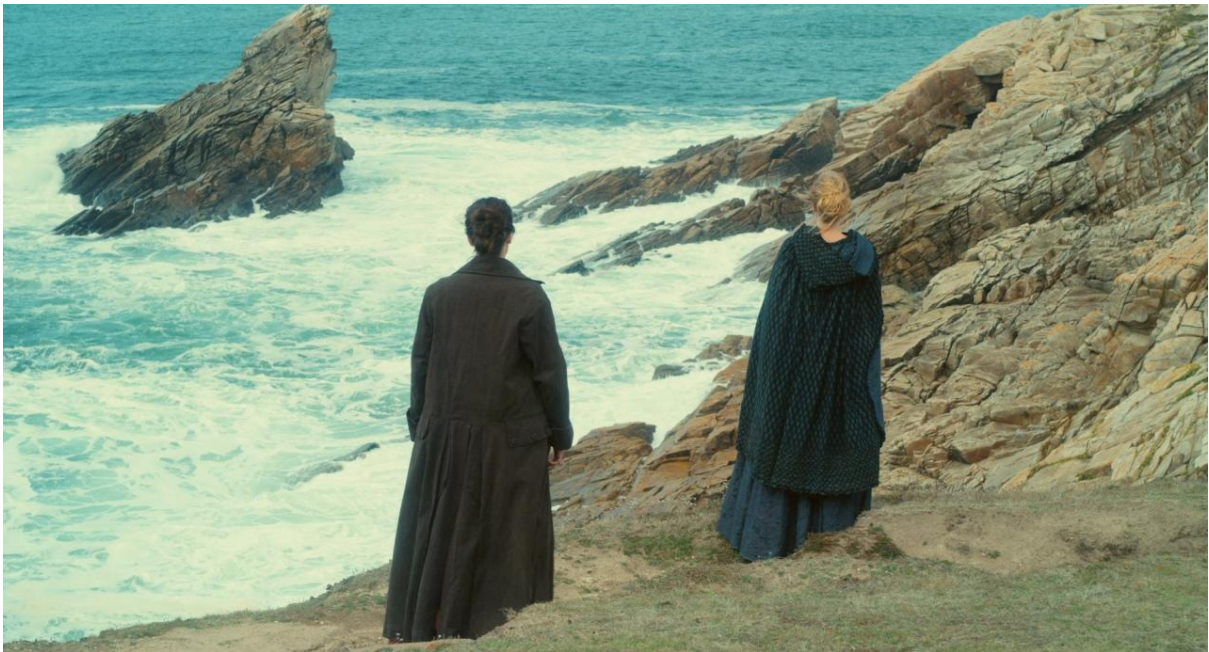


The Nature of Queer Desire in Céline Sciamma's Filmography



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Abstract

This thesis explores Céline Sciamma's five feature films *Naissance des pieuvres* (2007), *Tomboy* (2011), *Bande de filles* (2014), *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* (2019) and *Petite Maman* (2021). Central to this thesis is Sciamma's focus on queer narratives, as she demonstrates the fluidity of queerness as characters grow and explore themselves. Thus, this thesis uses cultural studies to focus on themes of gender, sexuality, queerness, desire and nature. Ultimately, this text considers how Sciamma uses nature as an allegory for queerness. Split into four chapters, this thesis uses the four elements (water, earth, air and fire) as a framework, proposing that Sciamma uses each of these elements allegorically throughout her films. The thesis argues that Sciamma uses the four elements to naturalise queer desire as it explores the intersection between ecology and queerness through a close textual-analysis and reading of Sciamma's films.

The first chapter investigates Sciamma's use of water, examining its symbolic use to display the fluidity of queerness in addition to the performative nature of gender within spaces of bathrooms, swimming pools and lakes. Chapter two studies the element earth to explore Sciamma's use of rural and urban spaces, examining how she creates queer chronotopes within her films. This thesis then moves on to analyse the role of air. To do this, the chapter acknowledges how pain and eroticism are displayed through the breath and then examines how sound and silence play an important role in Sciamma's representation and naturalisation of queerness. Finally, this thesis focuses on the element fire by considering the creative and destructive dichotomy of the element, in addition to discussing the manifestations of fire through lighting, food, warmth and passion.

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Introduction

From 2007 to 2021, Céline Sciamma wrote and directed five feature films, *Naissance des pieuvres* (2007), *Tomboy* (2011), *Bande de filles* (2014), *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* (2019) and *Petite Maman* (2021). Sciamma explores the fluidity of queerness, engaging with questions of gender, sexuality and desire whilst also focusing on growing up, coming of age and the exploration and discovery of queerness. Sciamma released her debut film *Naissance des pieuvres* in 2007. Having written the script as part of her final year at La Fémis, in *Naissance des pieuvres* (*Naissance*) she explores the desires and anxieties of three adolescent girls within the central setting of a synchronised swimming pool. It won the Louis Delluc award for a first film and was selected to screen at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival, whilst also being nominated three times for the 2008 César Awards. Four years later, Sciamma released *Tomboy* which tells the story of a young child's exploration, confusion and experimentation with their gender. In 2014, Sciamma released *Bande de filles*, the last film in her unofficial coming-of-age trilogy,¹ which follows Marieme, a Black teenage girl, living in the banlieues of Paris. *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* (*Portrait*) (2019) premiered at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival and won both the Queer Palm and Best Screenplay for the queer 18th century period film. Sciamma's latest film, *Petite Maman* (2020) is a magical-realist film in which the protagonist Nelly meets her mother as a child.

Sciamma's films were released within an era of socio-political change and development for the queer community. In France, civil partnerships were extended to homosexual couples in 1999 but the legalisation of same-sex marriage was only legalised in 2013. Before the legalisation of same-sex marriage, *Naissance* and *Tomboy* had already been released - two films which explicitly examine and delve into queerness amongst adolescents and children. Transgender rights within France, and much of the rest of the world, have not been particularly progressive. In 2012, trans and intersex people became protected from discrimination, on the basis of 'sexual identity', which was then replaced with 'gender identity' in 2016. Thus, *Tomboy* demonstrates Sciamma's progressive filmmaking through her spotlight on queer gender identity within children.

¹ Zeba Blay, 'Interview: 'Girlhood' Director Céline Sciamma on Race, Gender and the Universality of the Story', *Shadow and Act*, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20150208121213/http://blogs.indiewire.com/shadowandact/interview-girlhood-director-celine-sciamma-on-race-gender-the-universality-of-the-story-20150206>> [accessed 10 October 2021].

Most of Sciamma's films explicitly question and explore queerness, however, this thesis argues that all of Sciamma's films are queer, through their rejection of heteronormativity and patriarchal expectations and norms as well as Sciamma's queer representation of the nature of growth, self-discovery and coming-of-age. Despite not always explicitly demonstrating 'queer' characters, there are always queer elements within her films, in addition to Sciamma's queering of film-making conventions.

The main theoretical approach used throughout my thesis is cultural studies so as to explore the themes of sexuality, gender, nature and desire. This thesis uses queer ecology and queer theory throughout, focusing specifically on Judith Butler's theory of gender and performativity. Additionally, film studies and textual analysis are used to analyse my corpus using ideas from David Melbye's *Landscape Allegory in Cinema* and Xavier Isamil's 'Historical Allegory' to explore how Sciamma uses nature throughout her films as an allegory for queerness and queer desire. John Gibbs' ideas from *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation* are important within this thesis, contributing to the discussion of visual style and formal techniques within Sciamma's films, from lighting, colour, costume and décor to framing and camera movement to closely read and analyse Sciamma's films.

Within the scholarship on queer cinema, many academics and authors focus upon male sexuality and representation. Nick Rees-Roberts explores a wide range of queer films within a French political context in his 2008 book *French Queer Cinema*, however, he primarily focuses on gay male sexuality, failing to acknowledge lesbians, or other queer identities, due to the lack of 'out lesbian filmmakers and of lesbian self-representation.'² Stephanie Schechner recognises that lesbians have been 'historically relegated to the proverbial closet within French cinema.'³ Despite B. Ruby Rich's exploration into American cinema, she also acknowledges the lack of focus on queer women and lesbian narratives within her book, *New Queer Cinema*, which examines a comprehensive overview of queer issues from politics to gender.

Regardless of this focus on the representation of male sexuality within academia, there is some scholarship surrounding women and lesbians within French queer cinema. Clara Bradbury-Rance believes that lesbianism is more present and visible on screen than

² Nick Rees-Roberts, *French Queer Cinema*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 5.

³ Stephanie Schechner, 'Shifting Stereotypes? Lesbians in Contemporary French Cinema', *New Zealand Journal of French Studies*, 33. 1 (2012), 63-85 (p. 63)
<<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/leeds.ac.uk?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/shifting-stereotypes-lesbians-contemporary-french/docview/1080538924/se-2>> [accessed July 9 2021].

ever before. Within her book *Lesbian Cinema after Queer Theory*, she discusses ‘the varying types of representation of lesbians on screen’⁴ exploring desire, intimacy and sexuality through analysis of a variety of films released over the last two decades, including *Naissance des pieuvres*. Within her book *Sapphism on Screen: Lesbian Desire in French and Francophone Cinema*, Lucille Cairns claims that there is no ‘book-length study dedicated to lesbian desire in French and Francophone cinema’⁵. Therefore, her book aims to fill this gap by contributing to queer studies from a French-language cinematic viewpoint. However, Cairns does not look at Sciamma nor does she provide a technical cinematic analysis of the films in her book. Furthermore, within *Toward a Queer Gaze*, Erin Christine Tobin looks at a variety of films, from one of the first depictions of lesbian sex in cinema in Chantal Akerman’s *Je tu il elle* (1974), to New Queer Cinema. Tobin examines how Akerman, and other filmmakers, move away from heteronormative cinematic and narrative conventions⁶.

There are many studies on feminism and queer theory within cinema, but specific scholarship regarding queer French cinema or explorations of nature and queer ecology within French cinema have been underrepresented. Over the past decade, eco-cinema, which is seen as a sub-branch of ecocriticism, has gradually been explored and developed more. Within his book *Eco cinema*, Chu Kiu-wai characterises eco-cinema as ‘a study of the interplay among film, ecology and the human mind’⁷. The anthology of books within *Eco cinema*, provides a comprehensive overview of a wide range of thematic issues and topics within eco-cinema, including multiple various theoretical approaches examining the relationship between humans and nature as well as the exploration of environmental problems and the role of food within cinema.

Within the book *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature*, Sidney Dobrin and Sean Morey explore eco-cinema by considering the role of visual rhetoric and aesthetics in relation to the construction of space, place, nature, environment and ecology, ultimately studying the visual representation of nature and ecology within painting, photography, film and television. This leads to the exploration of the relationship between the visual image and the environment and

⁴ Clara Bradbury-Rance, *Lesbian Cinema after Queer Theory* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), p. xii.

⁵ Lucille Cairns, *Sapphism on Screen: Lesbian Desire in French and Francophone Cinema*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁶ Chu Kiu-wai, *Ecocinema*, (Oxford University Press, 2017).

⁷ *Ibidem*.

how visual rhetoric, of particular films, could ‘cultivate spectators’ eco-awareness or produce a positive environmental impact on them’⁸.

In *Transnational Ecocinema*, Pietari Kääpä and Tommy Gustafsson analyse the environmental representations found in film but also regard the discursive and narrative structures, examining how these relate to the wider world. They examine the relationship between the human body and the ecosystem, particularly regarding modern capitalist and socialist regimes, reflecting the existence of humans into the wider world and environment. They question the ‘mainstream understanding and perception of nature’⁹ exploring the relationship that nature has with people and culture.

Queer theory has historically criticised the concept of ‘naturalness’, stressing instead notions of performance for example, over ideas of what is natural or normal. However, the relationship between the ‘natural’ and queerness is a new area of focus in environmental activism and literary studies¹⁰. Queer ecology and ecofeminism interrogate the relations and intersections that exist between sexuality and ecology, viewing nature, biology and sexuality through the lens and perspective of queer theory. Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands suggests ‘we can think about *queer environments* as sites where sexual and ecological politics intermingle.’¹¹ Queer ecology challenges heteronormative ideas of what is natural whilst deconstructing the dominant hierarchies, power structures, binaries and dualisms within society’s understanding of nature and culture - what is considered natural and unnatural, e.g., heterosexuality vs homosexuality, able-bodied vs disabled etc. The world we live in associates heterosexuality with nature and normality - to be queer is deemed unnatural.

Cynthia Belmont addresses this in ‘Claiming Queer Space in/as Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Secretary,’ focusing on how gender and sexual norms and expectations are rooted in ‘definitions of the natural and the natural is rooted in definitions of sexual normality’¹². Belmont quotes Pat Califia for who ‘our society strives to make masculinity in men and femininity in women appear natural and biologically determined,’¹³

⁸ Sidney I Dobrin, Sean Morey eds. *Ecosee: Image, Rhetoric, Nature* (State University of New York Press, 2009).

⁹ Pietari Kääpä, Tommy Gustafsson, *Transnational Ecocinema* (Intellect, 2013).

¹⁰ Nicole Seymour, *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy and the Queer Ecological Imagination*, (University of Illinois Press, 2013), p. 13.

¹¹ Catriona Mortimer-Sandilands, cited in Cynthia Belmont, ‘Claiming Queer Space in/as Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Secretary’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 19.2 (2012), 317-335 (p. 330) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44087102>> [accessed 8 January 2022].

¹² Belmont.

¹³ Pat Califia in *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex*, cited in Cynthia Belmont, ‘Claiming Queer Space in/as Nature: An Ecofeminist Reading of Secretary’, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 19.2 (2012), 317-335 (p. 319) <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44087102>> [accessed 8 January 2022].

demonstrating how nature has often been used as an argument against homosexuality, or anything that differs from the heteronormative ideas and expectations that society has of gender and sexuality¹⁴. According to Nicole Seymour, in *Strange Natures: Futurity, Empathy and the Queer Ecological Imagination*, there is a lack of scholarship regarding the intersection of queer theory and ecocriticism, as she questions whether there is a queer way of thinking environmentally and ecologically¹⁵.

In *Feminism and The Mastery of Nature*, ecofeminist Val Plumwood argues that nature is a political rather than descriptive category. Plumwood suggests that nature is problematic due to the fact that it is so interwoven with gender and has encompassed many different sorts of colonisation. It also retains a dualistic dynamic, where human vs natural world are contrasting dualisms, in which the natural world - including women, indigenous people and non-humans - is subordinated. Timothy Morton also disregards the concept of nature and replaces it with the term 'ecological thought', making a clear distinction between the two.¹⁶ Ecological thought recognises the interconnectedness of ecology and all forms of life, 'ecological thinking is to do with art, philosophy, literature music and culture...Ecology includes all the ways we imagine how we live together. Ecology is profoundly about coexistence.'¹⁷ Morton emphasises that radical change and thinking are needed to relate to non-humans and nature as a whole, as 'nature exists as something that sustains civilisation, but exists outside of society's walls'.¹⁸

Morton argues that the ideas that we have of nature, and even the word nature itself, are a construction of society which deems heterosexuality and gender binarity as normative and natural. 'Nature' in reality does not follow the expectations and rules of society, but is in fact strange, unexpected and queer. It does not make the kind of sense that environmentalism or society demands it makes. Morton argues that 'ecological thought' engages with the queerness and strangeness of the world, making space for introversion, homosexuality, disability, spontaneity, irony and ambiguity. To understand and acknowledge that nature is queer is to recognise and get rid of heteronormative assumptions and interpretations of nature. It is to accept the complexities present in the wild, strange, queer world and ecological world within it.

¹⁴ Belmont.

¹⁵ Seymour, p. 1.

¹⁶ Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Harvard University Press, 2010).

¹⁷ Idem, p. 4.

¹⁸ Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature*, (Harvard University Press, 2007), p.1.

This thesis examines how Sciamma creates spaces and environments which challenge and deconstruct conventional ideas of dominant hierarchies, power structures, constructed binaries and heteronormativity within French society and nature. Sciamma recognises the queerness of nature within her films and uses it to mirror, symbolise and create parallels between the queerness of her characters. This thesis examines Sciamma's filmography by specifically investigating the role of queer desire in addition to the presentation of nature and how they intersect with each other. To explore this, this thesis will address the following research question: 'how does Sciamma naturalise queer desire in her films?' It will do so by analysing the role of nature in her work with a view to displaying queerness as well as the political and progressive act of representing queer narratives.

To desire something or someone means to wish and long for it. The original literal sense being 'to await what the stars will bring' from the Latin *de sidere*. This thesis explores types of desire that Sciamma's characters present, all of which can be described as examples of queer desire - from sexual and romantic, to the desire to express oneself authentically.

There are two meanings of nature to consider within this thesis. The word nature comes from the latin *nasci*, meaning birth as well as the principle of life. When exploring nature, this thesis investigates the role of the physical natural world within Sciamma's films; this includes plants, animals, landscapes, outdoor spaces and the weather. Additionally, it is also important to consider what nature means separately from the ecological world. The nature of something can mean the characteristics, features or qualities of something. Thus, this thesis also explores the characteristics of desire. These two definitions link together by investigating how nature intersects with the qualities of desire, ultimately aiming to explore both meanings of 'the nature of desire'.

This thesis examines queerness, using 'queer' as an umbrella term for the rejection of non-conformity; this includes the defiance of the default of heteronormativity as well as societal expectations and assumptions of gender, sexuality, desire and sex. This thesis aims to examine the queer coding rooted in Sciamma's film language from the cinematic techniques used, to themes, characters and narratives. Sciamma exposes the limits of heteronormative conditioning and French society. Not only does Sciamma do this through her presentation of queer narratives and characters, but also uses her films to demonstrate and exemplify the reinforcement of heteronormative values.

Through the framework of the four classical elements (water, earth, air and fire), this thesis explores how nature is present within Sciamma's films and how Sciamma uses the elements to naturalise queer desire. Traditionally, the four elements are used to explain the

complexity of all matter in the world, constituting the fundamental aspects of life. The four elements were first grouped together and identified by Greek pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles in the 5th century BCE¹⁹ and were considered to be the four elements to make up all creation in the world.

For hundreds of years, the four elements were used to aid scientific and medical research and exploration.²⁰ In addition to Ancient Greek culture, Ancient Tibetan and Indian cultures also grouped these elements, resulting in the four elements to be used throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, ultimately influencing European thought and culture. The idea of the four elements has since been developed and elevated into more concrete philosophical ideas. However, the four elements still provide a useful perspective for thinking about the natural world as well as providing important symbolism.

Some consider the four elements to be dangerous, damaging and destructive, causing natural disasters and destroying human lives and values.²¹ However, many consider the four elements essential to life; for instance, in *The Illustrated History of the Elements*, Kozák and Musson argue that ‘earth’ is the ‘fundamental element or prime matter,’²² sustaining all living organisms.²³ Water represents fluidity, movement and transport, ‘regulating and transporting oxygen, liquids and nutritional material in living bodies’²⁴. Air is a renewable source of energy, giving humans oxygen and enabling respiration²⁵. Finally, Kozák and Musson do not consider fire to represent a mass substance, but that it denotes a process that produces heat, light and enables food to be made.²⁶

Sciamma has not outwardly addressed the role of the four elements within her work, but this thesis critically examines how the four elements are presented and become a vital part in demonstrating and naturalising queer desire. This thesis analyses each of the four elements successively to explore Sciamma’s cinematic ecosystem and how she ultimately uses nature politically to defy heteronormativity as well as demonstrate the intersection between ecology and queerness. Moreover, Sciamma queers cinematic conventions and form,

¹⁹ Katherine M Bunker, Margaret F Farr, Maura C Rogan, ‘The Four Elements: Air, Earth, Fire and Water in Art’, *Art Education*, 54.5 (2015), 25-32 (p. 25) <[10.1080/00043125.2001.11653464](https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2001.11653464)> [accessed 1 February 2022].

²⁰ Jan Kozák, Roger M. W. Musson, *The Illustrated History of the Elements* (Springer International, 2020), p. 1.

²¹ Kozák, Musson, p. 1.

²² Idem, p. 4.

²³ Idem, p. 5.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Idem, p. 6.

²⁶ Idem, p. 7.

creating a queer political manifesto. Using the framework of the four elements, this discussion into Sciamma's naturalisation of queer desire will begin with chapter one exploring the role of water, examining how water is eroticised through saliva, orality and watery spaces. Additionally, chapter one will examine how Sciamma's use of water facilitates freedom and longing whilst also demonstrating the fluidity and vast expansive nature of queerness. Chapter one also explores how watery spaces can encourage gender performativity and exploration, primarily using Judith Butler's theory of performativity. Chapter two focuses upon the element earth using Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope to examine the configurations of time and space by exploring rural and urban spaces within Sciamma's filmography. Chapter three moves on to explore the element air. This chapter investigates the role of the breath in addition to diegetic and territory sounds throughout Sciamma's films. Finally, chapter four focuses on the element fire, exploring fire, food and passion through the dichotomy of fire's ability to create and destroy.

Chapter 1: Water

Water is a key thematic element in Sciamma's films used to represent the depth and expanse of fluid queer desires. According to Adriano D'Aloia, in his book about water in cinema, 'water can visually give matter and meaning to human desires, dreams and secrets.'²⁷ Thus, this chapter examines how water is an allegory throughout Sciamma's films demonstrating the depths of her characters' desires, dreams and secrets. Sciamma's characters are unfixed and fluid, flowing freely and queerly demonstrated through the symbolic nature and omnipotence of water within her films. The fluidity and shapelessness of water mirrors the fluidity and undefined nature of queerness, including gender, sexuality and desire. Judith Butler's theory of gender as a performance is used throughout this chapter to examine how Sciamma uses the image and symbol of water to demonstrate the fluidity of gender. Water is protean and connective reflecting the growing sexualities, connections and desires of Sciamma's characters as they grow up, experience lust, longing, attraction and connect to others. Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection is used to investigate Sciamma's use of spit, in connection to the element water. Additionally, queer ecology is used as a framework throughout, questioning how Sciamma's films present queer characters within nature, contributing to Sciamma's naturalisation of queer desire.²⁸

Getting Wet: Eroticism and Orality

The critical theory of abjection, described by Julia Kristeva in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection*, is the feeling of uncanny and the repulsive reaction to being confronted with something threatening that is deemed impure or taboo such as bodily fluids, wounds and death. It is not a corpse itself that is repulsive but the realisation that the barrier between life and death is not as distinct as we believe.²⁹ When one is repulsed or threatened by bodily fluids, or a corpse, boundaries are dismantled, forcing one to acknowledge that the boundaries between the self and what is 'other' are more fragile than originally perceived. According to Kristeva and Lechte, 'it is not the absence of health or cleanliness which makes something abject, but that which perturbs an identity, a system an order; that which does not

²⁷ Adriano D'Aloia, 'Film in Depth. Water and Immersivity in the Contemporary Film Experience', *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, Film and Media Studies*, 5 (2012), 87-106 (p. 87) <<http://www.acta.sapientia.ro/acta-film/C5/film5-6.pdf>> [accessed 7 March 2022].

²⁸ Kiu-wai.

²⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur. Essai sur l'abjection*, (Seuil, 1980).

respect limits, places or rules. It is the in between, the ambiguous...³⁰ The abject, like queerness, occupies an in between, ambiguous, liminal space which can be viewed as taboo through its defiance of society's perceptions, expectations and norms.³¹

According to Senthoran Raj in 'Disturbing Disgust: Gesturing to the Abject in Queer Cases', definitions of queerness, and queerness itself, have historically been entangled with disgust. The unconventional taboos of abject bodily fluids, such as spitting, can be paired with the taboo and disgust towards new sexual possibilities or queer identities. Both spit and queerness do not align with the 'the social order of heteronormative intimacy'³² through their taboo nature and otherness. Saliva is a bodily fluid made up of mostly water with strong links to thirst and orality but is also threatening and is often deemed disgusting, violating social codes. Sciamma uses spit in her films to demonstrate autonomy and power, whilst also eroticising it, creating sensuality, and desire through the abject fluid. Through Sciamma's use of spit, she naturalises queerness and defies social taboos and disgust.



Figure 1. The swimming pool during the opening scene of *Naissance des pieuvres*.

Naissance des pieuvres, dir. Céline Sciamma (Haut et Court, 2007).

The swimming pool in *Naissance des pieuvres* is the central setting throughout the film (figure 1). Its omnipresence is significant, from representing the pressures of femininity

³⁰ Julia Kristeva, John Lechte, 'Approaching Abjection', *Oxford Literary Review*, 5.1/2 (1982) p. 127.

³¹ James Aimers, 'Abjection and Normativity', *Queer New World: Challenging Heteronormativity in Archaeology*, <<https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-lgbtq-studies/chapter/abjection-and-normativity/>> [accessed 31 March 2022].

³² Senthoran Raj, 'Disturbing Disgust: Gesturing to the Abject in Queer Cases', in *Queering Criminology*, ed. by Angela Dwyer, Matthew Ball, Thomas Crofts, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 83-140 (p. 83).

through synchronised swimming, to the fluidity of water mirroring the fluidity of queerness and the deep flowing desires felt by the characters. François tries to sleep with Anne again at the synchronised swimming party at the swimming pool.³³ Through synchronised swimming, Sciamma demonstrates how the sport is emblematic of the pressures girls face as adolescents in (French) society through the expectations that exist for the girls to conform to an ideal of desire, femininity, grace and beauty. The swimming pool is also where the boys train for water polo, demonstrating the clear separation and gender binary within French society, which pressurises adolescents to conform to one side of the binary and perform either femininity or masculinity. The swimming pool in this scene demonstrates the pressures of adolescence through Anne's desire to conform with the feminine expectations and ideals of synchronised swimming, as well as to fit in to this group of girls who perceive her as a strange outsider to laugh at. It is also a space of heteronormativity in which Anne has developed attraction and desire for François, the muscular, masculine popular water polo boy.



Figure 2. Anne and François at the synchronised swimming party.

Naissance des pieuvres.

An eroticism and sexual tension already exists in this space where they have both watched each other, in a state of semi-nudity, perform their sport (and gender). François also walks in on Anne naked in the changing room at the start of the film. Thus, sexual tension exists between them, alluding and foreshadowing sexual intimacy. The scene begins with a medium-long shot of Anne and François in a swimming pool store room, surrounded by

³³ *Naissance des Pieuvres*, dir. by Céline Sciamma (Haut et Court, 2007), 01:11:17.

swimming equipment (figure 2). The room is drenched in blue light from the glow of the swimming pool behind them, highlighting the importance of the setting. Sciamma presents a mid-shot of Anne sat down on the floats while François stands above her, demonstrating heteronormative roles within sex, as François takes his top off and unbuckles his belt, asserting his power, masculinity and dominance, whilst Anne is on a lower level, reflecting her submission within their sexual relationship. All that can be heard is the sound of their breathing as they stare at each other expressionless. This scene exemplifies the significant lack of intimacy and emotional consistency between them, demonstrating and naturalising the sexual urges and desires they, and adolescents, have. As François stands looking down at Anne, the light hits his body whilst his face is hidden in the shadows. With this shot, Sciamma queers the way François is presented by sexualising and focusing on his body instead of Anne's; the shape of his muscles are highlighted by the blue light of the swimming pool. There is a close up of François and Anne's faces as they stare at each other, then François pushes Anne down onto the floats and gets on top of her (figure 3). Sciamma shifts the power onto Anne, as she rejects François' kiss and moves from being underneath him to pushing him down against the floats and getting on top of him, queering the heteronormative roles within sex as she takes control occupying a dominant position. Anne then slowly moves towards him as though to kiss him, but as François closes his eyes and moves his lips close to her, Anne spits directly into his mouth. The quietness of the scene enhances the sound of the spit as it drops slowly from her mouth (see figure 4). Sciamma uses a close up of both of their faces, focusing on the abject spit dropping into François' mouth.



Figure 4. Anne spits in François' mouth.

Naissance des pieuvres.



Figure 3. François on top of Anne.

Naissance des pieuvres.

With this act, Anne displays her autonomy and self-worth, rejecting François and his lack of respect for her, whilst also dismissing her original desires. Sciamma uses the abject through Anne's spit to assert female dominance rejecting the restrictive and heteronormative power dynamics within heterosexual sex. Despite the central setting of the swimming pool representing the pressures of synchronised swimming, Sciamma ultimately uses Anne, and her defiant act of spitting in François' mouth, to shift the power and take control, queering

and rejecting the norms and expectations represented by the pool. The act of spitting is an expulsion as Anne rids herself of the expectations and pressures she faces as an adolescent girl, ‘the time of life when the individual has developed full sexual capacity but has not yet assumed a full adult role in society’³⁴ and imposed heteronormativity.

Sciamma uses spit in another scene in *Naissance*, however Sciamma uses it to demonstrate Marie’s desire for Floriane as well as the liminal space she occupies as an adolescent discovering her queerness. After helping Floriane meet François in secret, Marie climbs to the top of a climbing frame in the dark (figure 5). Once she reaches the top, there is a close up of her face as she stands looking out. The camera stays focused on Marie, not displaying what she looks at, but moving to a close up of her hand as she looks down to spit onto it.³⁵ This scene is short and brief exemplifying Marie’s confusion towards her queerness and adolescence.³⁶ As Marie climbs the climbing frame, symbolic of childhood, she stands at the top thinking of Floriane and her desire for her, emblematic of the in between liminal space Marie occupies as an adolescent, as she leaves childhood behind and begins to experience desire and queerness. Marie uses orality and saliva to not only reject childhood, but to also express her desire for Floriane. Spitting onto a hand is usually done to connect to



Figure 5. Marie climbs to the top of a climbing frame before spitting into her hand.

Naissance des pieuvres.

³⁴ Anne E Hardcastle, Roberta Morosini, Kendall B. Tarte, *Coming of Age on Film*, (Cambridge Scholars, 2009) p. 1.

³⁵ *Naissance des Pieuvres*, dir. by Céline Sciamma (Haut et Court, 2007), 00:25:10.

³⁶ Catherine M Jonet, ‘Desire and Queer Adolescence: Céline Sciamma’s *Naissance des Pieuvres*’, *The Journal of Popular Culture*, 50.5 (2017) 1127-1142 (p. 1136).

someone else, to shake on a promise or pact. Marie however does this alone, displaying the separation and unrequited desire between them. As she spits and removes the abject saliva from her mouth onto her hand, she attempts to expulse her desires and confusion, ridding herself of queerness.

In *Portrait*, water and spit are closely tied together and are used to display the sensuality and intimacy between Marianne and Héloïse. Sciamma uses the abject taboo spit to demonstrate Marianne and Héloïse's queerness. After they take the hallucinogenic 'flying ointment', the camera zooms in to a close up of their mouths as they kiss, focusing on a trickle of spit between their lips (figure 6 and 7). The merging of spit connects them together adding to the sensuality of the scene. After this scene, Marianne climbs on top of Héloïse while she sleeps, lightly strokes her face and whispers "il faut que vous buviez,"³⁷ breathing into her mouth. The camera then follows Marianne as she takes a gulp of water and kisses Héloïse, spitting the water into her mouth (figure 8).³⁸ Sciamma uses a long take to linger on them kissing for 14 seconds, demonstrating the importance and intimacy of this moment as they kiss and taste each other through the exchange of water and saliva. Slow cinema conventions are evident throughout this scene through the emphasised long take and diegetic sound of the water moving between their mouths. This scene enables the spectator to observe the natural rhythms and patterns of Marianne and Héloïse, and their intimacy together, as they occur on screen.³⁹ Sciamma uses the abject and socially queer act of saliva twice within this scene, mirroring the abject taboo nature of their queerness, whilst also juxtaposing it with the desire and intimacy of this scene. Thus, Sciamma queers something abject and disgusting, filling it with sensuality and desire.

³⁷ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, dir. Céline Sciamma (Camera Film, 2019), 01:34:17.

³⁸ Cristina Johnston, 'The queer circulation of objects in the films of Céline Sciamma', *French Screen Studies*, 22.4 (2022), 287-303 <10.1080/26438941.2021.1956717>.

³⁹ Tiago De Luca, *Slow Cinema*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 257.



Figure 7 Marianne and Héloïse kiss after rubbing flying ointment into their armpits.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu, dir. Céline Sciamma (Camera Film, 2007).



Figure 6. String of spit in between Marianne and Héloïse's lips after kissing.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.



Figure 8. Marianne puts water into Héloïse's mouth while kissing her.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

Sciamma also uses taste and saliva in *Tomboy* to demonstrate queerness, otherness and separation. In one scene, the children are sat outside playing truth or dare. They dare Lisa and Mickaël to swap their chewing gum.⁴⁰ The exchange of saliva and chewing gum is a moment of abjection, as the children find it disgusting yet also exciting as they cheer and laugh while Mickaël grimaces and scrunches their face up. This exchange is intimate and playful contrasting with the non-normative nature of sharing gum. By sharing chewing gum, which is deemed disgusting by the children, Laure demonstrates their queerness, which the children also find disgusting. The act of sharing the gum becomes a synecdoche for Laure's queer gender and sexuality. The children's disgust mirrors their reaction towards Mickaël and Lisa kissing, once learning that Mickaël is biologically female. This scene entangles queerness with disgust and is allegorical; Sciamma demonstrates that the children have been socialised with heteronormative ideas of gender and sexuality.

Sciamma uses water to create tender intimacy between Lisa and Mickaël when they kiss for the first time.⁴¹ Lisa takes Mickaël's hand, guiding them into the forest, leading the way. Lisa then stops by the lake, there is a mid-shot as they facing each other and Lisa puts her hands over Mickaël's eyes and kisses them gently (figure 9). The water of the lake flows behind them, framing the shot and making the only sound for this scene. The fluidity and

⁴⁰ *Tomboy*, dir. Céline Sciamma (Pyramide Distribution, 2011), 00:18:56.

⁴¹ *Tomboy*, 00:47:18.

movement of the water mirrors the fluidity of their queerness - Mickaël's gender to Lisa and Mickaël's ambiguous, fluid sexuality and relationship. Their relationship demonstrates fluidity and queerness through their acceptance and expression of their desires, kissing each other and naturalising their queerness.



Figure 9. Lisa puts her hands over Mickaël's eyes before kissing them.

Tomboy, dir. Céline Sciamma, (Pyramide Distribution, 2011)

Sciamma displays the important symbolism of water in *Naissance* by eroticising water in spaces such as showers and swimming pools, entangling desire, spit and water together. The eroticisation of water is used to demonstrate Marie's sexual longing and desire for Floriane. The sport and performance of synchronised swimming demonstrates desirability and eroticism which enables Marie to explore her sexuality and queerness (figure 10). The first scene in *Naissance* displays Marie's sexual awakening and the beginning of her infatuation with Floriane. Sciamma positions Marie and the camera above the water to watch the synchronised swimmers perform and dance.⁴² The camera then shifts between shots of the synchronised swimmers and close-ups of Marie as she watches entranced. Both the camera and Marie are drawn to Floriane, focusing on her within the group of swimmers. Floriane exemplifies elegance, beauty and femininity throughout the performance, demonstrating the symbolism of her name which resembles 'fleur'. While the synchronised swimmers move, dance and float in the water, Marie is still, staring at Floriane, until a woman in the audience asks her to sit down, symbolising a heteronormative authority interfering with Marie's queer

⁴² *Naissance des Pieuvres*, 00:02:28.

desire. Marie cannot take her eyes off the pool and stays still - transfixed by Floriane, contrasting with the movement of the synchronised swimmers. Sciamma shows close ups of the legs kicking and splashing in the water as they perform, while orchestral operatic singing accompanies the performance, building up to the final shot of the performance in which Floriane rises from the water with a beaming smile. As Floriane elegantly emerges and rises from the water, in the centre of the pool, drawing all eyes towards her (figure 10). She is the centre of the blossoming flower, as well as the blossoming object of desire for Marie, while the rest of the synchronised swimmers remain underwater, keeping her afloat. As Marie watches her entranced and stands to applaud the performance, she experiences a sexual awakening filled with desire, arousal and captivation.



Figure 10. Floriane rises from the water at the end of her performance.

Naissance des pieuvres.

Sciamma uses synchronised swimming to display Marie's growing desire and attraction as she is captivated by Floriane's femininity and beauty performing. Marie attends the synchronised swimming practice for the first time, standing on the side of the pool, observing the swimmers from afar (figure 11). Floriane then invites her into the pool and as Marie plunges deeper into the water, the camera follows her, transforming the spectator's perspective, immersing the spectator into the water. Marie swims across the pool, observing, captivated as they dance below the surface of the water (figure 12). Sciamma presents the dynamic movement of the swimmers as their legs kick and arms move furiously (figure 14). The camera shifts between shots of the synchronised swimming and close-ups of Marie,

progressively revealing Marie's attraction'.⁴³ The synchronised swimming team perform in a semi-nude state, inviting people to look and watch them dance, building Marie's desire as she watches their bodies dance and move. This scene enables Marie's desires and attraction to develop further, as she is invited to watch their performance closely and under the water with them.



Figure 11. Marie watches Floriane's synchronised swimming practice.

Naissance des pieuvres.



Figure 12. Marie goes underwater to get a better look at the synchronised swimming practice.

Naissance des pieuvres.

⁴³ Belot, p. 173.

After this scene, the camera cuts to a medium-long shot of Marie in the shower with her eyes closed and the water pouring down on her.⁴⁴ Sciamma eroticises the water within the shower displaying Marie's sexual desire and frustration. Marie is in the middle of the frame as she stands breathless and wet in the shower (figure 13). The camera moves to a close-up of Marie's face, after many seconds of watching her breathless in the shower. The scene is still and quiet, building up and intensifying Marie's longing, dragging it out as she slowly stretches and interacts with the water. Marie leans her head backwards, the camera focuses on her neck while the water streams down her body. Marie sticks her tongue out to gulp, taste the water and spit it out (figure 14). By tasting the water Marie tastes Floriane and connects to her, as their bodies have both shared and touched the same water. The water becomes a synecdoche for the body and sex; as she drinks from the shower, with thirst and desire, the orality mirrors and demonstrates Marie's sexual frustration and desire for Floriane after having watched her practice in the pool.



Figure 13. Marie in the shower after watching the synchronised swimming practice.

Naissance des pieuvres.

Later on in the film, Marie and Floriane share this shower together (figure 15 and 16). The spatial consistency refers back to the scene just mentioned, as well as the scene in which Floriane and François kiss in the shower. Sciamma transforms this shower into an erotic and sexualised space which recalls the sexual potential of the previous two scenes. Throughout the film, the watery spaces are signposts marking the progression and development of their relationship, from Marie watching Floriane swim, to the erotically charged scene in the

⁴⁴ *Naissance des Pieuvres*, 00:20:05.



Figure 14. Marie gulps and tastes the water from the shower.

Naissance des pieuvres.

shower, which suggests the development, queerness and erotic nature of their relationship, actualised through water.⁴⁵ Floriane stands in the shower on her own, rinsing her hair with her eyes closed enjoying the pleasure of the shower. Marie slowly walks into the shower and joins Floriane, as they both occupy the central focus of the frame. As they share the shower, they stand together getting wet, smiling and giggling with each other. According to Fernando Berns, ‘queer desires can be tested outside the boundaries of the “dry” socially regulated world without fear of reprisal,’⁴⁶ water enabling space to flee from oneself and experience intimacy and queerness. The shower is a sensual erotic space which builds sexual tension between the two. The increase in physical proximity mirrors the developing intimacy and sexual tension.

⁴⁵ Fernando G P Berns, ‘Water and Queer Intimacy’, in *Space and Subjectivity in Contemporary Brazilian Cinema. Screening Spaces*, ed. by Antônio Márcio Da Silva, Mariana Cunha (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017) pp. 185-200 (p. 194).

⁴⁶ *Idem*, p. 186.



Figure 15. Marie walks into Floriane's shower.

Naissance des pieuvres.



Figure 16. Marie and Floriane smile at each other as they share the swimming pool shower.

Naissance des pieuvres.

In addition to the eroticisation of the water in *Naissance*, both the French and English titles of the film tie into Sciamma's allegorical use of water and naturalisation of queer desire as well as her eroticisation of water. The English title of *Naissance des pieuvres* is *Waterlilies*, evoking delicacy, femininity and beauty. This title mirrors the desires and pressures the synchronised swimmers face to transform into beautiful feminine performers within the water. The title also alludes to Monet's impressionist paintings of the same title. These paintings, and impressionism itself, use hundreds of small blurring brush strokes

creating a painting filled with fluid, blurring hazy colours and shapes, reflecting the fluidity and unlimited potential of queerness and the desires of the protagonists within *Naissance*.

On the other hand, the direct translation into English of *Naissance des pieuvres* is ‘Birth of octopuses’, which transports the spectator deep below the surface of the water into the world and imagery of octopuses. In *The Squid Cinema from Hell*, William Brown and David H. Fleming argue that the French title gives ‘a far greater clue to the film’s meaning than the English translation.’⁴⁷ In an interview, Sciamma explains the symbolism and importance of the octopus in the title, ‘Pour moi, la pieuvre est ce monstre qui grandit dans notre ventre quand nous tombons amoureux, cet animal maritime qui lâche son encre en nous. C’est ce qui arrive à mes personnages dans le film, trois adolescentes, Marie, Anne et Floriane.’⁴⁸ Thus, the birth of octopuses reflects the birth of growing desires and emotions that the girls face within adolescence as well as the queer transformations they experience.⁴⁹

Octopuses have often been seen as sexualised animals, especially within Japanese art such as *The Dream of the Fisherman’s Wife*, where octopuses are wet and sticky with sexualised tentacles, mirroring the sexual nature and queer desires of the characters in *Naissance*. Moreover, in *The Squid Cinema from Hell*, Brown and Fleming look at the role cephalopods - primarily octopuses and squids - play in contemporary media, emphasising their focus on film.⁵⁰ They examine the sexual nature of these creatures, arguing that cephalopods’ sexual nature and development is similar to the change humans undergo during puberty; ‘the adolescent begins to become sexual and see the erotic in everyday life, in a state of sexual overwhelm, just like the sexual cephalopodic perspective.’⁵¹ The sexual symbolism of octopuses is important throughout *Naissance* as the adolescents mirror these behaviours as they explore and experience desire and sexuality. Brown and Fleming also describe octopuses as ‘aliens who seduce and sucker others into their dangerous liquescent world.’⁵² The octopus’ sexual nature and seduction mirrors Floriane’s manipulative power and seduction of Marie, as she lures her into her dangerous world, using and taking advantage of her.

Jonet argues that the protagonists grow sideways, ‘adolescents’ gradual unfolding has been relentlessly figured as vertical movement upward (hence, “growing up” toward full

⁴⁷William Brown, David H. Fleming, *The Squid Cinema from Hell*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 6.

⁴⁸ Alice Antheaume, Interview avec Céline Sciamma, ‘Tout le monde, dans la salle, être une fille de 15’, *20 Minutes*, <<https://www.20minutes.fr/cinema/158840-20070518-tout-monde-salle-doit-etre-fille-15-ans>> [accessed 5 November 2022]

⁴⁹ Jonet, p. 1129.

⁵⁰ Brown, Fleming, p. 1.

⁵¹ Idem, p. 2.

⁵² Brown, Fleming, p. 25.

stature, marriage, work, reproduction, and the loss of childishness; but Sciamma presents a sideways growth, taking into consideration nonnormative queer desires, motives, actions and fluidity departing from the typical vertical growth trajectory.⁵³ Sciamma creates characters in *Naissance* who are developing constantly; they are not fixed entities but fluid, growing and in flux, just like water and the image of the soft loose octopus with no fixed form. Octopuses are animals that combine both female and male sexual elements from the wetness and stickiness to their tentacles, reflecting the queerness of octopuses by nature in addition to the limitless nature of the characters' desires. This title enables the spectator to reflect upon the birth of desire, passion and sexuality as the three girls grow up and explore themselves within the central setting of the swimming pool, exhibiting the multiple forms of feminine desires as adolescents within the film as well as the transformations that take place within them.

Testing the Waters: Queer Performativity and Experimentation

Judith Butler argues that due to imposed heteronormativity within society, gendered behaviour is a series of acts, or a performance, that is imposed upon us.⁵⁴ Within *Undoing Gender*, Butler interrogates and dismantles the binary gender categories which are defined in heterosexual opposition to one another, reframing gender.⁵⁵ In Sciamma's films, water and watery spaces enable characters to explore their gender and express themselves, demonstrating how gender is performative, built up of a series of repeated acts. The swimming pool in *Naissance* is a stage for the performance of synchronised swimming, but Sciamma also uses the space of the swimming pool and the sport of synchronised swimming to demonstrate the performativity of femininity and the pressures of perfection and beauty that girls face within the world of synchronised swimming, as well as wider French (and contemporary) society at large. Synchronised swimming in *Naissance* is used allegorically to demonstrate the effort and preparation needed for femininity, as well as the hidden efforts that go into the seamless performances. The elegant movements above the surface, exemplify femininity and beauty, and juxtapose with the effort, force and kicking that takes place below the surface, hidden from the spectators. Synchronised swimming requires effort hidden under the water, mirroring the ways the girls comply and conform to heteronormativity and expectations of femininity (figure 17). As the girls kick furiously and wildly to stay afloat whilst performing their routine, their performance above the water seems natural, effortless

⁵³ Jonet, p. 1131.

⁵⁴ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender* (Routledge, 2004).

⁵⁵ Idem, p. 10.

and beautiful, conveying a false idea of perfection. Not only is this an allegory for femininity and the expectations of adolescent girls, but it is also allegorical of Floriane as a character. Floriane gives an impression of sensuality and sexual confidence, however throughout the film we learn of her insecurities and the pressures she faces to be confident within her sexuality. The swimming pool enables Floriane to hide behind her constructed false identity through synchronised swimming as well as the expectations of femininity.⁵⁶

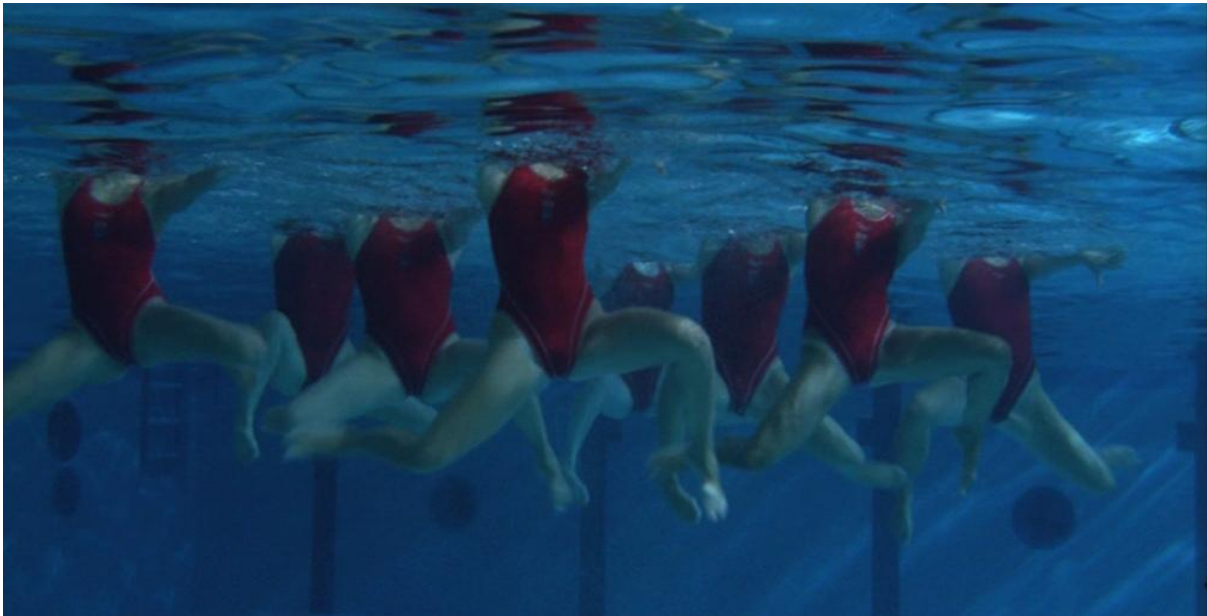


Figure 17. Marie's view of the synchronised swimmers kicking their legs under the water.

