

Bumping and Grinding On the Line: Making Nudity Pay

Becki L. Ross

Volume 46, 2000

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/11t46art06>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Ross, B. L. (2000). Bumping and Grinding On the Line: Making Nudity Pay. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 46, 221–250.

Résumé de l'article

Cet article invite les historiens et les sociologues qui s'intéressent à la classe ouvrière et à la communauté homosexuelle à prendre en considération les structures qui ont exclu l'attention portée aux expériences des travailleur(se)s qui, au cours du vingtième siècle, ont fourni des services sexuels aux consommateurs, hommes dans la plupart des cas. Plus précisément, Vancouver, C.B., 1945-1980, est un cas d'étude pour l'exploration du spectacle érotique après la guerre — le burlesque, la danse à-go-go et le strip-tease. Les archives préliminaires et les résultats ethnographiques révèlent les conditions de travail et les influences artistiques des ancien(ne)s danseur(se)s, les attentes de nature raciale du spectacle érotique et les dimensions homosexuelles de la culture du strip-tease. Adorés et célébrés par les admirateur(ice)s, les strip-teaseur(se)s ont aussi travaillé sous le stigmate de la prostitution signalé par les réformateurs moralistes, la presse populaire et la police. C'est sur cette tension qui existe entre la révérence et l'hostilité engendrée par les danseur(se)s érotiques sur que se base le thème principal de cet article.

Bumping and Grinding On the Line: Making Nudity Pay

Becki L. Ross

It was always tricky explaining that I'd been a stripper once; it was startling to other sensibilities, as harsh a class distinction as one can make. People reacted with suspicion, pity or sometimes prurient fascination. They leaped into their assumptions, imagining me a whore, an idiot, a victim. I winced, not from my shame, because there really wasn't any, but from the shame people wanted to impose.¹

Mining Erotic Exchange

THE ACT OF PAYING for sex as a customer is significantly different from selling it as a supplier. The act of having vacation sex on expensive sheets in a fancy, far-away hotel room is significantly different from laundering the same sheets for a living. The act of stripping in pasties and g-string on a nightclub stage is significantly different from watching striptease and guzzling beer from gynecology row. The act of running an early 20th century brothel or a 21st century escort service is significantly different from policing these businesses undercover and demanding sexual favours in exchange for silence. The act of posing as a centrefold for the inaugural issue of *Playboy* magazine in 1953 is significantly different from standing behind the camera, or banking the profits as publisher. The act of talking dirty on the telephone and getting paid per minute is significantly different from jerking off on the other end of the line. Indeed, the precise conditions organizing the sale and purchase of commercialized sex-related services have been contingent on a nexus of socio-economic factors: uppermost among them are the classed, gendered, and racialized relations between producers and consumers that constitute the nature of the exchange, at any given moment, in specific political economies.

¹Lindalee Tracey, *Growing Up Naked: My Years in Bump and Grind* (Vancouver and Toronto 1997), 209. In her autobiography, Tracey criticizes the feminist film director, Bonnie Sherr Klein, who used and distorted her experience to tell an anti-stripper and anti-pornography salvationist parable in "*Not a Love Story*" (National Film Board 1982).

Throughout the 20th century across North America, largely white, straight, monied men have had the means to define what they want sexually, how, and when they want it. Both married and unmarried, wealthy and working class, white and non-white, men have made payments for a variety of sex-related interactions with women.² Indeed, it has been working-class white women and women of colour who have enabled the carnal appetites and fantasies of men, or lubricated them, if you will, *through their paid labour*.³ While the character of these women's labour has greatly varied, prostitution has been most vigorously singled out as a dire social problem in need of public, media, and state action.⁴

Beginning in the late 19th century, European sexologists, anatomists, physiologists, and physicians sought to territorialize the prostitute body as a working-class body — grotesque, diseased, and distinct from the bodies of bourgeois wives and chaste daughters. According to Shannon Bell, the prostitute was marked as dirty, repulsive, noisy, and contaminating, and was “produced as the negative identity of the bourgeois subject — the ‘not-I’.”⁵ The medical discourse of nymphomania hailed working-class prostitutes, both white and black, as naturally and essentially hypersexual, prone to clitoral hypertrophy and sexual perversion of all sorts.⁶ Assumptions about prostitutes as sinners, sex slaves, and unchaste vectors of disease have contributed to their vulnerability to violence, even murder: consider the mangled, sexually mutilated remains of five prostitutes at the hands of Jack the Ripper in 1888, in East London.⁷ At the time, reporters for the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Daily Telegraph* blamed the women for their fate: “[These] drunken, vicious, miserable wretches whom it was almost a charity to relieve of the penalty of existence” were “not very particular about how they earned a living.”⁸ A hundred years later, between 1975 and 1999, an estimated sixty-seven street prostitutes in Vancouver's downtown eastside have either disappeared or turned up dead and

²The act of men paying men/male youth for sexual services has a long, compelling history, and is not a topic of consideration here.

³This is not to discount the uneven and complex sexual exchanges between young, largely working-class boys and older men. On this topic, see the superb essay by Steven Maynard, “‘Horrible Temptations’: Sex, Men, and Working Class Male Youth in Urban Ontario, 1890-1935,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 78 (June 1997), 191-235.

⁴Deborah Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem* (Toronto 1998), 4.

⁵Shannon Bell, *Reading, Writing and Rewriting the Prostitute Body* (Bloomington, Indiana 1994), 43.

⁶Margaret Gibson, “Clitoral Corruption: Body Metaphors and American Doctors’ Constructions of Female Homosexuality, 1870-1900,” in Vernon Rosario, ed., *Science and Homosexualities* (New York 1997), 118-21.

⁷Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago 1992), 198.

⁸*Daily Telegraph*, 24 September 1888; *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 September 1888, cited in Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, 200.

dismembered, some in dumpsters.⁹ Dehumanizing, anti-prostitute stereotypes have animated the campaigns of police officers, judges, lawyers, physicians, moral reformers, and civic politicians who have predicated their anti-vice agenda, in part, on the inadmissibility of sex work as a labour relation.¹⁰ In effect, century-old dismissals of sex work *as work* have afforded legions of medical, legal, and moral experts the licence to pathologize the working-class female supplier of erotic goods as nothing but a congenital type predisposed to sexual degeneracy, immorality, and innumerable societal transgressions.¹¹

In spite of Foucault's astute observation that discourses about sex have multiplied and proliferated since the 17th century, and that discursive regimes have administered and regulated sexuality, the history of women's labour in the commercial sex industry has not much captured the imagination of Canadian scholars.¹² Historians of working-class labour in the 20th century have identified the injustices of structural unemployment, ugly conflicts between workers and management, the exploitation of non-Anglo immigrants, the consolidation of a gender-segmented labour force, declining rates of unionization, and deepening class schisms, as

⁹Daniel Wood, "Missing," *Elmstreet Magazine*, December 1999, 15-22.

¹⁰For selected reading on the topic of moral regulation by Canadian state and extra-state apparatuses, see Mariana Valverde, ed., *Radically Rethinking Regulation* (Toronto 1994); Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, *Making Good: Law and Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939* (Toronto 1997); Joan Sangster, "Incarcerating 'Bad Girls': The Regulation of Sexuality through the Female Refuges Act in Ontario, 1920-1945," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7 (1996), 239-75; Becki Ross, "Destaining the (Tattooed) Delinquent Body: Moral Regulatory Practices at Toronto's Street Haven, 1965-1969," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 8 (April 1997), 561-95.

¹¹See, for example, Alexander John Baptiste Parent-Duchatelet, *De La Prostitution dans la Ville de Paris, Volume I*, (1836), trans. by Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth Century Paris* (Princeton 1985), 205-35; Havelock Ellis, *Sex in Relation to Society: Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, Volume VI (Philadelphia 1910), 277.

¹²For selected readings on the history of the sex trade, see Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution in Victorian Society* (Cambridge 1980); Ruth Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood: Prostitution in America, 1900-1918* (Baltimore 1982); Bell, *Reading, Writing, and Rewriting the Prostitute Body*; Nickie Roberts, *Whores in History: Prostitution in Western Society* (London 1992); Deborah Nilsen, "The 'Social Evil': Prostitution in Vancouver, 1900-1920," in Barbara Latham and Cathy Less, ed., *Selected Essays on Women's History in B.C.* (Victoria 1980), 205-28; Lori Rotenberg, "The Wayward Worker: Toronto's Prostitute at the Turn of the Century," in J. Acton, P. Goldsmith, B. Shephard, ed., *Women at Work 1850-1930* (Toronto 1974), 33-70; Bay Riley, *Gold Diggers of the Klondike: Prostitution in Dawson City, Yukon, 1898-1908* (Toronto 1997); Charlene Kish, "A Kne Joint is Not Entertainment: the Moral Regulation of Burlesque in Early Twentieth-Century Toronto," MA thesis, Department of History, York University, 1997; Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble: Prostitution as a Social Problem*.

flagrant, wretched features of capitalist social formation.¹³ Historians of sexuality have energetically explored the social inventions of homosexuality, bisexuality, and heterosexuality, as well as the formation of sexual communities, and the emergence of state and extra-state campaigns to police sexual fears, anxieties, and dangers.¹⁴ New investigations include Karen Dubinsky's brilliant, cheeky meditation on Niagara Falls as a theme park for heterosexual honeymooners, Valerie Korinek's trenchant re-interpretation of *Chatelaine* magazine as a powerful (and at times contradictory) mid-century guide for "proper, modern womanhood," and Mona Gleason's impressive dissection of the role of postwar psychology in producing 'normal' male and female citizens at school.¹⁵ However, the dual unfolding of sex-free labour studies alongside work-free sexuality studies within Canadian social history has meant that the rich registers of "sexuality" and "labour" have rarely been placed systematically in relation to, and in tension with, one another.

