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A striptease poetics

Liepe-Levinson, Katherine Helen, Ph.D.

City University of New York, 1993

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A STRIPTEASE POETICS

by

Katherine Liepe-Levinson

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1993

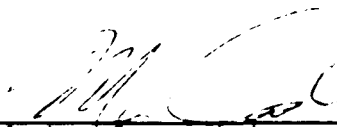
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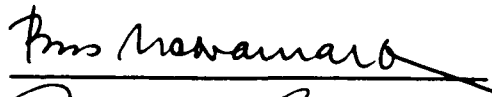
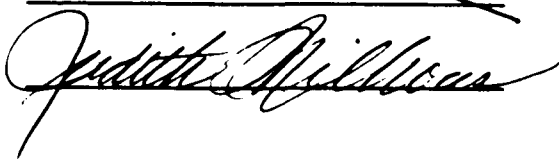
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

STRIPTease: ACTS OF TRANSGRESSION AND CARNIVAL

When we act in everyday life we do not merely re-act to indicative stimuli, we act in frames we have wrested from the genres of cultural performance. . . And when we enter whatever theatre our lives allow us, we have already learned how strange and many-layered everyday life is, how extraordinary the ordinary.

--Victor Turner¹

For theatre, the basic theoretical project for feminism could be termed a 'new poetics,' borrowing the notion from Aristotle's *Poetics*. . . This 'new poetics' would deconstruct the traditional systems of representation and perception of women and posit women in the position of the subject.

--Sue-Ellen Case²

A woman dances in the spotlight of a small platform stage. She moves her hands over her undulating body and then takes off her clothes. The male spectators stare. Some sit motionless, others solemnly hand her dollar bills or carefully place the money into the

dancer's G-string or garter belt. This generic act is variously called topless, bottomless, nude dancing, exotic dancing, erotic dancing, and striptease entertainment by trade papers such as *Exotic Dancer*, *Canadian Stripper*, *Mentertainment*, and the *Go-Go-Gazette* (Fig. 1.1). It has been seen/described as a performance about the Freudian primal scene, socio-sexual purgation, male degradation of women, female rebellion against the dictates of the double standard, and even as an authentic instigator of vice and crime.³

In a "similar" scene, a man gyrates under the stage lights. He massages his bare chest and stomach. He bends over to slide out of his pants. The female spectators also stare. Some whistle, laugh, and shout, others vigorously wave dollar bills in order to receive kisses and hugs from the dancer. This generic act is called exotic dancing, erotic dancing, and striptease. It has been seen/described as "turning the tables," an affirmation of the status quo, an inadequate female imitation of male lust and the male gaze, and--a joke.⁴

This study performs yet another act of seeing/describing these representations of flesh and desire. It attempts to explore a national sampling of contemporary female and male strip events through the ways in which these events simultaneously uphold and transgress traditional sex roles and other related cultural dictates. It also seeks to explore what such a negotiation or doubling of social and erotic positions may have to say about the performance of dominant heterosexuality, gender, and female and male desire in this context. This project's act of seeing/describing is limited to primarily white, heterosexual, middle class female and male striptease performances

(including topless, bottomless, and nude dancing entertainments that incorporate acts of disrobing⁵). This limitation reflects the constraints of my own cultural background, but also my conviction that it is crucial to continue to examine hegemonic depictions of gender and desire since they are the artifacts of the prevailing social mores and statutory laws.

During the preliminary research period (June 1989 through February 1990) I came across several unusual female and male strip events that were not available in New York City at the time (this situation has now changed somewhat). For example, the television talk show, "Geraldo," aired a program about a number of Texan strip clubs that present female strippers framed by elegantly appointed restaurant and spa-like environments.⁶ The "Phil Donahue" talk show featured female and male strippers from the twin clubs Big Al's and Big Alice's located in Peoria, Illinois.⁷ These clubs share the same building. Women strip for men in the downstairs area, while men strip for women in the smaller upstairs space at the same time. Female and male spectators are allowed entry to both events. Jill Dolan, in her article "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," mentions that male strip clubs for women in Montreal, Canada, permit the dancers to expose their genitals as they perform on portable platform stages placed inches away from their patrons.⁸

In order to include a greater variety of strip events in this project, seven cities in the United States and one in Canada (New York, Houston, Washington D. C., San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chicago, Peoria, and Montreal) were selected as "field sites." Other Canadian and American cities noted for these entertainments, such as Windsor

and Toronto in Canada, and Kansas City, Miami, Boston, and New Orleans, were considered for this project. They were eventually eliminated, mainly because of financial and time restrictions, but also because the cities that were chosen appeared to offer similar or more interesting events than the "cities not taken."

This study was completed, with starts and stops, over a three year period. I regularly attended strip bars, clubs, and theatres in the New York City area from the winter of 1989 through the spring of 1992. The strip events in Washington D.C. were reviewed in half a dozen installments from the winter of 1990 through the winter of 1992. Exotic dance events in the other cities listed were attended from January 1990 through August 1990. Over sixty different strip clubs, bars, theatres, and sex emporiums were reviewed. The vast majority of these places present females stripping for male audiences, which reflects the current gendered distribution of such spaces.

As suggested by the opening of this chapter, the "views" of strip events as entertainments that are either "good," "evil," "cathartic," "trivial," or "sexy" are dependent upon a variety of different social premises and theories which collectively underscore the fact that acts of seeing are never "innocent." Lila Abu Lughod, in her essay, "Can There be a Feminist Ethnography," suggests that ethnographic practices (academic acts of seeing/describing) are "reflexive" anthropologies whose methodologies involve an intense negotiation, or an "unsettling of the boundaries," between the subject(s) of study and the personal and social orientations of the researcher.⁹

I have been "caught looking" or rather caught up in striptease performance for several reasons. Strip events are performances about sex, seduction, and desire.¹⁰ A number of feminist theorists working in the related areas of literary criticism, film, television, and theatre insist that women must continue to speak and write about sexual experiences because, until recently, the majority of such representations and recordings have been those of men.¹¹ "Speaking sex" for some feminist critics is confined to discussions which seek to define "pornography" and to explain how women are objectified and degraded by these kinds of representations. However, as Linda Williams suggests in the introduction to her book, *Hardcore*, "if we limit ourselves to using the explicit sensationally, to condemn men's sex as evil, then we have not used it to our best advantage; we have not demystified sex, we have only reversed the 'dreadful patriarchal ideas that sex is evil and that the evil in it is women.'"¹² This study does not attempt to negotiate the labyrinth or the problems involved in the enterprise of defining a "pornographic genre," perhaps best exemplified by the now famous paraphrase of Justice Potter Stewart's remarks on the subject, "I can't define it, but I know it when I see it."¹³ Rather, this project seeks to question some of the assumptions about heterosexual pornographic-erotic representations in terms of the issue of sexual agency or sexual subjectivity.

Sexual agency or subjectivity involves the extent to which culture and society manage female and male sexual desires and choices and the representations of those desires and choices. It also stands for the dominant vantage points from which these expressions

and signs are generated and received. The articulation of female and male sexual agency in strip events (and in other theatrical productions) is not simply represented through the staged acts, but also through the reception and performances of their respective spectators. Sue-Ellen Case suggests, specifically with regard to all-women audiences of theatrical events, that such spectator communities become "an essential part of the composition of the theatrical event, rather than a social statement of separatism or reverse sexism."¹⁴ In order to examine the question of sexual agency more effectively in terms of the cultural management and the vantage points of sexual difference, I included both female and male strip performances in this study.

Striptease performance turns upon acts of desire and seduction, being desired and being seduced. These acts are structured through ritualized forms of performer and spectator gazing in concert with ritualized forms of performer nudity. Strip shows reproduce some of the most stereotypical aspects of traditional female and male sex roles. As noted, in the scheme of most of these events, men pay women to perform sexual acts. These sexual acts usually feature female performers in what has been commonly called the sex object role. Male spectators control aspects of the mimetic scene through their established social privileges of economic power and their presumed power as the scrutinizers of women. In the dramatic, sartorial design of strip events, male spectators are protected by their dressed state, while the nudity of the female performers suggests the cultural and physical vulnerability and accessibility of women to men.

Stereotypical sex role characteristics are also represented in events that feature men stripping for women. Male dancers usually perform the traditional action roles of "masculinity," which include displays of physical strength, social authority, and economic power (i.e., male strippers often portray policemen, military officers, businessmen, etc). Only a few of the strip clubs for women feature completely nude male dancers. Because of the social position of men in our society, and because so many male dancers emphasize physical prowess in their acts, male nudity in striptease may be less suggestive of the vulnerability of the body and more demonstrative of additional displays of male power and potential sexual expertise. Female spectators in these contexts often appear to solicit the gaze of the male dancer. These patrons indicate that they wish to be seen and desired by the dancer by drawing attention to themselves through dancing, yelling, and waving dollar bills. Women often laugh during male strip acts. This may suggest that female participants do not take their roles as sexual consumers as seriously as men do, or, that women are "entertained" rather than "aroused" by such spectacles.

Sightings of these stereotypical sex role traits in striptease performance support two of the most prominent critical approaches to the study of representations of gender and sexuality. The first type of critique, in the tradition of writers such as Andrea Dworkin and Catherine MacKinnon, analyzes representations of sexual fantasy, play, desire and agency exclusively through how they compare to and reflect the inequities of our male dominated social system that creates and maintains gendered classes of women and men.¹⁵

"Pornographic" depictions of women are not only seen as representations of female objectification, exploitation, and commodification, but as tantamount to the crime of rape. At the same time, males who perform in desired sex object roles or sexual surrender positions may also be seen as objectified and exploited because their performances in this context are often relegated to the social category of the "feminine."¹⁶

The second major trend of gender analysis is based on psychoanalytic theories. These include the more mainstream Freudian and Lacanian concepts of sexual difference as well as feminist revisions of those theories, beginning with the early writings of film theorist, Laura Mulvey.¹⁷ Mainstream Freudian-Lacanian theories posit that the dynamic of desire and the socio-psychic positions of women both rest on concepts of "Lack." Desire, including sexual desire, is considered to be the result of the infant's initial bonding with and then separation from the primary love object, the Mother. In such paradigms, the Woman-Mother does not exist in her own right, but as a catalyst for the maturation of the (male) child. At the same time, Woman also represents Lack because she does not possess the penis-phallus, the signifier of an individual's or a group's full participation in the dominant discourse of language and law.¹⁸ Some writers who incorporate psychoanalytic discourses are careful to note, as did both Freud and Lacan, that women and men can not absolutely be classified into "active" and "passive" or "masculine" and "feminine" camps. However, despite this qualification, the use of Desire-Woman-Lack models still situates women in positions of social, cultural, and

psychic "negativity." These designs continue to rely on gendered, diametric, concepts of desire *vis a vis* views of the "Lacking female" set in opposition to the culturally "complete" figure of the male.¹⁹

Social, psychoanalytic, and psychosemiotic approaches to gender and desire articulate much about the roots and current structures of female oppressions in terms of systems of class and linguistic control. However, many of these theories, in and of themselves, can not interrogate the aspects of erotic-pornographic representations and sexual play that elude the often simple classifications of their diametric frames. Such classifications of sexual and social difference propose the following assumptions about representations of sex and gender and the spectator pleasures they produce. 1) There is a one to one correspondence between erotic-pornographic depictions of female and male sex roles and the socio-sexual positions of women and men in "everyday" life. That is, the theatrical compact and the mimetic roles of the performer and the spectator are ultimately subsumed by the social destiny of biological sex and gender. 2) The desired sex object role is a position of pristine passivity. 3) The desirer-viewer experiences sexual pleasure through "total" control of the mimetic scene at hand and through the representation's commodification of the desired sex object. 4) Spectators of erotic-pornographic representations do not experience bi-gender identifications. Men identify only with depictions of powerful males, while females identify solely with depictions of their socio-sexual subordination. This study attempts to question these assumptions.

Laura Mulvey moved away from her original psychoanalytic theory of spectatorship, representation, desire, and pleasure outlined in her 1973 essay, "Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema" in order to develop a theory of spectatorship that could encompass the ambivalent and contradictory social symbols and narratives her earlier model excluded.²⁰ Mulvey turned to the works of writers such as Terence Turner, Victor Turner, Arnold van Gennep, and in particular, Mikhail Bakhtin. These theorists explore representations and events which feature "transitional" or "in-between" social stages--depictions and rituals where inconsistent and conflicting cultural symbols openly confront each other.²¹ While other feminist writers are also working in this vein,²² Mulvey's theoretical shift is notable because her earlier ideas on spectatorship, desire, and gender were perhaps the single greatest influence on feminist writings in the disciplines of both theatre and film from the mid 1970s to the present.²³

Mulvey's primary interest in Bakhtin centers around his analysis of the Carnival during the Medieval and Renaissance periods and its literary uses in the works of Rabelais.²⁴ For Mulvey, Bakhtin's ideas about the Carnival are useful for contemporary theories of representation and gender because he focuses, not only on the aspect of carnivalesque masquerade, but also on the different ways in which the entire event simultaneously reproduced and altered the dynamics of the social roles of "everyday." Carnival participants were allowed to mock the cultural mores and inequities of their time through the normally taboo activities of social parodies, role reversals, and the partaking of excesses of food, drink, and sex.²⁵ These mimicries and

activities highlighted elements of the existing asymmetrical social system. But at the same time, the structure of the event did not posit the socially powerful and the socially marginalized in immutable positions of domination and subordination. Carnival participants performed dramatic confrontations and "dialogic" engagements with hegemonic traditions and mores.

Strip events replicate many of the historical, cultural, and mimetic aspects of the Carnival. Traditional sex roles for women and men are represented in these events, but they are featured as part of a larger performance of negotiations between social norms and their transgressions. A brief summary of the cultural history of American striptease performance illustrates this point.

During the heyday of Burlesque in New York City in the 1930s, these entertainments were regularly denounced by civic and religious groups as well as raided by the police. Nevertheless, Burlesque performances were simultaneously so popular that they threatened to engulf all of Broadway.²⁶ The fully licensed and legitimate Broadway theatres, the Republic, the Apollo, the Eltinge, the Oriental, the Winter Garden, and the Irving Palace, all housed the strippers of these events.²⁷ Notwithstanding the social stigma in some quarters, newspapers and magazines featured articles and reviews on exotic dancers. The renowned Gypsy Rose Lee was frequently mentioned in the society and gossip columns of New York City newspapers.²⁸ Even the sedate *Dance Magazine* carried a number of articles about striptease and related performances from circa 1928 to 1956.²⁹

Publicity stunts to promote exotic dancers and the "art of striptease" produced a number of parodic events which featured transgressions of social authority through the performances of "sexual acts." For example, Gypsy Rose Lee became the recipient of a very special "academic" degree, *Doctor of Strip Teasing* (Fig. 1.2). Her award ceremony at the Oriental theatre was hosted by Bernard Sobel and six professors from New York University. They were supported by a chorus of female "graduates" dressed in caps and see-through gowns.³⁰ In 1937, the Minsky brothers managed to influence an act of federal legislation. They convinced the House Immigration Committee of the United States to rule that "striptease is an American art" and therefore no "foreigner" would be allowed to practice it within the borders of the United States.³¹

By the end of the 1930s, Burlesque was arguably the most popular form of entertainment on the legitimate American stage.³² The enormous attention and adulation paid to the stripteasers of this era is cited as a primary reason for the closing of the Burlesque Houses in New York in 1942.³³ However, despite this official label of taboo, the stripper still remained within the sightlines of mainstream America. Star stripteaser Ann Corio mourned the closing of the Burlesque houses by performing an act on Broadway in which she wore a giant padlock over her evening gown and sang the song, "I would if I could but I can't."³⁴ A few other Broadway houses actually circumvented the ban on stripping by presenting plays and musicals which featured ecdysiasts as "characters." These included *Pal Joey* (Ethel Barrymore Theatre, 1940), *Star and Garter* (Music Box Theatre, 1942), *The Naked*

Genius (Plymouth Theatre, 1943) and later productions of *Gypsy* (Broadway Theatre, 1959), and *The Loss of Roses* (Eugene O'Neill Theater, 1959). Three of these eventually became material for Hollywood films (*Pal Joey*, 1957; *Gypsy*, 1962; and *The Stripper*, 1963). Strippers continued to perform their routines in cabarets, revues, midways, and seedy bars.³⁵ But they also worked in exclusive nightclubs settings as well. Damon Runyon, in his syndicated newspaper column "Runyon Views," discussed the phenomenon of the upscale revue stripper in terms of popular complaints about the rise in ticket prices and the class discrimination of such establishments.³⁶

According to the compilers of a publicity kit for the contemporary New York Chippendales male strip show for women, the sexual revolution of the Sixties made it possible to market exotic male dance acts for female and mixed audiences in the United States. This was accomplished by popularizing striptease and male nudity, again, through other more socially accepted performances (e.g., rock concerts, musicals, and "psychedelic burlesque shows").³⁷ By the 1970's, male strippers were touring the city and neighborhood cabaret and bar circuits for special "Ladies" and "Ladies Only" nights.³⁸ Less than a decade later, a number of male strip shows for women established semi-permanent or permanent places of performance for their female patrons.³⁹

Strip events today continue to straddle a double position or mediation between the socially acceptable and the socially deviant. On June 21, 1991, the Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States of America ruled that forbidding nudity in topless bars and

places of adult entertainments is not unconstitutional.⁴⁰ In response to this decision, the headline of the weekend edition of the *New Post* pointedly read, "No Nudes Is Good Nudes."⁴¹ However, this current official label of taboo, once again, stands in the wake of a nationwide proliferation of strip bars and clubs. Eric Scigliano, in his article, "The Skinpresarios" printed several months after the Supreme Court ruling, insists that the "growth sector in adult entertainment--and the emerging battleground in the eternal war between prudery and prurience--is the ancient, quaint, and innocent-sounding art of the striptease."⁴²

In addition to the persistence of contemporary exotic dancing events, strippers and images of strippers continue to be incorporated into many other kinds of popular entertainment venues and novelty items. Plays, musicals, movies, and videos feature performances of strippers (Fig. 1.3).⁴³ Novels, autobiographies, and comic books revolve around the life stories of exotic dancers.⁴⁴ Television talk shows regularly present strippers as guests on their programs.⁴⁵ The Exotic World museum in Helensdale, California, features a Burlesque Hall of Fame (Fig. 1.4). Self-help and self-improvement centers offer "how to" workshops on stripping and strip club ownership and management as well as group "field trips" to exotic dancing clubs (Fig. 1.5, 1.6).⁴⁶ Portable purse or pocket-size view-masters proffer male exotic dance acts on film strips (Fig. 1.7). Happy Birthday video-grams feature both female and male striptease performances. Drawings and photographs of strippers decorate greeting cards, pens, and calendars (Fig. 1.8, 1.9).

This cultural doubling of the common and the extraordinary, or the socially accepted and the socially transgressive, is also apparent within the structure of strip events and within the individual dance acts. In these venues, sex and drink are advertised as exciting "excesses," but at the same time they are carefully monitored and controlled by the rubrics of their immediate environments and the laws of their municipalities. The traditional lines between performer and patron, activity and passivity are visibly blurred during the events. Many female spectators of male strip shows aggressively express their appreciation of male sex acts, while many male spectators "passively" watch female routines of seduction. The class (and race as a class) of both the spectators and performers is often clearly defined in terms of economic privilege. However, these social roles are also unstable because they are mediated through the expectations of the special games and mimetic parts offered to the patrons and the performers by the different strip clubs and theatres. Female and male strippers do reproduce gender and socio-sexual norms on stage, but they perform transgressions of those norms as well. Female dancers break the rules of the double standard through their overt sexual exhibitions. Male strippers violate traditional gender positions by performing aspects of the desired sex object role. Both female and male exotic dancers transgress the accepted sartorial decorum of most public places through their displays of nudity.

Instead of attempting to ignore or reconcile these (and other) contradictory or unstable terms of striptease performance, "A Striptease Poetics" considers transgressive dynamics as integral to the

strip event's theatrical and social structures and, as Mulvey suggests, as a primary method of analysis. Within the framework of a "poetics of transgression," theatre and theory have the opportunity to acknowledge the bigotries and inequities of our social systems, but at the same time, perhaps the ability to stage conflicting social and cultural discourses in *active* conversations and negotiations with one another. Within such a theoretical formulation, women as a gendered class, need not find themselves reinscribed into patriarchal positions of immutable passivity and victimization by the very theories that seek to alleviate such conditions. (This principle could extend to more marginalized communities as well). Theory not only explains phenomena, it also can create the phenomena to be seen. This study seeks to see and describe the ways in which theatre/theory represent traditional and transgressive aspects of heterosexual, female and male erotic desires in active conversations with one another through the popular entertainment of striptease. Again, it attempts to "see" what these conversations may have to say about representations of dominant heterosexuality, gender, and female and male sexual-erotic desires in terms of sexual agency.

Angela Carter calls pornography "the orphan little sister of the arts."⁴⁷ She suggests that this genre involves the abstraction of human intercourse in which the self is reduced to formal elements.⁴⁸ While one may wish to question Carter about her definition of what constitutes "human intercourse," her description of "sexual performance" as an interface of cultural symbols (formal elements) is useful. Contemporary performance theorists suggest that theatrical

events produce meanings for their spectators, not only through the formal elements of their immediate staged productions, but also through the symbols of the event's larger social situation. For this reason, many theatre semioticians include elements such as the locations of the theatrical events and the exterior and interior designs of their places of performance as part of their analyses of these representations.⁴⁹ This project follows suit. It examines the urban locations of the strip bars, clubs, and theatres and their exterior and interior designs as formal elements of performance. It also explores the dancer's use of costume and the body as costume; the choreography and structure of the different strip acts; and the roles, rituals, and games performed by the spectators. While a consideration of such a combination of "theatrical" elements is in line with contemporary semiotic analyses, these aspects of performance are also significant in terms of sexual-erotic production and reception. This grouping refers to several of the immediate environmental pressures that most obviously inform and reflect sexual display and acts of desire (i.e., the social situation, place, and surroundings; the dress of the participants; the body language of the actants; the common cultural narratives of sexual fantasy invoked by the combination of these elements; and the sex games and play that result from all of the above).

Chapter Two begins the examination of these environmental factors by exploring how the physical and social geographies and topographies of strip bars, clubs, and theatres depict both sex role norms and "carnavalesque" transgressions of those norms. The

subsequent chapters continue to investigate how gender and other socio-sexual dictates are simultaneously upheld and transgressed through the different aspects of striptease performance. Chapter Three re-views the interior designs of strip event establishments in terms of how they co-produce sexual-erotic experiences through their social decorations of desire and through their physical and cultural managements of spectator sightlines. Chapter Four discusses striptease costume dramas and the body as costume in terms of how they structure doublings of socio-erotic positions for both performers and patrons. Chapter Five analyzes female and male erotic dance acts through the ways in which the choreography, structure, and narratives of these routines support positions of pleasurable mimetic jeopardy for female and male participants. Chapter Six seeks to redefine some of the traditional terms of erotic-pornographic spectatorship in order to further explore the oscillating roles of performers and spectators, desirers and desired subjects through games and rituals of the strip event.

All of these elements of theatrical, social, and sexual performance conspicuously overlap in many ways. Therefore, while each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of the overall production, there are references to the other performance elements in order to suggest how each contributes to a system of pornographic-erotic representation through the dynamics of transgression and carnival. The concluding chapter of "A Striptease Poetics" returns to the issue or question of sexual agency in dominant pornographic-erotic depictions.

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**19-27,62,74-75,
119,123-125,189,
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197,201,203,205-207,
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NOTES

¹Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 122.

²Sue-Ellen Case, *Feminism and Theatre* (New York: Methuen, 1988), 114-115.

³For analyses of striptease as the Freudian primal scene of sexual difference and the male castration and identity complex see Jean Baudrillard, *L'échange symbolique et la mort* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 155-156; David Lodge, *Small World: An Academic Romance* (New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1984), 31-43; Martin Grotjahn, *Beyond Laughter: Humor and the Subconscious* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 108-9; Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 22-23.

For analyses of striptease as various forms of social purgation see David Dressler, "Burlesque as a Cultural Phenomenon" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1937), 81; Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957; repr., New York: The Noonday Press, 1988), 84, 86; Bernard Sobel, *A Pictorial History of Burlesque* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1965), 9, 70; Robert C. Toll, *The Entertainment Machine: American Show Business in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 195; Jill Dolan, "'What No Beans?' Images of Women and Sexuality in Burlesque comedy," *Journal of Popular Culture* 18 (1984): 36-47.

For analyses of striptease as representative of male degradation of women see Susan Brownmiller, *Femininity* (New York: Ballantine Books, Random House, Inc., 1985), 27, 44, 84, 96; Susan Griffin, *Pornography and Silence: Culture's Revenge Against Nature* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 29-31; Susanne Kappeler, *The Pornography of Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 58, 63-81. For striptease as female rebellion against the double standard see Seph Weene, "Venus," *Heresies* 3, no. 4 (1981): 36; Amber Cooke, "Sex Trade Workers and Feminists: Myths and Illusions," interview by Lauri Bell in *Good Girls & Bad Girls: Feminists and Sex Trade Workers Face to Face (Proceedings of a Toronto Conference on the Politics of Prostitution and Pornography, Held in Toronto 22-24 November 1985)* ed. by Laurie Bell (Toronto: The Seal Press, 1987), 190-1; A.S.A. Harrison, "Revelations," chap. in *Revelations: Essays on Striptease and Sexuality*, Margaret Dragu and A.S.A. Harrison (London, Ontario: Nightwood Editions, 1989), 54.

For striptease as an instigator of vice and crime see the 21 June 1991 Supreme Court ruling on nude dancing and the freedom of speech, *Barnes, et al. v. Glen Theatre, Inc., et al.*, ___ U.S. ___, 111 S. Ct. 2456, 115 L. Ed. 504 (1991) and also "High court Gives States Right To Ban Nudes," *New York Post*, Saturday, 22/23 June 1991, 51.

⁴For an analysis of male striptease for women as "turning the tables" see for example Paula L. Dressel and David M. Petersen, "Gender Roles, Sexuality, and the Male Strip Show: The Structuring of Sexual Opportunity," *Sociological Focus* 15, no. 2 (April 1982): 156-158. For male strip acts as affirmations of the *status quo* and inadequate imitation of male lust see Dolan, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 61-62; *idem*, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1988), 64-66, 77-80; social historian John R. Gillis quoted in Georgia Dullea, "For the Bachelorette, A Wilder Last Fling," *New York Times*, 13 May 1990, sec. 1, p. 34; Harrison also notes that "popular opinion is echoed in the statement of a columnist who writes that when women strip for men, the men are in control, and when men strip for women, the men are still in control. This is a matter of seeing what you believe" (82).

For male striptease for women as a "joke" or "just a laugh" see for example Susan Demuth, "Get 'Em Orff. . . boys!," *What's On in London*, 11-18 January 1989, 9.

⁵The following sources refer to topless, bottomless, and nude-dancing entertainments as variations of the striptease: Harrison and Dragu in *Revelations: Essays on Striptease and Sexuality*; Marilyn Suriani Futterman, *Dancing Naked in the Material World* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1992), along with the current trade papers such as *Canadian Stripper*, *Exotic Dancer: National Directory of Gentlemen's Clubs*, *Mentertainment*, and the *Go-Go Gazette*.

⁶PIX's "Geraldo" on "Couch Dancing," air date, 14 April 1988, *Journal Graphics* transcript #148.

⁷NBC's "Donahue" on "Unisex Strip Club," air date, 8 February 1990, *Journal Graphics* transcript #2878.

⁸Dolan, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 59-67.

⁹Lila Abu Lughod, "Can There Be a Feminist Ethnography?" *Women & Performance: Feminist Ethnography and Performance* 5, no.1 (1990): 26.

¹⁰Harrison, 9.

¹¹For discussions about feminists "speaking sex," see Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 14-16; Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson, introduction to *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, ed. Snitow, Stansell, and Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 9-10, also cited in Williams, 15.

¹²Williams, 265-266. Williams bases her statement on Kate Millet's suggestion in the documentary film, *Not a Love Story* (Bonnie Klein, 1982), that explicitness can be useful because it may help us overcome "dreadful patriarchal ideas that sex is evil and that the evil in it is women."

¹³Justice Potter Stewart cited in Erwin Chemerinsky, "Prohibiting Pornography Would Violate Civil Rights," *Opposing View Point Sources: 1986 Annual Human Sexuality Edition* (St. Paul, MN: Greenhaven Press, Inc. 1986), 91; and in Williams, 17. The exact quote of Justice Stewart Potter is as follows: "I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligently doing so. But I know it when I see it." *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, 378 U.S. 184, 197 (1964).

¹⁴Case, 116.

¹⁵Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Perigee Books, 1979); *idem*, *Intercourse* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987); and also see again Brownmiller, 27, 44, 84, 96; Griffin, 29-31; Kappeler, 57-81.

¹⁶See for example Kappler, 78-79.

¹⁷Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," chap. in Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), vii, 162.

¹⁸For descriptions of Freudian and Lacanian theories of sexual difference and feminist reworkings of those theories in terms theatre performance see Case, 114, 119-120, 128-129; Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 12, 42, 49, 56, 83.

¹⁹For discussions about the problems of feminist use or cooptations of psychoanalytic theories see for example Judith Mayne,

"Review: Feminist Film theory and Criticism," *Signs* (Autumn 1985): 92-94; Barbara Freedman, "Frame-Up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre," in *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Practice*, ed. Sue-Ellen Case (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 74; Phyllis Grosskurth, "The New Psychology of Women," *New York Review of Books*, 24 October 1991, 32.

²⁰Mulvey explains her theoretical shift, vii, 162.

²¹*Ibid.*, 159-176.

²²See for example the contributors to the anthologies *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, ed. Dale M. Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991); *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, ed. E. Deidre Pribram (London: Verso, 1988).

²³Judith Mayne, "Review Essay: Feminist Film Theory and Criticism," *Signs* 11 (Autumn 1985): 83; cited in Gayle Austin, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 79.

²⁴Mulvey, 167-168.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Irving Zeidman, *The American Burlesque Show* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967), 173.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 168-175; Jacqueline Boles and Albeno P. Garbin, "The 52-Week 'Strip' of Carrie Finnel," *Amusement Business*, 27 April 1974, 42.

²⁸Gypsy Rose Lee, *Gypsy: A Memoir*, with an Introduction by Whoopi Goldberg and Afterword by Erik Lee Preminger (New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc., 1986), 286-287, 290-291.

²⁹See for example Vera Caspary, "The Secret of Gertrude Hoffman's success," *Dance Magazine*, November 1925, 14-15; H. E. Cooper, "Pink Tights--British Blondes," *Dance Magazine*, October 1926, (pages unknown); *idem*, "A Cycle of Dance Crazes," *Dance Magazine*, February 1927, 28-29, 50; *idem*, "Glorifying the American Leg," *Dance Magazine*, March 1927, 26-27, 56; *idem*, "Variety, Vaudeville, Virtue, Naughty Nineties to Respectability," *Dance Magazine*, December 1929 (pages unknown); Betty Duval, "The

Strip...for Action," *Dance Magazine*, July 1956, 30-33; Stuart Palmer, "Has Dancing Saved Burlesque?" *Dance Magazine*, April 1928, 16-17, 48; Ann Pennington, "How Dancing Builds Sex Appeal," *Dance Magazine*, February 1928, 10-11, 62 (The Dance Collection of the Performing Arts Research Center, The New York Public Library at Lincoln Center).

³⁰Lee, 308.

³¹Bill Gladstone, "Fifty Years of Striptease," *Weekend Magazine*, 3 February 1979, 10; Lee 307-308; Morton Minsky and Milt Machlin, *Minsky's Burlesque* (New York: Arbor House, 1986), 267; H. M. Alexander, *Strip Tease: The Vanished Art of Burlesque* (New York: Knight Publishers, 1938), xi, 39.

³²Zeidman, 173.

³³Alexander, ix; Toll, 195; Zeidman, 168-175.

³⁴Toll, 195.

³⁵Zeidman, 175.

³⁶Damon Runyon, "Poor Man Has Been Robbed," "Runyon Views" distributed by International News Service, King Features Syndicate, Inc., mostly likely in the *Herald Tribune*, 30 January 1942, unpaginated (The Billy Rose Theatre Collection of the Performing Arts Research Center, The New York Public Library at Lincoln Center).

³⁷"Seeing is Believing: Welcome to Your Fantasy" press kit, obtained from the Jacksina Company, Inc., New York City, Spring 1989, unpaginated.

³⁸See for example, Adonis Peter, *Ladies Night Out: The Best of Male Burlesque/The Peter Adonis Traveling Fantasy Show* (New York: Putnam Sons, 1982).

³⁹ The M. C. of the male strip show at the Hangar Club in Camp Springs, Maryland (Washington D.C. area) explained to his female audience that this club has featured male exotic dancers for women since 1974 (14 February 1992 visit to this club); the Chippendales New York "Seeing is Believing" press kit cites the opening of the Los Angeles Chippendales club as February 1979 and the opening of the New York club as sometime in 1983; Danna Montana's male strip show at the Sugar Shack club in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin opened in

March 1976. The Chicago Sugar Shack II club for women opened 16 November 1987. *Sugar Shack: The Danna Montana story*, written by Jo Collins and Bob Parkinson (New York: Triangle Classics, 1988), 150, 294.

⁴⁰Barnes, et al. v. Glen Theatre, Inc., et al., ____ U.S.____, 111 S. Ct. 2456, 115L. Ed. 504 (1991). This ruling gave local legislation the right to require female exotic dancers to wear pasties and G-strings. (Apparently, our foremost legal thinkers consider such minute coverings to be the preventatives for a variety of social crimes, including rape and prostitution.)

⁴¹*New York Post*, Saturday, 22/23 June 1991.

⁴²Eric Scigliano, "The Skinpresarios," *Seattle Weekly*, with photos by Lisa Stone," 14 August 1991, 35.

⁴³For example, recent stage productions which feature exotic dancers as characters include *Striptease* by Robin Moran Miller, produced at the Westbeth Theater Center in New York City (1992); *GIRLS, GIRLS, GIRLS, LIVE ON STAGE TOTALLY NUDE* by Sharon Evans, produced at the Live Bait Theatrical Company in Chicago (1990); *A Particular Class of Women* by Janet Feindel produced at the WOW Cafe in New York City (1989); and the revival of the musical *Gypsy on Broadway* (St. James Theatre, 16 November 1989-6 January 1991; Marquee Theatre, 28 April 1991-July 1991).

Contemporary films, television movies, and videos about strippers include *Blaze*, 119 min., dir. Ron Shelton, starring Paul Newman and Lolita Davidovich, Touchstone Pictures (a division of Walt Disney), 1989; *Stripped to Kill II*, 83 min., dir. Katt Shea Ruben, Concorde, 1989, videocassette; *Ladykillers*, 90 min., dir. Robert Lewis., starring Marilu Henner, Leslie-Ann Down, Joan Collins, Susan Blakely, Barry Weitz Films in association with ABC Circle Films, 1988, air date 9 November 1988; *Males in Motion*, 60 min., Ero-Tron Productions, 1985, videocassette; *Stripper*, 90 min., dir. Jerome Gary, Jerome Gary-Visionaire Communications, Inc. film, Key Video, 1985, videocassette.

⁴⁴See for example D. Keith Mano's best-seller *Topless: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 1991); Yvette Paris' autobiography, *Queen of Burlesque* (Buffalo, New York: Prometheus Books, 1990); Sylvie Rancourt's autobiographical cartoons about her life as an exotic dancer in Montreal, Canada, collected, translated, and published in English by Sylvie Rancourt and Jacques Boiven as the comic book anthology, *The Orgies of Abitibi: Melody Book One* (Princeton, W.I.: Kitchen Sink Press, Inc., 1991).

⁴⁵Robin Byrd's weekly erotic cable talk show (MCTV 35) specializes in female and male stripper interviews and dance acts; Network television talk shows that have presented strippers as guests include "Donahue," "Sally Jessie Raphael," "Geraldo," "Oprah," "Jenny Jones," "Montel Williams," and "Nightline." *Journal Graphics: A Television Transcript Company Topic Catalogue* (Spring 1990, and the annual 1990, 1991, and 1992 catalogue updates) indicates that at least ten different talk show programs about strippers have been aired each year from 1988-1992. "Donahue" also devoted two recent shows to a retrospective of all the female and male strip acts aired on his program over the last two decades. NBC's "Donahue," "Male Strippers Who Have Appeared on Donahue," air date 22 July 1991, *Journal Graphics* transcript #3254; "Female Strippers Who Have Appeared on Donahue," air date 23 July 1991, *Journal Graphics* transcript #3255.

⁴⁶The Learning Annex in New York City, an established traditional adult education center, schedules a fairly regular one night workshop on the art of stripping for female participants only. Different professional strippers and porno stars lead these workshops. The Learning Annex has also presented several lectures by Jay Bildstein, the co-owner of the erotic-dancing sportsbar Scores in Manhattan from June to September of 1992. Bildstein's talks were titled "How to Own, Manage, Run or Even Dance in a Topless Bar." The Learning Annex has also featured "field trips" for women to Chippendales New York strip shows. And finally, the Annex also sells the videocassette, *How to Strip for Your Man*, L. Suarez/La Gioconda Enterprises, LTD., 1987.

⁴⁷Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman and Ideology of Pornography* (London: Virago Limited, 1979; repr., New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 13.

⁴⁸Carter, 3-4.

⁴⁹See for example Marvin Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics: Signs of Life* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 41-55; idem, *Places of Performance* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1989); idem, "Theater and Dialogism," in *Critical Theory and Performance*, ed. Janelle G. Reinelt and Joseph R. Roach (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992); *Performing Texts*, ed. Michael Issachoroff and Robin F. Jones (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988); Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen & Company Ltd, 1987).

CHAPTER II

URBAN LOCATIONS OF DESIRE

I need to understand how a place on a map is also a place in history, within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist, I am created and trying to create. . ."

--Adrienne Rich¹

Marvin Carlson states that "places of performance generate social and cultural meanings of their own which in turn help to structure the meaning of the entire theatre experience."² The types of buildings which house theatrical events are innumerable (e.g., traditional theatres, movie houses, storefronts, restaurants, renovated factories, brownstones, bars, etc.). The primary structures of these places often reflect the history of their uses and the zoning codes of their municipalities. For this reason, Carlson suggests that the location of the places of performance within the city, the exterior decorations and modifications (including the names) of those places, and their general upkeep are usually the most visible markers of urban narratives for the passerby.³

Les Wade, in his essay, "Bourbon Street Burlesque: The Urban Erotic Zone," refers to Carlson's ideas about the social and cultural significance of theatre locations and their exterior designs, in part, to

address how eroticism or sexual desire is produced for the male spectators of strip events in New Orleans.⁴ Wade insists that the audience's sexual-erotic experience in the Bourbon Street clubs is not limited to the actual strip shows and the display of "nudity," but is also a result of the cultural expectations and assumptions about the city of New Orleans, Bourbon Street, and the symbols which adorn the facades, marquees, and foyers of each establishment.⁵ Wade's suggestion that sexual desire can be "geographically" and "topographically" delineated is a relevant and valuable one.

This chapter will explore how gender and heterosexual desires are represented by the "urban positionings" of female and male strip bars, clubs, and theatre in the cities visited for this study. These "positionings" include the physical locations of selected establishments which present strip entertainments; their exterior designs, which may mark or hide their locations in different ways; and finally, the situation of these mappings in terms of a dominant discourse of sexualities, "carnival," and transgression. Places of strip events for male patrons are discussed first. Their physical and social sites are then briefly compared to the "locations" of non-dominant strip clubs as a way of charting the representation of heterosexuality within a larger socio-sexual context. And last, the geographies and topographies of male strip establishments are compared and contrasted to those of heterosexual, middle class, and predominantly white women--who span both dominant and non-dominant cultural discourses.

Places of Strip Performances for Men

The stereotypical idea of a place of strip performance for men is usually a sleazy, but discretely hidden "nudie" bar located in a municipal district of "ill-repute." However, this urban design of desire is only one among several representations. Strip bars, clubs, and theatres for men are often located in commercial areas that are not associated with "sex and sin." Many of the newer exotic dancing bars and cabarets are designed as upscale, and even luxurious, "gentlemen's" clubs. Sometimes these establishments are situated in fairly exclusive business sectors.

In Montreal, Canada, most of the well-known strip clubs and bars are located in the fashionable downtown district along Saint Catherine Street. This area includes posh movie houses and theatres, well-known department stores, four-star hotels, and boutiques.⁶ Despite this central and otherwise mainstream location, Montreal strip clubs boldly advertise their presence. They sport names which refer directly, and sometimes humorously, to the sex trade (e.g., Club Le Scandal, La Cave du Sexe, Club Super Sexe, etc.); prominent marquees with fanciful designs and bright lights; and neat, tuxedoed doorpersons posted in the thresholds of their immaculately maintained establishments.

A number of these clubs and theatres display depictions of female bodies or body parts on their facades. These range from giant *Playboy* photographs of nude women which cover entire windows to

neon signs of naked female silhouettes. Two of the Montreal clubs have especially notable exterior decorations. Cabaret Penthouse features a "doorway" that is flanked by huge partially disembodied female legs. Patrons must walk through or under this pair of legs in order to enter the club. Club Super Sexe is adorned with a giant marquee depicting a comic book-style "supersexy" heroine in a bikini and traditional super hero cape and boots, flying across the sky (Fig. 2.1, 2.3).

While depictions of immense, disembodied female legs and huge outlines or exaggerations of nude women on the facades of strip clubs easily refer to the now cultural cliché of men socially dominating women by reducing them to sexual objects through representations of their bodies and body parts, the humor and exaggeration of many of the names and exterior designs of these strip establishments simultaneously parody hegemonic sexual desires. These "carnavalesque" images suggest visual puns on male performance anxieties--the fears of not living up to "gigantic" female sexual desires and abilities.⁷ This is particularly notable in the case of Club Super Sexe, where "heroism" and "sexiness" or sexual prowess (rather than moral depravity) is clearly represented through a female figure.

Such depictions may also reflect socially subversive male desires to be engulfed or overwhelmed by "tremendous" and public expressions of female sexuality--however culturally-mediated those expressions may be. For men's desires are also limited by social dictates, and this censorship is particularly intense with regard to sexual pleasures and roles that are deemed to be "feminine." One way

around this social doctrine is to represent censored desires through parody.

The topography and geography of Montreal's strip establishments for men pose dominant male sexuality and desires as theatrical fantasy extravaganzas which are as readily available as any other type of amusement for adults--as long as one is willing to cross their very conspicuous and sometimes bizarre thresholds. The pervasive theatrical and fantasy aspects of these clubs, in combination with their direct sexual references, clearly separate them from "everyday" city life, in the face of their "ordinary" and central locale.

In Los Angeles, California, the urban positions of male strip clubs and theatres also represent sex through the euphemisms of "show business" and "fantasy." A large number of Los Angeles clubs are located on the major boulevards of the Hollywood and West Hollywood districts. These sectors are, of course, associated with the motion picture industry.⁸ Here, the names of many strip clubs and bars indirectly refer to both theatrical and sexual performance (e.g., Star Strip, the Crazy Horse, the Seventh Veil, the Aladdin, Jumbo's Clown Room, etc.).

Several strip establishments in these districts display Hollywood film or carnival-like exterior designs. The Aladdin's golden columns and intricately patterned facade recall the "exotic" movie sets used to suggest "sheikdoms" (Fig. 2.3). The Body Shop, the Seventh Veil, and the Crazy Horse all exhibit murals of giant female nudes--nudes which are posed in exaggerated odalisque-like positions (Fig. 2.4). These murals are designed to be eye-catching to the steady stream of

automobile traffic on the boulevards. Nevertheless, the "nude" woman painted on the facade of the Body Shop is still quite unusual because her "ghostly," chalk-white form covers almost the entire length of the building which houses the strip club. While aspects of these images again suggest the social subordination of women through male control over erotic representation, both the sizes and the stances of these figures suggest exaggerations and parodies of dominant desires--and hence, transgressions of those desires.

Most of the adult entertainment centers, theatres, and bars that present strip events for men in San Francisco's Tenderloin district and New York City's Times Square area feature "sex as show business" as well. However, in these municipal sectors, such designs are modified by "sex as sin" or "sleaze" narratives. Both of these areas encompass or are adjacent to traditional theatre districts. However, these sectors still include areas that are well-known for being physically rundown and crime-ridden as well.

Strip establishments and sex trade industries in these districts also use conspicuous billboards and neon marquees to mark their locations. The names of the majority of these clubs and theatres reflect their relationship to the show business districts of which they are a part (e.g., the New Paris Revue, Show World, and Flash Dancers in Times Square and the New Century Theatre, the Market Street Cinema, the Chez Paree, and the Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theatre in San Francisco). In San Francisco, many of the establishments that present strip events are converted movie houses and theatres.

This overt mixing of "the theatrical" and "forbidden" or "dangerous" zones in terms of the construction of an erotics is perhaps best captured by the decorated facade of the rather glamorous Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theatre in San Francisco's Tenderloin district. One side of this immense building is completely covered by a mural depicting a tropical jungle scene (Fig. 2.5). While this mural is quite beautiful and eye-catching, while it may have been designed to represent a sexual "paradise," and while it may support Susanne Kappeler's argument that women in our society are frequently depicted by devices which render them animalistic, alien, or exotic (anything but human),⁹ this place of performance also offers a wild jungle zone which frames the position of the spectator with risk and uncertainty. Such a sexual-erotic narrative, then, cannot depict male desire as a position of pristine "control" over others.

As noted earlier, strip clubs within "jungle zones" or "districts of ill-repute" indicate only one of the ways sex and desire is organized or mapped by dominant culture. This factor is underscored by cities, such as New York and San Francisco, which offer adult and strip entertainments in several different municipal zones. Besides the Times Square area, three other well-known business districts in the borough of Manhattan offer strip entertainments: the Wall Street sector, the garment center, and the East Side midtown shopping area (Fig. 2.6). Queens Boulevard in the borough of Queens in New York City has the single greatest concentration of strip bars and clubs in the New York area. None of these districts or areas are associated with the "depravity" of Times Square.¹⁰

San Francisco also offers a concentration of strip bars and nightclubs in its North Beach sector, which is located between Russian Hill and Telegraph Hill. North Beach is also known as the "Little Italy," "Greenwich Village," "London's Soho," and "bohemian" section of San Francisco. *The Real Guide: San Francisco and the Bay Area* describes this district as the place where "poetry meets porn" (Fig. 2.7).¹¹ North Beach strip clubs sport names that suggest literary references (e.g., Condors, Hungry "i's", and the Garden of Eden). While *Frommer's San Francisco* (1989-1990) cautions women against visiting the Tenderloin section unescorted, it describes North Beach as a relatively safe section with Las Vegas-like entertainments.¹²

In contrast to the blatant advertising of sex entertainments in Montreal, Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco, two other cities represent desire and sex through different "under-cover" topographies. Strip events in Washington D.C. and Houston, Texas, are centrally located in upscale business districts. But in these cities, such events maintain a relatively low profile or are even camouflaged in various ways.

In Washington D.C., middle-class strip bars are situated in Upper Georgetown on both Connecticut and Wisconsin Avenues. They are also established in and around what Fodor's 1991 travel guide to Washington D.C. describes as the "high density nightlife area of 19th and M Streets, Northwest. . .located near the city's lawyer-lobbyist-filled downtown."¹³ Most of the Washington D.C. strip bars and clubs are housed in brownstones or buildings with small storefronts. The majority of these establishments are identified by fairly

subdued signs in terms of their color, size, and lighting--although these do vary. Their names do not suggest or refer to sexual entertainments (Joanna's, Archibald's, Camelot, Royal Palace, Good Guys, J.P.'s, etc.). Sometimes small placards and modest headshots of the dancers are displayed in the windows of the bars and clubs. Nude or partially nude photographs and murals of dancers are not a part of this map (Fig. 2.8).

Houston, Texas offers the most extreme version of the "sex under wraps" theme. Many of its middle-class strip clubs for men are located at the outskirts of the prestigious Galleria section, which is internationally known as a major center of finance and commerce.¹⁴ The exteriors of these strip clubs take on the ambience of their district. The Men's Club presents nude dancing and strip performances in a soft coral-pink building with an outdoor fountain surrounded by palm trees. It suggests the appearance of a plush health spa. Caligula XXI, under reconstruction but still in business at the time of this writer's visit, is an off-white free standing structure with a majestic facade reminiscent of ancient Roman ruins (Fig. 2.9). Rick's Bar and Restaurant (cited in Fodor's *Texas* as one of the classiest Burlesque clubs in town¹⁵), along with its sister club, the Colorado, which is situated just outside the Galleria area, outwardly look like nice well-kept family or yuppie restaurants (Fig. 2.10). The majority of the strip clubs for men in this district do not have names which refer directly to sexual entertainment. In this city and context, sex and desire in the land of mythic oil wells and wealth is represented through symbols of

"conspicuous consumption," including food and the pampering of the body.

These examples of the urban positionings of strip clubs for men do not represent heterosexual male desires either as monolithic or as "natural." Whether the strip bars, theatres, and clubs are "located" through depictions of sex as sleaze, as masquerade and show biz, as hidden and forbidden, as conspicuous consumption, or as any combination of the above, sex and desire are never depicted as biologically preordained, but on the contrary, as social structures that are highly artificial and even "extraordinary." These municipal chartings of strip clubs also represent different urban gestalts with regard to sex and the erotic.

Urban Positions of Marginalized Desires

As stated in the introduction, this study concentrates on white, middle-class heterosexual male and female strip events. However, certain obvious points about hegemonic attitudes towards race, sexual preference, gender, and class are underscored through the urban positions of the strip clubs, bars, and theatres. While some of these points appear to be self-evident, for they are based on the more general institutionalized urban segregations, they still should be briefly addressed here, because they clearly situate dominant heterosexuality and desire within a *social* discourse. A more detailed discussion of the

urban positions of strip establishments for middle-class heterosexual women follows this section.

As one might expect, most of the strip events dedicated to "non-mainstream" audiences are "ghettoized" or separated from the "locations" of strip establishments for middle-class heterosexual males in a number of different ways. In Montreal, where many of the strip environments are located in a relatively fashionable part of town along Saint Catherine Street, most of the clubs for gay men, bisexuals, and women are either found at the far ends of this main thoroughfare or between the downtown area and Old Montreal. The names of the strip clubs for heterosexual women and gay men are also not as sexually explicit as the names of the clubs for straight men in this city (contrast the Campus, Club 281, Bistro Bunnies, Chez Jean Pierre and Bar Apollon with names like La Cave du Sexe and Club Super Sexe).

There is a brief but pointed anecdote with regard to this hegemonic urban map of desire in Montreal. The Apollon, located in the main section of the downtown area, originally opened as a gay strip cabaret. According to the manager, Maurice, the Apollon was forced to change its clientele to straight women because of the fights that continually broke out between the gay patrons of the original club and the straight men who visited the strip clubs nearby--in particular the Chez Patee of Montreal, which is right next door to the Apollon.¹⁶

The more subdued advertisements of the strip clubs and bars in the main downtown areas of Washington D.C. may act as a buffer for a limited intermingling of gay and straight strip clubs. However, these places of performance are still separated by a number of city blocks.

While the most well-known heterosexual strip cabarets and bars for men are located on or around 19th and M Streets and Upper Georgetown Northwest, gay bars which present go-go boys and strip entertainments tend to be closer to Dupont Circle (e.g., Badlands and Rascals), the center of the gay and lesbian community in D.C. The Chesapeake House, which also features gay strip entertainments, is located further downtown, next to Washington D.C.'s Convention Center.

Several other clubs which offer strip events for mainly gay audiences are located in the "rougher" Southeast sector of Washington. They include La Cage aux Follies, Ziegfeld's, and Tracks D.C.. Tracks D.C. presents a weekly strip show for gay men called "Flesh." Tracks also features "Lesbo-a-Go-Go," an exotic dance show for lesbians, one night a week. This entertainment includes a few numbers which suggest stripping but which do not include nudity.¹⁷ This Southeast district is also home to heterosexual "black" strip bars and clubs which include Isle's, the Penthouse, the Foxy Playground, and Muncambo. The highest concentration of these clubs is on Georgia Avenue.¹⁸ The Hangar Club, the only establishment which provides on-going strip entertainment for heterosexual women in the Washington D. C. area, is situated just outside of the city's boundaries in Camp Springs, Maryland. Camp Springs borders the infamous Southeast sector and is also next to the Andrews Airforce Base.

The better-known strip clubs in Houston's Galleria section, such as Rick's, the Men's Club, and Caligula XXI, are patronized by a predominantly white, middle-class clientele. The Colorado is also a

comparable upscale and "mainstream" club, but it is located a little outside of the Galleria area. This place is patronized by a more culturally diverse crowd.¹⁹ While La Bare, Houston's sole strip club for heterosexual women, is located within the Galleria district, no gay or lesbian clubs were visible within this prestigious area.

Gay and straight male strip establishments and adult centers do overtly "share" erotic urban zones under certain conditions. In San Francisco's Tenderloin area, despite the conspicuous billboards and marquees, gay sex entertainment centers such as the Tearoom and the Campus Theatre are not relegated to the furthest reaches of this district as in Montreal, but are centrally located within this district. They are also only a few blocks away from the straight shows for men presented at the Chez Paree and the New Century Theatre. In the heart of the Times Square area of New York City, this sharing becomes even more evident. Brightly advertised straight and gay sex establishments are literally located side by side or across the street from one another. The gay strip theatres, the Gaiety and the Show Palace, are only steps away from the more or less straight crowds at Show World and a couple of blocks from the New Paris Revue. Perhaps this particular geographical and topographical scenario is possible in these districts because, unlike areas such as Montreal's Saint Catherine Street, parts of the Tenderloin and Times Square still operate under the auspices of "outlawed" urban sectors. In these socially "transgressive" zones, male heterosexuality and homosexuality are interestingly situated side-by-side, their differences marked by neon marquees.

With the exceptions of the "no-nudity" erotic dance performances offered to lesbians and women at Tracks; the "Burleszk" strip shows under the direction of Debi Sundahl at the now defunct Baybrick in San Francisco; the rare tours of Sundahl's "Burleszk" show²⁰; a few leads about *ad hoc* performances and parties suggested by booking agents and club managers in San Francisco and Montreal; and a lesbian and gay strip show presented weekly at the Spectrum Disco in Brooklyn, New York (which consists of one female and one male dancer performing their acts for mixed audiences), I found no established environments for on-going lesbian striptease entertainments either in the New York area or in the cities visited. This does not indicate that these events do not take place, only that if they do, they are not visible on "mainstream" urban maps of desire and because of my own heterocentric limitations.

In *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Dolan discusses the importance, but also the personal and political dangers, of publicly representing lesbian sexuality in this present "era of political intolerance and sexual prudence."²¹ She also debates whether representations of lesbian sexuality and desire would become "neutralized" if they were viewable as commodities "consumable in a more mainstream economy."²²

Adrienne Rich remarks that, because of the cultural imperatives that repeatedly situate the phallus at the center of socio-sexual discourses which insist that women can not exist without men, it is "small wonder that lesbians are reported to be a more hidden population than male homosexuals."²³ Rich states that in the light of

such cultural pressures "the absence of choice remains the great unacknowledged reality, and in the absence of choice, women. . .will have no collective power to determine the meaning and *place* of sexuality in their lives" (my emphasis).²⁴ While Rich is discussing the lack of sexual choice in terms of a social system predicated upon "compulsory heterosexuality" and its attending bigotry and oppression, her statement also resonates with regard to heterosexual women and their sexual agency within this cultural hierarchy.

Places of Strip Entertainments for Women

A mapping of the *places* of strip events for women includes a number of geographical and topographical curiosities which also raise questions about sexual "visibility" and "cooptation" from within the confines of white, middle class heterosexual privilege. Establishments which present striptease events for straight women are never situated in "forbidden" or "disreputable" urban zones. They are also rarely placed in areas which are primarily dedicated to male-dominated businesses such as the Wall Street area in New York City. Places of strip performances for women tend to be in districts associated with the "regular" entertainments of shopping, nightclubs, restaurants, and discos. La Bare in Houston; Club 281 and the Apollon in Montreal; Chippendales New York and Chippendales Los Angeles; and Big Alice's in Peoria, Illinois, are all located in mainstream amusement and

commercial sections. While strip clubs for men are also situated in these districts, they are not restricted to them.

