The body as drama: Narrative strategies in the one-woman show

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THE BODY AS DRAMA: NARRATIVE STRATEGIES
IN THE ONE-WOMAN SHOW

by

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ABSTRACT

The Body as Drama:
Narrative Strategies in the One-Woman Show

by

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This thesis examines the one-woman show in the United States focusing on the female body as the arbiter of truth. Beginning with a study of feminist performance artists from the late 1970s-1980s and exploring the subject matter of women such as Rachel Rosenthal and Holly Hughes, the particular narrative thread of "truth and the body" continues to the recent works of playwright Eve Ensler. Her one-woman play, The Vagina Monologues, explores the discourse of the female body. Playwright Lisa Kron further explores this issue, and her one-woman play 2.5 Minute Ride is dissected as an example of successful theatrical narrative. This thesis compares the narrative strategy, theatrical conceits and social privileging that occur in each woman's work.
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INTRODUCTION

In the winter of 1981, Susan Gubar, a feminist scholar, wrote, "Unable to train themselves as painters, unable to obtain the space or income to become sculptors, gifted women in these areas have had to work in private, using the only material at hand - their bodies, their selves."¹ Gubar’s essay, "'The Blank Page' and the Issues of Female Creativity" examines the woman as a blank page, based on Isak Dinesen’s short story, "The Blank Page." Gubar discusses the nature of female creativity, illustrating two main points, the first of which is of great importance to the creation of the one-woman show; "many women experience their own bodies as the only available medium for their art, with the result that the distance between the woman artist and her art is often radically diminished."² This relationship between a female artist and creativity has created a theme for feminist

² Gubar 296
performance artists and theatre artists alike. Therefore, it should be no great surprise that when women were looking for a way into the art scene in the late 1970s and early 1980s, they created the continuing theme of "the body as drama;" they used their bodies as the text for their performance pieces.

The body as drama is a simple yet evocative dramatic theme, one that has propagated nearly every kind of art form. While feminist scholars were studying plays by women (think Lillian Hellman), feminist performance artists were using themselves to create art. Women were finally able to find a space in the art world - performance art. While men also participated in this new art, women seemed to dominate it. Performance art became the ripe venue for women and creativity.

The one-woman show developed, or at least the one-woman shows that centered on the body as drama, developed thanks in large part to these feminist performance artists. Eve Ensler, discussed in chapter three, is often times referred to as a performance artist herself, and Lisa Kron, examined in chapter four, was heavily influenced by Holly Hughes and several other heavy-hitting feminist performance artists. The common thread for each artist introduced in
this thesis is that they use their bodies as the arbiter of truth.

While the theme of the body as drama can be found in many one-woman shows, the narrative strategies vary greatly. Even performance artists used a plethora of strategies, and because this kind of art is predominantly autobiographical, no one piece will be structured like the next. To further this point, "The attraction of women writers to personal forms of expression like... autobiographies...points up the effect of a life experienced as an art or an art experienced as a kind of life." \(^3\) This close relationship helps to make the form of the one-woman show immensely immediate. This is where one big advantage to producing one-woman show lies; the intimacy of a one-woman show is something you can’t get on television or in a movie. It happens right now, with an audience. This is also where the dualities of playwrights like Ensler and Kron are strongest; they each have one foot in the autobiographical camp and one foot in the art form camp. This duality is what brings together Gubar’s point with the world of theatre.

What about the overall theatrical effectiveness of a one-woman show? Theatre artists of all kinds debate the

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\(^3\) Gubar 299
structures of a one-woman play, and find - just as with any kind of play - there are good ones and bad ones. So what makes a one-woman show better than another? I find that there are a few guidelines that can help one narrative strategy become far more effective on an audience than another, and I will use a few of Aristotle’s principles to highlight them.

First and foremost, a play ought to have a universal theme of some kind. Universality of theme is what can reach a diverse audience; with a universal theme no audience is marginalized. Aristotle expressed this idea: “Poetry...is a more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular.”4 As Francis Fergusson puts it, “Here we meet once more the universality of art: the passions of tragedy must spring from something of more than individual.”5 I would like to add that while Aristotelian structure is generally considered patriarchal in nature, it is the ability/inability of the female playwrights discussed in this thesis to take universality to a new level; to present a universal theme that is not masculine or male-identified.

The second most important element for a play is what some playwrights call "the lie of the play." This indicates there must be some hidden fact or event, and once the lie is discovered there is a turning point. Aristotle called this recognition: "Recognition...is a change from ignorance to knowledge," and it can occur in the character/characters on stage, in the audience, or both. Recognition is important because when the audience already knows what is going to happen, the dramatic tension is eliminated. Aristotle addressed several other components that can help make a play successful (magnitude, catharsis, etc). At one point in history, Aristotle's Poetics became absolute; in contemporary theatre playwrights do as they please. Still, it cannot be denied that Aristotelian structure can help make a play successful.

This being said, feminism is a useful tool to examine the one-woman show and its subsequent narrative strategies. Feminist performance artists were concerned with gender stereotypes and the social construction of gender. They sought to explore sexuality and the female body, changing the discourse of female sexuality in the theatrical realm. Their art was a form of protest against heteropatriarchal norms and values, and the door that they opened helped to

6 Aristotle 72
create the one-woman show. For example, Karen Finley "was
banned from performing in London by a law that forbids
women to be onstage nude and speak at the same time. As we
know, prohibitions always imply obligations. The female
body with an active tongue is still, evidently, a
violation." This kind of law exists to prevent women from
gaining subjectivity through dialogue. Combining nudity
with silence objectifies the woman; this law clearly
supports the objectification of the female body. A woman's
obligation, then, is to quietly take off her clothes and
remain silent while she is objectified. The need for
performance art like Finley's becomes obvious when laws
that prohibit the nude female to speak still exist. Finley
was a pioneer in this aspect, continually pushing the
envelope of social acceptance for women and art.

Continuing this theme is Kate Bornstein, a transgender
performance artist, who believes that

Cross-gender casting merely scratches the surface of
what we could really be doing theatrically with
gender. If theatre artists really want to grab hold
of the future of the body, then it's time those
artists understand that there are some new tools

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available: me and my people. What kind of theatre might you build with bodies that walk beyond the boundaries of what’s allowed by the proprietors of popular culture?\(^8\)

Bornstein’s point parallels the struggles of third wave feminists to break the boundaries of socially constructed gender and sexuality, and Kron’s play, 2.5 Minute Ride, is able to transcend the need for labeling to reach an audience as a white, middle-class, Jewish lesbian without being labeled as such.

