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Raunch Culture, Third Wave Feminism and *The Vagina Monologues*

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Abstract

This article considers Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* in the latter part of the 2000s, in respect of tensions between Second and Third Wave feminism in an era of "raunch culture," in the contexts of exploratory university teaching and in performance, and against the background of experiences of cultures of feminist activism in Greater Manchester, and the trashier end of feminist literature.



Photos: SlutWalk Manchester, 20 June

2011 Poster captions read "If it's not 'yes' you can take it as a 'NO!' (and probably a 'fuck off' too)"; and, "Take your filthy paws off my silky drawers unless I explicitly and enthusiastically consent."

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The Vagina Monologues (1996) has come to occupy an untenable position: critically invisible and yet, buoyed and sustained by prolonged commercial success, widely seen and known. So speculation is unavoidable: why have the *Monologues* not "just" become a fully canonical or a fully commercial concern? As it is, they sit neither with the contemporary and earnest (of, say, Sarah Kane revivals), nor with the knowing and am-dram friendly (Alan Ayckbourn, some Alan Bennett); neither with stand-up comedy shows, nor with knees-up shows (*Full Monty/Calendar Girls*-derived West End and touring hits) - although, in terms of their ubiquity, the *Monologues* share the cash cow status of the latter. In terms of the monologue-based structure, and star performers, they do hold some common ground with stand-up comedy and latter-day variety (as with illusionist Derren Brown and *Puppetry of the Penis*), but are not conceptualised as comedy or "light entertainment". Perhaps the most useful comparison, then - in terms of audience participation and the idea of the theatrical performance as accessing and embracing serious subject matter - is with the shows of touring psychics.

The *Monologues* evidence a lacuna in terms of academic and critical readings of contemporary populist theatre culture that, in the first instance, could be dismissed as a symptomatic - and familiar - schism between popular and middle class tastes. But such schisms usually occur with respect to tourist-calibrated "smashes" of Broadway and the London West End, and are founded on the corporate (often Disney-branded) nature of such productions, which often defy authorial readings of the productions in question, or utilise the original author's or authors' names as their branding. At any rate, the ways in which the *Monologues* ostensibly look to and seek to explore an interlocking series of theoretical/linguistic and activist/psychotherapeutic concerns and framings, and even aspire to intervene in these areas, put them some distance from the light entertainment mainstays of the commercial theatre sectors of the Western world.

And yet the *Monologues* have come to make profound connections with popular and activist cultures - and connections that problematize the tradition from which the *Monologues* seem to spring. On the one hand, the *Monologues* clearly look to experimental theatre forms, and can be associated with identity politics along with elements of Second Wave feminism. But these elements suggest further contentious developments that are crystallised in - on the other hand - "raunch culture," and non-performance in an age of Reality Television and WAG celebrities. In short the *Monologues* seem to have converted the militant spirit of the "march through the institutions" into a free-for-all Slut Walk.¹ This paradox seems to indicate something of the generational tensions between Second and Third Wave feminists.

I felt inclined to test the *Monologues* therefore, to explore them and reconsider my own predominantly negative feelings towards them.

1.

The lack of critical literature on the *Monologues* was a practical frustration too, since my exploration would occur with newly-arrived HND students on performance courses at the University of Salford, Greater Manchester.² As it turned out, my engagement with the *Monologues* in this context would run between 2007 and 2011. Critical literature, as "required reading", would have been helpful. But the lack of critical literature did ensure that the texts of the *Monologues* remained a *carte blanche* and that, together, we could push on into unmapped territory. Such a "blind" approach also removed the difficult contemporary contexts sketched out above: in the isolation of our lecture theatre/rehearsal space, whatever tensions and contractions, and traditions and conflicts, that would otherwise distort the reception, experience or understanding of the *Monologues*, could be possibly neutralised. By 2009, I even sought to remove myself: I handed over the texts without explanation or commentary and sent groups off to work on them and come back with the results. Contextualization and critical theory could occur later.

My first mistake was thinking that the resultant grass-roots perspective would constitute an unadulterated, "naïve" response to the *Monologues*. In the first two years of the period, before moving to the *Monologues*, I had initially attempted to workshop some Franca Rame monologues but the results were too specific, too sociological. Franca's writings were not taken as cultural artefacts, with their form intimately connected to their politics, but as catalysts for general discussions of domestic servitude, of the anecdotal now (mostly what their mothers all did around the house) and, from me, the historical then. Eve Ensler's writing was often purer and so more universal, presumably in its attempt to be less overtly political: her concern was not the kitchen sink but the female genitalia, and not so much the clenched fist of the abusive male (where males come into it) but more his erect penis. I hoped that this would lock the responses into the specifics of the texts and circumnavigate the need for secondary reading to make a fuller sense of the dramas, at this early stage for these new students. This was met, however, with a radical refusal on the part of the students to deal with the "stuff" of the texts. The fragments that make up *The Vagina Monologue* - poems, sometimes of no more than a few dozen words, stories, reportage, screeds, streams of consciousness, chats³ - seem to function as springboards, propelling those who find themselves suddenly precariously balanced, with some certainties undermined, out into the void.

This is what happened when the groups returned, and I asked them to share their responses. Group by group, they took the floor, acknowledging that all eyes (including two alien eyes: mine) were on them. They gesticulated, sometimes wildly, speed-riffed, dealing in information and terminology that defied taste and busted mores. Often individuals would step forward and so introduce themselves (again) to their cohort, momentarily describing an arc far above our heads, only to then plunge to earth - and as they extricated themselves from the wreckage they seemed flushed, exhilarated, maybe frustrated and even occasionally piqued. They met the challenge of the predominant "confessional mode" of the *Monologues*: without shame, let us speak of our own experiences. And often the sessions were, for me, at best humbling and at worse an indication that I had either gone too far (pushing them into self-exposition, taking advantage of their need to maximise their entry velocity in terms of this new university environment and culture), or that I was churlish to think they would not rise to the challenge. Sometimes the terribly quiet or shy would speak up, unprompted. Yes, they recognised this (to be specific: distaste for one's own genitalia ... "I would look at it in the mirror too and think ..."), agreed that the imperatives of fashion had gone too far (for whom are we shaving? Fuck 'em!), and - and this was something saved for smaller discussion groups or the "critical portfolios" I asked them to write and submit - recognised that inflamed sexual desire, however irrational or ill-advised, represented their autonomy and marked their possession of their bodies. Ensler, whose writing I had found depressingly curtailed in scope and ambition, had allowed them to speak.

These, of course, were the female students. The clusters of males I deliberately grouped together (feigning haphazard selection but in fact respecting the gendered seating divides that are in operation in the first few weeks of university), and sent away to deal with a monologue of their choice, reacted very differently. Realising that they found themselves dangerously exposed - that no laddish collective defence would be acceptable, that only limited smirking and joshing was possible in the light of the heartfelt responses from their female counterparts - the male groups came to circle the wagons, and in a most uncharacteristic way. Upon their return, they had transformed into aspirant academics. This was, presumably, to access that safer, cooler ground of objectivity, talk through a balance of arguments, and so deftly remove themselves from the maelstrom of autobiographical testimonials and free speaking. Yes, they would say, the resonances of the discussions we were now having are apparent: the texts seek to reclaim those often pejorative terms - vagina, cunt, pussy, and innumerable others (since the act of naming itself is a major concern of the *Monologues*; the first monologue concludes with a list of terms).⁴ The everyday battle lines were apparent too: there was a perception of wrongs done by a culture in which the male students were already well versed. *Mea culpa* moments occurred ("I now realise that ..."), and intimations of more fundamental aspects of sex education at the hands of Ensler. Counterbalancing questions of the rebuking of gentlemanly behavioural codes, mostly in terms of opening doors, were aired but found no answer. (Benatar identifies this perceived issue as a facet of "the second sexism" - that is: post-feminist anti-male sexism - as the "chivalry bind").⁵ But the logical leap of imagination then necessary (flip the gender; perform the same service on yourselves, decoupling masculinity from self-worth) was too dangerous - a potential freefall that could only result in too much exposure.⁶ So student-compiled handouts and PowerPoints provide an excuse for bustle, often a few choice quotes gleaned from literature quickly skimmed by those assigned to go to the library, or hit Google, and bring back sound bite definitions of feminism, finessed with some rape stats, and the occasional soft porn image.