Naissance des pieuvres.

The changing rooms in *Naissance* are a space in which the girls not only prepare for the performance of synchronised swimming, but also the performance of sensuality and femininity. Their feminine identity is socially constructed through rituals and performance; the girls are lined up as a coach inspects each of their armpits for stray hairs before they perform. Sciamma demonstrates that the feminine ideal of women and young girls is based on heteronormative misogynistic expectations and ideas of gender, through the effort and preparation that goes into synchronised swimming in *Naissance*, from the kicking and effort to stay afloat, to the makeup, hair, glittering colourful swimming costumes (see figure 18). Additionally, the synchronicity of their performance means that they must all look and be the same - symbolising the expectations of women and femininity to comply and fit in to a specific idealised expectation within patriarchal French society.

⁵⁶ Berns, p. 195.



Figure 18. Floriane gets ready to perform

Naissance des pieuvres.

Sciamma also uses water to demonstrate the performative nature of gender in *Tomboy*. Like the changing rooms in *Naissance*, the watery space of the bathroom also becomes a space for performativity and expression as Laure experiments with gender expression and clothing. The bathroom becomes a space for Laure's gender performance in which they are able to construct their own identity and become Mickaël.⁵⁷ Jeanne cuts Laure's hair in front of the mirror in the bathroom; the framing of this shot displays Laure and Jeanne's backs to the camera but Laure's face is out of focus as they look into the mirror, displaying how Sciamma blurs the lines of gender and identity (figure 19). Later on in the film, Laure looks at themselves in the mirror of the bathroom, which becomes a space of transformation for Laure throughout the film.⁵⁸ By lifting up their top, they begin to inspect their body in the mirror (figure 20). The camera shows a deep focus of Laure's reflection in the mirror while the back of Laure's head is blurred, blurring the lines between identity and Laure's perception of themselves and their gender expression. Laure then flexes and prods their muscles, turning and twisting their body as they inspect it and the flatness of their chest. The scene ends with Laure spitting into the sink, and producing a small smirk of pride in their ability to be recognised as a boy and their performance of masculinity. The spitting mirrors what Laure has seen the boys do whilst playing football, thus demonstrating this learned, performative behaviour of masculinity. Waldron argues that body detritus as an externalised

⁵⁷ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Routledge, 1990).

⁵⁸ *Tomboy*, 00:22:53.

sigh of masculinity is implied within this scene, through spitting into the sink and the satisfaction of performing masculinity.⁵⁹ This scene reveals the conditionality and performativity of gender as well as conditionality of compulsory masculinity.



Figure 19. Jeanne cuts Laure's hair in the bathroom.

Tomboy.

Sciamma uses the lake in *Tomboy* to demonstrate Laure's performance of masculinity. The children play in the lake, jumping off from the pontoon.⁶⁰ Just like the swimming pool in *Naissance*, the pontoon is also a symbolic stage enabling the children to perform their gender identity and express themselves. According to Butler, 'the effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the way bodily gestures, movements and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.'⁶¹ The lake enables Laure to transform further into Mickaël who stylises their body through the creation of a plasticine penis and the destruction of a swimming costume into swimming shorts (figure 21 and 22). Mickaël also demonstrates strength and masculinity fighting with the boys, pushing them into the lake and wrestling with them, contributing to the socialised compulsory idea of masculinity. Lisa does not take part in the fighting, demonstrating the way the children are socialised with heteronormativity and defined binary gender roles. The setting of the lake gives Laure's body the freedom to exist; the vast expanse

⁵⁹ Darren Waldron, 'Embodying Gender Nonconformity in 'Girls': Céline Sciamma's *Tomboy*', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 53.1 (2013) 60-73 <doi:10.1353/esp.2013.0001> [accessed 10 December 2021].

⁶⁰ *Tomboy*, 00:45:17.

⁶¹ Judith Butler, (1990), p. 179.

of water mirrors the unlimited potential of Laure's gender expression and desires. The preparation and effort that goes into this transformation demonstrates the performative nature of gender. These scenes display the series of behaviours and acts that contribute to the perception of Laure as a boy, ultimately naturalising queerness and displaying the fluidity of gender. Through Mickaël, Sciamma demonstrates that the outward signs of masculinity have no innate grounding in boys but is made up of a series of learned and socialised acts, behaviours and performances.⁶² According to Waldron, this particular sequences of scenes takes the embodiment of masculinity even further, suggesting that the phallus can be 'inventively annexed'⁶³ through Laure's plasticine creation as well as demonstrating the lengths individuals are prepared to go to, to comply with their gender identity.



Figure 20. Laure inspects their body in the bathroom mirror.

Tomboy.

⁶² Waldron, p. 67.

⁶³ *Ibidem.*



Figure 21. Laure's plasticine penis.

Tomboy.



Figure 22. Laure looks in the mirror inspecting their swimming shorts and plasticine penis.

Tomboy.

In *Bande de filles*, Marieme also undertakes a transformation in the bathroom, representing a rebirth and symbolic baptism. At the hotel, Lady takes a bath while the others eat pizza and watch the television. While Lady is in the bath, Marieme joins her in the bathroom as her brother tries to ring her. As Lady soaks in a bath filled with bubbles, her body submerged in the water, she represents freedom and pleasure and encourages Marieme to turn off her phone, enjoy her night and to do what she wants. Lady then gives Marieme a

necklace with golden letters spelling out ‘Vic’, symbolising Victoire/victory. There is a close up of the necklace while Marieme in the background is out of focus. There is a religious undertone to this scene as Marieme is transformed into Vic and provided with a new identity, undergoing a baptism of new identity and community. The new identity, Vic, is queer through its gender neutrality representative of a concept and aspiration rather than the restrictive nature of a gendered name. The space of the bathroom enables the construction of this new identity which allows for free performance of Marieme.

Diving Deep: Freedom and Escapism

Sciamma uses the symbol, setting and imagery of water to display characters’ relationships to freedom. Through the fluidity and vast expansive nature of water, water symbolises limitless possibilities as well as the endless fluidity of queerness. It also represents freedom, facilitating escapism and for characters to experience their queerness freely. *Portrait* is set on an isolated island; the ocean that surrounds the island is a space of escapism and freedom as well as a symbol for a utopian female community. Men are rarely shown or within the frame throughout *Portrait*, thus the island is a rejection and temporary escape from society and heteronormative patriarchy. Marianne and Héloïse are surrounded and protected by the water that surrounds the island, as they are temporarily able to experience queer love and freedom within their liberating relationship together. Sciamma uses the ocean in *Portrait* to mirror the freedom Marianne and Héloïse find in the nature that surrounds them, and in their relationship together. As they walk along the beach together and converse by the sea they are able to escape from their lives and society’s expectations of them, grow closer and have passionate moments together by the sea, as they kiss for the first time in the cave by the sea and later on cry and hug each other on the coastline. (figure 23 and 24).



Figure 23. Marianne and Héloïse on their first walk together catching glances of each other.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.



Figure 24. Marianne looks at Héloïse as they sit on the beach.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

The space of the beach in *Portrait* enables the two to escape from the confines of the house along with the confines of heteronormativity and social conventions. On their walks outdoors is where their relationship blossoms and deepens. As they spend time together by the water, they engage in intellectual, intimate conversations which draw them together, adding to the sensuality and sexual tension between them. On the first walk they take together, they walk along the cliffs; the sound of the waves crashing as they both look out to

the dramatic backdrop of the ocean and the cliffs. The island is allegorical and a temporary utopia for their relationship. Marianne travels by boat and is displaced, reaching this isolated location and meeting Héloïse. Upon the island they are able to experience freedom to explore nature, attend bonfires with other women and develop a passionate romance together, momentarily entering a feminine utopia. However, they are only able to experience the freedom of the island temporarily. Due to societal expectations and heteronormativity of 18th century France, they must return to the real world, beyond the island.

Sciamma uses the ocean in *Portrait* to display Héloïse's desire to escape and experience freedom outside the confines of the convent or house. Immediately after Marianne and Héloïse meet for the first time, Sciamma uses a reverse angle shot of Héloïse as she begins to run towards the edge of the cliff, whilst also showing Marianne watching her from behind, following her and running breathlessly to catch up. As Héloïse runs, the spectator perceives that she is about to jump towards the water, in the same way her sister died. However, she does not intend to jump, but stops at the edge showing her desire to run and be free, escaping both society's expectations and her sister's fate. As the waves crashing dominates the soundscape, Héloïse arrives at the edge of the cliff and finally turns around showing her face for the first time. Héloïse's face is in the middle of the frame as she is immersed in the background setting of the ocean and crashing waves, which exemplify the adrenaline and limitlessness she has experienced through seeking out freedom.

After Héloïse finds out that Marianne has been painting her in secret, Héloïse swims in the sea (figure 25). She walks into the sea, submerging herself within the water, despite having told Marianne 'je ne sais pas comment nager'⁶⁴ demonstrating her lack of freedom, independence and experience due to growing up isolated from the exterior world in the convent. This scene importantly highlights Héloïse's desire for freedom as she momentarily escapes from the island she is trapped on. As Héloïse engages with the sea, her submersion cloaks her from pain and creates a safe space of escapism.⁶⁵ The vast expanse of sea in *Portrait* reflects the unlimited potential of queerness as well as freedom and the human experience that Héloïse desires.

Sciamma presents a long shot of the landscape, with the sea as the main focus, in the centre of the shot. Héloïse is in the middle of the frame as she undresses and slowly gets

⁶⁴ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 00:27:15.

⁶⁵ Berns, p. 195.

smaller within this long take as she walks into the water, disappearing and submerging herself into this vast limitless space. Héloïse appears small as she enters the vast expanse of water and is unable to swim, exemplifying and highlighting how she tries to stay afloat both within the water and society. The sea is allegorical of Héloïse's inability to escape; she is surrounded by freedom and the large body of water but she cannot swim. She is limited and restricted as a woman, with her future decided for her.



Figure 25. Héloïse undressing to go and swim in the sea.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

Sciamma also uses the symbol of water and Héloïse's desire to swim to also symbolise her sexual desire and sensuality. According to Franziska Heller, 'water challenges the clear distinction between the external world and human body'⁶⁶ connecting and interweaving water with the nude human body in motion, the physical movement of swimming and the physical sensations of the water upon skin. Thus, the water becomes sexualised and eroticised along with the active sensual body which has become wet and salty from the sea. As Héloïse takes off her layers of clothing, she removes and rejects her pretence of heterosexuality as her clothes anchor her to heteronormativity and the patriarchal society she lives in, enabling her to experience freedom and accept her queer desire. Héloïse is surrounded by water entering 'the realm of the audio-visual sensorium' where all of her senses interact with the water, creating a haptic experience.⁶⁷ As Héloïse walks out of the

⁶⁶ Franziska Heller, 'Water and Film: Fluidity of Time and Space and its Somatic Perception', *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews Water*, 5.6 (2018).

⁶⁷ D'Aloia, p. 97.

water, her senses have been heightened as her body and desire have been awakened by the contact with the water. This scene mirrors the start of the film when Marianne jumps into the sea during her boat journey to the island, to retrieve her painting supplies. She does not rely on any of the men in the boat to get it for her but she displays her independence and autonomy by jumping in herself. Sciamma again uses water here as a symbol for the freedom and independence that women strived to achieve within 18th century society. As they both swim through the water, on separate occasions, they temporarily escape from society and experience freedom.

The two protagonists share many significant moments together by the sea, such as their first kiss in a cave. The quiet waves crashing and quasi-silence of this scene enables the spectator to focus on this intimate moment between the two and displays the sensuality and sexual tension within their relationship. They watch each other for a few seconds and are at eye level with each other, emphasising the balance and equality between them. As they stare at each other, it refers back to all the moments throughout the film, prior to this scene, where they have watched, gazed and admired each other, contributing to the building and burning sexual tension, desire and passion between them. As they lower their scarves at the same time, they both move in to kiss each other, displaying their mutual, equal desire and attraction. As they unmask themselves and lean in to kiss each other they display consent as well as vulnerability. This kiss is emblematic of their relationship throughout the film; it is balanced, equal and filled with desire and sensuality. The waves crash in the background as they kiss, flowing and moving in time with their breath and the movement of their kiss, connecting them together.

Marianne and Héloïse often look out to sea together as they stand on the beach or the cliffs. One scene in particular,⁶⁸ resembles Romantic painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* by Caspar David Freidrich,⁶⁹ a painting which evokes the sublime (figure 27). The sublime is the artistic effect displaying the strongest emotion the mind is capable of feeling, as the natural world of the cliffs combines with the internal emotions, self-reflection and contemplation of the figure in the painting. Thus, the shot of Héloïse, which resembles Freidrich's painting, evokes her desire for freedom and escapism from patriarchal society but

⁶⁸ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:39:34.

⁶⁹ Caspar David Freidrich, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818, 94.8 x 74.8 cm, Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg.

also the depth and strength of the interiority of the feminine mind and emotions she feels towards Marianne.



Figure 27. *Héloïse look out to sea, resembling the painting Wanderer above the Sea of Fog.*

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

In both *Naissance* and *Petite Maman*, the final scenes take place in water. In the final scene in *Naissance*, Marie cleans off Floriane's lipstick after they have kissed for the first time, rejecting Floriane and their relationship as she removes and expulses Floriane. Marie then jumps into the swimming pool submerging herself into the water. This scene demonstrates Marie's heartbreak and pain, however the camera is still and does not follow Marie to see her emotional state, as her body slowly sinks to the bottom of the pool. She then rises up again into the frame as she is reborn, renouncing Floriane along with her desire for her. This scene is a climatic baptism and reawakening as Marie is immersed into the water, symbolically cleansed. Anne joins Marie in the pool and they float peacefully together as they return to themselves and their friendship prevails.

In *Petite Maman*, Nelly and Marion spend their last few hours together rowing a boat on the lake. This scene is playful displaying their intimate, profound and queer connection as mother and daughter with a merging timeline. They row through a pyramid structure which mirrors the shape of the hut they built together in the forest, thus, reflecting on their connection and the maternal symbolism of the metaphorical womb of the hut. The unusual pyramid structure stands out within the lake and further enhances the fairy tale like quality of the film.

This chapter has explored how Sciamma eroticises water through her presentation of taste, bodily fluids and water, as well as how water in Sciamma's films is also used to create a performative stage enabling characters to perform and explore their gender and queerness. Sciamma interweaves water and queer desire, naturalising her characters queerness and facilitating freedom through her allegorical use of water. The movement and fluidity of water ultimately reflects the fluidity of Sciamma's characters, their desires and queerness.

Chapter 2: Earth

Chapter one explored the element water within Sciamma's films, examining its ties to eroticism, queerness, performativity and freedom. Water facilitates movement and transportation, connecting and bringing people together on land, to experience the element earth. Therefore, chapter two focuses on how the element 'earth' is represented throughout natural outdoor spaces and urban spaces in Sciamma's films. This chapter examines how the element earth provides growth and supports life, representing and symbolising grounding, safety and security. I will also examine how nature, fertility and growth are present within the exploration of the element earth in Sciamma's films as well as the allegorical role of the forest. Chapter two uses queer ecology as a framework throughout, exploring the dualisms that exist in the study of environmentalism, nature and the earth and how they intersect with queerness, sexuality and gender within Sciamma's films as well as exploring Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope and Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Space* to examine space and intimacy within indoor spaces.

Rural Spaces: Sciamma's Queer Chronotopes

The chronotope is a theoretical term and unit of analysis used by Mikhail Bakhtin who explores and examines how configurations of time and space are represented in literature.⁷⁰ The chronotope is an exploration into how different genres operate with varying representations of time and space.⁷¹ According to Bakhtin, time and space are intrinsically linked and 'space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history'.⁷² Thus, the chronotope operates almost as a metaphor directly influencing the diegesis and characters.

Robert Stam in *Film Theory: An Introduction*, argues that the theory of the chronotope is even more appropriate and relevant to examine when looking at film compared to literature. 'Literature plays out in a virtual, lexical space'⁷³ whereas the cinematic chronotope unfolds in literal time, as well as illustrating Bakhtin's idea of inherent relationality of time and space.⁷⁴ The spectator's impression of time and space within film

⁷⁰ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, (University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 425.

⁷¹ Robert Stam, *Film Theory: An Introduction*, (Blackwell, 2002), p. 205.

⁷² Bakhtin, p. 84.

⁷³ Stam, p. 205.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

can be affected by a multitude of aspects, for example, different shots at different speeds, or the use of music.

In 'The Chronotopic Restructuring of Gaze in Film', Tracey A. Rosolowski defines a 'normal chronotope' as one with common sense logic of space and time with dimensional continuity demonstrated through establishing shots and visual matches, or real time tracking shots, for example. On the other hand, Rosolowski describes a 'horror chronotope' as a system of disrupted time and space.⁷⁵ This could consist of, for example, the creation of temporal dislocation or disorientation due to strategic camera work at different speeds or the use of music to eliminate chronological connectors, disorientating the information presented and preventing the viewer from reconstructing spatial and temporal continuities.⁷⁶

When discussing Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, Pooja Mittal Biswas coins the term 'queer chronotope', describing it as 'multidirectional, non-linear and non-heteronormative.'⁷⁷ A queer chronotope is a subversion of linear, binary time and space within a narrative. Biswas examines how, in *Orlando*, the protagonist's 'sex change disrupts the linearity of "straight time" as their gender fluidity and queer sexuality queers the linear timeline of the narrative. Both time and their gender are fluid and do not conform but step out of time and place, leaving the here and now of straight time'.⁷⁸ Similarly, the specific spaces and natural settings, such as forests in *Petite Maman* and *Tomboy* for example, are queer chronotopes which lend themselves to specific meanings and narrative tropes, demonstrating fluidity and non-normativity.

The forest is a frequent motif in fairy tales. Characters in fairy tales - such as in *Hansel and Gretel*, *Little Red Riding Hood* or *Alice in Wonderland* - often get lost upon entering the forest, enabling them to discover a new world and a new self. The forest is an allegory in Sciamma's films: as the characters lose their way within the depths of the forest, they are able to explore themselves and their queerness deeper. Ultimately, they are able to be themselves as the forest is a space of freedom, enabling characters to escape from heteronormative expectations of French society. Forests are filled with plants and nature

⁷⁵ Tracey A Rosolowski, 'The Chronotopic Restructuring of Gaze in Film', *Arizona Quarterly*, 55.2, (1996), 105-138 (p. 109) <<https://doi.org/10.1353/arq.1996.0010>>.

⁷⁶ Rosolowski, p. 116.

⁷⁷ Pooja Mittal Biswas, 'Queering Time: The Temporal Body as Queer Chronotope in Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*', *Anglia*, 138 (2020), 38-61 (p. 38) <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339880047_Queering_Time_The_Temporal_Body_as_Queer_Chronotope_in_Virginia_Woolf_s_Orlando> [accessed 26 April 2022].

⁷⁸ *Idem*, p. 46.

growing wild in corners of darkness, representing the fraught lost and ignored state of characters' minds as they delve into the wilderness and depths of the forest. The space of the forest is often threatening and dark, where people lose their way, symbolically and physically as they enter the labyrinth of trees and plants. However, in 'Into the Wild Woods...', Laszkiewicz writes about the role of trees and forests in literature arguing that 'those heroes who actually manage to leave the forest do so stronger and wiser than they had been at the beginning of their stories, because the wilderness is a place of growth and transformation'.⁷⁹

Sciamma creates a queer chronotope within *Petite Maman*. The temporal aspect of the chronotope consists of Nelly experiencing and journeying through time, moving away from straight normative time into 'queer time' where the regular notion of time is disrupted and 'queered' as she enters the space of the forest. Two separate timelines merge - Nelly's mother's past with Nelly's present-day life - creating a narrative with temporal distortions and disrupted time and space. As Nelly enters the space of the dense, wild forest, her experience of time is subverted (figure 1). She enters a world of fantasy and mystery where nature and the forest are queer, as she meets her mother as a child.

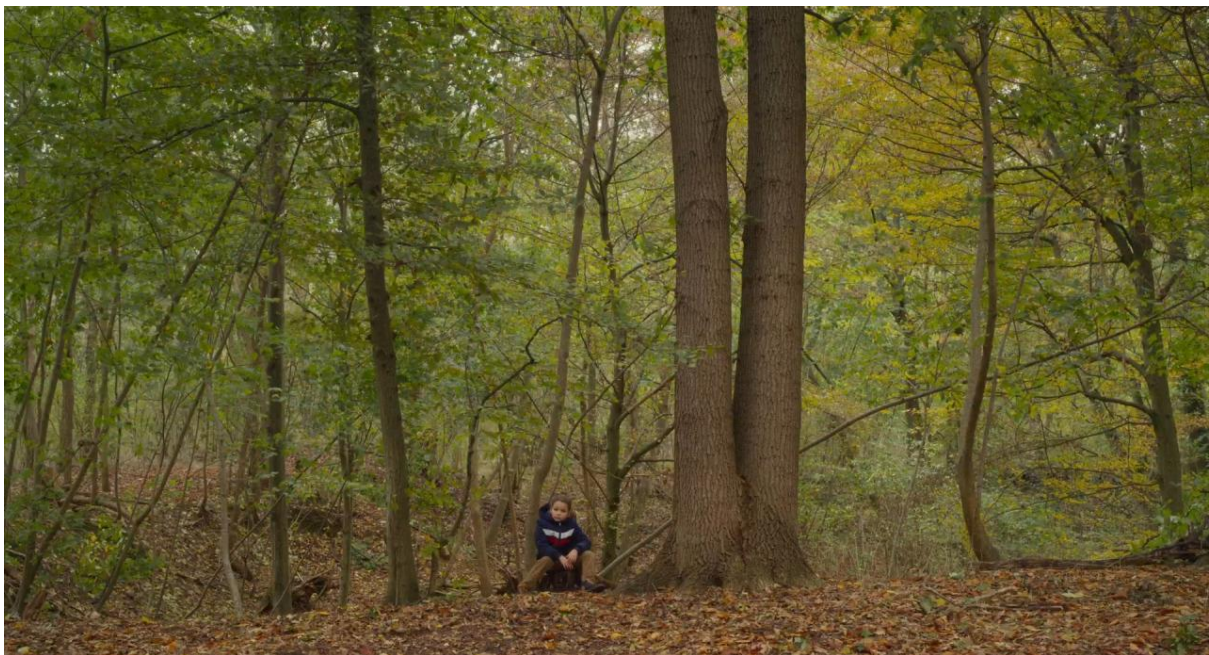


Figure 1. Nelly plays in the forest.

