Genre-bending / Gender-bending: On the (Feminist) Social Contract

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Abstract: *Social contract narratives are genre-bending origin sto- ries that blur the distinction between political theory and fiction. This article presents Monique Wittig's theoretical and literary work as a genre-bending/gender-bending rendition of the social contract that repurposes its narrative structure for feminist ends. Informed by Sylvia Wynter's generative notion of genre, I show that by centering on freedom rather than oppression, Wittig's affirmation of the genre of contract represents a compelling and emancipatory alternative to feminist and critical race critiques. In doing so, I also explore the potential of reading political theory as a creative genre, and creative genres as political theory, and the implications for feminist political theorizing.*

Keywords: *Monique Wittig, social contract, heterosexual con- tract, freedom, genre, Sylvia Wynter*

In collecting these words, I took some creative license. I wove in lines from Locke's Second Treatise on Government (the first two lines); Hobbes's Leviathan (the next two); Monique Wittig and Sande Zeig's Lesbian Peoples: Materials for a Dictionary (the fifth line), and Rousseau's Essay on the Origin of Languages (the concluding line). This assemblage prefigures the story I want to tell, one that takes social contract narra- tives as genre-bending myths of origin that do political theory through fiction and fiction as political theory. Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau imagined a past (an original anthropology, a state of nature, a contrac- tual transition), and in their stories there is tension and drama (oh, the drama!): characters, desires, and a potentially happy (or calami- tous?) ending. These ingenious constructs, Anne Garréta argues, can be thought of as the fictional core that structures their political theo- ries, at least in part. When one approaches the contract in this way, the distinction between the political, the philosophical, and the literary becomes blurred and unstable.[1]

In this article, I focus on the narrative structure of the contract rather than the specific contents of its canonical renditions, which, as critics have argued, betray sexist, racist, and colonialist worldviews. Specifically, following Robyn

Marasco, I consider the contract as a poetic narrative device whose function is to denaturalize political community and to conceive of present society as self-instituted and, as such, open to reinstitution.[2] My objective is to examine an instantiation of the contract that repurposes its fictional core and narrative structure for feminist purposes. To this end, I draw on the fictional and theoretical oeuvre of French writer, activist, and theorist Monique Wittig (1935–2003). With Wittig's theoretical writings in The Straight Mind and Other Essays (1992), La pensée straight (2001), and Le Chantier littéraire (2010) as my background,[3] I analyze three of her works of fiction: Les guérillères (1969/2007), The Lesbian Body (Le corps lesbien, 1973/1976), and the fictional dictionary she coauthored with Sande Zeig, Lesbian Peoples (Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes, 1976/1979).[4]

I conceive of the latter three texts as a "contract trilogy" that not only recovers emancipatory elements of the contract tradition, but reinvents it.[5] Like canonical contractarian accounts, this trilogy is genre-bending, blurring the lines between the theoretical and the literary. Unlike them, the trilogy is also gender-bending: it conjectures alternative feminist pasts and envisions a feminist world unmoored from the heterosexist ideology that Wittig calls the straight mind or, alternatively, the heterosexual contract.[6]

I think of "genre" as a political rather than a merely stylistic category. Elisabeth Anker has shown that different genres of polit- ical discourse establish sets of "interpretive conventions and affec- tive expectations for public political life."[7] In a related vein, Bonnie Honig has demonstrated how the practice of "genre-switching" can be employed to counteract both tendencies to restrict the interpre- tive possibilities of a given genre and the sedimentation of inherited reading practices. This fluid relationship to genre, Honig asserts, can act as an "emancipatory tactic of interruption," transforming the polit- ical reception of a genre along with the reader's expectations of it.[8]

Both Anker and Honig rightly underscore that the assumption of genre influences not only the perception and meaning of the object of interpretation, but also its underlying politics. In this sense, genre functions as an interpretive device that can impede or facilitate the emergence of novel readings. The same applies to the case that occu- pies me here: reading the contract narrative as a purely theoretical and philosophical genre constrains both its interpretative possibilities and its potential emancipatory redeployments. It also precludes the consideration of its fictional undertones. Going beyond Anker's and Honig's political theory of genre, I propose that the assumption of genre not only mediates interpretive reading practices but also, as the etymology of the term suggests, generates a world.[9] In order to foreground this generative, creative power of genre, I draw inspiration from Sylvia Wynter's work. For Wynter, "genre" denotes a socially instituted constellation of narra- tive schemas, origin stories, and descriptive statements articulating a specific ontology. This includes what Wynter calls a particular

genre of the human, the less-than-human, and the non-human. Once a genre has been established as a "governing principle," it expresses itself as a "representation of origin that we ourselves invent" but is "retroactively projected onto an imaginary past."[10] This is a key point, since different narrative schemas, Wynter argues, lead to "specific orders of conscious- ness […] in whose terms we then come to experience ourselves as this or that genre/mode of being human."[11] Wynter also reminds us that "genre" and "gender" share a common root and, most importantly, a common function.[12] Gender and genre are praxes, namely, enactments of a particular narrative schema expressing a specific, retroactively naturalized, mode of being/becoming human. Following Wynter's suggestions, I employ a genre-bending/gender-bending lens to examine Wittig's intervention in the contract genre, with the aim of showing that this lens can expand our vision of what feminist political theory can be, where it can be found, and how it can be articulated. I argue that Wittig's "anti-contractarian contrac- tarianism," to borrow Charles Mills's apt phrase, offers a compelling alternative to prevailing contract critiques, since it demonstrates the genre's own creative and generative potential and its capacity for transformation.[13] On this point, I propose that at the core of Wittig's contract lies a notion of freedom as origin story instead of domination as narrative schema, and that this very distinction reconfigures both the genreing and gendering power of the contract.

I organize this article as follows: first, I provide an overview of the plots of what I call Wittig's "contract trilogy," Les guérillères, The Lesbian Body, and Lesbian Peoples, followed by a brief explication of Wittig's lesbian-materialist theoretical framework. I then consider how Wittig's appropriative approach to the contract genre differs from Carol Pateman's and Charles Mills' contract theories. Finally, I turn to an analysis of the critical trilogy itself, concluding with some thoughts on genre-bending, and the potential of expanding and experimenting with political theory as a creative genre, and its implications for femi- nist political theorizing.

THE CONTRACT TRILOGY: AN OUTLINE

To give context to the discussions that follow, I want to begin by giving an outline of the works that I refer to as a contract trilogy: Les guérillères, The Lesbian Body, and Lesbian Peoples. It is important to note that Wittig's theoretical production began some years after the publication of these texts. In this light, I believe that her theoretical essays' conceptual vocabulary emerges from her literary experimentation, rather than the other way around. Nor does her lesbian-feminist theory come to displace the literary oeuvre; the two remain inextricably interwoven.

Les guérillères (1969/2007) is an epic depicting a victorious global revolution, "the longest most murderous war [the world] has ever known, the last possible war in history," and its aftermath.[14] The titular protagonists, a transnational guerilla army of indomitable warriors, are referred to as elles

(the French third-person feminine plural), and their antagonists as ils (the French third-person masculine plural).[15] Despite the use of gendered language, Les guérillères does not depict a war of the sexes aimed at, say, replacing patriarchy with matriarchy. In fact, as Wittig would later explain, elles are not women, or at the very least, they fight for the undoing of the very categories woman/ man. And, as Linda Zerilli points out, ils stand in for what Wittig, in her theoretical writings, would call "the straight mind" or "the hetero- sexual contract,"[16] both of which come to bear in the production of androcentric language and the category of sex. These are very things that elles—representing both Wittig's subversive use the pronoun and the "name" of the protagonists—fight against.

