Women alone: A creative thesis performance project

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WOMEN ALONE
A CREATIVE THESIS PERFORMANCE PROJECT

BY
Toni Cross
B.F.A., Memphis State University, 1977

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Theatre
In Acting
Department of Drama/Dance
University of Montana
May 16 and 17, 1980

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Chairman, Board of Examiners

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Dean, Graduate School

Date 6-10-82
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Cross, Toni R., M.F.A., March 1982, Drama/Dance

Women Alone: A Performance Project

Director: Randy Bolton

The purpose of this performance project was to explore dramatically some of the ways in which women confront and cope with the world around them through the various roles they play. The specific roles explored in rehearsal and subsequently presented in performance were working women, female friends, mothers, sisters, and sex objects.

The material for performance was chosen in the process of a five-month rehearsal period. The script was developed by combining elements of prose, poetry, plays, music and art. Rehearsals involved myself, Leah Joki and Mary Thielen. Each element of the script was chosen as part of an acting growth process. The process is fully documented in the following paper.

The conclusion of the exploration and rehearsal was a final performance of the developed script.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I have always been interested in exploring and expressing a woman's viewpoint through drama. It was this interest that led to the formation of this project. My purpose in presenting this project was to explore, in a theatrical context, some of the roles women play as they confront the world around them, and the effect playing these roles has on their personal wants and needs. The failures, successes and, sometimes, ambivalent feelings associated with such role playing formed the basis for this project.

My personal struggle to meet the expectations of my various roles as teacher, daughter, sister, or friend determined the choice of material for the project. As I grow older and find myself coping with a wider variety of situations and roles, a feeling of schizophrenia sometimes occurs when the obligations and expectations of two or more of the roles come into conflict with each other. My role as an artist may conflict with my role as a daughter; my role as a friend may conflict with my role as a teacher, and so on. Most importantly, my own expectations and needs, the role I intend to play for myself,
may be totally outside of and incongruent with the expectations placed upon me in my other roles. As I chose material for the project, I was drawn most strongly to poems and plays that in some way related to my personal life experience with these conflicts. The roles I became most fond of in the project and, at times, the ones that presented the greatest difficulty in performance, were those that related most directly to my own real experience, expected experience, or fears. What follows is a documentation of the changes and growth I experienced as an actor in the process of creating the project and exploring my own life roles.

Background and Precedents

My interest in the woman's viewpoint in drama had surfaced in other ways prior to the formation of the project. During the fall of 1978, I was seeking a vehicle for this interest. I directed an abbreviated version of For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf. The project marked the first time I had been involved in an exclusively female production. As a result of directing Colored Girls, I suddenly became aware that I was part of a much larger group. What I had viewed in myself as a solitary struggle and had tried to express in the piece, pulled strong responses
from other women and from men as well. I discovered a commonality of feeling in my audience.

As a result of this realization, my work began to undergo a process of personalization. I began to choose directing projects on the basis of whether or not I could convey through them my own hopes or fears or joys. In addition, my work as an actor became more exciting to me as I began to realize that my life and art are closely related. Indeed, they must be closely related in order for my art to engage an audience. That is, in order for my work as an actor, or as a director, to have a firm root and base—a reality on stage—it must draw its life from my own emotional life. That is the meaning of personalization. As far as my acting was concerned, it was impossible to experience the events of every role I performed in reality, but I could find parallel emotions and experiences in my own life in which to root my work. By learning to be open to my personal response as well as to the character's personal response, I discovered the power of the unity of character and self to the life of a role. I approached this performance project with this in mind.

I knew at the outset that my personal connection to the subject I chose for the project and the material within it had to be strong. The project was a challenge in two important ways. I tried to choose roles for myself
to which I seemed to have little personal connection and yet still tried to find the connection, and I tried to reveal this connection honestly to an audience, without fear at such self-exposure. My growth as an actor is directly related to the ways in which I tried to meet these two challenges. What follows is a discussion of my personal method and how it worked for me as I explored the major roles within this project, my personal feelings about the results of my exploration, and a final critique of the project.
CHAPTER I

A SCRIPT
OF THE
CREATIVE THESIS PERFORMANCE PROJECT:
WOMEN ALONE

Presented by: Toni Cross
Assisted by: Leah Joki and Mary Thielen

Part I

I'm not a girl or "I Just Work Here"

(There is a slide of Norman Rockwell's painting of "Rosie the Riveter" projected on a backdrop. The three actors take their places in the dark. A red light then appears as the slide fades out. The actors then sign the following poem in silence.)

I'm not a girl
I'm a hatchet
I'm not a hole
I'm a whole mountain
I'm not a fool
I'm a survivor
I'm not a pearl
I'm the Atlantic Ocean
I'm not a good lay
I'm a straight razor
look at me as if you had never seen a woman before
I have red, red hands and much bitterness

(The three actors then let the sign for the following words, expand and carry them to other parts of the stage as the words are spoken.)

LEAH: Pearl
MARY: Ocean
TONI: Hatchet
LEAH: Mountain
MARY: Razor
TONI: Girl
TONI: I'm--
LEAH: You're stupid, Simone.
MARY: You have no talent, Simone.
LEAH: You're awkward, Simone.
MARY: You're nothing but a girl, Simone. ¹
TONI: I'm not a girl.
LEAH: You'll never amount to anything, Simone.
MARY: You'll never match your brother, Simone.
LEAH: You're only a girl, Simone.
TONI: I'm not a girl.
MARY: You'll never know the truth, Simone.
LEAH: Beauty is useless, Simone.
MARY: You're unworthy, Simone.
LEAH: You're wretched, Simone.
MARY: You have no talent, Simone.
LEAH: You have no genius, Simone.

MARY: You're a girl, Simone.
TONI: I'm not a girl.
LEAH: You're a girl, Simone.
MARY: You're a girl, Simone.
LEAH: You're a girl, Simone.
MARY: You're a girl, Simone.
LEAH: You're a girl, Simone.

(During this sequence of lines, Toni becomes a tug-of-war rope between Mary and Leah. At this point, she breaks free and speak the poem aloud.)

TONI: I'm not a girl
   I'm a hatchet
   I'm not a hole
   I'm a whole mountain
   I'm not a fool
   I'm a survivor
   I'm not a pearl
   I'm the Atlantic Ocean
   I'm not a good lay
   I'm a straight razor
   look at me as if you had never seen a woman before
   I have red, red hands and much bitterness.3

(Leah and Mary have once again signed the poem, beginning with "hole." They now move upstage and bring a desk down to stage left. They then seat themselves upstage.)

The Belle of Amherst

Emily Dickinson: Toni Cross

EMILY: This is my introduction. Forgive me if I'm frighten ed. I never see strangers and hardly know what I say. My name is Emily Elizabeth Dickinson. (Placing a chair stage center.) Elizabeth is for my Aunt Elizabeth Currier. She's Father's sister. Oh, how the trees stand

3Grahn, edward the dyke and other poems, p. 1.
up straight when they hear Aunt Libbie's little boots come thumping into Amherst! She's the only male relative on the female side. Dear Aunt Libbie. But I don't use my middle name anymore--since I became a poet. Here in Amherst, I'm known as Squire Edward Dickinson's half-cracked daughter. Well, I am! The neighbors can't figure me out. I don't cross my father's ground to any house or town. I haven't left the house for years.

The Soul selects her own Society--
Then--shuts the Door.

Why should I socialize with village gossips? There goes one of them now--Henrietta Sweetser--(moving to an imaginary window, stage right)--everyone knows Henny. She'd even intimidate the anti-Christ. Look at her! She's strolling by the house, trying to catch a glimpse of me. Would you like that? So, I give them something to talk about. I dress in white all year round, even in winter. "Bridal white," Henny calls it. (Seats self and mimics Henny.) "Dear, dear! Dresses in bridal white, she does, every day of the blessed year. Year in, year out. Disappointed in love as a girl, so I hear. Poor creature. All so very sad. And her sister, Lavinia, a spinster too. Didn't you know? Oh, yes. Stayed unmarried just to be at home and take care of Miss Emily. Two old maids in that big house. What a lonely life, to shut yourself away from good people like us." Indeed! You should see them come to the door, bearing gifts, craning their necks, trying to see over Vinnie's shoulder. But I'm too fast for them. I've already run upstairs two steps at a time. And I hide there until they leave. You can imagine what they make of that! One old lady came to the door the other day to get a peek inside. I surprised her by answering the door myself. She stammered something about looking for a house to buy. To spare the expense of moving, I directed her to the cemetery. (Crossing to desk, stage left) I'm told one woman in Amherst is imitating me now. Probably Clarissa Cartwright. Just what Amherst needs--another eccentric. Oh, I do have fun with them! My menagerie. I guess people in small towns must have their local characters. And for Amherst, that's what I am. But do you know something? I enjoy the game. I've never said this to anyone before, but I'll tell you. I do it on purpose. The white dress, the seclusion. It's all--deliberate. But my brother, Austin--he knows. He says, "Emily! Stop your posing!" (Stand-
ing center stage). Words are my life. I look at words as if they were entities, sacred beings. There are words to which I lift my hat when I see them sitting on a page. Sometimes I write one . . . (Writing in air) . . . "Circumference" . . . and I look at its outlines until it starts to glow brighter than any sapphire. Oh. Phosphorence. Now, there's a word to lift your hat to. Can you spell it? To find that phosphorescence, that light within that's the genius behind poetry. We have an Irish girl who's been with us for a long time. I was here yesterday at tea (sitting in chair) and she asked me how to spell "genius." (As if speaking to Maggie) Why do you ask, Maggie? No, just leave the tray, dear. Oh, writing to your brother. I see. And whom are you describing? Me? Oh, Maggie! Well, I guess I'd better spell it for you. G—E—N—U—S. Genius. Oh, don't ask me that! I don't know what it means. No one knows that, Maggie. No one. Thank you, dear.  

MARY: Well God knows there's no security in marriage. (Rising upstage)

LEAH: You give up your anatomy, economic self-support, spontaneous creativity. (Rising upstage)

TONI: (rising) and a helluva lot of energy trying to convert a male

MARY: Half-person

TONI: into a whole person

MARY: who will eventually stop draining you

LEAH: so you can do your own work

TONI: (crossing to desk, stage left) And the alternative, hopping onto the corporate or professional ladder is just as self-destructive.

MARY: If you spend your life proving yourself, then you just become a man.

---

LEAH: which is where the whole problem began and continues.  

Helen, at 9 A.M., at noon, at 5:15

Helen: Toni Cross

Helen: (seated at desk)

Her ambition is to be more shiny and metallic, black and purple as a thief at midday; trying to make it in a male form, she's become as stiff as possible. Wearing trim suits and spike heels, she says "bust" instead of breast, somewhere underneath she misses love and trust, but she feels that spite and malice are the prices of success. She doesn't realize yet, that she's missed success, also, so her smile is sometimes still genuine. (Rising) After a while she'll be a real killer, bitter and more wily, better at pitting the men against each other and getting the other women fired. She constantly conspires. Her grief expresses itself in fits of fury over details, details take the place of meaning, money takes the place of life. She believes that people are lice who eat her, so she bites first; her thirst increases year by year and by the time the sheen has disappeared from her black hair, and tension makes her features unmistakably ugly, she'll go mad. No one in particular will care. As anyone who's had her for a boss will know the common woman is as common as the common crow.


6 Grahn, edward the dyke, p. 31.
(Toni now moves the desk to far left stage, and resets a chair at center stage. She then exits upstage right. Mary enters from upstage left and sits at center. Toni reappears upstage right.)

Mary of Scotland

Elizabeth: Toni Cross

Mary of Scotland: Mary Thielen

ELIZABETH: I am Elizabeth.

MARY: Elizabeth--(she begins to rise, but is motioned to remain seated)--I have been here a long while
Already--it seems so. If it's your policy
To keep me--shut me up--. I can argue no more--
No--I beg now. There's one I love in the north,
You know that--and my life's there, my throne's
there, my name
To be defended--and I must lie here darkened
From news and from the sun--lie here impaled
On a brain's agony--wondering even sometimes
If I were what they said me--a carrion-thing
In my desires--can you understand this?--I speak it
Too brokenly to be understood, but I beg you
As you are a woman and I am--and our brightness
falls
Soon enough at best--let me go, let me have my life
Once more--and my dear health of mind again--
For I rot away here in my mind--in what
I think of myself--some death tinge falls over one
In prisons--

ELIZABETH: It will grow worse, not better. I've known
Strong men shut up alone for years--it's not
their hair turns white only; they sicken within
And scourge themselves. If you would think like a
queen
This is no place for you. The brain taints here
Till all desires are alike. Be advised and sign
The abdication.

MARY: Stay now a moment. I begin to glimpse
Behind this basilisk mask of yours. It was this
You've wanted from the first
ELIZABETH: This that I wanted?