Finally, there is a need to study the one-woman show and its successes or problematic messages because women are still struggling to be seen as equals in the world of theatre. “According to a report issued in the late 1970s, ‘Action for Women in Theatre,’ the total number of professional women playwrights and directors hired by regional and Off-Broadway theatres over a seven year period from 1969 to 1975 was 7\%.\(^9\)” Things haven’t gotten that much better; “In 1999 women wrote only 8\% of all plays and only

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1% of musicals.”¹⁰ That year the Guerrilla Girls bought a full-page advertisement in the 1999 Tony Awards. “The headline read: ‘There’s a tragedy on Broadway and it isn’t Electra.’”¹¹
CHAPTER TWO

FEMINIST PERFORMANCE ART

It is no secret that for centuries women have been oppressed. The woman’s place has traditionally been the home, the bearer and caretaker of children, queen of the domestic realm while the man fills the role of breadwinner and defender/head of the nuclear family. Women were not given the right to vote until 1920, it was both legally and socially acceptable for husbands to rape their wives, and women were isolated in a manner that prevented them from rising up to fight the phallocentric society. All of this has changed only in the past century.

It is also no secret that women have been silenced, unable to write literature of their own, from poetry to dramatic texts. There have been a plethora of women writers in the past four decades searching for a new history, a new context and a new discourse with which to study women. Lilian Schissel wrote, "There is a wide discrepancy in American culture between the life of women as conceived by men and the life of women as lived by
women." Schissel poignantly reveals the gap between the genders. Because women did not write literature for so long, men have written about them; now that women are able to write there is a vast chasm between how men have seen the lives of women and how women actually live. This has opened an entirely new field of academia for feminist scholars to explore what the lives of women were actually like in the past.

During the second wave of feminism, which began in the 1960’s, women were struggling for equal pay, equal benefits and child care so they could work and go to school. In 1973 the Supreme Court ruled in Roe v. Wade that women were allowed to terminate an early pregnancy, giving women reproductive rights. In 1976 Adrienne Rich wrote a forward to the book Working It Out: 23 Women Artists, Scholars, and Scientists Talk About Their Lives and Work. She states,

I cannot imagine a feminist evolution leading to radical change in the private/political realm of gender that is not rooted in the conviction that all women’s lives are important; that the lives of men cannot be understood by burying the lives of women; and that to make visible the full meaning of women’s

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experience, to reinterpret knowledge in terms of that experience, is now the most important task of thinking.¹³

It became incredibly important for women writers and artists to pave a new path. Around this same time, women were also searching for different ways to express themselves; to tell their stories that had not been heard before in a manner that had not been done before. What became of this desire is performance art.

In an interview with Denise Meola, performance artist Rachel Rosenthal was asked, "Why are women drawn to this kind of art [performance art]?" Rosenthal answered, "It's simple: They were barred from almost everything else. Hordes of women made visual art but few had a gallery representing them. Performance art was a way for women to make a dent in the art world without passing through the art structure."¹⁴ Rosenthal's point rings loud and true, particularly considering the number of women trying to make their way in the world of theatre.

The nature of performance art is continually surrounded by controversy. Often theatre scholars disagree

whether performance art is theatre or something entirely different. This thesis is not concerned with either argument; however, it is important to understand that the narrative strategies in performance art have influenced/are influencing theatre artists today.

Rachel Rosenthal is a performance artist whose narrative strategies exemplify the importance of theatre. Rosenthal began her work in 1955 with the Experimental Instant Theatre, which lasted ten years. For the whole of the 1970's she was a leader in the Women's Art Movement and co-founded Womanspace, among others.¹⁵ She won an Obie Award in 1989 for Rachel's Brain, a collection of her performance pieces from 1977 to 1992.

In an interview with Elaine Barkin, Rosenthal discusses her art on theatrical terms. She defines theatre as an art where each piece (writing, directing, acting, designing) is provided by a different person/persons, whereas she does everything herself. She goes on to say that of the performance artists she has seen, her work is considered "more theatrical." Other artists use different media, particularly technology, to create their art. Rosenthal is considered highly theatrical, in part because


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she is concerned with the audience. She emphasizes, "Most of my past work has been autobiographical, using my own experiences and trying to affect an audience by reaching the universal through the very deeply personal."  

This concern with the universal is what places Rosenthal in a unique position as a performance artist. Her desire to communicate with the audience gives her work a level of theatricality, based on Aristotelian drama, that otherwise might not exist. The attempt at a universal theme is certainly one of the most important narrative strategies available, and one of the most effective.  

Overall, Rosenthal's work is concerned with "humanity's place on the planet," yet she begins by using herself. Rosenthal  

has fully grasped the fundamental principle of great autobiographical art: that it is never the literal self that matters. Or rather, not the one we think is the literal self, but another more literal, more palpable, more material one: that collection of

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17 Rachel Rosenthal Company. 15 Dec. 2005

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physical and emotional experiences we keep hidden behind a curtain of metaphors and memories.\textsuperscript{18} This statement will highlight the works of other female theatre artists in the coming chapters, particularly Lisa Kron.

Several other successful female performance artists flourished in the late 1970’s and 1980’s. It is important to note that performance art became heavily dominated by women, and women’s collective/collaborative theatre groups during this time were influenced by performance art. One very important player in the women’s performance art scene is Karen Finley. Finley’s work has always been highly controversial, primarily because she uses her body and her sexuality as the basis for much of her work. Jill Dolan believes that “Language in feminist performance. . .is only part of the story. The body writes the largest portion of the text.”\textsuperscript{19}

The performance art strategy of using the body, especially the female body, as the ultimate source of drama, was really born in this period and thanks in large part to Finley herself. Up until this point in history, women were discouraged from talking about their bodies to

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} Una Chaudhuri, ed., Introduction, Critical Performances: Rachel’s Brain and Other Storms (London & New York: Continuum, 2001) 2
\end{flushright}
anyone, much less an audience. The female body was still subject to the discourse of the patriarchal society, and that made it something to hide; occasionally for sale but nearly always something dirty and connected to scandal. Women's bodies were defined by men, and no real language existed for women to use. One of many results of the second wave of feminism, therefore, was a desire to create a new discourse for women to talk about their bodies as defined by them, not by their husbands, fathers or the government. Roe v. Wade had a large impact here, allowing a woman a given amount of privacy with which to decide for herself what to do with and how to feel about her body. It becomes important to note that while second wavers were in favor of a new discourse for women, they were not in favor of women using their sexuality. Here is where Finley is outside of the hegemony of the second wave of feminism—she firmly believed that the female body and sexuality become socially acceptable.

Finley began performing at a young age. When she was twenty-one, her father committed suicide in his garage, killing himself with a gun. In an interview with Robert Schechner, Finley said of her father's death, "That really put me in such a reality state, of realizing that nothing
really ever matters. In some ways, it actually freed me.”