Later, Wittig elaborated on her use of pronouns. In the ordinary use of language, "elles never stands for the general and is never the bearer of a universal point of view."[17] Using it, as she does, as a neuter pronoun, is therefore a strategic way of underscoring the arbitrary nature of androcentric language and its use of ils as a default and stan- dard for the universal. Accordingly, the first two parts of her novel are "totally inhabited, haunted" by elles, with no masculine pronoun in sight. This technique, she said, afforded elles a "sovereign presence" over the entire text. The masculine ils, on the other hand, appears only in the third part of the novel, particularized, "reduced and truncated out of language."[18] Wittig's overt linguistic counter-violence calls forth the covert violence of androcentric grammar, illuminating one of her dictums: if the appropriation of the universal constitutes a "criminal act at the level of concepts, philosophy, and politics," then those from whom it has been wrested are tasked with reclaiming it.[19] This pivotal element of the text was (criminally?) lost in the English translation, which renders elles as "the women" instead of "they"—a puzzling decision, given that it reinforces the gender grammars whose disman- tling Les guérillères enacts.[20]

In terms of structure, Les guérillères is divided into three sections. Rather than telling the story of the war in chronological order, from a prerevolutionary beginning to the postrevolutionary end, the book begins in the aftermath of the victorious war/revolution, with the first part depicting the difficult process of building a society unconfined by the category of sex. The war itself is only narrated in the third and final part, whereas the middle section is temporally ecstatic, juxta- posing past, present, and future in a manner that confounds our sense of chronological orientation.[21] Let me offer a vignette to illustrate this structure. In the opening part of the book, we are introduced to what seems to be a newly founded society resulting, I propose, from consensually contracting. There, elles exalt "the **O**, the zero or the circle, the vulval ring,"[22] in a way that parodically subverts the phallocentrism of the prerevolu- tionary era. But by the time we encounter the war in the final section, we realize that said society's inhabitants likely

include young men who had joined their revolution. We read, for example, that elles give "a thousand thanks to those who have understood our language / and not having found it excessive / have joined with us to transform the world.[23] And so, the newly-founded society, which is no more a society "of women" than ours is a society "of men," ultimately grows weary of its vulva-centric preoccupations. The "feminaries," canonical texts that had celebrated the beauty and fecundity of the female body, become a source of amusement, "useless knowledge" written in a language no longer understood. Once again, they exalt the **O**, but this time, not as a stand-in for the vulval ring, but as the resolve to start again, to start from zero, to invent a new language: "they say that they must break the last bond that binds them to a dead culture;" "a new world is begin- ning."[24]

In the second text in the trilogy, The Lesbian Body (Le corps lesbien, 1973/1976), we see again Wittig's subversion of pronouns at work, here too anticipating the contemporary recognition of their political significance. The protagonists of this poetic text are two lesbian lovers, referred to simply as "I" (j/e) and "you" (tu).[25] While the English trans- lation renders j/e as a cursive I, I follow Marion May Campbell, who suggests that a slashed I/I better captures the intended transformation and re-signification of subjectivity.[26] Aptly described by Lynne Huffer as an "erotic pronomial relation," the book portrays an "incessant, often violent movement of dismemberment and reassemblage"—as Robyn Okumu puts it, a veritable "literary operating table holding pleasur- able vivisection[s]."[27] The lovers die and revive; lose and find each other. "I/I" and "you" peel each other's skin, tear each other's organs apart, lick each other's viscera, eyes, clitoris, muscles, and nerves. One of them is tricked into eating the other and, horrified, vomits when she finds out. They also change shape and color, become a horse and a giant fly with ten thousand eyes, flowers sprout from their bodies… a kind of species-bending. This is certainly not your typical love story. Like The Lesbian Body and Les guérillères, Lesbian Peoples (Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes, 1976/1979) depicts "a lesbianized alter- nate reality."[28] It is a "rough draft" of a fictional encyclopedic dictio- nary that Wittig coauthored with Zeig.[29] The "reference" section at the end of the dictionary lists fictional sources, myths, and stories that groups of "bearers of fables" had collected from around the world.[30] In the texts that follow each of the word entries, we learn about amazons and mothers; languages powerful and weak; of near defeat, temporary retreat, and a successful revolution. In a Hesiodic vein, Wittig and Zeig write of events that took place in a long-gone Golden Age and a Silver Age, a Bronze Age and a catastrophe that gave way to various stages of an Iron Age, "the worst of all, the origin of chaos."[31] We also read about a Glorious Age inaugurated after a mysterious "night of the vanishing powder."[32] As befitting a dictionary, a sequential narrative structure is absent.

The dictionary opens with the entry “Age,” and ends with “Yam.” In between, there are entries like “Clitore” (rings worn by “companion lovers,” made of the clitoris of dead friends) and “Long Live Gomorrah” (a cheerful morning greeting).[33] As in The Lesbian Body, masculine names and pronouns are absent, as are entries for “man” and “men.” There is, though, a definition of “woman:” “the most infa- mous designation,” an obsolete word which used to mean “one who belongs to another.”[34]

As I will show next, Wittig’s “lesbianization” of language and imagery and subversion of narrative and grammatical structures are experimental strategies that portend a certain sovereign power over language and a capacity to imaginatively devise alternative systems of grammar that, besides doing away with gender, could also genre the world otherwise. Humankind, she wrote, “must find another term for itself.”[35]

LESBIAN MATERIALISM, OR THE LESBIAN AS NOT-WOMAN

Wittig’s political theory is rooted in two interrelated analytic methods: feminist materialism and lesbian materialism. Developing an imma- nent critique of Marxism, the former examines women’s oppression “not in terms of sexual difference but against it:” women, from this perspective, are a socio-political class, and not a natural group.[36] The contention is that the original materialism not only failed to address women’s social reproductive labor, but also remained oblivious to sex as a category of oppression and to the ideologies and practices that entrench and reproduce it. Despite its critical power, therefore, mate- rialism has been constrained by a logic that effectively denies women and minoritized groups access to agency, subjectivity, and freedom. Wittig’s lesbian brand of materialism expands on this approach. In addi- tion to analyzing the social, ideological, and economic mechanisms of gendered oppression, it underscores the material and linguistic mani- festations of heterosexuality as a political regime.

“Heterosexuality” in this context is not simply a compulsory logic of desire, just as “lesbianism” is not merely an alternative “sexual orientation.” Instead, heterosexuality refers to the very splitting—as discursive as it is material—of corporeality, subjectivity, and society into oppositional categories and their concurrent categories and iden- tities. The issue for lesbian materialism is the very existence of the cate- gory of sex as one that is based on hierarchical divisions, including linguistic ones. The signification of sex imprinted on the body and on cognition unevenly distributes power and freedom. Sex and heterosex- uality are, therefore, political categories, not erotic, physiological, or ontological ones: they do not preexist oppression, but are their result.[37] The conceptual universe of sex and heterosexuality is couched

in what Wittig calls “the straight mind,” a linguistic, philosophical, psychoanalytic, and scientific assemblage that ontologizes heterosex- uality,

binarizes sex, and reduces biological diversity to strictly regi- mented categorizations. The straight mind, as Zerilli explains, conceals "in the necessity of nature, the contingency of the category of sex and with it [its] own origins, thereby denying both freedom and histo- ricity."[38] Consequently, the genreing impact of the narrative devices of binary sex and heterosexuality can only make sense and cohere within the narrative schema of the straight mind.

In this context, Wittig mobilizes a specific political subjectivity: "lesbian." This term serves, to borrow Wynter's terminology, as a placeholder of a different genre of the human that would not merely decenter straight sexuality, but the straight mind and its heterosexu- alized systems of grammar.[39] Similarly to the proletariat, the lesbian stands for the universal validity of the interests of the oppressed: "[s] tanding at the outpost of the human," she writes, the lesbian "represents historically and paradoxically the most human point of view."[40] For this reason, Wittig explains, it is inadequate "to say that lesbians associate, make love, or live with women, for 'woman' has meaning only in heterosexual systems of thought and heterosexual economic systems."[41] Her contention is that, just as it is not (only) a matter of emancipating the proletariat but of abolishing class altogether, so it is not (only) a matter of women's liberation, but of eventually abol- ishing sex as a category; to envision a society no longer colonized by its myriad obsessions with chromosomal, hormonal, and phenotypic difference.[42] These remarks should help clarify Wittig's provocative statement in the essay "The Straight Mind": "Lesbians are not women."[43] In La pensée straight, Wittig reformulates this phrase, emphasizing it in a way that I think better captures her point: "Le sujet désigné (lesbienne) N'EST PAS une femme" ("the subject designated (lesbian) IS NOT a woman").[44] Finally, we can distinguish between three interrelated figures in her fictional and theoretical work: "lesbian" (in the singular) as an emancipatory genre of the human; "lesbians" as a resistant polit- ical position that challenges the straight mind; and "lesbianism" as a prefigurative community, currently "the only social form in which we can live freely [economically, politically, and ideologically]."[45] I will return to these figures in my analysis of the contract trilogy. But now, and having outlined Wittig's lesbian materialism, let me examine how this lesbianized conceptual constellation comes to bear in the contract genre.

THE SOCIAL CONTRACT, REVISITED

As a form of origin story and narrative device, the contract genre is at once structured around and serves to institute specific genres of the human. Historically, as feminist and critical race political theo- rists such as Carole Pateman and Charles Mills have shown, contract narratives served to model the human on white, European, propertied Man. Considering their critiques,

I argue that Wittig's contract does three distinctive things: firstly, it challenges the contract's discur- sive elements—its ontologies, epistemologies, and politics—not by disavowing the genre, but by infiltrating and (re)generating it.[46] In this line, secondly, it deploys the contract as an origin story undergirded by freedom, rather than domination. Thirdly, it examines the politics of language as an inextricable aspect of the contract.