MARY: It was you sent Lord Throgmorton long ago
When first I'd have married Bothwell. All this while
Some evil's touched my life at every turn.
To cripple what I'd do. And now--why now--
Looking on you--I see it incarnate before me--
It was your hand that touched me. Reaching out
In little ways--here a word, there an action--this
Was what you wanted. I thought perhaps a star--
Wildly I thought it--perhaps a star might ride
Astray--or a crone that burned an image down
In wax--filling the air with curses on me
And slander; the murder of Rizzio, Moray in that
And you behind Moray--the murder of Darnley, Throgmorton
Behind that too, you with them--and that winged scandal
You threw at us when were married. Proof I have none
But I've felt it--would know it anywhere--in your eyes--
There--before me.

ELIZABETH: What may become a queen
Is to rule her kingdom. Had you ruled yours I'd say
She has her ways, I mine. Live and let live
And a merry world for those who have it. But now
I must think this over--sadness has touched your brain.
I'm no witch to charm you, make no incantations;
You came here by your own road.

MARY: It was you forced Bothwell from me--
You there, and always. Oh, I'm to blame in this, too!
I should have seen your hand!
How could I have been
Mistaken in you for an instant?

ELIZABETH: You were not mistaken.
I am all women I must be. One's a young girl,
Young and harrowed as you are--one who could weep
To see you here--and one's a bitterness
At what I have lost and can never have, and one's
The basilisk you saw. This last stands guard
And I obey it. Lady, you came to Scotland
A fixed and subtle enemy, more dangerous
To me than you've ever known. This could not be borne,
And I set myself to cull you out and down,
And down you are.

MARY: When was I your enemy?

ELIZABETH: Your life was a threat to mine, your throne to
my throne, 
Your policy a threat.

MARY: How? Why?

ELIZABETH: It was you
Or I. Do you know that? The one of us must win
And I must always win. Suppose one lad
With a knife in his hand, a Romish lad who planted
That knife between my shoulders—my kingdom was yours.
It was too easy. You might not have wished it.
But you'd take it if it came.

MARY: And you'd take my life
And love to avoid this threat?

ELIZABETH: Nay, keep your life
And your love, too. The lords have brought a parchment
For you to sign. Sign it and live.

MARY: And if I will not sign
This abdication?

ELIZABETH: You've tasted prison. Try
A diet of it.

MARY: And so I will.

ELIZABETH: Child, child, I've studied this gambit
Before I play it. I will send each year
This paper to you. Not signing, you will step
From one cell to another, step lower always,
Till you reach the last, forgotten, forgotten of men,
Forgotten among causes, a wraith that cries
To fallen gods in another generation
That's lost your name. Wait then for Bothwell's rescue.
It will never come.

MARY: I may never see him?

ELIZABETH: Never,
It would not be wise.

MARY: And suppose indeed you won
Within our life-time, still looking down from the heavens
And up from men around us, God's spies that watch
The fall of great and little, they will find you out--
I will wait for that, wait longer than a life,
Till men and the times unscroll you, study the tricks
You play, and laugh, as I shall laugh, being known
Your better, haunted by your demon, driven
To death or exile by you, unjustly. Why,
When all's done, it's my name I care for, my name and
heart,
To keep them clean. Win now, take your triumph now,
For I'll win men's hearts in the end--though the sifting
takes
This hundred years--or a thousand.

ELIZABETH: Child, child, are you gulled
By what men write in histories, this or that,
And never true? I am careful of my name
As you are, for this day and longer. It's not what
happens
But what men believe to have happened. They will believe
The worst of you, the best of me, and that
Will be true of you and me. I have seen to this.
What will be said about us in after-years
By men to come, I control that, being who I am.
It will be said of me that I governed well,
And wisely, but of you, cousin, that your life,
Shot through with ill-loves, battened on lechery, made
you
An ensign of evil, that men tore down and trampled.
Shall I call for the lord's parchment?

MARY: This will be said--?
But who will say it? It's a lie--will be known as a lie!

ELIZABETH: You lived with Bothwell before Darnley died,
You and Bothwell murdered Darnley.

MARY: And that's a lie!

ELIZABETH: Your letters, my dear. Your letters to Bothwell
prove it. We have those letters.

MARY: Then they're forged and false!
For I never wrote them!

ELIZABETH: It may be they were forged.
But will that matter, Mary, if they're believed?
All history is forged.

MARY: You would do this?

ELIZABETH: It is already done. (Sitting in center chair.)
MARY: And still I win.
A demon has no children, and you have none,
Will have none, can have none, perhaps. This crooked track
You've drawn me on, cover it, let it not be believed
That a woman was a friend. Yes, cover it deep,
And heap my infamy over it, lest men peer
And catch sight of you as you were and are. In myself
I knew you to be an eater of dust. Leave me here
And set me lower this year by year, as you promise,
Till the last is an oubliette, and my name inscribed
On the four winds. Still, STILL I win! I have been
A woman, and I have loved as a woman loves,
Lost as a woman loses. I have borne a son,
And he will rule Scotland—and England. You have no heir!
A devil has no children.

ELIZABETH: By god you shall suffer
For this, but slowly. (Rising from chair and facing her.)

MARY: And that I can do. A woman
Can do that. Come, turn the key. I have a hell
For you in mind, where you will burn and feel it,
Live where you like, and softly.

ELIZABETH: Once more I ask you,
And patiently. Give up your throne.

MARY: No devil.
My pride is stronger than yours, and my heart beats blood
Such as yours has never known. And in this dungeon,
I win here, alone.

ELIZABETH: Goodnight, then. (Beginning to exit upstage right.)

MARY: Aye, goodnight.
Beaton!

ELIZABETH: (turning back)
You will not see your maids again,
I think. It's said they bring you news from the north.

MARY: I thank you for all kindness.  

(Elizabeth exits upstage right, and Mary reseats herself in center chair.)

(Leah and Toni are now seen tiptoeing onto stage from up left and up right. They carry pillows and proceed to engage Mary in a pillow fight. As the fight ends, the desk is replaced downstage left, and a chair is placed at center. The three actors bring chips and a candy bar to the table. Mary and Leah sit at the desk. Toni sits with her pillow in the chair. They read.)

Uncommon Women

Katie: Leah Joki
Holly: Toni Cross
Samantha: Mary Thielen
Rita: Toni Cross

KATIE: Holly, did you ever have penis envy?
HOLLY: I beg your pardon?
KATIE: Did you ever have penis envy?
HOLLY: I remember having tonsilitis.
KATIE: Have you, Samantha?
SAMANTHA: I know I never had it. Robert's was the first one I ever saw. I didn't even know men had pubic hair.

KATIE: How big was Robert's? Holly, don't fall asleep. This may be the last chance we have to accumulate comparative data. We're graduating in two more weeks. Now I remember Thomas' was around this big. (She demonstrates with a nut roll, breaking it off as she goes.) That's small to medium with a tendency toward tumescence, and Iki was around this big. But it was curved so you can't trust my estimation. In fact, if I can remember the others were all kind of average. Oh yeah, except for Blaise. His really did stand out. It was the biggest I ever saw. Except it was just like him. Large, functional and Waspy.
HOLLY: I knew a boy at Columbia with three balls. Really. He came up to see me my freshman year because his psychiatrist said I wouldn't mind.

KATIE: Did you sleep with him?

HOLLY: I didn't want to hurt his feelings.

KATIE: Holly, you're such a mealy-mouth.

HOLLY: I didn't care. I guess I don't like men's underwear, especially when they don't remove it and it's left dangling around one ankle. In fact, if you'd like a rundown of every flaccid appendage in the Ivy League, I can give you details.

KATIE: I've never been with an impotent man.

HOLLY: You haven't lived.

KATIE: Listen to this! This is from a chapter in Chip Knowles' new book: Women My Issue. Chip has concluded, and I quote:

That the discovery at four months that a girl is castrated is the turning point in her road. At fourteen months little girls fingers and pacifiers are introduced into the vagina and at fifteen months a girl baby has been known to fall asleep with her genitalia on her Teddy bear. Finally, at sixteen months they start using a pencil.

SAMANTHA: Don't little boys use pencils?

HOLLY: No, they write with their cocks.

SAMANTHA: But don't men have breast and womb envy?

KATIE: Well, if they have it, they just become creative or cook dinner every now and then.

HOLLY: I guess I envy men. I envy their confidence. I envy their options. But I never wanted a fleshy appendage. Especially a little boy's. Whenever I get fat I get nauseated because it looks like I have one in my pants. Katie, this is nonsense. The only people who have penis envy are other men.

KATIE: You mean it's all those appendages compensating for being small?
HOLLY: Yeah.

SAMANTHA: Well, I know I wouldn't want one 'cause then I couldn't have Robert's. What time is it?

KATIE: 2 A.M.

SAMANTHA: I gotta go to bed, I have an Art History final in the morning. (This last phrase is said in unison. Samantha exits.)

KATIE: Good night, pumpkin. Holly, do you think I have penis envy?

HOLLY: Oh, Katie, gross me out!

KATIE: No, really for me it's entirely possible.

HOLLY: You don't have it. (Katie exits. Holly remains seated.)

(Toni now rises and carries her pillow downstage center. She drops it on the floor and attempts to go to sleep. Finally gives up in frustration.)

RITA: I can't sleep! I keep having recurrent Let's Make a Deal dreams. . . . (she rises to her knees) . . . and my future is always behind the curtain, and the audience is screaming at me, NO, NO, TAKE THE BOX! TAKE THE BOX! I haven't told anyone, but yesterday I went to New York, on a job interview. It was for one of those "I graduated from a seven sister school and now I'm in publishing jobs." I did very well at the interview. I told the interviewer that I was an English Composition Major, and I liked Virginia Woolf and Thackeray, but I really want to assistant edit beauty hints. I told her yes I thought it was so important for women to work and I would continue to write beauty hints even with a husband and family. (The preceding is spoken to the interviewer.) The big thing at these interviews is to throw around your new found female pride as if it were an untapped natural resource. Anyway, at the end of the interview she told me it was delightful (again, to interviewer), I told her it was delightful, we were both delightful. She walked me to the door, and said, "Tell me dear, do you have experience with a Xerox machine?"

---

8 Wasserstein, Uncommon Women, pp. 63-66.
I said, "Yes, And I've tasted my menstrual blood." I did. I can't go to one of those places. I don't know what I'm going to do, but it's not going to be that. I'm not going to throw my imagination away. I refuse to live down to expectation. If I can just hold out 'til I'm thirty, I'll be incredible. Actually I do have a new fantasy that helps me deal with the future. I pretend that I am Picara in a picaresque novel and this is only one episode in a satiric life. Hey--let's go down and hit the candy machine and see how much weight we can gain in a night. And when the candy machine is empty, I'm going to start writing my novel. (Rita exits up left.)

PART II

Friends and Neighbors

(A new slide now appears on the backdrop. It is a picture of two girls at a fair, holding balloons. The following recorded transition poem is heard:)

The Phenomenology of Anger

The only real love I have ever felt
was for children and other women.
Everything else was lust, pity,
self-hatred, pity, lust.

(Mary sets a table and chairs at stage center and covers it with a cloth. A snatch of 18th century music is heard. Leah enters dressed in an outrageous housedress with a bouffant hairnet on. Toni then enters in similar garb, carrying a tea tray. The following scene climaxes in a food fight.)

The Misanthrope

Arsinoe: Leah Joki

9Ibid., pp. 66-67.

ARSINOE: (As Celimene enters.) Madame,
The flame of friendship ought to burn
Brightest in matters of the most concern
And as there's nothing which concerns us more
Than honor, I have hastened to your door
To bring you, as your friend, some information
About the status of your reputation.
I visited, last night, some virtuous folk,
And, quite by chance, it was of you they spoke;
There was, I fear, no tendency to praise
Your light behavior and your dashing ways.
The quantity of Gentlemen you see
And your by now notorious coquetry
Were both so vehemently criticized
By everyone, that I was much surprised.
Of course, I needn't tell you where I stood;
I came to your defense as best I could,
Assured them you were harmless, and declared
Your soul was absolutely unimpaired.
But there are some things, you must realize
One can't excuse, however hard one tries,
And I was forced at last into conceding
That your behavior, Madam, is misleading
That it makes a bad impression, giving rise
To ugly gossip and obscene surmise,
And that if you were more overtly good,
You wouldn't be so much misunderstood.
Not that I think you've been unchaste--no! no!
The saints preserve me from a thought so low!
But mere good conscience never did suffice:
One must avoid the outward show of vice.
Madam, you're too intelligent, I'm sure,
To think my motives anything but pure
In offering you this counsel—which I do
Out of a zealos interest in you.

