

‘On it we live’¹
Being at the limit and feminine subjectivity

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Abstract

Regulation of the sex industry tends to produce a certain economy of sexual difference, sexual desire and exchange whereby ‘selling sex’ is rendered inherently problematic and in need of control. Such regulation (and the discursive techniques it involves) separates this economy from the idealised economy of monogamous, non-commercial hetero-sexuality. This paper explores the thresholds between these two economies by engaging with exotic dance as a liminal form of commercial sex. I argue that the discourse of exotic dancers, refracted through multiple sites of articulation, amplifies the resonances between commercial and non-commercial forms of sex. In this paper, I suggest that women who ‘cross over’ from this idealised economy to the shadowy world of commercial sex are perceived to have transgressed a limit (of morality, of autonomy, of sexual integrity, of self) from which they cannot return. Thus, the popular fascination with the ‘double life’, or the sociological concern with the ‘deviant lifestyles’ of women involved in exotic dance. This fascination amounts to a petrification of the lived woman into ‘The Stripper’, a static object which obscures the connections between the performance, experience and speech of feminine subjectivity. By contrast, the speech of exotic dancers, precisely as they transgress that limit repeatedly, everyday, constitutes a threshold between these two economies of desire and exchange, such that it cannot be subsumed by the categories of exploitation or empowerment, victim or agent, since it speaks at the very place from which those positions emerge.

Introduction

In 1999, the Victorian Government introduced amendments to the *Prostitution Control Act 1994*, expanding the definition of sexual service into a complex, 3 part, 5 sub-section definition.² The rationale for this related to the increased popularity of tabletop dancing as a form of sexually explicit entertainment. It was felt that a loophole was being exploited, that the line between service and entertainment was being blurred, thus allowing ‘illegal brothels to open via tabletop dancing’. What this anxiety over ‘loopholes’ and ‘blurred lines’ tells us is that commercial sex, as an object of government regulation, is an economy characterised by a certain ‘boundedness’. That is, an underlying imperative in the control of commercial sexual

exchanges, is to ensure, firstly, that forms of commercial sex (for example prostitution as opposed to stripping) remain distinct. A second, far more crucial imperative, is to ensure that the exchange of sexual touching or looking for profit is not confused with the idealised economy of monogamous, non-commercial hetero-sexuality. In this, it is also a *re*-production of normative presumptions about sexuality, sexual difference and subjectivity within the contemporary socio-political field. I argue that the attempt to separate these sexual economies conceals important resonances in modes of performing and exchanging the feminine, such that one site is problematised, while the relations within another are normalised.

In response to these relations of (ab)normalisation, the paper shifts to consider what exotic dancers themselves say about their work. For the texts of women involved in exotic dancing speak precisely to the experience of performing a contrived, fantastic femininity for profit. I am interested in the speech of those who pass through multiple sites of articulation – woman, sex-worker, performance, fantasy – and who yet construct themselves as subjects. Specifically, I focus on the texts of three different women (Eaves 2002, Funari 1997, Rambo-Ronai 1999)³ who negotiate the line between commercial and private sexual economies at the level of the everyday. This repetitive, quotidian, crossing over, I hope to show, creates a threshold wherein the dictates of femininity and sexual difference 'double up', and point to a general economy of the feminine.

The Commercial Sexual Exchange as a Bounded Economy

When the amendment was introduced into parliament, there was a 'whole philosophy' attached to it:

We as a society have decided that prostitution is an activity that should be licensed. The purpose of licensing something is to bring it out in the open and let everyone see it and accept it for what it is and to make rules and regulations about it. When prostitution is out in the open, the community can be protected against aberrations such as crime, violence and health problems.⁴

The imperative to bring prostitution – as one such aberration of the sexual drive – out into the 'open', to make it 'visible', is to make the practice *speak as* aberration against the rest of the social terrain. This designation of sex-work as a site of 'erotic danger' and deviancy (Singer 1993) enables it to be contained and concealed through an array of regulatory machinery:⁵