Chippendales New York is located in the row of discos, nightclubs, and yuppie restaurants on the Upper East Side of Manhattan which line First Avenue. Bloomingdale's department store and other New York City shopping landmarks are only a few blocks away. Danielle's, a restaurant nightclub in the borough of Queens in New York, presents male strip entertainment for women every Thursday night. It is situated on Austin Street in the neighborhood of Forest Hills which is also known as a fairly posh shopping area boasting designer clothes stores and "chi-chi" restaurants (Fig. 2.11).²⁵

Escapes, formerly a teen disco on Long Island in New York, is actually part of a small shopping mall which includes a supermarket, a family video store, an ice cream parlor, several clothing shops, a pizza palace, and a Chinese restaurant (Fig. 2.12). The Sugar Shack II in Stone Park, on the fringes of Chicago, Illinois, is strategically placed right across the street from one of the area's largest shopping malls. The exterior decorations of these places reflect their uses as more general restaurants, nightclubs, and discos. While these "locations" for female strip event patrons can be attributed to concerns over safety and convenience, there are some other possible "geographic" implications involved as well.

Women who patronize male striptease performances usually do not have sexual *places* or "rooms of their own." (Exceptions to this rule will be discussed in due course.) The majority of the strip events for women reviewed share their performance spaces with other

mainstream entertainments or with sexual entertainments for men. Chippendales New York, Escapes, Danielle's, and Sugar Shack II, all become coed discos after each of their male strip shows. During the 1990-1991 season, Chippendales New York also included a midnight female exotic dance and strip show for male patrons on the weekends. Beefcakes U.S.A. touring male strip show, based in the New York area (Fig. 2.13), and Chippendales Los Angeles regularly performed at Danielle's and Carlos, respectively. These two places are established restaurant-nightclubs which feature dancing, comedy nights, and other types of coed entertainments. The Hangar Club, just outside of Washington D. C., presents a male strip show for women in the evenings. But during the daytime hours, this club features continuous strip events for men. Similarly, Big Al's/Big Alice's in Peoria, Illinois presents one male striptease show for women in its relatively small upstairs space several nights a week, while the much larger downstairs space is dedicated to continuous day and night time female strip performances for men.

In some situations, strip shows are used to lure women into the clubs as "bait" for the generally higher-paying male clientele. Danielle's charges their female patrons five dollars for the male exotic dance show and an open bar. Men, who attend these performances at Danielle's to meet women, pay a ten dollar cover charge and full price for their drinks or any drink they order for a woman at a table.

At Chippendales New York, during the 1989-1990 season, it was not unusual to see a line of men nightly wrapped around the block waiting for the male strip show to end in order to have access to a

disco filled with "hot" women. (Of course, such a set-up could also be viewed as a place where women have access to visual sexual stimulation as well as a steady supply of "real" men.) Currently, late night dancing at this club is no longer much in vogue. However, men still come to dance with the women after the strip shows.²⁶ This Chippendales club presents another ironic aspect in terms of a place dedicated to female desire and spectatorship. Males escorted by women are allowed to view the strip show from a glass-enclosed balcony, pointedly called the V.I.P. Lounge, which offers a birds-eye view of all the action below. From this "position," men watch women looking at male stripteasers.

An additional form of subsetting should be briefly mentioned here. The entire strip event for women is often "located" within one of several special social events (e.g., bachelorette, divorce, anniversary or birthday party). Most strip clubs for women target a large portion of their advertisements for those types of occasions. The Chippendales New York press kit, "Seeing is Believing," even includes a short printed skit in which two friends plan a bachelorette party for another friend (Fig. 2.14).²⁷ This suggests that strip performances for women are more socially acceptable if they are located in relatively rare or obviously special "initiation rites." While some male advertising of and attendance at strip events is also targeted for special occasions, it is not a primary reason (or "excuse") for strip event patronage. All the types of "subsetting" discussed, with regard to strip entertainments for women, contribute to a semblance of mainstream gender decorum.

Because the majority of the environments which present strip entertainments for women are "shared" or subset spaces, it also follows that these events are subject to temporal constraints that are not imposed on similar entertainments for men. It is not unusual to find this distinction, or the days of the week and times of strip shows, posted on exterior signs of the bars, clubs, and theatres.

Most spaces which sponsor strip entertainment for women present these events one to five times a week, as compared to the strip bars and clubs for men which present continuous strip performances six to seven days and nights a week. Strip clubs and bars for men generally open between 12 noon and 3 p.m. and close in the early hours of the morning. The earliest opening hour discovered for strip clubs for women in this sampling was at 5:30 p.m. at La Bare in Houston, Texas. The actual strip entertainments for women generally begin between eight and nine o'clock. The average length of these shows is one and a half to two hours.

The circumscribed duration, advertising, and starting time of the majority of strip events for women mimic that of the more traditional show biz entertainments. The Chippendales' "Seeing is Believing" press kit advertises the 1989-1990 "Welcome to Your Fantasy" strip show as wild and thrilling as "the frenzy of a rock show." At the same time, however, the publicity release also reassuringly states that this is socially acceptable material for women because it has "the values of a Broadway musical." The 1990 souvenir program of Dana Montana's Sugar Shack II Dancers of Chicago makes a similar point. One male performer is quoted in the program as stating that the Sugar Shack

show is "just like a Las Vegas Revue. . .it's real serious entertainment."²⁸

Billboards, advertisements, and signs on the facades of strip clubs for males also often indicate the number of dancers performing and the degree of nudity allowed (Fig. 2.15). Signs outside of the clubs and theatres for female audiences are usually limited to some sort of group picture of the current performers with no reference to the amount of dancer nudity. These advertisements are not only artifacts of the municipal laws governing zoning and nudity, but they are also artifacts of the less formally represented social expectations about gender roles and economic and social privileges. The critical importance of this advertising is that it is a representation of the male cultural privilege of multiple sex partners, sexual variety, and legal and social choice over how a woman's body may be "viewed."

The urban mapping of strip bars, clubs, and theatres clearly depicts aspects of female and male sex roles that are securely located in cultural gender norms. These representations could be used to explain and even reify the socio-sexual differences between women and men. For example, the proliferation of strip establishments for men, along with the presumable sexual freedoms advertised by them, could be interpreted as further "evidence" of the male "biological" need for sexual variety and the "innate" pleasure men experience through the visual stimulation of female "flesh." This "narrative" could be additionally supported by the fact that strip clubs for women are relatively few in number and supposedly replicate "the values of a

Broadway Show," rather than direct female sexual interest in male nudity and provocative dancing.

This geography may also suggest, if one adheres to the premise that the structure of heterosexuality seamlessly and categorically denies sexual agency to women, that even in arenas which purport to encourage female sexual desires and pleasures, women still have no other recourse but to console themselves with "the values of a Broadway Show" because men can never be read as sexual objects in the way that women are in our culture.

In line with a different type of critique, one could argue that the urban positions of strip clubs and theatres for women indicate that females as a group do not have the economic resources, the time, or the social training (because of obvious cultural inequities), to support sexual places all of their own. And finally, in the light of all of the above "factors," one could also suggest that most women do not bother to patronize such places--because what would be the point? However, this charting of traditional socio-sexual decorums *vis a vis* the urban positionings of strip events for women and men simultaneously also indicates the ways in which gender and sexual norms are resisted and transgressed through pornographic-erotic representations.

A Geography of "Carnival" and Transgression

Sexual entertainments for women which depict the cultural management of females and which conceal the use of the male body

as a "sexual object" through the accoutrements of a Broadway show effectively frame and negotiate female sexualities and pleasures so that they are acceptable to the governing social rubrics. This is not a sign of sexual passivity or even a lack of agency on the part of female participants as it has been theorized. Rather, it is one representation, in a long line of similar strategies used by women, to gain sexual pleasure and social power under oppressive conditions.²⁹

This type of tactic attempts to circumvent the social pressures of the double standard. The double standard (which may be invoked by both feminist and patriarchal discourses) may indeed be slightly more relaxed these days, but it still continues to deploy the labels of "whore," "bad girl," or "powerless object" in the face of many overt displays and representations of female sexual interest. Such labelling usually takes place regardless of whether these images are produced by or targeted for heterosexual women or for heterosexual men.

Female spectators of male striptease performances are consistently considered to be more demonstrative of their sexual interests than male spectators of female strip performances. Almost all the dancers, patrons, managers, and club owners interviewed for this study, as well as the majority of the sociological and documented popular opinions about male strip performances for women, agree on this point.³⁰

These displays of "female" desire and sexual pleasure include yelling and whistling, enthusiastic verbal expressions of their appreciation of male bodies and body parts; payment or tipping of male strippers for kisses, caresses, lap-sitting, and private dances; and

even fairly regular propositioning of male dancers. It has been argued that these behaviors are not really representations of female or "feminine" desires, but are rather poor imitations of "objectifying" male desires.³¹ However, such an interpretation may be the result of cultural dictates which "theorize" that such expressions are inherently "male." Dolan contends that "antipornography activists and cultural feminists are caught in a restrictive, literal interpretation of desire as male that limits their ability to see the potentialities of representation."³² Johnny Rotten, a well-established free-lance stripper who dances at Escapes, with Beefcakes U.S.A., and for private parties, suggested that women are overt about their desires in such events, because "women can express themselves and not run the risk of being called sluts by men."³³

While the places of these sexual-erotic performances for female spectators reveal cultural and transgressive negotiations between concealing and exposing female desires through various forms of subsettings, the locations of strip events for male spectators represent complementary depictions of the upholding and breaking of socio-sexual boundaries. As suggested in the introductory chapter, sex trade establishments for men are often publicly visible in terms of their central locations and obvious advertising. However, such places are still hidden or removed from daily life by the social stances and municipal ordinances of most American cities. Fredric A. Strom suggests, in his book *Zoning Control of Sex Businesses*, that many urban regulations regarding sex trade industries for men are aimed at their clear separation from work and residential areas--that is, their

separation from "everyday life," rather than their total suppression.³⁴ David Dressler, in his unpublished dissertation, "Burlesque as a Cultural Phenomenon" (New York University, 1937), pointed out that the Burlesque theatres of his day were situated on main thoroughfares and that their presence was frequently marked by conspicuous advertising.³⁵ Nevertheless, Dressler still insisted, several years before the official closing of the New York City Burlesque houses, that those places of entertainments "must remain in the hinterlands" in order to "exist in peace."³⁶

Dressler may have been prophetic in terms of the subsequent banishment of Burlesque from the legitimate Broadway stage. But, his comments also refer to the extant paradox or mediation inherent in our social positionings of sexual representations and events for men. While expressions of female sexuality are culturally managed through the rubric of the double standard, expressions of male sexual desires are controlled by images of sex safely stowed away from everyday public life, even though they may be quite visible. Put another way, as Les Wade suggests, the physical doorways of *legal* strip establishments nevertheless offer "thresholds" which dare the passerby to leave "the relatively safe zone of the street for the illicit interior of the club."³⁷ At the same time, the promotion of some these places of performances by flagrant displays of female bodies suggests yet another type of transgressive boundary crossing. While such use of women's bodies represents an aspect of male social and sexual control over females, this very signifier of power and desire also conveys visions of a male position of sexual-erotic surrender.

The fact that strip clubs and topless bars for heterosexual men are numerous does not in any way alleviate the cultural taboos and the label of "extraordinary" which also mark the advertisements of these environments and events. On the contrary, this juggling of the common and the socially taboo is similar to the sociological concept of *dictated deviance*. That is, some behavior and representations may indeed be common and socially endorsed in various ways, yet still retain their questionable or forbidden status. This, of course, is a great source of their appeal.

The city as a culturally controlled or zoned body, which includes forbidden parts and districts, mirrors "zoned" human bodies which may be wholly socially outcast or which may be required to wear pasties, G-strings, or decorated fruit-of-the-loom underwear to simultaneously mark and hide their forbidden parts. Within these cities, places of strip performances are not just environments that permit acts of clothing removal, because those acts take place in Broadway theatres, in opera houses, and on some municipal beaches as well. Strip environments are spaces which have been socially located as extraordinary or deviant for both women and men, whether they are positioned or zoned as "naughty" or "undercover."

In the context of these urban positionings, dominant heterosexuality is represented as a social organization that needs constant conditioning and that functions through unusual rules and accessories. The unusual rules and accessories, depicted by the municipal geographies and topographies of female and male strip events, also represent female and male sexual-erotic desires, not as

"natural" phenomena, but as structures that are clearly built upon the narratives of the culture of which they are a part.

Dressler states that the Burlesque event is "almost like a fairy tale."³⁸ His analogy is far from obscure or even apolitical, because most fairytales involve stories about physical, metaphysical, and social transgressions and transformations. Fairytale, folk fable, and myth narratives frequently depict these transgressions and transformations through the bodily removal of the protagonist from her or his everyday environment into strange and extraordinary ones as part of a rite of passage.³⁹ Laura Mulvey, in "Changes: Thoughts on Myth, Narrative and Historical Experience," cites Arnold van Gennep's analyses of the structure of rites of passage. Building on van Gennep's ideas, Mulvey notes that ritualistic "liminal" structures and states are often marked by the participants' actual "movement through a threshold, from one space to another"--the crossing and recrossing of boundaries. Mulvey insists that such a movement "has a very different mythic connotation from that of a binary opposition."⁴⁰

A number of theories about the experiences of eroticism and of sexuality propose that both rest upon dialogical threshold crossings *vis a vis* exchanges or tensions between established physical, social, and personal boundaries and their simultaneous disruptions. Such theories range from the "pedestrian" to the esoteric. They include Linda Wolfe's survey and analysis of the sexual interests of 106,000 readers of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Wolf determines that the favorite conceptual "turn-ons" of her sample of heterosexual women are anticipation, risk-taking, and rule-breaking.⁴¹ Academic writings on

this subject encompass the cryptic musings on eroticism, culture, and power of Georges Bataille, Jean Baudrillard, and Michel Foucault; the Marxist theories of Nancy Hartsock; the visionary, sociological schemas of Erving Goffman; and the psycho-semiotic interpretations of gender of Jessica Benjamin, Jacqueline Rose, and Linda Williams.⁴²

In various ways, the above writers posit that erotic pleasure, and even the experience of sexuality, are created by the abandonment or testing of the self in situations where a safety net (or the probability or feeling of a safety net) is maintained--where boundaries are upheld and broken at the same time. This dynamic offers the experience of the instabilities of the self and of social institutions--experiences which are apprehended and defined as a result of their cultural prohibitions. For the contemporary female and male striptease spectator, the physical and social act of crossing and recrossing the thresholds of the bars, clubs, and theatres that present these entertainments, are the first direct and visible steps into this theatrical, erotic, and dialogical conversation between the socially acceptable and the socially transgressive.

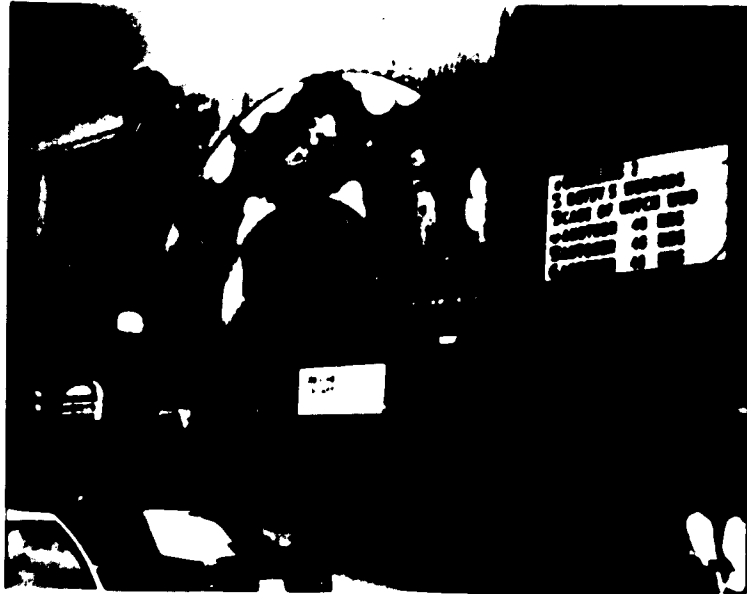


Fig. 2.2



Fig. 2.3



Fig. 2.4

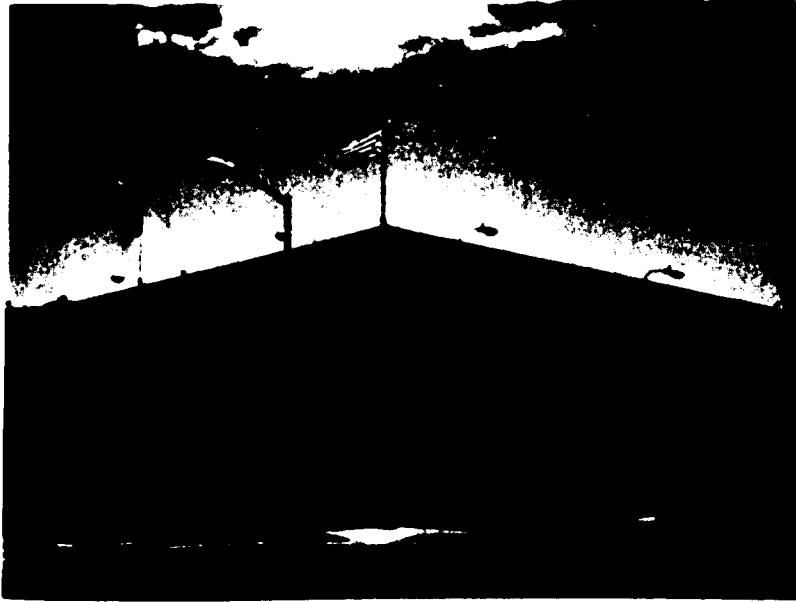


Fig. 2.5

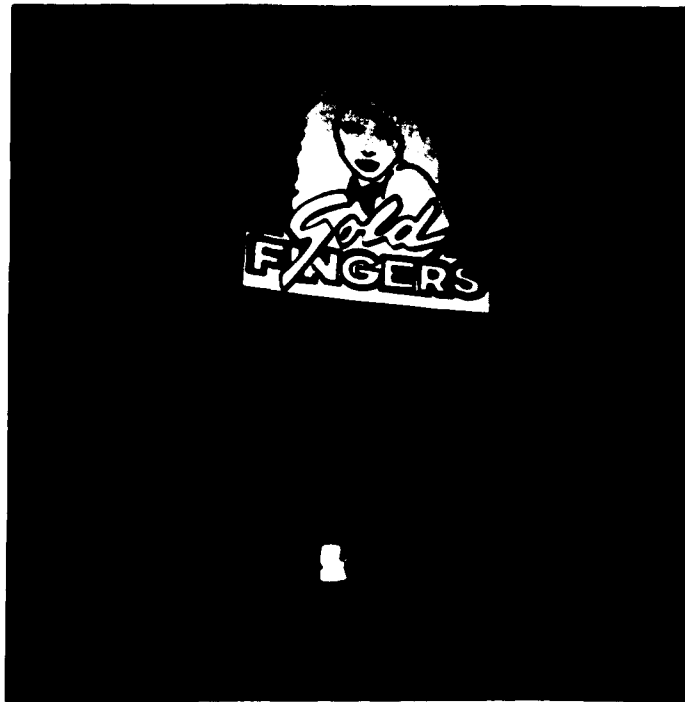


Fig. 2.6

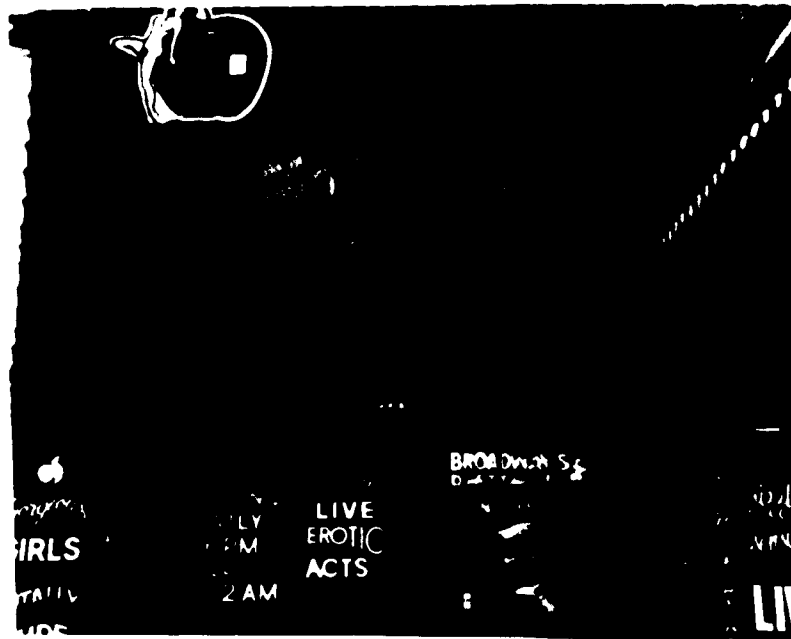


Fig. 2.7

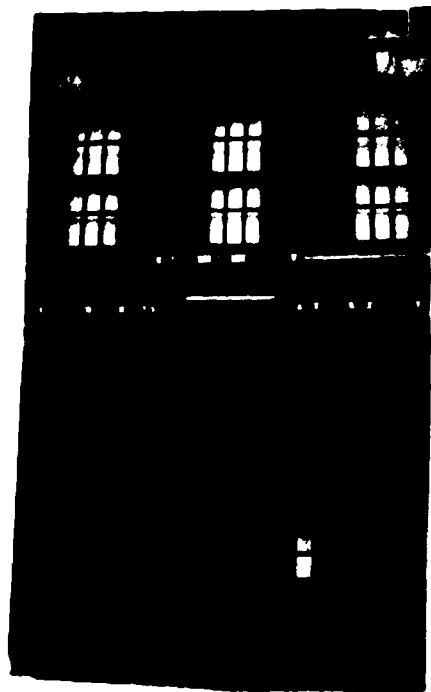
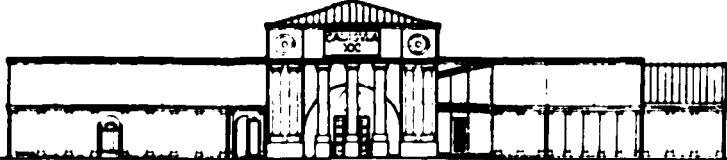
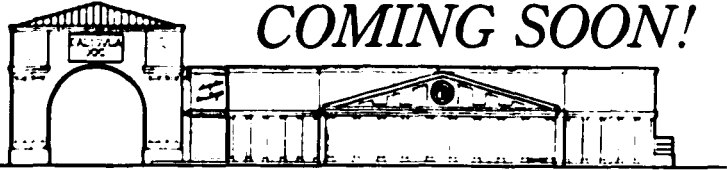


Fig. 2.8



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Fig. 2.9

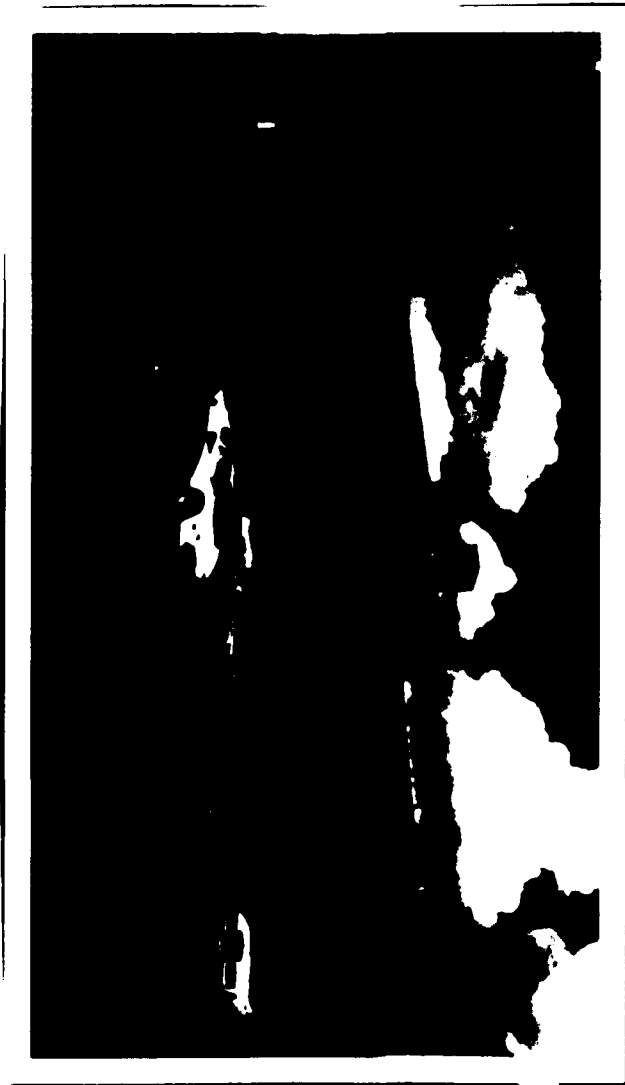


Fig. 2.10

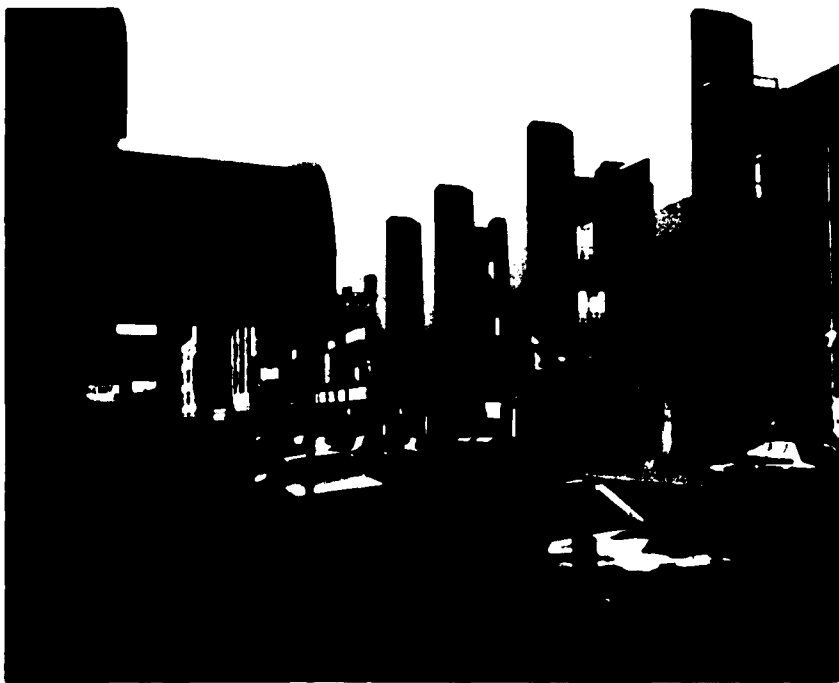


Fig. 2.11



Fig. 2.12

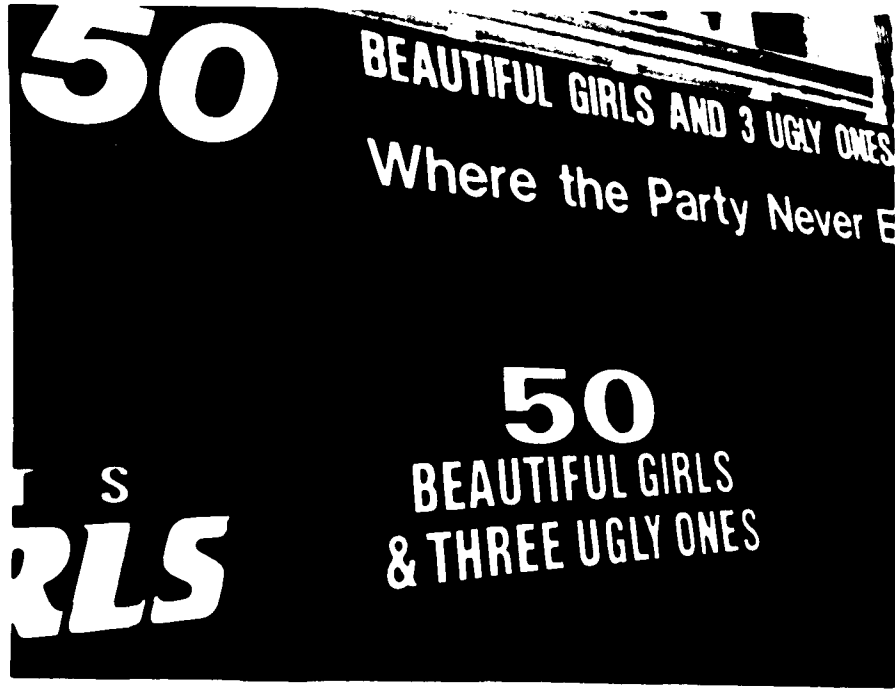


Fig. 2.15

NOTES

¹Adrienne Rich, "Notes Toward a Politics of Location," in *Women, Feminist Identity and Society in the 1980's: Selected Papers.*, ed. Myriam Diaz-Diocaretz and Iris M. Zavala (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1985), 8; quoted in Murphy, 41.

²Carlson, *Places of Performance*, 2.

³Ibid., 98.

⁴Les Wade, "Bourbon Street Burlesque: The Urban Erotic Zone," (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Mid-American Theatre Conference, Eleventh Annual Convention, 16 March 1990), photocopied.

⁵Wade, 1-2.

⁶David Low and Julia Lisella, ed., *Fodor's Montreal & Quebec City* (New York: Fodor's Travel Publications, Inc., 1990), 78-82.

⁷For a discussion about *Playboy*-type representations of women's bodies which impose sexual demands on their viewers see Berkeley Kaite, "The Pornographer's Body Double: Transgression is the Law," in *Body Invaders: Panic Sex in America*, ed. Arthur Kroker and Marilouise Kroker (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 150-152.

⁸The Hollywood areas include Sunset, La Brea, and La Cienega Boulevards. The other major concentration of strip clubs is in Inglewood by the Los Angeles airport. The author did not visit the latter area.

⁹Kappeler, 63-81.

¹⁰See Faye Hammel, *Frommer's Comprehensive Travel Guide: New York '92* (New York: Prentice Hall Travel, 1992), 207-213, 225-230, 236-241; Suzanne De Galan, ed., *Fodor's '93 New York City* (New York: Fodor's Travel Publications, Inc., 1992), 56, 73-76, 122-129; Mark Leeds, *Ethnic New York: A Complete Guide to the Many Faces and Cultures of New York* (Lincoln, Illinois: Passport Books, 1991), 106-108.

¹¹Deborah Bosley and Jamie Jensen, *The Real Guide: San Francisco and the Bay Area*, ed. Martin Dunford (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1991), 63.

¹²Mary Rakauskas, *Frommer's San Francisco* (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1989), 137-139.

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¹⁵Beresky, 91-92.

¹⁶"Maurice" (manager of the Apollon), interview-conversation with author, 7 July 1990, Montreal, Canada.

¹⁷As described by Jim Deely (display art manager for the *Washington Blade*), telephone interview-conversation with author, 13 November 1991; "Tony" (an employee of Tracks), telephone interview-conversation with author, 13 November 1991. See also ABC's "Phil Donahue" on "Lesbo-A-Go-Go," air date 15 November 1991.

¹⁸Doorman at the Camelot club, interview-conversation with author, 21 April 1990, Washington D.C.; "Brad" and two other male patrons at Archibald's, interview-conversations with author, 13 February 1992, Washington D.C.

¹⁹Robert Watters and Bob Fury (assistant to Watters), interview-conversation with author, 13 April 1990. The author's visit to the Colorado also confirmed the observations of Watters and Fury, 13 April 1990.

²⁰Debi Sundahl, telephone interview-conversation with author, spring 1990. See also Sundahl, "Stripper," in *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*, ed. Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Cleis Press, 1987), 177-179.

²¹Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 119.

²²Ibid., 120. The questions Dolan asks in her book reflect some of the concerns voiced in the 1989-1992 Women and Theatre Program

conferences about heterosexual cooptation of lesbian and gay performances for their own titillations and desires. Heterosexual audiences usually do not consider the cultural differences in the production of meaning in these performances nor contextualize them within the frame of social oppression. See also the Sue-Ellen Case and Holly Hughes debate on this issue, "A Case Concerning Hughes, letters from Sue-Ellen Case and Holly Hughes," *The Drama Review* 33, no. 4 (Winter 1989): 10-17.

²³Adrienne Rich, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence," in *Powers of Desire*, ed. Ann Snitow, Christine Stowsell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 200; see also Rich, 189-190.

²⁴Rich, 202.

²⁵Martin Dunford and Jack Holland, *The Real Guide: New York* (New York: Prentice Hall Travel, 1992), 157-158.

²⁶See for example Sophie Ben-Shitta, "Susan of Screw Interview with Sophie of *Mentertainment: Part I*," *Mentertainment*, June/July 1992, 37.

²⁷On this point see also Paula L. Dressel and David M. Petersen, "Equal time for Women: Social Notes on the Male Strip Show," *Urban Life* 11, no. 2 (July 1982): 198.

²⁸"Danna Montana's Sugar Shack Dancers," souvenir program, obtained 10 August 1990 (Chicago, Illinois), 6.

²⁹See for example Williams, 205-228; Rosalind Coward, *Female Desires: How They are Sought, Bought, and Packaged* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1985), 186-196; Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," in *Formations of Fantasy*, ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan (London: Methuen, 1986), 35-44.

³⁰See for example Harrison, 79-83; Ben-Shitta, 37; Dressel and Petersen, "Equal time for Women: Social Notes on the Male Strip Show," 197-204; idem, "Gender Roles, Sexuality and the Male Strip Show: The Structuring of Sexual Opportunity," *Sociological Focus* 15, no. 2 (April 1982): 151, 154, 156-160. This point was also demonstrated on NYW's (FOX) "Montel Williams" on "Male and Female Strippers," air date 30 November 1992.

³¹See for example Kappler, 78-79.

³² Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 77-81.

³³ Johnny Rotten, telephone interview-conversation with author, 4 May 1990. See also similar comments in Dressel and Petersen, 202-204.

³⁴ Fredric A. Strom, *Zoning Control of Sex Businesses* (New York: Clark Boardman, Ltd., 1977), 21.

³⁵ Dressler, 127.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁷ Wade, 16.

³⁸ Dressler, 67.

³⁹ Steven Swann Jones, "The Structure of Snow White," in *Fairytales and Society: Illusion, Allusion, and Paradigm*, ed. Ruth B. Bottigheimer (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 168.

⁴⁰ Mulvey, 171. Here, Mulvey also notes that Victor Turner's concept of liminality in *Dramas, Fields, Metaphors, Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974) is based on van Gennep's theory of the liminal discussed in his *Rites of Passage*.

⁴¹ Linda Wolfe, *The Cosmo Report*, with a foreword by Helen Gurley Brown (New York: Arbor House, 1981), 34.

⁴² Georges Bataille, *Eroticism: Death & Sensuality*, trans. Mary Dalwood (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1957; repr., San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1986); Jean Baudrillard, *The Ecstasy of Communication*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer, trans. Bernard Schutze and Caroline Schutze (Paris: Editions Galilee, 1987; repr., Brooklyn, New York: Autonomedia, 1988), 77-95; Michel Foucault, "Preface to Transgression," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews by Michel Foucault*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1988), 29-52; Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York: Longman, 1983), 172; Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), 197-199, 209; Jessica Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination* (New York: Pantheon

Books), 65-71; Jacqueline Rose, *Sexuality in the Field of Vision* (London: Verso, 1988), 210-213; Williams, 10-11, 263-264.

CHAPTER III

INTERIORS

We find here a characteristic logic, the peculiar logic of the "inside out" (*a l'envers*), of the "turnabout," of a continual shifting from top to bottom, from front to rear, of numerous parodies and travesties, humiliations, profanations, comic crownings and uncrownings. A second life, a second world of folk culture is thus constructed; it is to a certain extent a parody of the extracarnival life, a "world inside out."
--Mikhail Bakhtin¹

The interior "scenographies" of female and male strip bars, clubs, and theatres offer a number of different designs and ambiances structured around the co-mingling of the culturally familiar and the culturally extraordinary. This chapter begins by briefly examining the basic physical types of contemporary strip environments in terms of their general decor, ambience, and spatial layout. Next, it investigates some of the common socio-sexual themes of gender and heterosexual desire that are reproduced by these elements. And lastly, this chapter discusses how patron seating arrangements influence not only the "sightlines" of the spectator, but certain aspects of their participation as well. While the interior designs of these places of performance clearly

refer to some of our traditional social myths about sex and gender, they nevertheless also dispel notions about simple stable positions of spectatorship and desire.

Basic Types of Strip Establishments

For the sake of discussion, I have divided the strip establishments reviewed for this study into three overlapping "environmental" categories: the strip bar hangout, which ranges from the "neighborhood" pub to the "dive"; the "show biz" environment, which is much more fanciful and formal than the strip bar hangout; and the carnival-like sex emporium or environment, which makes use of sex emporium-type features.

The strip bar hangout is, not surprisingly, the most prevalent of these environments. Bar cultures, as a whole, have not only been historically the domain of men, they also operate in conjunction with a form of dictated deviance. Sherri Cavan, in her ethnographic study of bar settings in San Francisco, points out that such places are set apart from many aspects of regular city life. Most drinking establishments expect and accept what Cavan describes as "normal trouble" (her variant of dictated deviance). This "trouble" encompasses behaviors such as inebriation, sexual behavior, various forms of hustling, and the social accessibility of all members to one another.²

Many of the strip bar hangouts surveyed for this study share a similar lay-out and design. They are generally small, narrow, dimly lit

spaces that are decorated with dark colors (black, dark maroon, red, brown, forest green), strategically placed mirrors, and, sometimes, wood paneling. Most of the strip bars are equipped with small stages, juke boxes, and varying degrees of spartan furnishings. The social position of these bars, along with their usual non-specific decor and the interactions they encourage among their patrons, creates an air of informality and familiarity. This "familiar" ambience, in concert with the accepted but extraordinary "trouble" behavior, offers patrons marked negotiations between the socially acceptable and the socially deviant within the environment itself. The performance of "nudity" or stripping becomes another form of "normal trouble" which further highlights this preexisting condition.

Show biz strip environments include, but are not limited to, converted movie houses, traditional theatres, discos, and cabarets. These places feature relatively large stages, sophisticated lighting and sound systems, formal seating arrangements, and uniformed or tuxedoed personnel. While show biz establishments are also primarily decorated with black, red, or deep maroon color schemes, the dark hues are frequently used as the backdrops for festive lighting designs. They include string lights, chase string lights, Venetian string lights, and decorative neon ribbons. Many of these clubs are also embellished with streamers, balloons, mirror balls, and gold or silver accents. In a more or less obvious fashion, the interior designs and accessories of the show biz environments represent the cultural negotiations between the familiar and extraordinary by conspicuously relegating "normality" to the outside world.

As suggested in the previous chapter, this type of cultural mediation is a bit more complicated in terms of the show biz strip environments for female spectators, because there is a doubling up of the symbols of the extraordinary and masquerade. In this context, the "extraordinary" environment of the show biz setting is used to mask the even more extraordinary sexual activities for female patrons that take place within the club. In other words, as unusual as show biz designs may be, they are still more "ordinary" than erotic entertainments specifically geared for women.

Sex emporiums or strip environments which have sex emporium-like features also frequently use show biz embellishments. But these places include another set of "negotiations" for the pleasure of their patrons. Most sex emporiums are divided into multiple sub-spaces, in which different types of adult entertainments are presented (e.g., fantasy booths, peepshows, adult films, strip shows). In most of these situations, these performances take place simultaneously.

Brooks McNamara in his paper, "Defining Popular Entertainment," notes that spectators in "entertainment environments" (carnivals, amusement parks, midways, etc.) are partially responsible for the organization of their own event and entertainment experience.³ While this mien indicates a certain kind of spectator control over the proceedings, in this design the patron also has the *problem* of negotiating multiple threshold crossings and viewing positions. This creates another type of interplay between the familiar and the extraordinary because such entertainments are structured upon the pleasures of "liminality," through the experience of repeated spectator

dislocations and transversings, and not upon "total" spectator control. While other types of entertainment environments and theatrical events also feature mediations between the ordinary and extraordinary, establishments which present strip events foreground this transgressive dynamic, because, in our culture live, public presentations of "naked" bodies are socially disruptive. The naked body, particularly the naked female body, usually refers to sex--and sex in public is taboo.

Needless to say, one of the obvious ways heterosexuality is depicted through the interior designs of strip environments is by their gendered distribution. Establishments which present strip entertainments for men encompass all of these designs and mediations, while those for women are usually relegated to a modest variant of the show biz environment.

Social Decorations of Sexual Desire

Places for Men

The specific interior designs of strip clubs for men also offer a wider variety of subsidiary cultural themes about sexual desire than do most of those places of performance for women. Several of these themes occur, in different "scenic" forms, in all types of strip environments for men. They include clean/dirty dichotomies, glamor and excess motifs, and the representation of sex as a game. These

social symbols of desire are depicted through the decorations, ambiances, and general upkeep of the strip establishments. There is usually considerable overlap between these taxonomies. However, in order to discuss each theme more thoroughly, I have selected the strip environments which offer the most distinct examples of each. In certain cases, I will also refer to a few contingent elements of performance in order to analyze and describe how these cultural decorations function in terms of the overall strip events.

"Dirty" and "clean"

Joanna's and Archibald's in Washington D.C. follow most of the standard features of the strip bar hangout. But, in addition to the more or less spartan accoutrements generally found in such places, these two clubs feature dinner and drinks served on bistro tables, which are decked with simple white cloths, napkins, and small vases of fresh flowers. In these two establishments, the usual indifferent attitude towards the general upkeep of the hangout bar-type space is replaced with a conspicuous concern for a "clean" environment.

The managers and owners of Joanna's and Archibald's, in separate interviews-conversations, stated that they strove to provide their patrons with "clean" and "healthy" atmospheres and entertainments. In keeping with this theme, they all described the female dancers who worked in their respective places as "healthy," "girl-next-door types," "sweet kids," "clean-cut," "gals-just-trying-to-

make-a-living," and "one-of-the-guys."⁴ This plan of environmental cleanliness is also visibly incorporated into the actual performances of these dancers through a peculiar strip act coda which makes use of certain elements of interior design.

The female dancers in the Washington D. C. area perform "topless" and "bottomless." In lieu of "dirty" crotch-revealing floor shows, many dancers in the "nice and clean" D. C. clubs choreograph a series of poses or movements which are sometimes performed by leaning up against the mirror-backed walls of the small stages. The more unusual poses at Joanna's are accomplished with the help of the overhead bar. During these performances, the mirrors backing the stages frequently "fog up."

At the end of each strip set or act, whether the mirror is visibly "dirty" or not, the performers are required to carefully wipe it clean with a strategically placed sponge or towel and a bottle of Windex. These feats become part of the strip shows, because they are usually performed to music and are accompanied by "encouraging" comments from the audiences--such as "that's right, make it squeaky clean."⁵

Paradoxically, the bodies of the dancers, which are described as clean and healthy by the club managers and owners, strangely leave "dirty marks" on the mirrors as a result of their "sexual" performances. The placement of the mirrors is also of note because, depending on one's location in the club, they can reflect both the images of the dancers and some audience members--who are "dirtied" and then "cleaned" through the process of the performance. The Windex coda has the odd effect of underlining not only the

"cleanliness" of the environment, but also the possibility that "dirt" may encroach upon it, the event, and the spectators at any moment.

The *mise en scene* of these "clean" and "healthy" entertainment environments is produced by the physical appointments, the general upkeep of the spaces, the performances of the dancers, and the "vision" and "direction" of the managers and owners. This scenography suggests that sexual acts of seduction and desire are "performances" which need to be carefully monitored and maintained--because they could easily go out-of-control.

Two other clubs in Washington D. C. follow a different, but complementary design of this clean/dirty exchange. J.P.'s and Good Guys are also located in the fairly prestigious Northwest business sector of our nation's capital. They have the same general spatial design as the "nice" and "clean" strip bars just discussed. However, in J.P.'s and Good Guys, "dirt" and "danger" are not ominously lurking in the wings, they are literally represented on stage. The exteriors and interiors of these bars present environments which are relatively physically dirty and spartan. Unadorned tables, scuffed wooden floors, and dust are all part of the ambience of these bars.

Here, too, the performers and spectators visibly interact with their environments. In these two strip establishments, topless and bottomless dancers can perform parts of their routines on the floors of the small platform stages. Several dancers at J.P.'s and Good Guys actually incorporated the physical dirt and dust into their routines. During their strip acts, these dancers periodically showed their patrons the places where dirt had accumulated on their bodies. The spectators

generally responded sympathetically to this "show and tell" by handing the dancers additional dollar bills.⁶ A Washington D. C. businessman reported that both of these bars have reputations for walking on the borders of the municipal adult entertainment laws--even though they are considered middle-class clubs and are patronized by many established lawyers and businessmen.⁷

Good Guys was recently refurbished. Two extra stages and multi-colored lights were added to the space to create a somewhat cleaner and more overtly festive environment. During my last visit to this club, a policeman was posted in the back of the bar to make sure that the dancers did not perform their infamous "dirty" floor routines.⁸ J.P.'s and Good Guys offer their patrons extraordinary environments which are already or almost "out-of-control." In this set-up, the sense of risk is the excitement and danger of a possible "raid" from the "ordinary" world which threatens to police, and possibly Windex clean, all those who play and act within.

There is one other strip establishment in Washington D. C. which offers a distinctive play on the themes of cleanliness and the "policing" of sexual desire. The two-story, glamorous Camelot is an unusual combination of both the hangout and show biz types of strip clubs. It is located right next door to Joanna's, but it presents a far more formal environment, beginning with its uniformed doorman standing outside.

The downstairs space at the Camelot looks like an upscale, narrow, neighborhood bar with the addition of mock, Tiffany style stained-glass windows interspersed with polished wood paneling.

There is one very small platform stage along the wall in the center of this room. The upstairs environment has much more of a cabaret look. The walls are decorated with elegantly patterned mirrors, polished wood paneling, and giant dark nondescript paintings trimmed with ebony and gold. The bistro tables are decked with candles and small vases of flowers. The large platform stage is ringed with string lights.

These two environments are further distinguished from one another because businessmen and heterosexual couples are usually escorted upstairs, while a generally younger, less formal, all-male crowd is seated downstairs. Both of these levels are patrolled by male bouncers who wear very visible yellow security guard jackets and carry walkie-talkies. Their job is to make sure that the patrons behave and basically "stay put."⁹

The lighting plan in both of these environments is also unusual, for this design includes the prodigious use of black light which creates another atmospheric condition. The dancers in this club wear mostly white or light colored outfits and lingerie because of the dramatic effect of the lighting. Since the Camelot is also attended by many businessmen, the black light also plays upon the white or light blue shirts worn by those seated closest to the stage. "Stuffed shirts" glowing in the dark inadvertently become amusing icons in the structure of this "scenic" arrangement. In the Camelot, the sparkling white or light-colored costumes of the dancers; the seated "stuffed" shirts; the carefully detailed, subdued, and coordinated decor; the general segregation of the spectators according to gender and perceived type; and the overt "performance of policing" by the

uniformed guards with their walkie-talkies create an atmosphere of order, discipline, control, and most of all--tension.

In all of the clubs just described, the representations of physical and conceptual "cleanliness" and "dirtiness" are not only related to cultural and historical connotations of women's bodies with desire, sex and sin, but also to carnivalesque, transgressive positions of spectatorship. As demonstrated, dirtiness and cleanliness are, indeed, represented as cultural signs attached to the bodies of the female performers in these clubs. However, these symbols are also part of the environmental structures which shape the roles of the spectators as well as those of the performers. Spectators, who attend places of striptease performance, are not positioned as clean, unified, subjects-in-control, who gaze at "poor," "dirty," "powerless" dancers. Instead, the scenographies of these strip clubs situate their patrons in positions of risk and uncertainty--for they, too, are extensions of their environments and are, therefore, subject to be "cleaned" or "dirtied" depending on the design. This uncertainty is surely a great part of the experience of transgressive, erotic pleasure.

It is also important to note that concepts of the "dirty" are frequently synonymous with concepts of the socially chaotic and uncontrollable, and hence, often the sinful (which is probably why they are so frequently attached to females within dominant discourses). "Cleanliness," on the other hand, often represents order and control. The use of these two terms in such paradigms refers to the tensions and exchanges between stable social boundaries and chaotic dissent. In the "nice and clean" strip clubs, the disrupter is "dirt," while the

spectators attempt to position themselves in terms of stability and social boundaries. In the "not-so-nice clubs," spectators openly choose positions of social rebellion, reveling on the verge of being taken over and controlled. In the Camelot, "control" over the spectator is an obvious part of the event. The "police" hover about inside the club, "lying in wait" for any patrons who dare, or mistakenly, step out of line.

Glamor and "glaring excess"

Show biz type strip environments for men focus on the themes of glamor and dress-up or masquerade. In these scenic designs, interplays of social control and chaos are usually depicted through representations of excess--and this, of course, then necessitates some sort of management. Many of the strip clubs and theatres visited in Montreal, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Houston, Peoria, and New York City, use this style of sexual representation.

In addition to the standard glitzy type of appointments already mentioned, some show biz strip environments are so elaborately designed and decorated that they are reminiscent of Donald Trump's projects. Several of the most ostentatious of these clubs are located, not surprisingly, in Houston, Texas.

Rick's Bar and Restaurant, one of Houston's premiere strip clubs,¹⁰ sponsored the *Stripteasers* series of videotapes which were shot in its special V.I.P. Lounge. This space boasts floor to ceiling

arched windows and mirrors, pinkish walls, soft blue lighting, pink table cloths, exceptionally large vases of fresh flowers, and huge abstract paintings in blues, reds and whites. The main platform stage is backed by mirrors and mauve columns and has a very small runway attached to it. White baby grand pianos are used as supplementary stages (Fig. 3.1).

The main party room at Rick's is considerably larger and combines high tech and art deco designs. The walls, carpeting, plush chairs, and tables are done in mauve and light green colors. These pastels are mixed with mirrors, shiny black surfaces and accents, and the use of multi-colored spotlighting. The main stage is a large runway. White baby grand pianos are used as stages in this space as well.

Robert Watters, the owner of Rick's, stated that his club was designed to create "the environment of a European cabaret--sophisticated--where businessmen feel comfortable."¹¹ At the same time, Watters also suggested that the ambience of the main area was modeled after the huge first floor cosmetic section in Bloomingdale's department store in New York City. The Bloomingdale's cosmetic section is surrounded by mirrors, high-tech lighting, shiny black surfaces, and a plethora of merchandise. Bloomingdale's offers their consumers a considerable selection of "goods," which may suggest consumer control through the "choice of objects." However, its aim, according to Watters, is also to "overwhelm" and "confuse" the shoppers. Watters states that his own intentions for Rick's follow suit.

This club intermingles an ambience of patron "comfort" with an ambience of patron "overwhelm."

In this club (as in a number of other strip clubs for men), twenty or more dancers can be performing at the same time, on the formal stages and at the tables of individuals and groups of patrons. Watters stated that this environment promotes both spectator "overload" and the "pleasure of conspicuous consumption." While the idea of this kind of "spending," again, suggests the economic control and dominance of the patron, such actions also present certain dangers for the "big spender." In these environments, patrons may not be able to master the situation--that is, they can become overloaded, or even "spent."

The Men's Club, also located in Houston, takes Rick's V.I.P. Lounge to even further extremes. According to architect Robert Schuh, this absolutely gigantic club is modeled after art nouveau hotel lobbies because of its undulating lines, floriate patterns, and symbolic themes which conjure "exotic" or dreamlike imagery.¹² The Men's Club boasts marble accented walls and columns, thick floral carpets, and niches with statues and brass lion heads. Spectators sit in high-backed, floral parlor chairs placed around large, circular tables. The main runway stage is balanced by other smaller, round, platform stages throughout the space. The use of more diffused lighting, as opposed to the stronger spot lighting favored by most "glamor" clubs, adds to the environment's parlor-like or hotel lobby aura.

The general openness of the environmental design also establishes the sense of being in a very public setting. This strange characteristic is heightened because the Men's Club includes the

addition of more "ordinary" adjoining spaces. An outdoor swimming pool, an indoor health club, a gift shop, and hair dressing salons complete the design of this spa-like complex. This scenography suggests the transgressive thrill of "getting away" with sexual activities in the middle of a truly public place--or perhaps of the experience of a dream or nightmare in which one goes out and then discovers that one has forgotten to dress. The entire "picture" is that of infinite sex performances, viewable from all angles, in a Fellini-esque atmosphere.

Goldfingers, in the borough of Queens in New York City, also offers themes of glamor and excess, but through an exclusively high tech space-age design. This club also plays to some more obvious adolescent fantasies about sex, social rules, and games which will be discussed shortly. Goldfingers is a large, glitzy nightclub covered with matte and shiny black surfaces (Fig. 3.2). It features lilac neon lighting, high tech sound equipment, and five separate formal stages. The large main stage is located at one end of the space. It is surrounded on three sides by both single chairs and bistro tables and chairs. Next to this stage, and overhead, is another performing space. A small plexi-glass platform allows patrons an unusual perspective--they may literally peek or look up a woman's skirt.

The other large stage at Goldfingers is placed in the middle of the room and in the center of an enormous circular bar. At the other end of the club, a raised and partitioned section with a small stage is available for private parties. On weekend nights, Goldfingers also presents hot-oil wrestling in its basement space. Patrons can perform in these events by becoming the managers of the female wrestler--that

is, if they are willing to pay enough for this honor. These roles are auctioned off to the highest bidders (the cost can range anywhere from fifty to two hundred dollars).¹³ Because of the multiple stages and performance situations possible in many of these types of strip clubs, some of them easily overlap with the sex-emporium category (Fig. 3.3).

Sex emporiums, games, and "adjustments"

The ambiances of sex emporiums can range from the glamorous to the decaying. Nevertheless, the simultaneous use of different performance areas in these entertainment environments highlights the theme of excess through multiple scenographic exchanges and spectator negotiations.

The Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theatre in San Francisco is still managed by its founders and the producers of one of the most popular porn films of all times, *Behind the Green Door*. As one may well imagine, this sex center focuses on abundance, variety, decadence, and glamor. The lobby is a well-lit, immaculately clean space, covered with greenish-blue and cream tiles. The focal point of this area is a large exotic fish tank built into the wall. This area leads to five different types of spaces which are loosely named for the sexual performances featured in each (all include some form of stripping): the New York Live Stage, the Green Door Room, the Cine Stage, the Copenhagen Room, and the Ultra Room. The decor of these individual spaces

ranges from high tech party environments and elegant yuppie movie theatres to the mythical decadence of ancient times.

The Cine Stage is a movie theatre space which presents adult films and also special strip performances by female porno stars. A performance stage is placed in front of the ceiling to floor and wall to wall film screen. The audience seating is arranged in a modern amphitheater design. The entire space is subdued, but richly decorated with dark green colors and light oak wood trim.

In contrast to this quiet, controlled, and relatively dark movie theatre environment, the New York Live Stage space presents continuous strip shows with dazzling light and video displays. In this area, music seems to blast from all directions. Strippers perform on a large, rectangular, platform stage. The stage is surrounded on three sides by slightly raked, traditional theatre seating. "Dressed" performers also roam the audience, offering to sit on the laps of the spectators while the striptease acts are in progress.

The Green Door Room offers another type of environment. The dark green walls of this performance area are subtly lit, but they are decorated with gigantic ancient and Renaissance friezes depicting "erotic" scenes. This performance space is designed as a cabaret. The main stage is half-moon shaped and is surrounded by tables, chairs, and banquettes. The tables are unusual because they are larger than the regular bistro tables and are also carpeted.

The half-moon stage turns into a shower room during the show. Female performers undress and then shower together. After they wash, they individually move to the carpeted table tops to dry off and to

engage the spectators seated around those tables in conversations for tips.

The Copenhagen and Ultra Rooms are less ornate. The Copenhagen Room is a very small space ringed with red couches and mirrors. This performance area features "girl on girl" acts, mini-strip shows and performer-spectator lap sitting. The Ultra Room, which was not available at the time of my visits, offers private booths and peep shows where performers strip and play with various sex toys.

As suggested, spectator movement within and between all of these spaces intensifies spectator engagement with the different designs of the environment. The patron has both the excitement and problem of organizing the sexual events with a personal "show" of individual control and decision-making. Because the "rules of the game" change according to the different spaces, the spectator embarks on a play of dislocation and adjustment in order to fulfill the expectations of each environment.¹⁴

For example, acceptable spectator behavior in individual fantasy or peep show booths may be quite different from the expected spectator behavior in the movie theatre or strip theatre spaces of the same establishments. A shift in location is frequently a shift in spectator-spectator relationships as well. In certain spaces spectators must contend more directly with the scrutiny of their peers. Similarly, certain types of spectator-performer contact may be allowable in some areas, when the performer is partially "dressed," and not allowable in other settings when the performer is "nude" (see chapter six for more on spectator behavior and "performance").

