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Bodies, Form and Nature:

Three Canadian Plays and Reproductive Choice in the 1990s

This article will deal with the ways in which three contemporary English-Canadian women playwrights have explored issues of reproductive choice in their creative work. Each playwright has made certain choices regarding form and design in order to address politically charged social issues in a specifically theatrical way. In Susan G. Cole's comedy *A Fertile Imagination*, a lesbian couple attempts to have a child through artificial insemination. Cole works within the familiar format of the television situation comedy to introduce characters and subject matter in a way which both naturalizes them and simultaneously attempts to subvert the genre. In Linda Griffiths' intimate character study *The Darling Family*, subtitled 'a duet for three,' a couple grapples with the implications of an abortion. Griffiths strips away most of the conventions of realist theatre: there are no costumes, sets, music, or scene breaks, just two nameless characters speaking to themselves and each other. Deanne Taylor's musical fantasy, *2nd Nature*, positions a woman's experience of her body and child-bearing capacity as a force opposed to industrialized urban life. *2nd Nature* exemplifies a theatrical style which Taylor has developed through twenty years of work with her company Videocabaret. Mixing live action with videotape and featuring flamboyant costumes and a multimedia setting, *2nd Nature* uses form as a visual metaphor for content. All three of these plays were produced at Theatre Passe Muraille in Toronto in the early 1990s.

Reproductive choice and new technologies were very much current issues in Canada in the late 80s and early 90s. In 1988, the Supreme Court threw out what remained of the laws governing abortion, and in 1989, a Royal Commission on New Reproductive Technologies was created; the Commission issued a final report, containing 293 recommendations, in 1993. The three plays under consideration reflect the general preoccupation and concern of the Canadian public, but while they are *about* reproductive choice issues, they contribute to the debate more by form than by content. As Ric Knowles has argued, form is itself a 'material agent of cultural affirmation (or

reproduction), on the one hand, or cultural intervention, on the other' (Knowles 15-16). We can ask what cultural work is being done by 'different dramatic forms and different dramaturgical structures, whatever the subject matter or thematic content.' Knowles goes so far as to suggest that form is the 'unconscious' of a play, and may or may not be at odds with the conscious subjects, themes and points of view (Knowles 16). I will argue that the reproductive issues in the plays' contents are complicated and problematized by the particularities of each plays' form, setting up a tension around the body onstage and the definitions of 'nature' it represents.

In the three plays under consideration here, the written text is only made fully meaningful by the performance text, in which underlying anxieties about the body and its relationship to nature are revealed in unexpected ways. While the play text (the drama) can be read, live bodies (both actors and audience) create another text entirely, layering significance through their flesh-and-blood presence. The importance of embodying meaning is especially relevant to questions of feminist theory, since many issues identified as feminist are body issues, revolving around the use and control of the body, the appearance and sexuality of the body, and the body's productive and reproductive capacities. Thus, the body of the woman onstage carries with it, literally represents through embodiment, its relationship with notions of nature and its contested status within culture. As we shall see, all three of the plays under consideration work with both cultural and materialist feminist models, at times suggesting that nature is innate, an experience to be expressed, and at others insisting that nature is just as constructed and changeable a concept as culture.¹

As Sherrill Grace argues, theatre always has 'an ideological meaning conveyed in forms which are never without socio-political purpose, whether that purpose is to replicate and conserve the status quo or to resist and replace accepted power structures' (Grace 182). Unlike the transparency assumed by realism, highlighting formal conventions draws attention to them and destabilizes their authority, creating an environment in which all other notions of inherent authority, such as received notions of what is 'natural,' are similarly alienated.