Three major institutional forms for capitalising on sexuality as the marker of desire in late capitalism (although not specifically its inventions) are *prostitution, addiction* and *pornography*...They function as strategic safety valves, compensatory indulgences...on the one hand, while they also function as limits against which co-ordinated and acceptable forms can be mobilised and maintained. In other words, the existence of commodified forms of sexuality capitalises *both by turning sex into capital, and by preserving sexuality from it*. (Singer 1993: 39, emphasis mine)

These safety values which are indeed part of the logic of regulated production, are 'the modes by which sexuality is historically institutionalised in our age' (Singer

1993: 45), are the modes by which sexuality, for all its illusory quality as the last bastion of freedom, well-being and individuality, becomes possible, acceptable and meaningful. This institutionalisation profits from sexuality as the very image of capitalism itself, taking to the logical end point capitalist modes of social and cultural organisation (Singer explores the hinges between advertising-pornography; consumption-addiction; prostitution-service contract). Disciplinary techniques and mechanisms which order, zone and contain this exchange relate not only to the marking and management of various 'delinquent' bodies. These political technologies work also to 'remove' and conceal - to make foreign - forms of social relations from the rest of the social field in a way that distracts; there are always the idealised, normalised, 'safe' spaces which continue to resonate silently with the hegemonic structurings of sexual difference and sexual politics, with, that is, hegemonic forms of sexual subjectivity. Such concealment, in other words, is not only about the 'unsavoury' aspects of selling sex, but is fundamentally about ensuring the naturalness of the phallogocentric order of sexual difference and sexual desire, of what is sex, what is 'sexy', and maintain the distinction between what 'paid for' and what is 'free'. The experiences of and reflections on exotic dancing that I explore in this paper profoundly disturb these taken-for-granted lines between economies of sexual exchange.

The dancer as a folded subject

The general contours of the positions available for women involved in the sex industry are two-fold: victim or entrepreneur; its effects exploitative or empowering. Attempts – both popular and academic – to 'understand' the woman in the commercial sexual exchange and her connection to the social milieu in which she exists, proceed from the point of view of a static figure. A sexual fantasy, a deviant body.

Take the media discourse on exotic dancers and strippers in Melbourne. Dee-Dee is described as 'petite with bright blue eyes and waist-length brown hair'. Donna is 'slim with bright blonde hair and a sense of wariness towards strangers'. Chrissy Lane "knows the value of her assets. Blonde hair. Piles of it, fluffing up from her head like a meringue and curling down around her ears. Kitten face, button nose and pearly white teeth. Two plump breasts, a firm bum, good legs and skin that tans to gold."⁶ And Alabama is 'what you call 'built'.'⁷ This inventory of bodily assets is then coupled with certain gestures, which variously render the dancer coy, bored or laced with a certain animal tension. Donna is 'dressed up and ready to go, sucking on a cigarette and pawing the floor with her high heeled shoes'. Alabama 'presses against your arm and runs a finger down your cheek'. As the media itself stated, these were women who more or less 'look the part: a soft-focus, Vaseline-on-the-lens vision, a blonde bombshell, a centrefold, a sexual fantasy'.⁸

Since the early 1970s, sociology has been interested in strippers and stripping insofar as it constitutes a 'deviant' occupation.⁹ Given its deviant status, stripping becomes an activity of performance, fronts and neutralisation. The stripper's performance 'provides the important social function of giving the *illusion of intimacy* when the *legitimate* institutional settings of intimacy fail to provide what participants seeks' (Enck and Preston 1988: 370, emphasis mine). Strippers and exotic dancers produce a

'counterfeit intimacy' (Boles and Garbin 1977) as opposed to the 'genuine' intimacy among men and women in mainstream society. Again, the practice of exotic dancing as a form of commercial sex is sequestered from everyday life. What these studies do not explore is the overlap or threshold *between* these interactive strategies employed by women at strip clubs, and their interactive strategies outside such clubs.