I suspect that myriad explanations account for the parallel-tracking that has hindered venturesome, fruitful intercourse between sex history and labour/work-ing-class history. Among them is the lingering ambivalence, if not hostility, of some labour specialists toward the relevance and legitimacy of so-called private sexual matters. In addition, the initial focus of sex history specialists (whose numbers are quite low in Canada) was on recovering knowledge of queer sexual identities, communities, and *non-remunerated play*, in the context of an oppressive, heteronormative past. Sex historians have not, until recently, turned their attention to the participation of both queers and non-queers in the *remunerated work* of selling sexual arousal and activity which has itself, like homosexuality, been subject to punishing penalties, though for different reasons. And the proverbial dilemma of locating sources germane to the story one wants to tell — whether it's case files,

¹³For selected readings in Canadian labour history, see Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto and Vancouver 1983); Craig Heron and Bob Storey, *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Montréal and Kingston 1986); Gregory S. Kealey, *Workers and Canadian History* (Montréal and Kingston 1995); David Bercuson and David Bright, eds., *Canadian Labour History: Selected Readings* (Toronto 1994); Franca Iacovetta, *Such Hard-Working People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto* (Montréal and Kingston 1992); Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns* (Toronto 1990); Gillian Creese, *Contracting Masculinity: Gender, Class and Race in a White Collar Union* (Toronto 1999); Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (Toronto 1998).

¹⁴Carolyn Strange, "Bad Girls and Masked Men: Recent Works on Sexuality in U.S. History," *Labour/Le Travail*, 30 (Spring 1997), 261-75.

¹⁵Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* (Toronto 1999); Valerie Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto 2000); Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada* (Toronto 1999).

police records, personal scrapbooks, court transcripts, mayor's papers, diaries, or city directories — is especially acute for those of us who confront the legacy of sex work as "unspeakable," stigmatized and clandestine.¹⁶ Absent from both Canada Census data and statistics that plot the contours of the formal labour force, sex trade workers have proved to be an elusive population.

It seems plausible to me that the discursive construction of the Sexual Other in 20th-century Canada most vigorously and unrelentingly targeted women who oiled the machinery of commercialized sex. This is certainly not to say, as some feminists do, that female sex trade workers, in every instance, have been coerced, degraded victims of patriarchal control.¹⁷ While evidence of dangerous, violent working conditions exists, the complex agency of female sex workers throughout the 20th century remains under-explored — their challenges to grinding stereotypes, their efforts to combine migrant labouring with familial intimacy, their battles against the regulatory practices of police, politicians, and moral reformers, and their spirited bids to unionize, among other measures of resistance. Increasingly, activist female sex workers, primarily in the geo-political north, have found resources to write their own illuminating, bracing tales of exploitation *and* rebellion, resistance *and* accommodation.¹⁸ However, unlike female cannery workers, fishers, bakers, stenographers, child-minders, and retail clerks, working-class women who marketed their sex-related skills found themselves at once desired *and* criminalized, or at the very least, scorned and marginalized, in unique and disturbing ways.¹⁹

In the absence of detailed empirical and theoretical studies, I have more questions than answers. When we consider Foucault's notion that the medicalization of sexuality "set about contacting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments," what

¹⁶See Rosen, *The Lost Sisterhood*, xi.

¹⁷Sara Wynter, "WHISPER: Women Hurt in Systems of Prostitution Engaged in Revolt," in Frederica Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander, ed., *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry* (Pittsburgh 1987), 66-70.

¹⁸For contemporary writings from the standpoint of sex trade workers, specifically prostitutes, see Valerie Scott, Peggy Miller, and Ryan Hotchkiss, "Realistic Feminists," in Laurie Bell, ed., *Good Girls, Bad Girls: Sex Trade Workers and Feminists Face to Face* (Toronto 1987), 204-17; Margo St. James, "The Reclamation of Whores," in *Good Girls, Bad Girls*, 81-87; Gail Pheterson, *A Vindication of the Rights of Whores* (Seattle 1989); Gail Pheterson, *The Prostitution Prism* (Amsterdam 1996); Alexandra Highercrest, *At Home on the Stroll: My Twenty Years as a Prostitute in Canada* (Toronto 1997); Jill Nagle, ed., *Whores and Other Feminists* (New York 1998); Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander, eds., *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry* (Pittsburgh 1987); Wendy Chapkis, *Live Sex Acts: Women Performing Erotic Labour* (New York 1997); Brock, *Making Work, Making Trouble*.

¹⁹In his book, *Vancouver: The Way it Was* (Vancouver 1984), Michael Kluckner comments: "Prostitutes followed the Canadian Pacific Railway workers across the country like a scruffy, pulchritudinous plague." (34).

might we learn about how sellers and buyers of erotic goods have been differently contacted and caressed?²⁰ How have the "promiscuous lower orders" — those presumed to be intrinsically lascivious — both consented to and resisted demands for sexual servicing from "the propertied and self-controlled?"²¹ Specifically, what has been the nature of female-dominated job categories such as street prostitute, call-girl, stripteaser, peep show dancer, masseuse, and pin-up/porn model?²² What occupational choices did sex workers confront prior to entering the business? How might we compare and contrast the occupational hazards and benefits faced by female sex workers in mid-century Canada with those encountered by textile workers, waitresses, domestics, and beauticians, or female journalists, nurses, and teachers? What differentiated professional stripteasers from the can-can and hula dancers employed to entertain workers at the Canadian Car and Foundry Company in Fort William before, during, and after World War II?²³ In decades past, female factory employees were subjected to forms of sexual harassment on the line, though Joan Sangster learned that former clerical staff at Quaker Oats in 1940s Ontario tended to accept this behaviour as "part of the job" in an era that predated feminist analysis of unwanted, intrusive male advances.²⁴ Did labouring to sell sex, or sexual arousal, expose female vendors to greater frequency and/or intensity of unsolicited male sexual attention and assault? To what extent did sex workers internalize the shame they were taught to feel for parading around skimpily-clad in public, for brazenly inciting men's lust (and getting paid for it), or for refusing the role of full-time wife and mother? Moreover, how did the stubbornly racist, sexist stereotypes of black women as oversexed jezebels,²⁵ Asian women as Dragon Ladies,²⁶ and First Nations women as sexually fast, loose squaws,²⁷ shape the experiences

²⁰See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I (New York 1978), 44.

²¹Angus McLaren, *Twentieth-Century Sexuality: A History* (Oxford 1999), 6.

²²In the past twenty years, we might add telephone sex operator, internet sex operator, and professional s/m dominatrix.

²³Helen Smith and Pamela Wakewich, "'Beauty and the Helldivers': Representing Women's Work and Identities in a Warplant Newspaper," *Labour/Le Travail*, 44 (Fall 1999), 93-5.

²⁴Joan Sangster, *Earning Respect: The Lives of Working Women in Small-Town Ontario, 1920-1960* (Toronto 1995), 98, 112.

²⁵See Patricia Hill Collins, "The Sexual Politics of Black Womanhood," in *Black Feminist Thought* (New York 1990), 163-180; Evelyn Hammonds, "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: the Problematic of Silence," in M. J. Alexander and C. Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York 1997), 170-192.

²⁶Linda Xiao Jia Chen, "Laundresses and Prostitutes: Deconstructing Stereotypes and Finding an Asian Feminist Voice," *Resources for Feminist Research*, 3/4, 20 (1992), 88-90.

²⁷Sarah Carter, "First Nations Women of Prairie Canada in the Early Reserve Years, the 1870s to the 1920s: a preliminary inquiry," in Christine Miller and Patricia Churchryk, eds., *Women of the First Nations: Power, Wisdom, and Strength* (Winnipeg 1996), 51-76; Jean Barman, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900," *BC Studies*, 115/116 (Fall/Winter 1997/98), 237-66.

of non-white female sex workers? In particular, how did stripteasers of colour use the stage to act out, and act against, the crushing colonial tropes of African primitivism, Indian savagery, and Orientalism?

*"Ladies and Genitals...Let Us Tickle Your Pickle"*²⁸

In this paper, I ruminate on complicated entanglements of sexuality, labour, and social class in the history of 20th century erotic entertainment in North America. I utilize preliminary archival and ethnographic findings from my case study on burlesque and striptease culture in Vancouver, 1945-1980,²⁹ to explore the working conditions and artistic influences of former dancers, the racialized expectations of erotic spectacle, and the queer dimensions of strip culture.³⁰ Accepting "business insiders" as the expert practitioners of their own lives means discovering not only the identities of the women who performed striptease in postwar Vancouver, but the meanings that these entertainers attached to their craft.³¹ And because men have been indispensable to the production and consumption of striptease as club owners/staff, musicians, choreographers, booking agents, costume designers, photographers, and patrons, their recollections must be solicited, and will be integrated in upcoming research reports.

Popular lore within striptease culture laments the decline of the glamorous, golden era of the tasteful, lavish art of "the tease" in burlesque, and the gradual rise of the vulgar, anti-erotic, generic "cunt show" by the late 1970s.³² Reflecting

²⁸Tracy, *Growing Up Naked*, 5.

