ZONA NORTE

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The Post-Structural Body of Erotic Dancers and Sex Workers in Tijuana, San Diego and Los Angeles: An Auto/ethnography of Desire and Addiction

By

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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For Sage Tune

There I sat, waiting, waiting,—yet for naught,
transcending good and evil, sometimes caught
in light, sometimes caught in shadow, all game,
all sea, all midday, all time without aim.

—Nietzsche, "Sils-Maria," *The Gay Science*

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PROEM: TIJUANA:

END OF THE LINE

San Ysidro is the trolley's end of the line, several yards away from where worlds collide like two dueling Japanese movie monsters, battling in the center of Tokyo. In the distance, tens of thousands of houses cram into the hills like prisoners at Abu Gahrib, another time, another world. At the top of these hills are dozens of radio transmission towers, sending music and words into cities and suburbs. The arches of town square call to me like the many mariachi players who stand and wait for a gig: the music for my own desire and affliction. Little children wave cups at me while I walk across the bridge over the Tijuana River, hoping I will place coins inside their cups; little children open the door of my taxi cab, hoping I will tip them with a small coin; little children sell bubblegum and candy, holding the little boxes out, their little arms trembling, their little eyes trained to look sad. A billboard shows a little girl, five or six years old, with those sad eyes and a message: PLEASE DO NOT MAKE ME PART OF YOUR TOURISM. I stop off at my favorite taco stand, $1 for beef, $1.50 for chicken or pork—I cannot be sure if the *carne* is what they say it is, but it tastes good, and I tell people: "You have not had Mexican food until you've had a dog taco." I stop off at my favorite cantinas and have a bottle of *cerveza* and scan the day's hustlers and whores and think about what they may be offering. I buy *Tramadol*, a generic form of Vicodin, from whatever pharmacy has the best deal for a bottle of 100. I have become addicted to the painkiller and I have no idea how I will stop. I am now an official junkie—oh to be William Burroughs! Today it does not matter. Today, I am here to have fun and enjoy myself. Today, I am the anthropologist writing a self-ethnography of myself. I go into the Hong Kong Club and look at the women available. Some dance on the bar, some dance on the stage, some sit in booths, dark corners, waiting. Beers are two for one, $3.50, $1 tip to the waiter. Beers for the "companions" are $7. They get a $5 commission for each beer or drink. They are given a ticket with their name on it for each beer or drink sold. They collect the tickets and cash them in at the end of their shift. A private booth costs a bucket of six beers. The dark, air-conditioned VIP room costs a bucket of

10 beers. The companion stays with a customer until the beers are gone, or another bucket is purchased. The music is loud and hurts my brain. In the VIP room, the music is muffled and my naked 22-year-old Mexican companion grinds her rear end into my crotch: a sloppy lap dance. She takes my hand and places it between her legs. We do not speak because I know very little Spanish and she knows absolutely no English. Today, this does not matter inside the context of my auto/ethnography. Today, I am here for myself, not academic research. Tomorrow will be another story. Tomorrow is always another story, when I become the cultural anthropologist again, thinking in APA citation style, creating qualitative inquiry to interpret the reality I observe. Reality, though, is on the other side of the fence. I will get in a taxicab and say to the driver, "La Línea." That's what they call the border crossing: *la línea.* The ride will cost $5. There may or may not be a long line to get through customs. I will hand the border agent my ID and say, "U.S. citizen, nothing to declare." One day I will have something to declare; one day I will say, quite loudly, "This is my story and I want you to listen to it!" I will orate, speechify, and pontificate until someone stops or arrests me. Today is not that day. Today, I am a U.S. citizen and I have nothing to declare. The government agent nods and I walk away, back to my country, back home, safe and sound and real.

INTRODUCTION

Statement

This book is about strippers, call girls, and prostitutes in Tijuana, San Diego, and Los Angeles—and myself: the independent investigating anthropologist.

Terminology

I have appropriated (see Federman, 1994) this opening sentence from Dumont (1978:3, cited by Ellis, 2004:16) that states: "This book is about the Panare Indians of Venezuelan Guiana and me, the investigating anthropologist." In 1978, the researcher as the researched among the observed Other was labeled reflexive anthropology (and sociology), auto-anthropology (Strathern, 1978), and radical empiricism (see Ellis, 2004). Hayano (1978) coined the term "auto-ethnography" in a seminal essay of reflexivity in the field, the study of the self within one's own culture, but it was not until the late 1990s and into the Twenty-first Century that the term was an accepted method and a discipline in its own right.