The challenge is to go beyond the reductive political terms for thinking about the subject who is involved in such practices, for, given the intimacy of governmentality in our lives, such political formulations are never simply about exotic dancing. As I said at the outset, the speech of exotic dancers is located at the intersection of lines which attempt to make distinct modes of performing and consuming the feminine. Between the words of the dancer, who moves and touches herself in the service and image of another, and the words of the men who consume that service and image, a third voice eddies and pools in the fissures of a self which consciously, agentically steps into the role of sex-object. This is why the speech of the dancer carries such an affective and radical weight, for the very act of speaking insinuates a/her self between what the customer desires and thinks he is getting, and the act of giving it, this in addition to the ambiguity inherent in performing this sexualised self. It is the speech of a folded subject which tries to find ways stretching the self without breaking: 'the self has to be stretched but not broken, folded but not rendered schizophrenic' (Probyn 1993: 129).

In the following, I draw out the ways Eaves, Funari and Rambo Ronai develop a 'grammar of becoming' (Colebrook 1999) which enables them to maintain self not in spite of having transgressed a limit, but because of it:

'I have to exist in two distinct modes of physical feeling, defined through my sense of touch, the way my own touch feels to me. At work, what my hands find in touching my body is "product". Away from work, my body has continuity, integrity: my toes are connected to my scalp by means of everything in between. (Funari 1997: 32)

My question is what kind of self is being constructed through such mode of existence?

Counterfeiting intimacy

The politics of performance sociological studies revolves around a woman's identity as stripper. Even Wood's (2000) study, which offers itself as a feminist approach to the negotiations of power and gender, says little of the transmutation of what are considered private resources to a public and commercial domain. I find it odd that little consideration and critical inquiry is given to the question of what qualitative difference, if any, there may be between the intimacy "outside" stripping and its cynical, counterfeited simulacra within them. Funari states that 'the peepshow does not subvert the culture, it mirrors it' (1997: 26), a statement that is of a piece with Singer's theorisations of the contemporary sexual economy, where the lines between commodified sex and authentic, private sex are more fluid than is generally appreciated. This is not to say that the lines of sexual subjectivation are exactly the same, that the difference would be one only of degree, for this is not far removed from a MacKinnon-esque continuum proposition. However, it is not entirely clear that there is a difference in kind between the red velvet darkness of the stripclub, and the concrete clarity of the street, for this would seem to attribute essential distinctions between the types of people on the inside and those on the outside.

Walking along the street after my morning coffee, I smiled at a man washing the windows of a restaurant, and he smiled back. Then I saw in him, as I see in most men now, a possible customer at the Lusty Lady, and my face did not know what expression to take next. It occurred to me that the thing I may be trying to learn from this experience is true acceptance of difference. If I can know that any man I greet could easily be a frequenter of peepshows, and that such a man could still consider himself a lover of women or even a supporter of women's equality, if I can know that and still feel human warmth for him, then I will have accomplished something. Or maybe, if this "warmth" is unilateral, maybe I'll just be a chump...I still can't answer the questions I came in with, much less those that the job brought up for me. What stays with me is the question of how to relate to those men who exist both in the world of the peepshow and in 'my' world....The peepshow and male violence against women exist in the same matrix (patrix?), and they no doubt influence each other; but eliminating the peepshow would still leave us encountering each other on the street, at work, in bed, in the same socio-economic system. (Funari 1997: 27; 35; 30)

How do women occupy and experience the threshold between these facets of their selves, the threshold between sites of social negotiation? Far from the reductive statement that "[o]vertly wielding sex for power in daily life has...important consequences for the dancers...they discover their power is confined to the club's environment and does not easily translate into daily life" (Pasko 2002: 62 modified), When empirical studies of exotic dancing unquestioningly proceed from a normative line, a line which leaves unexamined the wider cultural milieu in which stripping takes place, indeed, which it makes possible, I suggest a terrible violence is done to the capacity of the women engaged in exotic dancing not only as agentic and in de Certeau's words, artful subjects. More profoundly what is also concealed is the challenge such an art of existence may bring to status quo. Funari's reflections suggest a more complex amalgam of questions:

These first moments are a lesson in the potential internal costs of doing sex work. I can see that if I want to survive here I'll have to jettison those praised womanly habits of care taking and sensitivity and retain only their physical traces: the open gaze, the welcoming smile. In this work, I cannot mean what I do (Funari 1997: 21).

Here is something far more complex and thorny than exploitation through selling one's sex/body/flesh. Here is the confrontation with one's idealised cultural self, what women aspire/are expected to be. In order to make it through the day, what has to be done is an excising of those qualities – receptive, responsive, open, warm, accommodating – *nice* – so that they can be put to work. Of course such capacities have always been put to work, often for the benefit of men, in the course of 'love'.

There is a profound difference between what can be seen as genuine acquiescence to the romantic ideal of the heterosexual relation and its simulation. The work that is done in strip clubs, and the writing that has emerged highlights two things: a price is finally put on this shadow labour, and its connections with the general expectations of and for the feminine self become more explicit. This management of emotion and its political import is suggested in Arlie Hochschild's (1983) study on flight attendants and the capitalisation on emotional resources the service industry complex requires and produces. Hochschild examines the different ways men and women are invested in this emotion work, and the different ways it is wielded. Commenting on the battery

of studies and the common-sense perception that women are more 'in touch with their emotions' and more willing to adapt to the needs of others, Hochschild writes 'these studies often imply the existence of gender-specific differences that are inevitable if not innate' (1983: 165). However, Hochschild argues that "women accommodate... but not passively. They actively adapt feeling to a need or purpose at hand, and they do it so that it *seems* to express a passive state of agreement" (1983: 167, my emphasis). This surface passivity functions to smooth and cover over the fractures between modes of being such that the work is not perceived as such, what Ivan Illich called "shadow labour" – never specified as labour, but the crucial accompaniment for getting the job done.

Other women involved in exotic dancing have expressed that those social expectations outside the clubs are easier to refuse:

Working in the sex industry has made me even more aware of just how much power I do have in my relations with men that I didn't recognise before. Like before, if a man had asked me to come over and show him something or talk to him about something...on the street...I probably would have said "Okay" and now I refuse. And I'm very firm about that sort of thing, and about my boundaries, and about what I can and cannot give to people, have or don't have to do. [Working in] the sex industry has made that very clear. (Rosetta in Dudash 1997: 118)

Eaves talks of the changes she experienced through the repeated crossing over the threshold between the conditions of club and street:

I started dressing more modestly outside of work, wearing overalls and loose sweaters. I got all the sexual affirmation I needed now in a few hours a day. I care less than I had before whether men thought I was attractive or sexy. And I felt now as if I could control when I was looked at when I wasn't. Like turning a faucet on and off. I lapped it up at work and the rest of the time I shut it down. I was the master of my transformation.

I also became more comfortable blowing men off outside work. If a man in bar, for example, said something stupid or pleasant, I no longer even pretended to be polite. If a man asked me to dance for a third time, I no longer felt I had to keep up a pretence that he was charming. I saw that for a long time I had lived as though there were a taboo against being confrontational or angry toward men, as though they had a right to patience and tolerance even when they didn't merit it. I had given too much benefit of the doubt before. I saw that now I could be paid to listen to insulting drivel. (1997: 70)

This shortness is not simply because exotic dancers exist as sex objects for men, but because part of the fantasy includes this 'nice' quality:

After the audition, the manager...asks me how it felt...She tells me I did well, expect that each time I looked at customer I rolled my eyes to the ceiling... "Well it's kind of weird for me to dancing naked in front of strangers." She gives me some pointers, tell me to interact more with customers, to say, "Hi, how are you? Good afternoon."...She is saying, "Just be nice, fulfil their needs." The sign outside calls customers in with the promise of "naughty, nasty" girls, but I am being told to be "nice". Men come in to see "naked" girls, but it is a carefully

constructed nakedness...Exactly what is the fiction being constructed here and why does it work for those involved? (Funari 1997: 22)

The interesting question it seems to me, is not whether 'exploitation' or 'empowerment' is to be found by being an exotic dancer, or what are the socialisation processes women experience which lead them to become exotic dancers, nor solely questions about what imagined subjects women become within the strip club environment, but what practices of the self does the exotic dancer enact precisely at the threshold between 'the club', coded in the popular imagination as dark, smoky and opaque, and the 'real' world? Such practices I contend, may work on an individual, but they do so to the extent that such an individual is located within a social nexus. In this sense then, the techniques of the self which enable the exotic dancer-woman to pass over this threshold and back, repeatedly, sediment and fold over into a new form, one which should not be understood as an armour only to the 'occupational milieu' of the exotic dancer, but as a response to a general condition of the feminine subject in discourse.

'I cannot mean what I do'

Funari's words – I cannot mean what I do – institutes a productive rupture in the hegemony of the phallogocentric structure of sexuality. Funari writes of the jolts of connection between herself and her customers which do not correspond to the stratified lines of exchange which a category such as 'sexual service' establishes:

First shift: The shutter goes up and his eyes light up when he sees me. He starts waving at me, saying something I can't hear over the music, nodding enthusiastically as I weave around in front of the window. He pulls out a pen as the shutter slides down, and when it come back up seconds later he is pressing a napkin to the glass that says, "I love your hair." He points to my belly, my crotch, and my underarms to be sure I understand he means my abundant body hair, not the shiny auburn wig on my head. It's the first human moment in this long evening, and it happened in writing. He proceeds to strip his body of every stitch of clothing and starts jerking merrily away. I'm amazed at his humour, his abandon, and his unusual choice to touch his naked flesh to the cum spattered surfaces of the booth. I wonder what this joyful man is doing masturbating at a peepshow, but I'm glad he's here.

[...]

Booth 23: He smiles broadly, nods his enjoyment of my swivelling hips, my undulating belly. When I put my cunt to his gaze, an inch from the pane, out comes his tongue and he works it, just an inch from his side of the glass. Funny, I think, that you can tell a good eater of pussy just by watching him lick air. I am suddenly reminded that there is an outside world, and that it's raining there, because he lifts his curved bamboo umbrella handle to his lips and begins sucking and tonguing it. I laugh, and I silently thank him for having a sense of humour...I can imagine [him] giving pleasure to some woman somewhere in the raining world. I dance for him till he goes away, and it isn't hard to smile at him from myself. I can call that an enjoyable experience. (1997: 23; 26)

At the peepshow, Funari's job is to dance provocatively until those viewing her ejaculate. At an ideological or macropolitical level, it is accurate to say that she is nothing more than an object. At the level of the lived however, more fluid lines of identification and sensation cross-pollinate, multiplying or potentialising, the possible

ways subjectivity emerges and is experienced. It is the encounter with the affective qualities of abandon and joy, which renders momentarily the commodification of the flesh a backdrop to the interaction, even as it is its frame. Similarly, the licking of the umbrella, as a continuation of and prop for, simulated cunnilingus is at once comedic, and linked to the outside world of rain, intimacy and pleasure. Funari extends into the break that the umbrella creates, and it is in that field of connections, of tongue, bamboo and rain, that Funari finds she is able to smile from within herself. At the intersection of the commercial sexual exchange and the issue of women's political subjectivity, the practices by which women sex-workers negotiate and perform what is exchanged, produce the subjects they become. The signatures of the nude dancer which a mainstream imaginary regards as her truth and housing, are inverted by the dancers who wield them into complications and opacities. A certain body is being constructed, but as Colebrook notes 'a body becomes virtual by organising itself into a subject' (1999: 131). It is in etching the speech of western desiring masculinity onto her skin, in watching the male gaze trace that writing, in the 'eyes that follow my nipples and then my cunt like hungry dog watching a biscuit waved in the air' (Funari 1997: 24), that the integrity and continuity of a bodily existence between toes and scalp, that one's own knowledge of and living in the body (its warm spots, moles and patches of hair), of an embodiment beyond that which is given to her and which she performs, stands out in relief.