CELIMENE: Madam, I haven't taken you amiss;
I'm very much obliged to you for this;
And I'll at once discharge the obligation
By telling you about your reputation.
You've been so friendly as to let me know
What certain people say of me, and so
I mean to follow your benign example
By offering you a somewhat similar sample.
The other day, I went to an affair
And found some distinguished people there
Discussing piety, both false and true.
The conversation soon came round to you.
Alas! Your prudery and bustling zeal
Appeared to have a very slight appeal.
Your affectation of a grave demeanor
Your endless talk of virtue and of honor,
The aptitude of your suspicious mind
For finding sin where there is none to find,
Your towering self-esteem, that pitying face
With which you contemplate the human race
Your sermonizings and your sharp aspersions
On people's pure and innocent diversions--
All these were mentioned, Madam, and, in fact,
Were roundly and concertedly attacked.
"What good," they said, "are all these outward shows,
When everything belies her pious pose?
She prays incessantly; but then, they say,
She beats her maids and cheats them of their pay;
She shows her zeal in every holy place,
But still she's vain enough to paint her face;
She holds that naked statues are immoral,
But with a naked man she'd have no quarrel."
Of course, I said to everybody there
That they were being viciously unfair;
But still they were disposed to criticize you,
And all agreed that someone should advise you
To leave the morals of the world alone,
And worry rather more about your own.
They felt that one's self-knowledge should be great
Before one thinks of setting others straight;
That one should learn the art of living well
Before one threatens other men with hell,
And that the Church is best equipped, no doubt,
To guide our souls and root our vices out.
Madam, you're too intelligent, I'm sure,
To think my motives anything but pure
In offering you this counsel--which I do
Out of a zealous interest in you.

ARSINOE: I dared not hope for gratitude, but I
Did not expect so acid a reply:
I judge, since you've been so extremely tart,
That my good counsel pierced you to the heart.

CALIMENE: Far from it, Madam. Indeed, it seems to me
We ought to trade advice more frequently.
One's vision of oneself is so defective
That it would be an excellent corrective.
If you are willing, Madam, let's arrange
Shortly to have another frank exchange
In which we'll tell each other, entre nous,
What you've heard tell of me, and I of you.

ARSINOE: Oh, people never censure you, my dear;
It's me they criticize. Or so I hear.

CALIMENE: Madam, I think we either blame or praise
According to our taste and length of days.
There is a time of life for coquetry,
And there's a season, too, for prudery.
When all one's charms are gone, it is, I'm sure,
Good strategy to be devout and pure:
It makes one seem a little less forsaken.
Some day, perhaps, I'll take the road you've taken:
Time brings all things. But I have time aplenty,
And see no cause to be a prude at twenty.

ARSINOE: You give your age in such a gloating tone
That one would think I was an ancient crone;
We're not so far apart, in sober truth,
That you can mock me with a boast of youth!
Madam, you baffle me. I wish I knew
What moves you to provoke me as you do.

CALIMENE: For my part, Madam, I should like to know
Why you abuse me everywhere you go.
Is it my fault, dear lady, that your hand
Is not, alas, in very great demand?
If men admire me, if they pay me court
And daily make me offers of the sort
You'd have them make to you,
How can I help it? What would you have me do?
If what you want is lovers, please feel free
To take as many as you can from me.

ARSINOE: Oh, come. D'you think the world is losing sleep
Over that flock of lovers which you keep,
Or that we find it difficult to guess
What price you pay for their devotedness?
If one were envious of your amours,
One soon could have a following like yours;
Lovers are no great trouble to collect
If one prefers them to one's self-respect.

CALIMENE: Collect them then, my dear; I'd love to see
You demonstrate that charming theory;
Who knows, you might . . .
ARSINOE: Now, Madam, that will do;  
It's time to end this trying interview.  
My coach is late in coming to your door,  
Or I'd have taken leave of you before.

CALIMENE: Oh, please don't feel that you must rush away;  
I'd be delighted, Madam, if you'd stay.  
However, lest my conversation bore you  
Let me provide some better company for you;  
This gentleman, who comes most apropos, 
Will please you more than I could do, I know.  

INTERMISSION

Part I

My Sister, Myself

(A new slide appears on the backdrop. It is a picture of Toni and her sister, Celeste, at work in a pantry. The following recorded transition is heard as Toni seats herself on the floor far downstage.)

The Sisters

She will be a scholar, and I
a good for nothing like my father.
She is gifted with lemon hair
and cleverness. I must learn
not to expect too much.

She will be enough for them,
the one like a yellow lily.
They bend their necks and say
snow will turn into doves for her.


TONI: My sister has always been so much braver than I am. I used to have terrible nightmares as a child, and she would let me sleep in her bed. She never had nightmares. I used to think that this was because she was better than me. My mother said I had them because I watched too many vampire movies. My sister said I had them because I wanted to be scared.

Once when we were children, we were over at my aunt's house, playing with several cousins on an old, rusty tractor in my aunt's front yard. My sister was in the driver's seat, as usual. Suddenly, a swarm of bees appeared from somewhere inside the tractor. We all jumped down and ran, except for my sister. As I looked back to see where she was, I saw her stand up in the seat of the tractor. Just then the bees began to sting her, and she began to scream. I froze for what seemed like hours, then I ran back to her and just as I stretched my hand up to her, she grabbed my hand and jumped to the ground.

My aunt finally calmed us both down and put baking soda on my sister's bee stings. My sister looked over to where I was sitting, and she could see that I was still shaken. She dipped her finger into the baking soda, drew a moustache on her upper lip, and said, "Oh, girl, it didn't even hurt."

I guess the point of this story is that she has said about a lot of things that have happened to us in our lives, "Oh, girl, it didn't even hurt." And by saying it, she makes it so.

(At the conclusion of this story, Mary appears upstage behind Toni, whipping a red cloth through space. As the cloth settles on the floor, the next scene begins. Both actors grasp an end of the cloth and use it as a rope throughout the scene.)

Antigone

Antigone: Toni Cross

Ismene: Mary Thielen

ANTIGONE: Ismene, dear sister, catastrophes drop upon us one after the other. First, we were cursed by the history of our father, Oedipus; and now we suffer because of the civil war our brothers have waged against each other.
Neither God nor man has spared us a single horror; even so, our enemies have one more shame in store for us. Can you guess what they intend to do?

ISMENE: No—Antigone—Nothing more can touch us. They cannot hurt us anymore. Our beautiful city . . .

ANTIGONE: Yes, it was beautiful!

ISMENE: . . . Has been torn apart by civil war. A war led by our own brothers . . .

ANTIGONE: beautiful brothers . . .

ISMENE: Who hated each other . . .

ANTIGONE: Fought each other . . .

ISMENE: Struggled for control

ANTIGONE: like gangsters . . . Mafia!

ISMENE: They shot each other down

ANTIGONE: Murdered each other.

ISMENE: Died in each others arms.

ANTIGONE: But we loved them! Admired them! Our brothers!

ISMENE: Now their followers . . .

ANTIGONE: The rebels . . .

ISMENE: Having no leaders, vent their frustration and anger . . .

ANTIGONE: by a reign of terror . . .

ISMENE: they sabotage . . .

ANTIGONE: bomb . . .

ISMENE: market places . . .

ANTIGONE: churches . . .

ISMENE: schools . . .
ANTIGONE: kill senselessly . . .
ISMENE: wound wild animals . . .
ANTIGONE: But there's more . . .
ISMENE: Yes, more . . .
ANTIGONE: still more . . .
ISMENE: The people . . .
ANTIGONE: hungry, confused . . .
ISMENE: are scattered throughout the city
ANTIGONE: countless holes-in-the-wall . . .
ISMENE: huddled together . . .
ANTIGONE: Like rats . . .
ISMENE: unsure of who or what to follow, what to believe . . .
ANTIGONE: More!
ISMENE: still more . . .
ANTIGONE: Yes, yes, tell it all!
ISMENE: Uncle Creon . . .
ANTIGONE: Our brand new president . . .
ISMENE: Using the pretext of emergency . . .
ANTIGONE: "emergency powers" . . .
ISMENE: has set himself up as a dictator . . .
ANTIGONE: edicts . . .
ISMENE: decrees . . .
ANTIGONE: proclamations . . .
ISMENE: No freedom . . .
ANTIGONE: No freedom . . .
ISMENE: for anyone at all!
ANTIGONE: But there is more.
ISMENE: No, no more.
ANTIGONE: Yes, still more.
ISMENE: No, no, no.
ANTIGONE: Yes, more
ISMENE: I don't want to hear.
ANTIGONE: Listen!
ISMENE: What else could there possible be?
ANTIGONE: What else? Creon!
ISMENE: No!
ANTIGONE: Creon is no longer content to rule men with an iron hand, he must rule God as well. Have you heard his latest proclamation?
ISMENE: No.
ANTIGONE: Have you!
ISMENE: Please Antigone, I don't want to know—we have suffered so much.
ANTIGONE: You will listen to me, Ismene!
ISMENE: You're hurting me, Antigone!
ANTIGONE: Our brother, Eteocles, because he had gained control of the "establishment"—was supposedly chief of police and fighting to save our city—he is to be buried with honor, a state funeral. But our brother, Polynices, the so-called rebel, the outsider—his body is to be left in the streets—in the gutter to rot so that the stench of his carcass may remind all rebels of the price of folly. He may not even be mourned . . . much less buried. This is what Uncle Creon, our noble president,
has decreed. He considers it of the greatest importance that his orders be carried out to the letter. To disobey is death.

ISMENE: Poor Polynices . . .

ANTIGONE: Creon is coming here to personally announce his new decree.

ISMENE: No funeral . . .

ANTIGONE: No one to commend him to God.

ISMENE: Handsome Polynices . . .

ANTIGONE: a defiled, obscene corpse . . .

ISMENE: It's not fair, Antigone!

ANTIGONE: Oh my dearest sister, now you have the chance to show the world the stuff you are made of.

ISMENE: What?

ANTIGONE: We'll show Creon what it means to be the children of Oedipus.

ISMENE: Why are you looking at me so strangely?

ANTIGONE: Will you help me?

ISMENE: What can we do?

ANTIGONE: Bury Polynices!

ISMENE: Antigone! We don't dare!

ANTIGONE: We must.

ISMENE: But Creon . . . the police . . . we would be breaking the law.

ANTIGONE: Creon has no right to make such laws.

ISMENE: You can't be serious. You really mean to bury him?

ANTIGONE: Yes. He is our brother. My brother . . . and yours. Yes, I shall bury him. I cannot leave his carcass for the dogs to fight over.
ISMENE: Antigone, Antigone, for God's sake think carefully before you do anything rash. Our father put out his eyes to pay for his crimes. He died, a blind man and a beggar. Our mother paid for her part in their incest by hanging herself. Our brothers' crimes caused them to slaughter each other. Oh Antigone, what a horrible fate would descend on us if we now become criminals ourselves. To defy Creon, the police, the law ... sister, we can't.

ANTIGONE: So!

ISMENE: Creon is our President. He is in command. We are just women. He is too strong.

ANTIGONE: I see.

ISMENE: No you don't see. Polynices wouldn't ask this of us. He would know that we must obey the powers that be. He would know and forgive.

ANTIGONE: Of course.

ISMENE: Antigone!

ANTIGONE: Oh don't worry baby sister. I'm not going to twist your arm again and make you cry. Of course you must do as you think best. As for me, I shall bury my brother. After that I shall be glad to die, if I must. It is God's laws that tell me what I must do, and the law of God tells me that my life is, in any case, a brief moment compared to the eternity I must spend with my dead brother. You, who are afraid of the laws of man; do you dare to despise God?

ISMENE: I don't despise God at all. He knows that even if you don't.

ANTIGONE: Of course your conduct is your own affair.

ISMENE: Who am I to try and fight the system?

ANTIGONE: Oh yes, the system.

ISMENE: One person against a whole government.

ANTIGONE: Good. Invent excuses, lots of them!

ISMENE: Antigone!
ANTIGONE: I'm going.
ISMENE: Where?
ANTIGONE: To bury Polynices.
ISMENE: How?
ANTIGONE: As best I can.
ISMENE: You can't!
ANTIGONE: Let go of me, Ismene.
ISMENE: It's crazy.
ANTIGONE: Let go!
ISMENE: No, no, wait Antigone. Look, don't tell anyone your plans. OK? Especially the reporters. I'll keep very quiet--then maybe they won't notice anything after you do it.
ANTIGONE: Keep your cowed silence for yourself.
ISMENE: But no one must ever know.
ANTIGONE: Tell the world, sister, if you think I am wrong. At least then I could respect you.
ISMENE: Antigone, I love you!
ANTIGONE: Then come with me!
ISMENE: I can't. You're attempting the impossible. You'll be caught.
ANTIGONE: Of course.
ISMENE: But you said yourself, they'll kill you.
ANTIGONE: I'm going.
ISMENE: Antigone, you're the only thing dear to me left in this world.
ANTIGONE: Be quiet, Ismene, or I shall begin to despise you.
ISMENE: Antigone, I don't want to be left alone! Don't go please!
ANTIGONE: Goodbye, Ismene. (Exits upstage right.)

