

**Sapphic Ambivalences:
Rethinking Nietzschean Contestation for Feminist Practices of Democracy**

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Abstract:

Drawing upon a set of provocations for feminism laid out by Monique Wittig, this essay proposes to press contemporary feminist interventions into debates about democratic contestation past their usual parameters. By first casting contemporary feminist efforts to displace a circular debate between universalism and difference as a genealogical inheritor of the strategies of agonistic democracy, I argue in the first part of this essay that the *kind of account* that much of feminist scholarship gives when it attempts to displace the antinomy universalism/difference shares with agonism a standpoint which links irreducibly contingent articulations to the ethical ends of democracy. While both traditions buttress this strategy with a reading of Nietzsche that prioritizes the democratic ethos of contestation, I argue for an alternative reading of Nietzsche reveals more ambivalent relations between contest and articulation. Such a reading not only problematizes the agonist/feminist arrangement of provisional subjects, articulations, and political horizons, but also sets the stage for Wittig's own efforts to confiscate the terms of politics on behalf of those marked as women. Finally, then, this paper works though Wittig to push these Nietzschean insights forward into the question of feminist displacements of the universalism/difference antinomy. Because Wittig takes seriously some of the more ambivalent elements inherent in the relations between articulation and power in Nietzsche, I argue that she seeks to expand and renew the horizons of the *kind of account* feminism might give of politics by offering a trenchant critique of the reciprocity of language, and by reorienting the task of political struggle through a rehabilitation of subjectivity. In so doing, her work serves both as an important response to the problematization of agonistic notions of articulation and as a powerful rejoinder to feminists concerned with staging a confiscation of the terms of democratic politics.

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I. Introduction

In a characteristically idiosyncratic essay entitled ‘Homo Sum’¹ first published in 1990, Monique Wittig denounces “out of exasperation” the cohort of her contemporaries she likens to “the Tweedledee and Tweedledum of Lewis Carroll.” The figures of the nursery rhyme, who continually threaten to do battle with one another over all manner of things, but whose encounter in fact never takes place – for in the end they flee the scene of their would-be battle hand in hand – stand in rhetorically for what Wittig sees as two complimentary responses to the same political dissimulation. Manifest as the concealment of domination in both classical universalist and feminist thought, the dissimulation which concerns Wittig misrepresents the categories of difference that structure political thinking as causes, not effects, of power – a dissimulation left unseen both by those who would defend a “Reason [which] has been turned into a representative of Order, Domination, Logocentrism,” but also by those who wager their “salvation” from such a Reason to be “a tremendous exaltation of what they call alterity under all of its forms.”² Displaying “symptoms of... the straight mind,” both the ‘Tweedledee’ of a universal Reason undermined by its insistence on ‘natural’ sexual difference and the ‘Tweedledum’ of a feminism which takes the spurious ‘fact’ of womanhood as the starting point of politics are, for Wittig, figures who appear politically as “representatives of the dominators.”³ That is, insofar as they fail to reveal the fact that “thought based on the primacy of difference is the thought of domination,” the would-be battle between its two representatives succeeds only in continually shoring up “the primacy of difference [which] so constitutes our thought that it prevents turning inward on itself to question itself.”⁴

The bite of Wittig's metaphor, of course, lies in the profound resonance of the problem it calls to mind for a feminism concerned to work away from what was, by 1990, a full-fledged disavowal of attempts to ally feminism to formulations of universal struggle (particularly Marxism) and, instead, towards a set of new theories about feminist standpoints, knowledges, and epistemologies premised on the 'position of women.'⁵ Yet the frustration crystallized in Wittig's reference to Tweedledee and Tweedledum – a frustration, as I argue in what follows, that yet haunts feminist political theory – points to the complementarity with which these two positions must take their forms: if 'the party of the Other' threatens to replace the 'One,' it is only because the latter reproduces the categories of difference which form a 'double parameter' of political thinking. For Wittig, it is *precisely* the categories of difference which give themselves as 'natural' starting points for opposition which, on the one hand, reveal the lie in universalist thinking, but also, crucially, which reveal the constraint on political efforts to incite a confiscation of the terms of politics by feminists.

Wittig's fundamental insight in 'Homo Sum,' as in much of her political writing, is thus that the *historical, political* and *philosophical* tasks of feminism are embedded in a historically contingent – yet remarkably resilient – discursive/material order which radically separates those marked as women from the possibility of confiscating the terms of thinking and acting politically.⁶ At the bottom of this order is the "philosophical and political abuse"⁷ of the category of sex (as well as other categories of 'difference,' more generally). Despite the fact that "Every philosopher of our modern age," as Wittig puts it, "will tell us that without these precise categories of opposition (of difference), one cannot reason or think or, even better, that outside of them meaning cannot shape itself," Wittig seeks to "send [both] representatives of the dominators away back to back, whether they come from the party of the One or the party of the

Other”⁸ by invoking the deep circularity of this problem for feminism – of persistent problematics, of curiously conjoined polarities – and by inciting a collective displacement of their repetitive possibilities in favor of new political possibilities that lie “beyond the category of sex.”⁹

If Wittig’s characterization of the political requirements of an emancipatory feminism remains provocative, as I believe it does, for contemporary feminism today – in a word, if her insistence that the *displacement* of the circularity of the so-called battle between universalism and difference is not only intellectually but politically necessary – it is because feminism remains caught between the foundational promise of a universalist account of democracy, on the one hand, and the post-foundational critiques of such an account levied by post-structural theories of social construction, constitutive difference, and the historical contingency of identities and interests, on the other. Indeed, while today most readers familiar with the contours of feminist theory agree that it has “turned itself into a virtual testing ground for democracy’s most radical ideals” by casting an unrelentingly skeptical glance at democratic orthodoxy, and in particular at the relationship between epistemological foundationalism and political practice,¹⁰ there is currently little agreement over strategies for shifting, re-conceptualizing, or moving beyond – put simply, for displacing – the political horizons held in place by the antinomy these commitments produce when put in relation to a still-lively universalism. To put a finer point on the matter, despite a widespread consensus amongst feminist theorists that the displacement of philosophy in favor of a contestatory politics is a necessary step away from the ‘foundations’ debates which roiled conversations about identity, difference, and the politics of multiculturalism in the 1990s, Wittig’s provocation to move ‘beyond the category sex’ in order to confiscate the terms of political thinking will persist unanswered as long as feminist theory remains deeply imbricated in

articulating itself as part of a staged debate between universalism and difference.¹¹ To what extent, then, we might ask with Wittig, has feminism displaced the circular battle between the ‘Tweedledee and Tweedledum’ of universalism/difference?

