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Skin Flicks on the Racial Border: Pornography, Exploitation and Interracial Lust

> *"Honest and open explorations of the complexities of interracial sexual attraction have not been among Hollywood's strong points."*
> Henry Lous Gates, Jr.

> *"The question of interracial sexual relations remains virtually untouched."*
> Jane Gaines

It has been argued that the so-called 'classical' cinema is regulated by a semiotics of race relations posited on a single prohibition: "no nonwhite man can have sanctioned sexual relations with a white woman"[1]. Yet this prohibition is today regularly flouted, if not in today's Hollywood, then in that parallel universe in the San Fernando Valley where a line of contemporary pornography labeled "Interracial" aims specifically at violating precisely the taboos that once reigned supreme in Hollywood. Videos with titles like *Black Taboo, Black and White in Living Color, Black Meat, White Cream, White Dicks/Black Chicks, White Trash, Black Splash, Color Blind, South Central Hookers* speak about racial differences in sex in ways that elsewhere in the culture have often been unspeakable. The loudest thing they say is that *Crossing the Color Line* (to invoke yet another title) can be sexually exciting, especially the line between black and white that had been most firmly erected by America's history of chattel slavery. If Hollywood has been lacking in "honest and open explorations of the complexities of interracial sexual attraction"[2], pornography, and sexploitation cinema have at least been willing to explore what more polite forms do not.

"Racialized Sexuality"

Abdul JanMohamed has coined the term "racialized sexuality" to designate the field in which Michel Foucault's familiar "deployment of sexuality" joins with a less familiar "deployment of race"[3]. Racialized sexuality is constructed around and through the policing of a (unequally permeable) racial border. Unlike "bourgeois sexuality," which emerged through a compulsive discursive articulation, "racialized sexuality" has been characterized by a "peculiar silence"[4]. While Foucault teaches that bourgeois sexuality was articulated through the intersection of techniques of confession and scientific discursivity, racialized sexuality in the U.S. was more occulted, grounded as it was in the "open secret" of the white master's sexual desire for, and sexual use of, the female slave[5]. JanMohamed argues that this sexual relation, which implicitly acknowledged the slaves' humanity, threatened the maintenance of the racial other in a subservient position.

> "Unable or unwilling to repress desire, the master silences the violation of the border and refuses to recognize, through any form of analytic discursivity, the results of the infraction. This peculiar silence prevents the development of the kind of confessional and 'scientific' discursivity central to the deployment of sexuality as Foucault defines it".[6]

The hypersexualization of the black body (male and female) in some ways parallels the "hysterization" of the white woman's body: both are represented as excessively saturated with sexuality. However, the discursive exploration of the female body ultimately integrates that body into the social body while the discursive silence and lack of confession about sexual relations with the racialized Other has aimed at segregating it from the social body. JanMohamed thus argues that racialized sexuality is an inversion of bourgeois sexuality; where bourgeois sexuality is driven by an analytic will to knowledge, and an empiricist discursivity, racialized sexuality is driven by a will to conceal its mechanisms and a reliance on unempirical stereotypes[7].

The situation JanMohamed describes may be true enough for the era he describes (his essay centers on a reading of Richard Wright's *Native Son*). What happens, however, when the racialized body becomes the subject of pornography's unique brand of confession? If, as I have argued (1989, 1999) pornography is a genre that seeks to confess the discursive 'truths' of sex itself, what happens when racialized bodies are asked to reveal their 'truths'? In this case the "peculiar silence" that JanMohamed so aptly describes can turn into a noisy confession. In contemporary video pornography the pleasures of sexual-racial difference that were once the province of white masters have become commodified, mediated and available to all.[8] Not unexpectedly, they are informed by the power differentials of that original relation.

Consider a contemporary porn video, marketed under the rubric "Interracial," entitled *Crossing the Color Line*[9]. Like most examples of hard-core pornography it presumes to confess the "truths" of sexual pleasure. But, unique to the subgenre of

"interracial" pornography, it speaks the once-silenced, taboo "truths" of racialized sexuality. The video consists of a series of interviews, followed by sexual performances between African American and white performers who "frankly" discuss their feelings and observations about race in the porn industry. The interview sections are earnest and full of liberal sentiments of equality and the unimportance of race; the sex sections are intensely erotic, often "nasty" and contradict the preceding liberalism by a fascination with racial difference. Sean Michaels, a handsome, African American with shaved head and athletic build, begins in an initial interview with a complaint about racism in the industry and concludes with an appeal to progress:

> "Young ladies in our industry, white or black, are told that if you work with a black man you will probably have difficulty getting a job or gig dancing on the road in Southern States…OK, well, if that's the truth then what about the rest of the continent?…Sure the South is the South, we know this, but things are changing and they have changed …if we don't wake up as a people we are going to be left behind by the rest of the world in the progression of our minds and our very souls."

Next, a white female, porn performer, Christi Lake, speaks to the camera:

> "I think people believe interracial sex is taboo just because of the old South. The plantation owner getting a hold of black females and such. They could do it but no one else and so it was always kept taboo. I don't believe that though. Having sex with a person of another color is very exciting, very erotic. I look at the person inside, not outside."

Both Michaels and Lake speak about the outdated taboos of the "old South" and Lake explicitly asserts the contemporary ethic of "color blindness." Yet these supposedly outdated taboos against interracial sex inform and eroticize the subsequent sexual performance between them, proving not that Lake looks "at the person inside" but quite the contrary: that "sex with a person of another color is very exciting." Thus liberal, verbal protestations of the ethic of colorblindness in the interviews give way to a "dirty talk" common in porn video in the performances. Lake, in particular, noisily articulates a sexual pleasure taken in the observation of racial differences linked to sexual differences. Sometimes this "racialized sexuality" is clearly visible, as when Lake's verbal ejaculation, "fuck my tight pink little pussy with your big black dick," can be seen in the form of an actually "pinkish" "pussy" next to Michael's truly long, truly black, "dick." Sometimes, however, it is a suggestion that is not literally visible as when Lake says, "put your spit in there and make it all wet and mix in with my white juices." Not all of the interracial sexual performances in this video verbally articulate such an overtly racialized sexuality, but once we have been cued by this first number to look for racial-sexual differences, such differences, visible and invisible, articulated and not-articulated, seem to emerge. Thus, in the next interracial pairing, following similarly earnest interviews-this time between a white man, Mark Davis, and a black woman, Naomi Wolf-the usual visual pleasure of exaggerated gender difference typical of heterosexual pornography becomes complicated by race. When we see, for example, a

pinkish penis and balls slapping up against a dark pubus, or ejaculate which is creamy white on black female skin, it is no longer just sexual difference that we see, but racial.

What does it mean to watch such comminglings of raced bodies? In a genre that tends to suspend narrative in order to scrutinize the sights and sounds of interpenetrating bodies – tongue in mouth, mouth around penis, penis in vagina or anus, hand on pubis, etc. – what does it mean when these bodies are not only differently gendered but also differently raced? And if it is possible to say that the pleasures of heterosexual pornography have something to do with the differences of gendered bodies, is it possible to say that pleasure can also be taken in the sight of the interpenetration of differently raced bodies? Why is this once-forbidden commingling, as Lake puts it, "very exciting, very erotic"? Finally, is it possible to articulate the formal pleasures of the color contrast without sounding like a racist?

Pornography, because it has so long existed in determined opposition to all other forms of mainstream culture, has often become the place where sex happens instantaneously. Pornotopia is the land, as Steven Marcus once put it, where it is "always bedtime," and where the usual taboos limiting sex are very easily overcome.[10] Couples fall into bed at the drop of a hat and nothing impedes the immediate gratification of myriad forms of sexual pleasure; the taboos that circumscribe and inform sex acts in the real world just melt away.

Because it is "always bedtime" in pornography the genre can often seem determinedly opposed to the generation of erotic excitement. Erotica is a term that is frequently opposed to pornography, often by anti-pornography feminists to contrast a tame and tasteful female pleasure to more gross and violent porn. However, this contrast belies the fact that both forms of representation ultimately aim at sexual arousal. What may more usefully distinguish the two terms, then, is the way taboo functions in each. Pornography as a whole defies the taboos against graphic representations of sex acts, but it often chooses not to inscribe these taboos into the truncated narratives of their fantasy scenarios. Erotica, in contrast, inscribes the taboo more deeply into its fantasy. Thus erotica is not necessarily more tasteful or tame than pornography (witness the grossly transgressive literary erotica of Georges Bataille, who is also the great theorist of transgression) nor is it without explicit imagery (witness the explicit but tasteful film and video erotica of Candida Royalle), but it does inscribe the tension of the forbidden into its fantasy.

If pornography is the realm where nothing impedes the immediate enactment of easily-achieved and multiple forms of sexual pleasure, then erotic forms of pornography are those in which the taboos and prohibitions that limit pleasure are, at least vestigially, in force often in order to enhance the desire that overpowers them. Eroticism in pornography thus depends on the continued awareness of the taboo that is transgressed in it. This is one reason why interracial pornographies can sometimes have an erotic charge that other forms of pornography do not.

To transgress a taboo is certainly not to defeat it. Georges Bataille argues that transgression is the flouting of a taboo that fully recognizes the authority and power of the law that prohibits: "Unless the taboo is observed with fear it lacks the counterpoise of desire which gives it its deepest significance"[11]. Prohibitions thus often

provide an element of fear that enhances desire. I will be arguing in much of what follows that it is fear – the fear that was once generated by white masters to keep white women and black men apart – that gives erotic tension to interracial sex acts that in "ordinary," non-racialized, pornography often become rote. The violation of prohibitions represents a breaking down of the established patterns of the regulated social order. [12]

The interviews in *Crossing the Color Line*, then, invoke the prejudices of the "old South" as if they were passé. But in the sexual performances that follow, these passé stereotypes make the violation of the color line more vivid and dramatic. Awareness of these taboos and stereotypes lends erotic (and dramatic) tension to the performance of the sex acts. The video takes the (unequally enforced, weakened) "taboo observed with fear" to elicit the "counterpoise of desire." To the extent that such pornography acknowledges the color line that informs the taboo, it works against the contemporary goal of "color blindness" now operant in American culture.

