

*Dear Catalina,*

Summer has ended, and so has the exhibition *Le jour des esprits est notre nuit*.<sup>[1]</sup> It was then that we began a conversation around divination. You told me you became interested in divination as an interrogation of the invisible, inasmuch as it constitutes what you called «a means of communication with invisible, often sacred, entities—like in the Ifa religion—and works very much like diagnosis in Western medicine, except that in this case the force of the invisible and the unknown supersedes what can be seen, measured and seized». If we take divinatory healing systems for example, I would add that these interrogations displace a focus on ill bodies towards the objects that are connected with the invisible, from an interest in the individual towards an interest in the collective. In order to heal, we interrogate sand, seashells, relationships with the living and the dead, among other things, so as to make tangible and thinkable that which is hidden. Divination is practical, it's a good mediation technique, not all that far-removed from the act of creation, which we'll continue to experiment with in the upcoming exhibition.

This summer I re-read *Les Guérillères* by Monique Wittig. As you know, Wittig—who was born in 1935 in a town just a few kilometres from CRAC Alsace and passed away in 2003 in Tucson, Arizona—is part of the political and affective territory of the art centre, so much so that we set out to read the entirety of her work two years ago, to see how it would affect our programmes. In this way, in the spring of 2018, the exhibition *IL PLEUT, TULIPE* brought together artists who focus on «minor» beings—rain, plants, animals, images or signs which interact as subjectivities within the world—, artists haunted by potentialities whose voices are unheard or minoritised, with which they converse or join forces. Monique Wittig's voice emerged one Sunday afternoon during a collective reading of *The Straight Mind*<sup>[2]</sup> in Altkirch, her voice embodied by twenty or so people who, one by one, read the texts gathered in this volume and discovered Wittig's thought on their own, her critique of a supposedly natural heterosexuality, which is neither natural nor a given, but a political construct. If Wittig urges that we surpass the normative categories of «men, women» by putting an end to an essentialism of sexes, genders, and races, then this project is not only political but also literary at its core. Because a critique of the dominant social structure cannot be separated from a critique of the language (grammar and syntax) that upholds it.

Other readings and projects followed, books passed from hand to hand: *Lesbian Peoples: Material for a Dictionary*, *L'Opoponax*, *The Lesbian Body*, *Paris-la-politique*,... *Les Guérillères* joined the top of the pile more recently, becoming our primary reference for the upcoming exhibition. Published in 1969, Wittig starts writing the text in 1967, before May 68, in a political context ripe with decolonial struggles and women's liberation movements. Appropriating the literary canon, she

constructs a long epic poem describing a mythical and colourful march to overthrow, guerilla-style, both the patriarchy and the language upon which it's established. It's a war of pronouns: *They* appears [in French: *Elles*, third person feminine, plural], a collective entity and main character engaged in a bloody struggle against the patriarchal regime. The book is divided into three sections separated by circles, while a poem composed of a list of names cuts through the length of the narrative, every five pages. The final section is the one Wittig first wrote, the part where *They* win and where, heavily armed, *They* thrash this regime. Then «*They* say, If I take over the world, let it be to dispossess myself of it immediately, let it be to forge new links between myself and the world.»[3] The first two sections take place after the last section, in the future, one where no class shall take power over another. A future where we invent and decontaminate language. A future where we create new ontologies. The exhibition *Le couteau sans lame et dépourvu de manche* is part of this reading experience. It gathers artists whose work explores the transformative power of language in a process of de-categorisation, dis-identification of bodies and relations, and/where speculative works take place after *Les Guérillères*.

To conclude, let me share a riddle that I'd like to propose for divination: «Daniela Nervi, while digging foundations, has unearthed a painting representing a young girl. She is all flat and white lying on one side. She has no clothes. Her breasts are barely visible on her torso. One of her legs, crossed over the other, raises her thigh, so concealing the pubis and vulva. Her long hair hides part of her shoulders. She is smiling. Her eyes are closed. She half leans on one elbow. The other arm is crooked over her head, the hand holding a bunch of black grapes to her mouth. The women laugh at this. They say that Daniela Nervi has not yet dug up the knife without a blade that lacks a handle.»[4]

What buried stories will we unearth?

See you soon,

Elfi

[1] *Le jour des esprits est notre nuit*, with Meris Angioletti, Minia Biabiany, Oier Etxeberria, Tamar Guimarães & Kasper Akhøj, Sheroanawe Hakihiwe, Candice Lin, Sean Lynch, Lázara Rosell Albear & Sammy Baloji, Beatriz Santiago Muñoz, curated by Catalina Lozano & Elfi Turpin, *CRAC Alsace*, exhibition from June 13 to September 15, 2019.

[2] Monique Wittig, *The straight mind and other essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).

[3] Wittig, trans. David Le Vay. *Les Guérillères* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), 66.

[4] *Ibidem*, 14.

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