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**Profiles of the Black Venus:
Tracing the Black Female Body in
Western Art and Culture -
From Baartman to Campbell**

Terry M. T. Provost

A Thesis

In

The Humanities Programme

**Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
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Abstract

Profiles of the Black Venus: Tracing the Black Female Body in Western Art and Culture - From Baartman to Campbell

**Terry M.T. Provost, Ph.D.
Concordia University, 2001**

During the Enlightenment, in the midst of the Trans-Atlantic slave era, the Hottentot Venus became an icon of racial, gender and ethnic difference, and continues to have a strong presence in contemporary western media. In 1810, Saartjie Baartman (1790-1815), a young Khoikhoi from South Africa, was one of the first named women to enliven this steatopygic allegory. Since Baartman, the subsequent transformations of the Black Venus circumscribe the Black female body in problematic ways. The thematic motifs of the bestial, sensual, savage and hypersexed persist in contextualising the body of the Black Venus in contemporary depictions. Why is the profile still so oft-reproduced in the west? What is the fascination with the unclothed Black female physique? What does the re-diffusion of the Black Venus as a prototype achieve in cultures that claim diversity as part of their national make-up? And what does this reproduction say about the changes of political structures regarding the representation and appropriation of the colonised?

Using postcolonial theory, Black feminist theory, and semiotics, this analysis investigates the politics of representation of the Black Venus. Various versions—historical and contemporary—are examined as systems of repetition and ambiguity that allow racist and derogatory stereotypes of Black women to be reproduced. Methodological perspectives that treat race, gender, corporeality and ethnicity are employed to scrutinise the different processes of the making of the Black Venus—from conceptualisation of the corporeal allegory to its final production as part of material

culture. The approach is interdisciplinary, considering visual and textual works from different timeframes.

Calling for a critical, politicised study of the aesthetics of the Hottentot and Black Venus, this study also theorises the ways in which racist and sexist ideologies from the colonial era have become increasingly normalised. Especially examined are how fixity and transformation occur in imagery, and how the repetition and dissemination of the Black Venus impact on the social reality of Black women and the imaginary of the White mainstream.

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I am so incredibly elated to have finally leaped over this dissertational hurdle. Life can only get better and sweeter from here on. . .

Dedications

To my family, -

Past and present.

In memory of Saartjie Baartman

Each individual must develop a high political consciousness in order to understand how this System enslaves us all and what actions we must take to bring about its total destruction.

*-Frances M. Beal, *Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female*(1969:396)*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures		xi
Introduction	-	1
Chapter 1 - Continuity of the Black Venus		9
-	Impact of the First Encounter	9
-	Baartman, the Person	13
-	Profiling Representation	17
-	Enslavement, Class, Finances	20
-	Repetition in Aesthetic Discourse	25
-	Descent Through Continuity: The Steatopygous Body	33
-	Contrastive Bodies	37
PART I – BLACK VENUS IN THE MAKING		
Chapter 2		
The Violence of the Text:		
Wording the Other, Bestialising Beauty		45
-	Race Un/Articulated	47
-	Tautologies: Concept, Word, Illustration	50
-	Recoding Skin, Recoding Nakedness	56
-	Archetyping the Hottentot Venus	62
-	The Hottentot Venus as Colonial Therapy	65
Chapter 3		
(Hetero)Grafting Colour onto the Female Body:		
Rereading Venus Iconography in Black and White		69
-	Background: Venus, The <i>Light</i> (Pre)Christian Goddess	72
-	The Neo/Platonic Nude	80
-	Venus Blackened in the Romantic Era:	
-	An Erroneous/Erogenous Matter of Exaggeration	83
-	The Female Allegory Vulgarised by Black Epiderma	84
PART II – MODERNISING BLACK VENUS		
Chapter 4		
The (Im)memorial Image of the Black Venus: The Stereotype		94
-	After Baartman	94
-	Madame Josephine, The Venus of Jazz	104
-	Other Sightings/Citings of the Black Venus	107
Chapter 5		
Crossing Cultures: Black Goddesses in		
the Multicultural Canadian Context		114
-	The Feminist Critique of Male-Conceived Femininity	116
-	Primitivism and Its Conflations	119
-	Deifying the Body	121
-	The Politics of Art in <i>Multicultural</i> Canada	131

Closing Remarks		134
Works Cited		138
-	Books/Articles/Films	138
-	Newspaper Articles	149
-	Catalogues	149
-	Archival Sources	150
-	Primary Sources	150
-	Internet Sources	151
-	Museological/Documentation Centres	152
-	Figures	152
Figures		155
Appendices		184
-	Appendix A	185
-	Appendix B	186
-	Appendix C	187
-	Appendix D	188

List of Figures

Figure 1. Saartjie Baartman as <i>La Belle hottentote</i> c.1812.	156
Figure 2. Naomi Campbell as <i>La Vénus au voile</i> c.1995. Mario Testino.	157
Figure 3. Detail of Saartjie Baartman c.1815. Leon de Wailly.	158
Figure 4. <i>Black Venus</i> c.1957. Margaret Burroughs.	159
Figure 5. <i>Birth of Venus</i> c.1484-1486. Alessandro Botticelli.	159
Figure 6. <i>Voyage of the Sable Venus</i> c.1801. W. Grainger.	160
Figure 7. Advertisement for Storm King Whiskey c.1868.	160
Figure 8. <i>La Vénus hottentote</i> c.1814.	161
Figure 9. <i>The Ball of Duchess du Barry</i> c.1829.	161
Figure 10. Detail from <i>Funerary Relief: Sacred dance performed during an Isiac ceremony</i> c.200 A.D., Ariccia (Rome).	162
Figure 11. <i>The Venus of Willendorf</i> c. 30,000 B.C.	163
Figure 12. <i>Olympia</i> c.1865. Édouard Manet.	164
Figure 13. Bo Derek as Jane bathed by a Black woman c.1981. John Derek.	165
Figure 14. <i>The Bath</i> c.1880-1885, Jean-Léon Gérôme.	166
Figure 15. Detail from "Park and Ride" fashion spread c.2001. Xevi.	167
Figure 16. <i>Alek Wek. Los Angeles</i> c.1998, photo by Herb Ritts.	168
Figure 17. March/April cover of <i>PhotoPlus</i> c.1999.	168
Figure 18. Detail from website.	168
Figure 19. Cover of François Le Vaillant's travelogue of Cap de Bonne Espérance. c.1791.	169
Figure 20. Revised cover of François Le Vaillant's travelogue of Cap de Bonne Espérance. c.1883.	169
Figure 21. <i>The Orang-Outang carrying off a girl</i> c.1795.	170
Figure 22. Image of man and woman (untitled) in George Leclerc de Buffon's <i>Histoire Naturelle</i> .	171

Figure 23. <i>L'Homme et La Femme</i> c.1853. Frontispiece of the revised edition of de Buffon's <i>Histoire Naturelle</i> .	172
Figure 24. <i>Allegory of Time and Lust</i> c.1545. a.k.a. <i>Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time</i> . By Agnolo Bronzino .	173
Figure 25. Black Madonna from Nurie, Spain. a.k.a. The Queen of the Pyrenees [mediaeval relic. date unknown].	174
Figure 26. Isis nursing Horus.	175
Figure 27. Madonna and Child with Angels c.1534-1540. a.k.a. Madonna with the Long Neck.	176
Figure 28. <i>Sleeping Venus</i> c.1510. By Giorgione.	177
Figure 29. <i>Venus of Urbino</i> c.1538. By Titian.	177
Figure 30. Josephine Baker with 'count' Pepito Abatino c.1926.	178
Figure 31. 12 inch replica of Toukie. c.1975. Jean-Paul Goude.	179
Figure 32. <i>Venus</i> . centre panel of triptych <i>Another Spring (after Botticelli's Primavera)</i> c.1982. Hilda Woolnough.	180
Figure 33. <i>Les Demoiselles d'Avignon</i> c.1907. Pablo Picasso.	181
Figure 34. <i>Lives of Lizzie</i> . triptych c.1990. Katarina Thorsen.	182
Figure 35. Exhibition announcement for Katarina Thorsen's Exhibition "I Love Titty."	183

Introduction

Attitudes regarding racism, diversity and multiculturalism continue to change the sociopolitical climate of contemporary cultures in the west. Yet the persistent reproduction of certain images from the Trans-Atlantic slave era of the early 1800s to the present, such as the Black Venus, demonstrates that colonial racism and sexism have re-articulated the Black female body in new complexly ambiguous forms of debasement and violence. "Profiles of the Black Venus: Tracing the Black Female Body in Western Art and Culture – From Baartman to Campbell" calls for an urgency in understanding how colonial racism and sexism thrive in protean forms of representation. The thesis urges readers to rethink and to re-assess how the Hottentot Venus as a colonial image has been diffused through the years, to become a neocolonial icon and a subliminal fixture in the contemporary western imaginary

Insofar as certain theorists imply that the non-visibility or the clothedness of the body is a response to these problematic representations (Wiegman 1995: 6; Chancy 1997: 38), it is still visual and textual images of Black female corporeality that bombard western media in the twenty-first century, and have an influential presence in culture. Open-ended with a focus on visual and cursive imagery, this thesis invites readers to ponder ways for the Black Venus as a carnal hyper-racialised sign to be mobilised from its derogatory signification. The objectives of the thesis are: 1) to politicise the discussion of how the dissemination of the Black Venus operates in current times, 2) to trace how the Black female body, signified as a steatopygic or deified allegory, functioned in previous times, and 3) to study how the reiteration of this sign concurrently reinforces White supremacist ideologies about the Black female body and the social internalisation of Black female alterity as negative and subhuman on a collective and individual scale.

Often portrayed in profile or by exaggerated corpulence, the Hottentot Venus is the multiply stigmatised body that magnifies racial, gender and corporeal alterity at the expense of stamping out the face of person. Personhood and depersonalisation are thus a channel of psycho-political and philosophical inquiry. The processes of re-defining particular alterities as derogative at different moments in history and of obliterating human identity with new conventions are key to how this icon can be both fixed thematically and transformed aesthetically. This is the *modus operandi* of the Black Venus: the body wearing the fiction of allegory and signifying individual identity becomes a dynamic site of contestation. Thus studying the textual and visual languages of the Black Venus from their conception as abstract idea to their materialisation in different mediums is how I bridge, yet complicate, fixity and transformation as they script the body as person and thing. In connecting Saartjie Baartman (1790-1815) to Naomi Campbell (1970-)¹ as *La Vénus au voile* (Figs.1-2), this analysis creates a critical tension by underlining the likenesses between the colonial past of the Hottentot Venus and the neocolonial present that stages the new variants of the Black Venus. This tension shows that hegemonic fixity of certain stereotyped subjects can change, but nevertheless resist radicalisation.

Comprehending thematic fixity entails examining the Black Venus in a time- and culture-specific context. Baartman is situated as the archetypal Hottentot Venus of the early nineteenth century, a persona solidified by the ideologies and practices of slavery and Euro-colonialism. Though theories from Carl Jung's psychology are employed to explain her as the blueprint of 1810, the concept developed of the archetype is not Jungian, but based on specific ethnic populations being named and given a particular semiotic currency by colonial hegemony in the slave era. If anything,

¹ "Mr. Showbiz," <http://mrshowbiz.go.com/celebrities/people/naomicampbell/index.html>; "Naomi Campbell pictures wallpapers pics," http://www.toppics4u.com/naomi_campbell.

Jung's concept of the archetype originating from a transcendent source collapses when race and its socially construed definitions are shown as arbitrary conventions.

My reason for privileging race is because of its frequent suppression in theoretical equations that deal with the principle social structures governing western culture. Inserted into the gender equation, race uncovers the normalising biases of Whiteness in the epistemological models of the feminist mainstream. Discussing Black ontology in *Blackness Visible*, Charles W. Mills identifies race as a political system that encompasses the control of knowledge, economic wealth and political privilege (1998: 78-79). And the physical traits of bodies were indeed directly implicated in this system by phenotypic differentiation. Says Mills:

... of all human bodies, blacks' are the farthest from the Caucasoid somatic norm, not just in color but also in hair texture and facial features. So whereas... other races have on occasion been seen as physically attractive, sexually "exotic," the black body has usually been portrayed in grotesque and negative terms, caricatured and denigrated in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century illustrations of European travelers' tales, the later representations of "scientific" racism... (1998: 78-79)

In calling race a political system, Mills is naming a superstructure which, until quite recently, has been denied legitimacy in contemporary thought. This system flourished significantly from the physical differences of the body. The inventing of the body of the Black Venus was therefore an offshoot of the political system of race proliferating under European imperialism.

Interdisciplinary in nature, my analysis draws on a methodology which diverges from that of traditional art history and feminism. In fact, Stuart Hall's theory of articulation is the umbrella method that binds together Black feminist theory, Frantz Fanon's concept of epidermalisation and semiotics. These four concentrated into one methodology allows for a greater focus on Blackness, femaleness and the body at

different historical periods. Hall is thus positioned because his theory of articulation permits a subject-matter to be turned theoretically inside-out and simultaneously problematised at its historical and contemporary conjunctures.

The ways in which articulation has been developed, discussed and used tend to foreground and background certain theoretical, methodological, epistemological, political and strategic forces, interests and issues. As theory and method, articulation has developed unevenly within a changing configuration of those forces. It carries with it 'traces' of those forces in which it has been constituted and which has constituted. To understand the role of articulation in cultural studies is thus to map that play of forces, in other words, to track its development genealogically. (Slack 1996: 114)

Nor is this methodology perfect. Even with the politicised mapping, loopholes exist. At times, the language seems heavily binarised (i.e., Black/White, man/woman, coloniser/colonised, good/evil, animal/human), yet inescapable when discussing how otherness is asymmetrically constructed against identities conventionalised as normative.

Other terms, such as *reality*, *truth* and *authentic* pose a problem in themselves. However, to muse about these terms would detract from my primary focus and is therefore beyond the scope of this work. These terms should be then understood in their generic sense. The aim here is not theoretical perfection, but to instigate a theoretical dialogue of the historical forces that impact contemporary modes of seeing and internalising the Black female body. The combined methodology permits racial and gender representations to be thus discussed.

With Baartman as the blueprint of the Black Venus and Campbell as a 1995 copy, the thesis represents a synchronic and diachronic study, indicated by the principal divisions Part I – The Black Venus in the Making and Part II – Modernising Black Venus. In analysing the protean elements of the image, the study demonstrates how predominantly White collectives and marginalised subcultures have been socialised to

see the body of the Black Venus as an extension of Black women in real life, and how the violence Baartman sustained to bring the image into being has become subliminally encoded in the silhouette.

Set apart, Chapter 1 - "Continuity of the Black Venus" is a discussion of the *naissance* of the Black Venus as a personal project, before it blossomed into an all-out dissertational project. It historicises Saartjie Baartman, reviews some of the literature on her experience in Europe as the Hottentot Venus, a racial and gender curiosity from 1810 to 1815. It also synthesises the concepts of recognition, repetition, aesthetic discourse and Fanon's epidermalisation. A brief overview looks back on certain historical representations of the steatopygic body, and its eventual stigmatisation as anomaly. This chapter ends with a critique of modern artistic scenes that exploit the Black female body as a dark backdrop which promotes White femininity.

The two chapters constituting Part I concern the examination of the violence in the visual and textual language that popularised the Hottentot Venus in the Enlightenment. Chapter 2, "The Violence of the Text: Wording the Other, Bestialising Beauty" concentrates on definitions and descriptions of the bodies of South African women whom the Europeans referred to as Hottentots. Excerpts from French ethnographies produced by White male writers of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century are analysed as a genre of aesthetic discourse, given that they describe the aesthetics of the body in a discursive form which facilitated the diffusion of colonial ideologies, prescriptions and perceptions of Black women. These historical texts show a preoccupation with the genitalia, or more specifically the labia whose size was the measuring stick for the disposition and morality of the subject in question. The bigger the labia, the less intelligent the person, the more controlled was she by libidinal urges, and the closer her classification to animal in the colonialist hierarchy of human evolution. Baartman is discussed in this chapter as a tabooed body. Checked as

pathological, her steatopygia becomes a zoological and spectatorial attraction, not only in ethnographies and natural histories, but in the rituals engendered around the body viewed in museum contexts.

Chapter 3, "(Hetero)Grafting Colour onto the Female Body: Rereading Venus Iconography in Black and White," backtracks to the Renaissance, examines the Venus allegory in Alessandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* of 1484-86 and its subsequent transmutations of race, gender and corporeality when colonial expansion, slavery and the Christian Missionary movement were gaining force in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. A synopsis of the Black Madonna is included to emphasise how the surface of particular icons Whiten or Blacken according to the adapted ideological context of a particular epoch. Violence, corporeal terrorism, public humiliation of the body and their impact on the collective psyche are theoretically teased out to problematise the means through which the steatopygic body becomes vulgarised. *Heterografting* is my reworked concept of a horticultural term that signifies a violent alteration done onto the allegorical/colonised/recipient body by the donor/coloniser culture. Unlike hybridity, which denotes the merging of two or more components to create another "thing" or entity (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2000: 14), *heterografting* is intended as a more politicised term that magnifies the effects of the covert and blatant violence against the Black female body operative in representation.

Chapter 4 of Part II, "The (Im)Memorial Image of the Black Venus: The Stereotype," is a cross-cultural survey of the Black Venus in literary and visual works. The focus is on the magnitude of the repetition of the allegory in different mediums which signals the outset of stereotyping. The repetition of the steatopygic silhouette results in the image becoming collectively remembered but, as a stereotype surviving after Baartman, immemorial of her tragic history and demise in Europe. I draw parallels between Baartman's treatment as a horse in her European exhibitions from 1810 to 1815

and contemporary incidents of Black women being fashioned as animals in different media representations. The theme exploited in this chapter is the bestial stereotyping of the Black female body, preserved through time, despite the pandemic consciousness-raising of racism and sexism in western culture.

"Crossing Cultures: Black Goddesses in the Multicultural Canadian Context," the last chapter, deals with art production and practices around the dark female body that are ambiguously sanctioned by the policies of multiculturalism. The artworks of two Canadian-based women, Katarina Thorsen and Hilda Woolnough, have been singled out for their controversy. This chapter aims to unveil the different kinds of internalisation of ideologies based on race, gender and ethnicity as they affect the agency of the artist and responses of peoples coming from colonised histories and realities. These artworks demonstrate that grotesque images of Black goddesses have become a contemporary cross-cultural problem even in Canada where discourses of multiculturalism are pervasive. *Canadian* is thus situated in this chapter as a term that implies racial exclusivity.

The thesis is the product of my ongoing research of representations of the Black Venus which I began in the late 1980s. It is thus a work based on my selection of Black Venus images and my own ways of seeing this icon through racialised representations of Black women in the different media. Yet given other scholars similar focus on race and gender, it acknowledges that the aesthetic reconstruction of the Black female body as Venus has become a lasting problem. These chapters, initially written as individual essays, have been cohesively revised to stress the common theme of the transformatively fixed profiles of the Black Venus in history that have gained ambiguous readings in modernity. As a political strategy to not perpetuate the stereotype, images of the Black female body have been limitedly reproduced. Whenever possible, translations have been provided in footnotes or inserted in the body

of my analysis for greater reader accessibility. Translations appearing as my own are coded by a double asterisk (**).

Chapter 1 – Continuity of the Black Venus

The dead call us to remember. Some of us have not forsaken these teachings.
—bell hooks (1992: 180)

In this chapter, I discuss my “encounter” with Saartjie Baartman as the Hottentot Venus, survey the literature on her history, and map out some core theories pertinent to the contextual and corporeal ambiguities of the Black Venus, a subject-matter that in recent years has mushroomed into a scholarly movement and an unresolved political battle between France and South Africa over Baartman’s remains (see Appendix A).

Begun outside of academia, this thesis germinated from my long-term observations of the Black Venus in material culture. It voices my sentiment of futility about the image changing, but a branch of race and gender representation in the west not changing quickly or at all. Over the years, I have watched the Black Venus alter to the vogue of the moment, exhibiting basic aesthetic constants—the naked Black female, dark flesh and a voluptuous body of taboo and excess. Like the Hottentot Venus of early nineteenth-century Europe, contemporary visual and textual images depict the Black Venus in new forms that are problematic in their recurrence. How, then, can a body undergo so much epochal transformation, yet remain circumscribed as forbidden, sensual, savage and hyper-sexed? This question is the fuel of my theoretical investigation.

Impact of the First Encounter

South African Saartjie Baartman was the first Black Venus I stumbled on. It was in the late 1980s, at a bargain section in Toronto’s Wold’s Biggest Bookstore, that I found Stephen Jay Gould’s *The Flamingo’s Smile* for \$1.99. Intrigued by the picture of

Baartman as *La Belle hottentote* in Chapter 19 (Fig.1), I read on, only to become horrified by her humiliating display in Europe and the posthumous desecration of her body. The injustices she suffered at the expense of colonial phantasies provoked, personally, an upset regarding her social alienation and her condition of coerced servility; inspired a want to address iniquities of race and gender; and led to a greater awareness of the barbarity sanctioned during the Enlightenment and routinely exercised on other peoples by Europeans under the guise of “civilising” and justifiable discipline.

Baartman’s situation demonstrates that the institutionalised treatment of certain bodies mirrors their hierarchical ranking in a given society at a given era. Stigmatised as atavistic, Baartman was viewed by Europeans as a creature from the interior of Africa. And that her “guardian” Réaux was an animal keeper only reinforced her status as subhuman in the imaginary of western society (Denean Sharpley-Whiting 1999: 18). As seemingly owned property, she occupied the subordinate status of servant and slave, a position made common to many diasporic and indigenous Blacks living in Europe in the late 1700s and early 1800s (Maseko 1998). This ambiguity of status was due partly to the internal abolitionist shifts happening within the institution of slavery.

Whereas the British had outlawed the African Slave Trade in 1807 (Green 1976: 53; Du Bois 1896: 95), it was endorsed in France and its colonies until 1848 (Smith 1984: 191; Miquel 1976: 351). Manumitted slaves became a servant class; yet many Blacks with the civil status of slave were also servants. Orlando Patterson states that “*Slavery is the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons*” (1982: 13). *Violent domination and dishonored persons* applies to Baartman’s pre-European history; for as a young Khoikhoi girl in what is now South Africa, under Dutch rule, her people were hunted down and slaughtered by European colonists. The survivors, mostly women and children, became chattel distributed among the Dutch settlers (Maseko 1998). Identifiable as Black and woman, and carrying the national

captions “African” and “Bushman-Hottentot.” Baartman gained a new inscription by the Dutch régime. Preconceptions of her body as oddity, spectacle and object of voyeuristic amusement were cross-culturally disseminated within the power structures of colonial Europe.

Of the punished spectacle in early nineteenth-century Europe, Michel Foucault considers corporeal torture in public the symbol of a subject debased to “body,” fallen in social and political standing: “Le corps s’y trouve en position d’instrument ou d’intermédiaire: si on intervient sur lui en l’enfermant, ou en le faisant travailler, c’est pour priver l’individu d’une liberté considérée à la fois comme un droit et un bien. Le corps, selon cette pénalité, est pris dans un système de contrainte et de privation, d’obligations et d’interdits” (1975: 18).¹ Like Patterson, Foucault sees the techniques of corporeal punishment fostering psychosocial alienation. The inflected subject is socially marked as deviant. In turn, s/he interiorises this label and is ostracised through rituals of public debasement, as was Baartman.

An account from a European who witnessed Baartman’s display and public chastisement as the Hottentot Venus underscores Foucault’s perspective about the body as a concrete intermediary whose harsh management, containment and spatial restriction incite, through public display, individual alienation as well as spectatorial terror. Addressed to a government official in the *Morning Chronicle* of 12th October 1810, the epistle read:

A PROTEST

Sir, As a friend to liberty, in every situation of life, I cannot help calling your attention to a subject, which I am sure need not only be noticed by you to insure your immediate observation and comment. You stand so deservedly high in the

¹ The English translation reads: “The body now serves as an instrument or intermediary: if one intervenes upon it to imprison it, or to make it work, it is in order to deprive the individual of a liberty that is regarded both as a right and as property. The body, according to this penalty, is caught up in a system of constraints and privations, obligations and prohibitions.” Qtd from Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) 11.

public opinion as a staunch friend of humanity and a sincere promoter of the abolition of the slave trade that you will perhaps anticipate the cause I am now pleading, and to which I wish to call public attention. I allude to that wretched object advertised and publicly shewn for money—the 'Hottentot Venus'. This, Sir, is a wretched creature—an inhabitant of the interior of Africa, who has been brought here as a subject for the curiosity of this country, for 2s. a-head. This poor female is made to walk, to *dance*, to shew herself, not for her own advantage, but for the profit of her master, who, when she appeared tired, held up a *stick to her, like the wild beast keepers*, to intimidate her into obedience. I think, Sir, I have read somewhere (but you will know this better than me), that the air of the British Constitution is too pure to permit slavery in the very heart of the metropolis, for I am sure you will easily discriminate between those beings who are sufficiently degraded to shew themselves for their *own* immediate profit, and where they act from their own free will: and this poor slave, who is obliged to shew herself, *to dance*, to be the object of the lowest ribaldry, by which her keeper is the only gainer. I am no advocate of these sights, on the contrary, I think it base in the extreme, that any human beings (sic) should be thus exposed. It is contrary to every principle of morality and good order, but this exhibition connects the same offence to public decency, with that most horrid of all situations, *Slavery*.

Your obedient servant,

AN ENGLISHMAN.²

This ENGLISHMAN *recognised*: 1) Baartman's physical intimidation to perform as the Hottentot Venus; 2) her mortification in being forced "to shew herself" obscenely and to assume unbecoming behaviour which positioned her as "the object of the lowest ribaldry" (i.e., to dance in a state of undress); and 3) her bodily exploitation and the oppression of her individual will, given that her display was not for her "*own* immediate profit," the *own* emphatically italicised by the original writer.

Clearly, the Englishman was undecided about Baartman as a *person*. Observing her through the mask of the Hottentot Venus, he called her a "wretched object," "a wretched creature. . . of the interior of Africa," but later referred to her as a "poor female," a "poor slave" and vaguely as "any human being." Puzzled by her status as object-creature-human, he was nonetheless sufficiently moved by the horror of her forced display to write the lengthy protest. Since 1815, Baartman's visual terrorism as the

² Qtd. in full from Paul Edwards and James Walvin, *Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1983) 172.

Hottentot Venus has been blurred by generations of refashioned aesthetics. Yet for the spectators privy to her history, traces of her linger in certain images, and the terrorisation of her person reads as aesthetic dissonance.

Though I commence with Baartman's experience in France from 1810 to 1815 as the Hottentot Venus, and include images of the millennium of the Black Venus, my analytical finish line is with Mario Testino's photograph of Naomi Campbell as *La Vénus au voile*, featured in the November 1995 *Paris Match* (Fig.2); hence the names demarcated in the title—"From Baartman to Campbell." Campbell's image is a crucial successor of Baartman, because it underlines the immortality of certain stereotypes in western culture, the automaticity of their reproduction, the social desire for their existence and re-diffusion, and the ability for representation to transform concretely, but less so connotatively.

Baartman, the Person

Who, then, was this woman popularised and persecuted as the Hottentot Venus?

Born 1790, Saartjie Baartman was a young Khoikhoi woman from the Cape of South Africa (Fig.3). She supposedly entered an agreement in 1810 with two men—Henrick Caesar and Alexander Dunlop who were Dutch farmers come to South Africa to settle. Baartman would travel with them to Europe, do domestic chores for them, and be displayed for 5 years (Webster 2000:26; Edwards and Walvin 1983: 176-177). The attraction would be her steatopygia or large buttocks, and she was to receive a percentage of the profits from her masters. When the contract ended, she would return home to the Cape. But what happened to her was entirely another matter.

Arrived in England in June 1810, barely clothed, she was immediately displayed as the Hottentot Venus. This lasted until 1811, her exhibition at times occurring in a cage (Jahoda 1999: 79; Maseko 1998). A few years later, she was exhibited in Ireland, and in

France during 1814 (Denean Sharpley-Whiting 1999: 18). Then in Paris, Caezar sold her to the animal keeper Réaux (Denean Sharpley-Whiting 1999: 18). In December 1815, a four-foot six-inch Baartman fell ill with an inflammatory disease allegedly related to syphilis,³ and died later that same month—December 29—under Réaux's roof. Shortly thereafter, anatomist Georges Cuvier procured her body, dissected her, and made a plaster cast of her corpse (Gould 1985: 292, 294). The replica and her remains were later re-exhibited at Musée de l'Homme in Paris well into the 1970s. Cuvier removed her anus, buttocks, spine, and skull, pathologising her as a specimen genetically closer to simians, and thus the inferior antithesis of the White male and female European (Jahoda 1999: 79-82; Backhouse 1999: 46-47). Her genitalia were also cut out and jarred, and has since been reported missing by Musée de l'Homme (Maseko 1998).

Cuvier's findings of Baartman were impermeably documented in his zoological text *Histoire Naturelle des Mammifères* of 1824. His pseudo-scientific reports of non-Europeans have left a lasting cross-cultural legacy of institutional racism and its systemic normalisation. His writings were even used in Canada during the first half of the twentieth century to assist with formulating legislation for constitutional rights and freedoms of certain indigenous groups (Backhouse 1999: 299, n123). That Baartman perhaps died of a syphilitic illness, which is curiously absent in Cuvier's report, implicates Réaux as both keeper and pimp (Koch 1995). But her subsisting appropriation in image as a synecdoche of the corporeal identity of Black women, and as a metaphor of subhumanness, somatic oddity and disease, signifies the occurrence of *racist-sexist* ideologies of the Enlightenment neutralised into normative *race-gender* ideologies in the western contemporary. Thus the forgetting of Baartman's ordeals is due to today's social climate, which incites amnesia of colonial dominance and racism by glorifying racial eclecticism as multiculturalism. Who then benefits from the cultural

³ "Bring Back the Hottentot Venus." *Weekly Mail and Guardian* (15 June 1995).

conservation of such images? The people of colour to whom the representations allude? The White mainstream? Or the community at large who “learns” about the differently raced and gendered by exposure of these images under the rubric of embracing difference?

Regarding multiculturalism, there is a current presumption of race and ethnic relations being better off in the west, because of globalisation and immigration—a consensus that, for the most part, overlooks the perseverance of hegemonic control and power, and in this overlooking circularly perpetuates them. In North America, culture is considered a diversifying phenomenon with the accelerated increase of immigrants whose presence has a political impact (Wood and Remnant 1980: 56-58; Agócs 1992: 244-247; Stram 1999; West 1993; Young 1990). American and Canadian society, in particular, are said to be greatly affected by ethnic and racial polymorphism as a result of immigration and miscegenation. Yet the reappearance of colonial stereotypes like the Black Venus shows another face of the romanticised imaginings of the American melting pot and the Canadian mosaic—the reality of xenophobia and its normalisation in imagery.

The longevity of the Hottentot Venus in western media signals that xenophobia is now more refined than ever, filtered through modes of visual culture as predominantly acceptable and “overlook-able” effects. Therefore, this analysis calls for a critical reading and rethinking of race and gender imagery, focussed on the female body; for as B. Ruby Rich affirms: “It is through the arts that a nation’s cultural heritage can be passed on to a new generation. . . . It is through the arts that influence can be exercised” (1994: 225). Chief to my postulation is that racial representations which are unapparently discriminatory sustain colonial ideologies of the Black female body through passive violence and sublimation.

In order for derogatory racial typing in representation to endure, more signs have to be ambiguously encoded in their externality and pass in media as unharmed. Of racialised codes, Robin M. Chandler explains how imagery creates controversial divides in spectatorship:

The production of visual images in media functions from within white imagination to exploit, sensationalise, placate, distort, and carnivalise representations of Africanness. (1996: 15) . . .

Visual terrorism is the production and use of visual images to express contempt for, to disempower and to terrorise members of a particular culture group, by another group. What may appear all innocuous playtime in white representations of blackness and Africanness, is so often interpreted by people of colour as an attack on identity. (1996:17)

Chandler makes an excellent point of visual terrorism. But I would redact that people of colour are not interpreting these representations as discriminatory, but *recognising* them as so.

Interpretation connotes a subjective perception of content whereas *recognition* of the Hottentot Venus through the aura of the Black Venus goes beyond opinionatedness: It signals that a particular image has been profoundly socialised within a culture to have specific meaning/s to a collective. *Recognition* indicates that representation, with its problematic definitions, are deeply etched into the psychical fabric of the social and communal, and that they continue to influence how certain groups are collectively perceived. This socialisation of the image is in itself an auto-perpetuating institution. Says Norman Bryson:

... the crucial difference between the term 'perception' and the term 'recognition' is that the latter is social. It takes (at least) two to recognize a sign. And when people look at representational painting and recognize what they see, their recognition does not unfold in the solitary recesses of the sensorium but through their activation of codes of recognition that are learnt by interaction with others, in acquisition of human culture. (1988: 65)

Similarly, Rudolf Arnheim explains that:

The most useful and common interaction between perception and memory takes place in the recognition of things seen. Visual knowledge acquired in the past helps not only in detecting the nature of an object or action appearing in the visual field; it also assigns the present object a place in the system of things constituting our total view of the world. (1969: 90)

Recognition is the collective comprehending of a sign severed from most of its abstract meaning and matted into the everyday and immediately understood conventions of ordinary culture. This is how the ENGLISHMAN was able to recognise Baartman's situation as exploitive and persecutory, and to liken it to slavery.

Imaging, textualising, codification, knowledge acquisition, retention of learnt patterns, subliminal naturalisation of meaning, and repetition indicate the matrix of systems entrenching the Black Venus as a stereotype in the occidental imaginary of today. These are the outlets of material culture from which the silhouette of Baartman's accentuated buttocks has epochally proliferated. As a consequence, this profile has become both the signature of her tragic persona as the historical Hottentot Venus and iconic to the new configurations of the Black Venus.

Profiling Representation

The title "Profiles of the Black Venus" is a double entendre of concrete and abstract value. It refers to the stereotyped silhouette of the Black female body as the Hottentot Venus of 1810, but also the studies of the versions that followed. Profiling certain representations spotlights the aesthetic complications of the Black Venus, and the political dilemmas in reading the image as a liberated prototype in popular culture. Does the Black Venus decrease or renormalise racist thinking in modernity?