In raising the question of feminism’s attempts to confiscate the grounds of political thinking, I mean to press the notion of displacement past its usual parameters: that is, this essay proposes to call to attention the strategies that contemporary feminists deploy as responses not only to the question ‘*what* is being displaced?’ but also ‘*what kind of account* of displacement do we need?’ In order to raise these questions together, this essay proceeds by situating Wittig’s own intervention – her efforts to confiscate the terms of politics on behalf of those marked as women – against a broader set of debates in both contemporary feminism and a particular strand of post-foundational democratic theory. By first casting contemporary feminism as a genealogical inheritor of the strategies of agonistic democracy, I argue that the *kind of account* that much of feminist scholarship gives when it attempts to displace the antinomy universalism/difference shares important characteristics with theories of agonistic democracy – namely, that it seeks to establish a new set of relations that link individual and collective political articulations to new, democratic ethical ends – and that both traditions trace this strategy back to a reading of Nietzsche’s work that prioritizes contestation as a kind of democratic ethos. Yet the agonist debt to Nietzsche, however real, is itself only partial, for it over-determines, to a much greater extent than does Nietzsche himself, the ways in which individuals (subjects), the space in which collective political claims take place (‘the political’), and ethics (the ends of democracy) work together to displace epistemological foundationalism. To the extent that Nietzsche saw the possibilities for contest and articulation across these levels of politics far more ambivalently than the agonists would contend, the displacement that agonists and feminists seek to effect looks

more like a transition from one relatively stable episteme to another with new alibis for power – namely, the fantasy of reciprocal dialogue.

I turn next to an alternative reading of Nietzsche premised on provocations from his essay ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’ in order to problematize the agonist arrangement of provisional subjects, articulations, and political horizons, and to push these insights forward into the debate over feminist displacements through the lens of Monique Wittig. Because Wittig takes seriously some of the more ambivalent elements inherent in the relations between articulation and power in Nietzsche, I argue, finally, that she seeks to expand and renew the horizons of the *kind of account* feminism might give of its confiscation by offering a trenchant critique of the reciprocity of language under conditions of power and erasure, and by reorienting the task of political struggle through a rehabilitation of subjectivity. In so doing, her work serves both as an important response to the problematization of agonistic notions of articulation and as a powerful rejoinder to feminists concerned with staging a confiscation of the terms of democratic politics.

II. When Antinomy Becomes Paradox: Agonist and Feminist Problematics

If the recent strand of feminism with which I concern myself here is peculiarly situated in relation to the acrimonious ‘foundations’ debates of the 1990s – a strand which is concerned, to borrow a phrase from Linda Zerilli, to displace the mounting sense of circularity bound up in the worry that “the price to pay for refusing the universalizing impulse of theory is the inability to say something beyond the particular case”¹² – it is because it can neither accept the terms of the debate nor relinquish them as an animating paradox. Like Wittig’s Tweedledee and Tweedledum, feminism today seems peculiarly bound to the staging of a debate which

nonetheless appears increasingly intractable by virtue of its very circularity. Consider, for example, Michael Ferguson's recent formulation of the problem:

In somewhat different ways, feminist and democratic theorists share the view that identity claims are claims to true knowledge grounded in commonality. This view of identity has troubling political consequences. When we conceive of identity as something we can know and get right, we end up with a choice between two undesirable options: either we continue searching in the vain hope that we will succeed where others have not and discover the true essence of our identity, or we resign ourselves to the incoherence of the subject of democratic and feminist politics. Neither choice is compelling.¹³

For Ferguson, as for Zerilli, contemporary feminist questions begin *precisely* at the limits of this collapsing antinomy. To what extent, they ask, is it possible to move forward politically when one concedes, as they both feel they must, that on the one hand universalism ('knowledge grounded in commonality') marks out a failed and democratically bankrupt impulse to foundationalism, while on the other, difference ('the incoherence of the subject,' 'the inability to say something beyond the particular case') appears at best to move towards a depoliticization of individual experience? Both Zerilli and Ferguson thus seek to effect the displacement of this circular antinomy by at once recognizing the validity of both of its terms and performing a displacement which seeks to transform, albeit provisionally, the antinomy between them into an animating paradox. Yet the underlying anxiety which surrounds attempts to chart a 'third way,' to uncover an 'occluded' possibility by turning away from questions of knowledge and returning, instead, to questions about paradox and provisionality is by no means the only attempt in political theory to rethink the terms of politics in the face of a collapsing antinomy, however uncertain the task for feminism appears today. Indeed, though agonistic democracy is only one such attempt, its own engagement with post-foundational conceptions of the subject and the nature political life – this, even more than the fact that feminists themselves often claim agonism

as a genealogical precursor – make it uniquely suited to reveal the concerns of a feminist theory hoping to perform its own displacement of foundations.

Of course, the sign ‘agonism,’ like feminism, does not denote a tidy package of theories perfectly consistent with one another, nor can it be fully disentangled from feminism’s own multivalent genealogy.¹⁴ Yet like all ‘family resemblances,’ what gives the grouping its boundaries and relative coherence is an immersion in a shared problematic animating its assumptions and techniques. Indeed, within agonistic democratic thinking, these family resemblances are strong; thinkers in this tradition were in the early 1990s concerned to address a perceived crisis in theorizing about democracy underlying, as Chantal Mouffe put it in 1993, the seemingly straightforward question “What does it mean to be on the left today?”¹⁵ Indeed, Mouffe’s question bespeaks a deep skepticism about the very possibility of theorizing democracy in a historical moment which appeared to exhaust inherited strategies of analysis. Formulated as a reaction to (and against) the live question of what it meant to think democratically in the context of the rapidly collapsing liberal/communitarian antinomy, the horizons of agonistic democracy, like contemporary feminism, are thus defined as much by its historiographical anxieties as by its positive strategies.

Indeed, the theorists presented here share some version of the animating paradox Anne Phillips expresses in the introduction to her 1993 essay collection:

The changing [democratic] context is expressed in a mounting sense of the difficulties democrats face, for, as all around seems to conspire to dislodge ancient certainties, the tearing down of the old has so far outstripped the process of reconstruction... It has in this sense proved a daunting experience [...] because I seem to circle with ever-increasing anxiety around the same set of questions, trying to hold together what I half fear are incompatible ends. Prominent among the worries are my sense that the universality that flattens out difference was none the less a great inspiration to progressive politics and thought, and that the heterogeneity which welcomes variation can carry with it a disturbing fragmentation and closure.¹⁶

Parsing the question yet another way, William Connolly defines the task of agonistic democracy as one “[working] within and against the terms of... paradox:”¹⁷ while there are “powerful pressures working upon everyone... to treat [local] instances as cases to be drawn without loss into established categories or as modest anomalies that call for slight modification in the categories,”¹⁸ agonism seeks to work invoke a mutuality between these alternatives in order to open onto a “recognition of the unavoidability of fundamental presumptions and the unlikelihood of secure knowledge of their truth into an ideal of political discourse itself.”¹⁹