A Fertile Imagination

A Fertile Imagination deals directly with the issues at hand: form, reading bodies onstage, and the changing definition of nature. The play is a largely autobiographical account by a well-known Toronto journalist, chronicling a lesbian couple's attempts to have a baby.ⁱⁱ The main characters, Del and Rita, are looking for a sperm donor so that Rita can be artificially inseminated, or, as they prefer to call it, 'alternatively fertilized.' Between scene transitions, an audiotape is played which is supposed to be the couple's answering machine messages; the following example, from the transition between Act One scenes two and three, suggests the play's humorous tone and its placement in a specific social milieu:

-- Hi gals, this is Audra. I'm getting on with the legal paperwork. Your guy's lawyer wants to come Tuesday at 5:30 pm. Make sure you're home.
-- Del, this is your editor. I have a question about your sexual harassment piece. You say that a male professor's comment on a female student's clothing might constitute harassment. Don't you think it should read that it could constitute sexual harassment?
-- Rita, dear. It's mum. I wish you wouldn't put on that machine. I'm taping the Donahue show for you. He's interviewing some women who are, you know, in your situation.
-- Hey Del. Dykes on Donahue. Turn it on.ⁱⁱⁱ

The play is written in a situation comedy format, taking material that, for many in the audience, might be unfamiliar and possibly threatening, and making it seem friendly and familiar. A series of short, fast-paced scenes introduce likeable, easily-identifiable characters who find themselves in an unusual situation and deal with it in a light, comic manner. Helpful information about reproductive technologies is offered within a highly normalized portrait of lesbian life.

(Interestingly, this is the same strategy employed by actual television sitcoms that deal with lesbian life, such as *Ellen*). Cole clearly hopes that the show will speak to a mainstream audience; she comments that when she first did the piece as a monologue, 'It seemed to cross a lot of different sensibilities and communities. That's what I remember most. It wasn't one particular group of people who were touched by it' (Cole *Night Talk* 1). In the advance publicity for the show, director Kate Lushington reveals: 'Along the way, those involved in the production have been challenged in their heterosexist assumptions – something they hope will also happen with the

audience' (quoted in Kaplan 22). The company chose not to produce the play at Buddies in Bad Times, Toronto's gay and lesbian theatre space, and advertised it as a 'courageous comedy' in anticipation of some resistance to its content. All of this indicates that the production was designed to attract a non-homosexual audience, and that Cole's choice to use the non-threatening sitcom format fit in with this agenda.

However, Cole also had a socially transformative purpose in mind as well. In both the (unpublished) script and the program for the second production, there are a number of cues that the playwright is making every effort to place her play within a contemporary social and political, and specifically feminist, context. For example, the script calls for the third actor (who plays a variety of other characters) to be Black, in an attempt to reflect Toronto's multicultural make-up. A sarcastic reference is made to the 'politically fantastic element' of having a 'radical feminist' write a regular column for a daily newspaper. Reference is made to the Morgentaler Clinic as Toronto's free-standing abortion facility (pre-dating the destruction of the clinic by arson the next year, 1992), and program notes dedicate the play to the pro-choice movement and thank the Gay and Lesbian Community Appeal for seed money.

The match between form and content was an uneasy fit. The superficiality of the form undermined the attempt to get audiences to do any real questioning of the multitude of issues being raised. Reviewers either concentrated on the comedy and ignored the politics, or argued that the form undermined the politics. On one end of the spectrum are reviews in which famous television sitcoms are cited as a way to sum up the play: Del is called 'a gay Rhoda for the 90s,' and Del and Rita are described as being such warm characters that 'even Archie Bunker might want to know them' (Stephanie Griffiths N.Pg.). Critic Vit Wagner writes that the play 'is such an odd mix of radical politics and sitcom convention that one is tempted to call [Cole] a lesbian Neil Simon. This is *Barefoot in the Park* for the same-sex crowd' (Wagner B5). Wagner identifies the 'odd couple' pairing of Del and Rita, and the 'familiar, comfortable way the comedy works' through one-liners, as further evidence of its sitcom format. At the other end of the spectrum, Sandra Haar, writing for a gay and lesbian newspaper and describing the play as having a 'linear plotline' with 'skit-like

segments,' faults the comedic form for undermining the play's politics. Haar comments that while 'lesbians everywhere' were no doubt encouraged to see a 'mainstream' company like Nightwood mounting this play, Cole was too obviously trying to appeal to a broad audience. As evidence, Haar points out that some jokes and references were 'extended to permit a small explanation . . . Because lesbians live a different reality that [sic] non-lesbians, the extending [of jokes] served to pander to the needs of a mainstream audience' (Haar 15). The reviews make it apparent that the sitcom formula was not an effective match for the kind of audience attracted to the play's content, whether straight or gay.

