

## The Ambivalent Grotesque: Reading Black Women's Erotic Corporeality in Wangechi Mutu's Work

**S**exual and monstrous women's bodies abound in the work of the internationally renowned contemporary New York-based artist Wangechi Mutu. She is known primarily for her collages that craft otherworldly hybrid figures by combining images of models from high fashion magazines, racialized pornography, and ethnographic photographs of African villagers. Her work variously addresses issues of political and gender-based violence, race, and beauty politics by culling, juxtaposing, and troubling figurations of black women's corporeality in visual culture. In the Feminist Futures Symposium held at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) in New York in 2007, she described how a 1992 demonstration at Uhuru Park in Nairobi, Kenya, her hometown, shaped her approach to crafting bodies in her work. The artist was deeply affected by the manner in which a group of elderly women exposed their nude bodies in defiance of their violent harassment by the police, who were attempting to end their demonstration against the detention of their sons as political prisoners. She stated, "The body has been a central part of my work and thinking since. Like a restless, mutating pivot on which almost all my ideas are placed and gravitate" (Mutu 2007). In her presentation, Mutu discussed how her practice is informed by such overtly political and feminist actions, in addition to the unlikely feminisms she found practiced in the all-girl's Catholic school she attended as a child.

Listening to Mutu's Feminist Futures talk in MOMA's online archive, I was struck by statements she made regarding a very different group of women—black models who pose in pornographic magazines. Her comments centered on the representation of women in *Black Tail* and *Player's Girls Pictorial*, two race-themed pornographic magazines she uses in her collages. In describing black pornography at MOMA, Mutu said, "It's incredibly graphic. It's graphic beyond porn of any other ethnicity or race. There's less Photoshop. There are shots that only a gynecologist should

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be looking at. It's just, it's obscene, and it always shocks me too because it goes beyond the point of titillating" (2007). The artist framed the magazines as representative of a no-holds-barred hyperpornography that forgoes aestheticizing Photoshop treatments and focuses on women's splayed vaginas. In comments that preceded this statement, Mutu explained that she draws from pornography because it is a site where she feels that meanings regarding her body as a black woman are constructed and circulated: "what is perceived to be me—the African woman, the African female body" (2007). Thus, it appears that she finds herself implicated negatively by this form of visual production.

Beyond the Feminist Futures talk, the discussion of gender in relation to Mutu's practice has been overwhelmingly framed through issues of sexual violence, exploitation, and trauma suffered by black women, even in the recent scholarship accompanying her first survey exhibition *A Fantastic Journey* (Schoonmaker 2013). These critiques notwithstanding, I find myself ambivalent about whether the meanings of gender generated by her work are indeed limited to those involving harm and suffering. This article explores how the grotesque aesthetics in Mutu's work may conjure ambivalent responses to the erotic presentation of black women's bodies. My position does not suggest that issues of racial, gender, and sexual violence should be ignored but rather that black women's disparate experiences of self-determination and pleasure in sex work should also be accounted for in interpretations of Mutu's image production. To this end I employ a multiperspectival approach that reckons with my own conflicting responses to Mutu's practice and the various stances on sexual representations of blackness articulated by the artist herself and by concerned scholars in gender, race, sexuality, art historical, and visual studies.

This multivocal conversation is anchored by an interview I conducted with Mutu in 2009 that centered on the *Ark Collection*, a 2006 project composed of small-scale collages that combine ethnographic photographs of African women with images of black women from pornographic magazines.<sup>1</sup> This essay emerges from having engaged in this intellectually nuanced interview and later finding myself conflicted upon hearing Mutu's comments during the MOMA talk regarding images of black women in ethnic pornography.<sup>2</sup> In our one-on-one interchange Mutu did not narrate the kind of disgust with black pornography that she expressed at the

<sup>1</sup> This interview was conducted on April 9, 2009, in Brooklyn, New York. Audio recording and transcription are on file with the author.

<sup>2</sup> I listened to the talk after our interview had concluded while undertaking further research.

Feminist Futures symposium. My struggle stems from holding her artwork in great esteem for the powerful way it engages women of color in intimate conversations about gender, race, and sexuality, something exceedingly rare in the mainstream art world, and my concomitant uneasiness with the sex-negativity in reception that often attends the work.

I gaze upon and read the images that Mutu crafts from the standpoint of a woman-of-color feminist from a working-class family. Her work speaks to my positioning as a diasporic Caribbean Latina with roots in the post-colonial spaces of Cuba and Puerto Rico. As a light-skinned *morena*, I understand that I access certain privilege in the racialized aesthetic hierarchies that denigrate black women, especially those who are darker skinned. In previous work (Hernandez 2009) I have reflected on the ways my body has been read through the entwined discourses of “exotic” Latina hypersexuality and the denigration of the racialized working class. It is these experiences that compel me to consider the “complex personhood” (Gordon 1997, 4) of black women who pose in pornographic magazines rather than describing them in relation to Mutu’s work as unilaterally grotesque, disempowered, and denigrated. In addition to scholarship, Mutu’s visual production has also inspired my praxis both as a curator and community arts educator with girls of color.<sup>3</sup> Her work mediates the way I have located my embodied self in a contemporary art world that continues to exclude women, people of color, and working-class communities.<sup>4</sup>

I bring this standpoint to bear specifically on a selection of Mutu’s works that engage the vicissitudes of pleasure and injury in erotic corporeality for black women. They include the 2006 *Ark Collection*, the 2012 video work *Eat Cake*, and several recent collage works. I analyze these images through an interpretive strategy that confronts the ambivalence of the grotesque, which not only critiques racism, colonialism, sexism, and classism but simultaneously provides space for affirmation in sexual representation for women of color—especially for those who do not have

<sup>3</sup> In 2004, I established Women on the Rise! at the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami, a gender-specific outreach project that presents the work of contemporary women artists, including Mutu, to girls and young women ages ten to twenty-five through art workshops that engage participants in critical dialogues about gender, social relationships, and expressive culture. I have curated and cocurated exhibitions featuring women artists at traditional and alternative venues throughout the United States such as Maryland Art Place, Georgia State University’s Welch Gallery, and the Bas Fisher Invitational in Miami, among others.

<sup>4</sup> In concluding her Feminist Futures talk, Mutu noted that she was one of the few women of color participating and read an extensive list of black women art historians, artists, curators, and feminist scholars who were not invited.

class privilege and for those who practice sexual labor. I juxtapose various interpretations so as to read across them, including those that deviate from Mutu's framing of her own work, in order to suggest that her images might, despite her intentions, subtly evoke complex figurations of black women's *pleasure* in sexually explicit corporeality.

These readings are organized into several sections. The first explores the potential class politics of Mutu's assessments of black pornography. The second mobilizes my interview with Mutu to analyze the dynamics of gender, race, and sexual representation in the *Ark Collection* and is followed by an elaboration of the interpretive framework of the ambivalent grotesque. I then turn to an interrogation of black women's erotic corporeality in Mutu's recent collages and conclude by considering how the video work *Eat Cake* more explicitly plumbs the possibilities for black women's power and pleasure in sexual representation as she situates herself in the vulnerable position of erotic self-display. Beyond expanding the standard interpretations of racialized gender in Mutu's practice, tarrying with ambivalence may offer more complex pathways for theorizing sexual freedom, difference, and feminism with the nuance demanded of women of color's varying erotic subjectivities and embodiments.