Petite Maman, dir. Céline Sciamma, (Pyramide Distribution, 2021)

In *Tomboy*, Sciamma uses the forest as a space for exploration and discovery (figure 2). Playing in the forest enables the children to escape from the world of rules, restrictions

⁷⁹ Weronika Laszkiewicz, 'Into the Wild Woods: On the Significance of Trees and Forests in Fantasy Fiction', *Mythlore*, 36.131, (Mythopoeic Society, 2017) pp. 39–58.

and adults, enabling play, freedom, discovery and exploration. As Laure seeks refuge in the forest, losing their way and exploring it deeper, Laure transforms further into Mickaël, and is able to explore queerness and an alternative identity, straying from heteronormative expectations of femininity and girls. Zulueta in his article ‘Tomboy’, argues that the forest is a space of the unknown and untamed, but also a space which facilitates discovery, journey and exploration.⁸⁰ In addition to the transformation into Mickaël, the forest is also a space where the queer relationship between Mickaël and Lisa develops as they walk into the depths of the forest together to kiss and hold hands, experiencing the freedom and limitlessness of the forest and of their queer identity.



Figure 2. Lisa and Mickaël walk through the forest to meet Lisa's friends.

Tomboy.

Laure's body and gender fluidity in *Tomboy* is a queer chronotope and a 'figure for relations between bodies past and present.'⁸¹ Sciamma demonstrates the embodiment and movement between different genders and identities through Laure's existence at home with their family, and then through the queering of their identity as Mickaël is free to exist within the wild space of the forest. Over the linear time and narrative throughout the film, which follows Laure's summer, Laure transforms further and further into Mickaël, through the exploration of the forest and themselves. At the start of the film Laure has short hair and wears loose 'tomboyish' clothing and upon being recognised as a boy by Lisa, Laure adopts the

⁸⁰ Ricardo E Zulueta, 'Tomboy (2011), *Film and History*, 42.2 (2012), 107-110 <muse.jhu.edu/article/490412> [accessed 3 September 2021].

⁸¹ Ibidem.

name Mickaël. Throughout the film, Sciamma demonstrates that the more time spent in the forest exploring the wild space of freedom, the further Laure transforms into Mickaël. This is shown through Jeanne cutting Laure's hair, the construction of the plasticine penis and swimming trunks as well as the performance of gender and masculinity intensifying throughout the film, as Mickaël adopts the boys' mannerisms by fighting and spitting. As Laure transforms into Mickaël and experiences the bliss, joy and freedom of gender expression, time does not exist but is queer and free.

In *Tomboy*, 'the woods appear as a central and liminal space of transformation that exists between the female and male.'⁸² The forest enables Laure to exist freely as Mickaël through the performance of masculinity. Playing football is part of Laure's physical performance and demonstration of gender expression (figure 3). This is not due to the male-centred nature and exclusivity of the sport, but according to Lindner, to the fact that football in *Tomboy* demonstrates a 'display of the boys' performative articulation of normative masculine'⁸³ behaviours and identity. Playing football enables Laure to display masculinity and become Mickaël even further by imitating the behaviours of the boys. As Mickaël plays football, he spits on the floor and runs around topless, demonstrating the clear performative and learned behaviours of gender. These scenes imply that these outward behaviours and representations of masculinity have ultimately no innate grounding in boys, as well as displaying the lengths they are prepared to go to in order to comply with gender roles and expectations.⁸⁴

Towards the end of *Tomboy*, Laure enters the clearing wearing a dress (figure 4), after being made to by their mother; the dress is a symbol for societal expectations of femininity. There is a static long establishing shot which is filled with diegetic sound - trees blowing in the wind and birds singing. Sciamma uses techniques associated with slow cinema in this scene, as she focuses on the stillness and slowness of the moment, allowing this long-take to create a space in which spectators can observe nature's rhythms and patterns and focus on Laure and their emotions.⁸⁵ After a cut, which signals a radical change, Laure leaves the dress hanging on a tree, like an empty cocoon (figure 5), as Mickaël is able to exist and experience

⁸² Idem, p. 109.

⁸³ Katharina Lindner, 'Céline Sciamma's Queer' Cinema: Affirming Gestures of Refusal in *Tomboy* and *Girlhood*' in *Film Bodies: Queer Feminist Encounters with Gender and Sexuality in Cinema* (Routledge, 2020), pp. 194-245 (p. 212).

⁸⁴ Darren Waldron, 'Embodying Gender Nonconformity in 'Girls': Céline Sciamma's *Tomboy*', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 53.1 (2013) 60-73 <doi:10.1353/esp.2013.0001> [accessed 10 December 2021].

⁸⁵ De Luca, Tiago, *Slow Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2015) p. 257.

the freedom of gender expression within the forest.⁸⁶ Mickaël exits the forest and abandons the cocoon of femininity, heteronormativity, and of their former self. This scene symbolises Laure shedding their skin, rejecting gender norms and metamorphosing into Mickaël, as they stray from the path of normality and societal expectations and into the wild queer liminal space of the forest. The cocoon of the dress hanging on the tree demonstrates a static idea of femininity and womanhood, linking to reproduction and the image of the womb. The cocoon is a transformative symbol and as Laure leaves the dress hanging on the tree like a cocoon, Laure transforms into Mickaël.



Figure 3. Mickaël watches the boys play football before joining in.

Tomboy.

⁸⁶ *Tomboy*, 01:11:25.



Figure 4. Laure sits in the forest with their dress on.

Tomboy.



Figure 58. Laure leaves the dress hanging from a tree in the forest.

Tomboy.

The forest in *Petite Maman* also occupies a queer liminal space as Nelly journeys between two timelines through the forest. Sciamma also uses the setting of the forest to emphasise the maternal nature of the film and Nelly's connection with her mother. *Petite Maman* is filled with dark autumnal colours of orange, red and brown. The setting of the autumnal forest is symbolic of the theme of life and death throughout the film, as Nelly encounters death for the first time. Nelly experiences confusion and sadness at the loss of her

grandmother, along with the regret of not having said goodbye. However, her grief, and the death of her grandmother, enable the forest, earth and nature to open up as a portal to a past world. Sciamma demonstrates intergenerational womanhood as she brings Nelly and her mother closer together, enabling them to bond over their shared grief.

The enclosed space of the trees and plants surrounding Nelly in the forest resembles the intimacy and safety of Nelly's relationship with her mother. The forest, maternal and fertile, is an allegory for the relationship and connection between the two. Just like Mickaël running to the forest for safety, to hide from his identity as Laure, the forest is a sanctuary of safety and maternal presence. Nelly is able to connect to herself and the lineage of women she is part of through mother nature itself and the queer merging timeline which enables her to meet her mother as a child. Nelly runs away to the forest to play and experience joy in this period of grief.

The hut that Nelly and Marion build together in the forest is allegorical of the maternal nature of their intimate, queer unique bond and relationship (figure 6). The hut is enclosed, small, safe and cosy, the womblike shape reflects the maternal nature of the forest and their relationship. They collaboratively build the hut, whilst producing a unique, intimate union between them. The shape of the hut also resembles the pyramid structure on the lake, further adding to the maternal nature of these small enclosed spaces which are symbolic of



Figure 6. Nelly and Marion look at the hut they have made together.

Petite Maman.

the womb or a cave. They also symbolise escapism; Nelly is able to seek refuge in these spaces from the external reality of grief, confusion and sadness.

In *Petite Maman*, Sciamma creates a queer chronotope through the distorted queer time within the space of the forest as she blends two timelines together. Through the coexistence of Nelly and Marion's timelines, Sciamma juxtaposes and embraces multi-generational stories bridging together reality and imagination, evoking a sense of possibility beyond the ordinary, rational, straight world and French society.⁸⁷ 'Fabulism' and 'magical realism', combine elements of magic, myth or fantasy with realism; blending the two genres together. Sciamma displays realism through the mundane aspects of everyday life - Nelly feeding her mother crisps in the car, her use of slow cinematic conventions such as long shots and quietness display the reality of Nelly's life. Realism is also conveyed through the grief and loss Nelly and her family experience. This is merged with the magical unexplained element of meeting her mother as a child. These techniques and genres are rooted in fairy tale and fable and strive to defy genre constraints or limitations. *Petite Maman* goes beyond any expectations of the natural world as Nelly enters the forest and is transported into the past. The unexplained fantasy elements of *Petite Maman* are emblematic of queerness; they are fluid and do not need an explanation or conclusion. Sciamma's fantastical elements dismantle and queer the traditional storytelling of fantasy or magical realism. Fantasy comes from Nelly's daily activities of playing in the forest, instead of a digitally enhanced dream sequence for example.

Sciamma presents a mid-shot of Nelly as she walks through the forest; Nelly slowly approaches the camera looking towards something in the distance. A long-shot of the forest shows a small figure of a child in the distance dragging a tree branch. Up until this point, the forest has been still, quiet and empty, thus Sciamma uses the close up of Nelly in conjunction with the long shot of the forest to draw out and display Nelly's curiosity and excitement as she sees another child in the distance. Marion then waves to Nelly and asks for help with constructing the hut. As Marion and Nelly continue to build the hut, Sciamma avoids showing Marion's face, either filming her from the side or from behind, building up to the moment where we realise Marion is Nelly's doppelganger, thus emphasising Nelly's intrigue. They then run through the forest to escape from the thunderstorm. As they reach Marion's house, Nelly stops momentarily, skidding through the wet leaves as she acknowledges her

⁸⁷ Richard Matthews, *Fantasy, The Liberation of Imagination*, (Routledge, 2002), p. 2.

grandmother's house before her. As Nelly enters the house, a follow shot is used to immerse the spectator in Nelly's experience as she takes the house in, wandering down the corridor and tracing the wall to feel for the hidden cupboard - recognising that she has entered a furnished inhabited version of her grandmother's house. In this scene, Sciamma uses a tracking shot to slowly bring the kitchen into view, emphasising Nelly's curiosity and intrigue. This shot highlights and brings into focus her grandmother's wallpaper, indicating the house is her grandmother's from the past.

There is no particular shift in era or style as Nelly and Marion's timelines merge. Obvious fantastical or sci-fi visual cues and techniques, such as special effects or sound effects, creating a sensation of separation or disconnection from the real world are not used in *Petite Maman*. The fantastical elements are placed into the everyday setting and realism of Nelly's life. Sciamma uses an incredibly shallow depth of field and autumnal colour palette which creates a fantastical fairy-tale like atmosphere. The fairy-tale like forest creates a timeless quality and acts as a queer liminal space between both timelines, as the forest remains the same throughout both Nelly's present and her mother's past, enabling magic to be integrated into the film subtly. The magical of the forest is presented as a restorative healing force in the face of inner loss and grief. External comfort comes through Marion and the games they play together in the forest. Nelly is able to explore her grief as well as her mother's past, coping with loss and facilitating a new understanding and connection with her mother.

Mittal Biswas writes that the spatial aspect of the queer chronotope consists of the 'physical and psychological space of the protagonist's body - including the body's gender'⁸⁸. Not only is the forest in *Petite Maman* a queer chronotope, as it defies space and time, but Nelly's body and gender are too. As Nelly moves between her grandmother's home past and present, she moves between two timelines and brings her mother's past into the narrative present. As time is queer and offtrack, filled with temporal distortions, Nelly's queerness and gender neutrality are also apparent as she experiences both timelines within the space of the forest. The queer time and chronotope within *Petite Maman* are allegorical of the queerness of Nelly, through her gender-neutral expression through her clothes as well as her performance of masculinity when playing games with Marion. Nelly in the present day is more gender neutral, through her overalls and jumpers and tied up hair, than her mother in the

⁸⁸ Mittal Biswas, p. 39.

past, demonstrating the shifts in expression and expectations through time and how culture and society have developed and changed over time, specifically in relation to gender roles. Through Nelly and Marion's role-playing and games together, they take on different characters and identities. An over-the-shoulder shot presents Nelly flattening her hair down in the mirror, and then attempting to put a tie on, demonstrating the performative nature and props used to present herself masculinely. The queer chronotope of the forest is also allegorical of Nelly's transformation into adolescence. Moving into queer time, meeting her mother as a child and facing loss and grief all contribute to Nelly's inquisition and exploration into another world of adulthood and the queer liminal space occupied by adolescence.

The queer chronotope of the body is equally expressed through Marieme in *Bande de filles*; Marieme follows a queer direction, moving away from the expected track of normality and femininity. *Bande de filles* engages with questions of sexuality and gender, but in a more implicit way than *Tomboy*, *Portrait* or *Naissance*. Sciamma refrains from defining Marieme's gender and sexual identity, just like the rest of her characters,⁸⁹ however, Marieme takes on a variety of identities with different gendered appearances and behaviours throughout the film. Throughout the linear straight time of *Bande de filles*, Marieme is forced to comply with the demands and expectations of French society to make money and escape from her life in the banlieues. Normative real time has an effect on Marieme's body; as she gets older and navigates new spaces and groups of people, her body becomes a queer chronotope. She tries out different identities that French society has set out for her, exploring herself as well as how she will be perceived, judged and interacted with, within different spaces as the narrative takes place within a single linear timeframe. Her gender expression is fluid and ever changing, responding to the demands of French society.

This is particularly evident when Marieme works as a drug dealer in the final section of the film. Marieme takes on two contrasting appearances and identities⁹⁰ - firstly transforming into an ultra-feminine persona wearing a blonde wig, makeup and heels when entering the middle-class Parisian parties to sell drugs. Immediately after Ismaël leaves Marieme upon discovering she has bound her chest, Marieme transforms into an ideal of femininity. The scene is highly stylised with vibrant bright colours and extreme close ups with a shallow focus of Marieme's eye as Monica applies mascara to her eyelashes and then

⁸⁹ Lindner, p. 194.

⁹⁰ Idem, p.240.

her lips as lipstick is then applied (figures 7, 8 and 9). These techniques contrast to the long-shots within the rest of the film, such as Marieme and the other drug-dealers playing Fifa and eating pizza together. Marieme and her friends fill the frame and the camera lingers on them as they play, chat and eat. Marieme blends in with the boys through her androgyny and dark clothing. Thus, her transformation into femininity forces the spectator to focus on Marieme and her physical appearance as well as her fluid transformations between masculinity and femininity. After Marieme's performances of femininity, she immediately changes into baggy, androgynous clothing, removing her blonde wig and unveiling her braids.

Sciamma uses Marieme to demonstrate and implicitly critique traditional notions of womanhood; Marieme must comply with societal expectations of femininity, beauty and middle class white ideals as she transforms herself into an ultra-feminine ideal of a Black girl. In contrast to this, in *Portrait*, Marianne and Héloïse connect with historic practices of alternate feminine self-expression, connecting to their queerness, desires and sexuality through taking the psychedelic flying ointment, which the earth represents. Flying ointment is a herbal hallucinogenic made from a mixture of herbs and hallucinogens which became popular during early modern and Renaissance eras. It is a natural drug made from the earth and plants, taken by wise women and witches enabling them to 'fly'. This historic practice of alternate feminine self-expression provided autonomy, liberation and pleasure for women within a patriarchal misogynist society.



Figure 7. Close-up of Marieme's eye as she gets ready.

Bande de filles, dir. Céline Sciamma, (Pyramide Distribution, 2014)



Figure 8. Close up of Marieme as she gets ready.

Bande de filles.



Figure 9. Close up of lipstick on Marieme as she gets ready.

Bande de filles.

Marianne and Héloïse use the flying ointment, a drug which arouses feelings of love and sexual desire, on their last night together. The flying ointment additionally demonstrates Marianne and Héloïse's female liberation as they take control of their own pleasure, as they take a drug made and taken by witches and women refusing the limitations of French society and its expectations. Not only do they reject expectations of patriarchal French society through their queer relationship and drug taking, but they also reject straight, normative linear time, as the drug distorts time and they enter the psychedelic induced queer chronotope, making time longer. The queer act of drug taking queers their experience and perception of time. The feeling of flying produced by the drug mirrors the freedom and bliss of their relationship and sexual experiences together. The mysticism and magic of the witchcraft and the drug reinforces the magic of the relationship and intimacy between the two characters.



Figure 10. Close up of Héloïse to show her dilated pupils after taking flying ointment.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

This scene is short, however Sciamma demonstrates the intimacy and pleasure induced by the drug. The scene begins with a medium shot of Marianne and Héloïse lying in bed together naked as Héloïse brings out a pot of the ointment. After deciding to take it together the scene cuts to an extreme close-up of the ointment being rubbed into Héloïse's armpit, producing a suggestive and erotic shot in which Sciamma challenges the spectator and their expectations of sex. The spectator immediately perceives the shot to depict penetration due to the extreme close up and angle of the fingers moving in between skin, as well as the sound of the Marianne and Héloïse breathless in the background. However, as the camera slowly zooms out, the shot enables the spectator to see the armpit. Without displaying explicit or graphic images, Sciamma still creates a scene filled with eroticism and desire which highlights the sensuality and intimacy between the two without displaying an explicit sex scene. The scene is sexual without objectification. Similarly to the balanced equal relationship between the two, the spectator is able to feel the tender affection as well as the mutual, balanced gaze between the two, which is evident within this scene. Sciamma does not focus on their bodies or display voyeuristic depictions of them; she presents a scene which is cinematographically queer and strays away from the heteronormative sex scenes in cinema which linger, watch and focus upon bodies, observing women as sexual objects. Sciamma doesn't let the spectator look and observe but invites them to feel and experience the eroticism created through the building tension, looks and dialogue between the two, which

build to create sensual tension and desire, ultimately subverting the spectator's perception of female sexuality and sex within cinema. As the camera zooms away from the armpit, there is another extreme close up of Marianne and Héloïse's lips as they kiss slowly and passionately. This shot is slow and drawn out, adding to the intimacy of the scene. It also queers and lengthens time, as they take pleasure and indulge in each other over the lengthening of time produced by the flying ointment. The scene ends with a close-up of Héloïse's face with big drug-induced pupils, before the scene cuts (figure 10). The scene is filled with hapticity, instead of the sexualisation of their bodies, it is about touch, sensuality and intimacy.

Urban Spaces: Interior and Exterior Spaces

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard compares trees to the home; both the home and the image of the tree move between micro and macro cosmos of both nature and interior spaces where the perspective ranges from the most intimate interior to the most vital expanse.⁹¹ The tree amplifies from the root and bole to the leaf and branch, like the house's amplification from small intimate spaces such as drawers, cupboards and locks to the whole house. Bachelard's work is about the poetic possibilities of conjuring memory from spaces and places. This is particularly relevant when exploring *Petite Maman*, which explores the value of memory in spaces, as Nelly and her parents sort through her grandmother's house after her death. 'Inhabited space transcends geometric space'⁹² according to Bachelard as he takes the reader on a journey through the home, exploring the comforts, mysteries, memories and dreams that inhabit different spaces within the house.

Sciamma delves into these memories and experiences through the house and possessions as well as the forest, where Nelly meets her mother as a child, opening up endless dimensions of existence and doors to experiences, memories and secrets. Nelly's exploration of the house enables her to explore and learn of her mother and grandmother's past, just like the forest, where she meets her mother as a child. Her mother's memories and experiences are fixed in the space of the house. As Nelly looks through her mother's books and drawers, she finds toys and small possessions charged with memories and experiences from her mother's childhood. Imaginary dimensions exist in the house, according to Bachelard, from underground cellars to secret wardrobes. The house and its imaginary dimensions filled with memories, also open up the imaginary, fairy-tale like dimension of the forest and two

⁹¹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, (Penguin Books, 2014).

⁹² *Ibidem*.

coexisting timelines, bringing Nelly and her mother closer together, through ‘the virtues of magic and the virtues of the homely.’⁹³ The past is transformed into the present through Marion’s memories, possessions and house as well as her past-self emerging into Nelly’s present day life.

Where outdoor nature and natural spaces symbolise liberation and the freedom to fulfil queer desires, the urban environment in *Bande de Filles* represents the opposite. The representation of the banlieues and the urban environment in *Bande de Filles* is implicitly critical of French society, urbanism, capitalism and patriarchy as well as eco-critical. Sciamma demonstrates the classism and racism of French society throughout *Bande de Filles* and ‘challenges the dominant discourse around Frenchness in cinema’⁹⁴, creating a non-normative film that aims to question and queer narratives of girlhood, adolescence and the normative narrative which insists on heteronormativity. Sciamma produces a commentary focusing on how patriarchy and capitalism affect the natural world due to greed and potential individual growth. Normative and traditional gender, desire and sexuality are imposed within Sciamma’s patriarchal urban spaces of *Bande de filles*, compared with ecological spaces where all forms of life exist and are queer and free.

The setting of *Bande de filles* consists of the banlieues of La Noue in the impoverished north-east suburb of Paris (figure 11, 12 and 13). It is mostly filmed in a static wide shot and framed at head height, displaying a street-level perspective.⁹⁵ According to Caroline Bainbridge, the girls in *Bande de filles* are ‘constantly renegotiating their home and public life in accordance with gender and economic roles that are conveyed through both institutions and male figures in their lives’.⁹⁶ The banlieues are dominated by patriarchy and masculinity; the girls lower their heads and stop talking when approaching groups of men staring at them from the top of steps or looking down from walls.

⁹³ Bachelard, (2014), p. 5.

⁹⁴ Diane L’Ambrose, ‘Cité Life- Gender and Space in Céline Sciamma’s *Bande de Filles*’, <https://www.academia.edu/36053585/Cit%C3%A9_Life_Gender_and_space_in_Celine_Sciamma_s_Bande_de_Filles_docx> [accessed 13 May 2022].

⁹⁵ Ibidem.

⁹⁶ Caroline Bainbridge, ‘Growing up girl in the ‘hood’: Vulnerability, violence and the girl-gang state of mind in *Bande de Filles/Girlhood*’, in *Femininity and Psychoanalysis: Cinema, Culture, Theory*, (Routledge, 2019), pp. 48-65.



Figure 11. Marieme walks home.

Bande de filles.



Figure 12. Area surrounding Marieme's flat.

Bande de filles.



Figure 13. Area surrounding Marieme's flat.

Bande de filles.

In response to the racist, classist French society that Marieme lives in, she reacts by going off track and queering her reality. By joining the girl gang, changing her name and adopting a new identity, Marieme is queered and attempts to adapt her attitudes and behaviours to free herself from the restrictive nature of French society. Marieme ‘experiments at the margins of femininity - trying on guises of female subjectivity.’⁹⁷ Her only option is to change, mould and adapt to a new identity, adopting a different way of life. Not only does she change once meeting Lady and her friends, but she also adopts a new identity when she becomes a dealer working for Abou, as mentioned in the first part of this chapter. Vic/Marieme ‘places herself in the in-between spaces of experimentation, hyper-performativity and transformation in ways that thus articulate identity as queer’⁹⁸ as she oscillates between a performance of ultra-femininity and masculinity, moving beyond the confines of heteronormativity and gender binarity. She wears makeup, a blonde wig, heels and a dress, performing femininity and presenting herself as seductive woman to fit in with the glamorisation of the drug world she has become a part of. On the other hand, Marieme’s masculine performance is her way of blending into the male-dominated world of drug dealing. Gender performance is her means for survival as she blends in adapting herself to suit the expectations of banlieue French society. Marieme’s fluctuating, fluid performance of gender identity also underscores the exclusion from French society she experiences as a working-class, Black girl living in the banlieues embodying ‘all the queer possibilities and radical openness of girlhood’.⁹⁹ Ultimately, the indeterminacy and queerness of Marieme embodies the uncertainty and confusion of queerness, growing up and girlhood.¹⁰⁰

Sciamma’s filmography is implicitly eco-critical as she demonstrates the freedom of natural outdoor spaces and the element earth and its inherent queerness. Outdoor spaces are often queer liminal spaces facilitating the exploration, performance and discovery of queerness. These spaces are often queer chronotopes, demonstrating the inseparability of Sciamma’s queer space and time. As a consequence of the lack of natural spaces, such as the queer forest of *Tomboy* or *Petite Maman*, in *Bande de filles*, Marieme must hide under a variety of costumes, finding her way through these different guises, as she is unable to experience the queerness and freedom of the earth.