The changed aesthetics of the Black Venus signifies where ruptures have occurred and where sameness has turned into similarity (Schwartz 1996). For instance, the term *Hottentot Venus* is a nominal antecedent of *La Vénus au voile*. Both share a substantive sameness and the proper noun, the goddess Venus. But their national and racial names denote—not a sameness or identity—but a similarity as well as a dissimilarity. Both images, with their visual/textual referents, similarly portray the Black female body as a corporeal object of Africanness or Blackness. However, *Hottentot* is an adjective of the archetype that has since disappeared from the stereotype's context in modernity. Moreover, Campbell's enactment of the bare, fashionable *Vénus au voile* shows a tapered physique to Baartman's corpulent Venus. Thus a divergence occurs in contextual elements that stem from changes in media and in remaking. These themselves are implicated in historical systems of democratisation and exploitation as markers of time (Fernández 1998).

Ethnographic sketches, high-tech miniatures, and the ultra-scopic realism of photo-periodicals are additional transformations of media and aesthetics indicating a breakage in the representational sameness of an image, each breakage weaved into a set of historically-specific systems and political circumstances that (dis)privilege certain subjects at particular moments in history. These fractures corrupt and pluralise definitions, rendering meaning polysemous by de-/re-contextualisation. Through such fractures is born an ambiguity in consuming and discerning the stereotype. These aesthetic ruptures allow a socially construed archetype (i.e., Baartman) to be dissociated from its neoteric reformulations (i.e., Campbell) and read as an image without any link to Baartman's history of corporeal terrorism.

The process of affiliating or separating one's self from history as a reading-discerning subject produces conflicts around the Black Venus, which open onto another complicated platform of queries related to the subjective distancing or identifying of the

historical atrocities of colonised peoples. The mode of (dis)identification occurs—and instigates controversy—when a person, thing, or situation is re/cognised as a pure fiction to some, and a reality adulterated by fiction to others. Given the political tensions race creates in representations such as the Black Venus, it becomes imperative to ask: At what point can history be forgotten when reading imagery? Need colonial trauma and the massacre of certain populations *always* be remembered by the contemporary mainstream and the hegemonic consciousness when conceptualising representation? Can these tragedies be used as political guidelines for today's acting agents who make material culture? When can an artist produce without having to take heed of the political histories of oppression? And can such works spark a dialogue without evoking the devastating events of the past? What will be forsaken if forgotten? What risks being repeated or re-enacted through the rupture of colonial history?

Numerous theorists have attended to the problems of racial-gender representations (Mohanty, Russo and Torres 1991; Collins 1991; Mitter 2000; Poole 1997; hooks 1990; Tobing Rony 1996). But just as many counter-discourses of gender, silently dominated by Whiteness, are drowning out the disseminative impact of race awareness. Certain are caught up in the juvenile stage of wondering when "race" existed, whilst others are busy producing highly sophisticated discourses which deny racism as a genre of historical thought that motivated tyrannical acts with large-scale repercussions, such as genocide, land expropriation and colonisation.

Crucial to these debates of representation is the artist herself. For instance, African-American Margaret Burroughs composed *Black Venus* in 1957, centuries after Alessandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* c.1484-1486 (Figs.4-5). This image was likewise appropriated by engraver W. Grainger as *Voyage of the Sable Venus* c.1801 during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and the abolition movement, and then made into an advertisement for whiskey in 1868, which erased the presence of the Black Venus

(Figs.6-7). Yet in decyphering the image, do the political dynamics of race and gender as related to the maker surface as a force in representation that frees the image from stereotyping? What alters in knowing a Black female artist or a White male colonist—an African-American woman or a European man—reid Botticelli's image, especially if all final versions strongly resemble? Carla Williams considers the identity of the maker a predicament in representation that may cancel out political intervention. She says images created by certain Black female artists "are inextricably examples of being looked at and interpreted by an outsider, not of picturing one's self" (2000: 5). This statement suggests that Black female artists have so internalised White ways of seeing that they can no longer fathom new ways of envisaging self.

What of the quandary of media diffusion? If diffusion is an opportunity to educate, but an occasion in which the artist's intentions must be abbreviated or the image's context stripped of historical particulars, how will spectators learn of the attempt to subvert? And wouldn't saying that Whites represent Whites, gays represent gays, women women et cetera essentialise the dynamics of representation? This aspect is a paradox in my reasoning, given that, inasmuch as self-representation is problematic, I see a greater problem with how White artists portray the Black female body. Taken from a website, *Black Venus* (1957) is contextually pared down, leaving no trace of Burroughs' motives for remaking Botticelli's Venus. One can only read the new depiction, to try to find signs of difference or (feminist) resistance in the artist's new aesthetics.

Enslavement, Class, Finances

Though I have primarily dealt with race and gender, class significantly affects the conundrum of the Black Venus. The temporality of a representation reflects the kinds of freedoms allowed subjects at specific periods. Baartman's and Campbell's varying

ability to exercise agency directly relates to the sociopolitical institutions of their times within White western hegemonies, which impose restraints or liberties on volition that complicate Black female ontology. Lisa Jones sees these liberties still dictated by western hegemony. Discussing the voluptuous body of model Beverly Peele profiled in a high-fashion magazine, Jones comments: "Isn't Peele lucky to be a young black woman posing for a fashion spread in America circa 1991—while Negro bodies and self-expression are in vogue, marketable, and represent some vague notion of visual equality, in lieu of political and economic power: With a resplendent derriere like hers, in another era, Peele could have been the legendary Hottentot Venus herself" (1995: 75).

Baartman and Campbell can both be considered young Black women of their time, in/famous in the public eye. But whereas Campbell is an affluent supermodel, highly paid to be photographed naked as *La Vénus au voile* (1995), Baartman in the early 1800s had no such privilege as the Hottentot Venus. Moreover, due to the outrage of her public display, Baartman went to trial in November 1810 (Edwards and Walvin 1983:173-177). Yet even her testimony sounded over-rehearsed, her words the words of Réaux, her mouth his medium. A segment of the transcripts from the court proceedings reveal:

... yesterday, the Master of the Crown Office had himself personally attended, and examined her by two Dutch Interpreters, one on behalf of her keeper, and one for himself, and the result of that examination was reduced into writing and was in substances as follows.—That she was born in the interior of Africa, that her father was a bullock driver from the interior of the Cape, and was killed on one of his journeys by the Jagays. He[r] mother died when she was two years old, and she was a nursery-maid in the house of Mr. Caesar. That she had married a drummer at the Cape and had one child, which was dead, that she came to England by her own consent for the purpose of exhibiting her person; that she agreed to come for six years, and was to have half the profits of the exhibition—that she did not wish to go home as she liked this country, and was very kindly treated by her Keeper, who gave her money, and took her out riding in a coach on Sunday, which she liked very much—that she had a black boy and girl to wait upon her, and did not wish to change her situation. Being asked if she

did not wish to see her four sisters and brother at home, she did not give any answer but remained inflexibly silent.⁴

What were Baartman's thoughts at this moment? To stay in Europe and suffer the exploitative treatment of the animal keeper who may also have been prostituting her? Or to return "home," see her family and struggle for economic emancipation as a contracted "servant" in the Dutch-colonised Cape? Compliant in her testament, she may have feared for the economic uncertainty of a future alone in Europe.

Because certain histories weigh differently with particular groups and affect how image-recipients from different subcultures absorb portrayals, historical irresolutions turn into problems in the present. Baartman's body is one such national/political irresolution,⁵ with post-apartheid South Africa requesting in the year 2000 the return of her remains to her homeland for a proper burial. Musée de l'Homme is against this wish, however, still viewing Baartman as invested property. Said assistant curator Philippe Mennequier: "Her skeleton is very well cared for here because we never know what science will be able to tell us in the future. If she is buried, this chance will be lost. . . for us she remains a very important treasure" (Webster 2000: 26. Appendix A).

"A treasure" is Baartman described in the millennium, a skeleton "very well taken care for" and on hold as a specimen for the possible further discoveries of western science. The curator's perspective is potentially explosive for how he envisions Baartman in new times. Moreover, these ongoing tug-of-wars over colonised bodies as museum property indicate that, in the contemporary, the western demand for curiosity and exoticism has not desisted. My theoretical development questions whether the Black female body, nude or naked, can be articulated in a humanising, person-oriented

⁴ Qtd. from a reprint of the *Morning Post* (26 November 1810) in Edwards and Walvin (1983: 176-177).

⁵ See "The Hottentot Venus," Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site, http://www.nps.gov/malu/documents/film_2000.htm; John Yeld, "Plea to return remains of Hottentot Venus to SA," *Independent Newspapers* 1998, rpt. <http://www.saep.org/for/DB/for/DB9901/ARCHHottentotVenus/ARG130199.htm>; and Alex Dodd, "Humanising history," <http://www.mg.co.za/mg/art/tv/9810/981015-baartman.html>.

context that satisfies a wide range of image-recipients: whether this body can be transcribed into anything other than the colonial definitions of the bestial, libidinal, exotic and sensual other; and how to re/store the signs of this icon to dignity from a 200 year-old abyss of colonial denigration. Could it be that the visual signs of the Black Venus are over-exhausted, the basic constants super-saturated by negative meaning? The term negative conjures a duality yes; however, according to Charles Mills, race is a political system started from dichotomous thinking:

For hundreds of years, race was a political system in its own right: it was through race that whites came to understand their identity, their position in the world, their manifest destiny, their civilizing missions, their burden, their entitlements and privileges, their duties and responsibilities. The term *white supremacy* is usually associated with localized regimes, particularly with the American Old South and Apartheid South Africa. . . [I]n a broader sense the history of the world has long been a history of white supremacy, in that Europeans basically controlled the globe and were the privileged race. . . (1998: 75)

For Mills, White supremacy comprises regimes of colonisation and contemporaneous hegemonic systems that place the White subject at the in/visible centre of things (1998: 78-79).

This is Tracey Denean Sharpley-Whiting's critique of Sander Gilman's *Difference and Pathology*. In *Black Venus: Sexualized Savages: Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French*, she comments that Gilman used Baartman as a footstool to develop a discussion on how White prostitutes were similarly racialised to Black women:

Gilman's piece is frequently referred to as an example par excellence of a study of the representations of black female sexuality in France. However, one never finds any details about the one major black female figure featured in this chapter, Sarah Bartmann, the Hottentot Venus. The literal photographic presence of the black female body and her genitalia are there expressly for a better understanding of (white) patriarchy's construction/fear of female sexuality (to be read as white female sexuality). (1999: 3)

Even in contemporary theoretical frameworks dealing with gender, race and class, White women are still conveyed as the worthier subject. Also evident in *Difference and Pathology* is Gilman's leveling of difference between Jewish and Black identities. This reverts to Mills' insight of the two identities regularly pitted against each other, only for Jewishness to surface as the more discursively valued (1998: 77). Analogies such as the ones below punctuate Gilman's introduction.

But the very concept of color is a quality of Otherness, not of reality. For not only are blacks black in this amorphous world of projection, so too are Jews. (1985: 30)

The Jew became the "white Negro"... (1985: 30)

The image of the Jew as the black was not merely the product of the racist biology of the late nineteenth century... For the association of the Jew with blackness is as old as Christian tradition. (1985: 30).

In these passages, Gilman theoretically exploits Blackness, discolouring it and minimising Black oppression to strengthen his argument of Jewishness as deviant. Though interventionist for what it provides on race representation in western history, Gilman's text is disturbing in how it theoretically dims Blackness and, in Baartman's case, Black womanhood.

Founded on re-readings of historical texts, Gustav Jahoda's perspective on Baartman's volition is also unsettling. Leaving behind no written sources of her own (Denean Sharpley-Whiting 1999: 17), and coming from an oral tradition, Baartman is nonetheless construed by Jahoda as a free agent of the nineteenth century, fully complicit of her denigrating experience of display and whose existence was divorced from the racial/gender institutional prejudices of Euro-colonial society. In *Images of Savages in Western Culture*, Jahoda wrote: "The 'Venus' was a Sanid (Bushman) woman who was taken to Europe and was exhibited in London in a cage (in fairness it must be added that she agreed to this)" (1999: 79). Given that Black slavery was a full-blown

institution maintained for centuries in Europe's colonies and that it took a long time to obliterate.⁶ Jahoda's parenthetical assertion of Baartman's consent is especially perturbing. In the early 1800s, with European society pregnant with White supremacist practices, Baartman's agency—or the degrees of it she could exercise—is presented as an enigma by today's more punctilious scholars who realise that persons marked deviant in colonial England and France, like Baartman, had limited opportunities to act out individual will (Maseko 1998).

The suppression of Black women's troubling histories is of concern to other scholars, like Robyn Weigman. In *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*, she remarks that mainstream feminism's failure to deal with the complex sides of identity has created the bifurcated category of "blacks and women" (1995: 7). She says: "Lost in the systematic reduction is the black woman, whose historical and theoretical presence has quite rightly been pursued in recent years as a way of rethinking the inherently compounded nature of social identity" (1995: 7). Weigman employs "black and woman" as a refrain in *American Anatomies*, to rethink conjunctures of history that have been obscured. She places Baartman at the axes of slavery, abolition, the rise of science, and corporealisation, to discuss how she was anatomised in scientific discourse (1995: 57-59).

Repetition in Aesthetic Discourse

Aesthetics are what constructs the body outwardly in relation to *beautiful* and *ugly* as social conventions (Chaplin 1985: 14). But as they embellish objects, aesthetics are also implicated in systems of power and taxonomy (Clifford 1999: 60). Elizabeth Grosz asserts

⁶ See, for instance, W.E.B. Du Bois. *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870* [Doctoral thesis] (1896; London: Dover Publications Inc., 1970); William A. Green. *British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment 1830-1865* (1976; Oxford: Clarendon P., 1985); Concerning the slave situation in Canada and the resistance against its eradication, see Robert Prevost. *Montréal. ... La Folle Entreprise* ([Montreal]: Editions internationales Alain Stanske, 1991) 231-232; and Robin W. Winks. *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. 2nd ed (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1997) 23.

that: "Bodies are always irreducibly sexually specific, necessarily interlocked with racial, cultural, and class particularities" (1994: 19). These particularities that narrate an artistic intention in visual or textual composition I call *aesthetic discourse*, for signs compressed in composition and given semiotic currency become a discourse that communicates the idea/s of an artist through a particular style and theme.

The evocation of Baartman in the contemporary Black Venus indicates that dissonance chronically infects the aesthetics articulating the nude/naked Black allegory. This dissonance finds logic when the violences suffered by Baartman to bring this persona to life are excavated and read against today's sexually glamorous image of the Black Venus. Synchronic changes through repeated reworked aesthetics have blurred the memory of Baartman. There is, though, a sensorial component to aesthetics: They seduce or horrify the senses of the image-recipient (Baudrillard 1979). This supports John Locke's deduction about the ties between lasting impressions, pleasure, and pain. In *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Locke wrote: "Attention and repetition help much to the fixing and ideas in the memory: but those which naturally at first make the deepest and most lasting impression, are those which are accompanied with pleasure or pain" (94). This dualism of pain and pleasure emerges when different image-recipients read the aesthetics of the Black Venus. Some enjoy the image of the nurturing carnivalesque body of the goddess whilst others, remembering Baartman's and other slave women's misfortunes, consider it a devastating reminder of colonial racism and neocolonial indifference. For instance, discussing his collaborative work of Saartjie Baartman and Josephine Baker in the exhibition *Venus Hottentot 2000*, artist Lyle Ashton Harris stated that: "Engaging the image of the Hottentot Venus has deepened my understanding of the body as a sight of trauma and excess" (Harris qtd. in Read 1996: 150).

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel himself saw aesthetics as the study of the stimulation of the senses which, during his time, became increasingly confounded with fine arts and beauty. In his *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, initially published in German and written for courses he taught from 1820 to 1821 (Inwood qtd. in Hegel 1993: xiv), Hegel stated:

The name 'Aesthetic in its natural sense is not quite appropriate to this subject. 'Aesthetic' means more precisely the science of sensation or feeling. Thus understood, it arose as a new science, or rather as something that was to become a branch of philosophy for the first time, in the school of Wolff, at the epoch when works of art were being considered in Germany in the light of the feelings which they were supposed to evoke—feelings of pleasure, admiration, fear, pity, etc. (1993: 3)

Hegel prepared these lectures shortly after the period in which Baartman was publicly flaunted as *La Belle hottentote*. What, in Europe, could have caused a greater sensation of pleasure, admiration, fear and pity than the corporeal exhibiting of a solitary, scantily clad South-African Venus whose physiognomy and gestures were taken as crude and subhuman?

Also, the historical ethnographies illustrating and documenting the body of *La Belle hottentote* represent a powerful medium. Word and image blend, visually and textually explaining to the viewer the object absorbed. The result of this visuo-textual joining is a new economy and efficiency in identifying otherness. Taken together or by themselves, textual and visual signifiers of the Black Venus articulate the Black female body into a material narrative which implicates the sensory, the imaginal, and the cognitive of cultural convention. Immanuel Kant makes this connection clear in his 1790 *Critique of Judgement*.

This perplexity about principle (whether it is subjective or objective) presents itself mainly in those judgements that we call aesthetical, which concern the beautiful and the sublime of nature or of art. And, nevertheless, the critical investigation of a principle of judgment in these is the most important part of a

critique of this faculty. For although they do not by themselves contribute to the knowledge of things, yet they belong to the cognitive faculty alone and point to an immediate reference of this faculty to the feeling of pleasure or pain according to some principle *a priori*, without confusing this with what may be the determining ground of the faculty of desire, which has its principles *a priori* in concepts of reason. (5)

Whereas Hegel categorises desire, pleasure and pain under one faculty, Kant here separates them, singling out desire as an aspect responsible for reason. More interestingly, though, is his viewpoint of principles and judgements being “objective,” originating from an *a priori* pattern of presupposition, a before-the-present pattern that perverts apprehension (Kant 1790: 28-29). Yet groups of people—usually those in power—come together to make subjective decisions on aesthetics and conventions that collectives eventually abide by. Therefore the objective beforeness in the aesthetic judgement Kant ascribes still stems mostly from cultural biases, as with definitions concerning race.

Re-examining the texts of several prominent thinker from the late 1700s and early 1800s, in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze says: “Enlightenment philosophy was instrumental in codifying and institutionalizing both the scientific and popular European perceptions of the human race. The writings on race by Hume, Kant, and Hegel played a strong role in articulating Europe’s sense not only of its cultural but also *racial* superiority” (1997: 5). Eze underlines the problematic ideologies of White supremacy reproduced in European philosophical discourses and presented as a neutral forum in contemporary readings.

Jean Baudrillard claims it is no longer actualities that are considered significant, but the simulation of the actual. Phantasy is not of reality, but vice versa: real life is contoured and subordinated to match the whims of the hegemonic imaginary (1983: 4). The power of the simulated over the actual is demonstrated with the re-imag(in)ing of the Black Venus. It is the colonial male phantasy that still moulds the aesthetics of the

Black female body in the replica. It is through repetition that Baartman as the Hottentot Venus has aesthetically transformed from the deified object of ridicule and sexual debasement to an ambiguous object of exotic sensuality.

As a mechanism of cultural conventionalisation, repetition is embedded in systems of representation, codification and epistemology, in which signs are homogenised to be understood on a basic level by a collective. The frequency of repetition is a mnemonic continuum that determines how images are patterned as a forgettable singular occurrence, a ritual of the everyday, or a tradition of nations and cultures. In the west, the reproduction of the Black Venus in media has become ritual. Yet as a long-standing figure reconstructed in the practice of art and aesthetics, the Black Venus is additionally a racial-sexual mediatory tradition. The iterative frequency of diffusion of the Black Venus in variegated media has, as well, produced a greater image retention. Even Locke was privy to this phenomenon. In section six "Of Retention," also printed in the 1689 *Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, he stated:

Constantly repeated ideas can scarce be lost. But concerning the ideas themselves it is easy to remark, that those that are oftenest refreshed (amongst which are those that are conveyed into the mind by more ways than one) by a frequent return of the objects or actions that produce them, fix themselves best in the memory, and remain clearest and longest there; and therefore those which are of the original qualities of bodies, viz., solidity, extension, figure, motion, and rest; and those that constantly affect our bodies. . . (96).

As the interagents of retention, the senses make meaning from the outside world of materiality as well as the inner world of discernment and cognition. However, they must also be consistently indoctrinated in particular ways, in order for a community to decypher uniformly the rudiments of a concept through material signifiers. Lengthy exposure to these signifiers facilitates and homogenises ways of decyphering. As a

consequence of repetition, an image passes from archetypal to conventional to subliminally stereotypical—which is the current situation with the Black Venus.

Hall acknowledges that certain historical occurrences influence institutions, ideologies, identities, privileges and epistemologies in the present. Hall metaphorically refers to their interstices as joints that either remain fixed together as necessary correspondents of culture or break apart into new formations.

An articulation ... is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstances *can* a connection be forged or made? So the so-called 'unity' of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct, elements which *can* be re-articulated in different ways because they have no necessary 'belonging-ness.' The 'unity' which matters is a linkage between that articulated discourse and the social forces with which it can, under certain historical conditions, but need not necessarily, be connected. (Hall qtd. in Grossberg 1996: 141)

The theory of articulation enables the study of a specific unit, object, or subject in its specific time, space or culture, but also the study of its transformations as it is repeated out of its initial context as a new phenomenon. Hall sees the middleground of this theory as a space from which the political struggles between the base and the superstructure, ideology and reality, consciousness and agency can be observed. It is this tension of fixity and newness, of the cultural-before and the cultural-after, that Hall strives to retain in his theorisation from the middleground, and which I have adopted with the Black Venus. I apply this theory so as to particularise ambiguous points of contentions. In particularising the multiple dimensions of the Black Venus, numerous perspectives come into dialogue concerning the conjunctures in aesthetic reconfigurations.

Hall's theory questions accountability through the many levels of action and production. Were the stereotyping of Baartman taken as an historical phenomenon of totality, then the subsequent contemporary images that evoke her historical presence

can be seen as new conjunctures of image-transformation. Each stage of the image's re/production bears persons acting, producing and governing in groups who are responsible for re-issuing the Black Venus into contemporary culture: They are also accountable for the aesthetic re-defining of *person* as *physical* and *metaphysical* construct in new eras, which is where Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic concept enters.

Fanon's epidermalisation, or epidermal schema, originated from his tormented experiences as an educated *Martiniquais* who fought with the French troops against German nazism in World War II and who studied psychiatry in Lyon, France during the postwar (Gordon, Denean Sharpley-Whiting and White 1996: 2-3). Marginalised as a visible minority in a predominantly White society, he realised his skin was an important social signifier which led to his being collectively perceived as "nigger," ape and intellectual inferior (Fanon 1952: 25-27, Zolberg 1970: 121). Thus skin colour is relevant to how persons are racialised, perceived and treated by members of a specific society. This visual grasping of racial difference happens through social conditioning with the vehicles of language, texts and images as manufactured by White hegemony. The conditioning is also instilled by the political and institutional practices ritualised around corporeal differentiation. This is the situation of the Black Venus. The allegory brought to life in material culture mirrors colonial definitions, behavioural expectations, and presuppositions of Black women in real life. But not only the White mainstream, Black individuals have internalised these conventions of racial otherness (Fanon 1952; Zahar 1969: vii, xi). It is through these compounded dynamics, Fanon discerns, that subjects are inscribed corporeally and affected psychosocially. Epidermalisation enables the Black female body to be discussed in psychical and sociopolitical contexts; it zeros in on psychosocial processes of internalisation induced by the White ruling class that affect the human condition of the Black subject (Fanon 1952: 8-10).

This internalisation moulds Black identity, permitting an individual to see her self as a Black subject equally entitled to constitutional privileges, but to see her other self through the gaze of the White colonial collective as a negation, a subperson from a 'primitive' elsewhere. Fanon and W.E.B. Du Bois shared similar outlooks in how the Black subject views self in White-ideologised cultures. This moment of recognising the conflicts of the two selves within the same identity is what Du Bois called "double-consciousness." In his 1903 *The Souls of Black Folk* which documents the antebellum African-American experience, he explained:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's self by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body ... (2).

Double-consciousness entails the contentious processes of interiorisation, forced assimilation and subject revolt. Fanon says that, on a grand scale, Black skin in the west signifies non-human and inferior in myriad facets of life—socioeconomically, biologically, morally, religiously and intellectually. Nowhere is this internalisation of subordinacy with its conjoining double-consciousness more apparent than in the Black subject's desire to demonstrate her/his cultivatedness to White society: "C'est encore un fait," observed Fanon: "des Noirs veulent démontrer aux Blancs coûte que coûte la richesse de leur pensée, l'égalité puissance de leur esprit" (1952: 9).⁷

The allegory of the Black Venus was instrumental to this process of collective/individual interiorisation; it imparted debasing patriarchal and colonial ideologies of Black women in social signification. What follows is a microcosmic survey

⁷ The English translation of this passage reads "There is another fact. Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs the richness of their thought, and equal value of their intellect" (Trans. Markmann 1967: 10).

of the steatopygous body of African women in historical western media that draws attention to the different meanings of the female body racialised as Black.

Descent Through Continuity: The Steatopygous Body

Images of the Black Venus have proliferated since the cross-cultural exhibition of Baartman as *La Belle hottentote* in early nineteenth-century Europe. After her demise in December 1815, other Black women in conditions of servitude were debasingly displayed, forced to carry on the legacy of the Hottentot Venus (Fig.8-9). Sander Gilman and Tracey Denean Sharpley-Whiting have both stressed the vast influence of this persona on western culture of modernity. The Hottentot Venus was the butt of cartoon satire, scientific studies, vaudeville theatre, literary works, and amusement at balls or masquerades held by notorious aristocrats (Gilman "Black" 1985; Denean Sharpley-Whiting 1999; Rogers 1967: 241-242). Yet the Black woman with large buttocks has had an extensive presence in the mediums of the pre-modern west that was not entirely negative.

In addition to decorating Roman vases from the fourth century B.C. (Snowden Jr. 1976: 178-179), curvaceous Black women manifest on tomb reliefs as guiders of the dead in the afterlife, as in Figure 10. Concerning this particular relief, Frank Snowden Jr. notes that: "Three rather steatopygic Negro women are among the participants depicted in a ceremony which has been associated with the festivals of Isis and Serapis" (1970: 30). Elaborating, Jean Laclant relates the scene to an Isiac ceremony which displays Black dancers in worship and celebration:

... from the time of the Old Kingdom, Negroes and Pygmies brought into Egypt from black Africa were prized for their skill as dancers. Their dances, more entertainment at first, seem to have taken on a magical and funerary significance. Dances by blacks could therefore be performed as part of Isiac feasts like that of the November Isia, in which the death and resurrection of Osiris were acted out. (1976: 282)

Steatopygous dancers were thus associated with Isiac veneration, which combined the sexual with the spiritual, incest with matrimony, life with death, and heaven with earth⁸—complexes that counter Victorian ethnographer J. Gardner Wilkinson's phallo-/Eurocentric perspective on Egyptian symbology. Apart from his flawed insistence of Egyptians being singularly Caucasians,⁹ Wilkinson projected clichés of gender biases onto the roles of the deities. In the first of his two-volume text, *The Ancient Egyptians* (1854), he claimed of the symbolism that: “the vivifying or generative principle” was “the abstract idea of ‘father’” and the mother, “the producing principle of nature” (332). Conversely, in *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, Sarah Pomeroy highlights the intricacies Isis represented:

The goddess readily encompassed inconsistencies and mutually contradictory qualities . . . She was endowed with magical capabilities, could heal the sick, and promised blessed resurrection to her devotees after death.

Even more remarkable than her assimilation of the powers of female deities is Isis' acquisition of powers associated in the classical world with male divinities. She has the attributes traditionally assigned to the Indo-European sky god: dominion over lightning, thunder, and winds. . . . Aretologies surviving from antiquity give long lists of the attributes of the goddess; her epithets are innumerable, her powers limitless. (1975: 218)

This description does not, however, reflect everyday realities, for the social ills of class stratification, African slavery, xenophobia and gynephobia also plagued societies of antiquity (Leclant 1976: 269-270; Keuls 1985).

⁸ Isis' spouse was her brother, Osiris.

⁹ In Chapter 5, which carries the subtitle “Origin of the Egyptians,” Wilkinson writes: “The origin of the Egyptians is enveloped in the same obscurity as that of most people, but they were undoubtedly from Asia; as is proved by the form of the skull, which is that of a Caucasian race, by their features, hair, and other evidences, and the whole valley of the Nile throughout Ethiopia, all Abyssinia, and the coast to the south, were peopled by Asiatic immigrations. Nor are the Kafirs a Negro race. Pliny is therefore right in saying that the people on the banks of the Nile, south of Syene, were Arabs (or a Semitic race) who also founded Heliopolis.” Qtd. from J. Gardner Wilkinson, *The Ancient Egyptians: Their Life and Customs*. Vol. I. (1854; London: Senate, 1994) 302.

But concerning steatopygia, Erich Neumann warns that the exaggerated buttocks is not unique to “a particular African or Hottentot type” (1963: 97). He observes that the stomach, breasts, torso and thighs of the Venus/Mother Goddess image are “often gigantic” indicating a “female vessel” as “both prehuman and superhuman” (1963: 95-96), and that:

The unshapely figures of the Great Mother are representations of the pregnant goddess of fertility, who was looked upon throughout the world as the goddess of pregnancy and childbearing, and who, as a cult object not only of women but also of men, represents the archetypal symbol of fertility and of the sheltering, protecting, and nourishing elementary character. (1963: 96)

The above indicates that the Black female body had a greater signifying range in Old-World cultures—from the purchased slave to the affirming deity. Moreover, Pomeroy states that, with Roman domination in the Hellenistic era, Isis’ symbolism was fragmented and replaced by a plethora of male and female gods led by Zeus, a raping, androcentric tyrant (Maxwell 1997: 148-149), able to give birth from his head, which annulled a crucial function of certain female divinities. “... Zeus and Apollo are examples of male deities who function as rulers, intellectuals, judges, warriors, fathers, and sexual partners in both homosexual and heterosexual affairs” (Pomeroy 1975: 8).

Particularly striking of the portrayals from classical antiquity is the detailing of the body’s form and colour. It is these signs of heavy anatomy, embodied by dark skin and curly hair, that articulate Black female alterity into recognition. But this meticulousness should come as no surprise, seeing as how Black physicality was studied thoroughly and replicated in Graeco-Roman art. Snowden Jr. remarks that:

The Greeks and Romans knew a great deal about the physical features of the peoples whom they called Ethiopians.¹⁰ Their writers described the Ethiopian

¹⁰ Snowden Jr. asserts that Black and Ethiopian were used interchangeably, and sometimes even collapsed by the term Ethiopian-black (1970: 5). In this citation, this same analogy applies

type is considerable detail (1970: 1) Through describing Ethiopians as black or dark, the ancients recognized that these peoples differed in pigmentation and took considerable pains to record the observed differences. (1970:5)

According to Snowden Jr., the Greeks and Romans invented categories of Blackness: red, copper-colored, exceedingly Black, deep Black, pure Ethiopians, and discolour for the racially mixed (1970: 3-4). He notes that additional features observed in Blacks and contrasted with White physiognomy were their flat noses, woolly hair and thick lips (1970: 6). Therefore, the bio-racial differences of Black bodies were already popular in the aesthetics studied in Graeco-Roman art, and had begun to cement at this time in the imaginary of the occident.

As a sacred symbol, the Black steatopygous female had multifarious purposes in previous historic periods. Such a racialised body type in the vernacular held less of a stigma, given its omnipresence in numinous iconography. Steatopygia is presumed a physical trait widely idealised in palaeolithic imagery (Shlain 1998: 31). As Edward Lucie-Smith comments: "It has been said that the steatopygous character of these representations of women was in addition more directly related to the idea of physical survival, because the members of the tribe who carried the most fat would be the last to die at times of famine" (1991:12). There is even the *Venus of Willendorf*, a four-and-a-half inch steatopygic figurine, thought to be anatomically modelled after a Grimaldi woman and bearing a similar endomorphic shape of certain contemporary South-African women (Sharp 1993: 15) (Fig.11).¹¹ The figurine has also been considered "an object of female sexuality and fecundity" (Hill and Wallace 1992: 7). Explaining the excessive anatomical proportions of female deities in Old World civilisations, Marija Gimbutas says:

¹¹ Sandra Sharp explicates that the Grimaldis are: "Another Black prehistoric group . . . [who] made it to Europe some 30,000 to 40,000 years ago, and are considered its first modern population. . . . Their icons have been discovered in Italy and Austria. Qtd. from Sandra Sharp, *Black Women for Beginners*. Illustrated by Beverly Hawkins Hall (New York: Writers and Readers Publishing Inc., 1993) 15.

The Goddess of Palaeolithic and Neolithic is parthenogenetic: creating life out of herself. She is [a] primeval, self-fertilizing "Virgin goddess" who has survived in numerous culture forms (sic) to the present day. The Christian Virgin Mary is a demoted version of this original deity. . . . From the artifacts it seems clear that woman's ability to give birth and nourish children from her body was deemed sacred, and revered as the ultimate metaphor for the divine Creator. (1991: 223)

A salient point from the aforementioned is that Gimbutas parallels the excessive body with the divine creator, a pre-Christian symbol of life and parthenogenesis, in which the Christian Virgin Mary follows as a "demoted version."

Whereas the enduring mediatory repetition denote that the deified steatopygous woman as a Black allegory has turned into a lasting icon of alterity in western representation, it is the descent through continuity, the gradual descent into coarseness that has become the prevailing circumstance, and thus my concern, of the Black Venus in the modernity starting from the Enlightenment. A human marker of this landslide is Baartman. Though beautified in millennial media and by new aesthetics, the reiteration of different women as the Black Venus and the aesthetics highlighting the body—nakedness, dark epiderma, and portliness in profile—still evoke Baartman's tragic history and the violent corporeal desecration of her person in life and death.

