

BOCADOS

Our *bocados*, or mouthfuls, are short meditations solicited from various scholars, writers, and artists on the visceral nature of their work and daily lives. The *bocados* live in digital space, on the Tumblr that we set up to disseminate the call for papers for *On the Visceral*. Here, we offer a sampling of the work available for public consumption at that site, as a way to move the conversation into a broader and more dialogical space than that afforded by a journal. We hope you enjoy every savory and unsavory morsel.

These are excerpts of selected *bocados*. For the full versions, as well as many other *bocados*, visit onthevisceral.tumblr.com/.

SWEETNESS AND LIGHT

**A conversation between Kyla Wazana Tompkins
and Dirtysurface**

The Toronto-based artist and pornographer Dirtysurface created the images we have used for the covers of the two issues of *On the Visceral*. The original image that is paired with *Sweetness* and that was chosen for the cover of 21.1 shows the same model penetrating her own vagina with a backlit Coke bottle was ultimately too explicit for circulation; the current cover is a re-shoot and re-interpretation of that image. This is an excerpt of the conversation; the full text is available at onthevisceral.tumblr.com/.

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Figure 1. *Sweetness*. Courtesy of Dirtysurface



Figure 2. *Light*. Courtesy of Dirtysurface

Kyla Wazana Tompkins: So just to get started: tell me how you describe yourself as an artist.

Dirtysurface: I present myself as “pornographer” in art circles, “technician” in porn circles, use “artist” to describe cumulatively the ways I share things that keep my brain busy. Less whimsically, it’s about examining the elements that shape my experience:

- systemic elements that racialize, stigmatize, or otherwise assign their own meanings to bodies like mine.
- personal elements like horniness, happiness, distractibility, and varying health, my invisible disabilities and visible African/other hybridity, invisible queerness when I’m with visibly femme partners.
- broader social elements/forces shaping our world overall, especially those forces opposing and complicating each other: compassion, capitalism, lust, fear, efficiency, curiosity.

KWT: How do you think about your work in relation to various branches of the porn industry? Do you work in response to, or does your work put forth, a critique of mainstream or other queer porn?

D: I'm not usually very interested in dialogue about or with mainstream porn, but my work or any other explicit sexual material can't help but be seen in relation to it. The visual (and other) languages of porn are becoming very familiar to most of us. Given that inevitable comparison/engagement, I prefer to engage with the strengths of pornography rather than reflagellating the discussions around objectification, the direction of the gaze, et cetera. The strengths of porn from my perspective include the capacity for honesty about desire, the capacity to draw and hold our attention when so much else does not, and the capacity to simultaneously depict and provoke pleasure. I don't see those capacities used often or fully, but it seems obvious they exist.

Inasmuch as I'm focused on power, pleasure, responsibility, and resistance, those themes sometimes work well with mainstream porn's tropes, sometimes work more directly against them, often overlap more easily with the concerns of producers on the more politicized fringes, particularly work that gets categorized as queer porn, as feminist porn, as crip porn. Those single-issue categories aren't always comfortable fits for the work I'm most driven to make (or to consume), and I'm cautious about the ways those prefixes can work to diffuse criticality about other aspects of nonmainstream porn production like labor issues, race, and representation, but I'm mightily glad there is such a range of smut being made from so many different perspectives, opening the doors to a wider range of participants and viewers.

Mainstream porn is a big, soft, easy target, in some ways deserving of the weight of negative attention it receives, but in some ways targeted just so that people have more excuse to talk about sex and bodies. Most of what's wrong with porn is wrong with all media in an environment that skews as heavily as ours does toward patriarchal, heterosexist, binarist, racist, and capitalist values. Capitalism in particular (and its homogenizing, lowest-common-denominator effect) strikes me as the simple explanation, if there is one, for why so much porn is so dull and/or insulting.

KWT: I picked the series of two photographs we are using in *GLQ* after looking through a lot of your food-centered porn. Before we get to *Sweetness*, tell me about using food in your shoots. Where have you used it, and what are some of your favorite images?