Part II

Mothers and Other Strangers

(A new slide appears on the screen. It is a picture of a pregnant woman. The following recorded transition is heard.)

Oh, Mother

My mother slapped me, beat me
Tore my clothes
Put me in the laundry
Washed me, ironed me.
nothing is tougher than a MOTHER.14

(Toni appears upstage right, dressed in an old bathrobe. As she delivers this speech, she sets the table downstage left and a chair at center stage.)

The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds

Beatrice: Toni Cross

Ruth: Leah Joki

BEATRICE: Cobalt 60! Half-life! Science, science, science! Don't they teach our misfits anything anymore? Anything decent and meaningful and sensitive? Do you know what I'd be now if it wasn't for this mud pool I got sucked into? I'd probably be a dancer. Miss Betty Frank, The Best Dancer of the Class of 19... something.


One minute I'm the best dancer in school—smart as a whip—the head of the whole crowd! And the next minute...

One mistake. That's how it starts. Marry the wrong man and before you know it he's got you tied down with two stones around your neck for the rest of your life.

When I was in that lousy high school I was one of the most respected kids you ever saw. Before I knew what happened I lost my dancing legs and got varicose legs. Beautiful varicose legs. Do you know, everything I ever thought I'd be has exploded! Exploded! You know, I almost forgot about everything I was supposed to be... Half-life! If you want to know what a half-life is, just ask me. You're looking at the original half-life! I got stuck with one daughter with half a mind; another one who's half a test tube; half a husband—a house half full of rabbit crap—and half a corpse!

That's what I call a half-life, Matilda! Me and cobalt-60! Two of the biggest half-lifes you ever saw.15

(At the conclusion of the monologue, Leah, as Ruth, rushes onto the stage from upstage left, in the grip of an epileptic seizure.)

BEATRICE: Stop it! Stop it, Ruth!
Ruth! Stop it! You're not going to let yourself go, do you hear me, Ruth? You're not going to go!

RUTH: He's after me!

BEATRICE: You were dreaming, do you hear me?
Nobody's after you! Nobody!
(Holds her till she calms down).
There, now, nobody's after you. Nice and easy.
Breathe deeply... Did the big bad man come after my little girl? (has Ruth in chair stage center) That big bad bogey man? (Ruth laughs) Now that wasn't so bad, was it?

RUTH: It was the dream with Mr. Mayo again.

BEATRICE: Oh. Well, we'll just get you a little hot milk and—Why, Ruth, your skin turned ice cold! This will warm you up . . . (gets a blanket) What's the matter?

RUTH: The flashlight.

BEATRICE: What's wrong with it?

RUTH: It's the same one I used to check on Mr. Mayo with.

BEATRICE: So it is. We don't need it.

RUTH: No, I'll keep it. Do you want to know how they have (this in the files at school?)

BEATRICE: No, I don't.

RUTH: Well, they say I came out of my room . . . And I started down the stairs, step by step . . . and I heard the choking and banging on the bed, and . . .

BEATRICE: I'm going back to bed.

RUTH: No!

BEATRICE: Well, talk about something nice, then.

RUTH: Oh, Mama, tell me about the wagon.

BEATRICE: You change so fast I can't keep up with you.

RUTH: Mama, please . . . the story about the wagon.

BEATRICE: I don't know anything about telling stories. Get those great big smart teachers of yours to do that sort of stuff.

RUTH: Tell me about the horses again, and how you stole the wagon.

BEATRICE: Don't get me started on that.

RUTH: Mama, please . . .

BEATRICE: Do you want a cigarette?

RUTH: (Takes one) Leave out the part where they shoot the horses, though.
BEATRICE: Honey, you know the whole story—

RUTH: "Apples! Pears! Cu . . . cumbers!"

BEATRICE: No. It's "Apples! Pears! Cucum . . . bers!"  
(Together)  
"Apples! Pears! Cucum . . . bers!"

RUTH: How did you get the wagon out without him seeing you?

BEATRICE: That was easy. Every time he got home for the day he'd make us both some sandwiches—my mama had been dead for years—and he'd take a nap on the old sofa that used to be . . . there! And while he was sleeping I got the horses hitched up and went riding around the block waving to everyone.

RUTH: Oh, Mama, you didn't!

BEATRICE: Of course I did. I had more nerve than a bear when I was a kid. Let me tell you it takes nerve to sit up on that wagon every day yelling "Apples! . . . "  
(Together)  
Pears! Cucum . . . bers!"

RUTH: Did he find out you took the wagon?

BEATRICE: Did he find out? He came running down the street after me and started spanking me right on top of the wagon—not hard—but it was so embarrassing—and I had one of those penny marshmallow ships in the back pocket of my overalls, and it got all squished. And you better believe I never did it again . . .

You would have loved him, Ruth, and gone out with him on the wagon . . . all over Stapleton yelling as loud as you wanted.

RUTH: "Apples! Pears! Cu . . . cumbers!"

BEATRICE: No!

RUTH: "Cucum . . . bers!"

BEATRICE: My father made up for all the other men in this whole world, Ruth. If only you two could have met. He'd only be about seventy now, do you realize that? And I'll bet he'd still be selling vegetables around
town. All that fun—and then I don't think I ever knew what ever really hit me.

RUTH: Don't tell about--

BEATRICE: Don't worry about the horses.

RUTH: What hit you?

BEATRICE: Well, it was just me and Papa . . . and your father hanging around. And then Papa got sick . . . and I drove with him up to the sanatorium. And then I came home and there were the horses--

RUTH: Mother!

BEATRICE: And I had the horses . . . taken care of. And then Papa got terribly sick and he begged me to marry so that he'd be sure I'd be taken care of. If he knew how I was taken care of he'd turn over in his grave.

And nightmares! Do you want to know the nightmare I use to have?

I never had nightmares over the fights with your father, or the divorce, or his thrombosis—he deserved it—I never had nightmares over any of that.

Let me tell you about my nightmare that used to come back and back:

Well, I'm on Papa's wagon, but it's newer and shinier, and it's being pulled by beautiful white horses, not dirty workhorses--these are like circus horses with long manes and tinsel--and the wagon is blue, shiny blue. And it's full--filled with yellow apples and grapes and green squash.

You're going to laugh when you hear this. I'm wearing a lovely gown with jewels all over it, and my hair is piled up on top of my head with a long feather in it, and the bells are ringing.

Huge bells swinging on a gold braid strung across the back of the wagon, and they're going DONG, DONG . . . DONG, DONG. And I'm yelling "APPLES! Pears! CUCUM . . . BERS!"

RUTH: That doesn't sound like a nightmare to me.
BEATRICE: And then I turn down our street and all the noise stops. This long street, with all the doors of the houses shut and everything crowded next to each other, and there's not a soul around. And then I start getting afraid that the vegetables are going to spoil . . . and that nobody's going to buy anything, and I feel as though I shouldn't be on the wagon, and I keep trying to call out.

But there isn't a sound. Not a single sound. Then I turn my head and look at the house across the street. I see an upstairs window, and a pair of hands pull the curtains slowly apart. I see the face of my father and my heart stands still . . .

(A long pause)

RUTH: Is nanny going to die here?

BEATRICE: No.

RUTH: How can you be sure?

BEATRICE: I can tell.

RUTH: Are you crying?

BEATRICE: What's left for me, Ruth?

RUTH: What, Mama?

BEATRICE: What's left for me?16

(The sound of soft rain is heard as the beginning of the transition into the next piece. Leah exits upstage. Toni crosses down right. The poem takes place between the desk and stage right.)

Tearing Up My Mother's Letters

TONI: The rain of summer thunders down past the sweet peas trailing up the staves of my balcony, and I,
just returned from a journey,
am sitting among pencils and letters and checkbooks,
thinking of the pleasures of sleeping
in my own bed tonight,
wondering if my yellow roses like this rain,
for "roses," as a good poet has said, "are heavy feeders,"
and I'm wishing I were with a certain man,
let us call him "Michael," for that name is common, and
as good
as any other
but I am alone, as usual,
taking the pleasures one has in solitude,
of music and books,
letters from/to friends,
a good glass of wine,
and I notice that I write the checks first, to pay
my bills,
then I write to my mother,
from whom I am often estranged,
and that, unlike all my other pieces of mail, which I file,
as I answer (or decide not to answer), I tear up
my mother's letter
in her fine bookkeeper's handwriting,
recalling that I have always saved most friends' letters,
but always torn up family ones.

Just a note,
The rain has stopped. I
go out on the balcony to check my plants. The sweet peas
are leaning out into the night. Lightening flashes quickly,
like the pain which slithers in and out of my right knee
during
cross-country drives.
I tear up my mother's letters
because she is a sad woman and has given me
the gift of her sadness.
The words so thin and determined,
reminding me of how seriously we all take our small lives.
And I am ashamed of her letters;
they could be written by me,
that part of me I could never love,
that small, frightened, even stupid part,
determined to be noticed,
when it should rejoice in being ignored.
That too-loud voice which always embarrasses me
in a quiet room.

I tear up her letters
as I have tried to tear that part
out of me. 17

(Toni ends the poem standing stage right. As the transition into the next piece, Leah moves downstage to the desk and places a chair to it's right. Toni turns to Leah, holding the letter.)

Mrs. Warren's Profession

Mrs. Warren: Toni Cross
Vivie Warren: Leah Joki

MRS. WARREN: Vivie: what's the meaning of this?  (Indicating letter). I got it from the bank this morning.

VIVIE: It is my month's allowance. In future I shall support myself.

MRS. WARREN: Wasn't it enough? Why didn't you tell me? I'll double it. I was intending to double it. Only let me know how much you want.

VIVIE: You know very well that that has nothing to do with it. From this time I go my own way in my own business and among my own friends. And you will go yours. Good-bye.

MRS. WARREN: Good-bye?

VIVIE: Yes: good-bye. Come: don't let us make a useless scene: you understand perfectly well. Sir George Crofts has told me the whole business.

MRS. WARREN: Silly old-- He ought to have his tongue cut out. But I explained it all to you; and you said you didn't mind.

VIVIE: Excuse me: I do mind. You explained how it came about. That does not alter it.

MRS. WARREN: Vivie: do you know how rich I am?

VIVIE: I have no doubt you are very rich.

MRS. WARREN: But you don't know all that that means: you're too young. It means a new dress every day; it means theatres and balls every night: it means everything you like, everything you want, everything you can think of. And what are you here? A mere drudge, toiling and moiling early and late for your bare living and two cheap dresses a year. Think it over. You're shocked, I know. I can enter into your feelings and I think they do you credit; but trust me, nobody will blame you: you may take my word for that. I know what young girls are: and I know you'll think better of it when you've turned it over in your mind.

VIVIE: So that's how it's done, is it? You must have said all that to many a woman, mother, to have it so pat.

MRS. WARREN: What harm am I asking you to do? Vivie: listen to me: you don't understand: you've been taught wrong on purpose: you don't know what the world is really like.

VIVIE: Taught wrong on purpose: What do you mean?

MRS. WARREN: I mean that you're throwing away all your chances for nothing. You think that people are what they pretend to be—that the way you were taught at school and college to think right and proper is the way things really are. But it's not: it's only a pretense, to keep the cowardly, slavish, common run of people quiet. Do you want to find that out, like other women, at forty, when you've thrown yourself away and lost your chances; or won't you take it in good time now from your own mother, that loves you and swears to you that it's truth—gospel truth? Vivie: the big people, the clever people, the managing people, all know it. They do as I do, and think what I think. I know plenty of them. Haven't I told you that I want you to be respectable? Haven't I brought you up to be respectable? And how can you keep it up without my money, and my influence? Can't you see that you're cutting your own throat as well as breaking my heart in turning your back on me?

VIVIE: Mother: you don't know at all the sort of person I am. I know very well that fashionable morality is all a pretense: and that if I took your money and devoted the rest of my life to spending it fashionably, I might be as worthless and vicious as the silliest woman could
want to be without having a word said to me about it. But I don't want to be worthless. I shouldn't enjoy trotting about the park to advertise my dressmaker and carriage builder, or being bored at the opera to show off a shop windowful of diamonds.

MRS. WARREN: But--

VIVIE: Wait a moment; I've not done. Tell me why you continue your business now that you are independent of it. Aunt Lizzie, you told me, has left all that behind her. Why don't you do the same?