Contrastive Bodies

Baartman has been internalised through subsequent copies of the Black Venus. When she lived as a spectacle of display, the defining of her physiognomy and anatomy as libidinal and brutish implicitly promoted White femininity as the pinnacle of beauty. Édouard Manet's *Olympia* of 1863 visually utters this gender and racial analogy which additionally involved the problematics of class and prostitution (Fig.12).

Situated as part of the backdrop in Manet's painting, the Black servant named Laure assumed to be Caribbean (Pollock 1992: 21) is read as ambiguously deviant presence that sexualises the body of her White mistress, the central character. Yet even

within the class hierarchy of working-class/slave-servant of Manet's *Olympia*, race is still an important factor. This point is weakly argued by Griselda Pollock who says: "The painting's negation of orientalism emerges from its assertive modernity, a here and now-ness of the working wōman hired to model as a courtesan attended by another working-class woman, displaced from her African home through colonial slavery and now in wage slavery" (1992: 21). Assessing the composition Myriam Chancy criticises Pollock, commenting:

It is clear to me, however, that such a reading should not lead us to conclude that the figures in the painting are rendered equal by their "working-class" status. The Black female figure remains at the service of both the male gaze and of the female figure she is attending; objectively and sexually she is possessed by both. (1997: 42)

The woman posing as Olympia is Victorine Meurnet, a model who allegorically fluctuates between nude and the naked by her portrayal as prostitute-goddess (Lipton 1992 : 5-7; Krell 1996: 49-53). Yet there is a visual declaration of rank in the way the White body lounges leisurely, and is waited on by the Black servant. Of the corporeal contrast that interracially (juxta)poses female subjects in implied hierarchies, Albert Boime remarks that:

... the black and white racial divisions had already been conventionalized in terms of the painter's palette.

Thus black and white, dark and light, were signifiers in a double sense—a dual signification still retained in the phrase "people of color". ... The domestic role of the black maid shows at once that she is custodian of Olympia's daily routine, thus freeing the courtesan for her entrepreneurial activities. If nothing else, the maid indicates the status of her mistress, which is always a notch above her own. (1990: 3-4).

This hierarchical comparison ensues in the contemporary via the filmic and photographic.

There is, for instance, the late John Derek's version of *Tarzan*, which featured his spouse, Bo Derek, as Jane. In the September 1981 *Playboy*, stills from the movie were reproduced which compressed Black and White female bodies into an ideologically contrastive paradigm. In one photograph, a semi-clothed Black woman is seen scrubbing the back of her captive, Jane (Fig.13). Standing from behind, she turns servile to her lighter counterpart, bathing the White body. Yet her presence also blends into the backdrop of tribal exoticism, her body acting as a corporeal device of contrast that highlights the blonde beauty and ultra-svelte-ness of Jane/Bo Derek. The Black female body, though pendulating between visible, in/visible and hypervisible, never becomes *primary subject* in the scopophilia glorifying White beauty. The racialised lesbosocial event of bathing eroticises the overall context, and the naked bodies performing this event become hierarchised objects that gratify the (hetero)sexual curiosity of the male/John Derek's gaze.

This staging uncannily resembles an earlier orientalist depiction, *The Bath* c.1880-1885 by Jean-Léon Gérôme (Fig.14). Though separated by a hundred years and made in different media, the images possess the same racially accentuated theme: Female Whiteness is the corporeal ideal, enhanced by the servile dark-skinned body of exoticism. Of harem life in the 1800s, Alev Lytle Croutier notes that Black slave women tended to their White mistresses and that "The bathing ritual took several hours" (1989:81). Gérôme's portrayal iterates this order of class and race within a same-sex category. By being the bather, the Black woman serves her White counterpart, painted as an allegory; and not only the shackles, but the skin colour further visually distinguishes the enslaved from the free subject, femininity from brutishness.

A similar set-up appears in *Vibe* of June 2001, a magazine founded by Quincy Jones and whose target readership is young, Black, unisex and hip hop. As a photographic appropriation from Russ Meyer's film *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* of 1962,

the photo-spread "Park and Ride" shows two female models—one White, one Black—in continual corporeal juxtaposition. If not merged with the backdrop, then the Black woman is situated behind, or peripheral to, her White counterpart who becomes centric to the visual narrative (Fig.15)—much like in John Derek's Tarzan spread and Manet's *Olympia*. The Black model in "Park and Ride" is seen but not seen. She is in/visibly hypervisible. Not surprisingly, as the dark crude background that reflects White beauty, she is the one sporting a "Metallic green Lycra bikini by Sauvage" (2001: 134). Yet the blurb explaining the images admits the context is staged as a male fantasy: "What a male fantasy: two fast women in fast cars. . . Beautiful ladies and sleek automobiles definitely have whip appeal" (2001: 134). In conjunction to this confession, the caption "Park and Ride" is a sexual euphemism for intercourse which con/textually and visually parallels the women to the "sleek automobiles;" they become interchangeable spaces for male penetration. The text, the media of photography, and the models who perform lesbosociability by their close proximity and flirtatious touching, underline the image's bottom line of deviant sexuality, but also its ambiguities.

Considering the venue of these images, the question of repetition, ambiguity and (neo)colonial maxims in aesthetics, as with Margaret Burroughs' *Black Venus*, arises once more. What is ideologically challenged, deconstructed, transformed or fixed in such images? With "Park and Ride," although catering to a predominant Black readership, how do these photographs of women performing inter-raced lesbianism impact on the Black psyche? Moreover, as pieces of a male fantasy that photographically narrate the desire for interracial and bisexual sex, do these images mirror—and position in their reflection—the voyeur as sexually avant-garde or sexually deviant? Is he conjured as a pervert, sexually drawn in by the lesbo-interracial dimension of "Park and Ride"? Or a liberal who believes in embracing difference on multiple levels? Is embracing difference connoted by the absence of racial adjectives in

the text? As observed, the models are simply referred to as “women” from start to finish, without the textual racialisation of “Black” and “White.” Is the male voyeur then meant to see all “women” sexually as the same, namely objects for penetration and phallic gratification? So again, what has transformed or remained unchanged in this repeat of Meyer’s film?

Though *fixity* and *transformation* seem adversarial and oxymoronic in the same phrase, they do indeed cohabit quite comfortably. As a symbolic aperture of transparency and opaqueness, mimicry—“the act or art of copying or imitating closely” (*Collins Dictionary*)—enables this cohabitation and “emerges,” says Homi Bhabha, “as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (1994, 85). Bhabha explains that mimicry actualised in the material world breaks up the units of historical antecedents and creates duplicates that, although totalities themselves, are nonetheless imitational components of previous models. This process Bhabha calls *metonymy of presence* (89), a presence which fosters a loaded ambivalence by being near, but not identical to the emulated model: “The ambivalence of mimicry—almost but not quite—suggests that the fetishized colonial culture is potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal Under cover of camouflage, mimicry, like the fetish, is a part-object that *radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, and history*” (Bhabha 1994: 91) (emphasis mine).

The mention of knowledges reverts to those regulators, mediators and upholders of hegemonic authority who, in the larger scheme, greatly determine how aesthetics are re/defined for collective cognition and consumption in the west. These aspects which carry on the image of the Black Venus are explored in the following chapters.

bell hooks also sees Black women's display during the slave-trade era informing current practices of racial/gender representations. She purports that pornographically animalising the body is one frame for articulating the aesthetics of Black womanhood; another is physiologically hybridising these aesthetics in image, in order that the "ethnic" look also seduces the White image-recipient through self-identification. Regarding Naomi Campbell's polemic popularity in a predominantly White racist fashion world, hooks comments:

... the new black female icon who is also gaining greater notoriety, as she assumes both the persona of sexually hot "savage" and white-identified black girl, is the Caribbean-born model Naomi Campbell. Imported beauty, she, like Iman, is almost constantly visually portrayed nearly nude against a sexualized background. Abandoning her "natural" hair for blonde wigs or ever-lengthening weaves, she has great crossover appeal. Labeled by fashion critics as the black Brigit Bardot, she embodies an aesthetic that suggests black women, while appealingly "different," must resemble white women to be considered really beautiful. (1992:73)

Understandably, hooks finds it a problem when high-profile figures from marginalised groups, such as Campbell, aspire to look White. The "blonde wigs" indicate myriad possibilities: 1) that the model is uncomfortable with her own "natural hair," as hooks implies; 2) that her wigged appearance wrongly disseminates, to White and Black viewers, the notion of White aesthetics as the epitome of beauty; 3) that in donning the blonde wigs, Campbell is denouncing her Blackness, ultimately betraying—and being irresponsible to—the members of the Black community.

Contrariwise, hooks overlooks that, as a fashion model, this is precisely Campbell's livelihood: She is commissioned to enliven different looks by changing surface aesthetics (i.e. cosmetics, hair, clothes et cetera). Nor does hooks problemise her own comment, which implies that Blackness possesses specific biological traits. On the

contrary, it has become a miscegenated category bearing a diversity of Black looks and Black identities. Campbell herself is a composite of this diversity of Blackness. On one website, it is noted that she is not born in the Caribbean as hooks claimed, but in Streatham, South London (see Appendix B). Moreover, her ethnicity is documented as “Jamaican/Chinese” under an “English” nationality.¹² She is therefore not an “imported beauty,” but an indigenous European within the Black diaspora. But seemingly, hooks faults Black persons for appropriating, be it strategically or otherwise, and for not sufficiently self-essentialising by retaining their “natural” traits. With Blackness diversifying through continued interracial mixing, and with Black subjects having more choices and freedoms in the contemporary, their selected aesthetics—and use of these aesthetics to make a personal or subversive statement about identity—increasingly complicate the politics of representation.¹³

¹² Regarding Campbell’s ethnicity, see also Serena French, “Oh, no, my poor Omil!” *National Post* (22 Jan. 2000), B3.

¹³ See comments from Black students in Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*, rev. ed. ([New York]: Basic Books, 1999), xx.

PART I – BLACK VENUS IN THE MAKING

Chapter 2 - The Violence of the Text: Wording the Other, Bestialising Beauty

... the department of knowledge called anthropology came into existence during the nineteenth century as an enterprise in which white men fanned out across the world to look at and "study" people of color.

—James S. Moy (1993: 7)

... the mastery of language does more than damage or undeniable violence to those who do not have whichever language is being privileged in whatever discourse.

—Bruce Ferguson (1995: 109)

Excerpts from the French ethnographies of François Le Vaillant (1753-1824), Georges Leclerc Comte de Buffon (1707-1788), and Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) exhibit a pattern of image and text reinforcing one another. In this chapter, I explore how these texts rendered the bodies of African women into the ultra-condensed other of bestiality. I introduce this problematic with an image of model Alek Wek, to forge relations between her current portrayal as feral and Saartjie Baartman's as the brutish Hottentot Venus of the early 1800s. I discuss the defining of Baartman as a specimen and the transition of the Hottentot-Venus role from textual enigma to concrete archetype by its social reinforcement in nineteenth-century Europe.

Herb Ritts' photograph of Alek Wek graced the 1999 March/April cover of *PhotoPlus* (Figs.16 & 17). It was reprinted a year later on the jacket cover of Patrick Roegiers' *Herb Ritts: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain*. The book (with cover) is also electronically diffused on a Chapters.Indigo website which offers purchasing information to browsers and consumers (Fig.18). Sensationalist, the aesthetics imprinting Wek into visibility do violence to her body and to her image as a person. Even worse, this sensationalism can be discounted, because of the context of fashion which generally advertises the body as well- and/or barely dressed spectacle. The photograph, a visual text in itself, shows Wek's slim physique caught in stride and semi-profiled. Of the profile in Ritts' photography, Roegiers states that: "The sculptural

plasticity of the human body obeys a mannerist will of stylisation which finds its perfect form in the profile. . . " (2000: unpaginated). Stylistic manipulation has given Wek a head with lizard-like scales, and the talons extending from her toenails appear as "natural" anatomical digits of her feet. The cranial plates and her nakedness work together to transform Wek into a sexual reptile of aesthetic intrigue. Accentuated by the framing whiteness, her skin optically doubles as an exotic epiderma and a bronzed substance that fossilises her into a saurian specimen.¹ As polysemous signifiers, Wek's hyper-enhanced Black skin and unclothed body represent ethnic as well as racial deviancy. She is connoted and denoted as an exotic entity between human and animal, her dark skin associated with a tropical foreignness in the contemporary west of White normativity. Such condensed aesthetics visually pronounce Wek as "beast."

I open with this millennial image because it continues the age-old myth of Black female alterity as animalistic, which had gained popularity in the Enlightenment. This alterity as morbidly sexual and animal was a text imposed onto and performed by the colonised during slavery. The circulation of the imperialist text anteceded the huge influx of Black women to the New World as slaves. In this light, social roles were begun by the described and textualised body. Thus the author's ability to reduce a person into a lexical body was one of the deciding factors regarding who served and who controlled. Were Saartjie Baartman taken as an example, how did her role as the Hottentot Venus—the coarse, bestial inverse of White beauty—turn lucid in the western imaginary? Through travelogue accounts? Or by performing the text of the Hottentot Venus in social or public milieus?

¹ Of the many subjects photographed in this collection, there are a few Black models (Naomi Campbell included). But of all the subjects (White and Black), only two are animalised, Wek as discussed here and another African model named Djimon who wears an octopus on his head. See Rogiers' introductory text in *Herb Ritts: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain*, the section dealing with Mapplethorpe and Black phobia, as well as the photograph of Djimon entitled *Djimon with Octopus, Hollywood* c.1989. Djimon also appears in a prior photo-text that features Ritts' work. See Herb Ritts, *Herb Ritts* (Los Angeles: Fahey/Klein Gallery and Twin Palms Publishers, 1989).

Race Un/Articulated

Numerous Enlightenment writings of the late 1700s and early 1800s reveal a male-European preoccupation with the bodies, sexual practices and sexual attractiveness of African women. These artefacts provide an insight into the machination of how otherness was conceptualised, negated and reified by the discursive practices of colonial hegemony. In reading these ethnographies and natural histories, it is evident that texts, especially when reprinted and diffused for centuries, have power over defining subjects and identities. Roland Barthes attests that: "*The Text is experienced only in an activity of production...* [T]he Text cannot stop (for example, on the library shelf); its constitutive movement is that of cutting across [*traversée*] (in particular, it can cut across the work, several works)" (1984: 170). Texts can fix prejudices in the collective consciousness for generations, influencing profoundly mass perceptions of, and interactions with, those defined as the negated.

In the case of the Black Venus, propaganda mixed with Black women's oppression in the slave era as chattel caused words on paper to be taken as authority and imposed on the real world of acting bodies. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said says of the travelogue style:

... many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country *is* like this, or better, that it *is* colorful, expensive, interesting, and so forth. The idea in either case is that people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes. (1978: 93)

The historical ethnography that pre/de/scribed Black female alterity conflated anatomy with moral character: the bodies of African women signified an extension of their temperament and intellect. The proliferation of such writings, which do worded violence to the Black female body, signaled the *naissance* of a branch of epistemology

in modernising Europe, derived from the racist and sexist assumptions of androcentric perversity.

However, certain scholars studying the Enlightenment wonder if “racism” existed at this period. They say to apply this term to a time where it did not exist is problematic, if not presentist. In *White on Black: Images of Africa in Western Popular Culture*, Jan Nederveen Pieterse states that, during the turn of the nineteenth century: “Abolitionism as a counter-force engendered the pro-slavery propaganda of planters’ lobbies. . . . It was ‘at the very point in time when large numbers of men and women were beginning to question the moral legitimacy of slavery’ that the idea of race came into its own. *Race* emerged as the buffer between abolition and equality” (1992: 58-59). In *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, Mary Pratt infers that it was not racism, but Northern Europe’s pursuit of global knowledge, or “planetary consciousness” as she coins it, that sparked colonial expansion and colonisation (Pratt 1992: 9). Other scholars believe likewise, such as Londa Schiebinger who remarks that, in the eighteenth century, “Most anatomists agreed that human bodies were best differentiated by age, sex, and nation (the term *race* was not yet in vogue)” (1990: 389). Yet Linda Merians, studying certain images of South Africans in European ethnographies, claims that: “The British primary representations written between the 1660s and the 1780s suggest that race was one of the main concerns of author and reader” (1993: 20).

There is also some dispute as to when the word came into usage. Raj Anand claims “the word ‘race’ first appeared in the English language around 1,500 A.D.,” but that “it was not until the eighteenth century that the term was used to indicate major divisions of humankind by stressing certain common physical traits such as skin colour and head shape” (1985: 82). Magnus Hirschfeld says the etymology of “race” in modern Europe may have come from the Moors whose language contained the term *rās* for *origin* or *source* (1938: 51). He iterates, however, that de Buffon was the one who

"introduced the term in scientific literature" (Hirschfeld 1938: 52). In *The Race Concept* of 1975, Michael Banton and Jonathan Harwood state that the first evidence of 'race' in print "was in a poem by William Dunbar of 1508" (1975: 13). But of the French etymology, they argue that:

The first published use of the word 'race' to classify peoples by skin colour, hair and appearance is that by the French traveler and physician François Bernier, writing anonymously in 1684, but his essay does not seem to have led others to make use of this concept, chiefly perhaps because most of the treaties in anthropology down to the end of the eighteenth century were written in Latin. (1975: 13)

Whereas parts of their statement are debatable, Banton and Harwood do consider race a concept with historical roots in the overlapping worlds of the social and biological, and that the concept evolved according to time and cultural perspectives regarding difference.

When evidence from geology, zoology, anatomy and other fields of scientific enquiry was assembled to support a claim that racial classification would help explain many human differences, the race concept acquired a new authority and entered upon a further stage in its career. (Banton and Harwood 1975: 13)

In *Things of Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*,

Kim Hall agrees that, over the course of the centuries, the dichotomisation of identities gradually became "infused with concerns over skin color, economics, and gender politics" (1995: 2). This denotes that *racism*, not yet a word per se, existed pre-verbally in other types of cultural practices. Moreover, Constance Backhouse astutely defends that:

The derogatory label 'presentist' is meant to suggest that the writer/speaker has infected her historical analysis by overlaying the historical record with assumptions, knowledge, and ideology drawn from present-day life (1999: 10). . . .

Some historians have suggested that the word 'racism' was not coined until the 1930s. Does this make it inappropriate to attach the term to events that took place prior to its articulation? The word 'feminism' was coined a lot later than the emergence of the ideals and behaviour that bear its analytical imprint.

Why is there so little objection to historical research that seeks to locate and explicate feminist forebears from centuries afar, and so much resistance to attributing 'racism' to generations from the past? (1999: 12)

Scholars who incessantly use the corrective "there is no such thing as *rac*es." or "only one race exists—humankind" are: 1) suffocating counter-discourses that may raise greater race awareness; 2) naively overlooking the fact that *rac*es do indeed exist if they are used by collectives as social constructs of alterity and given symbolic and politico-hierarchical currency; and 3) furthering the normalisation of White rationalisations for racial oppressions in the past, if race as an explanatory theory is to be denied.

Once in text-form, observations of bodies scorned and othered become constitutive of hegemonic epistemological systems. And marking down alterity, then deploying meanings through various media to conventionalise definitions for communal use, is integral to how discriminatory traditions of corporeal literacy—of being literate in reading certain physical traits on the body as inferior and derogatory—are sustained. The cursive meanings of the Black female body *qua* bestial organic matter were pummeled into the Enlightenment imaginary through the cipher of the Black Venus to the point that, now, the definitions reverberated in everyday culture. This reverberation incorporated modes of tautology through which the limits of the signifier echoes in different media, flowing from thought to word to illustration to enactment. These modes created a machine for the colonial phantasy that turned its contents into an oppressive reality.

Tautologies: Concept, Word, Illustration

It is imperative to take heed of Georges Cuvier's organisation of *Histoire naturelle des mammifères* (1824). Widely heard and acclaimed at the royal courts, a respected lecturer of his time, and the head of the royal menagerie (Banton and Harwood 1975: 26-27; Maseko 1998), Cuvier was looked upon as an authority who helped to found modern

science. In his *Histoire naturelle*, the blurb on the title page fosters the anticipation of experiencing a visual odyssey of exotic animals through the words of a seasoned naturalist: "Avec des figures originales," it reads, "coloriées, dessinées d'après des animaux vivans."² Yet immediately positioned at the beginning is not a sumptuous colour illustration of a living animal, but lithographs of Saartjie Baartman naked: one shows her body frontally, another in profile. Named in the text, she is anonymised in illustration, simply referred to as *Femme de Race Bôschismanne*.³ Not only does she commence Cuvier's zoological report; she is the only human represented and contextualised therein as animal proper.

The chart "Ordre Méthodique," appearing in the preface, is the fruit of Cuvier's collaborative effort with Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, professor of science. The chart indexes the content. But Baartman alone comprises the subcategory "Espèce humaine." Moreover, she is descriptively sandwiched between the general title "Espèces de mammifères" and "Espèces quadrumanes" (quadrumanous species). Baartman's (con)textual animalisation is doubtless consciously intended, as confirmed by Cuvier's explication of the illustrated poses in the forward (*Avertissement*):

Nos dessins représentent chaque animal dans une attitude simple, et toujours de profil, parce que c'est dans ce mouvement qu'on peut le mieux saisir l'ensemble des formes, et la physionomie; et nous aurons soin de donner une figure de face toutes les fois qu'il sera nécessaire de voir ainsi les animaux pour les mieux juger. (1824)⁴

As concerns *une figure de face*, the frontal view, Baartman is the only "specimen" so displayed, the only "animal" privileged with a profile and front portrayal. These textual particulars initiate a cognitive dynamic through which Baartman is presupposed, articulated and comprehended as subhuman. In fact, Cuvier's textual formatting of her

² **English translation: "With original figures in colour, drawn from live animals."

³ **English translation: Woman of the Bôschismanne Race.

as primitively naked and animalistic finds its morphological traces in Ritts' mannerist photography of Wek and Roegiers' rationalisation of the profile as the perfect form for observing the human body.

Also, Baartman's genitalia is extensively magnified under the lens of Cuvier's text. While the mania about South African women's *tablier* in pseudo-scientific writings has been pointed out by myriad scholars (Gould 1985; Gilman 1985; Denean Sharpley-Whiting 1999), it is the disclosure of the *apron* being a long-standing western obsession I wish to highlight here. Cuvier writes: "*Il n'est rien de plus célèbre en histoire naturelle que le tablier des Hottentotes, et en même temps il n'est rien qui ait été l'objet de plus nombreuses contestations. Long-temps, les uns en ont entièrement nié l'existence, d'autres ont prétendu que c'était une production de l'art et du caprices*" (1824: 1) (emphases mine).⁵ Cuvier's words mirror the lasting enigma of the South African female genitalia, but also how he wants readers to seize Baartman in illustration—as a prurient intrigue and one of the many exotic *animaux vivans* of the menagerie, caged and supervised by European colonists. Through his (con)textualisation of her as a *mammifère* (a mammal), and her textual adjacency within a descriptive chain of animals proper, Baartman is converted and diminished to genitalic soma and a bestial body by a visual and linguistic interplay.

As a result, Cuvier's editorial organisation establishes a socio-archetypal negative from which other representations of Black women develop. The Black female body is referenced by a zoological nomenclature that, with ongoing use, solidifies into mnemonic-linguistic conventions and aesthetics which eventually and automatically came to articulate the Black female body in visual and literary culture. This animalistic vocabulary was already employed decades before Cuvier's 1824 publication. It is in this

⁴ **English translation: "Our drawings represent each animal in an ordinary pose, and always in profile because it is in this gesture that we can better see the entire form and the physiognomy. We have taken great care to provide a frontal view whenever necessary, to better see and judge the animals."

capacity that the Englishman writing in protest of Baartman's display in 1810 could unflinchingly call her a "wretched object advertised and publicly shewn for money" and a "wretched creature . . . of the interior of Africa" (see Chapter 1, p.12). Cuvier's documenting of Baartman as form helped to normalise the textual and extratextual defining of the Black women as subhuman. His idea of her as simian-like, his zoological presentation which alphabetises her as animal, and her descriptive representation as soma-based rather than spiritual or intelligent emblematised the creating of the knowledge of a human being who becomes identifiable to the imaginary and the consciousness of colonialists as feral. Similar themes are seen in François Le Vaillant's travelogue which predates Cuvier's *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*.

The second volume of *Voyage de Monsieur Le Vaillant dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique par le Cap de Bonne-Espérance*, published 1791, is a travelogue of François Le Vaillant's adventures in Africa. The subheadings *Dans les Années 1780, 81, 82, 83, 84 & 85 avec figures* implicitly guarantees a first-hand account of Le Vaillant's lengthy stay in Cap de Bonne-Espérance, as well as illustrated descriptions of exotic lands and peoples. Revised in modern French with an abbreviated title, the 1883 reprint highlights the travelogue's dimension of exotic escapism: The vignettes, the number of illustrations and the name of the artist, D. Semeghini, are this time carefully noted on the frontispiece (see Figs.19-20).

Le Vaillant begins by recounting his days in the Dutch colony of Guyana, where he was born and raised as a boy. From childhood, he was intrigued by his parents' *cabinet d'histoire naturelle*, a collection of still life which was not only representative of their travels from faraway, but a source of discussion and learning. Le Vaillant admits: ". . . Je jouissais à mon aise de leur cabinet très intéressant: j'aurai, dans la suite, occasion

⁵ **English translation. "There is nothing more notorious in natural history than the apron of the female Hottentot. At the same time, nothing else has been the object of so much debate. For a long time, some have entirely denied its existence, others have claimed that it was a fabrication of art and of whim."

d'en parler" (1883: 2).⁶ Inspired by his parents *cabinet*, he soon begun his own. The language employed to detail his whetting for the collection of dead animals and insects is sensual: "Tout disait à mon amour-propre que je devais aussi me faire un cabinet d'histoire naturelle: je me laissai *caresser* par cette idée *séduisante*: et, sans perdre de temps, je déclarai traîtreusement la guerre aux animaux les plus faibles, et me mis à la poursuite. . . de toutes les espèces d'insectes (1883: 2-3) (emphasis mine).⁷ Later, in 1780 when sojourning in France, his father's homeland, Le Vaillant is struck with the desire to collect even more exotic undiscovered objects. He conjures journeying to Africa to discover these objects, to add them to his *cabinet*.

... je songeais continuellement aux parties du globe qui, n'ayant point encore été fouillées, pouvaient, en donnant de nouvelles connaissances, rectifier les anciennes: je regardais comme souverainement heureux le mortel qui aurait le courage de les aller chercher à leur source: l'intérieur de l'Afrique, pour cela seul, me paraissait un Pérou. C'était la terre encore vierge. (1883: 8)⁸

Le Vaillant leaves France in July 1780 to realise his dream, to get to the "pure" origin of exotic nature, "l'intérieur de l'Afrique." Moreover, he imagines Africa as a vast virgin territory whose discovering will unearth new knowledges (de nouvelles connaissances) and dispel with old misconceptions (rectifier les anciennes).

Through convenient contacts, he sails to Cap de Bonne Espérance on the nineteenth of December 1781 (1883: 13), in search of new adventures, determined to be the "discoverer" of new curiosities and the imparter of the new knowledges he preconceives through phantasy. He even confesses: "J'étais impatient de connaître ce

⁶** The English translation: "At my leisure, I delighted in their rather interesting cabinet which I subsequently had the opportunity to talk about."

⁷ **The English translation: "All was telling my pride that I too should have my very own cabinet of natural history. I let myself be tempted by the idea. Not wasting any time, I wickedly declared war on the weakest animals and set off in pursuit of the different kinds of insects."

⁸ **The English translation: "I kept dreaming of those parts of the globe not yet scoured and how they could provide new types of knowledge that would reform old ones. Extremely happy would be the mortal who had the courage to seek them out at their source. The interior of Africa, that alone, seemed to me a big catch. It was still virgin territory."

pays nouveau, où je me voyais transporté comme en songe” (1883: 21).⁹ Upon his arrival at the Cap, he immediately compares, through condescension and ethnocentrism, the physical appearance of Africans and Europeans: “En général, les hommes me parurent bien faits, et les femmes charmantes. J’étais surpris de voir celles-ci se parer, avec la recherche la plus minutieuse de l’élégance de nos dames françaises; mais elles n’ont ni leur ton ni leurs grâces” (1883: 22).¹⁰ The word *ton* has a weighted significance in its French delivery, meaning 1) eloquence of expression, 2) mannerisms, and 3) skin colour.¹¹ These behavioural and physiological aspects are collapsed in Le Vaillant’s phrase; but he describes the women’s etiquette in hierarchical, national terms, which blatantly spells out: “nos dames françaises” are superior to African women.

The density of this description instigated a new literacy and a new type of cursive racism that became laudable, credible even, in the syntax of natural history and travelogue ethnography. This new literacy was a marriage between the colonial inscriber’s visual observation, his cognition of the other and his textual reporting. Caught in the middle was the body of the colonised, catalogued anew and acquiring an alphabet of stigmatisation. Thus was produced a new efficiency in reading “character” hierarchically through epiderma, pigment, and body surfaces (Fanon 1961, 161-163). Etienne Balibar suggests that the reason discursive racism in science has become increasingly slippery is because the documenting of “evidence” mimics not the physical “evidence,” but rather the racist thought of the observer: “. . . les théories du racism savant miment la discursivité scientifique en se fondant sur des “évidences” visibles (d’où l’importance essentielle des stigmates de la race, et en particulier des stigmates corporels). . .” (1997: 29-30).¹² African women thus moved from national subjects to

⁹ **The English translation: “I was anxious to see this new country, where I imagined myself transported, as in a dream.”

¹⁰ **The English translation: “Generally, the men appeared handsome, and the women charming. I was surprised to see the women dressed to the hilt, with the most meticulous affectation of elegance seen in our French women; but they had neither their manners nor their grace.”

¹¹ See the second meaning of “ton” in *Le Petit Robert I: Dictionnaire de la langue française*, ed. 1990.

¹² **English translation: “. . . the theories of scholarly racism imitate scientific discursivity by merging with visible “evidence” (wherefrom came the basic importance of racial stigmas, especially corporeal stigmas. . .”

ethniced objects under the nib of Le Vaillant's pen. His study classes them as nugatory, their dress and mannerisms falling increments below "nos dames françaises"—a clause lauding French culture and its women as finely bred.

This fusion of describing a stigmatised identity represents what I call the *ethnoracialisation* of certain peoples in which the amalgamating of ethnicity as non-European and race as non-White are taken as epidermal signs—signs on the body that represent the unordinary (Provost 2000). In the politics of colonial imperialism, ethnoracialisation is crucial to corporeal literacy because it is through the fluctuating simultaneity of being optically denationalised, disenfranchised, ethniced, racialised and corporealised that the othered body becomes a hyper-signifier of inferiority and carnality. Furthermore, the catalyst facilitating the subhumanisation of the African woman is the manner in which the illustrations appear as grammar, made to reflect and authenticate Le Vaillant's discourse about the naked body. The discourse seams together not only the words with the visual images, but the author's prejudices, concepts and conventions of nakedness as generally understood by other Europeans. His travelogue description thus becomes definition, entering a European system of re/cognising the pigmented body, the body unclothed, and moreover the unclothed as unclothed and obscene.

Recoding Skin, Recoding Nakedness

The social coding of nakedness as indecent spread with the transcontinental Christianisation of cultures. Christian colonialism was an affiliate of the greater Euro-imperialist missions that sought to conquer and dominate the globe. With Christianisation came the recoding of epiderma. Skin signified nakedness as well as racial colour. In the essay "The Empire's Old Clothes: Fashioning the Colonial Subject," Jean Comaroff notes: "Mission activities suggest that, at least in this Christian culture, clothedness was next to godliness: it was easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a

needle than for the ill-clad to enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (1996: 21). However, Kenneth Maxwell asserts that the conventional association of nakedness with obscenity began very early in western history with the indoctrination of the story of Genesis: “The puritanical view that public nudity is sinful, and in most places criminal, stems from the time Eve fell for the snake’s spiel about how it would make her and Adam like gods if they ate the forbidden fruit” (1997: 6). Le Vaillant’s travelogue, with its portrayals of naked Africans in the outdoors, shares the theme of nakedness as morally corrupt.

Yet the travelogue’s style of presentation and method of recoding the Black body in discourse overlap with similar aesthetic discourses of nineteenth-century pornography that placed an emphasis on word and image to seduce the reader. Defining pornography remains a problem. Bernard Arcand surmises that: “The pornographic label... will often fall at the imprecise and contestable point in the process that reduces sexuality to its purely physical dimension, as a game of body parts” (1991: 32). The ocular narrowing of a subject to body parts is how Le Vaillant portrays Hottentot women in certain passages of ethnography.

Lynn Hunt remarks that pornography took shape in the sixteenth century with the onslaught of “print culture” (1996: 30). More interestingly, pornography had epistemological value and was used politically to critique the conservative thought and institutions of the imperial superstructures governing nation states. Says Hunt: “It hardly seems coincidental that the rise in pornographic publications in the 1740s also marked the beginning of the high period of the Enlightenment as well as a period of general crises in European society and politics” (1996: 33). As it scripted race, class, gender, ethnicity and nationality onto characters in narratives, pornography became a tool for learning, not only about textual titillation and gratification, but also about viewing the behaviour—whether deviant or virtuous—of others. Patricia Hill Collins, on the other hand, considers pornography, prostitution and rape ritualised genres of sexual violence used against Black women during and since the Trans-Atlantic slave trade to maintain

their oppression as chattel and sexual animals (1991: 166-167). Says Collins: "While the sexual and racial dimensions of being treated like an animal are important, the economic foundation underlying this treatment is crucial. Animals can be economically exploited, worked, sold, killed, and consumed" (1991: 171).

Removed from its context and placed in a new geo-cultural context, the unclothed body of African women experienced definitional shifts to carnality. It slid laterally from an ordinary physique, a norm within a certain collective and culture, to one vertically classified as obscene and strange in the signification of its adopted, slavocratic context. Problematising the ethnographic scopophilia in late nineteenth-century photography that focussed on the bodies of Zulu women, William Ewing explains that:

The nudity of the Zulus was postulated as proof of primitive morality—the natural condition of savage races closer to nature and their animal ancestry. But it was one thing for the innocent 'natives' to 'dress' this way, another to put images of their bodies on display before the civilized world. Their nakedness was equated with ugliness and looseness of morals. (1994:14)

The ethnographic description as it resonates in the author-outsider's observation of the African woman, his projected notions of her body and the Eurocentric illustration of a sexualised Black-female anatomy work in harmony to aesthetically de/grade the African female subject to the level of bestial.