More damagingly, Haar found fault with the production because the two actors playing the couple were known to be heterosexual, which brings us to the matter of the female body onstage. The reviewer writes: 'Of course, reality is not what theatre is about, but authenticity is. The relational, emotional framework that Cole has claimed to want to contextualize lesbian sexuality cannot support the sex and sensuality in *A Fertile Imagination* and little heat is generated' (Haar15). For Haar, authenticity has to do with recognition, with the perceived comfort level of the actors, and with their 'real-life' sexuality. In the politicized arena of gay theatre, the emphasis is not on a traditional approach to inhabiting a role, but on reading the performers *as* performers and as members of a particular community. The artist's physical presence, her body, becomes the signifier of authenticity and the site of lived experience, and is just as important as the veracity of the playwright's script. I would agree that, particularly in work that positions itself as autobiographical, or which seeks to represent the experience of any marginalized community, the visible reality of the physical body is of enormous importance. While I would not argue that, for example, a non-lesbian actor can never play a lesbian character, I would acknowledge that she must be prepared to withstand a different kind of scrutiny, both within the public discourse around the production and in the confines of the theatre space.

Concern with an authenticity that can be read on the body is directly related to the on-going anxiety throughout the play with the idea of nature. For example, in the following sequence, Del represents the fact that they have to involve a midwife to teach them the insemination procedure:

Rita: You know we can't do this alone.

Del: But a fourth party? It's bad enough we have to go sperm-hunting a third.

Rita: Del, we've been through this before. Why are you making it so complicated?

Del: Midwives don't have to help other people get pregnant.

Rita: Since when do you care what other couples do?

Del: Well, the whole thing makes me feel... unnatural. I hate that feeling. I hate feeling marginalized.

Rita: So, we could use the support.

In addition to being something 'other than' their 'unnatural' situation, nature is a mystery to be figured out, and Rita superstitiously worries that they might somehow tamper with this force. She insists on throwing away all of the tampons in the house while she is trying to become pregnant, claiming they are 'bad luck,' and she chastises Del for reading about miscarriages on the grounds that 'just thinking about it' can somehow bring it about. When Rita does in fact miscarry, she sees nature as an angry god:

Rita: We got what we deserved. Messing with nature

Del: You don't think what we do is natural.

Rita: We made a baby with a plastic syringe.

Del: We made a baby with love.

Rita: We're being punished.

By the end of the play, however, Rita has become pregnant again and they have devoted themselves to constructing a new family model that will work for them. Del, who has resolutely refused to discuss their experience in her newspaper column, finally writes a personal, first-person account and names her situation: 'I'm not Daddy Del . . . I'm a woman who loves a woman and we're going to have a baby. I'm going to be a mother.' Yet despite their determination to do things in a new way, and by implication to develop a more consciously chosen and constructed, individual sense of what is natural, the normalizing tone of the play lingers. The penultimate scene makes clear the playwright's belief that, in a fundamental way, Del and Rita are more like, than unlike, other parents. In discussing the pitfalls of raising a child, Del says ruefully: 'He'll hate us because we're lesbians,' and Rita reassures her 'No, no she won't. That's too simple. She'll hate us for some reason we can't even dream of.' Onstage, the picture is iconic: Del's hand is on Rita's

belly and she reacts with joy as she feels movement. Different productions of this play, especially various casting choices, might well have different degrees of success in subverting the TV sitcom format; and despite her choice of this form to appeal to a heterosexual audience, Cole's content does strongly suggest that she hopes to have a transformative effect on them. Interestingly however, the power of this form is so containing that it manages to undermine the potentially subversive sight of two women onstage embodying lesbian desire and a radically new form of reproduction.

The Darling Family

Linda Griffiths is one of Canada's best-known theatre artists, both as an actor and a playwright. Her play *The Darling Family* opened in January of 1991, with Griffiths and then real-life partner Alan Williams as SHE and HE. The published play was nominated for a Governor-General's Award, and a feature film was also made, directed by Alan Zweig and with Griffiths serving as actor, writer, and executive producer.^{iv}

In his review of the plays nominated for the Governor-General's Award that year, Ronald Bryden differentiates between the plays that read well and those that play well, and he praises *The Darling Family* as being the 'best acting play.' He goes on to comment: 'Griffiths has had the excellent theatrical idea of illustrating the much-discussed difference between the ways men and women talk in a situation where communication on both sides is vital. . . . Their shared experience and talking has made them into a pair of some kind' (Bryden C6).