²⁹There is an important sociological literature that focuses on the business of striptease or "exotic dancing" in the 1980s and 1990s, though much of the work is uncritically rooted in the tradition of the sociology of deviance. See Craig Forsyth and Tina Deshotels, "A Deviant Process: The Sojourn of the Stripper," *Sociological Spectrum*, 18 (1998), 77-92; William Thompson and Jackie Harred, "Topless Dancers: Managing Stigma in a Deviant Occupation," *Deviant Behaviour* 13 (1992), 291-311; Scott Reid, Jonathon Epstein, and D.E. Benson, "Does Exotic Dancing Pay Well But Cost Dearly?," in A. Thio and T. Calhoun, eds., *Readings in Deviant Behaviour* (New York 1995), 284-88; and G.E. Enck and J.D. Preston, "Counterfeit Intimacy: A Dramaturgical Analysis of an Erotic Performance," *Deviant Behaviour*, 9 (1988), 360-81.

³⁰My research assistants and I have much more archival material to consult, including Health Department records regarding forced venereal disease testing of dancers/prostitutes, records of booking agents, promotional photographs of dancers, dancers' autobiographies, Hollywood and independent film, records of the Pacific National Exhibition, RCMP and Vancouver Police, Attorney General's files on provincial liquor licensing, records of women's groups and clergy who lobbied for closure of nightclubs, among others. I also plan to travel to Hellendale, California to visit former stripper Dixie Evans' "Exotic World Museum" — a shrine in the desert that honours burlesque and striptease artists in the twentieth century.

³¹See Dorothy E. Smith, *The Everyday World As Problematic: Toward a Feminist Sociology* (Toronto 1987), 154.

³²Lucinda Jarrett, *Stripping in Time: A History of Erotic Dancing* (London 1997), 192.

on her exit from the business in 1979, Montréal-based dancer Lindalee Tracey observes: "Striptease fell from grace because the world stopped dreaming."³³ In my larger project, I intend to subject this lore to careful sociological investigation of shifts within the business, and within the broader socio-economic context of B.C.'s lower mainland, over a forty-year period.³⁴ In what follows, my *entrée* into striptease history wedges open a window onto deep-seated cultural anxieties about gender and sexual norms, working-class amusements, and racial otherness. I conclude with some comments about the imbrication of sex and nation in the history of erotic entertainment.³⁵

Nice Girls, Smart Girls, Good Girls Don't Disrobe in Public

Female burlesque, go-go, and striptease have been perceived by religious, civic, and moral reformers as commercialized sexual vice that inflame men's passions (already fuelled by alcohol), propel them to seek adulterous liaisons, abandon their families, and jeopardize their workplace productivity.³⁶ For almost a century, popular conflation of striptease with nymphomania, illiteracy, drug addiction, prostitution, and disease, have labelled female erotic performers dangerous to the social order, the family, and the nation.³⁷ In the 1920s and 1930s of the US and Canada, striptease within the broad rubric of burlesque was a unique combination of sexual humour and female sexual display, with a focus on sexual suggestiveness aided by the "tease" factor.³⁸ Historian Andrea Friedman notes: "The key to the striptease was not how much a woman stripped, but how much the people in the

³³Tracey, *Growing Up Naked*, 210.

³⁴Much has changed in the world of striptease since 1980, including the introduction of table dancing, lap dancing, in-house massage, merchandising, contests in Las Vegas, Internet transmission of live strip shows, and increasingly global movement of strippers within and across national borders. On the emergence of striptease clubs and the hiring of international dancers in the Caribbean, see Jacqueline Martis, "Tourism and the Sex Trade in St. Maarten and Curacao, the Netherlands Antilles," in Kamela Kempadoo, ed., *Sun, Sex and Gold: Tourism and Sex Work in the Caribbean* (Lanham, Maryland 1999), 207-8.

³⁵For stunning insights into the place of sexuality in the process of Canadian state formation, see Steven Maynard, "The Maple Leaf (Gardens) Forever: Sex, Canadian Historians and National History," unpublished paper, Department of History, Queen's University, 1999.

³⁶Ann Corio with Joseph DiMona, *This Was Burlesque* (New York 1968); Charles McCaghy and James Skipper, "Stripping: Anatomy of a Deviant Life Style," in Saul Feldman and Gerald Thielbar, eds., *Life Styles: Diversity in American Society* (Boston 1972); Jarrett, *Stripping in Time*.

³⁷Cited in James Skipper and Charles McCaghy, "Stripteasing: A Sex-Oriented Occupation," in James Henslin, ed., *Studies in the Sociology of Sex* (New York 1971), 281-82. Also see James Skipper and Charles McCaghy, "Stripteasers: The Anatomy and Career Contingencies of a Deviant Occupation," *Social Problems*, 17 (1970), 391-404.

³⁸Robert Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina 1991), 244.

audience thought she stripped, as well as how successfully she encouraged their desire that she strip."³⁹ It was maintenance of the illusion of nudity that afforded the business some legal protection from obscenity laws. Italian American Ann Corio, a stripteaser throughout the 1930s, remembers incidences of state power over sexual representation, and the tricks employed to safeguard illicit shows:

[At the Howard Theatre in Boston], once the ticket-taker saw the censor coming up the stairs he pressed his foot on a pedal. On stage, the show might be in full production. A stripper might be giving her all for mankind, shimmying and grinding. Clothes might be flying in all directions. The crowd would be yelling, "Take it off," and the music might be crashing to a crescendo. Suddenly a red light would start blinking in the footlights. A censor had arrived... Imagine Mickey Mantle trying to stop in the middle of his swing. That's what those stormy strippers would have to do...Red light! Hold it! The hips would stop as if paralyzed. Those clothes would come flying back from the wings. The perspiring musicians would dissolve to a waltz. And by the time the censor reached the top of the stairs and looked down on the stage he would see — not a hip-swinging, hair-tossing, half-naked tigress — but a nun on a casual stroll through a most unlikely convent.⁴⁰

Friedman shows how a decade-long campaign against burlesque waged in New York by religious, anti-vice, and municipal activists, including mayor LaGuardia, resulted in a city-wide ban on burlesque entertainment in 1937. Friedman's research also suggests that anxieties about the disorderliness and immorality of the male burlesque audience were at the heart of contests to eradicate sexual entertainment in New York in the 1930s.⁴¹ By 1942, every burlesque theatre licence in the Big Apple was revoked, on the grounds that the shows promoted filth, vulgarity, immorality, and male sexual violence.⁴² In effect, anti-burlesque initiatives were part of a larger set of strategies to regulate the sexual content of commercial culture, which included motion pictures, crime comics, and obscene or dirty magazines. Ironically, as Marilyn Hegarty notes, some mainstream American magazines during World War II featured "sizzling" female dancehall and canteen entertainers in g-strings as morale builders for the troops — for a brief moment, the nation, or the nation's solidiers, depended on public displays of feminine (hetero)sexiness. However, the entertainers' patriotism remained suspect due to their "potential promiscuity" and "descent into prostitution."⁴³

³⁹ Andrea Friedman, "The Habitats of Sex-Crazed Perverts: Campaigns Against Burlesque in Depression-Era New York City," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 7 (1996), 204.

⁴⁰ Ann Corio and Joseph DiMona, *This Was Burlesque*, 175. Similar stories have been told about the use of red lights to warn lesbians and gay men engaged in illegal same-sex dancing in public bars and clubs in the 1940s and 1950s. See Joan Nestle, *A Restricted Country* (Ithaca, New York 1987), and *Persistent Desires: a femme/butch reader* (Boston 1992).

⁴¹ Andrea Friedman, "The Habitats of Sex-Crazed Perverts," 237.

⁴² Friedman, "The Habitats of Sex-Crazed Perverts," 235, 238.

⁴³ Marilyn Hegarty, "Patriot or Prostitute: Sexual Discourses, Print Media, and American Women during World War II," *Journal of Women's History*, 10 (Summer 1998), 122.

Cameos of stripteasers in Hollywood film have worked to stabilize the age-old dichotomy between good, middle-class girls and wayward, working-class sex deviants. In the decorated blockbuster, "The Graduate" (1967), newly minted, aimless university graduate Benjamin Braddock (Dustin Hoffman) is pressured to escort Elaine Robinson (Katherine Ross), the daughter of his lover, Mrs. Robinson (Anne Bancroft), on a date. By insisting on accompanying Elaine to a downtown stripclub, Benjamin succeeds in sexually, publicly humiliating and punishing the white, upper-class, virgin by forcing her to witness the sullyng, sickening debauchery of stripteasers who twirl ornamental tassels from jeweled pasties (double-dutch style) for a living. However, at the horrifying sight of Elaine's tears, Benjamin is jolted into class-conscious chivalry and proceeds to lunge angrily, violently at the dancer on stage. Pursuing a fleeing Elaine out of the club, he later comforts her with kisses and food in the safety and style of his red convertible sportscar.

In the post World War II era, burlesque and striptease flourished in Vancouver's blind pigs or afterhours booze cans, and a handful of nightclubs and mainstream theatres. Marketed as adult entertainment for both locals and tourists in the port city, erotic performance was "most legal" and "most respectable" in large, soft-seat nightclubs such as the Palomar and the Cave Supper Club that routinely staged swing bands, large-scale musicals, and big-name lounge acts.⁴⁴ In smaller nightclubs such as the Penthouse Cabaret, the Kobenhavn, and the Shangri-La, in poorer, working-class neighborhoods, including Chinatown, striptease acts that overlapped with "high art," though packaged to emphasize partial, and later, full nudity, faced multi-voiced opposition. Clergy, public officials, women's groups, and police argued for the careful scrutiny of "low class" venues associated (ideologically and spatially) with the "criminal classes," and at different times, mobilized a range of municipal by-laws, provincial liquor laws, and federal Criminal Code provisions, to turn up the heat on unscrupulous hoteliers, cabaret owners, and dancers.⁴⁵ Indeed, the flourishing of striptease, first on the stages of quasi-legal, unlicensed bottle clubs (which themselves traded in the forbidden), and later,

⁴⁴Robert Campbell makes a similar argument when he distinguishes the sale of alcohol in first-class hotels from lower-end hotels with their overwhelmingly working-class clientele. See his article, "Managing the Marginal: Regulating and Managing Decency in Vancouver's Beer Parlours, 1925-1954," *Labour/Le Travail*, 44 (Fall 1999), 112.

