

# Forms of difference in Sorcières

Spencer, Catherine

Date of deposit	03/10/2019
Document version	Author's accepted manuscript
Access rights	© 2019 Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. This work has been made available online in accordance with publisher policies or with permission. Permission for further reuse of this content should be sought from the publisher or the rights holder. This is the author created accepted manuscript following peer review and may differ slightly from the final published version.
Citation for published version	Spencer, C. E. (2019). Forms of difference in Sorcières. <i>Women: A Cultural Review</i> , 30(3), 254-279
Link to published version	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2019.1658512">https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2019.1658512</a>

Full metadata for this item is available in St Andrews Research Repository at: <https://research-repository.st-andrews.ac.uk/>



## Forms of Difference in *Sorcières*

In a 1978 article published in the art magazine *Opus International* about the relationship between the women's movement and art production in France, Aline Dallier (Dallier-Popper) (1978: 35) observed that there had been a short but nonetheless noticeable lag between the full-scale emergence of the Mouvement de libération des femmes (MLF) in 1970, and the establishment of feminist groups specifically concerned with visual creation. The first of these, *La Spirale*, started meeting in 1972. Dallier, an expert on textiles and one of the few critics who wrote consistently about art by women during the 1970s (Dumont 2008), identified two main factors informing this situation. Firstly, the MLF focussed in its initial years on social and legal issues, such as access to contraception and the legalisation of abortion, rather than symbolic and cultural representation. Secondly, in the immediate aftermath of May 1968, many women artists actively re-assessed their practices, questioning how to reconcile political engagement with art (Dallier 1978: 35–6). The May strikes and occupations, and particularly women's experiences of marginalisation during these events, prompted shifts in subject matter and medium, as well as periods of suspension from creative activity. Art practice and organising held a precarious place among the feminist constellations that evolved after May 1968 (Quinby 2012: 154–5), and this was reflected in written publications and periodicals.

Dallier's article was one of the few moments at which the mainstream French art press made space for criticism that addressed art made by women within the context of the MLF. The year before, *Art Press International* devoted its March 1977 issue specifically to women's art, under the editorship of Catherine Millet, assisted by Catherine Francblin. It opened with an interview between Julia Kristeva and

Francblin (1977a: 6–8) entitled ‘Femme/mère/pensée’ (‘Woman/Mother/Thought’). Accompanying articles appraised figures ranging from the historical, such as Artemisia Gentileschi, to the contemporary, including Michelle Stuart and Meredith Monk. The issue also attempted to assess the status of women in the art market, featuring a table ranking the highest-earning names (Wayser 1977: 38–9).

Unsurprisingly, North Americans such as Stuart, Jo Baer, Helen Frankenthaler, Agnes Martin, Joan Mitchell, Louise Nevelson and Dorothea Rockburne dominated.

In 1983, *Opus International* followed up on Dallier’s 1978 article by handing an entire issue over to her editorship. The critic used this opportunity to consider the contribution of women to, and treatment within, the French and international art worlds. Like the special issue of *Art Press International*, it skewed towards articles that assessed the contribution of women artists to the historical avant-gardes, and information about the situation in the US (Dallier 1983).<sup>1</sup> Both *Art Press International* and *Opus International* publications were decidedly one-off affairs: subsequent issues returned to the male-dominated status quo. Moreover, as Fabienne Dumont (2014: 42) notes in her detailed history of this period, neither special issue explicitly referred to feminism in their titles, although Dallier addressed it in her 1983 editorial. While a number of women’s art collectives existed in France by the late 1970s, a degree of uncertainty remained among critics and practitioners alike concerning the exact connections between visual art and the groupuscules that made up the MLF, many of which had divergent ideologies (see also Balaram 2008).

At the same time, avowedly feminist, collectively-produced publications such as *Le Torchon brûlé* (1971–73), *Les Pétoleuses* (1974–76) and *Histoires d’elles*

---

<sup>1</sup> Dallier had travelled to the US in 1972, when she visited the women-run A.I.R. Gallery in New York; in 1976 she helped organize the exhibition *Combative Acts, Profile and Voices: An Exhibition of Women Artists from Paris* at the gallery.

(1977–80) included interviews with and essays on women artists, and made use of striking visuals. The cover of *Le Torchon brûlé*'s first independent issue in May 1971 consisted of a psychedelic medusa head in orange, purple and green, surrounded by the words 'mother' and 'whore' (fig. 1). *Histoires d'elles* also made adept use of humorous, eye-catching cartoons (fig. 2). However, as Diana Quinby (2004a) concludes, engagement with women's art was an ad-hoc affair in feminist publications just as much as the art press. It was generally treated as a side issue or accompanying illustration, rather than a means of political experimentation and contestation in its own right.

Yet there was one forum that proved a marked exception. The writer Xavière Gauthier founded the journal *Sorcières: les femmes vivent* in 1975, and the first issue appeared at the end of the year.<sup>2</sup> Initially produced on a bimonthly basis, *Sorcières* reached a print run of approximately 7,500 (Goldblum, 2011). Éditions Albatros published the journal between 1976 and 1977, before it moved to Éditions Stock from 1977 to 1980. The last issue came out in 1982. From 1979, *Sorcières* was published every three months in a format that shifted towards longer, more composed texts. This contrasted the more fragmentary and collage-like quality of earlier issues. *Sorcières* was indebted to the precedent set by initiatives such as *Le Torchon brûlé*. But an interest in the intersections between feminism as a political project and creative expression—particularly written, but also visual—distinguished it from other enterprises. *Sorcières* regularly featured a range of contemporary artwork in different