Whether this attention to racial difference is a good or a bad thing-in pornography or elsewhere-is a matter for debate. On one hand, "recognizing" racial differences can seem to be, and sometimes is, synonymous with racism itself[13]. On the other hand, in a culture that has become so determined to be officially blind to racial differences that it has created a new kind of taboo around its very mention, it can seem excitingly risque to notice differences of skin tone, ass or lip shape. On one level, then, interracial pornography's refusal to be color blind points to the obvious fact that as a culture we are not so much color blind as, as Susan Courtney puts it, "color mute": we take note of racial differences, much as we take note sexual differences, but unlike sexual differences, racial differences are not supposed to be noticed.[14] Ample female posteriors, for example, are often celebrated in "black" and "interracial" videos; caucasion features can also be racialized. In *Crossing the Color Line*, for example, white male or female skin tone seems to exist *for* its contrast to black, and black skin exists for its contrast to white. Sometimes this contrast is imaginary: "White pussy" – which actually registers as a pink color not visually all that different from the interior pink of African American women – nevertheless seems racialized in its contrast with the black penis. "White cock" – which registers considerably darker than the rest of the variously toned skin of white men, and therefore as not dependably darker than the cock of all men designated black – nevertheless seems racialized in contrast with the darker skin of the black woman. An even more impressive contrast is offered in the white man's pink lips and the black woman's dark haired pubis. Contrast, real or imagined, is what makes these comminglings so stunningly dramatic.

Contrasts are also invoked between men in this, and other, interracial videos. For example, we can't help but note the hirsute quality of the white man, Mark Davis, who has sex with the black woman, Naomi Wolfe in the second episode, compared to the smoothness of the black man, Sean Michaels, in the first episode. Nor can we fail to notice that Davis's lighter toned penis is shorter – though thicker – and also uncut. (Of course, both penises are oversized by any but pornographic standards.) If the white man's penis is (comparatively) small and the black man's

is (comparatively) large, which is the norm? Pornography as a genre has its own, changing, norms. The large black penis that once was given by the white master as a reason for white women to abhor and fear black men, is today valued by all in the world of interracial pornography. One thing is clear, however, though blackness and whiteness are articulated as racially and sexually saturated differences, they are articulated differently. The black woman does not articulate her pleasure in the "whiteness" of the white man's cock, as the white woman articulated hers to the black man. If the white man's cock is not racialized the same way the black man's is, nevertheless, racial differences have become part of a repertoire of visual pleasure to be found in the form. This is the case both for those differences that can be registered visually and those that are only imaginary.

All of the above racial differences remain more or less unmentionable in polite discourse because of their associations with racial stereotypes. Once used to elicit fear and revulsion that would enforce separation, these stereotypes are now used to cultivate desire across the racial border. It would be a mistake, certainly, to consider the mere flouting of an increasingly anachronistic color line as a progressive act, especially if we accept Bataille's notion that transgressed taboos are actually honored in the transgression. What, then, can we say about the deployment of racial stereotype in the erotic excitement of "crossing the color line"? Do these stereotypes do further harm to people of color and should they be eschewed? Must we agree, for example, with Franz Fanon that sexual stereotypes of black men, born of white fear, continue to reduce the black man to an "epidermalized" racial essence?

Racial Fear and Desire

Franz Fanon has famously written about the experience of being interpellated as a raced being when a white boy points to him on the street to say, "Look, a Negro… I'm frightened"[15]. In this classic description of the power of a white gaze to reduce the black man to an 'epidermalized,' phobic essence, Fanon sees negrophobia as a form of white sexual anxiety. The white gaze sees the organ of black skin and immediately is afraid. According to Fanon, the deepest cause of this fear is the reduction of the black man to a penis which is ultimately a pathological projection on the part of the white man of his own repressed homosexuality[16]. The white man's fear is thus, to Fanon, also his desire. Yet, as Mary Ann Doane [17] has shown, the specific instances of negrophobia analyzed by Fanon tend to ground the pathology of this projection especially in the white woman. The white woman's fear of rape by a Negro is viewed as an "inner wish" to be raped: "it is the woman who rapes herself"[18]. Pathology thus marks the white woman's desire for the black man. Fanon similarly pathologizes the black woman's desire for the white man. Yet, as Doane shows, Fanon does not equally pathologize the black man's desire for the white woman. Indeed, he does not find anything in his behavior that is motivated by race. This man is simply a typical "neurotic who by coincidence is black"[19].

Fanon's (unequal) condemnation of the "epidermalization" of racial fear and desire is understandable given his quest for revenge on the system that so fixes

him. But his protestation that the man of color's desire is not itself racially influenced is unconvincing. It is as if Fanon's response to the negative stereotype of the oversexed black man can only be to create another negative stereotype: the white oversexed woman and the undersexed white man (whom to Fanon is a repressed homosexual). Writing in 1952, Fanon, for good reason, cannot conceive of a world in which epidermal difference would become a commodity fetish grounded in the very fear expressed by the child who hailed him in his epidermal difference. Nor can he admit that this fear-desire might exist (unequally but powerfully) on both sides of the racial border. He thus cannot imagine a black man's desire for a white woman as grounded in a fear that enhances desire.

Kobena Mercer's much later (1994) attempt to analyze his own, black and gay, attraction-repulsion to Robert Mapplethorpe's photographs of nude black male bodies offers an intriguing new take on Fanon's notion of epidermalization.[20] Mercer's initial reaction to Mapplethorpe's photos in the (in)famous *Black Book* follows Fanon's example and dismisses them as a stereotypical objectifications grounded in the phobia of the hypersexed black male body. He quotes Fanon: "The Negro is eclipsed. He is turned into a penis. He *is* a penis"[21]. Mercer thus accuses Mapplethorpe of a fetishistic objectification of the black male body. In the much-discussed photo, *Man in a Polyester Suit* (1980), showing a penis protruding from the fly of the eponymous suit, he objects to the conjuration of the large penis as "phobic object," evoking "one of the deepest mythological fears and anxieties in the racist imagination, namely that all black men have huge willies"[22]. Mercer argues that Mapplethorpe's camera fetishizes the black male body, masking the social relations of racial power between the well-known artist and his anonymous subjects and oscillating between sexual idealization of the racial other and anxiety in defense of the white male ego[23]. This racial fetishization is ultimately Mapplethorpe's way, Mercer argues, of splitting belief, of saying "*I* know (its (sic) not true that all black guys have huge willies) but (nevertheless, in my photographs, they do)"[24].

In a second article, however, Mercer opts for a more contextualized reading of the photo's aesthetic and political value and for a revision of the very notion of racial fetishism as a necessarily bad thing[25]. Here, he complicates his earlier discussion of the fetish of the "big black willy" as part of the "psychic reality of the social relations in which our racial and gendered identities have been historically constructed"[26]. Mercer now allows that fetishized (gay male) erotic representations are not "necessarily a bad thing." Interestingly, his reason is that, like the point-of-view shots in gay male pornography, they are "reversible"[27], the object of the gaze can look back. Because the gendered hierarchy of seeing/being seen is not so rigidly coded in homoerotic representation, Mercer can justify Mapplethorpe's objectification of the "big black willy." Fanon's argument against the fixing of the black man by the white man and the white woman had been to say that the irrational fear of the black man's sex was actually pathological desire – and a pathology from which the black man himself was exempt. In contrast, Mercer's own homosexual (and intraracial) desire *for* the same black penis that the white photographer desires leads him to question the very pathology of fetishism. Torn between seeing the black man's sex as desirable and seeing it as a phobic object, Mercer fails to see

that it is the tension between fear and desire that marks the special appeal of these photos, whether the taboo transgressed is that forbidding same sex desire or that forbidding interracial sex. [28]

Mercer admirably introduces a rich ambivalence into his reading of these images, claiming that it is not possible to say whether such images reinforce or undermine racist myths about black sexuality. Nevertheless he wants to think that the homoeroticism of these images is capable of shocking viewers out of the stable, centered subject position of the straight "white male subject"[29]. He thus comes close to saying that, because Mapplethorpe photographs from within a shared community of homoerotic desire, and because Mercer himself writes from a similar perspective, these images do not offer a "bad" kind of racial fetishization, even though, from the perspective of Mapplethorpe's desire, they still objectify the blackness (if not the same-sexedness) of the black models' "willies." Does this mean that a "progressive," taboo-breaking, same-sex desire can absolve interracial lust of its own bad history of fetishization? Mercer, who has already gone a long way in probing these difficult issues, does not further elaborate.

Mercer's argument evades, but also evokes, the important question of whether the phobic fetishization that once fixed Fanon is still present in the new desiring fetishization. I argue that it is but that now it is in the service of fueling a pleasure that has become more complex, a pleasure that serves more than the white former masters. Jane Gaines, for example, in a complex response to Mercer's essay, has called for a better understanding of the "full diversity" of Mapplethorpe's *Black Book*, by which she means the full diversity of the readers of its images[30]. Gaines suggests that straight black women, straight white women and gay black men have all derived different kinds of pleasure from these pictures and that the actual sexual preferences of these models – whom Mercer presumes to be gay – are irrelevant to the fantasies they may generate[31]. Her point is that there are many taboos that inform the fantasies of sexual and racial couplings and that the furor and ambivalence over these photos suggest that many people, gay and straight, black and white, who once only feared the appearance of the "big black willy," are now becoming educated in its desire.

I would add that this "education of desire" – the term is borrowed from Richard Dyer[32] – occurs along with the rise of above-ground hard-core pornography in the seventies and eighties. As is well-known, this pornography has enshrined the penis – of whatever hue – as a commodified object of desire. Such commodification occurs in different ways across the racial border but it now includes the black man's own repertoire of sexual postures vis a vis the white women he once had good reason to fear. Indeed, the real historical change, as Jane Gaines demonstrates, is the simple fact of the circulation of a book of photos whose main *raison d'etre* is the display of this once fear-inducing, now desire-inducing, object.

Thus while white supremacist stereotypes certainly inform the fascination with the black penis in these photos, we may not need to have recourse to Mercer's intelligent, but also highly defensive, arguments to "save" Mapplethorpe's black male nudes from Fanonian-style disdain. Mercer, for example, argues that the "commonplace stereotypes" of pornography can create, when mixed ironically with high art,

a "subversive recoding of the ideological values supporting the normative aesthetic ideal"[33]. In this light, racial fetishism becomes, not a "repetition of racist fantasies but a deconstruction of the ambivalence at play in cultural representations of race and sexuality"[34].

I am full of admiration for Mercer's willingness to rethink his earlier condemnation of racial fetishism. I am a little suspicious, however, of his argument about the "subversive recoding" of both the high art ideal and the low pornographic stereotype because it tends to elide the fact that both the high and the low are not simply ironic but capable (in different degrees and in different ways) of arousing desire[35]. The real point of the combination of traditions in Mapplethorpe, I suggest, is not the shock of the juxtaposition but that both are so frankly erotic. What Mercer seems not to recognize fully in this much-revised and extremely important argument is that the phobic deployment of the stereotype of the black man's sex had already been transformed by popular culture, not Mapplethorpe's art, into an ambivalently mixed bag of stereotype and fetishistic valuation in which fear, desire and envy are already mixed.