On the one hand, for both Phillips and Connolly, a sense of loss pervades the recognition that the very philosophical categories that had lent coherence and political purpose to calls for democracy are nonetheless impositions (and often violent ones) on heterogeneous communities; on the other, an awareness of the dangers of a listless, depoliticizing celebration of difference makes a new path forward appear all the more necessary. Posed against a keen sense of the impossibility of a productive democratic stance on either side of the liberal/communitarian antinomy, then, Phillips and Connolly here call to consciousness the underlying crisis at work in Mouffe’s more straightforward “what does it mean to be on the left today?” The answer, as we shall see, depends in agonist thinking on “returning to politics” in response to its “displacement” by the epistemological stability of older liberal and communitarian understandings.²⁰

Readers familiar with recent debates in feminist theory will likely recognize uneasiness with which Mouffe, Phillips, and Connolly approach the problems of democratic thinking in the face of a collapsing antinomy which nonetheless seems to structure the very terms of debate – indeed, one hears its echo often in the increasingly frenzied query “what does it mean to be a feminist today?” While the antinomy now register at a slightly different pitch, it has become for contemporary feminists as for agonists both more untenable and less desirable to retreat to

epistemological first principles and ethical imperatives, however enervating abandoning them may seem. As Linda Zerilli has put it,

In the face of modernity's growing awareness of value pluralism, the objectivist and rationalist idea that all individuals reasoning properly will be led to the same judgments is no longer credible, which is not to say that it is no longer tempting – the idea of perfectly attuned minds following the logic of reason dies hard... In any case, contemporary feminists are writing in a context of a decayed rationalism, in which the rules for judgment are no longer given or guaranteed by something outside the contingent human practice of judging itself.²¹

Zerilli, like the agonists, thus notes that the challenges of theorizing under modernity's conditions of plurality are both *politically* and *historically* exigent, but that the available forms of articulation too easily fall back into the terms of the collapsing universalism (essentialism)/relativism (anti-essentialism) antinomy. For though it is no longer tenable to uncritically claim the category 'women' in the name of political struggle and social change, on the one hand, or to escape into the relativist impulse of recent articulations of "choice feminism," on the other, contemporary feminists remain keenly aware of their temptations.²² Instead, Zerilli insists that feminists faced with this challenge must "refuse to assume from the start an agreement [about the terms of judgment] that needs to be worked out politically,"²³ a sentiment she shares with a wide swath of contemporary feminists concerned to work beyond epistemological disagreements and "the fear of politics" and, instead, towards a conception of feminism as "a political movement born from debates amongst women about our collective freedom."²⁴

If, then, in the early 1990s the watershed collapse of the ubiquitous liberal/communitarian binary prompted agonists not only to ask themselves "what does it mean to be on the left today?" but to situate their answer at the edges of what this antinomy makes thinkable, then it appears both reasonable and urgent to recognize that contemporary feminists are situated in a paradox structurally, if not always substantively, analogous to agonist approaches to democratic

theorizing. It is in this spirit that I propose to take a closer look at agonistic democracy as a genealogical precursor to the ills of contemporary feminism – what strategies and ways of thinking do feminists inherit when they conceive of contemporary democratic problems as animated by the terms of a collapsing antinomy, and on what new registers do these inheritances function today?

III. Standpoint, Technique, Horizon: “The Return to Politics” In Agonism and Feminism

As Phillips, Connolly, and Mouffe’s uneasiness makes clear, agonism explicitly disavows the foundations of democratic thinking out of a sense of *historical* necessity. Agonist theorists, as noted, share a commitment to decoupling democratic practice from its liberal conceptual foundations – for example, and most importantly, an emphasis on authoritative conceptions of the good or the just, a narrow conception of the public sphere which prioritizes universal reason and consensus, and a theory of the subject which roots out individuals’ most shared attributes.²⁵ Nor do they find recourse in communitarian alternatives to liberal democracy; indeed, they find these alternatives equally suspect in their insistence on teleology, commonality, and enclosure of political space.²⁶ Yet to say that agonistic democratic theory levels a staunch rejoinder to the epistemological foundations of modernity’s most prized collective projects is not to say that it offers no political episteme in its own right. Indeed, the project of agonistic democracy is at its most basic level an attempt *not only* to resist traditional political foundations, but to press the displacement of previous foundational assumptions into the service of a new political practice, to shift to a different standpoint from which to imagine new horizons of collective politics.

The extent to which these political horizons come to bear on contemporary debates about feminist practices of democracy (and indeed, the extent to which the horizons themselves become limitations) depends, then, on the standpoint upon which agonism has staked its

alternative claims – in particular, the assertion that no individual or group demand can be articulated without constitutive enclosure and exclusion, and its corollary, the insistence on perspectivism, the view that no transcendent measure can adequately account for or evaluate the multiplicity of claims and values that radical democracy demands. To deny these core realities – to “still the unruly conflicts and contests of democratic politics” by dissolving what are fundamentally political contests into universal ethical imperatives or methods of administration – is to give into the ruse of practices which, as Honig puts it, “[engender] remainders that could disempower and perhaps even undermine democratic institutions and citizens.”²⁷

In agonistic thinking, this standpoint is borne out by three key strategies of analysis, each of which launches a similar critique at a successive level of political thinking. On the most granular level, agonistic democracy offers a trenchant critique of the democratic subject by working alongside the deconstructive concepts alterity and *différance*.²⁸ In contrast to categories which seek to shore up consensus and commonality, these concepts are deeply intertwined with the disavowal of political identity as something knowable, coherent, and pre-articulated – in a word, they stake their most basic claims in the denial of the individual and collective ‘subjects’ of politics (especially, of course, those subjects given by liberalism and communitarianism). Instead, agonists hold that because every *subject* is “constituted by an ensemble of ‘subject positions’ that can never be totally fixed in a closed system of differences,” every (political) *identity* of such a subject “is therefore always contingent and precarious, temporarily fixed at the intersection of those subject positions and dependent on specific forms of identification.”²⁹ In other words, while an individual’s identification requires the delineation of limits and, with it, the identification of a constitutive ‘other,’ agonists also contend that the *field of possible relations* between differentiated subjects is also highly contingent insofar as it is historically and

politically conditioned. As such, no pre-given structure of difference (worker/capitalist, woman/man, black/white) can singularly account for the ‘real’ nature of oppression, let alone for the terms of universal liberation.³⁰ In the agonists’ view, then, insofar as neither an individual nor a collective subject of politics can be determined or defended, democratic theory ought instead begin from the premise that *no* form of identification – which is to say, no individual *or* collective bearer of political struggle – provides, in the final instance, an authoritative foundation or common direction for democratic practice.