⁹⁷ Ibidem.

⁹⁸ Idem, p. 18-19.

⁹⁹ Frances Smith, *Bande de Filles, Girlhood Identities in Contemporary France* (Routledge, 2020).

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem.

Chapter 3: Air

Air is produced by plants and the element earth, thus, chapter three moves on from the element earth to examine the role air has within Sciamma's films. This chapter considers the different manifestations of air within her films, including wind, breath, silence and sound. The element air has not been investigated much within film studies, however, Kevin L Ferguson's article 'Panting in the Dark: The Ambivalence of Air in Cinema' studies air by focusing on the range of meaning found in cinematic breathing, from the shallow breathless sounds in sexual scenes to heavy stilted breathing demonstrating fear. According to Ferguson, air is a vessel of communication filled with intent that has been ignored as a 'medium for conveying complex attitudes about gender, sexuality, ambivalence, representation, our bodies.'¹⁰¹

Additionally, Davina Quinlivan, in *The Place of the Breath in Cinema*, considers the way air is displayed and experienced within cinema when it is something that cannot be seen.¹⁰² One way in which Sciamma displays air within her films is through a focus on the breath, through auditory and visual cues. Sound is another manifestation of the element air; this chapter examines Sciamma's queer use of sound, silence and music, exploring the audio detail, territory sounds and vivid soundscapes within Sciamma's films. Air is used to display characters' freedom, self-expression and queerness. Sciamma gives her characters voices, literally and figuratively, enabling them to express themselves through their breath, voice, silence and music.

Heavy Breathing: Eroticism and Pain of Queer Breath

Air is a connection to life force and we experience this, on a personal level, through the breath. The audio detail of the breath is an important part of Sciamma's films; it becomes more important than dialogue often dominating the soundscape. Sciamma uses the breath to display sensuality, desire, longing and also pain. This use of the breath is queer; it is used to communicate emotions, desire and freedom, and replaces normative forms of expression and dialogue. Liz Greene, in 'The Labour of Breath: Performing and Designing Breath in Cinema', states that the 'presence of breath in fiction film is a conscious choice made by

¹⁰¹ Kevin L. Ferguson, 'Panting in the Dark: The Ambivalence of Air in Cinema', *Camera Obscura: Feminism, Culture and Media Studies*, 26.2 (2011), 33-63 (p. 34) <[https://read.dukeupress.edu/camera-obscura/article-abstract/26/2%20\(77\)/33/58458/Panting-in-the-Dark-The-Ambivalence-of-Air-in?redirectedFrom=fulltext](https://read.dukeupress.edu/camera-obscura/article-abstract/26/2%20(77)/33/58458/Panting-in-the-Dark-The-Ambivalence-of-Air-in?redirectedFrom=fulltext)> [accessed 13 March 2022].

¹⁰² Davina Quinlivan, *The Place of Breath in Cinema* (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 1.

filmmakers.¹⁰³ This can be done by using sound to draw attention to the rhythm and patterns of breath, or by changing the studio environment by using darkness and cool temperatures to make the breath visible. Sciamma consciously draws attention and focus to the breath, making it a vital part of her narratives, favouring breathing and exaltations over the delivery of words.¹⁰⁴ Film theory has often been eye-orientated and focused on the gaze and act of looking, thus, ‘the notion of breathing stimulates new ways in which to question the nature of seeing, perceiving and sensing things which are not always entirely visible in film.’¹⁰⁵

By focusing on the sounds and rhythms of the breath, instead of dialogue and action, Sciamma inflects meaning and conveys emotions in a queer way, having stated that ‘the sound of bodies breathing is something I’ve always obsessed about.’¹⁰⁶ Through the silence and minimal dialogue in her films, Sciamma draws attention to the sounds and expressive nature of the breath, enabling an ‘enhanced aural close-up of the characters within the story.’¹⁰⁷ Modern technology, such as close-miking and post production recording, enables Sciamma to display small changes and details of the breath, amplifying silence and focusing on objective-internal sounds such as the physiological sounds of the mouth from the breath to moaning.

Through changes in breathing, such as it deepening, or characters becoming breathless, Sciamma eroticises the breath. The eroticised breath creates sensuality which engages the viewer in a queer way, subverting heteronormative ways of displaying sex and eroticism which favour sexualising female bodies and fail to focus on female pleasure.¹⁰⁸ Additionally, the breath occupies a queer liminal space in between words conveying a richness of meaning through silence and what is not being said. The breath is in a space of resistance, conveying meaning unconventionally and queerly and is thus inherently political, communicating through the power of silence, sound and slowness.

In *Portrait*, the breath becomes a means for communication between Marianne and Héloïse; it builds sexual desire and tension in a queer, non-normative way. The changes in

¹⁰³ Liz Greene, ‘The Labour of Breath: Performing and Designing Breath in Cinema’, *Music, Sound and the Moving Image*, 10.2 (2016), 109-133 (p. 9) <<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/651455/pdf>> [accessed 23 July 2022]

¹⁰⁴ Kelley Conway et al. ‘Gender and Sexuality’ in *A Companion to Contemporary French Cinema*, ed. by Alistair Fox et al (publication, year) pp.377-480 (p.437).

¹⁰⁵ Quinlivan, p. 1.

¹⁰⁶ Eileen G’Sell, ‘Breathing Lessons: An Interview with Céline Sciamma’, *Reverse Shot*, <http://reverseshot.org/interviews/entry/2931/celne_sciamma> [accessed 23 July 2022].

¹⁰⁷ Greene, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 76.

breathing allude to sexual encounters and desire: the laboured breath and changes in breathing demonstrating desire or the satisfaction of sexual encounters and orgasm. Early on in the film, Héloïse comes into Marianne's room and sits down where she would sit if she were posing for her portrait, if it was not being made in secret (see figure 1).¹⁰⁹ As Marianne walks out from behind the curtains, she watches Héloïse. The scene is almost silent; all that can be heard are Marianne's breathes deepening and quickening. The camera is still and Sciamma fixates on Marianne's expression watching and taking Héloïse in with admiration and captivation. The close up of her face and upper body enables the spectator to see her chest rising as she looks towards Héloïse. This shot alludes to the deepening breath within a sexual encounter; the tension, sensuality and desire is implicitly displayed through this queer focus and use of the breath.

While Héloïse is sitting for her portrait, after Marianne destroys her first attempt,¹¹⁰ they tease each other over each other's mannerisms, both confessing to observing each other. Héloïse says to Marianne 'et quand vous êtes troublée, vous respirez par la bouche.'¹¹¹ This shot consists of a close up of the two as they look at each other silently (see figure 2). Sciamma draws attention to the breath through Héloïse explicitly commenting on the way Marianne responds and breathes. The focus on the breath builds the tension; they watch each other, acknowledging each other's breathing as it deepens, standing out in this quasi-silent scene. They have been watching each other, noticing the patterns and rhythms of each other's breath, intensifying the sexual tension and desire. Sciamma then cuts to Marianne continuing to paint; she exhales deeply, almost as a sigh¹¹², accentuating the evident sexual frustration and longing between the two after this intense sensual encounter.

¹⁰⁹ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 00:36:37.

¹¹⁰ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:06:07.

¹¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹¹² *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:06:40.



Figure 1. Héloïse sits in Marianne's room.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.



Figure 2. Marianne and Héloïse observe each other's mannerisms while Héloïse sits for her portrait.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

Another scene which displays Sciamma's erotic use of breath is when Marianne and Héloïse are in the cave covered by their masks, moments before kissing for the first time (see figure 3).¹¹³ A sound bridge is used linking the music from the previous scene, at the bonfire, into this scene. This technique highlights the importance of sound within this scene; as the singing comes to a halt, the silence and the deep breathing becomes even more apparent and

¹¹³ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:19:54.

significant in contrast to the singing voices. The tension of the scene is drawn out through the slowness and silence as they stand and watch each other, building up the anticipation and sensuality. The wind can be heard blowing on the beach, along with their deep, heavy breathing as they look at each other. As their breathing deepens, the camera moves to a close up as they look into each other's eyes, creating more intimacy. As their faces move closer together, they look at each other's mouths and slowly edge closer to each other. They pull down their masks and kiss each other breathlessly. When they pull away from each other the deep breathing continues, displaying the eroticism, pleasure and sensuality of the scene, as well as the anxiety and panic of acting upon their queer desires.



Figure 3. Marianne and Héloïse in the cave moments before kissing for the first time.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

The scarves are significant within this scene; they protect them from the wind, but also add to the longing and desire between them. The scarves act as a mask creating another layer and barrier between their mouths and breath, displaying consent and the active decision they both make to act on their desires and kiss each other. As they remove their masks, two different types of air combine - their breath and the wind.

In another scene, Sciamma displays a close up of their faces together as Héloïse breathes onto Marianne's neck.¹¹⁴ Marianne responds by breathing deeply inwards and then onto Héloïse's hand as she touches her lips, creating this link between the orality of kissing with breathing, emphasising the sensuality that builds between these moments of touch,

¹¹⁴ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:23:59.

breath and sensuality. After this, they kiss passionately and their breathing can be heard as they breathe life into each other on both a personal and creative level, inspiring each other through their relationship of muse/artist as well as their romantic connection.

Sciamma also eroticises the breath in *Naissance*, to display Marie's admiration and desire for Floriane. After Floriane is sick at a party, she chews gum then spits it out and brings her open mouth up towards Marie to check her breath.¹¹⁵ Marie is already mesmerised with Floriane, following her to the bathroom and trying to convince her to take her to the synchronised swimming practices. This moment is tense and silent; the camera's close up displays Floriane breathing intensely and closely into Marie's mouth, adding to Floriane's eroticism and Marie's obsession with her. Sciamma transforms Floriane's breath after being sick, into something erotic filled with tension, longing and desire.

Sciamma uses the act of smoking within her films to further emphasise and focus on the eroticisation of the breath. Sciamma is not only as an erotic act, but also a transgressive queer act to display characters' autonomy. Female smokers in 18th century France were perceived as 'backwards, socially deviant, vulgar and immoral.'¹¹⁶ Women smoking was a taboo associated with deviance from societal constructions of ideal feminine norms¹¹⁷ as tobacco usage was a male habit. Thus, smoking, became a form of resisting patriarchal oppression by defying gender expectations and expressing female independence. According to Greaves, historically, a woman smoking either meant that she was a prostitute, a lesbian or intending to seduce men, demonstrating the patriarchal power over women, their habits and sexualities.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ *Naissance des pieuvres*, 00:13:05.

¹¹⁶ 'The Sensuous Smoker', *Driehaus Museum*, <<https://driehausmuseum.org/blog/view/the-sensuous-smoker>> [accessed 26 July 2022].

¹¹⁷ Kate Hunt, Mary-Kate Hannah, Patrick West, 'Contextualizing smoking: masculinity, femininity and class differences in smoking in men and women from three generations in the west of Scotland', *Health Education Research*, 19.3, <<https://doi.org/10.1093/her/cyg061>> pp. 239-249.

¹¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

Marianne and Héloïse smoke together on two separate occasions throughout *Portrait*. This transgressive act underscores the rigid boundaries and constructions of masculinity and femininity. Sciamma demonstrates queerness through these scenes; they defy normative expectations of women displaying female autonomy and subverting traditional gender and sexual expression. The act of smoking is focused on orality and the breath, thus it is an eroticised act encoded with sexual meaning and desire. Héloïse asks Marianne if she has any tobacco¹¹⁹, and as they smoke, the sound of their deep breathes stand out (see figure 4). The slow, measured inhales and exhales build tension, drawing focus on the breath, orality and seduction of this act. Eroticism and queerness implicitly depict sex and desire through the orality and nature of sharing the pipe, smoke and each other's breath.



Figure 4. Marianne and Héloïse smoke together in Marianne's room.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

The orality of smoking adds to the passion and tension building up between the two as they become closer emotionally and gaze at each other longingly. They have a profound conversation about what it means to be free and then spend several moments catching each other's eyes as they glance at each other silently, building up the intensity and sensual passion of this scene. The second time they smoke together, they discuss whether they have been in love, whilst looking at each other intently (see figure 5).¹²⁰ By exploring love in their conversation, the intense desire between the two is evident as their attraction and desire has been deepening throughout the scenes prior.

¹¹⁹ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 00:37:03.

¹²⁰ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 00:59:50.



Figure 5. Marianne and Héloïse smoke together in the kitchen.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

Both smoking scenes present important moments for the two as they become more vulnerable and intimate with each other. Sciamma presents sensuality and desire through the slow cinematic conventions in these scenes. They consist of still long takes and minimalist mise-en-scène, focusing on Marianne and Héloïse smoking and chatting. These shots provide an observational style; in addition to the drawn out dialogue filled with silence and pauses, Sciamma enables the spectator to focus on the shared gazes and breath which build tension and longing.

Sciamma presents the symbolic act of smoking within *Bande de filles* to demonstrate escapism and freedom whilst also presenting the girls' queerness within French society. Marieme and her friends smoke weed and shisha together in the hotel room they rent for the night (see figure 6) demonstrating their desire to escape from society and their daily lives. The hotel room is a chronotope; upon entering this space of freedom and escapism, they smoke weed, drink alcohol and time slows down and is distorted. There is a slow motion mid-shot of Lady's profile as she blows smoke out of her mouth and it slowly dances across the screen. The characters' and spectator's sense and perception of time is slowed down as the characters enter a state of intoxication where time is distorted. This shot then cuts to a slow motion close up of Lady facing the camera blowing out a big cloud of white smoke towards the camera. Sciamma's use of slow motion slows down time and the scene 'is

stretched out and made surreal, in line with their elated languid drugged perceptions'¹²¹ as the girls fade into intoxication, are bathed in blue light and lip synch to Rihanna's *Diamonds*.



Figure 6. Lady smokes weed in the hotel room.

Bande de filles.

The act of smoking within this scene displays their desire for freedom, relaxation and escapism, as they enter a surreal fantasy scene resembling a music video. As working-class Black women living in the banlieues of Paris, they are marginalised, different and defy French society's expectations of normality. Smoking weed within the banlieues demonstrates a rejection of society's rules, norms and expectations and a defiant act against French society. Thus, the representation of smoking weed further exemplifies their difference and queerness, separating them further from normalcy.

Sciamma also uses the breath to display pain through the use of shallow breathing, panting, crying as well as characters becoming breathless. Sciamma uses automated dialog replacement (re-recording sounds in post-production) and looping to accentuate the audio detail of the breath within her films, enabling the spectator to focus on sounds of anxiety and pain produced by the breath. Sciamma uses the breath to display violence and aggression within fighting scenes in both *Tomboy* and *Bande de filles*. In *Tomboy*, when Mickaël fights with one of the boys, the audio detail of their panting, deep breathes and grunts can be heard as they push and hit each other.¹²² This fight provides Mickaël with the opportunity to perform masculinity. The sound of the breath throughout this fast, erratic scene contrasts with the slowness, stillness and quasi silence throughout the majority of the film as the children fly

¹²¹ Emma Wilson, 'Scenes of Hurt and Rapture: Céline Sciamma's *Girlhood*', *Film Quarterly*, 70.3 (2017) 10-22 (p. 15) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26413784>> [accessed 10 March 2022].

¹²² *Tomboy*, 00:58:22.

across the frame in a blur of bodies and aggression. The breath stands out in this scene displaying the extent of Laure's desire to achieve masculinity. Sciamma uses Mickaël's repeated learned behaviours of masculinity, such as fighting, to demonstrate Butler's ideas regarding repeated acts contributing to gender performance further contributing to the illusion of binary sex.

In *Bande de filles*, Marieme also participates in a fight.¹²³ Before the fight begins, the scene and the crowd are still and silent in anticipation as the girls watch each other. Suddenly the sound of their feet against the ground breaks the silence and they begin hitting and grabbing at each other, grunting and panting, expressing moans of pain, force and effort. The crowd surrounding them cheer and scream; these sounds build up and contrast with the silence of the start of the scene adding to the dramatization and brutality of the scene. The other girl pushes Marieme to the floor raising her arms in the air, opening her mouth in an animalistic roar of victory and power, thinking that she has won. Marieme, however, gets back up and continues to fight her, choking her as the girl screams and moans in pain - her victorious screams silenced by her stilted breath and cries. As Marieme takes off the girl's top, the crowd scream and suddenly the girl is silent, contrasting with her expressive noises prior. As she is stripped of her clothes, she guards her body, becoming vulnerable and exposed, silent with embarrassment. The exposure silences her, hurting her more than the punches and kicks. The sound of Marieme's knife, as she cuts the girl's bra off, stands out within the sounds of the crowd screaming and cheering, highlighting Marieme's new aggression and power. After winning the fight, Marieme finally receives appreciation and acknowledgement from her abusive, violent brother. Her victory produces a new found agency which leads her to see Ismaël and display her sexual dominance.¹²⁴

In *Naissance*, as the girls swim and perform, they hold their breath underwater, stifling and restricting themselves and their breathing (see figure 7). Sciamma displays the physical demands and effort of synchronised swimming from kicking and beating the water, to plunging beneath the surface, holding their breath. The act of synchronising their movements also resembles the societal pressures and expectations of femininity and women - synchronising to conform and become an idealised object of desire and femininity. Their mouths gasp for air as they come up from underneath the water to breathe, as well as sucking in their breath as they are lined up waiting to be scrutinised by the swimming coach as she

¹²³ *Bande des Filles*, 00:58:53.

¹²⁴ Wilson, p. 17.

checks their armpits for any visible hairs, handing out a razor to those who do not live up to her standards as she relentlessly scrutinises the girls, forcing them to conform (see figure 8).



Figure 7. Synchronised swimmers holding their breath underwater as they perform.

Naissance des pieuvres.



Figure 8. The synchronised swimming coach inspects the girls' armpits for stray hairs.

Naissance des pieuvres.

Sciamma's Queer Soundscapes: Sound and Silence

In *Audio-Vision*, Michel Chion writes about how film theory consistently neglects sound and fails to recognise the way sound influences and shapes the spectator's perception of images, and vice versa. Sciamma uses slow cinema techniques throughout her films by focusing on

stillness and quietude through the use of long shots, the focus on mundane, small moments in life and the use of quasi-silence. Slow cinema, according to Stephanie Lam, ‘provides breathing space in an oversaturated and overstimulated’¹²⁵ environment. Cavallini also argues that ‘silence is considered as a critical stance for inhabiting and disrupting the world in which we live’¹²⁶. Thus, Sciamma’s focus on silence and stillness is queer, resisting the ‘socially sanctioned narrative pathways enforced by classical cinema’¹²⁷ and audio-visual heteronormativity as she establishes a new transformative cinematic language. The environment is also a central subject and focus within slow cinema¹²⁸ and Sciamma uses silence to focus on the territory sounds of nature.

Sciamma’s use of physiological objective-internal sounds, ambient noises and territory sounds and silence ‘enables the viewer to pay attention to the subtleties of the film’s soundscape and appreciate the weight of words.’¹²⁹ Chion theorises that cinematic silence must always be considered in relation and in contrast to sounds heard beforehand.¹³⁰ In *Portrait*, there are many scenes filled with silence which produce intense sexual tension and desire. These moments of silence draw out the simmering queer desires, longing and fluctuating tensions that develop and spark between Héloïse and Marianne.¹³¹ When Héloïse sits for her portrait, they both playfully tease each other. Silence fills this scene, drawing out the gaps and tension in between the dialogue, creating sensuality filled with desire, enabling the dialogue to resonate more deeply.¹³² The slowness and silence throughout *Portrait* mirrors the nuanced development of desire throughout the film.¹³³

Throughout *Petite Maman*, the focus on silence and territory sounds, enable the spectator to focus on the rich detailed audio track of the film. The sounds throughout are vivid and crisp, transporting and immersing the spectator to Nelly’s environment. Mundane

¹²⁵ Stephanie Lam, ‘It’s About Time: Slow Aesthetics in Experimental Ecocinema and Nature Cam Video’, in *Slow Cinema*, by Tiago de Luca (Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 255.

¹²⁶ Roberto Cavallini, ‘No way home: Silence, slowness and the problem of authenticity in the cinema of Lisandro Alonso’, *Aniki: Portuguese Journal of the Moving Image*, 2.2 (2015), 184-200 (p. 188) <https://www.academia.edu/21874662/_2016_From_Slow_Cinema_to_Slow_Cinemas_In_Slow_Cinema_Edinburgh_Edinburgh_University_Press> [accessed 10 September 2022].

¹²⁷ Rosalind Galt and Karl Schoonover, ‘The Emergence of Queer Cinematic Time’, in *Queer Cinema in the World*, (Duke University Press, 2016) p. 277.

¹²⁸ Lam, p. 255.

¹²⁹ Zach Green, ‘A Formalism of Feeling: Queer Temporalities and Memory in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*’, *Luma Quarterly*, 6.22 (2020) <<https://lumaquarterly.com/issues/volume-six/022-fall/a-formalism-of-feeling-queer-temporalities-and-memory-in-portrait-of-a-lady-on-fire/>> [accessed 1 August 2022].

¹³⁰ Chion (1994), p. 57.

¹³¹ Ibidem.

¹³² Ibidem.

¹³³ Green.

moments in the film build up the richness of details and create intimacy between the spectator and characters, such as the crunch of leaves, a pencil scratching the answers of a newspaper crossword, book pages, crunching cereal and slurping milk (see figure 9). When Nelly brushes her teeth or soup is poured into a bowl, the silence throughout the film highlights and accentuates these visceral sounds even further. Sciamma lingers on these normal mundane moments, creating intimacy and tenderness through the sensory haptic notion of the sounds, smells, tastes and textures which create nostalgia and aural texture. After one of the only scenes in *Petite Maman* with music, when Nelly and Marion take a boat out onto the lake,¹³⁴ Sciamma displays a mid-shot of the two girls sat next to each other looking into the distance, with their hair blowing in the wind in silence (see figure 10). This contrasts with the music of the previous scene and exemplifies the intimacy between the two through the comfortable silence they experience together.



Figure 9. Nelly eating cereal.

Petite Maman.

¹³⁴ *Petite Maman*, 01:05:09.



Figure 10. Nelly and Marion after rowing on the lake.

Petite Maman.

Where silence can display comfort, Sciamma also uses it to display awkwardness and discomfort. This can be evident within the sex scenes in *Naissance*. The sex scene between François and Anne is quiet, enabling the sounds of François' heavy breathing and grunting to contrast with Anne's passivity and silence (see figures 11 and 12). Anne lies passively while François pleases himself; her silence displays her discomfort and lack of pleasure or self-expression as she submits to François and his desires.¹³⁵ François' breathing cuts through the silence of the scene as he pushes Anne against the wall, forcefully touching her. The camera focuses on close-ups of Anne's face, displaying discomfort as François aggressively forces himself upon her. They don't kiss throughout this sexual encounter, displaying not only the lack of intimacy, but also François' lack of interest in Anne's pleasure or feelings, as he concentrates solely on his desires, taking advantage of her and her affection for him. With this scene Sciamma rejects heteronormative expectations and enforced gender roles within sex through focusing on Anne's experience and François' explicit manipulation of her. Sciamma uses the breath and silence to exhibit Anne's discomfort and François' selfish desire, brutality and force.