MRS. WARREN: Oh, it's all very easy for Liz: she likes good society and has the air of being a lady. Imagine me in a cathedral town! Why, the very rooks in the trees would find me out even if I could stand the dullness of it. I must have work and excitement, or I should go melancholy mad. And what else is there for me to do? The life suits me: I'm fit for it and not for anything else. If I didn't do it somebody else would; so I don't do any real harm by it. And then it brings in money; and I like making money. No: it's no use: I can't give it up—not for anybody. But what need you know about it? I'll never mention it. I'll not trouble you much: you see I have to be constantly running about from one place to another. You'll be quit of me altogether when I die.

VIVIE: No: I am my mother's daughter. I am like you: I must have work, and must make more money than I spend. But my work is not your work, and my way not your way. We must part. It will not make much difference to us.

MRS. WARREN: Vivie: I meant to have been more with you: I did indeed.

VIVIE: It's no use, mother: I am not to be changed by a few cheap tears and entreaties any more than you are, I dare say.

MRS. WARREN: Oh, you call a mother's tears cheap.

VIVIE: They cost you nothing; and you ask me to give you the peace and quietness of my whole life in exchange for them. What use would my company be to you if you could get it? What have we two in common that could make either of us happy together?
MRS. WARREN: We're mother and daughter. I want my daughter. I've a right to you. Who is to care for me when I'm old? Plenty of girls have taken to me like daughters and cried at leaving me; but I let them all go because I had you to look forward to. I kept myself lonely for you. You've no right to turn on me now and refuse to do your duty as a daughter.

VIVIE: My duty as a daughter! I thought we should come to that presently. Now once for all, mother, you want a daughter and Frank wants a wife. I don't want a mother; and I don't want a husband. I have spared neither Frank nor myself in sending him about his business. Do you think I will spare you?

MRS. WARREN: Oh, I know the sort you are—no mercy for yourself or anyone else. I know. My experience has done that for me anyway. I can tell the pious, canting, hard, hard, selfish woman when I meet her. Well, keep yourself to yourself: I don't want you. But listen to this. Do you know what I would do with you if you were a baby again—aye, as sure as there's a Heaven above us?

VIVIE: Strangle me, perhaps.

MRS. WARREN: No: I'd bring you up to be a real daughter to me, and not what you are now with your pride and your prejudices and the college education you stole from me—yes, stole: deny it if you can: what was it but stealing? I'd bring you up in my own house, so I would.

VIVIE: In one of your own houses.

MRS. WARREN: Listen to her! Listen to how she spits on her mother's grey hairs! Oh, may you live to have your own daughter trample on you as you have trampled on me.

VIVIE: I wish you wouldn't rant, mother. It only hardens me. Come: I suppose I am the only young woman you ever had in your power that you did good to. Don't spoil it all now.

MRS. WARREN: Yes, Heaven forgive me, it's true; and you are the only one that ever turned on me. Oh, the injustice of it, the injustice, the injustice! I always wanted to be a good woman. I tried honest work; and I was slave-driven until I cursed the day I ever heard of honest work. I was a good mother; and because I made my daughter a good woman, she turns me out as if I was
a leper. Oh, if I only had my life to live over again. From this time forth, so help me Heaven in my last hour, I'll do wrong and nothing but wrong. And I'll prosper on it.

VIVIE: Yes: it's better to choose your line and go through with it. If I had been you, mother, I might have done as you did; but I should not have lived one life and believed in another. You are a conventional woman at heart. That is why I am bidding you good-bye now. I am right, am I not?

MRS. WARREN: Right to throw away all my money!

VIVIE: No: right to get rid of you? I should be a fool not to? Isn't that so?

MRS. WARREN: Oh, well, yes, if you come to that. I suppose you are. But Lord help the world if everybody took to doing the right thing! And now I'd better go than stay where I'm not wanted.

VIVIE: Won't you shake hands?

MRS. WARREN: No, thank you. Good-bye.

VIVIE: Good-bye.

(The desk and chairs are now removed. The sound of a child's music box is heard. The three actors lie down, one by one at center stage, heads, arms and legs intertwined. The first words of the "abortion poem" are repeated and overlap until the actors explode from "sleep" to begin the poem.)

For J. S. B. 1972

MARY: eyes

TONI: mice

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LEAH: womb

TONI: nobody

MARY: tubes tables white washed windows

LEAH: Margaret, seen through a picture window. After she finished her first abortion she stood for hours and watched it spinning in the toilet, like a pale stool, some distortion of the rubber doctors with their simple tubes.

MARY: tubes tables white washed windows

LEAH: still makes her feel guilty,

TONI: A woman breaks her husbands bones. He will forgive her anything but the broken, jagged pieces of elk he knows or does not see but steals from.

LEAH: guilty
White and yeasty.

MARY: grime from age wiped over once
legs spread

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19 Ntozake Shange, "abortion cycle #1," in For colored girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf, (New York: Macmilliam Publishing Co., Inc., 1977, pp. 16-17.


21 Shange, loc. cit.

22 Grahn, loc. cit.


24 Grahn, loc. cit.

25 Shange, loc. cit.
anxious
eyes crawling up on me
eyes rollin in my thighs
metal horses gnawin my womb
death mice fall from my mouth

TONI: She runs her hands along the rippled wale of bone:
a buff heavy braille.

LEAH: All her broken bubbles push her down into a shifting tide, where her own face floats above her like the whole globe. She lets her life go off and on in a slow strobe.

TONI: Silence in her head explodes.

MARY: i really didn't mean to
i really didnt think i cd
just one day off ...
get offa me allia this blood

TONI: Her stomach makes a fist. She smells leathers soaked with sweat, the sticky scent of coiled entrails plunged inside her nostrils. Each time it is the same.

LEAH: At her last job she was fired for making strikes, and talking out of turn; now she stays home, a little blue around the edges.

TONI: Her husband walking on a ridge finds a stillborn elk—hours into death. Kneeling down he wonders why its gums are purple.

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26Pinaire, loc. cit. 27Grahn, loc. cit.
28Pinaire, loc. cit. 29Shange, loc. cit.
30Pinaire, loc. cit. 31Grahn, loc. cit.
32Pinaire, loc. cit.
At home his wife watches the knife
draw back the tender skin.
Inside the stillborn sleeps
a baby with perfect fingers.
His father is a hunter
whose bones are beautiful and sound
Awake she hurls the bones against a wall,

MARY: bones shattered like soft ice-cream cones

LEAH: Counting calories and staring at the empty
magazine pages, she hates her shape
and calls herself overweight.
Her husband calls her a big baboon.

MARY: I cdnt have people
lookin at me
pregnant
i cdnt have my friends see this
dying danglin tween my legs
& i didn't say a thing
not a sign
or a fast scream
to get
those eyes offa me
get them steel rods outta me
this hurts
this hurts me

TONI: Awake she hurls the bones against a wall

LEAH: Lusting for changes, she laughs through her
teeth, and wanders from room to room.

MARY: & nobody came
cuz nobody knew
once i was pregnant & shamed of myself

TONI: Awake she hurls the bones against a wall,

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33 Shange, loc. cit.
34 Grahn, loc. cit.
35 Shange, loc. cit.
36 Pinaire, loc. cit.
37 Grahn, loc. cit.
38 Shange, loc. cit.
39 Pinaire, loc. cit.
and dreams her child free.

**Part III**

**Object Lesson**

(At the completion of the abortion poem, a new slide appears in the background as the lights black out. It is a copy of Norman Rockwell's painting of a young girl comparing her mirror reflection to a picture of a beauty queen. The following recorded transition is heard:)

**Dialogue**

I do not know
if sex is an illusion

I do not know
who I was when I did those things
or who I said I was
or whether I willed to feel
what I had read about
or who in fact was there with me
or whether I knew, even then
that there was doubt about these things.

(As the poem finishes, Toni comes downstage with a paper sack to stand in a spotlight.)

I have come to claim Marilyn Monroe's body

TONI: I have come to claim
Marilyn Monroe's body
for the sake of my own
dig it up, hand it over,
cram it in this paper sack.
hubba, hubba, hubba,
look at those luscious
long brown bones, that wide and crusty
pelvis, ha Ha, oh she wanted so much to be serious

---

but she never stops smiling now.
Has she lost her mind?

Marilyn, be serious——they're taking
your picture, and they're taking the pictures
of eight young women in New York City
who murdered themselves for being pretty
by the same method as you, the very
next day, after you!
I have claimed their bodies too,
they smile up out of my paper sack
like brainless cinderellas.

the reporters are furious, they're asking
me questions
what right does a woman have
to Marilyn Monroe's body? and what
am I doing for lunch? They think I
mean to eat you. Their teeth are lurid
and they want to pose me, leaning
on the shovel, nude. Don't squint.
But when one of the reporters comes too close
I beat him, bust his camera
with your long, smooth thigh
and with your lovely knucklebone
I break his eye.

Long ago you wanted to write poems;
Be serious, Marilyn
I am going to take you in this paper sack
around the world, and
write on it: --the poems of Marilyn Monroe--
Dedicated to all princes,
the male poets who were so sorry to see you go,
before they had a crack at you.
They wept for you, and also
they wanted to stuff you
while you still had a little meat left
in useful places;
but they were too slow.

Now I shall take them my paper sack
and we shall act out a poem together:
"How would you like to see Marilyn Monroe,
in action, smiling, and without her clothes?
We shall wait long enough to see them make familiar faces
and then I shall beat them with your skull.
hubba. hubba. hubba. hubba. hubba.
Marilyn, be serious
Today I have come to claim your body for my own. (At the completion of "I have come to claim Marilyn Monroe's body," Toni crumples the paper bag and tosses it over her shoulder, after sitting atop the desk which has been placed center stage.)

Carla

Carla: Toni Cross

CARLA: I wanted to be a sex goddess. And you can laugh all you want to. The joke is on me, whether your laugh or not. I wanted to be one— one of them. They used to laugh at Marilyn when she said she didn't want to be a sex goddess, she wanted to be a human being. And now they laugh at me when I say, "I don't want to be a human being, I want to be a sex goddess." That shows you right there that something has changed, doesn't it? Rita, Ava, Lana, Marlene, Marilyn— I wanted to be one of those. I remember the morning my friend came in and told us all that Marilyn had died. And all the boys were stunned— rigid, literally, as they realized what had left us. Like a flame going out, like a moth fluttering away, like the moon not rising full on the proper night . . . death, bone-white death. I mean, if the world couldn't support Marilyn Monroe, then wasn't something desperately wrong? We were all living together, me and three gay boys that had picked me up when I ran away, in this loft on East Fifth Street . . . We were all . . . old-movie buffs, sex-mad— you know, the early sixties. And then my friend, this sweet little queen, he came in and he passed out tranquilizers to everyone, and told us all to sit down, and we thought he was just going to tell us there was a Mae West double feature on somewhere, and he said— he said— he said, "Marilyn Monroe died last night." And all the boys were stunned, but I— I felt something sudden and cold in my solar plexus, and I knew then what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to be the next one. I wanted to be the next one to stand radiant and perfected before the race of man, to shed the luminosity of my beloved countenance over the struggles and aspirations of my pitiful subjects. I wanted to give meaning to my own time, to be the unattainable luring love that drives men.

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Grahn, edward the dyke, pp. 6-7.
on, the angel of light, the golden flower, the best of
the universe made woman-kind, the living sacrifice,
the end! Shit! 42

BLACKOUT

42 Robert Patrick, "Carla," from Kennedy's Children,
CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS

Whenever I begin to explore a character, I ask myself three important questions: (1) Why do I, Toni, care about what is happening to the character? (2) Why does my character care about what is happening, or how does my character feel about what is happening?, and (3) What does the script say? This is my method, my technique, and I apply it to every character I do.

My purpose in this chapter is to describe the working process for my project and to discuss my own development as an actor in the project. I will explain (1) why I chose certain specific characters for the project and why I care about them; (2) why I feel they were better acted, or more of a challenge to me; (3) what I learned from exploring them. Most of these pieces are solo pieces. In the solo pieces I was able to focus my energies on my own growth and development as an actor. I was able to set my director role aside and was not too distracted by such externals as blocking, conflicting opinions as to how a scene should be performed, or unpreparedness on the part of a partner. I could focus on myself--the actor.

I felt strongly when I began to assemble this
project that it should present as many acting challenges for me as possible within a limited time frame. The roles I was often cast in, prior to the project, were relatively "safe" ones for me. I usually played the "good" woman, the woman in control of her situation and emotions, or the strong woman. I was never really required to lose control as a character, and I was seldom required to put myself on the line as an actor. What I was asked to do onstage rarely approached my personal danger zone. This is not to say that I did not learn from, or enjoy, those roles. Certainly, they gave me the opportunity to polish my technique, among other things. However, I wanted to structure this project in such a way that I was forced to take more emotional and physical risks. I wanted my choice of roles to test and reflect the positive development I have been undergoing for the last few years, and for the last eighteen months in particular. In a sense, this was my own self-created acting class.