For the male students, it is as if it is bad enough to strike a wary bargain with academe - for re-entry, where the price for going back for these Prodigal Sons is to swallow the pills of analysis and critical engagement, and deliver a measure of as much too via assessed writing - without then finding that the allotted spaces of study are not exclusively circumscribed within the lecture theatre but suddenly wend uncomfortably into the spheres of "actual" culture. Perhaps part of their problem was also the lack of readily available critical literature on the *Monologues*. Academics had collectively failed to provide a fall-back position - a safer ground of

secondary reading. Clearly desperate measures were being taken along these lines: the university library complained to me that copies of Ariel Levy's *Female Chauvinist Pigs* - one of the first books I promoted as a good, albeit journalistic, introductory text for our weeks with the *Monologues* - were being routinely stolen.⁷

Few male students would write about the *Monologues* at the end of the course, but the majority of female students would. And, interspersed with notes for *Monologue* performers and sketches of possible stage designs, were relatively fearless stretches of autobiographical writing, shading into purple prose. Ensler had freed their tongues and their pens, and maybe more too. During a thrice-delayed one-on-one tuition session one day, as dusk darkened my office, one student read aloud from her draft, which concerned the sexual inevitabilities of acting on impulse, of lust overwhelming reason, and solely in relation to her own feelings. She'd forgotten to bring a print-out of the draft but had a copy saved on her pen-drive, so she read from my PC screen while resting on all fours: her knees on her chair, her elbows on my desk. What mattered beyond my hurried verbal feedback as I ushered her out, as I recall this moment now, was that the work eventually submitted was outstanding, and was marked accordingly. My initial frustration with Ensler was over the premature endpoint of the idea of the personal becoming the political, a kind of "end of politics", and the way in which this maxim then limited the horizon of the possible. This was a consequence, as I took it, of the enfeebled nature and legacy of identity politics. But this inappropriate advance was also a scrambled variant of this feminist maxim too, as mutated by my experimental lecture theatre conditions: the personal had become the academic. And, along the way, the personal had been realigned with the individual: the female students who spoke, spoke of themselves. Where male students formed a collective, and worked together as instructed, it seemed to be to avoid the exposure of this individualising personal mode. The experience of the *Monologues* was, as with a succession of spoken monologues rather than a dialogue, linear: student followed student. It did not mass its subjects.

One year, a theatre trip was organized by the students. A prior engagement prevented me from joining them. "How was it?" I texted, "[y]ou'll have to give me the quote of the night too!" "There wasn't a specific quote we just liked the fact that we could shout penis and such words at the top of our voices, haha". My initial frustration remained: Why, then, are the other voices that should be shouting about the *Monologues*, that I want to be shouting, still silent?

2.

There had been a particularly long run-up to this phase of feminist self-determination, which marked the break between Second and Third Waves of feminism, and which was occurring as monetized or "sexy" feminism. Jennifer Keishin Armstrong and Heather Wood Rudolph name it as such (*Sexy Feminism: A Girl's Guide to Love, Success and Style*) and gleefully set about revising feminist nostrums: "Vanity is Not a Feminist Sin", "Is Dieting Antifeminist?" "Being a Fashionista *Can* Be Empowering", and so on.⁸ What seems to mark the shift is the way in which pre- or non-feminist practices, which Shulamith Firestone diagnosed in 1970 (so that "[...] woman is constantly and explicitly informed on how to 'improve' what nature gave her..." to the point at which "[...] the 'ugly' woman is now so nearly extinct even she is becoming 'exotic'.")⁹ and which then represented the condition of oppressed women, had been reinvented, *pace* Armstrong and Rudolph *et al*, as the condition of freedom for non-oppressed girls. And girls, in the sense of girlishness (Riot Grrrls, the "girl power" of The Spice Girls, the blingy materialism of TLC and Destiny's Child and, with a postmodern knowingness, the HBO series *Girls*) and sex (the faked orgasm scene of *When Harry Met Sally*, *Pretty Woman's* "lifestyle option" prostitution, *Desperate Housewives*, *Sex and the City*, "cardio" pole dancing as work-out, the *Monologues*-like "pussy speech" Jennifer Lopez delivers in *Gigli*, and the SlutWalks) and beauty (*pace* Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards, "coming to terms" with thongs, etc., and the sudden accessibility of chemicals for tans and teeth whitening, and cosmic surgery) and professionalism/entrepreneurship (*Working Girl*, *Ally McBeal*, *2 Broke Girls*) had been the principal characters of this shift. Baumgardner and Richards are blunt in describing the outcome: "the girlie/feminist conflict".¹⁰ The skanky, or trampy, had suddenly become classy, and alluring; the female had finally materialised in the room via flaunting and self-performance, not via social equality and professional standing. The *fait accompli* nature of the transformation is apparent in the censorious responses of the liberal wing of Third Wave feminism: Natasha Walter sets out to police the raunch and shame the ringleaders, obsesses about amateur pole dancing (Manchester's Boutique club, with its three poles against one wall, is named),¹¹ and concludes by listing enormously ineffectual examples of "changes", often centred on setting up a website.¹² For this reason, rather than reach for, say, Judith Butler or Nina Power (who attacks girlie feminism as calibrated to "... the ownership of expensive handbags, a vibrator, a job, a flat and a man - probably in that order.")¹³ it seems more useful here to survey trashier feminism-as-self-help writings in terms of a contextualization of Ensler's writing.

The *Monologues* figure in this continuum, or have come to retroactively assemble a cast of characters drawn from popular culture, and to lend an ideological sheen to their pronouncements, actions and performances - L7's live shock tactics, Spice Girl Geri's hands-on-hips fuck-you face, *City's* Samantha's serial shagging, leaked celebrity sex tapes, vajazzling, and even the supposed seduction strategies of Monica Lewinsky (flashing the President) and Kate Middleton (fishing for a close encounter with the king-in-waiting via a see-through negligee, for a university catwalk show).¹⁴ This was the problem for disheartened Second Wave feminists: self-determination was occurring on the "wrong" grounds, for the "wrong" reasons and to the "wrong" ends. In short, as for Susan E. Bell and Susan M. Reverby, and Michele L. Hammers, writing about the *Monologues*, espousing the "wrong politics", as founded on a gendered biological determinism. The *Monologues*, then, become a moment in this crisis, and entirely redolent of it: for Wairimū Ngamiya Njambi their good internationalist intentions are colonialist, and for Christine M. Cooper, even more pessimistically, their counterproductive popularity is theorised as a reaction to the endangerment of feminism itself.¹⁵

But the lesson of the *Monologues* experience was that this recidivist culture was rudely, fundamentally and vibrantly extant, and it was too easy to dismiss it all as misguided and illusory, of vanity trumping vigour, and so prone to collapse at any time. Seeing Britney Spears live during her 2011 *Femme Fatale* tour, pole dancing in sparkly hot-pants around an audience member selected at random and then tied to a car on the stage for this private-in-public performance, suggested not so much that the signals being sent out were unfortunately mixed, but that such a mix *was* the signal.