It is precisely the erotic appeal of this racialized sexuality around which Mercer's essay seems to dance. The gist of his fascinating and honest argument with himself might come down to something like this: if Mapplethorpe's photos were viewed only by (straight) white viewers, then they might easily be accused of fixing and negatively fetishizing black men in their very blackness and hypersexuality. But the context of viewing is everything. Black viewers of these bodies, and gay viewers of these bodies, and black gay viewers of these bodies, and women viewers of all races and sexual orientations now exist in a culture that has not only denigrated and "fixed" the black man negatively in his sexuality but has also celebrated his erotic power in the familiar poses of a macho black power. Racial fetishization is today not the same as the "fixing" to which Fanon objected. As Mercer notes, the statement "the black man is beautiful" takes on different meanings depending on the social subject who says it: white or black woman, white or black man, gay or straight. Beauty is indeed an important component of Mapplethorpe's photos. But it may be more pertinent to alter the statement to "the black man is sexy" for beauty in this case leads to an acknowledgement of desire. The black man is sexy in this instance in the way he is sexy in contemporary interracial pornography: in the stereotypical, racialized characteristics of black skin and large penis. These characteristics now inspire ambivalent mixes of fear and desire in a much wider range of subjectivities than Mercer originally conceived (including, as Gaines points out, white women and black women). Those who transgress taboos that proscribe either interracial or same sex desire may experience an ambivalent mix of fear and desire that is part of these images' appeal.

If we are willing to acknowledge that interracial lust evolves out of the taboos initially imposed by the white master, but which now serve to eroticize a field of sexuality that is no longer his sole province, then we begin to recognize the validity of varieties of commodification in contemporary visual culture, and not only in its much-discussed, high art, incarnations. But what if we now turn to a decidedly "low" example of interracial lust which no one could call high art, and which is not

even attempting, like *Crossing the Color Line*, to counter the racism of the porn industry, but which seems vigorously to embrace its crudest stereotypes?

Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout White Chicks[36] is a porn video which became notorious, and popular, for its articulation of all the stereotypes and clichés of racial difference. Since its release in 1984, when it won the XRCO Best Picture award, it has acquired something of a cult status and has, unlike many other porn titles, been subsequently reissued as a "classic". The video box proclaims it "The Original Interracial Classic." Its director, Gregory Dark, is a white man who also pioneered hip, politically incorrect "New Wave" straight porn and then briefly turned his hand to interracial pornography in the mid 80's. Dark proudly proclaims that "you will not find one sensitive moment in any of my work." (Bright np). Like Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever* (1991), it unearths the most regressive sexual stereotypes of taboo desire. Unlike Lee, who chooses to tell his version of the story from the perspective of an upwardly mobile black man who momentarily succumbs to "jungle fever" and then learns better, Dark revels in the black male enthusiasm for ever more outlandish conquest of "white chicks." The tone is set with this opening rap:

> "White chicks! They're so hot and pretty, they get down to the real nitty gritty.
> White chicks got this attitude, they ain't happy 'till they get screwed.
> Give me five on the black hand side, there's nothing as sweet as a little white hide.
> When I see black chicks on the street, I know white chicks got them beat.
> Got to get some fine white pussy, feel so wet and tastes so juicy.
> Got to get some fine white chick, give her some of my big black dick.
> White chicks!"

A group of low life black men – a pimp, some petty thieves, and one slightly more respectable figure whom I will call the resister – sit around in a bedroom, bragging about their sexual conquests of "white tail." Each narrated conquest is viewed in flashback. Each consists of an intrusion into a perceived white, upper class realm (actually only mildly upscale Southern California kitchens, bedrooms and bathrooms), until the final number, which occurs in the funky bedroom they occupy. Typically the episodes begin as robberies and then turn into opportunities for sex with exceedingly willing white women. Conspicuously absent from the video are white men. By behaving like the stereotypes that white men have made them out to be – lazy, lawless and sexually insatiable – a crude revenge is taken on the unseen white man.

The pimp figure begins the bragging, extolling the virtues of white women over black. The resister disbelieves him, saying at one point that white women make his stomach turn. His buddies spin fantasy after fantasy to convince him, and finally, in the last number, break down his resistance by offering him a white woman on his very own bed. Before he is finally won over, however, he confesses his fear of white women. Indeed, one could say that the entire drama of this video (such as it is) rests on the ambivalence of this one black man towards the white woman he has historically been blamed for desiring. The sex scene with which the film

concludes, and indeed all of the outrageous sexual fantasies of black men "boning" eager white women, might thus be construed as a counter to this fear. Bataille's statement about the relation of fear to desire is again relevant: "Unless the taboo is observed with fear it lacks the counterpoise of desire which gives it its deepest significance"[37]. The "taboo observed with fear" resides in the very real fact that black men were once justly afraid of white women for the danger they could cause. White racists also have been known to fear that white women would, if they tasted sex with black men, never "come back." Both fears inform the racialized sexual fantasies performed in this video. However, fear is not, as it was for Fanon, the dominant emotion. It now is Bataille's "counterpoise of desire" – the tension that enhances desire.

On one level, then, *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout White Chicks* can be described as the racist white male fantasy that argues that black men are animals and that the white women who go with them are sluts. The pleasure taken in this depiction of their sex acts could be called the pleasure of seeing the white woman sullied by the animalistic appetites of the black man – appetites which have historically been projected onto the black man by the white. In this case, the white man is not directly implicated in this nastiness except as its onlooker and, of course, as the main author of the fantasy. The black man who acts the part of the animal and the white woman who proves herself to be a slut by going with the black man may also be flouting the taboos of white supremacy for the very pleasure of the white men whom we know to be the dominant consumers of pornography and the writer, director and producer of this video.[38]

On another level, however, this video can play as a black male sexual fantasy. Narratively, the "me" who tells "ya" about white chicks is a black man talking to other black men, telling tall tales of the obliging availability of white women who crave sex with, and pay money to, low class black men for their sexual services. On this level the video can be viewed as a straightforward black male fantasy that takes pleasure in acting out what was once the white man's worst nightmare. On yet another level, however, it is possible to see that even the eponymous white woman might take pleasure in watching her counterparts have down and dirty sex with a primitive Other. One thing at least is clear, while it is not in the least politically correct, this fantasy offers an eroticized transgression of a variety of racialized perspectives. The one racialized perspective that is studiously ignored, however, is that of the "black chicks" who are unfavorably compared to the "white chicks." A companion video, *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks*, by the same writer, director and producer, would appear to have rectified the imbalance of insult, but it is lost.[39] However we judge the racist stereotypes at work in these films, it would seem that by the time of their release, interracial forms of lust had begun to refunction the more purely phobic kinds of reactions to stereotypes of what Mercer calls the "big black willy." On both sides of the color line men and women who watched these video could participate in the "ambivalences" described by Mercer.

Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout White Chicks is thus neither a "subversive recoding of the ideological values supporting the normative aesthetic ideal," as Kobena Mercer claims for readings of Mapplethorpe, nor is it a pure "repetition of racist fanta-

sies"[40]. Its function is not, like Reconstruction and Progressive Era racial fantasies, to keep black men in their place. Rather, it is a new kind of racial pornographic fantasy which has come into being because of America's history of racial oppression but which is not a simple repetition of these past racist stereotypes. Like *Crossing the Color Line*, it reworks the phobic white fear of the black man's sex, and related fear of the white woman's animalistic preference for that sex, into a pornographic fantasy that may have originated from, but is no longer "owned" by the white man.

It is thus a pornographic sexual-racial fantasy propped upon a pre-existing racial stereotype that was itself a sexual-racial fantasy, though not one that its white creators could ever use overtly for sexual pleasure. This does not mean, however, that it is a positive, as opposed to a negative, stereotype. Indeed, the conventional language of stereotypes seems to fail us in the attempt to analyze the refunctioning that has occurred around this phobia. For the phobia's original purpose was to prevent precisely the kind of black male white female couplings celebrated in these videos.

The problem in thinking about stereotypes, as Mireille Rosello has pointed out, is our stereotypes about them[41]. Our stereotypical notions of stereotypes often lead to a lack of precisely the sort of ambivalence noted by Mercer. Rosello argues that stereotypes are important objects of study not because we can better learn to eliminate them from our thinking, but rather because they cannot be eliminated. Stereotypes persist, and perhaps even thrive upon, the protestations against them; the louder the protest, the more they thrive. Rosello offers, instead of protest, a nuanced study of the changing historical contexts of stereotypes. Something like this seems to be what is needed in our understanding of stereotypes of interracial lust as well. To forbid all utterance or depiction of the stereotype of the originally phobic, image of the large black penis is to grant it a timelessness and immortality that it does not really possess. Once uttered, a stereotype does have, however, an enormous power to endure. Racial stereotypes especially, as Homi Bhabba has noted, take on a fetishistic nature, as a

> "form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place' as already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated…as if the essential duplicity of the Asiatic or the bestial sexual license of the African that needs no proof, can never really, in discourse be proved"[42].

In the perpetual absence of proof (say a random sampling of penis size and actual sexual behavior of black men) there is no truth to the stereotype. But precisely because there is no truth, the claim must be repeated. Rosello, however, argues that the refunctioned repetition of stereotype shows what happens when what the culture thinks it knows comes in contact with the stereotyped person's reaction to that supposed knowledge. In this case the "iteration" of the refunctioned stereotype does not deny it, but uses it in historically new ways that are more erotic than phobic.

In other words, the racial stereotype of the big black "buck" that right-thinking Americans have now come to label unjustly "negative" (but have in no way eliminated as a vacillating form of knowledge and belief) has ceased to function in the

same way it did when the Clan was riding. It has ceased to so function precisely because it has, in the intervening years, been refunctioned to different ends by black men who have willingly occupied the fantasy position of the hypersexed black man in order to instill fear in the white man and to counter the older stereotype of the passive Uncle Tom.[43]

The typical argument against stereotypes is to say that "real" people do not resemble them. But as Steve Neale[44] and Jane Gaines[45] point out, it is almost never actually "real people" who are asked to offer the antidote to harmful stereotypes, but an imaginary ideal that can serve as a "positive image" for stigmatized minorities. Harmful, negative stereotypes are not measured against the "real" but against the culturally dominant "ideal." Jane Gaines quotes Isaac Julian and Kobena Mercer on this point:

> "…it's not as if we could strip away the negative stereotypes of black men…and discover some 'natural' black masculinity which is good, pure and wholesome"[46]

Historically, then, the negative stereotype of the oversexed "black buck" was countered in the late 50's and early 60's by the positive stereotype of the super-civilized (handsome but never overtly sexual) Sydney Poitier. But this de-sexed image of the black man was in turn countered by more explicitly sexualized – "bad" – images of black men produced in reaction to the perceived passivity of the Tom figure. Thus the reappearance of the stereotype of the "black buck" in the post-Civil Rights era does not represent a return to a *Birth of a Nation*-style stereotype. Stereotypes, if we follow Rosello, do not simply repeat. The very emergence of this figure, in a newly above-ground post-Civil Rights era pornography, would seem to provide evidence that the older function of what Foucault calls the deployment of power through "systems of alliance" and a "symbolics of blood"[47] indeed does give way to a newer deployment and analytics of sexuality. But like so much else in Foucault, these two modes of power are intertwined.

