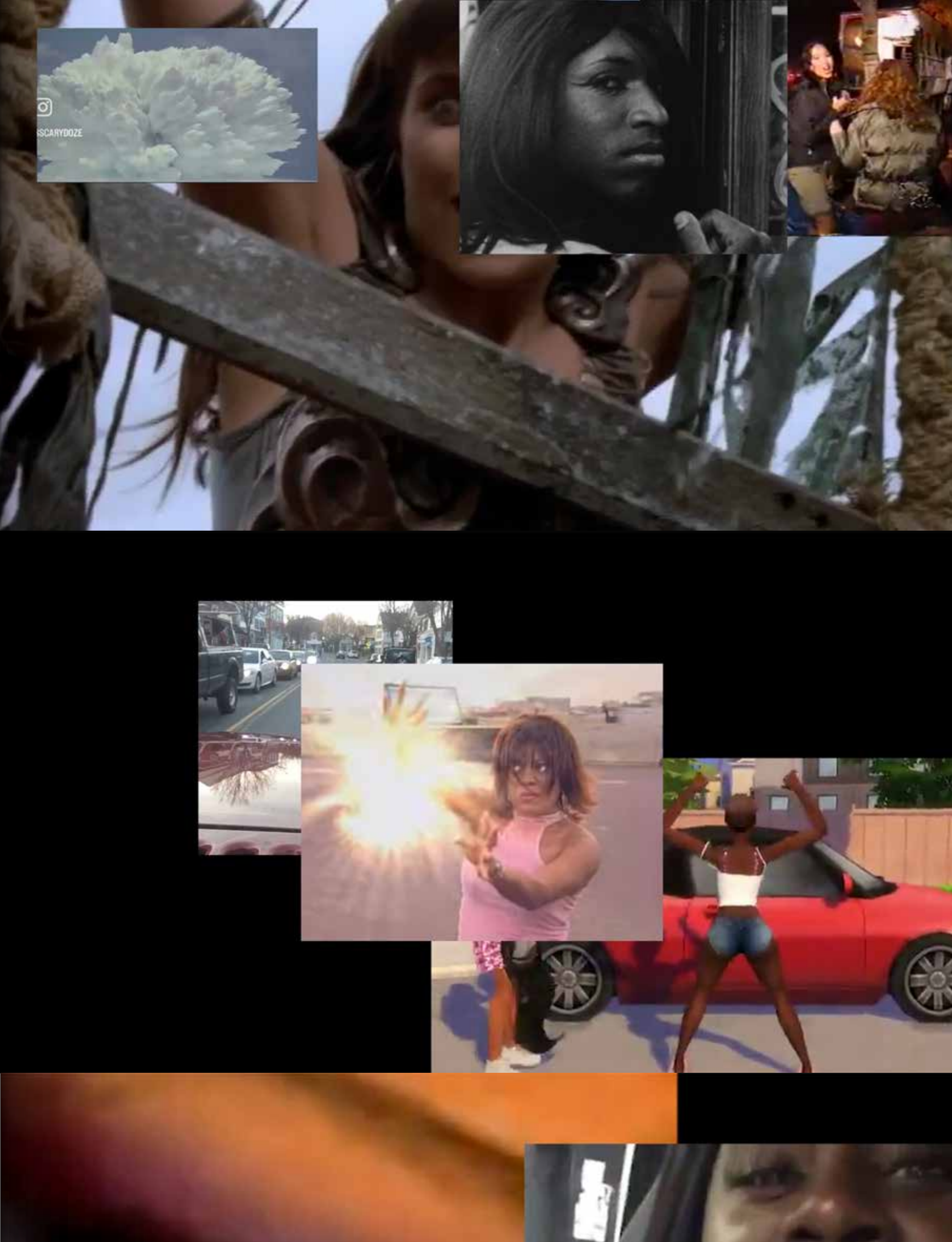


Nasty Girl Kills English Language

Start with the opening scene of Spike Lee’s 1996 comedy *Girl 6*, in which an as yet no-name aspiring actress, portrayed by Teresa Randle (who had already achieved “it girl” status at the time of the film’s release), sits down for a screen test in hopes of landing a starring role with an impatient Quentin Tarantino, played by himself. Tarantino, performing his real world celebrity persona, asks Randle, performing what we can imagine might have been her former self, to say some lines. She does; he’s unenthusiastic. He then says something like, “Okay, cut to the chase: take your top off. It’s needed for the role.” No-name Randle pauses and replies, “What? My agent didn’t say this is part of the gig.” Tarantino, annoyed, whitemansplains that yes, it *is* part of the role. He “needs” to see her tits as a part of the business, and he has upwards of fifty other Black women outside that door aspiring to play the part. So, if she doesn’t want to strip, she should stop wasting his time and find another profession.

EBUN SODIPO
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No-name Randle's initial reply is one of insolence. She thought that she was in the room with Tarantino because she was good at her art. But then she acquiesces, as she *needs* this gig to pay rent, and so down both shoulders, slowly, she slides her blouse, as if it was cotton blended with slime. Tarantino, and we as viewers, observe her discomfort and her nudity for a few seconds before she exclaims, "I can't do this!" She pulls up her shirt and bursts out of the rehearsal room and through the crowd of, as Tarantino promised, about fifty other Black women with no name waiting to be *SEEN*.

What happens next — and for the rest of the film — is that this no-name actress decides the most efficient way to earn money at the least expense to her dignity is to become a phone sex operator rather than aspiring to the fine art of being a serious actress. Thus, under the tutelage of a savvy and bossy madam played by a very hot 1990s Jennifer Lewis (who today is many scrollers' favorite great-aunt on the internet for her original meme-song "I-don't-want-nobody FUCKIN-wit' meeeee / in-these-streets!"), no-name actress rebrands herself as the eponymous Girl 6.