¹³⁵ Gemma Edney, 'Electronica, gender and French cinematic girlhood in Céline Sciamma's films', *French Screen Studies*, 20.3-4, (2010), 285-297 <10.1080/26438941.2020.1742563>.



Figure 11. François and Anne's legs as they François gets on top of her.

Naissance des pieuvres.



Figure 12. Anne's face while having sex with François.

Naissance des pieuvres.

Silence plays an important role in the sex scene between Marie and Floriane, which also lacks intimacy and sensuality. The scene is filled with awkwardness and silence as they participate in this strange encounter and are both unable to communicate their feelings, needs or desires. Sciamma uses a mid-shot of Floriane as she lies down on the bed and Marie watches her. As Floriane lies down, she looks at the ceiling creating a separation, distance and lack of intimacy between herself and Marie, as Marie begins to touch her under the

covers (see figure 13). The scene is uncomfortable and brief, without any sense of enjoyment or pleasure from either of the girls as they stay silent throughout it. It is not a sexual encounter but an emotional one where their vulnerabilities are exposed. Towards the end of the silent scene, there is a close up of Floriane shedding a tear and finally makes a noise, exhaling shakily (see figure 14). This scene is particularly brutal for Marie as she experiences erotic awe for the first time whilst being used by Floriane through this transactional act. They make the bed together in silence, hiding the evidence as well as their true feelings and thoughts. At the end of the scene, François arrives and Marie is made to leave, feeling helpless and heartbroken.¹³⁶ Sciamma's use of silence in this scene demonstrates the messiness and discomfort of their sexual encounter, displaying a queer depiction to what is often glamorised and heteronormative within American cinema.



Figure 13. Marie and Floriane in bed together before their sexual encounter.

Naissance des pieuvres.

¹³⁶ Wilson, p. 12.



Figure 14. Close up of Floriane's face with a tear going down her face after their sexual encounter.

Naissance des pieuvres.

As mentioned previously, Sciamma's use of silence enables the spectator to focus on the details of the diegetic sounds and soundscapes that she creates. Sciamma creates soundscapes by establishing an atmosphere built on silence, breathing, and territory sounds of nature, inhabiting the space and creating a continuous and atmospheric presence throughout. Sciamma favours natural, atmospheric sounds and territory sounds over the use of music or dialogue, adding rich detail and creating an ambience and setting beyond the use of voices and music. This queer use of sound mirrors the queerness of Sciamma's films and narratives, as slow cinema offers a space for observing the rhythms and patterns as they occur onscreen, resisting the socially sanctioned narrative pathways enforced by classical cinema.¹³⁷

In *Audiovision*, Chion coins the phrase 'materialising sound indices'¹³⁸ to describe aspects of sound that draw direct attention to the physical nature of its source¹³⁹, for example footsteps or breathing, which also provide a feeling of texture. Sciamma's films privilege materialising sound indices and territory sounds, creating vivid atmospheric soundscapes which 'function like the sense of touch by triggering physical memories of smell, touch and taste.'¹⁴⁰ These sounds include the sound of wind and birds chirping - ultimately, atmospheric natural sounds which contribute to the setting, space and atmosphere, providing presence,

¹³⁷ De Luca, p. 257.

¹³⁸ Chion, (1994), p. 114-17.

¹³⁹ Miguel Mera, 'Materialising Film Music' in Mervyn Cooke and Fiona Ford (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Film Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 1.

¹⁴⁰ Davina Quinlivan, *The Place of Breath in Cinema*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p. 3.

definition and three-dimensionality.¹⁴¹ Sciamma uses diegetic sounds to add to the notion of real time and space, creating realism and intimacy between spectators and characters through sensory cinema which is tactile, dynamic and kinetic.¹⁴² Sciamma's filmmaking engages with Laura Marks' concept of 'haptic visuality', where sensory depth is produced through the modes of perception and expression in film. Hapticity refers to the sensation of touch particularly within film imagery, however, Marks does not write about sound's role within the context of hapticity.

The first scene in *Tomboy* depicts a close up of Laure's face in the centre of the frame with their eyes closed and the sun shining on their face (see figures 15 and 16). It is quiet with the sound of birds chirping, the wind blowing in the trees and the car driving. As Laure closes their eyes and feels the wind blow through their hair and against their skin, the sounds of nature and wind reveal the tactile physicality of Sciamma's soundscape which 'announces its hapticity, creating an embodied connection with the spectator.'¹⁴³ Sciamma presents a highly sensory and tactile depiction of the wind in *Tomboy* through its constant movement and sound - rustling leaves and blowing hair. Laure puts their hand out of the car window to feel the wind against their skin, interacting with nature surrounding them.¹⁴⁴ The sun streams through the trees and the wind blows in *Tomboy*, immersing the spectator into the nostalgia of childhood summers whilst creating a visual hapticity, as Sciamma 'invites the eye to function as an organ of touch.'¹⁴⁵ Sciamma's use of hapticity throughout *Tomboy* is queer; she doesn't use sound or the camera to look but creates sensations of touch and texture, queering the way the spectator engages with Laure's narrative, mirroring their queerness. Miguel Mera argues in 'Materialising Film Music' that in haptic music and sound, the ears function like organs of touch, creating a visceral and sensory quality of sound.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴¹ Chion, (1982).

¹⁴² Chion, (1994), p. 75.

¹⁴³ Mera, p.2.

¹⁴⁴ *Tomboy*, 00:01:21.

¹⁴⁵ Quinlivan, (2012), p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ Mera, p.5.



Figure 15. The back of Laure's head as they stick their head out of the car.

Tomboy.



Figure 16. Laure feeling the wind on their skin.

Tomboy.

In *Portrait*, when Marianne and Héloïse go on walks together, the soundscape consists of the wind in the trees, rustling leaves and the sound of footsteps, creating a vivid and immersive diegetic soundscape.¹⁴⁷ The wind is wild and intense, blowing their hair and forcing them to wear scarves as protection. The intensity of the wind mirrors their intense

¹⁴⁷ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 00:19:26.

desire for each other - which is wild, intense and fiercely against nature and conventions. The sound and landscape change and develop with each other; the sound of footsteps against pebbles changes to footsteps in the grass and the quiet breeze is replaced with the sweeping wind. Music or sound effects do not obscure Marianne and Héloïse's emotions; the continual presence of environmental territory sounds provide them and their emotions room to breathe and feel as they walk together outdoors, catching glances of each other, building desire and tension. It is as though the wind has blown Marianne and Héloïse together onto the island.

Due to Sciamma's extensive use of silence, diegetic and territory sounds in *Portrait*, the use of music at the bonfire is particularly powerful and impactful. Marianne, Héloïse and Sophie attend a bonfire populated solely by women who sing a Latin acapella hymn around the fire (see figure 17).¹⁴⁸ The singing throughout this scene is powerful as it contrasts drastically with the silence up until this point. It highlights a shift in narrative displaying the thematic significance of this climatic moment of desire between Marianne and Héloïse. The ethereal chanting of voices slowly builds, harmonising with each other, until they become louder as more voices layer and blend together. The women start clapping as the camera pans across their faces. The singing within this scene is a clear example of Chion's dramatization of shots, in which sound orients a shot or scene towards a feeling of imminence and expectation.¹⁴⁹



Figure 17. The women around the bonfire begin to sing.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

¹⁴⁸ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:16:35.

¹⁴⁹ Chion, (1994), p. 13-14.

As the music gradually builds up, Marianne and Héloïse smile at each other across the fire - the music enriches the scene adding to the passion and intensity, highlighting a development in their relationship. Drew Daniel in his article 'All Sound is Queer', argues that sound can let the spectator hear what is not yet locatable on the available maps of identity;¹⁵⁰ the bonfire scene uses sound to unite a queer group of women who are ignored and marginalised within 18th century French society. Amongst this group is the woman who helps Sophie have an abortion, as well as the woman who sold Héloïse the flying ointment. This group of women are inherently queer; they reject society and the expectations imposed upon them. Once the music crescendos, the music pauses in a moment of dramatic silence. The singing then continues into the next scene in which Marianne and Héloïse are holding each other's arms as they help each other climb down a cliff.¹⁵¹ The passion and power of the music and the fire lingers and burns between them, foreshadowing their first kiss. Their masks protect them from the wind, creating a barrier between each other, adding to the longing and desire. The music then suddenly stops, creating an intense and shocking silence, building the tension as Marianne and Héloïse kiss for the first time.

Sciamma uses music as an allegory for illicit queer desire and longing. Héloïse's excluded and sheltered life growing up in the convent gives her an appreciation of church music, but has never heard an orchestra. Héloïse asks Marianne to describe the sound of an orchestra to her resulting in Marianne playing the harpsichord and describing the music.¹⁵² Héloïse's desire to hear music she could not hear in the convent mirrors her illicit queer desire for Marianne. They sit together at the harpsichord, moving their bodies closer together, adding to the sexual tension as Marianne plays. Héloïse is mesmerised and excited by both the music and Marianne as she watches her play, describing and comparing the music to nature coming to life, mirroring the passion and desire between them which is also coming to life like nature. The camera is behind them, creating distance from the spectator and this moment of intimacy. Vivaldi's 'Summer', which Marianne plays on the harpsichord, returns towards the end of the film at an orchestral concert, many years after their brief romance.¹⁵³ The use of this song has a shocking dramatic effect, just like the song at the bonfire, as it cuts through the silence and diegetic atmospheric throughout *Portrait*. It becomes more intense as

¹⁵⁰ Drew Daniel, 'All Sound is Queer', *The Wire*, 333 (London, 2011), 1-20 (p. 5)
<https://www.academia.edu/15525147/ALL_SOUND_IS_QUEER> [accessed 6 November 2022]

¹⁵¹ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:56:11.

¹⁵² *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 00:38:35.

¹⁵³ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:56:11.

the camera focuses on Héloïse and her intensely emotive reaction to the music. As the music crescendos, the camera zooms in towards Héloïse, focusing on the details of her chest rising and the heaviness of her breath as she holds back tears, moved by the music reflecting upon her relationship with Marianne, many years prior. Sciamma creates an incredibly intimate, emotive shot as Héloïse cries in response to the music as Marianne watches from afar, separated by the distance in their seats as well as the social boundaries that separate them. As the music intensifies, there is a close up of Héloïse as she breathes deeper and her eyes fill with tears. The last shot of her displays a smile through the tears, reminiscent and nostalgic for Marianne and their relationship (see figures 18 and 19).



Figure 18. Marianne watches Héloïse at the orchestra in the final scene.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

Sciamma uses non-diegetic music to create private spaces of freedom and transformation, a space where queer desire is expressed beyond the power of words. The most prominent use of non-diegetic music within Sciamma's films is in *Bande de filles* in which Marieme and her friends dance and sing to Rihanna's *Diamonds*. The scene takes place in a space of luxury and escapism as they take bubble baths, eat pizza, dress up in stolen dresses, whilst drinking and smoking weed in their rented hotel room.¹⁵⁴ The scene, according to McNeill, is 'a hedonistic escape from their everyday lives and an affirmation of their friendship'¹⁵⁵ as they dance and sing together, ritualising in their friendship,¹⁵⁶ as well as

¹⁵⁴ Wilson, p. 15.

¹⁵⁵ Isabelle McNeill, '“Shine Bright Like a Diamond”: music, performance and digitextuality in Céline Sciamma's *Bande de filles* (2014)', *Studies in French Cinema*, 18.4 (2018) <10.1080/14715880.2017.1345187> [accessed 21 July 2022].

¹⁵⁶ *Ibidem*.

baptising Marieme's new identity as Vic (see figures 20, 21, 22). In Sciamma's interview with *Seventh Row*, she discusses why this scene is her favourite, saying that 'it is a narrative piece about the birth of friendship.'¹⁵⁷



Figure 19. *Héloïse cries at the orchestra in the final scene.*

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

The scene becomes surreal as they slip into a state of intoxication; it begins in slow motion and then transforms into a sequence of lip synching and dancing. Smoking weed justifies the drift into modernist fragmentation as the girls enter a world of fantasy and escapism. Sciamma switches between narrative modes, transforming from realism towards a non-classical dreamlike narrative consisting of the music video scene of *Diamonds*.¹⁵⁸ The blue lighting within this music-video-like scene contributes to a queer disorientation which adjusts the viewer to a different atmosphere. Rather than focusing on the plot and narrative, Sciamma uses techniques of modernist art cinema to display the desires and pleasure of these girls and their friendship through the use of the music and their performance altogether.

¹⁵⁷ Alex Heeney, 'Cinema is the only art where you share somebody's loneliness' and other insights from Céline Sciamma', *Seventh Row*, <<https://seventh-row.com/2015/02/01/celine-sciamma-girlhood/>> [accessed 28 July 2022].

¹⁵⁸ András Bálint Kovács, András, 'Narration in Modern Cinema' in *Screen Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 57.

As the girls perform *Diamonds*, lip synching and using mimicking codes, they mirror the performance and discovery of finding one's own voice and identity. They also reference queer vocal identification and the art of lip synching in drag culture. This scene provides each of the girls with a voice to communicate love for one another and express themselves. Throughout the majority of the film, the girls are presented as tough with defensive mechanisms and hardened exteriors. Regardless of the pressures and expectations of the patriarchal world of the banlieues, this scene provides an ambiance in which the girls are able to express themselves, experiencing playfulness and escapism. As they dance and sing, Sciamma provides them with a way to feel powerful and free as they experience euphoria away from the outside world.¹⁵⁹



Figure 20. Lady as she begins to lip synch to *Diamonds*.

Bande de filles.



Figure 21. Marieme watches the girls dance and sing to *Diamonds*.

Bande de filles.

¹⁵⁹ Rory Doherty, 'Bande du Film: Céline Sciamma's Music of the Future', *The Quietus*, <<https://thequietus.com/articles/30844-film-petite-maman-celine-sciamma-music>> [accessed 17 August 2022].



Figure 22. The girls singing and dancing to *Diamonds*.

Bande de filles.

Both *Tomboy* and *Petite Maman* contain no diegetic music and very little non-diegetic music in each of them. Thus, the use of music within these films is applied thoughtfully with a significant impact.¹⁶⁰ Sciamma uses empathetic music (music which matches the mood or rhythm of the action onscreen) within *Tomboy* when Mickaël and Lisa play in Lisa's room. The music and its mood and rhythm matches the energy and joy within the scene as they dance together to energetic, upbeat pop.¹⁶¹ The music in this scene contrasts dramatically with the naturalistic territory sounds throughout the rest of the film. There is a sudden change from the quiet stillness and natural territory sounds to the catchy electronic song which is filled with clapping, layers of upbeat arpeggios, energetic vocals and repetitive lyrics. This scene provides Mickaël the freedom to dance and enjoy himself, existing in this moment with Lisa, 'avoiding conforming to any particular gender norms, enjoying corporeal expressivity and intimacy.'¹⁶² Lisa and Mickaël are able to dance and express themselves away from their peers and parents, enabling Laure to exist freely and queerly as Mickaël, without the other children or adults there to enforce the pressures of heteronormativity.

Additionally, the eruption of music is not diegetically sourced; it is trans-diegetic, (music which has a diegetic source and then becomes non-diegetic) and occupies a liminal in between space that is both outside the filmic world and a part of the character's world as they hear the music, interact with and dance to it.¹⁶³ This use of trans-diegetic sound challenges the spatial and temporal representation within the film, bridging the gap and blurring the

¹⁶⁰ Doherty.

¹⁶¹ *Tomboy*, 0:37:06.

¹⁶² McNeill.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*.

boundaries between the space of the characters and the audience.¹⁶⁴ McNeill argues that this use of music destabilises the film's naturalism and realism,¹⁶⁵ presenting a liminal third space which symbolises non-binarity and non-conformity through the ways the music expresses how 'childhood experience hovers on the boundary between the infinite imaginative possibilities associated with fiction and the more rigid parameters of social structures.'¹⁶⁶

Sciamma uses non-diegetic music throughout *Naissance* to demonstrate heartbreak.¹⁶⁷ The music gives form and expression to the girls' emotions, and is often used instead of dialogue in scenes where the girls are unable to communicate and express themselves. The music offers an insight into the heightened disoriented sensation of the girls' encounters with intimacy,¹⁶⁸ articulating their feelings, desires, anxieties and emotions. The electronic score has been described by Tim Palmer as 'blending shrill, tinny, electronic strings, distended minor-key treble slides, distorted by pitch bends, with intermittently off-beat rhythms, to create weirdly disjunctive accompaniment.'¹⁶⁹ This use of music is fluid, constantly changing and distorting with the fluctuating queer desires, anxieties and emotions of the girls.¹⁷⁰ This music is also accompanied by the natural territory sounds of the 'girls' chatter, splashing water and rhythmic counting of exercises.¹⁷¹ As these sounds permeate through each scene, even when music is playing, Sciamma demonstrates the omnipresent pressures of the world of synchronised swimming and constant expectations and demands of the sport, mirroring the pressures of femininity within French society. The music occupies a queer liminal space, expressing the queer desires and emotions of the girls in addition to mirroring the liminal space of adolescence.¹⁷²

Music is particularly poignant in the first scene of *Naissance* where Marie sees Floriane perform for the first time. As she watches, Marie experiences a sexual awakening. The music is dramatic and almost operatic, overlapping with the girls splashing through the water. It builds up and crescendos, creating an intensity that mirrors Marie's desires as she watches. When Floriane and Marie go clubbing, the use of electronic music and energetic

¹⁶⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁶⁷ Jonet, p. 1127.

¹⁶⁸ Fiona Handyside et al. 'Emotion, Girlhood, and Music in *Naissance des pieuvres* (Céline Sciamma, 2007) and *Un amour de jeunesse* (Mia Hansen-Løve, 2011)', *International Cinema and the Girl*, 10.1057/97 (2016), 121-133 (p. 121) <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137388926_10>.

¹⁶⁹ Handyside, p. 129.

¹⁷⁰ Idem, 127-128.

¹⁷¹ Idem, p. 129.

¹⁷² Idem, p. 130.

drums is powerful. The bass adds to the intensity of the scene and speeds up as the two enter the dancefloor. The scene is filled with intense anxiety as Floriane teases Marie by dancing with her, building the sexual tension as they dance closer. Floriane leans in to kiss her but then backs away to dance with a man, having used Marie to attract male attention. The music, and in particular the bass, add to this sickening anxiety inducing effect as Floriane plays with Marie's emotions taking advantage of her attraction towards her.

Sciamma uses non-diegetic music in *Petite Maman* to bring characters together, creating connection and intimacy, but also as an ecofeminist protest. Nelly listens to music with her headphones and Marion asks her if it is the music of the future. 'La musique du futur' by Para One begins playing and bridges into the next scene, where the two girls take a boat out onto the lake (see figure 23). The lyrics of the song were written by Sciamma and the song consists of a choir of children's voices harmonising together; it is a 'soaring electronic and choral tune, which captures the intensity of this unique friendship and the playfulness of its fantastical nature.'¹⁷³ The music brings the girls together and commemorates the end of their friendship, highlighting and reflecting on the impact they have had upon each other. Sciamma wanted it to 'feel like a political anthem that could be sung in protest...this would be the anthem to this ecofeminist protest.'¹⁷⁴ Sciamma directly addresses the ecofeminist aims throughout her work, demonstrating the important intersection of feminism and environmentalism and their universal attempts to overthrow and reject patriarchy and capitalism and their domination over women and queerness, as Nelly and Marion row together on the lake displaying their connection to each other and the nature surrounding them. This song demonstrates the universal aims of ecofeminism throughout Sciamma's filmography as she presents the connection between nature and queerness through their equal oppression.

¹⁷³ Doherty.

¹⁷⁴ Jose Solís, 'Céline Sciamma on *Petite Maman*, Cinema as Resurrection, and Childhood Pleasures', *The Film Stage* <<https://thefilmstage.com/celine-sciamma-interview-petite-maman-cinema-as-resurrection-and-childhood-pleasures/>> [accessed 23 July 2022] .



Figure 23. Nelly and Marion row on the lake.

Petite Maman.

Sciamma uses silence to create a space of resistance, conveying meaning queerly and unconventionally. She uses rich audio-detail to focus on the emotions, anxieties and desires of her characters through the breath and territory sounds. Sciamma's use of breath is queer through her ability to communicate emotions and desires through the different sounds, rhythms and expressions of the breath. Film theory has often been eye-oriented and Sciamma queers this by using the breath and richly detailed soundscapes to create intimacy and hapticity throughout her films as well as using silence, breath and territory sounds instead of dialogue and action.

Chapter 4: Fire

Air is needed to produce fire, thus, chapter four examines fire, exploring how Sciamma naturalises queer desire through fire's juxtaposing destructive and creative qualities. Fire has the power to create with its transformative potential, producing warmth, cooking food and providing light. Fire constantly creates - growing and intensifying, burning brighter and harder. However, fire also destroys and burns. According to Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, lighting is 'one of the most subtle and important dimensions of mise-en-scène'¹⁷⁵, thus this chapter engages with how landscapes and mise-en-scène are encoded with meaning, examining the use of light, a manifestation of the element fire.

Playing with Fire: Burning Passion and Creation

Sciamma uses fire to initiate warmth, comfort and healing. Towards the beginning of *Portrait*, Marianne arrives at the house encased in darkness, symbolic of the dark, oppressive patriarchal environment. There is a long take of Marianne sat by the fireplace smoking, filling her room with the light and warmth from the flames that crackle and burn (figure 1). The room is filled with darkness; the light comes from the fireplace, candles and the pipe. In an interview with Claire Mathon, director of photography in *Portrait*, she explains how she de-emphasises the light's directionality by using larger light sources from a distance to the subject and creating a soft ethereal aura of light from the candles and fire making the scene look like a Renaissance painting.¹⁷⁶ The fire not only lights Marianne's way literally through the darkness of the house, but is also a figurative symbol of the development of Marianne and Héloïse's relationship as a burning bright light within the darkness of a misogynistic, patriarchal 18th century French society. This scene exemplifies Marianne's independence as she provides herself with pleasure sitting in the warmth of the flames, smoking serenely. According to Gaston Bachelard, people who sit by the fire lose themselves within the flames as it becomes a source of reverie and daydreaming.¹⁷⁷ The fire is a place of warmth and comfort after Marianne's journey to the island. It is within this scene that fire becomes symbolically connected with Marianne for the first time. Bachelard says that 'fire for the man

¹⁷⁵ Timothy Corrigan, Patricia White, 'Exploring a Material World: Mise-en-Scène', in *The Film Experience*, (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), 42-74 (p. 58)
<<http://artsites.ucsc.edu/faculty/gustafson/FILM80A/corrigan.white.2.pdf>> [accessed 15 July 2022]

¹⁷⁶ Video- Claire Mathon parle de 'Portrait de la jeune fille en feu', <<http://www.afcinema.com/J-aime-regarder-les-filles-qui-marchent-sur-la-plage-13522.html>> [accessed 12 September 2022].

¹⁷⁷ Gaston Bachelard, *La psychanalyse du feu*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), p. 13-20.

who is contemplating is an example of a sudden change or development and an example of a circumstantial development'¹⁷⁸ which highlights Marianne's transformation as she becomes the fire that enters Héloïse's life, foreshadowing their passionate burning romance.