Changing Research Parameters

The research began as an ethnographic account of sex workers in Tijuana and San Diego; it turned into an auto/ethnography about my own desires and addictions while in the field. I add Los Angeles, although my original intention was to gaze at political implications of the international border, comparing and contrasting the working lives of those engaging in a certain "deviant" vocation.

The research question, initially: "What are the working conditions of sex workers in Tijuana., compared to sex workers in San Diego?" My plan was to interview selected subjects, asking the following:

- *How long have you been working?*
- *What made you choose this profession?*
- *What was being with your first client like?*

●*How many days a week do you work and what are your normal hours?*
●*How much longer do you see yourself working?*
●*Does your family know?*
●*When you were younger, what did you dream to be?*
●*If and when you quit this life, what do you see yourself doing?*

The parameters of my two years of research (approximately from May, 2006 to May, 2008) altered mid-course when I began to question my motives for choosing this topic. Colleagues and friends wondered why I was going down to Tijuana, observing and participating in the red light district, and contacting local sex workers that posted on the San Diego Craigslist. Was it simply for prurient reasons? Was it to have sex with subjects and call it ethnographic research (Goode 1999, 2002) in the socio-anthropological mode? A female friend told me, "I think you're doing this because you're lonely." Questioning reasons and motivations for any ethnographer's research is a valid topic. What draws them to their subject of study? There is usually a personal reason; e.g., Frank (2002) was working as a stripper while in grad school, so decided to do her Ph.D. on men who go to strip clubs; Humphreys (1970) was a closet homosexual Episcopalian minister earning his doctorate in sociology and decided to study men who seek out sex in public bathrooms; Hayano (1982) loved to gamble so studied other gamblers; Ellis (1995) lost her lover/professor to a disease and so wrote her book about the sociology of death and loss; Drew (2001) enjoyed going to karaoke bars in his private life, and decided to study others whose lives surrounded this curious social interaction; Charles (2007) spent two years in West Africa with the Peace Corps, armed with a Ph.D. in family therapy, and studied herself and her sexuality as an "exotic other' in a foreign culture. In each of these ethnographic studies, the researcher soon became the research subject as outside events had hegemony over the inner self; each researcher switched the anthropologist and sociologist's gaze of the other to what Ellis (2004) calls the ethnographic "I."

While examining and observing myself in the field, engaging in systematic self-observation (Rodriguez and Lincoln 2001), reflexive ethnography (Denzin 1996; Ellis and Bochner 1996; Davies 1999) and auto/ethnography (Hayano 1989; Reed-Donahay, 1997; Holt 2003; Lincoln and Denzin 2003; Ellis 2004; Rambo 2006, 2007; Dyson 2007; Hemmingson 2008), this study switched from the object to the subject, the Other to the I. What started off as a "realist tale" became a "confessional tale" (Van Maanen 1988).

The research question changed to:

What are my true motives—why am I interested in sex workers, why Tijuana, and what deep inner need, or desire, is the research fulfilling?

Thus, I began to study myself within the culture of sex workers on both sides of the U.S./Mexican border, as a customer and (auto)ethnographer. Reed-Danahay (1997:3) tells us that the "auto/ethnographer is a boundary-crosser and the role can be characterized as that of a dual identity." This is certainly how I perceived myself halfway through my experiences in the field.

Auto/ethnography: Definition, Critique, Defense

Auto/ethnography has its supporters and detractors. "That's a good story, but is it research?" (Ceglowski, 1997) has been the question that auto/ethnographers have been pestered with by their peers and colleagues since its inception. "What is the role of the 'I' in ethnography?" asks Ellis (2004: xix), one of the leading advocates—indeed, the "diva" (see Rambo, 2007)—and designers of the current form of this genre (*The Ethnographic I* is the current Bible of the methodology).