In the last year and a half of my training, I have undergone a process of "stripping." This means that I have tried to break down physical and emotional walls in myself that impeded my process and progress as an actor. Having been a timid actor, afraid of personal exposure, I have been consciously trying to take more risks in my work. As an actor, and as a person, I have been trying
to open myself emotionally, to give myself over to the needs and impulses of a character. I wanted this project to reveal and engage in this growth.

I once felt that I had done a good job in acting, had created a good character, only when the character was as different from me and as far removed from my personal response as possible. Now I know that there can be no real truth to a character unless she is deeply invested with my personal response. It should involve some personal risk for me to play her. The risk is not always the same, nor always as strong with each character, but it must be there. If it is not there then I have not really answered the question of "Why do I care?" and I am simply reciting words. The character may not be "just like me." The character is rarely just like me, in fact. The ultimate shape of the character may be different from my shape, but if she is going to be true and full, my personal risk must be there. My goal for this project has been to take these personal risks in spite of personal timidity.

Certain pieces in the project contributed more to this goal of self-exposure than others. It is these specific roles that I will discuss in detail, for they were essential to my personal development as an actor. They are as follows:

(1) "I'm not a girl" and "Helen at 9 AM, at noon"
at 5:15," by Judy Grahn.

(2) "Tearing Up My Mother's Letters" by Diane Wakowski.

(3) Beatrice from The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds, by Paul Zindel.

(4) "For J. S. B., 1973," (the "abortion poem").

(5) Sister Story

(6) "I have come to claim Marilyn Monroe's body," by Judy Grahn and Carla, from Kennedy's Children, by Robert Patrick.

"I'm not a girl" and "Helen, at 9AM, at noon, at 5:15"

Snakes and snails and puppy-dog tails
That's what little boys are made of.

Sugar and spice and everything nice
That's what little girls are made of.

My personal connection to "I'm Not a Girl" began years ago, when I was still my daddy's "gal young-un."

"I'm Not a Girl" continues to be pertinent to my life. If I can be made to see myself as a "girl," then I can be paid less, my opinions can be ignored, I can be the "done to" or the "done for" instead of "the doer." This is why I care about the woman of "I'm Not a Girl." The poem is about refusing to see oneself in that role as I refuse to see myself in this role. It is myself speaking, when I have the courage to say those words.
Several ideas were tried for staging the poem. One of the first attempts at staging it involved performing the poem as a round. As one woman began the poem and got to the word "hatchet," the next woman would begin and so on. This gave the impression that many women were speaking together. It also caused the words to become so garbled that they were indistinguishable from one another. The strength, simplicity, and clarity of the poem, which is what attracted me to it, were lost. The statement it made was lost. Thus, the idea of the round was discarded. Mary Thielen, one of my partners in the project, then suggested that we try performing the poem in sign language, just to see what kind of effect it would have on the poem. Once we had learned the sign and staged the poem, it seemed to be a strong visual image with which to open the project. We gradually allowed the signing to become larger and larger, to actually turn into a "dance," until we were almost signing with our whole bodies. These dance-like motions carried us out into the thrust of the stage, until we each occupied a place in the downstage area.

I had, in my search for material for the project, discovered a play by Megan Terry called Approaching Simone, about the scholar/activist Simone Weil. One of the lines that is repeated throughout one scene from the play is "You're just a girl, Simone." Simone is tormented by
anonymous voices that tell her she is "just a girl" and will never amount to anything. I took this small section of fourteen lines and used it as a transition into my verbal performance of "I'm Not a Girl." The transition was achieved in this way: After the sign language/dance carried us into the downstage space, my partners began to torment me/Simone by reminding me that I was "just a girl." Initially this tormenting was supposed to turn into a dance too, with me being pushed and pulled into their arms or to the ground. I found that I was physically too tense to achieve this movement without hurting myself. The tenseness seemed to come from a lack of trust in my partners' ability to support my weight, as well as a lack of trust in myself. I was also intimidated by the idea of performing a "dance." I should have tried to meet this physical challenge as hard as I tried to meet the emotional challenges I set for myself. I could not relax into the movement. For this reason, the movement was simplified and the tormenting was confined to a tug-of-war using me as the "rope," until I broke free. After throwing them off, I began to perform the poem alone.

I knew that the woman in the poem and I shared a similar, if not identical, rage. My personal investment in her point of view was strong. The acting problem became the task of allowing my rage to become her rage.
and vice-versa. I had to deal honestly with my feelings and response, and also with the questions: "Why does she care?" and "What does the script say?" The acting challenge or the emotional challenge was to submit myself to such self-exposure.

I found it incredibly difficult to give vent to such absolute rage, in spite of the fact that this is what the poem demands. I find that I personally internalize a great deal of my rage. This personal coping mechanism made it difficult for me as an actor to let that anger out, to give it complete expression. I know how to be a girl too well, and girls do not get angry. I did not want to risk facing condemnation for that anger, yet I would have been ignoring my responsibility to the poem if I had refused to confront the audience, and myself, with it. My personal impulse was to draw back and hide. The need to release that rage and the fear of releasing that rage made performing the piece a real risk. I decided to keep the piece and test my ability to release, to be so fully given over to the character that I, Toni, was no longer in total control, but shared that control with the character. My failure in the piece was not being able to give myself over physically to its demands. Had I done so, it would have reinforced the statement of the poem. I would have liked to have found an alternative to the sign
language dance in order to engage my body as well.

"Helen, at 9 AM, at noon, at 5:15" speaks to me much in the same way as "I'm not a girl," although about a different aspect of my life. I have sometimes found myself, in trying to do my work, becoming more man-like than a man. I have too often equated responsibility, sensibility, and dedication with stiffness or coldness and/or maleness. I have blocked off certain emotions because they seemed too "feminine" and therefore weak: "trying to make it in a male form she's become as stiff as possible."

I, too, fall into popular male/female stereotype traps.

"Helen" appealed to me because of the structure of my life at the University. As a graduate student, I found myself faced with a great many new responsibilities I felt inadequate to meet. As a woman I felt myself placed at a disadvantage. I felt that in order to prove (to myself and to my colleagues) that I was mature and dependable, I would have to be like them--and they were men! Many of these feelings were simply self-imposed, but they carried over into my artistic expression. I tried to be always "in control" there as well.

Of course, I am not just like Helen, but it is the ways in which we are alike that drew me to the poem. My personal struggles with having to "make it in a male form" made me choose the poem for my project. The subject and
speaker of the poem is a woman who is locked into a professional role that she does not realize is destroying not only her femininity, but also her humanity, as I often felt mine was being destroyed.

My earliest ideas for working on the poem were fairly complicated and unnatural. I first tried performing the poem in a very mechanical way, as if the speaker were a robot or automaton. I even considered performing Helen as a sort of high-fashion model, with a very polished, plastic exterior. At times, working with external, physical aspects of a character, such as experimenting with how she moves, can reveal something important about her emotionally, but not in this case. I needed to explore my personal, intimate, emotional relationship to Helen first. I tried, instead, to avoid personal revelation by imposing rigidity on the poem. In this way I could avoid the explosion that would have to come from a real place in myself. I related very personally to the struggles of the poem, but tried to hide from the truth of it. I tried to avoid too much self-exposure by ignoring the question of "How does Helen feel?" I tried to intellectually impose a shape or an interpretation on the poem rather than investing myself and my personal response in the poem. If I did not honestly answer the questions: "How does Helen feel? and "What does the script say?" then the poem could not possibly
work. It would be hollow and without real meaning or life. In addition, I had to answer the question of "How do I feel?" in more than just an intellectual way. I had to reveal those personal conflicts that I have just noted.

It seems cowardly to speak of so much hiding and avoiding. It would have been cowardly had I not continued the exploration. I purposely chose pieces I knew I was afraid of because of the challenge they presented to me to try to overcome my fear.

I found that "Helen" became understandable, humane, and a part of me when I allowed myself to speak as Helen, discussing the events that were happening to her, and yet reacting to those events at the same time. In fact, those events were happening to me and I had to speak as if they were happening to me. The poem is written in the third person and the effect on the performance was to create a Helen talking about her impending insanity while really going insane. By answering the question, "What does the script say?" I was provided with a shape and workable staging for the poem.

The personal risk involved was to see if I could let my grief and rage merge with Helen's grief and rage. I had to give more control over to Helen. I cared about her and what she had to say, but I had to let that caring show. I had to let it go to some objective and hopefully
affect the audience in some way. Quite simply, it was a
test to see whether I had the courage not to hold back.

Finally, "Helen" was a personal challenge to show
my ugly, unloveable self. The fear of exposing my ugly,
angry self is only reinforced by playing "safe" women. If
the characters I had played before were physically ugly,
they were not emotionally ugly. They were not petty or
unkind or malicious. The personal risk was to reveal that
those qualities exist in me and that I could convincingly
portray a character possessing those qualities.

"Tearing Up My Mother's Letters"

A letter from my mother, on becoming a waitress,
fall, 1981:

Dear Discouraged No. I Child,

Be as pleasant [to the customers] as you can.
Try smiling to yourself as if you have a
secret, because you will never be able to get
the last word with some people. Your Daddy
and I find it's best to be pleasant, even
when the customers irritate us. In the long
run they realize they have been wrong. There
are lots of nice people, Toni; don't give up
on finding some.

Love,

Dear Abby (Mom)

P.S.

If you are the kind that wants to succeed
Just try to help those in distress
A life that is clear, a heart that is true,
And doing your best--that's success!
If any relationship in my life has made me the person I am, it is my relationship to my mother. She is a woman of strength, determination, great love and faith. My mother taught me how to be alone with myself. If she ever had a dream of freedom, then I am its fulfillment. I have often wondered if she ever wishes for a "what might have been" for herself. It is this question, as well as our not-always-idyllic relationship that determined my choices for the "mother's" section of my project.

I left home at the age of eighteen, never to really return. Every week for the last eight years, sometimes twice a week, I have received a letter from my mother. Sometimes, because their contents are suspect, days pass before I can bring myself to open them. As often as not they are full of that ironic, self-parodying sense of humor that is so uniquely my mother's. My mother—the storyteller, the worker, the wife, the mystic—reminds me of a life I can never go back to. I will always be a displaced person, uncomfortable in the world I grew up in, uncomfortable in the world I have created for myself.

I was personally closer to "Tearing Up My Mother's Letters" than to any other piece in the project that was not specifically composed of my own words. I chose Wawowski's poem for the sake of all my mother's letters. Wawowski speaks intimately for me. The words are my words,
although I did not write them. My life and the life of the poem merged and became one in the performance of the poem in a union unlike any other within the project.

The rehearsal process for this poem was a lonely, solitary one. Time after time I would complete the poem only to burst into tears, or worse, be unable to complete it. I truly seemed unable to control the emotions that washed over me as I worked through the poem. I knew that how I felt and how the poet felt were very similar. I knew the emotion was appropriate. What I did not know was if I could keep the expression of that emotion appropriate. There is nothing very communicative about an hysterical actor.

Therefore, I concentrated on answering the third question, "What does the script say?" and this time I approached it literally. I repeated the poem over and over to myself and out loud, simply by rote. I rehearsed it, forcing myself to keep it low-key and, literally, dry. I reversed my usual working process by working on externals instead of internals. That is, I concentrated on my movement for the poem, setting up a space for the poem, working out a transition into the next piece, timing a pause. When I had formulated an external structure for the piece, a framework, I once again released the emotion. This time it had a shape, a container, to flow into. I concentrated
on the script, on the space it suggested to me, and on the next word I had to say. In this way the emotion was full, yet contained. It was open, yet not self-indulgent.

Working in this way, what I call working with "externals" or from "the outside in," is not my usual method of working, as my three questions indicate. My experience with this poem taught me respect, if not a fondness for this method of working. I learned a lesson about flexibility and being willing to explore options.

This was one of the first instances where I met the challenge of self-exposure head on. I felt that I had done the poem justice and achieved my goal. Nevertheless, it was easier to perform this poem than it was to perform either "I'm Not a Girl" or "Helen." It is easier for me to reveal the vulnerable, hurt part of me than it is to reveal the angry, malicious part.

The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds

A conversation with a man I love, spring 1981:

"I don't really understand feminism and feminists."

"Well, it's not easy to explain, but we're trying to create the possibility of more choices for women in their personal lives, in their jobs. We want things to be better for us and our daughters than they were for our mothers."

"How are things 'better' for you? You're a waitress at Burnies!"
In spite of appearances, things are better for me. I am able to choose any number of ways to take care of myself. What's more, I can actually do it alone. I need not have a mate to be acceptable and productive in our society. A single female is no longer the social freak she once was.

The "mother's section" grew out of my personal feelings about what it is like not to have this choice. I grew up in an environment where the acceptable choice for women was marriage and children. I have rejected that choice so far. The "mother's section," particularly Marigolds and the "abortion poem" reflect my conflicting feelings about that decision. My conflicts over this personal choice made it necessary to include Marigolds and the abortion poem in the project. It was time to reveal my ugly, unloveable, unwomanly side.