A stereotype that once functioned to frighten white women and to keep black men in their place (as in JanMohamed's stereotyping allegory), now functions to solicit sexual desire in the form of a transgressive, pornographic tale. However, this arousal remains propped upon the original phobic stereotype aimed precisely at prohibiting the very sexual commerce depicted. Are black men and white women kept any less "in their place" by this sexual fantasy whose point of origin is the power of the white man? I would argue that the white man's power remains the pivotal point around which these permutations of power and pleasure turn. The sexual fantasies depicted are primarily rivalries between white and black men. The agency of white women, and black women even less, is difficult to discern. Nevertheless, there is a big difference, as Tessa Perkins's has observed, between 'knowing' racist stereotypes and 'believing' them[48]. I suggest that pornographic and erotic fantasies of interracial lust rely upon all viewers, male and female, black and white, knowing these stereotypes. Although nothing necessarily rules out their also *believing* them – that is, they can certainly be interpreted in a racist manor – the pleasure taken in pornographic depictions of interracial lust does not depend upon

believing them. It would seem that what is involved instead is a complex flirtation with the now historically proscribed stereotype that operates on both sides of the color line. Thus the very taboos that once effectively policed the racial border are now in the service of eroticizing its transgression.

"Fear of [and desire for] a Mandingo sexual encounter"

We have seen that a mix of fear and desire is at the heart of the erotic tension of interracial pornography. The "resister" in *White Chicks* who admits his fear of white women was also, inadvertently, admitting his fear of white men. White men, for their part, have historically feared black male prowess, even while (and as a means of) exercising sexual sovereignty over black women. White male fear of the black man's sexual threat to white women has been the ostensible reason, as JanMohamed notes, for countless acts of violence against black men. What we see in the above examples of interracial pornography is that this fear has now been iterated in a new way. Where it once operated in a more exclusively phobic mode to keep the black man and the white woman apart, now its reversal in pornographic fantasy shows how the stereotype informs the erotic tension of representations of interracial lust. I don't mean to suggest, however, that because a racialized mix of fear and desire informs contemporary pornography that it is now totally innocuous. Quite the contrary. One of the worst riots of recent American history was precipitated by the fantasmatic projection of one white man's racial-sexual fear, envy and resentment grounded in just such a scenario of interracial lust.

When the white Los Angeles Police Sergeant Stacey Koon saw a powerfully built black man holding his butt and gyrating his hips at a white female Highway Patrol Officer, he claimed to see a lurid scenario of interracial sex that then triggered the beating of Rodney King. Koon's reading of King's pornographic gestures is described in his book, *Presumed Guilty*.

> "Melanie Singer ... shouted at King to show her his hands. Recognizing the voice as female, King grinned and turned his back to Melanie Singer. Then he grabbed his butt with both hands and began to gyrate his hips in a sexually suggestive fashion. Actually, it was more explicit than suggestive. Melanie wasn't so much fearful as offended. She was being mocked in front of her peers.... Control and common sense were cast aside. Melanie's Jane Wayne and Dirty Harriet hormones kicked in. She drew her pistol, and advanced to within five feet of the suspect."[49]

In the original manuscript of this book, however, Koon had offered a slightly different version of his reason for intervening, stressing this time not Singer's "offense" but what he called her "fear of a Mandingo sexual encounter"[50]. In an interview after his acquittal in the first (state) trial, Koon tried to explain what he meant by these words, which were eventually eliminated from the book:

> "In society there's this sexual prowess of blacks on the old plantations of the South and intercourse between blacks and whites on the plantation. And that's where the fear comes in, because he's black"[51].

Koon's phrasing is worthy of note: he uses the word "intercourse," rather than the word rape that his logic of imputed fear seems to imply. Yet he clearly wants it to appear that he was saving the white woman from a fear-inducing black "sexual prowess." It is not clear whether he realizes that "intercourse between blacks and whites on the plantation" was historically almost entirely between white masters and black slaves. Most likely he is attempting to subscribe to the Reconstruction era myth of the helpless white woman in need of rescue from the lustful black man by a heroic white man (himself).[52] But the scenario no longer fits. His improbable imputation of sexual fear to the six-foot tall and highly professional Melanie Singer at the moment King was surrounded by no less than eight Highway Patrol officers with drawn guns says more about his own sexual insecurities regarding the competence of the female cop who threatens to usurp his own authority. The vacillations in his story are telling: in one version he attributes sexual fear to Singer; in another version mere offense. It is clear that in both cases, fear and offense are not only a projection of an actual sexual threat onto King, but a form of punishment enacted on Singer for having the gall to place herself in the "Dirty Harriet" position of a male officer.[53] The real fear for which he also punished *her* by taking over the arrest – may very well be that she was a perfectly competent cop doing her job arresting a speeder.

At the same time, however, Koon's use of the term "sexual prowess of blacks" intimates something of white sexual envy of black men; it is hardly a phrase old-fashioned racists like Thomas Dixon or D.W. Griffith would have invoked. This envy, I suggest, is inherited from a much more recent legacy of pornography and exploitation cinema that has culminated in the fantasy depictions of interracial lust cited above. While Stacey Koon would like us to believe that his initiation of the beating of Rodney King was caused by Singer's "fear of a Mandingo sexual encounter," his motives are different than Dixon and Griffith's. Like them, he wants to keep black men and white women in their place. But unlike them, he seems aware of the various ways in which the fantasy of black male sexual threat to the white woman has become the material for much more overtly titillating scenarios.

One clue to his different deployment of the figure of the "black beast" may lie in Koon's peculiar use of the word Mandingo, which designates along with the variant Mandinka a tribe of African warriors – instead of black or African or any of the other available animalistic epithets apparently used by police before and during the beating of King. This word signals Koon's own semi-conscious acknowledgement that the scenario he invokes has since the 70's become something more than the white patriarch's fear of the pollution of his own racial line by a hypersexual African slave and the subsequent loss of control over "his" women. "Mandingo" does not mean to Stacey Koon's generation what "African" meant to Dixon and Griffith's. One reason may be that in 1975 a popular "sexploitation" film with the very title *Mandingo*, which Stacey Koon is old enough to have seen as a teenager,

had already refunctioned the older scenario of white female fear in the face of black male lust.

Stacy Koon's over-reaction to King's grabbed butt and gyrated hips may have unleashed the same kind of overkill as the ride of the Clan, but the raced and gendered fear that Koon attempted to project onto Melanie Singer was no longer a historically believable emotion. This is one reason for its excision from the manuscript of his book and replacement of the word "offense." But in saying "fear of a Mandingo sexual encounter," Koon also invoked a white female *desire for* that same encounter as depicted in the film of that name. For Richard Fleischer's 1975 film is most famous for its depiction of a white mistress's taboo-breaking seduction of her husband's Mandingo slave.

As noted above, one component of the legacy of "black power" in American popular culture since the sixties has been to fight the stereotype of the emasculated Tom with gestures of black male virility. From the virile stances of the black power movement proper, to Eldridge Cleaver's claims to have raped white women in Soul *on Ice*, to an array of early seventies Blaxploitation films which *Mandingo* followed, to the black-power derived poses of Mandingo itself, the defiant gesture by which the black man asserts his virility in the face of a white dominated world has become as automatic a reflex as "rescuing the white woman" was to Stacey Koon. Perhaps if we could begin to understand the reach of the sexual-racial fantasies that fuel the relations between the races at so many levels, we might better understand not only the reasons Stacey Koon grabbed his taser, but also the reason Rodney King "grabbed his butt" in the first place.

Stacey Koon's fateful projection onto Melanie Singer of a "fear of a Mandingo sexual encounter" thus needs to be understood as a nexus of extremely ambivalent, highly stereotypical white and black sexual fear that Koon certainly wanted to see reaching back to the mythic plantation but which actually joined mainstream popular culture in the 1970's. It is the emergence of this mixture of racial fear and desire that I would like to examine in this section. As we have seen, the racially inflected hard core pornography examined in the last section is propped upon the old, purely phobic, picture of the threatening, hypersexual black male. In these films, white myths of the "old South" came into contact with post-civil rights era assertions of black power and black sexual potency. But how did they actually interact? We can see the effect of this interaction in the catastrophic collision of the two reflexively macho gestures described above: the reflexive gesture with which Rodney King asserts his defiance of the law by adopting a "sexually provocative" pose vis a vis a white woman; the reflexive gesture of beating the black man in order to "rescue" a white woman who was never really in danger.

I would suggest that neither of these reflexes is a pure repetition of the past: the macho bravado of King's response to Singer's order is as deeply conditioned by the very same 70's popular culture that Stacey Koon inadvertently invokes when he says the word Mandingo. The macho bravado of Koon's response, which wants to see itself repeating a gesture of heroic rescue out of the mythic white supremacist past, is also deeply conditioned by the imagination of a "black power" "sexual prowess" signaled by the very word "Mandingo." The word seems to function as

a screen memory – a memory that both recalls and blocks out – unresolved questions of interracial sex and violence that have been percolating in the culture since the 1970's. It would therefore behoove us, before trying to say too much more about Stacy Koon and Rodney King's fantasies, to examine the film of that name as a way of excavating a moment in American culture when mainstream audiences, black and white, began to find titilation – not just danger – in depictions of interracial lust.

Mandingo

Mandingo is not pornography but for many viewers who did not yet venture into the porn theaters of the era it came close. Reviewers were unanimous in viewing it as an exploitative potboiler and a work of lurid "trash."[54] Directed by Richard Fleischer in 1975, and a big hit at the box office, *Mandingo* has only recently begun to receive critical due.[55] The fairly expensively produced film does not directly belong to the cycle of Blaxploitation films but it is best understood, as Ed Guerrero argues, in relation to them. Blaxploitation was Hollywood's word for an exploitation of both race and sex that became popular, and economically important, to the very survival of Hollywood, in the early and mid 70's. Blaxploitation films were breakthrough films for black directors which typically offered contemporary reworkings of outlaw and detective genres set in the inner city with contemporary jazz scores and tough, sexually desirable black heroes who displayed sexual prowess to both black and white women (The Isaac Hayes theme song for *Shaft* sings of the "black private dick that's a sex machine for all the chicks"). *Mandingo*, in contrast, is set on a plantation of the old South, directed by a white man and has a primary white hero. But like the blaxploitation cycle, it portrays black struggle against racism while also celebrating black male sexual prowess. Also like blaxploitation, it was popular with the same black urban audiences who played such a major a role in Hollywood's recovery from economic slump in the early seventies.[56] The film represents a new post-Civil Rights, post-Black Power view of the coercive sexual relations of slavery but one which also takes a frankly lurid interest in those relations. Finally, *Mandingo* presents interracial sexual relations not only as compellingly erotic but systematically in relation to the different economic situations of white masters and mistresses and black male and female slaves. It thus represented a revision of the most recent incarnation of the plantation genre – a type of pulp fiction that was already predicated, sans black power message, upon a certain lurid fascination with black/white sexual relations.