Definition

I had never heard of the term until, in 2006, sociologist Michael Kimmel read draft chapters of this project and referred to it as "self-ethnography." Researching that term, I found the school of auto/ethnography, a branch of qualitative inquiry in communications, health sciences, social work, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Holt (2003:4) explains auto/ethnography as

> a genre of writing and research that connects the personal to the cultural, placing the self within a social context (Reed-Danahay, 1997). These texts are usually written in the first person and feature dialogue, emotion, and self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure, and culture (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Reed-Danahay explained that autoethnographers may vary in their emphasis on *graphy* (i.e., the research process), *ethnos* (i.e., culture), or *auto* (i.e., self). Whatever the specific focus, authors use their own experiences in a culture reflexively to look more deeply at self-other interactions. By writing themselves into their own work as major characters, autoethnographers have challenged accepted views about silent authorship, where the researcher's voice is not included in the presentation of findings.

Beverley (2000) views it is a form of "testimonio" for the subaltern voice. "The *testimonio* is a first-person political text told by a narrator who is the protagonist or witness to the events that are reported on" (Lincoln & Denzin (2003: 18). Furthermore:

> Finding a space for the subaltern voice suggests a new location for voice, that is, in personal narratives, autobiographies, and autoethnographic texts. In autoethnography, researchers conduct and write ethnographies of their own experience. If we study our own experiences, then the researcher becomes both the research subject and its object […] A variety of terms and methodological strategies are associated with the meanings and uses of autoethnographies, including personal narratives, narratives of the self, writing stories, self stories, , auto-observation, personal ethnography, literary tales, critical autobiography, radical empiricism, evocative narratives, reflexive ethnography, biographical method, co-constructive narrative, indigenous anthropology, anthropological poetics, and performance ethnography. The autoethnography can be read as a variation of the testimonio, or the first-person life history. (p. 19)

Ellis (2004: xix) defines it as

> research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political. Autoethnographic forms feature concrete action, emotion, embodiment, self-consciousness, and introspection portrayed in dialogue, scenes, characterization, and plot. Thus, autoethnography claims the conventions of literary writing.

Ellis (2004:vii) explains the method in a more personalized manner when describing it to a student:

> I start with my personal life and pay attention to my physical feelings, thoughts, and emotions. I use what I call 'systematic sociological introspection' and 'emotional recall' to try to understand an experience I've lived through [Ellis, 1991]. Then I write my experience as a story. By exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life, as Reed-Donahay says.

Auto/ethnography, then, is a highly personalized social science that borrows techniques and forms from the humanities: essay, poetry, and fiction; some see it as "the postmodern successor of both ethnography and life history" (Bloor & Wood, 2006), an evolution of methods and theory used by the modernist Chicago School of Sociology that enjoyed its salad days early in the Twentieth Century. As a fork of experimental writing, it accepts the "postmodern" label in the same way that the metafictional

writings of Raymond Federman, Ronald Sukenick, Richard Brautigan, Robert Coover, Kurt Vonnegut, and Donald Barthleme questioned the modernist rules of fiction by mixing autobiography and history with fiction and fact. Meta texts are self-reflexive, they are aware of being a textual construct, they are self-analytical; and so auto/ethnography follows this school of thought, although the social sciences tend to prefer the term "messy text" (Marcus, 1994:567; see also Denzin, 1997 and Speedy, 2008) where

> a documentary style is often used. This style creates the illusion of giving the reader direct access to reality. The style embodies a relentless pursuit of naturalism, which presumes a connection between lived experience and the written word. This style seeks its own version of authenticity by invoking the speech of real, ordinary people in real situations. (Denzin, 1997:224)

Auto/ethnography questions the strict rules of modernist ethnographic composition from field notes and observer-participation; the reflexive ethnographer engages in biased participant-observation and sociological introspection (Ellis, 1991). Crawford (1996:158-169) argues that "taking the ethnographic turn, living and writing the ethnographic life, is essentially a self-report of personal experiences […] the ethnographer is unavoidably in the ethnography one way or another, however subtly or obviously" and further notes

> I must include some account of myself […] the reflexive turn of fieldwork for human study by (re)positioning the researcher as an object of inquiry […] An unstable/subjective self, the reduction of distinctions, the surfing of perspectives, the high-speed juxtaposition of the private and global, and the like may be features of autoethnographic account […] a kind of guerilla action and subversive discourse that productively challenges and changes the traditional and, in my judgment, transparently flawed ways of experiencing, portraying and acknowledging ethnography.