---

<sup>2</sup> The first issue is therefore also often dated to the beginning of 1976. It is difficult to ascertain the exact dates of the issues, because they did not include the details of the month or year in which they were printed. This was a deliberate editorial choice to distance the journal from the Christian calendar. Xavier Gauthier, correspondence with the author, 27 June 2019. I have retained the date of 1976 in my citations for the first issue, because that is how most libraries where scholars will find the journal have catalogued it.

media, including photography, painting, drawing and collage (Bordenave 2018), as well as reproductions of historical works by women and examples of women's representation in advertising and popular culture. The front covers provided a consistent and prominent display space for art, including designs by Mechtild, Agnès Stacke and Jeanne Socquet. *Sorcières* also printed reviews of art exhibitions and commentaries on visual production. In 1977, the editors devoted the whole of issue 10 to women's visual art. Despite its primary allegiance to written expression, *Sorcières* thus offered the most sustained engagement with visual art and feminism among the array of activist and art publications in France.

In her edited volume of translated texts from the women's movement in France, Claire Duchen (1987: 56) identifies *Sorcières* as 'one place where women wrote a "Woman's Voice"'. The journal's inclusion of texts by writers such as Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous aligns it with the exploration of women's difference informed by psychoanalysis, particularly the notion of *écriture féminine* that powers Cixous's writing (Jones 1981). This is encapsulated by Cixous's 1975 essay 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1976: 875–93), which urged women to forge their own language in order to subvert the fundamentally patriarchal structures of thought and knowledge. Within the MLF, the group *Psychanalyse et politique* (Psychoanalysis and Politics), with which Cixous was involved for a period of time, most consistently engaged with elaborations of difference. *Psychanalyse et politique* courted controversy because of its dismissal of feminist activism, which it claimed merely replicated the patriarchal symbolic order, and its move to copyright the term 'MLF' in 1979. This caused significant consternation in the wider movement (Duchen 1986: 27–47 and 1987: 19–22). The Marxist sociologist Christine Delphy (1995) and scholar Claire Moses (1998) have vigorously critiqued what they see as the

construction of ‘French Feminism’, primarily by US academics. They argue that it misleadingly prioritizes the psychoanalytic strain of theorising promoted by *Psychanalyse et politique*, and the voices of Kristeva, Cixous and Irigaray in particular, ignoring the vigorous political organising, direct action and engagement with class and economics in France (see also Jenson 1990; Leonard and Adkins 1996; and Braidotti 2014). Close inspection of *Sorcières*, however, suggests that it crossed materialist and psychoanalytic divides, rather than stringently adhering to them.

Gauthier was undeniably invested in questions of difference. Domna C. Stanton (1988: 76) describes Gauthier’s 1974 book *Les Parleuses* with the author Marguerite Duras as a concerted effort “‘to speak the female” through the cracks in the syntax, semantics, and logic of male language’, comparing it to the experiments of Cixous and Kristeva. *Les Parleuses* consists of four unedited interviews between the two writers. Gauthier maintained that any attempt to impose grammatical regularity on their exchanges would have meant bowing to Cartesian logic (‘De polir et de policer ces entretiens pour leur donner cette bonne ordonnance grammaticale, cette rectitude de pensée qui se plie à la logique cartésienne.’) (Duras and Gauthier 1974: 7).<sup>3</sup> A comparable commitment to *écriture féminine* characterizes the writing in *Sorcières*. At the same time, the journal also contained information about campaigns and practical organising. It investigated topics from food to sex work, in ways that combined poetic registers with historical perspectives informed by attentiveness to socially produced constructions of gender.

*Sorcières* was in many respects constrained by an assumed normative view of ‘women’ as predominantly white, cisgender and middle/upper class. Although it addressed lesbian experience, this was rarely placed at the journal’s forefront. Like

---

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise noted in the list of works cited, translations are my own.

much feminist activity during this period in France, *Sorcières* was firmly rooted in its circumscribed Paris milieu (Moses 1998: 248). Yet despite these restrictions, the publication did not adopt an exclusively essentialist position, or focus on embodiment to the outright dismissal of materialist concerns. This openness, I propose, is especially apparent in the journal's engagement with visual art, resulting partly from the key contribution made by members of the Collectif Femmes/Art. The women who participated in Femmes/Art came from a variety of political positions, and combined analyses of gender with practical organising against the art world's structural misogyny. Equally, I consider how *Sorcières* did not seek to distinguish between art made by women, and politically feminist art. This had limiting as well as productive effects, but ultimately the forms of difference that the journal entertained nuance and complicate binary narratives of feminism in France.

### ***Sorcières*: Faire une revue**

*Sorcières* emerged during a period of heightened activity in the French feminist press (Kandel 1977: 51). It shared strong transnational affinities with the contemporaneous US journals *Heresies* (1977–92) and *Chrysalis* (1977–80), which comparably sought to combine feminist politics with art and writing. The history of feminist publishing in France can be traced back to the nineteenth century newspaper *La Fronde* (1897–1905), which was run entirely by women (Duchen 1986: 3). One of the first second-wave feminist publications was a special issue of the left-wing journal *Partisans*, entitled *Libération des femmes année zéro* in 1970. According to Margaret Attack, Alison Fell, Diana Holmes and Imogen Long (2018: 6), this uttered a clarion cry in print 'of the new feminist politics', establishing a template for multiplicity with 'articles on sociological analysis, rape, abortion, women's bodies, sexuality, prison,

plus poems, drawings, and images.’ This heterogeneity became even more pronounced with *Le Torchon brûlé* in 1971, commonly understood to have become the first autonomous MLF publication after its initial appearance as an issue of *L’Idiot international*. Françoise Picq (1993: 112–13) vividly recounts how there were no headers or defined sections in the newspaper, its pages filled with a melange of ‘theory, testimony, debate, experience, life stories, fiction, poetry, information’ (‘ni rubriques, ni distinction entre théorie, témoignage, débat, expérience, récit de vie, fiction, poésie, information’). This, Picq stresses, mirrored the multiform dynamics of the MLF during its early years.