Finley attended the San Francisco Art Institute for a time and struggled to make her way in the world of performance art. Probably most known as “the chocolate smeared woman,” she used food items to represent feces, cum and other bodily discharge. She was breaking the barrier of social acceptance, and most people were not happy about it.

“Onstage Karen Finley represents a frightening and rare presence—an unsocialized woman.”

Finley was creating a space for the discourse of the female body on female terms. During the 1980’s she was a key player in feminist performance, a time where women were becoming “hard-edged, less subtle.”

Richard Schechner believed,

...the very words themselves scare people—because ‘sexual women’ are often constructed by males as being visible, physical, and literally dumb, without words. Men...obviously continue to see women as objects.

...what you are presenting is a woman who is a subject expressing the sexual violence and humor that

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22 Carr 142

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women are still supposed to be the objects of. . .

You don’t just show it, you talk about it—the shock is in the words you use. . .

Much of the controversy over Finley’s work lies here, in the expression of the woman as a subject rather than object. By this I mean that Finley is constructing her own meaning; she is an active participant in her life and art. She refuses to be constructed by others as a sex object, while at the same time she is using her sexuality to construct her subjectivity. This was necessary for women in performance art at this time. A necessary evil some might say, for in doing so Finley’s work became viewed in terms of pornography. She denies that her work is pornographic, but because she, along with other female performance artists of the time, had to create this new discourse she is susceptible to critics who misunderstand her intentions.

Finley is also criticized by other feminists. She loves burlesque shows, calling burlesque “the greatest theatre in the world.” She has worked as a stripper and a hustler, which falls in the controversial realm of owning one’s sexuality vs. exploiting it. She thought Judy Chicago’s Dinner Party project was disgusting, saying,

\[23\] Schechner 153
"Men would never have a show with, like, Abraham Lincoln's dick on a plate."

Finley's point is that women should not objectify their own achievements. Finley also had disagreements with the Women's Caucus for the Arts over changing words in the title of her piece, *I Like the Dwarf on the Table When I Give Him Head*. Finley feels "personal humiliation" for actors on television, citing specifically actress Linda Evans and the kinds of shows where, "The women with power. . .won't really use it—'and they're good women because they don't use it.'" This frustration is understandable; Finley fights against the patriarchy with one hand and against feminists with the other. Although, as C. Carr believes, "feminists fight like this over language because they know it controls the world."25

The "icing" on the controversial Finley "cake" came in 1990 when John Frohnmayer vetoed four National Endowment for the Arts grants. The grants had been approved by the NEA peer review panel, and were to be awarded to Karen Finley, Tim Miller, John Fleck and Holly Hughes. Frohnmayer vetoed on the grounds that the works of the artists were obscene and vulgar. Three of the four's work (Miller, Fleck and Hughes) dealt with homosexuality, while

26 Carr 149
25 Carr 148-49
Finley's work was sexually explicit. By 1993, the courts had ruled in favor of the "defunded four," under the first amendment.

At this point feminist performance art had created a web of knowledge about the female body, correcting the discourse of inequality; however, one more major piece of the puzzle was coming into play. Holly Hughes, like Finley, was one of the "defunded four," but her role in performance art differed greatly. Hughes' work was primarily about lesbianism, and for several years her work was surrounded by the fear and championship of "homoerotic" art. Hughes' fourth performance piece, World without End, was the piece she was working on when the NEA vetoed her grant. Hughes was attacked from the right and the left; the right attacking her work for its homosexuality, and the left attacking it because it wasn't homoerotic enough. Kate Davy "realizes that lesbian 'identity' does not automatically imbue a piece with a readable lesbian discourse and aesthetic;"\(^{26}\) meaning that just being a lesbian wasn't enough for some members of the left. They were looking for exclusivity, and this is the most prominent reason Hughes' work was attacked from both sides.

I would argue that Hughes was ahead of her time, performing art that did not solely depend on her lesbian identity and was not mutually exclusive with human experience.

Hughes' work was vitally important for this very same reason - lesbians are women, too. Feminism for many years was only about white middle class women. Hughes helped open the door for feminist lesbian artists. Peggy Phelan stated, "'Lesbians are not as overtly hated because they are so locked out of the visible, so far from the minds of the NEA and the New Right, that they are not acknowledged as a threat.'" In this way, lesbians are not even seen as human, but as a subhuman race that deserves little to no attention. To further this point, Bertha Harris wrote, "'The lesbian, without a literature, is without life. Sometimes pornographic, sometimes a mark of fear, sometimes a sentimental flourish, she...floats in space...without that attachment to earth where growth is composed.'" Thus Hughes created and is still creating art as a lesbian with no history readily available to examine; she was, and still is, forging a new path for the lesbian. Because of this struggle, Hughes' performance work was generally loud and

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27 Davy 56
28 Rich 200
aggressive; she understood the importance of gender and sexual equality.

Rosenthal, Finley and Hughes all share another common denominator - content mattered. In the phallocentric tradition of theatre, form is generally privileged over content. The explosion of exploration of theatricality in the 1960’s was still nevertheless about form, not content. This is another major reason for performance art to be so heavily female dominated - it gave women a place to privilege content, their content, from their bodies to their sexuality. According to Davy, “Somehow the seemingly forever devalued notion of ‘content’ becomes salient again in the context of representation that would call itself lesbian.”29 Not just lesbian, but feminist in nature and, as always, using the female body as the ultimate source for drama and truth. This is what paved the way for the one-woman show.
CHAPTER THREE

EVE ENSLER AND THE VAGINA MONOLOGUES

Feminist performance art certainly cleared the path for feminist theatre. This thesis examines one particular door that was opened - the one-woman show. There are two varieties that evolved. The first type has several different characters, all personified and performed by one woman, such as that of Anna Deavere Smith. The second type is a very long monologue, often called a monologue play as opposed to a one-woman show. Both types serve different functions: the one that deals more with the body as drama is the latter. The one-woman show is ideal for dissecting and discussing body issues, primarily because the audience gets an individual story. Single person shows lend themselves to autobiographical drama.

Perhaps the most well-known one-woman show today is Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*. *The Vagina Monologues* are several shorter monologues combined for an evening of drama connected by the exact theme “the body as drama.” This play deals wholly with the female body experience,
sharing the topics so earnestly developed by artists like Finley and Hughes; however, its narrative strategy is problematic in several ways. This chapter explores the play’s narrative, looking at the success of the show as well as the somewhat confusing message it sends. This confusion begins with an examination of feminism in the late 1990’s and early Twenty-First Century.