Social movement writers have jumped into the game, revealing "their own experiences as participants to understand social movements" (Ellis, 2002:402). Psychologists, psychoanalysts, health care and social workers, doctors and nurses, communications researchers, poets, painters, performance artists and qualitative educators have all followed suit in their individual ways. In the Twenty-First Century, auto/ethnography has become extremely popular, and more acceptable as a research method.

Anti-Reflexivity: Critique of the Navel-Gazers

"It is generally not wise to conduct a study of the 'self'" Holt (2003:7) was advised when working on his dissertation (his article is an "auto/ethnography about auto/ethnography"). Obviously, not everyone in the social sciences was keen on the burgeoning reflexive method. Ellis (1995) recounts the resistance of peer reviewers when she was exploring the form in the early 1990s; she was told that the self was not a sufficient sample for scientific study. Detractors contend auto/ethnography lacks a cosmology within the global complexities of human sciences, and is limited in scope as a "self-anthropology" (Strathern, 1978). Some critics maintain *stories* are not scientific research (see Holt, 2000); that personal experience is self-indulgent and narcissistic (see Mikhaylowskij 1995: 230-232, and Sparkes 2002:211) and the auto/biography is extravagant and confessional, not true research methodology (see Goodall, 2000). The anti-reflexivity camp ask why would any responsible body engage in self-indulgent navel-gazing when the method is difficult to validate and present as rigorous or replicable (Holt, 2003). It is "irreverent, self-absorbed, sentimental and romantic" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:736), "a movement away from trying to understand the world of the 'other'" and "a turn away from praxis" (Ellis, 2002:400). Gannon (2006:491) refers to it as "the (im)possibilities of writing the self" and notes "it is clear that just 'being there' is insufficient as any guarantee of truth." Jacobsen (1991:122) states: "The experience of the ethnographer into an account does not necessarily shed light into the account of others." Some condemn it: "without guidance, experience and patience this process can, for many, result in nothing more than pointless self-absorbing introspective 'navel gazing' excessive subjectivity and self-delusion" (Boufoy-Bastick, 2004:10) and that "the force of the ontological is impoverished" (Probyn, 1993:32) when the self takes precedence over the other.

Defenses for Navel-Gazing

Poulos (2008) points out that

> the "self-indulgent navel-gazing" charge is a straw man argument, combined with a simple ad hominem attack. It is usually intended to belittle and bully. As such, it may carry emotional weight, but it has no merit. It is a bit like the U.S. conservatives of the Rush Limbaugh/Anne Coulter stripe who throw the word "liberal" around as though it were unequivocally and naturally a pejorative term. Of course, as I glance back at my 50 years on this planet, I can honestly say that I have met very few

> "self-indulgent navel-gazers" (most people, in my experience are, in fact, less than satisfied with their navels), and most of them were people who either smoked too much high-octane weed or who suffered from narcissistic personality disorder. The prognosis was not good, and none of them were writers. If, by this charge, the critics mean that introspection or reflection are bad per se, I have nothing to say other than "Try it sometime." But I think what most of them are saying is that we should not "indulge" our emotional lives because emotions can lead us astray. Indeed, they can. On the other hand, most of the great literature, art, music, writing, poetry, etc. in the history of humanity has tapped into the great and deep energy of pathos to move the human soul to new highs and lows.[4]

Burnhard (2007:809) argues that auto/ethnography "must be more than navel gazing or self-disclosing for its own sake." "While able to slip into the worst sort of navel-gazing, the best examples of auto-ethnography draw [on] self-awareness, empathy and reflexivity" (Galloway 2007:web page).