### **A question of class?**

Perhaps Mutu finds the images of black women in porn debasing and amateurish in contrast to the softer, more glossy, professional-appearing photographs in magazines featuring white women that seem to serve as her point of reference, such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse*? Might her palpable and intense disgust with the display of black porn models' bodies stem from discomfort with their low- and working-class aesthetics? The cheap spandex clothes, Lucite platform heels, conspicuous makeup, tattoos, body hair, ornate acrylic nails, and weaves that adorn them?

Cultural studies scholar Laura Kipnis has theorized the class politics of feminist disgust with porn in her analysis of how the magazine *Hustler* levels critiques at bourgeois moralism and propriety by depicting grotesque bodies that are the antithesis of the glamorized figures in publications such as *Playboy* and *Penthouse*, which seem to be the standards against which Mutu assesses the images of black women in *Black Tail* and *Player's Girls Pictorial*. Kipnis maintains that gestures of disgust are often undergirded by class biases and argues that feminist disgust "is not without a function in relation to class hegemony, and more than problematic in the context of what purports to be a radical social movement" (1992, 378). As an influential upper-class artist invested in challenging representations of

black women as hypersexual, Mutu appears to want to salvage these debauched women and restore their respectability through her manipulation of their images.

In *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography*, Mireille Miller-Young notes the considerable challenges that black women in pornography face not only in gaining respect in the industry *as* black women but also in defending their decision to engage in this form of labor. She writes, “Black women sexual performers and workers have had to confront a prevailing stigma: if all black women are considered to be sexually deviant, then those who use sex to make a living are the greatest threat to any form of respectable black womanhood” (2014, 4). The manner in which Mutu states that the images in ethnic pornography negatively represent her as a black woman reflects Miller-Young’s insight.

Mutu’s own body has been photographed for circulation in mass culture. *Glamour Magazine* published a photograph of the artist along with her two daughters (Branch 2015), and she has appeared in *Vogue* twice (June 2006 and April 2009). In the April 2009 issue of *Vogue* she posed as a majestic and fashion-forward “African mother” displaying her bare pregnant belly (fig. 1). The story, which was shot by celebrated photographer Annie Leibovitz, was titled, “A Fertile Mind” (MacSweeney 2009). These images and their context differ significantly from the thongs and spread-eagle vaginas featured in black porn magazines, which highlights how the traffic of racialized gendered bodies in the realms of elite visual production—such as the glossy high-fashion magazine catering to fantasies of luxury consumption, in contrast to the porn magazine found at the corner store in ethnic urban communities—shape discrepant valuations of women’s bodies through rhetorics of sexual aesthetics: high-fashion glamour versus pornographic trashiness. The streamlined artist’s studio that frames Mutu’s body in the Leibovitz portrait contrasts dramatically with the backdrops against which the women in *Black Tail* and *Player’s Girls Pictorial* are often posed, with their plastic floral arrangements and ornately patterned, hyperfeminine décor.

In the MOMA talk Mutu described her practice of appropriating, disassembling, and reassembling typological depictions of black women as “exorcisms.” Her invocation of the word recalls Pablo Picasso’s description of how he came to conceive of his landmark 1907 painting *Les Femmes d’Alger (O. J. R. M.)*, an iconic primitivist rendering of female prostitutes that is heavily racialized: “It was my very first exorcism painting—yes absolutely!” (Malraux 1976, 11). What is it about women openly displaying and splaying their flesh, prostitutes and porn models, that so drives this quasi-religious desire for purification and banishment?



**Figure 1** Wangechi Mutu, photographed by Annie Leibovitz, April 2009 issue of *Vogue*. Courtesy of Annie Leibovitz/Vogue/Trunk Archive. © Annie Leibovitz. A color version of this figure is available online.

One possible answer: the absence of shame. This absence is signaled by the arms posed suggestively behind the heads of the figures in *Les Dames d'Avignon* and in the spread legs of the black models in the pornographic magazines that serve as Mutu's source material. Such seemingly willing submissions to the attentions of hungry racial, sexual, and gendered desires convey a perverse and troubling abdication of power and subjectivity before a normative gaze.<sup>5</sup> Where Picasso's anxiety stemmed from a troubling encounter with gendered and racial difference (Chave 1994), could Mutu's repulsion toward racialized porn be read as bearing signs of class distinctions? She appears to reference her own work in terms of the politics of class disgust and engages tropes of racialized pornography in order to demonstrate both the harm they pose to black women and her distance from them. However, another reading is possible, one in which Mutu unintentionally reclaims these tropes and exposes their potential erotic and political power for women of color, as can be seen the *Ark Collection*.

<sup>5</sup> My thinking on the politics of sex, power, and normativity here is informed by Bersani (2010).



**Figure 2** Installation view of the *Ark Collection* (2006). A color version of this figure is available online.

### The seductions of the *Ark Collection*

In *Modern Art and the Grotesque*, art historian Frances Connelly claims that “Images gathered under the grotesque rubric include those that combine unlike things in order to challenge established realities or construct new ones; those that deform or decompose things; and those that are metaphoric” (2003, 2). The collages that compose Mutu’s *Ark Collection* exhibit the boundary-crossing and combinatory elements of the grotesque described by Connelly. There is virtually no negative space in the images, no respite for the eye. The source materials are constitutive of the entire collage; there is no outside of representation, as it were. The ethnographic and pornographic fragments of black women’s bodies do not come together to form recognizable faces or bodies, as they do in most of Mutu’s collages. They are borderless. Human body parts and tribal/pornographic backdrops comingle and become almost indiscernible. Mutu arranges the materials in such a way as to entice the viewer to complete or make sense of the collages—but to no avail. The eye is continually lead on.

In most of the pieces Mutu uses the body of a woman from a pornographic photograph as a framing device or outline. The artist fills the contours of the pornographic body within each collage with fragments from *Women of the African Ark*, a popular postcard book containing images of “tribal” African women captured by white photographers Angela Fisher and Carol Beckwith. The sixteen collages of the *Ark Collection* are postcard-sized and exhibited in glass vitrines (fig. 2).