A brief look at Pateman and Mills will help us understand Wittig's approach. They both denounce the alleged moral, social, and political equality promised by contract theory, unveiling its sexist, racist, and colonialist premises. To gain insight into these repressed undercur- rents of contractarian discourse, they argue for the existence of two contracts: one implicit, the other explicit; one of domination, the other of freedom (for some). Pateman names these "the sexual contract" and "the social contract," while Mills distinguishes between "the racial/ class contract" and "the social contract." Together, Pateman and Mills assert, the sexual and the racial contract function as one: a contract of domination, which is then concealed by the alleged contract of freedom.[47]

In Pateman's account, the sexual contract, which predates the social contract, consolidates the transition from an autocratic patriarchy to a modern, (pseudo)egalitarian fratriarchy. What remains unaltered in this transition is women's sexual domination—that is, the principles of the sexual contract itself. In other words, what the sexual contract determines is who dominates women—the brothers, not the patri- arch. The social contract is thus little more than a veil (of ignorance?) that consolidates and legally codifies fratriarchal society. Indeed, for Pateman the social contract represents "the specifically modern means of creating relationships of subordination" by institutionalizing what had been already socially entrenched: namely, securing men's freedom, while justifying, reinforcing, and reproducing sexual domination.[48]

Mills adds another layer to the story: the original contract, he proposes, is not only sexual but also racial; that is, an agreement among white men that, by enacting a hierarchical "conceptual parti- tioning" of human populations between inferior (racialized) and supe- rior (non-racialized) populations, establishes white supremacy.[49] With this move, and in a manner analogous to the position of women in Pateman's contract, racialized peoples become "the objects, rather than the subjects of the agreement."[50] But Mills, who identifies himself as an anti-contractarian contractarianist, adopts a more generous stance. Rousseau, he argues, inaugurated a "subversive tradition within social contract theory" that can be appropriated and re-narrativized for emancipatory ends.[51] He therefore suggests that the narrative device of the social contract can be salvaged by disassociating it from racist ideologies, while retrieving its avowed purpose to safeguard moral equality and freedom for all. This can be achieved, on the one hand, by acknowledging the epistemology of white ignorance that has histor- ically permeated liberalism, and, on the other,

by dismantling the racial contract's ontological foundation, whereby non-racialized men have been designated as exclusive bearers of rationality, equality, and freedom—that is to say, as the exclusive bearers of full humanity.[52] Now, in Wittig we also find a duality of contracts, one overt and the other covert, to which she refers respectively as "the social contract" and "the heterosexual contract."[53] Note the inversion of the order: whereas Pateman and Mills regard the social contract as a mere façade covering over the deeper oppressive constellation of the sexual and the racial contracts, for Wittig it is the social contract that is occluded and the heterosexual one that is the façade. This represents not merely a reversal in temporality but, rather, a radical modification of the contract genre itself, the way we understand and orient ourselves in it, and our grasp of the political work it performs. In Wittig's approach, the origi- nary experience—the origin of the story—is freedom, not sexual/racial domination. And it is this original freedom that is concealed. Anchoring freedom as the narrative device of the contract genre, I argue, not only serves as a critique that exposes the hidden transcripts of oppression, but more importantly embodies a creative and emancipatory praxis.

What is the original social contract that is being concealed? Wittig appropriates Rousseau's insight that humans are born free but every- where reside in coercive associations to which they have not consented. The notion of being born free, and thus retaining an inherent and poten- tial freedom, is what the original social contract signifies. "Clearly," Wittig asserts, "in what Rousseau says, it is the real present existence of the social contract that is particularly stimulating for me—whatever its origin, it exists here and now, and as such it is apt to be understood and acted upon."[54] The question Wittig ponders is whether the contract as presently experienced disavows or fosters individual and collective freedom. "I consider it my duty," Wittig declares, "to examine the set of rules, obligations, and constraints that this society has imposed on me, and [to assess whether] these rules, constraints, and obligations guarantee a freedom that I would not find in nature. Or, if this is not the case, to say […] that society has deceived us […]."[55] But how can the social contract and the freedom it grants be said to exist at all, if one is, in fact, being duped and oppressed by its mandates and prescriptions? To explain this, Wittig turns to language, drawing upon Rousseau and Émile Benveniste's assessment of first- and second-person pronouns.

The social contract, Wittig tells us, belongs, as it did for Rousseau, to the very fact of language and our having language: "in its complete social form [language] is the first, permanent, definitive, social contract."[56] Language is the condition for the possibility of world- building and community-making, a space where "we are all equal and free, and if we weren't, there would be no pact possible […]." Our social experiences show that linguistic practices are flexible and meaning in fact never solidifies (despite efforts to do so): we all can "take, use, and bend" language to craft other meanings.[57] The point

here is that, whereas language essentially belongs to all, the heterosexual contract arrogates and renders it a privatized form of property. This shift from what I describe as "language as commons" to "language as bound and bounded," alters the terms—the genre—of contract from a vessel of freedom to one of domination. This is achieved in great part through the modulation and reconfiguration of pronouns.

To elucidate this process of displacement, and with recourse to Benveniste, Wittig presents a language-tethered origin story of subjec- tivity, of becoming a self. "It is in the instance of discourse," Benveniste writes, "in which I designates the speaker that the speaker proclaims [themself] as 'subject'."[58] Borrowing and extending this insight, Wittig suggests that in the linguistic environment of the social contract— language as commons—each self fully experiences themselves as an agent, as "the absolute subject of discourse" to whom "the world, which [the subject] forms and deforms at will, belongs."[59] Crucially, "I" is not an independent entity, but born of relation: I speak, there- fore I (uniquely and universally) am; in turn, you speak, therefore you (uniquely and universally) are I. At the same time, I (to you) am you. Thus, each I, same and multiple, has access to a universal point of view—one's eyes look at the world, absorb it, shape and share it, inhabit it without yet possessing it, speak in it and from it with you. Perhaps counter-intuitively, "you" are a sovereign "I" with whom "I" share the world and through whom our shared world is revealed to me. With this move, Wittigian linguistics delineates an experience of co-sovereignty antithetical to the tenets of liberal possessive individ- ualism and the antagonistic Sartrean self/other dynamic: the interac- tion between co-sovereign subjects is not predicated on a desire for mastery, but on the expression and exercise of freedom. Taking a cue from Lawrie Balfour, this is a relation of "sovereignty without subju- gation."[60]

A key point is that in this primordial social contract's linguistic environment, the category of sex and linguistic gender are yet to be engineered—there are no signifiers and imaginaries of subjection and domination.[61] However, as is usual in contracts-as-origin stories, some- thing happens. In Wittig's contract genre, a rupture and a shift in the dynamics of language occurs with the introduction of the "mark of gender," the linguistic index of the material oppression of women.[62] The mark of gender partitions the commons first, by implicitly classi- fying/categorizing speakers. If I and you, in some languages, remain ungendered, other linguistic operations—including for example, the gendering of third person pronouns in some languages—generate a differentiation between the default or authoritative speaker and the ones who are particularized. Thus, for instance, when reading a story narrated by "I," the default assumption for most readers would be that the narrator is a "he," unless we are given specific and explicit reasons to think otherwise. Even I-you relations become asymmetrical or potentially asymmetrical as women come, at least ordinarily, to occupy the

position of "recipient" of discourse—for example, as in the all-to-familiar form of discourse we call mansplaining.