The theme or game of mastery and control in the face of carnivalesque dislocations and excesses is perhaps most clearly represented by the exterior and interior designs of the sex-emporium Show World in New York City. Show World's exterior marquee is shaped like a circus or carnival tent. The main entranceway even displays a collection of mechanical clowns posted above the inside door. The carnival design is also carried out in Show World's interior spaces--in the individual "live" fantasy booths, the individual movie booths, the peep show theatre, and the transsexual and straight strip show and movie theatre environments (Fig. 3.4).

These interior places of performance are also decorated with bright colors (yellow, red, and orange), festive string lights, mirror chips, and clown mosaics. The stage of the Triple Treat Theatre, which presents straight strip shows interspersed with porno films, is adorned with mirrors and red scalloped trimmings which are designed to resemble the entranceways of circus or side-show tents. The carnival midway and game arcade theme is also supported throughout the entertainment environment because patrons purchase separate tokens and tickets to pay for many of the entertainments.

The location of "amusements" within an environment or larger event sometimes provides other types of social signification and mediation. The Triple Treat Theatre, individual fantasy booths, and peep shows which present female performers are located on the ground level and upper floors of Show World. The same types of events which present transsexual performers (men to women),

however, are located in the basement of the building--for they are the most "extraordinary."

The references to circus and carnival events suggest the fears and thrills associated with the social dislocation that occurs through the viewing of individuals and feats which disrupt visions of the normative. The game arcade motif, also apparent here, refers to the pleasure of mastery and winning--but as game players well know, in these situations failure, loss, and possible disgrace also "lurk in the wings."¹⁵

Game or sport thematic depictions of male sexual desires are prevalent cultural depictions. These representations, in some form, figure into all of the strip environments and events surveyed for this study. Two of the most pronounced scenographic examples of this theme are found in Scores in New York City and in the Colorado in Houston.

Scores is located just around the corner from Chippendales on the East Side of Manhattan. Its name not only relates to game points, but to sexual satisfaction. Both game points and sexual satisfaction are achieved, in the context of "scoring," by undergoing various tests, challenges, and risks. Scores is advertised as New York's "Only Fully Equipped Executive Club for Gentlemen" (Fig. 3.5). It is a huge space of 15,000 square feet, similar to many of the large gentlemen's clubs in Houston's Galleria area. Its interior design combines teal green walls, bistro tables, and comfortable banquettes; real stained glass windows; floors carpeted with a colorful confetti pattern; a huge "S"-shaped bar with two small stages on either side; and one large main stage equipped with mirrors, a projection video screen, and a smoke

machine. The space includes other video monitors and screens which continuously feature sports events. They are placed strategically throughout the main area. Scores also has a V.I.P. room designed in a similar style. It is separated from the main space by doors adorned with expensive stained glass windows.

At Scores, the interior scheme encourages patrons literally to play as well as watch. This club "sports" a mini basketball court and a game arcade. In the game arcade, one can shoot pool, play video games, practice golf on a mini putting green, or try out the soccer and air hockey machines. The miniature basketball court offers patrons a chance to dribble balls on a cement floor and to shoot baskets against a portion of a white brick, exterior-looking wall. Since these spaces are in view of the main area, patrons can take turns playing and watching each other as well as gazing upon the dancers who perform on the stages, at table sides, and on table tops.

The Colorado, situated just outside of Houston's Galleria district, suggests a different game plan from that of Scores. The Colorado conflates sex and desire with sporting events which include hunting, and possibly, colonization. The Colorado is a two-space environment. (However it was about to be renovated into a multi-space entertainment center.¹⁶) Its present interior areas sport the basic mauve and light green color design that dominates many of the other prestigious strip clubs for men in Houston, but this is where the similarities end. Rough hewn timber beams decorate the walls and ceiling of the main room. These are covered with animal trophies, statues of animals, stuffed animals (lions and tigers and bears. . .oh

my!), and a few pictures of "wild-west-type" women in corsets--holding rifles. Patrons sit at the bar or in comfortable grey bucket chairs clustered around copper-topped tables. Adjoining the main space is the Sports Club. This large room boasts rows of pool tables, a "library" of well-bound books in a niche, wood panelling, and stained-glass windows. It is the ultimate in fantasy "dens" (Fig. 3.6, 3.7).

The name, the Colorado, while not specifically sexual, conjures up images of wilderness, cowboys, the gold rush, and a variety of outdoor sports. Employees and patrons as reciprocal extensions of the environment, carry out the overall intent of the design. At the time of this writer's visit, the waitresses in this club did not wear the standard variation of tuxedo tails or some form of leotard prevalent in many of the strip establishments in Texas and elsewhere. They dressed, instead, in camouflage safari shirts and shorts. At the same time, the relatively conservative behavior manifested by the Houston patrons of the yuppie high tech or hotel lobby art nouveau environments described previously, is replaced with what owner Robert Watters and club manager Bob Fury call "macho hooting and stomping."¹⁷

Sex as sportsmanship and women as hunted, dangerous, beasts either to be "killed" or "captured" by "manly" men is visualized throughout this environment. This interior design may indeed position the male participants as "zoo-keepers" or tamers of dangerous and non-human female bodies.¹⁸ However, neither the power positions within this place of performance, nor the cultural mythology which informs it, are necessarily uni-directional. In the Colorado the "subservient" waitresses assume the costume of colonizers or animal

tamers. And, interspersed among the animal head trophies, the prints of corseted women holding rifles pose symbols which suggest socially subversive role reversals. This strip scenography may position the spectators as sportsmen or hunters who are "winners" or "slayers." But at the same time, this design also allows the male players to take up the exciting roles of being "overwhelmed" or "slayed" by the situation ("slayed" as in the expression of desire--"you slay me").

Male participants who enter into strip environments enact a wide variety of stereotypical social roles which are supported and encouraged by the scenic designs. However many of these roles (which involve the sexual themes of clean/dirty, excess, and games) often simultaneously offer males mimetic experiences that resist the cultural dictates which require them to be in social and sexual control at all times. As Linda Williams insists in *Hardcore*, "pornographic" or "erotic" depictions frequently carry very notable representations of cultural resistance within them.¹⁹

Male cooptations of sexual-erotic positions traditionally assigned to women are not sympathetic or empathic responses to the positions of females as a gendered class in our society. They are, instead, subversive tactics undertaken to experience sexual roles forbidden to them in dominant heterosexual contexts. For, while the double standard limits sexual expression for women, other social rubrics manage male sexuality by censoring any erotic behavior which is culturally considered "feminine."

Places for Women

As discussed in the previous chapter, strip events for women are usually subset into environments which offer more mainstream types of entertainments. Because of this, the interior designs of those environments generally reflect their larger functions (e.g., restaurants, cabarets, nightclubs, discos). There are several important exceptions to this rule of thumb which will be discussed presently, but even these do not match some of the scenic extremes found in the strip clubs for men. In a sense, this difference reflects the social doctrine which continues to forbid overt displays of female desires and sexualities.

One of the starkest examples of this basic difference between male and female strip club interior design is the comparison of Big Al's and Big Alice's in Peoria, Illinois (if it plays in Peoria. . .). These places of performance are housed in a single building and are under the same management. Big Al's is located in the larger and more convenient ground floor space, while Big Alice's is situated in the much smaller upstairs area. Big Al's contains bright orange, black, and red carpeting; blue-green walls covered with mirrors, silver tinsel, and pictures of spotlighted female pin-ups and centerfolds; and four different types of stages, including one go-go cage. Spectators sit around reddish bistro tables on chairs or stools, depending on the height of the table. They can also sit at the large bar.

In contrast to Big Al's excess or overload of color and design, Big Alice's upstairs space has a simple pinky-peach color scheme, accented with peach neon ribbons delicately circling the room. A

single platform stage is located at one end of the space. A very small bar, decorated with a few plants, is placed at the other end. The spectator seating is arranged in neat rows of utilitarian chairs interspersed with a few bistro tables for drinks. The audience space is strangely divided in half because of a foundational wall that runs down the center of most of the space. Despite this one oddity, the entire area has a bare, airy, "neutral" appearance (Fig. 3.8).

Several other environments which present striptease for women follow similar design schemes. Danielle's, a restaurant-nightclub in New York City, presents a weekly male strip show in conjunction with other types of entertainments for coed audiences (comedy nights, disco, sing-a-longs, etc.). Danielle's is also a fairly understated environment. The more rowdy bar area is separated from the dining and nightclub space by a glass divider. The dining and performance area has soft pink-colored walls, hanging plants, and a small dance floor surrounded by a neat layout of bistro tables and banquetts (Fig. 3.9).

The Apollon, in Montreal, is a more sophisticated and less "neutral" version of this look. It is also one of the few spaces solely dedicated to strip entertainments for women. This club sports soft pink walls decorated with a few small, gold-framed paintings and mirrors. The tables are covered with pink cloths, cloth napkins, and fresh flowers in small vases. A palm tree and a large gold statue of the god Apollo are situated at the far end of the room, next to a small bar with additional seating. A medium-sized platform stage is placed in the center of this narrow, rectangular space. The stage is flanked by

suggestions of classical Greek columns and is equipped with the latest in lighting and sound technology. The Apollon's use of a few exotic signifiers does suggest a scenic interest in the representation of desire. But this club differs from similar strip environments for men, because the exotic references are used sparingly and because the play and pleasure of excess is not expressed through the interior design. It should also be noted that, according to the club manager, the Apollon was originally conceived as a strip club for gay male audiences.

In contrast to these fairly subdued environments, Chippendales New York and Chippendales Los Angeles; La Bare in Houston; and Escapes on Long Island, New York offer versions of the glitzy cabaret-disco or show biz environments. But, once again, these spaces do not suggest the "overload" aspect created by many of glamor, cabaret strip environments for men. The majority of the disco-cabaret environments for female striptease spectators surveyed for this study feature "the spare and the bare." These spaces usually include dark-colored walls, theatrical spot lighting designs, single stages, and utilitarian seating (e.g., old movie theatre seats, bistro chairs and tables, planks, banquettes, etc.). La Bare in Houston is the only club for women visited that offered more than one formal stage.

Escapes, on Long Island, New York, is one of the more unusual of these types of clubs. It still has the aura of its original purpose as an airplane hangar teenage disco. Several different levels are sculpted out of the immense interior space. Gold and silver trimming decorate the peeling black walls. Cafeteria tables with red paper coverings form long lines across the gymnasium-like main floor. Black bistro tables

and chairs with paper placemats, decorated with a group photo of the current male dancers, make up the furnishings and decorations of the elevated "dining section." The rows of tables on the main floor and the overall ambience remind one of a high school cafeteria or gym decorated for a themeless party.

Chippendales New York has recently undergone a few cosmetic renovations which have spruced up the overall environment. This space includes a traditional platform stage as well as a floor-level dancing and performing space situated directly in front of the main stage. The audience sits on utilitarian benches and stackable chairs that are placed on makeshift-looking risers. These risers are set up to create a three-quarter amphitheater seating arrangement around the floor-level performance space. This performance area has been painted dark red. Several large, but rather sedate prints of male pin-ups and festive, multicolored lights near the bar area have been added to the decor (Fig. 3.10). However, the platform stage still sports the *Westside Story* set design that has been used for a number of years. This set, with its street lamp, torn chain metal fence, and on-stage car may indirectly refer to the "romance" of star-crossed lovers, but it is also designed to lend a "macho" look to the proceedings which pose men as desired sex objects. At the same time, there is something sophomoric about this set which may serve to frame adult female erotic experiences with the less threatening fantasies of school girls (Fig. 3.11).

Two cabaret or disco-style strip clubs for women come very close to the male model of this type of sexual scenography. Club 281

in Montreal, the smaller of the two places, follows the more standard kind of the male cabaret strip club. It has a dark interior color scheme which is accented with multiple strands of yellow and green string lights and a few hanging plants. Like many of the clubs for men, 281 displays "pin-ups" on its walls. The Club 281 male pin-up prints are more numerous and "racier" than those at Chippendales New York (that is, more of these photos display full body shots and skin). This overt scenic display of males as objects of female desire is probably due to the fact that Club 281 is one of the few establishments which is used solely as a strip entertainment environment for women.

Club 281 also has a large bar that runs along one side of the room. Sleek bistro tables and chairs are crowded into the rest of the space. The medium-size stage platform is situated opposite the bar with additional seating directly around it. The stage is backed by an enormous screen which projects images of the particular dancer who is performing. This heightens the show biz directives of this type of club by presenting each male dancer as a star of a mini-movie or video.

While Club 281 replicates the male generic model of a cabaret strip club with its many lights, large bar, high tech features, sleek furnishings, and walls decked with pin-ups, the much larger Sugar Shack II in Chicago is fashioned after the fantasy glamor design. The interior walls of the Sugar Shack II are covered with exterior bricks. Sections of the walls and ceiling are also topped with an unusual thick, red carpeting. The brick areas of the walls are patterned to create the appearance of a series of large arched windows. The ceiling is

covered with white string lights, and while the show is in progress, it has the effect of stars overhead. The audience area is set on different risers which are uniquely designed to resemble numerous outdoor brick terraces. Rows of garden lamps adorn the tops of the brick dividers which outline the terraces. Shiny square and rectangular tables and high stools are neatly lined up on each of the balconies (Fig. 3.12).

The space-age stage appears to be at odds with the old-world courtyard design of the audience space. The stage is composed of three levels: a main stage space, a runway area, and a small, shiny, steel platform cage that can be raised and lowered. The stage lighting is hung on conspicuous polished steel racks overhead. A giant video projection screen backs the main part of the stage. The design of this environment suggests an interesting clash or exchange between a star-filled night on a romantic balcony or in courtyard and the viewing of a sci-fi spaceship adventure story (Fig. 3.13). One has the odd experience of being both indoors and out-of-doors simultaneously--of transversing some past era into a time of the future.

Notable, too, is the fact that this scenic plan follows a traditional division of gender roles--women are positioned on "romantic" balconies while men are situated in a space age technological setting. But as in all strip club designs, the performance areas and spectator roles are not stable entities. In this environmental plan, it is the males, rather than the females, who are posed as social aliens. Here, women are framed with the signifiers of the universal or the classical. And while the female spectators may be located within the cultural safety of

traditional romantic scenes, they are still invited onto the space ship stage to take part in various tipping activities. Once again, this scenography offers social boundaries and disruptions of those boundaries by referring to theatrical negotiations of time, place, and action (traditional gender roles).

The interior design of the Sugar Shack II is a rarity in strip clubs for women because the use of scenographic negotiations to dislocate or decenter the spectator is generally relegated to strip clubs for men. This may be due not only to the issue of subsetting and the general social suppression of more overt sexual representations of female desires, but also because males in our society may need more accessories in order to experience sexual dislocation and the positions of desire culturally denied to them. On the other hand, male strip performances and events for women may themselves provide enough of a cultural dislocation to effect a similar experience because they are so extraordinary within our society.

Spectator Seating and "Sightlines"

Marvin Carlson states: "Surely no one in theatre needs to be told that space 'speaks'--that spatial configurations can be powerful signifying agents."²⁰ The relationship between the spectator and the performer is integral to spectator-spectator interaction and vice versa. The type of spectator seating frequently indicates the type(s) of patron participation required or expected by the event. This section will deal

with two aspects of spectator-spectator configurations--"isolated spectator" and "spectator subgrouping" seating arrangements. Chapter six, "Sporting the Spectator," discusses other elements of spectator-spectator and performer-spectator proxemics and interactions.

The importance of the "isolated spectator" and "spectator subgrouping" seating distinctions is not so much whether spectators initially attend strip events as singles or in groups, but rather that certain spectator behaviors and experiences are elicited through the "encouragement" of particular seating designs, in tandem with the overall structure of event and environment. Some strip environments promote one or the other of these basic seating patterns, while a few environments offer a combination of arrangements.

Isolating the Spectator

Dressler briefly describes "isolated spectator" behavior in his dissertation on the Burlesque show in New York City. He notes that the traditional theatre set-up and audience decorum of his day focused the attention of the patrons almost exclusively on the stage activities so that the spectators usually took little notice of one another during the performances.²¹ The audience areas of these Burlesque houses were arranged in the typical side-by-side spectator seating plan. Contemporary strip environments which use this standard theatre or movie house design are the most obvious modern examples of side-

by-side "isolated" spectator seating arrangements. The **New Century** and **Market Street** theatres in San Francisco, and the **Harmony Theatre** and the **New Paris Revue** in New York City, are a few of the clubs which come under this category.

Side-by-side seating, however, is also used in the less formal layouts of strip bar hangouts and nightspots. For example, in some of the pubs, the bar counter and stools run along a good portion of the length of the space. The stage or stages are often placed directly opposite the bar seating so that the patrons must either sit or stand with their backs to the bar in order to see the action. Generally, chairs are also placed directly around the stage areas. This design creates two or three rows of spectators. In other hangout spaces, the shape of the bar is circular or rectangular. The stage is usually situated in the center of this design with a galley around it for the waiters and bartenders. The spectators sit side-by-side around the outside of the bar. Often another "row" of spectators stand behind the seated patrons at the bar.

Table and chair groupings are either non-existent or quite limited in these types of establishments. The spectator seating is structured so that there is less of an opportunity for patrons to sit facing one another without the stage and performers in-between them. Sightlines are of great importance in this design. The strip acts are usually staged so that the performers rotate places, in order to insure that all the audience members will eventually have some sort of "centered" view of their routines. In New York City, **Gallagher's**, the **Merry-Go-Round**, the **Baby Doll Lounge**, and **Billy's** make use of this

type of seating arrangement. In a sense, such a spatial set-up functions as a "gaze-control" device.

A unique version of the "isolated" spectator and "gaze-control" plan is on view at the Star Strip in Los Angeles. The Star Strip is a large, sleek space with black walls adorned with different colored neon lights. Running down the center of the space is an unusual series of eight small, circular, raised platforms which are interconnected with small runways. Both the stages and the runways are also decorated with neon lighting. The performers rotate from platform to platform so that the spectators do not have to move or shift their focus.

Each interconnected stage looks a little like a small pool. The center portion of each stage is sunken or cut out (about two to three feet) and lit with bluish-lavender lights around the bottom and sides. Patrons sit directly around these pools, mostly looking down into them, because the dancers, after stripping quickly, sit or lie at the bottom of these pools and perform floorshows. These sightlines discourage spectator-spectator interaction because of the *slant* of the spectator's gaze.

All of these isolated spectator strip structures highlight the transgressive element of "private" sexual acts and experiences taking place in "public" settings. This design also refers to one of the traditional ways sexuality and nudity are represented within our culture--that is, they are both relegated to a metaphysical hinterlands, which is apparent and hidden at the same time.

Spectator Subgroup Seating

Strip environments which encourage subgrouping spectating positions (that is, two or more spectators seated together and conspicuously interacting) within larger audience populations may also refer to the tensions between sexual privacy and public display-- but through a doubling of this process. The spectator is an individual within a small group, which is itself within a larger public group. However, the more important differences between single and subgrouping spectatorship are found in the locus of control and the interplay of "homosocial" relationships and desires which will be discussed in chapter six.

Strip environments which encourage subgrouping through their seating arrangements generally replace the informal and formal designs of side-by-side spectator seating with tables and chairs or banquettes. Small group interaction is frequently reinforced by additional sub-events offered or abetted by these establishments (e.g., dining, business deals, table side or table top strip performances, competing fan clubs, and various "private" parties or celebrations). These types of seating arrangements, particularly in combination with accompanying sub-events, often preclude the type of sightlines and focus which direct the spectator's gaze more exclusively onto a main stage or event.²²

Spaces which encourage small group participation through their interior designs and activities also encourage a shift in the role of the performer--from that of the main focal point of an event, to one of

several points of interest and sometimes even as a catalyst for the internal interactions of the subgroups. As described, performer-catalyst roles may also exist in isolated spectator set-ups. But in the subgrouping models, the catalyst role is much more pronounced because of the relationship of the small group members to one another. For example, business deals were observed and reported in all of the clubs for men which provided table seating. The owners or managers of Archibald's, the Men's Club, and Caligula XXI all referred to the business transactions that take place in their clubs as "the main event."²³

Sex emporium-type strip environments offer yet another variation on isolated spectator and subgrouping seating arrangements. Strip clubs such as Rick's, the Men's Club, Big Al's, Goldfingers, Scores, the Penthouse, Club Super Sexe, as well as Club 281 and La Bare for female patrons, are large establishments which provide multiple stages or performance areas. These clubs also feature both side-by-side and cluster patron seating.

In such environments, spectators can move about the space, adjusting their distance between the performers and their fellow spectators. Spectators can share various activities as members of small groups at tables and then temporarily leave those positions and take up side-by-side seats at bars or around the formal stages of the clubs.

While these set-ups, again, indicate a type of spectator control in terms of a "personal" organization of the strip event, changes of location and seating can also decenter the patron by requiring the

proper adjustment of her or his behavior. At the same time, individual shifts of position also impact on the experiences of other spectators and the performers, all of which necessitate additional negotiations between the players.

"Scenic Management" of Desire

The effects of all of the seating modalities just discussed appear to have less influence over female spectators of strip events in general. The majority of strip shows for women are under the direction of an M.C. (See my chapters on choreography and spectatorship for other discussions about the M.C.) The M.C. interferes, to some degree, with both isolated and subgrouping spectator behavior because the M.C. attempts to have all the participants respond as a unified community (Fig. 3.14). This is not to say that isolated and subgrouping experiences do not occur in these types of clubs for women, but simply that female spectators have this additional factor in play. In strip clubs for women which do not have the "guidance" of the M.C. (e.g., La Bare, Club 281, and the Apollon), the seating arrangements operate in much the same fashion as they do in the clubs for men.

In the context of strip events, environmental management of male spectator desires and actions is just as intense as it is for female desires and actions. The difference is that the management of male spectators is deliberately designed to be less overt. While M.C.'s do not usually preside over strip shows for men, the environmental

directives of seating and thematic design are insidious control strategies which nevertheless preserve a sense of male spectator autonomy, which is in keeping with the prevailing social norms of gender. As McNamara proposes, "entertainment environments" offer "a distinctive brand of fantasy architecture or 'scenography.'"²⁴ For McNamara, "'the shape of the event' becomes, in fact, a kind of constant mediation between the spectator and the powerful entertainment environment that surrounds him [*sic*]."²⁵

The designs of strip club scenographies and the spectator interplay with those scenographies represent some of the transgressive, carnivalesque ways in which female and male patrons can experience "extraordinary" sexual roles and expressions while still being allied with the culturally "familiar." In all of these environments, differences in female and male heterosexual desires are clearly represented as differences in environmental design and instruction.



Fig. 3.2

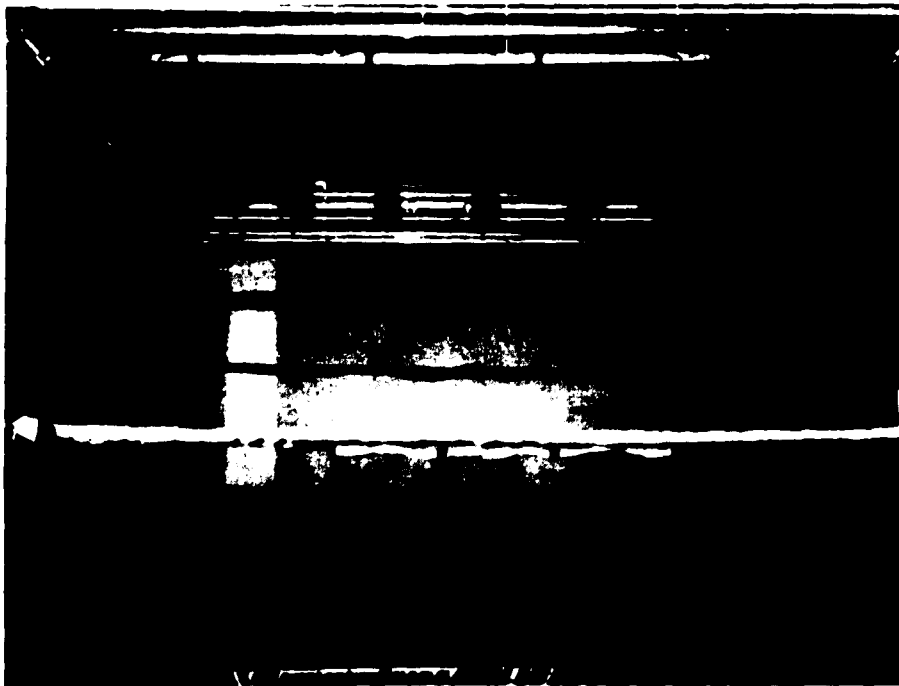


Fig. 3.3



Fig. 3.4



Fig. 3.8



Fig. 3.9



Fig. 3.10

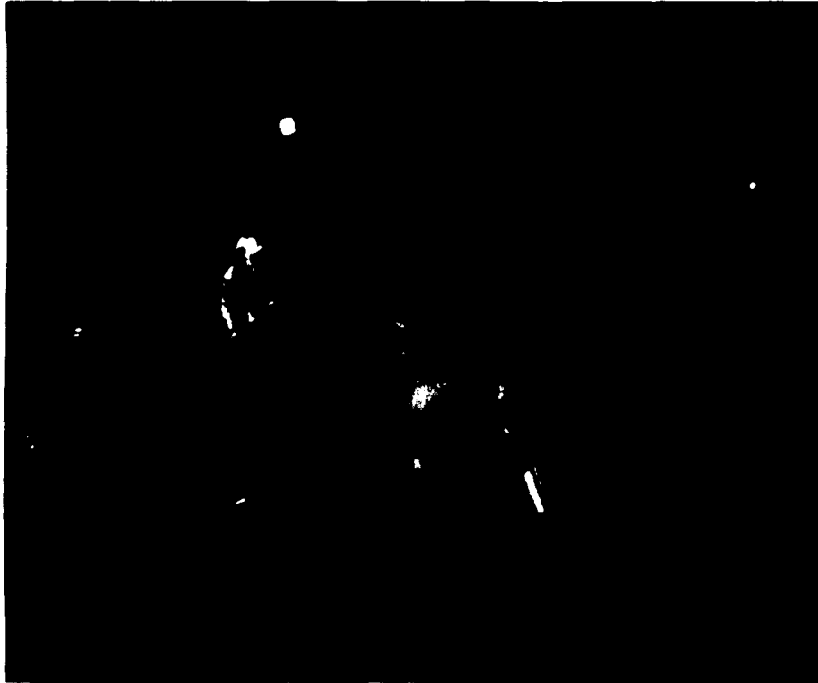


Fig. 3.11

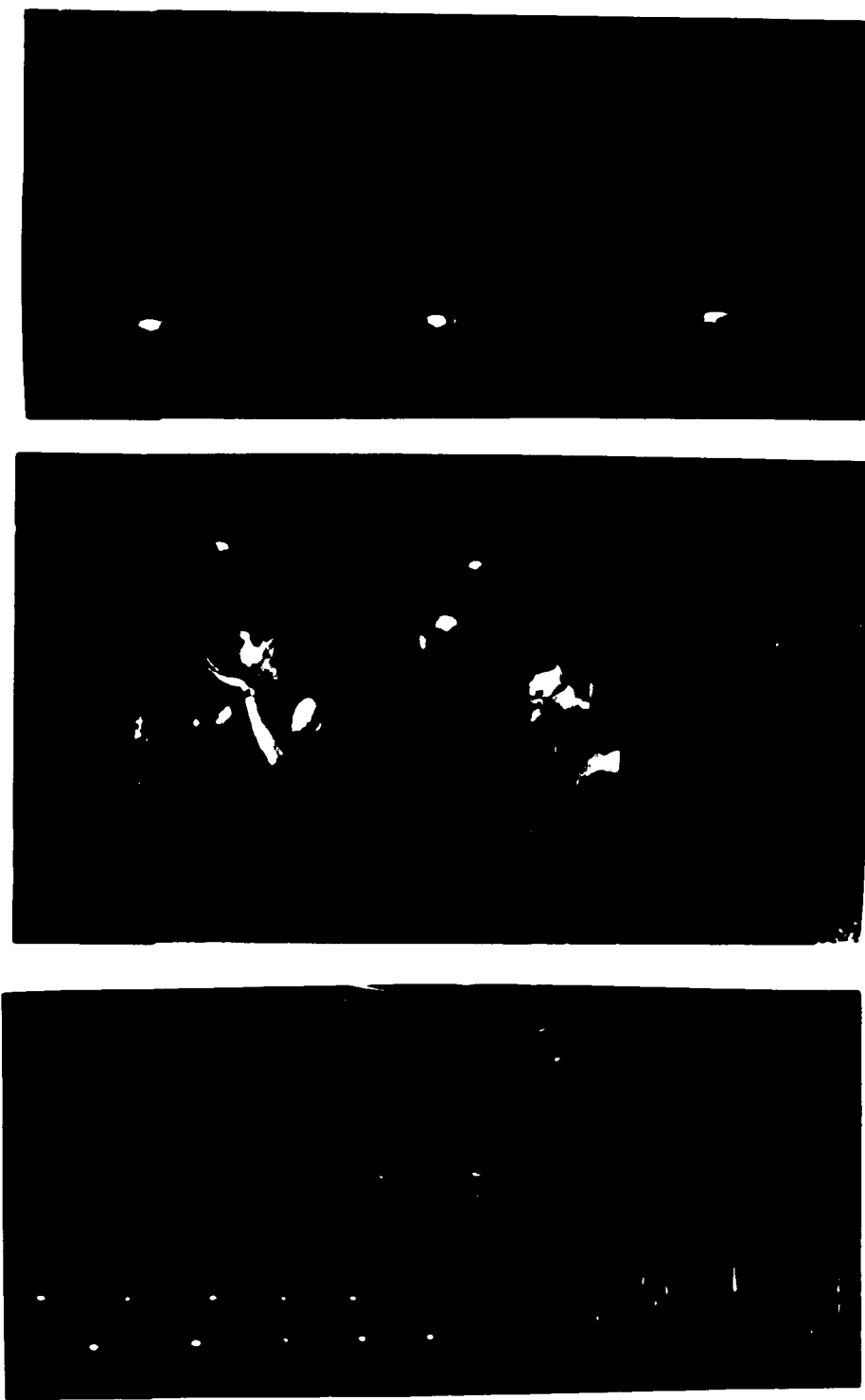


Fig. 3.12



Fig. 3.13



Fig. 3.14

NOTES

¹Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 11.

²Sherri Cavan, *Liquor License: An Ethnography of Bar Behavior* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1966), 49-51, 67, 76-77.

³Brooks McNamara, "Defining Popular Entertainment," (International Symposium on Popular Entertainment: As a Reflection of Identity, New York City, Graduate Center, City University of New York, 9 October 1987), 4, 8-10, photocopied.

⁴Dan Harris (manager-owner of Archibald's), interview-conversation with author, Washington D.C., 20 April 1990; Manager-owner of Joanna's (name not noted), interview-conversation with author, Washington D.C., 20 April 1990; Rocky Blackwell (bartender-manager of Joanna's), interview-conversation with author, Washington D.C., 21 April 1990.

⁵Strip acts, Archibald's and Joanna's, Washington D.C., 19-21 April 1990; 20-22 September 1990; and April 1991.

⁶"Dirt on the body of the dancer" routines were also observed at Billy's and the Baby Doll Lounge, New York City, summer 1990.

⁷Prominent Washington D.C. businessman (who wished to remain anonymous), interview-conversation with author, circa 20-21 April 1990.

⁸ Good Guys, Washington D.C., 15 February 1992.

⁹Doorman at the Camelot, interview-conversation with author, 21 April 1990.

¹⁰Beresky, 91-92.

¹¹Robert Watters, interview-conversation with author, Houston, Texas, 10 April 1990.

¹²Robert Schuh (architect for the renovation work on Caligula XXI), interview-conversation with author, 11 April 1990.

¹³Goldfingers in the borough of Queens in New York City was reviewed in June 1991, August 1991, and October 1991. Martin Levinson described the "hot oil wrestling" event in an interview-conversation with this author, August 1991.

¹⁴Again, for a discussion about patron participation in "entertainment environments" (simultaneous, multi-event activities such as carnivals and amusement parks) see McNamara, 8-10. For discussions about the importance of the mastery of rules and "competent" behavior in "action" events see Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face to Face Behavior* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1967), 50-51, 185-186, 196.

¹⁵For analyses on "thrill seeking" behavior see Goffman, 185-187, 195-197, 262-269; see also Bakhtin on games, fate, and the risk of loss, *Rabelais and his World*, 235-237.

¹⁶Bob Fury, telephone interview-conversation with author, late April or May 1990. Fury described plans to renovate the Colorado so that there would be at least five different erotic "theme" spaces.

¹⁷ Robert Watters and Bob Fury, interview-conversation with author, Houston, Texas, 13 April 1990.

¹⁸Kappeler, 63-81.

¹⁹Williams, 228, 275.

²⁰Carlson, *Theatre Semiotics*, 43.

²¹Dressler, 63.

²²Robert Watters, interview-conversation with author, Houston, Texas, 10 April 1990. Watters stated that he deliberately designed the spatial layout of Rick's so that the mainstages would not be the focal points of the club. This set-up helps the dancers to make money because the patrons tend to hire more table dances as a result of this arrangement.

²³"Victoria" (administrative assistant, Caligula XXI), interview-conversation with author, Houston, Texas, 11 April 1990; "Terri Jo" (manager for the Men's Club), interview-conversation with author,

Houston, Texas, 12 April 1990; Dan Harris, interview-conversation with author, Washington D.C., 20 April 1990.

²⁴McNamara, 10.

²⁵Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

COSTUME AND BODY DISGUISES

(Dress). . .links the biological body to the social being, and public to private. This makes it uneasy territory, since it forces us to recognize that the human body is more than a biological entity. It is an organism in culture, a cultural artifact even, and its own boundaries are unclear...and unclear boundaries disturb us.

--Elizabeth Wilson¹

Despite the fact that striptease performances are frequently labeled topless, bottomless, and even nude dancing events, costume still plays an important part--both in terms of masquerade and in terms of images which simultaneously uphold and transgress social boundaries through sartorial plotting. In an interview for *Variety* in 1965, printed under the page-wide headline, "Topless No Threat to Strip," Harold Minsky scoffed at the suggestion that the 1960s vogue for topless bathing suits or that the "modern film imports" would undermine Burlesque performance. He stated that "the femmes on the bump-and-grind circuit, do not merely expose themselves. There is drama and interest in what they do, how they do it."² Twentyfive years later, Robert Watters, the owner of two "nude dancing" clubs--Rick's

and the Colorado in Houston--arrived at the same lucrative conclusion. In an interview for this study, Watters insisted that simple stage nudity is not as interesting as the nudity produced through strip events because striptease performances offer "storylines" to their audiences. In order to help the performers at Rick's and the Colorado create erotic tales for their patrons, Watters provides his dancers with several photograph albums of carefully displayed costume suggestions. These "suggestions" include lingerie items, leather apparel, street clothing, and cocktail or evening wear.³

Gio, a contemporary Burlesque queen, devotes a portion of her video, *How to Strip for Your Man*, to costume selection.⁴ Stripper and porno star Veronica Hart, in her workshop "How to Strip for Your Lover" (sponsored by the Learning Annex in New York City for straight women and lesbians), takes considerable time to discuss appropriate costuming as well.⁵ Both of these instructors emphasize the choice of costume as an integral part of the choreography and performance. Most of the female and male dancers interviewed for this project also commented that the selection of costume and accessories, even if those selections are limited to two or three articles, are primary elements in the construction of their performances. The importance of dress or costume in strip acts is further illustrated by the stage names of a current husband and wife striptease team, Malibu-Barbie and Malibu-Ken (Fig. 4.1).⁶ This couple's choice of names readily conjures up images of the Barbie doll and her partner, the Ken doll. These toys produce play dramas for children which are implicit in the socially

marked roles of the dolls' outfits and in the children's constant dressing, undressing, and redressing of these dolls.

Generally speaking, contemporary female performers in the smaller strip bars and clubs tend to begin their routines in accessorized, lingerie type outfits. The choice of this costuming appears to be related to the limited stage spaces of most of these types of places and to the more intimate or "familiar" ambience that they strive to create. Female dancers working in larger bars, clubs, and theatres with show biz or cabaret atmospheres usually make use of more elaborate and varied costuming. Male dancers who strip for female spectators almost uniformly use complicated costuming because they perform in overtly theatrically-oriented establishments.

However, regardless of whether the costumes for strip acts are lingerie articles or are based on storybook or mythic characters, all of these outfits are chosen for their sexual appeal. Costumes are environments for bodies, and like the interior designs of theatres, they not only frame those bodies, but they also engage the wearers and viewers in environmental reciprocities with cultural symbols of gender and desire.

Valerie Steele, an editor and major contributor to the recent anthology on clothing in our culture, *Women and Men: Dressing the Part*, suggests that "the conventions of sexual expression in dress are clearly dependent upon the ways in which sexuality is organized in the culture as a whole."⁷ Steele adds that "sexiness (however it may be defined) is not an intrinsic attribute of clothing; it is a meaning ascribed to particular clothes by particular people."⁸ Petr Bogatyrev, in his

essay "Costumes as a Sign (The Functional and Structural Concept in Ethnography)," views clothing as significant markers of social boundaries with important socio-sexual functions which are "closely related to moral function."⁹ Clothing is "moral" in dressed cultures, in the most general sense, because the wearing of clothing (as well as the wearing of the "correct" clothing), indicates adherence to social rules. As Anne Hollander states in reference to nudity in our culture in *Seeing Through Clothes*, "Nakedness is not a customary but rather an assumed state, common to all but natural to none, except on significantly marked occasions. These may be ritual, theatrical or domestic, but they are always special, no matter how frequent."¹⁰

Strip performances are particularly interesting with regard to social sartorial scripts. These acts are theatrical and cultural events organized around the dramatic, "moral" use of clothing. At the same time, the costumes of strip routines are specifically selected by the dancers to send sexual messages to the spectators. The "moral" function of costume in the strip event is first established by the ironic stance of the audience. The opening costume and all other clothing items worn by striptease performers immediately become *dramatic* elements of the storyline because they are obstacles to a final outcome. This exchange between dressed and undressed states in striptease performance, which in effect begins before the stripper removes any clothing item, clearly refers to the social prohibition of nudity as well as to the state of nudity itself.¹¹

Both the dramatic, moral function of dress and its simultaneous and transgressive sending of sexual messages in strip acts are

additionally heightened because most of these events concentrate on gestural, rather than verbal communication. Hollander points out that in dance performances, as well as in ritual and emblematic productions such as masques, tableaux, and pageants, costumes function in a manner closely allied to those in figurative or pictorial art. According to Hollander, in these representations, "costumes are the drama."¹²

Strip event "costume dramas" are explored in several different ways in the rest of this chapter. First, striptease costumes are discussed as devices which promote a particular type of social gazing, the "peekaboo look." Second, the costumes are analyzed in terms of a number of female and male "cliche" outfits or "uniforms" which initially refer to traditional gender positions (e.g., women's and men's formal wear, occupational uniforms, "baby dolls," and "alien-exotic" costumes). And last, the naked or partially nude bodies of the performers are also examined as cultural costumes which both uphold and transgress social norms.

Costume Dramas of Peekaboo Looks

James Laver attempts to analyze the historical legacy of female clothing fashions which both conceal and reveal particular body parts through his theory of the "shifting erogenous zone." According to Laver, clothing fashion maintains the sexual appeal of women for men by continually shifting the emphasis of different parts of female anatomy through the cut, fabric, and accessories of clothing design. If

one were to follow Laver, not only is all of Western female fashion history played out in the strip show, but the entire evolution of male sexual drives as well.¹³ Laver focuses solely on female dress in this regard. However, Hollander and others point out that, historically, men's clothing has also been designed to show off legs, buttocks, chests, and genitals.¹⁴

While Laver views the shifts in women's fashion design as a necessary response to male biological drives, writers such as Steele argue that peekaboo changes in clothing fashion are the results of changes in fashion styles and social mores¹⁵--both of which are, more often than not, played out on the bodies of women. In our culture women's bodies are doubly taboo because they stand for sex and because they differ from the social "norm" which continues to be "masculinity."¹⁶

"Forbidden-erotic" views of bodies are underscored by fashion designs which both conceal and reveal the body in various ways because they offer visual representations of both social taboos and their transgressions. Through this design, viewers may be both "good" and "bad" at the same time because they simultaneously sight dressed and undressed states.¹⁷ One of the most interesting examples of this double vision afforded by sartorially-constructed peeking is found in descriptions of the performances of Burlesque star, Margie Hart. Margie Hart, a contemporary of Gypsy Rose Lee, promoted the use of the panel or fringe dress, which is still available in women's fashion today. This costume has a skirt constructed out of many strips of material.¹⁸ Hart's performance generally consisted of baring her

breasts early on in her act and then parading around the stage for a considerable time in her panel skirt. The audience members stared not at her fully exposed breasts, but at the swishing motions of her dress which *suggested* glimpses of her genitals. Hart reportedly did not wear a G-string.¹⁹ Zeidman states that the audience's attention was riveted throughout Hart's act because they "followed with avid concentration every slight movement of the fingers toying with the folds of the trick gown, every sudden twist of the wrist, for, who knows. . ." ²⁰ Ann Corio, in her description of Hart's performance, pointedly states that Hart "caused more 'eye-strain' in one night than the New York Eye Hospital sees in a year."²¹ Zeidman also cites *Variety* as dubbing Hart as the "'most daring' of all strippers."²² Nevertheless, the construction of the panel skirt actually protected Hart from the censors because it was very difficult to prove indecency charges.²³ Hart and her audience, then, could be legally both "good" and "bad" simultaneously.

Zeidman's and Corio's commentaries on Margie Hart's performance also suggest that "eyestrain" or peeking is a "skill" that must be acquired. The spectator of this type of fashion event needs to participate actively in looking games which often replicate "peekaboo" or hide-and-seek play in order to "see." Once again, this type of double vision does not offer a stable viewing position for the spectator--and it is the mimetic instability that is part of the pleasure of the experience.

It makes sense, then, that the most obvious types of sexualized dress in our culture are those designs which encourage "peeping" or "peeking" behaviors in their beholders. Ballet skirts, camisoles, bras,

girdles, corsets, garter belts, stockings, negligees, evening gowns, cocktail dresses, mini-skirts, and many other types of women's apparel easily fall under this grouping--all of which are used by contemporary female strippers.

It is interesting to note that the closing of the strip clubs for men in Chicago proper (circa 1989-1990), simply gave rise to another type of "live" erotic performance, the "lingerie" or "fashion show." This entertainment is currently featured in some of the bars lining Mannheim Road--a district that was formerly known for its strip bars and adult entertainment centers.²⁴

Female performers are not permitted to dance during lingerie shows because erotic dancing in this type of public event is now illegal as well. Instead, the lingerie show performer usually *strolls* around the bar, typically dressed in corsets, panties, garters, stockings and heels. The performer also changes her apparel several times during the course of her four-hour shift. She sells raffle tickets for the outfits that she presumably wears and then discards. At the Playpen, the raffle winners traditionally stand just outside of the bathroom door where the performer changes her clothing--so that they can receive their prizes "hot off the body." While one could focus on the various tactile titillations supplied by this procedure, such acts also resemble the precursors of striptease in which dancers and performers removed their clothing behind on-stage screens or curtains--stripping *in absentia*. Pointedly, one fashion performer at Promises stated that many Chicago lingerie strutters also work as strippers for private parties and for strip-o-grams. These performances are still legal under

Chicago's municipal laws because they are not "public" events. It is not at all surprising that lingerie shows have replaced strip shows in Chicago, because both types of performances require and foreground similar modes of spectator participation.

There is additional evidence of the similarities between lingerie shows and strip events. Rick's Bar and Restaurant in Houston regularly supplements its continuous strip and nude dancing shows with specially advertised "Lingerie Lunches." During these lunches, the dancers at Rick's parade through the club in corsets, stockings and garters, and negligees. The Pure Platinum chain of strip cabarets, with clubs in Florida, the Mid-West, and more recently in New York City, requires its cocktail waitresses to wear lingerie outfits--bustiers with garters, stockings, matching panties, and high heels. In New Jersey, where most local laws enforce the wearing of pasties during topless and strip shows, a good number of former strip bars and clubs have opted for the lingerie parade instead.²⁵ And finally, in the spring of 1992, Danielle's in New York City began to offer an occasional lingerie fashion show for men which precedes the regular weekly male strip show for women.

Steele reminds her readers that in the current fashion industry, despite such vogues as unisex ripped jeans and t-shirts, women's "sexy" clothing pays far more attention to the peekaboo aspect than men's clothing. Steele states that "men's sexy clothing more often relies on indirect associations with particular men, such as movie stars or rock stars, or male archetypes, such as cowboys or secret agents, who themselves are regarded as being sexually attractive."²⁶

However, in the carnivalesque realm of strip events, male dancers and their female audiences have also learned to make use of erotic eye-strain designs.

Even though many of the costumes used by contemporary male strippers do refer to occupational roles, high social status positions, and fictitious or legendary characters, these outfits are frequently modified so that parts of the costume are cut-away or missing. For example, a male stripper may wear a tuxedo, but without a shirt. Or the shirt may be cut in such a way that much of the chest is exposed. Some of the character or mythic costumes selected by the male strippers also make use of inherent peekaboo designs. These include the twin gladiators costumes and the fantastical outfits of the South and North Native Americans displayed in strip acts at the Sugar Shack II in Chicago; Johnny Rotten's bad boy torn jeans and midriff-exposing t-shirts in his performances with Beefcakes U.S.A.; and the Los Angeles Chippendales version of a tropical heat scene in which bare-chested safari men in shorts sponge and splash the sweat off their bodies (Fig. 4.2, 4.3, 4.4).

While contemporary male dancers still do not have the wealth of lingerie items or undergarment eye-strain "fashion tools" which make up the wardrobe of most female strippers, this situation is rapidly changing. Arthur Asa Berger, in his short essay, "The Clothed Mind: Cultural Studies," comments unhappily on the changing styles and subsequently changing social attitudes towards men's underwear and sexual image.²⁷ Berger points to a recent Sears catalogue which offers eight full pages of male, female, and children's undergarments.

He admits that he is particularly uneasy about the designs and colors now available in male underwear. Berger states:

We also find, with the development of underwear advertising for men, that the male has been turned into an object of female lust (perhaps male lust, in some cases). It is not unusual to see baseball players and other athletes wearing briefs in magazine advertisements. This so-called "beefcake" is a revolutionary development. Prior to it, only the female body was seen as a legitimate object of lust. . . .²⁸

Berger's concerns about the objectification of the male body through advertising campaigns are by no means the first in this regard, but they are important to this discussion of costume and the construction of the erotic.²⁹ Berger's basic complaint is that fashion has shaped a once utilitarian article of clothing for men into sexualized apparel. (Note that Berger's reasoning is similar to feminist arguments about the social sexualization of female body parts.³⁰) As Berger suggests, male underwear is not only represented as "sexy" in many commercial advertisements, it also reshapes or refashions how the male body is culturally seen. Berger insists that:

as this has occurred, men's psyches have changed...And men's bodies are no longer able to escape from being objects of the desire and lust of others. It used to be that men were judged in terms of their position, their education, and their manners. All of this has been stripped away and men are now, like women, increasingly being judged basically in terms of their physical attributes.³¹

Berger is quite accurate in certain aspects of his analysis--for, the power and pleasure of sartorial eroticism is not lost on female spectators. For example, *R. S. Sales* is a catalogue, advertised in *Cosmopolitan* magazine for women during 1990, which offers

"provocative intimate fashions for men." Women can buy their objects of desire erotic attire which includes briefs, bikinis, leather, sheerwear, and leisure wear "with the kind of fit a man looks for and lives in." In striptease performance, this fairly recent turn of events in social sartorial plotting is simply taken to its furthest extremes.

While female performers often prolong the strip act or the spectator's interest in a lingerie parade or in a partially nude dance performance with beat after beat of peekaboo scenarios filled with garter belts, stockings, camisoles, and the like, male dancers are now making use of the newer variety of underwear and sportswear in order to create the pleasure of the peekaboo looks for their female spectators (Fig. 4.5).

Instead of exposing the final G-string after the removal of pants or shorts, many male dancers wear some type of underwear plus one or two additional G-strings in ever-decreasing sizes underneath (Fig. 4.6). Johnny Rotten uses this technique and extends the stripping process by adding skintight bicycle shorts under his jeans and over two G-strings or speedos. He also sports a midriff tank top under his shirt which functions in a manner similar to the brassiere of the female dancer. After Rotten removes his shirt, he plays with the short midriff tank top, flashing one nipple and pectoral muscle at a time--while his female audiences go wild (Fig. 4.7, 4.8).³²

Another technique employed by male strippers is the removal of the final G-string behind a towel, robe, or pillow. In this scenario, the G-string is often tossed into the audience while the stripper flashes and then pretends to lose control of the pillow, robe, or towel which covers

his genitals (Fig. 4.9). During this play, female audiences strain as hard as they can for views of any possible "slippage." These types of male strip acts can be seen at Big Alice's in Peoria, Chippendales Los Angeles, and Chippendales New York City. "Michael," the former legendary star of Chippendales New York, stated in an interview for this study that he has used all three of these devices in different strip acts over the years.³³

The Montreal strip establishments for women, Club 281, the Apollon, and the bisexual Bistro Bunnies, permit their male dancers to strip to "total" nudity. In these clubs, some strippers turn their fruit-of-the-loom underwear or G-strings into penis slings and manipulate their genitals before completely disrobing.³⁴ The Montreal dancers conspicuously use fashion tools, not simply to hide the culturally-marked hot spots of the body for erotic titillation, but to underscore their presence as well.

Mark Cook and Robert McHenry's research on female and male sexual desire, reported in their book *Sexual Attraction*, strongly suggests that men are not naturally more turned on by visual stimuli than women.³⁵ Steele, citing Cook and McHenry's work, insists that "sexual behavior, including arousal and attraction, is culturally conditioned, and men may have been encouraged to respond more to certain kinds of sartorial eroticism."³⁶

Art historian Mario Perniola, in his essay "Between Clothing and Nudity," suggests that, in general, representations of partially clothed female or male figures create a greater erotic charge for their viewers than completely nude ones. He states that "eroticism appears as a

relationship between clothing and nudity. Therefore, it is conditional on the possibility of movement--transit--from one state to the other."³⁷ Perniola's idea of the "transit" specifically refers to the spectator pleasures that are produced by transgressive threshold crossings and recrossings which, in this case, incorporate the hiding and seeking of the taboo body or body parts and forbidden but expected desires. And such "transit" spectating offers no single, stable viewing position for the event participants.

Costume Dramas of "Cliche-Uniforms"

Alison Lurie, in her book *The Language of Clothes*, states that dress not only tells us whether a person is interested in sex but often, "what sort of sex they are interested in."³⁸ Of course one could argue with Lurie that one's public image does not necessarily coincide with one's sexual tastes and orientations and that public and private images are also subject to the social interpretations of others. However, in this context, Lurie's point is useful.

Most likely, a female stripper initially dressed in a black leather mini-skirt or jump-suit refers to different types of sexual narratives from our collective cultural storehouses than a stripper dressed in a white and pink chiffon baby doll outfit or night gown. Similarly, a male stripper outfitted in a white preppie tennis shirt and shorts may provide different erotic dramas for his audiences than a male stripper dressed in ripped jeans and a leather jacket.

Lurie suggests that the above types of dress fall into the category of cultural "cliche outfits," many of which have become so standardized that they could even be considered "uniforms."³⁹ In addition to the peekaboo lingerie outfits and undergarments already considered, this section will discuss several kinds of cultural cliche-uniforms used in contemporary female and male strip acts which also offer double erotic positionings for performers and spectators. Again, for the sake of discussion, I have divided these costume types into several overlapping groupings: evening, formal, or party wear outfits; costumes which refer to occupational roles: baby girl and boy dressing; and finally, costumes that refer to the "alien-exotic" or the socially marginalized. This last costume grouping frequently includes signifiers of ethnic, racial, and regional stereotyping as well as some references to legendary and storybook figures. Many types of "street" or "everyday" apparel fall under each of these categories as well.

Formal Wear

When one thinks of striptease performance in terms of costume, amid all the gimmicks, props, elaborate embellishments, and underclothing, the traditional or "cliche" dress of the Burlesque queen--the glamorous evening gown--usually comes to mind. While the evening gown is not as prominent as it once was in female strip performances, it still makes frequent appearances. In fact, the current chain of Pure Platinum strip clubs, which has outlets in Florida, the

Mid-West, and New York City, and the related Thee [sic] Doll House club at the El Morocco in Manhattan, require all of its female performers to wear either cocktail dresses or evening gowns accompanied by stockings, high heels, and long or short gloves.⁴⁰ Other formal wear strip costumes for women are on view at Rick's and the Men's Club in Houston; Scores, Goldfingers, Gallagher's, and the Harmony Burlesque in New York City; Big Al's in Peoria; The Body Shop in Los Angeles; the Penthouse and Club Super Sexe in Montreal; and at the New Century Theatre and the Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theatre in San Francisco (Fig. 4. 10).

Most male striptease shows for women also include at least one routine in which a male dancer strips out of formal wear, whether it is a tuxedo, a vampire outfit with an opera cape, or the dress uniform of a military officer. The signature costume of stripper "Downtown Marty Brown," the director/manager of Beefcakes U.S.A., is a complete tuxedo outfit. The M.C. of the Escapes male exotic dance show strips out of his white dinner jacket and dress pants as the finale of the event. A male chorus number at the Hangar Club features rows of performers in glittering turquoise tuxedo costumes (Fig. 4.11). According to Maurice, the manager of the Apollon in Montreal, his dancers regularly perform in tuxedos, dress suits, military dress uniforms, and dinner jackets, while Dracula costumes make occasional appearances as well. Theo, manager/owner of the La Bare club, also stated that performers create fairly regular strip acts around various types of men's formal wear. And finally, one of the most popular strip routines, reviewed at both Club 281 in Montreal and Chippendales Los

Angeles, featured dancers outfitted in copies of Richard Gere's white military dress uniform used in the film, *An Officer and a Gentleman* (Fig. 4.12).⁴¹ Both of these strip acts were performed to this film's Oscar-winning theme song, "Up Where We Belong," by Jack Webb.

While formal wear, particularly formal wear for females, could be analyzed in terms of the peekaboo construction previously discussed and also for the various embellishments and designs related to ethnic, regional, and racial sexual stereotyping (which will be addressed shortly), there are several other features that bear examination. Evening wear and formal attire are obviously associated with the idea of dressing-up and adorning oneself for special occasions. Bogatyrev points to evening wear and holiday apparel as outfits which clearly mark the lines between the everyday and the extraordinary.⁴² Evening dress and formal wear may be cultural cliché-uniforms, but they also have the double position of being "extraordinary" as well. The fabrics and cuts of evening gowns are usually not used in "everyday" wear. Evening gowns and cocktail dresses are traditionally made of velvet, beaded, or shiny materials. Many of these outfits are worn with feather boas and furs. The cut of the gowns often reveals portions of skin not viewable during "regular" hours. Such elements of design seem to repel and invite touch simultaneously. They intimidate because they are unusual--but yet they invite touch because of their visual and tactile appeals.⁴³

Modern formal wear for men follows the traditional gender rules of everyday dress in that it is much more subdued than women's clothing. However, "extraordinary" elements in men's formal wear are

also produced through cut, fabric, and accessories which support such clothing's special social standing. Morning suits and tuxedos include "tails", "cutaway," "Parisian," and "stroller" designs. Many of these suits are trimmed with satin, while some dinner jackets are made from velvet materials. Primary dress suit colors are no longer in vogue. However, the vests, bow ties, ascots, suspenders, handkerchiefs, fringed silk scarves, cummerbunds and sashes that accompany these outfits are often patterned or brightly colored. For example, the male stripper featured as "'Thom' the Playboy" in the *Males in Motion* video begins his routine dressed in a black and white tuxedo with tails, trimmed with a scarlet bow tie and matching cummerbund.⁴⁴ A stripper at the Hangar Club dances in a similar costume (Fig. 4.13).

High ranking military dress uniforms differ from the military outfits of everyday use because they are also designed for "show" or special occasions. These white, red, and dark blue uniforms are usually closely fitted to the body and decorated with brass buttons, gold epaulets, gold braids, and metals. Such costumes may be tactilely appealing but they are again socially intimidating, particularly since they signify authority. Popular entertainers, from the Beatles to Michael Jackson and Janet Jackson, have incorporated the glamor and the potential for symbolic social transgression through their cooptations of and fantasias on these types of dress uniforms--and, as noted, strippers follow "suit."