⁴⁵Robert Campbell, in *Demon Rum or Easy Money: Government Control of Liquor in British Columbia from Prohibition to Privatization* (Ottawa: Carleton University Press 1991), 50-55, argues that the BC Liquor Control Board enforced a "no food, no entertainment, no dancing" policy in Vancouver's beer parlours (in hotels), until 1954. In his article, "Managing the Marginal," Campbell points out that the Chief Inspector for the BC liquor board rejected applications for a liquor license from Chinese in Vancouver, as it "has been found that Chinese are not able to handle this type of business." (cited on p. 123)

post-1969, when "bottomless" strip acts were legalized, contributed to the city's reputation as home to the hottest nightclubs north of San Francisco.⁴⁶

In Vancouver in 1941, a special Police Delegation of religious and temperance leaders toured and inspected the city's night spots: they were known as the "special constables," and were part of a long tradition of anthropological treatment of the city as, quoting Carolyn Strange, "a laboratory full of troubling specimens of urban life."⁴⁷ When they roamed city streets in search of flourishing vice both inside and adjacent to well-known red-light districts, they became social geographers, mapping the locations of moral evils. Upon visiting a local cabaret, Mrs. McKay of the Vancouver Local Council of Women, representing seventy-eight women's groups, told reporters for the *Vancouver News Herald*: "The floor show was objectionable, with girls naked except brassieres and loin clothes." Rev. Cook complained of "immoral conduct highly suggestive of Sodom and Gomorrah."⁴⁸ Years later, in 1965, Tom Hazlitt of the *Vancouver Daily Province* commented: "The city's cabarets are crowded with bottle-packing juveniles. Drunkenness and fights are commonplace. So is drug addiction, prostitution, and erotic dancing of a bizarre nature. Some places are frequented by men who dress up as women and women who dress up as men."⁴⁹ In 1966, reporter George Peloquin of the *Vancouver Sun* quoted the city's Chief Licence Inspector, Mitch Harrell: "Two cabarets were warned: the attire on their girls was too skimpy. One involved dancers with transparent, black chiffon blouses. The by-law forbids any person to produce in any building or place in the city any immoral or lewd theatrical performance of any kind."⁵⁰ Ten years later, in 1976, the Attorney General's office instructed the BC Liquor Control Board to enforce a ban on "bare-breasted waitresses" in Vancouver nightclubs.⁵¹ A key paradox in the history of the nightclub scene in British Columbia and elsewhere, is the subjection of striptease to a concerted proliferation of speech and acts intended to prohibit it.⁵²

The Penthouse Cabaret, which opened on Seymour Street in downtown Vancouver in 1947, was owned and run by the Filippone brothers — Joe, Ross,

⁴⁶Chuck Davis, *The Greater Vancouver Book: An Urban Encyclopedia* (Surrey, British Columbia 1997).

⁴⁷Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem* (Toronto 1995), 106.

⁴⁸"Drunken, Immoral Conduct in Cabarets: Church, Temperance Heads Related Visits to Night Spots," *Vancouver News Herald*, 13 December 1941; "Police Revert to One O'Clock Cabaret Closing," *Vancouver News Herald*, 13 December 1941.

⁴⁹Tom Hazlitt, "Legal or Illegal: City's Night Spots Roar Wide Open," *Vancouver Daily Province*, 9 January 1965.

⁵⁰George Peloquin, "Go-Go Cabarets Can't Go Topless," *Vancouver Sun*, 19 September 1966.

⁵¹"Cover Up, Says A-G," *Vancouver Sun*, 31 August 1976.

⁵²Here, I am adapting insights of Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech* (New York 1997), 130-35.

Mickey, and Jimmy — and their sister Florence.⁵³ It started out as Joe's penthouse apartment where he "privately" entertained guests above the family's Diamond Cabs and Eagle Time Delivery service, and it was raided for liquor infractions the first night it opened. Still operating in 2000, and continuing to be run by members of the Filippone family, it is the longest-standing striptease venue in Canada. In 1968, reporter Alex MacGillivray wrote that The Penthouse was "a watering spot for bookies and brokers, doctors and dentists, guys and dolls, ladies and gentlemen, and just about anybody who could smell a good time."⁵⁴ Show business celebrities such as Tony Bennett, Sophie Tucker, Sammy Davis Jr., Liberace, and Ella Fitzgerald entertained at the Penthouse, as did headlining strippers such as Sally Rand (of the famous fan dance), Evelyn West, the "Hubba Hubba" girl (with breasts insured by Lloyds of London for \$50,000), Lili St. Cyr, and Tempest Storm, beginning in the late 1950s, though the Filippone brothers prohibited full nudity until the mid-1970s. Extravagant Las Vegas-style revues full of scantily-clad, plumed, and spangled showgirls were imported, and the burlesque acts were accompanied by live jazz and swing bands.⁵⁵ By the early 1960s, the Penthouse had a reputation as the best place in the city to meet elite prostitutes who frequented the club, bought food and drinks, and charmed a loyal clientele of tourists and locals.⁵⁶

For decades, the Penthouse was habitually raided and closed down. Between 1951 and 1968, nightspots like the Penthouse were strictly bottle clubs — patrons brought bottled liquor to the club or purchased drinks from the illegal stash behind the bar, as well as ice and mix. In so doing, they made themselves vulnerable to police busts. According to Ross Filippone, his brother Joe arranged for a lookout on the roof who buzzed a waiter downstairs when he spotted the "Dry Squad." The waiter then warned patrons to hide their booze on built-in ledges under the tables, and to deny any wrong-doing to the gun-and-holstered boys in blue. In 1968, after decades of lobbying by the West Coast Cabaret Owners Association, the Penthouse was finally awarded a liquor licence which legalized liquor sales years after hotel parlours in the city had been granted the right to sell beer (only, and by the glass). In December 1975, after a five-month-long undercover operation,⁵⁷ the Filippone brothers, a cashier and a doorman, were charged with living off the avails of

⁵³Filippone is the anglicized version of the original Philliponi, invented by a racist immigration officer when Joe (the eldest) and his parents arrived in British Columbia from San Nicola, Italy, in 1929.

⁵⁴Alex MacGillivray, "Column," *Vancouver Sun*, 20 December 1968, A2.

⁵⁵Les Wiseman, "Not Your Average Joe," *Vancouver Magazine* (April 1982), 68.

⁵⁶Daniel Wood, "The Naked and the Dead: Truth Isn't the Only Victim in the 50-year Penthouse Saga," *Vancouver Magazine* (December 1997), 104.

⁵⁷According to a cover story in *Dick MacLean's Guide: the Fortnightly Restaurant Magazine*, 4-18 October, 1978, "the full operation, which involved 12 officers, included surveillance by means of electronic eavesdropping devices, hidden cameras, motor vehicle surveillance, and male officers entering the club to pose as prostitutes' clients." (13)

prostitution and conspiring to corrupt public morals.⁵⁸ In his testimony, Joe Philliponi vowed that he never allowed total nudity on the stage at the Penthouse's Gold Room. All the dancers were cautioned to keep their g-strings firmly in place.⁵⁹ Finally, in 1978, after a forced, padlocked closure lasting two-and-a-half years, convictions, fines, appeals and \$1.5 million in litigation fees, all of the accused were fully acquitted.⁶⁰ So, though Vancouver nightclubs were never closed down *en masse* à la New York City in 1942, hotspots like the Penthouse, as well as the Kobenhavn, Zanzibar, and Oil Can Harry's, were consistently under the gaze of moral and legal authorities, scapegoated as dens of immorality, obscenity, and indecency. Stripteasers, who were commonly assumed to moonlight as prostitutes, were never exempted from the scrutiny of those who damned nightclubs as the playgrounds of gangsters, bootleggers, bookies, pimps, hookers, and sex fiends.

Working The Stage: The Good, The Bad, The Ugly

Headliners Sally Rand, Gypsy Rose Lee, Lili St. Cyr, "Queen of the Strippers," and Tempest Storm, all of whom performed in Vancouver during the 1950s and 1960s, netted top salaries. Their price of upwards of \$4,000 per weekend (even when they were over 40), meant they earned more than women in any other job category.⁶¹ However, a handsome pay cheque did not necessarily translate into respect. In 1969, American sociologists Jesser and Donovan interviewed 155 university students and 122 parents of students, all of whom assigned stripteasers a lower occupational ranking than what were seen to be traditionally low status jobs: janitor, artist's model, and professional gambler.⁶² Interviews with five former dancers suggest that female erotic dancers who performed in Vancouver clubs such as the Penthouse and the Cave, and later, the No. 5 Orange Hotel, the Drake Hotel, and the Cecil Hotel, negotiated salary and working conditions in a stigmatized, male-controlled profession.⁶³

⁵⁸Dick MacLean's *Guide*, 112-15.

⁵⁹"The Penthouse Papers," *Dick MacLean's Guide*, 27.

⁶⁰*Dick MacLean's Guide*, 113; and, see Pino Didon, "A Candid Interview: Philliponi Disapproves of Nudity," *L'Eco D'Italia*, 20 January 1978, 1-3, 8.

⁶¹Jarrett, *Stripping in Time*, 170.