Click for larger view

Image: Britney Spears, Manchester Arena performance, 6 November 2011

And the transmitters of mixed signals, at the point between the Second and Third Wave, were particularly powerful, and reached a large constituency, and often via a parlaying of the lineaments of feminist separatism into the identity-forging "event". Thus Riot Grrrl songs seem structured and delivered in such a way so as to demand a "being there". As in Mary Daly and Jane Caputi's writings, which seek to advance a wholesale womanization of language, and where chants and incantations are provided for a strategy of collective liberation for women,¹⁶ articulation in unison is understood as an affective action of liberation. And King notes that changing language for feminist ends, even just for matters of inclusivity, is often the occasion for scorn arising from discomfort and sometimes latent anger.¹⁷ For the rioting grrrls, audience participation occurred somewhere between a sing-along and effectively inviting the audience in on backing vocals: the Riot Grrrl event collectively revelled (and so found itself) in trying to offend. And, to that end, the look of the Riot Grrrls themselves was often cutesy and school girl-like, as if an outgrowth of girl groups of the 1960s, and as if to enable a re-enactment of the feminist rejection of its earlier role models. But this was no triumphant fruition of the struggles of the 1970s. Sara Marcus records that the Riot Grrrls were not above subversively dabbling in subservience, and so mixing signals at the outset: working as strippers, and stripping to the sound of "Killing in the Name" (with an increasingly frenzied crescendo of "Fuck you -1 won't do what you tell me!").¹⁸ This audience/performer participation dynamic is true of the back-and-forth and vamping of proto-Riot Grrrl group Jack Off Jill's 'Hypocrite'. Vocals are delivered across war drums and churning, grungy guitars, and culminate in pay-off punchlines:

(Chanted/chorus): Hypocrite! Hypocrite!
 Hyp - hyp - hyp - hyp - hypocrite!
 (Spoken): You're a cunt. You're a bastard, cunt. That's right, you're a cunt. C, u, n, t - cunt.
 (Sung/verse): Well your best friend (yeah you're my best friend)
 Your best friends says he's looking for you
 Well your best friend - but before you can thank her
 His dick is in your mouth

The target here is carefully gendered both ways (although one blast of the chorus is given a proviso - the hypocrisy comes from the way in which "[s]he's fucking behind your back! Bitch!") The achievement of female liberation, the singers seems acknowledge, is the ability to behave badly too, to the extreme point, for 'Cumdumpster', of celebrating the fallen status of women - even into prostitution or "coming to terms with" exploitation ("I've learned to hate you/that's quite OK").¹⁹

Such a contrarian position, which characterised much of the feminism of popular culture across the 1990s, including in Britpop and in the work of the Young British Artists, is particularly provocative in the light of the radical orientations and imaginings of Second Wave feminism. The *Monologues* also fall into this timeline. But that academics had not fully risen to their challenge (despite, surprisingly, frequent student-produced performances on North American university campuses, and some bannings of performances, around the turn of the millennium)²⁰ also seemed to be a generational matter. This blind spot points to the status quo aftermath of the successful march through the institutions by that baby-boomer generation of 1970s feminists. Roughly, in career terms: entry lectureships in the mid-1970s (so those feminists born in the late 1940s/early 1950s), lending character to departments and then routing the curricula, mainly of humanities courses, of "dead white males" across the 1980s, to a consolidation of gains via the ascendancy to senior management and professorial/tenured positions by the 1990s.²¹ The *Monologues*, which were first performed, off-Broadway, in 1996, and came to prominence a couple of years later, missed this generation: Enslar's concerns were at best *passé*, at worse retrograde, and the *Monologue's* cause must have seemed marginal, and on these grounds deserved to be brushed aside by the tenured Second Wave.

Second Wave feminists would have felt the same disappointments as I: Enslar did not seem to want to remake the world, only to reform it a little, and in doing so sets back the clock. Rape was left as merely rape and not treated as also fully entwined with cultures of violent oppression (unless, for Enslar, as with the George W. Bush White House, this could be a *casus belli*)²² The charity Enslar founded in conjunction with the *Monologues*, V-Day, is "a global movement... to stop violence against women",²³ and so proponents and participants, or fans or donators, her "Vagina Warriors", "are directed by vision, not by ideology", as she puts it²⁴ (and this below "[t]hey love to dance" in the list of "general defining characteristics"). In this is the naivety of one-issuism, or the wilful blindness of an NGO charity, and so exemplifies a position that is ideal for the liberal, confused or guilty members of the middle classes.²⁵

Despite the claim that the "Vagina Warriors" "[...] are no longer beholden to social customs or inhibited by taboos",²⁶ for a monologue concerning a sexual encounter between women aged 13 and 24 ("The Little Coochi Snorter That Could") Ensler backed down from breaking the age taboo: she revised the lower age to 16, among other edits. The radical edge and furious invective of Firestone and Andrea Dworkin find only a feint echo in the V projects. A poor substitute, and attractive commodity, self-help, seems to have edged this out. From this vantage point, the notion that healing comes from within is only one small step away: interventionism as, first and foremost, "heal thyself" (as with Ratzinger's Vatican). One monologue, "The Vagina Workshop", describes such a session. So ideological considerations of violence against women propels Ensler to mystification, when writing about the "Vagina Warriors: An Emerging Paradigm, An Emerging Species", with talk of .. developing the spiritual muscle to enter and survive the grief that violence brings and, in that dangerous space of stunned unknowing, inviting the deeper wisdom.²⁷

The texts themselves enact a *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus*-like essentialism.²⁸ They decline to rule out heterosexually-founded, phallogocentric sexual pleasure: man remains an object of desire, and sexual fulfilment a goal. All of this would have represented a terrible recalcitrance. Radical feminist group Cell 16 explored the idea of a praxis of celibacy, partly on the grounds that such common romantic notions were squandering the energy of potential feminist militants. Desire fulfilled merely allows the women to then be co-opted, so that "[...] too often all they reap is demoralization, damaged egos, emotional exhaustion" and even "orgasms are no solution" since "[e]ven with perfect sexual fulfilment, mutual guilt-free pleasure, we are still oppressed."²⁹ Firestone writes in a similar vein: there is no such thing as eroticism, which merely signifies "[...] the displacement of other social/affection needs on to genital sex."³⁰ More generally, the vagina itself seems to represent Ensler's world whereas feminist texts of only a couple of decades before placed questions of sexuality in enormously wider contexts of the family, reproduction and society. Whereas one is tempted to say that the issues that were faced by playwrights engaging with gender and sexual difference in the 1970s and 1980s have since been overcome in Western society (at least, in respect of public discourse), so that Ensler is now able to put aside polemics and didacticism in favour of celebration and exploration, and even of mother-to-daughter feminism-as-sex-education,³¹ and to not even have to explicitly present herself as a feminist, this vagina-centrism illustrates a more profound set of limitations.

Firstly, the general avoidance or mystification of child birth in Ensler's texts (in stark contrast to Firestone's famous declaration that pregnancy and childbirth are barbaric) suggests not only the disconnection between sexual pleasure and society, but mimics the bourgeois conceptualization of sexuality. Here, in the league of what seems to matter in the texts after questions of violence at home and abroad, childbirth effectively becomes an afterthought to career and sexual fulfilment, and hastened only by impending menopause.³²

Secondly, Ensler's concerns with sexual fulfilment/sexual de-alienation, which are explored in this vagina-centrism, effectively abstract the vagina itself. This is arguably unavoidable in terms of gendered biological determinism, with the resultant disconnection (rather than Firestone-esque dialectics) between sexual pleasure and society.

In Inga Muscio's book *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence*, first published in 1998, such recalcitrance can be seen to have come into its own - indeed, to have declared independence, in the unapologetic form of a self-help manual. Muscio initially invites the reader to join in with some semiotic-linguistic warfare, *a la* Ensler:

If you will be so kind, say "vagina" out loud a few times. Strip away the meaning and listen solely to the phonetic sound. It resonates from the roof of your mouth [...] Say "cunt" out loud, again stripping away the meaning. The word resonates from the depths of your gut. It sounds like something you definitely don't want to tangle with in a drunken brawl in a dark alley.

[...] "cunt" can be neither co-opted into having a negative meaning, venerable history or not, it's ours to do with what we want. And thanks for the versatility and user-friendliness of the English language, "cunt" can be used as an all new woman-centered, cuntlovin' noun, adjective or verb.³³

And, beyond this vocal/conceptual warm-up, the target becomes clear: storming the bastions in order to establish "Cuntlovin' Consumerism"³⁴ and even a "Cuntlovin' Investment Portfolio".³⁵ It is an ideological turn familiar from the histories of other great 1970s political projects of liberation: of Black Power (from militancy to the petit-bourgeois dead-end of "Black Capitalism") and post-Stonewall gay, rather than queer, politics (in the advocates of the Pink Pound, pro-marriage pressure groups, and so on). "Cunt," "nigger" and "fag" are reclaimed, respectively, as terms of empowerment and passwords for inclusivity by a newly emergent dominant class.