The formal wear outfits just described involve cultural notions of the "glamorous" which are inexorably bound up not only with special occasions, but also with "high ranking" social positions for both women

and men. For women, these glamorous and high ranking positions have been traditionally structured around cultural concepts of physical beauty. Glamour for males, on the other hand, most often involves the "high ranking" signifiers of economic and political power. Both of these elite positions can be undermined by what is considered to be "improper" social and sexual behavior in our culture.⁴⁵

In formal wear striptease costume dramas, the movement or transit from conspicuously glamorous and extraordinary images of female and male dancers to some degree of nudity (which stands for the odd combination of "naturalness," "purity," and "social degradation" or the "stripping of rank) allows for the maximum dramaturgical play possible. This sartorial plot takes the social symbols of dressed and non-dressed states (and all their various implications) and moves them to their furthest conceptual extremes--thereby underscoring the visions of both positions.

There is one additional sartorial device, related to the wearing of formal wear, that should be discussed here because of its long-standing tradition in striptease acts--dress gloves. As mentioned, one prominent chain of contemporary strip clubs requires its female performers to wear dress gloves as part of their occupational "uniform." Female dancers in a number of other strip bars, clubs, and theatres reviewed for this study also use dress gloves as part of evening gown, cocktail dress, bride costume and lingerie strip acts (Fig. 4.14). Gio in her *How to Strip for Your Man* video even includes a special section on how to wear and remove gloves for erotic titillation.⁴⁶

Male dancers usually wear dress gloves with tuxedo, dinner jacket, and military dress costumes. The strippers who created dance routines around the white military dress uniform featured in *An Officer and a Gentleman* each devoted several bars of music to the slow removal of their short white gloves--one finger at a time. The strippers' use of dress gloves was particularly pronounced in the act featured at Chippendales Los Angeles in which three "officers" stripped off their gloves in synchronization to cheers and swoons of female audience members (see again Fig. 4.12).

While female and male strippers may choreograph their play with gloves in order to invoke penis and fellatio imagery, other cultural symbols are conjured as well. As with many types of glamor dressing, dress gloves can signify special events and places (e.g., a doorman who wears gloves in a fancy hotel). They can also signify the social standing and rank of individuals. In this context, dress gloves can refer to socio-sexual decorums which include the tropes of "cleanliness/purity/integrity" (or as Webb's song suggests, "Up Where We Belong") and the visible rituals of bi-gender social touching and sexual availability. Amy Vanderbilt reminds us that the wearing of gloves was "the sign of a lady."⁴⁷ She points out that during the traditional American handshake between a man and a woman, the man removes one glove while the woman keeps both of hers on.⁴⁸

In the film *Gilda*, Rita Hayworth plays the title character who performs a "striptease" routine of sorts to the song, *Lay the Blame on Mame*.⁴⁹ During the course of this number, the character, Gilda, actually only removes a diamond necklace and one black glove. At the

end of her performance she invites an audience member to undress her, but he is not able to unzip her evening gown. The pretense of sexual availability and interest through a striptease metaphor in this scene is represented by the removal of a single glove in conjunction with Gilda's invitation. Because of this display, Gilda called a "slut" by Johnny, the leading male character in the film played by Glenn Ford. This particular scene was much discussed when the film was released.⁵⁰ The erotic and transgressive symbols of this scene are not lost on contemporary critics. The capsule review of *Gilda*, in the *TV Movies and Video Guide 1991 Edition*, notes that: "Rita has never been sexier, especially when singing, 'Put the Blame on Mame.'"⁵¹

The continuing signifying power of gloves and formal attire is evident through the use of these cultural symbols by two of our most popular contemporary entertainment artists. During the 1991 Oscar award ceremony, Madonna performed a take-off on a Burlesque queen's routine. She wore a spangled evening gown, long white gloves, and a white fur stole. In this act, Madonna also stripped off a single glove. Michael Jackson, whose female/male and white/black looks transgress the social norms of gender and race,⁵² continues to wear variations of fantasy military dress uniforms along with a single glove as his trade marks.

Female and male stripteasers who perform in the "dressed up" costumes of formal wear have the most to dramatically "play" in terms of the action of the strip. Thus formal wear, in conjunction with the use and choreography of dress gloves, foregrounds cultural rules of socio-

sexual decorum and at the same time suggests the transgressions of those rules.

Occupational Roles

Female and male strippers both use costumes that represent different kinds of occupational roles. While costumes that suggest "rebel" or "exotic" job choices refer to transgressive narratives because they frequently stand for the culturally marginalized (which will be discussed below), costumes that represent the more "mainstream" work roles can also suggest transgressive scenarios.

As mentioned in the second chapter of this dissertation, there is a social taboo that separates mainstream jobs and work environments, not only from places of sex trade industries, but also from other kinds of overt sexual activity--despite the many transgressions. Contextually, striptease costumes which depict traditional occupational roles for both women and men refer to this taboo as well as to its violations.

Mainstream occupational costumes are more prevalent in contemporary male striptease performances for women than in female striptease performances for men. This may again suggest that erotic representations of males for females in our culture still rely heavily upon their signification as "success" and "action" sex objects or on the more general relationship of males to the public sphere.⁵³ At the same time, this phenomenon also indicates that the most "erotic" female occupational role for men continues to be the "occupation" of the

woman/sex object. However, as we shall see, there are other storylines "at work" here as well.

Male occupational costumes for strip acts are generally selected for their references to virility, endurance, and physical strength or for their references to authority figures. Construction workers labor away at Escapes in New York and at the Hangar Club outside of Washington D. C. (Fig. 4.15). Lifeguards, tennis pros, and body builders and trainers display their bodies at Chippendales Los Angeles and in Beefcakes U.S.A. at Danielle's in New York. Police and military officers parade at Club 281 in Montreal and in Chippendales New York and Chippendales Los Angeles. And, business executives display their expensive Italian cut suits at La Bare in Texas and at Club 281 and the Apollon in Montreal.

Despite the stance of dominance and control ostensibly depicted by these outfits representing masculine physical and social power, these designs also serve to highlight the performer's and spectator's double position with regard to erotic control and surrender roles. First, the male stripper wears the macho costumes of male "action" roles, but he wears them in concert with the performance of a sexual act that has frequently been associated with the "feminine," "passivity," and sexual "objectification." Second, in this context, male occupational power roles also suggest "service" positions to female bosses. The construction worker, the tennis pro, the body builder trainer, and even the business executive may be hired--that is "taken charge of" or "placed in (stud) service to" their respective female employers. Athletes and Italian suit-types can be scripted as Richard

Gere gigolos. The man dressed in a tuxedo, an outfit which often refers to wealth and power, can be "revised" as a symbol of service and subordination in the person of a maitre d', waiter, or butler.

Tellingly, the Chippendales New York "Seeing is Believing" press kit for the *Welcome to Your Fantasy* show includes a description of one of the featured male dancers under the caption, "John/Room Service" (Fig. 4.16). In the opening performance sequence of the following Chippendales New York show, *One Night of Love*, the M.C. introduces a male dancer to the audience as a "doctor" who can be hired out for "house calls."⁵⁴ Male sexual "for hire" roles usually need to operate in tandem with the fantasy of female economic prosperity and a more equitable distribution of social control. This fantasy is supported by the environments of strip events for women. In these venues, women pay men for specific sexual behaviors which may include kissing, hugging, the displaying of desired body parts, talking, and dancing. Male dancers *survive* as participants in these environments by meeting the expectations of female desires. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White note in their work, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, if one is "for hire," be he or she maid or doctor, one also risks "dismissal."⁵⁵ In the case of the male stripper, not only is the dancer for hire in terms of his occupational costume role, but also in terms of his occupation as a "stripper" in a recontextualized economic frame (Fig. 4.17).

The importance of this redefined environmental exchange is noted by a number of male dancers in the interviews conducted for this study. Many reported that female spectators frequently insist on

tipping, even when a male dancer is willing to "perform" for "free." During the visit to Montreal's Club 281, this particular scene was acted out in a fairly dramatic fashion. One male stripper, dressed as a cowboy, performed several dances at the table of a single, attractive female spectator. When she tried to pay him for the dances, he refused. The young female patron then threw her money on the table and promptly left the club.⁵⁶

Occupational costumes worn by female strippers suggest a different but yet complementary set of double erotic positionings for both performers and spectators. While teacher, nurse, maid, and secretary costumes follow the traditional cultural view of woman as nurturer-helpmate, other "work" outfits worn by some female strippers refer to macho action roles.

Female hard hat construction workers in short shorts "erect" their acts alongside of policewomen in skirts toting guns during costume theme nights at Rick's in Houston. The Dolly Sisters' police officer act occasionally raids the strip bars of Staten Island, New York City. Male business suits and rock star outfits are displayed by feature strippers Veronica Hart and Donna Foxx in theatres such as Show World and the Harmony in New York City. And lady wrestlers fight to the finish on the stages of Goldfingers in New York and the Tropicana in Los Angeles.

In these scenarios, female strippers as sex "objects" simultaneously take up roles associated with sexual prowess and control. Despite the fact that there are female police officers, construction workers, and business executives in "real life," there is a

sense of "transvestism" in the use of these uniforms and outfits in this venue because of their coupling with sex through the strip act.

Marjorie Garber, in her book *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*, suggests that sightings of transvestism are confusing and also thrilling to their beholders because they pose a "third term" which rejects the binary distribution of traditional gender and social roles.⁵⁷

Contemporary female occupational strip outfits that are associated with female care-taking roles also feature costume dramas of transgression. While these outfits do not predominate in contemporary strip acts, they still make fairly regular appearances. Clothing and lingerie items with French maid motifs are on display at the Body Shop in Los Angeles; the O'Farrell Theatre and Lusty Ladies in San Francisco; and at the Harmony Theatre and Show World in New York City. The Blue Angel Nightclub also in New York presented a cabaret routine, as part of its grand reopening show, in which a group of secretary-types suddenly stripped off their clothing in unison on the subway.⁵⁸ Veronica Hart occasionally includes a secretary routine in her featured exotic dance acts. Hart, along with Annie Sprinkle, also performs nurse striptease numbers. Hart even selected the nurse routine as a demonstration strip act for her students in the Learning Annex workshop, *How to Strip for Your Lover*. Nurse strippers also minister to "patients" at Rick's in Houston during special costume theme events. The strip bars on Staten Island, New York, continue to be noted for their dancers who create housewife, teacher, maid, and nurse fantasy routines. For example, Marcelina, a dancer in

a South Beach strip bar on Staten Island performs an act in which she struts around the stage with her hair pulled back, slapping a ruler against her hand to Van Halen's, "Hot for Teacher."⁵⁹

The housewife, nurse, teacher, maid or nanny costume roles are of particular interest because even though these outfits may represent "service" or "helpmate" jobs, they also refer to a time of life or to situations in which women ostensibly have immediate social and physical control over others. The housewife, teacher, maid, and nurse roles may "help" a male spectator to position himself as a "naughty boy" in need of reprimanding; as an "innocent" boy or young man swept off his feet (and onto his back) by the sexual prowess of an "older" or more "knowledgeable" woman; or as an adult male controlled by contextual female authority in a nurse-patient relationship.

According to interviews-conversations with many female strippers across the country, the phenomenon of male patrons requesting to be treated as "babies," with and without the addition of caretaker costuming, is common. In a published interview, the Dolly Sisters of Staten Island, New York, also reported that their customers enjoy both "mommy" and "kitten" acts and stated that many of their male patrons like to be called "Baby." Gabriel "Dolly" concluded: "We talk baby talk. We say 'Good little baby'...It's being in control without being mean. Men want to be babied. They want to be controlled."⁶⁰ Annie Sprinkle discussed her "Nurse Sprinkle" strip act during an interview-conversation for this study.⁶¹ Her nurse routine was originally featured in Burlesque theatres and nightclubs and is now

performed in conjunction with her work as a "post" and "post-post-modern" performance artist (Fig. 4.18).⁶² Sprinkle-Steinberg stated that in both performance venues she always presented her Nurse Sprinkle character to her audiences as a "helper." She added that, as a prostitute, she also "felt like a school nurse" because she often taught her clients about "sex." This focus became part of her nurse striptease routine.

Nurse Sprinkle begins her act by addressing her audience as "boys and girls." As she strips, Nurse Sprinkle proceeds to teach her audiences an anatomy lesson about the female body. However, this "lesson" does not simply concentrate on male spectator pleasure, because it includes directions about how to please women sexually. As Nurse Sprinkle exposes her various body parts through stripping, she explains and demonstrates the best way to massage and titillate each of her erogenous zones. Sprinkle-Steinberg also stated that she usually uses a microphone during these performances because "it amplifies my voice, engulfs them (the audience), massages them, penetrates them."

Stallybrass and White compare the social and psychological functions of the domestic nursemaid and the professional analyst. They use Freud's own account of his relationship with his nursemaid to explore the shifting power relationships between employers and the hired help who have "intimate" control over them.⁶³ In our society, females have been traditionally placed in such occupational positions. Because of their "hygiene" training, nurses may be considered more sexually expert than the "average woman." However, unlike the

"sexually expert" prostitute or even the sexually interested woman, the nurse is granted special socio-sexual "privileges" in our culture. The nurse figure circumvents the bad girl/good girl dichotomy to a certain extent because, like the doctor, it is socially acceptable for her to "professionally" view, touch, and take intimate control over the bodies of "patients."

The different uses of female and male "occupational" costumes in strip events are erotic tactics which maintain the traditional gendered positions of surrender and control roles, but they also allow for subversions or expansions of many aspects of those parts. These tactics are, of course, responses to the social conditions which distribute sex role and erotic pleasure positions according to biological sex. Such strategies, then, add to the creation of "unsettling" theatrical performances and realms in which erotic doublings or "third terms" are foregrounded.

Baby Girls. . .and Baby Boys?

Baby doll outfits used in female striptease performances are of particular interest because of their connection to childhood and sartorial peekaboo games and because they also refer to cultural concepts of "innocence." Strippers, in a variety of baby doll dressings, perform "little girl" or "kitten" acts in almost all of the strip clubs for male patrons. These types of outfits include: the baby dolls' sleep or lounge wear lingerie; street and party wear versions of little girl dresses for

women; and a few instances of overt costume-masquerade clothing that refers to little girls.

Lingerie versions of the baby doll look tend to be used by performers in the smaller strip bars and clubs such as Archibald's and Joanna's in Washington D. C.; Jumbo's Clown Room in Los Angeles; Big Al's in San Francisco; and Billy's, Virginia's, and, not surprisingly, the Baby Doll Lounge in New York City. Party and street wear little girl dresses for women are more frequently seen in strip acts presented at the larger cabaret-style clubs. These clubs include: Rick's and the Men's Club in Houston; the Body Shop in Los Angeles; Big Al's in Peoria; Le Sexe Scandal and Club Super Sexe in Montreal; and Scores and Pure Platinum in New York City. Performers who use more overt little girl "costumes" (complete with pigtails and props such as teddy bears and jump ropes), were seen in Billy's in New York City; in Janet Feindel's play about Canadian strippers, *A Particular Class of Women*, presented at the WOW Cafe, New York City; and in the movie, *Stripper* (1986).⁶⁴

Baby doll lounge wear or lingerie usually consists of a loose-fitting and sometimes lacy top, cut short enough to reveal the matching panties underneath. As with many of the outfits for infants and little girl children, this style of adult clothing shows "underwear" as part of its design. Such outfits for women, then, appear "sweet" because culturally they refer to a time of "innocence." However, this apparel simultaneously looks "naughty" because it also transgresses the norms of modern adult clothing through the use of "peeking" undergarments.

The baby doll look for women continues its long-standing tradition in street wear as well. The *New York Times* ran an article about the 1990-1991 fashion fad for street wear baby doll dresses for women. This article was titled, "Baby Dolls, Naughty and Nice."⁶⁵ Baby doll street wear designs are usually high-waisted and "demurely" loose-fitting, but their hemlines are cut well above the knee. The wearer of such apparel runs the risk (or gives the impression of running the risk) of having the dress "inadvertently" inch up and reveal what is not supposed to be revealed. Cultural expectations of female "innocence" and "transgression" are neatly played out in this design.

Corio, who performed little girl strip acts, as well as her renowned Burlesque queen routines, states, "the one virtue that drives men wild: (is) innocence!"⁶⁶ The erotic charge of the cultural conflation of sex and the symbols of the girl-child is most often analyzed in feminist critiques as yet another manifestation of the social oppression of women--from the violations of the pedophile to the presumable male pleasure in the total dominance and control of women through scenarios of "first time" sex and the despoiling of virgins. I am not about to dispute these charges, but simply to suggest that little girl symbols *consciously adopted by adult women* take on additional signification in terms of erotic construction.

Nancy Hartsock, in her book *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism*, discusses what she calls the "persistent (male) fantasy of transforming the virgin into the whore." Hartsock describes this fantasy:

She begins pure, innocent, fresh, even in a sense disembodied, and is degraded and defiled in sometimes imaginative and

bizarre ways. Transgression is important here. Forbidden practices are being engaged in. The violation of the boundaries of society breaks its taboos. Yet the act of violating a taboo, of seeing or doing something forbidden, does not do away with its forbidden status...Put another way the obsessive transformation of virgin into whore simply crosses over and over again the boundary between them...And without the boundary to violate, the thrill of transgression would disappear.⁶⁷

As Hartsock points out, while such scenes of transgression may employ the social signifiers of gender hierarchies--often in heinous ways--they also depict scenes of social risk and censorship for the spectator-participant.

Maurice Chevalier sings about the sexually liminal position of little girls in the movie, *Gigi* (1958)--a story which explicitly plays out virgin/whore transgressions. Chevalier croons in the Lerner and Loewe theme song, "Thank Heaven for Little Girls," "those little eyes so helpless and appealing one day will flash and send you crashing through the ceiling."⁶⁸ As the lyrics of this song suggest, the use of the little-girl character in erotic representations does not simply refer to the social power and sexual prerogatives of males, but also again to male spectator risk--the experience of being knocked off balance (or "crashing through the ceiling") by the "sudden," but still expected, sighting of the sexual maturation of the little girl. *The figure of the little girl, budding into sexual maturity, is a symbol of social transgression.* For, in our culture, the "healthy," "normal" child-to-adult transformation through sexual experience is still generally reserved for males.

There are other aspects of erotic baby doll representations which undermine traditional female and male sex roles. Because baby doll outfits allow the wearer to be both "naughty" and "nice," these

costumes may be, again, subversive cultural strategies which seek to avoid the dictates of the double standard that divides good girls from bad girls according to overt expressions of sexual interest and behavior. Since little girl costuming refers to "innocence," sexual interest and behavior can be manifested and simultaneously exonerated. "Innocent" children are not usually morally or legally held responsible for the sexual signals they either "deliberately" or "inadvertently" send. The traditional responsibility (and inequitable liability) of socio-sexual decorum is shifted from the woman to the man in this scene through the woman's masquerade as a girl-child. (Here I need to include the cautionary note that the stripper's or grown woman's masquerade as a little girl is in no way an equation to the behavior of "little girls in real life," but rather that such a disguise offers a mimetic position of safety for sex role experimentation generally not granted to women in our society. Once more I argue that this is not a tactic of passivity on the part of women, but an active mediation as a result of cultural conditions.)

There is also a complementary double position for the male spectators of these "little girl" representations which circumvents certain social expectations of male sexual behavior as well. Lauri Lewin, in her autobiography about her career as a stripper in Boston in the 1970s, discusses her trade mark, little girl strip routine. She explains that in her strip act, her little girl character discovers her newly maturing body--that sometimes includes hips which manage to rotate of their own accord.⁶⁹ Lewin states that her little girl stripper was "too

naive to be manipulative, she presented no threat to men; they could feel wise, knowing, and a little naughty when they watched her."⁷⁰

Lewin's analysis of her own act could be critiqued as indicating that little girl/women ultimately have no control over their destiny as sex objects in our culture. Her remarks could be interpreted as indirect references to male control over the social position of women as "children." However, since Lewin makes it clear that she carefully crafted her little girl/woman strip act, her descriptions also point to the socially deviant male pleasure of being sexually controlled by females. This "deviancy" is "safely" packaged for males because it comes with a mimetic "guarantee" or reassurance that this control is not really taking place. That is, the stripper, in little girl guise, pretends to be "too naive" to take up a position of erotic dominance.

While baby doll dressing is a mainstay of female strip events for men, a few male exotic dancers also use the appeal of "youth" in the construction of their "sexual acts" for the pleasure of women. However, most of the costumes and strip routines which stress male youth do so through the sartorial symbols of the "young rebel" (e.g., torn jeans, leather jackets, motorcycle props, etc.). This makes sense because, unlike the young girl, a boy or young man is not considered to be a social rebel, transgressor, or delinquent through his gaining of sexual knowledge. Therefore, male "baby boy" costuming usually needs to suggest other types of possible "delinquency," both to indicate the idea of transgression and to suggest the idea of youth. (Rebel roles will be discussed further in the following section.)

However, there is one important exception to this generalization. In the Chippendales New York *One Night of Love* show, the M.C. begins the performance by introducing the male chorus dancers and ushers to the female audience. These dancers and ushers are all costumed in black spandex pants. Their bare chests and arms are accentuated with tuxedo collars and cuffs. Each performer is presented by the M.C. as a "sexual type" through a kind of verbal costume. The M.C. introduces the individual dancers by telling the women that "this is so and so, the doctor," "the football player," "the Italian," "the marine," etc. The last dancer in this introductory sequence is presented through an extended version of this bit. The M.C. asks his audience, "How many ladies like them young and innocent...I've got a virgin--Timothy and he is eighteen years old." This announcement is greeted by cheers and whistles from the audience. Throughout the show's various spectator participation activities and bits, Timothy is referred to as "the virgin" by the M.C.--much to the continued delight of the audience.

While female spectator pleasure in this running scene may be a reflection of the changing socio-sexual mores which make it currently more acceptable for women to select younger men as sexual partners for both short and long term relationships, it has another significance. First, it is important to note that a virgin boy initiated into sexual experience by an "older" woman is a common male fantasy. The male point of view of this standard fantasy, however, places the female--whether she is cast as a prostitute hired for the specific purposes of such an initiation or as a "Mrs. Robinson" figure--not only in the

position of a transgressor, but also in the position of a catalyst for the "greater action"--which is the boy's transformation into manhood.

The difference in this design as presented at Chippendales is that the fantasy is recast from the point of view of female pleasure and sexual interest. In the Chippendales's virgin "bit," female audience members are encouraged to vicariously take the erotic "control" positions of the sexually experienced and knowledgeable, but without the addition of the labels of "slut" or "whore" which are usually attached to such positions for women. This design, of course, subverts traditional sex roles.

Erotic representations of virgins for female and male spectators alike include one other important element of transgression. As with all sorts of other types of "virginal" representations, these sexual depictions are exciting because they offer their spectator-participants the vicarious thrill of uncertainty through the experience of the "new."⁷¹ In "virgin" strip scenarios, female and male spectators may outwardly position themselves in the control roles of "teachers," but part of the thrill of "teaching" is the experience of identifying with and reliving "first time" experiences with the "student."

"Aliens-Exotics"

Many female and male strippers refer to themselves as "exotic" dancers. Not only is the term "exotic" a recognized euphemism for a stripteaser, but, of course, it also stands for the "alien," the "foreign,"

and the "unusual." Male and female strippers frequently double their own cultural positions as "aliens" by selecting costumes which represent a wide range of other social "exotics." In other words, strippers often choose costumes which represent characters who stand outside of the cultural norms of dominant society or who are marginalized in some manner. These costume choices may include outfits which refer to ethnic, racial, and regional stereotyping as well as outfits which represent space aliens, robots, leather rebels, sadomasochists, and legendary-mythic characters.

Striptease costume dramas which make use of "exotic" ethnic, racial, and regional sexual stereotypes appear in a number of different forms. Several female dancers at Gallagher's in New York City begin their routines or sets in various "Latin" costumes which range from copies of flamenco outfits to Mexican peasant tops and skirts. Some dancers at Rick's, Caligula XXI, and the Colorado in Houston perform in what stripper "Ivy" calls "Tex-Mex" dress.⁷² The Body Shop in Los Angeles offers a different version of "Southern" erotics. One dancer in this cabaret theatre strips out of a Confederate belle style evening gown. At the Sugar Shack II in Chicago, male strippers wear "white man" costume fantasias on South and North American "Indians" (Fig. 4.19). And finally, lingerie and evening gown outfits worn by female strippers in a variety of bars, clubs, and theatres across country often include the symbols of Westernized versions of Japanese, Chinese, and Arabic dress. It is not unusual to see female dancers performing in silk kimonos with "oriental" designs, mandarin style evening gowns,

and lingerie with feathers, see-through pants, and assorted veils and scarves (Fig. 4.20).

Female and male striptease costumes that are designed to represent space aliens and robots frequently overlap with or resemble the costumes of motorcycle rebels and S/M participants. The Sugar Shack II, Chippendales Los Angeles, and Chippendales New York all present helmeted, space-aged male dancers in shiny leather outfits accented with spikes, chains, and other types of hardware (Fig. 4.21). Female strippers tend to use a more subdued style of this dress. Many of them sport black mini-skirts with matching bras, G-strings, chains and boots. Some dancers, like "Nancy" of the *Satin Angels* strip show for men, specifically select obvious "dominatrix" costumes of leather, dog collars, ropes, chains and whips in order to appeal directly to spectators who enjoy S/M fantasies.⁷³

The most common character-mythic-rebel figure represented in contemporary striptease performance is that of the cowboy and cowgirl. Cowboys and cowgirls turn up, in one form or another, in almost all female and male strip clubs. The most elaborate cowgirl outfits (which include cowgirl hat, fringed jacket, chaps, and boots) were seen at Le Supersex and Le Club Scandal in Montreal. The most elaborate cowboy costumes were on view at Club 281 in Montreal and at the Sugar Shack II in Chicago. Other cultural rebel figures, such as beach bum surfers and safari explorers, have been featured in the exotic dance shows of Beefcakes U.S.A. and Chippendales Los Angeles. There are only a few instances and citations of contemporary strip acts constructed around more specific

storybook or legendary characters. Nevertheless, these acts are still worth noting because they also incorporate the themes of social rebellion and marginalization.

Zorro appears at the Sugar Shack II in Chicago (Fig. 4.22). Superman stars on the *Males in Motion* video tape (Fig. 4.23).⁷⁴ Female vampires occasionally stalk their victims at Cabaret Showgirls in Montreal. A few male dancers at Show Palace in New York City occasionally perform as Spiderman and Robin Hood.⁷⁵ A stripper-character in Janet Feindel's play, *A Particular Class of Women*, lists Snow White as the inspiration for one of her exotic dance acts.⁷⁶ What is interesting about this collection of fairy and folktale figures is that all of these characters are forced to live, either permanently or temporarily, on the perimeters of their own fictive societies. From Snow White to Superman, each of these characters is also forced to take on additional disguises in order to escape from those in authority. The use of storybook sartorial plotting and intertextuality allows for an intensification of dramatic tension in these strip acts, because some of the costumes require double strippings (i.e., Clark Kent to Superman to "nude" man). This prolongs the action and underlines both "real" and the fictive social boundaries as well as the disruptions of those boundaries.

In her discussion of "carnavalesque play" in the novel, Julia Kristeva points out that liminal figures such as "androgynes" and "foreigners" are exciting because they can function as double signs-- that is, such roles are often scripted to be "read" in more than one way.

This model creates both uncertainty and dramatic tension for the "reader."⁷⁷

All of the above types of alien-exotic striptease costumes not only offer storylines about social rebellion and marginalization, they also suggest double character positions in terms of erotic "surrender" and "control" roles. In the strip event, male spectators may view female dancers outfitted in the garb of Southern belles or in the dress of "Eastern" women as submissive partners in roles of sexual surrender. At the same time, however, these alien-exotic costumes may also frame the performers in the power and control positions of Scarlett O'Haras and Cleopatras.

Some feminist writings suggest that women are often depicted as "wild" and "unruly" specifically so that men can enjoy erotic fantasies about taming female rebels, and by doing so, returning those rebels to their "rightful" positions as social subordinates. Natalie Zemon Davis, in "Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe," cautions against this reductive kind of analysis because it ultimately ignores how the figure of the unruly woman repeatedly disrupts and questions the validity of hegemonic gender norms.⁷⁸

At the same time, such theories do not take into account the sexual representations which place men in similar erotic categories for the pleasure of women. While male exotic-alien costumes such as cowboys, sheiks, Samurai warriors, "noble savages," safari-explorers, gladiators, robbers, and "Latin lovers," may suggest storylines about physically fit, dominating, irresistible, and possibly "cruel" men, these

same outfits may also encourage scenarios and fantasies which feature females as "male tamers." Rosalind Coward points out that in romantic "fiction" for women, male characters are often depicted as "cruel," "great heartbreakers," "arrogant," and extremely sexually active (in other words "unruly"). However, in these kinds of narratives, the "unruly" hero is eventually tamed or "rescued" by a transference of power to the heroine, usually in the form of the heroine nurse-savior or through marriage.⁷⁹

Female and male striptease costumes which resemble space aliens, robot-terminators, motorcycle rebels, and other leather mamas and papas can also propose stories about characters in need of "rescue" or "control." Such characters either demonstrate a penchant for self-destructive behavior or they run the risk of being destroyed by the rigid codes and bigotry of the social world (i.e., *Easy Rider* and *Edward Scissorhands* lore⁸⁰). At the same time, many performers dressed in (leather) fetish represent themselves as "mistresses and masters of domination." These roles reinvent traditional social and personal boundaries according to "new" rituals of hierarchical exchange--and these rituals are not necessarily predicated on the prevailing gender norms.

In striptease performance, as in many other types of sexual representation, dramatic figures or events which induce this kind of double reading suggest a circulation of erotic positions and identifications, rather than simple either/or mimetic experiences for the spectator. Stallybrass and White insist that, in our society, the middle-class "uses the whole world as its theatre in a particularly instrumental

fashion, the very subjects which it politically excludes becoming exotic costumes which it assumes in order to play out the disorders of its own identity."⁸¹ As indicated, the use of the alien-exotic or the grotesque in erotic-pornographic representations frequently bespeaks a host of social prejudices which revolve around cultural fears of the "foreign."⁸²

Nevertheless, the almost inexhaustible variety of costume dramas about "aliens" in striptease performances (and, again, in many other erotic-pornographic representations) suggests that not all of these alien images are directly connected to actual, contemporary social and cultural prejudices. Therefore, the construct of the alien-exotic figure in mainstream erotic-pornographic representations, while many times in concert with institutional bigotry, provides additional material to examine in terms of socio-erotic structures.

Stallybrass and White suggest in their own development of a "carnival-transgressive" theory, that the alien--or what they classify as the "grotesque"--takes two basic forms. The first form serves to help a particular group (or person) distinguish itself from other groups. This is the grotesque of the "Other." The second type of the "alien" experience is more intricate and is a result of the first. Stallybrass and White state that the second stage of the grotesque is:

a boundary phenomenon of hybridization or inmixing, in which self and other become enmeshed in an inclusive, heterogeneous, dangerously unstable zone. What starts as *simple* repulsion or rejection of symbolic matter foreign to the self inaugurates a process of introjection and negation which is always *complex* in its effects...an identity-in-difference.⁸³

The hypothesis that identity *through* difference or differentiation frequently operates in conjunction with an "identity-in-difference," calls

into question theories of spectatorship which insist that only the first type of spectator identification takes place. That is, for example, that male spectators can only identify with other "powerful" males in the representations, while female spectators identify solely with other females and only in terms of roles of socio-sexual subordination. Writers such as Benjamin, Rose, and Williams, suggest that in sexual representations, and even in acts of desire and sex, "spectating" and "performing" participants identify with and vicariously play double erotic roles--feminine-masculine and control-surrender.⁸⁴

The use of the alien-exotic in contemporary strip events may indeed be a cultural device to foist "dangerous" gender and sex role exchanges onto the socially marginalized. In this aspect of the culturally-constructed alien-exotic figure, socially transgressive behaviors and desires are kept in play, but at the same time are located away from the "homebase" of the dominant through the masquerade of the Other. This tactic is similar to the geographical and topographical locations of urban sex trade industries which are socially and culturally managed so that they may be centrally situated but still segregated from traditional places of work and home.

But there is another stage or negotiation in this operation as well. The alien-exotic figure, as with many of the other costuming devices discussed in this chapter, is used as a device of mimetic social and gender transcendence (or subversion) *vis a vis* the "foreign" or the "extraordinary." This "transcendence" is not the end point of the overall project, but yet another element (again, often in concert with a variety of social prejudices and phobias) which helps to establish what

Stallybrass and White call the "inclusive, heterogeneous, dangerously unstable zones."

Costume Dramas of "Naked" Bodies

Because strip events are performances which represent cultural negotiations with the socially extraordinary and the socially familiar-- often through depictions of physical extremities, it is not so strange to find Burlesque queens and kings decked in traditional formal wear in the same strip show or sharing the same shift with performers who represent Superman, Zorro, and Snow White or with strippers who impersonate space aliens, sedate secretaries, leather mamas or papas, power executives, and baby dolls.

In some strip clubs and bars, which outwardly stress the "familiar" or "intimate," the variety of erotic-character roles may be more subtly represented through such contrasts as baby doll lingerie performers sharing the stage spaces with leather mini-skirted strippers.

However, in both of these types of performance situations and all of those between, striptease events indicate that sexual desires are not "raw" or direct results of biological responses, but are rather made-up and "outfitted" by the cultures they inhabit. So what happens, then, when the social documents of clothing are presumably stripped away and naked or partially naked dancers continue the performance?

Lauri Lewin titled her biographical account about her short career as a stripper during the late seventies in Boston, *Naked is the*

Best Disguise. Lewin tells her readers that one of the reasons she decided to strip was that she felt "nakedness was natural, the primal costume."⁸⁵ The paradox in the idea of Lewin's "primal costume," as well as in the colloquial expression of nudity "to wear one's birthday suit," suggests simultaneous visions of dressed and undressed states.

Barthes, in his essay on the striptease, also poses this double vision of the stripper's body. He insists that "in striptease a whole series of coverings are placed upon the body of the woman in proportion as she pretends to strip it bare."⁸⁶ Barthes's short piece inspired contemporary choreographer Mark Morris to create a modern dance striptease event which included the eventual "total" nudity of his performers.⁸⁷ Dance critic Arlene Croce called Morris's *Striptease* a "brilliant porno-ballet."⁸⁸ Morris costumed his dancers in some of the traditional striptease cliché outfits. He appeared to assign these outfits (and the character roles they implied) to his dance company members according to their body types. Terri Weksler was cast as the bride-stripper--her body is slim, young-looking, and probably what would be thought of as "virginal." Rob Besserer, a tall, rangy, blonde, and blue-eyed dancer, was assigned the role of a cowboy-stripper. Morris cast himself as a "derelict-flasher." His body at the time was a little out of shape and overweight. Similar corresponding body-costume roles were assigned to the other dancers of his company.

Morris stated in an interview for the *New York Times* that "the fantasy is all in the dress-up part...as you get naked, you become more like everybody else, and it becomes less erotic."⁸⁹ However, because the bodies of the dancers matched the stereotypical expectations of the

costume (and played to the cultural erotic dictates or assumptions that went with both body and costume types), it was, in fact, not that difficult to keep the character roles in mind--even after all the performers stripped completely naked. One could still view each of them within the erotic narratives that had been set up by the initial costumes, because as Barthes himself suggests, the bodies of the strippers become obvious extensions of their costumes.

This matching of culturally-marked body type and costume is a continuing tradition in striptease performance which is predicated on dominant social ideals of attractive bodies. Kenneth Clark, in his book *The Nude*, states that:

...we cannot discuss the nude without considering its practical application, because every time we criticize a figure, saying that a neck is too long, hips are too wide or breasts too small, we are admitting, in quite concrete terms, the existence of ideal beauty.⁹⁰

While Lewin insists on the naturalness of the "primal costume," as a stripper, she in fact relied on stereotypical body/costume exchanges in order to create her erotic performances. Throughout her autobiography, Lewin bemoans the fact that she was considered short and had "unattractive," short legs. She even tells her readers of her envy of a stripper who was blonde and tall, and who was able to carry off strip acts outfitted in exceptionally beautiful Burlesque-queen type costumes. Lewin's culturally-situated critique of her own body led her to select a little girl costume and act, as described earlier, in which her stripper-character practices at being a "grown-up" woman. Lewin also chose "Lolita" as her stage name. These selections demonstrate that

Lewin actually viewed the "primal costume" not in relation to some essential natural condition, but in the terms of the societal ideals and narratives which frame bodies according to cultural categories of the erotic. Lewin, by creating her Lolita-character, situated herself within a particular social text that shaped her body into a sexually fashionable one.

Numerous contemporary strippers incorporate these overlapping socio-sexual narratives of bodies and costumes. For example, at Show World in New York, a regular "house" dancer consistently drew crowds and applause. This dancer has a totally flat barrel chest with exceptionally tiny nipples and a protruding stomach. She calls herself "Baby." Baby usually begins her strip act dressed in a childlike one-piece bathing suit or leotard. Her routine basically consists of wildly flaying arms and legs and body crashes onto the floor. At Big Alice's in Peoria, a very young-looking male dancer with long, tangled dark hair and a scruffy appearance performs in a torn jeans outfit. He projects an *enfant terrible* or young rebel air. He, too, creates a dance act that looks physically out of control and includes body crashes into the floor. His audiences literally wince each time this dancer makes contact with the ground. Neither Baby nor the *enfant terrible* appeared to be actually bruised or harmed by their undertakings. And while their acts did not look choreographically controlled or skillful, they performed the same type routines over and over again to rapt audiences.

Karl, stripping in the gay club Chez Jean Pierre in Montreal, also plays on the appeal of youth. He stated in an interview-conversation

with this writer that he tries to present a preppie college kid character for his audiences. Karl is not a student, but he is blond, thin, relatively small, blue-eyed, and has very white skin. Karl stated that he specifically makes sure that he does not tan so that he will look more studious.⁹¹

At the Apollon, a strip club for women also in Montreal, a short-haired, basically clean-cut but average-looking male dancer begins his strip in an expensive business suit with all the accoutrements. He stated that he makes the best tips when he "wears outfits that are 'suited' to him" and that "glamorize" his body.⁹²

In contrast to the body types of these performers, there are some strippers whose physiques take the presiding social ideals to their extremes. The dancer who performs the Superman strip in the *Males in Motion* video is tall, very muscular and exceptionally "well endowed."⁹³ The stripper who bills herself as Malibu-Barbie has a body almost identical in proportion to that of the Barbie doll--a fact that did not go unnoticed during her performance and interview on the Phil Donahue Show. And, as one might expect, the stripper, Malibu-Barbie, sports outfits that are every bit as elaborate as the fantasy gowns designed for the doll.⁹⁴

The matching or cultural exchanges between body and costume types are also accentuated by props and accessories which are displayed after the final degree of nudity is achieved. These items frequently continue to refer to the initial costume-character choice. They include jewelry, scarves, boas, high heels, stockings, corsets,

whips, chains, dildos, assorted hats, neckties, animals, weapons, and decorated underwear.

Anne Hollander's research and theories in the interdisciplinary areas of art criticism, clothing, and fashion design focus on the historical fashioning of body canons through the reciprocal exchanges between clothing, bodies, and viewers. In *Seeing Through Clothes*, Hollander suggests that what we consider to be the "natural" beauty of both clothing and bodies has been taught to us through "the alchemy of visual representation."⁹⁵ Not only does Hollander remind us that "art proves that nakedness is not universally experienced and perceived any more than clothes are,"⁹⁶ but she also insists that all nudes in representation provide their viewers with double visionings, because: "An image of the nude body that is absolutely free of any counterimage of clothing is virtually impossible. . . all nudes in art since modern fashion began are wearing the ghosts of absent clothes--sometimes highly visible ghosts."⁹⁷ Strip events, in all aspects of their productions, underscore this phenomenon.

Hollander's discussion of the nude figure wearing the ghosts of absent clothes also addresses the ways in which certain clothing dictates the form of the "nude" body through the manner in which those items force the wearer to carry the body as a result of its sartorial conditioning (i.e., the actual physical effects on the body produced by high heels, corsets, mini-skirts, speedos, jockstraps, and bicycle shorts--all items favored by either female or male strippers). This leads Hollander to observe that the "unclothed costume" is always worn in "correct period style."⁹⁸

Many other writers have noted that the wearing of the "unclothed costume" in "correct period style" may necessitate other kinds of adornment which are not necessarily related directly to what is considered clothing. For example, E. Adamson Hoebel in his essay, "Clothing and Ornament," states:

In all times and climes, man [*sic*] undertakes to effect what he vainly believes are improvements upon his body appearance...The time and effort that have gone into painting, pricking, scarring, puncturing...the human body for aesthetic and status reasons are beyond all calculations...People who wear little or no clothing are no contradiction to what has just been said. Be man ever so unclothed, he is never unadorned.⁹⁹

Adornments or "improvements" on the human body are, of course, representations of the cultural aesthetics produced by social dictates which then "dress" the body. Adornments such as tattoos, specific hairstyles, and nail polish may also refer to subgroup membership as well as to class and gender.¹⁰⁰

Striptease performers "tinker" with the appearance of their "nude" bodies through a variety of adornments and techniques that are also available to the general public. They use facial and sometimes body make-up (e.g., blush between the breasts or around the pectoral and stomach muscles, rouge on nipples, etc.) to highlight certain features that are considered sexually appealing. Finger and toe-nail polish, body glitter, and hair styles for both male and female dancers also help to construct culturally erotic and socially acceptable bodies.

Female dancers usually shave or wax their legs, underarms, and pubic hair. Male dancers also use hair removal products on their chests and sometimes their legs to heighten the muscle development.

Kenneth, a stripper at La Bare in Texas, explained that he used Nair on his chest to create a more provocative tactile and visual appeal for his female patrons.¹⁰¹ Alison Susan Pate, the market director for several different chains of male and female strip clubs, stated that male dancers at the Florida La Bare clubs were required to shave or remove all body hair except for pubic and head hair to help dancers maintain a "clean" appearance.¹⁰²

Both male and female dancers make use of tanning salons, self-tanning products, and oils on their bodies. These help the skin to reflect light and accentuate muscle tone and body curves. A few clubs such as Rick's and Caligula's provide their dancers with in-house tanning machines. Tanning can also produce some unusual effects on the body. The markings of "bikini lines," visually and materially constitute Hollander's idea of nude bodies wearing ghost clothing. Fashionable bodies are also produced by the toning and shaping of exercise programs and dance classes. Through these programs, performers learn the skills necessary to carry, move, and pose their bodies into shapes which help create culturally-ideal silhouettes and body parts. Flexed muscles, pointed toes, and special shoulder and buttock positions all change the form of the "natural" body.

On the more drastic side, some of the dancers interviewed stated that they had used, or knew of other dancers who had used, surgery and drugs to sculpt their bodies. Reportedly, some strip clubs actually encourage their female performers to have breast augmentations. While none of the male dancers admitted to surgery (which might include the relatively new silicone implant augmentation

for male pectoral muscles), some male dancers did state that a small percentage of their peers used steroids to increase their body and muscle size. Thus, despite certain cultural ideas about the naturalness of nudity, female and male bodies are never actually represented as natural--either in "real life," "art," or in all the states between--because what is displayed and revealed is always the categorized, manipulated, and "tinkered body." All of the examples just discussed indicate that while the publicly displayed nude bodies of the strippers may indeed break social taboos, these nude bodies also clearly bare and bear the markings of social and cultural rules.

There is one additional manifestation of the transgressive double-articulations invoked by clothed and nude bodies in strip events. An interesting anecdote gives a vivid example of this aspect. Former Burlesque Queen Jeanine France described one of the reunion performances of the Golden Era Strippers in an interview for the *Los Angeles Times*. This particular event was held in a bathhouse in San Francisco. Although France stated that she enjoyed participating in the performance, she also noted: "That one was weird. Our audience only had towels on. How do you do a striptease for people who aren't dressed?"¹⁰³

Hollander states that the most intense sexual messages "are always delivered by the image of an unclothed body; and even more intense ones must then necessarily be conveyed by a bare body shown in the company of a covered one, even in the most abstract arrangement."¹⁰⁴ In striptease performances, social boundaries and their disruptions are underscored by a sartorial plot agreed upon by

both strippers and patrons. In the strip event, the spectator has the responsibility of maintaining and highlighting the taboo aspect of the performance in general through her or his dressed state in contrast to the eventual nudity of the dancer. This operation is particularly pronounced in the environments which feature stages and runways that are surrounded by spectators who can easily see one another as well as the performers.

However, despite the startling contrast of these sartorially based spectator and performer positions, they are not diametrically opposed. Some female and male striptease patrons actually mime and even remove outer articles of their clothing while the formal exotic dance acts are in progress. Even though such occurrences are relatively rare, they seem to symbolize the larger-scale identifications that take place between dressed and non-dressed participants in strip events. Spectators of these events are thrilled by the nudity of the performers, in part, because they can simultaneously imagine themselves "in the nude." As Perniola proposes in "Between Clothing and Nudity," the "spectator feels himself [*sic*] watched" because "the stripper's nudity functions like a mirror." As a result, the patron "has to confront himself and his own potential nudity."¹⁰⁵

All the aspects of striptease costuming discussed in this chapter (peekaboo clothing designs, character cliché outfits, and the body as costume) involve double articulations of both dress and the body. For, the strip event is predicated upon the interplays of the social costumes of dress and the social costumes of nudity. These exchanges are not apolitical, utopian, or "playful pluralistic" because they foreground the

dominant social contradictions and ambivalences towards sex and gender--and often, how these contradictions and ambivalences relate to hegemonic ideas of class, race, ethnicity and sexual preference. Nevertheless, these exchanges in striptease performance, however politically imperfect, still pose what Garber calls the "third term"--that is, a representation which is culturally disruptive because it does not neatly fit into traditional binary categories.¹⁰⁶



Fig. 4.2

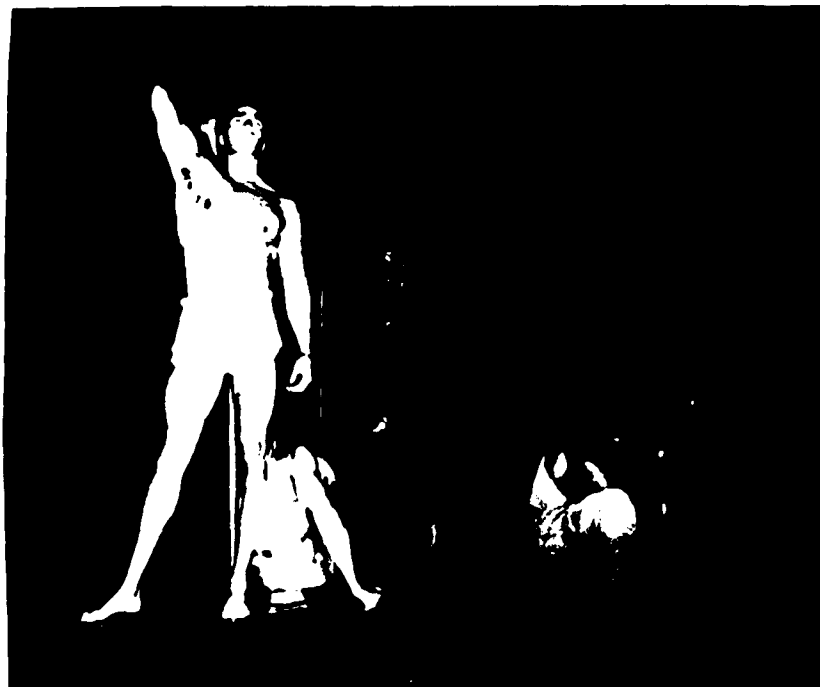


Fig. 4.5



Fig. 4.9



Fig. 4.11



Fig. 4.12



Fig. 4.13



Fig. 4.15

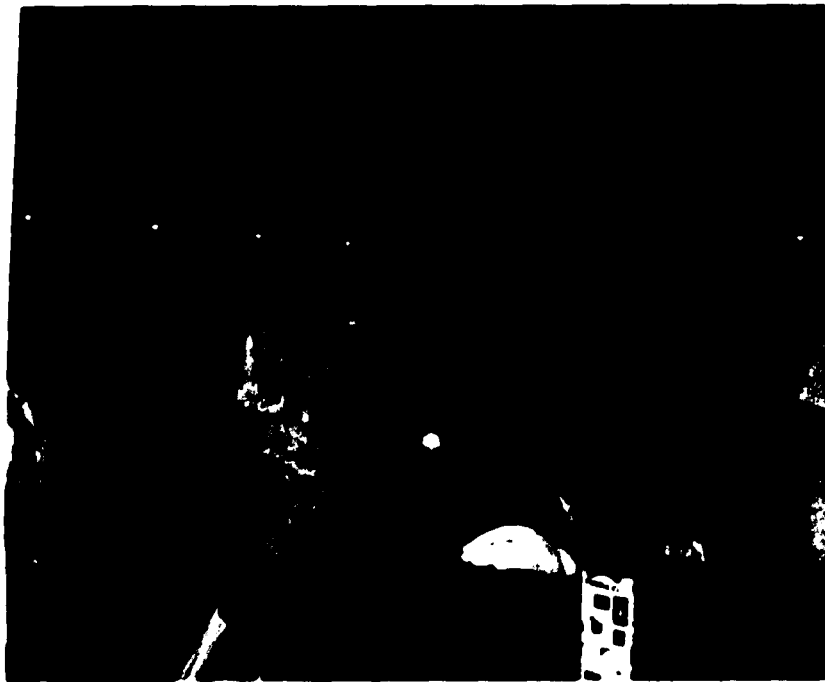
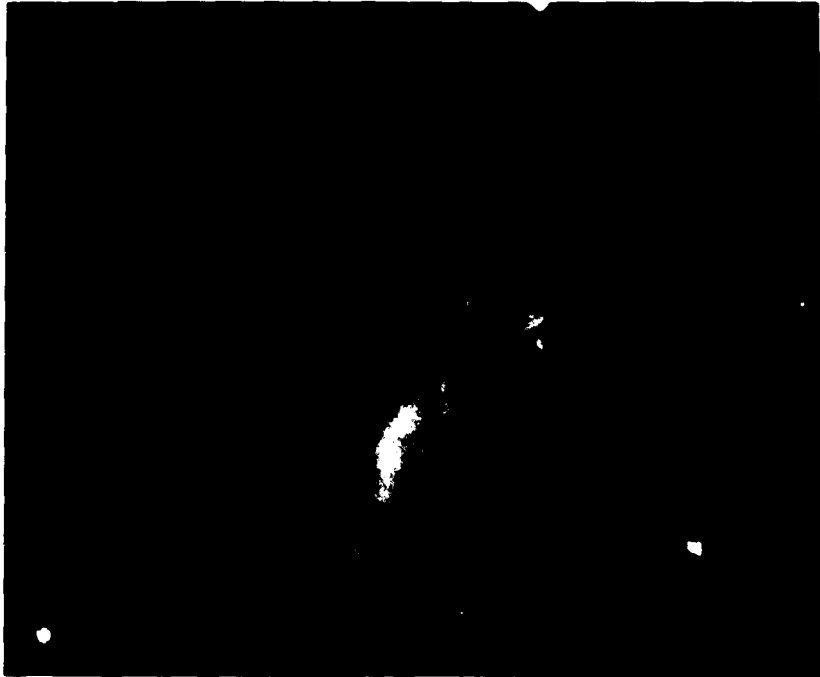


Fig. 4.17



Fig. 4.21



Fig. 4.22

NOTES

¹Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 2-3.

²Harold Minsky, "Topless No Threat to Strip," interview by Job Cohen, *Variety*, 2 June 1965.

³Robert Watters, interview-conversation with author, 10 April 1990, Houston, Texas.

⁴Gio, *How to Strip for Your Man*, L. Suarez/La Gioconda Enterprises, LTD., 1987, videocassette.

⁵Veronica Hart, "How to Strip for Your Lover," Learning Annex Workshop, New York City, 18 July 1990.

⁶NBC's "Donahue" on "Unisex Strip Club," air date, 8 February 1990, *Journal Graphics*, transcript #2878.

⁷Valerie Steele, "Clothing and Sexuality," in *Women and Men: Dressing the Part*, ed. Claudia Brush Kidwell and Valerie Steele (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 44.

⁸Steele, 46.

⁹Petr Bogatyrev, "kro jako znak," *Slovo a slovesnost* 2 (1936): 43-47; trans. Y. Lockwood in *Semiotics of Art*, ed. Ladislav Matejka and Irwin R. Titunik (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), 13.

¹⁰Anne Hollander, *Seeing Through Clothes* (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 84.

¹¹See Tracy Davis's analysis of nude signifiers on the stage in her article, "The Spectacle of Absent Costume: Nudity on the Victorian Stage," *New Theatre Quarterly* 5, no. 20 (November 1989): 321-333. Davis cites two female music hall spectators who describe the experience of "seeing" nudity on the stage *vis a vis* fully clothed performers wearing ankle length skirts (326-327).

¹²Hollander, 237-238.

¹³James Laver, *The Concise History of Costume and Fashion* (New York: Abrams, 1969), 268-269, 272-273. See also Laver discussed in Steele, 42-44; and in Wilson, 92.

¹⁴See for example Hollander, 157-236 passim; Steele, 44; Kaja Silverman, "Fragments of a Fashionable Discourse," in *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 139-152; Barbara Clark Smith and Kathy Peiss, *Men and Women: A History of Costume, Gender, and Power*, catalogue for the Smithsonian Institute exhibition (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), 15-18. Silverman, Smith, and Peiss also point out, that before the Industrial Revolution, upperclass men's clothing had many of the same characteristics as upperclass female clothing.

¹⁵Steele, 42-44.

¹⁶Coward, 82.

¹⁷See Davis, 326. Davis also addresses the notion of "good" and "bad" peering positions, particularly with regard to the ballet skirt and tights. However, she does not suggest a good/bad split experience for individual viewers, but argues instead that this costume design allowed certain audience members to play "bad" or naughty spectators while other viewers of the same event played "good" patrons of the arts.

¹⁸For a brief description of similar types of panel skirts used in spectacles for the Victorian theatre, see again Davis, 328.

¹⁹Zeidman, 153.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 152.

²¹Ann Corio and Joe DiMona, *This Was Burlesque* (New York: Madison Square Press, 1968), 90.

²²Zeidman, 152.

²³*Ibid.*

²⁴The author visited the Mannheim Road area in Chicago, 10 August 1990. Author interview-conversations with police officers, performers, and bar patrons, Mannheim Road, Chicago, 10 August 1990, confirmed the closing of the strip bars.

²⁵"Kino" (regular patron of New Jersey exotic dancing clubs, contact suggested by Dr. Daniel Gerould, Theatre Department, City University of New York, Graduate Center), telephone interview-conversation with author, Spring 1990. See also Sandy Lovell, "Police Stop-Stop Go-Go," *The Hudson Dispatch* (Bergen/Hudson Counties, New Jersey), 2 July 1990, 1, 4, for a story about the enforcement of the New Jersey State Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission censorship of topless dancing.

²⁶Steele, 62.

²⁷Arthur Asa Berger, "The Clothed Mind: Cultural Studies," *Et cetera* 47, no. 3 (Fall 1990): 236.

²⁸Berger, 237-238.

²⁹See for example Andrew Sullivan, "Flogging Underwear," *The New Republic*, 18 January 1988, 20-24. Sullivan states:

Male eroticism is the most unprecedented aspect of the new advertising culture. Nude or seminude men are now part of advertising campaigns of . . . BMW, Saks Fifth Avenue, Calvin Klein, and the French Socialist Party. Until now, only women were portrayed as passive sex objects. What's interesting is not so much the sudden objectification--even feminization--of male sexuality, but the question why men are buying products sold with male sex (20).

The author suggests that we only see men in this context as "feminized" and "passive" because of our cultural expectations which include the association of the "feminine" with women and with passivity. As I have argued earlier, perhaps males purchase these products because of their socially subversive pleasure in male auto-erotic and desired sex object role depictions, regardless of sexual preference.

³⁰See for example a discussion about the sartorial eroticization of "utilitarian" female feet and breasts in Brownmiller, 33-34, 41-46.

³¹Berger, 238.