I will suggest that the auto-anthropologist should not take offense to the label "navel grazer" and should see the truth in those words, embrace the concept. It is the navel that first gave us life, where we once breathed while in the womb, connecting us to our closest Other, our mother (of course, for some, this may be a negative relationship) via the umbilicus. I urge narcissistic researchers to desire a closer relationship with their navel, *and to interview their navel,* which would be akin to the self-interview, or auto-interrogation. I would also suggest asking questions of the umbilical chord. That may sound absurd but you must know I am speaking symbolically; the umbilical chord, lost to us since the day of our birth, is something that must be re-found, re-discovered, re-connected to (Hemmingson, 2008). Here is an example: today, as I write this (February 25, 2008), I had to pay a visit to my mother and get a copy of my birth certificate. I looked at the old document, processed on a manual typewriter in 1966, and I felt disconnected from my "self," that body of the newborn. I asked, "Is this me?" This piece of paper represented an infant fresh to the world, his navel deprived of the umbilicus it had known for months, in comfort. Here this piece of paper said my mother was sixteen-years-old and my father eighteen. They were children themselves, they were hippies, they were people I never knew and to this day do not understand. My mother's listed address is in a neighborhood I would never set foot in today; it is a gang territory. I was amazed how baffled I felt, how much of my identity vanished from me as I gazed on this slip of government documentation. I knew I had to become an ontological detective and find

my lost umbilical chord, and speak to it, understand it, query it, which would result in a re-understanding of my self.

Effective auto/ethnography, for me, is being naked and honest, not leaving anything out. Ellis (2004:xviii) agrees: "Honest autoethnographic exploration generates a lot of fears and self-doubts—that's when the real work begins." I found this "tricky" for a study of sex workers because there are ethical and moral lines I was in "danger" of crossing, and some will say I did. However, if I cannot be completely open, if I cannot truly examine myself and my experiences in the field, and learn about myself, and reflect on my research and how it affects me within culture, then I become a victim of both institutional and self-censorship. Who wants that?

Interpretive Interaction

I employ a secondary method called interpretive interactionism. Denzin (2001:99) states this method

> seeks to bring lived experience before the reader. A major goal of the interpretive writer is to create a text that permits a willing reader to share vicariously in the experiences that have been captured. When this occurs, the reader can naturalistically generalize his or her experiences to those that have been captured […] It is a form of performative writing. It creates verisimilitude, a space for the reader to imagine his or her way into the life experiences of another.

Denzin derived from Mills (1959) an aegis of interpretive interaction, an evolutionary extension of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Denzin, 1992). Denzin (2001:31-33) identifies one method of interpretative interaction as

> attempts to uncover the means that inform and structure the subject's experience. It takes the reader to the heart of the experience that is being interpreted. It assumes that all meaning is symbolic and operates at the surface and the deep, and the micro and the macro levels. It turns on thick description, which always joins biography with lived experience.

The research in this book can be read through an interactionist lens and interpreted as social text regarding interpersonal relationships, substance abuse, poverty, prostitution, with political and cultural narratives that reflect a certain time and atmosphere on the borderland between Mexico and the United States. The personal problems of my actors—and

myself—reflect larger global issues; our lives are affected by events beyond our control, such as heightened security at the San Ysidro border crossing and the danger in the Tijuana streets as the drug gangs battle with each other, the police, and the army. These events caused my research to become "dangerous fieldwork" (Lee, 1995) and had an economic effect on all citizens in Tijuana, not just the sex workers I encounter. History and autobiography intersect so that this research can be framed within Mill's (1959) theory of the sociological imagination.

> The person with the sociological imagination thinks historically and biographically. He or she attempts to identify the varieties of men and women who prevail in a given historical period […] Persons with the sociological imagination self-consciously make their own experience part of their [writing]. The sociological imagination is not just confined to sociologists (Denzin, 1989b:48-49).

The ideas posited by Mills (1959) can be applied to my research. Denzin (1989b:7) agrees with my approach when he states:

> In *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills (1959) challenged scholars in the human disciplines to develop a point of view and a methodological attitude that would allow them to examine how the private troubles of individuals, which occur within the immediate world of experience, are connected to public issues and public responses to these troubles. Mill's sociological imagination was biographical, interactional, and historical.

The purpose of the first section of *Zona Norte* is not merely to describe my encounters with prostitutes and strippers as a catalogue of arousing, sensual experiences (although it may be read that way, for some—for those who wish to bypass the academic attributes and seek a prurient text), but to examine the socio-economic, cultural, historical, and regional aspects of Tijuana's sex tourism industry; to compare and contrast the lives and circumstances of Tijuana sex workers to their sisters on the "other side of the fence" working in San Diego and Los Angeles. My research into this study of the sale of lust and love on the international border is qualitative in nature, experimentally ethnographic in spirit, mixing the scholarly with the personal, the fanciful with the pragmatic. I seek to understand the accumulative need, circumstance, and social criterion that causes an individual to engage in the "oldest profession in the world," and are these measures different or the same on either side of the Mexican/American border?