In a section of the 1791 edition regarding the sexual anatomy of South African women (whom Europeans called "Hottentot" or "Boschjesman"), Le Vaillant laboriously muses over the genitalia, demystifying the extended labia or *tablier* (as it was called in French) by stating that.

Le tablier naturel n'est en effet ... qu'une prolongation, non pas des nymphes, mais des grandes leves (sic) de parties de la femme. Elles peuvent arriver jusqu'à neuf pouces plus ou moins, suivant l'âge de le personne, ou les soins assidus qu'elle donne à cette décoration singuliere (sic). J'ai vu une jeune

fille de quinze ans qui avoit déjà ses levres de 4 pouces de longueur. Jusques-là ce sont les frottemens & les tiraillemens qui commencent à distendre; des poids suspendus achevent le reste. J'ai dit que c'est un goût particulier, un caprice assez rare de la mode, un raffinement de coquetterie. (179i 251)¹³

Adjacent to this section on the *tablier* is an illustration of a naked female Hottentot, wearing only a cape opened to frontally expose her extended labia to the viewer/voyeur. As Hunt ascertains, the tautological defining of the African female body as interstitially hemmed into word and image was not at all objectively detached from the sociopolitical machines regulating imperialism. Rather, the production of such meanings, of Black women as animals who mated with simians, had vested interests that crossed paths with the anglophilic colonial imaginary of the Enlightenment. For instance, Edward Long wrote in his 1774 *History of Jamaica* that:

The oran-outangs are said to make a kind of huts (sic), composed of boughs interlaced which serve to guard them from the too great heat of the sun. It is also averred, that they sometimes endeavour to surprise and carry off Negroe women in their woody retreats, in order to enjoy them. (vol.3: 360)

Here "enjoy" is Long's discrete verb for the more offensive terms of fornication. Illustrations to this effect were also in circulation during the late 1700s, buttressing the myth of Black women having beastly sexual proclivities (Fig.21). The written discourse, supported by the illustrations, fabricates an effect which gives legitimacy to these colonist-authored fictions. This again underlines Balibar's previously cited discernment—about material "evidence" bending to rationalise racist theories.

In his *Histoire Naturelle* of 1818, George Leclerc de Buffon took up the theme of human taxonomy through corporeal description, but with some modifications. He used dichotomies to justify his classificatory system. A Christian version of metaphysics

¹³ **English translation: "The apron is in fact... a protraction of the big lips, rather than the nymphs (labia minora). They can reach up to 9 inches, depending on the age of the person, or the care she gives to this singular decoration. I have seen a young girl of fourteen who already had lips 4 inches in length. As far as it is known, it is the rubbing and tugging that causes the distension. Suspended weights accomplish the rest. I emphasise that it is a particular liking, a caprice that is rare in style, an affectation of coquetry."

appeared to be de Buffon's methodology. He disavowed humans as beings of the flesh. In addition to being Eurocentric, de Buffon's natural history was polarised by a Christian idealisation of anti-corporeality. This is particularly apparent in his introduction. The prefacing illustration recalls Adam and Eve, the fall of man (denoted by the naked bodies), and an androcentric order (denoted by the gender position of the images—male top/female bottom) (Fig.22). Even the modernised version of this image, entitled *L'Homme et la Femme*, which appeared in the 1853 edition, aesthetically conjures the Christian theme of the expulsion from Eden. The male model sports a fig leaf and facially resembles biblical depictions of Jesus Christ. The dark-haired female sits passively by his side as a sign of carnal temptation, seduction and female subordination (Fig.23).

In this same introduction, de Buffon insists that nature is divided into two substances—"l'une est l'inétendue, immatérielle, immortelle [**one is without bounds, immaterial, and immortal] et l'autre est étendue, matérielle et mortelle [**and the other is spatial, material and mortal]" (1818: 1). The soul (l'âme), representing the first category, takes the shape of thought; the body (le corps), representing the second category, takes the form of matter (1818: 4). How is the interior of bodies organised, is what de Buffon ponders in his discussion. Because the soul has will, and can will the body into obedience, it is considered the superior of the two substances: "L'âme veut et commande; le corps obéit tout autant qu'il le peut" (1818: 4-5).¹⁴

In establishing these principal dichotomies, of human/animal, flesh/soul, thought/matter and spiritual dominance/corporeal obedience, de Buffon interrogates the alterity of humans and animals, their surface composition and the inner workings of their bodies. This is done methodically, in an authorial voice that naturalises the asymmetrical binaries of racism and sexism. He states: "En comparant l'homme avec l'animal, on trouvera dans l'un et dans l'autre un corps, une matière organisée, des sens,

de la chair et du sang, du mouvement et une infinité de chose semblables” (1818: 6).¹⁵ But since there is the risk of too many similarities, and the phobia of being too like the other, de Buffon claims that the only way to judge the differences between man and beast is by the outcome of their actions (les résultats des opérations naturelles), as reflected in the development of their environments and civilisations (1818: 6). Conversely, de Buffon later implies that the hierarchical differentiating of peoples (to be read also as nations) can be measured by anatomy, skin colour, form, size and disposition (1818: 202). It is with this contextualisation that he begins his typology of people in the universe.

A Monsieur Kolbe’s description of the Hottentots is used at length by de Buffon. Notes from Kolbe concerning hair texture, hair length, and skin colour of South Africans are meshed into his discussion on ethnic difference (1818: 257), as are certain negative definitions: “les Hottentots, au contraire, sont de la plus affreuse malpropreté: ils sont errans. . . ” (1818: 257).¹⁶ de Buffon later discloses his prejudices about African women in an ethno/pornographic description of the apron.

Ces Hottentots sont, au reste, des espèces de sauvages fort extraordinaires: les femmes surtout, qui sont beaucoup plus petites que les hommes, ont une espèce d’excroissance ou de peau dure et large qui leur croît au-dessus de l’os pubis, et qui descend jusqu’au milieu des cuisses en forme de tablier. Thévenot dit la même chose des femmes égyptiennes, mais qu’elles ne laissent pas croître cette peau. . . . Quoi qu’il en soit, toutes les femmes naturelles du Cap sont sujettes à cette monstrueuse difformité, qu’elles découvrent à ceux qui ont assez de curiosité ou d’intrepidité pour demander à la voir ou à la toucher. (de Buffon 1818: 258)¹⁷

¹⁴ **English translation: “The soul wants and commands, the body obeys as much as it can.”

¹⁵ **English translation: “In comparing man to animal, we will find in one and in the other a body, an organised matter, of senses, flesh and blood.

¹⁶ **English translation: “the Hottentots, on the contrary, are the most hideously dirty, they are wanderers.”

¹⁷ **English translation: “ Moreover, these Hottentots are quite extraordinary savages. The women especially, who are much smaller than the men, have a type of excrescence or hard wide skin which grows above the pubic bone and falls to mid-thigh in the form of an apron. Thevenot said the same of Egyptian women. But they do not let the skin grow. . . . Whatever the case may be, all the women native to the Cape are subject to this monstrous deformity which they expose to those who are curious or bold enough to ask them to see or touch it.”

de Buffon's perverse engrossment with the Hottentot apron is very like Le Vaillant's and Cuvier's,¹⁸ the last two privileging their readers with an illustration, which makes for facile comprehension.

Apparent in de Buffon's passage is the ethnoracialised copula punctuating his sentences and anchoring the African body into a derogatory polysemy. The ethnoracial application of the copula manifests as the *is*, or the *son't*, that becomes a space of conflation, metaphor, and fiction (Bhabha 1994: 71). The copula represents a textual crevice where the bodies of African women are recoded in European language and thought. It represents, in Stuart Hall's theory, a joint of new formations that permits varying, even troubling, articulations of Black female corporeality. Edward Said posits that the present tense of the copula carries more epistemological potency: for the description can be reread at whichever period as "the timeless eternal" of the contemporary (1979: 72). A second glimpse at de Buffon's aforementioned passage reveals that the Hottentots *are* very extraordinary savages, but that the women *are* sufferers of the monstrous deformity known as the apron.

The description seeks to present "truths," yet they also intensify the temptation or desire to experience the female Hottentot's body through perversion. This discursive titillation preceded Baartman who, to her great misfortune, came to signify the colonial text.

Archotyping the Hottentot Venus

The copula is a powerful syntactical device which dissolves units through reconstruction. This is to say that the descriptive *is* is verbally combined with the prescriptive *is*, thus positioning the nounal subject in a dual situation of *being* (descriptive), but in a preemptory state of *ought to be* (prescriptive/normative). The

¹⁸ In *Histoire naturelle des mammifères*, Cuvier cites de Buffon and Le Vaillant for their methodology and descriptions on South Africans.

copula denotes, therefore, a present tense and the future present of anticipation. The textual iteration of the copula in ethnographies such as Le Vaillant's, Cuvier's and de Buffon's cognitively conditions the reader and sets up an expectation of how Black women are, should be, and will be. In this manner, the colonial reader anticipates the other in advance through the medium of the text. This is how the Hottentot Venus was initially construed as a colonial archetype. The syntax of the copula signals an archotyping related to tense as a concrete convention of time, not as an abstraction. With the brutal archotyping of Saartjie Baartman, the copula allows the elision of the *is*, in present and past tense. Baartman *is* the Hottentot Venus. But she can just as easily be recognised as "Baartman, La Vénus hottentote" or simply "La Vénus hottentote," her individual identity partly effaced through the mask of the debasing persona. Before her arrival to Europe in 1810, newspapers had already begun to do severe damage to her reputation by describing her as a "perfect specimen from the interior of Africa" (Maseko 1998). There was a collective anticipation of who she was, the way she would appear, and how she would behave. However, the pinnacle of voyeuristic pleasure was to see her live.

The textual *is* of the Hottentot Venus, forced onto Baartman, animated an imperialist phantasy, and gave material shape to a colonial perversion. This violent archotyping, which entailed the becoming of the text on the body in performance, is a component of colonial discursive tautology. Coerced into performing, Baartman symbolised the repetition of the coloniser's text as a kinetic extension. Yet for Baartman, this also meant internalising the text. By performing the Hottentot Venus, she was transformed into an ostracised spectacle, a situation doubly difficult for a Black minority living in slave-sanctioned régimes in the nineteenth century.

According to Dean MacCannell, a sign begins to possess iconic magnitude when it transgresses from an abstract image into one that resonates in the material world (1992: 237). He asserts that: "Icons exist in particular relationships to particular groups

(such as a cult, a group of fanatics, spectators at a spectacle)" (MacCannell 1992: 237).

Overlaps occur between the person performing the archetypal role, the sign reiterated through performativity and the public who desires the icon. Theorising the body in discursive practices, Judith Butler affirms that: "Performativity is neither free play nor theatrical self-representation; nor can it be simply equated with performance. Moreover, constraint is not necessarily that which sets a limit to performativity; constraint is rather, that which impels and sustains performativity" (1993: 95). Yet the "constraint" Butler presents becomes ontologically complicated for Black subjects in the early 1800s whose agency and physical person were restricted by slavery

Just as Baartman's sequencing and situatedness must be pondered in Cuvier's text, so too must the organisational and staged elements that constituted the context of her live display. Baartman became a form seen and surrounded by museo-zoological particulars. Her guardian was an *animal keeper* who abused her like a *pet*. Furthermore, the price of her display was in direct competition with the cost of entry to other *animal exhibits*. These are the particulars structuring context and repeating the colonial text as social actuality. Together, they archetype Baartman as animal specimen. Of this repetition, Says Butler:

... performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production. ... (1993: 95)

That Baartman was made to display herself in hardly any clothes and in a cage opened onto a new dimension in performing, manufacturing and socially re/cognising taboo identity. Her epidermal and ethnoracial sexualisation re-sexed and re-gendered the body she represented in denser, complex ways.

Labelled subhuman, venereal, genitalic and hyper-libidinal, *La Venus hottentote* was a construct neither human nor feminine. The represented body as it bifurcates from Baartman the person is biologically re-sexed as somewhat female, but gendered ambiguously as male; for while hypersexuality has been deemed a female pathology, at the same time, it is associated with a male virility and masculinity. Redefined in the slave era, the dark-skinned steatopygic body oscillates through the aperture of hermaphroditism: The identity of the Hottentot Venus becomes both masculine and female yet, by negation, neither feminine nor male. This aspect I shall revisit in the following chapter; but now I will turn to how the racialised archetype works through social reinforcement.

The Hottentot Venus as Colonial Therapy

In Carl Jung's psychology, archetypes manifest as instinctual impulses or forms of consciousness (1964: 58). They belong to a particular ethos or people who develop collective psychological patterns around their interpretation. Given that the archetype's symbolism is culturally specific, race is imperative to mediating meaning in the western unconscious (Chaplin 1985: 34; Hall and Nordby 1973: 45).

A gendered ethnoracial hierarchy was reinforced by Baartman's display and Cuvier's textual discourse of pathology. These dynamics furthered the archotyping, or the collective psychological imprinting of Baartman as the notorious Hottentot Venus who, in the colonial imaginary and consciousness, represented obscenity, carnality, racial deformity and somatic retardation. Of the archetype's impact on the collective psyche, Jung says:

One can perceive the specific energy of archetypes when we experience the peculiar fascination that accompanies them. They seem to hold a special spell. Such a peculiar quality is also characteristic of the personal complexes: just as personal complexes have their individual history, so do social complexes of an

archetypal character. . . . [A]rchetypes create myths, religions, and philosophies that influence and characterize whole nations and epochs of history. (1964: 68)

The *mots-clefs* relative to Baartman, as Jung defines the western response to archetypes, are "specific energy," "peculiar fascination," "special spell" and "peculiar quality."

However, that collective responses are mostly socially conditioned problematizes Jung's conception of how archetypes come into existence.

Whereas Jung considers archetypes originating from a transcendent source, Karla Halloway views them as products of the social: "Archetypes that render mythic structures into systems of meaning are generally archetypes of behaviour and cognition" (1992: 87). And while Jung deems an archetype a "collective image" experienced by society as "mental therapy" (1964: 68-69), Petrine Archer-Straw asserts that: "Europe's 'conquering' of Africa and the 'new world' . . . created 'primitive' types and functioned as a kind of collective therapy to maintain European esteem and belief in its various nationalisms" (2000: 13).

For Baartman, however, being turned into an archetypal spectacle within a racial/(hetero)sexual/patriarchal/social context signaled her depersonalisation, objectification and symbolic redefining as *subperson* in colonial society. Reflecting on the notion of subperson, Charles Mills explains:

The peculiar status of a subperson is that it is an entity which, because of phenotype, seems (from, of course, the perspective of the categorizer) human in some respects but not in others. It is a human (or, if this word already seems normatively loaded, a humanoid) who, though adult, is not fully a person. And the tensions and internal contradictions in this concept capture the tensions and internal contradictions of the black experience in a white-supremacist society. (1998: 6-7)

The mediator of the projected phantasies of White male colonists, Baartman in her role as subperson and archetypal synecdoche mirrored the similar psychological and

corporeal oppressions other Black women faced in New World colonies dominated by Europeans.

As chattel, slave women were objects of sexual abuse, forced to comply in various acts of their own degradation. Perpetually in a state of nakedness, Baartman as a seductive/horrific body on display was gazed at, prodded, examined, pawed, whipped, ridden like a horse, compared to other animals, and in the end mutilated and re-displayed in pieces. These were the colonial regimes' preferred meanings of Baartman. Stuart Hall says "preferred meanings" are coloured by the social relations within a "dominant cultural order":

The domains of 'preferred meanings' have the whole social order embedded in them as a set of meanings, practices and beliefs: the everyday knowledge of social structures, of 'how things work for all practical purposes in this culture', the rank of order of power and interest and the structure of legitimation, limits and sanctions. (1999: 513)

The role she was intimidated into acting out and her repeated treatment by the public as corporeal and social outcast indicated how Baartman, the Hottentot Venus, socially reinforced colonial phantasies and realities as they exploited Black women. They also demonstrate how well-entrenched the prejudices of Black women as sexual beasts were becoming through text, illustration and performance. As Fanon had discerned, these prejudices were normalised in interpsychic and social relations (1967: 109). Racism thus influenced ways of seeing and objectifying certain groups. Says Richard Schmitt: "Relationships to other human beings are the essence of being human. But these relationships can be of very different kinds. . . . Racism, it turns out, is a particularly complex and powerful set of structures for imposing objectifying relationships" (1996: 41). The depersonalisation and sexual objectification of individuals, reconstructed through the basic ethnoracial scopophilia, presuppose the spectator, evoke conventional biases, and normalise acts of racism.

As they were socially reinforced in early nineteenth-century Europe, preferred meanings instigated the descent of Baartman: The hegemonic text converted her steatopygic body into a distortion of beastliness. This script and the potency of its violence continue: It has branched out from science to affect the arts and iconography. And it is mirrored in Ritts' 1999 photograph of Alex Wek.

Chapter 3 - (Hetero)Grafting Colour onto the Female Body: Rereading Venus Iconography in Black and White

This chapter explores how the colonial hegemony charted social meaning onto the body of the Black Venus via allegory. Using my reworked notion of *heterograft*, I critique the historical iconography of the Black and White Venus of the colonial gaze by foregrounding elements of the allegory overlooked in the popular pedagogy of disciplines related to the visual arts. I begin with an historical synthesis of the (White) *light* Venus as the nude from the Renaissance, then move to a closer iconographical analysis of the Black Venus from the 1780s to the early 1800s as a hermaphroditic construct of colonial propaganda of the slave era.

In art-related disciplines, the curricular marginalisation of “colour” signifies that “White” persists as the norm. This problem is especially apparent when considering the Black Venus and its theoretical absence in canons. Caught between religious worship and secular eroticism, the iconography of Venus was complicated in the late 1700s by the ensuing practice of slavery and the Christian missionary movement. Within these historical events, the allegory assumed different proportions and darker hues, generating a new iconography with new signification. The Black racialising of the allegorical female body signified a multifaceted alterity classed lowly in the colonial imaginary and rooted in definitions of heathenism, eroticism and pathology. The negative racialising was also indicative of the internalisation of White supremacist ideologies by Black subjects, which triggered the procuring of double-consciousness (Fanon 1952:8-10). Double-consciousness entails forced assimilation and subject revolt—forced assimilation in that the Black subject must insert herself into, and exploit, those venues the White ruling-class makes socially and economically available to her while concurrently being exploited;—subject revolt in that Black persons endeavour to change

their oppressive circumstances by disproving established stereotypes that sustain the reality of Black menialness.

Nowhere is this internalisation of subordinancy with its conjoining double-consciousness more evident than in the Black subject's desire to demonstrate her cultivated-ness to White society: "C'est encore un fait," observed Fanon: "des Noirs veulent démontrer aux Blancs coûte que coûte la richesse de leur pensée, l'égalité de leur esprit" (1952: 9).¹ As shall be seen, the allegory of the Black Venus was instrumental to this process of collective/individual interiorisation by disseminating patriarchal/colonial ideologies of the Black woman as a vulgar anomaly in social signification. Questioned are the iconographical deviations of the Black and White Venus. How was conceptual difference epidermally colour-coded in religico-secular signification on the allegorical body? How did this re-articulate gender and sex on the Black female body? And what were some of the ambiguities of the Black Venus concerning the ideal representation and the lived realities of numerous Black women during the Trans-Atlantic period?

The racialised allegorical body and its epochal modifications are especially noteworthy for what they reveal about the projections of the colonial consciousness and the sociopolitical attitudes toward Black women during specific periods. Aesthetic changes provide insight into how Black women were ideologically and politically (de)valued and how western art was complicit in the actualising of this (de)valuation. As demonstrated with Saartjie Baartman, the Black woman on display was a compound of an actual body, an individual body, a performing social body, but via allegory, a projected manufactured body. In this regard, the Black woman forced to masquerade as a secular "deity" symbolised a corporeal palimpsest for colonial ideas and phobias. This

¹ The English translation of this passage reads: "There is another fact. Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs the richness of their thought, and equal value of their intellect" (Trans. by Markmann 1967: 10).

body articulated a fusion of truths, (de)formed through iconographical replication.

About the function of allegory, Erika Langmuir elucidates that:

Personification is a device used in European languages to make abstract notions more vivid: it enables us to imagine that 'time flies', fate has a 'cruel hand' . . . and love 'is blind' . . .

Painted or sculpted allegories form a category of art uniquely bound to language. Rooted in the propensity of language to personify, visual allegory also relies on other figures of speech: simile—as when we call someone 'as steady as a rock'—and metaphor—as when we write of 'the ship of state'. (1997: 10)

Given Langmuir's discernment of the allegory as a bridge between syntactical and visual language, aesthetic conventions employed by the European masters must be re-examined to see the differences in the iconographical treatment and articulations of the deified allegorical body modelled after Black women.

To better study the interplay of the physical/conceptual body, I use the term *graft* and *heterograft* as gerund, verb, and noun. *Graft* connotes a physical alteration done to the body. But my reformulation of the term *heterograft*—taken from medical terminology²—refers to a violent alteration through which the donor culture, White western civilisation, aggressively projects its desires and phobias on a recipient subject, in this case the Black woman, cornered into mediating colonial perversions time and again. *Heterograft* signifies a variety of colonist ideologies played out through the allegorical aesthetics of the Black woman as live corporeal medium. The auditive register of the prefix *hetero* conjures an epidermal-related phenomenon happening in the confines of heterosexual patriarchy. And this was mainly how the historical situation of the Venus portraits have been documented—as objects for the gratification of the male scopophilia. *Heterografting* also evokes the clinical phenomenon of charting, mutilating, patching, and re-stitching foreign matter/s onto the body. The term

² "Heterograft" as stated in the *Third New International Dictionary of the English Language Unabridged* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* is: vb. A graft of tissue taken from a donor of one species to be grafted into a recipient of another species. A graft taken from an individual of a species different from that of the recipient; a heterotransplant."

therefore underlines the unification of two different alterities—donor (coloniser) and recipient (colonised) hybridising in power-contested ways that merge into something else, something other.

The power contestations are further complexified by appropriated fragments of culture from the past. These are used again by participants in a different time and space who displace historical meaning by altering conventions. The definitions are metaphorically sewn onto the body and played out anew in the real of social and political interaction. These fragments disrupt and re-condition how difference is read on the body. Visual (de)cyphering is thus imperative to iconography, given that the eye plays a vital role in the psycho-sensorial chain of perceiving, discriminating and knowing. Dionne Brand claims: “The eye is a curious thing . . . The eye has experience, knowledge and has cut out territories, reasons why it sees this subject leaning in and that one leaning away . . . The eye has citizenship and possessions” (1994: 169). What do the different colour codes of skin say to the eye in allegory?

Background: Venus, the *Light* (Pre)Christian Goddess

Icon: An image of a saint or holy personage, particularly when the image is regarded by the devotee as sacred in itself and capable of facilitating contact between him or her and the personage portrayed.

— *The Oxford Dictionary of Art*

My chosen point of departure is with Florentine painter Alessandro Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* c. 1484-1486, a visual narrative of a pre-Christian deity (Fig.5). In Botticelli's depiction, the gods Zephyr and Chloris blow an unclothed Venus toward the shore where her keeper awaits her arrival. Positioned contrapposto, Venus is an angelic, wafer-thin nymph, modest about her sexuality as she covers her breasts and genitals, her countenance pensive. She appears psychologically removed from the happening of her own birth; and the 'look' of introspection emphasises the topos of unsubstantiality.

To describe Venus as a *light* goddess is to expand the meaning of the term *light*, which con/fuses the literal with the figurative. Venus is literally *light* in pigmentation, literally *light* in build, and figurative-literally *light* in her signification as a divinity. She is, figuratively-literally, moral virtue incarnate. Explaining the painter's symbolism, David Wilkins and Bernard Schultz state that: "The exquisite beauty of Botticelli's figures asserts their divine nature. They are otherworldly deities who do not belong to the realm of the real" (1990: 252). This otherworldliness is not, as the authors indicate, linked to materiality, but to an imag(in)ed space of higher order and heavenliness. Thus, the celestial perspective portrayed in *Birth of Venus* is a metaphor for the higher dimensions of humankind in material existence.

This religico-moral encoding as it grafts the body into a distorted, denaturalised, dematerialised state has been coined *the nude* in 'high art' and history painting. The nude's objective in the Enlightenment "was to provide moral instruction through the representation of uplifting scenes of noble deeds ..." (Roworth 1992: 22). About its codification in paintings of classical myths, John Berger says:

To be naked is to be without disguise.
To be on display is to have the surface of one's own skin, the hairs of one's own body, turned into a disguise. ... The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress. (1972: 54)

Nudity being a disguise, the externality of the female muse becomes radically altered. Body hair, signifying virility, disappears from anatomical surfaces (Berger 1972: 55; Guiley 1995: 241); nipples and areolae shrink to small dots or vanish entirely; of the White allegory, the sex organs become seamed or aesthetically infibulated (Provost 1996: 2), as with Agnolo Bronzino's *Allegory of Time and Lust* c.1545 (Fig.24).

In this mannerist painting, Bronzino portrays Venus in a passionately incestuous embrace with her son-lover, Cupid.³ The characters are long-limbed, the torsos elongated, conventions typical of the mannerist style. But the female allegory is twisted into an awkward frontal position that gives the spectator's gaze greater access. Unlike the male allegories, the nudity embellishing Bronzino's Venus shows depilated skin and a denaturalised genitalia (Provost 1996: 2). The occluded genitals at once signify the tension of an unsexed yet libidinally impulsive female. This paradox in sexuality is inherent to the mythology of Venus.⁴ Tracking the transformations of Venus in classical antiquity, Sarah Pomeroy states that:

The Romans traced their rulers' descent from Venus' (Aphrodite's) son Aeneas. In philosophical discussions on the nature of love in Plato's *Symposium*, Aphrodite is said to have a dual nature. Aphrodite Urania, born of Uranus without a mother, represents intellectual, nonphysical love. Aphrodite Pandemos, said to have been created by the union of Olympian Zeus and the sky goddess Dione, was the patroness of prostitutes, and represented common or vulgar love. (1975: 7)

Here, Venus signifies an embodied contra/diction, possessing two adversarial genesis narratives. Birthed from a male deity, the *patri-genic* Venus advocates the denial of the mother and all connected with the feminine as the mattered world. Birthed of a female deity and by the result of a mythic heterosexual union, the *matri-genic* Venus turns into the icon of "prostitutes" and of "common or vulgar love," which is precisely the theme inferred in Manet's Victorian painting *Olympia* (Fig.12). Thus the iconographical signification shifts drastically when intercourse, female sexual knowledge, maternalism and corporealisation are entered into, or erased from the picture, so to speak.

³ Cupid was also known as Eros (Langmuir 1997: 20)

⁴ Many of the deities underwent name changes when they were appropriated by new cultures in new times. Anne Baring and Jules Cashford note that: "The Romans assimilated the images and the roles of the Greek goddesses and gods to their own pantheon: Hera becomes Juno; Athena, Minerva; Aphrodite, Venus; Artemis, Diana; Demeter, Ceres; Persephone, Proserpine. And of the gods, Zeus becomes Jupiter, Hermes, Mercury; Ares, Mars. Apollo was adopted by the Romans and keeps his Greek name." Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess: Evolution of an Image* (Arkana: Penguin Books, 1993) 403

The denial of the mother counters the worship of Mary in the Middle Ages, particularly that of the Black Madonna in predominantly oral cultures (Fig. 25). Leonard Shlain asserts that the earth and night were signs present in the epidermal aesthetics of the Black Madonna, making her a prime icon of cosmic holism. Earth represented "the most primordial substance," and light "its antipode" (Shlain 1998 : 268). Shlain says the disavowing of the veneration of a Black mother-goddess continues till this day:

Many medieval churches, extending . . . from Russia across Europe to Spain, had as their most sacred object a statue of a black Mary. The current official papal explanation posits that these representations were blackened by centuries of candle smoke. But close examination reveals that this could not be true, since the statues' clothes are not similarly stained. (1998: 267).

Shlain describes the Black Madonna as an icon of a period in which literacy was mainly oral. The cultural regression of this deity began with the spread of print alphabet (1998: 268), which perhaps ignited the fixing of Blackness as a negation associated with evil.

Other scholars have unearthed ample evidence about the worshipping tradition of the Black Madonna. The mediaeval Black Madonna with child is a pre-Christian goddess, a pagan deity that, ironically, has turned into one of Christianity's most precious devotional relics in its White rendering. One scholar speculated: "Tradition says that St. Luke who personally knew the mother of Christ, carved with his own hand the majority of these Black Virgins. It is highly interesting to know, therefore, if the mother of Christ was not a Negro woman, how it happens that she is black in France, Switzerland, Italy and Spain?" (Qtd. in Rogers 1967: 277).

The Black Madonna is herself a derivative of the Black Egyptian deity Isis who was worshipped cross-culturally for millennia, before the era of the Middle Ages (Fig.26). Not only is Isis a psychopomp of the netherworld, according to the myth, she breathes life back into her dead brother-husband Osiris, thereby resurrecting him as an immortal (Kinsley 1989: 168). These powers, when adopted and reworked into mediaeval

Christianity, were translated as attributes of a White male creator. And much like the symbolism behind the epidermal coding of the Black Madonna, which stood for both night and earth, Isis also represents the mattered world. David Kinsley explains: "As the fertile land itself, Isis was the ground upon which the pharaoh sat, and he was the genius of fecundity, the presence of order and civilization that made her habitable, beautiful, and even fruitful" (1989: 168). Isis and the Egyptian pharaohs occupy complex gender roles. The male pharaoh is positioned as civiliser and ruler whilst Isis emblematises nature. Yet Isiac mythology stresses a male-female reciprocity. Although the pharaoh is the male leader, the omnipotent goddess is the one who protects, nourishes, and politically guides him throughout his regular life, and into the phase of immortality (Kinsley 1989: 168).

Isis as the Black Madonna of the Middle Ages has whitened over time in the iconography of an increasingly negrophobic Christianity (Fig 27). So well entrenched is the image of the White Madonna in the west, so efficiently has it disavowed Blackness in emphasising maternal virtue as White that, to many, it is impossible to imagine a Black version, much less believe the Black version to be the previous model of the epidermally transformed White copy. The Black Madonna, a sacred Virgin Mother, nonetheless manifests as the opposite of both the Black and White Venus.

Metaphysical attributes are given to the White patri-genic Venus. Intellect, rationality and spiritual love, praised in classical antiquity and thought possible only amongst males, are ironically embodied in a female nude (Pomeroy 1975: 7). These aesthetics, grammared by values projected from masculinist ideologies and grafted onto a White female allegory, have an extensive tradition in western art. In the Renaissance, in addition to appearing in scientific texts, White female allegories represented traits socially conventionalised as masculine. Londa Schiebinger claims the male-produced spectrum of female-allegorical representations covered "reason (often portrayed as Minerva, armed with a word or taming a lion), theory, peace, liberty, the

rational soul, architecture, perspicacity, truth, wisdom, invention, economy, art, strength, logic, imagination, mechanics, statecraft, government, the academy, history, medicine, and metaphysics" (1988: 664). Maurice Agulhon observes a similar trend. Studying certain images of the folkloric deity Marianne as she manifested in historical art/cultural objects (i.e., illustrations, paintings, medallions and centimes), he speculates that the feminine of the Latin language may be responsible for the female-gendered allegorisation.

... when we ask ourselves why it should be the body of a woman (rather than a man or an animal, or any other object) that should in our Western culture, be the visual symbol used in allegory of the highest values, we are embarking upon a line of reflections that may lead far. First, why a woman? Is it because, in the Latin language, ... all virtues and qualities are usually feminine and the grammatical gender 'naturally' suggests the allegorical sex? or, probing deeper, could it be that over the past millennium a succession of cultures found upon male domination has assigned to women subsidiary roles as 'objects,' and that the allegory is, all in all, no more than an abstract dummy? (Agulhon 1981: 1)

Like Agulhon, Schiebinger deduces that Latin, with its feminine gender of scientific nouns, is the obvious explanation for the profusion of female allegories in the Renaissance (1988: 672). Conversely, she sees appropriation as a more plausible reason.

Given neoplatonists' appropriation of certain Egyptian iconography, Schiebinger surmises that: "Links between Renaissance hieroglyphics and Christian allegory were forged in the sixteenth century" (1988: 672). But the evidence of androcentric phobia of female sexuality is projected through suturing the female body, denaturalising the labial line of nakedness to (re)cypher it as virginally nude. Considering this alteration symbolic, Julia Kristeva claims that the flesh-vanishing female as a site of inscription in patriarchal Christian thought is a *sin qua non* for sustaining the heterosexual socio-religious moral order headed by man as the natural universal order (1986: 179-183). The schemes to humanise and civilise others stem from this thought and, as Kristeva stresses, unveil patriarchy's vested interest in preserving power. Pondering the altered

dematerialised maternal body in allegory. Kristeva asks: "What is there, in the portrayal of the Maternal in general and particularly in its Christian, Virginal, one, that . . . gratifies a male being" (1986: 163). But Dierdre Robson offers another view for the troping of the labially-infibulated female nude, explaining that, as in any social or religious context, leeways and limits existed to corporeal exposure and decency.

Many Classical ideals were rediscovered during the Renaissance, when the general tenor of philosophy became humanist. . . [T]he nude became an embodiment of perfect beauty and an emblem of abstract concept such as Beauty, Genius, Friendship, Truth or Sacred Love. More particularly, the rediscovery in Rome in the 15th century onwards of antique statuary such as the Apollo Belvedere or Medici Venus provided contemporary artists with models for their art, while the Church's new tolerance of the study of anatomy made a working knowledge of the human body possible (1995: 5-6).

Given the clerical "tolerance" of the unclothed body in imagery, the nude as an iconographic mediator thematically expanded from the 1400s to include moral and venereal themes (Clements 1992: 472, 479-481).