The introduction of linguistic gender precipitates the emergence of the heterosexual contract and, concurrently, the reduction of co-sover- eignty to a model of sovereignty as power-over: "Man"—the universal, the One, the neuter, the subject—over "woman"—the particular, the Other, the marked, the object. Ultimately, the conceptual maneuver performed by the mark of gender privatizes language and denies women the authority of speech. It deprives "the individuals marked [by gender]" of their own sovereignty and of "what belongs to them by right: language itself."[63] And so, from being a locutor among partner locutors, the now gendered-genre is femaled: particularized, minori- tized, her subjectivity truncated. Wittig's use of the term "mark" to denote linguistic gender is indicative of her linguistic materialism. For Wittig, language is a polit- ical force and a network of powers that mold social and material condi- tions.[64] The materiality of language generates and genres a world, acts as a lens that frames perception and self-perception, and limits and delimits the range of available meanings and significations; in this sense, for Wittig there is no disconnection between language and social and physical reality, signifier and signified, between conceptual and material, abstract and concrete. These apparent separations are in fact, she says, co-constitutive.[65]

"There is," she asserts, "a plasticity of the real to language," language "casts sheaves on reality," and "even abstract philosophical categories act upon the real as social." These assertions apply to the organization of both the social body and the individual one: "Each one of us," writes Wittig, "is the 'sum' of transformations brought about by words. We are social beings to such an extent that even our physicality is transformed, or, more precisely, formed […], by the accumulation of words within us."[66] Like Wynter's genre, then, language imprints lived reality and the lived body, the way we are, move, and think.[67] And the mark of gender, like category of sex, "sticks" to women only, "they are sex, the sex, and sex they have been made in their minds, bodies, acts, gestures […]."[68]

Recall, however, that the reproduction of a genre is contingent upon the continuation of the origin stories that a society tells about itself—what Wynter calls shared storytellings.[69] This implies that in the Wittigian origin story the heterosexual genre of contract thwarts, displaces, and degrades the social contract's egalitarian and free- dom-affirming premises and promises, yet does not entirely eradi- cate them. This is where the creative-emancipatory dimension of her intervention into the genre of contract comes into play. Language itself is the entry point. "We must," Wittig declares, "destroy gender completely. This task can be accomplished through the exercise of language." Destroying gender or altering its use "would not only modify language at the lexical level but would upset the structure itself and its functioning," affecting "the conceptual-philosophical level and the political one as well as

the poetic one."[70] In this regard, the emancipatory potential of the contract genre is predicated on the materiality of language: language both acts upon and is acted upon, and may be remade and resignified through shifts in our linguistic practices, thereby (re)creating a space of becoming free and sharing the same experience with others. Wittig exemplifies this point in terms of a redefined—or, as I will show, lesbianized—subjectivity: when I say "I," I reclaim and transform language, "I reorganize the world from my point of view;" I experience myself, once again, as an "entire, whole, universal, ungendered 'I'."[71]At this point, let me come back to Pateman and Mills. To recall, Pateman regards the social contract and, specifically, its univer- sal-egalitarian aspects, as a ruse concealing the archaic sexual contract. But by regarding the sexual contract as archaic, Pateman appears to assume the precontractual existence of a binary and hierarchical sexual difference, a premise that remains unproblematized. This raises an unresolved question: is sexual difference the "cause" of oppression? I agree with Marasco's assessment: in the end, "Pateman is too deeply invested in the somatic foundations of sexual difference and the stability of the body as a fixed and unchanging object."[72] Moreover, while Pateman's genre of contract changes the face(s) of the subject that oppresses (from patriarch to fratriarchs), the object of domina- tion is always already femaled. Ultimately, then, the sexual and social contracts share a narrative scheme of domination: namely, assuming that domination is a tendency of social organization functions as their shared storyline. Wittig, on the other hand, does not recognize any pre-contractual reality—that is, any pre-linguistic reality—except one retroactively constituted by the straight mind itself. For his part, Mills, like Wittig, does recognize the emancipatory potential of the genre of contract, positing that racial domination is neither inherent to it nor to liberalism. The racial contract's infra- structure can in fact be counteracted by a "Black radical liberal" standpoint that would "officially admit races as social existents." This approach exposes the conditions upholding the contract of domina- tion—the master's house of inequality, unfreedom, classism, racism, and sexism—rendering the contract responsive to Black histories and experiences, prioritizing racial and economic justice, moral equality, and shared citizenship.[73]

Mills and Wittig's perspectives on the contract genre thus share an understanding of race and sex/gender as contingent schemas that engender an exclusionary genre of the human. Where they differ is on the question of the remedy, so to speak. Mills calls for the recognition that the social contract itself has historically been racialized, and for the full inclusion of all racial identities (admitting races as "social exis- tents"). This move would, in his view, rectify the injustices that have been institutionalized by the contract of domination. Nevertheless, the question remains whether race, a modern category devised to justify violence and exploitation, can be fully "redeemed" by a reorganized contract structured around the promise of full inclusion.

To close this section, I want to emphasize that, despite their differing conclusions, Pateman and Mills's contract genres begin with the premise of domination as interpretive frame and schema. Their objective is to unveil the sexual, racialized, and classed underpinnings of the contract, thereby demonstrating that the notion of universal freedom and equality is, indeed, a fiction. Wittig, in contrast, begins with the premise of universal freedom, or freedom as origin story. Her appeal is not for inclusion and reform, however radical they might be, but for an upheaval capable of (re)activating the foundational freedom of the social contract: "Society was not made once and for all," she declares; the contract "will yield to our action, to our words."[74]

MAKE AN EFFORT TO REMEMBER. OR, FAILING THAT, INVENT

In the previous section, I indicated that the heterosexual deployment of the contract genre stages an origin story that retrospectively natu- ralizes oppression. The power of Wittig's lesbian-feminist contract genre lies in accenting freedom as an origin story, as opposed to a foundational contract of domination. In this way, the genre-bending form of the social contract is reclaimed and its content gender-bent to envision, as Zerilli writes, a "form of human political association that has no reality under 'the category of sex'" and that remains unspoken in the heterosexual contract genre.[75] As important as Wittig's theoret- ical framework is, it does not yet do the work of reclaiming linguistic sovereignty and envisioning alternative social arrangements or, at least, alternative origin stories. For this, we must return to what I term her contract trilogy.

It bears emphasizing that I am not using "trilogy" as a descriptive term to refer to three discrete texts. Rather, I use it to denote a project that narrates not different theories of contract, but three expressions of a single one. In other words, I show that the texture of a lesbian-femi- nist social contract emerges fully when Les guérillères, The Lesbian Body, and Lesbian Peoples are read together. Furthermore, I do not approach these texts as, say, parts 1, 2, and 3 of a "straight" narrative. Instead, in the spirit of Wittig's recurring **O** and the non-linear temporality of Les guérillères, the contract I concoct from these texts jumps and proj- ects back and forth: these books are interwoven "drafts" that obliquely layer, add to, and reference each other. The lacunae that exist not only facilitate such a reconstructive reading: they invite it. Indeed, Wittig not only acknowledges these gaps, but allots them positive value, for they fire one's imagination: as we read under the entry for History in Lesbian Peoples, "many companion lovers think that this interpretation of the past […] is plausible […]. Others say that this is impossible to know because there are too many gaps in our history."[76] In Lesbian Peoples, under the entry for "Amazons," Wittig and Zeig write: "In the beginning, if there ever was such a time, all the companion lovers called themselves amazons."[77] This phrase evokes both

certainty ("in the beginning") and doubt ("if there ever was such a time"). In Les guérillères, Wittig inquires in the same vein, "what was the beginning?" and presents two distinct origin stories. In the first story, which echoes the oppressive dynamics of Pateman's sexual contract, Wittig writes: "They say that in the beginning they are huddled against each other […]. They open their mouths to bleat or to say something but no sound emerges […]."[78] Pages later, we encounter another version of begin- ning, this time emphasizing the creative-emancipatory dimension of contract: There was a time when you were not a slave, remember that. You walked alone, full of laughter, you bathed bare-bellied […]. You say you have lost all recollection of it, remember […]. You say there are no words to describe this time, you say it does not exist. But remember. Make an effort to remember. Or, failing that, invent.[79]

The theme of beginning reappears in The Lesbian Body, this time suggesting an original "misery" (that has been left behind). Embarking on a journey to an island territory, I/I (j/e) exclaims: "farewell black continent of misery and suffering farewell ancient cities we are embarking for the brilliant radiant islands for the green Cytheras for the dark and gilded Lesbos."[80]

These layered storytellings and competing representations of origin do different political work, pointing to the opposing ontolog- ical, epistemological, and political origin stories of the social and the heterosexual contracts. In Les guérillères, the first story about begin- ning ("no sound emerges," "huddled against each other") signals the straight mind's mastery over language, subjectivity, and agency—"the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you."[81] But, when read with Lesbian Peoples as a companion, we realize that the second story of beginning recounts an even earlier era: the Golden Age, a time of freedom when all were equal and free and language belonged to all. In turn, the passage in The Lesbian Body, read against the background of both Les guérillères and Lesbian Peoples, suggests a threshold between, or a transition from the heterosexual contract (fare- well to misery) to a renewed one that, it is hoped, will uphold the prin- ciples of the origin, the social contract, the gilded Lesbos. And so, what was the beginning, if there was ever such a time?