Such retrenchment finds a direct articulation, in Third Wave feminist terms, in Catherine Hakim's 2011 *Honey Money: The Power of Erotic Capital*. Hakim's counterattack on radical feminism is only a passing concern in the book, but it is arresting nonetheless. She advocates utilising erotic potency for social and professional ends, even with respect to "the power balance in private lives".³⁶ Such potency is a déclassé asset, which is typically denigrated by an "elite [who] cannot monopolise it", and is itself at odds with a "Puritan Anglo-Saxon feminism [which] is profoundly uncomfortable with sexuality."³⁷ Hakim claims that her positions have been grotesquely distorted into an apologia for the chief institutions of female oppression (prostitution, lap-dancing and marriage)³⁸ while, meanwhile, orthodox feminism, post-march through the institutions, effectively dis-empowers that fledgling strata who could otherwise effect change, since

[e]very year, thousands of young women (and a small number of young men) take gender studies courses that leave women diminished rather than empowered, angry instead of confident. The feminist messages offered explicitly and implicitly, stimulate impotent rage against men and society with no realistic alternative to heterosexuality and marriage except for celibacy and lesbianism.³⁹

While the experience of dealing with the *Monologues* in the university environment outlined above suggests a bucking of this supposed (and un-evidenced) trend, Hakim does not consider the *Monologues* through the optic of her position. But then the *Monologues* chafe against erotic capital: Enslar seems interested in empowerment through pleasure (to be crude, in respect of her *dramatis personae*: being fucked) rather than, for Hakim, pleasure through empowerment (likewise: fucking others). In this, the *recherché* threatens to destabilize the *déclassé*.

For Naomi Wolf, for *Vagina: A New Biography*, the *Monologues* are unavoidable. And yet when they are mentioned, and even then only briefly, it is in the disconcerting context of a consideration of mostly 1970s radical feminist thought and the "advocacy" that continued into the 1980s and 1990s.⁴⁰ For Wolf, Enslar seems to suggest a vision of sexuality that is old fashioned. In fact, problematically for Wolf, *The Vagina Monologues* (and *Cunt*) represented, many years before *Vagina*, just that which *Vagina* declares as its intention (and so presumably is what is "new" in this "new biography"): "I am carving out rhetorical space that does not yet exist when we talk about the vagina, but which refers to something very real."⁴¹ An overview of radical feminist practices, which ahistorically includes the *Monologues*, also prompts an attack on Second Wave feminism. But Wolf goes one further than Hakim, removing separatism altogether for this revisionist history, and again in the name of the disappointed and confused non-lesbian feminist woman: "I now think that denial of this need for men for sexual pleasure in straight women's lives was not actually feminist and did not actually help heterosexual women."⁴² The point is so central to *Vagina* that Wolf makes it again later, and again furnishes it with the same self-evidently misguided cliché of Second Wave feminism ("A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle").⁴³ Thereafter, gendered biological determinism returns as an absolute. She writes, scandalously, "[a]gain, if you understand the profound nature of the animality of women..."⁴⁴ and from this position Wolf's book, on the vagina, is able to consider that "rhetorical space" in pure sex manual terms. Thus headings include "Find Her 'Sacred Spot,' Then Hang Out There Far Longer Than You Think Reasonable", "Tell Her She's Beautiful" and "Do Whatever She Likes to her Nipples"⁴⁵ and commentary includes:

Women may wish to be aware that if they want to have hot anonymous sex with some guy they may not trust, but don't want to fall in love with him - they would be well advised to discourage him from interacting with their nipples⁴⁶

Such revisionism, also found in Natasha Walter,⁴⁷ indicates more than just tactical backtracking. It is of a part with the dashing of the radical youthful dreams of the baby boomer generation in general. And the fear that motivates this recalcitrance and, this article contends, has silenced academe on the *Monologues*, arises from a problem that confronts Second Wave feminism most acutely. This can be bluntly summarised along the lines of why liberated young women (roughly, the daughters of the generation of Second Wave feminists, or at least the children of their sisters) then chose to behave in a subservient, pre-liberated manner. Ariel Levy's diagnosis and outline of a pervasive and near-institutionalised "raunch culture" approaches the same problem, and finds a theoretical opening for this possibility in the nominally feminist positions of Camille Paglia.⁴⁸ "Raunch culture" arises from the mimicking of male behaviours by the emancipated female - or, at least, the "meat market" vectors of male behaviour - so that the emancipated woman meets and matches the lowest common denominator: "If Male Chauvinist Pigs were men who regarded women as pieces of meat, we would outdo them and be Female Chauvinist Pigs...".⁴⁹ But, since the gender power relations essentially remain undisturbed in this transformation, for Levy, a Foucaultian self-policing is also put in place by the women who make sex objects of other women and of ourselves.⁵⁰ To continue to extract this new hermeneutics, which then remake cultures and behaviours rather than (as with Second Wave feminism and, literally, with the tactic of separatism) look to an anterior, radically set apart from those misogynist cultures and their behaviours, Levy reaches for the new female consciousness. This is found to have been lowered rather than raised - and lowered ever-further into submission, evidence of which she finds in urban myths of multi-female on sole-male teenage fellatio games, in the "Pigs in Training" chapter. Thus contemporary woman

... decided long ago that the Male Chauvinist Pig was an unenlightened rube, but the Female Chauvinist Pig (FCP) has risen to a kind of exalted status. She is post-feminist. She is funny. She gets it. She doesn't mind cartoonish stereotypes of female sexuality, and she doesn't mind a cartoonish macho response to them. The FCP asks: Why throw your boyfriend's *Playboy* in a freedom trash can when you could be partying at the [Playboy] Mansion? Why worry about *disgusting* or *degrading* when you could be giving - or getting - a lap dance yourself? Why try to beat them when you can join them?⁵¹

Levy's examples are idiosyncratically 1970s (soft pom magazines, girl sleep-overs, holiday hi-jinks, the death of the cmsh moment in favour of straight-to-sex). These examples miss, only by a couple of years, subsequent considerations of the smartphone facilitations of this tendency, where the mobile telephone becomes a private media outlet for performing FCPs: a "pornification", via sexting.⁵² Concerns were then raised over the idea of the opening of a direct line into the intimate environs of the young female for questionable unknowns prowling the Internet. But this potential one-on-one intimacy ends the *Playboy* Mansion/Springbreak parties. Now the "girls [have] gone wild" in isolation, on their own, and the loci of sexual desire is at one remove: abstract emoticon breasts ("oYo") and vagina ("{}"), followed by (with cameraphone technology) abstract low-res images of the same.

For Levy, the lowering of the female consciousness, however, also seems to have occurred in tandem with the lowering of, or the lessening of the problems associated with, self-consciousness. Now the girls feel freer, and show it, and of itself this phenomenon seems emancipatory, joyous and feminist. It is at this juncture that SlutWalk can occur in such a massed way, that performers of the *Monologues* are proud and unapologetic (so that the *Monologues* can also be a welcoming entrée into feminism for university freshers), and that *Girls Gone Wild* is not so much smutty *cinéma vérité* porn based on lost weekends at the beach but potentially a way of life with its attendant fantasmatic foundation (as Harmony Korine dramatized for *Spring Breakers* in 2013). Germaine Greer opened her "Germaine Greer - Forty Years of Feminism and Fun", at the Lowry, Salford, on 15 April 2012, with a direct address of this challenge. Specifically, Greer recounted walking behind a group of girls heading for a night on the town a few days before - the

town in question being the notorious fleshpot, in the popular imagination, of Newcastle. Greer attacked the contortions and discomfort exacted by their adherence to the "required" sartorial codes, and the ridiculousness of the "fake bake" look. But Greer could only conclude that in each yell that emanated from the group was evidence of desperation on the part of the young women: not so much "I'm on the pull!" but "Please - someone, anyone! - pull me!" Wolf opens *The Beauty Myth* with a quote from Greer that, a generation before, could be taken as axiomatic: "The fear of freedom is strong within us."⁵³ So is the case now that the "pro-sex" freedom has been fully embraced, but only to be misused, or even misconstrued? Or that this freedom, found in evidence on the streets of Newcastle and the beaches of Miami, is essentially false, and merely a way of continuing to avoid an engagement with that fear of freedom?