The film is one part Gothic sexploitation, one part blaxploitation and one part treatise on the Hegelian bond between master and slave. The story concerns a young white master (Perry King) who openly enjoys his *droit du seigneur* with a particular female slave while, unbeknownst to him, his sexually unfulfilled white wife furtively enjoys the sexual services of his prize Mandingo "buck." Kyle Onstott's lengthy 1957 novel about interracial sex on the plantation has been overlaid with a post-Civil Rights celebration of black power that systematically revises *Gone with*

the Wind-style clichés of the plantation melodrama.[57] The plantation, presided over by the young master's enfeebled patriarch (James Mason), is a breeding farm for slaves. When the young master discovers that his new wife is not a virgin, he turns to one of his previous slave "bed wenches" and develops a romantic relationship with her.[58] Sex between master and slave is not in itself presented as transgressive, though the romantic nature of this relationship is. Out of jealousy and frustrated desire his wife then orders her husband's prize Mandingo to service her sexually in a prolonged sex scene. When she later gives birth to a mixed race child, the master kills it and poisons her.

The one thing the film isn't, however, is what Stacey Koon's conflicted memory seemed to want it to be: a lesson teaching white women to fear the "sexual prowess" of black men. Rather, it teaches that these transgressive relations of racialized sexuality are the only relations that have any emotional force in a film otherwise structured by totally instrumental uses of both white and black flesh. But the part of the film that Stacey Koon really ought to have remembered is its conclusion. For when the white master seeks revenge on his slave for having had sex with his wife, his excessive violence[59], like Koon's, leads to "civil unrest" – in this case a slave revolt.[60]

Mandingo's black male revenge on the white master marks the film as a post civil rights era expression of black power. The film's systematic revision of happy black servility with equal parts of black rage and illicit sexual desire is thus part and parcel of its revision of the white master's insistence that white women should fear, not desire, the black man's sex. There are two major interracial sex scenes in the film. They are not the first interracial sex scenes offered up for prurient, as opposed to phobic, interest in mainstream American cinema, but they are the most sustained, and the most provocative in their challenge to plantation genre precursors.[61] Both entail transgressive erotic recognitions across racial difference.

In the first scene the young master is shown on a visit to another plantation where he and his traveling companion are given slave "wenches" for the night. Although he has previously been shown to have matter-of-fact breeding relations with a female slave, the kindly Hammond here responds differently. Sickened by a sadistic treatment of one of the women by his traveling companion, and responding to the fear shown by Ellen, the woman he has been given, he retreats into the next room with her. But he has also been repulsed by the kiss his companion has planted on his "wench" in violation of the code against real intimacy between the races. Ellen, for her part, is shaken by the rough violation of her fellow slave, afraid of her own violation (she is a virgin), and intrigued by Hammond's vulnerability, symbolized by a childhood injury that has left him lame. He reciprocates her kindness towards his lameness by telling her that if she does not want to stay she needn't. During the scene she stands above him. Andrew Britton has argued that Hammond's abrogation of his mastery then leads to Ellen's desire to please him, suggesting "not the submission of a servant but the emotional commitment of a lover"[62]. Britton, who mounted the first major defense of the film, argues that Ham and Ellen thus overcome their differences: she overcomes the fact that he is

master, and he overcomes the fact that she is a slave, and his revulsion to the idea of kissing a slave on the mouth.

Where Britton argues that Ellen's "color and status become irrelevant for Ham" and that he "renounces mastery"[63], I would argue that the abrogation of mastery can never be complete; its residue, in fact, is what marks the erotic tension of the scene.[64] If we look at how master and slave get to the point of their dramatic first kiss, we see that difference and mastery are never truly overcome. For example, even though Ham tells Ellen she is free not to service him and even though he invites her to "put your eyes on me; look at me straight into my eyes," she resists, "I can't. Niggers don't." Britton argues that Ham then more gently *asks* her to look at him, and that when their gazes meet, they overcome their differences. I suggest, however, that the shift from demanding to asking does not overcome mastery or negate their differences. Ellen is never truly free to refuse a master and her "color and status" do not "become irrelevant for Ham"[65]. Rather they become relevant in a new way. If Ellen's desire coincides with her need to please the master, so much the better. But when Ham says that she needn't service him, she reassures him with words whose sincerity cannot be ascertained: "I like you, sir. I want to please you." Ellen's apparently willing recognition of Hammond as a man not a master, elicits a corresponding recognition of Ellen as a woman not a slave when he finally overcomes revulsion to kiss her on the mouth. But the recognition figured by the multiple kisses that end the scene is never free of the power and raced differences that fuel its eros.

In their own way, however, these kisses are revolutionary, especially if we recall Abdul JanMohamed's[66] argument that sexual relations between master and slave do entail potentially subversive recognitions of humanity. In *Mandingo's* larger narrative this transgressive kiss initiates a chain of events that threatens the entire institutional edifice of slavery by exposing the homology of the black (male and female) slave's position as chattel and the white mistresses position as breeder for the master's seed. For this kiss precipitates the wife's sexual envy and her own much more transgressive violation of the taboo against interracial intimacy when she has sex with Hammond's Mandingo slave, Mede. The repercussions of that sex act will in turn precipitate the master's Stacey Koon-like overkill, which in turn sparks a slave revolt. Thus, while it is possible to say that "common humanity" is recognized in these transgressions of the racial border between master and slave, the recognitions are through and because of, not despite, erotically charged racial differences.

It is almost impossible not to see the sexual encounters between master and slave and mistress and slave in terms of racialized versions of Hegel's scenario of the dialectic of recognition between the lord and the bondsman that has been so influential in postcolonial studies. In this Hegelian turn I am especially indebted to Celine Parennas Shimizu (nd) whose paper on *Mandingo*, "Master-Slave Sex Acts: *Mandingo* and the Race/Sex Paradox" has clarified many of these issues for me. Hegel's description of the relation between the bondsman and the lord in *Phenomenology of Spirit* concerns the philosophical problem that "the one" – the "ego subject" or "I" of human self-consciousness must relate to the "ego object" of the

other in order to achieve its identity and become it. Hegel frames this relation to the other in terms of "Desire" – ultimately the desire of "the one" for recognition by "the other." Although Hegel's sense of desire is never, as Jane Gaines notes, sexual, there is a strong sense of the bodily confrontation between sameness and difference in his discussion of how the "bondsman" or slave becomes an object for the lord or master that is eminently suggestive of the sexual scenario.[67] The Hegelian dilemma of mastery lies in the fact that the more complete it is, the more the master fails to achieve genuine self-consciousness. For the master needs to be recognized by an independent will or consciousness, which is precisely what he has not granted the slave. Thus the master's very power frustrates the recognition of his own will and consciousness by an independent other. Jessica Benjamin calls this dilemma the dialectic of control: "If I completely control the other, then the other ceases to exist, and if the other completely controls me then I cease to exist."[68] Only in mutual recognition can two subjects become what Hegel calls actively "universal" subjects.

Hegel's paradigm may offer a way of conceiving forms of recognition extended to forms of racialized and sexualized subjugation inherited from American slavery.[69] Judith Butler's recent interpretation of both Hegel and Jessica Benjamin rejects the notion of a mutual recognition that functions as normative ideal of an inclusion of the Other by the self. According to Butler, the kind of overcoming of difference that we saw argued above by Britton with respect to *Mandingo* would be an example of the easy and overly optimistic interpretation that she challenges in Benjamin.[70] In contrast, Butler stresses a version of the master/slave recognition that sees both as running a risk of destruction. But this risk of destruction is also, she argues, constitutive of the self. It is a recognition grounded in difference and instability. Butler's argument is complex and nuanced, ultimately challenging Benjamin's dyadic concept of desire with a more multiple heterosexed, homosexed, and unnamably sexed, triad. I only take from it the basic paradox that recognition does not overcome difference or destruction but is, rather, grounded in both. I find this Hegelian reinterpretation, along with Shimizu's, helpful for understanding the nature of the erotic recognition that occurs between Ham and Ellen and that is symbolized in their kisses. In a film in which sex acts have functioned in the economic interests of the master, these transgressive, interracial sex acts do not, as Andrew Brittain would have it, overcome difference. Rather, they offer a perversely exciting form of sexual-racial recognition-in- difference.

This negativity of a destructive difference offers an important qualification for understanding erotic forms of recognition whose very eros is grounded in racialized differences of power. Consider, for example, the second big moment of interracial lust depicted in this film, that between the aptly named Blanche (Susan George), the sexually frustrated plantation mistress, and Mede, the Mandingo wrestler (the boxer Ken Norton). Blanche had disappointed Hammond by proving – through the abuse of her older brother – not to be a virgin upon marriage. When Ham turns to his slave Ellen for love, elevating her to quasi mistress status, Blanche's revenge is to seduce his slave. On a steamy afternoon, dressed in her white nightgown, with long blond hair falling down nearly to her waist, a half drunk Blanche orders Mede to her bedroom to sit on her bed – a move which momentarily equalizes the differ-

ence in their height when she stands before him, making it possible for each – as in the previous "master/slave" "recognition" – to look in the other's eyes. First she threatens him with his master's wrath: if he does not do what she wants, she will claim to have been raped by him. But since such coercion will only make her like Hegel's master, she then entreats: "Mede, ain't you ever craved a white lady before?" With this shift from terrorizing command to an entreaty that addresses his own desire for the Other, she kisses his unresponsive lips, caressing the sides of his face and looking him in the eye.

It was at the point of an interracial kiss that the previous "love" scene between Ham and Ellen faded out. Here, however, the kiss begins a prolonged seduction that climaxes in a soft-core depiction of mutual orgasm. Considered simply as a sex scene, it is no more transgressive than a great many of its era; considered as an interracial sex scene, it pushes the envelope, an effect that is enhanced by Maurice Jarre's Gothic music. Blanche slowly removes Mede's shirt and pulls him up from the bed to stand, towering over her. Embracing the full length of his body she reaches her hand down his chest and toward his groin. A reframed shot of their upper bodies shows both of them looking down in that direction. With this allusion to his involuntary sexual response to her coercive "seduction," Blanche begins to undress him. This gesture leads her, eventually, to kneel at his feet before him as if in abject submission to a virile response which she nevertheless controls. From behind Mede's back, we see a powerfully built black man, naked buttocks prominently displayed, with a white woman kneeling at his feet. Mede's body, not Blanche's, is clearly on display in this scene. Standing once again, Blanche now removes her clothes and embraces him, rubbing her face with its long blond hair against his naked chest.