It is precisely because alterity is an irreducible aspect of identification that the mid-level of politics - in which contingent collectivities are produced and political goals expressed – appears in agonistic democracy as “necessity of the political.” In stark contrast to what they view as depoliticizing urges of ‘virtue theories’ which “displace conflict, identify politics with administration and treat juridical settlement as the task of politics and political theory,”³¹ agonists (following those who Honig places under the sign ‘*virtù* theorists’) insist instead on a conception of ‘the political’ as an ongoing process attentive to contingency, excess, and situated articulation. As the phrase “the *necessity* of the political” indicates, agonists view this development as both politically exigent and democratically desirable. As Honig explains it,

Whereas virtue theorists assume that their favored institutions fit and express the identities or the formations of subjects, *virtù* theorists argue that no such fit is possible, that every politics has its remainders, that resistances are engendered by every settlement, even by those that are relatively enabling or empowering. It is for the sake of those perpetually generated remainders of politics that *virtù* theorists seek to secure the perpetuity of political contest.³²

As a site intended to accommodate a plurality of partial subjects and contingent demands, ‘the political’ is thus certainly “a horizon where the many different struggles against subordination could find a space of inscription.”³³ Yet its real critical force, for agonistic democracy, lies in its *displacement* of techniques which seek to reduce democratic claims to the *fit* between ‘the

politics of interest' and the overall context of adjudicating institutions.³⁴ To insist on politics, then, is to acknowledge the essentiality of the ongoing back-and-forth between provisional achievement, on the one hand, and public contestation, on the other. "In politics," Mouffe plainly writes, "the public interest is always a matter of debate and a final agreement can never be reached; to imagine such a situation is to dream of a society without politics."³⁵

To conceive of 'the political' as a space of ongoing, irreducible contestation, then, is to imagine an entirely different end of democratic politics altogether. Because politics properly understood cannot be undergirded by epistemological claims to commonality, agonists contend that attempts to stabilize political issues on these grounds in fact seek to *repress* the contingencies that are constitutive of every identity, first by stabilizing the integrity of the identification's internal structure and then by casting that which lies outside of its boundaries as 'evil' (Connolly), 'enemy' (Mouffe), or 'remainder' (Honig). Ultimately, such repression enters politics in the form of *ressentiment* and violence – in a word, *antagonism*. Better we recognize this danger, agonists argue, and work instead to cultivate political and ethical relations that sublimate *antagonism* into an *ethos of agonism*. Agonist theorists have conceived of this task differently; for Mouffe, for example, it is to reconceive of power and oppression in such a way that contingent, partial identifications may be thought as *democratically equivalent*. Such an analysis, in her view, would "[construct] a common political identity that would create the conditions for the establishment of a new hegemony articulated through new egalitarian social relation, practices and institutions."³⁶ Connolly, for his part, views the task instead as an ethical one: it is to "interrogate exclusions built into [one's] own entrenched identity" such that "conventional standards [of difference] sealed in transcendental mortar are tested and loosened through political contestation."³⁷ In this way, for him, "ethicality flows into agonistic

appreciation of difference.”³⁸ Whether borne out by ‘hegemony’ or ‘ethicality,’ though, what is important to notice about agonist conceptions of contestation is that they seek to redirect the worst impulses attached to the experience of contingency and difference towards a shared understanding of the terms of contention; in so transforming individual and group identifications, they seek to ground political life in the collective valuation of democracy *qua* democratic contestation.

To think of agonistic democracy’s contributions in terms of a feminist inheritance, then – for, as I have suggested, feminist conceptions of the relationships between identities, subject positions, and politics are both genealogically and structurally related to agonistic democracy – is to examine the contours of feminist debates for the new registers at which agonist strategies and ways of thinking are pitched. Because the agonist critique of the subject is by now well known in feminism – the nostalgia for a knowable subject is seen today as “illusory at best”³⁹ – it is more useful and interesting to interrogate feminist thought for the deployment of the agonist claims that democracy must take place in a space of ‘the political’ and that its ends lie in contestation itself. And indeed, examples abound. In feminist parlance, more often than not, agonist approaches to ‘the political’ are articulated in some version of the Brown’s conception of feminist practices of contestation: “Our spaces,” she writes, “while requiring some definition and protection, cannot be clean, sharply bounded, disembodied, or permanent” – they are, simply put, “democratic to the point of exhaustion.”⁴⁰ If Brown’s insistence on democratic practice ‘to the point of exhaustion’ follows swiftly on the heels of her categorical rejection of ‘clean, bounded, disembodied, [and] permanent’ spaces of politics, it is because it echoes so closely the agonist contention that the ‘necessity of the political’ requires both a break from pre-given (disembodied) subjects and identity claims and a disavowal of traditional (bounded) democratic

authority which would stabilize and enclose itself from a point outside of or against politics. For many feminists writing in the wake of the foundations debate, this break has less to do with a forcible or unwarranted tear between feminist theory and feminist practice (as post-modern feminists were accused of executing in the 1990s) as it does with the simple fact that the unified category 'women' contains "a retroactive fantasy about the wholeness of political origins, a fantasy that is by no means unique to feminism."⁴¹ Like the agonist concern to reveal liberalism and communitarianism as artificial displacements of politics, contemporary feminist attempts to 'return to politics' is in equal parts revelation that feminism is uniquely suited to think democratically under conditions of constitutive plurality and insistence that, for precisely that reason, feminism has been politics from the start.⁴²

Taking as their internal structure the fundamental agonist insight that partiality is an irreducible fact of political (and especially feminist) spaces, then, contemporary feminists employing agonist strategies to move beyond the problems of a collapsing universalism/difference antinomy have turned to an interrogation of judgment and publicity to explore new possibilities for contestation as an *end* of democratic practice. For if feminists can no longer take for granted the necessity or universality of any *particular* (local) claim on behalf of 'women,' theorists such as Zerilli and Ferguson instead contend that feminist claims might instead be construed as contingent instances of "a political practice of making cross-cultural judgments and claims in an idiom that others can come to recognize as shared."⁴³ Importantly, for Zerilli, "To think in this political idiom about the problem of judgment is to take leave of the new universalists and their insistence on first principles as the condition of cross-cultural judgments but without relinquishing the idea of universality as a political achievement;" in other words, on Zerilli's terms, the inherently partial and *political* nature of judgments and collective

articulations nevertheless gives way to contingent achievements which bespeak the ends of democracy itself. She continues:

Understood in a political rather than philosophical idiom, universality is an achievement that is deeply dependent on practical context and thus fragile. Rather than see this fragility as a failure of sorts, we might see it as an opportunity, for it means that apparently settled and stark differences of value, especially when it comes to the varying situations of women in a global context, can be disturbed and reconfigured in productive new ways.⁴⁴

It is precisely the publicity of judgment – that is, the revelation that judgments are by nature contentious when they are viewed in a ‘political idiom’ – that for Zerilli accommodates difference while simultaneously positing new imaginative commonalities.

Following Arendt, Zerilli thus argues what is the essentially agonist point that these collective achievements are possible only when contingent, unpredictable associations take them up in a political space: “the universality of such claims,” she writes, “depends on their being not epistemologically justified, as most feminists have tended to assume, but taken up by others, in ways that we can neither predict nor control, in a public space.”⁴⁵ Though the risks of such a conception of feminism are clear (for they explicitly resist the fixity of feminist subjects or collectivities), Zerilli argues forcibly that these risks are necessary attributes of a ‘freedom-centered’ politics that prioritizes agonistic respect. As Michael Ferguson more succinctly states, “When we make judgments, we take the risk that others will not agree with us, that we are going to offend some people we would like to persuade, and that we are going to turn off some people from feminism who we would prefer to have as allies. That’s politics.”⁴⁶ Politics, indeed – yet, I submit, a politics organized on an only slightly revised agonist standpoint.