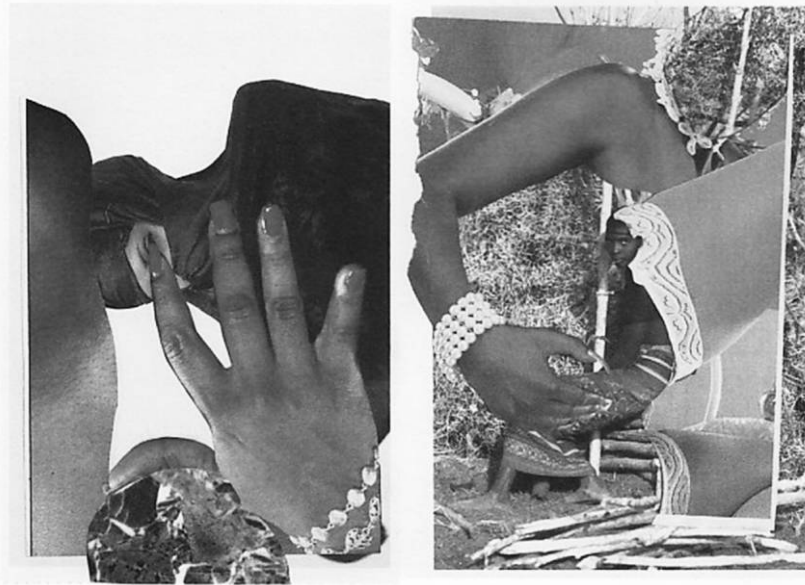
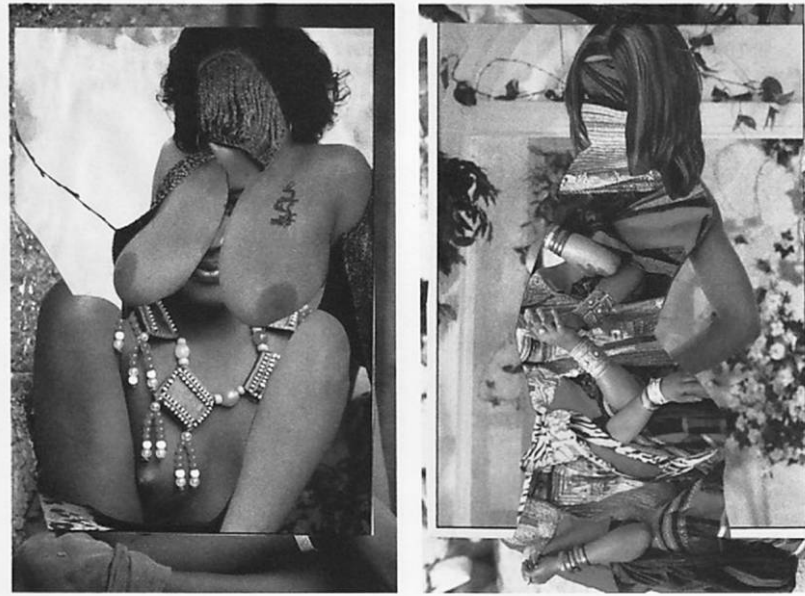
During my visit to her studio to conduct an interview, Mutu opened the drawers of a folio cabinet and retrieved the *Women of the African Ark* postcard book; most of the cards were by then torn out and used in the *Ark Collection*. She then went to a shelf and took down a large coffee-table book, *Africa Adorned*, which also features Angela Fisher's photography. Mutu told me that some of the images were probably staged. Flipping quickly through the pages she noted: "They probably made sure not to photograph anyone in the village who was wearing jeans." The photographs depicted a timeless, static, decorative "African" culture, yet upon Mutu's gaze, the realities that extended beyond the frame were ever-present. Despite the problematic nature of constructing this cultural "authenticity," Mutu described how the images were aesthetically pleasing nonetheless.

The genre of the ethnographic postcard has been a significant site in which women of color have been positioned as sexually deviant in colonial contexts. In his study of erotic picture postcards of Algerian women produced and circulated by French colonists in the early twentieth century, Malek Alloula observes, "The postcard . . . becomes the poor man's phantasm: for a few pennies, display racks full of dreams. The postcard is everywhere, covering all the colonial space, immediately available to the tourist, the soldier, the colonialist" (1986, 4). Mutu's work references the history of imperialist visual culture that often juxtaposed black and white women in ways that sought to highlight the grace and beauty of white femininity against grotesque, matronly, and subservient black women, who were framed as undesirable (Gilman 1985; O'Grady 1992/1994). In discussing this during our interview, Mutu said:

For me [the *Ark Collection*] was about the images that we consume and look at and are okay with of Africa are these incredibly traditional, sort of, specific rural woman who lives within a very orthodox type of community that is far from anything urban, close to and found in areas where nature surrounds. This notion of "that is where Africans are" is still being sold as the truth, so that's what is interesting to me. And on the other end of things, I think that what happens on this side of the Atlantic is that black women are still seen as hypersexualized, they are seen still as quite a lesser standard of beauty than white women.

The artist often veils the sexual figures in the *Ark Collection* in order to destabilize the exoticizing colonialist gaze. For example, the promise of the spread eagle pose indicated by the woman's open legs is thwarted (fig. 3, top collage, left panel), as the ornaments of a "tribal" woman be-





**Figure 3** Wangechi Mutu, *the Ark Collection* (2006): top collage, *Highland Woman, Muslim Woman, Konso Woman, Muslim Woman, Ogaden Market, Hamar Woman, Hamar Couple, Somali Woman (Vitrine 1)*, 2006; vitrine 39 × 61 × 23 inches; bottom collage, *Rashaida Woman Dancing, Rashaida Woman, Konso Woman, Somali Woman, Somali Woman, Afar Woman, Afar Woman, Rashaida Women (Vitrine 3)*, 2006; vitrine 100 × 155 × 58 cm, 39 × 61 × 23 inches. Collection of Adam Sender. Courtesy of the artist. A color version of this figure is available online.

come her skin. Legs donning lacy hosiery anchor the picture plane in this collage (fig. 3, bottom collage, right panel) and contrast with the rough straw and wood of the village depicted in the background. The bodies of the village women in the collage are agitated and caressed by the long, lacquered nails of the porn models—embraces signaling an uneasy representational sisterhood. The *Ark Collection* performs an aesthetically seductive, heavy, and restless troubling. Instead of depicting disfigured, combinatory bodies, the collages, which destabilize the relationship between figure and ground—are such grotesques. As such, the works may be understood as undermining racist assumptions of realism and authenticity while simultaneously establishing space for black women’s pleasure, a pleasure that I also locate in the artist’s pornographic source material.

Issues of *Black Tail* and *Player’s Girls Pictorial* depict black women posing on beds, house interiors, or outdoor backdrops displaying their breasts, buttocks, and vaginas. The models have a range of skin tones, a feature that is uncommon in more mainstream media, which continues to privilege light-skinned black women, and they are often captured in the act of pleasing themselves by touching their clitorises or inserting dildos into their vaginas (fig. 4).<sup>6</sup> The images center on women staging their enjoyment of their own bodies for a target audience of primarily working-class, hip-hop-generation heterosexual black men. In addition to the pictorials, *Black Tail* includes a section for readers’ letters titled “Holla Back!”; “Road Trippin’ At Da Clubs,” which features reports on strip clubs in black communities across the country; interviews with underground rap artists; and “Black Beats,” a section with reviews of hip-hop, R&B, and jazz. In contradistinction to the visual history that posed black women against white women to evidence a deficit of beauty and desirability, the women in these publications pose for an audience of men of color who find black women attractive and titillating.