At this point, Mede finally begins to respond voluntarily to her seduction. His arms embrace her and she smiles. Taking "control," he lifts her briefly up and then onto the bed where he lies upon her. Once again, it is his body, especially his buttocks, that are on display as the camera glides along its length to reveal her feet caressing his thighs. Suddenly, as if remembering that she should be in charge, Blanche reverses this arrangement and climbs on top, for the first time in the scene revealing the upper part of her own naked body. Immediately, however, Mede puts her back under him, and trembles as if in the grips of orgasm that gives the appearance, if not the guarantee, of mutuality. The scene ends with a languorous crane shot pulling up, revealing his body sprawled on top of hers with her legs spread-eagled beneath him.[71]

What kind of Hegelian recognition can we see in this scene? First of all, it is literally one that runs the "risk of destruction" by keeping in play a negativity – a possibility of obliteration that is the very source of its erotic tension. Indeed, both mistress and slave will die as a consequence of this sexual-racial recognition. The very death at the master's hand with which Blanche threatens Mede, will be delivered to them both.[72] The intense eroticism of the scene derives not merely from its explicit (relative to previous, non-"exploitation" Hollywood films) details of their sexual relations – reference to Mede's off screen erection, nudity, shuddering orgasm – but from the way his body itself becomes a battleground between fear and

desire. Here is another permutation of the fear of, and desire for, the racial Other. But where Ellen risked destruction in refusing to satisfy her master, Mede risks destruction both ways – in refusing to satisfy his mistress *and* in satisfying her.

Judith Butler writes,

> "The self in Hegel is marked by a primary enthrallment with the Other, one in which that self is put at risk. The moment in 'Lordship and Bondage' when the two self-consciousnesses come to recognize one another is, accordingly, in the 'life and death struggle,' the moment in which they each see the power they have to annihilate the Other and, thereby, destroy the condition of their own self-reflection. Thus, it is at a moment of fundamental vulnerability, that recognition becomes possible and becomes self-conscious"[73].

Butler's interpretation of the achievement of Hegelian self-identity through a relation to the Other that runs the risk of destruction, suggests, in contrast to Jessica Benjamin, that the price of self-identity is paradoxically self-loss. To be a self, according to Butler's reading of Hegel, is not to "enjoy the prerogative of self-identity" but to be ek-static, cast outside of oneself, to become Other to oneself. Thus Butler resists the sort of "happy" interpretation of recognition that sees it as an incorporation of the difference of the Other into the One. Her challenge to Benjamin is to think about the desire for (and the desire of) the Other beyond the complementarity of the dyad, master/slave, self/Other to consider the ways in which a third term intervenes.

In the various scenarios of interracial lust we have discussed thus far, both in pornography and here in a film thought to "exploit" (soft-core) sex in pornographic ways, the different interracial permutations of lust – those of the white woman and the black man and those of the white man and the black woman – there is a non-present third term which haunts the scene. This is the putatively "proper," same race, partner who can be said to be betrayed by the spectacle of interracial lust. When the black woman and the white man recognize and desire one another across their differences, this recognition is nevertheless haunted and erotically animated by the missing figure of the black man whose very masculinity and virility is put in jeopardy by his exclusion. It is also haunted by the missing figure of the white woman deprived of a partner because of the white male's interest in the "Othered" woman. Similarly in the sexual-racial recognition of the white woman and the black man, it is the jealous white man who represents the absent third term, and whose masculinity (and mastery) is put in jeopardy by his exclusion. To a lesser degree it is also haunted by the black woman who loses a potential partner to the myth of superior white womanhood.

These exclusions are not equal, however. The white man has much more power in his absence to structure the scene in which he does not act than does the black man, the white woman or the black woman. And for this reason we might say that the transgression of the sex scene between the white woman and the black man is greater and therefore more erotic. The point, however, is that the interracial recognition that takes place is never only between the two figures present in the scene and that this mutual, but unequal recognition is animated, in different ways, by the

desire and jealousy of a person who is absent. As Butler suggests, "if desire works through relays that are not always easy to trace, then who I am for the Other will be, by definition, at risk of displacement".[74] Thus "part of what it means to recognize the Other" is to recognize that "he or she comes, of necessity, with a history that does not have oneself as its center"[75]. The lame white master who looms so large in the Blanche/Mede recognition, the sex-starved white mistress who looms so large in the Ham/Ellen recognition are what give these erotic recognitions their sexual charge. They are the (unequally) powerful, white, transgressed-against figures whose very absence structures the erotic tension of the scenes. The black woman who would be the "appropriately raced" partner for Mede, and the black man who would be the "appropriately raced" partner for Ellen do not have the same power to be a force in the scene as their white counterparts. The transgression, in other words, is perceived as against the dominant white power: the large power of the white master and the much smaller power of the white mistress. The "hotter" the sex, the greater the transgressed-against power.

Both Blanche and Mede put themselves at risk in their enthrallment with each other. The "hot sex" that ensues is not a gesture of each "including" the other in his or her unity or oneness or humanity. Rather it is a dangerous "giving over" of the self to the Other that is never "freely" given and never achieves complementarity. Yet Blanche and Mede *do* recognize one another in sex through the very power differentials of their (similarly but unequally) enslaved conditions. If their recognition flouts the key sexual taboo of chattel slavery it is also informed by it as well. Indeed, the sexual encounter between Blanche and Mede is erotic in a way that the more romanticized relationship between Hammond and Ellen is not – precisely because the component of fear is greater. Fear of one another and fear of the white master are both palpable in the white mistress's and the black slave's bodies. Erotic tension unlike anything seen in any previous Hollywood film is manifest especially in Mede's body, which becomes a battleground of fear and desire.[76] Because Blanche is less conflicted in her desire for the "Mandingo" sexual encounter – because in effect she has less fear and more desire – her body is less eroticized than Mede's (though it is more eroticized than Ellen's whose "proper" mate has no social power). Blanche and Mede recognize one another not in their common humanity, not in their unique individuality, but precisely across racial and sexual skin and hair differences displayed in a sex act that flirts with but which at least momentarily holds "destruction in check"[77]. And their erotic relation is haunted by the power of the white master who is not there.

Obviously one can only take Hegelian readings of interracial sex in this film so far. While Butler is interested in what Hegel has to teach about the notion of the self, I'm interested in what her reading of Hegel's master and slave scenario can teach us about cinematic representations of erotic excitement. I simply hope that this mining of insights can point to new ways of reading moments of erotic recognition that are informed by fear and transgression. For it is fear, finally, that fuels the erotic fantasy of *Mandingo*. Stacey Koon got that much right.

The sex scenes in *Mandingo* need to be understood not only for their ambivalent political celebration of black male and white female sexual power and pleasure

– but as a new kind of mainstream visual pleasure – a pleasure explicitly and knowingly derived from flirting with taboo. In 1975, amid the tumult of a mainstream film industry seeking to appeal to younger and more racially and ethnically diverse audiences, interracial lust became a new commodity, acknowledged, not for the first time, but in a way that explicitly foregrounded the context of the master/slave dynamic of power, as an erotic pleasure grounded in the taboos it transgresses. *Mandingo*, a film that ranked sixteenth at the box office, helps us to recognize the emergence into a quasi-mainstream popular culture of the peculiar conjunction of black power, cinematic sexual explicitness, and self-conscious revisions of white myths of the "old South."

Behind the Green Door

But, of course, it was not only *Mandingo* that ventured into this taboo territory. I would like to conclude this essay by returning to a "classic" work of film pornography that has already been much discussed as pornography but very little as interracial sex. It is the early classic, *Behind the Green Door*[78] and the scene is the film's first heterosexual sex act following a "lesbian warm up"[79]. As far as I can determine this is the first American feature-length hard core film to include a major interracial sex scene, yet, as far as I can also determine, this sex scene has been unremarked by critics.[80] A woman named Gloria (Marilyn Chambers) has been abducted and placed on a stage where she will be ravished by a series of men before an elegantly dressed audience wearing masks. A frightened Gloria is led on stage, disrobed, stroked, kissed and fondled by a group of black-robed white women in seemingly ritual preparation for her first sexual "number." Suddenly a spotlight directs attention to a green door at the back of the stage. A barefoot black man (the boxer Johnny Keyes, here anticipating the later Ken Norton in *Mandingo*) emerges through the door dressed as a pornographic version of the African savage. He sports an animal-tooth necklace, facial paint and yellow tights with a hole in the crotch from which his semi-erect penis already protrudes. The "African," as if just let out of a cage, tentatively approaches the brown-haired white woman, not exactly stalking her but as if led to her by the magnetic pull of his protruding penis. She is held on the floor of the stage by the robed women who direct him to her spread legs. As the African performs cunnilingus, the robed women look on intently and massage Gloria's body while some members of the cabaret audience begin to masturbate. The scene builds as cunnilingus gives way to penetration, and as Gloria begins to respond to the rhythms of his thrusts and as the initial hushed silence gives way to jazz music.

The scene is intense, with both the white woman and the black man displaying initial reticence and then abandon. As pornography – the land where it is always time for sex – it does not portray the moment of sexual-racial recognition as the same dramatic battleground between fear and desire as does *Mandingo*. Like all hard core pornography, it turns to explicit sex acts very quickly, though the scene is distinguished by an erotic tension that is much more intense than our examples discussed earlier from the 80's and 90's. This sex scene marks, for the feature-length,

on/scene genre of pornography, the first moment in which the blatant invocation of taboos against interracial lust become a way of adding drama and excitement to hard core pornography's usual celebration of easy polymorphic perversities.