Scholars disagree over the exact ending of the second wave of feminism and the beginning of the third wave of feminism, as well as the ideologies of both. Dates are not necessarily important here; however, what is important is the difference between feminism for performance artists in the 1980’s, feminism according to Ensler, and the ideology of third wavers in the Twenty-First Century. Feminism is not just about equal rights for everyone—it has evolved. Estelle Freedman believes that today, “Along with calling for women’s independence, feminists have recognized the interdependence of all people, as well as the interconnection of gender equality with broader social justice movements.” For Hughes and Finley, just the idea of talking about female anatomy and sexuality was vitally important to change the public’s perception of the female

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as a whole. It mattered that people saw their work and were affected, feminists included. Above all else, they wanted to help their audiences realize that women did not need to be defined by men. This idea, or seed, has blossomed in the years since. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) theory has taken academics to a new place, and third wave feminists have joined in their ranks. For the purpose of this thesis, the primary goal of third wave feminism is to understand the existence of and consequential tearing down of social constructs. By social constructs, I mean the ideologies associated with masculinity, femininity, queerness, etc. For example, if, as a society we privilege masculine qualities, it is because society has constructed those qualities as more important or necessary. Once we realize that men and women do not have to act according to what society deems acceptable we can move past the privileging of patriarchal norms. “Masculine” and “Feminine” are only vague notions that imply behavior. It is important for human beings to realize the existence of socially constructed gender roles and sexuality, to move beyond stereotypes of what men and women are supposed to be, and reach a new place where acceptance and equality for all reigns.
This being said, it is necessary to look at the text of *The Vagina Monologues* and try to decipher just what is the message of the play. In the introduction, Ensler states, "Whenever I have tried to write a monologue to serve a politically correct agenda, for example, it always fails. Note the lack of monologues about menopause or transgendered women."\(^3\) It seems that from the beginning Ensler is quick to note the narrowness of the piece. Whether she is on the defense or simply stating a fact is unimportant; what matters here is the subject. While Ensler herself did interview many women of varying social status, race and age, the piece itself really only addresses a certain age group of women who are all heterosexual. There are no real homoerotic monologues, no monologues about transgendered men or women, and only one monologue about childbirth that was added two years after Ensler had been performing the piece. From the very beginning the play limits itself much like early feminism was limited, only available to white middle class heterosexual women. Third wave feminism is again a reaction to this problem and seeks to include marginalized,

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\(^3\) Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Villard, 1998) xxvi-xxvii

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transgendered and intersexed people in a manner that does not reinforce heteropatriarchal stereotypes.

The first monologue is entitled, "Hair;" it is one woman's reaction to her husband's infidelity, related to the audience via a discussion of her pubic hair. This is the first of several monologues that attempt to bring women together on the basis of their feelings for men; either what they do to women or how they treat, talk about or generally view women. For this reason Ensler puts herself at risk for being considered a "man-hater" (a right-wing misconception of feminism), something feminists are trying to avoid. "The Flood" is another monologue that Ensler uses to unite hetero-women, bonding together due to bad sexual experiences with men. Ensler herself has said that she became a feminist because of "my general anger and distrust of men" and "inappropriate sexual involvement with a series of older male professors." 32 The danger with this discourse is that general anger and distrust of men is probably an anger/frustration of living in a patriarchal society; however, it is misconstrued by the patriarchy as man-hating feminism. This is very delicate ground for feminists, and while anger is a perfectly viable motivation

for creativity, Ensler’s work is at risk because it is liable to lose its integrity due to this right-wing conception of man-hating. This puts a negative spin on feminism, as opposed to a positive, pro-active journey for equality for all human beings.

There are instances in the play where Ensler lists answers to questions she has asked several women. These sections generally deal with personifying the vagina, for example what would it say, what would it wear, etc. This is meant to be a celebration for women, a means to the end of a journey where women can think about their sexual and reproductive organs in a positive light, a way for them to own their bodies and feel proud. The problem is that once a woman celebrates the existence of having a vagina she is also defined by having a vagina. This excludes intersexed individuals, transgendered people, and men. Feminists today are trying to avoid viewing gender as simply binary.

“Because He Liked to Look at It” is a monologue where by a woman is taught to love her vagina because of a man. This, again is a confusing feminist message – on the one hand a woman learns to love her sexual self, on the other she is “shown the light” because of a man. The woman speaking says, “In the light, I watched him looking at me, and he was so genuinely excited, so peaceful and euphoric...I
began to see myself the way he saw me. I began to feel beautiful. . .".  

This is a popular monologue, the name of the man is Bob, and many people make or buy “I love Bob” tee-shirts and panties, perhaps to express their love for the men out there that love vaginas. Bob loves vaginas, don’t all women want a man who does? In many ways this monologue highlights the positive aspects of a hetero/healthy relationship; however, it also reinforces the hierarchy of man, man’s sexuality, woman’s sexuality, and finally woman. The man uses his sexuality and desire for vaginas to explore a woman’s sexuality, which, in the end, makes her feel like a woman. This, to some, could signify the need for women to rely upon men to make them feel wanted and sexual.

The Vagina Monologues also engages in a colonialist discursive tradition. Ensler includes several “Vagina Facts” in her play, some of which deal with genital mutilation. For example, she states,

Genital mutilation has been inflicted on 80 million girls and young women. In countries where it is practiced, mostly African, about 2 million youngsters a year can expect the knife - or the razor or a glass shard - to cut their clitoris or

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33 Ensler 57
remove it altogether, [and] to have part or all of the labia...sewn together with catgut or thorns.\textsuperscript{34} She also includes a fact about masturbation and clitoridectomy as a cure in the United States, but gives the fact that “In the United States, the last recorded clitoridectomy...was performed in 1948 - on a five year-old girl.”\textsuperscript{35} All of this seems to imply that Western culture has moved beyond genital mutilation, which is left to poor third world countries. The Intersex Society of North America felt this was so prevalent, albeit unintentional, that they posted a challenge to V-Day on their website.\textsuperscript{36} The main debate, of course, is whether The Vagina Monologues only celebrate “normal” women with “normal” vaginas. The ISNA felt that many children still endure types of mutilation, specifically intersexed children. The concern is that intersexed children in the United States are completely ignored for their “abnormalities.” The Vagina Monologues actively participate in this discourse. Ensler shares a story of a young girl she met in Oklahoma who was born without a vagina. The girl had discovered this at the age of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{34} Ensler 67  
\textsuperscript{35} Ensler 66  
\end{flushleft}
fourteen, when she had been playing with a girlfriend and realized her genitals were different. Being closest to her father, she confided in him and he took her to a gynecologist. Upon discovering that she did not have a vagina or a uterus, her father, in tears, said to his daughter, "Don't worry darlin'. This is all gonna be just fine. As a matter of fact, it's gonna be great. We're gonna get you the best homemade pussy in America. And when you meet your husband, he's gonna know we had it made specifically for him."^37 After sharing this story, Ensler tells her audience, "And they did get her a new pussy, and she was relaxed and happy when she brought her father back two nights later, the love between them melted me."^38 The emphasis of this story is on the abnormality of the young girl, the fact that she was born without a vagina made her less of a woman, and the relationship Ensler chooses to highlight is with the father, completely disregarding the fact that the girl discovered this by playing with another girl. Her father's statement also reinforces the heteropatriarchal tradition that a woman must have a vagina to please a man, so that her husband knows her vagina is

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^37 Ensler 99-100
^38 Ensler 100

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all for him. In this manner Ensler accidentally undoes her point - that women need to own their vaginas.