Either way, what seems to have been successfully expelled with the lowering of self-consciousness is the bedrock of female fear: shame. Here, freedoms are achieved as a condition of shame having "just" vanished. It is not the case that such freedoms are truly freedoms, and so truly liberate the female, because they are defined by the battles against (phallogocentric/moralistic, Judeo-Christian-founded) shame. This circumstance points to the limits of the confessional mode, which underpins the *Monologues*, and which inspired the students: it is an operation that by its nature attacks those foundations of shame, but the resultant victory, since it is a gain for others too, must remain pyrrhic. Or, as Greer heard in that yelling: the voice can be liberated, but there is no accounting for what it may then say. And the celebrity gossip that dominates much of the tabloid media faithfully tracks the liberation (as with WAGs, etc.: freedom to have a breakdown, freedom to be alcoholic, freedom to have "bad" boyfriends) so as to then, schizophrenically and hypocritically, re-inscribe shame for the secular age (papped falling out of nightclubs looking much the worse for wear, cellulite and bad skin in forensic close-up, teary television interviews, and so on). This tracking is a moralistic operation that somehow holds together prurience and voyeurism, emanating from one of the last bastions of "acceptable" misogyny, the gutter press, and identifies and vilifies a series of love/hate figures.

In this way the confessional mode rapidly becomes a minimum demand for those who live in the media spotlight, and the processes of confronting and overcoming shame merely tabloid fodder. Immodesty liberates and sells, and so connects Third Wave feminism to the flux of the female icons of the mass media, with figures such as Britney Spears as - in this queered pitch - latter-day Suffragettes. For the single "Piece of Me", Spears retains ambiguity as to her status in this respect. On the one hand she repeatedly offers "a piece of me" (as, presumably, a threat of physical violence, an offer of intimacy, and a financial offer made to the mass media) and, on the other, lists her supposed failings as "Miss bad media karma": "I'm Mrs *Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous*/I'm Mrs 'oh-my-God-that-Britney's-shameless'/I'm Mrs 'Extra! Extra! This just in!/I'm Mrs 'she's too big', 'now she's too thin'). The Third Wave feminist nature of the song can be seen in its antecedents.⁵⁴ Tracey Emin's installation/video *Why I Never Became A Dancer* (1995) ends with the artist dancing in an empty room to a disco soundtrack, after a voice-over narration concerning her rape and abuse as a teenager, and how those who took advantage of her, and called her a "slag", then sabotaged her turn at a dancing competition. The revenge is "classically" feminist: the performance - uninhibitedly dancing away such memories, dispelling the psychic and psychological trauma - becomes the very material for her subsequent acclaim and, with it, an escape from her hometown. Less explicit, in Emin's case, is the way in which the financial and social gains that follow further assure that freedom and insulate the artist-protagonist from criticism of her behaviour. For Spears, this is simply a validation: "Guess I can't see the harm/in working and being a mama/I'm still an exceptional earner/and you want a piece of me." Thus individual empowerment equates to a financial gain, with the role model negotiating, and emerging triumphant from, a nexus of confession, overcoming shame and "taking ownership" of the insults that have been hurled. And the *Monologues*, and their celebrity "Vagina Warrior" champions, fit snugly into this narrative: individual empowerment to protect against, rather than a common front to overcome, the mass media's, as it were, "bitch trials". And the foundation of this individual empowerment, as with reality television, as with raunch culture, and as with much feminist art of the Second Wave (along the lines of the personal/autobiographical as the political) is self-performance.

Tensions between Second and Third Wave feminists are partly articulated in the hostile reactions to *Honey Money* and *Vagina, SlutWalk* ("Dear Feminists, Will You Also Be Marching In N***erwalk? Because I Won't.")⁵⁵ and, as a paean to female sexual submission, E L James's *Fifty Shades of Grey*, from journalists who would cautiously identify themselves as progressives concerned with women's rights. As with my own initial dislike of the *Monologues*, this hostility was seemingly predicated on an unease over the introduction of unsophisticated readings of sexuality and desire, which were then presented as *the* battleground for advancement. That lack of sophistication seemed particularly apparent for SlutWalk: the wider ill was read directly in relation to the freedom to dress in a way that suggested sexual promiscuity, with or without irony, and that at any rate (for the Manchester 2011 march) morphed into any kind of alt-sex alternativeness. The walks came to consist of (mostly) women marching in public places in a variety of "slutty" outfits (from BDSM kit to post-assault Prom Queen, from porn star to Hogarthian harridan, or just in underwear), with placards and angry chants, reworking a "reclaim the night" or "women against pornography" initiative. The sexualised spectacle was not sufficiently alternative: the aspiration to create a womanist beauty was difficult to locate. So the event was falling foul of a very basic given of feminist thought, even of the 1990s; as Mary McIntosh puts it (with respect to liberalism and pornography): "[...] if we accept that women's liberation requires a transformation of patriarchal culture...".⁵⁶ Demanding the right to roam freely and publically across the spectrum of sexual stereotypes, from virgin to whore, without fear of criticism from the male authors and maintainers of that spectrum, was surely conceding defeat at the outset.

However, the event takes on a more compelling aspect if considered in Third Wave feminist terms: as, perhaps for psychotherapeutic reasons, as performing raunch, and as "self-help". All the facets of the degeneration of Second Wave feminism,

listed above, resonate in the march: it, presumably, would have been the object of attack for those feminists who once protested Miss World competitions.



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3.

Dramaturge Libby Mason identified, by the late 1980s, the bind from which feminist-lesbian theatre needed to break: to be neither "missionary" ("... which wraps up political ideas in a wholesome and palatable form to be presented to an audience which, we assumed, was not familiar with, nor sympathetic to those ideas...") nor "ghetto" ("... which simply reinforces the world view of the performers and audiences and leaves us all bathed in a rosy glow").⁵⁷ In practice, this seems to have resulted (if the plays that Jill Davis collects in *Lesbian Plays* are indicative) in tempering the politics with a knowing humour: serious discussions in unserious places, issue talk incongruously interrupting relationship talk. From *Double Vision*, by The Women's Theatre Group and Mason, and included in Davis's edited collection):

SPARKY:

We get on each other's nerves sometimes, that's all.

CHUM:

So what are we supposed to do? [...] I think we can work at changing our relationships just like we can work at changing society. I mean most of what we do to each other is just what we've absorbed from a heterosexist -

SPARKY:

I think I've heard this speech before.⁵⁸

CHUM:

[...] What have you been up to?

SPARKY:

Lighting fires.

CHUM:

I hope you didn't burn your fingers.

SPARKY:

No just a lot of films and magazines.

CHUM:

You what? I was being facetious.

SPARKY:

We set fire to a sex shop, I'm surprised you've not heard about it - and I'm collecting for a defence fund for the women who were arrested. And we also need money to help support their families too. [...] ⁵⁹

Dramatizing issues results in talk and empathy, and lends a soap opera feel (the form in which women are cast as talkers and empathisers) to many of the dramas. Otherwise difficult debates are enlivened, shared, approached from a variety of angles, but always in recognisable dramatic set-ups. The debate is cast as the motivation for the characters, the play, the collective, the staging, the event, its politics, its intervention, its education: the *praxis* is clear. But it is clearly not enough to now hark back to the considered stratagems of this feminist-lesbian theatre as a corrective to the *Monologues*. And it is no longer the late 1980s; the survey-to-surveillance metrics and bureaucratic machinations that go hand-in-hand with the rolling out of a consumer university education experience would actively work to prevent my "worthy" attempts at stagings of *Double Vision* with my students. And, more importantly, the *Monologues* illustrate the ways in which the debate has moved on in terms of feminism and theatre. They do not break out of the bind that Mason identifies so much as transcend it altogether. If considered just in terms of volume and delivery, talk and empathy are replaced by shouting and confrontation. And this vulgarity further inflames the "the girlie/feminist conflict" outlined above: the *Monologues* as very much the "wrong" type of performance, for the wrong type of feminism (raunchy, slutty), and even tandem with the "wrong" type of performers (soap actresses, TV talent show winners, those famous-for-being-famous, television presenters, comediennes and commentariat, WAGs, fallen celebs, yummy mummy gossip columnists, and so on). ⁶⁰ The near total amateurism that can result from this kind of theatrical pottage has been very apparent in the *Monologues* as performed.