Figure 1. Marianne sits by the fireplace and smokes on her first night.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

Sciamma makes extensive use of the fireplace in *Portrait* to invoke comfort and warmth. Marianne gets out of bed due to menstrual cramps and goes to the kitchen where Sophie heats up cherrystones to use as pain relief;¹⁷⁹ the warmth of the kitchen and fireplace enable Marianne and Sophie to have a tender moment of comfort and bonding. This intimate moment between them enables Sophie to open up about her pregnancy. The fire in this scene has the potential to heal and comfort, not only physically, but also emotionally, enabling Sophie and Marianne to help and relieve each other further. Gels and lanterns were used to soften the light source and reduce the shadows in scenes like these, keeping the nuances and details of colours in the shot and in the details of the actors' faces. This scene is then mirrored as Marianne heats up a pan of herbs on the fire to help induce Sophie's miscarriage. Fire is used by Héloïse and Marianne to defy the misogynistic patriarchal restrictions of 18th century France by helping Sophie to have an abortion. This scene demonstrates queerness through the queer friendship between the three, which defies social hierarchies and expectations of class.

¹⁷⁸ Idem, p. 16.

¹⁷⁹ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 00:55:45.

Fire is filled with energy, with the power to create and heat food, transforming its energy by fuelling humans. Food as part of the *mise-en-scène* is ‘intimately bound up with implications of social status, cultural difference, ethnicity, sexuality and other markers of identity,’¹⁸⁰ and is an increasingly significant trope within Eco-cinema studies.¹⁸¹ Food and gender can be examined from an ecocritical perspective, exploring how both the female body and natural environment can be exploited under the patriarchal system and destruction of ecology. Jill Anderson examines Allison Carruth’s *Global Appetites* and Nicole Seymour’s *Strange Natures*, bringing together food studies along with queer ecocriticism, examining how these different subsets of academia intersect.¹⁸² Anderson demonstrates that queer ecocriticism focuses upon questions of naturalness, which also resonates with ongoing debates surrounding food. Both Carruth and Seymour’s approaches examine how discourses of power are produced to justify exploitation and violence upon queer people and ecology, thus displaying the links between queer ecology and foodways.

Elspeth Probyn in ‘An Ethos with Bite: Queer Appetites from Sex to Food’ argues that queer theory needs to ‘extend its theoretic reach beyond an increasingly overprivileged and narrow use of sexuality.’¹⁸³ Probyn suggests ‘relinquishing its dependence on sexuality as the sole optic of analysis’¹⁸⁴, and engaging with the multifaceted experience of queerness by exploring other aspects of everyday life, such as food.¹⁸⁵ Sciamma explores the ways humans connect with nature, specifically through food, challenging the idea that humans are separate from the natural world as well as replacing the binaries of society’s ideas of sexuality, gender and class. Nature and food unravel these preconceptions by showing the ongoing intersections between queerness and nature.¹⁸⁶

The class distinctions between Marianne, Héloïse and Sophie are ignored when sharing food and cooking together. Sciamma uses food in *Portrait* as a medium of exchange and connection, creating ties between characters. Sophie’s role as a maid is also one of a

¹⁸⁰Gaye Poole, *Reel Meals, Set Meals: Food in Film and Theatre* (Sydney, New South Wales: Currency Press, 1999), p. 2.

¹⁸¹ David Melbye, *Landscape Allegory in Cinema: From Wilderness to Wasteland*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 153.

¹⁸² Jill E Anderson, ‘The Ecology of Power: Queerness and Food Studies’ in *Modern Fiction Studies*, 61.1 (Baltimore, 2015), pp.168-176 (p. 168) < <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26421778> > [accessed 12 September 2022].

¹⁸³ Elspeth Probyn, ‘An Ethos with a Bite: Queer Appetites from Sex to Food’, *Sexualities*, 2.4 (1999), p. 421.

¹⁸⁴ Idem, p 423.

¹⁸⁵ Idem, p 422.

¹⁸⁶ Joshua Sbicca, ‘Eco-Queer Movement(s): Challenging Heteronormative Space Through (Re)Imagining Nature and Food’, *European Journal of Ecopsychology*, 3 (2012) pp. 33-52.

caregiver and a provider of food. Thus, the scenes in which Sophie, Héloïse and Marianne spend time preparing food in the kitchen together, are even more poignant, especially when Héloïse and Marianne cook. Through long takes, Sciamma shows them spending time in the kitchen, playing cards, eating and cooking together, implying intimacy and connection. The kitchen is lit by candlelight and the burning fire, adding to the warmth and intimacy. They represent three different positions in society, however, each of them struggles for independence and autonomy. In one scene, Sophie embroiders flowers, as Marianne pours wine and Héloïse chops mushrooms (figure 2).¹⁸⁷ This scene is queer through its embodiment of sorority and equality, bringing three separate groups of people together in this utopic experience of womanhood. These meals develop a genuine relationship of intimacy¹⁸⁸ through privileging the generosity of food, time and conversation as a ‘conduit for emotional language.’¹⁸⁹ Sciamma goes against the exploitative heteronormative patriarchal system of 18th century France by bringing them together. Sciamma rewrites codes and conventions through these scenes by creating intellectual, romantic and platonic nourishment through sharing food.



Figure 2. Marianne, Héloïse and Sophie spend time together in the kitchen.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

Sharing moments in the kitchen together creates intimacy between Héloïse and Marianne. The intimacy and nourishment that they receive through sharing food together,

¹⁸⁷ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:10:15.

¹⁸⁸ Johnston.

¹⁸⁹ Poole, p. 3.

mirrors the intimacy and nourishment of their queer desire. The sensory haptic nature of cooking and sharing food substitutes acts of sex and romance in terms of the sensory nature of food as well as the pleasure and intimacy produced by sharing food. After eating together in the kitchen, Héloïse reads the myth of Orpheus to Marianne and Sophie. They sit together, captivated by Héloïse's words, while the fire crackles and the bokeh of the fire shines. The light and warmth of the fire brings them closer and builds an intellectual and sensual connection between them as they discuss ideas surrounding the myth.

Héloïse and Marianne also smoke together in the kitchen whilst Sophie is hanging from the ceiling, after taking the herbal medicine, to induce her miscarriage. While Sophie waits, Héloïse and Marianne sit at the kitchen table. The scene is lit by the candle on the table and the blazing fire in the fireplace (figure 3). They light the pipe on the candle and begin to smoke together, highlighting the warmth and comfort that the element fire produces. They begin to discuss love, symbolically lighting the fire within one another, setting each other ablaze with passion and desire. Their moment of intimacy is interrupted by Sophie falling down, her abortion attempt representing the reality of the patriarchal society they live in. This mirrors the struggles, restrictions and secrecy of queerness in 18th century France.



Figure 39 Marianne and Héloïse smoke in the kitchen together.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

Sciamma uses food in *Bande de filles* to display affection, intimacy and care. Marieme cooks for her housemate Monica,¹⁹⁰ mirroring the maternal act of cooking for her

¹⁹⁰ *Bande de filles*, 1:32:24.

younger sisters. This scene, and Marieme's relationship with Monica, displays more tenderness and intimacy than Marieme's heterosexual relationship with Ismaël. Monica applies makeup to Marieme tenderly and dances with her at the end of the film, creating a tender and tactile connection. When Ismaël discovers that Marieme has bound her breasts (figure 4), he responds with aggression, shouting and swearing at her. Marieme's body defies the heteronormative gender binary and expectations of a woman; this queerness alienates Ismaël. As a result, Marieme decides to leave patriarchy and misogyny behind, rejecting Ismaël, a heteronormative future and the expectations that are set in place for her.



Figure 4. Marieme after Ismaël discovers she has bound her breasts.

Bande de filles.

Sciamma also uses food in *Petite Maman* to create intimacy between Nelly and Marion. Food brings them closer together enabling them to experience carefree joy. They giggle while make pancakes - spilling milk and flipping pancakes onto the floor. The manifestation of fire is through cooking and the warmth, heat and joy that this act brings. Fire is also present on the candles of Marion's birthday cake, again building the intimacy, joy and tender connection between the two. The connection and relationship between Nelly and her mother as a child is queer, by transcending and queering time, as their two timelines exist at once. Elements of magical realism and fabulism are often present throughout *Petite Maman* through the realist setting that merges with the magical unexplained elements of time and lighting which creates a fairy tale like warmth and glow within the forest.

Both food and sex are characterised by appetites. Food is a consumptive embodiment of desire, indulgence and pleasure which can be filled with contentment and fulfilment and

connects to the physical body and orality, drawing parallels with sex and desire.¹⁹¹ Carole Counihan argues ‘eating and intercourse involve intimacy,’¹⁹² both contributing further to trust, familiarity and vulnerability. The ‘instinctive drive for food and sex are similar, and they often take on overlapping symbolic connotations’¹⁹³ functioning as a metaphor for emotional needs or sexual desire.

On Marianne’s first night, using a candle, she searches through the kitchen cupboards for food (figure 5).¹⁹⁴ It is almost silent, except for the sound of the plate and the rummaging in the cupboard. She tears the bread apart and cuts the cheese, eating quickly with hunger, desire and satisfaction. This scene is emblematic of Marianne’s willingness to satisfy her needs and desires; her hunger and desire is allegorical of her sexual appetite and queer desire. This scene enables Marianne and Sophie to have a conversation about Héloïse and her sister. Despite only just meeting, there is evident intimacy and candour within this conversation they share, demonstrating the beginning of their relationship and how it will develop over the course of the film.¹⁹⁵



Figure 5 Marianne going to the kitchen in search of food.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

¹⁹¹ Laura Lindenfeld, Fabio Parasecoli, *Feasting our Eyes: Food Films and Cultural Identity in the United States*, (Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 7.

¹⁹² Carole M. Counihan, *The Anthropology of Food and Body: Gender, Meaning and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 9-10.

¹⁹³ *Idem*, p 9.

¹⁹⁴ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 00:10:00.

¹⁹⁵ Johnston.

In *Naissance*, food functions allegorically, displaying sexual desire and hunger. Marie takes Floriane's rubbish bag from the bin to look through the contents of it.¹⁹⁶ She opens up the bin bag, putting each of the items onto her desk to inspect them- reading the crumpled paper, smelling and touching a tissue with lipstick stains, engaging all of her senses with Floriane and her rubbish, creating a scene filled with tactile hapticity. The camera then moves towards the half-eaten browning apple, as Marie turns it around in her hands. The camera follows Marie's hands as she moves the apple towards her mouth and takes a bite of the forbidden fruit; a representation of her desire for Floriane and her forbidden queerness. She closes her eyes, bites and chews, grimacing and scrunching her face, as she connects to Floriane, tasting her. According to Isaac Rosenfeld in Anne Bower's *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film*, since Adam and Eve, food has been entangled with forbidden desire and the use of food in a system of taboos has not only regulated diet but also sexual conduct.¹⁹⁷ The apple is eroticised and alludes to Marie's sexual appetite; the apple becomes a point of connection to Floriane as Marie tastes and touches what Floriane has tasted and touched. As Marie looks through Floriane's rubbish, she searches for traces of Floriane - the apple being a physical representation of her desire and lust, further naturalising the desire she feels for Floriane. The repulsive abject nature of this act mirrors the unconventional queerness of their relationship and Marie's metaphorical burning, sexual fire and desire for Floriane.

In *Naissance*, Sciamma continues to use Marie's hunger to symbolise and represent her sexual desire and longing for Floriane. As Marie waits for Floriane to return from seeing François, she sits in darkness, feeling sorry for herself, mindlessly eating sweets, metaphorically demonstrating her desire for Floriane.¹⁹⁸ The sweets lack satisfaction or nourishment, just like Floriane's relationship with Marie; she uses and manipulates her for her own needs, yet Marie still desires and craves her. While Floriane kisses François, Marie eats sweets, displaying 'anger, frustration and psychosexual orality,'¹⁹⁹ her hunger mirroring her sexual hunger for Floriane.

Another scene which examines the manifestation of fire as food in *Naissance* takes place in McDonald's with Sciamma herself, playing the cashier. This scene is used to show Anne's queerness, through her refusal to grow up, as she insists on buying a happy meal,

¹⁹⁶ *Naissance des pieuvres*, 00:41:16.

¹⁹⁷ Anne Bower, *Reel Food: Essays on Food and Film* (Routledge, 2004).

¹⁹⁸ *Naissance des pieuvres*, 00:23:49.

¹⁹⁹ Jonet, p. 1134.

despite being too old. In this shot reverse shot sequence with the cashier, Anne argues and is determined to receive a happy meal. On one hand, Anne displays a desire for sex, but on the other hand she is unable to leave childhood behind. After the cashier refuses to serve her a happy meal, the scene then cuts to a shot of Anne looking through the mini binoculars, the toy from the happy meal, and tucking into her food. Anne and Marie have an argument where Marie tells her she is sick of her childishness. Anne has sexual desires but is also still stuck in her childish nature, in this queer in-between state of adolescence that borders on childhood and adulthood.

Fire is an outward symbol of inner fire and passion, Yussof and Clark describe its attributes by saying that it can rage with ‘dramatic intensity with energetic excitations of light’.²⁰⁰ Fire, like queerness and queer desire, is often restricted, controlled and limited; it is treated with caution and suspicion, much like societal anxiety towards queerness and sex. According to Georges Bataille, fire and sex are both ‘expressions of an exorbitant energy flow.’²⁰¹ In chapter four of *La Psychanalyse du feu*, Bachelard examines the sexually charged nature of fire, exploring how fire is a metaphor for sex and reproduction as a fire transforms and develops, growing from a small fire, strengthening and intensifying into a considerable blaze.²⁰² Within *Portrait*, fires burn through the length of the film, acting as a symbol of burning desire and passion. Just like the burning fires, the characters let their queer desires and passion energetically burn and build intensely.

The bonfire scene exemplifies the passion, creativity and desire that fire embodies and symbolises. This scene is a transformative turning point as Marianne and Héloïse smile across the fire at each other. It is one of the few scenes with music, as mentioned in the previous chapter, and one of the first times they smile at each other. As the fire burns - flames crackling and lighting up the frame, the camera cuts between the two of them smiling, as they recognise their attraction and desire for each other. The scene is filled with sensuality and sexual tension as they look at each other, without saying anything in this idyllic utopic queer environment.

Fire is a vivid symbolic manifestation of their romance, desire and passion. After having kissed for the first time in the cave, Marianne finds Héloïse in her room waiting for

²⁰⁰ Nigel Clark, Kathryn Yusoff, ‘Queer Fire: Ecology, Combustion and Pyrosexual Desire’, *Feminist Review*, 118 (2018) pp. 7-24 (p. 8) <https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/87307/2/QueerFireFeministReview19_7.pdf> [accessed 10 November 2022]

²⁰¹ Idem, p. 10.

²⁰² Bachelard, (1964), p. 43-58.

her by the fire. The fire symbolises how their desire and love have been ignited further; the symbolic fire burns brighter and more fiercely since recognising their desire for each other. They are both silent, and the sound of the fire crackling and splitting can be heard as Marianne puts her head on Héloïse's shoulder and they hold each other (figure 6). A close up then shows them both slowly touching and exploring each other's bodies with sensuality and tenderness, lit by the warmth of the burning fire, symbolising their passion and desire. The warm light of the fire makes their skin glow and sets them alight with warmth and passion, as they kiss each other.



Figure 6 Marianne and Héloïse in Marianne's room, after kissing for the first time.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

In *Naissance*, heat is used allegorically to display Marie's sexual desire and frustration. In one scene, Floriane adjusts the straps on Marie's swimming costume slowly. The camera focuses on Marie's facial expression as she watches her and experiences Floriane's touch and teasing. With just Floriane's hands visible in the shot, Sciamma allows us to focus on Marie's response and reaction to this act, experiencing desire and sexual tension. After this, Marie watches Floriane and François in the shower kissing. This scene then cuts to a mid-shot of Marie in her bedroom, sitting on the floor by a fan, looking miserable and frustrated as she experiences sexual frustration and desire (figure 7). The shot uses conventions from slow cinema, carving out a space to observe and to exemplify Marie's boredom as she waits and cools herself off, desiring and longing for Floriane, cooling herself down from the previous two scenes filled with sexual tension and physicality.



Figure 7. Marie sat by the fan in her room.

Naissance des pieuvres.

Fire is creative, fuelling inspiration as well as growing and intensifying, creating more heat and light. *Portrait* explores different layers of creation and art not only through Marianne's paintings but also Sciamma's approach to filmmaking. By revisiting history, Sciamma displays what has been obliterated from history by bringing the activity of queer female artists, the role of women and queer femininity into the forefront. Sciamma reinvents cinema's depiction of 18th century France through her queer narratives, in the same way that Marianne, Héloïse and Sophie reinterpret the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, both bringing women to the forefront. Sciamma queers the epoch drama by literally and symbolically puts the queer female into the spotlight by telling a story about women, queer desire and female artists.

Sciamma uses Marianne's art and paintings allegorically to develop Marianne and Héloïse's relationship. After Marianne destroys her painting, she sketches Héloïse while she sleeps (figures 8 and 9). Héloïse is vulnerable as she is unaware of being watched. She does not pose and Marianne draws Héloïse as she is, not following the typical or standard conventions of portraiture, displaying and implying a growing love, loyalty and intimacy between the two, as well as a shift in the way that they look at each other. They create something new, liberating themselves and their art from the repressive society and expectations that surround them.



Figure 8 Marianne sketches Héloïse while she sleeps.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

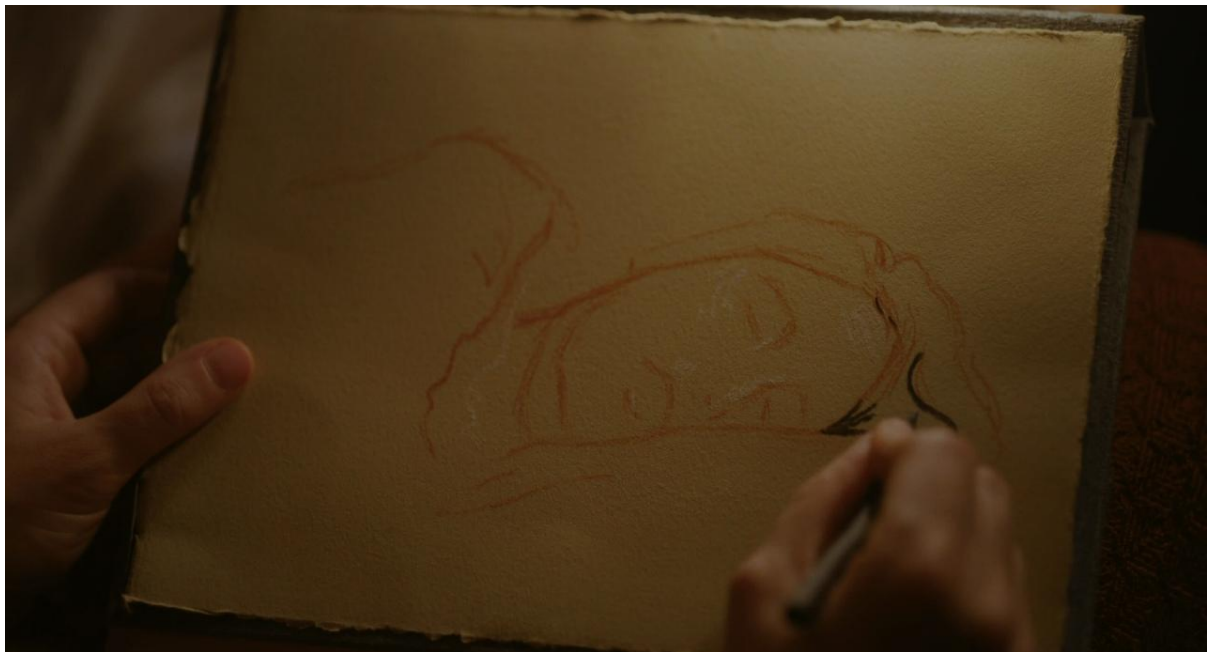


Figure 9 Marianne's sketch of Héloïse while she sleeps.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

In Marianne's second attempt to paint Héloïse, Héloïse agrees to sit for the painting and as she does, looks back at Marianne - just like Eurydice looks back in *Metamorphoses*, as well as Sciamma looking back at 18th century France and female artists. The painting becomes a collaborative effort and is created out of an equal exchange as they watch each other and finish the painting together. Marianne burnt and destroyed two paintings along with

gendered traditions and expectations, forging something collaborative and egalitarian with the second painting. They both dismantle and undo the one dimensional act of looking, queering the way art is created. The final painting is a collaborative effort between Héloïse and Marianne, just like the collaboration of Sciamma, Mathon and H  l  ne Delmaire, the classically trained oil painter who created the paintings for the film. The collaborative creation inspires H  lo  se to recreate Sophie’s abortion for Marianne to paint.²⁰³ Through the painting, they defy societal expectations and rules and eternalise this act of female defiance. This painting displays the queerness of their friendship as they oppose society and its expectations of class. They sit in the warm energetic glow of the fire, which feeds them with passion, energy and inspiration to create. The fire burns, creating light for Marianne and influencing the light of the painting.

Fire is a beacon of light and in *Naissance*, Sciamma creates desire through her manipulation of lighting that emanates and is reflected from the swimming pool. When Floriane performs, she rises from the brightly lit pool, glowing, in the centre of the frame.²⁰⁴ As Floriane shines brightly in the pool, Marie is set alight, burning with passion and desire; she watches captivated and claps in admiration. This fleeting moment enables the light to catch her and showcase her, illuminating her on full display for her audience, before she disappears beneath the surface, hidden away. This is symbolic of the way she uses her beauty and charm to seduce Marie and then abandon her for Fran  ois or men in clubs, teasing Marie and leading her on before leaving her.

Furthermore, Sciamma continues to use lighting in *Naissance* to create a seductive atmosphere which contributes to Marie’s burning passion and desire. At the party, Marie is in the bathroom while Floriane vomits.²⁰⁵ The bathroom lighting is green, illuminating the room, creating a club like atmosphere filled with intimacy in this bathroom, hidden away from the party. The green creates highlights and shadows bouncing off their faces, contrasting to the darkness of the rest of the party. Marie compliments Floriane’s performance and tries to initiate conversation with Floriane, who is uninterested and focused on herself, fixing her hair and makeup in the mirror. This moment displays Marie’s unrequited queer longing and desire. The brightness of the lights and the reflection of the mirror demonstrates Floriane and her self-obsession as she continues to ignore Marie. Despite

²⁰³ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 01:29:00.

²⁰⁴ *Naissance des pieuvres*, 00:03:57.

²⁰⁵ *Idem*, 00:12:56.

being a part of the shot, Marie's placement on the left, next to Floriane and not in front of the mirror, relegates her to the side and shadows, while the lighting, camera and framing force the spectator to focus upon Floriane who is lit brightly and filmed from behind as well as reflected in the mirror (figure 10). This adds to Marie's captivation, desire and longing for her. This scene is the beginning of their queer relationship, and emblematic of the power dynamics throughout. Marie is fixated on Floriane, while Floriane looks only at herself, displaying, as Jonet suggests, her vulnerability and surface bravado.²⁰⁶ The scene ends with Floriane asking Marie for chewing gum, she then brings her mouth close to her to ask her if her breathe smells. Within their first conversation, she make demands of Marie, using her sensuality to tease her.



Figure 10 Floriane looking in the mirror at the party.