The challenge of representing the variety of voices encompassed by the women’s liberation movement was one that many feminist journals grappled with. Gauthier perhaps had the rebellious dis-organisation of *Le Torchon brûlé*’s pages in mind when she elaborated her strategies for diminishing, or at the very least diluting, her editorial agency. Gauthier (1976: 5) did not want an editorial committee that was ‘fixed, definitive, restricted, rigid’ (‘je n’ai pas voulu faire un comité de rédaction fixe, définitif, restreint, rigide’). Instead, she envisaged that for every issue a new collective would form, in which each member could ‘discuss, suggest, and invest something of herself, and to put in play their pleasures, their questions, their strengths, their desires’ (‘où chacune peut réellement discuter, suggérer, investir quelque chose d’elle-même, mettre en jeu ses joies, ses questions, ses forces, ses désirs’). For the following 24 issues, Gauthier, joined from number six by the art historian Anne Rivière who focussed on visual content, presided over a series of different editors. They selected the contributions in consultation with a wider collective that in turn constantly changed and reformulated. As a result, many participants only contributed to one issue. Several women, however, including the writer Adélaïde Blasquez,



Danièle Carrer (Gauthier's sister), the artists Jacqueline Delaunay and Najia Mehadji, and the psychoanalysts Claude Boukobza and Françoise Petitot, were involved on more than one occasion, providing lines of continuity.

Each issue was organized according to an overarching theme, traversing topics including smells, clothing, and writing. Submissions were solicited by the editorial team and gathered through open calls in each publication for forthcoming topics. This attempt to achieve reflexivity and discursive exchange was particularly marked in two collective editorials that bookended issue seven on writing. Several recurrent members of the editorial network, including Carrer, the poet Françoise Clédat, Gauthier, the novelist Nancy Huston, and Petitot, discussed the politics of the journal's composition (Sorcières 1977a: 7–10). They attempted to give a transparent account of the nitty-gritty details involved in putting it together, including how texts were selected, finances, and the printing process. The editors engaged actively with questions posed by readers, and outlined the complexity of trying to represent and respond to a range of experience (Sorcières 1977b: 51–4).

The desire to cater to multiple interests was perhaps most apparent in the pages towards the end of each issue devoted to information about activism and events. These included updates on various groups in the MLF, as well as references to other publications such as *Histoires d'elles*, alongside a regular letters page. The first issue, for example, carried information about the murder of the German-born political activist Elisabeth Käsemann in Argentina by the military junta, with the aim of organising an international response. This appeared alongside notices about Musidora, a feminist association for women working in the cinema; another devoted to the activities of *Psychanalyse et politique*, which advertised their library and publishing house; and a notice about the women's centre Le GLIFE on the rue des Prouvaires.

Issue 14 on ‘La Jasette’, overseen by an editorial team of feminists based in Quebec, overtly addressed the challenge of making room for different voices and geographic perspectives within the pages of the journal.<sup>4</sup> This was, however, a rare exception in what the editors themselves acknowledged was essentially a ‘Parisian review written and made by women living in Paris’ (‘revue parisienne écrite et fabriquée par des femmes vivant à Paris’) (Sorcières 1978: 2).

This aspiration to multiplicity inflected the choice of visual production that featured prominently in the review from the beginning. The front cover of the first issue on food (‘La Nourriture’) consists of a line drawing of a witch hunched over her broom, produced especially for the journal by Leonor Fini (fig. 3). This is a witch undergoing a process of transformation. The petals of multiple flowering tendrils curl from her hair and body. Her broomstick, the bristles of which sprout blossoms and seedpods, is in a similar state of metamorphosis. Rather than forming a straight line, it curves sinuously under the witch, as if it too is alive. A second reproduction of a pen and ink witch drawing by Fini, identified as a theatre design, is the first image to appear inside the journal alongside Gauthier’s editorial ‘Pourquoi Sorcières?’ (‘Why Witches?’). This witch sits naked astride a flower stem that doubles as a broom, its phallic rigidity humorously deflating into the softness of the bloom at its end (fig. 4). Her buttocks are emblazoned with eyes that transform her into a Janus-faced figure, while evoking the mirrored markings on the wings of a peacock butterfly. Together, the drawings associate the journal with hybridity and shape shifting.

Fini was also represented in the first issue by a third witch design from *Le Sabbat ressuscité* (1957), a collection of the artist’s drawings accompanied by a text from the playwright Jacques Audiberti. Another of Fini’s witches appeared in issue

---

<sup>4</sup> ‘La Jasette’ is a Quebecois term for chatting or discussion.

two; a series of line drawings in issue five; reproductions of her works *L'Orphelin de Velletri* (1973) in number four and *La Leçon de paléontologie* (1972) in number 10; and a design in number 16. Fini's visibility testifies to Gauthier's guiding hand. Gauthier had previously published a book on Fini (1973: 43) that analysed the hybridity of her female figures, often rendered as sphinxes and witches, and her constant intermingling of the human with animal and organic life. This celebration of the witch as a hybrid figure sets the tone for Gauthier's first editorial. Gauthier (1976: 2) invokes witches who 'dance', 'crawl', 'fly', 'swim in all waters', 'coil themselves up', 'writhe themselves about', 'jump', 'crouch' and 'leap' ('elles dansent, elles rampent, elles volent, elles nagent dans toutes les eaux, elles se lovent, elles se tordent, elles sautent, elles s'accroupissent, elles bondissent'). The figure of the witch, Gauthier hoped (1976: 5), would resonate differently with each reader, serving to unite multiple modes of expression by women who 'write, sing, film, paint, dance, draw, sculpt, play, work' ('écrivent, chantent, filment, peignent, dansent, dessinent, sculptent, jouent, travaillent').