Here again a white woman and a black man display highly theatricized mixtures of fear and desire as each slowly gives him or herself over to the sexual-racial Other. The face paint, animal-tooth necklace and crotch-less tights emphasize the racial difference of the "African" in contrast to the white woman he "ravishes." This is not, like *Mandingo*, a scene in which the mistress has a measure of power over her slave. The African trappings seem designed to assert the animal power of the black man against the more servile iconography of the slave. Yet the "African" is no more in charge of the sexual show than he was in *Mandingo*, and once again the specter of the white man, the absent third term, haunts the show. Although the black man is in the more typically masculine position of ritualized "ravisher," he is obviously subject to the power that orchestrates his entrance and exit. Nevertheless, the film resembles *Mandingo* in its depiction of the desire tinged with fear of the black man, and in its theatrical performance of an interracial "sex act" as a form of commodified visual pleasure. In both cases, this pleasure consciously plays upon racial and sexual stereotypes – of the hypersexed black "buck" and the sexually voracious white woman whose pleasure is tapped by the black "beast." It is worth noting that the excitement of this particular performance is not measured in the usual close-ups of penetration and money shots but in a sustained rhythmic give and take in which "recognition across difference" is paramount. Although we see their entwined, whole bodies gyrating, the camera also frequently holds tight on their faces as they look one another in the eye, kiss and thrust in increasingly fast rhythms until Gloria suddenly closes her eyes and stops, as if unconscious, and the African slowly withdraws. We see his still erect penis, as he pulls it out and walks back to the green door from which he entered.

Earlier hard core pornography in the form of stag films had occasionally played upon stereotypes of African animality.[81] But no feature length theatrical film shown to sexually and racially mixed audiences in "legitimate" theaters had ever displayed these kinds of sexual-racial stereotypes for the primary purpose of producing sexual pleasure in viewers. This is certainly not to say that these films are not trafficking in stereotypical depictions of African animality (or, indeed, white female purity – let's not forget that Marilyn Chambers began her career as the Ivory Soap girl) suddenly transformed into insatiable lust. However, it is to say that the effect of the portrayal of animality is quite different in a generic world that celebrates lust and the fetishes that enhance it.

It is certainly true that the quasi-taboo relation of the stereotypically hypersexual African man and the stereotypically "pure" white man's white woman can still be deployed by white men as cautionary tools to maintain the sexual-racial hierarchy of white man over black man and white woman (c.f. Willie Horten, Stacy Koon's reaction to Rodney King). Nevertheless, as we have seen, such deployments are deeply complicated by the fact that the hypersexual black man is no longer a purely phobic object in the shared cultural imaginary. Rather, he has become a familiar element in erotic sexual fantasy producing visual pleasure for an audience that can

now include – and does include in the case of the diegetic audience in *Behind the Green Door* – white men, black men, white women and black women, and a wide range of other sexualized and racialized beings. In 1972, this black man is thus very different from what he had been. A fear that had kept black men and white women in their place now began to fuel an eroticism that brings them together, not in a "happy" mutual overcoming of difference but running risks of destruction tempting the outrage (however vestigial) of the excluded third term.

Conclusion: "In the blink of an eye."

This essay has worked backward from a 1999 example of the fully commodified category of interracial porn, marketed as such, to a 1972 classic of pornography that preexists the emergence of interracial porn as a marketed category but which appears to be the first example of the pornographic commodificatin of interracial sex acts in above-ground feature film. The 1975 example of *Mandingo*, while not an example of interracial pornography proper, has nevertheless permitted us to probe some of the deeper questions of power and pleasure in depictions of interracial lust. What conclusions can we now draw from these examples?

All depictions of interracial lust develop out of the relations of inequality that have prevailed between the races. They grow out of a history that has covertly permitted the white man's sexual access to black women and violently forbidden the black man's access to the white woman. The racist and sexist assumptions that underlie such unequal access to sex have generated forms of pornographic sexual fantasy with an important purchase on the American sexual imagination. To recognize the racism that has generated these fantasies is not to say that the function they fulfill today is racist in the same way. Nor is it to say that it does not participate in aspects of an increasingly outmoded racial stereotyping. This, indeed, is the lesson of the historicity of the stereotype. Distasteful as some of the stereotypes that feed these fantasies are, I hope to have shown that the simple charge of racism is increasingly imprecise when we are talking about visual pleasures generated by depictions of interracial lust. Tessa Perkins' distinction between 'knowing' and 'believing' racist stereotypes is worth remembering: the excitement of interracial lust – for both blacks and whites – depends upon a basic knowledge of the white racist scenario of white virgin/black beast. But the pleasure generated by the scenario does not necessarily need to *believe* in the scenario. Rather, we might say that there is a kind of knowing flirtation with the archaic beliefs of racial stereotypes.

It would seem then that the "racialized sexuality" described by Abdul JanMohamed is not always as silent as he claimed, at least not recently and at least not within the realm of pornographic and exploitation discourse. The pleasures of sexual-racial difference that were once available to white masters alone are now more available to all, though not equally to all. Black female viewing pleasure, it would seem, is the least well served by these newly racialized noisy confessions of pleasure.

Kobena Mercer writes,

> "Blacks are looked down upon and despised as worthless, ugly and ultimately unhuman. But in the blink of an eye, whites look up to and revere black bodies, lost in awe and envy as the black subject is idolized as the embodiment of its aesthetic ideal"[82].

As I have been trying to argue, aesthetic ideals are deeply imbricated in the sexual desirability of this "black subject." And the change to which Mercer refers may not have exactly occurred within "the blink of an eye." Rather, as we have seen, it has occurred through a somewhat slower three-decade process of re-aestheticization and positive sexualization in which low forms of exploitation and pornography have played an important part.

Thanks to Jane Gaines for enabling this essay in the first place and to Celine Parrenas Shimizu for many stimulating conversations and for sharing her pioneering paper on *Mandingo* with me. Thanks also to Elizabeth Abel, Karl Britto, Heather Butler, Anne Cheng, Noel Carroll, Lawrence Cohen, Susan Courtney,Tom Gunning, Michael Lucey, Ara Osterweil and Stephen Schneider for helpful comments. And special thanks to Rich Cante for a chance to say some of this out loud for the first time.

Anmerkungen

1 Nick Browne: „Race: The Political Unconscious in American Film“, in: East-West Film Journal, 1992, p. 8.
2 Henry Louis Gates Jr.: “Jungle Fever; or Guess who’s not coming to Dinner”, in: Steward/Tabori/Chang: *Five for Fives: The Films of Spike Lee*, New York 1991, p. 163.
3 Abdul JanMohamed: “Sexuality on/of the Racial Border: Foucault, Wright, and the Articulation of Radicialized Sexuality”, in: Donna Stanton (ed.): *Discourses of Sexuality*, Michigan 1992, p. 94.
4 Ibid., p. 94.
5 Ibid., p. 104.
6 Ibid., p. 104.
7 Ibid., p. 105.
8 They are not, of course, *equally* available to all. Jane Juffer (1998), writing about women’s consumption of pornography in the home, notes that access to pornography is radically different for women compared to men. Jane Juffer: *At Home with Pornography: Women, Sex and Everyday Life*, New York 1998, p. 5, 107.
9 Gino Colbert: *Crossing the Color Line*, 1999.
10 Even the long-running series entitle *Taboo* (Kirdy Stevens, 1980 passim) about mother-son incest, was remarkably quick to overcome the taboo.
11 Georges Bataille: “Erotism: Death and Sensuality”. trans. by Mary Dalwood, San Francisco 1986, p. 37.
12 For Bataille, this violation is a violent jolting out of discontinuous existence – a moment that puts the individual in contact with the continuity of death, which orgasm, which the French like to call “le petit mort,” approximates. This jolt transgresses the law but does not defeat it (Ibid. 30-39).
13 Peggy Pascoe: “Miscegenation, Court Cases, and Ideologies of ‘Race’ in Twentieth Century America”, in: Martha Hoddes (ed.): *Sex, Love, Race crossing Boundaries in North American History*, New York 1999, p. 482.
14 I am indebted to Susan Courtney for the illuminating term, color mute, which seems to me a useful term to describe the post Civil Rights era dilemma of so much racial discourse: no one is blind to visible racial differences, but the practice of politely ignoring them produces a condition of muteness that often impedes the ability to deal with racial inequality.
15 Franz Fanon: *Black Skin, White Masks*, New York 1967, p 11.
16 Ibid., p. 170.
17 Mary Ann Doane: “Dark Continents: Epistemologies and Racial and Sexual Difference in Psychoanalysis and the Cinema”, in: *Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis*, New York 1991, p. 221.
18 Franz Fanon: *Black Skin/White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann, New York 1967, p. 179.
19 Ibid., p. 79.
20 Mercer published an initial article attacking Mapplethorpe in 1986, a second article, revising the first, in 1989. He then combined them in the 1992 “Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary.” My notes are taken from his most recent revision, in his 1994 book, “Welcome to the Jungle”. Kobena Mercer: “Welcome to the Jungle”. New York 1994.
21 Kobena Mercer: *Welcome to the Jungle*, New York 1994, p. 185
22 Ibid., p. 177.
23 Ibid., p. 178.
24 Ibid., p. 185.

25 Ibid., p. 190.
26 Ibid., p. 191.
27 Ibid., p. 185.
28 Of course the real issue may be, as Jane Gaines (1992) has pointed out, who is reading, and finding erotic pleasure in, the "Black Book": Mercer and other gay black friends, white gay men, like Mapplethorpe himself, white women or black women? Only the latter could be said not to transgress some racial or sexual border. Jane Gaines: "Competing Glances: Who is Reading Robert Mapplethorpe's 'Black Book' ", in: *New Formations* 16, 1992.
29 Kobena Mercer: *Welcome to the Jungle*, New York 1994, p. 192.
30 Jane Gaines: "Competing Glances: Who is Reading Robert Mapplethorpe's '*Black Book*'?", in: *New Formations* 16. 1992, p. 27.
31 Ibid., p. 29.
32 Richard Dyer: "Male Gay Porn: Coming to Terms", in: *Imp Cut*, march 1985, p. 131.
33 Kobena Mercer: *Welcome to the Jungle*, New York 1994, p. 199.
34 Ibid., p. 199.
35 See, for example, Linda Nead: *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, New York 1992. Kelly Dennis: "Playing with Herself: Feminine Sexuality and Aesthetic Indifference", in: Paula Bennett/Vernon Rosario (eds): *Solitary Pleasure: The Historical, Literary and Artistic Discourses of Autoeroticism*, New York 1995. David Freedberg: *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago 1989.
36 (VCA, 1984, Dark Bros.)
37 Georges Bataille: *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans. by Mary Dalwood, San Francisco 1986, p. 37.
38 The Dark Bros. are white, as is the script writer, who writes under the pseudonym Antonio Pasolini. Pasolini claims that these videos were written with the intention of being as politically incorrect as possible. The companion video, *Let Me Tell Ya 'Bout Black Chicks*, was about the slightly less taboo sexual relations of low class white men and black women. It apparently contained scenes of white racists extolling the parallel virtues of "black chicks" and their special appeal to white men. Though the taboos against crossing this color line are historically less in force in this instance, apparently the use of white characters in KKK uniforms pushed many buttons. It was thus this video, not *White Chicks*, that was selected for indictment during the Reagan era, resulting in the disappearance of *Black Chicks* on all shelves. Even the writer claims not to be able to obtain a copy (personal interview with Antonio Pasolini).
39 As discussed in the note above, this video was indicted in the late eighties and has since disappeared.
40 Kobena Mercer: *Welcome to the Jungle*, New York 1994, p.199.
41 Mireille Rosello: *Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and Representation in French Cultures*, Hanover 1998, p. 32.
42 Homi Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*, New York 1994, p 66.
43 For the long discussion of this issue from the point of view of white supremacist, mainstream American culture, see my book, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*, Princeton 2001.
44 Steve Neale: "The Same Old Story: Stereotypes and Difference", in: *Screen Education*, 1979-80, p. 35.
45 Gaines, Jane: "Competing Glances: Who is Reading Robert Mapplethorpe's '*Black Book*' ", in: *New Formations* 16, 1992, p. 27.