Sampling

I employ convenience or haphazard sampling in finding informants in Tijuana. Bernard (2002:14) states:

> Convenience sampling is a glorified term for grabbing whoever will stand still long enough to answer your questions. It is useful in exploratory research, in phenomenological research (research in which the goal is to understand "what's going on out there?").

My samples in the Rio Verde Bar and Hong Kong Club (see Chapter One) are based on this convenience—they happened to be there when I was there; I asked to interview them and they agreed. I attempted to use snowball sampling, asking my informants what other dancers or prostitutes might be willing to talk to me, but that did not work out. (When talking to the dancers at The Happy Room in Los Angeles, snowball sampling proved useful.)

When interviewing women who advertise on Craigslist (see Chapter Two), I used judgment sampling, where "you decide the purpose you want information […] to serve, and you go out and find some" (Bernard 2002:14). In this research, I wanted to talk to women who engaged in sex work via Craigslist (and the Internet); I answered ads by women on Craigslist who personally interested me and thought would make interesting informants.

Interviewing

For the most part, my interviewing methods were unstructured as well as active.

Triangulation

The use of several methods in a single study is known as triangulation (Denzin, 1988). By triangulating participant-observation, interpretative and symbolic interaction, active interviewing, sociological introspection, urban ethnography and auto/ethnography, I arrive at a better understanding of sex work in the two cities, Tijuana and San Diego, and why I am personally drawn to this culture.

In the analysis section at the back of this book, I will discuss further my transformation, my transgressive epiphanies, my introspection, and my

self-actualization that occurred in the process of studying myself as I studied the other.

Informed Consent

All subjects were informed that I was doing research and that they could choose to answer my questions or not or interact with me either as researcher/subject or worker/client. It should be noted that no Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval is required because (1) this is an independent study done on my own time and funded by my own money and (2) this research is not part of a dissertation, funded by an institution receiving government or public grants, part of the research of a public institute or center and (3) done for advancement of knowledge outside the usual parameters of academia, yet still of interest for researchers in anthropology, sociology, culture studies, gender studies, and sex research. I have, however, adhered to basic ethical guidelines within qualitative research; I have changed people's names, even the names of dancers and prostitutes who use "stage names," and informed them I would take every precaution in protecting their true identities in print. I was aware of the ethics I needed to maintain even as an independent scholar and/or journalist, what Christians & Graber (1997) maintain as respect for another person's dignity and no that no harm comes to the innocent. There was also the issue Fetterman (1989:135) calls "guilty knowledge and dirty hands" when an ethnographer learns of illegal or immoral acts and is faced with the decision of adding this information or not. Humphreys (1970) and Goode (1995) have described the illegal activities of their subjects, for example—Humphreys about public sex (that includes homeless teens, one which was used as a decoy by the police) and Goode about drug use. For this study, several subjects did inform me of drugs use, prostitution, and criminal acts which I decided to either omit or leave in, on a case-by-case basis. If the illegal acts contributed to the subject's truth, I left it in; if not, if it was only a part of their situations I did not find it necessary to include the data. Since I have changed the names and appearances of my samples, this anonymity will shield them from any possible criminal prosecution, but the question I asked myself was this: if a subject revealed a crime that was actively being investigated and law enforcement read this study and asked me to identify the true name and whereabouts of a subject, would I claim journalistic integrity, that I had assured my subjects anonymity and ethically I could not betray that trust, or would I be faced with the public's interest to see justice done? This is the nature of dangerous ethnographic

fieldwork (Nilan, 2002; Lee, 2004) that every researcher who chooses such work may have to encounter, along with physical danger to the self.