In "History" and "Language," Wittig and Zeig's contract is eluci- dated in a manner reminiscent of Rousseau's Second Discourse.[82] They refer, albeit obliquely, to what I take as an enigmatic transition from the social contract to the heterosexual one, to its overthrow, and to the reinstitution of freedom. We learn, for example, that during the long- gone, but still remembered, Golden Age, nomadic amazons populated the earth. Amazons, of course, were not women; this neologism would be invented much later. Unlike Rousseau's pre-political "savage man" who solitarily wandered the world, occasionally mating, amazons are said to have inhabited political communities. They organized them- selves in tribes, voluntary associations founded on the principles of the original contract. Their language, according to a legend, "was capable of creating life or 'striking death'"—an apt textual image of

linguistic co-sovereignty and Wittig's linguistic materialism. We are told that this language, plastic and flexible, "was not composed of 'sentences' with a construction and syntax as rigid, rigorous, repressive as those we know."[83]

In time, some amazons decided to settle down and, for a while, all was well. But these sedentary amazons began to idealize their reproductive functions, "struck with wonder at one of their physio- logical processes." (We are told that they reproduced through their ears). Abandoning exercise in favor of their reproductive hobby, these city-dwellers lost their strength and powerful language.[84] Instead, they developed an "obsessional and tyrannical" language that intro- duced the "'sacred' into the meaning"—amazons called it the "slow language."[85] In a notable shift in their collective storytelling, they created a new designation for themselves, "mothers," and referred to the nomadic amazons as "those-who-do-not-assume-their-destiny."[86] Mothers eventually fused into an "anonymous collective conscious- ness," their communities "no longer [comprised of] separate, free, complete individuals."[87]

With this, and in what may be regarded as the genesis of a rela- tively exclusionary voluntary association grounded in a reproductive function-turned-identity, mothers constituted amazons as their other. Note that this shift did not result in linguistic dispossession, nor in a war of all (mothers) against all (amazons); instead, it gave rise to a kind of agonistic suspicion. And if mothers bestowed upon themselves a reductive appellation tied to the deification of their childbearing capacities, bringing about "the procession of pregnant goddesses that history has since known," their subjectivity as self-willed remained untainted by the mark of gender.[88]

The contract genre as deployed in these passages from Lesbian Peoples is characterized by three elements. First, the state of nature, a heuristic strategy central to contract theory, is conspicuously absent. There is no allusion to humans as a pre-political, mostly asocial, gendered species. Second, the creative-emancipatory and linguistic dimensions of the contract genre are textually represented as practices of linguistic freedom. And third, the underlying political imaginary and world-making all but elide the gendered narrative schemas that would be introduced by the straight mind's politics of language. For instance, we have a noticeable absence of androcentric language and references to "men." As I mentioned in the outline of Les guérillères, this strategy of erasure appears there too—recall that the first two-thirds of that book make no use of the masculine pronoun ils. Even so, the mothers' self-willed renunciation of their being-for- itself to the being of the child, as well as the designation of amazons as their other, does create a fissure within the narrative through which binarism insinuates itself. We are left to speculate on what happened during what Wittig and Zeig refer to as the chaotic Iron or Dark Ages, when a mysterious and unspecified "enemy" emerges who designates mothers and (most?) amazons as "those who belong to another."[89] How exactly this transition came to be is not described, a move

that I think further emphasizes the decentering of oppression, or at the very least underscores the contingency and limited temporality of the heterosexual contract genre. But perhaps this omission is meant to emphasize that the enemy is, in effect, a mode of thinking, speaking, and imagining—the straight mind.

However, in Les guérillères we do get an inkling of what this transition might have involved. The focus is on the material and meaning-making effects of linguistic practices. If the language in/ of the social contract was originally conceived and experienced as a commons, it is now reframed as an expression of private property. This reframing simultaneously centers oppression and shifts the origin story by projecting back, onto an imaginary past, a state of nature and the production of the heterosexual contract:

He writes of his right to bestow names that it goes so far back that the origin of language itself may be considered as an act of author- ity emanating from those who dominate. [Thus] he has said, this is such or such a thing, he has attached a particular word to an object or a fact and thereby consider himself to have appropriated it […].[90]

"He" works here as a metonym for the specific linguistic practices associated with the emergence of heterosexual genre: those gender-marked and displaced speak a language no longer theirs. "They [elles] say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what man has appropriated," namely, subjectivity. It is "made up of words that are killing you."[91] Notice the parallel between this account and Rousseau's portrayal of property as the origin of inequality. In Rousseau too, ownership is established through a performative injunc- tion: someone says that "this" (nature, object, body, knowledge) is "mine," therefore it is his. Quipping on Locke's famous argument, we can say that "the labor" of his meaning-making androcentric utterance gives him property rights to concepts, subjectivity, and universality.

It is important to note that, unlike the subjugated women of tradi- tional contract theory, elles express awareness of the straight mind's tricks, and indeed of the politics of contract itself. For example, when assessing the current apprehension of corporeality, they note: "oddly enough, what they [ils] have exalted in their words as an essential differ- ence is a biological variation." They also say that differences of sex and color have been foolishly turned into markers to "signify inferiority, their own right to domination and appropriation."[92] And they recall the enemy's acts of violence: "they [elles] tell how they were burned on pyres to prevent them from assembling in the future."[93] And yet, these words do not provoke the reader to linger in their experiences of domi- nation. Instead, they are eclipsed by displays of potency and violence: "They speak together of the threat they have constituted towards authority," and "the time approaches when you can cry, erect, filled with ardor and courage, Paradise exists in the shadow of the Sword."[94] These declarations suggest that the rhetoric of the straight mind does not entirely eradicate the freedom-affirming premises and promises of the social

contract; it only dislocates, suppresses, and defers them.

Further evoking the emancipatory edge of the contract genre, in Lesbian Peoples we are told that although "Amazonism" was no longer a "mass phenomenon," a group of amazons refused to accept defeat.[95] Calling themselves "Lesbian Nation," they concealed their subver- sive activities and orchestrated sporadic attacks. It can furthermore be speculated that at some point in the story a coalition with mothers was consolidated: despite their defeat, they persisted in commemorating Bacche, a "goddess of Amazonian features" who, over time "called [them] to arms."[96] Whichever narrative thread we follow, if the battle against the enemy is to be waged, it must be fought within the territory of (andro- centric) language:

Whatever they [ils] have not laid hands on […] does not appear in the language you speak. This is apparent precisely in the intervals that your masters have not been able to fill with their words of proprietors and possessors, [and it is] found in the gaps, in all that which is not a continuation of their discourse, in the zero, the **O**, the perfect circle that you invent to imprison them and to over- throw them.[97]

If language as materiality can be shaped and transformed from within, it is thanks to the permeable thresholds, in-betweens, and unfilled gaps in the field of meaning that language itself provides. Emancipatory tactics of interruption such as infiltrating and overthrowing syntax propel alternative significations, enactments of co-sovereign subjectiv- ities and, ultimately, genres of the human.[98]

For example, towards the end of the war in Les guérillères, one becomes aware that elles are not a homogeneous warrior collective but rather, as Susan Lanser asserts, an "infinitely expandable" community comprising all those who joined the fight to overthrow the straight mind.[99] Victorious, the guérillères, which have now, we can say, become "lesbian peoples," initiate a collective process of linguistic transfor- mation. As noted in the outline of the text, they initially lack suitable linguistic resources, so they employ the feminine-as-neuter, subver- sively mimicking androcentrism and placing it on its head. As the plot progresses, language is meticulously "examined, modified, turned upside down."[100] Finally, the tenuous ties that bound them to the old culture are severed: "They say that any symbol that exalts the frag- mented body must disappear […]. They, with bodies whole integral sovereign, advance marching together into another world."[101]

Allusions to sovereignty, individual and collective, are a recur- ring theme throughout the trilogy, challenging two trends in feminist political theory: the Arendtian-inspired articulation of non-sovereign freedom and the fetishization of vulnerability. Against this, we have unapologetic assertions of pride, force, and aggression. Consider the previous image of recuperating the unfragmented, "whole inte- gral sovereign" body, brought "violently to life,"[102] or the amazonian language that has the power to move mountains and "strike death." These examples show that, as Balfour proposes in relation to Toni

Morrison, sovereignty can be reimagined as a form of "linguistic authority" and redefined as an aspiration "to make the connection between storytelling and freer forms of self-definition and collective life irresistible."[103]