46 Ibid., p. 27; Mercer/Julien: "True Confessions", *Ten* 8/22, 1986, p. 6

47 Michel Foucault: The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1, New York 1978, p. 147.

48 Cited in Jane Gaines: "Competing Glances: Who is Reading Robert Mapplethorpe's '*Black Book*'?", in*: New Formations* 16, 1992, p. 27.

49 Stacey C. Koon: *Presumed Guilty. The Tragedy of the Rodney King Affair*, Washington DC 1992, p. 33-34.

50 John Fiske: *Media Matters: Race and Gender in U.S. Politics*, Minneapolis 1995, p 145.

51 *L.A. Times*, May 16, 1992, B2

52 It is worth noting that in these two different accounts Koon wildly vacillates between two competing images of the white woman cop: one casts her, somewhat improbably, in the Lillian Gish role of defenseless white woman cringing before the "black beast," the other casts her as a trigger-happy Dirty Harriet, trying to fill a man's shoes. I write about the racial melodrama of this fantasy of the endangered white woman in the white male imagination in my book, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*. Ruth Wilson Gilmore (1993, 29) discusses Koon's "rescue" of Singer in similar terms, suggesting that the gesture of protecting white womanhood is a reassertion of race/gender in the national hierarchy, making King stand in for Willie Horten *and* for Singer herself, who threatens to do a man's job. Ruth Wilson Gilmor: "Terror Austerity Race Gender Excess Theater", in: Robert Goodey (ed.): *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*. New York/London 1993.

53 See my discussion of this incident in Linda Williams: *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*", Princeton 2001.

54 *Variety* (5/7/75) wrote: "Schoolboys of all ages used to get off on Kyle Onstrott's novel of sexploitation sociology, 'Mandingo,' and now, thanks to Paramount and producer Dino De Laurentiis, they still can." Richard Schickel (*Time* 5/12/75) follows suit in dismissing its luridness: "Most of the suspense in *Mandingo* is generated by the unconscionable amount of time it requires for the blonde mistress of Falconhurst to invite into her bed the handsome black slave… her husband purchased to improve the breeding stock down in the quarters. Until this moment we cannot be certain that the movie is going to employ *every* cliché of antebellum melodrama." Kevin Thomas (*L.A. Times* 5/22/75) calls it "this year's trash masterpiece" whose "condemnation of slavery" is "but an excuse to project the most salacious miscegenation-inspired sex fantasies ever seen this side of an X rating." *Variety*: "Review of Mandingo", May 7, 1975. Richard Schickel: "Cold, Cold Ground", in: *Time*, May 12, 1975.

55 Several critics have made recent claims for the film's importance. Andrew Britton (1976) has made the earliest, and most auteur-centered claim for the film's importance as a work of art – as opposed a crass work of exploitation that marked its original critical reception. Robin Wood (1998) has followed suit. Ed Guerrero (1993) places the film more or less within the tradition of "blaxploitation" but does not make the same kind of claims for its importance. And Celine Parrenas Shimizu, in an unpublished paper, "Master-Slave Sex Acts: *Mandingo* and the Race/Sex Paradox", to which I am much indebted, has explored its connections to the Hegelian dilemma of "Lordship and Bondage." Robin

Wood: "*Mandingo*: The Vindication of an Abused Masterpiece", in: *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond*, New York 1998; Ed Guerrero: *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, Philadelphia 1993.

56 The cycle of "blaxploitation" began with *Sweet Sweetback's Baadassss Song* (1971), and was followed by *Shaft, Super Fly*, and a range of action-sex films set in the ghetto. They were closely followed by a cycle of female-centered action-sex films such as *Cleopatra Jones*, *Coffy*, and *Foxy Brown*.

57 The elegant way the film reworks the luridness of both previous traditions is encapsulated in the cover of the paperback edition of the novel, which, in turn took its cue from the film's posters. On one cover, cleverly parodying the pose of Scarlett O'Hara in the arms of Rhett Butler in the posters for that film, we see the white master sweeping his black slave girl off her feet; in the next we see the Mandingo "buck" sweeping his white mistress off her feet. See Wood. Robin Wood: "Mandingo: The Vindication of an Abused Masterpiece", in: *Sexual Politics and Narrative Film: Hollywood and Beyond*, New York 1998.

58 The novel is considerably less romantic; the young master is never really enamored of his wife and is already involved in a more then merely procreative relationship with his slave "wench."

59 He not only shoots him, he pushes his wounded body into a boiling cauldron with a pitchfork. The slave who picks up the gun at the end had been taught to read by Cicero, the revolutionary slave who is hung midway through the film, but not before delivering a speech in which he berates his fellow slaves for their servility and invites the masters to "kiss my black ass."

60 A house slave grabs a gun and kills the old master before running off. The young master is left mourning the body of his father, bereft of wife and child while Muddy Waters sings the blues.

61 A frequently cited precursor to both this film and the urban genre of blaxploitation is the James Brown, Raquel Welch love scene in 100 *Rifles* (1969). Henry Louis Gates (1991) briefly cites it as Jim Brown making "wild and passionate love to Raquel Welch," (163), although Ed Guerrero (1993) notes that this scene is tempered by the fact that Welch was cast as a Mexican. (79). The Brown-Welch scene has none of the frisson of this scene from *Mandingo*. Indeed, when Gates writes that it is "safe to say that the frisson of miscegenation has never been treated in American film with either intelligence or candor" (until Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever*), he clearly hadn't seen this film. Henry Louis Gates Jr.: *Jungle Fever; or, Guess Who's not Coming to Dinner,* in: Steward/Tabori/Chang: *Five for Five: The Films of Spike Lee*. New York 1991. Ed Guerrero: *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film*, Philadelphia 1993.

62 Andrew Britton, : *Mandingo*, *Movie* 22, p. 12

63 Ibid, p. 12.

64 Andrew Britton describes it as "one of the most beautiful and moving love scenes in the cinema," arguing that the beauty of the union lies essentially in its fragility" as the couple is "united in their horror at the other man's use of another human beingfor a personal satisfaction…which denies and degrades their humanity" (Andrew Britton: *Mandingo, Movie* 22, p. 11).

65 Ibid., p. 12.

66 Abdul JanMohamed: "Sexuality on/of the Racial Border: Foucault, Wright, and the Articulation of Radicialized Sexuality", in: Donna Stanton (ed.): *Discourses of Sexuality*, Michigan 1992, p. 104.

67 Celine Parennas Shimizu (nd) writes of this scene: "The two who struggle against each other's difference instead affirm each other's insufficiencies and dependencies within a system of dehumanizing brutality." Celine Shimizu: "Master-Slave Sex Acts: 'Mandingo' and the Race/Sex Paradox", unpublished manuscript.

68 Jessica Benjamin, p. 53.

69 Celine Shimizu offers an intriguing, and somewhat more hopeful argument that something like a subversive mutual recognition momentarily occurs in both this scene and in a later sex scene between the female mistress and her black slave before violence and subjugation re-emerge. "Sex both ensures slavery and undermines it in a complicated formulation of power" (20). While she may be right about the (briefly) subversive nature of these recognitions, it is worth asking, on what basis this recognition is made? Shimizu seems to suggest that it is grounded in a common humanity, that subject and Other find themselves, at least momentarily, reflected in one another despite their differences. Intersubjectivity is thus conceived here as an overcoming of difference, a discovery of sameness with radical, "self-fashioning" potential that can undermine the structure of slavery. My argument inclines more towards the notion that the eroticism is fueled by the taboo but that recognition keeps in place a destructive difference and aggression. Celine Shimizu: "Master-Slave Sex Acts: 'Mandingo' and the Race/Sex Paradox", unpublished manuscript.

70 Butler differentiates Benjamin's ideal of recognition in which "destruction of the self is an occasional and lamentable occurrence, one that is reversed and overcome in the therapeutic situation and that does not turn out to constitute recognition essentially" (274). Her own description of the ongoing process of recognition reads Hegel differently to argue that recognition cannot "leave destructiveness behind" (274), as if recognition was not also a form of aggression.

71 Parennas says that as she strips him of his clothes she also strips off her mastery. However, has "mastery" has never been the same as that of her husband, proof of which is given in the fact that what she risks in having sex with Mede is not what her husband risks in having sex with Ellen: her very life. Ellen is "sleeping up;" Blanche, like her husband, is "sleeping down" but unlike him, at real cost. Judith Butler: "Longing for Recognition.", in: *Sexuality and Gender Studies* I, 2000.

72 Blanche will be poisoned. Mede will be both shot and boiled.

73 Judith Butler: "Longing for Recognition.", in: *Sexuality and Gender Studies* I, 2000, p 287.

74 Ibid., p 284.

75 Ibid., p. 285.

76 This is not the first extended representation of interracial lust in Hollywood. A case could be made for the shower-sex scene in *Shaft* (1971) and even for the sex scene between Jim Brown and Raquel Welch in *100 Rifles* (1969), both mentioned by Henry Louis Gates as rare moments of interracial sex. However the sex in *Shaft* is purposefully casual and in *100 Rifles* arguably portrayed as between two persons of color (Mexican Indian and African American). *Mandingo,* however, appears to be the first important scene of

interracial lust in Hollywood cinema that inscribes the taboo against it into the very scene that transgresses it. It is thus also, in the Hegelian sense, the one film that portrays the difficulty of recognition.

77 Judith Butler: "Longing for Recognition.", in: *Sexuality and Gender Studies* I, 2000, p. 287.

78 *Behind the Green Door*, Mitchell Bros., 1972.

79 Linda Williams: *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, Berkeley 1989/99, p. 157.

80 I include my own, racially unmarked discussion in *Hard Core* (Williams, Linda: *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'*, Berkeley, 1989/99, p. 157.

81 A stag film from the twenties, entitled *Darkie Rhythm*, had an African American woman roll her eyes to the rhythm of the black male's thrusts.

82 Kobena Mercer: *Welcome to the Jungle*, New York 1994, p. 210.

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