In *Sexuality in Western Art*, Edward Lucie-Smith asserts that iconographic conventions transformed after Renaissance mannerism: "It was as if men had begun to trust their senses more. The result was a blurring of the strict division between body and spirit which Mannerism had often been at pains to establish. . ." (1991: 79). More crucially, though, the White racialising of the Euro-invented nude became an increasingly (in)visible sign, not only associated with the labially infibulated allegory, but on an abstract level with those revered covenants of secularised Christian culture. That White female allegories begin to repeat ad nauseum as the nude signals an important event: for it is through diffusive frequency that the frail asexual White female is subliminally hammered into the western psyche as the quintessential icon of the righteous nude.

Like Robson and Pomeroy, Wilkins and Schultz say Botticelli's iconography is steeped in Neoplatonism which idealised the doctrines of classical antiquity: "In

Neoplatonic terms. Venus personified beauty and beauty equaled truth” (1990: 253). Truth thus acquires, through the illustrated allegory, physical codes which—composing a tangible identity—merge and normalise a specific gender and race with Christian mores. During High Renaissance, the Enlightenment and the Victorian era, Christian virtues predominated in the secular west, were minced with humanitarian ideologies created by the colonial élite, and disseminated under the guise of moral and civilisational progress. These were in(ter)ventions that circulated notions of the colonised in psychical, colour-differentiated, concrete forms.

Even before High Renaissance, iconographic racialisation was infiltrating the religico-secular art consumed by the western masses. Kim Hall observes that, in early modern England, Christian views were based on colour dichotomies racialised in visual and textual tropes which presented Blackness as an oppositional identity of “sin,” “evil” and “African servitude” (1995: 4). Hall affirms that, whilst numerous scholars studying this period refuse to acknowledge race as enduringly prevalent in European thought, “The insistent association of ‘black’ as a negative signifier of different cultural and religious practices with physiognomy and skin color is precisely what pushes this language into the realm of racial discourse” (1995: 6). Further reinforcing these racialised asymmetrical dualities was Enlightenment philosophy, an intersectional breeding ground in which cosmic, pseudo-scientific, ethnographic, religious and civic doctrines were together articulated through visual culture (Kerszberg 1997: 33).⁵ Botticelli’s *Birth of Venus*, with its female allegory *qua* Truth, is proof of this multi-epistemological intersecting, and witness to the influence of philosophy on art and culture: for the bodily etherealisation of Botticelli’s White Venus did indeed spring from a particular philosophical thought.

⁵ See also “Of Miracles” in which David Hume explains the Christian beliefs of miracles by human sensories in a social context. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Eric Steinberg, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis, Cambridge, 1993) 72-77

The (Neo)Platonic Nude

Derived from platonism, neoplatonism—a philosophy of third century A.D.—heavily influenced the European literati till the late Middle Ages. Having mixed with Christian dogma, it re-emerged during the Renaissance (Hanks 1986: 1031; Nead 1992: 22-23).

Platonism is: “The theory that abstract entities or universals really exist outside space and time, in an autonomous world of timeless essences. One argument for the existence of universals is that there are statements, known as true. . . .” (Bullock and Stallybrass 1977: 476). Neoplatonism regards the ontological “order of beings” in time (Turetzky 1998: 44-45).

Scholars of antiquity argued that time was space; others saw time as a medium through which motion and space acquires tense—i.e., before, after et cetera. Another theory supported that time is eternal and, as such, could not be broken into tenses (Turetzky 1998: 46-49). Instead, what acquires tense or a socially-derived chronology are those beings that emanate in “the changing world of matter and motion” (Turetzky 1998: 49). Which, then, comes first—time or motion, space as matter, the physical before of tense, or the immaterial tense-less eternal? Platonism attempted to sort out an order and the relation between the intersecting worlds of the abstract and the material, the idea and its physical manifestations. Of platonism, Hegel stated: “The Platonic Idea is nothing other than the Universal, or more precisely the Concept of an Object of Thought; it is only in its concept that anything has actuality; in so far as it is other than its concept, it ceases to be actual and is a non-entity” (Hegel qtd. in Gardiner 1969: 68). A concept, therefore, has a temporal actuality if and only if it is active in thought as a correlative Object. Thus the Object must complement the concept and stay within its time-specific realm of signification to be recognised as an actuality or an entity.

Botticelli's rendition of Venus represents a Neoplatonic spectral abstraction in which truth becomes the em/bodied as actualising concept-turned-Object in the material world. Truth is Venus, and as such acquires a racial epiderma in which the

White allegory figures as anti-matter and superior morality in the order of being. This racial-gender grafting endured in the Victorian period,⁶ upsetting the Cartesian body-mind dichotomy (Descartes 1637: 100-121), given that the allegory's externality now defined the essence of its true character within a cosmic hierarchy.

As mentioned, Botticelli's deity is ivory white, her slenderness exaggerated, defying gravity. That she is pictured *light* and weightless, standing afloat a shell alludes to the ethereal fragility of the body. The visual feeling of bodily etherealisation is greater enhanced by the surrounding characters, likewise surreally suspended above land and sea. Of this image, John White says: "Venus remains a vision that transcends the study of proportion and perspective of anatomy and structure. . ." (1989: 141). Yet in recollecting the clerical tolerance of the nude, artists employed disguise to erotic themes diverging from those of Christianity (Massengale 1993; Sheriff 1990). These deviations changed the size and shape of the (in)visibly White neoplatonic Venus.

Decades after *Birth of Venus*, in *Sleeping Venus* c.1510 (Fig.28), Venetian artist Giorgione eroticised Venus by placing her prostate at the forefront of a nature backdrop. This allegory is fleshier and less self-conscious than Botticelli's. One description of Giorgione's canvas reads: "The pensive image draws a parallel between the harmony of the female form and the sweetness of nature" (Peccatori and Zuffi 1999: 15). Not only the said "harmony," but "the female form" itself symbolises nature. Also, the gesture of covering is made ambiguous. Unlike *Birth of Venus*, in which the muse conceals her loins clearly out of propriety, in *Sleeping Venus*, the hand veiling the genitals is both onanistic and modest, the former condoned by the model's state of sleep.

⁶ In analysing representations of the rescue myth of Andromeda and Perseus, Adrienne Auslander Munich states that: "Aryan theories of racial supremacy can be found in Victorian times. Charles Kingsley and Frederick Leighton [a Victorian writer and artist respectively], . . . connect Andromeda myth to ideas of racial supremacy, both accepting the opinion that Greek culture originated in a superior type of Aryan race. Perseus, an enlightened male, brings civilization to Andromeda, a barbarian princess. Racial and sexual supremacy coexist." Qtd. from Adrienne Auslander Munich, *Andromeda's Chains Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989) 25-26.

Contrary to the neoplatonic aesthetics of *Birth of Venus*, in *Venus of Urbino* c.1538 (Fig. 29), Titian drew the allegory with like proportions, but cognisant of her actions, signaled by her gaze which serenely yet steadily confronts her beholder. The nuptial and class signs—the pet dog said to represent betrothal (Wilkins and Schultz 1990: 286), and the maidservants whose presence create a class hierarchy—temper the visual articulation of eroticism which caters primarily to a (male) heterosexual gaze (Wilkins and Schultz 318-319; Berger 1972: 54-55). *Sleeping Venus* marked a transition in the signs illustrating bodily excess and female sexuality. This iconography, with its methods of eroticising White female allegories in particular, and equating the female body in general to the baser carnal instincts of flesh, nature and prurience set a precedent of the reclining female nude for years to come (Wilkins and Schultz 1990: 286; Robson 1995: 24; Barber and Peacock 1983: 3-4; Peccatori and Zuffi 1999: 72-73).

Inasmuch as the nude of the White Venus came to signify high art in which the (male) artist renders the female body to “formal perfection” (Clark 1956: 350), similar to Kristeva, Lynda Nead considers the neoplatonic female nude an oppressive mediator in visual art, promoting the control of female sexuality and reflecting male fear (1992: 6, 17-18). Yet counter to the nude, *the naked* metaphorises and obscene body that flouts and artistic and social conventions of decency. Says Nead: “The obscene body is the body without borders or containment and obscenity is representation that moves and arouses the viewer rather than bringing about stillness and wholeness” (1992: 2). Desexed by disguise, the female nude nonetheless operates from an ambivalent space where a lolled female body suggests sexual availability (Nead 1992: 14-16).⁷ But the “body without borders or containment” is of another signification linked to darkness and

⁷ From a contemporary perspective, Erving Goffman claims that spatial signs in relation to the posturing of the models and their bodies spell out subject location in social strata as well as sexual availability: “Beds and floors provide places in social situations where incumbent persons will be lower than anyone sitting on a chair or standing. Floors also are associated with the less clean, less pure, less exalted parts of a room—for example, the place to keep dogs, baskets or soiled clothes, street footwear, and the like. . . . it appears that children and women are pictured on floors and beds more than are men.” Goffman qtd. in “Introduction” of *Gender Advertisements*, by Vivian Gornick (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1987) 141.

corporeal anarchy; it is of a different plethora of aesthetics that excessively carnalise and reductively delineate the female body through Blackness.

**Venus Blackened in the Romantic Era:
An Erroneous/Erogenous Matter of Exaggeration**

Icon: an image or pictorial representation; a brief image representing persistent activity in sensory channels following stimulation.

—J.P. Chaplin (1985: 218)

Colonisation signaled Europe's contact with other cultures and the iconographical cannibalising of the exotic, idealised in the Romantic era (Cummings 1968: 17). One repercussion of colonial dominance was that numerous Black and indigenous peoples⁸ were abducted, purchased and imported to various parts of Europe as slave-servants, souvenirs, pets, gifts or curiosities like Saartjie Baartman (Honour 1989: 7; Schiebinger 1993: 4-5; Wright 1992: 122-123). Another repercussion was that Europeans flocked to the Antilles to pursue the missions of Christianity (Rooke 1978/1979). Through these networks of immigration, dark epiderma acquired layers of negation. Thus the person embodied by Black skin turned into a comm/oddity in the imperial economy of colonialism. The dark body was made to reflect dichotomies of race, gender, and class which were assimilated into collective ways of policing subjects in colonial social structures (Foucault 1966: 85). Thus Christianisation as implicated in the Transatlantic slave trade and European expansion deepened these new epidermal/allegorical inscriptions of race and gender, and re-organised the colonial order of beings. Slavery was therefore the manner in which the Black Venus became an even greater polysemous allegorical body, as well as the inverse of Botticelli's supernal nude. Locksley Edmondson affirms that: "Slavery, the first organized system of race dominance, was ... a phenomenon integrally related to the evolving international

⁸ Here, I am including miscegenated peoples.

political order. . . [I]t was part and parcel of the European thrust for prestige and power on a global scale. . . " (1976: 15).

As Anneka Marshall remarks, images of Black women modify "with different historical contexts to maintain power hierarchies" (1996: 17). Sander Gilman similarly claims that images of otherness function on bipolarity and "reflect the deep structure of the stereotype while responding to the social and political ideologies of the time (1985: 27). Though contemporary heuristic models privilege gender over race, colonial perceptions of phenotypic differences, documented in literature of the period, indicate no such monolithic chronology. In fact, that they show an awareness of race and gender differentiation leads one to speculate why gender has been validated as a theoretical discipline modernity, and race subordinated. As an outer-surface signifier, race is a dynamic of identity that is continually present in gender. An individual could very well be externally raced by perceptions of skin colour and physiognomy, but not immediately gendered. Even uncertainties of pigmentation and facial features belong to racialised categories of passability. This could likewise be said for gender, that categories of passability exist. But the crucial difference is the signifying immediacy of skin. Slavery was a social and economic institution of western modernity based on, and coded by, skin colour which directly affected the position of Blacks as subordinates in the New World (West 1997: 8), as well as the image of the Black female as vulgar allegory.

The Female Allegory Vulgarised by Black Epiderma

As the Botticellian Venus, the confounding of figurative and literal signs happens with the Black female allegory, which indicates that Black women, their physical presence in reality and their conceptual presence in the slavocratic imaginary were vulgarised within systems that (mis)represented their identity as diseased corporeal excess. Excess thus *denoted* and *connoted*, through anatomical exaggeration, a dark body sexed with

erogenous matter and in a constant state of libidinal tumescence. Diane Roberts explains that, relative to the “high” classical body, the “low” grotesque body articulates oppositional “extremes” (1994: 4). It is bulky, gigantesque or dwarfed, anchored in the abnormally carnal rather than the spiritual (Roberts 1994: 4).

Vulgarisation marked the Black Venus as a distortion of corporeal truths. These erroneous definitions turned the allegory from White and virtuous, as Botticelli’s nymph, to a muse of base essentialisms. Vulgarising the allegory established sociopolitical conjunctures in which the reification of the concept of *race* created a new *class of gender*. Allegory, in this light, distortingly interfaces reality with phantasy, the written with the imag(in)ed, the past meanings with the present, and the realistically described with the ideologically prescribed. The coming into being of the allegorical Black Venus represented for the Black woman as recipient the (de)limiting of personhood—a projection “donated” by the Euro-colonial hegemony.

As seen in the previous chapter, by the 1790s, illustrated descriptions of South African women were being diffused in travelogues authored mostly by White males for White readers and tourists. François Le Vaillant’s travelogue of 1791, *Voyage dans l’intérieur de l’Afrique*, had a lengthy passage regarding the genitalia of South African women, called the Hottentot apron in English, the *tablier* in French (see page 68). George Leclerc de Buffon’s *Histoire naturelle* (1818) and George Cuvier’s *Histoire naturelle des mammifères* (1824) followed suit (see pages 72, 59). In textually and illustratively amplifying the *tablier*, these French ethnographies moored Black women into a discursive well of semiotic pejoration in which they were specularly seized as living metaphors of insatiable genitals.

Moreover, the voice of these ethnographies communicates a moral as well as an aesthetic judgement, encoded as an objective observation of fact. Morally, these texts convey that the primary dimension to Black women are their over-developed vaginas which they readily, willingly, and obscenely expose to strangers. Recall that de Buffon

had written about South African women and their sex organs: “elles découvrent à ceux qui ont assez de curiosité ou d'intrépidité pour demander à la voir ou à la toucher.” This is his own moral critique of Black women's lewd behaviour—their readiness to indecently expose themselves to whomever for a sexual thrill. But in terms of aesthetics, for the White European male de Buffon assumes as normative viewer-reader, the Black woman's genitalia are scripted as hideous and unappealing: “toutes les femmes naturelles du Cap sont sujettes à cette monstrueuse difformité.” This inscribing as vulgar therefore occurs through a grammar of genitalic corpulence in which the complexities of *person* empty out into *body part* whose unsightly appearance constitutes immoral character. In *Sexual Desire: A Philosophical Investigation*, Roger Scruton astutely explains that:

Obscenity attaches, not to the things themselves, but to a way of seeing or representing them. If we say that certain parts of the human body are obscene, we mean only that, for whatever reason, we are compelled to see them so: their nature or function causes us to dwell on their fleshly reality, so as to eclipse the embodiment of the individual person. . . . Obscenity involves a 'depersonalised perception of human sexuality, in which the body and its sexual function are uppermost in our thoughts and all-obliterating. (1994: 138)

The depersonalisation Scruton speaks of converts the Black woman into an obscene body. Regarding textuality, Ella Shohat and Robert Stam assert that: “Although languages as abstract entities do not exist in hierarchies of value, languages as lived operate within hierarchies of power” (1994: 191). The visuo-discursively produced Black Venus of the Romantic period, now gaining frequency in media, signaled a fissure from archotyping to negative stereotyping.

The violent heterografting of the Black allegory recurs in W. Grainger's *The Voyage of the Sable Venus* (Fig.6). First completed in 1763, and then remade in 1801 (Honour 1989: 34), this engraving is particularly important because it shows the collapsing of Christianity with vulgar eroticism. Made after Botticelli, Grainger's

depiction situates the allegory as the central figure of the composition. Although afloat on a shell, Venus' muscular body, accentuated by her dark skin, alludes to both a manual working class and a stocky weightiness. Seemingly, she is pictured with her father Zeus, who is conventionally "white-haired and bearded. . . crowned with oak leaves. . . ." (Hope Moncrieff 1992: 8-9). His muscular masculinity echoes the darkened smaller body of his "offspring"—a comparison which distances her from the gendered category of frail femininity. Also, that she has fluttering puttis framing her upper body further visually punctuates her corporeal density. Horace Russell affirms that: "This was a representation of a well-formed and voluptuous black woman attended by her ethereal servants (all white) floating above the blue sea" (1983: 55).

Yet the epidermal emphasis on size and shape additionally refers to tumescence and innate sexual potency. Russell goes on to state that Grainger's engraving represents a stereotype of the Christian Black as Noble Savage, another construct from platonic thought (1983: 54). When abolition threatened slavocratic systems in the colonies, such stereotypes circulated in colonial media as part of propaganda strategies to appease the White colonists who feared for their privilege, power and wealth, and to assuage the Black slaves who, through insurrection, fought for freedom (Russell 1983: 53). The Black woman was therefore the ideal mediator for diffusing these tensions between the master and slave populations. Russell explains:

The black woman was a 'womb' and as such was mother and the harbinger of the future. With this the black man could not compete. . . [T]he female slave was exploited both by the headmen and the white men. And in that she was the ground of reconciliation.

This led naturally to the black woman and the coloured woman being treated as sexual objects. . . . She was the master's object of pleasures, seldom his companion. On the other hand, she was described in literature of the period as having magical powers which made her irresistible to men, powers which she obtained from the obeah man. (1983: 53-54).

This propagandist image of the Sable Venus appeared juxtaposed to "Sable Venus. An Ode" in Bryan Edwards' *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* of 1793 (27-32). A close reading of the ode indicates that it does naught to mention the political issues of slavery, emancipation, and abolition which were loudly debated at the time.⁹ Instead, the poem is a series of sugar-coated verses regarding the beauty of the Sable Venus. As Hugh Honour notes: "Neither the poem nor the print so much as alludes to slavery: the theme of both is the physical charm of the black woman whose form is likened to one of the most famous of all antique statues, the *Medici Venus*" (1989: 33). Richard Dyer comments that the poem, accompanied by the image, "marks an early articulation of the sexual economy of desire in the fantasies of race" (1997: 153).

The denial of brutality in the romanticised image of the Christian Sable Venus as it correlates to "fantasies of race" is precisely what enabled the continuance of sexual violence against Black women in slave colonies during the early nineteenth century. The history of Saartjie Baartman, which concerns the transposition of a myth onto a person, demonstrates this process of mutilating and mythically recharting the Black female body to justify the barbarity of Euro-colonial interests. Anatomist George Cuvier eviscerated her skeleton, her buttocks and genitals, his autopsy "findings" turning colonial fictions into "truths" about the supposedly bestial libido and somatic primitive nature of Black women. The dynamic heterografting of Baartman's body as bestial erogenous matter is immured in the depiction *La Belle Hottentote* (Fig.1).

In the 1812 cartoon, Baartman as *La Belle Hottentote* is exposed on a platform, and scrutinised by White spectators whose comments clock wise read: 1) Qu'elle étrange beauté; 2) Ah! Que la nature est drôle; 2)À quel chose malheur est bon; and 4) Godem quel rosbif. These exclamations intensify Baartman's sexual objectification.

⁹ See, for example, Thomas Paine (1737-1809) "African Slavery in America," *The Thomas Paine Reader*, eds. Michael Foot and Isaac Kramnick (1775; London: Penguin Books, 1987) 52-56 and William Wilberforce (1759-1833), "Pamphlets on West India Slavery," *The Westminster Review* II (April 1824): 337-370.

transforming her into an exotic freak of nature and a slab of meat. The woman crouched as though to better view Baartman's genitals, does not gaze upward, but across at the phallic sword of the male in kilt. This image not only positions Baartman as a sexual curiosity, but as a performing vulgar deity whose supra-corporealised presence emits a contagious bestial eroticism.

Baartman is used as a medium to articulate the fallacy, the allegory of *La Belle hottentote*. Her body as quasi-transposed muse thus troubles the concept of the White nude; for sexual contiguity as it is aesthetically represented in the cartoon fixes her as obscenely naked. Being out of the disguise of nudity, her exposed body incites sexual provocation from her beholders, her amplexity able to "move and arouse" viewers indecorously through the gaze (Nead 1992:2). Furthermore, as mirrored in colonial reality, the cartoon construes her as an erotic disease, her body transmogrified into a live pathological erogenous zone—pathological because of its hyper-aesthetic turgescence. In fact, the genitals are noted as follows in Havelock Ellis' renowned *Psychology of Sex: A Manual For Students*.

Erogenic Zones: This is the name now given to regions of the body which in the process of tumescence are found to be sexually hyper-esthetic.
The conception of erogenic zones... was first definitely formulated in medicine in the sphere of pathology... (1933: 30)

Several scholars confirm these colonial projections which reductively contrived the Black female body as salacious and genitalic. Jan Nederveen Pieterse says that, in the western imaginary, Blackness remains a substitutional signifier of "repressed libido" (1992: 179). Sander Gilman explains that: "During the rise of modernism... the black, whether male or female, came to represent the genitalia through a series of analogies" (1985: 109-110). More specific to Black women, he elaborates that: "When the nineteenth century saw the black female, it saw her in terms of her buttocks, and saw represented by the buttocks all the anomalies of her genitalia" (1985: 109-110). Marlene Nourbese

Philip likewise sees the Black woman's body as a genitalic metaphor for male colonists' pillage to create the Caribbean into the New World (1997: 76): "Womb and wound; cunt and cut—the paradigmatic axis around which the male European would move in the New World" (1992: 22-23). And of Baartman, Tracey Denean Sharpley-Whiting comments that: "Most nineteenth-century French spectators did not view her as a person or even a human, but rather as a titillating curiosity, a collage of buttocks and genitalia" (1999: 17).

This analogy of womb/cunt correlates to the Sable Venus as an allegory restrictively and ambiguously sexualised in iconography. But the occurrence of vulgarisation takes a different turn when Black epiderma and physical turgescence merge to form a new sign. Sable Venus' excessive muscularity, which seems at the brink of breaking skin, stands for not only a servile body accustomed to hard labour, but a body stripped of its femininity due to the racialised corporeal signs associated with Blackness and gender inscription. It is through this dark-skinned muscular excess that the Sable Venus translates into a hermaphroditic allegory of an ambiguous gender and sex, being both female and masculinised, but neither male nor feminine. The theme advocated by this androgynous allegory differed to the slave and the slavocrat.

White male slave-owners absorbing the image of the Sable Venus identified some semblance of a reality as played out in the colonial context. This is to say that the iconographical state of Venus' unclothedness points to hegemonic fabrications of Black slave women as promiscuous and primitive which circulated in, and influenced, slavocratic reality. The state of muscular turgescence of Sable Venus signifies the actuality of Black women's bodies shaped, scarred, and hypertrophied by the physical demands and abuses of slavery. However, the Sable Venus promoted propagandist ideologies that certain Blacks adopted. They believed that, as slaves, they would rise to the status of "human" by embracing Christianity. As a result, many slaves internalised

these ideologies of Christian propaganda. In 1774, slave and poet Phillis Wheatley wrote as verses:

'Twas Mercy brought me from my Pagan land,
Taught me benighted soul to understand
That there's a God, and there's a Savior too. (Qtd. in Sterling 1998: 43)

Wheatley saw Christianisation as a good for Black slaves, referring to Africa her birthplace as "my Pagan land."

That these ideologies were coded in the language of propaganda signals the strength of the discursive and its efficacy in marking, in impairing identities through skin, gender, sex, and corporeal inscriptions. Judith Butler states that: "The sex/gender distinction and the category of sex itself appear to presuppose a generalization of "the body" that preexists the acquisition of its sexed significance" (1990: 129). Whereas definitions of gender (man/woman) and sex (male/female) were carved out in the language used in coding Enlightenment ideologies and conventions, racialised slavery incited a context in which variegated meanings of Blackness were re-charted onto the female body in reality and in allegory, creating a contingent hermaphroditic configuration that could be further exploited in the variegated economies of slavocracy (i.e., socioeconomic, artistic, literary). Such configurations are the crevices in discourse which permit new conditions of re-articulation. Stuart Hall asserts that: "... it is in the *discursive* form that the circulation of the product takes place, as well as its distribution to different audiences. Once accomplished, the discourse must then be translated—transformed, again—into social practices if the circuit is to be both completed and effective. . . . If the meaning is not articulated in practice, it has no effect" (1999: 508). The iconography of the Sable Venus reflects the hegemonic meanings of the Black female subject as vulgar body in the practices of slave society. However, the heterografting of bestiality in iconography signals Baartman's body into mediums of art. This resulted in

the turgescient posterior of the Black Venus doubling as a tabooed erogenous zone, an iconic steatopygic deformation that begun to be psychically conventionalised as erogenous, bestial and thus pathological.

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PART II – MODERNISING BLACK VENUS

Chapter 4 -The (Im)memorial Image of the Black Venus: The Stereotype

In all these areas—gender, class, and race—criticism has correctly focussed upon the institutional forces in modern Western societies that shape and set limits on the representation of what are considered essentially subordinate beings; thus representation itself has been characterized as keeping the subordinate subordinate, the inferior inferior.

—Edward W. Said (1993: 80)

That Baartman was posthumously known by her proper name and as the Hottentot Venus indicates the (im)memorialising of her image through repetition, an image that, from its commencement denied her personhood. The continuity of the image bespeaks of a transition from archetype to stereotype. Whereas a stereotype is the prototype of an “original” (Collins 1986), the aesthetics politicised in my analysis signify the current notion of stereotype in which the imaging of a particular subject, whether visual or textual, denotes a pejorative meaning. Reading as a survey, this chapter interrogates the transition of the Hottentot Venus, questioning how the sexual, excessively corporeal image of the historical archetype transformed into a popular cross-cultural stereotype whose initial signification of indecency and atavism have been mnemonically obscured in the contemporary.

After Baartman

After Baartman's demise 29 December 1815, the Hottentot Venus continued to manifest in material culture throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. Tracey Denean Sharpley-Whiting has demonstrated how pandemic an icon *La Vénus hottentote* had become in French literature of the Romantic era and how it endured in illustrations. In their literary works, authors such as Honoré de Balzac, Émile Zola, Charles Baudelaire and Guy de Maupassant indulged to some extent in stereotyping their Black female characters, which took after the sexualisation of *La Vénus hottentote* (Denean

Sharpley-Whiting 1999). Earlier works near the turn of the nineteenth century, such as Voltaire's, show a Black presence in French literature surfacing as obsessional (Hoffman 1973). This assiduity was also infecting White anglophilic colonial hegemonies on a transcontinental scale. Some Victorian literature exemplifies the cross-over ideology which upheld, in terms of gender and race, that White/European femininity was the more cultivated over Black/African womanhood.

Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* of 1853 contains a section which supports this ideology. The story concerns protagonist Lucy Snowe whose life as a single woman in the Victorian era is turbulent and solitary. Moving from Bretton (Brussels) as a young adult, she finds employment as a schoolteacher in a girls' lycée. Teaching in a vicinal boys' school, Paul Emanuel, an eccentric professor of French literature turns into Snowe's love interest. But the budding romance between Paulina Mary Home (known as Polly) and John Graham Bretton (known as Graham)—distant relations of Snowe—is the moralising subplot (Brontë 1853: 7, 12).

Polly is thrown into Snowe's first-person narrative at a young age, when her mother dies and her father leaves her in the care of his Bretton relatives (Brontë 1853: 3). Later, as young adults, Polly and Graham grow closer. Yet a three-way tension is created by Ginerva Fanshawe, a pupil of Snowe's circle. She is presented as an obstacle between Polly and Graham. Her contact with Graham in the form of a flirtatious acquaintance tests his morals, judgement and taste in women.

This moralising on race and gender occurs in one particular scene in which Lucy Snowe is at an art gallery admiring a painting entitled *Cleopatra*. As Brontë describes the image through the protagonist, the female allegory is "put into a scale of magnitude suitable for the reception of a commodity of bulk. . . . She was, indeed, extremely well fed; very much butcher's meat—to say nothing of bread, vegetables, and liquids—must she have consumed to attain that breadth and height, that wealth of muscle, that

affluence of flesh" (Brontë 1853: 186). Snowe is first joined in the gallery by Emanuel, who muses over the painting of Cleopatra. When Snowe eventually asks the French professor his opinion of the reclining voluptuous allegory, he candidly replies: "Cela ne vaut rien," he responded. "Une femme superbe—une taille d'imperatrice, des formes de Junon, mais une personne dont je ne voudrais ni pour femme, ni pour fille, ni pour soeur"¹ (Brontë 1853: 190). In being equated to Juno, who was the Roman goddess of childbirth, Cleopatra's body translates into a metaphor of dark fecund matter, a particular stereotype given Black women in the slave era under the more coarse term of "breeder." Moreover, Juno's allegorical traits, which were considered inherent to Black slave women, are temperamentalness, *amour-propre*, and self-gratification (Hope Moncrieff 1992: 9).

Snowe later labels the allegory a "dusk and portly Venus of the Nile" (Brontë 1853: 191). And when Graham arrives at the gallery and absorbs the image, he too is asked his opinion.

As we left the gallery, I asked him what he thought of Cleopatra
'Pooh!' said he. 'My mother is a better-looking woman. I heard some French fops, yonder, designating her as "le type du voluptueux;" if so, I can only say, "le voluptueux" is little to my liking. Compare that mulatto with Ginerva!' (Brontë 1853: 192)

Graham's interjection ascertains that the image Brontë describes is indeed of a Black female allegory, or more precisely a "mulatto." She is used as a medium of ethnoracial contrast. The utterances made by the White male characters, Graham and Paul, are not only Brontë's indirect critique and national sentiment about White women being of a

¹ **English Translation: "That [painting] isn't worth anything. A magnificent woman, with the stature of an empress and Junoesque proportions. But not a person I would want to have as a wife, a daughter or a sister."

higher caliber than African women “of the Nile;” they also reflect a White woman’s phobia of European men actually preferring African women.²

The Egyptian female body of the majestic goddess Cleopatra falls to a common, abject body in Brontë’s representation. This happens by not only associating the body with Africanness, but more significantly with “mulatto-ness” as a degenerate form of African hybridity. As a female body of White and Black mixture, the female mulatto, though still within the category of Black, runs the risk of appealing to both Black and White men. At the time of Brontë’s writing this novel, concubinage of White planters with mulatto women was commonplace in the British West Indies (Green 1985). This gender-racial juxtaposition in literary works, especially those written by British women—which discretely addressed the “sinful” problem of interracial concubinage—was not uncommon in the post-abolition period (Denean Sharpley-Whiting 1999: 36-37). Through a narrational formula, these juxtapositions promote the biological and anatomical supremacy of White women, possessing hierarchically loaded connotations about nations and the cultivated quality of their womenfolk. Brontë’s comparison therefore typifies this moralising colonist condensation motivated by anxiety, fear, and the menace of miscegenation. It stigmatises the Egyptian allegory as gluttonous, somatically excessive, risqué and indecent. This stigma accords with the then emerging stereotypes of mulatto women being corporeally atavistic and libidinally savage—ruled by needs of the flesh. After all, as Paul pronounced, even this majestic Cleopatra is unworthy to share any social or blood ties with him—not as wife, nor daughter, nor sister.

Yet particularly disturbing, and indicative of Brontë’s negative stereotyping, is the reductive visuo-cursive accentuation—the graphic deliberation of image through words—on the dark voluptuous body of the allegory as “butcher’s meat,” “muscle” and

² See Denean Sharpley-Whiting’s discussion of the vaudevilles that mock the Hottentot Venus (1999).

"flesh." This textual rendering resembles the inscription given Baartman as roast beef in the cartoon of 1812, in which the White male visually seizes Baartman's posterior (Fig.1). Like Baartman, Cleopatra's body is presented as animal meat and as an exotic pornographic derision for European (male) viewers and readers. The body of a Black allegorical deity repeated in Brontë's "novel" representation as bestially corpulent.

Lynn Meskell remarks that western Europe has been intrigued by ancient Egypt for a long time. Scholars from Graeco-Roman antiquity took an interest in Egyptian civilization, as did savants from the Renaissance. A renewed interest occurred during the nineteenth century, as witnessed in French and British novels, like Brontë's. According to Meskell, Cleopatra was a favourite character in literature, painting and theatre (1998: 66-67). Inasmuch as contemporary readings consider Cleopatra "half-masculine," "androgynous," and "promiscuous" (Meskell 1998: 67), Meskell purports that in Victorian works, Cleopatra's body becomes the *material* of representation: "She is often painted as an Oriental despot, a femme fatal, jaded with absolute power and spent from desire. . . . The body of Cleopatra encapsulated contemporary fantasies of Egypt and her fetishized image. . . was thus subsumed within the discourse of ritual, power, sexuality and death" (1998: 66).

Certainly, there exists an authorial intention behind this obsessional *surveillance* of the Black female body in Brontë's work. To ponder, sketch, measure, plot, and write the Black female body into textual presence, so it mirrors a certain ideology, a certain implicit critique, and a certain subjective moral value requires premeditation and intention on the author's part when formulating character representation (Foucault 1966: 85). The chapter itself is entitled "The Cleopatra;" and throughout the plot, Brontë confounds the characters' physical traits and psychological dispositions with their national identities. Therefore, if Cleopatra is a glutton and wanton, it is symptomatic of her Africanness, an inferior nationalism to those of the Franco-British empire. Discussing

the “domestic cultural enterprises” of the novel, Edward Said underlines that: “The capacity to represent, portray, characterize, and depict is not easily available to just any member of just any society; moreover, the “what” and “how” in the representation of “things,” while allowing for considerable individual freedom, are circumscribed and socially relegated” (1993: 80).

