

THE
VAGINA
MONOLOGUES



Eve Ensler



Virago
2001

FOREWORD

by Gloria Steinem

I come from the "down there" generation. That is, those were the words—spoken rarely and in a hushed voice—that the women in my family used to refer to all female genitalia, internal or external.

It wasn't that they were ignorant of terms like *vagina*, *labia*, *vulva*, or *clitoris*. On the contrary, they were trained to be teachers and probably had more access to information than most.



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than to feel pleasure. (If such an organ were unique to the male body, can you imagine how much we would hear about it—and what it would be used to justify?) Thus, whether I was learning to talk, to spell, or to take care of my own body, I was told the name of each of its amazing parts—except in one unmentionable area. This left me unprotected against the shaming words and dirty jokes of the school yard and, later, against the popular belief that men, whether as lovers or physicians, knew more about women's bodies than women did.

I first glimpsed the spirit of self-knowledge and freedom that you will find in these pages when I lived in India for a couple of years after college. In Hindu temples and shrines I saw the lingam, an abstract male genital symbol, but I also saw the yoni, a female genital symbol, for the first time: a flowerlike shape, triangle, or double-pointed oval. I was told that thousands of years ago, this symbol had been worshiped as more powerful than its male counterpart, a belief that

It wasn't even that they were unliberated, or "straitlaced," as they would have put it. One grandmother earned money from her strict Protestant church by ghostwriting sermons—of which she didn't believe a word—and then earned more by betting it on horse races. The other was a suffragist, educator, and even an early political candidate, all to the alarm of many in her Jewish community. As for my own mother, she had been a pioneer newspaper reporter years before I was born, and continued to take pride in bringing up her two daughters in a more enlightened way than she had been raised. I don't remember her using any of the slang words that made the female body seem dirty or shameful, and I'm grateful for that. As you'll see in these pages, many daughters grew up with a greater burden.

Nonetheless, I didn't hear words that were accurate, much less prideful. For example, I never once heard the word *clitoris*. It would be years before I learned that females possessed the only organ in the human body with no function other

in male forms, altars feature the Jewel in the Lotus and other representations of the lingam-in-the-yoni. In India, the Hindu goddesses Durga and Kali are embodiments of the yoni powers of birth and death, creation and destruction.

Still, India and yoni worship seemed a long way from American attitudes about women's bodies when I came home. Even the sexual revolution of the 1960s only made more women sexually available to more men. The "no" of the 1950s was just replaced with a constant, eager "yes." It was not until the feminist activism of the 1970s that there began to be alternatives to everything from patriarchal religions to Freud (the distance from A to B), from the double standard of sexual behavior to the single standard of patriarchal/political/religious control over women's bodies as the means of reproduction.

Those early years of discovery are symbolized for me by such sense memories as walking through Judy Chicago's *Woman House* in Los Angeles, where each room was created by a different

carried over into Tantrism, whose central tenet is man's inability to reach spiritual fulfillment except through sexual and emotional union with woman's superior spiritual energy. It was a belief so deep and wide that even some of the woman-excluding, monotheistic religions that came later retained it in their traditions, although such beliefs were (and still are) marginalized or denied as heresies by mainstream religious leaders.

For example: Gnostic Christians worshiped Sophia as the female Holy Spirit and considered Mary Magdalene the wisest of Christ's disciples; Tantric Buddhism still teaches that Buddhahood resides in the vulva; the Sufi mystics of Islam believe that *fana*, or rapture, can be reached only through Fravashi, the female spirit; the Shekina of Jewish mysticism is a version of Shakti, the female soul of God; and even the Catholic church included forms of Mary worship that focused more on the Mother than on the Son. In many countries of Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world where gods are still depicted in female as well as

These last three decades of feminism were also marked by a deep anger as the truth of violence against the female body was revealed, whether it took the form of rape, childhood sexual abuse, anti-lesbian violence, physical abuse of women, sexual harassment, terrorism against reproductive freedom, or the international crime of female genital mutilation. Women's sanity was saved by bringing these hidden experiences into the open, naming them, and turning our rage into positive action to reduce and heal violence. Part of the tidal wave of creativity that has resulted from this energy of truth telling is this play and book.

