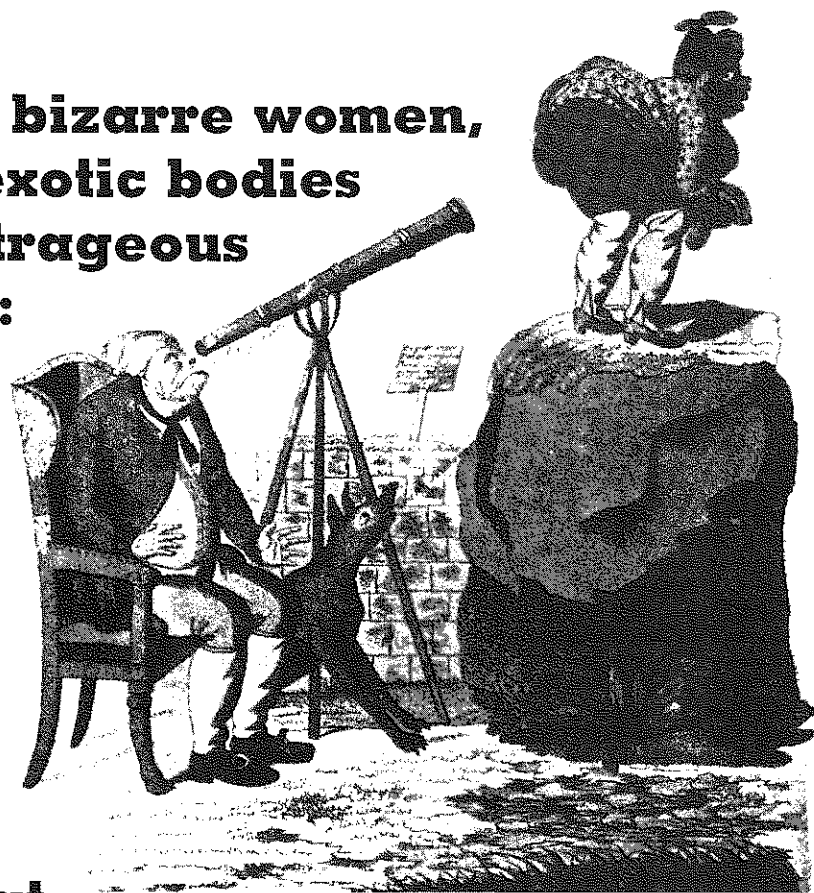


**bizarre women,
exotic bodies
& outrageous
sex:
or
if annie
sprinkle
was a
black ho
she
wouldn't
be all
that**



by karen/miranda augustine

The new school of lezzie pro-sex activism has been pushed into the mainstream of queer political thought. Important as it is for women's issues to be placed at the centre, and particularly so since lesbians generally have little emotional or financial dependence on men, throughout the bulk of sex mags, porn, and the Modern Primitives trend, at heart is an unacknowledged presence of culture-vulturism dependent on racialized sex-drives of white queers.

As a queer-identified Black woman, I have felt unsatisfied by the sexual liberation rhetoric firmly anchored within lesbian and gay spaces. S/M, dyke representation, censorship, pornography, sexual fantasies: this cornucopia of women's sexual practice within the mainstream of the lesbian, gay and bisexual communities has conveniently disregarded the very complex issue of race—and where it all fits—within these discussions.

I'm not big on sexuality theories because the very things that swell my clit, when thrown into the whirl-

wind of lezzie political correctness, just don't figure. And depending on how strong I'm feeling, shame is often the outcome if what's turning me on is deemed degrading to my sex by the progressive elite. Put quite simply, I don't claim definitive politics on a lot of these issues, but I do understand what makes me wet.

I am a consumer of pornography. Het porn, that is. I have been so since the age of 11. *Cherie*, *Penthouse*...you name it, I hoarded it. What I realized then was that Black female porn stars (like their Asian, Latina, Arab and Jewish sisters) were left to the pages of fetish mags, aluding to themes of cannibalism, bestiality and slavery. What I understand now is that race is the distinguishing feature in determining the type of objectification a woman will encounter. And believe me, the sex-libbers of the queer scene need a wake-up call: this problem is alive and well and deeply embedded within our communities. This in mind, a historical briefing on Black sexual exoticization will bring me back to my case in point.

the 411

Links made between the eroticization of Black sexuality, myths surrounding "whiteness" and colonial culture are lacking in the bulk of queer sex-lib theories. In examining the supposed normality of "whiteness" and the colonial construction of Black sexuality—and more importantly, how to reconceptualize that image—a different impression of the interconnectedness of race, class, gender, sexuality, power and control would emerge.

The use of Black women's bodies as fetish and "entertainment" for Europeans has its roots within the colonization of Africa. In France during the 18th and 19th centuries, the sexuality of African slaves was studied by scientists, naturalists and writers. The results deemed the African woman as primitive and therefore more sexually intensive. Interestingly enough, these "studies" which separated the African/"them" from the European/"us"—not just physically, but morally—distorted African sexual agency, and pathologized women's sexuality on the whole. The cult of (white) womanhood was confined to notions of purity, chastity, passivity and prudence. Black womanhood was polarized against white womanhood in the structure of the metaphoric system of female sexuality—the Black woman became closely identified with illicit sex.



sarah bartmann's girlie show

The genitalia of selected African slave women—referred to as "Hottentots"—was examined in order to prove them a primitive species who most likely copulated with apes. According to Sander Gilman, one of many African women placed on display, Sarah Bartmann, referred to as the "Hottentot Venus," is but one example of Black female objectification during early 19th century Europe. Her display formed one of the original icons for Black female sexuality; Bartmann was often exhibited at fashionable parties in Paris, generally wearing little clothing, to provide entertainment. To her audience, she represented deviant sexuality. Reduced to her sexual parts, Ms. Bartmann was showcased for about 5 years until her death at age 25 in 1815. To add insult to injury, her genitalia were dissected and—is to this very day—put on display at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris.

