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temporarily yours: intimacy, authenticity, and the commerce of sex

Elizabeth Bernstein, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2007, 288pp., ISBN:13 978-0-226-04458-3, £16.50 (Pbk)

There are books that make a key intervention in the existing body of feminist scholarship. Elisabeth Bernstein's *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* is one of these. Bernstein's work brings together two bodies of scholarship, that on the transformation of labour and on sex work that too often remain separate. What Bernstein's book does so well, and does differently from other works in this field, is to shift attention from whether sex work is actually a form of work to the issue of labour and labouring relations, and urge us to consider how current transformations of labour relations and labour markets are transforming the sex industry. *Temporarily Yours* takes sex work in post-industrial cities to be paradigmatic of the ways in which the boundaries between private and public, as well as between intimacy and commerce are being redrawn because of the transformation of the gendered division of labour. This does not imply that the separation between productive versus reproductive labour no longer exists, but rather that seeing it exclusively in terms of gendered division of labour does not fully capture the contemporary forms of labour arrangements. Drawing upon original ethnographic fieldwork with sex workers, clients and police in San Francisco and less substantial but very informative fieldwork in Stockholm and Amsterdam, Bernstein shows that in North America and Western Europe the redrawing of the boundaries between public and private life and intimacy and commerce has transformed sex work to such an extent that sexual commerce, in these post-industrial contexts, is no longer grounded in its opposition to the private sphere, but invested by the emotional and affective labour once associated with the intimate or domestic. In other words, what we see is a transposition of emotional labour and intimacy from the sphere of domesticity to that of commerce.

Where this comes most to the fore is in Bernstein's analyses of COYOTE and clients' demand for specific type of experience. COYOTE (which stands for call off your old tired ethics) is a sex workers' rights organisation founded in San Francisco in 1973, and is today one of the most visible and best known sex workers' rights organisation in the United States, whose members are from mainly middle-class backgrounds and who work as self-employed escorts, exotic dancers and erotic masseuses. Bernstein

shows that, contrary to the streetwalkers who usually maintain a separation between 'private' and 'public' selves, for middle-class sex workers sexual labour is diffuse rather than delimited, as it often includes emotional labour and diversified sexual activities that necessitate a larger amount of time and are more likely to take place at one's home (p. 102). This, Bernstein argues, is the main difference between prostitution in modern times and today's post-industrial prostitution. While the former was a quick and emotionally limited exchange based on maintenance of the boundaries between private and public selves and in which the private was off-limits, what Bernstein calls 'the emergent post-industrial paradigm of sexual commerce' engages emotions, affects and eroticism previously limited to the private sphere. Bernstein coins the term 'bounded authenticity' to suggest that what is being sold and purchased is an authentic emotional and physical connection and to indicate that this exchange is temporarily and emotionally bounded (p. 103). An example of this is GFE or the so-called 'girlfriend experience', where what is sold is a manufactured authenticity that tries to simulate being a girlfriend, namely a genuine desire and pleasure for a client who often seeks a 'real' and reciprocal albeit delimited sexual connection (p. 125–30). The main distinguishing characteristic then of the emergent post-industrial paradigm of sexual commerce is that emotional authenticity is explicitly brought into the economic contract.

Brilliant in its analysis of the COYOTE, the discussion of the situation in the Netherlands and Sweden is less convincing and lacks the depth of analysis of the previous chapters. It is certainly important to remark, as Bernstein does, that in the Netherlands and Sweden, the state policies towards prostitution, albeit exact opposites, that is, that of legalisation and criminalisation, respectively, have had very similar end effects. These include the states interventions in restricting rights and protections for migrant sex workers and the pushing of streetwalkers out of the center and to the edges of the city, thus giving the upper hand to the gentrification of the city centers. However, the problem is that, when the state is taken as the centre of control and oppression, what unfortunately remains unaddressed in Bernstein's book is the extent to which the state's territorial and institutional organisation has changed. This is particularly true in the EU, precisely because of the reorganisation of labour relations and markets and of the crisis in standard employment relations based on notions of the full-time male breadwinner. That a state-centered analysis is insufficient to address these transformations becomes evident when attention is focused on migrant labour, and especially on the ways in which the hierarchically organised access to labour mobility and citizenship makes visible new practices and forms of governance in Europe. Apart from these marginal considerations, *Temporarily Yours* is a brilliant and groundbreaking text that urges feminist scholars to deepen their analysis of the

sex industry and of the ways in which the reorganisation of the global economy brings about transformations in the erotic and intimate spheres more generally.

Rutvica Andrijasevic

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