

EMBRACING THE WHORE: DESTIGMATIZING SEX AND DANCE

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ABSTRACT

Dance has long been conflated with sensuality and sex. The act of dancing can incite intimacy and ecstasy, communion and liberation. This power has historically been vilified and restricted in the name of colonization and Christianity. Today, dancers are still subject to these associations: naming our profession yields lewd questions about our flexibility, or propositions for a private dance. Male celebrities wear ballerinas on their arms like trophies, with the implication of a vivacious sexual relationship widely understood and applauded. Rather than trying to distance the art of dance from the practice of selling sex, I propose we embrace our erotic history and instead focus our efforts on erasing the stigma surrounding sexual labor. With all the pleasures and dangers these vocations share—attractiveness, authenticity, vulnerability, exploitation—it is in our best interests to embrace the dancer's whore status and demand better conditions for all who make their way through the world with their bodily delights.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
DANCE	3
SEX	12
THE DANCE IN SEX; THE SEX IN DANCE.....	19
WORKS CITED	22

INTRODUCTION

Ask a child what they want to be when they grow up: they will tell you who they dream of becoming, not how they want to make money. This is why my answer was always something in the field of dance. I knew I loved everything about it, and I saw adults who built a life around performing or teaching or choreographing. What could be better? With age, I grew to understand the nuances of the industry and the challenges associated with pursuing dance as a profession. My commitment to the dream rarely faltered, despite being tested by internal and external forces. I was told I didn't have the body or the talent, and even if I did, the chances of making it in the industry were slim. I persisted, dedicating my undergraduate studies to the craft of dance. After graduating, I learned that definitions of "making it" are varied, and even those who had landed the most sought after positions were struggling both emotionally and financially. How could this be? I felt disillusioned and depressed, but couldn't conceive of a world where I gave up on dance. I worked straight jobs to support myself while continuing to assert myself as an artist, but felt burnt out from the hustle. In a period of decreased employment I turned to creating sex-based content for online distribution, an avenue for supplemental income that could give me the flexibility to take care of my mental and physical health while pursuing my less lucrative dance career. I found it both uncomfortable and exciting, and in many ways the content I created felt adjacent to my dance work. Executing movements and performing state changes for an audience was something I was all too familiar with; now I was just catering to a somewhat different gaze.

The experience got me thinking about just how similar these industries were—both dance and sex work demanded a performance of authenticity and vulnerability in demonstrating a certain physical prowess, all while appearing attractive enough to meet the cultural beauty standards that would deem the act commodifiable. I saw that performers in both industries were largely responsible for creating the product, but in so many cases saw the smallest cut of the profits. It was around this time that the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act (SESTA) and the Fight Online Sex Trafficking Act (FOSTA) were being passed, and I became frustrated that more civilians weren't enraged at these conservatives and lawmakers conspiring to infringe on everyone's internet freedoms under the guise of protecting children. I wished for a way to demonstrate that sex work was a job like any other, and that any consenting adult should be able to engage in it safely without persecution. Thus sparked a learning journey that has culminated in this research, and it is my hope that readers who engage with it will grow their understanding of economies outside the mainstream. If it is possible to find common ground for all workers existing on the margins, we might then be able to stand together and demand the protections we require to not only survive but thrive in our fields.

DANCE

I want to begin with dance. It's where I have the most lived experience, and where I expect many of my readers are coming from. The demands of working in the dance industry are substantial, and almost no one I know makes their living entirely from dance. It's a miracle any of us still do it, but for some dancing is like breathing so we weather the storm. Let's first look at what's instilled in us as young dancers. In the North American euro-centric private studio, whether it be competition or recreation, a great deal of emphasis is placed upon physical appearance. Girls are expected to be thin and graceful, and boys strong and powerful. Children are sent on stage to perform in heavy makeup and revealing costumes, emulating a degree of maturity that points to abilities beyond their years. We are told we have to work hard while we are young, that all opportunities for growth expire in adulthood, and with them our chances of being successful dancers. Those who survive that pressure cooker pre-professional environment with their passion for dance intact go on to pursue professional work, and find that we are still reduced to our looks. For a job that is theoretically based around technical skill, attractiveness plays a major role in the employability of a dancer. In "Preferences for perceived attractiveness in modern dance," a study published by the Journal of Cultural Economics, Rachel Lau and Brooke Krause write of this phenomenon:

"The choices of casting directors are, somewhat naturally, in part a reflection of the preferences of audience members, the consumers of the dance production. To a great extent, people's first impression

of others is dependent on visible characteristics. Regardless of whether they are conscious of it, people can place value judgements on others' physical attractiveness. These judgements of attractiveness, positive or negative, can affect people's behaviors, including their consumption decisions. If the preferences of audience members lend themselves to favor attractive dancers, casting directors may choose dancers based partially on attractiveness; if the audience does not want to see unattractive dancers on stage, casting directors may not place them on stage." (Lau et al, 484)

The report goes on to detail their procedures for conducting the study; while their methods are thorough, they fail to disclose the ways in which the two dancers being viewed by participants differ in appearance. Of course, determining the physical attributes that various audiences find attractive is beyond the scope of this study, but I can't help but wonder how this impacted the results. Nevertheless, their findings indicate there is positive correlation between a dancer's perceived attractiveness and the audience's willingness to pay to see them perform, and even more so with their interest in seeing another performance. Ultimately, the industry of dance placing such importance on dancers' attractiveness is an economic choice. The ramifications of this, however, place a great deal of personal responsibility on the dancer to remain employable. Significant time and money is often invested into eating well, staying active, acquiring flattering clothing and makeup, and a whole host of other beautification processes in the hopes of getting

or keeping one of the few jobs in dance. What this equates to is the expectation that dance workers perform considerable unpaid labor in order to maintain their standing in the field. There are exceptions where dance work accepts or even celebrates non-normative bodies (fat, disabled, Black, trans, old, or otherwise not adhering to dominant cultural ideals of beauty), but that's just what they are—exceptions. Finding consistent work as a dancer all but requires conforming to what directors and choreographers anticipate audiences will reliably pay to see.

Naturally, any venture intended to create capital is seeking to promote the most profitable product. Dance is no different, and so catering to the consumer's idea of attractiveness is good for business. But what else contributes to the lucrateness of dance? If audiences merely wanted to see attractive people, one could simply flip through a magazine full of attractive models or watch a movie featuring attractive actors. Even the desire to witness attractive people in movement can be satiated by a trip to the nearest bar or club. The experience of viewing a dance performance must offer something unique to stand a chance against the vast array of options for consumers. So what makes a live dance performance worth watching? In the second chapter of her 2019 book *Valuing Dance: Commodities and Gifts in Motion*, Susan Leigh Foster seeks to answer a similar line of questioning. She writes:

“To become a commodity, movement must also be spectacularized in some way, that is, it must be pumped up or sensationalized so that it becomes especially striking, marvelous, or alluring.

Typically, this sensationalization of movement is accomplished in one of two ways, both of which are dependent upon culturally

specific conceptions of what the body can and should do:
movement is either pushed to the limits of what is physically
possible, or movement is infused with exotic or sexualized
appeal .” (Foster, 59)

In short, to make dance a viable commodity the movement must be amazing or arousing (or both). It comes as no surprise then that among the highest paid dancers are those who perform on poles in strip clubs, making as much as five thousand dollars in a single night. Executing dazzling feats of athleticism and sensuality in near or total nudity maximizes earning potential for these specialized dance artists. Frankly, it’s amazing to me that Foster hardly acknowledges the way strippers so successfully commodify dancing in a book about dance as commodity. Why is there such a lack of credit given to these forms? The expertise involved in stripping is in no way inferior to that of concert or commercial dance; subordinate cataloging of these practitioners is merely a matter of classism, racism, and whorephobia. Despite the lack of recognition that stripping receives as a legitimate dance form, the nature of so much successful mainstream dance mimics these aesthetics. Across disciplines we see legs being spread wide, mesmerizing spins, and moments of ecstasy performed by dancers clad in costumes designed to display the body adjacent to or mimicking nudity. Anyone wishing to create a dance product that sells well be it commercial or concert likely incorporates these components into a performance, regardless of overall theme or intent.

Beyond the sheer titillation of beholding an attractive person performing the amazing or arousing, there is something bigger that draws audiences to live dance. It’s something I felt as a

kid, sitting in the second row of Chicago's Auditorium Theatre watching the dancers of the Joffrey Ballet. Seeing the sweat flying off their bodies, their accelerated breathing, even their facial expressions cued to me that what I was seeing was entirely real. Humans being human to the fullest extent they could manage from moment to moment. It's this experience of authenticity that can't be replicated by going online to watch a video, hence the premium we pay for tickets to a show. Especially in this age of algorithms and targeted advertisements, a product infused with the authentic has become increasingly valuable. Foster addresses this in the introduction to *Valuing Dance*, writing:

“The marketplace is glutted with goods and services, resulting in a sense that everybody is selling something, and everybody is buying the same thing. There is nothing individual anymore; everything is the same and hence everyone's desire for it is also the same...this has resulted not only in a constant need for new sources of authenticity but also a genuine anomie or cultural malaise around the impossibility of the authentic. Dance, a long-standing and reliable source for the authentic connection between motion and emotion, is now being commandeered as a site for the manufacture of authenticity. (Foster, 6-7)

What dancers in live performance provide for weary audiences is a reprieve from the phony, oversaturated media machine. An evening to silence the notifications and give undivided attention to people who have devoted their lives to this craft can be not only refreshing but

inspiring. Few things compare to leaving a performance with a new idea or outlook, or even questions. This is the ultimate power of dance, and the work that goes into making that kind of impact is too often overlooked. Dance workers make incredible sacrifices for their art, typically training and studying for years before seeing any compensation. Upon reaching the professional level, the pay is rarely a living wage, the hours can be long and late with significant demands on the body and mind, and opportunities are so scarce that I have certainly accepted jobs with artists whose vision I was not aligned with. Despite these challenges, we tend to endure it for the sake of following our passion. This tolerance for unsavory working conditions unfortunately creates opportunities to be exploited by employers, who consider the privilege of doing enjoyable work as part of the compensation package. High-visibility gigs often tout “exposure” as the sole pay, or worse the money promised is never seen by those dancers after all is said and done. An anonymous colleague of mine worked on a music video for a big name in music; after enduring verbal abuse and racist comments from the artist during shooting, the dancers were sent home with the promise of a check that never came. Demanding accountability for wrongdoing in these instances of dancers being taken advantage of is rare for fear of retribution, and any career-jeopardizing risk is unthinkable when work is already so scarce.

As if financial exploitation was not enough, the culture of tolerating poor conditions in the name of pursuing your dance dreams exposes dancers of all ages to sexual harassment, assault, and abuse. From the competition dance to ballet, it seems that the problem of predators is disturbingly pervasive in this industry. For the Dance USA Task Force on Dancer Health, clinical and dance psychologist Jo-Anne La Flèche wrote about the main sources of trauma for dancers.

Her 2019 article *Big Little Secrets: Traumatic Experiences in the Dance World* highlights sources of dance-related trauma and identifies four main categories. She describes them as “Self-abuse: Normalization of discomfort, pain, and injury,” “Director/teacher’s verbal abuse,” “Sexual abuse: The dancing body as an object,” and “Secondhand trauma: Portraying roles that involve extreme violence, sexuality, and/or emotional distress.” (La Flèche, 2-3) I would argue that the three categories outside of sexual abuse all contribute to the culture of endurance and silence that makes dance students perfect targets for predators. Being conditioned to take instruction from a powerful person while they degrade you and pressure you to dance through the pain instills in you the dangerous habit of ignoring the body’s warning signs. A dancer who has been trained this way is less likely to recognize when a relationship becomes inappropriate, or speak up if they feel that something is wrong. It’s tragically common for adults entrusted with educating young dancers to abuse their power and take advantage of students, grooming and coercing them into sexual relationships. Notable instances include scandals at Break The Floor Productions with accusations against faculty Gil Stroming, Mark Meismer, Danny Wallace, Nick Lazzarinni, Misha Gabriel, and Eric Saradpon. The company hosts wildly popular and successful conventions across the country involving workshops and competitions. These events reward hardworking dancers with trophies, titles, and industry connections. The convention circuit has a very insular monopoly on dance opportunities, breeding a space of pressure to obey those in leadership. Being singled out by an instructor could mean they see potential and are willing to invest in your career. This can instill in young dancers a dangerous sense of indiscriminate trust with those in power. An article for AP News detailing the myriad accounts of sexual misconduct

