

FREE-FOR-ALL¹

Recently, I've got a new bad habit: from time to time, I am reading a telegram channel which posts the profiles of independent, or, as they call themselves, individual female sex workers, with their photos, price lists, and – the most interesting part of it – customers reviews. I can only discuss this subject from my observations that arrive from the current realities of work in Russia: they work illegally and host their clients in their apartments. The prices range from 30 to 300 euros per hour; there are many choices from all included to additional services, which are carefully listed, sometimes with the worker's special comments, like "only for clean customers" or "I love doing this!"

Customer's reviews create an interesting genre. Some of them are well written; men compete in the art of writing, or copy others' rhetorical devices, try to be sharp, but also "objective." At first sight, these reviews are the same as customer reviews on all other commodities and services: they start from describing the apartments, the facilities in the shower, the reception and the level of conversation, the consistency of the real person with their profile photos, the quality of the services, and finally, estimate the overall cost/performance index of a given sex worker. However, on closer inspection, one can note that an average review on a sex worker is something different from an average review on a new fridge or a vacuum cleaner. Although many customers are trying to look cynical and really pretend that they describe an inanimate thing and her user parameters, some of them sound funny. "She really enjoys the process!", they write after listing consumer properties of her body.

You'd probably never write that your new vacuum cleaner really enjoys cleaning, but since in this case this is a service and not an object, it seems that a sex worker's enjoyment increases the value of the services, and I think that it is not only because it bolsters men's self-esteem. Yes, in the back of their mind, men might attribute this enjoyment to themselves, and even believe that perhaps they are the only ones with whom she really enjoys having sex. They get addicted and go from one sex worker to another in order to feel, again and again, an illusion that they are the only one among the many, who really have the talent to make her enjoy. Sometimes they even demonstrate unreflected paternalist tendencies, asking others not to offend this person, not to be rude to her. With this, a reader can discern the traces of classical rites of romantic love and jealousy, that entails also possessive characteristics, that the costumers observe in spite of their awareness that, having sex with a sex worker, they are precisely not the only ones.

In principle, her body is sharable: it is used by an unknown number of customers, without being appropriated by any one of them. And this impossibility to appropriate, and the necessity to share with others, is something that on the one hand attracts men, but also seems to provide sex work with emotional investments. In this regard, as a paradigmatic economic model, sex work is an extremely interesting one. A basic element of the economy of sharing is inseparable from the very mode of being a sex worker. If you want to buy her and her services exclusively, as you buy say, a car, she wouldn't be a sex worker any longer. Her services are to be used by many, and not to be permanently owned by anyone. the services of a sex worker are a special kind of commodity, a non-appropriable one. This is not, of course, a sharing economy in a proper sense: her services are not really shared, as a book in a public library, but rented, as a room via Airbnb. An intervention of money perverts the ethos of sharing.

Through this economic reading, one could say that a sex worker is the opposite to a slut. In everyday language the word "slut" designates a sexually promiscuous woman who makes herself available to be sexually used by many without being owned by any one. So, structurally it is the same as sex work, but there is one missing link here: money. A slut is having sex not for

¹ This text continues my reflection on female sexuality, polyandry and communism. See, for example: <https://thephilosophicalsalon.com/a-goddess-manifesto/>

money, but for pleasure. So, she is the one who only gains enjoyment. Consequently, one could claim that when a customer in their review, claims that a sex worker really enjoys the process, this is meant to say that a sex worker is a real slut, and not simply a worker. Let me articulate a tiny, but very significant difference between the two, in order to designate some non-obvious political-ontological premises behind a customer's popular fantasy that turns a sex worker into a slut.

Whereas the word "worker" is a neutral term, "a slut" is extremely loaded, both being explicitly negative and implicitly positive. It oscillates between moral conviction and sexual excitement. What is the cause of this excitement? My argument is that it can be found outside of the domain of sex itself. Behind certain phenomena that we envisage through the lens of sexuality, there is always something else – the disposition of power, economic models, politics and ecology, unconscious structures, anthropological invariants, modes of production, machines, ontological figures, etc. Thus, slut-shaming is not only a manifestation of sexism; in fact, this phenomenon can be traced back to deeper structures of desire historically linked to the relationship of humans to earth and nature, to the archaic rituals and modes of organization of societies. A slut is shamed not only because she transgresses the norms of patriarchal monogamy, but also because she transgresses certain basic economic models that shape our sexuality.