The repetitive singularities of sex, flesh, and the carnivalesque body that etch the Black Venus into the imagination partake in the practice of socially regulated circumscriptions of Black women under Dutch, French and British imperialism. Brontë’s imaging of Cleopatra is thus a synecdoche of imperialist stereotypes of Black/African women. On a different note, Elizabeth Grosz considers the body as surface tissue on which specific identities of specific epochs through specific means are chiseled: “There is nothing natural or ahistorical about these modes of corporeal inscription,” she says. “Through them, bodies are made amenable to the prevailing exigencies of power. They make the flesh into a particular type of body—pagan, primitive, medieval, capitalist. . . .” (1994: 142). Robbin Leger Henderson explains that, at its core: “Stereotype is an attempt to depersonalize individuals and thereby deny them the rights and dignity which our society professes to accord everyone” (1989: 6). Henderson goes on to state that the focus on physical exaggeration or distortion is symptomatic of derogatory stereotyping (1989: 6). In the same vein, Robert Landy agrees that: “The concept of ‘stereotype’ is itself a pejorative one; it connotes a reducing, diminishing, or belittling of a person” (1993: 138).

The incident of stereotyping Black women mushroomed from the pseudo-scientific, to bleed into other spheres of visual and literary art, as with *Le Costume Historique* of 1888 (see Appendix C and D). In the chapter entitled “Afrique” and subtitled “Familles Austro-Africaines—Hottentots, Cafres et Betchouanas: La toilette corporelle,” author Auguste Racinet (1825-1893) supplies details concerning Baartman’s national origins, but immediately thereafter describes her steatopygia as an anatomical

deformity peculiar to female "Boschjesmans." Racinet borrows this description from François Le Vaillant, mentioning one of Baartman's exhibitions in Paris as *La Vénus hottentote*. As the *Vénus callipyge*, (*callipyge* meaning "steatopygic" in French), Racinet re-inscribes Baartman as an animal of little intelligence, coaxed with candy by the visitors to perform the simple acts of jumping or singing ("On lui donne du bonbon pour l'engager à sauter, à chanter" (1888: unpaginated). In a book about fashion, costume and national dress, Racinet somehow found it necessary to include Baartman and to cite Cuvier's autopsy report on her bottom after labelling her monstrous: "Le nom de la déesse de la beauté et de la grâce appliqué à la monstrueuse Sarah fut une triste ironie". . . (1888: unpaginated). Thus the lasting impression of Baartman Racinet disseminates is that of her as an animalistic cross-breed of sorts,³ whose only use in Europe was to be displayed as a large butt, and then mutilated as one for the good of European science. It is in this respect that Enlightenment Europe cannibalised Baartman in every possible way.

Even more, Racinet "authenticated" his description of Baartman by cross-referencing it to photographs of an 1878 anthropological study of other steatopygic women in Africa, which ascertained that that body type still existed ("ce type subsiste toujours"). Implied by these photographs is that African women posed naked or semi-clothed. This is how "la toilette" for Africans, which denotes "dress" in French becomes oxymoronic, and even senseless in Racinet's subtitle "La toilette corporelle" [**The corporeal dress**]. Paradoxically, it indicates that the outer surface of the body is indeed a dress of codes. Worth stressing, again, is the leakage of anthropological, ethnographical and natural-history lore into diverse artistic mediums and aesthetic discourses, a phenomenon that severely disparaged Baartman in life and death, but which also

³ Baartman's people, the Hottentots, are described in Racinet's text as a biological cross between "yellow" and "Black" peoples (1888: unpaginated).

worked as a form of oppression during the Enlightenment in the realities of Black women.

Critic and writer of Oscar Wilde's circle, Frank Harris (1855-1931) alludes to the Hottentot apron in his autobiography *My Life and Loves*, published 1925. Though recounting events from his childhood, education, work experiences and journeys, the text is filled with explicit descriptions of Harris sexual encounters. One of these took place in America with a light-skinned Black woman named Sophy, nicknamed Topsy. Of their first interlude, Harris wrote: "To my astonishment her sex was well formed and very small: I had always heard that Negroes had far larger genitals than white people, but the lips of Sophy's sex were thick and firm" (1925: 181-182). That he singularly mentions "the lips of Sophy's sex" indicates Harris was influenced and socialised by sexual myths regarding the Hottentot apron. Harris is, moreover, physically attracted to Sophy, but only insofar as she remains a lover, an object to sexually gratify him at his whim. This is affirmed in a passage where he says: "As a mistress Sophy was perfection perfected and the long lines and slight curves of her lovely body came to have a special attraction for me as the very highest of the pleasure-giving type" (1925: 184).

An excerpt of this same escapade is printed in Charlotte Hill and William Wallace's *Erotica: An Illustrated Anthology of Sexual Art and Literature*. The first printing of this text was in 1992, followed by another in 1994. Hill and Wallace's contextualisation problematically voids Harris of his racist and sexist prejudices, positioning him instead as a Casanova with a penchant for all types of women. Though in Harris' autobiography, he is the one who takes Sophy's virginity, in the anthology, it is the reverse: Sophy is described as the expert who initiates Harris to new acts of sex. Hill and Wallace write: "Later Frank experiences bliss under the tutelage of a natural, the black maidservant Sophy" (1992: 119). By adjectivally racialising the maidservant as "Black" and labelling her "a natural," Hill and Wallace become complicit in political

textual practices that anchor the Black woman into pejoration, stereotyping her as an idiot savant, only knowing or being “a natural” at performing erotic acts.

Several hundred pages later, Harris, on an excursion in Zambesi, discusses other bawdy occurrences with African women. The main preoccupation here is not how the Zambezians live, but their sexual behaviour toward the Europeans. Harris admits to taking pornographic pictures of the women for his own onanistic amusement: “I loved to take their photographs in the most lascivious attitudes, enjoyed draping them in a pretty piece of stuff and thus bringing out their ever—present coquetry” (1925: 743). His extensive descriptions of African peoples as hyper-libidinous bodies textually transmits the stereotype of Black women as prurient to the reader; yet like Brontë, these passages unveil: 1) Harris’ engrossment with African women as hyper-erogenous entities and 2) his reductionist pre/re/cognition of Black women as primarily mattered beings. More imperatively, these passages demonstrate that he himself has internalised the stereotypes of African women fed to him by material culture.

Whilst Harris admits to preferring miscegenated women (“the half-white girls appealed to me much more; but the pure Negro type left me completely unmoved (1925: 743), he seems to have forgotten about his escapade with Sophy and his “discovery” of her genitals; for in a chapter entitled “Dark Beauties,” Harris authoritatively declares: “. . . it is not only the vigor of the Negro, but also the size of his sex which causes him to be so esteemed by the French prostitutes. On the other hand, the Negro girl, too, is far larger than the white and that certainly detracts from the man’s pleasure” (1925: 744). Harris’ avowal of preferring “half-white girls” mirrors Brontë’s and other White heterosexual women’s insecurities of Black women as rivalries. But his allusion to the corpulence of the Hottentot apron shows a transformation in its semantic and connotative usage. No longer tied to Baartman, the excessive genital, through the copula (“the Negro girl, too, is far larger than the white”) becomes an epidermalised metaphor

for Black female sexuality as it manifests in the imaginary of the White male. This metaphor functions to satiate his perversions.

Despite his anti-slavery sentiments, like other anti-slavery advocates of his time, Harris imagined Blacks as a class suitable for labour and sexual servitude to Whites, which permitted White colonial leisure.⁴ Because of her female-mulattohood, Sophy becomes engraved in Harris' consciousness as "the very highest of the pleasure-giving type" (1925: 184). His description of her from his own experiences is passed on to his fellow readers as prescriptive advice. And so circulates the male colonist ideology of Black women.

Particularly disturbing, however, is Black women's internalisation of these stereotypes. Through Harris' reporting, the reader learns of Sophy's insecurities about being abandoned by her Irish lover.

"That's why you goin' to leave me," she added after a long pause, with tears in her voice. "If it wasn't for that damned nigger blood in me, I'd never leave you: I'd just go on with you as servant or anything. Ah God, how I love you and how lonely this Topsy'll be," and the tears ran down her quivering face. "If I were only all white or all black," she sobbed. "I'm so unhappy!" My heart bled for her. (1925: 191)

So much did Harris' heart bleed for Sophy that, after having sex with her that same night, he curtly waved goodbye to her the next day (1925: 191), his prompt departure his genuine show of empathy.

Yet it is evident that Sophy has interiorised stereotypes of Black women to the point of self-sacrifice and self-aversion. Granted, distortions occur in Harris' second-hand report. One can only wonder what actually came from Sophy's mouth. But the phrase "damned nigger blood" rings as a idiom of self-hatred used by Black subjects

⁴ As concerns the maintenance of White leisure via Black domestic labour and servitude in post-slavery America, see M.M. Manring's *Slave in A Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1998).

who recognise the difficulty of their ontological situation in White-ideologised cultures which are determined to sustain Black oppression. By the tone implicit in her words (as mediated through Harris), Sophy has reached a point of desperation: She is willing to settle for being the mistress, servant, "or anything" to a White man, to avoid a life of solitude and destitution. In addition, the dependence on White men from affluent classes was ideologically engrained in both Black slave women and White male slavocrats for different reasons.

This was the case with myriad slave and ex-slave women in the antebellum era. Concubinage was a sin to the White high-brow Christian society, but a means of survival for many Black women in similar circumstances as Sophy. In the slavocratic imaginary, her light-brown skin marks her stereotypically as a hyper-sexed mulatto (which is how Harris represents her); but it also brands her as visibly Black, thereby limiting her access to numerous places and privileges reserved for Whites. Since the Enlightenment, this epidermal marking has been reconfigured in subsequent periods by the colonial Establishment to re-articulate, in new aesthetic translations, the fixity of Black-femaleness as ultra-carnal, libidinal and nugatory. These were socially constructed pathologies— or rather "socio-genic," to use Fanon's term (1952)—which stemmed from White desires and phobias about the Black female body and which gravely impeded Black female ontology. This socio-genic marking continued throughout the twentieth century, causing a struggle for peace within Black subjects who saw their reflections in aesthetic representations as the other of inferiority and menialness.

Madame Josephine, The Venus of Jazz

Of Native Apalachee and Black heritage (Haney 1995: 1), African American Josephine Baker (1906-1975) became the Black Venus of Jazz in Paris in the 1920s. Born and raised

in St. Louis Louisiana, Baker was witness to the racial tensions in her community during the interwar period (Haney 1995: 21,29). As a teenager, she found jobs serving in restaurants. Then in Harlem, she danced in chorus lines until her departure to France in 1925. Seeking better opportunities in Europe, Baker eventually secured a post as a performer with the troupe *La Revue Negro*. In her biography of Baker, *Naked at the Feast*, Lynn Hanoi commented: "What Josephine sensed but did not know... was that Paris was ready for Josephine Baker. Her entrance could not have been better timed... Soon she would be a leading figure of the age..." (1981: 50). Nonetheless, Baker's personal battles with racism, sexism and poverty continued in Paris. How did her role as a leading figure in cabaret and jazz impact on her identity as a Black woman?

In France, Baker performed with the *La Revue Negro* (Baker and Chase 1993: 17), enlivening White-conceived stereotypes of Black people as savage and sensual by her style of dance. It was Baker, however, who was singled out and coerced into performing half-naked as the Jazz Clipart, or the Venus of Jazz. Her costumes comprised skimpy banana skirts, feathers and furs—textures, prints, and ornaments that evoked in the White imaginary African's and barbarism (Rose 1989: 20-22). Thus Baker's minimalist yet flamboyant costumes were designed to maximally display her as exotic body and spectacle. When she stepped into the skin of the Venus of Jazz, Baker transmogrified into a sensual brown body of frantically moving parts, performing what was known as savage African dances. As Phyllis Rose explains:

Long before Baker hit Paris, the dancing black female body was associated in the French imagination with lewd invitation. From the earliest exploration of Africa, European travelers had been struck by African dances, and the dancing black came to hold a particular grip on the European imagination. To European observers, these dances expressed such indecency, such unbridled sensuality that they could only imagine them resulting from primitive inferiority—or, in kinder versions, primitive innocence. (1989: 27-28)

The style of dance Baker employed, which accentuated exaggerated movements and displayed the body in lascivious positions, triggers the remembrance of Baartman who was given candy—or goaded by her animal keeper—to dance, so that Europeans could voyeuristically watch the intimate movements, or “undulations” as August Racine had called them (1888), of her buttocks (see Appendix C and D). The evoking of Baartman through epidermal aesthetics and performance signifies that the lewd corporealisation of Black women’s bodies is key to how the Black Venus finds its life in diachronic and synchronic versions.

Personifying the Black Venus so well, so convincingly on stage meant that Baker was reciprocally internalising the indignities of the stereotype. Soon her stage persona began to dominate her real existence and her individual identity in everyday life. In the syntax of real life, she was living out the *is* in the copula which chained her to the carnal stereotype she enacted on stage. The Cleopatra and Black Venus of pornographic colonial fictions periodically obliterated Josephine Baker, the person. Through behaviour or remarks, viewers who had seen her semi-clothed and gyrating on stage projected onto her the image of the dancing primitive female savage. In this regard, Baker’s persona manifested as dubious—which, again, leads back to what kind of role model she represented. Was she glorified in France as a rare and live corporeal curiosity, like Baartman? Or was she legitimately respected by White French society for her talents as a jazz performer?

Because of the racial tensions she experienced in social interaction, Baker came to see her skin colour as a major obstacle in mobilising socially (Baker 1935). Her double identity in life, on stage and in White society were, to a great extent, irreconcilable, resulting in self-aversion. It is noted that she “hated being black, but she never forgave whites for the racial injustices she had suffered at home” (Baker and Chase 1993: unpagged); and that she “yearned to be part of the white fashionable “monde,” to which

she was now exposed by virtue of her talent and notoriety” (Haney 1981: 104). This self-hatred was sometimes blatantly apparent in the most ordinary of contexts. For example, in scrutinising a certain photograph of Baker and Pepito Abatino, her French fiancé in the late 1920s (Fig. 30), Petrine Archer-Straw discerns how Baker is the one who mimics her celebrity doll, and not vice versa:

The camera unflatteringly captures her looking pasty-faced and grinning. The harshness of the flash reveals the extent to which she has masked her blackness in order to appear a fitting ‘countess.’ Ironically, her fiancé holds not Josephine but the doll of the same name, now bare-breasted but nevertheless wearing the same inane grin. (2000: 94-97)

Though Baker struggled with her Black skin and her in/famous role as the Venus of Jazz, in her later years, she channeled her self-aversion into an activism against racism. She fought against segregation during the era of the Second World War. She also adopted thirteen children of different racial and cultural backgrounds whom she named the Rainbow Tribe (Haney 1981: 269). Furthermore, there was a side to Baker which realised that, not her skin colour, but cultural institutions with racist ideologies, patriarchal politics, and discriminatory privileges were the cause of racial violence, segregation and continued Black female oppression.

Faced with the limited choices of her time, as a Black female performer who played the role of the wild libidinal Black Venus, it must be acknowledged that Baker did indeed exercise agency, albeit dilemmically. She was exploited and dominated by the stereotype while, in return, socially and economically exploiting the circumstances the stereotype afforded her.

Other Sightings/Citings of the Black Venus

In America, Black people were still exhibited in vaudeville and museums as late as the 1930s. Blacks indigenous to the United States were displayed as “authentic” African

cannibals who, in modern times, had remained in a dormant state of savagery (Bogdan 1988: 51, 182-183). The Hottentot Venus was one of these “untransformed” types conserved in the American museum.

The Hall of Man, a project orchestrated by Malvina Hoffman and financially backed by the Museum of Chicago, was begun 1930. The goal: To preserve replicated samples of humans from different nations supposedly on the verge of extinction. The female Hottentot was one of many non-European subject groups appearing on the museum’s death list. After much curatorial debate, and reacting to the peoples selected, Hoffman commented: “When the subject of the ‘Venus Hottentot’ was first discussed, I confessed that I came very near to abandoning the whole project of the Hall of Man” (1936: 155). Revolted by the “female ugliness” of the Hottentot Venus, Hoffman was incensed by not having her way. She had wanted to pick “the best possible representative of a race” (1936: 155), which, in Hoffman’s rationalisation, would disqualify the female Hottentot. Furthermore, the reproduction of the body cast of the Hottentot buttocks proved to be a task in itself. Consultations with erudite anthropologists about measurements, size and shape were “endless,” Hoffman alleges (1936: 155). In speaking with a German professor, she recounts:

... I had arranged to satisfy all the experts on the subject of the correct size of a Bushman woman’s *steatopyga* development (sic). (This, dear reader, really means “fat tail,” or over-life-size “spankers.”)

I told him that my model had been approved by the officials of the Cape Town Museum, as an average medium example, but that as some experts insisted on more exaggerated proportions, I had decided to have the buttocks on my bronze figure made in thick flexible rubber, which could be easily inflated or deflated according to which anthropologist was expected to visit the museum! He really believed me. (1936: 155)

As demonstrated with the above examples, the *steatopygic* buttocks in profile was a cipher now acquiring greater iterative frequency in different media and different

milieus—fashion ethnography, performance, and the museum. These worked together as a matrix, crystalising the Black Venus in material culture and catapulting the archetype forward into future temporalities as a stereotype. As a consequence, the excessively protruding buttocks became a doomed insignia and a corporeal signature of the Hottentot Venus with all its negative connotations. The variants thus signaled a rupture from the aesthetics of Baartman as the Hottentot Venus, but also an amnesia around her individual history as her silhouette was (im)memorialised through acts of automatic or intentional reproduction in the contemporary.

This signature buttocks is sighted/cited in Anaïs Nin's *Delta of Venus*, a compilation of erotica produced for a male patron in the 1940s. Written in a rhythmic and sensuous style, Nin's erotic phraseology immediately evokes pictures to the imaginary. The stories are full of bizarre, problematic characters that represent otherness to the White western male assumed as normative reader. These figures range from the lesbian, Cubans, and "the dark-skinned Jesuit" with "some Indian blood" who possessed "the face of a satyr" (1969: 25). The entire book represents adult fairytales of pornographic escapades, punctuated by doses of sadomasochism.

The story "Mathilde" (1969: 10-24) reads like a colorful hallucination of body parts tossed together in a textual collage for the patron's erotoscopic pleasure. Narrating in third-person, Nin depicts Mathilde as a voluptuous Parisian hat maker who is out for sexual adventures. She leaves Paris for South America, only to end up a prostitute in an opium den in Lima, Peru. Mathilde whiles away her days by smoking opium and having group sex with three or four men at a time. But the client Martinez is her favourite. On one occasion, during an interlude, Nin recounts Martinez' lucid dream:

Erotic images would form again. Martinez saw the body of a woman, distended, headless, a woman with the breasts of a Balinese woman, the belly of an African woman, the high buttocks of a Negress; all this confounded itself into an image of a mobile flesh, a flesh that seemed to be made of elastic. The taut breasts

would swell towards his mouth, and his hand would extend toward them, but then other parts of the body would stretch, become prominent, hang over his body. The legs would part in an inhuman, impossible way, as if they were severed from the woman. (1969: 15)

Here Nin represents dark-skinned women as pieces of “severed” meat, patched together in a psychical collage that gives clarity to an exaggerated tumescent body.

Furthermore, the imagistic violence and sensationalism of the “headless” body is eroticised by the lyrical heterografting and plasticity of Nin’s phrases. And Nin did indeed labour over her style of erotic language, wanting it to “outdo” that of D.H. Lawrence (Barille 1992: 178). Dark-skinned women as they are syntactically articulated through the masochistic phantasy of the male voyeur lose their identity and status as humans. Through Nin’s ink, they are converted to “inhuman,” diminished to a form of “mobile flesh. . . that seemed to be made of elastic.”

This sensationalist eroticising of the mutilated female body reverts to Cuvier’s dissection of Baartman’s genitalia and buttocks, in which her most intimate parts were cut open, knifed, sliced off, measured and replicated in scientific/pornographic illustration. In the provocative documentary *The Life and Times of Sara Baartman* directed by Zola Maseko (1998), historian François-Xavier Fauvelle says that Cuvier and his colleagues were not at all concerned with the actual cause of Baartman’s death. Instead, what interested them was possessing a passive specimen, a cadaver that did not fight off invasive, sexualised mutilation. About Cuvier’s dissection and his colleagues who assisted with producing a corporeal knowledge about Baartman, Fauvelle states: “Les causes passaient totalement inaperçues. . . Ils avaient enfin un corps qu’ils pouvaient disséquer. . . un corps qui ne resistait pas” (qtd. in Maseko 1998).⁵

The themes of eroticised mutilation, and the projected White-male phantasy of Black women as animal flesh occurred decades later with one of Jean-Paul Goude’s art

production. A French photographer known for his problematic photographs of ex-wife/model Grace Jones. Goude by the 1970s had grown accustomed to taking pictures of Black women. But in his autobiography *Jungle Fever* (1981), he confesses he was obsessed with the body of one of his African companions, Toukie. Driven by this desire to fetishise her, Goude produced a 12 inch replica of her likeness, the exaggerated silhouette of her buttocks conjuring Baartman's historical profile (Fig. 31). He even boasts of the technology of the cast which efficiently duplicated the pores of Toukie's skin (1981: 41). Goude explained that his calculated exaggeration of Toukie was to improve on her actual body and to create the effects he desired. Says Goude, who is quoted at length:

... I couldn't help myself; I had to improve the masterpiece. The real Toukie was a step in the right direction but she was not quite like my drawings. I had to see my dream girl for myself and also show others my concept of beauty. So I started chopping the replica as I had done with the photographs, elongating limbs and widening shoulders. On the original statue, Toukie's tits looked unnatural, like silicone jobs—because they had been cast while floating. So I chopped them off and made them more natural with big prune-like nipples. I had always admired black women's backsides, the ones who look like racehorses. Toukie's backside was voluptuous enough, but nowhere near a race horse's ass, so I gave her one. There she was, my dream come true, in living color. (1981:41)

This description stresses the antagonism between White phantasy and Black actuality as fuelled by the ideologies and dynamics of race, gender, ethnicity, and class. Goude's confession also reveals the lengths the artist went to, in order to have his obsession "come true, in living color."

Like Toukie, whom Goude animalises with a racehorse's ass, Baartman was similarly toyed with by Europeans. One visitor who rode on her back as a young boy referred to Baartman as a "steed of Africa" whom he had whipped on the flanks

⁵ **English translation: "The causes [of Baartman's death] went totally unnoticed. They finally had a dead body they could dissect. ... a body that would not resist."

(Edwards and Walvin 1983: 181-182). These period-specific incidents of perceiving and interacting with the Black female body indicate that the contemporary stereotype and historical archetype of the Black Venus share similarities in the responses they provoke from White male spectators. Moreover, Goude's flippant understanding of Toukie's reaction to his exaggerated miniature underscores his refusal to see her as anything other than animal. Of the outcome concerning the bestial replica, Goude concludes: "To my disappointment, Toukie hated what I did. I think it was the main reason for our separation. She did not share my views; my fantasies definitely had nothing to do with hers. I saw her as this primitive voluptuous girl-horse. She preferred champagne, caviar, and the life you see in the pages of *Vogue*" (1981: 41).

The grotesque silhouette, with its racial carnalisation, its ultra-enhancing of Black skin, can be seen in the 1995 *Paris Match* fashion spread of Naomi Campbell. In one image taken by Mario Testino, Campbell is naked, save for neon-green pumps and a headdress (Fig 2). The headdress she models is a flowing gold-embroidered Versace cloth, with a generous train. She stands in profile, her buttocks tilted outward from the high-heels. The athletic contour of her buttocks, accentuated by her posturing, resembles the illustration of Baartman's profile found in Cuvier's text. Campbell's hand gesture to the face signifies both introspection and coquetry. The Blackness and nakedness of her svelte body appear as exotic fabrics and textures, ones that concurrently play up the hues of the gold-ivory cloth. The headdress itself is an 'orientalist' garb which further inscribes Campbell as other and exotic. Within the dynamic of the composition, the embroidered tissue and Campbell's skin aesthetically resonate as parallels of foreignness and the colourful.

Voyeuristically magnified for the viewer are Campbell's dark body, her leanness, her supple skin, and the firm tone of her physique. Yet as a repeat of the Hottentot Venus' corporeal silhouette, it must be mentioned that the image has indeed modified. The

media is photography the context fashion, and the model less voluptuous. But given that context has history, to know the changing elements of context is to know the social, political and mediatory shifts of an image as it re-appears in western culture. And although, like Baartman, Campbell is a controversial figure, the lens' racialised sexual objectification erodes her construction as subject. Like Baker, she becomes trapped in the space of *semi*-ness, ambiguously recognised as quasi –Campbell quasi-Venus, semi-subject semi-object. Also, the blurb explaining the scenario indicates that Campbell's transmogrification as the sensual Black goddess is based on her being a spectacle: "Dans l'euphorie des prises de vue, elle devient la Vénus au voile" (qtd. in *Paris Match* 1995: unpaged). Thus personified, Campbell becomes a subperson of sorts, vacillating between famous super-model, exotic deity and anonymous stereotype. This effacing/re-facing of identity is due to the pattern embedded in the signifying power of the codes. The dominant pattern preserves the thematic of corporeal bestiality while the signifying power incites and expands aesthetic transformation.

It is not only the reiteration of the Hottentot Venus that has made the image (im)memorial; the White collective obsession with the Black female body and its transmutations in media has also deeply branded the silhouette of the Black Venus in the western imaginary. Comprising of "theme" and "aesthetics," the transmutations ensure that the fixity and the transformation of the stereotype will continue indefinitely. The detriment to this realisation, however, is that the image of the Black Venus will endeavour to have negative ramifications on the realities of Black women—also indefinitely.

In the next chapter, I focus on several representations of Black goddesses in an exclusive Canadian context. This examination will highlight the problem of the Black Venus stereotype imported in Canadian culture, and the neocolonial ideologies it proliferates in the aesthetic discourses of art production.

Chapter 5 -Crossing Cultures: Black Goddesses in the *Multicultural* Canadian Context

Assumptions of white racial superiority inform the designation of formal culture in this country and the assigning of public funds. Culture is organised around 'whiteness' through various 'para-statal' bodies, including the CBC, the NFB, the Canada Council, provincial and metropolitan arts councils, and through private media and cultural and educational institutions.

—Dionne Brand (1994: 158-159)

This chapter examines the images from panels of the triptychs made by Canadian-based artists, Hilda Woolnough and Katarina Thorsen. These are studied within the prevailing social climate of multiculturalism. Though multiculturalism is a strategy of redress, I shall maintain that it permits colonial images to be ambiguously re-construed as progressive and eclectic in the contemporary. I shall also treat the way in which these images are viewed as feminist and emancipatory through the colonial history of Black women in the slave era, but also through the space of multicultural ambiguity that maintains racialised hegemonic ways of knowing the other through a constantly changing visual economy.

At the conference "Comparative Literature and Cultural Transnationalisms: Past and Future" held in Montreal, Quebec in April 1999, keynote speaker Gayatri Spivak spoke of multiculturalism in her paper "Crossing Borders."¹ She distinguished between *liberal multiculturalism*, the more commonplace notion of multiculturalism, used as lip service, and *radical multiculturalism*, the inclusion of all—coloniser and colonised in social interactions. Spivak asked that the latter be exercised more consistently by those in positions of power. A few years previously, bell hooks had made a similar plea: "Cultural critics who are committed to a radical cultural politics (especially those of us who teach students from exploited or oppressed groups) must offer theoretical paradigms in a manner that connects them to contextualized political strategies" (1990: 8). The practice of radical multiculturalism signifies the struggle for justice through inclusion, but also a commitment

¹ "Comparative Literature and Cultural Transnationalisms: Past and Present." [Conference Schedule] 8-11 April 1999, Montreal, Quebec. Gayatri Spivak's paper "Crossing Borders" was given 10 April 1999.

to ongoing self-criticism. This scrutiny of multiculturalism involves the art production of corporeal alterity or, in other words, of how racial otherness is represented through the body in art. Such artistic discourses, developed within the rubric of liberal multiculturalism, are unsettling in what they enable.

The late Prime Minister of Canada Pierre Elliott Trudeau (1919-2000) devised the multicultural policy in 1971 (Wood and Remnant 1980: 200; Cannon 1995: 244), stipulating that:

National unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own *individual* identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes, and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the basis of a society which is founded on fair play for all. (1998: 144-145)

The catch phrases in Trudeau's utopian, well-intentioned statement are "personal sense," "*individual* identity," "respect for . . . others," "willingness to share" and "fair play for all." Trudeau's *multicultural* too easily implies *equal*, in which (dis)privileges based on different aspects of identity are overlooked. It is in this vein that Marlene Nourbese Philip says: "Because it pretends to be what it is not—a mechanism to equalize all cultures within Canada—it ought not to surprise us that multiculturalism would be silent about issues of race and colour" (1994: 181). Thus the multiculturalism conceived and practised on this soil was created in good faith; yet because certain groups are still disenfranchised, it carries on the sociopolitical and colonial effects that position Canadian art as a domain in alliance with the larger institutions of White supremacy. Moreover, that Canadian is hyphenated by racial adjectives, such as Black Canadian or African Canadian signals an attempt by certain theorists and artists to change the commonplace assumptions of the identity being normatively White (Walcott 1997: 120; Clarke "Eyeing" 1997: xi-xiii). At the same time, though, these terms reinforce the customary understanding of *Canadian* by way of adjectival absences and binary semantics.

The Feminist Critique of Male-Conceived Femininity

Made in 1982 by Hilda Woolnough, the triptych *Another Spring (after Botticelli's Primavera)* contains a panel entitled *Venus* (Fig.32). It is not the entire triptych, but this one panel that is reprinted in art texts. It displays a nude/naked allegory whose face is fragmented by a mask, and whose large hands and feet are disproportionate to the rest of her body. She sits confronting the spectator head-on in her ultra-carnal prurience. Her thighs, parted by unwieldy fingers, reveal a crudely drawn thatch of pubic hairs. This daring act of exhibition contrasts sharply to the allegory's solemn countenance. As the aesthetic opposite of Alessandro Botticelli's principle allegory in *Birth of Venus* c.1484-1486 (Fig.5), Woolnough's *Venus* represents a criticism of male-derived standards of female beauty. But as Maria Tippett reports:

Countering the ways in which male artists depict women for the pleasure of the male viewer, Woolnough presented what she described as "a squatting, smelly-toed, and masked Venus." The chunky, grotesque figure of the central panel of her triptych arouses no sexual desire but mocks the small-breasted, sylph-like figures that dance across Botticelli's famous work ... Woolnough has exchanged one stereotype for another. Venus' ripe breasts, her exposed genitalia, her fetish-like stance indicate her connection to the earth, fertility and regeneration, the very stereotype of cultural oppression that feminists were determined to change. (1992: 170)

From a feminist point of view, the imperative here is Woolnough's want for the "grotesque," "smelly-toed" allegory to be horrific and desexualised in its visual register. Yet that the goddess is dark, masked and Picasso-like puts the image into a bracket in which the female body becomes racialised as non-white and engraved with primitivist aesthetics.

Indeed, the monstrous allegory exhibits aesthetic referents of primitivism. Joan Murray notes that, in 1978, Woolnough had begun refining her "*Venus series*," which encompassed a spectrum of depictions—from prehistoric to Rembrandesque goddesses (1989: unpagged). However, in the 1982 catalogue *Mirroring: Women Artists of the Atlantic*

Provinces, the *Venus of Another Spring* (after Botticelli's *Primavera*) is described as an archetype and the end product of the artist's concern over women's "vapid" representation "in traditional paintings" (Rosenberg 1982: 11). Curator Avis Lang Rosenberg explained that:

The women in Woolnough's drawings have long been anything but vapid: squat, black, bulging, threatening, crouching, seething, massive, hypnotic. . . Unlovely faces grimacing with wisdom, huge bodies with jutting breasts, gigantic grasping hands, and ponderous spreading feet crowd the shallow spaces in the manner of a bas-relief. . . A savage and stoical Venus presides, more Palaeolithic or pre-Columbian than Renaissance, her horny toenails and damp smoky crotch marks of pride and power, not shame. (1982: 11)

As outlined, the traits glorified in this archetype are her colossal corporeality, her Palaeolithic savagery and her "smoking crotch" of "pride and power"—an about-turn to Tippet's comment on the same panel. Although the artist re-invents Venus as a visual counter-discourse, but unwittingly as a dark goddess, the visual and textual framework occasion an epidermal racialising of the allegory. Moreover, *Venus'* contextualisation as a primordial savage and an insatiable sexual entity opens onto the rich history of Black women in the west and the propagandistic aesthetics of their bodies, employed cross-culturally since the eighteenth century, to sustain their subordinate status.

As a system of ideas, primitivism came into prominence during the Enlightenment, with the onslaught of European colonial expansion. This violent expansion signaled colonial expropriation of non-European lands as well as the cannibalising of other cultures through political dominance. Colin Rhodes explains that:

Colonialism. . . lies in the heart of theories about Primitivism. The colonial enterprise in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries provided a wealth of examples of cultures new to the West, set within a system of unequal power relations which determined that, or more often in contemporary writings, 'the savage', was invariably the dominated partner. . . (1994: 7)

Primitivism describes a Western event and does not imply any direct dialogue between the West and its 'Others'. In the context of modern art, it refers to the attraction to groups of people who were outside western society, as seen through the distorting lens of Western constructions of 'the primitive' which were generated in the later part of the nineteenth century. (1994: 8)

A characteristic central to primitivist renderings is the scopic focus on the unclothed body, which is styled to portray enormity and voracious sexuality. It is this lethal combination that communicates physical, sexual and intellectual savagery in visual discourse.

In Woolnough's triptych, *Venus* is magnified as a libidinal, threatening, massive and hideously deformed body. But that she is divested, with her genital thematically and visually centric to the image, transforms the dark goddess into an embodied erogenous zone. This aesthetic inscription is not novel, though. As discussed in Chapter 2, the specular emphasis on the physical exorbitance of the dark female body possesses historical roots in natural history stemming from the politics of White androcentrism and European imperialism. This inscription perseveres in defining the buttocks and sex organs of dark-skinned women as dangerous, hypersexed and the sum of their entire being. Sander Gilman claims that: "When the nineteenth century saw the black female, it saw her in terms of her buttocks and saw represented by the buttocks all the anomalies of her genitalia" (1985: 90). But this declaration can also stand for numerous twentieth-century depictions.