Present day notions of "freed" and "open" sexuality rely specifically on this historically-specific interpretation of Black womanhood.

fuck lea delaria & her big black dildo jokes

question: which is more intimidating? a) a man, b) a big man, c) a big black man

question: rough sex—who are you most likely to get it from? a) an Asian, b) an African

question: what makes Latinos so "hot-blooded"?

The onslaught of dyke sex paraphernalia, in an attempt to overthrow the strictures of

(white) womanhood, reinserts itself by commodifying "otherness" within certain sexual/body practices:

- body piercing, tattoos and scarification are a part of the Modern Primitives (an offensive and loaded term) movement, forms of body adornment inherent within Indigenous and Eastern cultures;

- in *Leatherwomen*, a book of women's sex writings, a (straight-identified) white woman is gang raped by 1 Black and 2 Latina women (never mind that Blacks, Latinos and First Nations form the majority of those incarcerated) who are portrayed as being sexually "deviant" and violent;

- and, in *Love Bites*, a book of lez-sex photography, white dykes fuck each other with big, black dildos.

Talks regarding the representation of women in porn and erotic writings have for too long privileged white gender and sexuality. Unchallenged racism is reflected in both het and queer smut: Black men are reduced to the size and effectiveness of their penises, while Black, Asian, Latina, Arab and Jewish women are viewed as anomalies, exotic treats and fetishes. Stereotypical notions of a person-of-colour's body suggest intense sexual pleasure unknown to the vanilla experience.

cross-over vanillas

Reactionaries may claim censorship over my blatant observations of race and representation. And reactionaries from the pink third space may attempt to regulate how we, as queers-of-colour, should knock boots proper (read: no S/M).

Yet most needed is a level of acknowledgement and social understanding regarding the cultural specificities of sexual expression. Non-sexual examples include how dancehall, rap and Black speech are misinterpreted in the mainstream by non-Black audiences. And how, in porn and other sex-smut, the racialization of Black and Brown people is taken to the nth power and most extreme level. Perhaps what I'm trying to express most is that a lot of the debates presume that we are all white and that the confines of white body culture apply to us all. And this just isn't so.

Stressed here is not a simple trashing of lezzie-fuck culture, but the limitations and myopia of a sex-lib scene that is stuck in the rut of racial ambivalence. What one has the right to fantasize about or sexually impress is not the issue here. The question *How entrenched is that sexual fantasy/practice in the myth of progressive representation and the transcendence of white patriarchal expression?* is key.

Further Reading

Hazel V. Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (London: Harper Collins, 1990).

Sander L. Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992).

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for Doug Wilson

a wall fell down, a field
of muddy bootprints like scattered bricks,
in early spring

then again, clinched
by winter, hard and white as a public toilet

shocked by the headlong rush of green
never before seen, every year, the
spring that never comes, every year

exhausting itself to the bones
of a million wheat, the ochre carcass
asleep on the black earth

then shucked, in autumn filaments
stacked by a few archivists
filing for winter

and again, summer
and again, for us, spring

Something in my Eye

My era shifted like the lurch from safety
to sudden unwellness, or the penis
pushing further to an unexpected depth
without warning, the platform spongy
the mother unrecognizable in evening wear

So my head tracks a cursive
swerve and spreads its reading
deeply across the dank wood
of this book, left through to
right against the grain, particles
floating to reach the eyes
in a splurge of scented sawdust
bearing physical memories
in letter form, hard inflections,
the crafted motes inhaled
in gulping osmosis.

And my eyes too casting off
not a vision precisely but a
fragrance, an outpouring of
every rational substance
once transcribed by time
with the elements of fovea,
iris, sclera, cornea...now
in heaping garlands, in sloppy handfuls
tossed into the disintegrating text
air-borne, chimerical
miasma of pulp and perceptive flesh.

Sleeping With the Enemy

The first lesion
does not appear for some time.
Its quiet mood ripples
below the thin velum
crackling a moment
unalarmed its message
hovering, static
giving way to defining flesh
and the horror of the body
speaking for the rest of me.
We mouth the taste of bodies
numbed and numbered.
We lie with the enemy
and dull the remembered flavour
of animal limbs
that arched our backs
with tidal shocks
receiving every pulse.
Our open mouths shun
the pleasure our pores speak of
delirious corners
and endless human corridors
leading to one place.
We miss the skin's vague contour.
We lie with the enemy
on restless sheets
damp with suspense
mealy with the erasures
of each recent session.
The body is on everything
humid breath through every fiber
the fluid exchange
of sentences, parsed or emended
down to a tender contract.
The push of flesh
furnishes this consoling aftermath.
We are left with this.
But the lambent body
articulates itself
irradiating nothing
leaving the night as chill,
as sanitary.
No one permeates its solitary
uninfected reflection.
You are left with me
and the touch of a rhythmic figure.

Stuart Blackley