When I first went to see Eve Ensler perform the intimate narratives in these pages—gathered from more than two hundred interviews and then turned into poetry for the theater—I thought: *I already know this: it's the journey of truth telling we've been on for the past three decades.* And it is. Women have entrusted her with their most intimate experiences, from sex to birthing, from the undeclared war against women to the new freedom of love

woman artist, and where I discovered female symbolism in my own culture for the first time. (For example, the shape we call a heart—whose symmetry resembles the vulva far more than the asymmetry of the organ that shares its name—is probably a residual female genital symbol. It was reduced from power to romance by centuries of male dominance.) Or sitting in a New York coffee shop with Betty Dodson (you will meet her in these pages), trying to act cool while she electrified eavesdroppers with her cheerful explanation of masturbation as a liberating force. Or coming back to *Ms.* magazine to find, among the always humorous signs on its bulletin board: IT'S 10 O'CLOCK AT NIGHT—DO YOU KNOW WHERE YOUR CLITORIS IS? By the time feminists were putting CUNT POWER! on buttons and T-shirts as a way of reclaiming that devalued word, I could recognize the restoration of an ancient power. After all, the Indo-European word *cunt* was derived from the goddess Kali's title of Kunda or Cunti, and shares the same root as *kin* and *country*.

In the 1970s, while researching in the Library of Congress, I found an obscure history of religious architecture that assumed a fact as if it were common knowledge: the traditional design of most patriarchal buildings of worship imitates the female body. Thus, there is an outer and inner entrance, labia majora and labia minora; a central vaginal aisle toward the altar; two curved ovarian structures on either side; and then in the sacred center, the altar or womb, where the miracle takes place—where males give birth.

Though this comparison was new to me, it struck home like a rock down a well. *Of course, I thought. The central ceremony of patriarchal religions is one in which men take over the yoni-power of creation by giving birth symbolically. No wonder male religious leaders so often say that humans were born in sin—because we were born to female creatures. Only by obeying the rules of the patriarchy can we be reborn through men. No wonder priests and ministers in skirts sprinkle imitation birth fluid over our heads, give us new names, and promise rebirth into everlasting life. No wonder the*

between women. On every page, there is the power of saying the unsayable—as there is in the behind-the-scenes story of the book itself. One publisher paid an advance for it, then, on sober second thought, allowed Eve Ensler to keep the money if she would take the book and its v-word elsewhere. (Thank Villard for publishing all of women's words—even in the title.)

But the value of *The Vagina Monologues* goes beyond purging a past full of negative attitudes. It offers a personal, grounded-in-the-body way of moving toward the future. I think readers, men as well as women, may emerge from these pages not only feeling more free within themselves—and about each other—but with alternatives to the old patriarchal dualism of feminine/masculine, body/ mind, and sexual/spiritual that is rooted in the division of our physical selves into “the part we talk about” and “the part we don't.”

If a book with *vagina* in the title still seems a long way from such questions of philosophy and politics, I offer one more of my belated discoveries.

sixteen-year-old girls as they decided to come up with a collective word that included everything—vagina, labia, clitoris. After much discussion, “power bundle” was their favorite. More important, the discussion was carried on with shouts and laughter. I thought: *What a long and blessed way from a hushed “down there.”*

I wish my own foremothers had known their bodies were sacred. With the help of outrageous voices and honest words like those in this book, I believe the grandmothers, mothers, and daughters of the future will heal their selves—and mend the world.

male priesthood tries to keep women away from the altar, just as women are kept away from control of our own powers of reproduction. Symbolic or real, it's all devoted to controlling the power that resides in the female body.

Since then, I've never felt the same estrangement when entering a patriarchal religious structure. Instead, I walk down the vaginal aisle, plotting to take back the altar with priests—female as well as male—who would not disparage female sexuality, to universalize the male-only myths of Creation, to multiply spiritual words and symbols, and to restore the spirit of God in all living things.

If overthrowing some five thousand years of patriarchy seems like a big order, just focus on celebrating each self-respecting step along the way.

I thought of this while watching little girls drawing hearts in their notebooks, even dotting their *i*'s with hearts, and I wondered: *Were they magnetized by this primordial shape because it was so like their own bodies?* I thought of it again while listening to a group of twenty or so diverse nine-

I interviewed a group of women between the ages of sixty-five and seventy-five. These interviews were the most poignant of all, possibly because many of the women had never had a vagina interview before. Unfortunately, most of the women in this age group had very little conscious relationship to their vaginas. I felt terribly lucky to have grown up in the feminist era. One woman who was seventy-two had never even seen her vagina. She had only touched herself when she was



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E washing in the shower, but never with conscious intention. She had never had an orgasm. At seventy-two she went into therapy, and with the encouragement of her therapist, she went home one afternoon by herself, lit some candles, took a bath, played some comforting music, and discovered her vagina. She said it took her over an hour, because she was arthritic by then, but when she finally found her clitoris, she said, she cried. This monologue is for her.



