



Editions de Minuit is publishing "Dans l'arène ennemie" (In the enemy arena), a collection of texts never before published in French by Monique Wittig, the great feminist writer, whose variety paradoxically demonstrates the tenacity of her thought.

This is a corpus of texts exhumed, translated and annotated by Sara Garbagnoli and Théo Manton for Editions de Minuit, which appears these days, at a time when Monique Wittig has recently become a major figure in mainstream feminist doxa, discovered by a new generation including myself, a discovery that is often dazzling, such is the strength and clarity of her words.

Monique Wittig was born in France in 1935 and died in the USA in 2003. A philosopher, novelist, poet and activist, she is the author of articles and conferences on what she has called the "heterosexual contract", a way of denaturalizing, in a logic close to Barthes, the "ça va de soit" of heterosexuality, revealing it for what it is, according to her: a political and economic regime based on the exploitation of women and the exclusion of homosexuals. She is also the author of mythological fictions largely inspired by her experience as a lesbian woman, notably *L'Opoponax*.

This new book is apparently not the best way to approach her work if you don't know it, which mixes texts of very different status, all written and/or spoken between 1966 and 1999: art criticism articles on Godard or Flaubert, excerpts from a symposium on Nathalie Sarraute, militant interventions at feminist congresses, interviews for the specialized press hitherto untranslated into French, prefaces or forewords to her major texts already published, and even a note on a theater production in which she had participated, having the male characters of Don Quixote played by female actors.

Apparently it's all over the place, and why not: scattered signs of a rich and international intellectual life; but what's quite fascinating is to read in the succession of these unpublished pieces, a thought of exemplary stability and capable of expressing itself in very different ways.

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The impeccable theorization of the self-evident heterosexual contract, the demonstration of historically organized female slavery. There's the complicated yet politically fertile friction between feminism and lesbianism. But also, beyond this, and constitutive even of all speaking out: this fascinating reflection on language, the need to appropriate the predominantly masculine language, and to invent another, poetic one, to say what she calls "the lesbian body". This involves the reactivation of old myths, such as that of the Amazons, geographical disengagement towards imaginary islands, lexical precision in the description of the female sex, and opening up gaps in words: putting a punctuation mark between the J and the E of "Je", for example, to break the female self out of the gangue of majority discourse. This kind of reflection is the perfect articulation between a political necessity and an aesthetic necessity, the famous articulation I'm always on the lookout for. Here again, Wittig's theory is crystal-clear: when she speaks of language, she speaks of it as a matter, a force, that must be tamed, turned inside out, words that must be "muscled" even, that's the kind of word she uses - whether she's talking about Godard's aesthetics, or the feminist revolution.

In fact, when you think about it, this collection is less a miscellany than a fractal figure, you know, that mathematical model in which the smallest has the same shape as the largest, like some cabbages: the smallest observable unit has the same shape as the whole vegetable. Well, that's exactly what happens with this collection of texts by Monique Wittig: the smallest unit, the smallest text, sometimes even a single paragraph, concentrates all the coherence of her thought, and this is undoubtedly the basis of the clarity that is so characteristic of her work. And that's what allows us to enter the "enemy arena" armed.