Both Beatrice's monologue and the scene with Ruth from The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds were chosen for their ugliness. If my own mother is primarily warm and loving, then Beatrice is primarily embittered and angry. The scene and the monologue share an important truth: Beatrice hates her life. What is her life, after all? She has been trapped into a marriage and trapped into motherhood: "He [her father] begged me to marry so he'd be sure I was taken care of." I wondered,
did my own mother ever feel like Beatrice? Do I feel like Beatrice?

I realized as I began to explore the character of Beatrice that it would be hard to find the link between us. My own mother had the number of children she wanted exactly when she wanted them. She was in more control of her life than Beatrice. I resisted playing a mother like Beatrice. I had to confront the rage, maliciousness and ugliness of Beatrice, her perversion of the mother-image. I had to confront her less-than-ideal feelings about motherhood. In return, she demanded of me that I confront these same negative qualities in myself.

On the other hand, I saw that Beatrice's anger and abrasiveness covered a vulnerability and a disappointment with her life that I also possess. Beatrice's best defense is to bite before she is bitten. This shared vulnerability proved to be a touchpoint for me with the character.

I decided to begin the explorations of Beatrice in somewhat the same way that I began work on "Tearing Up My Mother's Letters," except that I began at once to work from externals. I was not quite ready to deal with the internals of Beatrice. I tried moving with the body and movement I thought Beatrice should have. I found that if I tried to move as I felt Beatrice would move, certain possible internal qualities of the character were suggested.
For instance, if I began to move like a woman who no longer cared about her body or her appearance, if I allowed myself to sink physically, then internally I began to sink also. I felt as if I carried a great weight inside, as if I had succumbed to some oppressive situation or problem. I felt as if my spirit was under a great burden. I then tried to speak from the same feeling of weight. This process of working helped to answer the question, "How does she feel?" if only in the physical sense.

I could not view the relationship between Beatrice and Ruth as a typical mother/daughter relationship and still find the real truth to the character of Beatrice. I knew she felt rage at her situation. I forced myself to explore the extremes of rage and ugliness to which Beatrice would go. She does seem to enjoy torturing Ruth with the memory of the destruction of the horses. In fact, as soon as she begins to reveal a little of her vulnerability to Ruth, fear makes her draw back and she brings up the hated horses. When I felt I was going overboard in terms of bitterness and the opposite of mother-love, I actually came closer to a true Beatrice. When I explored qualities opposite to the ideal mother and when I emphasized the unnatural in this natural relationship, I came closer to the character of Beatrice.

As for my personal risk with Beatrice, the greatest
difficulty was admitting my own ugliness. I had to admit that Beatrice often spoke for me in her bitter tirades against marriage and children. Motherhood and wifehood are not two responsibilities that I have rushed to take on. On the other hand, I have often felt that my rejection of these roles is not quite what a "good woman" should do. These personal conflicts influenced my portrayal of Beatrice and made her more timid than she should have been. As I worked on Beatrice I felt that I was exposing this part of myself, (that is, my attitude toward a traditional woman's role), that might be viewed negatively. There is a part of me that also rejects motherhood and family life. I began to realize as well that, trapped in such a situation, I might be just as malicious and ugly as Beatrice. I reached a moment of oneness with Beatrice when I saw myself wearing her face.

Beatrice's final question--"What's left for me, Ruth?"--was a relief. Here I could be vulnerable, here an audience could weep for me. I realized as I worked through the monologue and scene that certain types of vulnerability are easier for me to reveal than others. The type of self-exposure that causes the audience to say, "She was wronged, she is hurt" is fine. The audience is with me, they are on my side. The kind of self-exposure that causes an audience to say, "You are ugly, you disgust me,
I don't like you" is something I had tried to avoid. I faced the same danger with "I'm Not a Girl" and "Helen." I chose to do Beatrice because she challenged me to reveal my own desperation and ugliness.

The "Abortion Poem"

Newspaper ad, summer 1981:

"Safe, gentle abortions . . . Open Saturdays."

Conversation, spring 1980:

"She was seventeen and he was black and . . . ."
"And what?"
"and afterwards . . . she . . . changed."

Abortion is the ultimate rejection of motherhood, whether out of necessity or out of choice. No woman emerges from it completely unchanged. It is, nevertheless, an alternative, a way out. Because I once cared deeply about a young friend who experienced an abortion. and because I believe it affected my own feelings about motherhood, I chose to include the abortion poem in the project. This "poem" is actually composed of three separate poems about abortion.

If Beatrice is a woman forced into playing the role of mother, then the abortion poem represents a view of three women forced to reject motherhood because of career,
financial or social pressures. As I looked at the three separate poems—"Margaret, seen through a picture window," by Judy Grahn, "The Dream," by Joanne Pinaire; and "abortion cycle #1," by Ntozake Shange—which were written by three very different women in different times and places, I was struck by the many similarities among them. All three poems repeat certain key images: bones, white, mice, pale, tubes. They all have a dreamlike quality about them, as if the writer is not fully aware of, or in control of what is happening to her. They are interesting examples of how similar the personal report of different people can be for the same situation. It is what enables me to begin to explore a role, knowing that my feelings and the character's feelings may at some point be identical or at least related in some way.

The similarities among the three poems provided me with the idea for combining them. The three poems were woven together to create a fourth "poem." Whenever I found a word from one poem repeated in another poem, that became the point at which part of the next poem was woven in, so that the completed piece was similar to a round, except for the fact that only one actor spoke at a time. The effect this created for me was of three different women thinking over their own separate experiences with abortion, perhaps in a separate place, yet somehow picking
up each other's thoughts. They were isolated, yet united by their common experience.

The movement and staging for the piece came from the dreamlike quality they all shared. At first I had thought to have the women moving randomly across the center of the stage, weaving in and out of each other's paths. But, in keeping with the answer to "What does the script say?" (or, in this case, imply), Mary Thielen suggested that we try having the women entwined on the floor, awakening from a bad dream. The words "eyes, mice, womb," which actually begin "abortion cycle #1" were repeated over and over and allowed to build to an explosion at which point the three women awoke from their "bad dream" and began to speak.

My close personal friendship with a girl who had had an abortion provided me with the answer to "Why do I care?" My sharing of her experience highly influenced the performance of my particular poem. What I felt again most strongly in the exploration of my character was the bitterness, anger, and sense of waste I had felt over my friend's dilemma at the time it happened. Those were my strongest feelings. Unfortunately, I never got beyond them. It would have been a more interesting artistic choice to incorporate some of the devil-may-care attitude my friend adopted to cover her real feelings about the
abortion as part of the performance. It would have added another level to my performance. However, I allowed my own gut reaction and my own personal experience to override the words of the poem itself. I did not really allow the woman in the poem to speak for herself, but forced her to speak out of my personal feelings. My exploration of this poem did not go nearly far enough, but stopped with the question, "Why do I care?" My feelings of grief and frustration at my friend's situation were the ones primarily present in the poem.

Exploring this poem was risky because it demanded that I reconfront my own feelings about the loss of my friend. She did not actually die, but she changed so that I hardly knew her, and, being unable to accept these changes, I lost her friendship. In a purely personal way, dealing with this poem forced me to recognize how selfish my own reaction to the event had been. In the actual performance I was required to reveal a personal, if selfish, grief.

I came to the realization that, as an actor, examining one's personal reaction to an event is simply not enough. I knew this intellectually, but fell into a trap I could have avoided. By not carrying the exploration far enough, I did the poem and the poet a disservice. By failing to answer all three of my questions, I presented
a rather one-dimensional interpretation of the poem.

Finally, something happened to me in the process of rehearsing and staging this poem that affected the performance. It made me watch myself instead of being totally within the character and the poem. The thought occurred to me that people would think it had happened to me.

**Sister Story**

A conversation with my sister, spring, 1980:

"Well, Toni, if you don't finish your thesis, and if you don't get your M.F.A., you'll still be Toni, and I'll still love you."

My sister has always had a remarkable facility for separating essentials from non-essentials. My relationship to her has been one of the most necessary in my life. As children she comforted me when I had nightmares, although she is the youngest. I can still call her at three in the morning to talk about something as trivial as a bad dream. Although we are rarely together physically now, I am always aware of her love and support.

I chose to tell *Sister Story* for two reasons. First of all, I wanted to use it as an example of the role my sister has played for me in my life: confidante, comforter, friend. Secondly, I wanted to present one moment
to the audience in which there was nothing between them and me. The character was me, the words were mine, the experience was mine. Essentially I was presenting my first question, "Why do I care?" as the performance.

I did not decide to include this story in the My Sister, My Self section until late in the process of developing the project. I wrote the story down and then promptly discarded it as too uninteresting to be engaging for an audience. The more I considered it, the more I decided that this was not the real reason for discarding the piece.

If the audience rejected my story, they rejected me. This moment was the most personally exposed moment of the entire project. There was no other face to hide behind, no character to blame, no author to accuse of poor prose but myself. If my purpose was to take personal risks, then I needed a moment like Sister Story.

After rehearsing the story alone a few times, I still intended to discard it. It really did not fit easily into the overall structure of the project, it was somewhat obscure in its meaning, it was too personal. The last excuse was the final justification for including the story in the project.

I began to realize, as I worked on Sister Story, that it is impossible for me to be "too personal" with
my audience. I could be inappropriate, as I was in danger of being with "Tearing Up My Mother's Letters," but I could never be too personal. I had to test myself to see if I could share myself with an audience minus the mask of a character.

The working process on the piece was fairly simple. It was written down with only minor changes made before the performance. I tried hard not to perform, but to tell it straightforwardly, from my heart, as it happened. Nevertheless, I still felt unsure of the piece during performance. I did not feel out of control of the piece. I was not afraid that I would not be able to continue. However, I still looked for rejection, ridicule, or boredom on the part of the audience. Primarily, I was doubtful of my courage to present my personal, naked self to the scrutiny of an audience. Yet my responsibility to my audience is to share a personal, private part of myself, even in this public situation. I felt in the final telling of the story that I acted with responsibility and appropriateness, but that I took the most personal of risks. Indeed, perhaps the story should have been the first moment of the project in order to show me before the layers of a character are added. I fulfilled my major objective for this project, if only for this one moment.
"I Have Come to Claim Marilyn Monroe's Body"  
and Kennedy's Children

In May when the first warm days  
open like peonies, the coat,  
the jacket stay home.  
Then making my necessary  
way through streets I am impaled  
on shisk-kabob stares,  
slobbering invitations,  
smutfire of violence.  
The man who blocks my path,  
the man who asks my price,  
the man who grabs with fat  
hands like sweating crabs.

I grimace, I trot.  
Put on my ugliest clothes,  
layer over sweltering layer.  
Sprint scowling and still  
they prance in ugly numbers.

I, red meat, cunt  
on the hoof, trade  
insult for insult,  
balance fear on coiled rage.  
I pretend to carry easy  
on my belt a ray gun.  
I flick my finger. A neat  
beam licks the air.  
The man lights up  
in neon and goes out.  
My fantasy leaves me still  
spread on the meat rack  
of their hate.

On the first warm day  
let me shoot up twelve  
feet tall. Or grow  
a hide armored as an  
alligator. Then I would  
relish the mild air,  
I would stroll, my jagged  
fangs glinting in  
a real broad smile.

The most important factor that influenced my choice of Object Lesson for the project was childhood spent among Southern belles. I chose not to participate in that particular role, although vestiges of it come back to haunt me. In order to perform, "I Have Come to Claim Marilyn Monroe's Body" and "Carla" from Kennedy's Children, I had to tap into some things in myself that I have always tried to sublimate: flirtatiousness, sexiness, "ultimate femaleness." These are qualities that are not easy for me to project. My primary role models were strong, straightforward women. The qualities of "ultimate femaleness" were not much emphasized, nor much valued. Deliberate sexiness or flirtatiousness in a woman was considered silly, if not downright embarrassing, at least in my family.

Both these characters use their bodies out of habit in ways that I do not. "I Have Come to Claim Marilyn Monroe's Body" is a double threat. The woman in this poem combines two qualities I find most difficult to express onstage. She combines anger with feminine seductiveness. Carla's sexiness is much less threatening than what I felt coming from this woman. This woman is very strongly centered in her pelvis, and by working from this center I began to find some emotional cues to the character.

As I explored the character physically, I concen-
trated on moving from my pelvis, hitting from my pelvis, letting all my impulses for movement of any kind originate from that body center, I began to get a real feeling of strength from the character. In fact, the woman was much stronger than I had at first imagined. This body center gave her sexuality a menacing, rather than a feminine quality. I began to feel that this woman was more in control of the role than it is in control of her.