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T H I F L O O D

[Jewish, Queens accent]

Down there? I haven't been down there since 1953. No, it had nothing to do with Eisenhower. No, no, it's a cellar down there. It's very damp, clammy. You don't want to go down there. Trust me. You'd get sick. Suffocating. Very nauseating. The smell of the clamminess and the mildew and everything. Whew! Smells unbearable. Gets in your clothes.

No, there was no accident down there. It



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E didn't blow up or catch on fire or anything. It
V wasn't so dramatic. I mean . . . well, never mind.
E No. Never mind. I can't talk to you about this.
E What's a smart girl like you going around talking
N to old ladies about their down-theres for? We
S didn't do this kind of a thing when I was a girl.
L What? Jesus, okay.

R There was this boy, Andy Leftkov. He was
cute—well, I thought so. And tall, like me, and I
really liked him. He asked me out for a date in
his car. . . .

I can't tell you this. I can't do this, talk about
down there. You just know it's there. Like the cel-
lar. There's rumbles down there sometimes. You
can hear the pipes, and things get caught there,
little animals and things, and it gets wet, and
sometimes people have to come and plug up the
leaks. Otherwise, the door stays closed. You forget
about it. I mean, it's part of the house, but you
don't see it or think about it. It has to be there,
though, 'cause every house needs a cellar. Other-
wise the bedroom would be in the basement.



T Oh, Andy, Andy Leftkov. Right. Andy was
H very good-looking. He was a catch. That's what
E we called it in my day. We were in his car, a new
V white Chevy BelAir. I remember thinking that my
A legs were too long for the seat. I have long legs.
G They were bumping up against the dashboard. I
I was looking at my big kneecaps when he just
N kissed me in this surprisingly "Take me by control
A like they do in the movies" kind of way. And I got
M excited, so excited, and, well, there was a flood
O down there. I couldn't control it. It was like this
N force of passion, this river of life just flooded out
O of me, right through my panties, right onto the
L car seat of his new white Chevy BelAir. It wasn't
O pee and it was smelly—well, frankly, I didn't really
G smell anything at all, but he said, Andy said, that
U it smelled like sour milk and it was staining his car
E seat. I was "a stinky weird girl," he said. I wanted
S to explain that his kiss had caught me off guard,
that I wasn't normally like this. I tried to wipe the
flood up with my dress. It was a new yellow prim-
rose dress and it looked so ugly with the flood on



E it. Andy drove me home and he never, never said
V another word and when I got out and closed his
E car door, I closed the whole store. Locked it.
E Never opened for business again. I dated some
N after that, but the idea of flooding made me too
S nervous. I never even got close again.

L I used to have dreams, crazy dreams. Oh,
E they're dopey. Why? Burt Reynolds. I don't know
R why. He never did much for me in life, but in my
dreams . . . it was always Burt and I. Burt and I.
Burt and I. We'd be out. Burt and I. It was some
restaurant like the kind you see in Atlantic City,
all big with chandeliers and stuff and thousands
of waiters with vests on. Burt would give me this
orchid corsage. I'd pin it on my blazer. We'd
laugh. We were always laughing, Burt and I. Eat
shrimp cocktail. Huge shrimp, fabulous shrimp.
We'd laugh more. We were very happy together.
Then he'd look into my eyes and pull me to him
in the middle of the restaurant—and, just as he
was about to kiss me, the room would start to
shake, pigeons would fly out from under the



T table—I don't know what those pigeons were
H doing there—and the flood would come straight
E from down there. It would pour out of me. It
V would pour and pour. There would be fish inside
A it, and little boats, and the whole restaurant
G would fill with water, and Burt would be standing
I knee-deep in my flood, looking horribly disap-
N pointed in me that I'd done it again, horrified as
A he watched his friends, Dean Martin and the like,
M swim past us in their tuxedos and evening gowns.

O I don't have those dreams anymore. Not
N since they took away just about everything con-
O nected with down there. Moved out the uterus,
L the tubes, the whole works. The doctor thought
O he was being funny. He told me if you don't use
G it, you lose it. But really I found out it was cancer.
U Everything around it had to go. Who needs it,
E anyway? Right? Highly overrated. I've done other
S things. I love the dog shows. I sell antiques.