³²Johnny Rotten, performances with Beefcakes U.S.A., Danielle's, Forest Hills (Queens), New York, 3 May 1990; Rotten, performances with Escapes "couples" strip show, Merrick, New York, 12 May 1990.

³³"Michael" (lead dancer with Chippendales New York, circa 1989-1991), telephone interview-conversation with author, 25 July 1990.

³⁴Male strip act performances, Apollon, Montreal, Canada, 6 & 7 July 1990; Bistro Bunnies, Montreal, Canada, 6 & 7 July 1990; and Club 281, Montreal, Canada, 7 July 1990.

³⁵Mark Cook and Robert McHenry, *Sexual Attraction* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1978), 1, 6, 16-19; cited in Steele, 44-45, 47.

³⁶Steele, 47.

³⁷Mario Perniola, "Between Clothing and Nudity," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body: Part Two*, ed. Michel Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi (New York: Urzone, Inc., 1989), 237.

³⁸Alison Lurie, *The Language of Clothes*, with illustrations assembled by Doris Palca (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 230.

³⁹Lurie, 17.

⁴⁰Alisa Susan Pate (Special Events Director for the M. J. Peter Club Management, Inc.), interview-conversation with author, 10 January 1992, New York City; strip performances at Stringfellow's Presents Pure Platinum, New York City, 10 Jan 1992; and strip performances at the El Morocco Presents Thee [sic] Doll House, New York City, 17 October 1992.

⁴¹*An Officer and a Gentleman*, 125 min., dir. Taylor Hackford, Paramount, 1982.

⁴²Bogatyrev, 14.

⁴³Steele, 56. Steele suggests that fabrics such as silk, velvet, and leather remind one of the sensation of touching the skin.

⁴⁴"Thom' the Playboy" in *Males in Motion*, approx. 60 min., Ero-Tron Productions, 1985, videocassette.

⁴⁵Annette Kuhn insists that social glamour roles are usually reserved for women in our culture. She suggests that glamorous women are "made-up," not simply in the sense of being cosmetically conceived, but also invented in the sense "that we might say a story is made up if it is fiction." Annette Kuhn, *The Power of the Image: Essays*

on *Representation and Sexuality* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 12, 13.

On the other hand, Marjorie Garber explores the sartorial adornment of males in concert with their cultural roles in our society and concludes that cultural ideas and representations of men and "masculinity" are as theatrical and artificial as those of women and "femininity." Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing & Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 373-374.

⁴⁶Gio, *How to Strip for Your Man*, L. Suarez/La Gioconda Enterprises, LTD., 1987, videocassette.

⁴⁷Amy Vanderbilt, *The Amy Vanderbilt Complete Book of Etiquette*, revised and expanded by Letitia Baldrige, with drawings by Mona Marks (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1978), 664.

⁴⁸Vanderbilt, 665.

⁴⁹Rita Hayworth in *Gilda*, 110 min., dir. Charles Vidor, Columbia Pictures, 1946.

⁵⁰Gerard Lenne, *Sex on the Screen: Eroticism in Film*, trans. D. Jacobs (Paris: Henri Veyrier, 1978; repr., New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), xi, 159. See also Mary Ann Doane, "Gilda: Epistemology as Striptease," *camera obscura: A Journal of Feminism and Film Theory* 11, (1983), 12-15.

⁵¹Leonard Maltin, ed., *TV Movies and Video Guide 1991 Edition* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 428.

⁵²Garber, 185.

⁵³Steele, 62. Steele suggests that high-status male clothing which denotes physical, mental, or economic prowess (the businessman, fireman, doctor, professor, football player) continues to be an indirect socialized turn-on for many heterosexual women.

⁵⁴*Welcome to Your Fantasy* shows, Chippendales New York, December 1990.

⁵⁵Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1986), 162.

⁵⁶Club 281, Montreal, Canada, 7 July 1990.

57 Garber, 9-13.

58 Blue Angel nightclub, New York City, circa April 1990.

59 Laura D'Angelo, "Bumps and Grinds in Life of a Stripper," *Staten Island Advance*, 15 November 1990, sec. C, p. 1.

60 Gabriel "Dolly," quoted in D'Angelo.

61 Annie Sprinkle, interview-conversation with author, 17 July 1990, New York City; and follow-up telephone conversation with author, 20 July 1990.

62 See C. Carr, "All Smut, No Slut," *Village Voice*, 16 May 1989, 97, for a review of Sprinkle's post-modern porn performances. For an "anti-porn" description of Annie Sprinkle's "post-modern porn" performances, see Elinor Fuchs, "Staging the Obscene Body," *The Drama Review* 33, no. 1 (Spring, 1989): 42-47.

63 Stallybrass and White, 154-163.

64 Janet Feindel, *A Particular Class of Women* (Vancouver, Canada: Lazara Publications, 1988), produced at the WOW Cafe in New York City (1989); *Stripper*, 90 mins., 1985, dir. Jerome Gary, Jerome Gary-Visionaire Communications, Inc. film, Key Video, videocassette.

65 Anne-Marie Schiro, "Baby Dolls, Naughty and Nice," *The New York Times Fashion Sunday*, 21 October 1990, 54.

66 Corio, 80.

67 Nancy Hartsock, *Money, Sex, and Power: Toward a Feminist Historical Materialism* (New York: Longman, 1983), 172.

68 Lerner and Loewe, "Thank Heavens for Little Girls," in *Gigi*, 116 min., dir. Vincente Minnelli, MGM (Metro, Goldwyn and Mayer), 1958.

69 Lauri Lewin, *Naked is the Best Disguise: My Life as a Stripper* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 79.

70 Lewin, 75.

71 Michael Balint discusses the experience of the thrill in connection with "unfamiliar" situations and satisfactions in terms of the

"virginal" in his *Thrills and Regressions* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1959); cited in Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 197. Balint states:

The obvious new object is a virgin, and it is amazing how many thrills claim this adjective. One speaks of virgin land, a virgin peak, or a virginal route to a peak, virgin realms of speed, and so on. On the whole, any new sexual partner is a thrill, especially if he or she belongs to another race, colour, or creed (Balint, 23-24).

72"Ivy" (exotic dancer at Rick's in Houston, Texas) telephone interview-conversation with author, April 1990.

73"Nancy," Satin Angels strip shows, Chippendales, New York City, July 1990; "Nancy," telephone interview-conversation with author, 25 July 1990; See also NBC's "Donahue" on "Satin Angels: Female Chippendales," air date 11 July 1990, *Journal Graphics*, transcript #2987.

74"Superman" in *Males in Motion*, approx. 60 min., Ero-Tron Productions, 1985, videocassette.

75Benjamin Glover (manager of Show Palace), interview-conversation with author, 26 July 1990, New York City.

76Feindel, 37.

77 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. by Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (Paris: Editions du seuil, 1969; repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 43.

78Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe," in *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society*, ed. and intro. by Barbara Babcock (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 147-190, passim.

79Coward, 189-190, 193, 195-196.

80The protagonists of both of these films are social outcasts. Wyatt and Billy, the cyclist "anti-establishment heroes" of *Easy Rider*, are shot and killed. The character Edward Scissorhands is abused and banished from "mainstream" life. *Easy Rider*, 94 min., 1969, dir., Dennis Hopper, Columbia Pictures; *Edward Scissorhands*, 100 min., 1990, dir. Tim Burton, Twentieth Century Fox.

81 Stallybrass and White, 200.

82 *Ibid.*, 172.

83 *Ibid.*, 193.

84 Benjamin, 65-71; Rose, 210; and Williams, 214-218.

85 Lewin, 30.

86 Barthes, 84.

87 The first performance of Morris's *Striptease* was presented in Boston at Northeastern University, 27 February 1986. It eventually became part of Morris's larger three-section dance work, *Mythologies*. This trilogy was inspired by two other essays (on soap powders and championship wrestling) written by Barthes in his collection, *Mythologies*. The author saw Morris's complete trilogy at the Manhattan Center Grand Ballroom in New York City, 7 May 1987.

88 Arlene Croce, review of *Striptease*, by Mark Morris (Northeastern University, Boston), *The New Yorker*, 1 December 1986, 103.

89 Jennifer Dunning, "Morris, in 'Mythologies,' Turns Words into Dance," *The New York Times*, 5 May 1987, sec. C, p. 13.

90 Clark, Kenneth, *The Nude: A Study in the Ideal Form*, A.W. Mellon Lectures in the Fine Arts, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 1953 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956; Princeton-Bollingen Paperback edition, 1984), 13.

91 "Karl" (exotic dancer at the gay club Chez Jean Pierre, Montreal, Canada) interview-conversation with author, 8 July 1990, Montreal, Canada.

92 Exotic dancer (name not noted, performer at the Apollon, Montreal, Canada), interview-conversation with author, 6 July 1990, Montreal, Canada.

93 "Superman" in *Males in Motion*, aprox. 60 min., Ero-Tron Productions, 1985, videocassette.

94 NBC's "Donahue" on "Unisex Strip Club," air date, 8 February 1990, *Journal Graphics*, transcript #2878.

95Hollander, xiii.

96Ibid., xii-xiii.

97Ibid., 85-86.

98Ibid., 87.

99E. Adamson Hoebel, "Clothing and Ornament," in *Dress, Adornment, and the Social Order*, ed. Mary Ellen Roach and Joanne Bubolz Eicher (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1965), 16.

100Hoebel, 17-27.

101"Kenneth" (exotic dancer at Labare, Houston, Texas), interview-conversation with author, 11 April 1990, Houston, Texas.

102Alison Susan Pate, interview-conversation with author, 10 January 1992, New York City.

103Irene Lacher, "Girls of a Feather," *Los Angeles Times*, 1 May 1991, sec. E, p. 3.

104Hollander, 178.

105Perniola, 259.

106Garber, 9-13.

CHAPTER V

CHOREOGRAPHY, STRUCTURE, AND NARRATIVE

. . .the body language of dance may carry a more immediate wallop than verbal communication in commenting on sexuality and in modeling gender because of its motion-attracting attention, language-like qualities, replete multilayered meanings...
--Judith Lynn Hanna¹

The ranges of choreography, gestural movements, and improvisational elements in contemporary female and male striptease performances are extensive. They include current disco and party dancing styles, gymnastic feats, ballet, modern dance, jazz dance, ballroom steps, martial arts, body-building, and sometimes even stunts with fire and animals. Dance movements of strip routines can also be structured around some of the stereotypical gestures and props culturally associated with costume-character types. For example, cowgirl and cowboy strippers often mime shoot-outs and ride phantom horses, while dominatrixes, bikers, and other leather rebels dance with chains, handcuffs, ropes, whips, and motorcycles. Judith Lynn Hanna in her seminal cross-cultural and historical study, *Dance, Sex, and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire*, and

theatre theorist Jill Dolan in her essays, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat" and "The Dynamics of Desire" both suggest that heterosexual erotic or "pornographic" representations such as contemporary female and male exotic dance acts ultimately replicate the most stereotypical features of traditional gender roles.² As noted earlier, in her arguments about "gender as class," Dolan focuses on the cultural frame of male dominance which accordingly renders both female and male strip performances as acts about male sexual pleasure and the social power of the phallus.³ Hanna arrives at a similar conclusion. She, too, concentrates on the frame of traditional gender hierarchy in her interpretation of these performances. But because her study specifically deals with dance, Hanna also adds a few comments about the differences in the stylistic approaches used by contemporary female and male exotic dancers.

Hanna insists that the types of movements and gestures used by female exotic dancers in nightclubs, restaurants, and cabarets categorically "feed a particular female image that many contemporary women reject--glamor, compliance, plaything, sexual object."⁴ On the other hand, Hanna states that male strippers usually perform the kinds of dances which "create the traditional aura of romance and chivalry mixed with overt sexuality and male aggressiveness."⁵ Hanna's brief remarks about female and male exotic dance performances follow the division of "feminine" and "masculine" gender characteristics she outlines in her tables, "Sex-Related Traits in America,"⁶ and (Western) "Stereotypic Nonverbal Gender Behavior."⁷ Most of these gender characteristics are commonly known and have been discussed by

many other writers working in the social sciences.⁸ However, I will take the time to summarize these sex role traits here in order to compare and contrast them more effectively with the physical expressions of traditional "femininity" and "masculinity" which are both represented and transgressed in contemporary striptease performances.

The listings in Hanna's table, "Sex-Related Traits in America," suggest that women learn to play the sex object roles of "kitten," "pet," and "doll" because of the cultural stress on beautiful, marketable (passive) female bodies. These roles support the cultural myth that "sex is done to" females. Because of the presentation of women as marketable bodies, the motivating force behind female sexual desire is culturally assumed to be monetary gain (including, but not limited to, actual prostitution), rather than any type of "natural" sex drive.⁹

According to the table, "Stereotypic Nonverbal Gender Behavior," women physically manifest and support their socio-sexual status by responding to the actions of others, rather than overtly initiating actions; by yielding the control of time and physical space to dominants (mostly males); by using smaller gestures in general; by presenting a circumspect and constrained "ladylike" body comportment; and by the use of a submissive, averted gaze. On the other hand, women are considered to be more emotionally demonstrative than men. Females frequently display their feelings through greater use of facial expressions than males.¹⁰

These same tables indicate that, conversely, male sex roles are based on social tropes of independence and activity. Men are considered to be monetary earners (workers) in their own right.

Because their bodies have not been marketed in the way that women's bodies have (until recently, that is), male sex drives are still attributed to "biological" imperatives. Men's bodies are also socially marked as sources of their own (male) sexual pleasure and strength. They are cultural "sex possessors" in every sense of the phrase.

Men physically demonstrate their social privilege through their accepted roles as initiators of action, their greater control over time, and their allotment of a larger portion of physical space. Males carry their bodies in a more relaxed fashion and they use larger gestures, regardless of their physical size. And finally, men have the social prerogative of a direct gaze. However, males are required to limit their demonstrations of "emotion." They are far more reserved in their facial displays of feelings than females.

Many of the differences in the stylistic approaches and movement choices of contemporary female and male strip performances follow Hanna's specific and general analyses. Male exotic dancers often select movements and gimmicks that emphasize physical strength. Their gestures tend to be large and spatially encompassing. The driving tempo and "energetic" execution of many of the movements in male strip acts, whether they are "hip hop" steps or pelvic thrusts, are frequently constructed through the use of acceleration and staccato accents. Such choreographic devices help to maintain the appearance of a particular type of intensity and power that is usually associated with the "masculine," or, as Hanna puts it, "male aggressiveness" in our culture (Fig. 5.1).

"Male aggressiveness" in strip acts is also represented through the choreographed staging of various action scenes which support cliché-uniform choices. Twin gladiators at the Sugar Shack in Chicago perform carefully choreographed sword fights. Construction workers at Escapes in New York and at the Hangar Club in Camp Springs outside of Washington D. C. tote flashlights and demonstrate body building poses. Cops and robbers literally "slug it out" on the stage of Chippendales Los Angeles. Bad boy rebels dressed in ripped black t-shirts and torn pants, blue jeans outfits, and leather attire perform "men's" push-ups with conspicuous pelvic thrusts into the floor at Chippendales New York, Chippendales Los Angeles, and Big Alice's in Peoria, respectively.

Female strippers, as discussed in the last chapter, depend less on these types of "action" costume-character roles than males. Many female exotic dancers use slow, controlled steps and gestures which are executed in a less overtly "energetic" manner and which cover less physical space than the movements of their male counterparts. This type of female strip choreography appears to focus more on the undulations and the display of the body and body parts than those of the male strippers (Fig. 5.2), whose more "vigorous" style of dancing tends to distract the audience's attention from such displays. Nevertheless, in addition to the aspects of striptease choreography which comply with stereotypical expectations of female and male sex roles, there are many exceptions, contradictions, and inconsistencies involved in this apparent dichotomy.

The balance of this chapter will address the carnivalesque and transgressive aspects of female and male striptease performances through the exploration of the following: 1) the "basic moves" of the striptease; 2) gender-bender strip acts of erotic "sensuality" and erotic "vigor"; and, 3) the traditional striptease structure and some of its variations which highlight the theatrical processes of transformation and voyeurism.

The "Basic Moves"

Many theatre historians trace the traditional movements of the striptease to the introduction of "belly dancing" or the "hootchy-kootchy" into American popular culture by the performances of Little Egypt (*aka* Catherine Devine) during the Chicago World's Fair of 1893 and the St. Louis Exhibition in 1904.¹¹ Little Egypt's Western interpretation of Middle Eastern dancing created such a sensation that it spawned a host of enthusiastic imitators who performed "Oriental," "Salome," and "Venus" dance acts in a wide variety of music hall, vaudeville, and Burlesque productions.¹² Burlesque stars, such as Carrie Finnel and Hinda Wassau, have been credited with "inventing" striptease because they created acts which combined the movements of the hootchy-kootchy with disrobing.¹³ These movements, along with the sartorially based structure of the strip routine, were refined and even codified during the American Burlesque era.

Most of the basic moves of the strip are listed in H. M. Alexander's appendix to his 1938 book, *Strip Tease: The Vanished Art of Burlesque*.¹⁴ Despite the title of Alexander's book, the dance elements mentioned in his "Glossary of Burlesque Slang" are almost identical to the featured movements demonstrated by "Gio" in her 1987 video tape *How to Strip for Your Man* and by Veronica Hart in her 1990 striptease workshop, "How to Strip for Your Lover," for the Learning Annex in New York City. Carrie Stern's analysis of contemporary Times Square strip shows in her paper, "Public Undress: The Choreography of the 42nd Street Strip Show," also describes the same dance elements.¹⁵ These basic moves include the "strut," the "bump," the "grind" and the "shimmy/quiver."

The "parade" or "strut" is a personalized, "sexy" walk. The "grind" is a circle or sometimes a figure eight of the hips which is generally performed in a relatively smooth fashion. The "bump," in contrast to the grind, is a sharp, isolated pelvic thrust that can be executed to the front, back, or side. The "shimmy" usually refers to the shaking of the shoulders and chest. But sometimes the shimmy also describes the trembling or quivering of other parts of the body or even the entire body.

Two other "dance" elements complete this grouping of striptease essentials, "body-stroking" and "facial choreography." Zeidman cites Hinda Wassau as the first striptease performer to specialize in running her hands over her entire body in auto-erotic ecstasy.¹⁶ Gio and Hart both use these types of gestures in their demonstrations of contemporary striptease technique. Stern, in her discussion of the

choreography of 42nd Street strip shows, also lists "body-stroking" as one of the basic elements of the current dance.

Alexander and Gio each discuss the importance of the projection of the dancer's "personality" during the strip act, but Hart specifically analyzes this projection of personality in terms of what she calls the stripper's "facial choreography." According to Hart, "facial choreography" includes an extensive range of "come-hither," "shy," "desiring," "knowing," and "innocent" looks. All of these "looks" involve different types of eye-contact play between the performers and spectators.

The basic movement elements of the striptease outlined above are still most likely to be associated with the "feminine" in our culture--from their historical and social connections with the traditions of belly dancing in America to the use of facial choreography to express "feelings." However, these essentials are performed by both female and male strippers. In addition to this general transgression of gender norms, the basic movement elements of the strip offer more specific representations and metaphors of sex role inconsistencies and contradictions. While most of these elements overlap in the strip act, in the sense that they are usually executed in simultaneous combination with one another (i.e., struts that include grinds, body-stroking, and specific facial choreography), I will initially discuss these elements in separate categories in order to clarify some of the points I wish to make about gender transgressions in female and male striptease choreography.

The Strut or Parade

Strippers use the strut or parade (a sexy walk) to show off costumes, bodies, and "personalities." Struts or parades can be performed on stages and performance areas of all sizes.

Contemporary struts function as entrances and opening segments; as pauses in the action of a strip act to build anticipation; and as connecting steps to travel from patron to patron for various kinds of performer-audience interactions including tipping procedures.

While oftentimes there is a distinction between the "macho" strutting of the male stripper and the more subdued, "mincing" step of the female dancer, which is frequently shaped by the use of high heels, this difference is not always so exact. For both female and male strippers can employ "sensual," "friendly," and "stalking" approaches in their construction of "sexy" walks.

"Sensual" strut variations usually include undulating hip and stomach movements, body-stroking, and distinctive "eye-plays" with audience members. Featured female performers such as Beverlee Hills, Porsche Lynn, Veronica Hart, and Gio open many of their acts by moving through the performance space using a modified version of the fashion model's walk which leads with the pelvis. In addition to the tilt of the pelvis, these performers strut while playing with their hair, throwing their heads back, half-closing their eyes, wetting their lips, and outlining their bodies with their hands.

Several routines in the most recent Chippendales New York and Chippendales Los Angeles shows present male performers using similar strutting techniques. One act, in both the Chippendales New York *All About Love* and *One Night of Sin* shows, features dancers who enter the performance space seemingly clothed only in towels wrapped around their waists. These dancers parade around the stage area with slow measured walks. Some dancers include hip and stomach undulations. Others lead with the pelvis and massage their chests. During this walking sequence, several of the performers half-close their eyes and then stare seductively at audience members before returning their gazes to their own bodies (Fig. 5.3).

In another act in the *One Night of Sin* program, presented in New York and Los Angeles, Chippendale dancers in white underwear solemnly carry bowls of ice water onto the stage. As the dancers walk across the performance area, they conspicuously shift their weight from one leg to the other which causes their hips to sway rhythmically to and fro. Several of the performers toss their long hair as they walk. The dancers then take turns splashing themselves with the water as they momentarily close their eyes and stroke their bodies.

"Friendly" struts or parades often use many of the elements of the "sensual" walks just described. They also tend to feature more dance-oriented movements such as a variety of simple turns and "hip hop" or stomping steps in combination with "walking." But female and male "friendly" struts are defined as such because of their use of constant smiling, open eyes, short periods of direct eye-contact with spectators, and, in some cases, on-going, convivial "patters." These

patters generally consist of the strippers traveling from patron to patron while asking their audience members questions such as: "How are you doing?" "What's your name?" "Where are you from?" "Are you having a good time?"

Male strip performances which tend to specialize in this type of strutting are presented at the Apollon in Montreal, Big Alice's in Peoria, La Bare in Houston, and the Hangar Club outside of Washington D. C. (Fig. 5.4). Female strip acts which feature "friendly" struts and styles are on view at Rick's in Houston; Billy's, Gallagher's, and Scores in New York City; and the Camelot, Archibald's, Joanna's, J.P.'s, and The Hangar Club in the Washington D.C. area, and Big Al's in Peoria (Fig. 5.5).

Female and male "stalking" struts can be structured around many different kinds of movements and tempos, but they all usually include the use of longish strides and prolonged audience eye-contact. The longer stride produces a swagger in the walks of both female and male dancers. The dancer's use of prolonged audience eye-contact heightens the dramatic tension of the approach. The overall effect produces a walk which suggests an act of "intimidation." The parade or strut of the strip is often used to shift the very ground of the performance event. This is particularly true in the case of stalking approaches, because this type of strut often precedes aggressive physical contact between strippers and patrons. Male performers in the strip shows of Beefcakes U.S.A., Chippendales New York, Escapes, and Big Alice's regularly use stalking struts as precursors to the exchange of caresses with their patrons (Fig. 5.6).

Stalking struts performed by female dancers may offer an additional type of "intimidation" or "thrill" experience for their audiences. Many of the bars, clubs, and theatres in which women strip for men enforce strict no-touch rules for their patrons. In these performance situations, female dancers may aggressively approach their spectators and engage in some types of physical contact while the men are required to remain immobile. For example, at Rick's in Houston, the female dancers are known for a severe, elongated type of fashion model strutting.¹⁷ Many dancers combine this strut with intermittent pauses to play with the ties, glasses, and hair of the male patrons who surround the stage areas.

At Good Guys in Washington D.C., female dancers take this kind of practice to much further extremes. As the strippers circle their small platform stages, they regularly place their boots or high heels on the shoulders of the male patrons who "dare" to draw near and who are only allowed to tip the dancers through hand to hand contact.

In addition to these physical descriptions, the "strut" or "strutting one's stuff" is also an interesting metaphor in terms of sex role transgression in striptease performance. Not only does the female exotic dancer transgress the taboo of the double standard by performing a public display of sexual expression, she also transgresses another cultural norm. The stripper more or less actively selects the time and place in which she is willing to "strut sexual stuff." Stripper/writer Debi Sundahl (along with several other exotic dancers interviewed for this study) also mentioned this point in different ways. Sundahl insists that:

Women who work in the sex industry are not responsible for, nor do they in any way perpetuate, the sexual oppression of women. In fact, to any enlightened observer, our very existence provides a distinction and a choice as to when a woman should be treated like a sex object and when she should not be. At the theatre, yes; on the street, no. Having the distinction so obviously played out at work, I felt more personal power on the street...For the first time I felt I could express my sexuality in a safe environment. I was in control.¹⁸

The average woman on the street or in the work environment is continually at risk for sexual objectification and exploitation. Without the choice of time and place, women become victims of the sex object role, rather than active appropriators of this role who may enjoy such a position for monetary gain, sexual pleasure, mimetic pleasure, or all three.

A male dancer "strutting his sexual stuff" in the striptease performance also breaks social norms. As already suggested several times, in this theatrical context the male performer acts out his social privilege of publicly displaying his sexual interests, but he does so through the "spectacle" of the desired sex object position which is usually reserved for women in our culture.

Bumps and Grinds

Both female and male strippers perform bumps and grinds throughout their acts. These movements are executed to add excitement to parades, turns, and even jumps. They can also be used

to remove clothing. The motion of the bump and grind enables strippers to extricate themselves from pants, skirts, dresses, and underwear while still maintaining the rhythm of the dance (Fig. 5.7). Strippers also frequently perform these gyrations through the use of "props" and "floorwork."

Male dancers at the Hangar Club bump and grind into the railings and columns that define the performance area. Performers at the Sugar Shack in Chicago execute various gyrations while holding on to the vertical railings that surround the portion of the stage that is used as a tipping area. The Chippendales New York dancers perform pelvic thrusts as they swing around or straddle a lamp post that is part of the permanent "West Side Story" stage design of this environment (Fig. 5.8).

Female strippers execute bumps and grinds by attaching themselves to mirrors, columns, and railings as well. However, female strippers often have a specialized prop at their disposal for this type of movement display. Clubs such as Gallagher's, Goldfingers, Flash Dancers, and New York Dolls in New York City; the Crazy Horse and the Body Shop in Los Angeles; and Big Al's in Peoria all have installed permanent vertical poles in their performance areas. Female strippers use these poles as silent dance and sex partners (Fig. 5.9).

Prone position bumps and grinds are often a featured element in female and male strip acts. Many exotic dancers gyrate on couches, chairs, beds, platforms, and stage floors. Female dancers regularly bump and grind in prone positions in clubs and theatres such as Show World, the Harmony Burlesque, the Baby Doll Lounge, and Billy's in

New York City; Cabaret Showgirls and Cabaret Penthouse in Montreal; and Big Al's, Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theatre, the New Century Theatre, and the Market Street Theatre in San Francisco. Male dancers bump and grind on stage floors, chairs, beds or platforms in all of the bars, clubs, and theatres which present male strip shows for women.

Prone position bumps and grinds overtly refer to scenes of masturbation and scenes of copulation with invisible partners. It is interesting to note, then, that while all of the male strip shows for women reviewed for this study allow their dancers these types of movement "scenes," a number of the strip clubs for men ban female dancers from this practice. Depending on the city and the location of the club, this restriction can be the result of the local ordinances, club management, or a combination of both.¹⁹

One of the most striking examples of this disparity in sexual representation is on view at the Hangar Club which presents both female and male strip shows. In this environment, female strippers are not allowed to perform floorwork, while most of the male dancers include this practice in their routines. In fact, a special platform is added to the performance area during the male strip shows to enhance the sightlines for the female spectators who enjoy male prone position bump and grind sequences (Fig. 5.10).

In light of this phenomenon, the presentation of bumps and grinds in striptease performance may offer yet another cultural contradiction in terms of traditional sex role depictions. The image of a Burlesque queen grinding her way through a strip routine is still a

popular social icon which refers to the "feminine." However, the actual movements of the bump and grind--that is, various types of pelvic thrusts--are usually more associated with the *activity* of the "sexual performance" of males in hegemonic culture. Since prone position bumping and grinding is associated with sexual intercourse and orgasm, and since the movements represent "action" sex roles, such performances by female strippers are the most socially transgressive of all. In these types of acts, sex is not categorically depicted as being "done to" women because the female stripper is mimetically "doing" sex.

Shimmies

Isolated and full body shimmies have several functions in female and male strip routines. As with bumps and grinds, various types of shimmies are performed in connection with clothing removal. Female and male dancers alike frequently vibrate out of costumes and underwear. Shimmies may also be used to dramatically highlight parts of the dancer's body. For example, female strippers use muscle vibrations and control to draw attention to their shoulders, breasts, and buttocks. Tassel-twirling is still probably the most renowned of the striptease shimmies, even though it is rarely performed by contemporary dancers (Fig. 5.11).

Male strippers use similar techniques in their acts. They shake their shoulders to underscore their physical size and potential strength.

They also flex and quiver individual groups of pectoral, stomach, and buttock muscles. These shimmy displays demonstrate male physical prowess, but at the same time, they provoke or tease the audience's desire to touch the body parts which are proffered through these movements.

The most stunning male shimmy act reviewed for this study was performed at the Hangar Club. One dancer created a routine which included an extended sequence devoted to his dancing chest muscles. This performer hiked up his tank-top t-shirt to a position just above his nipples. He flexed both of his pectoral muscles at the same time and then proceeded to vary the speed of his maneuvers. The dancer concluded the sequence by alternating and also changing the tempo of the quivers of his right and left chest muscles. The female audience members cheered and sighed through this portion of his act. A few spectators waved their hands in the air as if they were cupping the dancer's pectorals in their hands.

"Cock-twirling" is occasionally featured in some male strip acts. As briefly noted in the chapter on costumes, male exotic dancers in Montreal, Canada sometimes present a type of "cock-twirling" which involves the manual manipulation of their underwear or G-strings. During this procedure, the dancers wrap G-strings or underwear around their penises to fashion a type of "sling." They then move the sling back and forth with their hands to make their penises rotate or bounce around.

Another version of "cock-twirling" is displayed in the "Superman strip" of the *Males in Motion* video.²⁰ In this variation, the dancer does

not make use of sartorial devices. He places his hands on his head and swings (quivers, quakes, or shimmies) his hips back and forth so that his penis bumps off alternate thighs. He watches his penis "dance," and then looks out to the viewers in a manner strikingly reminiscent of the cliché stance of the Burlesque tassel twirler (Fig. 5.12).

Body-stroking

Dancer body-stroking gestures include the massaging or sometimes "feather" touching of the face, head hair, chest, stomach, buttocks, legs, and genitals. These movements obviously draw attention to the physical features the stripper wishes to highlight. However, unlike shimmies, body-stroking techniques refer more explicitly to the "sensual" and "autoerotic" interests of the dancer.

Props, such as oils, lotions, water, and towels, are frequently used in body-stroking displays. Female exotic dancers rub their breasts and chests with lotions and perform body-stroking movements through the actions of taking showers or baths on stage. As noted in chapter three, some strip clubs, such as Cabaret Penthouse in Montreal, the Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theatre in San Francisco, and Goldfingers in Manhattan include permanent shower stages as part of their interior designs (Fig. 5.13). A number of contemporary star strippers tour the United States and Canada with portable, transparent bath tubs and giant champagne glasses as well (Fig. 5.14).

Female performers touch and massage their bodies through the gestures of bathing and grooming. This kind of body-stroking suggests traditional cultural negotiations with the symbols of cleanliness and dirtiness in terms of the feminine. However, the use of bathing rituals in strip performances is also a device which represents the pleasure women take in their own bodies and in their own sexual actions as "clean" rather than dirty or bad girl behaviors.

Male strippers also use props in their body-stroking choreography. The Beefcakes U.S.A. strip show presented a beach boy surfer who stripped, sat on a towel, and then rubbed suntan lotion into his body. Featured dancers in both the Chippendales New York *All About Love* and *One Night of Sin* shows performed a different kind of "lotion" routine. These dancers mounted small platform stages that partially border the audience space. They danced in G-strings and then lay down on the platforms. From a prone position, they each picked up a bottle of lotion, shook it, and then squirted the lotion into the air, mimicking ejaculation. The dancers completed the act by rubbing the "ejaculated" lotion into their own bodies (Fig. 5.15).

Elaborate bathing rituals, and their accompanying clean/dirty exchanges, are usually not a part of the male exotic dancer repertoire. However, as mentioned earlier, both Chippendales Los Angeles and Chippendales New York present strip acts in which the dancers take turns splashing their faces and upper bodies with ice water. In a Chippendales New York show, one dancer rubbed an ice cube over his body. The audience cheered as his bare skin "involuntarily" turned to "goose flesh" (Fig. 5.16).

Hanna, in her comparison of female and male sex-related traits, posits that males experience their bodies as a "source of pleasure and strength" in a manner denied to women in our culture.²¹ However, as indicated throughout the preceding chapters of this study, there are also social taboos which restrict certain types of pleasures and erotic displays for males as well. Alexander, writing in the late 1930's, quaintly insisted that the body-stroking technique of the hand going to the back of the head "is a typically feminine gesture."²² (This gesture, of course, is used by many male dancers today.) More than fifty years later, David D. Gilmore suggests, in analyses throughout his 1990 book *Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*, that notions of masculinity in most societies, including our own, continue to be based on a physical hardiness and aggression which generally eschews overt expressions of nurturing and sensuality. Gilmore stresses that male hardiness and aggression are socially, rather than biologically, constructed.²³ Men in our society are rarely allowed to display their bodies as sources of pleasure in terms of the "sensual" because such display is not considered "manly." In our culture-at-large, "sensuality," like many concepts of "the feminine," is bizarrely linked to "passivity."

Facial Choreography

Strippers not only project their stage "personalities" and "emotions" through traditional forms of dance and other movement arts, they also create "character" through exaggerated versions of

"everyday" body language. This frequently includes a type of "facial choreography" that borders on "mugging."

Hart (Fig. 5.17) began her striptease workshop by teaching her students the fundamentals of erotic "facial choreography." During this portion of the workshop, Hart led her participants through "mouth" and "eye" exercises. The mouth exercises consisted of practicing the pursing, pouting, and parting of the lips. The tongue was also used to suggest licking and kissing motions. The eye exercises required the novice strippers to practice "codified" gazes. Participants were told to stare directly at imaginary spectators, to look at them through their eyelashes or half closed eyes, and to coyly gaze away from their phantom audiences by either looking down or off into the distance. Students were also asked to practice winking. Hart's class was limited to female members--however, both female and male exotic dancers use these face dancing techniques. Male strippers carefully compose partially open mouths, wet lips, boyish grins, pouts, and naughty boy looks along with tongue dances and eye games as part of their sexual performances for women.

Sometimes female and male facial choreography in strip acts is specifically structured to create additional "storylines" about transgressive sexual display. This adds to the overall erotic appeal of the strip performance because it underscores the breaking of social rules. For example, Beverlee Hills (Fig. 5.18) uses a facial "movement refrain" throughout most of her strip acts. As Hills reveals certain parts of her body or as she places herself in particular "sexy" positions, her face takes on a momentary look of "surprise" or "worry." Directly

following this look, Hills displays a come-hither or an ecstatic expression. The series of fleeting "worried" looks preceding the more traditional come-hither expressions emphasize the "forbidden" or taboo aspects of specific body parts and poses. Sex as a "thrill" experience is emphasized through this design.²⁴

Several male dancers at the Apollon and Club 281 in Montreal use similar choreographic ploys. During their "up close and personal" table dances for female spectators, these performers often sport "worried," "surprised," or sometimes even "embarrassed" looks as accompaniments to the gesture of covering their fully exposed genitals with their hands. This hand and face movement ritual is choreographed to suggest that the male dancer is getting an erection against his will. In other words, the dancer pretends to succumb to the sexual power and allure of the female patrons.

This hand-face ritual offers an additional type of social boundary breaking and "thrill" experience for the participants because the display of an erect penis by a stripper in Montreal is illegal. The male stripper's carefully choreographed performance demonstrates that he is continually "at risk" for legal and social censorship because of the pressure exerted on him by the female spectators.

The male stripper's use of certain aspects of facial choreography also transgresses traditional gender norms in general because it trades in a mode of nonverbal communication that is usually reserved for females in our society. At the same time, female and male use of the most important aspect of face choreography, eye-dancing, also transgresses those norms.²⁵

Hart, along with the majority of the dancers, managers, owners, and patrons interviewed for this study, stressed that the most important element of the stripper's facial choreography is direct audience eye-contact. Strip clubs in Montreal appear to highlight this aspect of performance. In these environments, female and male strippers perform "table dances" on tiny portable platform stages which they place directly alongside of the tables of the spectators. During portions of these dances, the strippers crouch or sit on their platforms and talk or simply gaze into the eyes of their patrons. The dancers in the Montreal strip clubs make most of their tips through this type of performance.

Talk show host Geraldo Rivera also took notice of the power of eye-dancing during his television program's presentation of the "All-Male National Dancathon" which included male strippers from the Rosebuds, the Sugar Shack, and U.S. Male dance groups. Rivera interviewed a number of female audience members during the course of the show. He asked each of them to name the body parts of the dancers they liked best. All of the women stated that they were most attracted to the eyes of the strippers. Rivera, in exasperation, finally exclaimed, "What's this eyes bit? What are you, ophthalmologists, here?"²⁶

It is possible to contend that the response of these female spectators is just one more example of the cultural repression of female sexuality and desire. It could be argued further that the participants focused on the sexual attraction of the strippers' eyes in order to avoid any "bad girl" labeling for expressions of "male-like" lust

on national television. On the other hand, these spectators simply may have been attuned to a very important element of the erotic for females and males alike--the mutual "dance" of direct gazes. Norman Ashcraft and Albert E. Schefflen, in *People Space: The Making and Breaking of Human Boundaries*, suggest that prolonged, direct eye-contact in Western society is an invitation to engagement.²⁷ Nancy M. Henley, in *Body Politics*, insists that "eye engagement is like touch in its mystic and magnetic qualities."²⁸ She proposes that direct eye contact not only implies engagement but "intimacy" as well.²⁹ Henley also discusses the direct gaze in terms of symbolic social "dominance."³⁰ As noted in regard to Hanna's table on sexual characteristics, research indicates that in "ordinary" life males tend to stare directly at females, while females tend to avert their eyes from the opposite sex in most situations. However, in the strip act, the dancer (female or male) not only solicits or initiates the action of eye-dancing, but most often the performer also controls the play of that action, which includes a choreography of direct gazes in combination with coy, come-hither, and averted "looks."

Kaite, in "The Pornographer's Body Double: Transgression is the Law," proposes that in the context of pornographic genres, the dichotomies of seeing/being seen and male/female do not represent the dynamic of the gaze, because in such genres gazing becomes "contradictory and oscillating."³¹ Kaite states:

The look is possessed by both the reader and the subject of the representation...when talking of the power of the gaze, designations of masculine and feminine do not represent a picture of unity but are themselves unstable, shifting, and rife with crosscurrents.³²

Slavoj Žižek, in *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture*, is even more radical than Kaite in his analysis of "looking" at pornographic events. He insists that "the real subjects" of these exchanges are the actors of the representation because it is through their efforts to excite the viewer that "we, the spectators, are reduced to a paralyzed object-gaze."³³

The erotic charge produced by the "dance of the eyes" is so powerful that it is actually used to sell sexual entertainment. As noted previously, the title of the press kit for the Chippendales New York *Welcome to Your Fantasy* show is "Seeing is Believing." The cover of this press package features a photograph of a pair of female eyes (Fig. 5.19). Included in the kit are descriptions of the show's leading male dancers. Each of those descriptions is accompanied, not by a full face or body shot, but by a photograph of the stripper's eyes (Fig. 5.20). The Lusty Lady sex emporium for men in Seattle, Washington advertises in a similar fashion. The hand bill for the Lusty Lady sports a picture of female eyes staring out above the descriptions of the entertainments presented in this place of performance (Fig. 5.21).

The importance of choreographed gazing for both female and male strippers indicates a conscious concern with the production of a circulation of looks--and hence a circulation of sexual-erotic positions.

Gender-Bender Acts of "Sensuality" and "Vigor"

Hanna concludes her chapter, "Sex Role Scripting," by stating that "the female is usually more passive, gentle, the male more aggressive, bold, and energetic" in both historical and contemporary forms of popular and concert dances.³⁴ Many of the strippers, club managers, club owners, and patrons interviewed for this study drew similar conclusions with regard to the differences between female and male striptease choreography. However, in addition to the "basic moves" of the strip which transgress certain aspects of traditional sex roles (including some assumptions about gendered "passivity" and "aggressiveness"), other types of movement and narrative choices further challenge such simple dichotomies.

Hanna, in her description of the male exotic dance team, the Feelgood Dancers, notes herself that "four out of five" of the strip acts presented by this group featured the characteristics of traditional "male aggressiveness."³⁵ In other words, this strip show did produce one "exceptional" male exotic dance routine. And since such exceptional or "extraordinary" strip acts are usually a part of a larger show, one could view their presence as lending an added dimension of gender transgression to the overall program as well. Individual female strip acts which conspicuously break with traditional sex roles may function in a similar fashion in terms of their effect on the larger strip event.

Gender-Bender Male Acts

Again, many male strip acts are indeed choreographed to emphasize the performer's physical strength and sexual control. However, other prevalent types of male exotic dance numbers focus on simple "sensuous" moves and sometimes even blatantly incorporate the type of narrative devices which usually accompany representations of women in our culture. The following descriptions are examples of these kinds of strip acts.

The current Chippendales New York show, *One Night of Sin*, features a routine in which a dancer slowly strips out of a casual jacket, shirt, and pants ensemble. This performer removes his "guy-next-door" costume with gentle body-stroking and bump and grind movements. He very simply piles the articles of clothing on a stool as he pouts and lounges around. Because this strip number concentrates on the gestural, rather than on an energetic type of "dancing," the female spectator's attention is focused on the body and body parts of the male stripper.

Another more complicated version of this routine was presented in the Chippendales New York *All About Love* show. In this variation, the performer entered the stage in a tan suit. He removed his clothes in a manner that suggested he had just returned home from a day's work. He slowly stripped out of his costume and struck various poses that were accompanied by facial pouts and sighs of fatigue. The dancer lounged in his G-string for a moment or two and then began to

redress in different clothes. This new costume had the look of an updated John Travolta's *Saturday Night Fever* outfit. During the redressing sequence, the dancer performed various preening and grooming movements. He finally left the stage dressed and revitalized for his "hot" date or night out on the town.

The gestures and dance movements used in this strip act also allow the viewers to concentrate on the performer's display of his body and facial choreography, rather than on the physical prowess of the more stereotypical male "action" moves. The redressing and grooming section served to double the male dancer's role as a sex object for women because of its play on and concern with the construction of male desirability in tandem with the depiction of male desire. Many male and female erotic representations which include depictions of "grooming" foreground the fact that desired sex object positions are not categorically removed from simultaneous positions of desire.

The La Bare club in Houston, Texas, featured a strip act that was structured around a "Dear John letter" scene. The performer of this act began his routine by reading a letter from his beloved which ended their relationship. The stripper then slowly and sorrowfully removed his clothes and caressed his body as if he was reliving his love and sexual experiences with his former partner. His routine drew sympathetic sighs from the female spectators throughout the performance. Again, the types of movements performed by the stripper were, for the most part, slow, sensual, and gestural. But the importance of the scene is that the "driver" of the action of this danced-out playlet is the off-stage woman. That is, the author of the Dear John

letter is also the author or initiator of the action in this scenario. The male stripper's performance is a "response" to an action over which he has no immediate control.

A more dance-oriented strip act on display in the *One Night of Sin* New York Chippendales show combines disco steps, martial arts, and fan dancing. Several male performers, dressed in black martial arts outfits, open this number with a series of undulating movements, bumps and grinds, and deep knee bends. The dancers also flash large black fans and strike assorted group poses. Their fan tableaux are similar to those used by the female choruses of big showtime and cabaret routines. In keeping with this tradition, the male fan chorus is eventually joined by the "star" of the act. The "star" male stripper enters the scene outfitted in a red leather jacket with a dragon design and tight black leather pants. His long blonde hair flies around him as he performs driving disco steps. The male chorus frames and fans him as he strips to a "hot" bump and grind finish (Fig. 5.22).

Another act, presented in both the Chippendales New York and Chippendales Los Angeles *One Night of Sin* shows, features a "simple" scene of male masturbation. The dancer begins his performance in a black satin bathrobe and G-string. He executes a few stretches and bump and grinds directly around a bed decked with black satin sheets. The stripper then climbs into the bed and gyrates some more. He removes his G-string underneath the sheet. He is handed a jar of some kind of creme by another performer who quickly exits the scene. Next the dancer rubs the creme (possibly Vaseline) on his genitals underneath the sheet. For the finale, he places a pillow

over his crotch, removes the sheet so that his body is exposed but his genitals remain covered, and then "masturbates" to climax (Fig. 5.23).

Because this scene does not make use of additional action or narrative motifs, the performer is removed from many of the symbolic social trappings associated with the "masculine." In this choreographic design, the female spectator is positioned as the "ultimate voyeur," both in the sense of peeping and in the sense of paying someone to perform a taboo act of masturbation in a black satin outfit on black satin sheets for her pleasure. In terms of the mechanics of audience reception and its co-production of a theatrical reality, male "performances" of masturbation and orgasm in heterosexual striptease events for women are similar to the masturbation/orgasm acts performed by females in porno films and live strip shows³⁶ because male erection and ejaculation displays (or lack of erection and ejaculation displays) are generally not "actually" visible to the spectators. In this context, men are usually required by law to cover their genitals. If they are allowed to perform "entirely" in the nude (such as at Club 281 in Montreal or the original Sugar Shack in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin) they are prohibited from displaying erections.³⁷ Thus, from the audience's point of view, there is no empirical way of knowing whether a dancer actually produces an erection/ejaculation or not. However, the confirmation of "authentic" phenomena is not the point of the mimetic enterprise, for the theatrical is predicated upon narratives of "possibility." Female patrons "see" male erections and orgasms through the male dancer's choreography of "rising action and tension" which ultimately progresses to the last shudder of orgasmic

completion. Such acts are no more or less "real" or "fake" than those of the female dancers (or even the legit actor's "real" tears and blushes produced through the conditions of the mimetic), because all of these performances are framed or given life through the theatrical, whether they are phenomenologically "real" or not.

"Table dances," presented in addition to the mainstage strip shows at the La Bare club in Houston and the Apollon and Club 281 in Montreal, offer yet another kind of gender-bender male striptease act. During the "table dance," the male performers (like their female counterparts in clubs for male spectators), strip and "dance" directly alongside of the tables or seating of the patrons. In this situation, the performers and spectators are separated by mere inches. Occasionally, dancers may also move around a particular table so that they can include a small group of spectators into their "personal" show as well. The spatial constraints involved in this kind of strip act obviously limit the size of the dancer's movements. These restrictions usually require the performers to concentrate on torso undulations, body-stroking, and facial choreography.

Table dances at the Apollon and Club 281 feature a further constraint on the movements of the male dancers. In these two places, table dances are frequently performed on portable, knee-high plastic platforms that are approximately one and a half to two feet wide. Because "complete" nudity is legal in Montreal, this platform pedestal proffers a genital show at the eye-level of the spectator. The male stripper, who is "displayed on a *pedestal*," resorts to even smaller torso undulations, poses, and body-stroking techniques. Dancers also often

show off their bodies by slowly turning around on the platform so that the female spectators may view their physiques and genitals from all sides. As mentioned already, facial dancing and various patters play perhaps the largest "choreographic" role in this type of "show."

Williams, in her discussion of the early stag films for men in *Hardcore*, refers to John Berger's theory of the function of female "nudity" in traditional European painting. Berger posits that "the spectator in front of the picture" is the true "protagonist" (subject) of these types of paintings, because the figures in the representations have assumed their nudity specifically for the viewing pleasure of the spectator.³⁸ While Berger's ideas may need modification in their application to strip shows (and other representations) because these events deal with oscillating performer and spectator positions, the concept of a "protagonist" viewing space with regard to female spectators is an important one.

Despite, or in tandem with, the larger social frame which positions women as members of "inferior" social classes and cultural subgroups, the spectacle of the male strip event for women (and as we shall see shortly the female strip for men as well) indicates that female habitation or co-habitation of such a "protagonist space," with all its pleasures, does take place. The frame of the strip event for female audience members, which is frequently foregrounded by the type of choreographic devices just discussed, temporarily restructures the gendered social hierarchy through a compelling theatrical and economic apparatus. This apparatus represents males performing, or dancing out, sexual acts for the favors of the female spectators. These

favours include both monetary gain and the pleasure of the desired sex object position which are bestowed on the male performers by the female spectators.

Gender-Bender Female Acts

The overall choreography and stylistic approaches of individual female strip acts can also carnivalize gender norms. Many female exotic dancers regularly perform acrobatic or gymnastic feats which demonstrate their physical strength and agility. These types of routines focus spectator attention on the "actions" of the performers, rather than on the simple display of their bodies.

Female acrobatic or gymnastic strip routines are often choreographed in conjunction with the use of vertical and horizontal poles that are permanently affixed to the performance spaces of many bars and clubs (Fig. 5. 24). At Joanna's and J.P.'s in Washington D. C., some dancers hang by their hands from the small horizontal poles suspended over the tiny platform stages. They execute aerial bumps and grinds as they swing to and fro from this position. A few dancers in these establishments also include regular "chin-ups" as part of their strip acts. At Joanna's, a group of businessmen offered a dancer one dollar for every consecutive chin-up she could perform. At J.P.'s, another dancer was hailed appreciatively by the entire bar of spectators as "What-a-woman!" for her act which consisted of a series

of undulating body swings, chin-ups, and biceps muscle flexing displays.

Gallagher's, Flash Dancers, and New York Dolls in New York City; the Crazy Horse in Los Angeles; and Big Al's in Peoria all present dancers who have perfected strenuous balletic spins, vertical splits, Burlesque queen poses, and dare-devil slides on vertical poles. At the Crazy Horse in Los Angeles, dancers take flying leaps onto these poles. The momentum of their leaps allows these strippers to attain height as well as multiple spins. New York Dolls presents Roxanne, a professional dancer who climbs to the tops of these poles, flips upside down and then hurls herself down in a slide only to land upright at the very last second in a split position on the stage floor. Roxanne's routine (performed simultaneously with other earthbound dancers) is always greeted with tips and requests for further "pole feats."

This type of gymnastic exotic dance act is even featured in the movie, *Stripper*--a pseudo-documentary film based on the Golden G-string Award contest that was held in Las Vegas during the late eighties.³⁹ "Janette" (Janette Boyd), one of the featured character-performers in this movie created an entire aerial strip ballet on a space-age jungle gym that was specially designed for her act. During this number, the dancer removes her clothes as she executes a series of gymnastic poses, spins, and slides on the different levels of bars of this strange apparatus. At the end of the act, the jungle gym emits "steam" to underscore the "hot" performance of these physical feats.

Some strip clubs offer displays of female physical prowess through another kind of choreographed act. As noted previously, Goldfingers in New York and the Tropicana in Los Angeles present dancer disrobing in combination with "lady wrestling" routines. At the Goldfingers club in Queens, New York female performers enter the special wrestling ring stage and strip off their robes (Fig. 5.25). They then engage in body-stroking activities by rubbing oil on their bodies. After the opening ceremony, the strippers perform what appears to be a tightly choreographed wrestling show. The Tropicana presents a series of simultaneous wrestling matches that are preceded by a fashion strip show of sorts. The performers parade around in costumes that range from everyday dress to bride outfits. The dancers strip and then wrestle in the rings that dot the space. While these kinds of routines may refer to stereotypical "cat fight" scenarios, they also transgress traditional sex roles by featuring women in "movement" or action parts traditionally delegated to male "champions."

The phenomenon of the female "action" strip routine is also documented in Dragu and Harrison's *Revelations*. Dragu, in her chapter, "Consumers' Guide to Strippers," describes the unique No. Five Club in Toronto, Canada. She explains that the design of the performance space of this club was inspired by a stripper who specialized in "gym workout" acts. Her performances primarily consisted of different types of body-building repetitions.⁴⁰ The patrons of the No. Five Club were apparently so impressed by this approach to stripping that the club management eventually installed permanent rings, hooks, and bars to encourage other strippers to take up these

feats. In addition to the example of the No. Five Club's devotion to female body-builder and gymnastic choreography, Dragu also includes a brief section on the "Jockette" performer in her consumer's guide to strippers.⁴¹ According to Dragu, the strip performances of jockettes can titillate and "shock" their audiences because these dancers often combine overtly sexual gestures with the "wholesome, and even virginal air" of athletic types.⁴²

The use of overt jockette choreography is not the only way in which female exotic dancers create "vigorous" strip routines. Many female strippers also use the energetic dance styles of disco, "hip hop," "techno," and "house." These types of pounding "folk dances" are often combined with the stalking struts already described in this chapter.

The "energetic" style of strip choreography was used in almost every act presented by the Satin Angels female exotic dance show in New York City. The female strippers who performed in the "couples" nights at Escapes on Long Island, New York, matched the "vigor" of their male dance partners step for step in their disco-style strip acts. The Body Shop in Los Angeles, the New York Room in the O'Farrell Theatre in San Francisco, and the New Paris Revue and Show World's Triple Treat Theatre in New York City all presented several strippers who specialized in "MTV" or "Fly Girl" dance routines. Even the strip bar hangout, Billy's, in New York City featured a few female dancers who literally exploded onto the stage with hip hop steps, despite the small performance space of this club.

Hanna states that the athletic woman became "sexy" during the 1980s.⁴³ Dragu insists that the jockette is now "the essence of popular

culture."⁴⁴ However, female displays of physical strength and ability, particularly in concert with the overtly sexual, still cross certain lines of gender. Madonna's continued success, which is due in large part to her representations of this type of sex role transgression, exemplifies this. Her use of vigorous popular dancing, overt sexual gestures, and gender-bender costuming all work together to deconstruct the traditional "sexual victim" position of women. Through these devices, Madonna represents herself as a "vigorously sexual" woman. These tactics are particularly evident in her movie, *Truth or Dare*, which documents her national and international *Blonde Ambition* tours (Fig. 5.26).⁴⁵

Cultural "Management" of Gender-Bender Acts

Ironically, while writers such as Hanna and Dolan dismiss both male and female strip events as simply performances about male socio-sexual power, albeit from slightly different angles, a "popular" analysis of male strip acts suggests that these representations include very noticeable disruptions of traditional gender roles. This recognition of sex role transgression in male strip acts for women is frequently expressed through a particular social strategy which involves the stigmatization of the male transgressor through cultural homophobia. As Hanna herself suggests, "movement labels and categorizes performers who cross social frontiers in much the same way as does costume."⁴⁶

A number of the female and male strip event patrons interviewed for this study, along with a number of participants in three lecture-discussions on strip events that I presented over the last several years,⁴⁷ reacted to the transgressions that they saw in the gender behavior of the male strippers by either asking if or suggesting that most of these male performers are "gay." This group included female respondents who stated that they also found the male strippers attractive and sexy.

Susan G. Cole, in her essay "Pornography: What do We Want?" describes a similar reaction to the early erotic magazines for women such as *Viva*. She notes that the female subscribers were initially "delighted" with the magazine's sexual adventure stories and photographs of male nudes.⁴⁸ Cole explains that everything possible was done to frame and physically pose the male models in "manly" cliches for the female spectators: "They had him in forest settings. They had him looking out into the distance to make him look like he had control over the whole environment. They had him on horses so that he could look like the Marlboro man."⁴⁹ But Cole states that the female viewers still worried about the nude male models looking "gay." She concludes by stating, "this is not to cast aspersions on my gay brothers but rather to say that when women looked at these pictures, they did not see what they considered masculine by conventional standards."⁵⁰

The label "gay" in these contexts none too subtly points to the homophobia inherent in our society. However, this label also indicates the extent to which gender transgressions are in fact perceived in

these types of representations. As Hanna points out, "among the population at large there are ambivalent or negative attitudes towards transvestism and homosexuality because they defy the normal categorization of male and female."⁵¹ Hanna also reminds us, citing Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley's introduction to the anthology, *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*, that the hegemonic fear of what is marked as "feminine" behavior is due to the gendered cultural hierarchy of male dominance. That is, for males (and sometimes for females as well) to adopt what is considered a "feminine" style in speech or movement is more of a cultural stigma than the reverse because it suggests downward social mobility.⁵²

Nevertheless, in the face of this cultural stereotyping and bigotry, the majority of the female spectators of male strip shows support and enjoy those performances. These female spectators demonstrate their interest and pleasure through their continued patronage; through their applause and cheers; and through their generous tips to the male dancers for the privilege of exchanging gazes, kisses, hugs, and caresses. Many of the female patrons and male dancers interviewed for this study also reported that women regularly ask the male dancers for dates, and on occasion also "proposition" them.⁵³

The spectacle of male strip events for women, carried out in large part through the choreography, creates an exchange of desires and erotic roles that are usually censored in the "everyday." It is the experience of the spectacle that ultimately triumphs for most female patrons of male strip events--and this is so, in spite of the cultural

dictates which attempt to undermine the "authenticity" of desire and protagonist positions played out in these venues.