⁶²C. Jesser and L. Donovan, "Nudity in the Art Training Process," *Sociological Quarterly* 10 (1969), 355-71.

⁶³For autobiographical writings on striptease from 1970 to 2000, see Misty, *Strip!* (Toronto 1973); Janet Feindel, *A Particular Class of Woman* (Vancouver 1988); Margaret Dragu and A.S.A Harrison, *Revelations: Essays on Striptease and Sexuality* (London 1988); Annie Ample, *The Bare Facts: My Life as a Stripper* (Toronto 1988); Lindalee Tracey, *Growing Up Naked*; Dianna Atkinson, *Highways and Dancehalls* (Toronto 1995); Shannon Bell, ed., *Whore Carnival* (New York 1995); Gwendolyn, "Nothing Butt: The Truth about the Sex Trade," *Toward the Slaughterhouse of History* (Toronto 1992), 16-23; Chris Bearchell, "No Apologies: Strippers as the Upfront Line in a Battle to Communicate," *The Body Politic*,

Commonly perceived as sex deviants (alongside unwed mothers, homosexuals, prostitutes, and unattached wage-earning women), female erotic dancers were subjected to surveillance, police arrest, detention, forced venereal disease testing, extortion, violence, and rejection by family and friends. One fifty-year old former dancer we interviewed has never told her twenty-something children about her years in burlesque. At the same time, a dancer like Val who was working-class and British-born, made more money, had more freedom, worked fewer hours, and had more control over her work than the waitresses, nurses, teachers, chambermaids, and secretaries she knew. Others like Michelle and Noelle, neither of whom had a high school education, told stories of long, twelve-hour days, split shifts "on an invisible leash," and six-day weeks cooped up in "ratty hotels with broken-down beds and cockroaches ... in small towns with people who had more keys to your room than you did."

Dancers were customarily paid in cash; they ear-marked a standard ten per cent of their earnings for their booking agent and, on occasion, paid fines to club owners for minor infractions such as showing up late or skipping a gig without adequate notice. Some like Val managed money wisely — saved it, got investment advice, and left the business after three years — and later secured a real estate licence. Others like Michelle had a tougher time: "I was raised Catholic, so it was like, you gotta have savings, but I had no money management skills whatsoever. When I retired, I pissed it all away on living for a year and a half, and on love. A dollar was like a penny to me. I could piss away money faster than anything ... that career did not set me up for being good with money."

The amount of pay, the quality of dressing room and performance space, lighting and music, food services, accommodation, promotion, and treatment by management and staff, depended on the nightclub. Headliners could clear \$2000 a week, placing them in an economic position of superiority compared to women in any other occupation, but these were the privileged few. Stratified on a scale from high end to low end, Vancouver nightclubs varied greatly in the downtown core: booking agents in the late 1960s graded "their girls" as A, B, or C, and slotted them into the corresponding clubs. Upon retiring from the scene in Vancouver in 1975, Val, who often felt like a counselor and "the one bright thing" in her customers' lives, received a "solid silver tea service from the gentlemen, the skid row types" who were her regulars.

Some occupational hazards were unique to the business; others were common to female-dominated service work. Val and Michelle recall fears of carrying around wads of cash at the end of the night. Jack Card tells the story of Las Vegas show

123 (February 1986), 26-29; Kim Derko, "A High-Heeled Point of View," *Independent Eye*, 12 (Spring/Summer 1991), 1-8; Sasha, "Taking It Off is One Thing...", *Globe and Mail*, 22 January 2000, A15; Merri Lisa Johnson, "Pole Work: Autoethnography of a Strip Club," in Barry Dank and Roberto Refinetti, eds., *Sex Work and Sex Workers*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey 1999), 149-58.

girls in the 1950s running out at rehearsal breaks to get silicone injected directly into their breasts prior to the invention of implants. Diane Middlebrook, author of *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton*, quotes a male nightclub goer who recalls that in the 1960s across the US, "guys would try to scrub out cigarettes or cigars on a stripper. Entice her over, use a cigarette to burn her leg, sometimes try to light their silken gowns on fire. I know one girl was burned to death when that happened, and many strippers carried burns on their bodies."⁶⁴ In future interviews with male patrons of Vancouver nightclubs, we will probe their reasons for attending strip shows, their perceptions of the business, and their relationships to the women on stage. Their very presence inside striptease venues was critical to the amount and quality of work available to erotic dancers. I suspect that the discourse "boys will be boys" offered male customers not only justification for a raunchy night out, but confirmation of their manliness, which was ratcheted up by "Hockey Night in Canada" broadcasts that began to fill TV screens inside stripclubs in the 1970s.

One male narrator who booked strippers for fraternity house parties on the campus of the University of British Columbia in the 1950s recalled that "college boys could be monsters." One evening, he escorted a dancer to a campus stag only to rescue her from "an ugly scene," and then "drove her home along back alleys, with the headlights out, in order to lose crazy kids who were following us."⁶⁵ Two dancers told stories about club owners offering cocaine to underage prospects as a recruitment ploy, and all of the dancers recalled the low-grade, lewd heckling from male customers. At the most extreme end of the spectrum, former booking agent Jeannie Reynolds was called to the Vancouver city morgue to identify the bodies of two strippers who had been murdered in downtown Vancouver nightclubs in the late 1960s.

Regardless of the venue, none of the former dancers had access to vacation pay, sick leave, disability leave, or pension plans. On the unionization front, in Vancouver in 1967, three "topless dancers" staged a two-night picket at a local nightclub.⁶⁶ They demanded higher wages, staff privileges, and a dressing room heater. They expressed the desire to organize dancers at six other nightclubs, though as far as we know, dancers never certified in Vancouver. In Toronto, the Canadian Association of Burlesque Entertainers (CABE) was a local of the Canadian Labour Congress in the 1970s, though it did not survive long, nor did the American Guild of Variety Artists, which represented sex performers in central Canada until the early 1970s.⁶⁷ Former dancer Barbara noted that waves of union agitation in

⁶⁴Dianne Wood Middlebrook, *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton* (Boston 1998), 221.

⁶⁵Interview with George P., 17 June 2000.

⁶⁶"Picket Still On - Three Dancers," *Vancouver Sun*, 18 October 1967, "Dancers End Picket at Club: Deal Reached," *Vancouver Sun*, 19 October 1967.

⁶⁷For more on efforts to unionize, see Amber Cooke, "Stripping: Who Calls the Tune?" and Mary Johnson, "CABE and Strippers: A Delicate Union," both in Laurie Bell, ed., *Good Girls/Bad Girls: Sex Trade Workers and Feminists Face to Face* (Toronto 1987), 92-9, 109-13.

Vancouver throughout the 1970s and 1980s often corresponded with times of economic affluence in the city, though club owners and booking agents consistently and fervently opposed the labour agitation. Additionally, Barbara recalled the competitive conditions under which dancers secured paying gigs, the lack of pro-union consciousness among the women, and the need for dancers to tour, all of which impeded worker solidarity and thwarted unionization. Stripteasers were migrant labourers whose travel and performance schedules were similar to those of employees of the Ice Capades, Barnam & Bailey's circus, and the National Hockey League. All of these "show biz folks" were contracted to move about from town to town, they had relatively short careers as entertainers, they typically rehearsed during the day and performed at night, and their vocations demanded top physical conditioning. However, unlike professional skaters, jugglers, and hockey players, stripteasers *explicitly* sold sexual allure and teetered on the edge of legality, which likely confounded efforts to attract union backing.

On occasion in postwar Vancouver, erotic dancers supplemented their nightclub earnings by modeling, movie work, all-male stag events (which date back to the late 1800s), magazine work, and legitimate dance in chorus lines and with jazz troupes. In the 1960s, a number of Vancouver-based strippers were hired to perform a fifteen-minute act between porn reels on the stage of the Chinese-owned Venus movie house on Main Street, at the edge of Chinatown. I suspect that a small percentage of former strippers combined striptease with prostitution, though no one has disclosed their involvement in the exchange of sex for money. Instead, several dancers emphasized their careers as artists, and either implicitly or explicitly set themselves apart from 'no-talent' prostitutes, which is an important division to flesh out further.

(Un)dressing For Success

Under the rubric of striptease as production and consumption of spectacle, we turn our attention to the nature of the performances themselves — the artistic, cultural, aesthetic, and musical traditions that influenced dancers and choreographers. According to former stripper Margaret Dragu, "Burlesque queens of the 1920s through 1940s possessed trunkloads of vaudeville-style costumes replete with long gloves, stockings with garters, gowns with sequins, ostrich plumes, marabou trim, and rhinestone studded chiffon. They were the last purveyors of the classic bump and grind."⁶⁸ In the 1930s, recalls Italian American burlesque queen Ann Corio, some women disrobed on stage behind a screen or a white shadowgraph, while others alternately covered and "flashed" their flesh by manipulating artful props or peekaboo devices: a sheer body leotard (with strategically-placed sequins), the panel dress, feathers, parasols, fans, banana skirts, Spanish shawls, pasties, netting,

⁶⁸Margaret Dragu, *Revelations: Essays on Striptease and Sexuality* (London, Ontario 1988), 24.

veils, smoke and bubble machines, body makeup, and g-strings.⁶⁹ The g-string, Corio observed, "was a tiny jewel-like bauble on a string around the waist covering up its specific subject."⁷⁰ In Vancouver, as elsewhere, the "A-class" feature dancers invested a considerable percentage of their earnings in costumes, props, expensive make-up, and, by the 1970s, taped music. They also combined elements of pantomime, magic, puppetry, theatre, gymnastics, comedy, and dance training.