The witch as conceived by Gauthier, through reference to Fini's drawings, is an overwhelmingly embodied subject, expressive of unbridled sexuality, desire, and expansive *jouissance*. Gauthier's answer to 'Pourquoi Sorcières?' (1976: 3) is that witches 'are in direct contact with the life of their bodies, with the life of the natural world, with the life of the bodies of others' ('elles sont en contact direct avec la vie de leur corps, avec la vie de la nature, avec la vie du corps des autres'). Yet Gauthier's interpretation of the witch does not exclude the possibility of materialist and socio-economic understandings of embodiment. The connection that the writer made between the witch and the 'life of the bodies of others' corresponds with her citation elsewhere in the text of the historian Jules Michelet's 1862 study of witches. Michelet

argued that the European witch-hunts of the Early Modern period were fuelled by a desire on the part of the Church hierarchy and emergent medical establishment to suppress working class women who had gained scientific knowledge through their labour as healers. The ‘witch’ perished as a result of ‘the very progress of those very sciences she first originated, by the hands of the physician, the naturalist, for whom she had worked so well’ (Michelet 1904: 328).

It was precisely such an understanding of the witch-hunts as a phenomenon generated by the conjunction of patriarchy, imperialism, colonialism and capitalism that inspired Marxist feminist interest in the phenomenon during the 1970s (Daly 1984: 178–222; Ehrenreich and English 1973). For Silvia Federici (2004: 170), the witch-hunts represented ‘an attack on women’s resistance to the spread of capitalist relations and the power that women had gained by virtue of their sexuality, their control over reproduction, and their ability to heal’. Gauthier (1977: 3) notes that witches’ knowledge of the body, and particularly contraception and abortion, played a key factor in their persecution, and these ideas continued to be expounded in subsequent issues of *Sorcières* (Herrmann 1976: 2–4).

As Alexandra Kokoli (2016: 1) observes, the witch’s association with the culturally repressed and socially subversive reverberated within the international women’s movement, a fact celebrated by Gauthier (1976: 5). The witch links *Sorcières* to initiatives such as the Women’s International Conspiracy from Hell (WITCH), formed in New York in 1968 as an offshoot of New York Radical Women. WITCH saw themselves as anti-capitalists as much as feminists. They took inspiration from the provocative activities of the Yippies (Youth International Party), founded by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin in 1967, to execute actions that included hexing Wall Street (Echols 1989: 76). WITCH affiliates explained that the group

chose the witch ‘as a revolutionary image for women’ because historically witches had ‘refused to accept the level of struggle which society deemed acceptable for their sex’, and therefore embodied working class and countercultural resistance (Chicago Covens 1970: 543). The organisation of *Sorcières* around the figure of the witch signals the journal’s embrace of political and conceptual multiplicity, underscoring its attempt to hold diverse approaches in relation.

### **Art and Women (and Feminism)**

Fini was by no means the only artist to find a home in *Sorcières*. Issue nine on blood included a text by the performance artist Gina Pane (1977: 44–7). Number 13 on the theme of dolls in 1977 featured a significant number of graphic works by Lou Perdu. Issue 15 on movements presented a photo-text by Nil Yalter (1978: 26–7), and number 17 in 1979 on clothes combined contributions by several artists. Designs by figures including Agnès Stacke appeared in multiple issues, often integrated with texts and articles (fig. 5). Featured practitioners were clearly credited at the front of the journal, just after the table of contents, ensuring that their images were identified as interventions in their own right, rather than treated as accompaniments to the texts. In February 1979, the editorial network organized an art exhibition at the Éditions Stock publishing house, which travelled to Rouen (Dumont 2014: 168). However, it was the imbrication of original artworks and articles that made the biggest impression on readers. The letters pages for issue 12 featured a complaint from ‘C.D.’ (1978: 63) that the number of photographs and images seemed to be decreasing, making the journal more ‘austere’, much to its detriment (‘la revue devient de plus en plus

austère, il me semble. On y respire mal’).<sup>5</sup> Evidently, the inclusion of visual art in *Sorcières* served as a key distinguishing feature.

Yet the relationship between visual art production, feminist politics, and the construction ‘women’ in the pages of the journal was complex and sometimes contradictory, as Fini’s prominence underscores. By the late 1970s Fini was at an advanced stage in her career, having exhibited with the Surrealists after travelling to Paris from Italy in 1936.<sup>6</sup> Despite the artist’s association with Surrealism, Whitney Chadwick (1992: 82) relates that Fini disliked André Breton’s patronising and domineering manner, refusing to become an official member of his group. Gauthier included a photograph of the artist wearing an extravagant headdress of flowers and feathers alongside her editorial (fig. 6), implicitly framing Fini as an independent female creator who rejected the conventions of marriage and motherhood, and carved out a successful livelihood on her own terms.

