* I didn't set out to make porn. But I met Tony and Christophe and one thing led to another; I made *The Crash Pad* and it sold like crazy, then I made another and another and here I am—known for making porn.

Miller-Young: Did your family resist your decisions along the way?

Houston: No, my mom was supportive. She's pretty much my family and was happy that I owned my own business. Generally, though, I was surprised at how much encouragement I received. That might be a Bay Area thing, I don't know, but everywhere I went people were supportive. Of course, I was careful about who I told.

Miller-Young: That's great! My mom felt like she'd worked too hard to have her daughter doing a PhD on porn. Obviously it's different for academics, or even directors, than it is for performers, but I find that we all worry about the stigma of being associated with porn. For directors specifically, I wonder if other people ever accuse you of exploiting your performers?



Houston: I got that question a lot in the beginning, but I think that as a community we are moving past it because more people are talking about their experiences making porn. One thing I found helpful in answering that question, though, was to highlight problems in the industry at large. For example, I'd point out that on set I always treat people with respect. I pay people as best I can. I only work with performers doing it because they want to do it. I never ask people to do anything they wouldn't normally do. We don't do fluid swapping activities. So, no, it's not exploitative. As I've always said, we use our voices to counteract the voices speaking for us, whether as queer folk, women, or trans folk. By creating new images, we create new voices.

Miller-Young: The representation of sexuality and desire is something older performers talk about often. I interviewed some black actresses active in the eighties who were, for the time, sex radicals. They explored their sexualities through sex with multiple partners and that sort of thing. And they always told me they wanted to see people who looked like them and acted out their fantasies. Today the primary interest seems to be making money and surviving this economy, at least for the women entering the mainstream hetero market. I'm curious about the women in your films. Who are they? Are they doing other kinds of sex work or just part of the queer community in the Bay Area?

Houston: It's a cross section. Most are amateurs; some have never done porn before. For some it'll be the only time they do it, but others want to get their feet wet and start with me—a few people who have gone off to do more and more. The Crash Pad Series and Pink and White Productions are kind of incubators in that way.

Miller-Young: I think it's great that you provide a space where people realize something about themselves—whether they are consumers or performers—and so I hesitate to ask about the negative side, but I wonder if other black women have ever confronted you or criticized your work?

Houston: Only white people have. Maybe it's white guilt. But the only folks who ask me why there aren't more brown people on the site and have issues around power dynamics and skin color are white people. I don't know why that is.

Miller-Young: Is it a feminist conflict between the antiporn versus prosex positions? Or are second-wave feminists responding negatively to your movies?

Houston: There are lines between ages and social positions within feminism, and they definitely determine responses to my work. Older women tend to have more problems with it. I always watch who walks out during my films and it's usually older folks.

Miller-Young: What sort of problems?

Houston: I'll give you an example from a great thread on my site. It was weird, and you'd have to read it to understand all the reasons why, but for one, it conflated body issues with the commodification of queer culture. Just like anticapitalist critiques, if you believe that all economic exchanges in a capitalistic society lead to commodification, then you'll always have a problem with my business—or any business for that matter. But I don't believe that commodification necessarily causes body issues. As I said before, one reason I make porn is to change the images available to folks, although that does require selling images.

Abroad, though, it's a different critique. In France and London people wanted to know why, in *Wild Kingdom* and the *Crash Pad Series* especially, I perpetuated the stereotype of black women as butch, or, more generally, as masculine. But that's not the stereotype in the United States. Here we have a stereotype of black women as hypersexual—in some cases asexual, but more often hypersexual.

Miller-Young: I agree that the stereotype is of a hypersexualized black woman, but also a butchy black woman that is supposed to remind us that *real* femininity is white femininity.

Houston: Exactly. I got that question two or three times in different ways.

Miller-Young: Has your work generally been received abroad in different ways than it has been in the U.S.? Are Europeans fascinated with you in a different way than people are fascinated with you in North America?

Houston: I'm not sure I can answer that, but I will say that I felt like people in Berlin were starting from the same place that I was—more so, anyway, than people in France or London. People in both the U.S. and Canada seemed to perceive a conflict between queer politics and feminism, which is interesting because when in Berlin, where they host the *PorYes Feminist Porn Awards*, people consistently interchange *queer* and *feminist*. Which makes some sense; they are interchangeable in some ways. To take an example from science, we have string theory and we have M-theory. Both look at the same thing but from a different angle. So if you look at one, two, three, four, five different waves of feminism, you see that queer theory incorporates, or at least responds to, all those various influences.

Miller-Young: I want to come back to the question of influence, especially in regards to the new direction that *Champion* is taking your work. You said that seventies porn has been an important model, but there must be other influences as well.

Houston: Well, I was studying *Raging Bull* a lot before writing *Champion*, which was fun, so why not go with it?

Miller-Young: There are shots from *Raging Bull* in *Champion*? Is that why you incorporated mixed martial arts, or were you influenced by the popularity of *Ultimate Surrender*, sexual wrestling competitions?

Houston: Neither, actually. Syd really is a kick boxer and I was watching Martin Scorsese, so the two things converged. You have to pay homage to your heroes. Hitchcock was also an inspiration. I owe a lot to Scorsese, Hitchcock, the Wachowskis, the Coen brothers, and Jim Jarmusch. I got ideas from all of them. Who knows? Maybe I'll be the Jim Jarmusch of porn.

Miller-Young: What about porn directors?

Houston: I don't know about directors, but as I said before, *Score* made an impression. I watch a lot of gay porn. I thought Wash West's movie *The Hole* was a smart parody of *Ringu*. I watch all the movies Paul Thomas does for Vivid Entertainment. I've seen a lot of Chloe Hoffman's stuff, which tends to be pretty good for mainstream porn. She was my first porn crush.

Miller-Young: How do you see yourself in relation to other women directors who have started their own companies, particularly people like Bella Donna or Tristan Taormino, who is especially vocal about queer sexuality?

Houston: I can't compare notes that way because I'm hypercritical of myself. I have to work with blinders, which is good and bad. I think being competitive with others in the industry is a good thing and a bad thing. It can be inhibiting. For example, I watched some of Maria Beatty's early movies, which draw on surrealist and noir-ish aesthetics. Even without putting her on a pedestal, I felt like she was the person to beat. But our work is very different, so it wasn't an especially productive fixation. On the other hand, I was having problems with narrative when I saw Anna Brownfield's movie *The Band*; it's a punk-rock love story. She got it, so seeing that helped resolve my own difficulties.

Miller-Young: Well, you're certainly carving out your own space in porn. I'm grateful for everything you do and for talking to me about it. Thank you.

# PART IV

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## Rough Archives