

Monique Wittig: Twenty Years Later

An international conference

University of California, Berkeley / Université de Genève

17-18 March 2023 (Berkeley) / 19-21 June 2023 (Geneva)

In 2023, we will mark the twentieth anniversary of the passing of the lesbian activist, writer and philosopher Monique Wittig, as well as the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of her *Corps lesbien*, with a two-part international conference. Hosted by the Department of French at the University of California – Berkeley and the Institut des Études Genre at the Université de Genève, this conference seeks to encourage new directions in scholarship on Wittig and to stimulate transatlantic and international exchange about her. We are guided in this by the spirit of Wittig's own life, split between Europe and North America, and the bilingual corpus she left us with.

The reception of Wittig's work has been divided both temporally and linguistically. A first period, from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s, saw her influence spread throughout Europe and North America. She initially made her name as a novelist identified with the *Nouveau Roman*, then as an activist and theorist within the women's liberation movement. These indissociable literary and political projects led her work to become one of the foundational building-blocks of postmodern feminism and queer theory in the United States. There followed a relative decline in scholarly attention paid to her ideas. But in the past decade, a reinvigorated enthusiasm for Wittig on both sides of the Atlantic and elsewhere has emerged, opening a second moment of reception. One goal of this conference is to connect these two periods, to historicise the waxing and waning of interest in Wittig's work. Another is to assess the stakes of contemporary reception of that work both within and outwith academia. In our context of revitalised feminist and lesbian activism, this task is all the more compelling.

This conference will also bring together Wittig's divided linguistic reception: scholars working in French and English, primarily, but also in other languages. Indeed, both assessments of and questions for Wittig's work have differed starkly across languages during the past six decades. It is our hope to bridge this gap, too, by bringing together scholars from across the world. By convening an international conversation on Wittig's work, we also seek to explore how Wittig's thought resonates with contemporary gender, sexual, racial and postcolonial politics, and how it might reorient current debates. Our hope is that these discussions might move us beyond the traditional oppositions that have long structured reception of Wittig's work (materialism/postmodernism, constructivism/essentialism, lesbianism/queerness).

The publishing history of Wittig's writings and their reprinting remains to be written, and we hope to receive proposals on this subject. Her collaboration with her French and American publishers, notably Minuit, Balland and P.O.L. and Beacon Press, witnessed by the correspondence found in her archives at Yale University, are a rich source for scholarly exploration.

In recent years, scholars have mined numerous new veins in Wittig's work: religion,ⁱ racialisation,ⁱⁱ translation,ⁱⁱⁱ play,^{iv} humour,^v anti-identitarianism as a literary practice,^{vi} connections with transidentities,^{vii} intellectual history,^{viii} French universalism,^{ix} utopian and radical imaginaries,^x

discursive violence,^{xi} among many others. We seek papers that further develop our understanding in those areas, or expand into new territory. Her theatre, her relationship to anarchism and Marxism,^{xii} adaptations of her work in the visual arts, reception studies, her influence on feminist and lesbian movements in and outside of France and the United States, her political theory of language and her relationship to the *Nouvelle Critique* of the 1960s, her materialist approach to lesbian identity, and so on. We also welcome proposals for art projects (performances, screenings, art exhibits, etc.).

Please submit 250-word abstracts and brief bios to Ty Blakeney, William M. Burton, Ilana Eloit, Carolina Topini and Agnès Vannouvong via this [Google Form](#) by **9th September 2022**. Proposals and presentations may take place in English or French. If you have any questions, please contact us via email at wittig2023@gmail.com.

The Berkeley leg of the conference will take place on 17th–18th March 2023 and the Geneva one, on 19th–21st June of that year

ⁱ Erika Ostrovsky, « Religion in the Fiction of Monique Wittig », in Morny Joy, Kathleen O’Grady and Judith L. Poxon (eds.), *Religion in French Feminist Thought* (Routledge, 2003).

ⁱⁱ Salima Amari, « Certaines lesbiennes demeurent des femmes », *Nouvelles questions féministes*, 34, (2015): 70-83; Stéphanie Kunert, « L’analogie “sexisme/racisme”: une lecture de Wittig », *Comment s’en sortir*, 4, (2017): 80-99; Alyosxa Tudor, « Im/possibilities of refusing and choosing gender », *Feminist Theory*, 20(4), (2019): 361-380.

ⁱⁱⁱ Katherine Costello and Ilana Eloit, « Monique Wittig (ou le lesbianisme intraduisible) », *Dictionnaire du genre en traduction* (LEGS-CNRS), 24 May 2021, <https://worldgender.cnrs.fr/notices/monique-wittig-ou-le-lesbianisme-intraduisible/>; Abigail Field, « Le pouvoir au bout du pronom: For a reconsideration of *Les Guérillères* in translation », *Drafting Monique Wittig* conference, Beinecke Library, Yale University, 10-11 October 2019; Cornelia Möser, « Sex Wars and the Contemporary French Moral Panic. The Productivity and Pitfalls of Feminist Conflicts », *Meridians*, 16(1), (2018): 79-111; Sandrine Sanos, « The “War Machine” of Language: Monique Wittig’s One-Dimensional Man and Post-68 Feminist Thought », *Drafting Monique Wittig* conference.

^{iv} Aubrey Gabel, « Ludic Intertexts in *Les Guérillères*: Reading as Training in Popular Warfare », *Drafting Monique Wittig* conference.

^v Julia Balén, « No Straight Faces: Wittig’s Trojan Horse Humor », *Drafting Monique Wittig* conference.

^{vi} Annabel L. Kim, *Unbecoming Language: Anti-Identitarian French Feminist Fictions* (Columbus, Ohio: The Ohio State University Press, 2018).

^{vii} Kate Costello, « La pensée cisgenre » and Blase Provitola, « Wittig’s Legacy: A Transfeminist Perspective », *Drafting Monique Wittig* conference; Kevin Henderson, « Becoming Lesbian: Monique Wittig’s Queer-Trans-Feminism », *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 16 (1), (2017) : 185-203.

^{viii} William M. Burton, « On the Origin and End of Sex: Language, Science and Social Construction in Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Monique Wittig » (PhD, New York, Columbia University, 2020).

^{ix} Ilana Eloit, « Lesbian Trouble: Feminism, Heterosexuality and the French Nation (1970–1981) » (PhD, London, The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), 2018), <http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/4041/>.

^x Eva Feole, *Corpo a corpo con il linguaggio. Il pensiero e l’opera letteraria di Monique Wittig* (Pisa, Edizioni ETS, 2020); Aurore Turbiau, « Sortir de l’enfer unidimensionnel : L’utopie “réelle” de Monique Wittig », *Mouvements*, 108, (2021): 80-93.

^{xi} Sanna Karhu, « Judith Butler’s Critique of Violence and the Legacy of Monique Wittig », *Hypatia*, 31(4), (2016): 827-843.

^{xii} Brad Epps et Jonathan Katz, « Monique Wittig’s Materialist Utopia and Radical Critique », *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13(4) (2007): 423-454.