Although consumers of the magazine likely also include white men with interracial desires, the manner in which I came upon an issue of *Black Tail* demonstrates the variable ways in which pornographic materials are circulated and used. When I told a close friend of mine, a black woman who at the time was in her mid-twenties, about my research on Mutu, she brought a copy of the magazine with her to our next lunch date, saying she had purchased it a long time before at a bodega in a Latino neighborhood in Brooklyn. This exchange can be understood as traffic in what black

<sup>6</sup> This image has been cropped in order to conform to the publisher’s policy on reprint permissions.



**Figure 4** Author scan of *Black Tail* magazine spread. A color version of this figure is available online.

sexualities scholar L. H. Stallings calls “mama’s porn”: “her amassing of juicy sexual gossip, new dances, dirty records and audio files, magazines, books, videos, and vibrators—is accumulated from stores, catalogs, websites, friends, family, or lovers” (2015, 60). Stallings describes how she came to theorize on mama’s porn after reflecting on how she found her single mother’s stash of pornographic videos featuring legendary Latina porn star Vanessa del Rio as a child in the late 1970s. Her book *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures* (2015) highlights the hitherto unacknowledged role that black women have played in the creation and use of pornography that appears to be the sole province of men’s desires. As I flip through page after page of black women performing autoerotic ecstasy in *Black Tail*, the presumed male viewer becomes marginalized and irrelevant in my consumption. My gaze locks on black women’s corporeal jouissance, or pleasure.

I see this jouissance echoed in a collage that depicts two black women in a sensual embrace. One kisses the neck and caresses the chest of the other, who cocks her head back in delight (fig. 5). The piece is unique in the *Ark Collection* for being a sexually explicit image minimally modified by the artist. Although lesbian sexuality is often performed for male arousal in heteronormative pornography, in the alternative context of Mutu’s practice, they may provide pleasure to her sexually diverse audience of women of color in the art world. This collage also prompts me to consider that there may be a sensuous, erotic dimension to Mutu’s engagement with representations of black pornographic models, in the broad sense of these terms. Can the process of collage be understood as one through which



**Figure 5** Wangechi Mutu, the *Ark Collection* (2006): *Highland Woman*, *Muslim Woman*, *Konso Woman*, *Muslim Woman*, *Ogaden Market*, *Hamar Woman*, *Hamar Couple*, *Somali Woman*. Collage on postcards displayed in vitrines, each vitrine 39 × 61 × 23 inches. Collection of Adam Sender. Courtesy of the artist. A color version of this figure is available online.

Mutu touches and comes into intimate contact with these *other* women? A contact across difference that unwittingly complicates the binary between deviant and respectable black womanhood and enables solidarity?

Stallings underscores the stakes of such solidarities when she writes, “Black female cultural producers, in order to create and sustain radical Black female sexual subjectivity, must embrace difference as a foundation without simply reversing the established order that fosters readings of difference as deviance. The stripper, prostitute, video vixen, gold digger, and sexual exhibitionist cannot continue to be the deviant polarity to the working woman, wife, mother, lady, and virgin” (2007, 6). The sensual encounters with difference figured in the *Ark Collection* are somewhat thwarted, however, by the enclosure of the collages within glass cases.

In our interview I asked Mutu about the approach she took to displaying them:

*Jillian Hernandez:* What made you think about using the vitrine, and how did that stage how the viewer was going to interact with the

work? It feels like you are creating a barrier—something protective that they couldn't access.

*Wangechi Mutu:* I didn't think about them so much as a barrier. I thought about the objectification of them and the objectness of them. I wanted these vessels to be a framework around which you were forced to look at them really closely. And I thought about the Ark, the idea of them being an Ark, because they are in pairs, two by two by two.

Mutu's display of the collages in vitrines and the title the *Ark Collection* evoke the "salvage paradigm" of Western collecting, as James Clifford (1987, 121) terms it, and the salvage narrative of the biblical story of Noah and the Ark. The work's title and its presentation indeed connote collection, preservation, objectification, salvaging. Yet what, exactly, is being recovered in these vitrines? Is Mutu trying to rescue black women from representational violence?

Possibly. The artist describes the black women in her pornographic source material as abject, overlooking the ways in which they could be seen as generating pleasure from their presentation, and how the images do not portray their beauty as inferior. By encasing the collages in vitrines and emphasizing their objecthood, Mutu appears to reject the notion that such pictures could express forms of complex personhood. Placing the works in a glass case can be read as an attempt to contain their unwieldiness.

However, the salvage paradigm also works from a conception of and investment in authenticity. Throughout our interview, Mutu not only questioned the authenticity of the ethnographic images we looked at but also presented a nuanced conception of her own position as a transnational subject, describing herself as a character who shifts her "migratory subjectivity" on a day-to-day basis (see Davies 1994, 36). Mutu's acknowledgement of the exploitative history and power relations that have undergirded the production and consumption of ethnographic and pornographic images of black women suggests that she wants to make an intervention into these representations. Yet she does not posit a formula for "good" representations, nor does she frame her work as such, which might evidence a willingness on her part to allow space for alternative readings.

If the *Ark Collection* preserves anything, it is pleasure and play. Pleasure is not antithetical to pain, and the images vacillate between both affective realms: the simultaneous aesthetic pleasures and political problems the artist associates with the images. The pleasure she provides for the viewer,

however, is complicated. It is not the racial pleasure of an ethnographic other representing an entire culture, nor is it the sexual pleasure offered by the ever-available black female body. It is a pleasure drawn from boundary troubling. Mutu's grotesque approach to collage stems from these ambivalent relationships.

In "The Grotesque Image of the Body and Its Sources," a chapter in *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin critiques German scholar G. Schneegans' *The History of Grotesque Satire*, which also centers on the work of the French Renaissance writer François Rabelais, to elaborate his own theorization. Bakhtin takes issue with how Schneegans defines grotesque imagery as employed in the service of satire, thereby failing to take into account what he calls the "deep ambivalence" of the grotesque (1984, 304). Bakhtin argues that the grotesque eventually loses hold of, or becomes "forgetful of its initial satirical goal" (307). The grotesque thus cannot be contained by the narrow moral confines of satire. Bakhtin writes: "Schneegans is forced to admit that even with considerable effort it is impossible to find the satirical orientation in all of Rabelais' exaggeration. He explains this by the very nature of exaggeration, which always tends to transgress its own limits; the author of the grotesque is carried away, is 'drunk' with hyperbole, at times forgetting the true role of exaggeration and losing [her] grip on satire" (307).

The image of the author of the grotesque overcome by the hyperbole it instigates is a productive one for considering Mutu's practice. One can envision the artist in her studio, working from her wide, long table littered with images culled from pornographic and ethnographic sources, snipping and slicing them until they are barely recognizable—making them even more perverse. Although Mutu frames her work through an antiporn position of satire, I suggest that the grotesque compositions she produces can provoke the avowal of black women's pleasure in sexually explicit representation.