Erasing the Self

'The reactivism of the subject is overcome not by denying the subject...but by affirming the subject as a virtual effect and then by *multiplying* movements of subjective 'virtuality'' (Colebrook 1999:131). Where mainstream discourse and representations of 'The Prostitute', 'The Stripper', 'The Call-girl' work themselves into a lather over the idea of the double life – librarian by day, prostitute by night – little consideration is given to the existence of the hinge binding librarian-prostitute, the two versions; it is the very thing which enables the doubling. Ambiguity over that connector is often mistaken for the division itself. It is not at all clear that the questions one may ask of 'multiple selves', are the same questions one may ask about the type of subject that constitutes itself *as and because* it moves across those multiple selves. It is also where the struggle between these virtualities takes place, since multiplying subjective virtualities should not be imagined as without constraints, dangers and traps:

The simplistic binary constructs that my culture give me to interpret these events, passive victim versus active agent, do not encompass my experiences in that kiddie pool or any of my experiences that night. I was and neither, something different, something to be located in the underlying play of differences between the dichotomy of victim and agent. (1999: 126)

That night, which Ronai attempts to think beyond the binary structures made available, involved being auctioned off for \$35 to a man who would act as her 'ring-side manager' for the evening, a job position that largely involved squirting oil over Ronai. That night was thus a limit-experience in that it brought Ronai to the edges of her own capacity for living, her own faithfulness (Braidotti 2001) and in passing through that limit, Ronai is 'marked forever'. It is imperative for Ronai to exist even

and arguably most especially within, those moments where one cannot believe one will endure. Responding to a friend's concern that Ronai was destroying herself through dancing, Ronai reflects that dancing is and is not destructive to herself:

Dancing has given me and other performers the opportunity to destroy ourselves. With the emergence of each new ambiguous situation or decentring moment, our selves are found to be too codified in a particular direction and inadequate for the task of dealing with the situation...As these selves are erased or destroyed, traces are left that influence the construction of new selves to meet the newness of the moment. (1999:127)

What renders exotic dancing a destruction as Ronai sees it, I suggest, are the sedimented narratives encasing the molar form of the feminine: passive, available, accommodating. It is the presence of the line and its crossing which shapes what it is possible to know about the exotic dancer. As I suggested above, this line and its transgression is frequently mobilised as the crossing over into a space of absolute signification, a line that cannot be erased. What point is there then, in speaking from 'the other side'? The ways in which Ronai, Funari and Eaves find and makes sense of the limit-experience is a discourse which thinks beyond the positions of exploited or empowered made available when the feminine subject crosses the horizon and steps into her starring role, so to speak. There is an explicit recognition of the simulacrum of woman these women become as exotic dancers. Thus Funari reflects:

In the peepshow, I'm not controlling the image: I don't make the rules. But I am plugging my body into a predetermined slot, and in doing so I produce my own body as imagery, with all its clear and indecipherable effects. The effects that matter seem impossibly mysterious. (1997: 25)