For Chadwick (1992: 110), Fini’s visual vocabulary of witches and sphinxes manifests ‘a refusal to subjugate the image of woman to man’s desires [that] invests these erotic images with new meaning’. Alyce Mahon (2013) expands on this to argue that Fini’s matriarchal symbolism can be understood as proto-feminist. Yet Fini did not identify as a feminist, and the *Sorcières* issue on art and women included an artist’s statement (1977: 41) in which she avowed that the women’s moment did not interest her, because she saw it as humanist (‘le *féminisme* ou le mouvement de libération des femmes me semble une version complémentaire de l’humanisme et cela m’intéresse directement peu’). Fini’s ambiguous, qualified relationship with feminism inflected the wider issue on art and women, even as it constituted arguably one of the

---

<sup>5</sup> Possibly Christine Delphy, an interesting point of intersection given her materialist approach.

<sup>6</sup> Fini was born in Argentina before moving to Italy.

most in-depth examinations in print of the relationship between the women's movement and art production during this period.

The artist Jacqueline Delaunay was the main editor of *Sorcières* 10, with assistance from a group that included Françoise Eliet, Michèle Katz and Mehadji. In a short introduction, the wider editorial group (*Sorcières* 1977c: 7) expressed their desire to know more about women artists 'who say that for them the word takes second place', while slightly condescendingly related their surprise at the beauty and originality of the texts produced by the visual artists ('Nous voulions en savoir plus sur celles pour qui, disent-elles, le mot est second (même si nous avons eu la surprise de lire, lors de ce numéro, des textes à chaque fois plus beaux, à chaque fois plus originaux)').' Like the special issues of *Art Press International* and *Opus International*, the ensuing articles reflected a drive to discover the longer histories of women's art production. They included an essay on the nineteenth century painter Marie Bashkirtseff (Héland-Cosnier 1977: 10–11), although this was more a poetic celebration of Bashkirtseff as a nonconformist icon than a concerted attempt at revisionist art history. Dallier (1977a: 14–17) contributed a piece on embroidery, which considered feminist subversions of a mode of making that had often been dismissed as 'women's work'. Her examples included Harmony Hammond's cloth constructions in the US, and the French artist Aline Gagnaire's combination of fabric and paint in her canvases. This was augmented by another perspective on contemporary tapestry from Nadia Prete (1977: 18–19). The sense of surveying the field continued in the reviews section, which included a list by Christine Maurice (1977: 57–8) of women's art spaces in the US.

Another feature that *Sorcières* 10 shared with the art press publications devoted to women's production was that it too elided the question of feminism. Its

title 'L'Art et les femmes' ('Art and Women') indicates that even in a publication that thought seriously about visual culture's relationship with women's liberation, alignments between plastic production and feminist politics were multifarious and sometimes convoluted, fissured by the difficulty of remaining open to women who adhered to multiple positions and perspectives, while simultaneously aspiring to collective politics. Gauthier has described the circle around the journal as rejecting the term 'feminist' and instead favouring 'lutte des femmes' or 'femmes en lutte' because they associated 'feminism' with the equality and assimilationist strands of the MLF (Gauthier and Carrer 2017).

Such deflections continue to haunt the French art world, although in the contemporary context it is less a question of distinctions between different modes of feminist thought, than a deep discomfort with its politics in any form. In the catalogue for her project to re-hang the Centre Pompidou entirely with works by the women artists in the Musée national d'art moderne collection, *Elles@centrepompidou*, the curator Camille Morineau (2009: 16) describes the intervention's aim as 'neither to show that female art exists nor to produce a feminist event, but to present the public with a hanging that appears to offer a good history of twentieth-century art.' Ania Wroblewski (2013: 5) observes that this equivocation infiltrated the resulting exhibition, which manifested a noticeable 'reticence' towards the word feminism. Morineau (2009: 17) indicates that this was in part due to the contentious status of the feminist movement in France more widely, where it is perceived as having 'run afoul of the national principle of universality' (on feminism and republicanism see also Scott 1996). But this resistance also reflects the longer, often-unresolved histories of art, women and feminist activism in France.



These histories shaped the pages of *Sorcières*, but were also complicated and contested within them. Although *Sorcières* 10 demurred when it came to identifying a specifically feminist art practice, many of the figures that it featured—Eliet and Mehadji, as well as Elisa Tan, Lea Lublin and Françoise Janicot—participated in the Femmes/Art collective, which had links to the wider MLF. Eliet, an artist, writer and psychoanalyst, played a defining role in the group, which was founded in 1976 and met regularly until 1979/80, often in each other's studios (Quinby 2004a). They released a manifesto in 1977 (reproduced in Dumont 2014, 471–3) that took notions of women's difference into account, but refuted separatism and maintained that women's bodies were sites of economic and materialist as much as symbolic oppression. As Quinby (2004b: 309) notes, the practitioners in Femmes/Art were not linked by a specific theory ('aucune théorie sur l'art, féministe ou autre, ne liait les pratiques de ces artistes entre elles.') Its members maintained connections with groups across the left and the MLF, including Groupe information asiles, Vive la révolution, and Psychanalyse et politique, and participated in a range of publications from *Art Press International* to the literary magazine *Tel Quel* (Dumont 2018: 36). The art writing and creation that featured in *Sorcières* 10 emerged from a range of committedly feminist organising, rather than simply being art made by 'women'. The journal's connections with Femmes/Art indicate that it was able to open up spaces in which different feminisms could co-exist.

### **Paint/Fight**

Writing in *Tel Quel* in 1974, Gauthier posed the question: 'does women's writing exist?' Her answer contended that women were trapped within a patriarchal system of language 'based entirely upon one fundamental signifier: the phallus', and that they

needed to discover how women might ‘speak “otherwise”’ through making audible ‘that which agitates within us, suffers silently in the *holes of discourse*, in the unsaid, or in the non-sense’ (Gauthier 1981: 162–3). As if continuing this discussion, the first issue of *Sorcières* carried a text by Hélène Cixous (1976: 14–17), while issue 10 contained excerpts from an interview with Kristeva by Delaunay.