The problem I had to overcome both with "Marilyn" and with "Carla" was my own physical reticence. The pieces were chosen for the physical challenge they presented to me. I had to boldly use my body, which I normally withhold from use. If I was to truthfully answer the question, "How does she feel?" or "Why does she care?" in relation to Marilyn, then I had to be able to let the rage come out of my fingers, my toes, even my genitals. My body must become my weapon.

The final moment of "Marilyn" created an intense emotional charge within me. I chose to slap the paper sack I used as a prop against one leg as "Hubba, hubba, hubba" was spoken. It seemed to prove the theory that "action creates emotion," for as I used the sack to pound out my disgust, I felt sorrow and pity welling up inside me for Marilyn. I felt momentarily that I was not only her defender and savior, but also one of those who tormented
her. It made it very natural for me to then caress the sack, as if protecting her from the world.

With both "Carla" and "Marilyn" I was forced to uncover what I keep covered. That is, I was forced to activate not only my emotions, but also my body. The project had to include physical exposure as well as emotional exposure if I was to be satisfied.

I found it just as difficult to allow Carla to use my body. It has taken me a long time to become comfortable in my body and to use my body in a comfortable way. Carla, on the other hand, has habitually and naturally used her body to get what she wants and where she wants to go. Once again, I decided to begin my exploration of the character by working from external, physical cues in order to find Carla's internal self.

I began to try to find Carla's movement, her unique way of using her body. I began to stroke my own body, to admire myself, to answer the question of how Carla feels about how she looks as opposed to how I feel about how I look. Carla was obviously pleased with her body. My problem was to overcome my own timidity about letting that pleasure show in my body. As I tried to physicalize Carla, I also tried to be specific. I thought of which parts of her body she might be particularly proud of: her breasts, her hair, her legs? I tried putting these body
parts "on exhibit" so to speak. I saw that I had to think of my whole body as a gesture, a way of communicating.

At first, I felt foolish, even exhibitionistic, with the physical work I was doing. However, Carla's rhythms and feelings seemed to come out of the gesturing. Just as sinking into myself had been a key to Beatrice, giving her weight, age, and anger, so did rising out of my body and forcing my body out become a key to Carla. She'd become lighter, prettier, sexier. I began to understand Carla's fascination with her own body and what it could do. I felt as though my body became a signal.

I chose to keep this particular monologue light and humorous. It is one aspect of Carla revealed in the play, although her final character is rather tragic. The final moment of Carla, and of my project, took on an interesting twist that may not have been apparent to the audience, but was apparent to me. It wasn't Carla saying "Shit!" It was me.

Completing Carla and "Marilyn" broke something in me. That is, since that time my body has almost ceased to be a burden. I don't find physicalization the problem I did before. My body, like my voice or my face, is simply another communicative element: It is asexual in terms of a character until I decide to use it for the purposes of the character. Withholding my body from such
use is not self-protection, but self-destruction. If I refuse to allow my body to be used and to develop as much as my mind and my spirit, then I am shortchanging an important facet of my artistic self.
CHAPTER IV

THE CRITIQUE

Critique of the Structure and Its Development

My self-criticism in relation to this project must cut two ways. I was responsible both for acting in the project and for directing the project. I eventually chose to give up my role as director, but not before some damage had been done to the project.

I began work on this project in a state of "premeditated unpreparedness." I had chosen a theme and had a collection of possible pieces, but no firm structure had been established and no final choices had been made as to the material I would use when I began rehearsals. My aim in doing this was to develop more flexibility as an actor. I had fallen into the trap of preplanning what I would do in rehearsals, of thinking too much ahead of time and feeling too little while in the moment. This habit accounted for the stiffness I felt was present in my acting. I hoped, by beginning the working process with such a loose structure, to permit myself to explore more possibilities and to encourage my own flexibility. I wanted to avoid becoming stuck in one choice without trying others.
This is an admirable goal for an actor, but as a director I needed a plan. When I direct I need a definite set of choices before I begin to work. I may discard, change, or rearrange these choices, but structure of some sort helps me to initiate the working process. When I began this project I mistakenly hoped to assemble the structure as I went along, instead of beginning with a tentative structure that could expand or contract as I chose. As a result of the lack of a beginning structure, the final project had a "bits and pieces" look to it. Had I, as director, formed a structure prior to the start of the working process, I would have felt more secure and yet more free as an actor. I am sure my partners in the project would have, too.

I also began work on the project with a very idealized view of how our work would proceed. I viewed the project as a sort of group-theatre effort, with each participant having an almost equal say in the matter. I was concerned that my fellow actors feel free to contribute their own ideas to the project. This they did, and their input was very valuable to me. However, I often allowed myself to be intimidated by their ideas. While trying to be genuinely more flexible and listen to all ideas, I allowed too much discussion and too many generalities to go on too long. This, too, can be partly attributed to
my failure to establish a solid beginning structure for the project. In retrospect, our very best work was done once the final choice of material was made and the sequence of the material, or the structure, was evolved.

My role as actor/director placed me in a strange, and often strained, relationship to my fellow workers. It was hard for them to determine who was saying "no": Toni, the actor (refusing to work? refusing to try alternatives?) or Toni, the director, (trying to keep a structure in mind, trying to see the overall picture). As an actor within the project, it was not my job to make decisions for other actors. As director of the project, I was expected to make such decisions. I could not concentrate fully on my own work as an actor and still stand outside myself to direct other actors. The timidity I felt as an actor in this project I attribute to continually trying to switch roles and yet never being able to perform either role fully.

I eventually asked Leah Joki and Mary Thielen, my partners in the project and directors in their own right, to take over the task of directing the scenes one or the other of them was not in. There were, in fact, only three units of the project in which we were all involved at the same time (Uncommon Women and Others, "I'm Not a Girl," and the abortion poem). This was by conscious design. Their
work as directors was invaluable to me. It did, however, give them a measure of control over the project that was divisive, even if well executed.

I simply could not and cannot direct myself through such a large undertaking. I could not even lead our group through any type of group exercises that I would usually do with a group I was directing, because I, too, was supposed to be within the group.

My feelings about the final result of our efforts are varied. I realize that within the confines of the project that I chose for myself, I tried to do too much. Any individual section of the project could have been expanded and, by itself, composed the entire project. In fact, Mothers and Other Strangers could almost have stood on its own as it was. However, once I had committed myself to the idea of women playing various roles as the theme of my project, I hesitated to reduce the scope of the project to one role, for fear that I would not have enough material to deal with, or enough variety in the material. In retrospect, reducing the scope of the project would have given the project more focus and clarity. It would have made the large transitions between pieces easier to achieve and also strengthened the transitions. As it was, the project lacked unity; it was sporadic.

The large transitions between major sections of
the project were a problem. These transitions were established far too close to the end of the working process and were put together hastily. The idea of projecting slides of women performing various roles on a backdrop as a prelude to each major section came from my lighting designer, David Lewandowski. This idea worked well for me. The poems I chose to tape as a background to the slides did not work, mainly because of the poor sound system. I should have found an alternative to the recorded poems.

I also wish I had had the skill to construct some type of unifying movement throughout the piece that would have helped establish a stronger link between the pieces themselves. It would have been exciting to have a theme to the movement that supported or contrasted with the theme of each large section or joined one large section to another within the project. However, acting problems were so pressing at the time that I did not leave myself enough time to deal with transitions.

Had I had more financial resources, I would have done more with the physical environment as well. The starkness of the environment, while working well for the piece, was also a financial necessity. In addition, I tried to eliminate as many problems as possible and turn most of my focus to my acting. Therefore, I chose not to try to deal with an elaborate set.
Although the quantity of the material covered in the project ultimately had an adverse effect on the unity of the project, it was there intentionally. I tried to provide as many acting challenges for myself as possible. Most of the roles I selected were ones I would not normally be cast in and/or ones for which I was not especially well-suited. I wanted to take risks, to test myself. Providing myself with a broad choice of material was my way of doing this testing.

The major question is did I take those risks? I feel the project was about evenly divided between the risks I took and succeeded in and the risks I took and failed to succeed in. Ultimately, I learned more from the failures. Those "failures" as well as the successes are primarily covered in the previous discussion of my process and growth as an actor. Since performing the project, the problems I encountered within myself as an actor—emotional and physical timidity, failure to put myself "on the line" as an actor—are ones I have focused on and tried to correct in my work. I think my acting at the present time has benefited more from attempting the roles I could not quite succeed in, than from the ones I did well.
Personal Evaluation and Critique
by the Faculty and Committee

I was particularly pleased with two pieces in the project: "Tearing Up My Mother's Letters" and "I Have Come to Claim Marilyn Monroe's Body." "Letters" was an emotional stretch for me; "Marilyn" was both a physical and emotional stretch. Both pieces allowed me to show a part of myself that I have kept hidden. They forced me to reveal my heart and use my body or fail the pieces. I do not think that I failed either piece. "Tearing Up My Mother's Letters" allowed me to finally break through the emotional walls I had been trying to break through for months. This breakthrough did not happen solely in the process of working on the project, but it seemed to come to fruition within the project.

"Marilyn," as performed in the project, was one of the most physically risky pieces I had yet done, and the most fully realized. Its companion piece, "Carla" from Kennedy's Children, was less fully realized, and I disappointed myself. However, by missing the mark with Carla I learned that I lacked some physical freedom and expressiveness as an actor. I simply did not explore the extremes of the physicality that I began to have with Carla. I continue to fight against my own physical timidity.
Beatrice from *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* is another "failure" from which I learned much. I wanted to see if I could find the ugliness in myself. Again, my mistake was in not going to enough extremes in my exploration process. From what I was able to achieve with Beatrice, I discovered what I have yet to do in terms of expanding my acting range and myself.

The timidity I have mentioned so often in connection with the project did not disappear entirely in the performance. Lack of self-confidence in what I was trying to do caused me to worry about pleasing too many people other than myself in my choices for the project, both of material and of presentation. This was foolish and detrimental to the project.

The project revealed to me my strength as a performer which lies in my ability to deal openly with the sadness of life onstage. I personally have a dark view of the human condition. This carries over into my acting, as everything in my life contributes in some way to my art. Looking at the project, I see that I need to develop more of a comic sense and technique. I need to be able to find the humor in the human condition and also communicate that openly and freely.

In the same way that my performance often seemed to say, "Is this right?", the faculty and thesis committee
had to ask, "Is this right?" The faculty and thesis committee was almost as divided in its feelings about the project as I was. What one person found engaging and committed, another found tentative and shaky. As my focus in the project was divided and in conflict, split between acting and directing, so was the criticism I received divided and in conflict.

It was pointed out by one committee member that some of the material did not provide me with a challenge as an actor, and I agree. However, I must point out that certain pieces in the project were chosen solely for their contribution to the structure itself, and not for any great challenge they presented to me as an actor. This was more of a scriptwriter's choice. I was concerned with creating a script that had variation, rhythm and flow, and not merely with assembling a series of audition pieces. It was, of course, my responsibility to make every piece engaging. If they were not, then that is my failure.

Several committee members and members of the faculty pointed out that the project needed a clearer stamp of viewpoint. They would have liked to have seen my feelings about a particular role that women play and my expectations of that role contrasted with the reality presented by the scenes and poems. I should have allowed my own voice to speak more often, as in Sister Story. This is a unify-
ing concept that would have enhanced the entire project and given it more clarity and boldness. However, the scenes and poems I chose were included because they do represent my viewpoint, or a large part of it. I should, however, have allowed my personal words, my personal voice, to be more definite.

Another committee member questioned the wisdom of my choice to perform poetry, maintaining that it is not meant to be performed. I share this viewpoint in certain cases. However, I chose poems I felt lent themselves easily to performance. I am careful to follow rhythm and meter, but most listeners were unaware that the poems I chose were poems, and not prose pieces.

It was also pointed out that, although my previous work as an actor has been noted for its definition and clarity, the roles within the project seemed to exhibit a certain "sameness." I take full responsibility for not exploring the extremities of some of the roles I attempted. An outside director, a "third-eye" could have helped to remedy this problem.

In some respects the committee's criticism was vague, as my performance in some respects, was vague. There were contradictory feelings among the committee and faculty about nearly every piece. This can be attributed to my own feelings of vagueness about some pieces, and
my vagueness in performing them. A more narrowly defined
project would have resulted in a more definitive performance
and a clearer critique.

Although attempting the project without an outside
director was an unpleasant mistake, the project was not
a failure for me. It isolated major acting problems, as
noted in Chapter III, that I am in the process of working
to overcome. It taught me the importance of having the
courage of my own artistic convictions. I feel that, since
the time of the project, I have become more aggressive in
my artistic demands, particularly in the demands I have
placed on myself. Success or failure is ultimately rela-
tive only to whether or not I have failed to measure up
to the standards I have set for myself.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