IV. Articulation and Ambivalence: Nietzschean Contests Contra the Ethos of Contention

At each level of analysis – the granular critique of the subject, the insistence on the ‘necessity of the political’ as a space uniquely equipped to accommodate a plurality of contingent identifications, and the achievement of political value in democratic contestation – agonist insights are thus animated by a conscious displacement of the terms of a collapsing antinomy inherited by feminist thought. To return to politics in this way, for such thinkers, is to address the stunning variety of claims that can be made on democratic terms without either running roughshod over the complex field of power in which they are situated, on the one hand, or presuming a fixity of any one field of contingent identities and claims, on the other. Both agonism and feminism, then, imagine the *activity* of politics to be inherently structured by the terms of political space itself – indeed, the structure of difference intervenes on agonist conceptions of individuals, provisional collectivities, and the ends of democracy in turn. On the level of political practice, agonistic democracy thus consists of ‘articulations’ which cut across the levels by expressing a contingent individual or collective perspective, but which are nonetheless subject to contestation. As a collective practice, articulation is conditioned by the paradox between persuasion and partiality: on the one hand, political agents must enlist others into shared political projects; on the other, they must nonetheless be ever aware that they and their articulations are irreducibly partial. It is precisely the reciprocal ethos of contention – the sublimation of the irreducible possibility of *antagonism* on each level of politics (the subjective, the political, and the ethical) into *agonism* at the end of the series – that renders this paradox bearable; the individual author of each articulation, however contingent and partial, exists in this way in equal standing with every other on the level of the collective.

This agonist conception of the interplay between articulation and contestation is typified in a shared interpretation of Nietzsche's essay "Homer's Contest." In it, Nietzsche juxtaposes two forms of discord (*Eris*) in the ancient Greek world: the first, which "leads men into hostile fights of annihilation," is judged to be evil, while the other "spurs men to activity: not to the activity of fights of annihilation but to the activity of fights which are *contests*."⁴⁷ Quite unlike the violence of modernity, which makes ample use of its universalist alibis, the 'agonist' Nietzsche suggests that the Greek state (which for him signals both a governing structure and a political culture) is exemplary precisely because it *recognizes* its own hatred, violence, and antagonism and transforms it into an invigorating ethos. This reading of 'Homer's Contest' hinges on what agonists interpret as Nietzsche's suggestion that just as the Greek individual "was unable to endure fame without any further contest, or the happiness at the end of the contest," Greek democracy thrived on contestation at the level of collectivity:

Let us note well that, just as Miltiades perishes, the noblest Greek cities perish too, when through merit and good fortune they arrive at the temple of Nike from the racecourse. Athens, who had destroyed the independence of her allies and then severely punished the rebellions of her subjects; Sparta, who expressed her domination of Hellas after the battle of Aegospotamoi, in yet much harsher and crueler ways, have also, after the example of Miltiades, brought about their own destruction through deeds of *hybris*, as proof that without envy, jealousy, and ambition in the contest, the Hellenic city, like the Hellenic man, degenerates.⁴⁸

For agonists concerned to draw out the implications of the partiality and contingency of articulation across the levels of democratic thought and practice, Nietzsche's peculiar elision of the 'Hellenic man' and the 'Hellenic city' here points directly to a reading of contestation which is educative for individuals and, *as such*, invigorating for political collectivities. "The basic thrust of the essay is clear," writes David Owen: "through contestation, we develop our human powers, and, as such, an agonistic ethos, as exhibited in the praiseworthy Eris-goddess, is integral to the cultivation of our capacities."⁴⁹ For Owen, such a cultivation grants validity to the

agonist assumption that “[individual] perspectival reason reveals itself as [collective] agonistic dialogue” when considered as a baseline activity of politics.⁵⁰

This view of Nietzsche, however, depends deeply on the agonistic insistence on redeeming Nietzsche’s post-foundational assumptions at the expense of many of the troubling paradoxes that accompany them in the larger context of his thought – not least the ‘evil’ *Eris* in “Homer’s Contest” which presses men into “fights of annihilation” and which has by now all but disappeared from the agonist line of vision. What has become of the impulse to value not *contest*, but *victory* and *annihilation*, which Nietzsche insists underlies acts from the most base to the most sublime? Though theorists like Honig and Owen do seek to incorporate these more troubling elements of Nietzsche’s work,⁵¹ they each self-consciously attempt to soften the blow by associating them with the work on the self they see as fundamental to the collective project of reciprocal agonism. Writes Honig,

Nietzsche’s connection of great politics with the overman is less disturbing than provocative, however, if we continue to read the overman as a personification of the parts of the self that are resistant to the formation of responsible subjectivity. In this way, we can build on the politicizing impulses of Nietzsche’s recoveries of responsible subjectivity without endorsing his vision of ‘great’ politics as such (there is, in any case, no necessary connection between the two).⁵²

Honig thus attempts to associate the undertones of cruelty in Nietzsche’s thought with precisely those “parts of the self” that agonistic democracy tasks itself with overcoming on the level of collective politics (that is, the processes of identity which engender remainders) and – crucially – dismisses any ‘necessary’ association with the rest.

Yet if, in this self-conscious way, agonistic democracy (and so its feminist inheritors) skirts the issue of Nietzschean ‘great politics’ – which is to say, politics whose expression is characterized not by reciprocity and mutual recognition of partiality but, instead, by the will to power – then agonist thinking would seem to occlude some fundamental paradox in Nietzsche’s

thinking, a paradox that ought give feminists pause before they sign on to agonistic conceptions of reciprocal political articulation *qua* contestable judgment. For while Nietzsche certainly values partiality and the dislodging of selves and collectivities from the ‘maladies’ of moral fixity he also deeply values the transformative element of wholesale struggle and the annihilation of existing ways of knowing, for these are precisely the political acts which make contest and articulation bearable and sustainable. As he puts it in ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,’

And here I recognize the mission of that *youth* I have spoken of, that first generation of fighters and dragon-slayers which will precede a happier and fairer culture and humanity without itself having more than a presentiment of this future happiness and beauty [...] Its mission, however, is to undermine the concepts this present has of ‘health’ and ‘culture’ and to excite mockery and hatred against these hybrid monsters of concepts; and the sign that guarantees the superior robustness of its own health shall be that this youth can itself discover no concept or slogan in the contemporary currency of words and concepts to describe its own nature, but is only aware of the existence within it of an active power that fights, excludes and divides and of an ever more intense feeling of life.⁵³

For Nietzsche, then, ‘great politics’ (in the sense of victory over established, stifling ways of being) is both the precondition for and lifeblood of those undertaking contentious articulation. What, then, do agonists and feminists risk occluding when they dismiss those elements of the paradox in Nietzsche’s thought between contention and annihilation which introduce a friction in the relationship between the contingent, partial individual and that which incites and sustains the *political* struggle to transform values? Recalling that the ethos of agonism depends on the activity of mutual articulation in order to maintain the link between the situated individuals and the space of the political to agonistic respect, we might characterize this paradox as follows: if articulation and judgment require democratic subjects to withstand relentless contestation in order to cultivate the ends of democracy, then what, at bottom, motivates and sustains this difficult practice, if not great politics?