In this discussion, Kristeva (1977b: 38) articulated her conviction that women’s artistic production was an attempt to eliminate pre-oedipal aggression, and hence constituted a form of sublimation for the desires denied by society (‘On peut examiner les créations féminines comme une tentative d’éliminer cette agressivité sauvage, pré-œdipienne, de lui trouver une dérivation en dehors de la sexualité proprement dite, une sublimation’). Kristeva (1977b: 38) linked the presence of women in the historic avant-gardes to their rejection of the fetish object, a drive that, she maintained, continued to inform contemporary art production. Kristeva’s conversation with Delaunay did not extend to current artistic production by women, let alone its possible links to activism and social change. Yet elsewhere in her writings on art, Kristeva (1980: 232) acknowledged that ‘a (subjective) signifying economy becomes an artistic signifying practice only to the extent that it is articulated through the social struggles of a given age’. The contributions by artists and art critics to *Sorcières* 10 can be understood as attempts to consider the extent to which the social and symbolic might intermesh at the site of visual creation.

Eliet’s text ‘Peindre/combattre’ (‘Paint/Fight’) is particularly significant in this respect. Like Kristeva, Eliet read women’s artistic expression as a manifestation of their struggle against repression within a patriarchal society. Eliet (1977: 21) noted that women continued to be subjugated by the production of fetish-images, from pious and religious iconography to the normative construct of the family album. But she

also approached art production as a site where the occlusion of women within culture could be tangibly countered. For Eliet (1977: 21), the process of historical rediscovery—the unearthing of what has been forgotten, and why, by art history and history more generally—was one of the decisive aspects of the fight for women’s liberation (‘C’est un des aspects les plus spectaculaires de cette lutte, un de ses moments décisifs parce qu’il s’agit de comprendre ce qui a été refoulé et pourquoi’). Eliet (1977: 21) contended that with the act of artistic production women step ‘outside the law’ (‘Peindre, pour une femme, c’est être hors-la-loi’), committing an act of subversion through which they might regain control of representation and expression.

From this perspective, the political battle is inseparable from cultural and symbolic struggle. Collective action plays a vital role in enabling women to gain access to alternative modes of knowledge, thinking and forms of living. ‘Peindre/combattre’ applies psychoanalysis to historical conditions, while elucidating a conception of art making that goes beyond sublimation. Eliet’s argument perhaps provides the journal’s most sustained and in-depth investigation of the relationship between art production, the feminist movement, and ‘woman’ as a socially and culturally constructed but also symbolic category. It moreover utters the rallying cry that art practitioners were uniquely placed to counter women’s historical, social and psychic repression.

As Quinby (2004b: 315) notes, Eliet also did not engage in her text with actual visual production by contemporary artists, instead looking to the work of Artemisia Gentileschi to elucidate her arguments. But her text sits in dynamic relation to the works submitted by her fellow Femmes/Art associates and other artists to *Sorcières* 10. These not only comparably address the psychic and social effects of patriarchal repression, but also explore the particular potential of the feminist journal as a

medium for redressing exclusion from history and discourse. Several submissions featured text as well as images, indicating the artists' acute consciousness of the medium through which their works were being disseminated. *Sorcières* 10 did not simply constitute an overview of visual art production, or a report back on the current state of play. Rather, it offered an active investigation of the possibilities for expression provided by the pages of a journal, in a way that resonates with the widespread conceptual and performance-related interventions by artists in magazines and journals during the 1960s and 1970s (Allen 2011).

Delaunay's contribution (1977: 8–9), for example, contains a rubric that looks like a word or number puzzle of the kind a reader might expect to encounter in a newspaper. However, this one consists of the terms 'objet', 'artiste', 'mythe', 'création' and 'femme'. Each is ascribed a different numerical value and the differences between them calculated until a final number is reached. Whatever arrangement they are placed in, however, the result is nearly always zero (fig. 7). Deblé (1977: 32–3) evidently also gave particular thought to the choice of work for reproduction in the journal. 'D'une fenêtre de Belle-Île' combines images of windows with sections of handwritten text, shifting between external observations and reflections on internal states. Spread over a double page, it loosely invokes the structure of the diary, addressing an interlocutor who is simultaneously positioned as viewer and reader (fig. 8).

Tan's entry consists of three photographs of an envelope, in which the folds have been peeled open to reveal a photograph of a tilled landscape. While in the top image, the envelope has been opened along all its seams to show the full landscape, the second envelope remains partially closed, and the third is open but only contains the segment visible in the partly closed iteration (fig. 9). At the bottom of the page,

the phrase ‘quelle liberté ont les yeux dans l’état mental réglé par les mots?’ (‘what freedom do the eyes have in a mental state regulated by words?’), has been scored through (Tan 1977: 34). Tan started using envelopes because of their connotations of containment and communication over distance, and their anticipation of a recipient (cited in Dumont 2014: 241). In this iteration, the combination of the envelope images with their subtitle implies the danger that images might be erased by words. Equally, Tan’s decision to cross out the text, and its subordination beneath the envelopes, grants the images power over the word, or at least indicates that both should be treated as worthy of comparable analysis.