Jack Card, a well-known choreographer who was born in Vancouver, and worked the West Coast wheel, remembers that every dancer had a gimmick: at "Isy's Supper Club, strippers worked with live doves or did fire shows, Yvette Dare trained a parrot to pluck her clothes off, another stripper was a magician, Jane Jones had a tiger in her act, another dancer sat on an electric trapeze and stripped while swinging." Stage names were invented: some of the most popular headliners who performed for years in Vancouver included Miss Lovie, April Paris, Suzanne Vegas, Marilyn Marquis, Lilly Marlene, Bonnie Scott, and Lottie the Body.

Regardless of how much nudity was allowed, or required (by the early 1970s), female bodies were expected to conform to male-defined standards of female sexiness: pretty face, medium to large breasts, long, shapely legs, small waist, long hair. "Bombshells" like Annie Ample, Morganna, and Chesty Morgan had legendary breast sizes; Mitzi Dupré was a super-feature who sprayed ping pong balls and played a flute with her vagina.⁷¹ According to Michelle, when Mitzi was on stage, she had people laughing in stitches while they played mock baseball games with the flying ping pong balls. For almost nine years, Bonnie Scott perfected her show-stopping extravaganza in Vancouver and across the country: on stage, under pink lights, she stripped off her super-deluxe, twelve-hundred dollar beaded gown (designed by Clyde), climbed a wrought-iron ladder, and once inside her five-foot tall, plexiglass champagne flute, she struck sexy poses amidst the bubbles.

Jack Card worked and travelled with headliner Gypsy Rose Lee who performed in Vancouver and, more regularly, in the extravagant Las Vegas revues where each of her costumes carried a \$5,000 price tag. Underneath the sequined gowns and furs, in addition to jeweled pasties and g-strings (which were often worn layered over one another), rhinestone clips were popular in the 1950s and 1960s: v-shaped and glittery, they fitted over the pubic area, were made of sprung steel, and inserted into the vagina. In Montréal in 1951, Lili St. Cyr was arrested and subjected to a trial for "giving an obscene performance," and arrested again in 1967

⁶⁹ Corio with Joseph DiMona, *This Was Burlesque*, 71-6. Corio, who was believed to be in her eighties, died on 1 March 1999. See Lawrence Van Gelder, "Ann Corio, a Burlesque Queen on Broadway, Is Dead," *New York Times*, 9 March 1999, C27.

⁷⁰ Corio with DiMona, *This Was Burlesque*, 76.

⁷¹ In a fascinating article, Kristina Zarlengo characterizes the "bombshell" as a "deeply desirable, unattainable woman with an inflated body and intense sexuality - a steadfast atomic age feminine ideal...who represented raw power of a kind frequently associated with the atom bomb." See Zarlengo, "Civilian Threat, the Suburban Citadel, and Atomic Age American Women," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 25 (Fall 1999), 946.

before tourists arrived for Expo.⁷² Perhaps because of St. Cyr's brush with the law, dancers in Montréal in the 1960s were known to wear "muckettes" — patches of artificial pubic hair glued to the pubic region in order to avoid arrest for indecency, all the while perpetuating the illusion of nudity.

The Colonial Carnavalesque Under Big Tents

Lured by the promise of a 20-week season and a steady pay cheque, many burlesque dancers packed their trunks and joined the traveling exhibition or carnival, often in the twilight of their career. *Girl Shows* had become staples of the touring carnival and circus across North America, beginning after the Chicago Columbia Exhibition in 1893.⁷³ Alongside the merry-go-rounds, arcades, shooting galleries, and side-shows spotlighting bearded ladies, alligator-skinned boys, and "midgits," strip-teasers were main features.⁷⁴ Borrowing from big revues like the Ziegfeld Follies, carnival showmen added "spice and less wardrobe" to give their tent-shows more edge than downtown cabaret acts.⁷⁵ While other show girls paraded their (hetero) femininity by baking cakes in competition, or strutting their stuff as beauty pageant contestants vying for the crown of Miss Pacific National Exhibition (PNE), strippers on carnival stages sang, danced, told jokes, and shed their elaborate costumes.⁷⁶

In the 1950s in Vancouver, impresario Isy Walters, who owned the Cave Supper Club, and later, Isy's Supper Club, also booked strip acts at the PNE. Isy's Black Tent Show,⁷⁷ which was next door to his White Tent Show, invited patrons to pass between the legs of a 50-foot plywood cut-out of a black burlesque dancer at the tent's entrance on the fairgrounds. As Jack Card recalls, inside the neon-lit tent, the talker introduced: "The African Queen, DIRECT from the jungles of

⁷²Murray Campbell, "Memories of Montreal's Skin Queen," *Globe and Mail*, 3 February 1999, A3.

⁷³According to A.W. Stencell, *Girl Show: Into the Canvas World of Bump and Grind* (Toronto 1999), in the 1860s it was said that in the various saloons and parlors, girls pretending to be can-can dancers, as practised in Parisian cabarets in Montmartre and Montparnasse, would do private dances without clothes for a dollar. (4)

⁷⁴See Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago 1988). For her inspiration, I am grateful to Helen Humphreys whose historical research for her prize-winning novel, *Leaving Earth* (Toronto 1997), 96 turned up evidence of women stripping underwater on the fairgrounds of the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto in the 1930s.

⁷⁵Stencell, *Girl Show*, 13.

⁷⁶Candace Savage tackles the world of beauty pageants in *Beauty Queens: A Playful History* (New York 1998).

⁷⁷In the US, the "black show" was typically referred to as the "Nig Show." See Carolyn Strange and Tina Loo, "Spectacular Justice: The Circus on Trial and the Trial as Circus, Picton, 1903," *Canadian Historical Review*, 77 (June 1996), 159-84.

Africa', and behind her there'd be Nubian slave girls in chains, a bumping and a thumping." Here, the colonial trope of African primitivism, bound up with the imperialist custom (and fantasy) of captivity, was remade as titillating foreignness at the same time, and in the same city, that African-American singer Lena Horne was refused hotel accommodation for "being a Negro." A decade later in Vancouver, Hogan's Alley — the city's working-class African-Canadian enclave — was bulldozed into the ground.⁷⁸ Significantly, the discourse of burlesque under the Big Tent was never about sex alone. It was tangled up with the economic, cultural and political privileges of a white body politic.⁷⁹

The racist, colonial trappings of the business of striptease were no accident. In 1815, Saartjie Baartman, a west African woman was captured and displayed, fully nude, across England and Europe, as a wanton, orangutan-like, freak of nature.⁸⁰ In circuses and carnivals across North America throughout the 1900s, black performers who were paid consistently less than their white counterparts, were routinely consigned to the role of cannibals, "Zulu warriors," bushmen, and bear-women from the darkest Africa.⁸¹ In addition, for more than a century, some white burlesque dancers disguised themselves as Algerian, Egyptian, Hawaiian, or Arabian in an effort to feed white appetites for the exotic, what Mary Douglas calls "radical strangeness."⁸²

Gawking at dancers of colour and white women who impersonated the Other, white consumers were reassured of their own normality and cultural dominance; social boundaries between spectators and performers, the civilized and the uncivilized, were conserved, and the near homogeneity of Anglo, postwar Vancouver, affirmed. Pre-existing racial and gender stereotypes were animated in the interests of carnies or showmen smartly fluent in the common-sense, naturalized precepts of mass entertainment. The speech of the talker, the colourful images on the bally front, and the handbills advertising the event, were rooted in a racial, gender, and class grammar that distinguished native instinct from white self-discipline, and native lust from white civility.⁸³

Josephine Baker (Figures 1 and 1a), (1906-1976), an African-American born poor in St. Louis, escaped in 1925 to work as a burlesque performer in France, and

⁷⁸ See "Hogan's Alley," directed by Andrea Fatona and Cornelia Wyngarten, 1994. Distributed by Video Out, Vancouver.

⁷⁹ See Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham and London 1997), 190.

⁸⁰ Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race and Madness* (Ithaca 1985), Anne Fausto-Sterling, "Gender, Race and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of 'Hottentot' Women in Europe, 1815-1817," in Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, eds., *Deviant Bodies*, (Bloomington 1995), 19-48.

⁸¹ Strange and Loo, "Spectacular Justice," 179-80.

⁸² Mary Douglas, "My Circus Fieldwork," *Semiotica*, 85 (1985), 201-4.

⁸³ See Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire*, 178-179.