Mutu arouses this response through her playful manipulation of culturally loaded source materials. In our conversation about the role of play in the *Ark Collection* she remarked, "I want people to look at [the collages], I want people to start looking to see what the edges are, to look through the body to look for this other image behind the backdrop, I wanted to play with their eye a little bit." Thus, her grotesque aesthetics generate an intimate, quasi-erotic connection between the viewer and the work. The *Ark Collection* illustrates the potential that grotesque aesthetics offer for productive modes of apprehending the nexus of gender, racial, sexual, and class difference through the lens of ambivalence. This aspect

of Mutu's practice leads me to conceptualize the interpretive work performed by what I call the ambivalent grotesque.

### **The ambivalent grotesque**

Bakhtin's theories of grotesque aesthetics advance the notion that the style revels in the popular and low class. In analyzing grotesque figurations of the human body, he notes that they are depicted as open, volatile, and in contact with the world through conjoinment with plant and animal forms—features that recur in Mutu's images. Bakhtin frames the grotesque aesthetics of the body as markedly ambivalent, as they symbolize old and new, death and procreation, the beginning and the end of metamorphoses. Such representations, he argues, conflict with the impenetrable, ordered, and self-regulating (white male) body that came to be exalted in the Enlightenment.

In "Tropes of the Grotesque in the Black Avant-Garde," Kobena Mercer draws from Bakhtin to observe that the grotesque aesthetics found in contemporary work by black artists communicate "semiotic qualities of ambivalence, equivocation, and intertextuality" (2007, 137). Probing how race and representation figure into grotesque optics, Mercer contends that "the social construction of blackness creates a condition of polyvocality in which visual signs of identity and difference are invested with a multitude of contradictory meanings and antagonistic values" (138). He references the depiction of black bodies in Western visual culture as at once horrific and attractive, savage and majestic. The ethnographic and pornographic source materials that Mutu works with are sites that dramatically stage these ambivalent constructions.

Ambivalence describes *mixed* feelings. Therefore, the ambivalent grotesque is not to be understood as a static dichotomous binary but rather as mobile multiplicities of feelings, aesthetics, and interpretations that hold elements in tension that are often at once complementary, contradictory, and coimbricating. Tarrying with the ambivalent grotesque requires humility and a willingness to get "low" and degrade oneself in a Bakhtinian sense: "Degradation here means coming down to earth, the contact with earth as an element that swallows up and gives birth at the same time. To degrade is to bury, to sow, and to kill, simultaneously, in order to bring forth something more and better" (Bakhtin 1984, 21). Thus, in analyzing Mutu's work, my feminist eye is particularly honed in on the bodies of racialized and classed women that are habitually marked as low.

The ambivalent grotesque is the enticement and disgust that Mutu feels when she looks upon sexual and ethnographic representations of black

women and the fluid composition and juxtaposition of bodily images she creates. It is also how a critic such as myself reads the images, with attention to the complexities of pain and pleasure, power and subjection that they carry and communicate for both viewers and producers. This interpretive modality is a fitting approach for analyzing sexual images of women of color from working-class backgrounds because we experience the push and pull of forces of respectability and stereotype critique, along with arousal and delight, in our depictions as (hyper)sexual.<sup>7</sup>

The ambivalent grotesque might also attune feminist scholars to ethical politics that embrace difference across races, genders, classes, and sexualities. In “Towards a Grotesque Phenomenology of Ethical Eroticism,” Sara Cohen Shabot claims that “(Re)creating ourselves in the image of the grotesque might help us be more accepting of our own *flaws* and *surfeit*, as well as those of others. This vantage point may very well save us from the aspiration for perfection and from the will to expunge our own and, more importantly, others’ differences” (2013, 70). Shabot adds that grotesque self-making opens the self to the world and makes one more invested in the “desire for the other’s freedom” (70). This approach to engaging difference is exemplified in Mercer’s reassessment of images of black men created by artist Robert Mapplethorpe, which engages a debate on race and sexual representation that is echoed in the scholarly discourses surrounding racialized sexuality in Mutu’s practice.

In “Just Looking for Trouble: Robert Mapplethorpe and Fantasies of Race” (2000), Mercer discusses Mapplethorpe’s *Black Males* publication of 1982, which featured classically styled photographs of black men against empty backgrounds that centered on their muscular bodies and genitalia. Mercer explains how he had initially expressed his negative criticism of Mapplethorpe’s work in a previous essay titled “Imaging the Black Man’s Sex” (1986), where he argued that the images reinforce the racist fetishism of the black male body defined solely through the penis. Using feminist theories of the gaze, Mercer drew attention to what he found to be the problematic racial politics of the work that was created by a white man, as the dehumanized figure of the hypersexual black “buck” is the product of a white heteropatriarchal imaginary. Later, troubled by the calls for censorship from feminist antipornography activists that attended the traveling retrospective of Mapplethorpe’s work, “The Perfect Moment,” in 1990, Mercer performed a rereading in “Just Looking for Trouble” that

<sup>7</sup> By stereotype critique I mean the labor that women of color perform in confronting and destabilizing the often negative typologies of their racialized gender and sexuality.



situated the artist's practice within the context of his death from AIDS in 1989, right-wing attacks on the National Endowment for the Arts, and the then-burgeoning alliance between antipornography feminists and conservative politicians.

As a black man, Mercer identified with the subjects being sexually presented in *Black Males* upon his initial encounter with the work. However, his subject position also elicited other registers of meaning. As a *queer* black man, Mercer concedes that his negative responses could include envy and rivalry (2000, 470). In describing the contradictory nature of his engagement with Mapplethorpe's images of black men, he states: "In revising my views, I have sought to open the question of ambivalence, because rather than simply project it on to the author (by asking whether he either perpetuates or challenges racism) one needs to take into account how different readers derive different readings not only about race but also about sexuality and desire, in Mapplethorpe's work" (470–71).

Interpreting artworks that deal with contentious issues of race, gender, sexuality—and, I would add, class—through the lens of ambivalence allows for interpretations that are open ended enough to facilitate difficult dialogue about the politics of representation without foreclosing debate or limiting readings of image production to questions of whether or not they are racist, sexist, and so on, as Mercer demonstrates in his discussion of how the complex subject positions of artists and viewers destabilize the authority of any one reading. In so doing, he shows how such images can be simultaneously both troubling and affirming, both painful and pleasurable to consume.<sup>8</sup> Mercer's reevaluation of Mapplethorpe's work performs the understanding across difference that Shabot frames as a major aspect of grotesque ethical eroticism, as he shifts his position to consider Mapplethorpe's experiences as a vilified gay man and the stakes of the feminist sex debates of the time.

Black feminist theorists such as Patricia Hill Collins (2004) and artists such as Wangechi Mutu have voiced their objections to sexually explicit representations of black women, as many reproduce racist typologies about their innate hypersexuality. In *The Black Body in Ecstasy: Reading Race, Reading Pornography* (2014), Jennifer Nash conducts an extensive reading of black feminist theorizing on sexual politics and representation. Nash particularly engages the scholars who have generated what she terms the "archives of pain" (27) that comprise canonical black feminist theo-

<sup>8</sup> My thinking here is also informed by Isaac Julien (1994), Celine Parreñas Shimizu (2007), and Tan Hoang Nguyen (2014).

rizing on visual representation. They include, among others, “controlling images” (Collins 2009, 7) and “pornotroping” (Spillers 1987, 67), which, in different ways, frame the realm of the visual as patently dehumanizing for black women through the historical reduction of their corporeality to an objectified status as (knowable and violable) flesh.