The play itself is a process, the progression of a relationship between the two characters and the progression of the audience through the same emotional journey. There was no director, and a note in the published text indicates the similar absence of other conventional markings of theatre: 'The play is ninety minutes without intermission, set, sound, or lighting cues' (9). The theatre where the performance took place, the Theatre Passe Muraille Backspace, is a very small stage in close proximity with a narrow, sharply raked seating area, a spare, bare-bones playing space that allows for no outside distractions. Of course the audience is aware of the inherent artificiality of *The Darling Family* as a play, but everything has been designed to focus on the

actors and to suggest that the spectator will be engaged in an unusually unmediated, intimate experience.

For this very reason, the film version undermined much of the play's effectiveness. The film medium offers the spectator too much distraction -- the two characters' apartments were shown, a musical soundtrack was introduced, camera tricks were explored -- thus dissipating the unrelenting focus on the actors. The inner thoughts of the characters could be heard in voice-overs, while onstage they were simply spoken. Poignant images from SHE's dreams, such as a little boy in a red snow suit walking away from her, were actually seen. At the same time that film gives the spectator more stimulation, it takes away their direct participation in a shared event. As Susan Bennett has pointed out, both film and theatre spectators are aware of themselves as a group, but theatre audiences are further aware of their interactions with the actors onstage and the actors' interactions with each other. The film offers the spectator an opportunity for voyeurism but the spectator has nothing to offer the film in return, not even applause (Bennett 89). The viewing process for (realist) film is less than demanding; as Richard Bruce Kirkley states: 'When the means of representation are...refined to the point that the fictional world can be made to appear as if it is the exact representation of an objectively real event, then the perceiver's own imaginative experience shifts away from active participation towards a more passive acceptance' (Kirkley 6). With *The Darling Family*, the film medium threw the emphasis onto content when, as I have been arguing, it was the unique form of this piece that enhanced the spectator's involvement in the theatre performance.

With this play, the configuration of nature is very much tied up with the playwright's own spirituality. In interviews, Griffiths often speaks of theatre as a spiritual activity, about her interest in New Age philosophy, and about experiencing acting as a kind of primal energy force that takes her over. ^v This spiritual attitude is suggested by the opening and closing of *The Darling Family*, where both actors light sage and perform a ritual smudge, purifying themselves and the audience. The character SHE believes that things happen for a reason, that her unplanned pregnancy must have occurred as part of some larger plan, in order to teach her something. As in *A Fertile*

Imagination, nature is a mystery to be figured out. HE, on the other hand, feels trapped by a random accident and deeply troubled by her 'fuzzy thinking' on the matter. He believes they are not ready to be good parents:

HE: Okay, you want to talk about learning things. Now I know I'd like to have kids someday, I didn't know that for sure before. But I think a child needs to be cared for. I know this may sound corny but I think of it like the Darling family in *Peter Pan*, you know, the Walt Disney version? That Victorian house with the nursery?

SHE: The dog with the apron and Mr. and Mrs. Darling and they're going out and he can't fix his tie and he's pissed off...

HE: The nursery is all set up for those kids, it's a place just for them, they're wanted and they know it.

SHE: And they fly out the window to become pirates and never go home.

HE: But they do go home.

SHE: Oh yeah, all except Peter Pan.

HE: I always thought I was Peter Pan.

SHE: I always thought I was. Maybe I just tell it to go away. Paula said she talked to it the night before, saying, "Next time, next time."

HE: That's the difference between us, I don't think there's an "it" to tell anything to (32-33).

She wants them to explore every aspect, to keep talking until it becomes clear, not so much what they should do, but what they are supposed to learn from it. This is, in fact, what happens. By the end of the play, when SHE has the abortion, they have come to love each other, they are a real couple, brought together by an emotional process which the audience has shared in every detail.