with Break The Floor includes an interview with Jeremy Hudson, a survivor of sexual abuse at the hands of teacher Mark Meismer. After being invited to Meismer's home at the age of 17, "Hudson said he was optimistic. This might just be his lucky break into professional dance. After all, Meismer was already an icon; he had toured with Britney Spears, Madonna, and Paula Abdul." (Linderman et al) Unfortunately, this invite was anything but professional. Hudson went on to endure years of sexual abuse, all in the name of paying your dues to pursue your dreams. The ballet world is no better—a similarly cutthroat and insular community with scarce opportunity makes young dancers severely vulnerable to victimization. In an ongoing lawsuit against former Boston Ballet principal dancer Dusty Button and husband Mitchell Taylor Button, seven women have come forward claiming to have suffered abuse at their hands, many of them minors at the time. Sage Humphries, who joined Boston Ballet as an apprentice at 19, claims to have been approached by then 28 year old Dusty. After taking an interest in her dancing and developing a mentorship-friendship, Dusty introduced Humphries to her husband and things began to escalate. In a 2022 article for Daily Mail, Ben Ashford writes "Humphries claims the Buttons threatened to wreck her fledgling career unless she cut off her parents and moved in with them in 2017 and submitted to their warped sexual demands." (Ashford) The abusive relationship persisted until an intervention was staged by Humphries' parents in cooperation with Boston Ballet to extract her from the situation. It angers me that as dancers we aren't taught to stand up for ourselves, to recognize when we are being taken advantage of, or that no career is worth these life-altering traumas. I will never forget finding out that a former teacher of mine was arrested on child molestation charges; the disgust in recalling every time he touched me, the

mixed relief and shame in being glad I didn't receive the worst of his advances. The pervasiveness of this abuse of power is repulsive and degrading. How do we better insulate this industry from such predatory behavior? Where is the demand for better protections against exploitation?

SEX

I will now turn my attention to the sex. The sex worker's experience is hardly a monolith: there are strippers, cammers, porn actors, full service sex workers, and myriad other approaches to capitalizing off of desire. My experiences reflect a small subset of this vast community. The dangers and pleasures of one avenue may not pertain to another, but I have made an effort to explore examples that touch on a variety of experiences. As with dance work (and most service or hospitality jobs), the success of erotic laborers is largely dependent upon appearance. Chanelle Gallant writes in essay *Fuck You, Pay Me*, "...sex workers aren't all that much different from other workers—many workers are expected to make someone happy, be pleasing, and look good while doing it." (Gallant, 178-179) At the same time, the burden of living up to what is deemed attractive in the sex industry is uniquely cumbersome. There is enormous demand for sex workers to appeal to popular standards of beauty—typically thin, white, cisgender and heterosexual presenting, young, able-bodied, and hairless. Of course, there are consumers seeking non-normative performers, but these bodies tend to be labeled as fetish and are in most cases too niche to be profitable on the same scale as mainstream workers (not to mention that within these fetish categories, performers are often still held to other standards i.e. most successful trans people are thin, hairless, etc.). Maintaining one's body to fit these expectations involves significant time, money, and labor that is not compensated. Hair removal, tanning, lip injections, botox, fitness classes, lingerie, and pleasers (extreme platform shoes worn by strippers) are just a few expenses associated with the various areas of sex work. But

maintaining one's employability in a field that commodifies the body goes beyond even this.

Heather Berg's book *Porn Work: Sex, Labor, and Late Capitalism* (2021) details the far reach of these life-dictating demands. She writes:

“Pre-scene preparation for many performers extends beyond a paid day's work. Performers often organize their schedules the day before a scene in hopes of performing and looking their best on camera. These goals are sometimes in conflict with each other. Performers may fast or restrict their food intake before a scene in order to appear the most slim and also to prepare for receptive anal sex but then must contend with fatigue and a lack of stamina during a demanding scene. Performers in higher-end scenes also restrict activities in the days leading up to a scene to be sure that they do not have sunburn, scrapes, or other blemishes when they come to set. BDSM performers have to be particularly careful, since an old bruise or rope burn could result in being sent home from set with no pay. Here, being work-ready means showing no signs of having recently worked.” (Berg, 143)

This precedent for appearing as a blank canvas limits one's ability to take on certain jobs if the dates do not allow for ample healing time between shoots, thus prolonging the opportunity to make more money. Not only this, but a simple fall or being in the sun too long could jeopardize expected income. Are porn actors not meant to have a life outside of this work? Even with every

precaution taken, it seems there is no guarantee that the condition of one's body will be acceptable to directors when filming day arrives. Dance workers experience a similar precarity; a twisted ankle could take you out of commission for at least two weeks, in turn missing an entire paycheck. But this is not the only way that these industries rob us of personal freedom and security. Surviving without a guaranteed income requires vigilance in not only maintaining the most hireable version of yourself, but constantly seeking out the next opportunity and promoting yourself. In chapter four of *Porn Work* Berg writes,

“In a compressed market, most performers take the gigs they can get. But the experience of almost always working is nearly ubiquitous. Porn workers spend countless hours trying to get and keep work. Being work-ready means preparing for scenes and resting after them, marketing oneself, and networking... Together, these labors lead to workdays without a clear end. And Because the work looks, and sometimes feels, like things we elsewhere do for fun and for free, the boundaries between work and life blur.” (Berg, 127)