Let me elaborate. In the Lesbian Body, the slashed I/I (j/e) represents the re-entry into language, the recuperation of the authority of the speaking subject, and the re-turning to the narration of freedom as origin story. Centrally, Wittig portrays a subjectivity, a new mode or genre of the human, that is so potent that it can lesbianize, ungender and unsex, "the symbols, […] the gods and the goddesses, […] the men and the women."[104] In this vein, I/I evinces a longing for the disman- tling of the binary worldview. "May you lose the sense of morning and evening of the stupid duality with all that flows therefrom. May you conceive yourself as I/I at last see you over the greatest possible space."[105]

Wittig continues with the theme of sovereignty, I/I am seated in the highest of the heavens in the starry circle where dwells Sappho of the violet cheeks […], I/I am the sover- eign one, I/I thunder with m/y three voices […], but I/I imme- diately relinquish m/y indubitably hierarchical position at your arrival, I/I raise you from your kneeling posture, I/I tear your mouth from m/y knees, possessed by a lively fever I/I cast m/ yself at your feet from which m/y tongue licks the dust […].[106]

In the lesbian polity there is no hierarchy and no self/other opposi- tion. Instead, there are intersubjective encounters between co-sover- eign and desiring, ravenous, and loving subjects—I/I am the sover- eign one, I then lick the dust and raise you up, and so on. I/I and you are interchangeable, sovereignty reciprocal.[107] The generative aspect of genre is introduced again through this relation between I/I and you: it, I/I suggests, provides written life to a new genre, and politics, of the human.

Lesbian bodies live now as "companion lovers." These voluntary associations comprise "those who, violently desiring each other, live/ love in peoples."[108] In the newly reached Glorious Age, companion lovers convene in assemblies to do language-work: they read and (re)write dictionaries and collectively determine, general will-like, which words to keep and which to discard to forestall the solidifica- tion of meaning.[109] This political practice is markedly different from the way sex was constructed, retroactively ontologized, and reified in the gendered linguistic practices of the heterosexual contract. Instead, they portray a contract founded on "a mode of interacting with others […] whose sole principle is freedom."[110]

The Glorious Age of lesbian peoples (note the plural, peoples), importantly, is not a mimesis of the amazonian Golden Age. This turning to elsewhere—in lieu of a return of the same—is evoked in the lines that encase Les guérillères: ALL ACTION (geste) IS OVERTHROW (renversement) and ACTION OVERTHROW (geste renversement).[111] Geste and renversement are polysemic terms. Geste

denotes an expressive movement of the body (a gesture), action, an epic poem; renversement invokes a return, a regime collapse, reversal, upheaval, disorder.[112] By deploying the contract genre as a "poetic instrument," my reading of the epic trilogy gestures towards the desire for renversement and the (re)attainment of the experience of freedom.[113] If, as Torrey Shanks suggests, conventional contractarianism is "indifferent or even hostile to the creative dimensions of language and imagination," then what I have proposed as Wittig's contract genre is precisely one that fore- grounds the creativity and flexibility of language and the generative— genreing—politics of re-narration.[114] If there is a unifying thread that runs through the temporality of Wittig's social contract, this is it: freedom as origin story. As if illus- trating that renversement does not signify the reiteration of the origin, but re-generating, companion lovers compose a consciously self-insti- tuted origin narrative: their Book of Genesis (in the beginning, indeed, was the word). And so, Wittig and Zeig write "They rested for some time to see what they had done and what world they had created. They saw that it was beautiful to look at, pleasant to live in, and they rejoiced."[115]

"A KIND OF IMPOSSIBILITY, BUT NOT REALLY…"

In this article, I examined the interplay between contract and genre and, through Wittig's work, proposed a novel approach to the rela- tionship between theory and fiction, illuminating the emancipatory possibilities of genre-bending.[116] With Wynter, I showed that genres are not merely a conduit for interpretation and reading practices; they also serve to engender a world through origin narratives and their concom- itant genre-specific subjects. In this vein, I put forth the argument that the narrative arcs of Wittig's (and Zeig's) contract trilogy provide an articulation of a feminist genre of contract. What are the stakes of these arguments for political theory?

First, the genre of contract as captured in the trilogy incarnates a Wynterian insight: the origin stories we create—and the social contract genre is one such story—can be purposefully and deliberately, as opposed to opaquely, unmade and remade. This is a crucial under- taking, since, as Wynter asserts, representations of origins denote "the shared storytelling origin out of which we are initiatedly reborn […]."[117] What I propose is that Wittig's experimental reimagining of the social contract reclaims and repurposes it, historicizing the hegemony of the straight mind, collapsing genres of contract that foreground Man as the human, and providing an alternative to contract critiques that under- score domination as narrative schema and oppression as beginning. It also shows that while canonical contract renditions work within the genre of contract, they are neither the genre nor do they exhaust its possibilities.

Second, regarding fiction and political theory, reorienting the genre of contract towards what Wynter calls the counter-novel or minority discourse

has the prefigurative potential to both hasten the conceptual erasure of the figure of Man, and to envisage alternative genres of the human in a way that "straight" theory, Pateman's and Mills's included, cannot do.[118] Interlacing the theoretical and the fictional, as Wittig does, allows for freeing language and creating subjectivities no longer sequestered by the hegemony of androcentric linguistic practices. If the worlds we desire are in many ways still unreal—we call them femi- nist futures—the creative edge of political theory lies precisely in envi- sioning plural and emancipatory ways to define ourselves, to create and rescue counter-histories, counter-meanings, and counter-politics, and to prefigure new ways of being human.

Also, at stake is an approach to language in which words and material conditions are co-constitutive, as well as a vision of it as a disputed territory and site of feminist struggle. Linguistic materialism underscores the potency of language in shaping our perception and interpretation of the world, of ourselves, and of others. As Anna Livia asserts, linguistic practices inform our ways of seeing and prompt us to "align" with the language we use.[119] If we absorb and embody language and put it into practice, most likely according to still-ubiqui- tous androcentric strictures and structures, we also have the power to act upon it to shape it differently. Feminist movements, for example, have indeed used language as a political strategy and a "blueprint for social change."[120] Concepts such as femicidio (femicide) and trans- femicidio (transfemicide) reframe the signification, perception, and interpretation of murderous violence, rendering it thoroughly polit- ical. The reconceptualization of rape and other forms of sexualized violence as expressive acts of heteropatriarchal power also affects the self-understanding of lived experiences of violence and resistance. And the increasing uptake of alternative pronomial and epicene gram- mars, which Wittig prefigured, is gradually facilitating a post-binary reframing of accepted and legitimately employed linguistic practices.[121] Finally, Wittig invites us to take political theory's familiar terms and subvert and reframe them for feminist purposes, "doing things to the language we already have."[122] Instead of discarding the genre of contract, one can unpack, reexamine, and reconstruct its political work, foundations, and commitments. My reading shows that oppres- sion need not be regarded as the contract's perennial substratum, but rather as its very betrayal. By narrating the genre of contract otherwise, its emancipatory potential is revealed: what was "in the beginning," if there was ever such a time, is also there, in the end—freedom.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to Roy Ben-Shai for reading (too many) versions of this essay and for his excellent and always helpful feedback. I would also like to thank Daniele Hanley and Lilly Goren for their excellent comments and suggestions on earlier drafts. Finally, I would like to thank the editors of

Theory & Event and the anonymous reviewer for their incisive, thorough, and valuable feedback.

NOTES

1. Anne Garréta, "Wittig, la langue-le-politique," in Benoît Auclerc and Yannick Chevalier, eds., Lire Monique Wittig aujourd'hui (Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2012): 25–26.
2. Robyn Marasco, "Terms and Conditions: On Carole Pateman's The Sexual Contract," History of the Present 3, no. 2 (2013): 207.
3. Monique Wittig, The Straight Mind and Other Essays (Beacon Press, 1992); Le Chantier littéraire (Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 2010); La pensée straight (Éditions Amsterdam, 2001). Translations of Le Chantier and La pensée straight are mine, unless specified.
4. Monique Wittig, Les guérillères, trans. David Le Vay (University of Illinois Press, 2007); Les guérillères (Les éditions des minuit, 1969); The Lesbian Body, trans. David Le Vay (Beacon Press, 1986); Wittig and Sande Zeig, Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes (Grasset, 1976/2011. Google Play ebook); Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary (Avon, 1979).
5. In her reading of Les guérillères, Linda Zerilli argues that the novel's achievement in "is not to demonstrate (with concepts or arguments) but to lead before the eyes (with images and metaphors) the radical reformulation of the heterosexual social contract." Nevertheless, she continues, Wittig's story does not resemble contract narratives: there is no solitary individual who joins political society because he fears death or needs to protect their property and freedom. There is "no pact to be signed, which would then authorize someone or some agency to act on its signers' (or their posterity's) behalf—only horizontally structured practices of social interaction." She asks, is Les guérillères a retelling of the social contract or a "poetic account of liberation?" The answer, for her, is contingent on one's definition of founding. I take her reading as an invitation to propose an alternative account that takes the contract in a new direction. Linda Zerilli, Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom (University of Chicago Press, 2005): 70, 82, 81.
6. In addition to contributing to democratic, race, and feminist scholarship on the social contract, this article also adds to two bodies of literature: firstly, to multidisciplinary scholarship on Wittig, which, with the notable exception of Zerilli, is markedly short of political theorists. Secondly, my reading of contract-as-genre contributes to the effort to expand the archive of feminist political theory to include a variety of textual and non-textual genres as fertile interpretive grounds. On contract, see Robyn Marasco, "Terms and Conditions;" Moira Gatens, Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality (Routledge, 1996); Charles Mills, The Racial Contract (Cornell University Press, 1997); Carole Pateman, The Sexual Contract (Polity, 1988); Pateman and Mills, Contract and Domination (Polity, 2007); Torrey Shanks, "Affect, Critique, and the Social Contract," Theory & Event 18, no.