There is another element of the play's structure that contributes to its meaning. The character of SHE, as part of her interest in New Age therapies, has been attending regression sessions in which she has 'remembered' a past life. This memory is narrated at the start of the play in a harrowing monologue, the story of a twelve-year-old, raped by her father, who gives birth in great agony to a stillborn baby and is driven to insanity. In the course of the play, SHE says two prayers. In the first, she equates the 'gift' of this pregnancy with the trauma of her past life and suggests that her ability to choose to stop it this time will allow her to 'finally be empty' (52). This time she has the power, the ability to choose, that the twelve-year-old did not. It is a radically significant ability because, as we shall see with *2nd Nature*, woman's child-bearing capacity

traditionally equates her with nature as an inexorable, biological cycle of reproduction that ‘fixes’ her in her physical body and cannot be denied. In the second prayer, SHE compares herself to elemental forces such as earthquakes and tidal waves because she wants to retain a personal connection with nature for her spiritual health, but she does not accept that she will have to have the child in order to do so. She can be ‘natural’ and still give up the birth. Thus, in *The Darling Family*, the political statement lies in claiming abortion as a ‘natural’ act. As in *A Fertile Imagination*, nature is not simply the body, but a relationship with the body that involves more options and more agency than previously thought possible. Nature starts out as an ineluctable god and ends up as something a woman defines for herself. Nature is no longer ahistorical, but culturally determined.

2nd Nature

Deanne Taylor is Artistic Co-Director of Videocabaret International, founded in Toronto in 1976. In the 1980s the company launched a series of political cabarets that coincide with and parody news coverage of elections and referendum debates, and involve both live actors and videotaped images. The means of production are very much part of the show: cables, monitors, cameras, and busy technical personnel all make up the *mise-en-scène*. Actors play both to the live audience and to the cameras, and spectators can watch the physical actor and their projected video image simultaneously. News footage of politicians is cleverly altered and interspersed with the fictional goings-on, commenting on the media industry, politics, and the manipulation of the electoral process. Taylor has said:

Videocabaret has practised theatre as a social art form very assiduously from the beginning. Theatre is a longhouse, a community hall. That is why cabaret is in the name. The video is the futuristic part, but the cabaret is the really old, traditional aspect. Our early cabarets were very much analagous to how we live with video in our midst. That’s why we plunked down 70s TVs in the middle of the space, not as decor, not as set dressing, but as content, always content (quoted in Winsor 23).

Another quote from Taylor may suggest why she chose to write and direct *2nd Nature*, an opera about the relationship between the body and nature: ‘In some ways, artists are locally apolitical.

They're good on the geopolitical, the Big Issues, but they're not pothole fixers, not development-blockers. They don't see their stake in property, so they're disconnected' (quoted in Winsor 23). *2nd Nature* sets out to draw obvious parallels between the internal human body (specifically a female body) and larger social issues, making the argument that the personal is political (and vice versa) in an unusually visceral way.^{vi} According to the program for the 1991 production at Theatre Passe Muraille:

The play is located on the disputed borderline [sic] between Mind & Body, Spirit & Flesh, Culture & Nature. Here where the body politic is represented by its neural and glandular co-ordinators, two branches of the primal corporation vie to define the meaning of life. Who is the governing body? Who will rule the state of mind? (*Program*).

The play has two acts, with the six women actors switching roles at intermission to create two generations of Volo, Ovary, Doc, Auto, Gusta and Cardia. The play pits the internal body functions against Volo, the social self, the external sense of 'I.' This is humourously played out in song and dance as, for example, in a scene where Ovary orchestrates a meeting of Ova and Zoa, and we see Volo, located above them on the stage, struggling in reaction to her internal hormonal activity. Once Volo becomes pregnant, Ovary helps her to overcome her fears:

Ovary: Wee anxiety attack?

Volo: Overwhelming.

Ovary: (*signalling*) More hormones...

Volo: You are much bigger than I am, do you understand.

Ovary: Yes.

Volo: Awesome, dismaying, terrifying. I feel...

Ovary: Earthed

Volo: Smothered in flesh

Ovary: Rooted in life

Volo: Mortal

Ovary: ... and death. Yes. That's how it is....

Volo: Feel too much... My body is monopolizing the dialogue. I feel as old as the hills, heavy as clods of clay, real as a compost heap. Too real... What does all this sweaty vegetation, this decaying tree of blood, this pushy bud have to do with me, with that cool abstract concept of self that I call I (S7).