The creation of works by Delaunay, Deblé and Tan that could be read as well as viewed indicates a desire to correspond with the women who encountered the journal. These are works that activate rather than merely illustrate, treating the pages of *Sorcières* as a site for discussion and exchange. The lack of an overarching framework for connections between cultural practice and feminist politics might be considered both a weakness and strength of *Sorcières* 10 and the journal as a whole. But the contributions by individual practitioners actively made those connections, constituting self-reflexively subjective responses to constructions of difference from a multiplicity of positions. The visual production in issue 10 of *Sorcières* is representative of its role in the journal as a whole, where artworks, artists’ statements and reviews contribute to the diversity of perspectives featured in its pages. For all its attempts at inclusivity, there were inevitable and undeniable gaps in the discourse that *Sorcières* generated. Yet while *Sorcières* was invested in embodiment, and in the ways in which women as construed by society experienced their corporeality, the result was not a limited view of what ‘woman’ might be. The journal’s embrace of

visual production produced within the discussions, debates and organising of the MLF was crucial to this.

### Works Cited

- Allen, Gwen (2011), *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art*, Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Attack, Margaret, Alison S. Fell, Diana Holmes and Imogen Long (2018), 'Introduction: Epistemologies, Politics, Fictions', in Margaret Attack, Alison S. Fell, Diana Holmes and Imogen Long (eds), *French Feminisms 1975 and After: New Readings, New Texts*, Oxford: Peter Lang, pp. 1–51.
- Balaram, Rakhee (2008), 'Femmes révolutionnaires: The Politics of Women's Art, Theory and Practice in 1970s France', PhD thesis, Courtauld Institute of Art, University of London.
- Bordenave, Ana (2018), 'The *Sorcières* Review (1975–1982): A Space for Feminist Representation Marrying the Visual Arts and Literature', *Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions Magazine*, 9 December, <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/magazine/la-revue-sorcières-1975-1982-un-espace-de-representation-feministe-entre-arts-visuels-et-litterature/>
- Braidotti, Rosi (2014), 'Thinking with an Accent: Françoise Collin, *Les Cahiers du Grif*, and French Feminism', *Signs* 39:3, pp. 597–626.
- C. D. (1978), Letter to *Sorcières*, *Sorcières* 12: 'Théorie', p. 63.
- Chadwick, Whitney (1992), *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, London: Thames and Hudson. First published 1985.

- Chicago Covens (1970), 'Witches as Women's Hidden History', in Robin Morgan (ed), *Sisterhood is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement*, New York: Random House, pp. 540–43.
- Cixous, Hélène (1976), 'The Laugh of the Medusa' (1975), Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen (trans), *Signs* 1:4, pp. 875–93.
- (1976), 'Un Morceau de Dieu', *Sorcières* 1: La Nourriture, pp. 14–17.
- Dallier, Aline (ed) (1983), 'Dossier: l'apport/la part des femmes', *Opus International* 83, Spring, pp. 8–44.
- (1978), 'Le Mouvement des femmes dans l'art', *Opus International* 66–67: May–June, pp. 35–41.
- (1977), 'La Broderie et l'anti-broderie', *Sorcières* 10: 'L'Art et les femmes', pp. 14–17.
- Daly, Mary (1984), 'European Witchburnings: Purifying the Body of Christ', in *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*, London: The Women's Press, pp. 178–222. First published in 1979.
- Deblé, Colette (1977), 'D'une fenêtre de Belle-Île', *Sorcières* 10: 'L'Art et les femmes', pp. 32–3.
- Delaunay, Jacqueline (1977), '« Et l'artiste créa la femme »', *Sorcières* 10: 'L'Art et les femmes', pp. 8–9.
- Delphy, Christine (1995), 'The Invention of French Feminism: An Essential Move', *Yale French Studies*, 87, pp. 190–221.
- Duchen, Claire (1987), 'Women's Difference', in Claire Duchon (ed), *French Connections: Voices from the Women's Movement in France*, London: Hutchinson, pp. 55–7.

- (1987), 'Introduction to Part 1: The MLF; History and the Future', in Claire Duchon (ed), *French Connections: Voices from the Women's Movement in France*, London: Hutchinson, pp. 19–22.
- (1986), *Feminism in France: From May '68 to Mitterrand*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Dumont, Fabienne (2018), 'Women's Art Collectives in France: A Multiplicity of Positions in a Turbulent Context', in Agata Jakubowska and Katy Deepwell (eds), *All-Women Art Spaces in Europe in the Long 1970s*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, pp. 19–46.
- (2014), *Des sorcières comme les autres: artistes et féministes dans la France des années 1970*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes.
- (2008), 'Aline Daller-Popper, pionnière de la critique d'art féministe en France', *Critique d'art*, 31, Spring, <https://journals.openedition.org/critiquedart/785>
- Duras, Marguerite, and Xavière Gauthier (1974), *Les Parleuses*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit.
- Echols, Alice (1989), *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America, 1967–1975*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara, and Deirdre English (1973), *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers*, London: Writers and Readers Publishing Collective.
- Eliet, Françoise (1977), 'Peindre/combattre', *Sorcières 10: 'L'Art et les femmes'*, pp. 21–4.
- Federici, Silvia (2004), *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, New York: Autonomedia.



