

"In The Enemy Arena": Monique Wittig's revolutionary radicalism Monique Wittig's revolutionary radicalism in a fascinating edition

Texts and interviews 1966-1999

A collection and multiple reprints to (re)read the woman who sought new ways of breaking down the heterosexual order imposed by patriarchy.

Rating: Very good



Feminist activist, radical lesbian: her thinking was impressively clear-cut.
Photo Catherine Deudon/Roger-Viollet

By Nathalie Crom

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Monique Wittig (1935-2003) refers to Nathalie Sarraute, whom she placed at the pinnacle of her career ("Such is the work of Sarraute, next to which I will name no other"), when she wrote superbly in 1989, in a text entitled "L'Ordre du poème":

"Every work of new form functions as a war machine. Its meaning is to demolish outmoded forms, reigns and conventions. Every important literary work is, at the moment of its production, like a Trojan horse. It always takes place in hostile territory, in which it appears strange, unassimilable, non-conforming. Then its strength (its polysemy) and the beauty of its forms prevail. The city gives way to the machine within its walls. For the past fifteen years, the city has been making room within its walls for the war machine that is the work of Monique Wittig, feminist and lesbian writer and activist. Reissued in paperback by Minuit, *L'Opoponax* (1964), *Les Guérillères* (1969) and *Le Corps lesbien* (1973) (1) have imposed the literary and highly political gesture of a woman whose combat writing

aimed to "demolish the old forms" that freeze and perpetuate the hierarchy between the sexes, to dismantle the categories man/woman that confine, to curb the language that carries "the mark of gender" in order to finally "go beyond gender, [...] leave it behind".

This reflection on forms and language, on writing conceived as early as L'Opoanax as "a Trojan horse [launched] into the enemy arena", is one of the speculative axes articulating the present collection of texts and interviews. In the pages, the foundations of this formidable battle against a heterosexual social order ("the heterosexual social order") are unfolded, clarified and nuanced ("heterosexuality is the political regime under which we live") based on inequality and domination: "When differences are established, when entire categories of individuals - women, children - are conceived as less social, when their bodies are appropriated, exploited, deformed, mutilated, killed, when compulsory heterosexuality becomes the social law, then the social contract has changed form and content and can no longer be called a social contract. I call it the heterosexual contract. They call it the law of nature..."

Wittig's clarity of thought and expression is always impressive. The radicalism, too, that has preserved his theoretical thinking from obsolescence, and whose weight is underlined by Sara Garbagnoli and Théo Mantion, the masterminds behind of this enthralling edition, underline its weight: "The emergence of the lesbian point of view provokes [...] a total conceptual re-evaluation of the world, an epistemological revolution that is first and foremost an aesthetic revolution, since it refers to the faculty of perception through which we see, and therefore make, the social world." Lesbianism is "a breach of contract", a dissidence, an insurrection, and "lesbian culture", a culture of women who are not reducible to sexual practice, a more or less hidden, clandestine culture, depending on the historical moment, more or less powerful, but a culture of rebels"...

(1) Also worth mentioning are *Le Voyage sans fin*, reissued by L'Imaginaire-Gallimard in 2022, and *Paris-la-politique et autres histoires*, reprinted last year in paperback by P.O.L. Also appearing today, in Minuit's Double paperback collection, the phantasmagorical *Virgile*, non (146 p., €9).