"The Little Coochi Snorcher That Could" is, by some, viewed as a homoerotic piece. In this monologue a young girl who has been sexually abused by an adult male is taught by an older woman to love her vagina. The woman teaches her how to please herself so she will never have to depend on a man for pleasure. Sexuality is explored in this piece, but I argue that the emphasis is on learning to love oneself rather than on an actual homoerotic relationship. For example, the young girl says, "In the morning I am worried that I've become a butch because I'm so in love with her...She transformed my sorry-ass coochi snorcher and raised it up into a kind of heaven."39 The young girl uses a negative slur to express her fear of being lesbian; however, ultimately she has prevailed in loving her vagina. Towards the end of the play, Ensler finally addresses homosexuality and lesbians. She shares a conversation she had with a lesbian; when the woman begins to speak about touching another woman's clitoris, Ensler says, "I realize I am embarrassed, listening to her."40 Further into the conversation, the woman is sharing a

39 Ensler 82
40 Ensler 116
fantasy, “My tongue is on her clitoris. My tongue replaces my fingers. My mouth enters her vagina.” Ensler replies with, “Saying these words feels naughty, dangerous, too direct, too specific, wrong (my emphasis), intense, in charge, alive.” And yet shouting “cunt” and moaning for several minutes is not embarrassing for Ensler? This leads to the conclusion that it is because the woman is a lesbian, describing a homoerotic fantasy as opposed to a heteroerotic one that is what Ensler finds to be distressing.

The Vagina Monologues seem to promote “taking back the word,” so to speak. In the piece titled, “Reclaiming Cunt,” a woman uses positive descriptive words to spell out the word cunt, in the same way some women have tried to take back the words bitch, whore, slut, etc. What the play doesn’t do is tell the audience what happens after a person takes back the word. Reclaiming cunt is only the first part; what happens after a woman reclaims cunt? What meaning is she supposed to give it? Is cunt a word for homo as well as hetero beings? What about men, can they use cunt — and how will anyone know the proper setting in which to use the word? There is a difference between an individual giving a word a particular meaning and society

41 Ensler 117
as a whole giving a word meaning; I can reclaim cunt for myself but how can an entire society? Ensler doesn’t address any of these issues, which makes “Reclaiming Cunt” feel like a gratuitous, naughty-word monologue.

Several problematic elements of The Vagina Monologues have been laid out in this chapter; nevertheless, the play has been what some might even be called a runaway success. In 1998 V-Day was first performed in New York City featuring a cornucopia of starlets. Originally, the New York Times refused to run an advertisement for the play; later they dubbed the show “the hottest ticket in town.”\textsuperscript{42} Since then the play has been produced on college campuses worldwide, with the proceeds benefiting non-profit organizations, such as rape crisis centers and so on. “In 2001, performances of The Vagina Monologues raised an estimated seven million dollars.”\textsuperscript{43} Despite its confusing feminist message, the monologues bring people together in a celebration of the female body. Ensler successfully draws our attention to the relationship of heteropatriarchal values and the value placed on the vagina. Katha Pollitt comments,

\textsuperscript{42} Enler 131
\textsuperscript{43} Hall
Besides being a wonderful night at the theatre, it reminded me that after all the feminist debates (and splits) and all the books and the Theory and the theories, in the real world there are still such people as women, who share a common biology and much else besides...Sisterhood-is-powerful feminism may feel out of date to the professoriat, but there’s a lot of new music still to be played on those old bones. Besides, if feminists don’t talk about sex in a fun, accessible, inspiring, nonpuritanical way, who will?’’

Pollitt has a fair point; many feminists share her view that *The Vagina Monologues* are a fun and even sexy way for women to feel good about themselves and bond. Many people leave the theatre feeling rejuvenated at having chanted “cunt” with several hundred others; yet somewhere in this cloud of pride I have always heard someone say, “Do you hear this GUYS? Did you pay attention MEN? I have a vagina and you must worship it!” While not all people leaving the theatre feel this way, it is undeniably one honest reaction to the play. Where is the positive message for homosexuals, transgendered individuals, and intersexed individuals? It’s euphoric to feel that womanly bond, but

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feminism has got to go further, beyond a pussy pep-rally to a place that does not exclude.

Because of the problematic and confusing feminist narrative, the play loses some of its dramatic effectiveness. The universality of The Vagina Monologues is clearly not so universal. Perhaps part of the problem is that Ensler creates her play based on a myriad of interviews, which prevents the audience from getting to know the character of the play. That is part of what makes the one-woman show so great, so intimate, yet The Vagina Monologues loses out on the intimacy of character. There are over a dozen monologues, several facts, and small sections that list short answers given by a variety of women. Instead of journeying with a character, the audience is told what to think about vaginas, and although Ensler includes many different antidotes, the fragmentation is jolting and sends the message that because many women were interviewed, then all women should be this way, think this way, feel this way. Instead of making the vagina personal, it becomes something that has to conform to Ensler's norms. The next chapter explores a one-woman show by playwright Lisa Kron, whose play is both personal and universal, a contrast to The Vagina Monologues.
CHAPTER FOUR

LISA KRON AND 2.5 MINUTE RIDE

After examining The Vagina Monologues, several questions can be raised. If Ensler's play is actually rather narrow and limited, then what is it that makes a one-woman show successful? Is it even possible for a one-woman autobiographical show to not be limited, since we are all limited by our own experiences? I argue that what makes a play at least partially successful is its universal quality, or, that if a play is to succeed, it must begin with a universal quality. How universal is The Vagina Monologues? If, to relate to the play, an audience member must have a vagina, then already at least half of potential theatre-goers are cut. Furthermore, if that person must fall under the context of "normal sexuality," then I would wager another fairly large percentage would also be cut. This leaves a small base of potential audience members. Something about the play has got to be universal, but what is it that makes a play universal?
This thesis is concerned with one-woman shows that use the female body as the ultimate source of drama. It could be argued that because these artists only use their bodies, female bodies, then half of the population is cut anyway. I disagree — every body feels hunger. Every body feels pain, every body needs sleep. These needs are not discriminatory. No one population or culture is marginalized because everybody needs the same basic elements to survive. Here is where universal nature enters — and universal characteristics do not necessarily have to deal with physicality. Our bodies all feel fear, stress, disappointment, love, etc. These qualities unite rather than divide us.