One difference with Woolnough's *Venus*, however, is the reconfiguring of aesthetics and the renovating of context as feminist criticism. "Renovating" is purposely used here; for it stresses the *problématique* of restoring a thing or situation to a better condition from an old deteriorated state, but the renovation (*nova/new*) itself presenting its own set of perplexing visual and political repercussions.² An unquestionably confusing feature that dominates the allegory is its oscillation between the camouflage of the nude and the realism of the naked.³ This recurring problem in corporeal representations of Black women directly interfaces with social and political reality. While the Picasso-like conventions codify the dark body as archetypal allegory, the appearance of pubic hairs on Woolnough's

² This problem is not exclusive to Black representation. See, for example, Part Three, "Appropriating The Image" in Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (1992. Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp P, 1995) 169-190.

³ See also Charmaine A. Nelson, "Coloured Nude: Fetishization, Disguise, Dichotomy." MA Thesis. Montreal: Concordia U, 1995.

goddess signifies a biological body: it eroticises the allegory, stripping away the moralising disguise to reveal virile nakedness.

Primitivism and its Conflations

Pablo Picasso's renowned *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)* c.1907 is an example of this primitivist transcription that encapsulates racialised innuendoes of Africanness, physical ugliness and pathological sexuality (Fig.33). The painting is of prostitutes in a brothel, some of whom display angular, mask-like faces (Robson 1995: 74; Green 1989: 366). The combining of these masks with the bodies of female prostitutes conflates Blackness with sexual bellicosity, animality and disease. Moreover, studies on Picasso's aesthetics indicate that these are indeed the aspects coded in *Les Femmes d'Alger (O.J. Version O)* (Lucie-Smith 1972: 155, 157).

Blackness merged with the prostitute's body symbolises beastly sexuality and venereal disease which deforms the allegories' physiognomy (Rubin, Seckel and Cousins 1994:108). Cubism therefore possesses specific standards for Blackness, Africanness and the female body. Of Picasso's image, David Wilkins and Bernard Schultz remark: "Compounding the psychological anxiety communicated by these masked figures is a composition which sets formal elements in violent visual combat: warm flesh tones and shades of pink and rust are set against icy blues, while spatial illusionism seems denied by the flat, abstract shapes. . . ." (1990: 448). In this regard, not only the content, but the genre of painting should be considered as to how it conventionalises the dark female body in composition (Hess 1975; Rhodes 1994).

Additional factors complicate the making of illusion. The artificial fuses with the genuine, the feared with the desired, and the normal with the abnormal. The longer the illusion is repeated over time and standardised aesthetically, the easier it is appropriated, absorbed in real life as normal, and the harder it becomes to separate the actual from the phantastic. Jean-Philippe Narboux asserts that: "... en thématissant la genèse de l'illusion, on pose le problème de la motivation du faux: en identifiant un mécanisme de l'illusion, on

prend acte de la naturalité et de la nécessité de l'erreur. Il y va de la *nécessité de la répétition de l'erreur*, de sa recurrence chronique et de sa persistance anachronique" (2000: 22).⁴

Obfuscated, as well, through the repeated errors of the illusion is knowing otherness in its actuality. From Hess' above statement, it seems little difference exists between conceptualising and knowing alterity as conjured by the European artist. Whatever is subjectively imagined as otherness is taken as objectively known when it issued from artistic creativity. This distortion accords with Archer-Straw's insights. Although discursively framed in the male normative, her groundbreaking *Negrophilia* underlines the influence of Africanness and Blacks as imagined by Europeans and (mis)rendered in Western avant-garde art of the 1920s:

The reality of the black man and the mystery of the land he represented became fertile psychological landscapes in which the white man could create and satisfy his desires. The line of demarcation between the real and the unreal became increasingly blurred. For Europeans, Africa and the black man were framed in notions of high adventure, savagery, fear, peril and death. Products of the outer reaches of the imagination, these fantasies necessitated distance in real and psychological terms. (2000: 13-14)

Consequently, the difficulty with revolutionising these images in a new light and with new aesthetics, as Woolnough had attempted to do, is that they already come from a White consciousness, imbued by centuries of race ideologies and binary thinking, of which the dark-skinned female body represents anomalies to the norms prescribed by White patriarchy.

Conversely, Woolnough's inadvertence in not recognising the signification of epidermal colour in her reformulated *Venus* demonstrates an ideological point of convergence, an imaginal affiliation with other collectives that have been socially conditioned to see the female body enrobed by Black skin as an other, self-directed by

⁴ ***The English translation: "In thematising the genesis of the illusion, the motivation of the false poses a problem.

pleasures of the flesh. This illusion has been inculcated in those groups across cultures that keep the ideologies of White western hegemony politically afloat and in circulation, whether consciously or unknowingly.

Like White patriarchy, Woolnough, though working from a feminist woman-oriented context, envisioned the dark female body as epidermal excess and monstrosity. Her employed aesthetics implicitly and inversely emulate the Botticellian ethereal svelteness of White femininity she criticises. Thus, Woolnough's primitive *Venus* as a social critique of androcentric paragons of female beauty backfires, and ironically discloses the intersectional prejudices of what (White) feminist/feminine artistry regards as corporeally other and corporeally normative in a Canadian context.

Deifying the Body

Other Canadian female artists have perturbingly re/created the stereotype of a dark, enormous, carnal goddess, thus provoking controversy. For instance, Katarina Thorsen's 1990 triptych *Lives of Lizzie* was displayed in a 1991 Vancouver exhibition at Fifty-Six Gallery (Fig.34). Titled "I Love Titty" (Fig35), Thorsen's section venerated, as she explained, Black women as deified mothers (Rosenberg 1991: D7; Wilson 1991: B10). Though intended as an homage to Black maternity, the images flanking the centre panel are eroticised. The middle image magnifies the head of a Black woman framed by curvilinear graphics. But the one to the left shows only a turban gracing the model, her torso and full breasts dominating the main perspective. The image to the right depicts a Black woman naked and in labour, her face by contrast stretched in an expression of ecstasy.

Like Woolnough, Thorsen's model's legs and genitalia in the third panel frontally open to the spectator. The witnessing of birth subsequently turns into a semi-voyeuristic activity; and the corpulent body transmogrifies to a primordial object of sexual fascination

In identifying a mechanism of the illusion, the naturalness and the necessity of error becomes evident. This turns to the *necessity of the repetition of the error*, its chronic recurrence and its anachronistic persistence."

as well as a machine of reproduction. It is this panel that oft-appears in texts. In fact, it was reprinted in *Artropolis 90: Lineages and Linkages*, with Thorsen's words juxtaposed. She claimed her works were her "personal celebration of the goddess-Mother Africa" and that:

My paintings are not an apology from a white person. Why do I, a middle-class white mother of two, always paint pregnant Black women, with large breasts? My initial response is that I like to promote my daughter's African Heritage so that she may grow up self-confident and complete. But it has become much more than that. It's become a personal focus—a ritual celebration of goddess, the creator, and a deliberate spiritual, mental and physical act to keep in touch with the truth, the beauty, and the genetics of all species. (Rosenberg and Varney 1990: 106)

With this period as the aftermath of colonialism and political recovery, and with institutionalised racism and sexism still infecting western society, one is impelled to ask: Is African heritage primarily about mother goddess worship, reproduction and childbearing— aspects used so recently against Black women to essentialise and restrict their agency in New-World slavocracies? Also, Thorsen's mention of her daughter's African identity—in conjunction with the photograph published of the two in an article—acts as a justification for her choice of topic. But are an African-Canadian female's identity and self-confidence foremost about embracing Mother Africa or moreover maternity, lactation and nurturance?

In White western science, the myth of Mother Africa possesses a twain analogy. It has been debated as an outright denial, or promoted as an hypothesis to pinpoint the origins of humanity from where evolved civilisation. The results of an American computerised DNA diagnostic of the early 1990s purport that "all of humankind descended from one woman who lived in Africa 200,000 years ago" (Begley 1992: K8). Whereas such anthropological discourses on evolution positively acknowledge African women as the originary source of human existence, at the same time, this information negatively highlights the primordality and degeneracy of the parent source which produces a more evolved offspring in the subsequent generations of the chain of "natural" evolution. This type of classificatory discourse was a growing branch of anthropology of the nineteenth

century. It explained human evolution by putting African Blacks as the first and most primitive type of species related to simians. Writing in 1814, James Cowles Prichard, an Edinburgh doctoral scholar, stated:

The necessary consequence of the principles which have now been laid down is, that the primary inhabitants of the earth were black; and that the progress of nature has been the gradual transmutations from the negro to the European. Several analogical arguments, drawn from the inferior animals, are adduced in proof of this position. . . and various considerations are also brought forwards (sic) to shew that the negro form and complexion are better adapted to his savage condition while that of the European is more suited to the civilized state in which he is placed. (88)

Childbirth is an additional discourse of ambiguity used by White western women to highlight, compared to 'Third World' women of colour, their status as either emancipated from motherhood, having acquired in the process more education, career opportunities and personal and sexual freedom; or too distanced from motherhood, given the surplus of reproductive technologies in the occident, still controlled by a male-dominated medical profession. Sheryl Nestel asserts that representations of maternity become politically charged when drawn from certain categories: "The context for the creation of these images is a highly political one, where class, race, gender and geography conspire to determine who will display, who will be displayed and who will witness the display" (1994/95: 16). This statement returns to how Thorsen chose to frame "Mother Africa" for scrutiny. Had she a target audience in mind? Or solely her daughter as the model spectator? What of the positioning of the Black female body as it is webbed in the politics of erotic spectating and objectification?

In again examining the third panel, the Black female body becomes reductively *genitalised* within the scopophilia that graphically depicts birth for the viewer, concomitantly seen as a machine of sex and reproduction. This genitalisation of Black women was paramount during the slave era. Via concubinage and rape, many were forced to reproduce—their bodies, breast milk, infants and care-giving chattel and transient

commodities of mostly White slave-owners across continents (hooks 1992: 61-62). Deborah Gray White states that the sexual imagery of Black women's bodies persisted in the western psyche due to "the conditions under which bonded women worked" on slave plantations (1985: 33-34). bell hooks accords that: "In the Victorian world, where white women were religiously covering every body part, black women were daily stripped of their clothing and publicly whipped. Slave-owners were well aware that it added to the degradation and humiliation of female slaves for them to be forced to appear naked before male whippers and onlookers" (1981:37). Hence, through practice, Black slave women became exploitable bodies not just in reality, but also in the art inspired by the witnessing of these experiences.

Black women were figured as icons of aspects related to the genitalic—sexual pleasure, fornication and continual reproductive "breeding" (Davis 1983: 25; Green 1976: 21). This is confirmed in Harriet Jacobs' autobiography of 1861 *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. She attested that: "Women are considered of no value, unless they continually increase their owner's stock" (49). Jacobs went on to recount the ordeal of a slave woman in the United States who "soon became a mother . . . She had a second child by her master, and then he sold her and his offspring to his brother. She bore two children to the brother, and was sold again" (1861: 51). This frequent uprooting of Black women for purchase likewise occurred in late eighteenth-century Montreal. Undoubtedly, gender was a constituent. Conversely, when considering the terms used to describe persons transacted as exchangeable bodies within the political systems of colonialism, race surfaces as a crucial determinant of gender and race concerning the buyer and the negotiated. For example, as Marcel Trudel documents:

Trois négresses ont appartenu successivement à cinq propriétaires: Marie Bulkley se vend en 1785 à Elias Hall, en 1788 elle appartient à John Lagord qui la cède bientôt à Pierre Joinville au cours d'un échange, puis Joinville en fait don à son gendre Louis Olivier et, enfin, Olivier la vend à Joseph Gent qui la garde comme servante: elle avait eu cinq propriétaires en seulement 12 ans. La négresse Cynda passe de Katy Brons

ou Broks à un nommé Balis, puis à John Lagord en 1787, ensuite à Pierre Joinville et de nouveau à Lagord: en 2 ans seulement, elle avait subi cinq propriétaires. La négresse Rose a elle aussi une carrière mouvementée: elle va de Samuel Mix à Louis Gaultier en 1787, elle appartient en 1791 à Lambert St-Omer qui l'a acquise dans un encan, en mars 1795 elle devient l'esclave du curé Louis Payet qui à l'automne de 1796 la fait vendre à Thomas Lée. (1960: III)⁵

Consequently, Black women's exposure as flesh for purchase and reproduction in slave pens and on auction blocks in Europe, Canada, America and the Caribbean established a cross-cultural base for the Black female body as spectacle in media stereotyping, mirrored in "I Love Titty."

Yet these historical conditions of Black women's bodies in the slave era inescapably speak to Thorsen's artworks of Mother Africa, though certain spectators, ignorant of—or overlooking—slavery as an institution of colonial Canada (Clarke 1997: 26-29; Provost 1996; Trudel 1960; Viger 1859), glorify these images in a contemporary vacuum. But given that the past gives birth to the present, how can 200 years of trading Black women as flesh for sex, labour and reproduction in the New World not be relevant to today's media context? How can these contemporary images, so closely resembling their historical counterparts, not matter in the political anteriority of aesthetic and thematic appropriation?

In the guest book, one viewer thought the paintings "Incredible;" another said she "love[s] what they feed back to women." Nonetheless, one visitor commented: "I am a white male, and I don't go around painting Black males' penises. If I did, I sure as hell wouldn't put it on display." And yet another, clearly peeved by the exhibition, scribbled to Thorsen: "Paint your own tits" (Wilson 1991: B10). After attending the exhibition, Janisse Browning adamantly wrote in her essay "Self-Determination and Cultural Appropriation" (1992):

⁵ **The English translation: "Three negresses had successively belonged to five different slave-owners. Marie Bulkley was sold in 1785 to Elias Hall; in 1788, she belonged to John Lagord who shortly afterwards gave her away to Pierre Joinville to settle a trade. Then Joinville made a gift of her to his brother-in-law Louis Olivier, and finally, Olivier sold her to Joseph Gent who kept her as a servant. She had five masters in only twelve years. The negresse Cynda went from Katy Brons or Broks to a one Balis, then to John Lagord in 1787, and after to Pierre Joinville, then once more to Lagord. In only two years she had been subjected to five slave-owners. The negress Rose also had a frequently disrupted record as a worker. She went from Samule Mix to Louis Gaultier in 1787; in 1791, she belonged

The artist. . . exoticises Black women in paintings with erect, larger-than-life breasts, sometimes with splayed open vaginas that invite the gaze of onlookers. Her representations. . . magnify the sexual prowess of Black women. Such images construct and reinforce dangerous stereotypes that already exist in many White people's imaginations. After expressing my disdain to the artist and her supporters at an opening last April, I realised how concretely power relations are reproduced in image-making and business. (1992: 33)

As an African-Canadian of Ojibway descent (Browning: "Intertribal"), Browning had written yet another article regarding Thorsen's works, in which she discussed the iterative parallel of the bodies of Black women in slavery's past and Thorsen's selling of the triptych with its portrayals of naked Black deities:

How can a well-meaning but misdirected white woman guiltlessly take the liberty to toy with Black women's bodies in the predominantly white, traditionally male Vancouver alternative art scene? The paintings are for sale—Black women once again price tagged for the indulgence of privileged buyers. And the people responsible for perpetrating this exploitation fail to recognize how they are aggravating old wounds. (1991: 15)

Congruous to Browning's perspective, certain spectators understood Thorsen's aesthetics as stemming from a perilous naiveté of the normalised White supremacist colonial ideologies that have tyrannised and since shadowed the realities of Black women in the present. This understanding of aesthetics, based on a cognition and comparison of past/present, permits the image to be read in multiple and critically conflicting ways. Certain will read the graphics politically and affiliate them with the real, or a dissonant *true* of historical actualities. Certain others, however, will read them fictively and insularly, seeing them as belonging uniquely to Thorsen's imaginings, musings and inspirations.

Surely, Thorsen's "attraction to and fascination with African Americans" ("Human Colour": 1990) indicate a liberalism toward Black subcultures; but alternately reading the triptych's visual syntax against the grain of Black women's historical realities, which consists of bodily abuses and exploitation in western cultures ruled by a White

to Lambert St-Omer who purchased her at an auction. In March 1795, she became the slave of cure Louis Payet

hegemony—complicates Thorsen's style of venerating Mother Africa. The reverence is obscured by the romanticised signs of Blackness, primordially, sex and supra-physicality. Resultingly, the exhibition magnified a clash with the artist's feminine and racial conventions of deification, her intent and conception of honouring Mother Africa through the eroticised body, the diverse audience readings, and the gallery context which—by default of the museological method of learning through observing—allowed the White supremacist myth of Black women as primitive oddity and sexual spectacle to be re-enacted.

Granted, her goddess triptych can be viewed as positive and “spunky” (Rosenberg 1990: D10). But more crucially, to certain spectators, *Lives of Lizzie* advocates a neocolonialism that idealises Black women's sexual denigration in yesterday's and today's western contexts. Presenting itself as an outgrowth of the exhibition's controversy, then, is the everlasting riddle: one person's romantic phantasy has been, or continues to be, someone else's lived persecuted reality—the malaise being that phantasy and reality both irreconcilably share the same language and the same pool of signifiers.

Supposing the answers to my earlier, expressly close-ended questions about African heritage and identity were “no”—no to African heritage being primarily about mother-goddess worship, reproduction and childbearing; no to African-Canadian female's identity and self-confidence being foremost about maternity, lactation and nurturance—this raises complex issues regarding Thorsen as a White middle-class art producer and mother of a racially mixed daughter in multicultural Canada; her aesthetics which carnalise the Black female body; and her right to individual expression. Ann Rosenberg caught on to the magnitude of the controversy. Yet in her review of the show, she detoured from tackling the politically complex aspects of the exhibition by favouring Thorsen's rights to freedom of expression. Says Rosenberg: “While her art is not meant to debase, I can understand why viewers found these images of jive-talking mamas racially offensive. But around town now,

who sold her to Thomas Lee in the fall of 1796” (Provost 1998: 50).

Thorsen is being roasted for expressing joy in her own biology and that, it seems to me, is highly unfair" (1991: D7). Rosenberg ignores the vehicle through which Thorsen as a privileged White artist chose to celebrate "her own biology"—the Black woman's body, or as she put it "jive-talking mammas." She also overlooked the manner of expression—exposed, gigantic, vessel-like and genitally opened for scopophilic invasion and voyeurism. This genre of depiction, with its gender/racial codes of Blackness, is a mnemonic conjurer of portrayals of the Black Venus.

Thorsen's idea of the Black female as biological parent body "of all species" indulges in the collective myth of Mother Africa, but more to the point, manifests as an explosive, toppling domino in a synchronous continuum of problematic images made by White artists. Were her triptych an exemplary Canadian work of art in general, and Canadian women's art in particular, which truth does Thorsen portray of the experiences of Black women deified in allegory? And how does the racial sexualising of the body differ from those of European and American artists, past and present? Again, the impasse of insider/outsider emerges as it implicates the appropriation of lived, racialised experiences in depictions (Banton 1988). It is precisely the endeavouring to amputate or dismiss context from the personal and historically experienced, and to contain and remould it onto an objectively artistic slate that produces a space of aesthetic ambiguity, a high-voltage space which protects the rationalisations and agency of members of Canada's White hegemony.

While Peter Wilson advocates artistic democracy, he understands the viewpoint of the spectators offended by Thorsen's art. He says that critics "... suggested she educate herself about the Black experience and about Black history before attempting to portray it in art. They called her naive, a judgement with which, after seeing the works, I would not disagree" (1990: B10). Nevertheless, Thorsen defends her art and her actions, even pronouncing a determination to revisit the theme of Black maternity in future years. She claims she will not be deterred from her subject-matter, seeing as how the opposition came from a minority of "women of colour" (Saenger 1991:49-50).

Wilson raises an interesting point—that educating oneself of the experience and history of others is a necessary to art-making, experience appropriation and representation. The process of educating oneself about suppressed or marginalised historical experiences may instigate a much-needed shedding of the romantic notions of alterity. Then again, it may accomplish naught. Self-education holds no guarantees of an artist's ability to envision new interventionist aesthetics that subvert stereotyping. Even as a remedy, educating and its diverse methods become questionable. According to bell hooks: "Without adequate concrete knowledge of and contact with the non-white "Other," white theorists may move in discursive theoretical directions that are threatening and potentially disruptive of that critical practice which would support radical liberation struggle" (1990:26). But how to measure the "adequate" in concrete knowledge when it varies from person to person, and furthers the debates regarding cultural appropriation?

Thus an important query not to shy away from is: Within a multicultural context, why should Thorsen—the White mother of a Black daughter—restrict herself from painting what she desires—Black female deities? Were Trudeau's words to apply to this situation, why shouldn't Thorsen be able to create these goddesses out of her "deeply personal sense" and to project onto the Black female body her "own *individual* identity" of motherhood? After all, as Hegel once said:

The beauty of art presents itself to sense, to feeling, to perception, to imagination. . . . Moreover, what we enjoy in the beauty of art is precisely the freedom of its productive and plastic energy. In the origination, as in the contemplation, of its creations we appear to escape wholly from the fetters of rule and regularity. In the forms of art we seek for repose and animation in place of the austerity of the reign of law and the sombre self-concentration of thought. . . (1886: 7)

If Thorsen's work is understood as fictive and imaginary, then what is the danger?—That phantasy concretised in material culture will sustain ways of knowing, observing and oppressing.

Whereas Hegel suggests that art should be a purge for the imagination, a description that alludes to escapism, eroticised representations of the Black female body are difficult to depoliticise and to isolate from the sexually exploitive realities of Black women's historical experiences. In her artist statement, Thorsen says she was inspired by "womanist writers."

I am 'obsessed' with the beauty, sexuality and lifeforce of the female breast. By reading works by womanist writers such as Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and Zora Neale Hurston, I suck the milk from their giving breasts. Females sharing, giving and growing as a result. *Love alone is Mother's milk*. I paint what I know. I paint what I want to see—'omni-sexuality' that embraces that which is female, male and universal. It is all *sexy*. (Thorsen 1991)

Thorsen, like so many previous and contemporary White artists, reductively equate the Black female body with the breast, maternity, omni-sexuality and sexiness. The artist statement is another conundrum: for Thorsen muddles desire for and obsession of the Black female body in her imagination with what she sees and knows.

Aesthetic neutrality, or 'art for art's sake' starts to collapse when viewers query into the artist's background and her political/ideological agenda for bringing a certain depiction to the fore. Who the artist is in terms of her national/gender/racial/class identity turns into pieces of a larger puzzle that are just as significant to extracting meaning from a representation as the subject construed in the image and the aesthetic manner of the portrayal. All factors—art producer, production, genre, style and the produced object/subject—count toward making sense of the new context of a renewed image and toward measuring change in how White hegemony views its other.

But far from new, artistic discourses accentuating the Black woman as excessively carnal and the originary parent of humankind are redundant in the west. In fact, Thorsen's loaded contextualisation pins down yet again the Black woman as the Other in race, sexuality, anatomy, nationality, time, nature, evolution, essence and social function—a composite affiliated with colonial paradigms (Wiegman 1991: 313). What then has to be

examined are the links between cultural appropriation, creative democracy, and Canadian multiculturalism, to discern how they politically enable each other to maintain old orders in new times. And the multicultural policy is doubtless a forerunning enabler, for as Trudeau had envisioned, Canadian multiculturalism was based on a "willingness to share ideas, attitudes, and assumptions."

Within the interstices of representational politics, artists' liberty *qua phantatised desires* and their responsibility *qua knowledge of the real* induce an ethical dilemma. Producing a representation, ethically sensitised to the history and current situation of a particular subject group, may entail self-censorship, something that defeats artistic creativity and which many art producers would not willingly forfeit. These old influences of aesthetics relate to Susan Rubin Suleiman's vision of discursive transformations: "... what may be needed is not merely the usurpation of old narrative structures and old words by new speakers, however important these may be as a first step, but the inventing of new structures, new words, a new syntax that will shake up and *transform* old habits of thought and old ways of seeing" (1985: 12). Suleiman emphasises a difference between *invention* and *appropriation*. But how to invent anew when appropriating snatches of sub/cultures is part of the process of artistic invention and political intervention? How to invent new painterly syntax around the Black female body when its visual grammar has seemingly reached the point of aesthetic supersaturation?

The Politics of Art in *Multicultural* Canada

The prevalent discourse of Canada being multicultural assuredly influences artistic creativity. It permits numerous artists to take units from other cultures and to make them one's own. The network of appropriating in the name of multiculturalism dispels critical thinking about race and enables negative stereotypes of black women to be adopted, remade and redisplayed in predominantly White milieus.

In this regard, Canadian liberal multiculturalism promotes the survival of colonial stereotypes which, when mediated as creative expression in a controlled gallery environment, is presented as a harmless representation of alterity. But this harmlessness is a breeding ground for violent and racist aesthetics, whether produced naively or knowingly. As Spivak had stated in her keynote lecture, radical multiculturalism is a different set of politics that confronts problems of racism head-on. This multiculturalism has yet to be practised widespread in Canada; for the most part, it remains a policy written on paper (Cannon 1995: 243).

The multiculturalism needed to make a radical difference and to have its impact felt would question the unevenness of power and privileges in systems based on race differentiation, but also implement activist strategies to address such problems. Toronto-based poet, writer and theorist Marlene Nourbese Philip has stated that: "In short, multiculturalism, as we know it, has no answers for the problems of racism, or white supremacy—unless it is combined with a clearly articulated policy of anti-racism, directed at rooting out the effects of racism and white supremacist thinking" (1992: 185). Stuart Hall identifies the same problem with the glamour of multiculturalism, that it slights the treatment of racism. He claims that if multiculturalism is to be an effective tool of political redress, it must deal with colonial inequities that continue colonial privileges in the present. Says Hall:

There is a close relationship between the re-emergence of 'the multi-cultural question' and the phenomenon of the 'post-colonial'. . . . Problems of dependency, underdevelopment and marginalization, typical of the 'high' colonial period, persist into the post-colonial. However, these relations are resumed in a new configuration. Once they were articulated as unequal relations of power and exploitation between colonized and colonizing societies. Now they are restaged and displaced as struggles between indigenous social forces, as internal contradictions and sources of destabilization within the decolonized society. . . . (2000: 213)

Multiculturalism thus re-inscribes a host of problematic binaries all at once linked to race, national identity, gender, class, and ethnicity.

The Black Venus as it has slipped through the crevice of Canadian multiculturalism and onto the artist's canvas bares Canada's true colours, so to speak. The re-appearance of this particular allegory in different times and spaces reveals that racialised hyper-sexuality and grotesque carnality are colonial clichés of Black women, idealised in the White Canadian consciousness. Similar images of Black women by White European and American artists indicate that this idealisation is systemically cross-continental. In this light, some of Canadian-made artworks exacerbate the issue of who redesigns the dark female body in representation and how.

Closing Remarks

Analysing the myriad versions of the Black Venus has revealed several significant factors regarding the image's transformation and fixity in aesthetic discourse. First of all, the corpulent profile indeed altered during different periods, as seen with the contrast of Baartman as the Hottentot Venus in 1810 and Campbell as *La Vénus au voile* in 1995. The comparisons show that, although the signs of the Black Venus have modified through the years, the motifs of the body have remained in tact.

Since slavery, the body of the Black Venus has been locked into definitions of pejoration—anomic, animal, ultra-fecund, hypersexed and subhuman. These negative meanings have acquired an incredible degree of sophistication, with the veneer and genre of media blurring these definitions. Exhibiting a slight steatopygia, Campbell's portrayal, contextualised by the title "Venus," evokes Baartman's silhouette. Yet the rich colour—ivory and gold against Black skin—seduces the eye while problematically reducing the model to a surface, an exotic fabric.

bell hooks likewise sees Black women's display during the slave-trade era informing current practices in racial and gender representations. She purports that pornographically animalising the body is one frame for articulating the aesthetics of Black womanhood; another is physiologically hybridising these aesthetics in image, in order that the "ethnic" look also seduces the White image-recipient through self-identification. Regarding Campbell's polemic popularity in a predominantly White racist fashion world, hooks comments:

... the new black female icon who is also gaining greater notoriety, as she assumes both the persona of sexually hot "savage" and white-identified black girl, is the Caribbean-born model Naomi Campbell. Imported beauty, she, like Iman, is almost constantly visually portrayed nearly nude against a sexualized background. Abandoning her "natural" hair for blonde wigs or ever-lengthening

weaves, she has great crossover appeal. Labeled by fashion critics as the black Brigit Bardot, she embodies an aesthetic that suggests black women, while appealingly “different,” must resemble white women to be considered really beautiful. (1992:73)

Understandably, hooks finds it a problem when high-profile figures from marginalised groups, such as Campbell, aspire to look White. The “blonde wigs” indicate myriad possibilities: 1) that the model is uncomfortable with her own “natural hair,” as hooks implies; 2) that her wigged appearance wrongly disseminates, to White and Black viewers, the notion of White aesthetics as the epitome of beauty; 3) that in donning the blonde wigs, Campbell is denouncing her Blackness, ultimately betraying—and being irresponsible to—the members of the Black community.

Contrariwise, hooks ignores that, as a fashion model, this is precisely Campbell's livelihood: She is commissioned to enliven different looks by changing surface aesthetics (i.e. cosmetics, hair, clothes et cetera). Nor does hooks problemise her own comment, which implies that Blackness possesses specific biological traits. On the contrary, it has become a miscegenated category bearing a diversity of Black looks and Black identities. Campbell herself is a composite of this diversity of Blackness. On one website, it is noted that she is not born in the Caribbean as hooks claimed, but in Streatham, South London (see Appendix B). Moreover, her ethnicity is documented as “Jamaican/Chinese” under an “English” nationality.¹ She is therefore not an “imported beauty,” but an indigenous European within the Black diaspora. But seemingly, hooks faults Black persons for appropriating, be it strategically or otherwise, and for not sufficiently self-essentialising by retaining their “natural” traits. With Blackness diversifying through continued interracial mixing, and with Black subjects having more choices and freedoms in the contemporary, their selected aesthetics—and use of these

¹ Regarding Campbell's ethnicity, see also Serena French, “Oh, no, my poor Omi!” *National Post* (22 Jan. 2000): B3.

aesthetics to make a personal or subversive statement about self—increasingly complicate the politics of representation.²

Individual identity is also muddled in image. Campbell is Venus, but also the controversial supermodel. Marginalised in the fashion world because of her dark skin, and under public scrutiny for her alleged deviant behaviour, hot temperament and preference of White men, Campbell's character profile as constructed in the media further enlivens *La Venus au voile*. The Black Venus has survived in media precisely because of a neocolonial demand and White hegemonic desire for the Black female body. The desire stems from colonial ideologies of racism and sexism which have become amnesiac in the contemporary and conventionalised in imagery.

Yet as demonstrated, though desire may drive an artist to capture the Black female body in representation, it distorts the experience of others. And this distorted materialisation involves violence. As a slave-servant in early nineteenth-century Europe, Saartjie Baartman was coerced into enacting the Hottentot Venus. Later, in 1853, Charlotte Brontë wrote *Villette* and consecrated the chapter "Cleopatra" to the violent derision of the body of the Egyptian mulatto, scorned as "butcher's meat," "muscle," and "flesh." Decades after, Josephine Baker became famous as the Venus of Jazz in France. Baker had initially refused to dance "bare-breasted" (Rose 1989: 6), but eventually succumbed under the violence of peer pressure.

In more contemporary contexts, it was from an obsessive White-male desire that French photographer Jean-Paul Goude produced the disturbing 12 inch replica of African model Toukie in 1975. The "racehorse's ass" he bestowed on the miniature violently animalised Toukie's represented body, the exaggerated steatopygic profile again conjuring Baartman's corporeal terrorisation. On the other side of the Atlantic, Canadian-based artist Katarina Thorsen was "driven by a need to paint pictures of nude

² See comments from Black students in Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in*

Black women, pregnant women with large breasts” (Saenger 1991: 49). This obsession resulted in Thorsen’s polemic exhibition “I Love Titty,” which contained artworks of naked Black woman as hyper-corpulent mother goddesses.

Internalisation of the Black Venus has occurred temporally, cross-culturally, individually and collectively. To the Black women who have raised their voices in protest, the Black Venus represents a colonial image of a colonised body, violated whenever displayed. In the White imaginary, however, the image is exotic, unharmed, and a visual way of relating to the other in phantasy. These relations trigger different group responses and group recognition, themselves implicated in complex histories. More crucially, the chronological repeating of the Black Venus in multiple media shows how prejudices become refined through repetition, and condensed into something as linearly simple as a profile.

But given that the allegory conflates the real with the imagined and the figurative with the literal, the Black Venus underlines how fictional ways of seeing the representation can be construed as prescriptive ways of seeing Black women in real life. Richard Brilliant explains that “To take someone for a ‘something’... is to place that person within the categories established by consensus to locate members of a society in the familiar roles by which they are particularly presentable and knowable” (1991: 89-90). The stereotype must then be seen as more than a product of artistic creativity. It is, in fact, a powerful political and psychical device that, in its repeated negative articulations, sustains myriad forms of oppression.

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Figures

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- Figure 2.** Naomi Campbell as *La Vénus au voile* c.1995. Photo by Mario Testino. *Paris Match* (November 1995): unpaginated.
- Figure 3.** Detail of frontal view of Saartjie Baartman c.1815. Illustration by Léon de Wailly. Hugh Honour. *The Image of the Black in Western Art* IV.2. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989. 53.
- Figure 4.** *Black Venus* c.1957. Print by Margaret Burroughs. Linoleum cut print. 14 x 11 1/8 in. (356 x 280mm). Website <http://www.webcom.com/~artext/images/aa12345.html>.
- Figure 5.** *Birth of Venus* c.1484-1486. Painting by Alessandro Botticelli. Tempera on canvas. 5'9" x 9'2". Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Denise Hooker, ed. *History of Western Art*. Toronto: Boxtree Ltd., 1989. 140.
- Figure 6.** *Voyage of the Sable Venus* c.1801. Engraving by W. Grainger. [After a painting made 1763]. Hugh Honour. *The Image of the Black in Western Art*. IV.1 Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1989. 34.
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- Figure 9.** *The Ball of the Duchess du Barry* c.1829. [Illustration]. Artist not mentioned. Sander L. Gilman. "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine and Literature." *Critical Inquiry* 12 (Autumn 1985): 215.