It is perhaps also important to note here that male and female strip events are comprised both of performers and spectators with the same sexual orientations as well as performers and spectators with different sexual orientations--and this is regardless of the mandated sexual orientation of the spectacle or event itself. That is, straight and gay men perform strip acts for women. Straight and gay males perform strip acts for gay men. (In fact, some managers of gay male strip clubs stated that fifty to ninety per cent of their male dancers are straight.) Straight women and lesbians perform strip acts for straight men. And, straight women and lesbians perform strip acts for lesbians.⁵⁴ This sampling suggests that there is no direct correlation between the stylistic approaches and movement choices of the performers and their own sexual orientations.

The point of the above information in this context is not to speculate about stated or unstated sexual identities of the strippers within performance environments geared to heterosexual orientations, but to focus again on the aspects of these strip acts that thwart the culturally induced binary systems which produce the strict distribution of gender characteristics according to biological sex. This phenomenon may also indicate the extent to which a theatrical or performance "reality" informs and structures the experience of the audience--an experience which is simultaneously "real" and "mimetic," not one or the other.

Sex role transgression by female performers in strips acts and like representations is also subject to cultural management. Harrison insists that female strippers, in all types of acts, perform with the same "energy, spirit, and confidence" as their male counterparts.⁵⁵ However, Harrison also adds that such sexual confidence and prowess, while generally expected of men, is culturally so foreign a concept in terms of female sexual expression, that "we often fail to recognize it when we see it." She continues:

This is a matter of seeing what you believe...The idea of powerlessness on the part of the female stripper arises from a general disdain for the sexually overt female--an attitude that may be felt and reflected by a stripper, but is mainly a projection of the viewer, himself.⁵⁶

Women who perform theatrical sexual acts or who overtly demonstrate, by other means, an interest in the sexual, are rarely considered "confident" and "expert" in our society. On the contrary, they are either regarded as persons who are "dirty," "sick," "slutty" or "insecure," or they are labelled by patriarchal and by some feminist discourses as "sex objects" bereft of personal and political agency.

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, disruptions of gender norms by females in strip acts and elsewhere not only exist, but are actually quite visible (Fig. 5.27). Our society handles these transgressors by relegating them to another type of "metaphysical sexual hinterlands," again through socio-political "labelling." Female disrupters of traditional sex roles are simply written off as victims of men, victims of their own ignorance, or even victims of their own culturally-constructed and politically incorrect sexual

expressions or desires. This cultural management technique repositions such "unruly" women in one of the traditionally accepted roles for women--that of the passive victim with no recourse.

Structure, Narrative, and Pleasure

The carnival-like violations of gender roles, of course, are not the only type of cultural transgressions depicted through striptease choreography. A number of other obvious and not so obvious structural and narrative devices support the strip event's representations of social "delinquency" as well. This section will explore some of these structures in terms of their dramatic functions with regard to transgression and the erotic. First, I will describe and briefly analyze the traditional "sequenced stripping" pattern and its importance to the construction of both female and male exotic dance acts. Then I will turn to a discussion of several overlapping structural and narrative devices which I have grouped together in the following categories: "undressing-redressing cycle" strips, "private moment" strips, and strips which suggest "bodily harm" to the performer.

The Traditional Strip Structure

Most contemporary female and male strip acts adhere to the basic structural design of "sequenced stripping" that was refined during

the American Burlesque era. Strippers generally begin their routines in "dressed states." The first section of their acts is devoted to the display of costumes and sometimes to the introduction of thematic props or gimmicks. During the second section of these dances, most female and male performers strip to expose their bare chests. In the third portion of these routines, dancer disrobing usually progresses to the display of the G-string or other types of underwear. In the clubs and theatres where "bottomless" or "total" nude dancing is permitted, the uncovering of the genitals also takes place during this section.

Once the sequence of stripping has been completed, the performers have a number of options. Some strippers concentrate on prone position gyrations. Some performers simply continue their style of dancing, but in the "buff." Other dancers turn their attention to the props and gimmicks that were presented at the onset of their routines. And still others focus on various types of performer-audience interactions. While the tipping of dancers can occur at any time during the strip act, most of these procedures take place after the final degree of nudity has been achieved.

Female dancers who perform in the smaller strip bar hangouts usually move quickly through the first three sections of this traditional striptease structure. The majority of male strippers, along with the female dancers who perform in strip clubs and theatres which feature show biz or cabaret-type atmospheres (e.g., Show World and Stringfellows in New York City, the Body Shop in Los Angeles, the strip clubs in Montreal, and most of the North Beach strip clubs in San Francisco), give attention to all of the sections of the sequenced

stripping design. Featured female or star strippers who tour the larger clubs and theatres with their acts (e.g., Beverlee Hills, Veronica Hart, Portia Lynn, and Donna Foxx) often formally divide the sections of the basic strip structure with changes in music, pauses in action, and solicited audience applause.⁵⁷

In the most obvious sense, the ritualistic structure of sequenced stripping underscores the crossing of social boundaries through a form of stage nudity which reveals increasingly taboo parts of the dancer's body. This theatrical tactic is further heightened because the "revelations" of the dancer's body parts are usually accompanied by the performer's accelerated use of taboo movements and gestures (e.g., body-stroking, masturbation, and sometimes the exchange of kisses and caresses with audience members).

Representations of transgression, *vis a vis* this progression of stage nudity, also highlight the processes of mimetic "transformation" and "voyeurism" which are inherent in most types of theatre spectacles. The body of the exotic dancer is exciting because it undergoes a conspicuous physical transformation through the sequenced stripping pattern. At the same time, the strip event clearly positions its spectators as "peepers" or voyeurs because these spectators are "stealing looks" at culturally taboo acts. (While the position of the voyeur is often regarded as a position of dominance, as I have argued earlier, it is also a role about social risk-taking--about potentially being "caught looking.") The sartorially-based design of the traditional strip act structure gives shape to the audience's self-conscious peekaboo style of looking.⁵⁸

Sequenced stripping is important to the construction of both female and male strip acts, despite one major difference in their usage of this design. The majority of female performers improvise their dances around this structure, while the majority of male strippers tend to use "set" or partially "set" choreography in their incorporation of this design.⁵⁹

It was suggested in a number of interview-conversations with club owners, managers, dancers, and patrons that male strip acts are choreographed in a traditional manner because female spectators are more interested "good entertainment" and "fun," than in "purely sexual" representations. According to this line of reasoning, many female dancers improvise their strip routines because the interests of the male spectators are centered on the "purely sexual," instead of the "theatrical." In other words, men go to strip events just to see naked women because that's what turns them on. However, there are other possible explanations for this seeming dichotomy.

First, since the male strip acts are usually performed in tightly controlled show biz formats which suggest mainstream entertainment, traditionally crafted dance numbers help maintain the overall set-up of these events. Again, "sex" in these venues is subversively (and safely) represented as show biz entertainment for women. Second, the more prevalent use of improvisation in female strip acts for male spectators is also related to "environmental" considerations. Female performers tend to work longer periods of time than their male counterparts. They usually dance in all-day or all-night shifts as opposed to the two to three hour show of the male strip event for females. (The exceptions to

this rule are the Apollon, Club 281, and La Bare establishments whose strip events for female spectators continue for four to six hours.) The use of improvisation may help the female dancers adjust to different audience conditions throughout the day or night. Because the sizes of the stages are more varied among the clubs which present female strip acts, and because many of these clubs also have several stages of different sizes within each of their environments, the use of improvisation may help the performers cope with such spatial shifts as well.

Female strip acts, whether they are "set," partially set, or improvised, not only follow some form of the sequenced stripping pattern outlined above, but many of these "improvised" performances also include repetitions of the movement, thematic, and gimmick elements already described in this chapter. This suggests that the choreographic construction of female strip acts for male audiences continues to affirm the primacy of theatrical *spectacle* in the creation of the sexual. The following anecdote is an interesting illustration of this point, specifically with regard to sequenced stripping.

"Starr" is a regular dancer for Show World's Triple Treat Theatre in New York City. Her acts are usually composed of Latin and disco dance steps, the basic moves of the striptease, and sequenced stripping which ends in "total nudity." The last section of Starr's exotic dance number is devoted to prone position bumps and grinds and genital display. One afternoon, however, Starr altered her basic act. She stepped on stage and immediately removed her short robe. She placed a blanket on the floor and then lay down on her stomach and

began to gyrate in time to the music. She was completely nude. Within a minute or two, almost all the audience members vacated the theatre. In the lobby, several complained loudly that there was "no show" and that Starr's attitude and performance was "disgusting" and "no fun." When Starr repeated her strip act about an hour or so later, she first danced in a matching animal print top and sarong skirt before she proceeded with the sequenced stripping which eventually led to "total" nude floorwork. This time, more or less the same audience members stayed to watch her entire performance.⁶⁰

Starr's "experiment" illustrates the pressure of environmental expectations. But again, it also points to the ritualistic striptease structure as an important device which heightens the experience of transgression and the erotic for most spectators. In addition to this basic pattern, there are also several other organizational devices which intensify the spectator's experience of transgression through the foregrounding of the processes of theatrical transformation and voyeurism.

Undressing-Redressing Cycle Strips

In 1937, Jan Marsh announced that her "new" reverse strip routine was going "to ruin the 'strip-tease racket'" (Fig. 5.28).⁶¹ Marsh began her act "nude" and then dressed herself as she danced. While Marsh's prediction, of course, never reached fruition, the reverse strip

was often incorporated into traditional strip acts through the use of undressing-redressing cycles.

Even Gypsy Rose Lee used this formula in her famous "Victorian Lady to Sexy Modern Woman" number. In this routine, Gypsy stripped out of a "sedate Victorian" costume in full view of her spectators and then redressed in a shadow box (so that the audience could see the outlines of her nude body). She emerged from the shadow box outfitted in a gold, beaded evening dress. Eric Preminger, in his autobiographical account of his mother's career, noted that her audiences were particularly delighted with this transformation which juxtaposed a costume of the supposedly "sedate/old-fashioned" with a costume of the "sexy/modern."⁶²

A few "undressing-redressing" contemporary strip acts still make use of this type of "double transformation" scene. The Chippendales number, described previously, in which the performer strips off his "work day" clothes and then redresses in a fashionable "date night" outfit is one such example. In this act, the exchange of costumes, with the display of the semi-nude body in between, contrasts the dress of "everyday" or the "ordinary" with the dress which suggests entry into the sexually exciting and "extraordinary" world of dating. The latter outfit, which is donned as preparation for erotic encounters, also implies future strippings.

Several dancers at the Body Shop in Los Angeles and at Joanna's in Washington D. C. presented routines which offered even more explicit, or rather "traditional," renditions of this narrative. In these acts, the female performers removed their "street clothes," danced in

the "nude," and then redressed themselves in negligee-style outfits for the finale of their performances.

The most common kinds of contemporary cycle strip acts, however, use single costumes. They also tend to be structured around two prevalent types of strip bar and theatre interior designs: the small hangout bar which has no dressing room or backstage space for the dancers, and the generally larger club which has several stages and which presents a series of simultaneous strip acts as part of a multiple performer rotation set-up.

J.P.'s and Archibald's in Washington D.C. are examples of the former. In these clubs, a single performer strips at a time on a small platform stage. The performer then dances in the nude and ends her act by ritualistically redressing herself in the original costume during the last song of her act. The spectators appear to be as attentive to the redressing segment as they are to the undressing and nude dancing portions of these acts. Cycles of undressing and redressing most likely maintain audience interest because they emphasize the processes of theatrical transformation and voyeurism through a variation of "dramatic irony." In the traditional strip structure, as the performer reaches the final degree of nudity, the audience is still aware of the "ghosts of absent clothing." However, in the reverse or cycle strip, as the performer redresses, the audience is given the "secret" pleasure and satisfaction of knowing what the dancer looks like "naked."

Cycle strip routines that are performed in concert with multiple dancer rotation designs introduce a few additional "plot twists" into this transgressive structure. In these set-ups, dancers complete their strip

acts during the course of rotating with other performers to several different stage areas in a given space. In clubs such as Gallagher's and Billy's in New York City and La Bare, Rick's, and the Men's Club in Houston, performers strip only at the first station of their rotation, which is usually the mainstage. They then dance "semi-nude" in the subsequent performance areas of the space and redress only at the last stop of their circuit.

Depending on the size and interior design of the club, a spectator can choose to view the strip event from the disrobing station, the stations where the dancers perform "nude," or even from the redressing station. Some spaces, such as Billy's and Gallagher's in New York City, are small enough or are designed so that the dancers can be seen at all stations and in all stages of undress or dress at the same time by almost the entire audience. This set-up creates an interesting "canon-effect" in which the transformations of the performers' bodies are viewed as part of a larger continuous cycle.

In other environments, such as La Bare and Rick's of Houston, as discussed in the chapter on interiors, the spectator physically needs to move around if she or he wishes to enjoy "views" of the performers in their various stages of stripping. This design accentuates the role of the spectators as voyeurs by offering several viewing positions which correspond to the different states of dancer disrobing. The totality of the exchanges between the dressed and undressed states of the performers and the various spectating positions of the viewers in all of these set-ups offers no stable position for either performer or spectator.

"Private Moment" Strips

Mimetic voyeurism and transformation are also intensified by the strip routines which highlight the position of the spectators as peepers by featuring performers in scenes that refer to "private moments" which take place in "real life." Interestingly, one of the historical precursors of the striptease made use of just such a tactic in order to abet the audience's experience of transgressive looking without the display of actual stage nudity. In the spring of 1894, a small music hall in Paris, Le Divan Fayouau, presented a routine called, *Le Coucher d'Yvette* (Yvette Goes to Bed).⁶³ In this act, a female performer removed a few of articles of clothing and then got into bed as if she were in the privacy of her own home. This performance was greeted with such enthusiasm that soon every variety house in Paris featured a similar number with titles such as *Le Bain de Maid* (The Maid Takes a Bath), *Suzanne et la Grande Chaleur* (Suzanne in the Heatwave), and *Liane chez le Medecin* (Liane at the Doctor's).⁶⁴

American strippers continued to develop the "private moment" strip act. "Tirza" and Dorothy Henry performed unusual toilette scenes on the stages of the Burlesque theatre. Tirza undressed and indulged in the luxury of her infamous wine bath and fountain, while Dorothy Henry's beauty regime consisted of stripping and then splashing about in a tub of milk.⁶⁵ Ann Corio's later road show, *This Was Burlesque* and the subsequent film, *Here It Is, Burlesque!*, also featured an exotic dancer at her toilette. This performer stripped, bathed in a see-through tub of water, redressed for bed in a negligee, and ended her routine by

brushing her hair in front of a mirror.⁶⁶ Even Lauri Lewin's little-girl Lolita strip act suggested that her character was playing "dress-up" alone in her mother's boudoir.⁶⁷

As noted, many contemporary female and male strippers structure their performances around similar gimmicks. These include depictions of performers showering and bathing, grooming themselves for hot dates, getting ready for bed and sex, reading letters from loved ones, and engaging in masturbatory activities. All of these structural devices accentuate the cultural taboos involved with strip event spectatorship by referring to other intimate scenes. Strip routines constructed around these "private moments" not only ostend the spectator's role as voyeur, but they frequently foreground the theatrical transformation of the performer's body through depictions of additional types of physical and sometimes emotional shifts of states. Bathing and showering scenes suggest movements between "dirty" and "clean" states. Scenes of overt masturbation depict the fluctuating states of sexual arousal and sexual satisfaction. Scenes involving "virginal" baby girl and baby boy strippers suggest boundary crossings between positions of social "innocence" and sexual knowledge. And finally, other types of "awakening" scenarios, which feature staid or even "repressed" characters rather than simply "innocent" ones, depict their actants moving from "inhibited" states to states of "freedom" through sexual expression.

A clear illustration of this kind of "awakening" act was on display at the Apollon in Montreal. The performer began his routine wearing a dark business suit and horn-rimmed glasses which gave him the

appearance of a "nerd." His initial movements represented a generic, workaholic personality. He checked his watch, went through his work papers, and readjusted his necktie with crisp business-like gestures. Eventually, the "heat" or the pressure of the job forced him to remove his jacket. As he proceeded to take off the rest of his clothes, this stripper-character appeared to discover or rediscover the pleasure of his own body through bumps, grinds, and body stroking. The routine ended with the stripper performing "vigorous" party dancing.⁶⁸

The "secretary striptease party on the subway" routine featured at the Blue Angel nightclub in New York City (also mentioned in the last chapter) is another example of this theme. Sedate secretaries or business women rebel against the workaday doldrums by ripping off their clothing and dancing wildly while they sport their "sexy" undergarments to other shocked mass transit passengers.⁶⁹

This depiction of "working" women, like the 1986 Bali Bra advertising campaign (which featured print and television advertisements of women dressed in grey flannel suits, opened to reveal lace bras and panties), could easily be interpreted as one more indication that women are categorically considered sex objects no matter how professionally they are "outfitted." However, this type of representation also has other ramifications in terms of the transformation of the performer's body from the repressed state of the "everyday" to a state of the "extraordinary" through sexual expression.⁷⁰

Strip Acts Which Suggest Bodily Harm to the Performer

Strip shows can heighten the spectator's sense of "forbidden peeping" by featuring exotic dance acts that suggest bodily harm or potential bodily harm to the performer. Many of these images are produced in concert with performer displays of physical prowess. During the heyday of the Burlesque era, Alma Braye perfected the ankle-drop on the trapeze as a convenient way to "drop her pants."⁷¹ Burlesque Queen Georgia Sothern created a type of frenetic dancing that was considered so violent that her peers labeled her "the bone-crusher."⁷² In the post-Burlesque period, Yvette Evil performed a striptease routine which gave the illusion that she cut off her head with a guillotine.⁷³ Her colleague, Dawn Delight, presented her own circus or carnival theme number by twirling a fire baton and moving the flaming torches over her nude body.⁷⁴

Contemporary strippers continue to perform routines which marry cultural symbols of sex to those of death-defying feats or potential acts of violence to the body. As discussed earlier, female pole climbers and sliders in clubs throughout the United States combine stripping with risky stunts. A few dancers, like Baby at Show World in New York City, perform "bone-crushing" routines through modified versions of the slam dance. Leather mamas and dominatrixes, adorned with chains, ropes, and whips, strut across the stages of innumerable strip bars, cabarets, and theatres. "Danyel" (Kimberly Holcomb), in the movie *Stripper*, performs a more graphic

version of the S/M act.⁷⁵ She "lashes" herself with a small whip until her naked body is streaked with fake blood (Fig. 5.29). Dancers, such as featured performer Porsche Lynn, literally play with fire. Lynn strips and blows flames out of the open palm of her hand.⁷⁶ One of the stars of the Garden of Eden in San Francisco massages her bare nipples with a special lotion and then sets them on fire.⁷⁷

Images of bodily harm in conjunction with acts of stripping have also been represented in popular films. *Lady of Burlesque*, a 1943 adaptation of Gypsy Rose Lee's novel *The G-string Murders*, is a thriller about several female strippers who are brutally killed by a mysterious assailant in a Burlesque house.⁷⁸ Two contemporary films, *Stripped to Kill* and *Stripped to Kill II*, are updated renderings of *The Lady of Burlesque*. In both of these movies, female exotic dancers are murdered by unknown stalkers.⁷⁹ Such representations have been interpreted in several ways. They have been analyzed as artifacts of the male imperative to eroticize violence against women in order to maintain social and cultural domination.⁸⁰ They have been discussed as symbolic "punishments" or "warnings" to those women who dare to express their sexual appetites and prowess in public.⁸¹ They have also been described as representations of the "masochistic" strategies used by both the dominant discourse and by women to circumvent the good girl/bad girl split. That is, in these depictions women express public sexual pleasure but still retain their "good girl" status because their pleasures are "forced" out of them by another (usually male).⁸² In the context of our asymmetrical social system, these kinds of analyses are crucial to our understanding of the ways in which women as a

gendered class continue to be culturally disenfranchised. However, what is also notable and what needs to be taken into account in terms of a deconstruction of these representations and in terms of the production of the erotic, is that similar kinds of body violation images figure into male exotic dance acts as well.

Blue-jean rebels at Big Alice's in Peoria and the "bad" boys in the *One Night of Sin* Chippendales New York and Chippendales Los Angeles shows perform pelvic bruising variations of the bone-crushing slam dance. Gladiators stab at each with swords at the Sugar Shack in Chicago. Motorcycle men parade with chains and leather thongs wrapped tightly around their bodies (Fig. 5.30). Dancers perform fantasy Native American fire rituals with flaming torches at the Sugar Shack (Fig. 5.31). A male stripper sets fire to the jock strap he is wearing on the "Phil Donahue" show as Donahue stares and then blanches in disbelief.⁸³ And *Ladykillers*, a made-for-television movie, once again uses a strip club as the backdrop for a murder mystery--but this time, male strippers are slain in a bloody fashion by an unknown female stalker.⁸⁴

One could readily argue that these images simply duplicate the male model of eroticizing sexual violence over others as a means of control. One could also suggest that since male strippers perform desired sex object roles which transgress traditional gender norms, any associated images of bodily harm or potential bodily harm suggest symbolic "punishments" for those social infractions. However, both female and male strip acts of this ilk depict other kinds of

transgressions or boundary crossings that deal specifically with the production of the erotic.

Williams suggests that representations which depict the body's visible responses to sex and to acts of physical violence satisfy the spectator's desire to see taboo, "confessional" responses, because depictions of these "intimate" physical reactions "seem" to be involuntarily wrung from the performer.⁸⁵ However, as suggested earlier, since the performer's confessional reactions occur within the frame of the theatrical, these acts create an additional dramatic dilemma (and transgressive dynamic) for the spectator. Confessional representations often keep the viewer actively guessing about whether the performer's pleasure or pain is "real," "pretend," or a combination of both.⁸⁶ In this situation, the spectator's uncertainty about the "real" and the mimetic supports the sex drama's production of erotic tension because it foregrounds the spectator's performance of "straining to see." At the same time, during the process of "straining to see," such scenes still allow for the spectator's vicarious identification with the confessional responses of the performer. None of these "acts" of spectatorship suggest positions of total control for the patron.

Representations which feature sexual acts in concert with acts of violence or potential violence also create a doubling of erotic states and positions through metaphors of death. The archaic use of the English phrase "to die" and the present-day French expression *le petite mort* (the little death) use "death" to describe orgasm. Another definition suggested for the verb "to die" is "to be consumed with desire."⁸⁷ The titles of the films, *Stripped to Kill*, *Stripped to Kill II*, and

Ladykillers, refer both to female and male strippers "killing" their audiences with desire by their sexual displays and to the physical deaths of the performers at the hands of spectators. These narratives suggest uncertain and oscillating "erotic" positions by this doubling up of meanings which define sexual pleasure as "unknown," "unpredictable," and "risky." Such "stories" also use the metaphor of death to represent another transgression of dominant mores by depicting acts which transverse social and physical boundaries through the symbolic taboo "breaking" of the corporeal body.

Writers such as Freud, Bataille, Benjamin, Sontag, and Williams all consider the production of eroticism in terms of representations which conflate eros with bodily harm or even death.⁸⁸ For example, Bataille, Benjamin, and Sontag propose that, in this context, images of death (or the risk of death or harm) conjure an erotic infinity because "death" stands for a state of abandon that has no exact boundaries. However, the erotic infinity of this "extraordinary" condition can only be apprehended and represented in terms of its tension with "everyday." Thus, such depictions are made visible and are experienced as erotic through a dynamic of transgression. Vampire legends and images in both literary and popular traditions (including those used in striptease performances) perhaps best "embody" this representation of the erotic. In the lore of the vampire, the "victim" of the Nosferatu is always also a potential vampire. The roles of the Nosferatu and her/his "prey" are also unstable or uncertain in terms of hegemonic mores because neither part is "bound" by the restrictions of gender or compulsory

heterosexuality. In this narrative, death ultimately gives birth to another state which is simultaneously death and life.

The Chippendales New York shows, viewed in March 1992, included a male strip routine which featured the state of "death" both as erotic foreplay to the act of sex and as a performance of death-life transgression through the "magical." In this routine, a "dead white male poet" stripper-character, romantically dressed in an artist's loose white shirt and tight black pants, is carried onto the stage by other male dancers who wear monk habits.⁸⁹ The monks place the sign of the magic pentacle on the ground and lay the "dead" poet upon the emblem (Fig. 5.32). Next, the monks strip off their habits and slowly manipulate the limp body of the dead male. Eventually, the poet-figure is brought back to life, swooning all the while. Finally, when his strength is restored, this poet dances a controlled striptease and then strolls off stage--back into "life," or possibly, once more into "the beyond"--another version of the Undead. The taboo of necrophilia aside, the transformation of the performer's body, through the transgressive act of crossing back and forth between symbolic states of "life" and "death" in concert with sexual performance, suggests an erotic infinity as it underscores the process of theatrical transformation. The scene further foregrounds the spectator's experience of forbidden peeping or voyeurism by combining "dangerous" acts of "magic" with the "dangerous" event of death.

Benjamin, in her analysis of the Western cultural romance with images of sex and death or bodily harm, points out that men in our society are rarely allowed to be represented in positions that lack rigid

social boundaries and control (except when they take up the roles of aliens or rebels such as vampires). Therefore, erotic "boundarilessness," which include depictions of sexual abandon or surrender, bodily violations, social aliens, and sometimes death imagery, is more commonly portrayed through the bodies of females. In sexual narratives, males are usually expected to maintain the dialogic between the states of abandon and the states of control by playing the parts of "policemen" who uphold the standard social and socio-psychic perimeters.⁹⁰ However, as indicated by the above examples, in the theatre of striptease, where carnival and transgression reign, this kind of traditional female-male dichotomy is overtly and repeatedly violated.

The choreography and structure of the exotic dance acts described in this chapter support the overall "carnival" mandate of the strip event. The basic movements of the striptease, the additional visual plays on erotic "sensuality" and erotic "vigor," and the different designs of the dance routines all maintain and simultaneously disrupt the social norms of female and male physical sexual behavior as well as the cultural mythologies that continue to "choreograph" those behaviors.

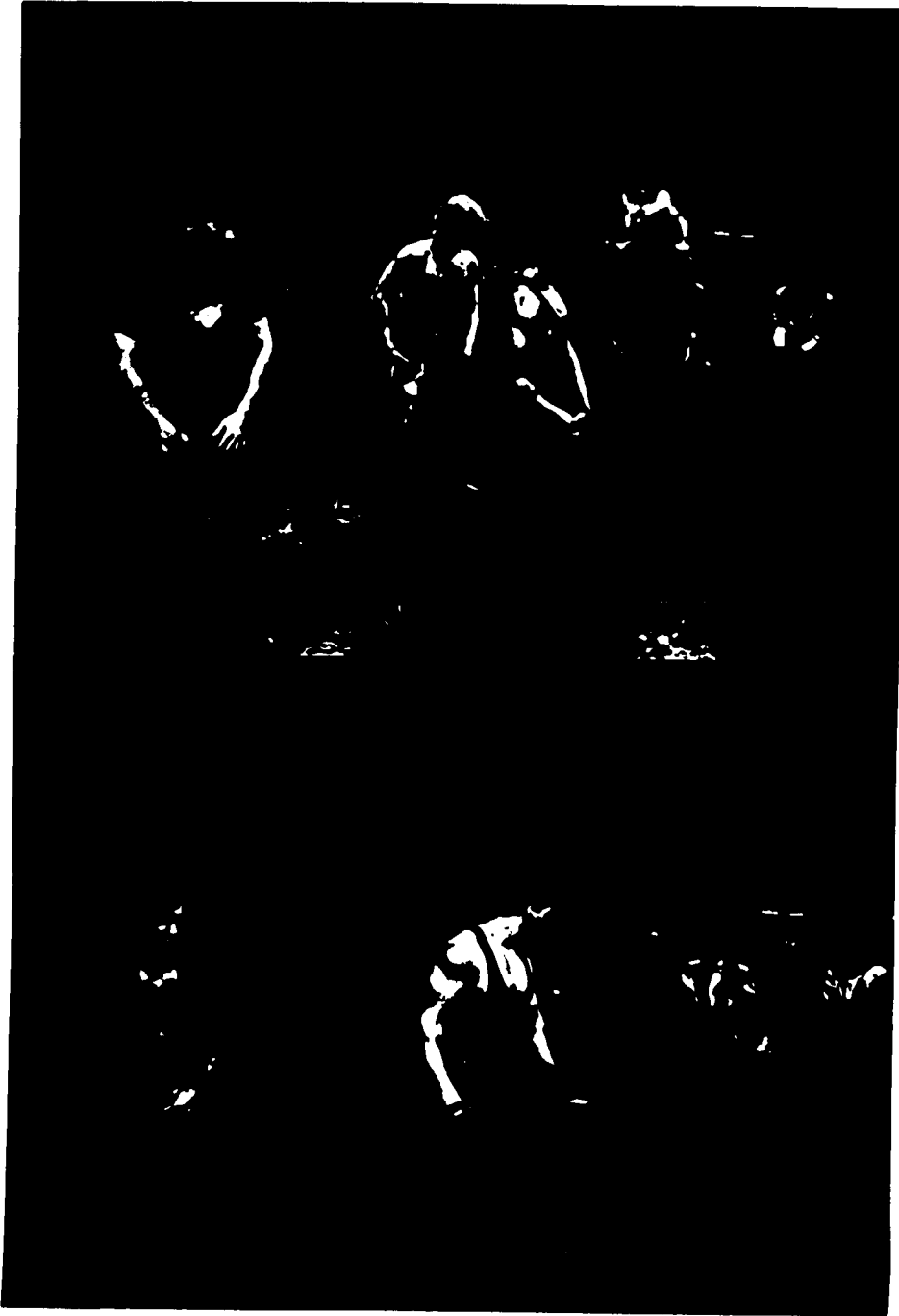


Fig. 5.1



Fig. 5.3



Fig. 5.4

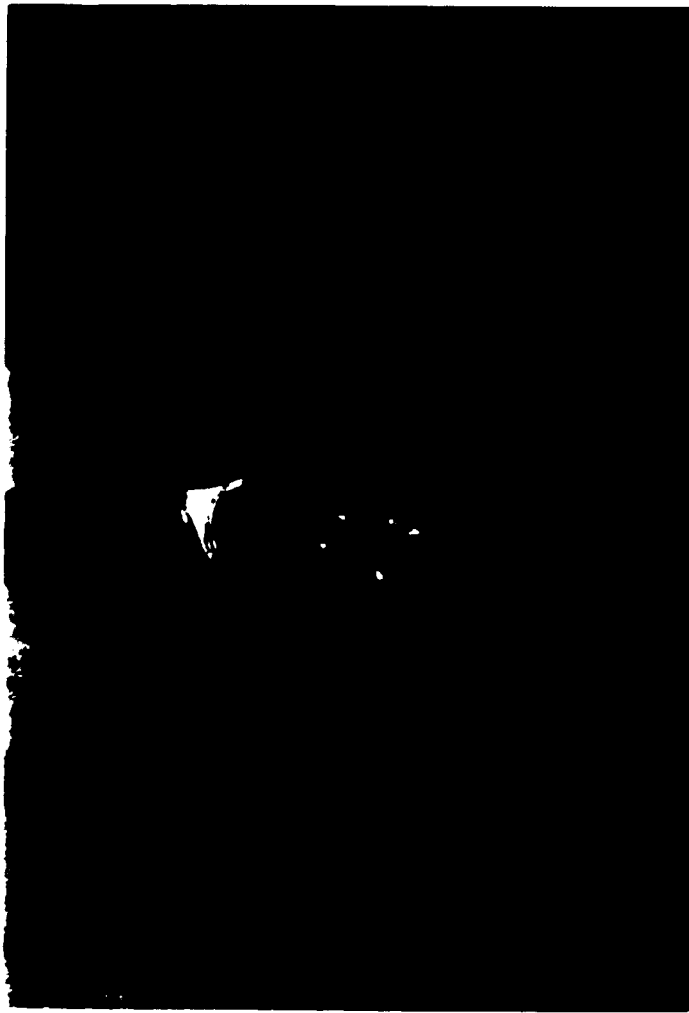


Fig. 5.6



Fig. 5.7

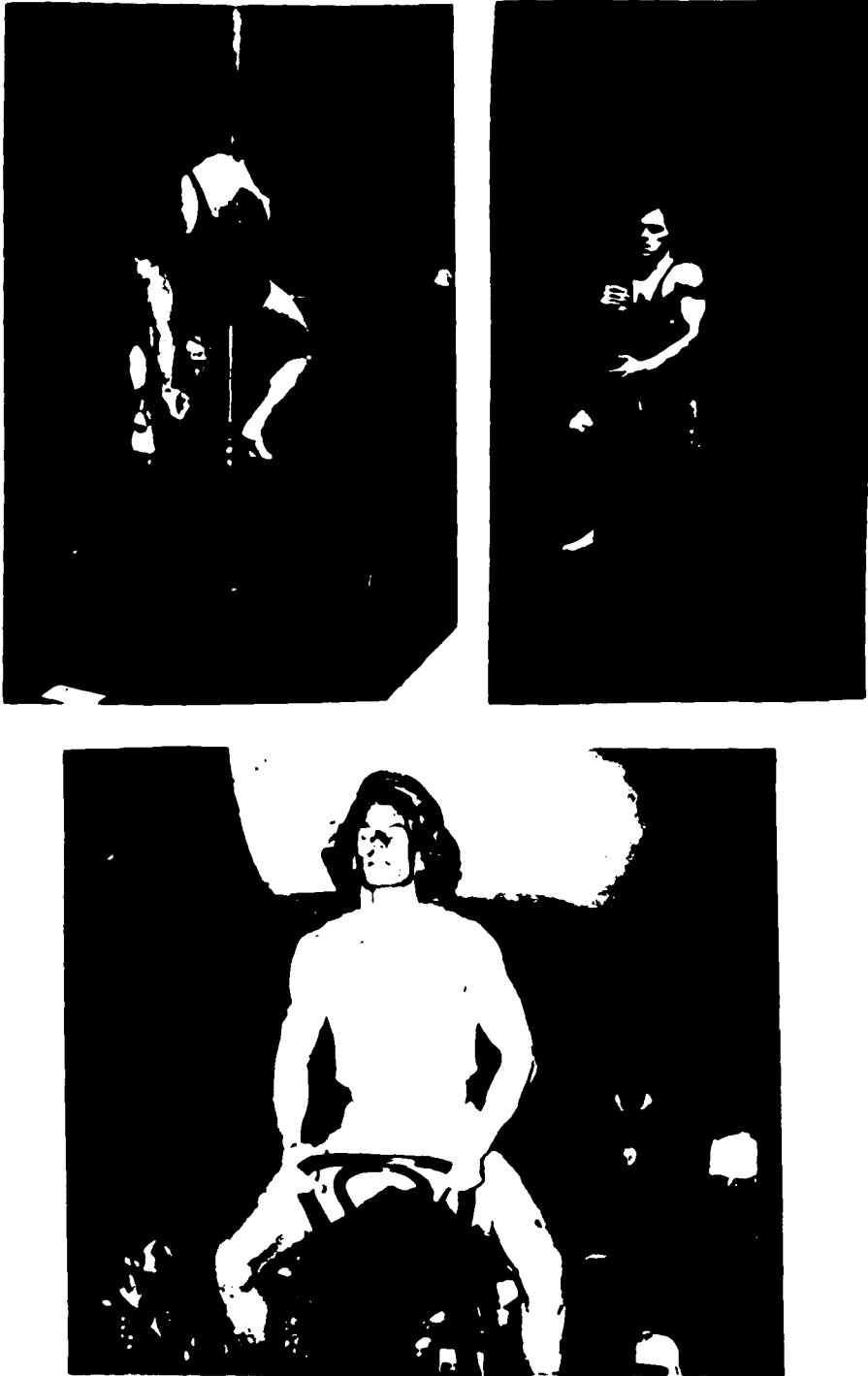


Fig. 5.8

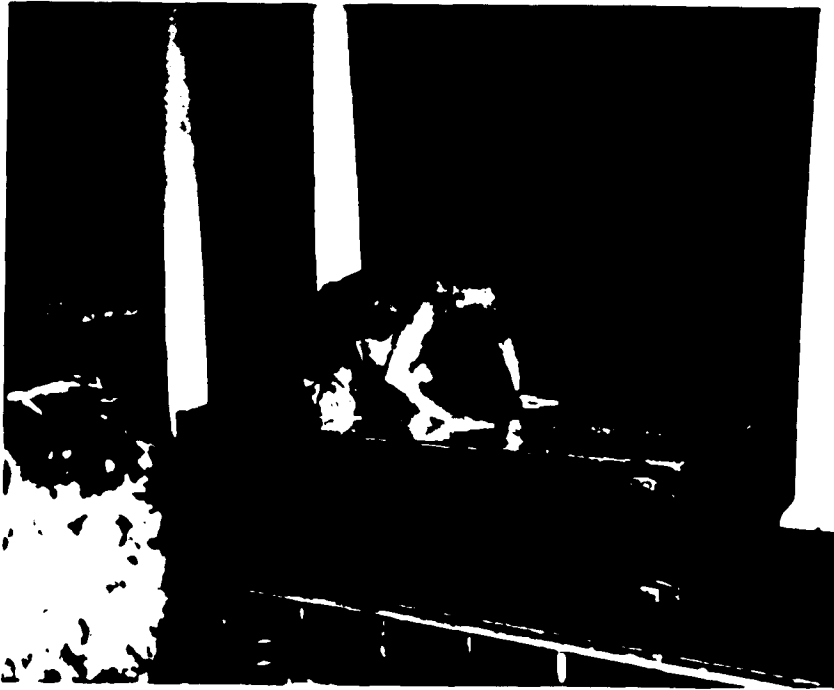


Fig. 5.10

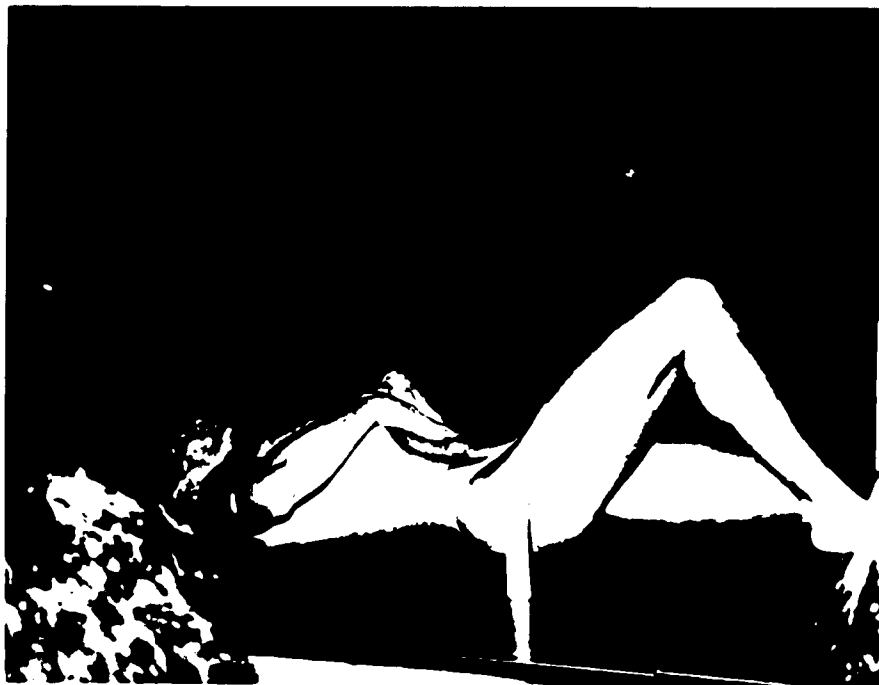


Fig. 5.15

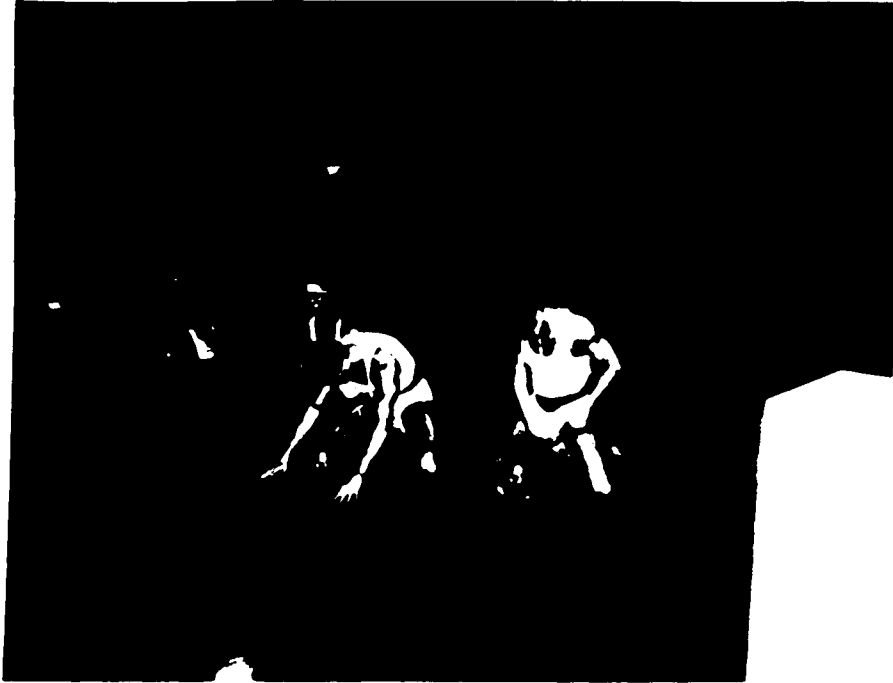


Fig. 5.16

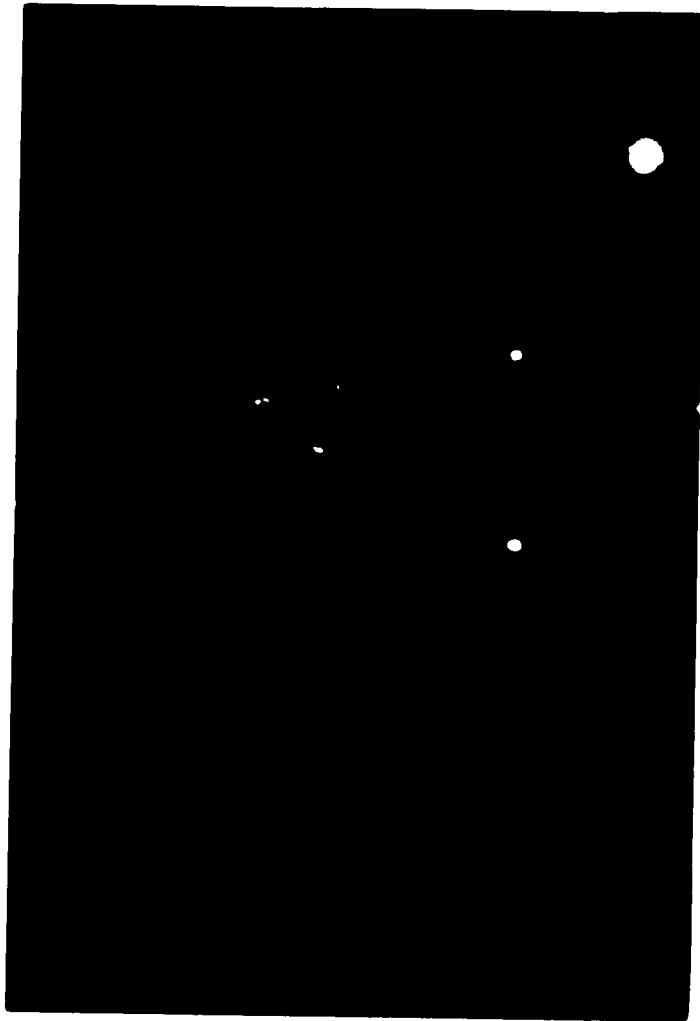


Fig. 5.22

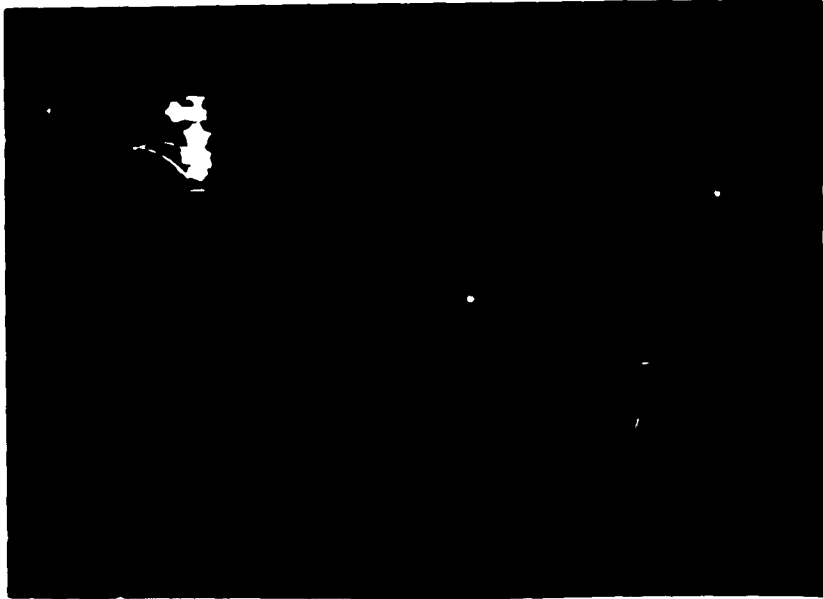


Fig. 5.23

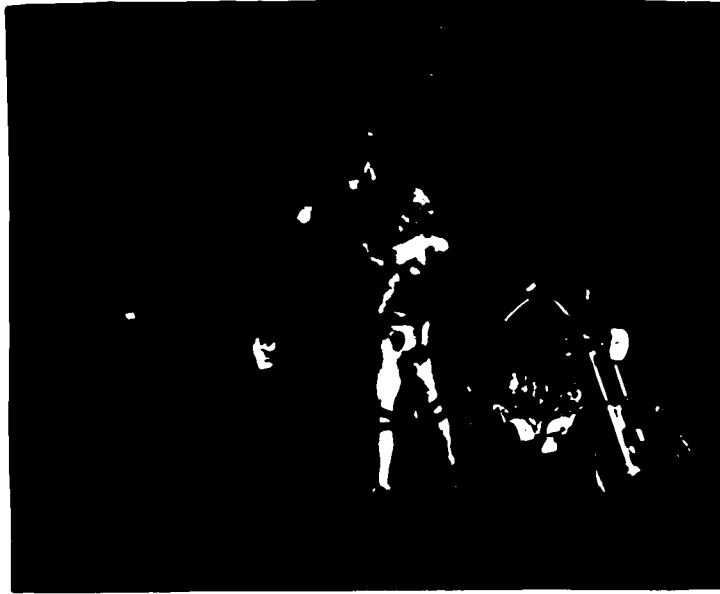


Fig. 5.30



Fig. 5.31

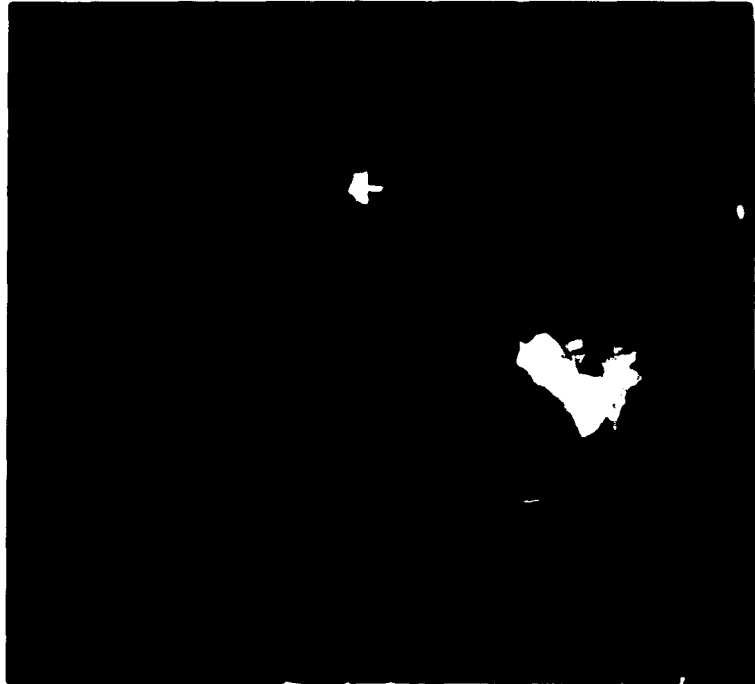


Fig. 5.32

NOTES

¹Judith Lynn Hanna, *Dance, Sex and Gender: Signs of Identity, Dominance, Defiance, and Desire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 22.

²Hanna, 64, 226; Dolan, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 59-67; and idem, "The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance," chap. in *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 64-65, 79-80.

³Dolan, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 61.

⁴Hanna, 64.

⁵Ibid., 226.

⁶Ibid., 11.

⁷Ibid., 160-161.

⁸The distribution of gender characteristics in Hanna's tables on female and male gender characteristics are partially based on other research and writings in this field. They include: Nancy M. Henley, *Body Politics: Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication* with drawings by Deirdre Patrick (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977); Clara Mayo and Nancy M. Henley ed., *Gender and Nonverbal Behavior* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1981); and Judith Hall, *Nonverbal Sex Differences: Communication Accuracy and Expressive Style* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

⁹Hanna, 11.

¹⁰Ibid., 160-161.

¹¹See for example A. Owen Aldridge, "American Burlesque at Home and Abroad: Together with the Etymology of Go-Go Girl," *Journal of Popular Culture* 5, no. 3 (Winter 1971): 569; Gladstone, 8-9; William Green, "Strippers and Coachers—the Quintessence of American Burlesque," in David Mayer and Kenneth Richards ed., *Western Popular Theatre: A Symposium Sponsored by the Manchester University Department of Drama* (London: Methuen and

Company, Ltd., 1980), 160-162; Sobel, 57-60; Zeidman, 36, 43, 61, 173. See also Hanna's discussion about the link of belly dancing to cabaret acts, 62-64.

¹²In addition to these popular entertainment formats, Mary Garden presented her version of the "Dance of the Seven Veils" at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City in Richard Strauss' *Salome* in 1907. Sobel, 117, 122; Zeidman, 63.

¹³Boles and Garbin, 42; Boles, "Stripping for a Living," Afterword in Futterman, *Dancing Naked in the Material World*, 124; Corio, 72-74; Gladstone, 9.

¹⁴H. M. Alexander, 120.

¹⁵Gio, *How to Strip for Your Man*, L. Suarez/La Gioconda Enterprises, LTD., 1987, videocassette; Veronica Hart, "How to Strip for Your Lover" workshop (New York City, sponsored by the Learning Annex, 18 July 1990); Carrie Stern, "Public Undress: The Choreography of the 42 Street Strip show" (New York City, New York University, Performance Studies, A Conference/Festival About Performance, 1990), photocopied.

¹⁶Zeidman, 155-156.

¹⁷Watters also discussed this phenomenon of fashion model strutting by dancers at Rick's, interview-conversation with the author, 10 April 1990, Houston, Texas.

¹⁸Debi Sundahl, 176-177. See also Dolan's citation of part of Sundahl's discussion on this topic in, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 63.

¹⁹For example, most of the middle class strip clubs for men in the Washington D.C. area do not permit their female dancers to perform floorwork. The notorious Good Guys bar is one of the few establishments which generally ignores this traditional D.C. house rule. However, during the author's last visit to the nation's capitol (15 February 1992), female dancers at Good Guys were temporarily banned from performing floorwork because of citizen complaints lodged against the bar. A police officer was stationed on the premises to make sure that this restriction was enforced.

According to Watters, the "couch-dancing" vogue came to an abrupt end in Houston, Texas, because the community leaders decided that the "idea" of women stripping on or next to couches was more obscene than the same movements and acts performed by

dancers standing upright or leaning on patron chairs and tables. Robert Watters, interview-conversation with author, 10 April 1990, Houston, Texas.

²⁰"Superman" in *Males in Motion*, aprox. 60 min., Ero-Tron Productions, 1985, videocassette.

²¹Hanna, 11.

²²Alexander, 13.

²³David D. Gilmore, *Cultural Concepts of Masculinity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

²⁴Beverly Hills' featured exotic dance act, The Doll House (currently New York Dolls), circa June 1990; Hills, interview-conversation with author, circa June 1990, New York City.

²⁵For discussions specifically on gender and facial expressions see Henley, 168-178; Mayo and Henley, 95-150 passim and 195-208; Hall, 58-72.

²⁶PIX's "Geraldo" on "All-Male National Dancathon," air date 24 May 1988, *Journal Graphics*, transcript #177.

²⁷Norman Ashcraft and Albert E. Schefflen, *People Space: The Making and Breaking of Human Boundaries* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Press, 1976), 12.

²⁸Henley, 151.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 152.

³⁰Henley, 153.

³¹Kaite, 152.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1991), 110.

³⁴Hanna, 96.

³⁵Ibid., 226.

³⁶See Williams on "invisible" female pleasure and male anxiety, 49, 234.

³⁷Most municipal laws forbid males to display erections or to reach orgasm in live shows for female or coed audiences. However, strip clubs and theatres for gay men in New York City and San Francisco allow the performers to display "real" erections and orgasms as long as the performers and participants do not touch each other.

³⁸John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Penguin Books, 1977), 54; cited in Williams, 59-60.

³⁹Janette Boyd as "Janette," in *Stripper*, 90 mins., 1985, dir. Jerome Gary, Jerome Gary-Visionaire Communications, Inc. film, Key Video, videocassette.

⁴⁰Dragu, 32.

⁴¹Ibid., 36-37.

⁴²Ibid., 36.

⁴³Hanna, 158.

⁴⁴Dragu, 36.

⁴⁵Madonna, *Truth or Dare*, 118 min., 1991, Boy Toy Inc., and Miramax Films.

⁴⁶Hanna, 78.

⁴⁷Katherine Liepe-Levinson, "The Striptease Power Paradox" (New York City, Empire State College, The Annual Women's Conference, 1990); idem, "A Striptease Poetics: Costume and Body Disguises" (New York City, Dixon Place, Writing Bodies: A Non-Fiction Series curated by Jessie Allen, 19 December 1991), video recording; idem, "A General Semantics 'View' of Male and Female Striptease Performances or The Naked 'Truth' Unveiled" (New York City, Pen and Brush Club, sponsored by the New York Society for General Semantics, 30 January 1992).

⁴⁸Susan G. Cole, "Pornography: What Do We Want?," in *Good Girls/Bad Girls: Feminists and Sex Trade Workers Face to Face, Proceedings of a Toronto Conference on the Politics of Prostitution and*

Pomography, 22-24 November 1985, ed. Laurie Bell (Toronto: Seal Press, 1987), 160.

⁴⁹Cole, 161.

⁵⁰Ibid.

⁵¹Hanna, 159.

⁵²Barrie Thorne and Nancy Henley, ed., introduction to *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance* (Rowley, Mass: Newbury House, 1975), 12; cited in Hanna, 157.

⁵³See also similar reports in Harrison, 79-83; Ben-Shitta, 37; Dressel and Petersen, "Equal Time for Women," 198-204; idem, "Gender Roles, Sexuality, and the Male Strip Show," 151, 154, 156-160.

⁵⁴The sexual orientation of female and male exotic dancers was discussed by Ron Martin (former executive officer of Show World, the gay theatre, Show Palace, and subsidiaries, New York City), interview-conversation with author, 18 July 1990, New York City; Benjamin Glover (manager of the gay theatre, Show Palace), interview-conversation with author 26 July 1990, New York City; "Ron" (owner-manager of the gay club Chez Jean Pierre, Montreal, Canada), interview-conversation with author, 8 July 1990, Montreal Canada; Manager of the Nob Hill Cinema (name not noted), San Francisco, interview-conversation with author, 20 August 1990; Debi Sundahl, telephone interview-conversation with author, Spring 1990; Stripper Johnny Rotten, telephone interview-conversation with author, 4 May 1990; Stripper Karl (exotic dancer at Chez Jean Pierre), interview-conversation with author, 8 July 1990, Montreal, Canada; Dancer at Show Palace, interview-conversation with author, late July 1990, New York; Featured stripper Donna Foxx, interview-conversation with author 26 July 1990, New York City; Former Baltimore stripper "Brian," interview-conversation with author, Spring 1991, New York City. See also Marilyn Salutin, "Stripper Morality," *Trans-Action* 8, no. 8 (1971): 16-17; Sundahl, 177-179.