Figure 1: Josephine Baker



Figure 1a: Josephine Baker

later appeared in Vancouver in the 1950s. Cast in the show, “La Revue Negre” as a “tribal, uncivilized savage” from a prehistoric era, hence consigned to “anachronistic space,” Baker was rendered intelligible and digestible to white Parisian voyeurs.⁸⁴ Narrating the fantasy of the jungle bunny — the oversexed object of both white European fascination and repulsion — she danced in banana skirt and

⁸⁴For an illuminating discussion of anachronistic space, see Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York 1995), 40.

feathers. And in other shows, straight out of the racist minstrel tradition, "she was a ragamuffin in black face wearing bright cotton smocks and clown shoes." Importantly, Baker also initiated desegregation in Las Vegas nightclubs in the 1950s by being the first dancer to refuse to perform for a white-only audience.⁸⁵

Racism in burlesque and striptease played out in myriad ways. In the US in 1956, Princess Do May — "the Cherokee Half Breed" (figure 2) — was photographed in full feather headdress, beaded headband, and a (sacred) drum, freeze-framed in time and space anachronistically as an Indian artefact displaced from community and territory, and repositioned against an untouched, untamed wilderness ripe for conquest.⁸⁶ A picture of condensed and standardized symbols of Indianness, and of imperialism as commodity spectacle, she served to make invisible the multiple identities and multiple interests of diverse first nations.⁸⁷ All colonial histories of slaughter and subjugation are absented in this rendition of the myth of the noble savage. The Princess, and not her degenerate sister — "the drunken, broken-down, and diseased squaw" — was employed in burlesque to excite the sexual imagination of white men who engineered Euro-Canadian and Euro-American expansion, settlement, and industry on the frontier.⁸⁸

Counterpose this image of Princess Do May against the seductive Lili St. Cyr (figure 3).⁸⁹ The American-born St. Cyr of Swedish/Dutch heritage, spent many famous years in Montréal, beginning in 1944, and was well-known for her on-stage bubble-baths, elaborate props, and her penchant for eccentric story-telling on stage.⁹⁰ The Nordic, voluptuous cowgirl, replete with ten-gallon hat, holster and guns, leather boots and lariat, is equally burdened by a condensation of symbols and metaphors — in this case, those of the conquerors of aboriginal peoples, and the keepers of Euro-Canadian myths of colonial rule. Here, St. Cyr stands in for the brave, heroic, pioneering men and women who have been memorialized as the founding ancestors of the contemporary nation, emblems of national identity, pride, and prosperity. St. Cyr embodies the colonial myth of the rough and tumble Wild West, the promise of abundant resources free for the taking, and the danger of encountering Indians who had never seen a white man or a white woman.⁹¹ Decked

⁸⁵Karen Dalton and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Josephine Baker and Paul Colin: African American Dance Seen through Parisian Eyes," *Critical Inquiry*, 24 (Summer 1998), 911.

⁸⁶Len Rothe, *The Queens of Burlesque: Vintage Photographs from the 1940s and 1950s* (Atglen, Pennsylvania 1997), 29.

⁸⁷McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 56.

⁸⁸Elizabeth Furniss, "Pioneers, Progress and the Myth of the Frontier: The Landscape of Public History in Rural BC," *BC Studies*, 115/116 (Fall/Winter 1997/98), 7-44; Jean Barman, "Taming Aboriginal Sexuality: Gender, Power, and Race in British Columbia, 1850-1900," *BC Studies*, 115/116 (Fall/Winter 1997/98), 237-66.

⁸⁹Rothe, *The Queens of Burlesque*, 97.

⁹⁰William Weintraub, "Show Business: Lili St. Cyr's Town - and Al's and Oscar's," in *City Unique: Montreal Days and Nights in the 1940s and '50s* (Toronto 1996), 116-40.

⁹¹Furniss, "Pioneers, Progress and the Myth of the Frontier," 29.



Figure 2: Princess Do May



Figure 3: Lili St. Cyr

out in traditional cowboy garb, St. Cyr fetishized the triumph of European colonizers, and reminded white men in the audience that force was always at their disposal if they needed or wanted it. At the same time, she sent up the machismo of the Marlboro man.

Hoochie Coochie Queers?

In their 1965 study of women's prisons in the US, Ward and Kassebaum found that a "disproportionate number" of strippers (and models) were likely to be homosexuals.⁹² In 1969, American sociologists James Skipper and Charles McCaghy interviewed thirty-five "exotic dancers" who informed them that approximately 50 per cent of their colleagues engaged in either prostitution or lesbian activities.⁹³ In 1971, Canadian journalist Marilyn Salutin stated that seventy-five per cent of female strippers were gay.⁹⁴ In his book *Girl Show: Into the Canvas World of Bump and Grind*, A.W. Stencell claims that, "Gays were often found in 10-in-1 side shows doing the half-man/half-woman act and working in drag on carnival girl shows. Many of the dancers who worked gay cabarets during the winter went with carnival shows in the summer ... it was a safe world where you were judged only on the job you did."⁹⁵

In my "Striptease Project," I have learned that gay dancers and choreographers, make-up artists, prop-makers, costume designers, wig-makers, and customers, found a home in the business.⁹⁶ According to Jack Card, some of the most beautiful showgirls he knew were gay, as were the dancing boys with their bare chests and false eyelashes. Former erotic dancers Maud Allan, Josephine Baker, Gypsy Rose Lee, and Tempest Storm are rumoured to have had women lovers. In 1958, renowned lesbian historian Lillian Faderman began stripping in California clubs to defray the costs of attending college. In 1998 at a queer history conference in Tacoma, Washington, Faderman mused publicly about the shame that closeted her bumping and grinding for forty years.

⁹²David Ward and Gene Kassebaum, *Women's Prison: Sex and Social Structure* (Chicago 1965).

⁹³James Skipper and Charles McCaghy, "Stripteasing: A Sex-Oriented Occupation," in James Henslin, ed., *Studies in the Sociology of Sex* (New York 1971), 283.

⁹⁴Marilyn Salutin, "Stripper Morality," *Transaction* 8 (1971), 12-22.

⁹⁵Stencell, *Girl Show*, 95.

⁹⁶African-American jazz singer, Teri Thornton, who died in May 2000 of cancer, found work as the intermission pianist for strippers at the Red Garter nightclub in Chicago in the 1950s. She performed in Vancouver at Isy's Supper Club in January 1967, though it's not clear whether or not she accompanied strippers at that gig. In Ben Ratliff's obituary in the *Globe and Mail*, "Singer was a favourite of Ella Fitzgerald," there is no mention of Thornton's sexuality, which suggests that she may have been gay. 8 May 2000, R6.

If stripteasers identified as gay women, what relationship (if any) did they develop to Vancouver's butch and femme bar culture?⁹⁷ Kennedy and Davis reveal that in the 1940s and 1950s, femmes in Buffalo, New York typically had steady paid employment while their butch lovers struggled with long stretches of unsteady, sporadic labour and financial uncertainty as car jockeys, elevator operators, and couriers.⁹⁸ What we don't yet know is: did the wages of femmes in g-strings subsidize the earnings of their butch lovers? Given the tendency of butches to bind their breasts, wear men's clothing, and spurn feminine artifice, was striptease a primarily femme occupational category?

Almost twenty years before the invention of "Xena: Warrior Princess" on prime-time TV, Klute — a butch lesbian in disguise — successfully reworked themes from "Conan the Barbarian" as an s/m dominatrix, and played with the fantasies of men who longed to be topped. As she recalled, she never fit the "high femme, mega-feature look." Instead, she played with gender ambiguity by adopting the personae of Michael Jackson and Grace Jones on stage until she was ostracized for being "too dykey." Notwithstanding Klute's impressive transgression, we suspect that butches were principally spectators who sought out striptease as exciting, titillating entertainment wherever it was staged; femme spectators likely balanced the opportunity to be mentored with pangs of envy. It is also probable that queer female customers in gay pubs that staged striptease — the Vanport and the New Fountain — were working-class gay girls who were less invested in the rigours of respectability than their middle-class, professional sisters.⁹⁹

In 1962, American jazz musician Billy Tipton — a biological female who passed successfully as a man all his adult life — "married" Kitty Kelly, a well-known stripper.¹⁰⁰ Because striptease demanded public display of exaggerated hetero-femininity, Kitty's occupation surely enhanced Billy's masquerade as a red-blooded heterosexual male. And what about male-to-female transgenders who successfully passed on stage in the 1950s and 1960s as ultra-feminine, sexy girls in full view of adoring (straight?) male fans? Transsexual burlesque stripper, Hedy Jo Star not only performed her own striptease act, but she owned carnival girl shows where she employed female impersonators in the 1950s.¹⁰¹ Jaydee Easton, a female

⁹⁷On butch and femme culture in Vancouver in the 1950s and 1960s, see Vanessa Cosco, "Obviously Then I'm Not Heterosexual: Lesbian Identities, Discretion, and Communities," M.A. Thesis, Department of History, University of British Columbia, 1997; and "Forbidden Love: the Unashamed Stories of Lesbian Lives," dir. Acelyn Weissman and Lynne Fernie, National Film Board of Canada, 1992.

⁹⁸Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York 1993), 278-322.

⁹⁹Katie Gilmartin, "'We Weren't Bar People': Middle-Class Lesbian Identities and Cultural Spaces," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian & Gay Studies*, 3 (1996), 1-51.

¹⁰⁰Middlebrook, *Suits Me: The Double Life of Billy Tipton*, 220-32.

¹⁰¹Stencell, *Girl Show*, 92.

impersonator in the 1950s, flashed in drag by looping her penis with an elastic band, attaching it to a small rubber ball, and inserting it into her anus.¹⁰² Other female impersonators such as Jackie Starr, most of whom were gay men, performed in straight nightclubs and in gay cabarets such as Seattle's famous Garden of Allah until the 1970s when full nudity in stripclubs made drag virtually impossible.¹⁰³ Jackie Starr replaced an ill Gypsy Rose Lee several times on music hall stages in New York in the 1940s, and was the top headliner at the Garden of Allah for ten years.

The presence of queers on and off striptease stages troubles the naturalized presumption that nightclubs and carnivals were indisputably straight milieux. Acting out moments of what Judith Butler calls "insurrectionary queerness"¹⁰⁴ inside cabarets, stripclubs, and under big tents, queer stripteasers, staff, and fans interrupted the heterosexual imperative. What is not yet apparent to us is the complexity of queer relationships to the closet, as well as to communities beyond the borders of the nightclub world. Given the criminalization of homosexuality prior to 1969, combined with the stigmatization of striptease, we suspect that most queers in the business prior to gay liberation in the 1970s sought the same subterfuge that sheltered Hollywood he-man Rock Hudson for so long.