- Figure 10.** Detail from *Funerary relief: Sacred dance performed during an Isiac ceremony* c.200 A.D. Ariccia (Rome). Jean Laclant. "Egypt, Land of Africa, in the Greco-Roman World." *The Image of the Black in Western Art. I [From the Pharaohs to the Fall of the Roman Empire]* 1976. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1991. 283.
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- Figure 12.** *Olympia* c.1863. Édouard Manet. Oil on canvas. 51 x 74 3/4in. Musée d'Orsay, Paris. David G. Wilkins and Bernard Schultz. *Art Past/Art Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1990. 401.
- Figure 13.** Bo Derek as Jane, bathed by a Black woman c.1981. Photo by John Derek. *Playboy* (September 1981): unpaginated.
- Figure 14.** *The Bath* c.1880-1885. Jean-Léon Gérôme. Oil on canvas, 29 x 23 1/2in. The Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, Mildred Anna Williams Collection. Alev Lytle Routier. *Harem: The World Behind the Veil*. New York: Abbeville P, 1989. 81.
- Figure 15.** Detail from "Park and Ride" fashion spread c.2001. Photo by Xevi. *Vibe* (June 001): 134-135.
- Figure 16.** *Alek Wek, Los Angeles* c.1998. Photo by Herb Ritts. Silver gelatin print. 137 x 17 cm. Patrick Roegiers. *Herb Ritts: Fondation Cartier pour l'art contemporain*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000. unpaginated.
- Figure 17.** March/April cover of *PhotoPlus* c.1999. Herb Ritts. *PhotoPlus* (mars/avril 1999) unpaginated.
- Figure 18.** Patrick Roegiers book on Herb Ritts on a Chapters.Indigo website c.2001. Chapters. Indigo.ca.
- Figure 19.** Cover of François Le Vaillant's travelogue of Cap de Bonne Espérance c.1791. François Le Vaillant. *Voyage de Monsieur Le Vaillant dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique par le Cap de Bonne-Espérance. [Dans les années 1780, 81, 82, 83, 84 & 85].* Tome 2. Bruxelles: Benoit Le Francq, 1791.
- Figure 20.** Revised cover of François Le Vaillant's travelogue of Cap de Bonne Espérance c.1883. François Le Vaillant. *Voyage de Monsieur Le Vaillant dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique par le Cap de Bonne-Espérance.* Paris: Garnier Frères, 1883.
- Figure 21.** *The Orang-Outang carrying off a girl* c.1795. Jan Nederveen Pieterse. *White On Black: Images of African and Blacks in Popular Culture*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1995. 38.
- Figure 22.** Image of man and woman (untitled) in Georgē Leclerc de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*. Frontispiece. George Leclerc de Buffon. *Oeuvres complètes de Buffon*. 1818.

- Figure 23.** *L'Homme et la Femme* c.1853. Frontispiece of the revised edition of de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*. George Leclerc de Buffon. *Oeuvres complètes de Buffon*. Paris: Garnier Frères. 1853.unpaginated.
- Figure 24.** *Allegory of Time and Lust* c.1545. A.k.a. *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*. Agnolo Bronzino. Oil on wood. 61 x 56 3/4in. National Gallery, London. David G. Wilkins and Bernard Schultz. *Art Past/Art Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1990. 330.
- Figure 25.** Black Madonna from Nurie, Spain, a.k.a. The Queen of the Pyrenees [mediaeval relic, date unknown.]. A. Rogers. *Sex and Race: Negro-Caucasian Mixing in All Ages and All Lands*. St. Petersburg: Helga M. Rogers, 1967. 279.
- Figure 26.** Isis nursing Horus. David Kinsley. *The Goddesses' Mirror: Visions of the Divine From East and West*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1989. 176.
- Figure 27.** *Madonna and Child with Angels* c.1534-1540, a.k.a., *Madonna with the Long Neck*. Oil on wood. 85 x 52in. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. David G. Wilkins and Bernard Schultz. *Art Past/Art Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1990. 267.
- Figure 28.** *Sleeping Venus* c.1510. Giorgione. Oil on canvas. 42 3/4 x 69in. Staatliche Gemäldegalerie, Dresden. David G. Wilkins and Bernard Schultz. *Art Past/Art Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1990. 318.
- Figure 29.** *Venus of Urbino* c.1538. Titian. Oil on canvas. 47 x 65 in. Uffizi Gallery, Florence. David G. Wilkins and Bernard Schultz. *Art Past/Art Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1990. 318.
- Figure 30.** Josephine Baker with 'count' Pepito Abatino c.1926. Petrine Archer-Straw. *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s*. New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000. 96.
- Figure 31.** Replica of Toukie c.1975. 12in. Jean-Paul Goude. Jean-Paul Goude. *Jungle Fever*. Ed. Harold Hayes. [Paris]: Xavier Moreau inc., 1981. Unpaged.
- Figure 32.** *Venus*, centre panel of triptych *Another Spring (after Botticelli's Primavera)* c.1982. Hilda Woolnough. Acrylic on masonite. 121.9 x 61 cm. Private collection. Maria Tippett. *By A Lady: Celebrating Three Centuries of Art by Canadian Women*. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992. 165.
- Figure 33.** *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* c.1907. Painting by Pablo Picasso. Oil on canvas. 96 x 92in. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. David G. Wilkins and Bernard Schultz. *Art Past/Art Present*. New York: Harry N. Abrams Inc., 1990. 48.
- Figure 34.** *Lives of Lizzie*, triptych c.1990. By Katarina Thorsen. Mixed-media on canvas. 48 x 108 in. Private collection. Archie Graham. "Busting at the Seams in Passionate Protest." *Vancouver Sun* (20 October 1990): D 10.
- Figure 35.** Exhibition announcement for Katarina Thorsen's Exhibition "I Love Titty." Courtesy Tony Bardach archives.

FIGURES

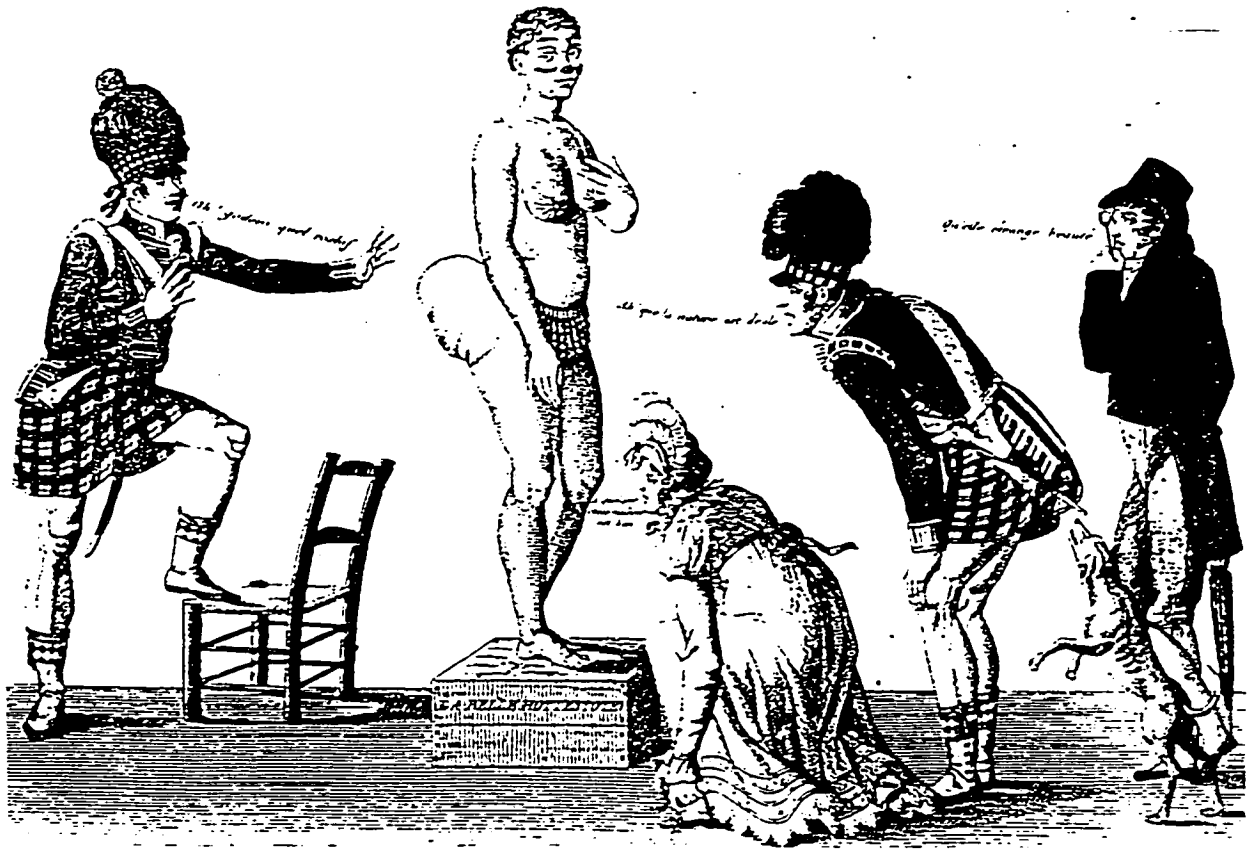


Fig.1
Saartjie Baartman displayed as *La Belle Hottentote* c.1812
(Cartoon satire)



Fig. 2
Naomi Campbell as *La Vénus au voile* c.1995
Mario Testino



Fig.3
Detail of Saartjie Baartman c.1815
Léon de Wailly

Fig.4
Black Venus c.1957
Margaret Burroughs

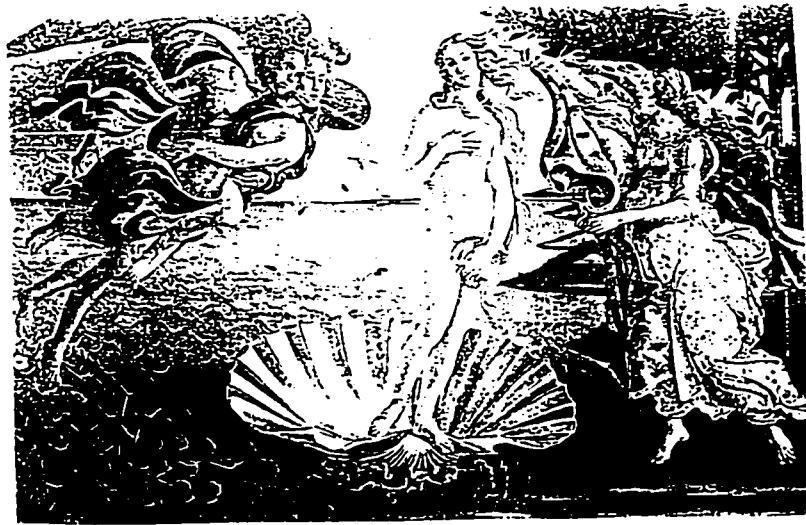


Fig.5
Birth of Venus c.1484-1486
Alessandro Botticelli

Fig.6
Voyage of the Sable Venus c.1801
 W. Grainger



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Fig.7
 Advertisement for
 Storm King Whiskey
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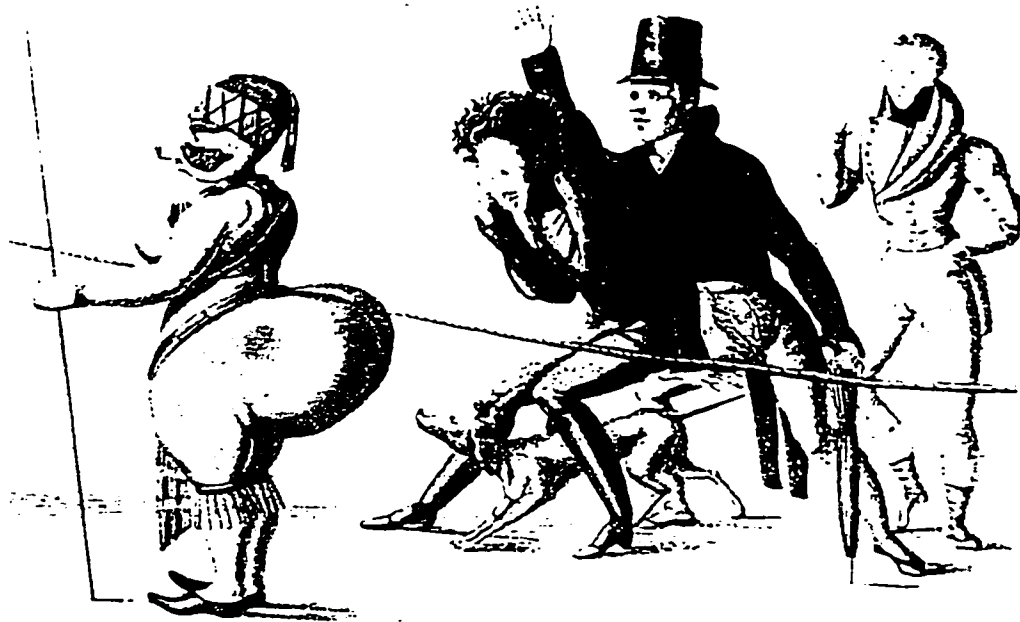


Fig.8
La Vénus hottentote c.1814
(Cartoon)



Fig.9
The Ball of the Duchess du Barry c.1829
(Illustration)

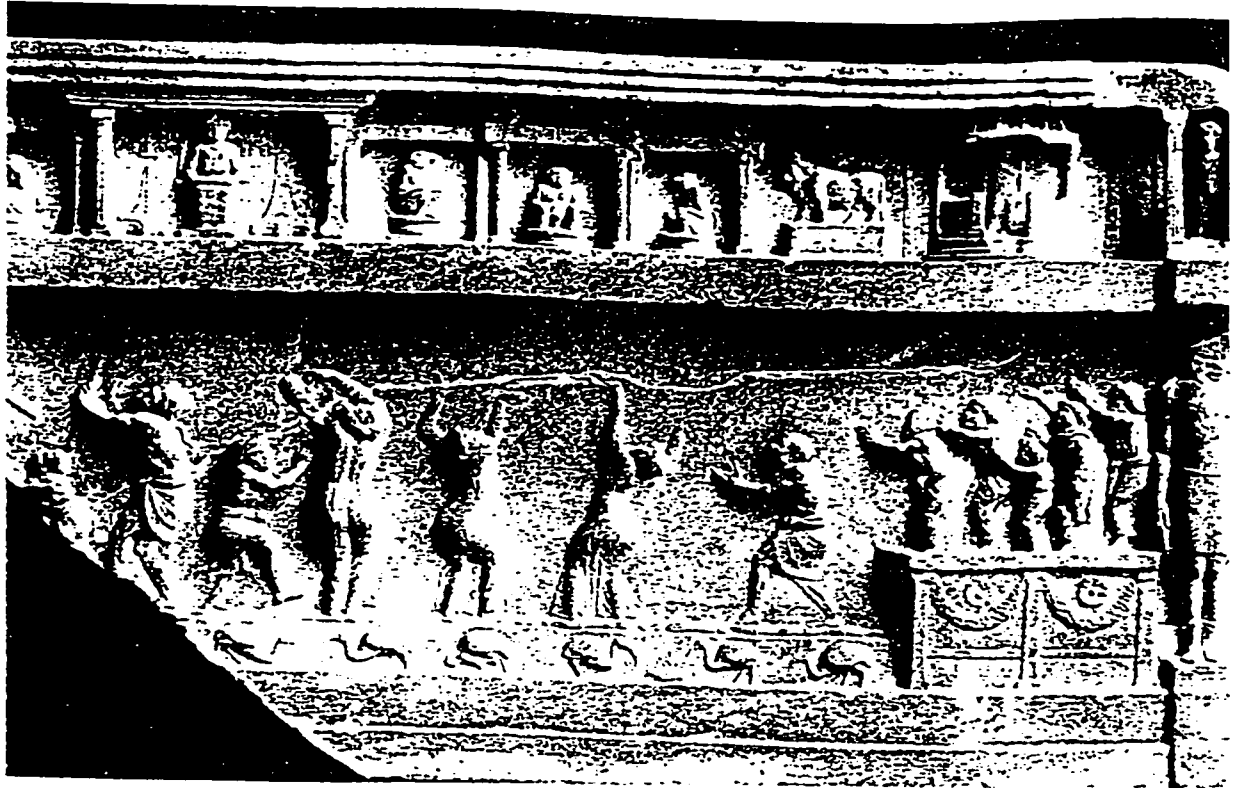


Fig.10
Detail from *Funerary relief*.
Sacred dance performed during an Isiac ceremony c.200 A.D.
Ariccia (Rome)

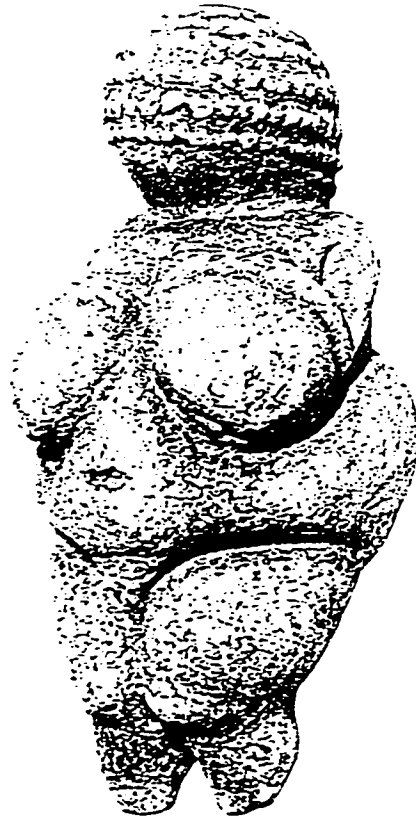


Fig.11
Venus of Willendorf c.50,000 B.C.



Fig.12
Olympia c.1865
Édouard Manet



Fig.15
Bo Derek as Jane, bathed by a Black woman c.1981
John Derek



Fig.14
The Bath c.1880-1885
Jean-Léon Gérôme

FASHION

PARK AND RIDE

What a male fantasy: two fast women in fast cars. Remember Russ Meyer's out-classic film *Fast, Hot & Loud*? Beautiful ladies and sleek automobiles definitely have a hot appeal. Photographs by Xevi Styling by Angela Brambilla



Fig.15
Detail of "Park and Ride" fashion spread c.2001
Xevi

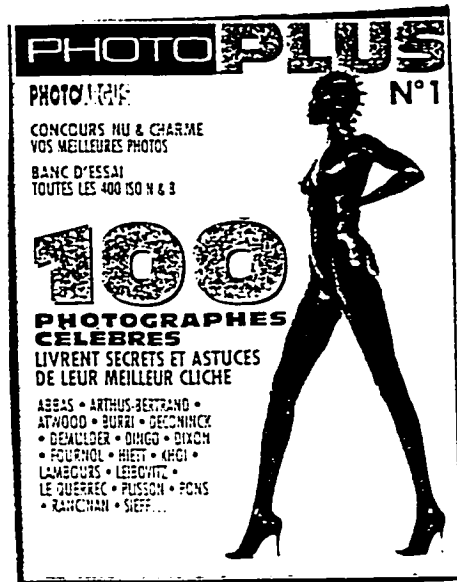


Fig17
 March/April cover of *PhotoPlus* c.1999
 (Above)



Fig.16
Alex Wek, Los Angeles c.1998
 Herb Ritts

Fig.18
 Detail of Chapter.Indigo website
 (Below)

Herb Ritts
 by Author Patrick Roegiers

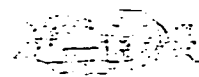


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 three weeks. Normal
 delivery times may be
 delayed if the supplier
 runs out of stock.

VOYAGE
 DE
 MONSIEUR LE VAILLANT
 DANS L'INTERIEUR
 DE L'AFRIQUE,
 PAR
 LE CAP DE BONNE-ESPERANCE.
 Des Volumes 1782. 62. 63. 64. 65.
 AVEC FIGURES.
 TOME SECOND.



IMPRIMEES,
 CHEZ LE FRERE, RUE DE LA HARPE,
 N. 22.

Fig.19
 Cover of François Levaillant's travelogue
 of Cape de Bonne Espérance c.1791

VOYAGE
 DANS L'INTERIEUR
 DE L'AFRIQUE
 ET
 AU CAP DE BONNE-ESPERANCE
 PAR
 F. LE VAILLANT
 EDITION ILLUSTREE DE 17 PLANCHES HORS TEXTE
 ET DE NOMBREUSES VIGNETTES
 Par D. SELEGHINI



PARIS
 GARNIER FRERES, LIBRAIRES-EDITEURS
 6, RUE DES SAINTS-PERES, 6

Fig.20
 Revised covr of François Le Vaillant's
 travelogue of Cap de Bonne Espérance c.1883



Fig.21
The Orang-Outang carrying off a girl c.1795



HISTOIRE NATURELLE.

L'HOMME.

DE LA NATURE DE L'HOMME.

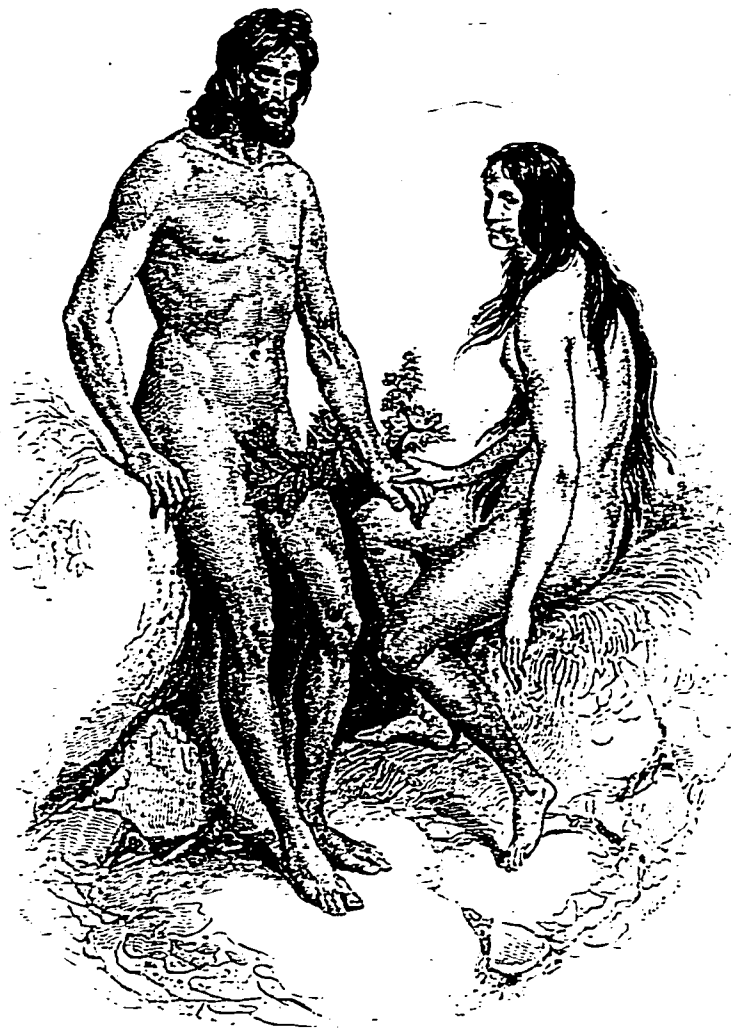
Quelque intérêt que nous ayons à nous connaître nous-mêmes, je ne sais si nous ne connaissons pas mieux tout ce qui n'est pas nous. Pourvus par la Nature d'organes uniquement destinés à notre conservation, nous ne les employons qu'à recevoir les impressions étrangères; nous ne cherchons qu'à nous répandre au-dehors et à exister hors de nous; trop occupés à multiplier les fonctions de nos sens et à augmenter l'étendue extérieure de notre être, rarement faisons-nous usage de ce sens intérieur qui nous a réduit à nos vraies dimensions, et qui separe de nous tout ce qui n'en est pas; c'est cependant de ce sens qu'il faut nous servir, si nous voulons nous connaître; c'est le seul par lequel nous puissions nous juger. Mais comment donner à ce sens son activité et toute son étendue? comment dégager notre âme, dans laquelle il reside, de toutes les illusions de notre esprit? Nous avons perdu l'habitude de l'employer; elle est demeurée sans exercice au milieu du tumulte de nos sensations corporelles; elle s'est desséchée par le feu de nos passions; le cœur, l'esprit, les sens, tout a travaillé contre elle.

Cependant, inaltérable dans sa substance, impassible par son essence, elle est toujours la même; sa lumière obscurcie a perdu son éclat sans rien perdre de sa force; elle nous voit à travers nos yeux, mais elle nous guide aussi sûrement. Revenons, pour nous conduire, ces rayons qui parviennent encore jusqu'à nous; l'obscurité qui nous environne diminuera, et si à toute n'est pas entièrement éclairée d'un bout à l'autre, au moins aurons-nous un flambeau avec lequel nous marcherons sans nous égayer.

Le premier pas et le plus difficile que nous ayons à faire pour parvenir à la connaissance de nous-mêmes, est de reconnaître nettement la nature des deux substances qui nous composent. Dire simplement que l'une est étendue, immatérielle, immortelle, et que l'autre est étendue, matérielle et mortelle, se réduit à rien.

Buffon 3.

Fig.22
Image of man and a woman c.1818
George Leclerc de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*



L'Homme et la Femme

N°14

Fig.23
L'Homme et la Femme c.1855
Frontispiece of revised edition of
de Buffon's *Histoire Naturelle*



Fig.24
Allegory of Time and Lust c.1545
a.k.a. *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time*
Agnolo Bronzino



Fig.25
Black Madonna from Nurie, Spain
a.k.a. The Queen of the Pyrenees [date unknown, Mediaeval relic]



Fig.26
Isis nursing Horus [date unknown]



Fig.27

Madonna and child with Angels c.1534-1540

a.k.a. *Madonna with the Long Neck*

Permiglianiono

Fig.28
Sleeping Venus c.1510
Giorgione



Fig.29
Venus of Urbino c.1538
Titian



Fig.30
Josephine Baker with 'count' Pepito Abatino c.1926



Fig.51
12 inch replica of Toukie c.1975
Jean-Paul Goude



Fig.32
Venus, centre panel of triptych Another Spring
(After Botticelli's Primavera) c.1982
Hilda Woolnough



Fig.33
Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J.) c.1907
Pablo Picasso



Fig.54
Lives of Lizzie triptych c.1990
Katarina Thorsen

KATARINA THORSEN

"I Love Titty"

*A celebration of the female breast as
lifeforce and sexual focus*

April 8-27, 1991

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7-10 pm, April 8

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Fig.35
Exhibition announcement of Katarina Thorsen's
Exhibition "I love Titty"

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Paul Webster. "France Keeps
A Hold On Black Venus."
Source: *The Observer*
[London], (2 April 2000): 26.

France keeps a hold on Black Venus

by Paul Webster
Paris

DERIDED by Londoners as 'Fat Bum' and contemptuously nicknamed the Hottentot Venus, Sarah Baartman is again making news 190 years after being shipped from the Cape as an anatomical freak before dying in Paris during the freezing December that followed Waterloo.

Diplomatic exchanges on her eventual repatriation are at a 'delicate stage', according to South African diplomats who have been pressing France for five years to give up Sarah's skeleton, kept among the reserve stock at Paris's Musée de l'Homme.

Nelson Mandela, South Africa's first post-apartheid head of state, asked both the late President Francois Mitterrand and his successor Jacques Chirac to arrange her return for a ritual burial by the Griqua people, the mixed Hottentot, Bushman and Dutch race among whom she grew up after birth in 1789. To her own people, her enormous bottom and dangling genitals, known as 'the apron', were common attributes among tribeswomen.

But Boer and European showmen exploited her with the same cynicism as that shown to the Elephant Man. Brought to London by a Dutch farmer, Hendrik Caeszar, in 1810, she was exhibited in Piccadilly before being shown in dozens of towns in England and Ireland. But curiosity had waned by the time Caeszar sold her to an Englishman, Paul Taylor, in 1814. Her career was relaunched in Paris, where she was the central character in a comic play

and was summoned for examination by anthropologist Georges Cuvier. Scientists said that her race represented 'eternal inferiority'.

But the humiliations inflicted on Sarah in life were nothing compared to the indignities afterwards. Cuvier cut off her genitals and bled her brain; anthropologists argued that she had been a prostitute specialising in sodomy. A plaster copy of her extraordinary figure was displayed in a showcase until 1981, but was taken away after feminists protested.

A recent South African



A contemporary cartoon of Sarah Baartman on display in early nineteenth-century England.

documentary and a book by journalist Gerard Badou, *L'enigme de la Venus Hottentote*, have revived controversy over whether France will ever agree to sending her remains back to the Cape. At the Musée de l'Homme, Philippe Mennecier, an assistant curator, said: 'Her skeleton is very well cared for here because we never know what science will be able to tell us in the future. If she is buried, this chance will be lost for us she remains a very important treasure.'

Appendix B

A section from "Naomi Campbell pictures wallpapers pics."

Source: website

http://www.toppics4u.com/naomi_campbell/

Naomi Campbell

Picture GalleriesNaomi Campbell pictures wallpapers picsWallpapers

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5For other female celebrities

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AwardsQuotesInterviewsAutographContact her

Last modified: 24 Jan 2001



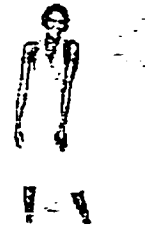
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Brief Facts



Full Name: Naomi Campbell
Birthday: May 22, 1970
Birth Place: Streatham, South London, U.K.
Zodiac Sign: Gemini
Body Measurement: 86cm 61cm 88cm (34-24-34)
Height: 177cm (5' 10")
Weight: 51kg (113 lbs)
Hair Colour: Dark brown
Eyes: Dark brown
Shoes Size: 40(Eur); 9(US)
Ethnicity: Jamaican-Chinese
Nationality: English
Relations: Companion: Damian Aspinall (British aristocrat)
Resides: New York and Stratham, Scotland
Hobbies: Boxing
Occupation: Supermodel, Actress

Top 10 pictures & wallpapers



Appendix C

Extract regarding Saartjie Baartman and national dress of the South African Cape.

Source: Auguste Racinet. *Le costume historique*.

Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1888. Unpaginated.

5° 11. — Sarah Bartmann, femme de la famille des Boschjesmans, dans la grande parure nationale. — Ce type est dépeint par Le Vaillant comme distinguant la race des *Houzoanans* : « La croupe naturelle que portent leurs femmes, masse énorme et charnue qui, à chaque mouvement du corps contracte une oscillation et une ondulation fort singulières. » Les études, d'après nature, exposées au champ de mars en 1873 dans la section anthropologique par les photographes du Cap, prouvent que ce type subsiste toujours.

Sarah Bartmann, ici représentée, est la célèbre Africaine de ce genre qui fut exhibée à Paris en 1815, en public comme dans les saïons, sous le nom de la « *Vénus hottentote* » *Programme des spectacles*, 4 janvier 1815 : « Vaudeville ; aujourd'hui Madame Farart, les Visites, et la *Vénus hottentote*. » *Journal des dames et des modes*, 12 février 1815 : « Les portes du salon s'ouvrent, et l'on voit entrer la *Vénus hottentote*. C'est une Vénus callipyge. On lui donne du bonbon pour l'engager à sauter, à chanter ; on lui fait dire quelle est la plus jolie femme de la société ; quel est l'homme le plus tendre de la compagnie... »

Le nom de la déesse de la beauté et de la grâce appliqué à la monstrueuse Sarah fut une triste ironie que, dans sa netteté crue, fait ressortir le langage du naturaliste. Cuvier a vu avec soin la nature intime de la *Vénus hottentote*. « C'est après le premier accouchement que, chez les femmes de la race boshismane, les fesses acquièrent une énorme grosseur ; elles saillent à angle droit au bas des reins sous forme de deux loupes énormes composées de gros paquets d'une graisse diffuse qui s'étend jusqu'entour des hanches au-dessous des muscles. Les mamelles s'allongent de telle sorte que, comme certaines négresses et hyperboréennes, la Hottentote peut donner à têter à l'enfant placé habituellement sur son dos. On est resté dans l'alternative de décider si des particularités si singulières sont réellement un caractère de race, ou si elles ne sont pas simplement un état de maladie héréditaire.

Appendix D

**English translated passage of Appendix C

Extract regarding Saartjie Baartman and national dress of the South African Cape.
Source: Auguste Racinet. *Le costume historique*.
Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1888. Unpaged.

No. II – Sarah Bartmann, female member of the Boschjesmans, in national costume. This type is depicted by Le Vaillant as distinct from the Houzouanas race: “The women are burdened with a rump, a fleshy and enormous mass which, at every movement of the body, contracts into an oscillation and an undulation that is most peculiar.” This is according to the studies on nature revealed in March 1878 in the field of anthropology, supported by photographs from the Cape, which proves that this type still exists.

Sarah Baartman, represented here, is the famous African who was exhibited in Paris in 1815 in public salons under the name *Vénus hottentote*. (*Programme des spectacles*, 4 January 1815): “Vaudeville: Today Madame Favart, Visitors, and the *Vénus hottentote*,” *Journal des dames et des modes*, 12 February 1815: “The doors open doors for the grand entrance of the *Vénus hottentote*. This Venus is steatopygic. She is given candy to jump or sing; she is told that she is the prettiest woman in the country. . . .”

Calling the monstrous Sarah Venus, the goddess of beauty and grace, is a dreadful irony in the crudest way, to use the words of the naturalist. Cuvier has carefully examined the intimate parts of the

her into jumping and singing. She is made to ask who is the fairest woman of society and who is the gentlest male companion. . . ”

Calling the monstrous Sarah Venus the goddess of beauty and grace is a dreadful irony in the crudest way, to use the words of the naturalist. Cuvier has closely observed the intimate parts of the Hottentot Venus, and commented: “It is after the first birth that the women of the Boshismane race acquire buttocks of an enormous size. They protrude at a right angle, under the kidneys in the shape of two large sebaceous sacs composed of lumps of diffluent fat that extend down about the hips, underneath the muscles. The breasts are lengthened so that certain negresses as the female hottentots can nurse their infants while they carry them on the back. It remains undecided if these unusual particularities are truly a characteristic of race or a condition of inherited illness.”