⁵⁵Harrison, 82.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷See also descriptions in Stern, 3; Alexander, 33.

⁵⁸See also John Elsom's similar analysis in his book, *Erotic Theatre*, with an introduction by John Trevelyan (New York: Taplinger Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), 180. Elsom states, "All theatre audiences are voyeurs in the sense that they are observers of a situation which is not of their creation, but strip-club audiences were constantly being reminded that they were voyeurs, which gave a different emphasis." Elsom seems to think that this emphasis ultimately ruins the thrill experience for the audience. This author disagrees. See my Chapter Six for a detailed analysis of the experiences of strip event spectators.

⁵⁹Stern comments on use of improvisation by contemporary female strippers, 7.

⁶⁰Exotic dance acts performed by "Starr," Triple Treat Theatre, Show World, New York City, 2 June 1990.

⁶¹Jan Marsh quoted in Joseph Mitchell, "The Strip-Tease To Storm B'Way," *New York World-Telegraph*, 21 April 1937, unpaginated (The Billy Rose Theatre Collection).

⁶²Erik Lee Preminger, *Gypsy & Me: At Home and on the Road with Gypsy Rose Lee* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1984), 10-11, 14-19.

⁶³Paul Derval, *The Folies Bergere*, trans. by Lucienne Hill (London: Methuen, 1955); quoted in Charles Castle, *The Folies Bergere* (London: Methuen London Ltd., 1982; repr., New York: Franklin Watts, 1985), 96-97.

⁶⁴Derval quoted in Castle, 96-97.

⁶⁵Gladstone, 10; Zeidman, 158.

⁶⁶*Here It Is, Burlesque*, 90 min., 1979, Home Box Office, Vestron Video, videocassette.

⁶⁷Lewin, 75, 78-79.

⁶⁸See also Susan Demuth's report of a similar male strip act in London. A dancer, billed as "Toyboy," began his routine dressed as a "square in tweeds and glasses" and concluded his performance as a wild man in a black G-string (9).

⁶⁹Secretary or businesswomen subway strip act, Blue Angel Nightclub, Grand reopening show, New York City, April 1990.

⁷⁰Steele briefly mentions this Bali Bra advertising campaign in her essay, "Clothing and Sexuality." She seems to suggest that these advertisements reflected the obsession about career and "yuppiedom" which marked the Eighties, rather than a backlash against women in the workforce (63).

⁷¹Alexander, 40-41.

⁷²Alexander, 40.

⁷³Gladstone, 11.

⁷⁴Ibid., 7.

⁷⁵Kimberly Holcombe as "Danyel," *Stripper*, 90 mins., 1985, dir. Jerome Gary, Jerome Gary-Visionaire Communications, Inc. film, Key Video, videocassette.

⁷⁶Porche Lynn, Cabaret Showgirls, Montreal, Canada, July 1990.

⁷⁷Female stripper and contortionist, Garden of Eden, San Francisco, California, August 1990.

⁷⁸*Lady of Burlesque*, 91 min., 1943, dir. William Wellman, adaptation of Gypsy Rose Lee's *G-String Murders*, United Artists.

⁷⁹*Stripped to Kill*, 88 min., 1987, dir. Katt Shea Ruben, Concorde; *Stripped to Kill II*, 83 min., 1989, dir. Katt Shea Ruben, Concorde.

⁸⁰See for example Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography: Men Possessing Women* (New York: Perigee Books, 1979); idem, *Intercourse* (New York: Free Press, 1987); Catherine MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

⁸¹For example, Nina Hartley attributes the proliferation of images that combine sex, violence, and women to the double standard which requires that any woman who overtly expresses sexual interests should be punished, whether she is "a prostitute, call-girl, or a woman with a higher sex drive. . ." Nina Hartley quoted in Rose Dean, "Women and Porn," *San Francisco Weekly*, 19 July 1989, 7.

⁸²As noted previously, while Benjamin and Williams acknowledge that images of women, sex, and violence can be a male strategy used to control females, they also suggest that such depictions can reflect some of the subversive routes women employ to gain sexual pleasure under oppressive socio-sexual conditions. Both of these writers also point out that female and male sexual masochistic behavior is not a search for pain, but for pleasure (Benjamin, 51-84; Williams, 185-228).

⁸³A rebroadcast of a clip from NBC's "Donahue" on NBC's "Channel 4, 11:00 (p.m.) News," air date 11 February 1992.

⁸⁴*Ladykillers*, approx. 90 min., 1988, dir. Robert Lewis, with actors Marilu Henner, Leslie-Ann Down, Joan Collins, Susan Blakely, Barry Weitz Films in association with ABC Circle Films, air date 9 November 1988; see also John J. O'Conner, "Male Strippers in 'Ladykillers' on ABC," *New York Times*, 9 November 1988, sec. C, p. 26. In this film, since male strippers are being murdered, a "cute" male police officer is brought in as a decoy stripper while his female partner is planted in the audience for "surveillance." The film audience, in turn, sees many of the events of the story through the eyes of the female police officer.

⁸⁵Williams, 194, 203.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, 203-204.

⁸⁷*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., s.v. "die."

⁸⁸Freud's "death instinct" is the drive which originates from the unconscious wish to return to the inorganic. The death instinct is in constant mediation with the eros drive for life. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* 21 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 119-122; and *idem*, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works* 18 (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), 7-64. See also Bataille, 40-48, 94-108, 164-178; Susan Sontag, "The Pornographic Imagination," in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Delta, 1981), 58-73; Benjamin, "The Bonds of Love: Rational Violence and Erotic Domination," *Feminist Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring 1980): 144-171; Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 51-84.

⁸⁹See Bataille on "the horror of the corpse as a symbol of violence," 45-47.

⁹⁰Benjamin, *The Bonds of Love*, 51-84. It should be noted, however, that Benjamin finds all types of representations which depict sexual violence ultimately harmful to the "health" and relationships of both females and males because they continue to promote relationships of domination and subordination, rather than "Mother" sharing based exchanges.

CHAPTER VI

TERROR, TEASE, AND PERFORMING SPECTATORS

Spectatorship has been addressed throughout this dissertation. In most cases, I have argued that the locations of the contemporary strip events; the exterior and interior designs of their environments; and the use of costume, choreography, and structure in the exotic dances work in concert to position the spectators in "roles of mimetic uncertainty"--that is, at the trajectories of various social norms and social "delinquencies," especially with regard to the traditional sex roles for women and men.

In this chapter, I will begin by introducing some popular and academic descriptions of and theories about spectator behavior in striptease performance. I will then discuss a few of the practical and theoretical problems with those "visions" of striptease spectator roles in order to clarify and redefine the terms of spectator participation in these types of situations. And finally, I will devote the greater portion of this chapter to an exploration of the roles, rituals, and games that are offered directly to the spectators by the different strip events.

"Bullies" and "Victims"?

Discussions about striptease spectator participation, in both popular and academic writings and reports, usually include descriptions of patrons in the roles of either bully-sadists or victim-masochists. In terms of "practical" behavior, the "bully role" activities ascribed to female and male spectators alike include verbal insults directed to the strippers, unsolicited and inappropriate aggressive touching of the performer's body or clothing, and the hurling of objects at the dancers--including ice cubes and burning cigarettes.¹ *Sin City: An Unusual Guide to New York* even issues a gentle warning to potential female patrons of Chippendales strip shows. It states that female spectators may caress the dancers in certain ways, but "no slam-dunking please."²

Writings and reports which situate striptease spectators as "victim-masochists" sometimes include descriptions of patrons as the targets of dancer "taunts" and ridicule.³ There are also a few recorded incidences in which strippers and other club employees caused physical harm to patrons. One *New York Post* headline announced, "Chippendale's Stung With Suit: Three women say bouncers beat them in beefcake club."⁴ Another headline, also in the *New York Post*, read "Model 'Squashed' by Male Stripper Wins Suit."⁵ (A male dancer called "The Barbarian" apparently fell on a female spectator while he was swinging on a vine or rope during his performance at Chippendales New York.)

In addition to these articles, a female patron interviewed for this study stated that she was physical and sexually harassed by two different male hosts at the Chippendales New York club several years ago. One male host insisted on kissing her each time she bought a drink from him, even though she indicated she was not interested in this exchange. Another employee pushed her out of the way while she was waiting in line at the ladies room by turning his large metal serving tray sideways and aiming it between her buttocks.⁶

In a number of other interview-conversations, strippers, managers, and patrons alike mentioned occurrences in which male striptease spectators were treated "roughly" by club managers, bouncers, and dancers. These included stories about patrons who were physically thrown out of clubs by bouncers and stories about spectators who had drinks dumped in their laps by performers and waitresses. Boles, in her study of modern striptease events, cites a few examples of rowdy male patrons who were "cut" or hit by dancers.⁷ Bildstein, during his lecture on topless club management, fielded a few audience questions about potential patron abuse. Bildstein insisted that "talking" was the best approach to use in dealing with the few male customers who became unruly.⁸

The most prevalent discussions about the striptease spectator as victim-masochist, however, generally involve anecdotes about patrons who are coerced into participating in "drink" and "date fantasy" hustles.⁹ While there appears to be a current movement away from "drink hustling," particularly in the more upscale clubs, a good number of strip establishments for male patrons still feature this "game." In

such places of performance, dancers unabashedly solicit expensive drinks from patrons. The price of the drinks can range from thirty dollars for a single "dancer's drink" to three or four hundred dollars for one bottle of champagne. Because such activities were so common in New York City through 1991, the review section of topless bars and strip clubs in *Screw* used to note the amount of drink hustling one could expect in a given club.

In some of the more exclusive strip clubs, such as La Bare, Rick's, and the Men's Club in Houston, and Club 281 and the Apollon in Montreal, dancers use "date fantasy" hustles on both female and male spectators. In this exchange, patrons ask performers out on dates. The performers either agree to the dates or give responses which suggest that they may be willing to go out with the patrons. The spectators, then, continue to buy drinks and to tip the strippers extravagantly in order to impress them. But, at the end of the evening, or when the patrons' financial reserves are depleted, the dancers usually depart.

Bildstein insisted that actual "dating" and prostitution are rare occurrences in contemporary strip clubs because most of the dancers in these middle class establishments earn far more than prostitutes and under much safer conditions. Bildstein also noted that during working hours dancers are interested in making money, not plans for dates.

In addition to these "practical" considerations of striptease spectator bully and victim roles, such performance parts have also been described and analyzed through metaphors and theories that

more directly address the politics of gender. Victoria Hodgetts, a writer and journalist who worked briefly as a stripper in the mid-seventies theorized about the role of the male spectators in these events:

That first time I remember thinking that it was like rape, only backwards: The women got to violate the men. There was something angry in these dance-seductions. The women tried to get the men as hungry and turned on as possible. Then they left them hanging. They could do nothing. Nothing but sit there in exquisite frustration, eager guilt. It was revenge on all the times that men put their greedy fingers all over women. It was striking back.¹⁰

Keith McWalter, writing more than a decade later, describes a similar experience, but from the point of view of a spectator of strip events. He visited several of the posh Texas clubs, including Rick's. In his article for the *New York Times*, and in his subsequent discussion as a guest on the "Geraldo" show, McWalter insisted that the male patrons of these strip clubs were reduced to positions of passivity. He states in his article that the strip performances "seemed a vengeful inversion of the old Victorian injunction, 'Ladies don't move.' Now the men were inert, slouched in their couches and the women were mobile."¹¹

Long time stripper and published writer, Steph Weene, describes striptease performance as an abstraction of the battle of the sexes. In her essay, "Venus" for *Heresies*, Weene suggests that female dancers and male patrons alternate between and sometimes simultaneously play both roles of domination and subordination.¹² Roxanne, the pole dancing virtuoso at New York Dolls in New York City echoed Weene's theories. She stated that it was not unusual for her to play "the sweet young thing" for audience members at one end

of the stage while treating patrons on the other end of the performance platform to what she described as "the bitch." "Either way," Roxanne concluded, "I make money because I know my customers."¹³

Contemporary theatre theorist Jill Dolan's commentaries on strip events also analyze spectator-participant roles in terms of "sodomasochistic" elements. But, again, Dolan sees the larger social structure of gender roles as the determining factor in the construction of strip event spectator positioning. In *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, Dolan states that the power relations between female strippers and male patrons is "complex and subtle, as power circulates between the two positions."¹⁴ However, she still concludes that male spectators of heterosexual striptease performances (and other forms of pornography/erotica) are ultimately in roles of "total control" over those representations because the male spectators "pay to see the image of the stripper as a commodity; they buy control over the gaze."¹⁵ According to Dolan and many other writers (e.g., Griffin, Kappeler, Dworkin), the experience of pleasure for these spectators comes from buying positions of "total control" which reflect the traditional gendered controls of economics and looking.¹⁶

At the same time, Dolan posits that it is very difficult, if not impossible, in hegemonic culture to place female spectators in control/looking positions and male performers in "sex object" roles. Dolan insists that "performers in heterosexual striptease are trapped by their gender roles and the assumptions of their heterosexuality."¹⁷ She states that simply reversing or "reorganizing this binary opposition (heterosexuality) so that the weaker term is placed in the theoretically

powerful position does nothing to deconstruct the dichotomy."¹⁸ In her essay, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," Dolan insists that female spectators of male strip shows are never granted sexual control roles because they categorically "want the male performer to desire them."¹⁹ According to Dolan, "desire" in these acts is ultimately represented by the "penis-phallus." Therefore, such performances can't help but represent the male social domination of women as a gendered class. In other words, within both female and male striptease spectacles, males are always privileged with control and desire roles whether they are the official performers or the spectators.

All of the "practical" and "theoretical" descriptions of striptease spectator participation listed in this section support the most stereotypical views of female and male strip events. They also reflect some of the most stereotypical depictions of traditional gender relations. Nevertheless, there are many aspects of strip event spectator roles which are inconsistent with, or which contradict, both the general assumptions about these performances and the dichotomies of sex role norms presumably represented by the above examples.

Re-Viewing the Terms of Spectatorship

First, deliberate physical abuse on the part of performers, other club employees, and patrons is extremely rare in contemporary strip environments. When they do occur, these types of behavior are

immediately censored, not only by the official bouncers of the clubs, but often also by the other participants in the immediate environment. When "smaller" infractions occur, such as "misplaced" hands or even tongues, most female and male dancers usually control such behavior either by verbal chastisement (which can become part of their performance) or by moving away from and limiting their interactions with the offending patrons in the future. According to Sofie Ben-Shitta, the editor of *Mentertainment*, dancers are usually angered by that type of customer behavior and only a few of the dancers tolerate certain degrees of these infractions to make better tips.²⁰ The toleration of some of these patron acts is essentially the dancer's choice as long as she or he does not get caught breaking the house rules and local laws.

The majority of female and male spectators do, in fact, abide by the basic rules of the club, city, and state. This is so because spectators patronize strip events in order to participate in and enjoy the pleasures of sex games which are structured upon those very rules. In his essay, "Sex as Play," Nelson Foote states that "any kind of play generates its own morality and values. And the reinforcement of the rules of play becomes the concern of every player because without their observance, the play cannot continue."²¹ It is telling that in an interview-conversation for this study, Texan club owner Robert Watters ended his musings on the creation of spectator pleasure in the strip event by stating simply, "Well, we all love our little rules."²²

Second, spectator participation in hustling games does not neatly place female and male patrons in the roles of "sucker-victims." While some patrons may unwittingly be swept away into "big spender"

acts by the dancers, many other spectators patronize "hustle" clubs as "regulars," knowing full well the cost of a performer's drink or the fantasy aspect of their dancer date requests.

According to Watters, these hustle scenes are pleasurable for patrons because the role of the "big spender" is an obvious role of social privilege. Spectators can also use their anticipation of "waiting" for the elusive dancer "dates" to increase their enjoyment of the strip event at hand. Watters suggested that many patrons really don't want to date the dancers. Rather, those spectators wish to prolong the experience of desiring the date and the fantasy of possibly being desired in return.

"Susan" of *Screw*, in an interview with Sophie of *Mentertainment*, offered a similar analysis of this scene. She stated that the men who frequent topless bars and like entertainments "may think that they want the girl to come home with them but they really don't want the fantasy of this teasing to go any further, they may want to touch or to feel, but they're almost submissive, almost as if they are there just for the tease. . ."23

In both the drink and date hustling scenarios, patrons have some measure of control over the interactions of these acts by virtue of their economic power. But, at the same time these patrons pay to be "taken" by the dancers--to experience a doubling of their anticipation, which flirts with the "uncertainty" of the situation--not total spectator control. Such spectator-performer exchanges, then, have much to say about the pleasure-control, pleasure-surrender, self-control, overwhelm, and seeing-being seen aspects of the other roles available

to striptease spectators in the different clubs and theatres. These will be discussed during the course of this chapter.

Third, while I agree with Dolan's analyses in many respects, my own experiences (earlier as a performer and more currently as a spectator-participant in strip events over the last several years) suggest that while female and male striptease spectator roles are indeed marked with many signifiers of traditional gender assignments, the patrons of these events do not simply pay "to see" the image of the stripper as a commodity--nor can they possibly purchase pristine control over "the gaze."

The concept of audience members establishing or purchasing total control over the gazes in almost any theatrical set-up is problematic at best. Richard Schechner points out that within this representational apparatus:

A person sees the event: he [*sic*] sees himself; he sees himself seeing the event; he sees himself seeing others who are seeing the event and who, maybe, see themselves seeing the event. Thus there is the performance, the performers, the spectators; and the spectator of spectators; and the self-seeing-self that can be performer or spectator or spectator of spectators.²⁴

Schechner's formulation, which is similar in many ways to the ideas of Stallybrass, White, and Freedman discussed in previous chapters, proposes that within the theatrical design, spectator gazes, identifications, and differentiations are not monolithic, but rather polymorphous. I have argued that the representational apparatus can encourage many kinds of cross-gender and bi-gender identifications. These identifications are not bereft of ideological signification, for they can include views of hegemonic orders and, simultaneously, views of

resistance to those orders as well. Nor do these experiences categorically trap female or male spectators into the participation in, or identification with, the social subordination of women as suggested by many of the psychoanalytic models. Nancy Hartsock, in *Money, Sex, and Power*, refers to the ideas of Robert Stoller as she suggests that representations and expressions of sexuality and intimacy often threaten "one's sense of maleness or femaleness"--and that "threat," rather than "total control," is a source of sexual excitement and pleasure.²⁵

There is one last but crucial point to be made before turning to the discussion of spectator behavior and participation in the roles, rituals, and games featured in different contemporary strip events. The concept of "the gaze" in most feminist critiques refers to both a "symbolic" and a "practical" source of male social control and power over women because it ostensibly creates "subject" positions for the looker and "object" positions for the subject viewed. However, to attempt to use this either/or paradigm specifically in the analysis of contemporary strip entertainments creates serious problems. In most of these events, while female and male spectators obviously pay "to see" the dancers (and possibly to experience vicarious identifications), they also pay, and even tip extra in order to participate in activities in which they themselves can be seen "on stage."

Much of the spectator participation in strip events falls in line with a certain type of commercial entertainment discussed by Erving Goffman in his book, *Interaction Ritual*. According to Goffman, these entertainments offer their patrons "the final mingling of fantasy and

action" because "scenes are available for hire where the customer can be the star performer."²⁶ Goffman insists that these starring roles are pleasurable for the patrons, not because they offer them positions of control, but because they provide them with the "thrill" of experiencing "jeopardy during a passing moment."²⁷ This "thrill" consists of voluntarily exposing oneself to some sort of perceived external danger, such as standing up in front of an audience and being scrutinized by the group. It is the pleasure produced by a mixture of fear, the hope for a positive outcome, and the exhilaration of having experienced "danger."²⁸

The rest of this chapter will concentrate on the patron "jeopardy" roles for hire which are available in all strip bars, clubs, and theatres in one form or another. "Thrill-seeking" female and male spectators can actively choose and purchase these starring parts in strip events in a number of ways. 1) Spectators can pay extra for "permanent" seats or standing positions close to or even on the formal stages of these establishments. 2) Patrons can also pay the dancers to make "seat calls"--that is, to perform "dance" acts right next to the spectators' seats. In a few environments, patrons can also create their own "seat shows" through acts of masturbation. These types of performances create temporary stage spaces throughout the audience areas. 3) Spectators may also purchase the privilege of "stepping into the limelight" by moving from their official audience seats to temporary positions next to or even on the stage with the performers. 4) And, in addition to the *active* hiring of these acts, spectators can also play at being "coerced" into starring roles in sex scenes by dancers, M.C.'s, and fellow

spectators through various "games of induction." These games are performed in the audience areas as well as on the formal stages.

All of these groupings are somewhat overlapping. A number of clubs also feature and encourage several different kinds of audience participation simultaneously. Therefore, these set-ups throw into even greater relief the difficulties of using analytical theories based on polarizations of looking/being seen, active/passive, power/powerlessness as effective tools for deconstruction.

"Ringside Performing Spectators

Strip event spectators often pay extra in order to sit in the seats that are closest to the official performance areas of the clubs and theatres. Female patrons at Chippendales New York pay an outright ten dollar tariff, on top of the twenty to twenty-five dollar admission or cover charge, for seats that are literally on stage (Fig. 6.1). Female and male spectators in Montreal are expected to tip the maitre d' for the privilege of ringside seating. In most other clubs, there is an unspoken rule that female and male spectators seated nearest the official stages must tip more, and also more frequently, than those seated further away. If patrons do not comply with this rubric, they are censored by various means.

For example, at the Harmony Theatre in New York City one dancer confronted a non-tipping spectator using several tactics. First, she sat down directly in front of him and silently stared at him. Next

she lay back and placed her hand over her pubic hair and motioned for cash. When the customer was still not forthcoming, she sat up and exclaimed, "If you look, you pay!" Several other front row spectators gave this patron dirty looks and shook their heads. Several more handed the dancer additional dollar bills to make up for the deficit created by the non-conforming spectator. Almost immediately after this interaction, this patron left the premises.²⁹ On a less dramatic note, one of the managers of Flash Dancers also in New York quietly requested an entire section of front row male patrons to change seats because they were not tipping enough.³⁰

The censoring of spectator behavior in these instances was not only to insure the dancers the greatest economic rewards possible, but also to insure the most dynamic show for all the patrons. The lack of ringside tipping slows down the "action" of the strip acts. Most tipping procedures involve different kinds of audience-performer exchanges which are an integral part of contemporary strip events. These audience-performer interactions range from strict "no-touch" games to "scenes" which involve "intimate touching" for both female and male spectators and performers.

"No Touch" Games

Some strip clubs, such as the Baby Doll Lounge and Billy's for men in New York City and Club 281 and the Apollon for women in Montreal, require their patrons to place tips on the stage or to hand

them to the dancers during the mainstage performances (Fig. 6.2). This tipping procedure virtually eliminates all physical contact between spectators and performers. Nevertheless, front row spectators in these clubs still play important roles in "the show." The dancers use ringside female and male patrons as on-going erotic scene partners who are expected to respond to their eye-choreography, patter, and bump and grind acts with a steady stream of dollar bills. The offering of dollar bills demonstrates to the rest of the group that the "on stage" spectators are filled with desire and are taking pleasure in the proceedings. These spectators also play the jeopardy game of "up close" and "no touch." Patrons perform this game in front of their spectating peers who may vicariously identify with the experience of these "dangerous" positions--dangerous in the sense that such activities pose a mimetic "threat" to the self-control of female and male participants alike (Fig. 6.3, 6.4, 6.5).

Rick's, the Men's Club, and La Bare in Houston, and Stringfellows Presents Pure Platinum in New York City offer more complicated tipping rituals for their respective female and male ringside spectators. Patrons seated around the formal performance areas in these environments play the "no-touch" game, but with an added twist. These spectators are expected to tip the dancers by placing dollar bills, in the correct manner, into the G-strings, speedos, underwear, or thigh garters of the strippers (Fig. 6.6). For example, in the Houston clubs female and male performing spectators are only allowed to tip the dancers at the sides or hip areas of the G-strings, bikinis, and speedos. The strippers have the option of whether to

make the tipping game relatively easy or more difficult for the spectator-participants. The dancers can pause during their performances and help direct the spectators' money into the proper place. They can also continue to move and tease while their patrons attempt to tip them, causing the spectators "to fumble" in front of the group.

Intimate Touching Games

A few contemporary strip events for male spectators and most contemporary strip events for female spectators combine ringside tipping performances with legal scenes of "intimate touching." The majority of the middle class strip clubs today do not allow the practices of some of the strip joints of by-gone years which occasionally included oral sex and even coitus between audience members and performers.³¹ However, certain other intimacies are still performed by spectators and dancers. Strip clubs and theatres for men which feature intimate touching games for their patrons are not permitted to serve hard liquor. There is no such restriction on strip events for women.

In the Paradise club in New York City, front row male patrons may tip the dancers in their bras, G-strings, boots, and thigh garters. Here, the dancers usually remain stationary during the tipping procedures in order to allow their male patrons brief and controlled contact with their bodies. In other words, patron touching of the

dancers is generally quite "fleeting" and even "delicate" in these exchanges.

In Show World's Triple Treat Theatre, some female performers encourage front row patrons to touch and fondle their naked breasts as part of their strip act. In the instances observed, the spectators who participated in this activity never grabbed at the performer's body, but again "delicately" touched or briefly "cupped" the stripper's breasts.

The Harmony Theatre in New York City offers spectator hand to dancer genital contact acts for its ringside patrons. In this scene, front row patrons are allowed to gently and fleetingly touch the performer's exposed pubic area with their finger tips. During this show, the dancer must remain on stage and the patron must remain in his seat.³²

Even though dollar tips were acceptable for the fondling acts in the Paradise, the Harmony Theatre, and Show World, only a few spectators in each event were willing to perform them in front of the group. Most of the other front row spectators who also tipped the strippers simply watched the action or limited their tipping games to the more traditional ones. This pattern of spectator behavior seems to suggest that these intimate touching acts create erotic arousal through tactile experience coupled with the thrill of participating in acts which are allowed, but at the same time which are clearly represented as taboo within the clubs themselves.

While these examples of intimate-touching spectator performances may replicate some of the most stereotypical aspects of traditional gender roles, in that men are obviously buying intimate looks at and touches of a woman's body, these looks and touches are

not under the "total control" of the spectator. For what is ultimately "purchased" by these patrons is the permission to participate in highly restricted public rituals of touching, seeing, being seen, and taboo-breaking behavior that are under the control of the statutory laws and the house rules of the environment. These rituals are also usually performed at the discretion and selection of the dancers as well. The following anecdote is an interesting illustration of this last point.

Trinity Loren is a featured performer for Show World and other strip clubs (Fig. 6.7). Her strip acts combine a "friendly" conversational patter and approach with spectator breast touching performances. At the end of one of Trinity's acts at Show World, her performance was interrupted by a group of noisy tourists entering the theater space. When the tour leader realized that Trinity was about to complete her act, he loudly insisted that she continue because the members of his group would pay her "big money." Trinity refused to extend her act for the tour and suggested that the group leader would have to "talk nicely" to the other dancers and to her if he was interested in having a good strip show for his clients. Trinity's original audience members broke into applause as the tour leader and his entire group left the Triple Treat Theatre dejectedly. In this instance, spectator gazes and intimate touches could not be purchased for any amount of money because the tour leader had not first surrendered himself and his group to the rules of the dancer and the rules of the "house."³³

In strip clubs for women, ringside female spectators also star in intimate touching games. While these games are predicated on constraining rules as well, they usually offer a greater variety of

physical interactions between dancers and spectators than most of the ones in strip events for men (possibly with the exception of the Paradise club for men).

In strip events and clubs such as Chippendales Los Angeles, Chippendales New York, Big Alice's in Peoria, Beefcakes U.S.A. at Danielle's, Escapes on Long Island New York, and the Hangar Club outside of Washington D. C., female spectators tip to share the spotlight and to receive an array of hugs, kisses, body caresses, "up close and personal" bump and grinds, lap-seating and even "dirty dancing" moments from the male dancers. In many of these environments, female spectators may touch and even hold the thighs, buttocks, chests, and arms of the male dancers. Generally, the only taboo male body part in these acts is the genital area.

The *One Night of Sin* show presented at Chippendales New York featured an unusual instance of ringside spectator-performer intimate touching play. At the end of an S & M motorcycle masturbation strip routine, the featured dancer attached a long leather thong to the dog collar around his neck. He then headed for the front row spectator who had been the most prolific tipper of the evening. The female patron hugged his body close to hers as the dancer played with her hair. They kissed. The male stripper then wrapped the other end of the thong around the spectator's neck and took several steps backward so that the rest of the spectators could see them bound together by their necks. It was a startling and specific tableau about the doubling or crossing back and forth of surrender and control roles played by both spectators and performers in these venues. The

intimate caresses, along with the S & M accoutrements, foregrounded the erotic-sexual excitement produced by the experience of mimetic danger.

Staged intimate touching games for participants in both female and male strip events obviously involve tactile satisfactions. However, they also generate additional thrill and jeopardy positions for both female and male performing spectators for a number of reasons. First, the spectators in these shows are more obviously scripted as co-performers in public "sex acts" through the physical actions. Second, the vulnerability of the bodies of both the performers and the spectators are underscored through the games of touch. Third, these touching games may also symbolically and practically heighten the sense of risking one's self-control in front of the group. And lastly, because such "intimate" scenes for hire are even more culturally taboo than the strip scenes which simply focus on the public viewing of naked bodies, the participants are expected to be "bound" even more closely to the required script and rules which construct these acts--otherwise these games could not be played.

"Seat Calls and Seat Shows"

In some strip environments and events, spectators can directly request and pay dancers to make "seat calls"--not just in the front rows of the theatres, but throughout the audience areas. "Dollar bill waves," "lap-dancing" or "*mardi gras*," and "table dance" acts situate spectators

"at ringside," by temporarily shifting the site of the performance(s) and focus of the participants. In most cases, spectators can hire these acts repeatedly. These "seat call" performances include both "no-touch" and "intimate touching" games as well.

In a few establishments, male spectators also star in their own seat shows through "self-exposure" and masturbation. Spectators are not allowed to hire dancers to participate in masturbation acts in which the patron's penis is exposed. Instead, these spectators pay to see the dancers and to rent the spaces for their own public "performances."

The Dollar Bill Wave

The "dollar bill wave" is found almost exclusively in strip clubs for women. After the male dancer performs his formal strip routine, he enters the audience area and exchanges kisses and other caresses with the female patrons who exhibit their desire for these acts by waving dollar bills (Fig. 6.8). Sometimes the dancer is accompanied by a follow spot which highlights the momentary starring roles of the tipping spectators. The dollar bill wave is an important part of the shows at Chippendales Los Angeles, Chippendales New York, Beefcakes U.S.A. at Danielle's in New York City, Big Alice's in Peoria, the Hangar Club in the Washington D. C. area, and Escapes on Long Island, New York.

Most likely, this activity predominates in strip shows for women because it is in keeping with the contained design of the majority of

these events for female spectators. A single male dancer performs at a time. His interactions with the individual patrons are relatively brief. And, this entire performer-audience exchange is usually orchestrated by the M.C. The M.C. not only draws attention to the performances of the spectators throughout the audience, she or he also partially directs the spectators' involvement in this rite with such lines as: "Ladies, do you like what you see?--then wave those dollar bills!" "Come on--don't be bashful--have some fun." "Ladies, wave those bills--the dancers will show their appreciation for your appreciation." "Put those bills anywhere on your body and the beefcake will retrieve them with his lips." "One dollar for a kiss."

While the M.C. may represent one more manifestation of how female sexuality and consumerism can be socially controlled or manipulated, this part also functions as a catalyst for transgression. The M.C. plays the role of a "challenger" who, like the barkers of the amusement parks, simultaneously *dares* and encourages the potential participants to place themselves in "jeopardy during a passing moment." This "challenge" adds to the thrill and taboo aspects of these roving sex scenes. At the same time, the M.C. also functions as a Brechtian narrator who continually tells the audience that the social hierarchy of gender has been refigured. Female patrons are encouraged to request directly and to pay for sexual exchanges without the stigma of "bad girl" labeling, but with the reminder that they are participating in extraordinary circumstances--which is, of course, part of the thrill of the event.

Lap-dancing

"Lap-dancing" or *Mardi gras* is literally the ultimate type of "seat call" because spectators actually hire performers to sit or "dance" on their laps for a charge of about one dollar per minute. Strip clubs for women regularly present male dancers who bump and grind on the laps of the patrons (Fig. 6.9). However, none of the clubs for women offer their participants the type of formal and explicit lap-dancing entertainment found in the clubs for men.

The Harmony Theatre in New York City and the Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theatre (the New York Room), the Market Street Theatre, and the New Century Theatre in San Francisco feature strip shows which incorporate lap-dancing performances. In these theatres, dancers perform individual strip routines on stage. Following their performances, they redress or partially redress, and then roam the aisles of the audience spaces to indicate that they are available for lap-dancing acts (while the strip shows continue on the main stages). During the spectator-performer lap dances, patrons are required to remain in their seats and to be dressed at all times. The dancers must wear underpants. Hand to genital, genital to genital, and oral-genital contacts between the performers and spectators are not permitted. However, spectators and dancers can caress or even masturbate each other by "dry humping" (dancing) through clothing. As with the other strip events which feature "intimate touching" activities, lap-dancing

acts are regulated sex games that must be played out correctly according to the rules.

Because the Market Street and the New Century theatres still retain their original movie house designs, the lap-dancing performances in these environments take on the appearance of multiple "make-out" scenes lit by the glow of the big screen. This set-up, as discussed in chapter three, allows spectators to star in "private moment" sex scenes which "thrillingly" take place in public places. It also provides the performing spectators with "peeking" and "being peeked at" positions, which heightens the voyeuristic pleasures of the show. Patrons, here, enjoy the rituals of "stealing looks" at each other's performances which take place throughout the space.

The Harmony Theatre and the New York Room at the O'Farrell Theatre are considerably smaller spaces. They are also designed around three-quarter stages. The use of lap-dancing acts in these establishments, then, structures audience positions which function as sites for both the oblique and the direct exchanges of gazes between spectators. These positions also suggest a dialogic play between "private" and "public" sex acts.

The Table Dance

Table dancing performances are available in some clubs for both female and male patrons (Fig. 6.10). As described earlier, the table dance is a mini-strip show that takes place right next to the chairs

and tables of the spectators seated in the audience areas. Usually, a number of these acts take place at the same time, while the traditional strip performances continue on the formal stages. Depending on the club, the cost of a table dance can range anywhere from five to twenty dollars for a three minute act. Rick's, Caligula's, the Men's Club, and the Colorado in Houston; Big Al's in Peoria; Cabaret Showgirls, Cabaret Penthouse, Le Sexe Scandal, and Le Super Sexe in Montreal; and Scores, Flash Dancers, Show World's Big Top Lounge, Stringfellows Presents Pure Platinum and Goldfingers in New York City are some of the clubs that offer table dancing performances for male patrons. La Bare in Houston, and Club 281 and the Apollon in Montreal are strip clubs which feature table dancing entertainments for female patrons.

While individual female and male spectators do hire table dances for themselves, the majority of table dancing acts appear to be shared experiences between two or more spectators. In these circumstances, spectator seeing and being seen roles become even more pronounced. Each member of a table dancing subgroup interacts directly with the performance of the dancer and with the "performances" of their immediate peers. At the same time, some of these individual groups vie with each other for the attention of the larger group--almost as if these subgroups were competing theatre companies, cast with traditional stock characters (i.e., the group clown, the group sweet gal or guy, the group leader, etc.). In addition to this basic "spectator on display" format, there are a number of table dancing variations which feature the simultaneous breaking and

upholding of gender norms through "real" and "mimetic" situations of social jeopardy.

Many of the strip clubs in Texas, including Rick's and the Colorado, require their female table dancers to remain at least twelve inches away from their spectators at all times, even though this dictate is not stipulated by statutory law. However, during the course of these performances, this "house rule" is often broken--not by the spectators, but by the dancers. Female table dancers regularly lean their nude torsos across the patrons' faces and chests as far as possible without actually touching them. Some of the performers also massage the necks, chests, and legs of the patrons with their hands while "dancing." Both of these "techniques" clearly present the dancers as "the active partner"--doing sex to male patrons. For, as McWalter complained on the "Geraldo" show and in his essay for the *New York Times*, the spectators are expected to adhere to the "real" rules of these clubs which specify that the men must remain more or less motionless until the completion of these table dancing scenes. According to Watters (owner of Rick's and the Colorado) this design, which includes the breaking of a pseudo rubric, intensifies the thrill experience for the spectators without overstepping the legal boundaries.

The three strip clubs for women which feature table dancing restrict the physical contact between their performers and patrons far more than in the other strip clubs for women. At La Bare, Texan women play table dancing games which include "no-touch" rules in combination with speedos tipping. While most clubs require their patrons to charge the cost of the table dances to their credit cards or to

simply hand the money and tokens to the performers, the La Bare club encourages its patrons to pay the table dancers by placing dollar bills into their underwear. This tipping game features another gender-bender element, best exemplified by the following "personal" experience.

This researcher-participant tried to hand "Kenneth," a La Bare dancer, a twenty dollar bill for a table dance (twenty dollars is the charge for this act at La Bare). "Kenneth" suggested that he give me twenty single dollar bills in return so that I could be "more involved" in the dance through tipping. I agreed. During our act together, Kenneth "teased." Sometimes he paused in his dance to help me with the tipping procedure. Other times he made my performance far more difficult by continuing to move or by stepping back just outside of my reach. At the same time, I also directed some of the action of our scene. While Kenneth danced, I asked him to step back, to turn around, to pose in profile, and to move closer. As we "performed" together, Kenneth explained that twenty single dollar bills in his underwear "looked better for business" than one twenty dollar bill. According to this stripper, continuous acts of patron tipping, along with the display of numerous dollar bills in the dancer's speedos, suggests to the other spectators that this performer is "sought-after" and "wanted."

Kenneth's statements and concerns over this "show and tell" readily contradict Dolan's theory that male strip events for female spectators inevitably limit women to discrete positions of "wanting to be desired," while the male dancers perform the actual roles of "desiring."

At La Bare and elsewhere, female spectators, like their male counterparts, perform *visible* acts of "desiring" which are staged through the tipping games and various other scenes. One aspect of these games foregrounds the dancers as "valued" objects of desire through the exchange of money.

Many of the strip clubs in Montreal offer their female and male patrons an interesting type of sexual "endurance" game in conjunction with table dancing acts. In this city, strippers specialize in spectator "air-nuzzling and "air-kissing" techniques. These provide the strip event patrons with both the satisfactions of a tactile experience and the tease of "no-touch" house rules. During the "air-nuzzling" portions of the table dances, the performers slowly circle the patrons with their lips so close to the spectators' bodies that they can caress the hair, faces, necks, shoulders, and sometimes chests of their stationary partners with their breath. Here, female and male patrons pay for acts in which they must remain motionless while their "dancing" sex partners literally "blow into their ears" as their peers look on. This act of patron "sexual surrender" is played to the hilt, regardless of the sex of the performers or spectators.

Several of the strip clubs in Montreal, as well as Stringfellows Presents Pure Platinum in New York City, offer their male patrons another type of table dancing act which also makes use of a tactile experience in combination with a form of symbolic "teasing." In these clubs, the female dancers remove their costumes and then drape their intimate articles of clothing on the heads and shoulders of the male spectators. It is not unusual to enter the clubs which present these acts

and see dozens of motionless men clustered around tables with bras and panties on their heads. Interestingly, these performing spectators usually do not attempt to remove the items of clothing—but remain instead frozen in their "jeopardy" positions until the dancers finally retrieve their outfits.

A few male strip shows for female spectators, such as those at the Hangar Club and Club 281, occasionally feature this "intimate clothing rack" bit as well. However, unlike their male counterparts, female patrons eventually end up holding the costumes of dancers in their hands or on their laps. In Club 281, female spectators also help the dancers to redress.

The creation of spectator jeopardy positions through the physical contact of "intimate" clothing carries a more powerful charge for male spectators than for female spectators because of the cultural taboos placed on the female body, and then hence on intimate female apparel. While this kind of table dance, in part, reflects the sartorial mapping of gender norms which usually constrains the bodies of women through clothing in various ways, it also presents the female dancers as "freed" from those constraints while the male participants are "bound up" and rendered inert through the touch of the cultural "magic" of those garments.³⁴

The last table dance variation of note is available in all the strip clubs which offer this kind of entertainment. In this version, female and male spectator subgroups hire more than one dancer at a time to perform a table dance. In some instances, each member of a subgroup engages her or his own stripper simultaneously (i.e., a group of

four members hires four performers for one table dance). The exchange of gazes and erotic positionings is extensive. The dancers talk and exchange gazes with each other. They look at the patrons who requested the dances. They look at the other patrons who are looking at other dancers. The spectators watch each other. They watch the specific dancer they have hired. They watch the dancers hired by other group members. And all the spectators and dancers of the small group occasionally look at the spectators and dancers outside of their immediate circle--those other patrons and performers who may or may not be watching them perform as a "company."

The interactions of the subgroups in strip events, particularly those centralized around table dance activities, foreground the ways in which patrons perform their desires for each other and the dancers. Female and male subgroup members are seen everywhere conspicuously sighing together, shaking their heads in unison, rolling their eyes, giggling, and pretending to slide under their tables or off their chairs. They repeatedly exclaim to one another and to the dancers statements such as: "I Can't stand It!" "I Can't take it!" and "I don't believe this is happening." Yet these spectators continue to engage more "clothing rack," "air-nuzzling," "up close and no-touch," and "sexual fumbling" scenes for themselves.

The role of "I can't take it" for both female and male spectators suggests that control issues for striptease patrons may be far less about "dominating" the dancers or being dominated (as is usually theorized), and much more about displays or performances about spectator self-control or the potential lack of it in theatrical situations of

jeopardy. These displays may include aspects of erotic-sexual subordination and domination parts, but these parts are not distributed according to traditional gender roles. Female and male strip event patrons alike play at becoming momentarily overwhelmed (or at risk of becoming overwhelmed) by the thrill situations they both hire and surrender to in order to experience and express desire and arousal.

Patron Masturbation Seat Shows

There is one other kind of spectator "seat show" in strip events that should be addressed here because it usually takes place in the designated audience areas and because it features an interesting play on the "self-control" and "overwhelm" issues just discussed. A few environments, such as Show World in New York City, allow their male patrons to publicly expose themselves and masturbate in their seats as long as they do not have direct physical contact with the dancers or the other spectators. These starring patrons are pleased both by their own physical acts and by the fact that their performances are observed by the dancers and their spectating peers.

However, unlike the unwitting observers of the acts of "sadistic exhibitionists" in "real life," the spectators in certain strip events are encouraged to use patron acts of masturbation for their own spectating pleasures as well. At Show World, spectators point, laugh, and stare at the audience-exhibitionists. They also look for and point out to each

other the reactions of the patrons who appear to be noticing these performances for the first time.

Martin, the former executive manager of Show World, stated that his organization allowed patrons to masturbate during strip shows because their acts ensured greater audiences and publicity for the sex entertainment center. He averred that "guys could never see anything like this in Iowa."³⁵ Show World regulars affirmed Martin's marketing plan. They stated in interview-conversations that the spectator masturbation acts are "just part of the scene" and "the excitement of the show."³⁶

Patron masturbation seat shows can also take place in more sophisticated and sedate environments. "Carol," a dancer at Rick's in Houston, related an anecdote about a wealthy businessman who had figured out a way to feature his own sex acts without ever illegally exposing himself. This patron consistently wore light-colored suits to the strip clubs. When he got up from his seat after watching the entertainment for a period of time, a large stain was usually visible in his crotch area--a stain which would not have been noticeable had he used either a condom or had worn a dark suit. This patron then typically paraded around the audience area a bit in order to exhibit his stained crotch--much to the amusement of his fellow spectators. Following this brief activity, this patron would either reseal himself or depart the premises. Eventually, his performances became so well-known that this spectator was often the focal point of attention whether he was seated or on parade.

While one might interpret the display of male exposure and masturbation in these instances as one more representation of male power and domination symbolized through the "play" of the penis-phallus, there are other possible readings of polemic importance.

Public patron masturbation performances in middle class contemporary strip environments for heterosexuals are relatively rare and random--even at Show World. As noted, other spectators often ridicule these acts through their laughter, pointing, and eyeball-rolling demonstrations. Therefore, the display of the penis in these contexts does not represent social power and authority. On the contrary, this display conflates male sexual desire with depictions of social "excess" in terms of a performance about a public loss of self-control. This display of "excess" also disrupts the traditional cultural laws which censor the exposure of penises even more than they censor the exposure of female genitals. Here, the penis can not be a symbol of social authority. Strip event audience members vicariously identify with and differentiate from the masturbators, not as social and sexual "dominators," but as players who "confess" to being sexually overwhelmed through their breaking of a "last" taboo--the display of their desire through public masturbation.

It must also be noted that male acts of masturbation in these controlled environments are pleasurable *confessions* of sexual overwhelm, not representations of rape. Female dancers in these specific places of performance *actively* solicit male sexual arousal in venues which allow patrons to pleasure themselves as long as they do not otherwise physically impose themselves on their fellow

participants, including the dancers. Patrons play on and experience the loss of self-control and overwhelm through the display of the penis-as they continue to abide by the rules of the house. If they were to break those rules, they would be removed from the clubs and could no longer perform in this game of pleasure and surrender.

Williams insists that the suppression of the "dick" does not in any way solve the sexual problems of patriarchal power. She states:

This feminist critique of explicit pornography fails, however, precisely in its attack on the literal organ of the penis...In attacking the penis we seem to attack the phallic authority that it symbolizes as well. But the tempting conflation of meaning between the two accedes to the impossibility of change.³⁷

Williams insists that "while the physiology of sex is not likely to change, its gendered meanings can."³⁸ Masturbation acts by strip event patrons are, in large part, exciting for their participants precisely because those acts are not absolutely predicated on dominant meanings attached to biological sex, physical display, and sexual performance. In these spectator performances, the organ of the penis is not represented as seamlessly sutured to the construct of the phallus. Instead, the male genitals are "re-engendered" through the erotic sex games of pleasurable overwhelm which include the overt and active sex play of women and the transgression of social authority depicted by the spectator ridicule and enjoyment of these acts.

Stepping into the Limelight: Enter Desirous. . .

Spectators can also star in strip event scenes by temporarily leaving the relative safety of their audience seats and stepping up to, or even onto, the formal stages of the bars, clubs, and theatres. This type of activity offers the spectators obvious "limelight" entrances and exits, which are themselves representative of the transgressive "crossing back and forth" design of these events. There are a number of variations of these kinds of "featured spectator" routines. They include more tipping games as well as "photo shoots," and "mini-dramas." All of these patron performances play with surrender and control positions which subvert the traditional expectations of gender representation.

Tipping Games

Joanna's, Archibald's, J.P.'s, and the downstairs space at the Camelot in Washington D. C. offer male patrons a special "front and center" tipping game. The goal of this game is to tip the single female stripper who dances on a small six by six foot platform in the center of the space. At first glance, this set-up appears to be fairly simple and straightforward, but there are a number of "scare elements" which "up the antes" for the participating spectators.

In order to be a part of this ritual, the spectators are expected to leave their audience seats and approach the stage *one at a time* (sometimes the patrons even neatly line up in front of the stage if the club is particularly crowded). The dancers in Washington D. C. usually strip quickly to complete nudity. The spectators tip the performers by placing their dollar bills into the thigh garters typically worn by the female dancers in our nation's capital. But in this exchange, the spectators are not allowed to tip the dancers, or even to attempt to do so, if the performers are still moving. The strippers can star (and control) individual patrons as "men-in-waiting" who must stand at attention for all to see until the performers deign to recognize them by pausing in their dance acts.

Some of the performers at J.P.'s have added an acrobatic stunt to this "waiting game." This provides their patrons with an extra jolt of jeopardy. While the "men-in-waiting" stand at attention next to the stage, the dancers at J. P.'s often swing by their hands from the horizontal bar placed directly above the stage platform. When the performer swings forward towards the immobile patron, her exposed genitals almost graze his face.

In all of these Washington D. C. strip clubs, the performers signal that they are ready to accept tips by extending the gartered leg to the patron and assuming a momentary, stationary pose. The spectator and the dancer then exchange a few words as the spectator carefully places his bill or bills into the garter. Following this task, the spectator looks up into the eyes of the performer in order to receive her smile and her "thank you." On the rare occasions when a spectator

deviates from this ritual, either by leering or making what the dancer considers to be "rude" comments, the dancer will publicly "punish" the spectator by refusing to smile at him or to say the "thank you"--both of which provide closure for their interaction. The censored tipper is then usually also subject to the ridicule of the other spectators.

One waitress at Joanna's stated that this patron tipping routine is so intimidating to some spectators that they give her money to give to the dancers rather than subject themselves directly to the risks of this show. My male companion for the visits to the Washington D. C. strip clubs also reported that he found the tipping acts "intimidating." He stated that he studied the performances of the other spectators almost as much as he watched the dancers so that he would not "make a fool of himself" during his own acts. He also noted that each time he successfully completed the ritual, he experienced both "relief" and "exhilaration."

The Sugar Shack II in Chicago offers a similar "front and center" tipping set-up for its female spectators. After each dancer performs his strip routine on the main stage, he mounts a small platform which is located directly in front of that stage. This "tipping station" functions in the same manner as the small stages of the D.C. clubs in that it helps to focus the audience's attention on performances of their fellow spectators. The female patrons of the Sugar Shack also line up at the tipping station one by one so that each spectator can enjoy a solo moment in the spotlight as she places her dollar bills in the dancer's G-string and exchanges brief hugs and kisses with him (Fig. 6.11).

In addition to this more or less "traditional" tipping game, the female patrons of the Sugar Shack II can also hire a "caveman ride." To participate in this act, female patrons can request and pay the male hosts (ushers and waiters) to physically carry them in their arms from the audience seats to the tipping station. Once at the tipping station, the male hosts also join the line and wait in turn so that they can hold their respective female patrons aloft for all to see while the women tip and caress the dancer (Fig. 6.12). Sometimes there are so many requests for these scenes that the club uses a "traffic" manager, complete with a walkie-talkie, in order to prevent accidents.

While the caveman ride may refer to sexual surrender through "being carried off" motifs, it also indicates the extent to which female economic control over sex acts can be "carried." In this scene, women hire "sex-slave-bearers" and enjoy two male sexual partners simultaneously--one who cradles them in his arms and another whom they kiss and caress.

Big Alice's in Peoria also offers its female spectators the opportunity to take part in center-stage tipping games. Some of these resemble the air-kissing and air-nuzzling routines practiced by the table dancers in Montreal. At Big Alice's, the female spectators who wave the most money are invited onto the stage one at a time by the M.C. Each spectator is paired with a male stripper who directs the female patron to either stand against the wall that backs the platform stage or to lie down on the floor of the stage. The dollar bills which the patron has proffered to the dancer are placed all over her body--between her breasts and thighs, in strategic pockets, and even in her

mouth. The male dancer slowly removes those bills with his lips. He takes the active sex role, but at the same time, this tipping game underscores the fact that he is being paid by the female patron for each caress that he administers (Fig. 6.13).

Spectator thrill experiences created by the tipping games in both the Sugar Shack II and Big Alice's are structured upon the same kinds of jeopardy positions found in the "on stage" tipping scenes in the strip events for men. The "genital Jane swing," "the caveman ride," and the "dollar bill dip" are, once more, experiences and acts in which the consumer pays for the role of being overwhelmed, or potentially overwhelmed, by the subject-object of desire.

Photo Shoots

"Photo shoots" are available as part of some strip events for female and male spectators alike. Flash Dancers, New York Dolls, and Show World in New York City, as well as Cabaret Showgirls in Montreal are clubs that feature this participation experience for their male patrons. Chippendales New York, Chippendales Los Angeles, and the Sugar Shack II offer this scene for female patrons.

In the clubs for men, photo shoots generally follow the performances of the featured strippers. Male patrons are invited to have their pictures taken with the starring dancers for a fee of five to ten dollars per polaroid. The "shoot" usually takes place in the lobby spaces of the strip clubs and theatres or in specially marked-off areas.

A chair and camera are set up in these places and the spectators gather around. This activity usually draws a substantial crowd of onlookers who watch a much smaller group of their peers actually participate in "the shoot." Each patron who wishes to be featured in this act individually steps out of the crowd and into the lights of the makeshift photo studio to pose with the dancer.

During these acts, patrons can request "to be shot" in specific poses with the performers. Many of these positions have become so standardized that patrons ask for them using a common vocabulary (i.e., "a lap pose," "a wide lap pose," "breasts on the head," "head on the breasts," "ear muffs," etc.). Because of this standardization, there is an additional pressure on the spectators to perform these positions "correctly." In other words, the performing spectators are always at risk for making a "mistake" in their own literal positionings (Fig. 6.14).

While some of these poses situate the strippers in the laps of the patrons in various Penthouse-like "spread" shots, many other positions place the dancers behind the patrons and in poses which suggest parodies of stereotypical male sexual fetishes (i.e., the dancer holds her breasts on top of a patron's head or manipulates them to cover his ears). However, the final design of these poses ultimately rests with the dancers, not with the patrons. At the same time, the camera person controls the length of time the spectators remain in the spotlight as well as the final framing of their scenes.

There is an odd, but notable addendum to these "naughty picture" acts. Several regulars at Show World in New York City carry small photograph albums around with them. One of the regulars

interviewed for this study explained that his album chronicled eight years of these shoots. He stated that he carried the photographs with him so that he and others could examine his "personal growth." He insisted that each time he had his picture taken with a featured dancer, he "challenged himself" to become "more daring" in terms of the type of poses and intimate touching he requested.

In between the exotic dance acts, the porno films, and the live photo shoots, patrons can review and compare each other's sexual performances through their respective strip event pictorial histories. These pictorial histories are comprised of "stills" which capture scenes and stories about male spectator desires represented through "being seen" roles and positions of potential sexual overwhelm.

The formal photo shoot sessions for female patrons of strip events are designed, like the outward images of these places of performance, to replicate "the values of a Broadway show." These sessions usually take place on the main stages of the clubs and theatres at the end of the strip shows. However, Chippendales New York sponsors a pre-show picture-taking scene as well.

Following the main events, the women in these clubs are told that they can have their photographs taken with the leading male dancers for a fee of five to ten dollars. The female spectators gather around the stage to watch some of their peers step into the limelight, one at a time, to pose with the strippers (Fig. 6.15).

The Chippendales New York pre-show photo shoot features a different, but complementary design. Here, the female spectators are greeted by three bare-chested male hosts as they enter into the main

space of the club. Two of the hosts offer to pose with each spectator, while the third takes the picture. The patrons are then directed or escorted to their seats where they can watch other spectators performing their "grand entrances."

All of these acts for women have the appearance of "fans" getting their pictures taken with film or rock stars because the male dancers and female patrons usually pose together in "arms around the shoulder" positions. Nevertheless, while these photo shoots deal with "mainstreamed" material, the female patrons of strip events can still star in and obtain "naughty" pictures.

Most strip events for women allow the spectators to take photographs of the show and the various activities with their own cameras (the Apollon and Club 281 are exceptions because the performers strip to complete nudity). Many female patrons spend much of their time taking pictures of each other interacting with the dancers. Part of this game is to capture and star one's peers and the dancers in "compromising" positions--which, like the formal polaroid shoots for the male patrons, may be both explicit and parodistic (Fig. 6.16).

"Capturing camera" games can also include genital shots of the male dancers. Some male performers make it a practice to "steal" cameras away from spectators in order to take shots of their own genitals on the stage. The dancers usually accomplish this feat, without really exposing themselves, by angling their underwear in such a manner that the eye of the camera sees the "object-symbol of desire," but not the audience. During this act, the camera owner is also often

on the stage. She becomes part of the scene because the audience members and dancer focus on her response to the genital snap shot.