The element of performance points to the fact that in the clubs, finally, a price is put on a *masculine* sexual imaginary. Exotic dancing commodifies men's need *not* of having access to women's sexual body, but to the fiction of feminine reciprocity, mirroring their own desires back to them. In these texts the woman behind/within the dancer, which is a sign of this feminine reciprocity, disappears. She disappears from the heterosexual script by veiling herself in it. The stepping into of a predetermined slot, which is not the real essence of 'woman' but is itself a simulation of a lived, embodied individual, a copy of a copy is the occupation of a threshold which causes both the ambiguity of self and its most intense articulation: 'I am frightened. I have total responsibility for what is happening. Sabrina is not a separate self, nor some kind of alternate identity to be blamed, like one of the faces of Eve, but is a culmination of all my dark potential' (Ronai 1992: 107). Here, Ronai can be understood as offering a critique of those perspectives which only multiply the kind of agency exotic dancers possess, rather than examine the ways in which a counter-agency is being articulated.

Conclusion: Transgression and the Limit

The exotic dancer transgresses a limit, which is at once the apogee of the feminine in western discourse and its inversion. Of the relation between the limit and its transgression, Foucault writes:

Transgression is an action that involves the limit, that narrow zone of a line where it displays the flash of its passage, but perhaps also its entire trajectory, even its origin; it is likely that transgression has its entire space in the line that it crosses...The limit and transgression depend on each other for whatever density of being they possess: a limit could not exist if it were absolutely uncrossable and, reciprocally, transgression would be pointless if it merely crossed a limit of shadows and illusions. (2000: 73)

The relationship between the limit and its transgression is thus not one of either absolute annihilation, nor one of passing through unscathed, unchanged or free. It is as Ronai describes, a destruction, but a destruction without any particular object or finality, since transgression resides entirely in the line that it crosses. In other words it says nothing of what pulls out to the other side.

The limit, Foucault tells us, is both the cutting edge of meaning and the vast press of its negative space:

the limit opens violently onto the limitless, finds itself suddenly carried away by the content it has rejected...Transgression carries the limit right to the limit of its being; transgression forces the limit to face the fact of its imminent disappearance, to find itself in what it excludes (perhaps, to be more exact, to recognise itself for the first time), to experience its positive truth in its downward fall. (Foucault 2000: 73)

Moving away from experience as recognition, towards strange compositions of non-recognition changes the quality of bodies confronting the limit that is the encounter. To use Foucault's language of transgression we do not look for a supersession of boundaries, a transcendence of the limits of being. A body's relationship to the limit is not clear-cut or victorious "but takes the form of a spiral which no simple infraction can exhaust" (2000: 45). It is taken up wholly, momentarily in an encounter with something else which exists both beneath and beyond the articulatable array. What is found is neither negative nor positive. Foucault suggests that 'Perhaps it is simply an affirmation of division...only retaining that in it which may designate the existence of difference'. This body, taken up in the moment of transgression retains nothing but for the capacity to affirm limited being in a limitless universe.

The available categories to 'classify' women involved in commercial sex and the narratives about inhabiting them, sit clearly on either side of a line or limit, which itself is never identified. Yet, it is the very horizon determining the subject positions sexed, lived bodies take up in discourse. In other words, this line serves as the cutting edge of articulating the feminine subject. Thus at a second level, deeply affected by the struggle and stutter of stripping women to speak them-selves, this chapter treats their speech – the speech of the object – as a discourse about the limit, about finding it and about crossing – repeatedly – over it.

On it, we sleep, live our waking lives, fight – fight and are fought – seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 150)

This is the line crossed which Funari and Ronai endlessly and repeatedly traverse. Theirs is a dance, in words and in body, with the collective limit given in discourse for the feminine subject. Far from disappearing 'beyond' that limit (figured as trauma, sexual pathology, or sexual liberation) as news media, sociological research, or popular culture might imagine, Eaves, Funari and Ronai bring the diverse lines – reproductive, sexual, social and familial – organising the feminine self rub up against each other in a discordant key of a minor discourse. Speaking from this place, it is unable to be subsumed by the categories of exploitation or empowerment, victim or agent, since it speaks at very place from which those positions emerge. It instantiates a far murkier dynamic of counter-claim and counter-agency, involving the very edges of the feminine self. Murky precisely because it eschews lived experience as *either* liberatory *or* repressive; counter-claim precisely because it speaks of and from the wedge between these qualities, and in this constitutes a *techne* of the self located along the strata of sexual difference. In doing so, what has emerged is a counter-discourse which articulates the ways in which my lived, sexed body, my subjectivity as woman is anonymously accorded value (as care-giver, nurturer, partner), is laden with expectation. The perpetual inscription of these expectations and their naturalisation often renders it difficult to resist them, or to give value to them; they become invisible properties of woman as such.