"Be my slut", a man tells me, trying to put his penis in one of the multiple openings of my body. How many are they? He is trying to count, but counting is not my thing. I am a porous body; a singular multiplicity of holes that never really creates a whole. In fact, I can pretend, but I cannot really be his slut, because being someone's slut is a contradiction in terms. Slut is never someone's, but always everyone's, and everyone else's at the same time. With her capacity and desire to give herself to many, she is also a no man's slut. The figure of the slut in many existing human cultures represents another relation to property that the one we know; she represents an alternative to the very idea of patriarchal ownership.

A slut is, as they also call her, "a common woman," or "a free-for-all," whereas a sex worker is rather "an un-free-for-all." The Russian equivalent for the "free-for-all" is something that could be better translated as "a giver," in a feminine gender. What does she give? – She gives herself. The paradox is that, giving herself won't really take her much: by giving, she does not lose herself; giving is not a loss. The idea that by giving something, one is losing what she gives, is the result of a mutilation that any kind of gift is subjected to, within capitalism. There is basically no place for a proper gift in capitalist universe, because capitalism considers gift as an exchange: one gives not only in order to receive back, but in order to receive back more than she gives. However, originally, a gift is something totally different. My favorite philosopher George Bataille speaks of a gift economy as a solar economy, meaning that the basic model of gift-giving is the sun which gives without ever receiving (the sun gives life to everything on Earth).

Gift economy is divine, glorious, and generous. It is opposite to capitalism, the system of greed. The solar side of desire is no way receiving, but giving. Bataille also calls it "the general economy" and opposes it to the restricted economy, like capitalist one, based on accumulation, production and growth. The sense of general economy is a non-productive expenditure, he says. Among various kinds of activities developed by human beings, there are those that are inscribed into restricted economy – and specifically, according to Bataille, such an activity is work. However, there are also activities that correspond to the general, or solar as Bataille calls it (which we would now define as ecology in a broader sense) and one of such activities that can be defined as non-productive expenditure, is sex. So, basically, if we follow this line of thinking, a slut, a woman that gives her body to everyone, is paradigmatically solar. She comes as a sign of a gift economy, that in capitalist society, seems impossible and stays forgotten and repressed. That's why a slut is shamed: she is an utopian figure, a guest from another world, a proto-communist figure that challenges not only moral norms, but also the very ontological settings of capitalism. The intervention of money transforms the general into restricted, a slut

into a sex worker, a pure enjoyment into profit, an expenditure into the production of value, a gift into a commodity.

I have to mention that in Russia the term "sex worker" is only used by a small group of feminists who is struggling to legalize it. Another group of radical feminists are totally against this term, and keep the word "prostitution" in order to emphasize the subjective experience of the group of women not as work, but as rape. I cannot go deeper into this discussion, which, in my country with its recently more and more patriarchal ideological tendencies, goes in raised voices and splits marginalized feminist minority. For me, both terms are correct. On the one hand, I agree that prostitution is a day to day rape, because, in my perspective, sex is essentially a sovereign activity that cannot be subordinated to external factors such as money and power; and any sexual intercourse that pursues goals unrelated to the enjoyment of bodily love, is already a kind of rape. On the other hand, I think that the term "sex work" is totally adequate, because it immediately clarifies something very important not only about sex, but also about work.

However, there is one point on which I am not in agreement with Bataille who opposes sex to work. If we accept such opposition, we could make a conclusion that the difference between a slut and a sex worker is that, for a slut who really enjoys sex, then sex is not work. My understanding of work is different, and refers to the old Marxian theory of alienation that Marx developed in his early humanist book *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. There, he suggests that labor is the essence of humans. He was broadly criticized for this claim, but upon working through this critique, I realized that Marx was right, and the idea that labor is the essence of the human can be reinterpreted and adopted in today's context. Labor, according to Marx, is our essentially free activity. In this sense does not differ much from sex, art or play (all these things, according to Bataille, are non-productive activities). There is work that we do simply because we really enjoy it. Such is, for example, creative work, arts, writing. Any work in fact may be such work, that we would do freely, even if we were not obliged or forced to do it, for example, by the need to survive. What is wrong in the way capitalism operates, is that we sell not only our labor, but this very freedom and enjoyment. That's why sex work is an excellent model of any work in capitalist society: it neutralizes the enjoyment of freedom, the traces of which, confuse sometimes the customers of sex workers. Polyandry is a solar capacity that is embodied by a slut which, in our society, is humiliated and abused. Sex work must be liberated not in a capitalist sense of legalizing it as capitalist enterprise, but in a sense of opening this black box of freedom, and breaking the taboo of female enjoyment in sex, both imaginary or real, that somehow is still kept for the future.