The *Monologues* set consists of three bar stools, in their own pools of light, and each with a small table with a bottle of water and an angled mic stand. ⁶¹ And the performers read out their lines from photocopies, were under-rehearsed and often stumbled and, when inspired to shout or whoop or, panto-style, led the audience in chants and responses, yelled directly into the microphones, incurring static and white noise. The net duration, either side of a lengthy intermission, was barely more than an (over-priced) hour.

On the way in, the demographic had been surprising. I had expected barely more than a handful of males, but perhaps only a meagre dozen in a few thousand were present. But the atmosphere was welcoming and unthreatening (Enslar notes that "sometimes men" can be "Vagina Warriors" too), ⁶² and at two points rounds of applause were invited from the stage for those men "brave enough" to be present. The majority of the audience seemed much older than anticipated. Perhaps, thinking of hen parties, the expectation had been for posses of women in their twenties, aspiring to be uninhibited, perhaps already preparing for the event via (what moralising tabloids refer to as) "pre-drinking" - getting partially loaded up at home before hitting the town - and waiting to be fed their lines as part and parcel of the boisterous entertainment to come (from male stripper troupe, the Chippendales, on dividing the audience into two sections: "Ladies - we're going to split you down the middle! ") But this audience mostly consisted of women in their thirties and forties, seemingly groups of office and shop workers, and slightly, but not decidedly, dressed up for the night. Theatre productions clearly inspired by the *Monologues*, such as *Hormonal Housewives* ("Looking at everything that makes today's woman tick (or ticked off) from the joys of teenagers, to the hell of IKEA, the madness of holiday reps and the insanity of DI Y"), seem especially aware of this somewhat more staid market. And yet - and here is where it could be said, of the *Monologues*, that they mesh the Ann Summers party with feminist separatism, or raunch culture finds succour in a 1970s circle-of-women consciousness-raising ("CR") vibe - the audience let rip all the same. After a limited period of respectful silence as the early monologues were performed came whooping and stationary dancing. Some laughed hysterically while chanting the given lines (typically biological, and concerning the superior nature of the female orgasm), egging the performers on as they (via Enslar's texts and their chatty, semi-improvised introductions) delved ever deeper into matters of private lives and private parts. By the second half, after almost every monologue, the crowd were on their feet applauding wildly, demanding more, so that every text came to be treated as an encore. Sal Renshaw talks of the "'I am a woman! Hear me roar!' spirit of *The Vagina Monologues*" ⁶³ and this evangelization gave rise to an evening of clamour and chaos.

In existential/feminist terms, the experience was that of a "women-only space", and being an interloper in the otherwise "closed" community gathering (to use a challenged term): a temporary separatist zone where, for Alex Dobkin, "[...] I know that I am in the exclusive company of women [so] I feel safe enough to 'open up'", since it is no longer a case that "[o]nce again women are being measured in relationship to men". ⁶⁴ The performance space was animated and overwhelmed by flows of, to employ a common feminist term, "women-only energy". The space was enlarged so that, from a theatrical perspective, it was not then so much a matter of breaking the fourth wall as storming and overwhelming it altogether, achieving that "filling in [of] the orchestra pit" which Walter Benjamin found fundamental to Brecht's theatre. The *Monologues* overcome that "abyss which separates the actors from the audience like the dead from the living" so that the stage "has become a public platform." ⁶⁵ The connection is made. *Monologue* performer Mario Thomas notes

The old rule of thumb in theater is that it's best not to look directly into the faces of the audience. When I performed *The Vagina Monologues*, I broke the rule. I looked into the eyes of the women in the audience and saw in this silent sea of faces their passion and hunger [...] ⁶⁶

Such direct communication also accommodates and further encourages unusual forms of response - in this case, and as with my undergraduate experiences, nervous and infectious laughter. Laughter, of course, figures in a particular tradition in terms of social satire, and the psychotherapeutic affect of taboo-breaking, from Bakhtin to Wilhelm Reich respectively, and beyond. But laughter also historically came to have a place of special importance in feminist cultures: laughter as sonically marking-out the liberated space, free from the destabilising male presence and, as Dobkin says, concomitant judgment. Jo Anna Isaak parses Freud's

theorising of humour and laughter as "something that women have a special purchase on" so that "[...] laughter or *jouissance* may be a catalyst that could enable a break or subversion in the established representational and social structure" and so feels emboldened to consider feminism and contemporary art primary in respect to "the revolutionary power of women's laughter".⁶⁷ In this instance, the microcosmic social structure, familiar to Walter Benjamin too in respect to the bourgeois mores and even the physical organization of the theatre, is eroded by laughter and its corollaries: flailing about, partly leaving the seat, sitting "inappropriately". The latter was particularly striking: audience members kicked off their shoes, and sometimes slipped their feet under their legs - this was comfort, and remade this space as their space.⁶⁸



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Another production of *The Vagina Monologues*; Manchester Opera House (October 2, 2013)

Behavioural parallels with pantomime audiences, which also spring to mind, suggests not so much attaining a forgotten, juvenile anarchy (since raptness and fear are also in that spectrum of pantomime experiences) but a form of regression therapy occurring in the liberated space too. And the edgy raunch culture dynamic, since it is - unlike sexting's virtuality - live, collective and real-time, a "be-in", seemed akin to dogging: the audience cheering on the sexual performance found at the end of their commute, vicariously joining in, allowing flows of erotic intensity to spread across the group. Like live theatre, dogging realigns experience with the unmediated, non-virtual world.⁶⁹

The *Monologues*, as a temporary "public platform", channels such "anarchic", shameless and liberated attitudes into the "women-only space" in the name of education, exploration and empowerment. And such attitudes are just those that, un-channelled, perhaps on the streets of Greer's Newcastle, vex Third Wave feminists - a potentially dangerously flailing outside of the immediate social and geographical/physical circles with the breaking of social conventions (highly emotional conversational engagements with strangers, public sex, loss of control of appearance, of belongings, public urination and vomiting, altercations and injuries inflicted on the self and others). In this social potential the nostalgia gap is closed, even reversed: the understood "legendary" nature of the night to come is already anticipated, and can be evidenced simultaneously to a wider social circle via social media. For the sufficiently rapid access to this level of intensity, alcohol and perhaps e-numbers are required in preparation: the posse is already in the mood even before the taxi is called. It is as if the *Monologues* occurs only belatedly in this narrative, and in Ensler's construction is free enough to connect to and absorb this level of intensity. Thomas may even have floundered had she not acknowledged this and avoided looking "into the eyes of the women in the audience."⁷⁰ And, as with pre-drinking for a night on the town, sobriety is sacrificed in the name of individual liberation (or attaining a devil-may-care attitude towards things that would otherwise seem important: whereabouts of the mobile phone, the need for safety in anonymous sex, caution in recreational drug use, the machinations of style and class to impress a desired person, and so on) rather than as a way of attaining a collective state of mind. In this respect, the event and experience does not speak to the Artaudian conceptualizations of radical theatre that also incorporated "sacramental" uses of stimulants during or for a performance, as with the "happenings" of The Living Theater. The *Monologues* is not a mass liberation but an incremental liberation of the masses, individual-by-individual. Such a liberation finds its calibration in the individuals' stories of the *Monologues*, and the personal/testimonial nature of the *Monologues* too. This absolute preference for the presented, spot-lit individual, the sole voice at the centre of the theatre/"public platform", is apparent in a selection of first-lines in their I's and my's:

I bet you're worried. I was worried. That's why I began this piece.
My vagina is a shell...
 This is how I came to love my vagina.
 My vagina was green, water soft pink fields [...]
 My vagina's angry.
 I have always been obsessed with naming things. If I could name them, I could know them.
 I call it cunt. I've reclaimed it, "cunt." I really like it.
 I love vaginas. I love women.
 I was there when her vagina opened.⁷¹

But these are vernaculars: the three performers may introduce each monologue themselves, but then slip into mostly unnamed, perhaps even composite, characters.⁷² This allows the performers to engage in the risqué (in a way still impossible in, say, a soap opera), and so demonstrate a sisterly and bonding example of testimonial bravery, while all the time speaking of another's vagina, and another's feelings, violations and struggles. The methodological foundation, whatever the nuances, is clear: the monologue - the sole voice speaking to (rather than with) others. For the Living Theater the psychic trauma was collective and collectively-inflicted (the prime example of the late 1960s: war), and so could only be collectively healed so that mass rather than individual focus became the essential praxis.⁷³

Such individualization, together with the ways in which the *Monologues*, sexting-like, "abstract" the vagina, as argued above, is the prerequisite condition for those mainstays of Third Wave feminism, as discussed: empowerment through confession/testimonial, possession (of bodies, of organs, of desires), possessions (material gains and freedom) and, most

particularly, self-centredness (of self-help and of self-performance). Sexual fulfilment was entirely contested as an objective in the phase of Second Wave feminism, but the raunch cultures of the "less uptight" Third Wave seem unwilling to fully reintroduce it. Sexuality becomes not so much an individual matter as *the* individual matter. This shift, macro-revolution to micro-revolution, is apparent: Enslar (and Spears and Emin) monologue whereas once Mason and the Riot Grrrls offered dialogues. The singularities that result exposed my students (who nonetheless met the challenge), potentially fragment extant feminism in the academy (and hence, it would seem, the *Monologues* blind spot) and are one with the isolation engendered by contemporary consumer existence (in Putnam's description, "bowling alone").⁷⁴ Collective comings together of individuals - for *The Vagina Monologues*, for Slut Walk - seem predicated on biologically-founded common causes rather than forming and founding a collective.

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Notes

1. "March through the institutions": the post-1968 strategy, as also adopted by feminists, of an infiltration and remaking of patriarchal nodes of the establishment. SlutWalk: the international protest movement founded in Toronto, Canada in 2011, in which women stage a "reclaiming of the streets" march while, to the chagrin of many feminists in the commentariat, dressed in a sexually provocative, "slutty" manner. "WAGs": paparazzi-favoured "wives and girlfriends", usually of footballers, and often sourced from the ranks of models and pop singers. All images in this article were taken by the author.
2. HND: the Higher National Diploma, which is a foundation course allowing access to degree study for students who do not hold the standard academic profile for entry, and was to become an effective way of "widening access" to university education, at the behest of the British Labour party (in government 1997-2010). In fact, a very small amount of critical literature did exist on the *Monologues* prior to 2007, and informs this article, but the reach of searchable databases at that point, the places of publication, and a number of the principal guiding concerns in this literature (pedagogy, disability, sexual health, theology), conspired to keep it obscure, and away from performance/drama-related bibliographies and, to a lesser but still discernible extent, feminist bibliographies. See the following references. Lisa Isherwood, "Indecent Theology: What F-ing Difference Does It Make?" *Feminist Theology*, 11: 2 (January 2003): 141-147. Linda Chen, "Why would a Professor have you read that book? *The Vagina Monologues* as a Teaching Text?" in *Radical Pedagogy* (2004), accessed March 2013, http://www.radicalpedagogy.org/Radical_Pedagogy/22Why_Would_a_Professor_Have_You_Read_That_Book_The_Vagina_Monologues_as_a_Teaching_Text%22.html. Kim Q. Hall, "Queerness, Disability and *The Vagina Monologues*," *Hypatia*, 20:1 (February 2005): 99-119. Susan E. Bell and Susan M. Reverby, "Vaginal Politics: Tensions and Possibilities in *The Vagina Monologues*," *Women's Studies International Forum* (September-October 2005): 430-444. Michele L. Hammers (2006), "Talking About 'Down There': The Politics of Publicizing the Female Body through *The Vagina Monologues*," *Women's Studies in Communication*, 29: 2 (2006): 220-243. Christine M. Cooper, "Worry about Vaginas: Feminism and Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*," *Signs*, 32: 3 (Spring 2007): 727-758.
3. A London 2012 Lyric Theatre *Monologues*-like performance event, featuring Ensler and others, was appropriately entitled *A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant and A Prayer*.
4. Eve Ensler, *The Vagina Monologues: The V-Day Edition* (New York: Villard, 2001, revised edition [first published 1998]), 5-6.
5. David Benatar, *The Second Sexism: Discrimination Against Men and Boys* (Chichester, Oxford, Massachusetts: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 241.
6. Ernest Thompson's off-off-Broadway production along these lines, drawing on his own experience of seeing the *Monologues*, *The Penis Responds*, was produced in 2000.
7. For a comparable account of teaching the *Monologues* - and comparable in the sense that my mid-Western counterpart, Linda Chen, also found herself wrong-footed and also engages in self-criticism (albeit seemingly less deserved than mine) - see Chen, "Why would a Professor have you read that book?"
8. Jennifer Keishin Armstrong and Heather Wood Rudolph, *Sexy Feminism: A Girl's Guide to Love, Success and Style* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2013), 55, 69, 85, their italics.
9. Shulamith Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* (London: The Women's Press, [1970] 1988), 146.
10. Jennifer Baumgardner and Amy Richards (2004), "Feminism and Femininity: Or How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Thong" in *All About The Girl: Culture, Power and Identity*, Anita Harris (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 66.
11. The club was at 18-22 Lloyd Street, and has since closed. Walter refers to it as "Boutique gentleman's club", which is both erroneous and misleading since the club functioned as an R'n'B and hip-hop dance venue. An actual lap-dancing club, Silks, remains next door.
12. Natasha Walter, *Living Dolls: The Return of Sexism* (London: Virago Press, 2012), 42, 231-238.
13. Nina Power, *One-Dimensional Woman* (Winchester and Washington: Zero Books, 2009), 1.
14. During a performance at the 1992 Reading festival, the lead singer of the all-female punk/grunge group L7 extracted and flung her tampon into the audience (who were throwing mud at the stage) and, also that year, exposed her vagina for a performance on Channel 4's *The Word*. "Vejjazling" was briefly popularised by the ITV series *The Only Way is Essex*, and consisted of applying diamante patterns to the vagina area. For an extended discussion of the practice, see Meredith Suzanne Dault, *The Last Triangle: Sex, Money and the Politics of Pubic Hair*, unpublished MA thesis, Queen's University, Canada (2011), accessed March 2013, http://qspace.library.queensu.ca/bitstream/1974/6840/1/Dault_Meredith_S_201110_MA.pdf
15. Wairimū Ngarūiya Njambi, "One Vagina To Go: Eve Ensler's Universal Vagina and its Implications for African Women," *Australia Feminist Studies* (special issue on genital modification), 24: 60 (2009): 167-180. Cooper, "Worry about Vaginas".
16. See Mary Daly and Jane Caputi, *Webster's' s' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language* (London: The Women's Press Ltd., 1987), 116, 133, 149 and 198 for example.