The framing of this act again represents the penis, not as an absolute symbol of power and authority, but as both an object for female pleasure and as a symbol of social taboo. The "presentation" of penises by the male dancers in strip events for women (as with the patron masturbators in the clubs for men) suggests transgressions of cultural law, not the upholding of it. In this situation, the dancers "steal" cameras and then take "sneak" and "improper exposures" of their genitals. The taboo scripting of these acts is further underlined by the performances of the M.C.s who pretend to "yell" at the dancers to make them stop their "naughty" activities.

The larger frame of the strip show designates the male body as an object of desire specifically for the pleasure of women. In this context, then, the unseen but "captured" penises locked up in the cameras of female spectators become symbolic "extensions" of female pleasures and desires. These symbolic "extensions" of female sexual desires are packaged so that they can be taken home with the patrons. And, once "developed," the women can do what they like with them-- they can view the "exposures" alone, share them with their friends, and fantasize about them in different situations and positions. Or, if the "exposures" are "underdeveloped," or not sexually pleasing in some other way, the women have the option of discarding them.

Once again, the object of this foray into the symbolism of the penis in strip events is not to degrade the male participants or male anatomy, but to grapple with sexual representations, dominant and

non-dominant, in terms of women's pleasure--instead of simply ignoring it, pretending it does not exist, or deciding that any manifestation of sexual pleasure by women is really some trick created by the patriarchy in order to keep females in check. Such a consideration of women's desires is imperative to an examination and realignment of the cultural sutures (and the theories that perpetuate them) which bind sexual pleasure for both women and men to social oppression.

Mini-Dramas

A few strip clubs offer their spectators leading roles in more prolonged sex games which often take the form of "mini-dramas." In this sampling of strip events, male patrons usually played extended parts in playlets which featured them in "action fight scenes." Female patrons, on the other hand, were most often starred in "courting scenes." While the themes of these scenarios obviously refer to traditional sex roles, the scripts of the actual mini-dramas juxtapose those themes with "gender-bender" character parts for the audience-participants.

"Fight scene" mini-dramas for male patrons are usually presented in conjunction with the "lady wrestler" or "foxy boxing" matches featured at some of the strip clubs for men. At Goldfingers in New York, male spectators "bid" to become the "coach-managers" of female hot oil wrestlers. It is not unusual for these roles to go for two or

three hundred dollars apiece. Once the winners have secured their parts, they are required to follow the directions of the "Ringmistress" who coaches the male participants in their roles.

While these patron parts are roles of "management," they are also "written" as "service" characters for the female dancers who are cast in the "action" parts. As "managers," the men are expected to coach and encourage the "lady wrestlers." They are also required to perform the tasks of waterboys and masseuses during the play. Not only are these patrons "at risk" for the chastisement of the Ringmistress and the dancer-fighters if they do not meet the standards set for their roles, but they are also subject to the continual scrutiny and suggestions of their fellow audience members, who are encouraged to behave as if they were at a "real" fight.

Mini-drama "courting scenes" for starring female spectators actually replicate the strip event in miniature. At Chippendales New York and Chippendales Los Angeles, the biggest spenders of the evening are often invited onto the stages by the M.C. to participate in these playlets. The featured female patrons are usually seated in special chairs that are placed in the middle of the formal performance areas. There, they watch the male dancers strip directly in front of them. The simplest of these scenes consists of one female patron seated center stage who watches a male dancer strip for her as he lip-synchs and mimes a love song. The more elaborate versions of this drama include mock candle light dinners and bondage games.

Both Chippendales New York and Chippendales Los Angeles feature candle light dinner routines for their patrons. In this mini-

drama, a female spectator and a male dancer play a couple out on a "romantic" date. This couple is seated at a table decked with candles, champagne, and wine glasses. The male dancer is dressed in a tuxedo. He pours his companion wine, stares into her eyes, and then finally stands up and strips. During the disrobing section, the dancer often pauses to caress his partner. Depending on the stripper performing this role, these "caresses" can be gentle and sensual touches or parodies of aggressive male behavior with grabs at the patron's body, heavy bumps and grinds, and even candle stick stroking which suggests masturbation (Fig. 6.17).

In addition to the love song serenade and the candle light dinner acts, Chippendales New York also presented a "bondage" drama in its *One Night of Sin* show which featured a relatively large cast of players. This act begins with three female spectators seated in chairs in the middle of the stage. One male stripper performs for them. He moves between the women, stares into their eyes, sits on their laps, strokes their bodies, and strokes his own body. Some of the female patrons observed during several different viewings of this scene sat quietly by and appeared to allow the male dancers to take control of their interactions. Other female participants actively caressed the dancers and also directed and sometimes limited their actions (i.e., one woman playfully slapped the hand of a male performer who was pretending to lift up her skirt).

After the lead dancer completes the first part of this routine, three other male strippers, wearing different colored bikini underwear, join him. They each dance over to a seated spectator and perform in

front of her. The male dancers then wrap crepe paper streamers around the bodies of each of the three women so that they appear to be "tied" to their chairs. The men continue to perform for the "bound" female patrons (Fig. 6.18). The drama finally ends with kisses between the parties as the women are "released."

The use of "paper bondage" in this mini-drama foregrounds the "mutual consent" necessary for the playing of all erotic sex games in strip events for both women and men. To be "in bondage" is to be controlled and therefore to be placed in jeopardy. However, the bonds of paper can be easily broken by the "tied up" participants. In the particular scene described above, if the male sex and courting show isn't appealing--within the strip event spectacle, women can simply get up and walk away. Sexual choice and consent is part of the striptease ritual for all participants even though women and men play with aspects of cultural surrender roles which are usually delegated to females.

Perhaps what is even more notable in all of these Chippendales mini-drama acts, from the simplest to the most elaborate, is that the female participants are conspicuously represented on stage in the process of spectating sex acts that have been specifically created with the idea of women's pleasure in mind. That is, all of these acts actually *stage* scenes of female looking and desiring. As Dolan insists at the conclusion of her essay, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," and in reference to some of the current imperatives for a feminist sexual politics--"The aim is not to look like men, but to look at all."³⁹

Games of Induction

Most strip events generate additional mimetic instabilities for the pleasure of their patrons through one other element of production that also deals with spectator games. In *Interaction Ritual*, Goffman posits that every social setting is subject to a "ceremonial order." The ceremonial order is the expected and agreed upon exchanges in a predefined communal set-up in which all the participants "render themselves accessible and usable for a particular type of communication or activity."⁴⁰

In strip events, female and male patrons not only star in the scenes of gender slippage which they actively initiate and most often purchase, they are also "at risk" to star in certain scenes and to watch others star in scenes which are structured upon various "games of induction." These games make up a large part of "the ceremonial order" of most of these events.

Patrons are in jeopardy for coercion into "center stage" performances by dancers, M.C.s, and other spectators. These scenes can take place in the audience areas as well as on the mainstages. Even though such activities are often designed to look as if the spectators are "forced" into these games, the spectators actually indicate their consent to participate through their continued presence in the events. The "forcing-surrender" aspect is part of the theatrical jeopardy which creates patron pleasure.

"Induction Games" Initiated by Performers

In the tradition of Gypsy Rose Lee, who used to invade her Broadway audiences to kiss and powder the heads of bald men,⁴¹ a few contemporary female and male strip events also feature dancers who stalk the audience spaces without direct spectator requests. These performer "invasions" are not limited to the front rows. The agility of the performers, their choice of the spectator-participants, and the general lay-out of the environments are the determining factors that decide which audience members will find themselves "on stage."

Beefcakes U.S.A. at Danielle's, Escapes on Long Island, and the Satin Angels of Chippendales in New York City have all presented "invading dancers" as part of the design of their shows (Fig. 6.19). At Danielle's, Beefcake U.S.A. dancers actively sought out female customers who either tried to hide or who were seated in the furthest reaches of the space. The dancers simply climbed over the tables, chairs, and even other patrons until they reached their selected partners. Johnny Rotten, a stripper who sometimes dances with Beefcakes U.S.A., stated that he makes a considerable sum of money from these supposedly "unwilling" spectator stars who tip him "to go away."⁴² During the "couple striptease nights" presented at Escapes in 1990, female and male dancers climbed stairs, scaled wall speakers, and maneuvered across tables in order to reach the patrons of their choice. The current male strip shows for all-female audiences continue this same rite. Some of the Satin Angels dancers, the female

exotic dancers who performed midnight shows targeted for male patrons at Chippendales New York during the 1990 season, made a point of traveling throughout the audience space to gyrate in front of and even on male patrons, regardless of whether those patrons proffered dollar bills. One male spectator stated that he found the acts "very sexy," but at the same time "disturbing" and "intimidating" because "you can't do anything."⁴³

The New Paris Revue for men in New York City, presents a more unusual variation of this invading dancer design. In this event, strip shows alternate with showings of porno movies. Almost no tipping takes place during the main stage strip routines. Instead, the dancers make their money by selling "private strip shows" which are performed in the small enclosed cubicles that line one side of the theatre. The process of selling and purchasing these "private" strip acts becomes a type of induction rite.

During the film excerpts, the strippers of the New Paris Revue walk around the audience area and actively solicit business for their private shows. They typically ask individual patrons the question, "Are you ready yet?" The question is posed in a manner that is calculated to place the spectators "on the spot." Many of the dancers address their potential patrons quite loudly. The stance adopted by some of the performers implies a public challenge to the virility of the male spectators. The question itself suggests that the men should be "turned on" and "ready" *by now* for a private strip show. Some of the strippers also incorporate additional comments and jokes about male sexual arousal into their patter. They direct these to specific patrons in

front of the group. And, finally a few performers actually physically pull patrons out of their seats and "drag" them into the cubicles. A 1990 *Screw* review of this club warns potential patrons that the strippers here are "predatory" and ends by lamenting, "Abandon hope, all ye who enter here."⁴⁴

However, according to several of the dancers of the New Paris Revue, most of their patrons are regulars. These regulars go through the same rituals of coercion each time they come to this theatre, because this game is a featured part of the ceremonial order. Interestingly, two of the strippers also noted that many of their patrons are members of orthodox religious groups. This makes some sense in the context of a setting which provides sex scenes predicated on mimetic inductions.

Performers can also initiate scenes of induction which display the spectators directly on the main stages of the strip clubs and theatres. One of the most amusing examples of these scenes took place during a "couple's striptease night" at Escapes. One female and one male spectator, who were strangers to one another, were selected by the M.C. to sing a song titled, *Eat Me*. These two patrons were escorted onto the stage by the strippers. The lyrics of the song were then "fed" to them by the M.C. As one may imagine, the verses of this duet lauded cunnilingus and fellatio. This couple sang the *Eat Me* song to the very last word, even though they both later stated that they "nearly died of embarrassment."

Chippendales New York features a different type of gimmick for its "on stage" performer-spectator induction scenes. This club

continues to begin its shows with audience raffle games. All patrons are automatically entered into two raffle contests by the numbers on their ticket stubs. The "winner" of the first raffle game is escorted onto the stage by one or two male hosts. She is then surrounded by a group of male performers who dance with her. During this scene, the male dancers eventually break into heavy bump and grind moves with the patron situated in their midst (Fig. 6.20).

There are two "performance" versions for the second raffle contest winner. In the earlier variation, the winning patron was escorted onto the stage by the male hosts and was steered directly to a bare-chested waiter who was lying prone and motionless on the floor. Two tickets to a future Chippendales show were attached to the crotch of his black spandex pants. The winner was directed to remove the tickets from the waiter's crotch using only her mouth. The male hosts held her arms behind her to make sure that she did not "cheat." In the most recent version of this "raffle dip," the M.C. tells the prize winner that the free tickets to Chippendales have been attached to the crotch of the show's only male "virgin." The female participant is encouraged to "get the tickets any way she can." In all of the instances observed, the female patrons in this leading role basically chased the "virgin" around the stage and "tackled" him to get the tickets (Fig. 6.21).

Games of Induction Initiated by Spectators

Female and male striptease spectators are also at risk for being "coerced" into the spotlight by their fellow spectators. Patrons can hire assorted scenes and starring roles for their spectating peers by either purchasing these "gifts" in advance of the actual strip event attended or by purchasing them in an *ad hoc* fashion while the event is in progress.

In most male strip shows for women, patrons can engage spontaneous sex scenes for their friends by waving money over the heads of their companions (Fig. 6.22). These companions are then automatically kissed, hugged, caressed, sat on, or even danced with by the male strippers who retrieve the tips. At the Sugar Shack II, this same gesture can hire male hosts to carry the inducted peers to the tipping station in scenes of "the caveman ride." Female and male table dances can also be hired for one's friends in a similar manner in the clubs which feature those activities. While the gifting spectator has the pleasure of watching a friend or friends undergo an experience of jeopardy, that spectator is usually also incorporated into the same scene because the larger group watches her or him watch the inductee(s). At the same time, the spectator-initiator of any induction act is always at risk (accessible and usable) to become the centerpiece of someone else's hired drama.

Spectators who arrange for their companions to become stars of erotic scenes which take place on the formal stages of these clubs usually do so in conjunction with celebration events such as birthdays,

anniversaries, weddings and divorces. These types of patron participation acts are often hired in advance through the reservation process. The Chippendales's candle light dinner and bondage dramas as well as the dollar dips of Big Alice's can all be ordered as prearranged gifts. There are also some other scenes which have been more specifically created for these kinds of subgroup parties.

Escapes featured an erotic "wedding" cake eating contest for those who were celebrating their impending marriages. All of the bachelors and bachelorettes of the evening were herded together and trouped on stage by the female and male strippers. They were "made" to eat large individual cakes in the shapes of giant breasts and penises. The Satin Angel show at Chippendales featured a scene in which a groom-to-be was "forced" to practice for his wedding day by participating in a mock wedding rehearsal number with an exotic dancer for a bride. At the end of the routine, "the groom" was shackled with chains to a chair on stage. His "bride" stripped out of her wedding gown right in front of him.

At Chippendales Los Angeles, a "birthday girl" was "kidnapped" from her audience seat and held hostage on stage by gangster-strippers. She was finally "rescued" by policemen-strippers who carried her off in handcuffs, while the M.C. mused out loud about the "birthday present" she was about to receive backstage. At Big Alice's, three women who were celebrating different events, including one birthday, were cajoled onto the stage by their friends and the M.C. They were told to remove a male stripper's G-string together (behind a large towel) using just their teeth. When the women had accomplished

this task, they were directed to have a tug-of-war with the dancer's G-string, again using only their teeth. The "winner" of this contest was eventually awarded the dancer's G-string to take home (Fig. 6.23).

Many of the female and male spectator induction scenes described in the above section produce "risk" positions for their participants through the random or chance elements of the games which select the performing patrons. Since strip events ostend the process of spectatorship, these patron "thrill scenes" seem to concretize Paul Willemen's formulation: "when the scopic drive is brought into focus, the viewer also runs the risk of becoming the object of the look."⁴⁵ These games of coercion also subvert traditional gender roles because both female and male actants participate as the initiators of sex acts as well as sex act inductees.

The sampling of striptease spectator games discussed in this chapter does reflect aspects of traditional gender role representation. Many of these games for female audiences involve "story" scenes with elaborate narratives. Many deal with sex and the erotic through humor or parody. And most of these scenes eschew the type of explicit sexual representation found in some of the strip events for men (e.g., formal acts of lap-dancing, patron masturbation, and formal photo shoot "spread shots"). Nevertheless, most strip events for women encourage a certain amount of "aggressive" sexual behavior and overt expression which are still at odds with the current social norms. In these venues, female participants are often more physically *active* than their male

counterparts. Because men's bodies in mainstream culture are not fetishized in the way women's bodies are, women can also play a greater number of sex games which use the entire body of the male as a sex object, rather than being limited to just certain parts. Since most of these games for women involve tipping procedures (the exchange of money for sex) the traditional gendered "marketplace" is both refigured and highlighted.

At the same time, while the male patrons of a few strip clubs can participate in "explicit" sex games, they are usually more restricted in terms of their own physical behavior than are the women. Rather than stereotypical aggressive expressions of sexual desire, most contemporary strip environments for men interestingly include and sometimes even emphasize an outwardly "passive" or "surrender" role decorum for their male patrons. Strip event spectator games and scenes for both female and male participants play on mimetic experiences of self-control and pleasurable sexual overwhelm through acts which overtly combine the positions of "looking" with those of "being seen." Since the primary elements of these sex games are neither constructed out of neat binary sets of identifications nor polarized sets of sexual symbols, the traditional meanings usually attached to sexual identifications and symbols (including female and male anatomy) are often redefined through the framing of the strip events' games and rituals. This "redefining of the terms" through the process of spectacle is not anchored upon simple reversals, because again, none of the acts and roles for female and male participants are informed by a structuralist design.

Ultimately, women and men patronize strip events and play in the scenes and games offered to them because they find pleasure in doing so. In these places of performance, the pleasure for both female and male participants is not based on theoretical positions of total control, but is derived from the mimetic uncertainty that is carefully orchestrated in terms of all aspects of the strip events, including the roles of the spectators.



Fig. 6.1

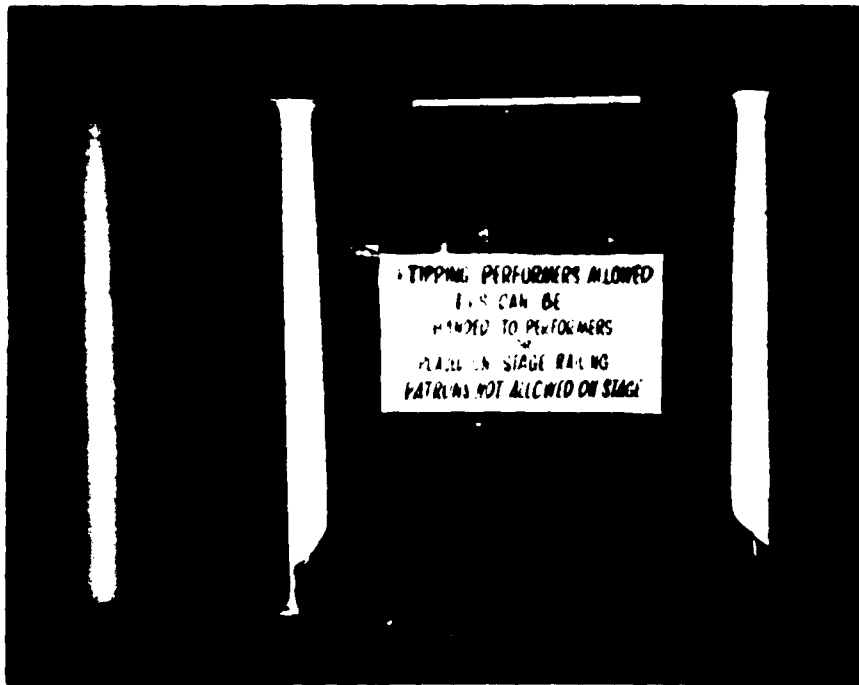


Fig. 6.2



Fig. 6.4



Fig. 6.8



Fig. 6.9



Fig. 6.11



Fig. 6.12



Fig. 6.13



*Marilyn
+ Bill
+ Mary
+ John*

Fig. 6.14

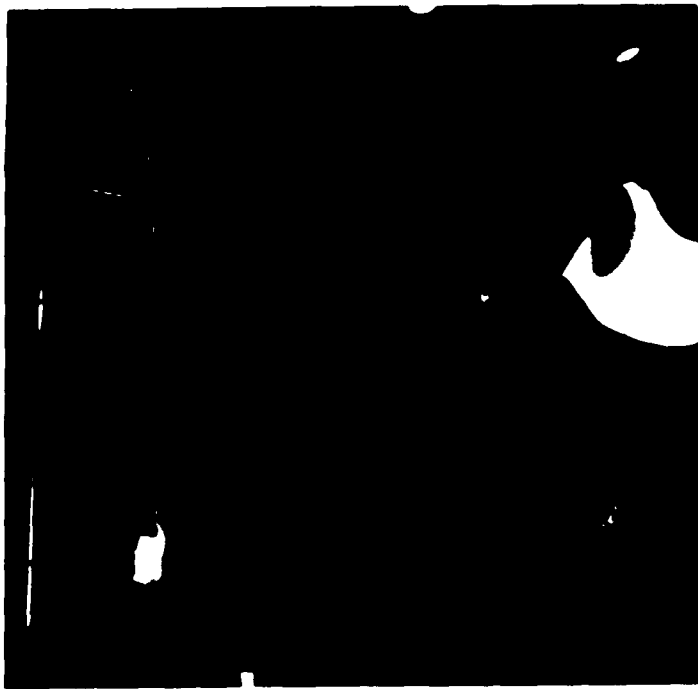


Fig. 6.15



Fig. 6.16

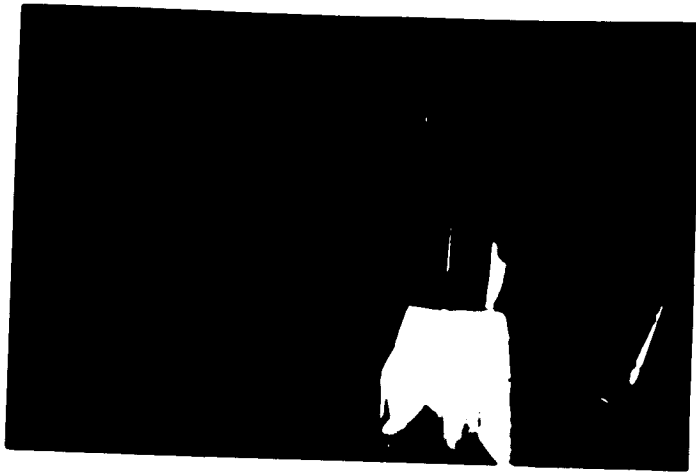


Fig. 6.17

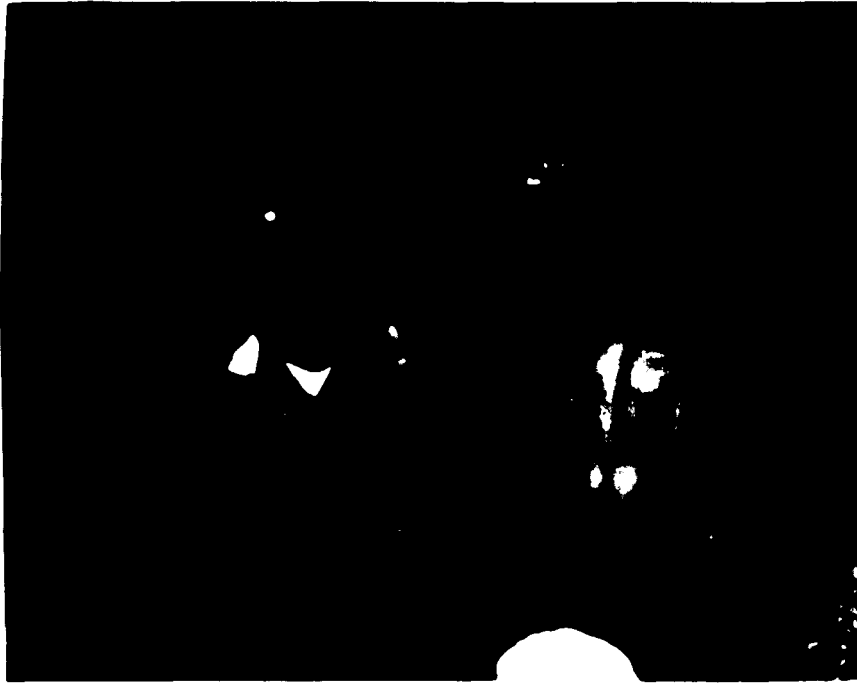


Fig. 6.18



Fig. 6.19

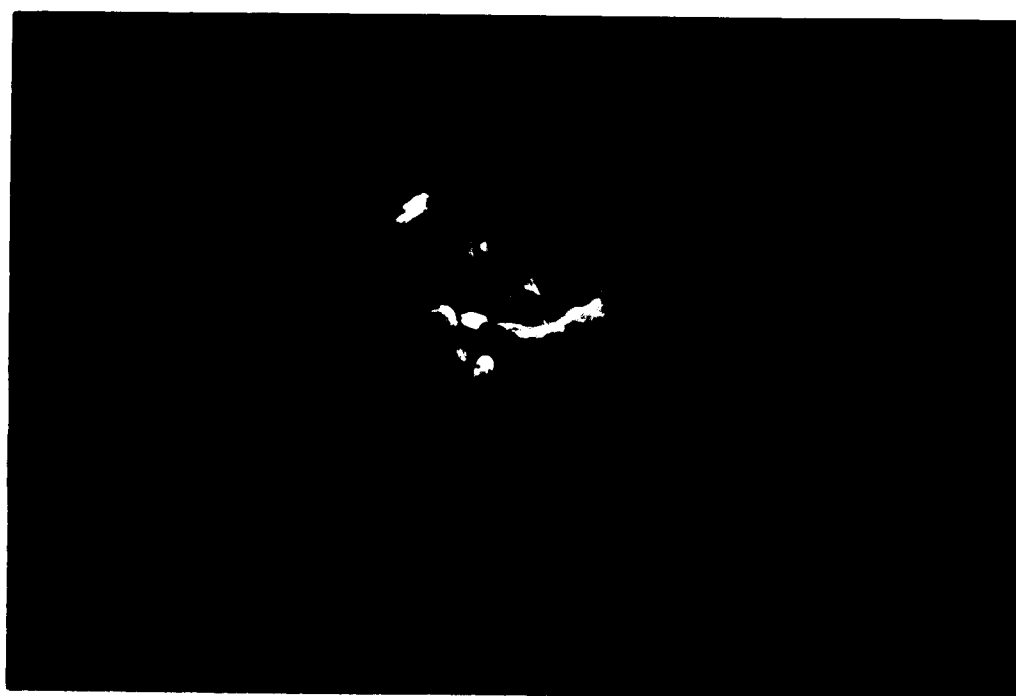


Fig. 6.20

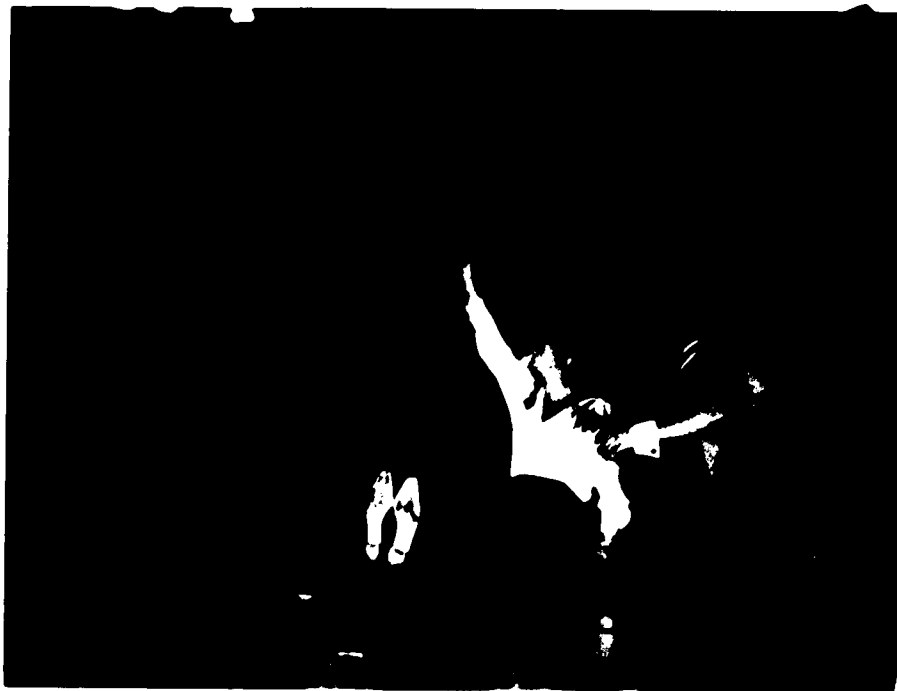


Fig. 6.21



Fig. 6.22



Fig. 6.23

NOTES

¹For example see Ben-Shitta, 34-35; Boles, 193, 195; Harrison and Dragu, 43-44, 81, 139; Dressel and Petersen, "Gender Roles, Sexuality, and the Male Strip Show," 157; idem, "Equal Time For Women," 200-201; Salutin, 20; Earl Wilson, "Last Night with Earl Wilson: Strips for Ladies," *New York Post*, 1 July 1981, 44; N. Ryder, *Sin City* (New York: Nautilus Books Inc., 1990), 41.

²Ryder, 41.

³Author interview-conversations with dancers, club owners, managers and patrons. See also Boles, 192-193.

⁴"Chippendale's Stung With Suit," *New York Post*, 8 February 1989, 9.

⁵Hal Davis, "Model 'Squashed' by Male Stripper Wins Suit," *New York Post*, 10 November 1990, 5.

⁶Sammi Amberson (one-time male strip show patron), interview-conversation with author, April 1989, New York City.

⁷Boles, 195.

⁸Jay Bildstein, "How to Own, Manage, Run or Even Dance in a Topless Bar," St. Moritz Hotel, sponsored by the Learning Annex, 1 June 1992.

⁹This aspect was discussed by almost all female and male dancers, club owners, managers and patrons. See also Boles, 136-137, 225, 237.

¹⁰Victoria Hodgetts, "Reporter Tries Burlesque: I'll Cry Tomorrow But I'll Strip Tonight," *Village Voice*, 8 March 1976, 108-109.

¹¹Keith McWalter, "Couch Dancing," *New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 6 December 1987, 138.

¹²Seph Weene, "Venus," in *Heresies* 3, no. 4 (1981): 36.

¹³"Roxanne" (exotic dancer at the Doll House currently called New York Dolls), interview-conversation with author, June 1990, New York City.

¹⁴Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 65.

¹⁵Ibid.; See also similar discussion in Dolan, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 59-64.

¹⁶Dolan, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 60.

¹⁷Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 79.

¹⁸Ibid., 64.

¹⁹Dolan, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 61.

²⁰[Sophie Ben-Shitta], "Susan of Screw Interview with Sophie of *Mentertainment*, Part I," *Mentertainment*, June 15-July 15, 1992, 34-35.

²¹Nelson Foote, "Sex as Play," *Social Problems* 1 (April 1954): 161.

²²Robert Watters, interview-conversation with author, 10 April 1990, Houston, Texas.

²³Susan quoted in Ben-Shitta, 36.

²⁴Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), 297.

²⁵Robert Stoller, *Sexual Excitement: The Dynamics of Erotic Life* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 21; cited in Hartsock, 170.

²⁶Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 269.

²⁷Ibid., 268; See also Schechner, *The End of Humanism* (New York: Performing Arts Journal, 1982), 28-29; and Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 114.

²⁸Goffman builds his general theory of thrill and action on Balint's concept of the "thrill." Balint, 23-24; cited in Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 197.

29Harmony Theatre, New York City, 28 May 1990.

30Flash Dancers, New York City, 6 April 1991.

31"Dominique" (owner-manager of the Harmony Theatre, New York City), interview-conversation with author, 28 May 1990, New York City; Annie Sprinkle, interview-conversation with author, 17 July 1990, New York City; and Sprinkle, conversation with author, December 1991, Dixon Place, New York City.

32Harmony Theatre house rules as explained by Dominique in interview-conversation with author. The author also noted the adherence to these rubrics during her participation in the strip events at the Harmony, 28 May 1990.

33Trinity Lopez, featured exotic dance act, 10:30 p.m. show, Triple Treat Theatre, Show World, New York City, 3 November 1990.

34See Steele on the erotic appeal of women's undergarments in "Clothing and Sexuality," 55- 59. Steele states that "the more intimate the connection between body and clothes, the sexier the clothes will be. In a sense, the sexual power and charm of the body "rub off" onto the clothes." Steele also calls underclothes "secret garments" (56).

35Ron Martin, interview-conversation with author 18 July 1990, New York City.

36"King" and "Eddy" (Show World "regulars"), interview-conversations with author, 2 June 1990, New York City.

37Williams, 266.

38Ibid., 267.

39Dolan, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 64.

40Goffman, *Interaction Ritual*, 169.

41Lee, 230, 296-297. Gypsy Rose Lee also joked about the importance of her audience-interactions with bald-headed men during her strip acts by stating that she "built a career on heads like that." Lee quoted in Jack Hamilton, "Gypsy Rose Lee: Dowager Stripper," *Look*, 22 February 1966, 62.

⁴²Johnny Rotten, telephone interview-conversation with author, 4 May 1990.

⁴³Danny Rogovin (patron of Satin Angels), interview-conversation with author, July 1990, New York City.

⁴⁴Capsule review of the New Paris Revue, "Naked City: The Consumer's Guide to Erotic Entertainment," *Screw*, 28 May 1990, 23.

⁴⁵Paul Willemen, "Letter to John," *Screen 21*, no. 2 (Summer 1980): 56; quoted in Kaite, 152.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

ACTS OF DESIRE: SEXUAL AGENCY AND SOCIAL SUTURES

...the instabilities around male sexual identity, performance and 'equipment' are given space in a discourse which purports to empower men. . . This disturbs claims that pornography 'silences' women, and it can be argued that pornographic machinery speaks . . . of women's sexuality."

—Berkeley Kaite¹

In our culture, female desires and sexualities are usually theorized and represented as being pristinely "under cultural control." At the same time, dominant male sexual desires are depicted as being "intrinsic" and not subject to social mediation. However, the strip events discussed in this study not only foreground the extent to which *both* female and male sexual desires are designed and managed by cultural dictates, but also that neither women nor men respond *passively* to those rubrics and conditions. Within the transgressive 'poetics' of the strip show, depictions of female and male sexual

interests take the form of active, dialogic conversations with the cultural imposition of sexual "normalcy"--and this includes the narrative of mainstream heterosexuality as a wholly "natural" entity.

Contemporary female and male strip events represent heterosexual erotic desires as a form of theatrical play. This play is visibly structured upon an array of elaborate ground rules and often unusual accessories gleaned from both the social and mimetic realms. The "formal elements" of striptease performance discussed in the preceding chapters depict sexual desire as "sleaze," "alien-exotic," "hidden and forbidden," "show biz," "opulence," "capricious," "comical," "absurd," "whimsical," and even as "deadly," but never as commonplace or as "natural." These signifiers of "unnatural" desire reproduce and magnify the ambivalent, inconsistent, and contradictory aspects of female and male sex roles and sex play which exist in everyday experience, but which have been rendered unreadable and unspeakable through the pressures of the hegemony, and unfortunately, sometimes through the very polemical arguments which seek to relieve those pressures.

Erotic ambivalence or uncertainty is not only produced through such individual, "unnatural" signifiers of desire, but through the representation of desire as "heteroglossic" exaggeration and excess, as overflowing surplus. In strip events desire and thrill experiences are predicated on schemas of erotic "Possibilities," rather than on versions of Freudian-Lacanian "Lack," which assume the interplay of diametric erotic positions of power and surrender. Desire in these pornographic-erotic representations is depicted and experienced through acts of

continuous confrontations and negotiations between traditional and transgressive socio-sexual symbols and positionings.²

The roles and games played by the spectators of these events perhaps most clearly "embody" the conversations of desire-excess. The performances of striptease patrons in the tipping rituals discussed in the last chapter do not stand for the simple commodification and exploitation of the performers. In these events, patrons not only purchase and consume views of the dancers; they also purchase the roles, games, and rituals through which they, too, can be viewed and consumed by others. The jeopardy scenes available for female and male spectators of strip events concretize the proposition of writers such as Kaite, Freedman, Stoller, and Zizek that sexual-erotic seeing and being seen roles operate in concert with one another in these circumstances, rather than in polarization.

The performances of the spectators in strip events support the argument that theoretical constructions of a position of "seeing-control-subjectivity-desirer-economic privilege-power" as opposed to one of "being seen-sexual surrender-objectification-being desired-economic subordination-powerlessness" simply do not "match up" in neat, one-to-one, binary correspondences in sexual-erotic play. In these scenes of desire and jeopardy, the aspect of socio-sexual "role reversal," evident in both female and male strip events, does not restate the designated boundaries of gender through discrete positions of desire and control, because it functions as an additional element of mimetic and erotic instability which resists the dominant discourse. This overall design in turn highlights the traditionally suppressed or overlooked bi-

gender and cross-gender identifications that occur through sexual-erotic play and representations. Since positions of seeing and being seen in sexual-erotic play are not absolutely connected to the respective positions of control and surrender, it is possible to theorize that positions of "desiring," "wanting to be desired," and "being desired" are likewise interwoven and inseparable for female and male participants alike in heterosexual contexts--even though these parts may be played out in forms which reflect the indoctrination of cultural gender norms.

As many spectator activities in the strip events indicate, the presumable power position of "the desirer" also contains aspects of the sexual surrender role. Perhaps the clearest examples of this are again found in the spectator tipping games. At first glance, acts of patron tipping appear to represent "desire" as social and erotic control over others through economic privilege. As Harrison implies in her descriptions of Club 281 for female spectators, patrons playing the parts of "big spenders" can actively select multiple sex partners during the course of the strip event.³

Male socio-sexual control of females *vis a vis* economic privilege is, of course, a far more common cultural phenomenon. It is interesting to note, then, that females and males who spend conspicuous amounts of money as part of their strip event participation are frequently referred to by dancers, club owners, and fellow patrons, not simply as "big spenders," but also as "suckers." Watters, in an interview-conversation for this study, and Bildstein in his lecture for the Learning Annex both wondered out loud in amazement why their

respective businesses thrive on patrons who pay out so much money to the dancers for what seems to be relatively "little" in terms of traditional ideas about sexual satisfaction.⁴

The confusion or disjuncture, with regard to strip event "big spenders" acts and their relationship to patron pleasure and "satisfaction," is precisely because the spending of money in these contexts does not solely represent desire as economic control. Big spender performances also represent desire as admiration for the acts of the dancer as well as desire as a confession of being swept away or "taken" by the stripper, who is simultaneously maintaining and thwarting traditional gender norms.

As the reader can "see," the position of the desired sex object in these events is an unstable entity as well. Weene, in her article "Venus," insists that the thrill she got from stripping was the thrill of "power" because as a stripper she was "being sexy on purpose, the initiator, not the victim."⁵ Rosalind Coward, in her discussion of sex object roles in romantic fiction, points out that such parts frequently render the male desirers "helpless slaves of passion."⁶

Berkeley Kaite is more radical in her analysis of the role of "the desired" in the essay, "Body Double: Transgression is Law." According to Kaite, being desired does not represent a position of total social subordination because the spectator-desirer looks until his "eyes pop out of his head" and the "subject" of his desire has "got him by the eyeball."⁷ Notable in Kaite's discussion is her refusal to use the word "object" for depictions of females who take up "desiring to be desired" positions (even in the most hegemonic of pornographic

depictions). Instead, Kaite always refers to women as the "subjects" of the representations in order to reexamine the circulation of power in sexual-erotic play and display.

And finally, phenomenologist philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty offers a view about the "being desired" power schema which is important because it relates directly to the mechanics of striptease performance. In his essay, "The Body in its Sexual Being," Merleau-Ponty states:

Usually man [*sic*] does not show his body, and when he does, it is either nervously or with an intention to fascinate. He has the impression that an alien gaze which runs over his body is stealing it from him, or else, on the other hand that the display of his body will deliver the other person up to him, defenseless, and that in this case the other will be reduced to servitude.⁸

One of the greatest difficulties involved in the task of describing and analyzing sexual representations such as strip events is that, in our society, erotic control and surrender roles are permeated with negative connotations because of their powerful connections to our inequitable, gendered hierarchy. Because of this social system, sexual-erotic roles of control continue to be thought of as "male" and "oppressive," whether they are played by women or men.⁹ Similarly, sexual-erotic surrender roles are usually considered "feminine" positions. These are even more worrisome for both female and male players since sexual-erotic surrender roles appear to be inexorably intertwined with positions of social victimization, social powerlessness, and even the willing or inadvertent participation in one's own social subordination. Such formulations often lead to the equation of control

and surrender roles in sex games and fantasies with the violence of the actual social and physical rape of women.¹⁰

According to Masters and Johnson, the second most common heterosexual fantasy for both women and men is being ravished by the "opposite" sex. (The first for both females and males is having sex with a new or different partner).¹¹ A cartoon in *Mentertainment*, a trade paper and guide to strip clubs and topless bars for men in the Northeast, actually depicts the male fantasy of being "raped" by a woman (Fig. 7.1).¹² So how are we to analyze and understand the play of these positions in terms of the performance of gender in erotic, heterosexual representations and in terms of the sexual agency of women and men?

Dolan asks, in "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," whether all sexuality is "motivated by objectification?" Dolan seeks a discourse where the sexual-erotic roles of desiring and being desired, control and surrender can be experienced and enjoyed without trading in positions of social degradation. Her answer to the question she posed has to do with participating in these parts in the context of the political and personal *mutual consent* of all parties. For Dolan, such a context is, of course, lesbian.¹³

In the strip events discussed throughout this work, performer and patron control and surrender roles also operate under a premise, and even through conspicuous performances, of "mutual consent" by the way of the theatrical contract. Strip events are comprised of mimetic acts which are predicated upon "paper bondage." This means that the dancer and patron both have ultimate control over their acts

together. If the proceedings are not acceptable to the parties at hand, spectators or performers can elect to leave the playing area. Strippers can also request other club employees to enforce the house rules and remove unruly guests.¹⁴ Thus, these events, however socially and politically imperfect, situate the mutual consent of the participating parties as an integral part of their sexual-erotic games and pleasures.

Of course, one can argue that females would most likely not take up sex worker roles or jobs if they had other comparably lucrative opportunities or if women were not culturally indoctrinated to think of themselves as simply signs of male sexual pleasure. But then, how much of this argument is, itself, informed by the double standard which insists that sexual representations and public expressions of sexual interest are categorically bad for women?

While female and male spectators of contemporary strip events overtly hire dancers to perform for them through tipping rituals, these games also foreground the ways in which patrons surrender themselves to the rules of the rituals they engage. Tipping games which involve "up close and no touch," or clearly circumscribed "intimate touching" rubrics, further highlight the spectators' agreement and obedience to the rules of the event through their correct performances of the expected dancer-patron interactions.

Peggy Phelan, in several discussions of mimesis during the 1992 Women and Theatre Program Conference in Atlanta, pointed out that while there is an obvious "link" between representation and "reality," this link is not a one to one matching-up of the terms. Phelan then rhetorically asked the audience what kind of link exists between

the "real" and the represented in terms of how we experience both and how they each shape our experience.¹⁵ Contemporary spectators and critics are usually willing to contemplate this simultaneous match and mismatch of reality and representation in forms which fall under the auspices of "art," such as traditional dramas performed in mainstream theatres. However, when representations deal with sexual-erotic or pornographic materials, there tends to be much more anxiety and energy involved in attempting to view these depictions as exact "copies" of the "real." As noted previously, some cultural critics such as Dworkin and MacKinnon, insist on interpreting the contents of erotic materials solely and literally in terms of our socio-sexual inequities.¹⁶ At the same time, many spectators of sexual-erotic or pornographic representations appear to need to be reassured that the subjects on display (in this case strippers) are "authentically," sexually aroused in some fashion in order to accept these depictions and performances, as well as their own desires, as "genuine."¹⁷

Phelan's question provides an important analogy to the primary discussion of this concluding chapter. Powerful links between heterosexual practice-sexual representation and a sexist society do exist in "glaringly visible" ways in our culture. But, once again, these links, however powerful and reprehensible, do not provide a perfect one to one matching-up of the terms. The performance of gender and sex roles, even in this limited selection of strip events, clearly questions assumptions of such neat, binary correspondences. These events indicate that dominant sexual desires and our gendered social hierarchy do not operate as a single seamless system. Rather, they

only seem to do so because of the insistent cultural management tactics which continually attempt to reframe sexual-erotic, "heteroglossic" excesses back into semblences of duality so that they do not disturb the complacency of our binary social system and culturally-structured symbolic orders.

These strategies are so ingrained and compelling that when one attempts to speak or write about "disturbing" socio-sexual experiences and representations there is usually no traditional vocabulary available with which to do so. Gail M. Schwab, in her essay "Irigarayan Dialogism: Play and Powerplay," refers to Caryl Emerson's distinction between Bakhtinian and Lacanian linguistic models. According to Emerson, Lacan's interpretation of the gap between the signifier and the signified is the pain of desire and the lack of any "real" primary objects. For Bakhtin, any linguistic gap and resulting "pain" is created by the "inarticulateness" of the "speaker-writer."¹⁸ Schwab suggests that for women, and in particular for feminists, this "inarticulateness" is created by the "lack of words, of our own words to express our particular experience(s)."¹⁹ Two discussions by sex trade workers illustrate this point. Both of these discussions seek the reasons and the language to explain their experiences of the culturally "extraordinary" behavior of strip event performers and patrons.

Seph Weene, in her essay "Venus," wonders how she was able to think of herself as a feminist and at the same time still enjoy her work as a stripper. She notes that while her expressions of sexuality on the stage were blatant, her expressions of sexual interest off stage

continued to be "covert or verbal."²⁰ Weene also comments that (as with most women) she was "taught to fear the sexual arousal of men." However, during strip events when "the air is charged with sexuality," she surprisingly found herself in "total control" of the situation.²¹ In order to explain and name the cultural contradictions of sex and gender that were foregrounded in her work as a stripper, Weene came up with the following solution:

I thought I was crazy because both the conventional, male-dominated outlook and feminist doctrine defined what I did as bad. I was having forbidden fun. I knew that the joyousness, the pride in my body and its abilities, was good. In order to reclaim the feminine power for my own, I gave it a name: *feminissima*. . . The word was also a way to own my aggression. . . I saw it was a positive way to describe an aggressive female stance, one that implied power in femaleness rather than in imitation maleness.²²

In a sense, Weene is creating a "heteroglossic" term to describe experiences which can not be categorized according to dualistic principles.

In an interview in the June/July 1992 issue of *Mentertainment*, two former female exotic dancers, who are now writers for male sexual entertainment publications, discuss the non-traditional behavior of male patrons in strip events. Susan begins this portion of their recorded conversation by suggesting that men who go to topless bars and strip entertainments are "almost submissive." Sophie agrees with her but adds that she thinks the "submissive" behavior on the part of male patrons is really their admission that they are "resigned" about their inability to establish "meaningful" relationships with women

because men fear emotional vulnerability.²³ Susan responds by stating, "resigned.' I don't know if that is the right word." Interestingly and in a similar vein, Harrison, in her study of Canadian striptease in the mid and late eighties, suggests that one reason males attend strip events is to experience "an abdication of the pursuit of sex."²⁴

Theories about male patron "resignation" or "abdication of the pursuit of sex" are not the results of data which suggests that the majority of the men who attend strip clubs have actually given up on "real" or "meaningful" relationships with women. Many of these patrons are, in fact, married or in long term relationships. Rather, such theories are themselves the products of the social confusion about men playing sexual surrender roles in public arenas. Part of this confusion stems from the cultural stigmatization of these positions as "passive."

According to Nancy Hartsock and Susan Griffin, at the "heart" of the hegemonic, pornographic culture, is the male fear of female rejection.²⁵ Police officer David Dressler, in his doctoral dissertation, "Burlesque as a Cultural Phenomenon," indirectly addressed the issue of male fear of female rejection. He proposed that most of the acts in the Burlesque show were based on the "magical" premise of pressing a button and getting the girl:

As a girl leaves, she will throw up her dress behind, revealing her buttocks, or suddenly go into a sex dance. Flowers and love potions produce magical effects. Swallowing a pill will make one love the next person one meets. Waving a "whoosis" before a girl's face will cause her to stop in her perambulations and moan, "Oh, daddy, give it to me."²⁶

Dressler suggests that these magical effects are short-cut devices to create scenes which "otherwise would require (a) slow and psychological build-up. . . How much easier to press a button and have the girl all ready to be seduced."²⁷ Later he adds, "Here is a gay world where every girl wants to go to bed."²⁸

While such scenarios reflect the male myth and fantasy of having multiple female partners who are sexually available at all times, they also have something to say about our culture's manipulation of male sexual desires. Male desires of "desiring" and "desiring to be desired" have been subverted into the scenes of the double standard and Dressler's magic button by a culture which fears and attempts to repress non-binary desires and sexual expressions on the parts of both women and men. Males not only "desire," but they obviously desire to be desired as well.

It is not so surprising then, that in almost every interview-conversation conducted for this study, dancers, patrons, managers, and club owners all stated that one reason males patronize strip events is to experience the fantasy of "being wanted," "being desired," "being liked," and "being noticed" by women, rather than being in total control over women. "Nick," a regular strip club patron from New York City stated that it "is a big thrill to have women come on to you because it doesn't exist like that in reality." "Carol," a dancer at Rick's in Houston, asked, "where else could a sixty plus guy get approached *first* in a nice environment by a beautiful young woman?" Bildstein, in a lecture about the topless bar business in New York City, suggested

that men like "up close and personal" entertainments because in these activities the male patrons can be better seen by the dancers.

According to Bildstein, this helps the customers fantasize that the dancers "really notice them" and even that the female performers "like" or "get turned on" by the male patrons.²⁹

Neo-Bakhtinian theorists such as Mulvey and Jaye Berman suggest that traditional visioning and status quo of social positions are continuously riven by carnival-like events because some of the "extraordinary" elements of these games, rituals, and performances are eventually absorbed into the "ordinary" world--thus, creating ever new versions of the social norm. Mulvey, in her book *Visual and Other Pleasures*, insists that "disruptive desire" expressed through "the gestures, emblems, and metaphors of carnivalesque ritual can provide an almost invisible breeding ground for a language of protest and resistance."³⁰ Jaye Berman, in her essay "A Quote of Many Colors," suggests that carnival activities may be a means to critique dominant culture, to indicate the gaps and sutures, and even to offer "correctives."³¹

The strip events described here do not expressly advocate social change. Nevertheless, these performances still stage various transgressions of our traditional sexual and cultural laws. They also suggest that sexual-erotic pleasures in heterosexual contexts are not uniformly predicated upon the "total control" of the "socially powerful," but rather upon a giddy circulation of culturally-constructed erotic positions which underscore the theatrical construction and potential mutability of those parts. Such a performance does not function as a

preventative against the social sutures which can coopt erotic pleasure as part and parcel of social oppression. But, again, it does strongly suggest that dominant sexual pleasures and our social hierarchy do not operate as a seamless system. Strip events, and like representations, do not categorically pose women who enjoy sexual and erotic pleasures in heterosexual venues as discrete and passive victims of social oppression. Nor do these performances suggest that women are complicitous in their social victimization *vis a vis* their own pleasure and interest in sex and the erotic, no matter how mediated those pleasures and interests may be.

On the other hand, striptease events are not apolitical depictions of "playful sexuality" and "playful pluralism," but events which stage erotic pleasure as a form of suture stumbling--the stumbling over the aspects of hegemonic/non-hegemonic sex roles that have no exact dominant social labels or signifiers to describe them nor any exact matches with our binary social system. Carnavalesque events, including the "pornographic," can offer the time and space for the staging of personal and social risk-taking behaviors which are often repressed or overlooked in the realm of the "everyday." They can be important sites and sights from which to "envision the revisions" of certain cultural norms.³² For such sights/sites demonstrate that the pleasures of sexual-erotic roles for females and males alike can not be so easily classified and named once they are examined and "made strange" by both "theatre" and by "theory."

NOTES

¹Kaite, 151-152.

²See also Bakhtin's idea of "heteroglossia" or the "polyvocal" applied to performance in Marvin Carlson, "Theater and Dialogism" in *Critical Theory and Performance*, 314, 317.

³Harrison, 89-82.

⁴Robert Watters, interview-conversation with author, 10 April 1990, Houston, Texas; Jay Bildstein, "How to Own, Manage, Run or Even Dance in a Topless Bar," lecture presented at the St. Moritz, New York City, sponsored by the Learning Annex, 1 June 1992.

⁵Weene, 36.

⁶Coward, 196.

⁷Kaite, 155.

⁸Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, ed. A.J. Ayer (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1962), 166-167.

⁹Dolan, *The Feminist Spectator as Critic*, 68.

¹⁰See again in general Andrea Dworkin, *Pornography*; idem, *Intercourse*; MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*.

¹¹Masters and Johnson cited in Marc McCutcheon, *The Compass in Your Nose, and Other Astonishing Facts about Humans*, with illustrations by Rosanne Litzinger (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1989) 48.

¹²Ace Backwords, "Sexley's Believe it or Nuts" (cartoon), *Mentertainment*, June/July 1992, 27.

¹³Dolan, "Desire Cloaked in a Trenchcoat," 63-64.

¹⁴CBS's "Jane Whitney" on "Strip Clubs," air date 16 October 1992. A dancer on this program stated that, in most strip clubs, the

adage "the customer is always right" does not apply. According to this performer the dancers and the club rules control the patrons. A visit to the El Morocco Presents Thee Doll House in New York City provided a case in point. One dancer refused to strip during her set. She performed her act fully clothed in an evening gown and gloves because some patrons were laughing and not tipping the dancers. Thee Doll House, Errol Flynn Dining Room stage, New York City, 17 October 1992.

¹⁵Peggy Phelan, Women and Theatre Conference: "Shifting Positionalities: Interrogating Cultural Pluralism," Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia, 1992. See also the similar theme and discussion in Phelan's introduction to her new book, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

¹⁶Dworkin, *Pornography*; idem, *Intercourse*; MacKinnon, *Feminism Unmodified*.

¹⁷This was a view or rather concern that came up in many interview-conversations with female and male strip club patrons. It was also echoed in some discussions with academic scholars interested in these kinds of events.

¹⁸Carly Emerson, "The Outer Word and Inner Speech: Bakhtin, Vygotsky, and the Internalization of Language" in *Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work*, ed. Gary Saul Morson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 32; quoted in Gail M. Schwab, "Irigarayan Dialogism" in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, ed. by Dale M. Bauer and S. Jaret McKinstry (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), 67-68.

¹⁹Schwab, 68.

²⁰Weene, 36.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid., 37.

²³Ben-Shitta, 36.

²⁴Harrison, 130.

²⁵Hartsock, 170; Griffin, 21.

²⁶Dressler, 68.

27Ibid.

28Ibid., 69.

29Bildstein, "How to Own, Manage, Run. . .," St. Moritz, New York City, 1 June 1992.

30Mulvey, 169.

31Jaye Berman, "A Quote of Many Colors: Women and Masquerade in Donald Barthelme's Postmodern Parody Novels," in *Feminism, Bakhtin, and the Dialogic*, 28-29.

32Gayle Austin suggests that a critical stance of liminality may be an important theoretical position for feminists because it "can be inhabited by women who are resisting cultural categories." Such a position "needs to be examined as a perspective from which feminist theorizing and criticizing can take place." Gayle Austin, *Feminist Theories for Dramatic Criticism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1990), 39-40.

APPENDIX**STRIP BARS, CLUBS, AND THEATRES REVIEWED****Chicago, Illinois**

Playpen
Promises
Sugar Shack II

Houston, Texas

Caligula XXI
Colorado Bar and Grill
La Bare
The Men's Club of Houston
Rick's

Los Angeles, California

Aladdin
The Body Shop
Chippendales at Carlos 'n Charlie's
Crazy House
Jumbo's Clown Room
Rose Tattoo
Seventh Veil
Star Strip

Montreal, Canada

Bar Apollon
Bistro Bunnies
Cabaret Penthouse
Cabaret Showgirls
The Campus
Castel Tina
Chez Jean Pierre
Chez Paree

Montreal, Canada (continued)

Club Le Scandal
Club Super Sexe
Club 281
La Cave du Sexe
L'Axe Disco Sex

New York, New York

The Baby Doll Lounge
Billy's
Chippendale's
Danielle's
The Doll House (New York Dolls)
Dominique's Harmony Burlesque Theatre
El Morocco Presents Thee Dollhouse
Escapes (Long Island)
Gallagher's
Goldfingers (Manhattan)
Goldfingers (Queens)
Honey Buns
The Kit Kat Klub (Flash Dancers)
Merry Go Round
Paradise Club
Scores
Show Follies
Show Palace
Show World Center
Spectrum
Stringfellows Presents Pure Platinum
Virginia's

Peoria, Illinois

Big Al's
Big Alice's

San Francisco, California

Big Al's
Garden of Eden (Paradise)
Hungry "i"s
Lusty Lady Theatre
Market Street Cinema
Mitchell Brothers' O'Farrell Theatre
New Century
Nob Hill Cinema
The Tearoom Theater

Washington, D.C.

Archibald's
Camelot Nite Club
Good Guys
Hangar Club (Maryland)
Joanna's 1819 Club
JP's
Royal Palace

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Strippers. Directed by Robert Deubel, narrated by Gwen Verdon.
Produced by Concepts Unlimited, 1983. 45 min. Videocassette.
The Dance Collection of the Performing Arts Research Center, the
New York Public Library at Lincoln Center, the Jerome Robbins
Archives.