¹ From Deleuze and Guattari (1987: 150)

² The amendment bill related to six primary areas in the regulation of the sex industry. First, the regulation of unlicensed brothels by creating a strict liability offence for a brothel operating on an individual's premises. This ameliorates the difficulty of proving knowledge about the operation of an unlicensed – that is, illegal brothel – in premises that an individual may own but lease to another. A second area deals with extending probity checks in granting business licenses, in particular to associates of bodies corporate. A third aspect gives more power to VCAT (Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal) to discipline operators and managers of brothels. The fourth area of the amendment standardises inspection powers and brings them into line with those passed in fair trading legislation. Fifth, it makes it an offence to own more than one permit or license and sixth, considered the most controversial, is the redefinition of 'sexual service' for the purposes of the Act. The philosophy behind all six areas is to make the sex industry (with specific reference to prostitution) a more transparent process. See the parliamentary debates regarding these amendments, in particular Prostitution Control (Amendment) Bill, Second Reading, Assembly, 25 May 1999 and Prostitution Control (Amendment) Bill, Second Reading, [Council, 1 June 1999](#).

³ I am referring here to *bare: On Women, Dancing, Sex and Power* by Elisabeth Eaves. This is a memoir by Eaves of her time dancing in a variety of stripclubs and peepshows mostly in the well-known Lusty Lady in Seattle. It also reflects on the lives of other dancers that Eaves met at the clubs. Having moved into Seattle as a graduate student and with her boyfriend, Eaves decided to take up stripping for a whole knot of reasons. Money was but one variable alongside an abiding interest in the connections between her body and the social values endlessly etched onto it by teachers, men in cars, her parents, boyfriends and by the men she encounters as clients. Eaves is currently a journalist in the area of foreign policy. Vicki Funari worked for a time at the Lusty Lady, a peepshow venue. In fact there are two so-named venues: one in Seattle and the other in San Francisco. The San Francisco venue was sold to the strippers who work there in 2003 and has since been managed as a co-operative. The Lusty Lady of San Francisco is also well known for being unionised in 1997. She is also the director of *Live! Nude! Girls! Unite* (2000) a documentary about the push for unionisation. Rambo Ronai is an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Memphis who used her experiences as an exotic dancer as the basis for ethnographic research.

⁴ Dean, Prostitution Control (Amendment) Bill, Assembly, 25 May 1999: [1199](#)

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⁵ Lee Godden makes a similar point in her analysis of Queensland's prostitution laws, which she describes as a 'bounding of vice'. She observes that while this is a shift away from the binary logic of moral purity, where prostitution is 'legitimised and contained within the putatively civic, legal space occupied by respectable citizens', it simultaneously requires a discipline and surveillance of the body, especially the female body in order to regulate (see Godden 2001: 92-93). See also Sanchez (1999).

⁶ 'Naked Ambition', *The Age*, 3 February 1996, Saturday Extra, p1.

⁷ 'Just another day at the pole for the girls of Santa Fe', *The Age*, 10 May 1998, p7.

⁸ 'Naked Ambition', *The Age*, 3 February 1996, Saturday Extra, p1.

⁹ See for example Boles and Garbin (1974a, 1974b); Forsyth and Deshotels (1997); MacCaghy and Skipper (1969, 1972); Special Issue of *Deviant Behaviour* (2003).

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