The play obviously works on a binary relationship between mind and body, reason and nature. Volo chooses to ignore her body in favour of external, intellectual pursuits and becomes alienated from her more compassionate instincts. It is only just before she gives birth that Volo really becomes aware of and is in tune with the sensations of her body, thus clearly equating child-bearing with being 'at one with' a wholistic sense of self.

In the second act we follow Volo Junior as she becomes self-aware, tries to please her parents, goes through teen-age rebellion, and then is seduced by Power Volo, 'the glamorous and invincible image of Volo's fantasies.' As Volo moves farther and farther away from her body, exercising herself into a disciplined machine and becoming more powerful and ruthless in the business world, the screen above the set reflects blueprints, girders, circuitry, and then the silhouette of a city. The drive to control and contain the body is explicitly equated both with land development and with colonialism:

Volo: Quiet. I am supposed to look Good. And that's not funny. I am here to bring your brutish humours and rebellious nerves under imperial control. I'm here to kick ass.

Auto/Gusta (*grateful colonials*): Yes, your loftiness.

Volo: You're supposed to be craving and desiring and depraving and conspiring with your devilish passions.

Auto: We're too busy making a living
(*Drums approaching*)

Volo: What's that

Auto: Fertility Hormones. Last dance.

Volo: I thought so. Devil music (S12).

By the end of the play, Volo finally learns her lesson like a modern-day EveryWoman. She goes through the torment of illness and is advised by Auto to change her lifestyle; again, clear parallels are drawn between looking after one's internal and external environments. Auto says: 'Pollution begins in your mental environs. Smogging your vision, poisoning your taste for truth, paralysing your energy, sterilizing your imagination, extinguishing whole species of thought and action.' When Volo vows to pass tougher laws, Auto advises her to put off holiness and learn to play a musical instrument, 'Anything we can do together,' (S15) that is, anything that integrates mind and body.

The real interest in this morality tale lies in its elaborate stage design. The version published in the journal *Theatrum* contains the following description: ‘A curving set embraces three playing areas: a downstage level associated with the lower orders of the body politic... a central focus where Auto performs her governmental duties; and a loftier level where Volo thinks and acts in relation to external affairs. ...The lower levels of the set are ringed with video monitors carrying lively images of hormones and nerves at work, sensation and memory at play...Lights fade in slowly, the sound of the ocean is mixed with call and response from the chorus, blue waves wash through the video screens’ (S2). As the action proceeds, the videoscape serves as a reflection and amplification. For example, in the scene where Volo realizes she is pregnant, the videoscape is described as ‘lush, fluid, bursting with bloodblossoms, rippling vines, deep jungle colours’ (S7). Throughout the play, the abstract images on the video screens reflect the internal landscape of the body, while upstage screen silhouettes reflect the external world.

Given the play’s valorization of nature, it might seem an unusual choice to represent internal body processes through the only high-tech element onstage, but we must take into account the context of the video screens in Videocabaret’s mandate and their relationship to all the other elements onstage. Much like the outrageous costumes, the presence of the video screens creates a polyphonous environment, and reminds the audience of the constructed nature of all the technologies at work in the presentation. What might appear a simplistic equation of woman with child-bearing is undercut and nuanced when her body is represented by technology. The use of technology is particularly interesting, because it highlights one of the fundamental aspects of theatre, the paradox of the real and the imitation. As Reid Gilbert writes, part of the appeal of the development of virtual reality technology, for example, is the promise that it will ‘reproduce known reality, allowing a heightened participation in the “natural” order’ (Gilbert 10). I would argue with Gilbert, however, that rather than getting us closer to reality, the presence of technology onstage in fact distances the spectator. It heightens their awareness of the artificiality of the medium and their own assumptions about the way they are supposed to respond (Gilbert 11). It is clear that the presentation choices -- from the video monitors onstage to the use of an operatic