If we are to take Nietzsche seriously as both a genealogical ancestor of agonistic strands of feminism and as a keen observer of struggle and transformation – in a word, *confiscation* – then such a paradox ought prompt a reconsideration of the agonist arrangement of contingent subjects, political space, and the ends of democracy. Is agonistic articulation – and the fixity of the relationship between subjects, politics, and ethics it engenders – adequate to the task of the confiscation of the terms of democracy which characterize the animating impulse of feminism? What sorts of contests demand and sustain such a transformation? And to what extent are the horizons of agonistic democracy actually limits for *feminist* political struggles for democracy? One way to pursue these questions is to interrogate the possibility that a transformative agonistic contestation, though elusive in Nietzsche’s writing on the *agon* itself, is implicit elsewhere in his writing. To do so, however, is to reconsider the terms within which agonists imagine democratic contestation takes place, namely, the equal standing with which each author must regard every other.

In his essay “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” Nietzsche indeed calls attention to the paradox between collective ends and individuality (articulation) rather bluntly. Insofar as he is concerned to address the conditions of a ‘history for life’ – which is to say, an articulation to “organize the chaos within [the author] by thinking back to his real needs” – Nietzsche insists that to give such an account is to tell a ‘self-seeking’ history, that is, a history which enables and legitimates one’s *own* project from within rather than by easily and complacently importing received values or morals. Indeed, a history for life must attend to man’s “plastic powers” – that is, the “capacity to develop out of oneself in one’s own way, to transform and incorporate into oneself what is past and foreign, to heal wounds, to replace what has been lost, to recreate broken moulds.”⁵⁴ For Nietzsche, the necessity of a ‘self-seeking history’ is an

injunction to a kind of provisional politics on the level of the individual; to act is to insist on healing the many wounds and fractures sustained by existing contingently in time and power, and to heal is to know when to forget and to dare to act. Moreover, though, such acts must insist on being radically subjective, for to fall back on judgments grounded on ‘knowledge’ is to “weaken the personality” and stifle positive freedom: such stifled individuals are “something different, not men, not gods, not animals, but creations of historical culture, wholly structure, image, form without demonstrable content and, unhappily, ill-designed form and, what is more, uniform.”⁵⁵ For Nietzsche, then, the *only* articulation worth defending is one which *displaces one’s position in structure*, one which refuses to accept one’s positionality as an unhappy but necessary point of view, one which insists instead on a radically subjective way of knowing which would unwork the structures that interpellate the individual.⁵⁶

Were these radically subjective, provisional articulations to engender a wholesale transformation of politics, then, Nietzsche insists they would need to press their bearers into ‘unlearning’ ways of thinking and living which are over-determined by the political/cultural structure itself. The question, then, for feminists concerned to adopt an agonist framework which ties the possibility of a democratic ethos to claims about the inherent partiality of both subjects and political contests, is in this context transformed: *can* such articulations be sustained across the levels of analysis which in agonist thinking are necessarily linked? Are radically subjective claims sustainable in a context which requires not divestment from subjectivity, but rather the whole reevaluation of “the contemporary currency of words”?⁵⁷

V. “Although I can fight only with others, first I fight for myself:” Wittig and Political Struggle

“We all learned to speak,” writes Monique Wittig in her 1984 essay “The Site of Action,” “with the awareness that words can be exchanged, that language forms itself in a

relation of absolute reciprocity. If not, who would be mad enough to want to talk?”⁵⁸ Wittig’s caustic gesture towards the underlying assumption of the ethos of contention presses on precisely the question with which we are concerned; for if a Nietzschean framework pushes us to recognize the deep-seated ambivalence between the individual’s articulation of contingency, on the one hand, and collective divestment from toxic ways of living, on the other, Wittig herself asks whether, and to what extent, the movement between the contexts of contingent subject positions (individuals) and the a transformation of the ends of democracy (collectivities) can be mediated by what she calls the ‘social contract’ called forth in the agonist space of ‘the political.’ For her own part, Wittig herself is indeed concerned to address these questions for feminism – a feminism whose “historical task” is transformative insofar as it seeks to enable a collective divestment from oppressive ways of being while yet attending to the paradox of sustaining individual articulations. As she puts it, “since no individual can be reduced to her/his oppression we are also confronted with the historical necessity of constituting ourselves as the individual subjects of our history as well.”⁵⁹

Wittig approaches the question of the possibility of reciprocity by interrogating the linguistic concept ‘locution’ employed by the linguist Emile Benveniste from within what she calls a ‘materialist’ framework. It is imperative, she writes, “to consider how gender works in language, how gender works upon language, before considering how it works from there upon its users”⁶⁰ – in other words the discovery of the ways in which the ‘what-goes-without-saying’ in the structure of articulation produces and sustains “the thought of domination.”⁶¹ Following Benveniste, Wittig claims that

when one becomes a locutor, when one says ‘I’ and, in so doing, reappropriates language as a whole, proceeding from oneself alone, with the tremendous power to use all language, it is then and there, according to linguists and philosophers, that the supreme act of subjectivity, the advent of subjectivity into consciousness, occurs. It is when

starting to speak that one becomes 'I.' This act – the becoming of *the* subject through the exercise of language and through locution – in order to be real, implies that the locutor be an absolute subject. For a relative subject is inconceivable, a relative subject could not speak at all.⁶²

Like Nietzsche's 'history for life,' the concept locution in Wittig's thought points to the peculiar ambivalence between the act of articulation – the radically subjective act of appropriating the 'tremendous power to use all language' to oneself – and the impossibility undertaking this act under conditions of partiality. Working through and against this paradox, Wittig writes that it is precisely this locutionary use of language which underpins the possibility of contest through articulation. A social contract in which such a power to submit one's articulation to the democratic ethos is universally understood as the *right* of every individual, this is the kind of political space

in which meaning has not yet occurred, the one which is for all, which belongs to all, and which everyone in turn can take, use, bend toward a meaning. For this is the social pact that binds us, the exclusive contract (none other is possible), a social contract that exists just as Rousseau imagined it, one where the 'right of the strongest' is a contradiction in terms, one where there are neither men nor women, neither races nor oppression, nothing but what can be named progressively, word by word, language. Here we are all free and equal or there would be no possible pact.⁶³

To consider this locutionary social contract through a materialist feminist framework is thus, for Wittig, to ask anew whether, and to what extent, such a contract is possible as a horizon for *feminist* approaches to democratic practice.