One playwright whose work transcends the limitations of autobiographical writing is Lisa Kron. Kron’s work is always authentically autobiographical, but always contains that key element of universality. She is heavily influenced by the work of Holly Hughes, the Split Britches Company (another feminist performance art group), and members of the Five Lesbian Brothers (of which Kron belongs). Kron graduated with a B.A. in theatre from Kalamazoo College in Michigan, won the Bessie Award as a member of the Five Lesbian Brothers (FLB) in 1993, was nominated for a Drama Desk award in 1995, and received an
Obie Award for *The Secretaries* as a member of the FLB, among other honors and awards. Since then she has written and performed in several other pieces, including her play *2.5 Minute Ride*, and *Well*, which is currently on Broadway (2006).

As mentioned in chapter two, Kron’s work identifies with several of the female performance artists examined. Like Rosenthal, Kron believes that “One of my main strengths as a performer...is my direct communication with an audience. There is a dynamic theatrical moment when an audience realizes you are talking to them sitting right now in this room.” This is obviously one of the benefits of telling a story, an autobiographical story that can build and climax for the audience rather than having several sections of several stories, which prevents the audience from journeying with the performer. Kron is a master when it comes to bringing the audience along with her. She also follows in the footsteps of Hughes, who used her sexuality as a jumping point for her performance art. Kron is able to be a lesbian, a woman, a Jew, a white, and so on and still surpass limitations that would otherwise hinder her performances because artists like Hughes

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46 Kron 218

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demanded that sexuality is just another part of being human.

Building on all of these things, the impact of Kron’s plays are nearly always universal. Being aware of the dangers of a solo show, Kron states, “There are two ever-present problems in autobiographical solo performance. One is that the story’s material will be about you and not have that oh-so-important universality. The other is that dramatic action is hard to come by.”\textsuperscript{47} Because she is aware of these possible problems, as a playwright she is able to overcome them. The play that I have chosen to explore for this chapter is \textit{2.5 Minute Ride} (which was first produced in 1996 at La Jolla Playhouse, and was later produced at The Joseph Papp Public Theatre/New York Shakespeare Festival in 1999).\textsuperscript{48} This play exemplifies Kron’s ability to achieve universality in theme from an autobiographical standpoint. By universality in theme, I am referring to a universal quality which is not male-centered, male-privileged, or male-identified. Kron is able to use Aristotle’s rule of thumb as her own tool, as opposed to a tool of the patriarchal society. As Ann Rosalind Jones

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[47] Kron 219
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said, "to write from the body is to re-create the world." Kron’s play transgresses masculinity as well as the binary oppositions of gender. When Kron writes from her body she re-creates the world on her terms. This is perhaps the most powerful manifestation of the body as drama.

In the production notes that Kron includes with the play, aside from a run-down of lighting and set pieces, she includes a preface that the piece serves "as a template, a framework into which the audiences project their own relationship and experiences." To further this point she states, "The theatrical dynamic of the piece lies in the intersection between what is presented onstage and the imagination of the viewer." She has written the play to be an open dialogue through which the audience can choose where they engage, what impacts them individually. Like any successful play, the audience is able to participate in so far as reaching a catharsis (purging of emotions).

The play is a combination of three main stories, interrupted occasionally by an antidote that is either important to the theme of the play, simply amusing, or both. The entire play is based on Kron informing the audience that she is making a videotape of her father,

50 Kron 280
documenting various parts of his life, including a trip that they took together to Auschwitz. The story of the video documentary is the jumping point into the play, and Kron imitates pointing to a myriad of pictures as she describes a particular action or person. The three story narratives include the following: a family trip to an amusement park, the wedding of Kron's brother, and the trip that Kron and her father took to Germany and then to Auschwitz. These three narratives share certain themes, and Kron pays close attention to the physicality of each person she describes.

There are also three ways that Kron highlights the importance of the body in these stories. Descriptions of other people in the play include and are usually dominated by physical characteristics, the blindness of Kron's father is an important aspect of the play, and Kron's constant referral to eating and the impact that has had on her is a main source of drama. The play is as much about Kron's body as it is about the bodies of everyone she describes. By using a variety of narratives she keeps the show from becoming one long personal story, and by using a variety of body references she points out how important and influential the body as drama can be.
I first would like to discuss the three ways that Kron uses the body as drama throughout the text. The first character that Kron introduces us to is her father. The second is Elizabeth Klip, “who was an exchange student who lived with our family when I was in college.”

Kron describes Klip as “a little high-strung, I think you can see here, a little bit around the eyes.” As she mimes pointing to a picture of Klip (there are no actual pictures or video clips in the piece, they are all imitations of actions), she gives the audience a physical description with implied personal characteristics. She is high-strung and that shows in her eyes. Kron’s descriptions of people are all similar to this one — how the person feels or is characterized is visible in their body. Just after this Kron describes her partner, Peggy, and Peggy’s family as “all healthy and Irish and good-looking. They all played sports all day.” In contrast, Kron’s family is “all either dead or crippled.” She refers to this several times;

Three members of my family are — to use an expression I think you are not supposed to use anymore but it is the expression my family uses to describe itself —

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51 Kron 284
52 Kron 284
53 Kron 284
54 Kron 284
"crippled." As in the phrase: "So crippled-up we can hardly walk." In addition to being crippled they are also in great, great pain. They gasp and moan with pain all day. It is in this state that my family, once a year, tackles a fifteen-acre amusement park. This "crippled" discourse is of great consequence because, as Kron uses physical descriptions, what someone is on the outside is a metaphor for how that person is on the inside. Thus, if Kron’s family is physically disabled, then they are also dysfunctional. It is important to note that these kinds of metaphors are not meant to stereotype; rather, it is Kron’s way of letting the audience in on her family’s dysfunctions.

Anytime in the text of the play that eating is mentioned, a stigma accompanies it. Kron tells the audience that, while her family is disabled, they enjoy going to the theme park for the food. This humiliates her. She says,

A few years ago, after a little therapy, I began to be aware that the women in my family often say things like: "Oh, I’m really not hungry. I couldn’t eat a thing. I think I’ll just have some pudding." Or: "I just need a little something light, maybe some pie."