- Fini, Leonor (1977), 'Abhumaine', *Sorcières* 10: 'L'Art et les femmes', p. 41.
- Gauthier, Xavière and Danièle Carrer (2017), 'Les Sorcières sont de retour',  
*Multitudes*, 67, pp. 90–93, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-multitudes-2017-2-page-90.htm>
- Gauthier, Xavière (1981), 'Existe-t-il une écriture de femme?' (1974), Marilyn A. August (trans), in Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (eds), *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, Brighton, The Harvester Press, pp. 161–4.
- (1976), 'Pourquoi Sorcières?', *Sorcières* 1: 'La Nourriture', p. 2–5.
- (1973), *Leonor Fini*, Paris: Le Musée de poche.
- Goldblum, Caroline (2011), 'Sorcières, 1976–1981: étude d'une revue féministe; Master 1, Université de Lille III, (dir. Florence Tamagne), 2009', *Genre & Histoire*, <https://journals.openedition.org/genrehistoire/1217>
- Gonnard, Catherine and Élisabeth Lebovici (2007), *Femmes artistes/artistes femmes: Paris, de 1880 à nos jours*, Paris: Hazan.
- Héland-Cosnier, Colette (1977), 'C'est un homme très fort que M. Bashkirtseff',  
*Sorcières* 10: 'L'Art et les femmes', pp. 10–11.
- Herrmann, Claudine (1976), 'De la magicienne à la sorcière', *Sorcières* 5: 'Odeurs', pp. 2–4.
- Jenson, Jane (1990), 'Representations of Difference: The Varieties of French Feminism', *New Left Review* 180, pp. 127–60.
- Jones, Ann Rosalind (1981), 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *L'écriture féminine*', *Feminist Studies* 7:2, pp. 247–63.
- Kandel, Liliane (1979), 'La Presse féministe aujourd'hui: des journaux et des femmes', *Pénélope: pour l'histoire des femmes*, Groupe d'études féministes de l'Université Paris 7, 1, June, pp. 44–71.

- Kokoli, Alexandra M. (2016), *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Practice*, London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Kristeva, Julia (1980), 'Giotto's Joy' (1972), in Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Leon S. Roudiez (ed), Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (trans), New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 210–36.
- (1977a), 'Femme/mère/pensée', réponses à des questions de Catherine Francklin, *Art Press International* 5, March, pp. 6–8.
- (1977b), 'L'Autre du sexe', propos de Julia Kristeva recueillis par Jacqueline Delaunay, *Sorcières* 10: 'L'Art et les femmes', pp. 37–40.
- Leonard, Diana, and Lisa Adkins (eds) (1996), *Sex in Question: French Materialist Feminism*, London: Taylor & Francis.
- Mahon, Alyce (2013), 'La Feminité triomphante: Surrealism, Leonor Fini, and the Sphinx', *Dada/Surrealism* 19: 1, <https://doi.org/10.17077/0084-9537.1274>
- Maurice, Christine (1977), 'Des lieux pour peindre aux Etats-Unis', *Sorcières* 10: L'Art et les femmes, pp. 57–8.
- Michelet, Jules (1904), *The Sorceress: A Study in Middle Age Superstition*, A. R. Allinson (trans), Paris: Charles Carrington. First published in 1862.
- Morineau, Camille (2009), 'Elles@CentrePompidou: Addressing Difference', Deke Dusinberre (trans), in Camille Morineau and Annalisa Rimmaudo (eds), *Elles@centrepompidou: Women Artists in the Collection of the Musée national d'art moderne, Centre de création industrielle*, Paris: Centre Pompidou, pp. 14–19.
- Moses, Claire Goldberg (1998), 'Made in America: "French Feminism" in Academia', *Feminist Studies* 24: 2, pp. 241–74.

- Pane, Gina (1977), 'Actions', *Sorcières* 9: 'Le Sang', pp. 44–7.
- Picq, Françoise (1993), *Libération des femmes: les années-mouvement*. Paris: Éditions du seuil.
- Prete, Nadia (1977), 'Tapisserie contemporaine comme expression de femme', *Sorcières* 10: 'L'Art et les femmes', pp. 18–19.
- Quinby, Diana (2012), 'Art About Motherhood – the Last Taboo? Reflections of an American Artist in Paris', in Rachel Epp Buller (ed), *Reconciling Art and Mothering*, Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, pp. 151–64
- (2004a), 'De l'art et du féminisme en France dans les années 1970', *Archives du féminisme* 8, <http://www.archivesdufeminisme.fr/ressources-en-ligne/articles-et-comptes-rendus/articles-historiques/quinby-d-lart-du-feminisme-en-france-les-annees-1970/>
- (2004b), '« Peindre/combattre »: un texte de Françoise Eliet', in Françoise Levaillant (ed), *Les Écrits d'artistes depuis 1940*, Caen: Institut Mémoires de l'édition contemporaine, pp. 309–19.
- Scott, Joan Wallach (1996), *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sorcières (1978), 'Éditorial', *Sorcières* 14: 'La Jasette', p. 2.
- (1977a), '... Nos traversées', *Sorcières* 7: 'Écritures', pp. 7–10.
- (1977b), '... Faire une revue', *Sorcières* 7: 'Écritures', pp. 51–4.
- (1977c), 'L'Art et les femmes: la création plastique', *Sorcières* 10: 'L'Art et les femmes', p. 7.
- Stanton, Domna C. (1988), 'Language and Revolution: The Franco-American Dis-Connection', in Hester Eisenstein and Alice A. Jardine (eds), *The Future of Difference*, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, pp. 71–87.

Tan, Elisa (1977), 'Paysage et enveloppe', *Sorcières* 10: 'L'Art et les femmes', p. 34.

Wayser, Claudine (1977), 'La Cote des peintres, le prix des femmes', *Art Press*

*International* 5, March, pp. 38–9.

Wroblewski, Ania (2013), 'Le Baiser de l'institution: Feminism after Elles', *C*

*Magazine: International Contemporary Art*, Spring, pp. 4–8.

Yalter, Nil (1978), 'Le Sexisme dans la cuisine turque', *Sorcières* 15: 'Mouvements',

pp. 26–7.

Accepted draft - pre-proof