This film is just one of the many citations that appear in Ebun Sodipo's *Nasty Girl (The Sharpest in Town)* (2023) and *Nasty Girl 2 (The Beast)* (2024), a duo of video works that collage together found footage that she has sourced from the far corners of Tumblr, one of the places where Black culture lives on the internet. Where and what is Black internet culture, exactly? A possible response: I can't tell you; you just had to be there. Another possible answer: the Black internet does not exist in a specificity of form or in the aesthetic of an image, but in the mechanisms of circulation through which the image travels. Meaning, Black internet perhaps does not exist in a stable format, but simply arises when (at least) one Black user transfers data to (at least) one other.

Sodipo also cites a clip from *Girl 6* in *Nasty Girl 1* (2022), in which one of the girls (Girl 75 in this instance) is on the phone, talking or rehearsing how to construct a compelling sexual fantasy for a listener who she hopes to keep on the line because the longer he listens, the more money he pays. Sodipo's video works could be interpreted as rehearsing or processing or trying to communicate this complex meeting point — call it an intersection — of three big problems for the single Black woman in a modern/postmodern metropolis. First, the compulsion to generate capital (*I need this gig!*). Second, the slimy fact of being viewed as a disposable object of desire by the dominant power structure that controls the remittance of that capital (Tarantino's impatience for an actress's discomfort). And third, a language problem — how to use your voice, and to whom you bother to speak your condition.

Girl 6 and Sodipo's *Nasty Girl* series, along with much of the Black feminist literature that Sodipo devours, articulates this intersection of dilemmas in a capitalist patriarchy where Black womens' presence is required for society to function, albeit as an object of resentment. What I have noticed in this literature that Sodipo reads, such as Saidiya Hartman's *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* (2019), is that Black women have tended to open possibilities for themselves through activating the mechanism that is also a site of the violence inflicted upon them: their own bodies. And in many cases, using the body to network language, by way of the voice, or in a more general sense the creation of text. So, the no-name actress generates her necessary capital, building a support structure for her survival, by speaking as a sex object on the phone. A phone which today has been replaced by the internet, where Sodipo, also an avid consumer of internet culture, is using her artwork to speak to and through the same dilemma that she herself is certainly deeply implicated within, as an emerging artist in an