Origin

This (auto)ethnography of prostitution and exotic dancing stems from my interest in the literary output of William T. Vollmann, a novelist, journalist, ethnographer, and essayist who has researched and written a great deal, in books and articles, about the subject. I co-edited *Expelled from Eden: A William T. Vollmann Reader* (McCaffery and Hemmingson 2004) and have written a number of critical essays on his work, as well as the general study, *William T. Vollmann*: *Freedom, Redemption, and Prostitution* (Hemmingson, 2009). I have been influenced and inspired, yet wanted to take my own study into different directions than Vollmann's. I had to consider where he had gone (his research was mainly in San Francisco's Tenderloin District, Thailand, Burma, Canada, and the Mexicali region of Baja California), what conclusions he had come to, and where my own research could fill in his deficits. Vollmann (McCaffery and Hemmingson, 2004:167) confesses in "The Shame of It All: Some Thoughts on Prostitution in America":

> I have worshiped them and drunk from their mouths; I've studied at their feet. Many have saved me; one or two I've raised up. They've cost me money and made me money. People might say that we've "exploited" each other. Some have trusted me; a few have loved me — or at least said so. They've healed my loneliness, infected me with diseases and despair. Some I pity; some I envy; most equal me in their fortunes. One robbed me at knifepoint in a hotel room in Montréal; dozens ran off with my cash over the years; the greatest number honorably remained after getting paid. (If I write so much of payment, that's because it's one core of this double-cored subject.) All too many feel stained by their profession; they're the ones to weep for.

In an interview at the literary website Bookslut.com, he explains:

> I have a lot of love and respect for prostitutes. Of course they're out to get what they can, and take advantages of the johns occasionally. They rob them, they give them disease; well, that's life, that's how people are. And at the same time, they make their customers very happy, they keep marriages together, they console lonely people. I think they're very, very spiritual in what they do (Hogan, 2000: online).

With Vollmann's assertions and admonitions in mind, I set my sights on researching sex work in Tijuana and San Diego.

Part One

The first section of this ethnography also examines the corrupt police force in Tijuana, their urban combat with drug cartels, the presence of the Mexican army in the streets, further gun battles, the decline of tourism and the rise of kidnappings, muggings, and murders, and finally my unintentional addiction to Tramadol, an over-the-counter painkiller I discovered in the Tijuana pharmacies. I was robbed by the Tijuana police twice, and beaten up once when I was drunk and out of control. I followed the Mexican army on their routes and observed Tijuana go from a busy tourist spot to a virtual ghost town.

These are the components of my study of the international borderline—the Rubicon of intimacy, of crime, of violence, of addiction to both a drug and the culture. Indeed, after a year of research, going down to Tijuana at least once a week, I started to feel like I was a part of the urban landscape, when there was a time I did not care for going to the city. Now, I couldn't wait to come back. Like the anthropologist who becomes so involved with a remote tribe on some island or rain forest, I became engulfed in the culture: the loud, booming music from the dance clubs, the lyrics of the Mariachi players, the taste of tacos from street vendors, the smell of urine and bleach in the streets, the texture of local beer, and the sensation of a dancer's naked body, sitting in my lap, at the Hong Kong Club.

Part Two

The second section is set in San Diego and Los Angeles and remains just as reflexive, if not more so. I offer my memories, my personal narrative, about past intimate relationships with women who worked as exotic dancers; my experiences as a journalist when sent on a assignment to visit and describe San Diego stripper bars and clubs; and a subsequent relationship with a dancer in Los Angeles while I was working on my first feature film (the anthropology of independent filmmaking, no less). Bradley (2007:383) notes in “Girlfriends, Wives, and Strippers: Managing Stigma in Exotic Dancer Romantic Relationships”:

> No research to date has examined the intimate social networks of sex workers. Nor have any studies specifically interviewed the romantic partners of sex workers. It is likely that these individuals have a substantial impact on the way dancers perceive themselves and their work. Dancers, customers, and staff do not exist in a vacuum. The current state of knowledge simply covers the “inside” perspective. To do this ignores

> the interactions of erotic laborers with other actors in their lives. These women are not merely sex workers; they are wives, girlfriends, mothers, daughters, fiancées, and lovers. These relationships are often the most salient and meaningful, and thus perhaps exerts the most powerful influence in how they do their job, how they think about their occupation, and how they perceive themselves.

I am sure there are scholars who are taking this scarcity of qualitative research into account; they are right now in the field and preparing their articles, studies, and dissertations.

