



ΕΛΛΗΝΙΚΗ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΑ  
Εθνικό και Καποδιστριακό  
Πανεπιστήμιο Αθηνών

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## **Bodily Fictions**

**Ενότητα:** Definition of taboo (Freud, tradition)

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## 1. Luce Irigaray

French feminism and Marxism; Tel Quel radicalism, psychology and philosophy  
“This Sex Which Is Not One”

Thesis: women must reclaim their plurisexuality to gain identity, pleasure, cultural recognition

### 1.1 Problems of current condition

- Phallogocentric scopophilia--> denial of presence/pleasure
- Objectification of women as mirror of men's desire
- Lack of true “contact”

### 1.2 Body as symbol and basis for écriture feminine and claiming respect

- “I desire/feel pleasure, therefore I am”
- “autoeroticism” as metaphor for autonomous self-affirmation
- Mystery of non-logical/linear definition (Trinity, 3ple Goddess)
- If body is visible, its exploitation and heuristic value will be too

### 1.3 Critique of Irigaray

- anatomy is destiny” again?
- Is heterosexuality that monstrous?
- why must women speak in confused, vague, uncertain language?
- is plural, complex thinking a natural sex trait or a survival strategy

## 2. Eve Ensler, The Vagina Monologues

### 2.1 The Vagina Monologues and V-Day

Information and quotes are from the V-Day website at <http://www.vday.org> (2005) and from the “The Story of V-Day” by Karen Obel, Afterword to Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues* (London: Virago, 2002): 127-77.

V-Day is a movement that started when members of the Feminist.com group contacted Ensler to cooperate on a project “inspired by the vision of a world where women are free from the threat of violence, and galvanized by the overwhelming need for action.” The inaugural event was launched on “Valentine's Day, February 14, 1998, in New York City. A group of talented women who star in theater, film, and music came together at the Hammerstein Ballroom to perform Eve Ensler's Obie award-winning play, ...and to raise awareness and money to stop the abuse of women and girls. That landmark performance of *The Vagina Monologues* launched V-Day as a movement that embraces and celebrates all women and girls and demands the end of violence against them.” Next year the 1999 V-Day College Initiative was launched, with 65 colleges in the U.S. and Canada participating. Despite slanderous opposition from Catholic religious groups (like the Cardinal Newman Society) and

other conservatives, in 2005, 1150 colleges and organizations around the world pledged to present special V-Day performances of *TVM* that mark V-Day. The number eventually rose to 2.500 feature events—it is now a worldwide movement, with much celebrity support and significant impact on the struggle against violence, and it keeps growing each year.

V stands for Victory, Valentine, and Vagina. According to its mission statement, “V-Day is a catalyst that promotes creative events to increase awareness, raise money and revitalize the spirit of existing anti-violence organizations. V-Day generates broader attention for the fight to stop worldwide violence against women and girls, including rape, battery, incest, female genital mutilation (FGM) and sexual slavery.” Around every performance, special support events are organized, such as the Clothesline Project (victims of abuse draw their stories on t-shirts which are then hung publicly, to expose the “dirty laundry” of society), various workshops, information booths, sales, raffles, parties, arts and crafts. In all places the event has been a larger-than-expected success and a positive experience for all involved. There are even hardcore fans and volunteers, known as “Vagina Warriors,” who are the backbone of these events. In that sense, every V-Day performance is unique: Ensler encourages the addition of new monologues that reflect the particularities of each place and time.

But V-Day is far more than a festival. Ensler’s dedication to stopping the violence against women has led to significant interventions in parts of the world where women suffer systematically under misogynistic cultures/regimes. Working together with local groups, in Kenya, V-Day has opened and maintains a school-shelter for African young girls who run away from their homes in order to avoid forced female genital mutilation; in Afghanistan, since 1999, it continues to fund and equip women’s schools, shelters, and support organizations, while providing contacts for Afghan women’s voices to be heard around the world; it maintains the orphanage for young girls in Sri Lanka; and through hundreds of projects it is a lifeline of hope for thousands of women in Egypt, Zambia, the Philippines, Bosnia, Iraq, South America, Palestine, Israel, India, Pakistan, and wherever awareness and support is needed.

In Greece there was one performance of *TVM* in Athens in 1998, and it comes back on stage for a second time in May 2006. There has never been a Greek V-Day.

### **2.1.1 Other plays by Eve Ensler**

- Conviction
- Lemonade
- The Depot
- Floating Rhoda and the Glue Man
- Extraordinary Measures
- Necessary Targets: A Story of Women and War (Villard-Random House, 2001)
- The Good Body (Villard, 2004)
- I Am an Emotional Creature. Vagina Warriors, words by Eve Ensler and photos by Joyce Tenneson (Bulfinch Press, 2005)
- Insecure at Last: Guidelines to Groundlessness (Villard, 2006)

### **2.1.2 Excerpts from Eve Ensler’s “The Power and Mystery of Naming Things” speech (“All Things Considered” radio show, This I Believe series, March 20, 2006**

“I believe in the power and mystery of naming things. Language has the capacity to transform our cells, rearrange our learned patterns of behavior and redirect our thinking. I believe in naming what’s right in front of us because that is often what is most invisible.”

“Naming things, breaking through taboos and denial is the most dangerous, terrifying and crucial work. This has to happen in spite of political climates or coercions, in spite of careers being won or lost, in spite of the fear of being criticized, outcast or disliked. I believe freedom begins with naming things. Humanity is preserved by it.”

## **2.2 The Vagina Monologues**

### **2.2.1 Gloria Steinem: Vagina awareness as a way to**

- raise social/self-awareness
- combat pseudo-scientific perceptions
- cleanse female body and identity from “dirty” or “shameful semantics
- combat violence, esp. culturally inscribed (clitoridectomy/infibulation, date-rape)

### **2.2.2 «The Flood»**

- Rewriting the Biblical story of Noah
- taboo of elderly sexuality
- symbolism of cellar, cancer and vaginectomy
- trauma of rejection
- dream (Yemanjá)
- result of interview (hostile talk VS feeling “touched,” relieved—>logos like vagina, with orgasmic potential)

### **2.2.3 «I was 12»**

- what do those varied attitudes signify?

### **2.2.4 «My Vagina Was My Village»**

- why this metaphor?
- why the double format?
- “ethnic cleansing” as exile from own body
- how is rape em-bodied (pictured in bodily terms)?

### **2.2.5 «I Was There»**

- ritual defilement and miracle (filthy and heart shape)
- what is the meaning of “I was there in the room,” “I remember”?

### **2.2.6 Question**

If language/logos is already suspect and tainted by cultural and patriarchal bias, how effective can such a play/project be?

- rituals around V-Day
- activism: reclaiming bodies, reclaiming language (e.g., όλ@, herstory, queer)



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