Though Wittig concedes that the locutionary contract is given in language as an 'exclusive contract,' however, she is insistent that the materialist feminist framework reveals a more complex reality. For locution – the act of constituting oneself as an 'I' – necessitates, by the very fact of its articulation, an 'interlocutor,' the addressee who introduces a conflict in language. In interlocution, the addressee "suddenly becomes nothing or almost nothing, 'you,' 'he,' 'she,' 'a small, rather ugly fellow,' an interlocutor."⁶⁴ Through such a "brutal reduction,"

interlocution “implies that the so-promising contract was glaringly false [...] given that, through language, ‘I’ has every power (as a locutor), and that, suddenly, there is the downfall wherein ‘I’ loses all power (as an interlocutor) and is endangered by words that can cause madness, kill.”⁶⁵ Wittig thus concludes that while the promise of intersubjective articulation – the agonistic ethos of democracy – is the “universal agreement” which belongs to the “explicit contract” of language, there exists simultaneously a *second*, implicit contract which reveals “the *fundamental flaw* in the contract, the worm in the fruit... the fact that the contract in its very structure is an impossibility.”⁶⁶ This implicit contract, of course, is in Wittig’s thought borne out by the effects of gender on interlocutionary language. For her, though the activity of appropriating language to oneself is the activity of the ‘absolute subject,’ gender, “an element of language, works upon this ontological fact to annul it as far as women are concerned ... because it tries to accomplish the division of Being.” She continues,

So what is this divided Being introduced into language through gender? It is an impossible Being, it is a Being that does not exist, an ontological joke, a conceptual maneuver to wrest from women what belongs to them by right: conceiving of oneself as a total subject through the exercise of language.⁶⁷

It is precisely this implicit function of language – the ‘ontological joke’ of language introduced by gender – that Wittig argues invalidates a feminist political practice premised on situated, contingent, and ultimately contestable articulation. For if those marked as women cannot constitute themselves as the subject of their own material political struggle, if they fall prey to the interlocutionary position “upheld [by] the illogical principle of ‘equality in difference,’” they find themselves “at an impasse out of a lack of reasons to fight.”⁶⁸

Wittig’s thinking is thus highly sensitive to the paradox Nietzsche presents between situated articulations and the conditions which might sustain collective divestments, but more importantly seeks to *incite* a necessary confiscation of the very terms of articulation. Where

feminists working within an agonistic inheritance view their displacement of epistemological foundations as a working-forward from the accepted critiques of universalism, on the one hand, and difference, on the other, Wittig instead insists staging an altogether different battle. If feminists are to fight for a new democratic ‘grammar,’ she insists, the battle cannot take place on the terms of partiality and agonistic respect, for the insistence on partiality is in her view “a trend that will make [those already barred from subjectivity in language] more and more powerless, having lost the faculty of being subjects even before having gained it.”⁶⁹ Rather, she holds that feminism “can renounce only what we have”⁷⁰ – the so-called antinomy between universalism and difference itself.

Like Nietzsche’s use of history for life, Wittig’s subjects show that what is needed is not simply a displacement of the epistemological space of “the political” in the hopes of persuading subjects that their articulations are irreducibly partial (though, in fact, they may be), but rather a confiscation of the very conditions in which articulations are given. Indeed, for Nietzsche as for Wittig, actions, though irreducibly partial, are always and *necessarily* perceived by their actors to be incomparably vast, for it is precisely this characteristic that sustains them as political struggles oriented towards divestment. As Wittig puts it,

What is at stake (and of course not only for women) is an individual definition as well as a class definition. For once one has acknowledged oppression, one needs to know and experience the fact that one can constitute oneself as a subject (as opposed to an object of oppression), that one can become *someone* in spite of oppression, that one has one’s own identity. There is no possible fight for someone deprived of an identity, no internal motivation for fighting, since, although I can fight only with others, first I fight for myself.⁷¹

For a feminist practice of democracy, then, Wittig insists that the illusory terms of the locutionary social contract be recognized, collectively seized, and reconstituted to accommodate new, seemingly impossible subjects. It is this fight – which confiscates the terms upon which

universalism/difference is staged – which is for her a feminist one. Indeed, it is *precisely* this new staging – one which is less about constructing an alternative ideal relationship between individuals, collectivities, and the ends of politics, but which instead works to show the ambivalences which emerge when one tacks back and forth across these levels – which gives an account of what it would look like to revise the terms on which *political* thinking and acting takes place.

VI. Conclusion

Casting Wittig in such a way – as a writer uniquely aware of the kinds of *political* and *material* struggles which must take place when one “refuses to become or remain” an interlocutor – enables a reading of her as a thinker equipped to bear the ambivalences of contestation one must confront in deploying a Nietzschean post-foundationalism in the service of a transformed practice of collective democracy. It equally enables a troubling of the agonist arrangement of situated subjects, politics, and the ends of democracy which are at the heart of contemporary views of feminist and democratic politics. More than that, though, it offers a crucial rejoinder to feminists who would adopt an agonist framework which sees partiality and contestation as the underlying fact of individuals and collectivities alike. I agree, certainly, with Zerilli when she argues that the task of feminism is not to seek out “an appropriately denaturalized position from which to doubt what we think we see but *an alternative figure of the thinkable*” that “offers a new way of seeing that allows us to gain a different perspective on an empirical object that has not (necessarily) changed.”⁷² For Zerilli, as for Disch, Wittig’s signal works represent “not a summons to unite in terms of a common identity but a call to effect a common divestment. The idea is to ‘break off the heterosexual contract’ by rupturing the connection between identity [subjectivity] and sexual difference.”⁷³

Yet Wittig, I want to suggest, would push quite farther: breaking free of ‘the straight mind,’ she suggests, cannot be effected by simply willing oneself out of the paradox between universalism/difference. Divestment can only be achieved through the active political constitution of ‘impossible’ (Sapphic) subjects which, through the seemingly impossible political articulation of their full subjectivity, displace and transform the very terms of political contestation from the inside out. Rather than insisting on the condition of partiality that affects us all, Wittig insists instead on the inherently political quality of the totality which is promised to us in the concept of speech and the dissimulation that the promise reveals about the possibility of reciprocal articulation. For her, it is only when the plasticity of articulation is used as a wedge between the two contracts of language/politics – the illusory ‘social contract’ of reciprocal locution, on the one hand, and the contract symbolized by ‘the straight mind’ which systematically obviates some peoples’ locution entirely – that such a transformation is possible. The point, then, is precisely that what takes place in a more democratic space of contestation must not only be to de-constitute the subject, but to seize the terms upon which one might incite efforts to radically *re-constitute* it. For feminists seeking to move beyond the acrimonious foundations debate – to thematize the ambivalence about a collapsing antinomy and to return to questions about democratic politics – Wittig’s thought is thus an inheritance that cannot be ignored.