55 Kron 292
And as soon as we arrive at Cedar Point, Aunt Francie, true to form, says, "I really don’t feel good. I think I need a hamburger." The day has just begun and already I’m feeling trapped, trapped, trapped with my family. I involuntarily leave my body and squish my whole self into my brain where a voice in my head is ranting: "A hamburger will not make you feel better! Shut up! Shut up about hamburgers! It’s ten o’clock in the morning for God sakes! Eating the hamburgers at Cedar Point is probably what put you in that wheelchair in the first place!" My therapy brain kicks in. I think, Now, Lisa, the reaction seems a little extreme. Is it your aunt you are despising or the part of you that is capable of eating a hamburger at ten o’clock in the morning?\textsuperscript{56}

Kron is clearly upset by her family’s ability to eat junk food around the clock. Her desire to leave her body and exist only in her brain points out her own feelings about her body. There is a constant conflict between the part of her that knows this habit is crippling and the part of her that can participate in the crippling. Kron continues this narrative; during the trip to Europe she orders more food than Klip and her father, she is constantly eating crackers

\textsuperscript{56} Kron 292-93
or cookies in the car, and once they reach Auschwitz Kron offers a snack to the two of them. "'No,' they say. They can’t eat here. I can. I feel defiant as I shove a cracker into my mouth and walk through the gates."^{57}

Eating, in this play, is never something people do because they need to; rather eating propagates the “crippled” discourse. Eating is a dysfunction of the female characters in the family, and Kron does not exclude herself from it.

Continuing the theme of dysfunctionality, Kron shares with the audience that her mother does not allow pictures to be taken of her. After her parents were married, there was a short time where pictures were allowed; “In these pictures she’s windblown and beautiful and so happy. My dad is dark and mysterious. Thick dark hair. Huge brown eyes.”^{58} Pictures are not allowed anymore. Kron’s mother is unhappy with her present looks, and because of her insistence that no photographs be taken of her, that unhappiness is transferred to the rest of the family as well. Once again, being disabled is tied into the dysfunctional eating habits of the family, which directly relates to her mother’s unhappiness with her own body. The

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^{57} Kron 301
^{58} Kron 298
family is concerned about how the mother will handle the brother's wedding. Fortunately, the mother gives in, does her hair and make-up, buys a new dress and allows a photo to be taken of her. The family compliments her new look; however, Kron is disappointed. "I think we must learn over time to make the translation from live person to still photo and I never did that with my mother. I see her in my mind. She looks like a laughing girl."\(^{59}\)

The third use of the body as drama in 2.5 Minute Ride is manifested in Kron's father, who is legally blind. This becomes an issue from the beginning; he cannot see to read the road signs in Germany, and he is the only one who speaks German. Kron is forced to sound out the German words. His blindness is attributed on some level to a ride at Cedar Point called the "Demon Drop." After the most recent trip to the amusement park, "Dad has triple bypass surgery. Somebody, he or my mom, casually mentions that he thinks he probably had a little heart attack on the way out of Cedar Point."\(^{60}\) During this trip, Kron and her father rode the newest roller coaster, the "Mean Streak." The ride lasts approximately two and a half minutes; Kron is upset for the whole ride that the experience will kill her

\(^{59}\) Kron 310
\(^{60}\) Kron 307
father. She only half jokes about it. At Auschwitz, the trio accidentally leaves the father’s bag of expensive eyewear somewhere in the camp. Kron says “I can’t bear that there’s a piece of us left here somewhere. . .I have an image now that he has a bubble around his life that’s complete and apart from this place and now I’ve broken the circle and lost a piece of him here.”61 The blindness and fragility of the father is ironically the only “non-crippling” discourse of the play. The metaphoric descriptions, the poor eating habits, the compulsive mother, and the trip to Auschwitz all participate in the disabling discourse; however, the father is able to remain intact despite his actual physical limitations. This is perhaps the most important message of the play. It is certainly the point to which the narratives of the body as well as the plot reveal the truth that Kron has been searching for.

The character of the father is important for this aspect; the play is about the relationship between Kron and her father. When the audience discovers that the father lives outside of the “crippled” world, they see that Kron lives in between the two; her struggle is to step outside of the world she knew into a world that transcends

61 Kron 309
dysfunction and disability. This struggle becomes clear to us through the discourse of the body; it is a universal struggle. At the end of the play, Kron sums up her father's experience in Germany: "He's in focus here, I thought. He's in context." In the journey from ignorance to knowledge, Kron has discovered that her father was able to overcome being "crippled" by remaining in context. The father's physical limitations are not dysfunctional, meaning that disability manifests itself in many ways, and is not dependent upon physical limitations. Kron, along with her audience, can come to the conclusion that any obstacle can be overcome, that biology is not destiny, just as religion and history are not destiny. We are what we make ourselves.

There is a parallel between the interweaving of these three particular uses of the body to create drama, and the three stories used to form the plot. The three narratives work together, just as the body discourse does, to create one main plot. There are several successful narratives in the play, but the plot is singular, and follows, to a point, an Aristotelian structure. The autobiographical play usually comes under fire for its lack of dramatic action. Kron herself is aware of this potentially deadly

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62 Kron 313
problem; she curbs it in two ways. First, she is speaking to the audience. The play itself is happening in real time, her conversation with them is an action. Second, the emotional events of the play are so dramatic that the spectators are swept along from beat to beat.

Kron's play also abides by another Aristotelian rule of thumb - magnitude. At one point in the play, Kron breaks down, she is unable to read a poem aloud to her father in Auschwitz: "I feel all shaky and helpless. . .The day is just beginning. I repeat the words that have undone me: 'People burn people here.'"\(^{63}\) The scope of the play is about Kron and her relationship to her father. The three narratives all point to one plot, one theme. Kron is using a microscope to look at one part of the Holocaust; the part that affected her father's life. This is how she craftily avoids the criticisms that her play is "just another Holocaust play."

Ultimately Kron is able to evocatively engage her audience. She uses the body as drama in a way that has not been done until the late 20\(^{th}\) century. She effectively steps beyond using the body as text (as the performance artists do), beyond using the body to propagate a physical and sexual norm (as The Vagina Monologues do), and reaches

\(^{63}\) Kron 300
a place where a Jewish white middle-class lesbian can perform a play that transcends marginalization.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In researching the topic, "the body as drama," I was surprised, at first, to be lead to performance art. I had intended to study the works of Marsha Norman, Wendy Wasserstein, and Beth Henley. These women are present in several books on feminism and theatre - but the topics of the female body, creativity and drama were not dominating here. I remain surprised and frustrated that when we study feminist theatre, the works of Holly Hughes, Karen Finley, Rachel Rosenthal and dozens of others go unmentioned. I find this surprising due to the incredible impact that these artists have had on the one-woman show today.