What would it wear? What kind of question
is that? What would it wear? It would wear a big
sign:



E "Closed Due to Flooding."

V What would it say? I told you. It's not like
E that. It's not like a person who speaks. It stopped
being a thing that talked a long time ago. It's a
N place. A place you don't go. It's closed up, under
S the house. It's down there. You happy? You made
L me talk—you got it out of me. You got an old lady
E to talk about her down-there. You feel better
R now? [Turns away; turns back.]

You know, actually, you're the first person I
ever talked to about this, and I feel a little better.

V A G I N A F A C Y

At a witch trial in 1593, the investigating
lawyer (a married man) apparently discovered a
clitoris for the first time; [he] identified it as a
devil's teat, sure proof of the witch's guilt. It was
"a little lump of flesh, in manner sticking out as if
it had been a teat, to the length of half an inch,"
which the gaoler, "perceiving at the first sight
thereof, meant not to disclose, because it was ad-
joining to so secret a place which was not decent

E to be seen. Yet in the end, not willing to conceal
V so strange a matter," he showed it to various by-
E standers. The bystanders had never seen anything
E like it. The witch was convicted.

N
S —The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets
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I WAS TWELVE. MY
MOTHER SLAPPED ME.

Second grade, seven years old, my brother was talking about periods. I didn't like the way he was laughing.

I went to my mother. "What's a period?" I said. "It's punctuation," she said. "You put it at the end of a sentence."

My father brought me a card: "To my little girl who isn't so little anymore."

I was terrified. My mother showed me the

I interviewed many women about menstruation. There was a choral thing that began to occur, a kind of wild collective song. Women echoed each other. I let the voices bleed into one another. I got lost in the bleeding.

E thick sanitary napkins. I was to bring the used
V ones to the can under the kitchen sink.

E I remember being one of the last. I was thir-
teen.

N We all wanted it to come.

S I was so afraid. I started putting the used
L pads in brown paper bags in the dark storage
E places under the roof.

R Eighth grade. My mother said, "Oh, that's
nice."

In junior high—brown drips before it came.
Coincided with a little hair under my arms, which
grew unevenly: one armpit had hair, the other
didn't.

I was sixteen, sort of scared.

My mother gave me codeine. We had bunk
beds. I went down and lay there. My mother was
so uncomfortable.

One night, I came home late and snuck into
bed without turning on any lights. My mother
had found the used pads and put them between
the sheets of my bed.



T I was twelve years old, still in my under-
H pants. Hadn't gotten dressed. Looked down on
E the staircase. There it was.

V Looked down and I saw blood.

A Seventh grade; my mother sort of noticed
G my underwear. Then she gave me plastic diapers.

I My mom was very warm—"Let's get you
N a pad."

A My friend Marcia, they celebrated when she
M got hers. They had dinner for her.

O We all wanted our period.

N We all wanted it *now*.

O Thirteen years old. It was before Kotex. Had
L to watch your dress. I was black and poor. Blood
O on the back of my dress in church. Didn't show,
G but I was guilty.

E I was ten and a half. No preparation. Brown
S gunk on my underpants.

She showed me how to put in a tampon.
Only got in halfway.

I associated my period with inexplicable phe-
nomena.



E My mother told me I had to use a rag. My
V mother said no to tampons. You couldn't put any-
E thing in your sugar dish.

E Wore wads of cotton. Told my mother. She
N gave me Elizabeth Taylor paper dolls.

S Fifteen years old. My mother said, "Mazel
L tov." She slapped me in the face. Didn't know if it
E was a good thing or a bad thing.

R My period, like cake mix before it's baked.
Indians sat on moss for five days. Wish I were Na-
tive American.

I was fifteen and I'd been hoping to get it. I
was tall and I kept growing.

When I saw white girls in the gym with tam-
pons, I thought they were bad girls.

Saw little red drops on the pink tiles. I said,
"Yeah."

My mom was glad for me.

Used OB and liked putting my fingers up
there.

Eleven years old, wearing white pants. Blood
started to come out.

T Thought it was dreadful.

H I'm not ready.

E I got back pains.

I got horny.

V Twelve years old. I was happy. My friend had
A a Ouija board, asked when we were going to get
G our periods, looked down, and I saw blood.

I looked down and there it was.

I'm a woman.

Terrified.

Never thought it would come.

O Changed my whole feeling about myself. I be-
N came very silent and mature. A good Vietnamese
O woman—quiet worker, virtuous, never speaks.