¹ Wittig’s title is a reference to the Roman poet Terrence, translated in her epigraph as “Man am I.” The entirety of her epigraphic reference reads: “Man am I; nothing human is alien to me.”

² Monique Wittig. ‘Homo Sum,’ pp. 57.

³ ~~Monique Wittig. ‘Homo Sum,’ pp. 57.~~ ³ Monique Wittig. ‘Homo Sum,’ *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp.

³ Monique Wittig. ‘Homo Sum,’ *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp. 57.

⁴ Monique Wittig, ‘The Category of Sex,’ *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp. 2.

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- ⁵ See, for example, the lively (and still relevant) debate on Heidi Hartman's piece "The Unhappy Marriage Between Marxism and Feminism," *Women and Revolution*, ed. Lydia Sargent. (Boston: South End Press, 1981).
- ⁶ The language of 'confiscation' is here borrowed from Foucault's essay 'Nietzsche, Genealogy, History;' I address the implications of the use of this language below.
- ⁷ Wittig, 'Homo Sum,' pp. 54.
- ⁸ Wittig, 'Homo Sum,' pp. 52.
- ⁹ Wittig, 'One is Not Born a Woman,' *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp. 20.
- ¹⁰ Anne Phillips. "Citizenship and Feminist Theory," *Citizenship*, ed. Andrews, G. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991), pp. 76-88; see also Mary Dietz. *Context is All: Feminism and Theories of Citizenship*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Carole Pateman. *The Sexual Contract*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).
- ¹¹ Indeed, as Linda Zerilli has succinctly put it, "To say that these debates are over... is by no means to declare them settled." Linda Zerilli. *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), pp. 33.
- ¹² Zerilli 2005, pp. 34.
- ¹³ Michael Ferguson. "Sharing Without Knowing: Collective Identity in Feminist and Multiculturalist Theory," *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy* 22(4), 2007, pp. 35.
- ¹⁴ Indeed, texts I treat as agonist here, for example Mouffe's *The Return of the Political* and Phillips' *Democracy and Difference*, saw themselves at the time of their publication as sharing an audience and point of origin with feminist concerns. Likewise, some thinkers I treat under the sign feminism – most especially Linda Zerilli – are deeply entangled with the legacies of agonism.
- ¹⁵ Chantal Mouffe. *The Return of the Political*. (New York: Verso Books, 1993), pp. 9
- ¹⁶ Phillips 1993, pp. 6.
- ¹⁷ William Connolly. *Identity/Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 13.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 12.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14.
- ²⁰ Mouffe, 1993; Honig, 1993.
- ²¹ Linda Zerilli. "Towards a Feminist Theory of Judgment," *Signs* 34(2), 2009; pp. 299.
- ²² On 'new universalism,' see Martha C. Nussbaum. *Women and Human Development: A Capabilities Approach*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Seyla Benhabib. *The Claims of Culture: Equality and Diversity in the Global Era*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002). On 'choice feminism,' see Linda R. Hirschman. *Get to Work: A Manifesto for Women of the World*. (New York: Viking Press, 2006), Claire R. Snyder-Hall. "Third Wave Feminism and the Defense of 'Choice,'" *Perspectives on Politics* 8(1); 255-61.
- ²³ Zerilli 2009, pp. 304.
- ²⁴ Michael Ferguson. "Choice Feminism and the Fear of Politics," *Perspectives on Politics* 8(1), 2010; pp. 247-253; Lori Jo Marso. "Feminism's Quest for Common Desires," *Perspectives on Politics* 8(1), 2010; pp. 269
- ²⁵ For detailed readings of each of these agonist critiques of liberalism (both philosophical and political), see Honig 1993 and Owen 1995.
- ²⁶ Mark Wenman. *Agonistic Democracy: Constituent Power in the Era of Globalization*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 6.
- ²⁷ Honig 1993, pp. 14.
- ²⁸ A common feature of agonism is its explicit indebtedness to post-structural thinkers – especially Wittgenstein, Derrida, Foucault, Said, and Spivak – for their contributions to the conceptual critiques of

unifying power; it is this indebtedness that genealogically links agonists to Nietzsche, both explicitly and implicitly.

²⁹ Mouffe 1993, 77.

³⁰ This formulation has been parsed rather differently by agonist thinkers; where Mouffe, for instance, makes her case through the language of the ‘friend/enemy’ distinction from Schmitt, Connolly instead parses the question through the Augustinian ‘question of evil’ which he argues is responsible for the enclosure of identity and the onset of existential *ressentiment*. Honig, for her part, expresses this idea in the language of ‘remainders.’

³¹ Honig 1993, pp. 3.

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 3.

³³ Mouffe 1993, pp. 6

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 48.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 50.

³⁶ Mouffe 1993, pp. 86.

³⁷ Connolly 1991, pp. 14.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 167.

³⁹ Zerilli 2005, pp. 1.

⁴⁰ Wendy Brown. *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), pp. 49.

⁴¹ Zerilli 2005, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, x.

⁴³ Zerilli 2009, pp. 303.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 315-16.

⁴⁵ Zerilli 2005, pp. 30, emphasis mine.

⁴⁶ Ferguson 2010, pp. 251.

⁴⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche. “Homer’s Contest,” *The Portable Nietzsche* ed. Walter Kaufmann. (New York: Penguin, 1882), pp. 35.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 39.

⁴⁹ David Owen. *Nietzsche, Politics, and Modernity*. (London: Sage Publications, 1995), pp. 139-140.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 143-144.

⁵¹ As opposed, for instance, to Connolly who declines this aspect Nietzsche as an element of agonistic thinking.

⁵² Honig 1993, pp. 74.

⁵³ Friedrich Nietzsche. “On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life,” *The Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 121.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 62.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 86.

⁵⁶ These ‘antidotes’ can be seen in especially stark relief against Nietzsche’s scathing critique of Hartmann (to whom he mockingly refers as ‘the parodist’), pp. 108-116.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 121.

⁵⁸ Monique Wittig. “The Site of Action,” *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), pp. 93.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁰ Wittig. “The Mark of Gender,” pp. 78.

⁶¹ “The Straight Mind,” pp. 31.

⁶² “The Mark of Gender,” pp. 81.

⁶³ “The Site of Action,” pp. 93.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 98.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

⁶⁶ Ibid., pp. 99.

⁶⁷ “The Mark of Gender,” pp. 81.

⁶⁸ “One is Not Born a Woman,” pp. 15.

⁶⁹ “Homo Sum,” pp. 57.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “One is Not Born a Woman,” pp. 16.

⁷² Zerilli 2005, pp. 62.

⁷³ Lisa Disch. “‘French theory’ goes to France: trouble *dans le genre* and ‘materialist feminism – a conversation *manqué*,” *Judith Butler’s Precarious Politics: Critical Encounters*, ed. Terrell Carver and Samuel Chambers. (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 57.