1 (2015). On recent work on Wittig, see Yale French Studies (142 [2023]) edited by Morgane Cadieu and Annabel Kim; M. M. Adjarian, "Monique Wittig and the Allegory of the Possible in Across the Acheron," Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies 39, no. 3 (2018): 96–117; Émilie Notéris, Wittig (Les Pérégrines, 2022); Blase A. Provitola, "TERF or Transfeminist Avant la Lettre?: Monique Wittig's Complex Legacy in Trans Studies," TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly 9, no. 3 (2022): 387–406. On Wittig and political theory, see Zerilli, Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom; "Rememoration or War? French Feminist Narrative and the Politics of Self-Representation," differences 3, no. 1 (1991): 1–19; "The Trojan Horse of Universalism: Language as a 'War Machine' in the Writings of Monique Wittig," Social Text 25/26 (1990): 146–170; and Kevin Henderson, "Becoming Lesbian: Monique Wittig's Queer-Trans-Feminism," Journal of Lesbian Studies 22, no. 2 (2018): 185–203. On genre, see Lori Marso, "Camerawork as Motherwork," Theory & Event 24, no. 3 (2021): 730–757; Ani Chen, "The Poetics of Failure in Simone de Beauvoir's Les bouches inutiles," Contemporary Political Theory 22 (2023): 506–528; Danielle Hanley, "Choreographing Affective Solidarity: The Choral Politics of Responding to Loss," Theory & Event 25, no. 4 (2022): 873–899, among others.

7. Elisabeth R. Anker, Orgies of Feeling: Melodrama and the Politics of Freedom (Duke University Press, 2014): 20.
8. "Genre-switching" involves moving between genres, thereby enabling them to be (re) considered in new contexts and interpreted in new ways, beyond the confines of main- stream genre-specific arguments. Bonnie Honig, Antigone, Interrupted (Cambridge University Press, 2013): 80–81."Genre" is etymologically tied to begetting and birthing.
9. Sylvia Wynter, "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, Its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-)Cognition," in Jason R. Ambroise and Sabine Broeck, eds., Black Knowledges/Black Struggles: Essays in Critical Epistemology, (Liverpool University Press, 2015): 199, 213, 226, 272; Wynter and Katherine McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for our Species?", in McKittrick, ed., Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis (Duke University Press, 2015): 24, 33–34, 45; Greg Thomas, "PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter," PROUD FLESH: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics and Consciousness 4 (2006): 24.
10. Wynter, "Un-Settling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Toward the Human, After Man, Its Over-Representation," CR: The New Centennial Review 3:3 (2003): 328–329. For Wynter, colonial Western storytellings pushed away the colo- nized, the racialized, and the poor from its genre-of-the-human, positing instead Western, overrepresented, ethnoclassed Man as the genre of the human.
11. A fact that is more evident in Romance languages, where genre and gender are denoted by the same word—genre, género, gênero, etc. Wynter and McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe of Our Species?", 33.

12. Charles Mills, “Rousseau, the Master’s Tools, and Anti-Contractarian Contractarianism,” The CLR James Journal 15, no. 1 (2009).
13. Wittig, Les guérillères, 128.
14. Wittig said that pronouns were the subject of her first three novels: L’Opoponax (1964, awarded the Prix Médicis), Les guérillères, and The Lesbian Body. Teresa de Lauretis called them a pronomial trilogy, inspiring the title of my text. de Lauretis, “When Lesbians Were Not Women,” in Namaskar Shaktini, ed., On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays (University of Illinois Press, 2005).
15. Elles, Zerilli writes, is a fantastic universal standing for what is currently unreal. Zerilli, Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom, 70, 87, 89–90.
16. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 85.
17. Wittig, Le Chantier littéraire, 144; The Straight Mind, 85.
18. Wittig, “Some Remarks on Les guérillères,” in On Monique Wittig: Theoretical, Political, and Literary Essays, 37–38; The Straight Mind, 56, 79–80.
19. The cover of the translation, featuring a slender young woman clad in a sexy mili- tary uniform seductively holding an assault rifle with her long hair blowing in the wind, certainly does not help. Wittig mentioned that in the event of a new transla- tion the masculine “must be more systematically particularized […]. The masculine must not appear under they but only under man, he, his in analogy with what has been done for so long to the feminine gender.” Wittig, The Straight Mind, 87. Wittig in fact corrected the translation, but her version was not accepted. For example: “~~The women~~ [They] say, you are really a slave if there ever was one. ~~Men have~~ [Man has] made what differentiates ~~them~~ [him] from you the sign of domination and possession.” Monique Wittig Papers. General Collection, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, Boxes 1 and 21. Additionally, the list of references (“samples”) at the end of the novel was omitted from the translation. In this article, I replace “the women” with “they” and, when appropriate, revise the translation according to Wittig’s corrections.
20. Wittig, “Some Remarks on Les guérillères, ” 41.
21. Wittig, Les guérillères, 14.
22. Wittig, Les guérillères, 128.
23. Wittig, Les guérillères, 72, 85.
24. Wittig described The Lesbian Body as “a reverie about [Émile Benveniste’s] beau- tiful analysis of [the] pronouns je and tu” (The Straight Mind, 87). It is composed of fragments and incorporates gender-bending reinterpretations of epics, myths, and religious stories: Achillea (“she who so loved Patroclea,”) makes an appearance, as does Christa, “the much crucified” (The Lesbian Body, 34–35). The “divine, incompa- rable Sappho” (The Lesbian Body, 57) is mentioned some 24 times.
25. Marion May Campbell, Poetic Revolutionaries. Intertextuality and

Subversion (Brill, 2014): 90–91.

26. Lynne Huffer, Foucault's Strange Eros (Columbia University Press, 2020): 190–191; Robin Okumu, "1973: Memories of a Lesbian Body—Reading Monique Wittig's Le Corps Lesbien through Deleuze and Guattari's Le Corps sans Organes," Deleuze and Guattari Studies 15, no. 1 (2021): 146.
27. Kristine J. Anderson, "Lesbianizing English: Wittig and Zeig Translate Utopia,"
28. L'Esprit Créateur 34, no. 4 (1994): 91.
29. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 43.
30. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 18–19.
31. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 1.
32. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 63–64.
33. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 99, 121, 142, 165.
34. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 165.
35. Wittig, "Paradigm," in George Stambolian and Elaine Marks, eds., Homosexualities and French Literature: Cultural Contexts, Critical Texts (Cornell University Press, 1990): 121.
36. Lisa Disch, "Christine Delphy's Constructivist Materialism: An Overlooked 'French Feminism'," South Atlantic Quarterly 114, no. 4 (2015): 830.
37. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 5–6, 11–12.
38. Zerilli, Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom, 76. Although the straight mind fore- grounds the categories of sex and heterosexuality as paradigmatic of domination, there is no suggestion that the oppression predicated on the category of sex is exclu- sive: it is the kernel of, and enmeshed with, other hierarchical logics of classification and stratification, such as the categories of race, caste, and class. These categories are effects of operations of reduction, "sophisticated and mythic construction[s]" that "reinterpret physical features […] through the network of relationships in which they are perceived." Wittig, The Straight Mind, 8, 11–12. Abolishing the category of sex, for Wittig, would mean doing away with the straight mind as a narrative schema that generates meaning through hierarchical splittings, not only those pertaining to sex. Wittig and some decolonial feminists share this vision. Wittig would agree with Rita Segato's argument that "the question of gender—the patriarchal order—is the cornerstone and center of gravity of all forms of power." Segato, "A Manifesto in Four Themes," trans. Ramsey McGlazer, Critical Times 1, no. 1 (April 1, 2018): 198. On race in Wittig, see Alexandra Bourse, "La Pensée straight, Le Corps lesbien et la 'mestiza consciousness': pour une mise en relation du féminisme lesbien chez Monique Wittig et Gloria Anzaldúa," in Lire Monique Wittig aujourd'hui; Alyosxa Tudor, "Im/Possibilities of Refusing and Choosing Gender," Feminist Theory 20, no. 4 (2019): 361–80.
39. See Teresa de Lauretis, "When Lesbians Were Not Women."
40. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 46–47. Just as "elles," "lesbians" potentially

includes all those who reject the naturalness of the category of sex and resist its current oppres- sive significations. Julia Balén, "The Straight Mind at Work at the Heart of Queer Theory: Excavating Wittig's Radical Lesbian Materialism from Misappropriation," TRIVIA: Voices of Feminism, Summer 2014. Available at: https://www.triviavoices. com/the-straight-mind-at-work-at-the-heart-of-queer-theory.html (Accessed June 18, 2024).

41. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 32. Following Beauvoir, "woman" is rendered a myth and an imaginary formation (a specifically "straight" genre), rather than a situated reality.
42. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 15–16. Along a similar line, Wittig declares that an initial strategic objective—the final one is abolishing the category of sex and gender in language—is to distinguish between women ("the class within which we fight") and woman (la-femme), the myth.
43. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 32.
44. Wittig, La pensée straight, 64.
45. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 20.
46. Wittig asserts that "important literary works" are war machines, like the famed Trojan Horse. They destroy "old forms and conventions." The introduction of new linguistic practices occurs "in hostile territory," but, ultimately, the war machine is welcomed and "blasts out the ground where it was planted." Wittig, The Straight Mind, 68–69.
47. Pateman and Mills, Contract and Domination (Polity, 2007).
48. Pateman, The Sexual Contract, 6, 11, 118, 233.
49. Racialization (like sex-gendering) is one-sided: only some populations are racial- ized; those deemed "white" are not. Mills, The Racial Contract, 12–13.
50. Mills, The Racial Contract, 13. In Contract and Domination, Mills and Pateman conclude that the sexual and racial contracts are one: a compounded contract of domination.
51. Mills suggests that the Second Discourse and The Social Contract articulate two normatively distinct contracts: a non-ideal class contract (the former), which he calls the contract of domination, and an ideal social contract (the latter), which could be thought of as the contract of equality. Mills, "Rousseau," 94–95.
52. Mills, "Rousseau," 92–94; Mills, Black Rights/White Wrongs: The Critique of Racial Liberalism (Oxford University Press, 2017): xvi–xvii.
53. Pateman mentions that the story of the sexual contract is also about heteronorma- tivity, although she does not expand on this idea. The Sexual Contract, 16–17.
54. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 38.
55. Wittig, La pensée straight, 83.
56. Wittig, La pensée straight, 5; Wittig, The Straight Mind, 40.
57. Wittig quoted in Kim, Unbecoming Language, (Ohio University Press,

2018): 95;

58. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 93.
59. Émile Benveniste, Problems in General Linguistics (University of Miami Press, 1971): 217–218, 226. For Benveniste "discourse" is always already intersubjective: it refers to language as it is put into practice between partners (223).
60. Wittig, Le Chantier littéraire, 138; Wittig, The Straight Mind, 95.
61. Lawrie Balfour, Toni Morrison: Imagining Freedom (Oxford University Press, 2023):
62. 56.
63. Wittig, Le Chantier littéraire, 61.
64. Wittig, The Straight Mind, xvii, 60.
65. Wittig, Le Chantier littéraire, 138-139; Wittig, The Straight Mind, 81.
66. Szymanski, J. A. "(Re)Reading Monique Wittig: Domination, Utopia, and Polysemy." Hypatia 38, no. 3 (2023): 549–71.
67. Wittig, Le Chantier littéraire, 40, 45–46, 132
68. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 43–44; Wittig, Le Chantier littéraire, 139–140.
69. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 41.
70. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 8.
71. Wynter and McKittrick, "Unparalleled Catastrophe for our Species?", 34
72. Wittig, Le Chantier littéraire, 139; Wittig, The Straight Mind, 88–89.
73. Wittig, Le Chantier littéraire, 138–139; Wittig, The Straight Mind, 81.
74. Marasco, "Terms and Conditions," 206.
75. Black Rights/White Wrongs, xvi-xvii, 7, 203, 214; Mills, "Rousseau," 92–98.
76. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 38.
77. Zerilli, 70.
78. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 79.
79. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 5.
80. Wittig, Les guérillères, 30.
81. Wittig, Les guérillères, 88–89.
82. Wittig,The Lesbian Body, 26.
83. Wittig, Les guérillères, 114.
84. On this point, see Garréta's preface to Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes.
85. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 94. Perhaps "at first, only poetry was spoken"? Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Two Essays on the Origin of Language. John H. Moran and Alexander Gode, eds. (University of Chicago Press, 1986): 12.
86. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 74–75.
87. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 78.
88. Wittig and Zeig, Brouillon, 15.

89. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 75–76.
90. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 75.
91. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 78.
92. Wittig, Les guérillères, 114.
93. Wittig, Les guérillères, 114.
94. Wittig, Les guérillères, 102–103.
95. Wittig, Les guérillères, 89.
96. Wittig, Les guérillères, 89; 110–111.
97. Wittig and Zeig, Brouillon, 36.
98. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 15, 94.
99. Wittig, Les guérillères, 114.
100. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 30; Luce Irigaray, Speculum of the Other Woman. (Cornell University Press, 1985), 142.
101. Susan Lanser, Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice (Cornell University Press, 1992), 228. They, for example, "wish the survivors [aux survivantes et aux survivants] love strength youth so that they may form a lasting alliance that no future dispute can compromise" (Wittig, Les guérillères, 128).
102. Wittig, Les guérillères, 134.
103. Modified with Wittig's corrections. Wittig Papers, Box 24. The published transla- tion reads "They, the integrity of the body their first principle, advance marching together into another world" (Wittig, Les guérillères, 72).
104. Wittig's Preface to The Lesbian Body, 10.
105. Balfour, Toni Morrison, 30, 28.
106. Wittig, The Straight Mind, 87.
107. Wittig, The Lesbian Body, 145.
108. Wittig, The Lesbian Body, 145.
109. Wittig, "Some Remarks on Le corps lesbien," in On Monique Wittig, 47.
110. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 35. Companion lovers are "not women, and certainly not women who love women." Garréta, "Préface," 2.
111. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 18–19, 166.
112. Zerilli, Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom, 81, 84.
113. "ELLES AFFIRMENT TRIOMPHANT QUE TOUT GESTE EST RENVERSEMENT."
114. Le Robert dictionary. Available at: https://www.lerobert.com. Garréta observes that "to reverse [renverser] does not mean to invert [inverser]," just as "to invert is not enough to overthrow [renversement]." In "Wittig, la langue-le-politique," 28. And Zerilli argues that renversement is "not a return to the pure origin or principle of beginning." Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom, 84.
115. Marasco, "Terms and Conditions," 207.

116. Shanks, “Affect, Critique, and the Social Contract,” 8
117. Wittig and Zeig, Lesbian Peoples, 52.
118. The title of the conclusion borrows Wittig’s description of The Lesbian Body: “a kind of joke but not really, a kind of impossibility but not really.” “Some Remarks on The Lesbian Body,” 46.
119. Wynter and McKittrick, “Unparalleled Catastrophe for our Species?”, 34.
120. Wynter, “On Disenchanting Discourse: ‘Minority’ Literary Criticism and Beyond,” Cultural Critique 7 (1987): 209.
121. Anna Livia, Pronoun Envy: Literary Uses of Linguistic Gender (Oxford University Press, 2001), 95. Livia, Pronoun Envy, 95.
122. To give but two examples, in Spanish there is a growing use of third person singular and plural neo-pronouns: elle (epicene third person singular) and elles (epicene third person plural), substituting for ella/ellas (she/they) and the, allegedly gender neutral, él/ellos (he/they). In French, there is also a growing uptake of neo-pro- nouns which conjoin the feminine and the masculine, iel (she/he), for example, and an interesting project for post-binary typographies, “Bye Bye Binary,” at http:// genderfluid.space (accessed October 10, 2024).
123. Kim, Unbecoming Language, 111.