G Nine and a half. I was sure I was bleeding to
U death, rolled up my underwear and threw them in
E a corner. Didn't want to worry my parents.

S My mother made me hot water and wine,
and I fell asleep.

I was in my bedroom in my mother's apart-
ment. I had a comic book collection. My mother
said, "You mustn't lift your box of comic books."

E My girlfriends told me you hemorrhage
V every month.
E

E My mother was in and out of mental hospi-
tals. She couldn't take me coming of age.
N

S "Dear Miss Carling, Please excuse my daugh-
ter from basketball. She has just matured."
L

E At camp they told me not to take a bath with
my period. They wiped me down with antiseptic.
R

Scared people would smell it. Scared they'd
say I smelled like fish.

Throwing up, couldn't eat.

I got hungry.

Sometimes it's very red.

I like the drops that drop into the toilet. Like
paint.

Sometimes it's brown and it disturbs me.

I was twelve. My mother slapped me and
brought me a red cotton shirt. My father went out
for a bottle of sangria.

V A G I N A P A C Y

The clitoris is pure in purpose. It is the only organ in the body designed purely for pleasure. The clitoris is simply a bundle of nerves: 8,000 nerve fibers, to be precise. That's a higher concentration of nerve fibers than is found anywhere else in the body, including the fingertips, lips, and tongue, and it is twice . . . twice . . . twice the number in the penis. Who needs a handgun when you've got a semiautomatic.

—from *Woman: An Intimate Geography*, by Natalie Angier

In the nineteenth century, girls who learned to develop orgasmic capacity by masturbation were regarded as medical problems. Often they were "treated" or "corrected" by amputation or cauterization of the clitoris or "miniature chastity belts," sewing the vaginal lips together to put the clitoris out of reach, and even castration by surgical removal of the ovaries. But there are no references in the medical literature to the surgical

E removal of testicles or amputation of the penis to
 V stop masturbation in boys.
 E

In the United States, the last recorded clitoridectomy for curing masturbation was performed in 1948—on a five-year-old girl.

—The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets

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In 1993, I was walking down a street in Manhattan when I passed a newsstand and was suddenly struck by a deeply disturbing photograph on the front page of Newsday. It was a picture of a group of six young women who had just been returned from a rape camp in Bosnia. Their faces revealed shock and despair, but more disturbing was a sense that something sweet, something pure, had been forever destroyed in each of their lives. I read on. Inside the newspaper was another photograph of the young women, recently reunited with

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their mothers and standing in a semicircle in a gymnasium. There was a very large group and not one of them, mother or daughter, was able to look at the camera.

I knew I had to go there. I had to meet these women. In 1994, thanks to the support of an angel, Lauren Lloyd, I spent two months in Croatia and Pakistan, interviewing Bosnian women refugees. I interviewed these women and hung out with them in camps, cafés, and refugee centers. I have been back to Bosnia twice since then.

When I returned to New York after my first trip, I was in a state of outrage. Outraged that 20,000 to 70,000 women were being raped in the middle of Europe in 1993, as a systematic tactic of war, and no one was doing anything to stop it. I couldn't understand it. A friend asked me why I was surprised. She said that over 500,000 women were raped every year in this country, and in theory we were not at war.

This monologue is based on one woman's story. I want to thank her here for sharing it with me. I am in awe of her spirit and strength, as I am in awe of every woman I met who survived these terrible atrocities in the former Yugoslavia. This piece is for the women of Bosnia.

MY VAGINA WAS MY VILLAGE

My vagina was green, water soft pink fields, cow mooing sun resting sweet boyfriend touching lightly with soft piece of blond straw.

There is something between my legs. I do not know what it is. I do not know where it is. I do not touch. Not now. Not anymore. Not since.

My vagina was chatty, can't wait, so much, so much saying, words talking, can't quit trying, can't quit saying, oh yes, oh yes.

E Not since I dream there's a dead animal sewn in
V down there with thick black fishing line. And the bad
E dead animal smell cannot be removed. And its throat is
E slit and it bleeds through all my summer dresses.

N My vagina singing all girl songs, all goat bells
S ringing songs, all wild autumn field songs, vagina
L songs, vagina home songs.

E Not since the soldiers put a long thick rifle inside
R me. So cold, the steel rod canceling my heart. Don't
know whether they're going to fire it or shove it through
my spinning brain. Six of them, monstrous doctors with
black masks shoving bottles up me too. There were sticks,
and the end of a broom.

My vagina swimming river water, clean
spilling water over sun-baked stones over stone
clit, clit stones over and over.