PART I

Employ “experience-near” language rather than “experience-distant” language.
—Norman K. Denzin (2001:3)

CHAPTER ONE

TIJUANA/SAN DIEGO SEXUALITIES: AN AUTO/ETHNOGRAPHIC APPROACH TO PROSTITUTION ON BOTH SIDES OF LA LÍNEA

Literature Review

Normally, literature reviews are found at the beginning of the research text. Since this is not a traditionally structured ethnography, I have decided to divide my review into four sections throughout this book, as the subject matter is presented:

(1) In the introduction, a review of auto/ethnographic literature;
(2) Part I, Chapter One, literature on sex work and human trafficking, with a focus on Third World nations;
(3) Part II, Chapter Five, literature on exotic dancers and strip clubs in the United States.
(4) Excurses, literature on the ethics of reflexive relationships and sexual contact in ethnographic fieldwork.

The literature on sex workers in third world countries is often gazed through a political or feminist lens that sees the women (and men) who work as dancers, prostitutes, masseuses, and escorts as victims, either forced into the life by nefarious pimps who traffic the women from one location to another, or have to do it because of needful economic circumstances or drug addiction. Often these elements intersect. Sex traffic is a global social problem (Sandy, 2006; Schauer & Wheaton, 2006) and Tijuana has a reputation as being one of the worst—or "best" for deviant tourists—sites of apparent sexual slavery. As the focus of my research was on exotic dancers, I should note that most dancers in Tijuana double as prostitutes; this goes beyond mere emotional labor (Egan and Frank, 2004; Deshotels amnd Forsyth, 2005) and simulated intimacy (Frank, 2002; Mestemacher and Roberti, 2003) that is the basis for stripping and dancing

in clubs in the United States (Ronai and Ellis 1993; Spivey, 2004). The Tijuana dancers I encountered who did not "go up to the room" for "sex-o" were usually new on the job; it also seemed apparent that the dancers were not controlled by pimps or "handlers" as the streetwalkers—*las parditas*--are (Castillo, Gomoez, and Delgado, 1999; Augustin, 2005). Based on my findings in this book, the dancers operate as freelancers (Roebuck and McNamara, 1973) and have a choice, unlike their counterparts outside on the street.

The literature on sex work in the United States is remarkably different than studies of sex workers in foreign—and often "third world"—nations. Outside the United States, sex work is either legal or tolerated (Larsen, 1992, 1996; Sullivan, 1999), but troubled with a sense of desperation and fatalism; i.e., there is no other line of work for these women. Ko, Chung, and Oh (2004) reveal that women who defect from communist North Korea often wind up working in brothels as their only means of earning an income in South Korea (Heiner, 1992), other countries in Europe, or in the United States. Kong (2006) defines sex work as "performance" and shows that sex workers in Hong Kong labor many hours a day (10-12) and maintain a strong work ethic. Indeed, in some countries, prostitution is considered a vocation like any other mode of physical labor (Orten and Phoenix, 2001; Lucas, 2005) rather than a deviant career choice (Luckerbill, 1986). This is certainly the case in Nevada, the only state in America where prostitution is legal and regulated by health and zoning codes (Brents and Hausbeck, 2001, 2005). In Japan (Lunsing, 2001) sex work does not encounter social stigma of Western condemnation and guilt where sex workers are only found in the hidden spaces of culture (Whittaker and Hart, 1996; Kay, 1999) or is viewed as so morally corrupt that the risk of punishment could be dismemberment or death (Pyett and Wan, 1999; Gysels and Nnalusiba, 2002; Hammer, 1999; Kuntay, 2002). Violence or the threat of violence is a common factor that comes along with sex work (Riberio and Sacramento, 2005). Other dangers are drug use, drug addiction (Marshall and Hendtlass, 1986; Erickson, Butters, McGillicuddy, Halgren, 2000; Green, Day, and Ward, 2000; Alantes, Fraile, and Page, 2002; Borei, 2004; Surratt, Inciardi, Kurtz, and Kiley, 2004; Geiger, 2006) and the community of violence (Barnard, 1993; Pyett and Warr, 1999; Phoenix, 2000; Campbell, Ahrens, Sefl, and Clark, 2003; Nixon, Tutty, Downe, Gorkoff, and Ursel, 2002; Nyanzi, Nyanzi, Kalina, and Pool, 2004) surrounding the drug trade (for instance, in Tijuana's Zona Norte, the drug cartels have business interests there and members of the drug gangs frequent the clubs, making the area a risk for sudden outbursts of violence, despite the police and military presence). Then there