Noting that these theories often center on the dangers and pains that attend black women’s sexual coming into visual discourse, Nash writes that much of this thinking “presumes that dominant representation injures Black female flesh and that Black women’s pleasure in representation comes through self-representation focused on restoring Black women’s wholeness, or through an active resistance of dominant representation’s violence” (2014, 57). I am interested in how Mutu’s collages can present black women’s pleasure in ways that exceed tropes of injury precisely by embracing a *lack* of wholeness through the grotesque juxtapositions and disarticulations of black women’s bodies in her work. In so doing she highlights what Nicole R. Fleetwood terms the visible seam that “works through the subtlety of a stitch that sutures but leaves visible the wound that it mends. It is a technique and a discursive intervention to address narrative erasure and to insert a troubling presence in dominant racializing structures” (2011, 9).

The visible seam discussed by Fleetwood is materialized in Mutu’s art through the medium of collage, a practice that feminist artists have drawn upon to trouble typological representations of women and to (re)present gendered subjectivity with complexity (Raaberg 1998). In discussing her work, Mutu has acknowledged Romare Bearden, an African American artist rarely mentioned in mainstream art historical studies of collage, as an important predecessor. Mutu has shared that she is inspired by how Bearden used photcollage to disrupt the truth status of photography during the Harlem Renaissance and to “create visually stunning narratives of black lives and dreams” (Mutu and Firstenberg 2003, 141). By deploying the medium of collage, Mutu presents black women’s erotic corporeality as never fixed, never knowable, always in the processing of becoming, as exemplified in her recent collage work.

### **Fantastic grotesques**

Jared Richardson’s exploration of grotesquerie and Afrofuturism in the work of contemporary black women artists, including Mutu, posits that “the representation of black women’s grotesquerie affronts issues of propriety by negotiating between several extremes: hypervisibility versus

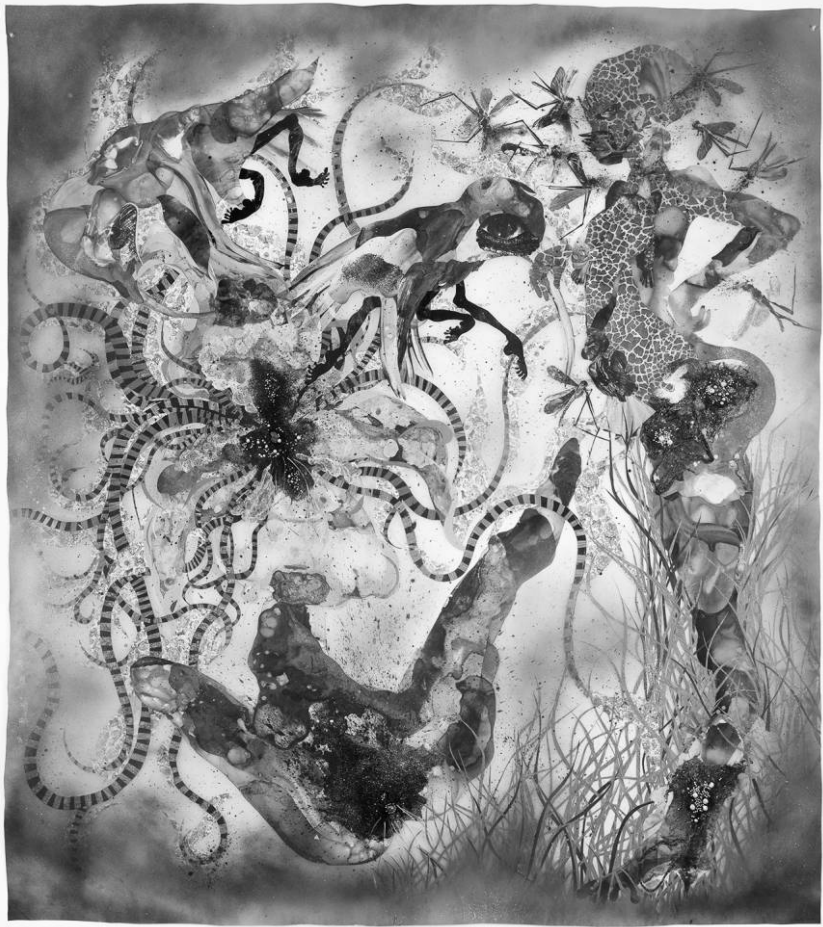
unsightliness and essentialism versus fluidity” (2012, 22). Mutu’s creative negotiations of the extremes of essentialism and fluidity are staged in recent works that were on view in the survey exhibition *A Fantastic Journey* that traveled the United States from 2013 through 2014. For example, the figure in *Humming* (fig. 6) stands with her hand cradled in the small of her back, which draws the eye to her voluptuous curves, which are embellished with animal-printed paper, pearls, glitter, and other sumptuous materials. Although the outline of her form recalls nineteenth-century images of so-called Hottentot tribal women from the Eastern Cape of South Africa, which centered on their buttocks, she looks back at the Western gaze with a knowing grimace and side-eye. This is an embodiment that she assumes on her own, otherworldly terms. She is from the future, a fugitive from histories of violence, and harbinger of new modes of living bodies and space.

The impact of the image is heightened by the vitalist kind of abstraction Mutu has employed in her more recent work. The brushstrokes and colors seem to have their own teeming energy and force. The backgrounds of the work are light and ethereal while simultaneously tactile. The glittery mounds she creates on the surface of the images exude a kind of perverse and excessive fecundity: life seems to be incubating and growing orgasmically on the surface. Walking through the exhibition was a profoundly haptic experience, as the walls were covered with protruding tree-like forms created with felt (which also looks like hair) and packaging tape, transforming the cold and rigid walls of the museum into a warm, dark, organic, and enticingly touchable space. The installation reflects what Bettina Papenburg observes as Mutu’s reordering of the hierarchy of the senses by evoking touch, smell, and sight simultaneously through the carnality of grotesque aesthetics (2013, 167).<sup>9</sup>

In this art space-turned-incubation chamber hung the work *Root of All Eyes* (fig. 7), a masterwork that communicates women of color’s erotic power. The large-scale collage, measuring 96 × 58 inches, features a cyborg woman whose dismembered body is fashioned from the culling of found images of machine parts, organic materials, entrails, and fragments of magazine photographs.<sup>10</sup> The figure faces the viewer frontally while seated upon a throne of mangrove-like plants, with her shapely legs crossed. Her body

<sup>9</sup> This article diverges from Papenburg and Richardson in that I look specifically at the role of pornography and class in Mutu’s figurations of the grotesque.