Feminist theatre seems to mean, by today's standards, plays that are written by women and have female characters. I realize that this kind of examination is important, it is its own venue; however, I did not find much of a venue at all that used the body - save the one-woman show. I began to understand that the word "feminism" is so broad that it covers literally thousands of subjects. I refined my
search to locate what kind of feminism would be most useful as a lens for the body as drama. Studying gender roles and female sexuality is where I found real meat.

In an essay published in the mid-1980s, Elaine Showalter defines three “patterns and phases in the evolution of a female tradition which correspond to the developmental phases of any subcultural art.” She calls them Feminine, Feminist, and Female. The first phase, Feminine, was used by women writers before the 1880s; they adopted masculine names and qualities, a “masculine disguise,” to produce their work. The second, Feminist, occupies the time “from about 1880 to 1920, or the winning of the vote,” and women “are historically enabled to reject the accommodating postures of femininity and to use literature to dramatize the ordeals of wronged womanhood.” In this phase, women propagate “fantasies of perfected female societies set in an England or an America of the future, which were also protests against male government, male laws, and male medicine.” In the third, Female phase, “ongoing since 1920, women reject both imitation and protest - two forms of dependency - and turn instead to female experience as the source of an autonomous art.

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65 Showalter 138
66 Showalter 138
extending the feminist analysis of culture to the forms and techniques of literature.” I find these definitions to be useful tools with which to summarize the body of this thesis. While no artist discussed herein enabled a masculine disguise, several female artists have participated in a phase much like the Feminist phase described above. If I were to ignore the dates that Showalter uses to place these phases, I could argue that feminist performance artists were indeed reacting to a phallocentric society, that their art is, in a manner of speaking, a kind of protest. Like the suffragettes of the early 20th Century, feminist performance artists were rallying for a cause, for a woman-centered art, for their voices to be heard. Perhaps some of the criticisms that have befallen artists like Hughes and Finley are simply reactions to their protests. I see a parallel between Showalter's second phase and these feminist performance artists.

Likewise, I see a parallel between Kron’s work and the Female phase as defined above. Kron’s plays seem to reject imitation and protest; her plays are certainly not dramatizations of wronged womanhood. Although Showalter continues to describe this phase as a duality of thinking

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67 Showalter 138-139
and writing styles: "'masculine' journalism and 'feminine' fictions," the movement beyond imitation and protest is no doubt where Kron's work lives - beyond gender and sexual stereotypes. But what about The Vagina Monologues? Here, I see, is where the general problem for Ensler lies. Rather than rejecting a protest against the heteropatriarchal ideologies, Ensler's play is a "pep rally," meant to unite her "troops." The play fantasizes about a world where average heterosexual women with normal reproductive organs all love their bodies and all share a common language with which to discuss them. As Showalter said, this protest phase is a form of dependency. If Ensler could push past this, her work would finally lie in the Female phase.

All of the five female artists explored in this thesis are still working today; Kron's most recent play, Well, just opened on Broadway (2006). Well is, in Kron's words, "'a theatrical exploration of issues of health and illness both in an individual and a community.'" The play is similar to Kron's other works - autobiographical - but this one has other actors in it. The premise of the play is still much like the one-woman show, but the characters that

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68 Showalter 139
Kron discusses in the play come to life. The narrative begins as a conversation between Kron and her audience; then the characters come to life and begin to interact with Kron. Following that ever present theme of the body as drama, this play looks at the discourse of the body in context of her mother (2.5 Minute Ride was primarily in the context of her father). In an article written by Charles Isherwood of The New York Times, Isherwood reveals that Well is not the only play on Broadway right now that deals with the human body. He comments, “The news that a fat-free diet may not significantly reduce heart disease made the nation’s front pages because it came as a disturbing rebuke to the widely held belief that we can be in firm control of our destinies.”

To further his point:

Serious theatre, and serious art in general, offers a welcome reprieve from this cheerful pressure to self-cure whatever ails us. It can acknowledge more complicated truths about life’s inevitable debilitations. . . Art allows us to feel good about feeling bad. At a time when commercial theatre is generally awash in pep-talking musicals, some of the most enticing new productions of the Broadway spring

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70 Isherwood 8
season are straight plays that explore just how tough it can be to treat the aches and pains of living.\textsuperscript{71}

Using the body as the source for drama continues to prove itself a worthy contender for subject matter, even on Broadway.

It should also be noted that the one-woman show, or any one-person show, is extremely cost effective to produce. The trend today is usually that the authors of the plays perform them, thereby eliminating the necessity for either an actor or playwright. The sets are generally simple. Overall, producing a one-person show is the only kind many theatres can afford today. The one-woman show can find safety in this aspect. The body as drama continues to be a success.

In 1999, Steven Drukman conducted several interviews with theatre artists of all kinds. His concern was the future of the body: "It may seem odd to theatre artists that so many critics, historians and scholars. . .can't stop thinking about the body these days. But 'the body' is the hot topic du jour."\textsuperscript{72} So he asked theatre artists how they felt about the topic. Craig Lucas replied,

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{71} Isherwood 8
\textsuperscript{72} Drukman 20}
People think you write from the head, but you don’t, you write from the body. Virginia Woolf wrote standing up. Your body will always tell you what’s going on, if you know how to ask it. The body can live without the brain but the brain dies without a body. The first thing the baby wants is the breast. Upon waking the first thing I want is another body, and if it’s not available I will go for my own. Even Bob Dole is advertising his woodies.73
Kate Borstein said, “I’ve since left off being female and decided to subscribe to neither male nor female as gender. . . Is my gender-flexible body a freak of nature? Or do I have the body of the future?”74 Tim Miller stated:
I see the need becoming even greater for theatrical and experiential para-theatrical spaces where people can explore together the complex human life going on within their bodies. A rigorous, embodied and participatory theatre is one of the few ways these bodies can gather with one another in our increasingly disembodied culture.75

73 Drukman 20
74 Drukman 21
75 Drukman 22
Clearly the body as drama is reaching a new height, moving far beyond the feminist performance art of the 1980’s and is beginning to address transgendered individuals, marginalization, sexuality as a human need and not a human flaw. This topic will continue to grow and expand, evocatively educating its audiences.

From using the female body as the text of a performance to using the body as drama to propagate a universal theme, social acceptance of the female body has come a long way in the past three decades. The one-woman show has served a variety of purposes, further enabling women to tell their stories, using a discourse that is non-patriarchal, and breaking gender and sexual stereotypes.
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