The Imbrication of Sex and Nation

In the end, a fundamental paradox governed the business of erotic entertainment before 1980, and arguably still does today. On the one hand, stripteasers were, in the main, well-paid, glamorous entertainers who, as working-class women with limited employment options, stripped first for the money. The women we've interviewed took pride in putting on a good show, they loved the applause, and the challenge of developing new routines, costumes, and props. On the other hand, they were subjected to criminal and social sanctions that pressured them to be ashamed of their work, to pretend that they did something else for a living, or to abandon their careers as dancers altogether. Their skills and expertise, their dedication, flare, and originality as workers, were overshadowed, if not entirely discounted, by moral reformers, police, and civic officials who, at various times and for a variety of purposes, were in the business of scapegoating non-conformists. While professional female dancers in ballet, modern, and jazz increasingly inspired awe and veneration in the second half of the 20th century, stripteasers were consigned to the interstices between adoration and attention, and fear, resentment, and hostility.

It seems clear that female erotic dancers did not qualify as full-fledged citizens dedicated to the ideal family, the social order, and the health of the Canadian

¹⁰² Stencell, *Girl Show*, 93.

¹⁰³ Don Paulson with Roger Simpson, *An Evening at the Garden of Allah: Seattle's Gay Cabaret* (New York 1996), 127-34.

¹⁰⁴ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech*, 159.

nation.¹⁰⁵ Perceived by many as no better than disgraced whores who haunted the quasi-legal underworld in postwar Vancouver, dancers were positioned outside of discourses that elaborated what it meant to be a normal, moral, and patriotic citizen. As a result, they could never take for granted the fundamental constituents of substantive citizenship such as inclusion, belonging, equity, and justice.¹⁰⁶ Like prostitutes and other sex trade workers, in an era of suburbanized, privatized domesticity, and marital nuclearity, erotic dancers were presumed to be devoid of real jobs, families, and meaningful, intimate relationships.¹⁰⁷ No dancer raising children, especially if she was non-white, was ever honoured for her role as mother and moral guardian of "the race." Because strippers were commonly perceived as anti-family, they were presumed to possess no maternal honour worth protecting. Rather than being extended dignity, security, and safety, their family forms were stigmatized as a menace to the stability of the nation state.¹⁰⁸ Two retired dancers we interviewed who balanced child-rearing and their careers as strippers recall the painful judgment of other parents, day care workers, coaches, and teachers who disapproved of their chosen field of work. In her autobiography, *Growing Up Naked*, Lindalee Tracey describes her desire to donate the proceeds from a large-scale strip-a-thon ("Tits for Tots") in Montréal to a charity for disabled kids, and the rejections she faced from agencies which explained they had "reputations" to uphold.¹⁰⁹

In 2000, all across North America, the paradox persists. More money is spent at stripclubs than at large-scale commercial theatres, regional and non-profit theatres, the opera, the ballet, jazz, and classical music performances — combined.¹¹⁰ In the US, the number of strip clubs has doubled in the past decade, with the fastest growth in upscale "Gentlemen's Clubs" which have reframed striptease as adult entertainment that upholds the highest standards of the hospitality industry. Over the past decade, Canada's Immigration Department has granted thousands of temporary six-month work permits to women from Romania, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, to serve Canada's burgeoning stripclub business as "bur-

¹⁰⁵David Scott, *Behind the G-String* (Jefferson, North Carolina 1996), 12.

¹⁰⁶See Jeffrey Weeks, "The Sexual Citizen," *Theory, Culture and Society*, 15 (August/November 1998), 35-9.

¹⁰⁷On the post-World War II era, see Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto 1997); Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto 1996); Joan Sangster, "Doing Two Jobs: The Wage-Earner Mother, 1945-1970," in Joy Parr, ed., *Diversity of Women, Ontario 1945-1980* (Toronto 1995), 98-134; and Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia 1994).

¹⁰⁸Nora Räthzel, "Nationalism and Gender in West Europe: the German Case," in Helma Lutz et al., ed., *Crossfires: Nationalism, Racism and Gender in Europe* (London 1995), 168.

¹⁰⁹Tracey, *Growing Up Naked*, 163.

¹¹⁰Eric Schlosser, "The Business of Pornography," *U.S. News and World Report*, 10 February 1997, 44.

lesque entertainers."¹¹¹ At the same time, striptease continues to be a lightning rod for cultural/legal and political conflicts all over North America.¹¹² Unresolved debates swirl around the legal and moral character of lap dancing, peep shows, live sex acts on stage, the physical location of "exotic dance," and nightclubs as venues for prostitution.

Community groups and politicians have staged protests to keep stripclubs out of their lives and neighbourhoods. Susan Marshall, Executive Director of Safe Neighborhoods, in Portland, Oregon, claims that, "Obscene speech, nude dancing, and hard core violent pornography serve no social purpose."¹¹³ Residents all over North America have lobbied for stepped-up patrolling of stripping activities and surveillance. In a move that conjures up Foucault's panopticon, police in the US routinely install cameras in clubs and dressing rooms to record criminal activity — a move that engenders hyper self-consciousness and self-discipline among dancers.¹¹⁴ At the same time, cameras positioned inside the performance space electronically transmit live strip shows to viewers via the Internet, a move that satisfies the needs of at-home consumers, blurs public and private boundaries, and deposits little or no extra cash in the hands of working women.

In 1996, New York mayor Rudy Guiliani called erotic dancing, "a dirty, vicious business ... [where one] finds the exploitation of sex that has lead to the deterioration of New York and places throughout the US." Defending his clean-up campaign, Guiliani argued: "If people express themselves in ways that destroy property values, increase crime, bring in organized crime and start to destroy a city, then you have to have the discretion to do something about it." Like Guiliani, Jerry Elsner, Executive Director of the Illinois Crime Centre, loathes the behaviour of strip club patrons: "A certain element of people go night after night after night, buy porn when they leave, then go home and hide in the basement and watch dirty movies all night. They're a threat to everybody in our community; they tend to congregate at watering holes — this is where the action is, where their friends and peers are at. One degenerate in the neighbourhood is bad; two hundred is real bad."¹¹⁵

The combination of old-fashioned police pressure, residents' associations dedicated to protecting property and family values, media sensationalism, and the manipulation of zoning ordinances, has meant heated attacks on stripclub culture, with sobering results. Since 1993, striptease has been the number one topic of Free Speech litigation in the US.¹¹⁶ According to anthropologist Judith Lynne Hanna,

¹¹¹ Estanislaw Oziewicz, "Canada's Bare Essentials," *Globe and Mail*, 19 February 2000.

¹¹² Judith Lynne Hanna, "Undressing the First Amendment and Corsetting the Striptease Dancer," *The Drama Review*, 42 (Summer 1998), 62.

¹¹³ "Gentlemen's Clubs," A & E Documentary, 1996.

¹¹⁴ For more on techniques, practices and mentalities of self-governance see Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Soul: The Shaping of the Private Self* (London 1990).

¹¹⁵ "Gentlemen's Clubs," A & E Documentary, 1996.

¹¹⁶ Clyde DeWitt, "Legal Commentary," *Adult Video News* (1995), 112-127.

over sixty-two communities across North America have enacted laws to restrict striptease, including Seattle, Tacoma, Fort Lauderdale, Syracuse, and Phoenix. New laws continually resurface.¹¹⁷ Only time will tell whether or not similar, discriminatory prohibitions will be invoked to control (or obliterate) erotic dancing in Vancouver, or any other Canadian city. So long as stripper bodies conjure up popular associations of worthless, diseased, lazy, drug-addicted, oversexed, dangerous, and unCanadian bodies, the erotic labour performed by dancers, past and present, will never be appreciated *as labour*: it will be forever figured as something else.¹¹⁸ And age-old struggles by dancers for improved working conditions, union certification, and destigmatization of their artform will continue in the absence of a titanic transformation in the cultural meanings attached to bump and grind.

This research is generously supported by a three-year SSHRC grant, 1999-2002. I am pleased to acknowledge the excellent research assistance of Kim Greenwell and Michelle Swann, both of whom have made a commitment to the "Striptease Project" well above and beyond the terms of their employment contract. My sincere thanks to all the women and men who we've interviewed so far, and whose plentiful stories impel us to keep going. I also thank Bryan Palmer for inviting me to contribute to Labour/Le Travail. And I am grateful for the loving ways and incisor-sharp mind of Tracy Porteous.

¹¹⁷ Judith Lynne Hanna, "Undressing the First Amendment," 40-1.

¹¹⁸ Recent articles in the *Vancouver Sun*, 10 June 2000, and *Globe and Mail*, 12 June 2000, that publicized my SSHRC grant, and my search for retired business insiders, catalyzed an international media feeding frenzy. The *Globe and Mail* article by Dene Moore at Canadian Press was printed in newspapers all across Canada, as well as in the *Bangkok Post* and *The Arab Times*. Radio, TV, and print journalists from England, Scotland, Australia, Germany, South Africa, the US, and Canada contacted me to justify my spending of "taxpayers' dollars" on "studying strippers." On several talk-radio shows in Toronto and Vancouver, I was attacked by successive callers incensed that the government would "waste their money" on such a "useless, disgusting project." Several male callers barked that a history of BC logging or mining was far more constructive. Though erotic dancers paid personal income tax and sales tax, and some bought Canada Savings Bonds, and later, RRSPs, they were automatically disqualified from national conversations about the allocation of state resources, which again underscores their lack of claim to substantive citizenship. Three weeks of media-heat confirmed my suspicion that, in the eyes of the majority, the impressive, century-long contribution of stripteasers to local economies and performance traditions is anything but deserving of state-supported study.