<sup>10</sup> See Smith (2009) for an extensive discussion of Mutu’s collage work and feminist cyborg theory.



**Figure 6** Wangechi Mutu, *Humming* (2010). Mixed-media ink, paint, glitter, synthetic pearls, collage on Mylar, 94 × 79 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York. A color version of this figure is available online.

is held up by a small figure at the bottom of the picture plane, which recalls the iconic image of the Mexican Virgen de Guadalupe supported by a male cherub at her feet.

Mutu's cyborg woman is at once fleshy, inorganic, futuristic, and ancient. In *Root of All Evils*, Mutu goes full circle, blending the Catholic imagery of her girlhood, in the form of the halo-like Virgin Mary mandorla surrounding the figure, with fragments of high-fashion, pornographic, and ethnographic imagery. Here Eve, whose transgression in the Garden of Eden has been framed as the cause of women's moral downfall and sexual deviancy, holds court. Her mutilated, curvy, and majestic body reigns over



**Figure 7** Wangechi Mutu, *Root of All Eyes* (2010). Mixed-media ink, paint, collage on Mylar, 96 3/4 × 58 inches. Courtesy of the artist and Gladstone Gallery, New York. A color version of this figure is available online.

the dystopian landscape in the background, as she seems to indifferently survey the viewer through her darkened sunglasses. The figure exudes seduction through her plump open mouth and voluptuous body despite her grotesquerie (as a dismembered arm gushes out blood). These recent collages are distinct from earlier pieces in the way the gazes of the figures in the newer work more directly engage the viewer while conveying Mutu's trademark ambivalence of beauty and violence, sensuality and horror.

In this the images perform what Alexander G. Weheliye, drawing from black feminist scholars like Spillers, describes as the work of black en-fleshment or "*habeas viscus*" as that which "insists on the importance of miniscule movements, glimmers of hope, scraps of food, and the interrupted dreams of freedom found in those spaces deemed devoid of full human life (Guantanamo Bay, internment camps, maximum security prisons, Indian reservations, concentration camps, slave plantations, or colonial outposts, for instance)" (2014, 12). Weheliye's intervention into theoretical discourses on biopolitics and bare life complicate notions of agency to account for the "deformations of freedom" that exist outside established frameworks of resistance in the "fleshy surplus" of black corporealities (2). Mutu's work can be understood as imaging the disfigurements of these fleshy surpluses to reveal black women's freedoms even as she points to their experiences of subjugation. These messy (and attractive) flesh politics come to play in a dramatic moving image work in which Mutu uses her own body to express the ambivalent grotesque of black women's erotic corporeality beyond the binaries of pleasure and violence, resistance and capitulation.

### **Conclusion: Getting low or "getting down to get over"**

Mutu's 2012 video work *Eat Cake* generates a "dirty" representation of black women's embodiment that appears to mark a departure from the artist's previous ideas regarding black women's erotic representations, as she places herself in the vulnerable position of performing sexuality before the camera. As artist and cultural theorist Lorraine O'Grady has noted in her discussion on the limits of critiques of imperialism for expressing black women's subjectivity, "Critiquing *them* does not show who *you* are: it cannot turn you from an object into a subject of history. The idea bears repeating: self-expression is not a stage to be bypassed. It is a discrete moment that must precede or occur simultaneously with the deconstructive act" (1992/1994). *Eat Cake* indicates an important shift in Mutu's practice, as it conveys both self-expression and critique in ways I have not observed in her previous projects.

The black-and-white video opens with a shot of a simple wooden chair placed on the base of a large, elegant tree. The breeze drifts. All is quiet save for the sounds of birds chirping. A three-tiered cake with glossy chocolate frosting appears in front of the chair, on the ground, and is tented by an intricate piece of white lace. The artist enters the frame wearing a long, billowy skirt with ruffled layers and a lacy white long-sleeved top. A flower is pinned on the side of her head, accenting her long, thick black hair. The camera zooms in on her long acrylic nails and the high, clear Lucite platform shoes on her feet (the “clear heels” that black comedian Chris Rock has described as indicative of a sexually deviant woman [*Never Scared* 2004]). The softness of the rather subdued feminine clothing is dramatically offset by the conspicuous nails and shoes, which are often signifiers of women of color in porn and strip cultures. It seems that Mutu is the queen for whom the throne and cake are staged.

The artist does not speak, she appears to be in a kind of trance, and she makes ceremonial gestures with her arms while seated on the chair facing the cake. She then removes its lace covering and plunges her hands into the pastry, filling her mouth with chocolate, smothering it on her hair and face. Mutu seems driven by an insatiable hunger, and the muted sounds of her eating are drowned out by bird noises, which mark her performance of consumption as evidencing an animalistic need. At one point the artist crouches down by the cake on the ground with her legs spread open. Her skirt is hiked up to her thick thighs, and the cake is positioned near her crotch, giving her actions a connotation of sexual indulgence (fig. 8). Here the artist quite literally engages in the productive self-degradation of the grotesque that Bakhtin described as a form of coming “down to earth” (1984, 240) to create something “new and better” (62). In this case the something better is a more complex figuration of black women’s erotic corporeality and subjectivity. The installation of the video reinforces this getting low. In exhibition *Eat Cake* is projected directly onto the floor, rather than upon the wall, so that one needs to look down (upon her) in order to view it. The piece is framed by a raw industrial wooden shipping pallet upon which a roughly stitched patchwork of white cloth is overlaid as a projection screen, giving the video a textured, tactile element that augments the carnality Mutu evokes in the performance.

The video recalls representations of black women in nineteenth-century European photography, particularly a well-known daguerreotype circa 1855 of a young black woman (fig. 9) that is discussed by Deborah Willis and Carla Williams in their book *The Black Female Body* (2002). The image captures the woman posed nude against a plush sofa that is overlaid with a white lace covering. Her head is wrapped in cloth in a manner similar to



**Figure 8** Wangechi Mutu, *Eat Cake*, 2012. Still from video installation. Courtesy of the artist, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Gladstone Gallery, and Victoria Miro Gallery.

that of orientalist nineteenth-century images of Arab women, such as Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *La Grande Odalisque* of 1814. The photo centers on a close-up of the young woman's body that crops parts of her legs out of the frame to privilege a view of her vagina. She reclines on the couch with a faraway gaze and soft smile. One hand is posed behind her head in *Demaiselles d'Avignon* fashion, while the other rests against her inner thigh with two fingers pointing toward her clitoris and vaginal lips, suggesting masturbation.

Willis and Williams articulate a reading of the photograph that shares a similar perspective to that of Mutu's interpretation of the images of women in black pornographic magazines. They note that although the daguerreotype itself is an expensive luxury item due to the considerable costs involved in producing them at the time, the image nonetheless represents the black woman as "cheap" and less valuable because of the lack of artistic affects and simple backdrop. Like Mutu, they view the lack of aestheticization as suggesting the black woman's perceived base "carnality" (2002, 51). Willis and Williams center on the white lace in the image, which is also foregrounded in Mutu's video, to further elaborate their critique: "The same type of crudely manufactured lace appears in numerous French photographs of nudes from the same period, but rarely with such lack of arrangement. Though this is a machine-made fabric, lace making was lower-class women's work, and it thus has a symbolic significance as the backdrop on which she rests. In spite of its traditional iconographic meaning, this lace does not connote innocence, gentility, beauty, or finery.