In essence, sex workers and dance workers alike are always on the clock. This is the trade we make, quite the opposite of the traditional phrase: do what you love and you will work every day of your life. Berg continues, “Here, porn work is a microcosm of the tension so many workers have found in the transition to late capitalism: we flee traditional employment in search of more autonomy but find that work that looks less like work can be all consuming.” (Berg, 127) While

it is undoubtedly an impingement on our full freedoms, this consumption of time, agency, and boundaries is hardly the most perilous aspect of sex work. There is very real danger in the trading of sexual services, namely the bodily harm experienced by so many full-service sex workers. According to a review of various studies on the correlation between sexual assault and sex work, “Risk of sexual assault and other forms of violence is high among sex workers, with up to 54% of sex workers across studies experiencing sexual violence while engaged in sex work, and up to 42% experiencing sexual violence by intimate or non-paying partners.” (Shepp et al, 3) To make matters worse, “street-based sex workers reported experiencing sexual assault (93%), assault from self-identified police (44%), and rape (75%) at particularly high rates.” (Shepp et al, 1) These are staggering numbers that at first beg the inane question, why do it? We know why people take these risks: largely to feed and house themselves and their family, and sometimes to support an addiction or reenact abusive relations as a trauma response. When I read these statistics, a different question comes to mind: why are protections so few for such a vulnerable profession? The issue boils down to not the existence of this type of work, but the way these workers are dealt with socially and systemically. It is both the legal and cultural attitude towards selling sex that makes it so dangerous. To treat someone as a victim or survivor requires they are first afforded personhood, something rarely extended to sex workers. More than anything though, sexual assault survivors who sell sex do not report it for fear of punitive action against them for their work. Particularly when the assailant is a police officer, there is truly nowhere to turn.

It becomes impossible to see things as either good or bad; we are swimming upstream in

an ever-changing river, letting the joy and pain wash over us. Particularly for sex workers who enter the field out of desperation, there is at once liberation and oppression in the job. Corinne Schwarz, Emily J. Kennedy, and Hannah Britton write of this phenomenon in their 2017 article *Aligned Across Difference: Structural Injustice, Sex Work, and Human Trafficking*:

“In place of a pleasure/danger binary, we envision pleasure and danger in new ways. Pleasure becomes a dynamic form encompassing both pleasure as autonomy and sensuality (such as joy in one’s work) and pleasure as agency within a constrained environment (such as the ability to feed your family)...This has meaning especially in societies and systems that seek to deny livability through incarceration, deportation, violence, and so on. Danger, on the other hand, becomes the intertwined structural and individual-level risk factors that created material harm: the threat of incarceration or deportation, neoliberal economic policies that defund the welfare state, anti-LGBTQ policies that facilitate discrimination, and the privatization and defunding of key social services. A person’s individual identities can also compound real danger of discrimination or vulnerability: race, citizenship status, poverty, LGBTQ identity, disability, homelessness, income insecurity, and health crises.” (Schwarz et al, 11)

It is clear that like with anyone else’s choice to enter a profession, a person’s choice to sell sex is

informed by the constraints of their reality. Whatever dangers may arise are an occupational hazard that are often outweighed by the pleasures of simply being alive. Again, the larger issue would seem to be the systemic criminalization of surviving.

Even for those whose choice is less constrained, this work is still preferable to “straight jobs” despite the perils, the stigma, the demands. Among these drawbacks is a perk that cannot be ignored: the potential for authenticity. Unlike most service work, where labor performed is for the sole pleasure of the customer, sex work makes available the possibility of the laborer’s pleasure in performing said service. This is the ultimate payoff of sex work, and yet it proves to be another endangering factor. Chapter two of *Porn Work* details this double-edged sword:

“Labor scholars warn that workers’ desire for work that feels less like work is intensely vulnerable to co-optation...In porn work this manifests as attempts to create filmed sex at some distance from routinized performance. Authentic pleasure creates that distance from straight work, which performers overwhelmingly frame as pleasureless. Managers do use this dynamic to extract more work for less; they frame authentic pleasure as a substitute for good pay and compel additional emotional labor of performers, who must demonstrate their personal investment in the work. But porn workers’ demands for authenticity in their own work cannot be dismissed as romantic, manipulatable attachments. Employers

want authenticity from workers, and workers demand authenticity in ways that both meet this expectation and resist its terms.” (Berg, 65)

Therein lies the catch-22 of monetizing your pleasure: it is nearly impossible to retain the intrinsic reward once an extrinsic reward is introduced. Authenticity becomes a commodity in and of itself: a bargaining chip between employer and employee. This is the dance of the sex worker—catering to one’s own needs while appealing to the client and appeasing the manager. Is it possible to perform authentic pleasure under these contrived circumstances? How can we keep everyone happy amidst such contradictory demands?