Not since I heard the skin tear and made lemon
screeching sounds, not since a piece of my vagina came
off in my hand, a part of the lip, now one side of the lip
is completely gone.

My vagina. A live wet water village. My
vagina my hometown.



T H E V A G I N A M O N O L O G U E S
Not since they took turns for seven days smelling
like feces and smoked meat, they left their dirty sperm in-
side me. I became a river of poison and pus and all the
crops died, and the fish.
My vagina a live wet water village.
They invaded it. Butchered it and burned it
down.
I do not touch now.
Do not visit.
I live someplace else now.
I don't know where that is.



V A G I N A F A C T

Genital mutilation has been inflicted on 80 [million] to 100 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 remove it altogether, [and] to have part or all of the labia . . . sewn together with catgut or thorns.

Often the operation is prettified as “circumcision.” The African specialist Nahid Toubia puts it plain: In a man it would range from amputation of most of the penis, to “removal of all the penis, its roots of soft tissue and part of the scrotal skin.”

Short-term results include tetanus, septicemia, hemorrhages, cuts in the urethra, bladder, vaginal walls, and anal sphincter. Long-term: chronic uterine infection, massive scars that can hinder walking for life, fistula formation, hugely increased agony and danger during childbirth, and early deaths.

—*The New York Times*, April 12, 1996



I had been performing this piece for over two years when it suddenly occurred to me that there were no pieces about birth. It was a bizarre omission. Although when I told a journalist this recently, he asked me, “What’s the connection?”

Almost twenty-one years ago I adopted a son, Dylan, who was very close in age to me. Last year he and his wife, Shiva, had a baby. They asked me to be present for the birth. I don’t think, in all my investiga-

*tion, that I really understood vaginas until this mo-
ment. If I was in awe of them before the birth of my
granddaughter, Colette, I am certainly in deep worship
now.*

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I WAS THERE IN
THE ROOM

For Shiva

I was there when her vagina opened.
We were all there: her mother, her husband,
and I,
and the nurse from the Ukraine with her
whole hand
up there in her vagina feeling and turning with
her rubber
glove as she talked casually to us—like she was
turning on a loaded faucet.

E I was there in the room when the contractions
V made her crawl on all fours,
E made unfamiliar moans leak out of her pores
E and still there after hours when she just
N screamed suddenly
S wild, her arms striking at the electric air.
L
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R I was there when her vagina changed
from a shy sexual hole
to an archaeological tunnel, a sacred vessel,
a Venetian canal, a deep well with a tiny stuck
child inside,
waiting to be rescued.
I saw the colors of her vagina. They changed.
Saw the bruised broken blue
the blistering tomato red
the gray pink, the dark;
saw the blood like perspiration along the edges
saw the yellow, white liquid, the shit, the clots
pushing out all the holes, pushing harder and
harder,

T saw through the hole, the baby's head
H scratches of black hair, saw it just there behind
E the bone—a hard round memory,
V as the nurse from the Ukraine kept turning and
A turning
G her slippery hand.
I was there when each of us, her mother and I,
held a leg and spread her wide pushing
with all our strength against her pushing
and her husband sternly counting, "One, two,
three,"
telling her to focus, harder.
We looked into her then.
We couldn't get our eyes out of that place.
We forget the vagina, all of us
what else would explain
our lack of awe, our lack of wonder.
I was there when the doctor
reached in with Alice in Wonderland spoons

and there as her vagina became a wide operatic
mouth
singing with all its strength;
first the little head, then the gray flopping arm,
then the fast
swimming body, swimming quickly into our
weeping arms.

I was there later when I just turned and faced
her vagina.

I stood and let myself see
her all spread, completely exposed
mutilated, swollen, and torn,
bleeding all over the doctor's hands
who was calmly sewing her there.

I stood, and as I stared, her vagina suddenly
became a wide red pulsing heart.

The heart is capable of sacrifice.
So is the vagina.
The heart is able to forgive and repair.

It can change its shape to let us in.
It can expand to let us out.
So can the vagina.
It can ache for us and stretch for us, die for us
and bleed and bleed us into this difficult,
wondrous world.
So can the vagina.
I was there in the room.
I remember.

ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ
ΣΥΝΕΤΑ ΑΓΓΛΙΚΗΣ ΓΛΩΣΣΗΣ
ΚΑΙ ΦΙΛΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ-ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗΚΗ

AMERICA

Jean Baudrillard

Translated by Chris Turner
(Material Word)



VERSO

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