mode to convey the material -- once again convey meaning through form. The meaning lies in the interpretation process of the individual spectator: does one see the video images as a kind of transparent, omnipotent peek inside the 'real' world of the body and nature, or, more likely, does the presence of the videos disavow such a claim to objectivity and highlight the subjective, constructed nature of the entire play? As Ann Wilson has argued, human subjectivity in the theatre must necessarily reflect the real forces at work in our lives, including technology and mechanization (Wilson 37). Here, the playwright chooses to tell a fable about the 'natural' body through a highly artificial and stylized form and a multi-media stage environment.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that all three of these plays deal with 'real' issues, it is not surprising that their authors have stayed away from traditional theatrical realism. Feminist theatre criticism has long targeted realism as an ineffective mode in which to explore issues of gender and sexuality. Instead, feminist theorists such as Jill Dolan find value in alternative modes like Brecht's epic theatre in which the spectator is estranged from the conditions of life outlined by the representation and therefore sees the dominant ideology as denaturalized. Dolan says: 'If the representational apparatus is ideologically marked, its material aspects must be brought into full view and denaturalized for the spectator's inspection' (Dolan 108). In these three plays, the authors are attempting to make the audience look at 'nature' in a new way, and each is well aware that experiments with form will be the most important means of achieving a fresh perspective.

Ann Wilson's comments about the forces at work in our lives bring to mind the radical approach of Donna Haraway. No theorist has argued more forcefully for a dismantling of the perceptual border and false dichotomy between nature and culture than Haraway when she calls for a recognition of both as invented and discovered, innate and constructed. An affinity between female identity and the natural world based on biology need not lead to a totalizing essentialism, but rather to a coalition based on recognition and responsibility, and an understanding that what is natural is necessarily part of our construction of what is cultural (Haraway 155). Part of what these three plays do, as cultural products, is to reinvestigate women's relationships with our bodies and

what is 'natural' in the 90s. All three undertake this project through content, but more importantly, through form.

NOTES

ⁱ See Case 1988. These categories are by no means mutually exclusive, nor are they the only 'types' of feminism that are applicable to theatre. However, much theoretical writing on feminist theatre uses cultural and materialist positions as a starting point. For the cultural feminist

theatre-maker, living in a female body becomes a rich source of theatrical creativity, both at a performative and a metaphorical level. For the materialist, to stress only women's common bonds of biology erases the many other factors that condition our lives and constitute identity.

ⁱⁱ *A Fertile Imagination* was first produced by Nightwood, Toronto's longest-running feminist theatre company. Susan G. Cole, an editor at the alternative weekly *NOW*, served on Nightwood's Board from 1986 to 88. During that tenure she performed an autobiographical monologue at a fundraising cabaret. Cole went on to develop it into a full-length play in collaboration with Nightwood's Artistic Director Kate Lushington and the cast. It opened in February 1991 at the Poor Alex Theatre, directed by Lushington and featuring Kate Lynch, Robin Craig and Patricia Idlette. A year later it was remounted at Theatre Passe Muraille, directed by Layne Coleman, with Yanna McIntosh replacing Idlette. For further information on Nightwood, see Scott 1997.

ⁱⁱⁱ All quotes are from the unpublished, unnumbered manuscript. The author wishes to thank Susan G. Cole for access to the text.

^{iv} *The Darling Family* began as a four-week independent workshop with two different actors in 1988. Two years later it was given a one-week workshop at Theatre Passe Muraille with Griffiths and Williams reading the parts. Six months later it previewed for ten days at Prairie Theatre Exchange in Winnipeg, and then opened in Toronto in January 1991. All quotes are from the published text. For more information on Linda Griffiths, see Scott 2000.

^v For example, see Judith Rudakoff and Rita Much, 1990, pp. 14-35.

^{vi} *2nd Nature* was first produced by Videocabaret at the Theatre Centre, July 6 to 24, 1990, with a cast made up of Janet Burke and Jennifer Dean (who, along with Taylor, comprise the performance trio The Hummer Sisters), Maggie Huculak, Mary Ellen Mahoney, Deborah Theaker and Maria Vaccratsis. The original production won a Dora Mavor Moore Award for costume design by Teresa

Przybylski, for lighting design by Jim Plaxton, and for outstanding performance by Maria Vacratsis. It was published in *Theatrum* magazine in the Feb./March issue of 1991 and all quotes are from this version. The play was remounted, with some revisions, at Theatre Passe Muraille in the fall of 1991, with Ellen-Ray Hennessy replacing Huculak and Karen Woolridge replacing Theaker.

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