THE DANCE IN SEX; THE SEX IN DANCE

It has been no easy feat trying to speak on these realms separately. As I suspected when embarking upon this research, dance and sex are inextricably linked. Despite the clear shared values and struggles, I see little to no allyship across fields. Concert dancers are quick to clarify that they are not strippers when asked about their chosen profession. Even so, the stigma that anyone who dances for money is whoring themselves out remains. From personal experience as well as conversation with other dancers, it would seem that the most common responses after revealing our line of work are “So you must be really flexible then,” “Can I get a private dance,” “Do you dance on tables,” and so on. A male celebrity will wear a ballerina on his arm like a trophy, and still no one wants to talk about the popular conflation of dance with sex. Likewise, sex workers are rarely deemed artists, let alone people worthy of rights and respect. The work done by anyone selling a sexual service involves a sophisticated performance balancing societal and individual needs and desires, and comes with significant physical and emotional risk. The interconnectedness of the practices of dance and sex is an ancient one, but it’s nearly impossible to find instances of people speaking on this. Keith Hennessy writes in a soon to be published book, “A history of dance is a history of sex work. The dancer’s body and the choreographed performance are archives of erotic embodiment, prurient entertainment, colonial gaze, and puritanical framing.” (Hennessy) He goes on to unravel these historical ties, citing Loie Fuller as borrowing from cabaret and burlesque, and the Paris Opera effectively operating as a brothel in the 19th century where wealthy benefactors could purchase sexual favors from dancers after a

performance. The association of dance with sex ran so deep that puritanical ideologies moved to outlaw dancing in many instances. “In the US, the dancing bans in particular christian communities echo the dancing bans of early christianity, when dancing was blamed for inciting lust and idolatry. Colonial laws and violence applied these anti-dance projections with even more cruelty against indigenous dance cultures, whether Native American or African.” (Hennessy) It is no secret that dance holds a power so sensual that oppressive forces have tried to contain it, so why has this history been erased? The respectability politics of “classical” and “contemporary” dance wish to rewrite this narrative, divorcing dance from its sexual nature while maintaining the necessary ties to make it a profitable art form. The distinction between dance work and sex work is a futile one to me, seeing as not only the associations but the material overlap is significant. Much of postmodern dance and performance art veers toward the pornographic. When an artist appears before audiences in full nudity performing sexual acts, at what point do they cross the threshold into whore territory? When Sophia Giovannitti transformed a gallery space into a public incall room where visitors could make an appointment to have sex with her in exchange for money, these lines were inevitably blurred. In a 2021 interview with Giovannitti for Movement Research Critical Correspondance, Sarah Michelson says of her viewing that piece, *Untitled (Incall)*, “...this way in which the idea of you as an artist and the art world and the transactional procedures within that, aligned with the fact that many artists use sex work as an income support system. The fact that the transactions of the art world themselves fetishize the artists and disregard them in a way that one might think of as stereotypical sex work.” (Vo) The way these worlds speak to and mirror each other and hold each other up is uncanny. I suspect that if the stigma were removed, the true overlap of these professions would be revealed to be

astounding. As Juli Apponen says to Moa Sahlin in 2015 article *The POSTDANCE Dialogues*, also for Movement Research Critical Correspondance, “I know sex workers but they also do porn and performance art related work, so it can be considered to be little bit in the same field. It's not about financing a dance piece with sex work, it's maybe more a part of their experimentation with their bodies.” (Napier) It all comes down to this. Who is afforded the privilege of conducting these bodily experiments? How does one navigate or evade the stigma of choosing a vocation harnessing the body's materiality? Why is the distinction between dancer and whore still being made? Who does this distance protect? Where do we go from here? Rather than trying to distance the art of dance from the practice of selling sex, I propose we embrace our erotic history and instead focus our efforts on erasing the stigma surrounding sexual labor. With all the pleasures and dangers these vocations share—attractiveness, authenticity, vulnerability, exploitation—it seems to be in our best interests to embrace the dancer's whore status and demand better conditions for all who make their way through the world with their bodily delights.

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