**Figure 9** Unknown maker, French. Nude study of a black female. c. 1855. Daguerreotype, 21.1 × 17.1 cm. Courtesy of the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. A color version of this figure is available online.

Like the woman displayed, it is to be understood as cheap, decorative, and readily available” (51). Such readings demonstrate how class politics shape the appraisal of sexually explicit images of black women as affronting. Class values significantly frame assessments of aesthetics, or a perceived lack thereof, as generating the harm in the representation. In donning and “fucking with” the white lace that drapes over her body and the chocolate

cake in the video, Mutu positions herself in the pictorial realm of the black feminized, sexualized working class.

Notably, in a single-authored essay about the 1850s-era daguerreotype titled “The Erotic Image Is Naked and Dark,” Williams articulates a more ambivalent view of the picture, in which she suggests that the woman may have played an active role in its creation (1994, 129). Considering the significance of this nineteenth-century black woman captured in an act of autoeroticism, she writes, “the act of masturbation, simulated or real, suggests a power to please one’s self that is not unlike the act of self-portraiture, which is similarly self-sufficient, highly personal, and exploratory” (131). The images of masturbating black women found in Mutu’s pornographic source materials can be understood as communicating a similar power. Thus, engaging the art object *and* the pornographic image with complexity can enrich the understandings of both while complicating the hierarchy of “high” versus “low” culture that is often mobilized to censor the work of feminist artists, queer artists, and artists of color who generate sexual content.

Mutu provokes interpretations of gendered hypersexuality and consumption by titling her piece *Eat Cake*. The artist reworks the statement notoriously attributed to the Queen of France Marie Antoinette, “Let them eat cake,” to give it a more active connotation—it becomes a command. Mutu’s performance plays off notions of excess consumption through eating and through highlighting the noises of the jewelry she wears in the piece—the metallic clinking of the numerous bangles that adorn her arm.

The vicissitudes of power and powerlessness that marked Marie Antoinette’s experiences take a racial valence in *Eat Cake* as well, as Mutu seems both out of control and ritualistically in control of her actions. The cake is imbued with power and appears to symbolize the ambivalent racialization of black women as grotesque and alluring, delicious and debased. Her eating seems to produce both gratification and pain, as there are moments in the video when she rests her head on her arms and rocks back and forth, appearing to feel nauseous. At the close of the video, Mutu walks into a body of water near the trees and washes the sticky cake off her hands and nails (fig. 10).

In examining the fetishization of soap in late nineteenth-century England that emerged in tandem with colonization projects in Africa, Anne McClintock describes how Africans were framed as dirty and undomesticated, lacking in appropriate hygiene, in an effort to justify their violent subjugation (1995, 226). In conjuring the gendered deviance of Marie Antoinette and the colonial framing of Africans as dirty, *Eat Cake* seizes on racist tropes concerning the material, irrational, and sexual excesses of



**Figure 10** Wangechi Mutu, *Eat Cake*, 2012. Still from video installation. Courtesy of the artist, Susanne Vielmetter Los Angeles Projects, Gladstone Gallery, and Victoria Miro Gallery.

black women and takes them to critical extremes through her gender-nonconforming spectacle of slovenly eating. The artist's ritualistic cleansing at the close of the video signals an expellation and ablation of these constructions and is perhaps responding to the disturbing spectacle of the Swedish minister of culture eating from a cake fashioned as a gruesome caricature of an African woman (the genital area of the body in particular) in 2012.<sup>11</sup> The scene of the black woman's body adorned with aesthetics of underclass hyperfemininity (Lucite heels, lace, long acrylic nails, copious jewelry), coupled with performative monstrosity, offers a representation that is radical in its unwieldy grotesque ambivalence. For Mutu, a climax has been reached, the body is cleansed, and the black woman prepares to fashion, feed, and please herself again.

Watching the artist crouch down on the ground by the cake and eat it elicits feelings of desire and disgust, pleasure and danger—the ambivalent grotesque. The ambivalent grotesque argues that there are always multiple modes of engaging with sexual representations of women of color. Mutu, Willis, and Williams are right to point out that black women have not been viewed as valuable enough in the Western imaginary to warrant aesthetic working-over in erotic representation. But what kind of power

<sup>11</sup> The cake was created by Afro-Swedish artist Makode Aj Linde to comment on female circumcision and commemorate the Swedish Arts Organization's seventy-fifth birthday and World Art day. It was critiqued in critical race and black feminist circles (Carr, Mhangami, and Asumadu 2012; Mackey 2012).

would such a makeover enable? Perhaps, alternatively, this low aesthetic can be understood as having the unintended effect of opening an incipient form of sexual freedom for black women beyond the gendered confines of class, even within the constraints of white heteropatriarchy.<sup>12</sup> As Miller-Young argues about the stakes of reading black women's sexual labor and representation in early twentieth-century pornographic stag films: "This kind of self-display shows an unruly desire to cross boundaries and to transgress social rules. By refusing the call by black social reformers and political activists to make themselves into images of moral and respectable womanhood as a counter to black women's stigmatized, hypervisible sexuality, some black pornographic actresses might have exhibited their sexualities on different terms—terms that understood their refusal to veil their expressive sexuality or forego their sex work" (2014, 64). The ideal of respectability to which Miller-Young refers was significantly elaborated through a black middle- and upper-class (and aspiring) discourse, and it is a construction that continues to shape contemporary debates over representations of black women in visual culture.

Art historian Judith Wilson notes that "For much of the two-hundred-year history of fine art produced by North American blacks, the chief reaction was avoidance of one of high art's favorite categories—the nude" (1983, 114). In her exploration of Bearden's use of pornography in his collages to figure black women's eroticism, which she critiques as voyeuristic and problematic in its romanticism of sex work, Wilson also finds that bringing low pornographic imagery up to the site of high art constituted a form of "getting down to get over"—"getting down," in this instance, in the sense of shedding inhibitions and risking descent into uncharted depths in order to transcend (or 'get over') existing cultural barriers" (1983, 119). Drawing from Wilson, I suggest that Mutu's *Eat Cake* can be understood as a project in which she "gets down to get over" by engaging in a critical form of Bakhtinian self-degradation that is generative of more complex representations of black women's erotic corporealities and subjectivities. The ambivalent grotesque perceives the low, tense, and sometimes titillating space between pleasure and peril as a potential site for women of color's erotic self-determination. In giving these mixed feelings visual form, Wangechi Mutu's work provokes more imaginative and multilayered understandings of black women's erotic corporealities and subjectivities.

*Ethnic Studies Department and Critical Gender Studies Program  
University of California, San Diego*

<sup>12</sup> My thinking here is informed by Cathy J. Cohen's notion of "deviance as resistance" (2004) and by Angela Y. Davis's *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism* (1998).

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