D: I didn't see patterns in my own photo porn until a few years into making it. The use of food as sex toy, as decoration, as texture, as backdrop, et cetera is definitely one of the foremost patterns. It was probably evident to everybody else much sooner than it was to me. Food is a natural because it stacks that other near-

universal source of satisfaction/arousal atop sex, gives us yet another reason to imagine ourselves within the sensory world an image presents. Food also appeals to me because its use in nongustatory ways signals the innovative spontaneity of desire, as well as abundance, excess. My politic is based in part on the idea of abundance. There IS enough food, enough water, enough land, enough love, enough recognition and sexual attention to go around. Does showing that abundance help us to see the barriers to more equitable experience?

One of my very favorite image series is from a Montreal cake-sitting shoot of a friend there, inspired by a Toronto model who spoke often of their desire to sit in cake. I'm drawn to the wasteful, exuberant excess of the idea and in the actual images by the messy, manic glee of the model.

People often ask me about the ways in which my porn represents my own desire. The slippy-slidy, sideways almost-answer is that my porn is more an arena of exploration in which to discover desires—my own and other people's—than a representation of them. As I recover my health and a less-fraught relation to my digestive processes, I'm discovering anew, for instance, that I really like food; am ever more inclined these days to revel in the overlaps between food and those other oral pleasures. Recipes and pics of dinner outweigh smut in my twitter feed 20-1, and I think I've become a better, more passionate cook over the years. Should I blame porn?

KWT: Tell me about *Sweetness*. Why sugar cubes running down Nzingha's body?

D: *Sweetness* came to be when I was asked to participate in a group art show held at a women-focused sex toy store in 2007. I didn't know then that one almost never sells visual art in those environments. How do pictures compete with buttplugs, magic wands, and fleshlights? It's incentive to craft intense, striking images so as not to be absolutely overshadowed.

The model, Nzingha, is a lover and a friend, an artist, parent, language worker, and webtech worker. The trust, patience, humor, and creative intelligence she brought to this were instrumental. It just couldn't have happened the same way with anyone else.

My father is Caribbean-Canadian, as is Nzingha, though they're from different islands. Both islands were entirely reshaped by the sugar industry. I came to the shoot with ideas about the use of affordable, everyday objects in religious ritual, one hallmark of spiritual traditions that she follows and I sometimes draw on. I was also thinking about the strange ubiquity of sugar, this delicious, popular toxin whose history is foundational to the slave-based plantation economies that moved our ancestors halfway across the world (massive props to Kara Walker,

whose 2014 *A Subtlety, or the Marvelous Sugar Baby* explores sugar in fierce, glorious depth at a scale that's hard to ignore).

Sweetness was made alongside and is usually shown paired with the much more overtly sexual image *Light*, in which Nzingha fucks a glowingly backlit Coke bottle. Cocaine, another naturally occurring substance rendered toxic and habit-forming through processing, has a more recent history than sugar in the West. The substances combined, as they were in the initial mass-market formulations of Coca-Cola, can function as shorthand for addiction to poison as a building block of the economics that underlie our current world order. I was learning art and politics in the mideighties. Right about then the divestment movement was effectively pressuring Coca-Cola to be less involved in profiting from South African apartheid, and the first flood of Contra-funding crack cocaine was making its way into predominantly black communities across North America. I'm interested in the relationships these products and processes have to black bodies.

I'd hoped by the combined title of the pieces to invoke a phrase implying both a respect for history, traditional arts, and the beauty therein and a willingness to penetrate past surface politeness.¹ The phrase "sweetness and light" also conjures up ideas of historically "appropriate" feminine demeanor, which we found funny in this context. I can't say, though, that the historical/political concerns led or outweighed the aesthetic and the lecherous in our process. Sometimes instinct takes you down a path that fuses all the elements into something way raunchier and more intense than the sum of its parts.

KWT: Looking at the pictures closely, they take up really radical angles, from above her head or from below, looking up at her labia as she penetrates herself with the bottle in the original *Light* image—it gives the sense of intense feeling but also some disorientation. Similarly with the new cover image, also called *Light*. Talk me through the pictures.

D: One of the lessons of politically themed motion picture work is to always go where the picture is, by camera placement composing the background as much as the foreground, by camera placement commenting on power and relationship to viewer.

I'm not sure what viewers will see or not see in these. I personally think they're kinda scary . . . and sweet.