17. Nicholas King, *Whispers of Liberation: Feminist Perspectives on the New Testament*. New York: Paulist Press, 1998), 24.
18. Sara Marcus, *Girls to the Front: The True Story of the Riot Grrrl Revolution* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, New Delhi, Auckland: Harper Perennial, 2010), 301. The track can be found on Rage Against the Machine's self-titled 1992 album.
19. Both tracks can be found on the Jack Off Jill compilation *Humid Teenage Mediocrity: A Collection of Early JOJ Recordings 1992-1996* (Livewire / Cargo Records).
20. The unavoidable nature of the *Monologues* in this respect is evident in the number of MA theses that have dealt with them in the last five or so years.
21. A profile seemingly fitting the authors of the first articles on *The Vagina Monologues*, which tend to take a close textual reading and/or mount a critique from the position of Second Wave feminism.
22. The monologue, "Under the Burqa", dealt explicitly with the situation of women under Taliban rule.
23. Eve Ensler, *Vagina Warriors*, with photographs by Joyce Tenneson. (New York, Boston: Bulfinch Press / Time Warner Book Group, 2005), 2. See www.vday.org - "The 'V' in V-Day stands for victory, valentine, and vagina."; Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2005), 137. Others have also associated it with violence, which is the explicit target of the V-Day movement.
24. Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2005), 5.
25. Territorialism could well be considered in an activist respect too since "Vagina Warriors work every day to undo suffering. They sit by hospital beds, pass new laws, write proposals, beg for money, demonstrate, and hold vigils in the streets." (Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* [2005], book flap) These anonymously authored sentiments offer an index for middle class pressure group activism. And, assuming "beg for money" isn't literal but denotes arguing over the distribution of funding, this goal is merely that of a greater say in matters of bureaucratic regulation of the capitalist state, or even the vaginal equivalent - douching? - of allowing companies to "greenwash" their image.
26. Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2005), 5.
27. Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2005), 6-7.
28. John Gray, *Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus: A Practical Guide for Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in Your Relationships* (London: HarperCollins, 1992).
29. Quoted in Carol Anne Douglas, ed. *Love & Politics: Radical Feminist & Lesbian Theories* (San Francisco: ism press, inc., 1990), 133, 134.
30. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex*, 140, her italics.
31. The first of the Vagina Warriors, Isabella Rossellini, writes "I took my daughter to see *The Vagina Monologues*. It was such a relief to hear it all out there in the theater..."; quoted in Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2005), 8.
32. A further indication of the middle class constituency of the *Monologues* is in the way in which a performance becomes central to an episode of the satire of middle class mores and confusions, HBO's *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. The monologue "I Was There In the Room" deals with childbirth, but from the point of view of an onlooker. This monologue ends the HBO documentary/performance *The Vagina Monologues* (Joe Mantello, Jon Stem, Meema Spadola, 2002).
33. Inga Muscio, *Cunt: A Declaration of Independence* (Berkeley: Seal Press, [1998] 2002, expanded edition), 3, 11, her italics.
34. Muscio, *Cunt*, 224.
35. Muscio, *Cunt*, 226.
36. Catherine Hakim, *Honey Money: The Power of Erotic Capital* (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Books, 2011), 158.
37. Hakim, *Honey Money*, 21, 89.
38. Hakim, *Honey Money*, 88.
39. Hakim, *Honey Money*, 93.
40. Naomi Wolf, *Vagina: A New Biography* (London: Virago, 2012), 195.
41. Wolf, *Vagina*, 7.
42. Wolf, *Vagina*, 75.
43. Wolf, *Vagina*, 254.
44. Wolf, *Vagina*, 314. The sentiment is also blasphemous (to Judeo-Christian traditions) since earlier Wolf renames "a state of mind or a condition of female consciousness" as "the Goddess"; Wolf, *Vagina*, 7.
45. Wolf, *Vagina*, 327, 331, 342 respectively.
46. Wolf, *Vagina*, 343.
47. Walter, *Living Dolls*, 84.
48. Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 108-109.
49. Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 4.
50. Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 4.
51. Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, 93, her italics.

52. "Sexting": exchanging of self-taken pictures of a sexual nature with others, via smartphones. Sexting's safeness and transgression is understood to appeal particularly to younger girls, who then reputedly become prey to paedophile avatars. Critical writing on the phenomenon has mostly concerned sociological and legal ramifications. See Catherine Arcabascio, "Sexting and Teenagers: OMG r u going to jail???" *Richmond Journal of Law & Technology* XVI, 3 (Spring 2010), 1-43.
53. Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth: How images of beauty are used against women* (London, Sydney, Auckland, Parktown: Vintage, 1991), 7.
54. Although this is perhaps problematized by the lack of a writing credit for Spears or any other female; the song was written and produced by Bloodshy & Avant (Christian Karlsson and Pontus Winnburg) and Klaus Ahlund, and was released as a single and on the 2007 album *Blackout*.
55. Keli Goff, "Dear Feminists, Will You Also Be Marching In N***erwalk? Because I Won't", *Huffington Post*, October 3, 2011, accessed March 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/keli-goff/slutwalk-new-york_b_993261.html (accessed March 2013).
56. Lynne Segal and Mary McIntosh, eds. *Sex Exposed: Sexuality and the Pornography Debate* (London: Virago Press, 1992), 155.
57. Quoted in Jill Davis, editor, *Lesbian Plays* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), 52.
58. Davis, *Lesbian Plays*, 42.
59. Davis, *Lesbian Plays*, 50.
60. In its earliest years, the casts included noted actresses, activists and politicians; see Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2005), 138-144, for a production history overview, 1998-2004. The CD release of the *Monologues*, with Ensler's measured delivery (alleviated by stand-up comedy moments, which are also found in the HBO documentary), tedious name-dropping, and a bizarre muzak soundbed accompanying her relating of, among other things, her own sexual abuse, evidences the more serious and professional ambience that surrounded the *Monologues* before and around the turn of the millennium. The CD, *The Vagina Monologues* (Time Warner audiobooks) seems to draw on a 2001 production, produced and directed by Paul Ruben.
61. My discussion here draws on one particular performance, which is typical of performances in the UK across the latter half of the 2000s, but I will decline to identify the exact performance and I will decline to name the performers. The non-heteronormative aspirations of this article are such that critique is couched in terms of mutually shared concerns and respect across factional differences rather than "objectivity" and cold distance.
62. Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2005), 4.
63. Sal Renshaw, "Divine Gifts and Embodied Subjectivities in *The Vagina Monologues*," *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 6:2 (2004): 318.
64. Quoted in Sarah Lucia Hoagland and Julia Penelope, *For Lesbians Only: A Separatist Anthology* (London: Onlywomen Press, 1988), 286-287.
65. Walter Benjamin, *Understanding Brecht* (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 1.
66. Quoted in Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2005), 30.
67. Jo Anna Isaak, *Feminism & Contemporary Art: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Laughter* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 14-15.
68. Although not widely seen in the UK, Ensler's own presence in the HBO documentary is comparable in this: she is also bare-foot, and in a black evening dress that seems more like a nightie. Such modes of public relaxation for the *Monologues* in performance suggests a "talking out problems" commonality with the use of the sofa in the café of *Friends*, where feisty conversations, between comedy and serious matters of the heart, also occurred.
69. "Dogging": the UK-based phenomenon of public, sometimes group sex, usually in cars parked in car parks or wooded clearings on the outskirts of metropolitan areas. Voyeurs are invited to watch, or join in, and information is disseminated online. Since public sex, in Califia's discussion, is mostly a matter of an "underground" of illegal gay practices, dogging can be taken as a sign of a civic maturity; Pat Califia, *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex* (Pittsburgh and San Francisco: Cleis Press, 1994), particularly 71-82. Bell provides a tentative definition of the practice but his consideration concerns the paraphernalia of dogging, and the way in which technology comes to facilitate and organise sexual behaviour; his one foray into the "liveness" of dogging is via the erotic autobiographical reminiscences of a television chef, and his tactile abilities to describe edible or decorative substances. See David Bell, "Bodies, Technologies, Spaces: On 'Dogging'," *Sexualities*, 9: 4 (October 2006): 387-407.
70. Quoted in Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2005), 30.
71. Ensler, *Vagina Monologues* (2001), 3, 43, 53, 61, 69, 85, 101, 105, 121; Ensler's italics.
72. The 2002 HBO *Vagina Monologues* documentary reproduces Ensler's research technique after the fact: talking head interviews with "everyday" women are then seen to have inspired monologues, which Ensler performs.
73. For The Living Theater's "manifesto" of this approach see the poem "Paradise Now", reproduced in Theodore Roszak, *The Making of a Counter-Culture: Reflections on the Technocratic Society and Its Youthful Opposition* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), 150-151. For the "vibrations of violence of civilization", "we want to change / the demonic character of our opponents / into productive glory", and this occurs via the collective happening of the theatre-event.
74. Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2000).

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