Naissance des pieuvres.

Sciamma uses lighting again to display Floriane's desirability and attraction when Marie tries to convince her to take her into the pool.²⁰⁷ The screen is split into shadows and bright sunshine (figure 11). Floriane stands in the bright sunshine, representing her allure and desirability as well as Marie's burning passion. While Marie stands in the shadows and greyness of the suburbs that surround the swimming pool representing the bleak, mundane normalcy of her life compared to the bright lights and attraction of Floriane and the world of

²⁰⁶ Jonet, p. 1131.

²⁰⁷ *Naissance des pieuvres*, 00:16:13.

synchronised swimming. Floriane stands in the sunshine like a temptress and seductress with power over Marie before inviting her into the pool



Figure 11 Marie convincing Floriane to bring her to the pool.

Naissance des pieuvres.

Sciamma also demonstrates queerness through bright natural light dappled through the trees, radiating warmth and brightness in *Tomboy*. Sciamma does not use traditional three-point lighting but focuses on natural lighting and sunlight in *Tomboy*, representing freedom and the self, enabling Laure to experience themselves as Mickaël. The film begins with Laure standing through the roof of the car; the camera displays a close-up of their head with a bright bokeh of sunlight poking through the trees. The sun catches their hair and streams through the leaves of the trees, creating dappled light and bursts of golden streams. The close up of Laure's face enables them to experience the warm bright sunlight, symbolising freedom and the bliss of gender expression and queerness. The natural sunlight is also significant and metaphorical of the freedom of queerness as the sunlight seeps through the trees when Lisa and Mickaël kiss (figure 12).²⁰⁸ The light shines on their faces as they kiss and the pathetic fallacy of the bright sunlight reflects the brightness and joy of queerness. Director of photography, Crystel Fournier, and Sciamma mainly relied on the natural lighting and diffusion of sunlight to bathe its subjects in a warm glow creating a nostalgic atmosphere like a blissful childhood memory. The warm tones and natural lighting creates a sense of

²⁰⁸ *Tomboy*, 00:47:20.

intimacy and proximity between the characters and the viewer, bringing us into Laure's world.

The physical natural lighting adds to Sciamma's naturalistic depiction of Laure's world as well as the objective observation of detail throughout, bringing attention to the natural characteristics of the environment and setting. This depiction of nature and the naturalistic approach mirrors the naturalness of Laure's queerness, setting queerness and non-conformity within the reality of a lived existence and experience. Sciamma renders queerness as a natural part of this world, thus, where nothing is artificial or exoticized here but exists freely, the sun shines without interference and Laure can exist as Mickaël and express themselves as they wish.



Figure 12 Mickael and Lisa walking through the sunny forest.

Tomboy, dir. Céline Sciamma (Pyramide Distribution, 2011)..

Up in Flames: Creative Destruction

This section examines the destructive potential and darkness of fire. After Marianne completes her first painting of Héloïse, she burns the previous artist's portrait of her. This act of destruction juxtaposes with the completion of her own painting. It also foreshadows the destruction of her own painting and displays her connection and loyalty to Héloïse, anticipating the turning point in their relationship, in which they will become lovers and Marianne will begin to paint Héloïse with her consent. The destruction of this painting takes place after Marianne tells la Comtesse that she has finished her portrait of Héloïse. La

Comtesse tells Marianne ‘elle vous aime beaucoup. Elle parle de vous’²⁰⁹ moments after Héloïse tells Marianne ‘j’ai aussi senti que vous me manquez.’²¹⁰ Hearing these words enables Marianne to consider the extent of her feelings towards Héloïse. As she inhales deeply reflecting on Héloïse and the finished painting, she concludes with destroying the original portrait, an act which brings her closer to Héloïse and leads her to destroy her own painting.

Marianne uses a candle to look at the details of the painting, tracing Marianne’s body from her rubbed out face to the folds in her dress and her hands folded in her lap. She gazes upon the details of Héloïse almost sensually, taking her in and appreciating each part of her. She then sets fire to it with the candle, burning it at the heart of the painting. The light of the burning flames illuminates Marianne’s face as she watches it (figure 14). She then places it in the fireplace, destroying what the painting represents - the arranged unwanted marriage along with the heteronormative patriarchal expectations of Héloïse and women in 18th century France. This act also displays her burning desire and passion for Héloïse.

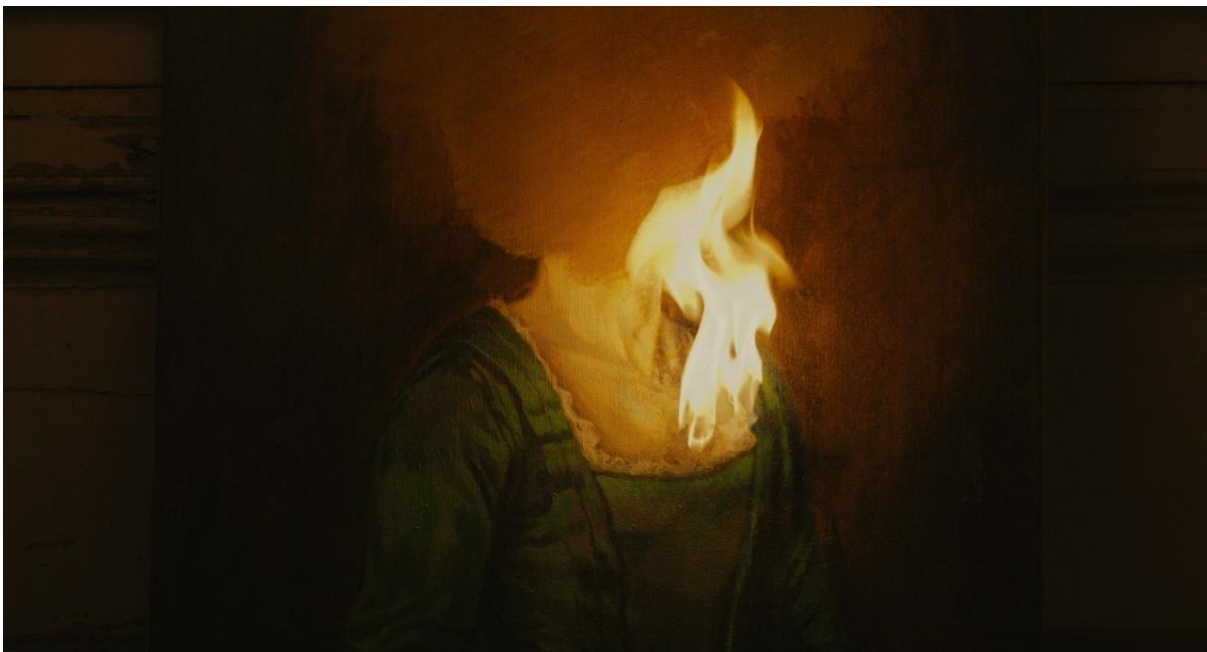


Figure 14 Marianne destroys the first painting.

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

After this, Héloïse’s rejects Marianne’s painting of her, displaying her refusal to be objectified, gazed upon and married off to a man she has never met. Refusing to sit for her portrait, along with the rejection of the painting, highlights her autonomy and independence.

²⁰⁹ *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, 00:44:27.

²¹⁰ *Idem*, 00:42:22.

Héloïse's disappointment towards the portrait is based on the painting lacking life and presence in its representation of Héloïse, but also in representing Marianne. Marianne responds defensively saying 'il y a des règles, des conventions, des idées.'²¹¹ Marianne has followed the rules and expectations of a male-dominated world of painting which looks upon women as muses and objects, a metaphor and reflection of the patriarchal society of 18th century France. She has not created something true to herself, or to Héloïse, but something lacking the significance and depth of the bond that they have formed and the perspective of a queer woman. At her frustration with Héloïse's disappointment, as well as her own inability to capture the essence of Héloïse, Marianne destroys the painting by smudging the face out with a cloth, mirroring what happened to the first painting. It is a defiant act that serves as a turning point in their mutual sexual attraction and intimacy.²¹² Marianne puts flames to this painting along with the history of how women are presented, looked at and objectified. This scene demonstrates how *Portrait* is about creative disruption and destruction as well as invention and creation. The next portrait is Marianne's attempt to show Héloïse in her true form as well as the depths of their connection as she detaches herself from learned conventions and rules. As Marianne creates a new painting, she also forges a new relationship with Héloïse defying conventions, rules and expectations of painting and also society, queering her relationship with Héloïse and queering her artistic process.

Héloïse becomes 'la jeune fille en feu' when her dress catches fire at the bonfire (figure 15). The fire transforms into a part of Héloïse's costume, as well as a part of Héloïse herself. Héloïse has always been burning and filled with fire; she is passionate, independent and constantly defies her mother, her intentions for her and her future, thus Héloïse is unbothered by the flames. Héloïse is filled with and represents fire, defying the expectations of the aristocratic woman that she is meant to be. Bachelard examines the Prometheus complex in *La Psychanalyse du feu*, exploring the psychological drive that impels children to defy their parents and touch fire.²¹³ Héloïse's queer desire, within 18th century French society, is much like the forbidden burning fire. But just like the burning fire, she lets it touch her and burn her, experiencing the heat and energy of queerness and the flames.

²¹¹ Idem, 00:50:09.

²¹² Buckland, (1964), p. 9.

²¹³ Idem, p.7.



Figure 15 *Héloïse catches fire at the bonfire.*

Portrait de la jeune fille en feu.

David Melbye's 'landscapes of the mind' 'define a particular approach to cinematic space in which natural, outdoor settings serve as outward manifestations of characters (troubled) psyches'.²¹⁴ The environment of the bonfire and the setting of the burning fire within darkness and relates to Marianne and Héloïse's burning passion and desire for each other. Héloïse and the fire have become manipulated to serve an allegorical mode of narration. The landscape, environment and fire become encoded with meaning and become symbolic and expressive of the changes developing in their relationship and the burning attraction, taking on an allegorical dimension.

This scene is a turning point for Héloïse and Marianne's relationship; as they smile across the fire at each other, their relationship transforms and merges into something sexual. The only lighting within this scene comes from the brightness of the burning flames from the bonfire; Héloïse and Marianne are surrounded by darkness, their faces lit and glowing by the fierce burning light from the fire as they are central to the frame and the focus of this scene. The visuality of the fire displays a 'new language of intimacy'²¹⁵, sharing the passion, desire and intimacy between Héloïse and Marianne as they look at each other without words as the acapella singing from the women swells around them. Time stands still in this scene as they look at each other, smiling across the fire, recognising their feelings for each other and filling

²¹⁴ Melbye, p. 1.

²¹⁵ Todd W Reeser, *Queer cinema in contemporary France: five directors*, (Manchester University Pres, 2022), p. 296.

them both with love and inspiration. This moment of destruction borders on creation, due to inspiring Marianne to paint this scene and create *Le portrait de la jeune fille en feu*.

Pietari Kääpä and Tommy Gustafsson engage with the relationship between the human body and the ecosystem within ecocinema.²¹⁶ Héloïse and Marianne burn heteronormativity and gender expectations, choosing queerness. They refuse to be controlled by society but enable nature to exist freely and wildly as the fire burns and Héloïse connects to the ecosystem surrounding her. They reflect upon the existence of humans in the wider society and ecosphere as they are placed within nature and within the fire. Nature is morphed within this scene as an interface for self-realisation, reflection. Héloïse becomes connected to nature through the fire burning her dress, enabling Marianne and Héloïse to recognise their feelings and queerness. No words are said as they stand apart from each other, separated by the fire which illustrates their passion and independence as well as patriarchal society's attempt to burn and destroy their defiance and queerness. The framing of each of them in the middle of the shot along with the cross cutting between each of them enables the spectator to focus on the way that they look at each other, standing directly in front of each other within the dark background and non-existent set dressing. Only Héloïse and Marianne can be seen as they are lit by the burning light of the fire. In this scene, the red monstrok camera accentuates the colours in their costumes as well as the bright vivid colours of the fire.

This scene displays a disruption of heteronormativity and gender norms as the dress catches fire and burns slowly, destroying the symbol of Héloïse's future marriage as well as French society's heteronormative expectations of women. As her blue dress burns in the fire, she destroys the ideas of the oppressive world she lives in, as new passion and queerness take over and set heteronormativity ablaze. The burning dress appears as a physical manifestation of the relationship between Marianne and Héloïse as they both burn and destroy the oppressive symbol of the dress and heteronormativity and take a step towards accepting their desire for each other.

The flames are then put out by the women around the fire, the blocking of the women and the smothering of the flames correlates to Héloïse's mother as well as the patriarchy and heteronormativity of 18th century France which smother Héloïse's flames, passion, independence and defiance. The flames of the bonfire act as an allegory for Héloïse's passion

²¹⁶ Kääpä, Gustafsson.

and autonomy but also display how, like their relationship and love, the fire must be put out and come to an end. It cannot continue to burn passionately in the society they live in.

Darkness blocks and hides the light, much like heteronormative society blocking out and suppressing queerness. In *Naissance*, the suburbs of Paris, Cergy-Pontoise, where the film is set and filmed, is full of greyness, dull colours and lighting. According to Corrigan and White, shading, darkness and the use of shadows help draw attention to certain features, commenting or focusing on certain objects or characters in a way that the narrative cannot.²¹⁷ The dark, drab colours of the setting of *Naissance* demonstrates the boredom and emptiness of the characters' lives as well as the heteronormativity that surrounds and stifles their queerness and freedom. The darkness and greyness of the suburban environment and the dark changing rooms, contrast with the bright colours of the world of synchronised swimming - from the glistening blue of the pool to the bright makeup and costumes the girls perform in. The dark, drab changing rooms with low dim lighting on the walls are a place of transformation, as the girls transform into the feminine ideal with their makeup and hair done as well as dazzling sparkling costumes. The darkness of these rooms hides this process of transformation, their original natural state is hidden away and not displayed in the bright lights of the swimming pool until they are fully transformed into idealised feminine performers. As Marie watches them dance she is entranced by the beauty of Floriane and the performance of the girls; the colour and the space of the pool is a space for Marie to experience and explore her queerness. She enters a new world of possibility, beauty and desire, filled with colour and light. She then leaves this space to enter the suburban darkness of the streets and houses of Cergy-Pontoise, which destroy, dampen and darken her queer desire, symbolising the reality of heteronormativity.

Sciamma also uses darkness throughout *Bande de filles*, particularly through the black screens that separate the five different sections of the film. The lighting transforms from bright lighting and stylised vivid colours to a screen of darkness. This non-diegetic technique is used as the 'ultimate cinematic shadow' according to Sadowski, creating an evocative and powerful effect, forcing the spectator to focus on something else.²¹⁸ The absence of visuals with the black screen enables sound to become the focus, or the viewer's imagination to take over. For example, this can be seen when Marieme and Ismaël kiss for the first time; as their

²¹⁷ Corrigan, White, p. 60.

²¹⁸ Piotr Sadowski, *The Semiotics of Light and Shadows: Modern Visual Arts and Weimar Cinema*, (Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), p. 81.

lips touch, they are hidden by darkness for a few seconds, allowing them the intimacy of this moment. This darkness foreshadows Marieme's decision to defy traditions and expectations that exist for her: to marry and conform to the patriarchal heteronormative nuclear family. This darkness represents her separation and refusal to comply, mirroring binding her chest, which separates her from femininity and the expectations men have of her. She reclaims her body and is in charge of her future. The transition of a black screen also happens after the first scene, in which the girls play American football together. Whether this scene is a fantasy or really happening, it is cut short and all light is shut down and diminished as they are plunged into darkness and return to the banlieues, representative of the sexism and patriarchy of their reality.

The dark screen is significant towards the end of the film. After Marieme leaves her sisters and says goodbye to her friends, the screen goes black and signals a new chapter in Marieme's life.²¹⁹ The camera then cuts to a shot of Marieme's legs walking up a red carpeted staircase; she is wearing high heels, a short red sequined dress and a platinum blonde wig. The camera follows Marieme from behind as she walks up the stairs and then into the party, tilting upwards to show her legs in the high heels, emphasising this transformation and transition from the previous scene into femininity and glamour. This outfit functions as a costume and disguise with a purpose; as a Black woman walking into a party full of middle-class white Parisians, her clothes enable her to blend in and disguise her race and age, through the glamour and sophistication of the outfit. Marieme removes the wig and dress as soon as she enters the car to leave, putting her baggy androgynous clothing back on, displaying how Sciamma does not prioritise heteronormative gender identity expression but reveals the fluidity and unrestrictive nature of gender through Marieme's character.²²⁰ Through this costume and performance, Sciamma questions and undermines Marieme's gender identity. Frances Smith argues that just like in *Tomboy*, feminine clothing acts as a disguise in this scene, as she compares this scene to Laure being made to wear a dress towards the end of *Tomboy*. Sciamma subverts the conventional meaning of feminine clothing by transforming her characters into a disguised shape shifting individual.²²¹

From bonfires to light and food, the element of fire is omnipresent within Sciamma's filmography. She uses the element fire to display the dichotomy of creation and destruction

²¹⁹ *Bande de filles*, 1:25:52.

²²⁰ Smith, p. 83.

²²¹ *Idem*, p. 84.

through its warmth, comfort and ability to create in contrast to its destruction and chaos. The different aspects of fire naturalise queer desire, bringing characters closer together, creating passion, sensuality, art and inspiration all of which contribute to the queerness of Sciamma's characters and narratives. Ultimately, Sciamma brings queerness out of the darkness by bringing queer narratives and characters into the spotlight, setting them ablaze with passionate burning desires.

Conclusion

This thesis began by examining the way in which Sciamma naturalises queer desire throughout her films. This consisted of exploring Sciamma's symbolic and important use of nature throughout her films, in addition to the queer narratives and characters inherently rooted in Sciamma's work. Throughout my thesis, I explored the connection and intersection between queerness and nature by examining queer ecology. Throughout the framework of queer ecology and the four elements, I investigated Sciamma's use of nature within her films through the lens of queer theory. Drawing on ecofeminism and queer ecology, I argue that Sciamma's filmography dismantles heterosexist notions of nature, thus further contributing to dismantling the heteronormativity and heterosexism that exists within French society. Queer ecology argues that nature and the natural are political categories which feed into society's understanding of what is considered natural and unnatural, consistently associating heterosexuality with nature and normality. Sciamma presents a queer natural world which defies societal and environmentalist expectations, as she engages with the queerness and strangeness of ecology mirroring the queerness of her characters and their narratives. Sciamma acknowledges the queerness of nature and humanity as she challenges heteronormative ideas of what is natural, whilst continuing to deconstruct the dominant hierarchies, power structures, binaries and dualisms that operate within society.

Chapter one investigated the role of the element water within Sciamma's films, primarily exploring the fluid, unfixed nature of water which mirrors the fluidity of Sciamma's queer characters and narratives. This chapter examined the allegorical use of water within Sciamma's films; water demonstrates, reflects and contributes to the deep, fluid, unfixed, flowing queer desires of her characters as well as the unlimited potential of their queerness and desires. The swimming pool is a vital key setting within *Naissance*. Through its omnipresence, it highlights and enforces societal expectations and ideas of femininity as well as demonstrating a clear binary. Sciamma uses synchronised swimming to display the pressures adolescents face as they begin to experience the pressures of femininity and womanhood within French society. On the other hand, Sciamma also uses water to display eroticism, through sexually charged showers, the semi-nudity that synchronised swimming encourages, as well as the romantic scenes that take place by the water in *Portrait* or *Tomboy*. The fluidity of the water demonstrates the fluidity and freedom of queerness in addition to naturalising the queerness of these moments. The eroticism and sexual appeal of

synchronised swimming plays an important part in Marie's self-discovery and sexual awakening as Sciamma oscillates between using synchronised swimming to display the heterosexism of the sport, which mirrors French society, whilst also using it to enamour and attract Marie as she discovers and explores her queerness.

Water is an important thematic element which not only symbolically mirrors the queerness and depths of Sciamma's characters but is also used to create spaces in which Sciamma's characters are able to perform their gender, further contributing to fulfilling their queer desires. Using Butler's theory of gender performativity, I examined how watery spaces become spaces of discovery, exploration and performance. The swimming pool is a stage and space in which girls repeatedly perform and demonstrate femininity, feeding into the pressures of perfection, beauty and heteronormativity of the sport (and society), through the synchronisation, forceful efforts and strength beneath the water as well as the preparation of their makeup and hair. The sport is ultimately an allegory for the pressures and expectations the girls face outside of the pool. Additionally, water enables Laure to perform their gender, through the exploration, experimentation and transformation of their body, hair and clothes. Sciamma uses these watery spaces to display the performative nature of gender, demonstrating that the outward signs of masculinity/femininity are a series of learned, socialised acts, behaviours and performances which ultimately have no innate grounding in boys/girls.

By examining the abject, I examined the entanglement of queerness and disgust, highlighting the taboos of queerness along with socially unconventional and unacceptable acts of spitting and bodily fluids. In addition to this, I also examined how Sciamma often eroticises spit and bodily fluids, blurring the lines between disgust and pleasure, resulting in the creation of a queer and defiant act. Sciamma uses Anne in *Naissance* to spit in François' mouth, demonstrating her shift from submission to dominance, empowerment and autonomy. Spitting is used as an expulsion, an attempt to be defiant and powerful in addition to Marie's attempt to remove and expulse her queerness and queer desires through spitting. Spit and saliva are used within *Portrait* to demonstrate the abject and socially queer nature of the bodily fluids, demonstrating and highlighting the taboo nature of queerness within 18th century France, whilst also juxtaposing this by creating scenes of eroticism, sensuality and intimacy.

Chapter two explored the role of the element earth within Sciamma's filmography by examining both rural and urban spaces. Earth is symbolically important within Sciamma's films, demonstrating grounding, safety, security as well as growth and life. By using Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope throughout, I suggested that Sciamma creates multiple queer chronotopes within her films as she subverts linear and binary time and space within her narratives. By examining the importance of the forest within *Petite Maman* and *Tomboy*, I suggest that the forest is allegorical; characters lose their way in the forest, exploring themselves, their queerness in this liminal space of freedom separate and away from heteronormative French society. Sciamma queers time within the space of the forest as it becomes a queer space of disrupted distorted time as two timelines merge. In *Tomboy*, the forest acts as a liminal space in which Laure transforms further into Mickaël and in which Mickaël's body acts as a queer chronotope over the length of the film and their exploration of the forest. The forest enables free exploration and performance, in which Laure is able to enact and perform their masculinity, shed their skin and reject gender norms whilst metamorphosing further into Mickaël.

Chapter two demonstrated how Sciamma's characters connect with various forms of feminine self-expression. This chapter also explores Marieme's queerness through her various identities and performances within *Bande de filles*. Marieme explores herself over time, trying out different identities and transforming as she responds to the demands of French society along with the societal expectations of femininity, beauty and bourgeois ideals. Additionally, Sciamma uses flying ointment in *Portrait* to enable Marianne and Héloïse to connect with each other through the liberating, expressive act of taking the psychedelic. Sciamma uses this scene to demonstrate a rejection of societal expectations and a display of autonomy and independence.

I also used Bachelard within this chapter to examine urban, interior spaces and the memories and desires that inhabit different spaces. By exploring *Bande de filles* and the urban environment that Sciamma displays within this film, I investigated the parallels this environment has with the capitalist, patriarchal French society and the lack of freedom incited by these spaces which contrast to the queerness and liberation experienced in outdoor natural environments. Ultimately, I argued that Sciamma uses these urban spaces to demonstrate an implicitly eco-critical stance as she presents the oppression and heteronormativity of these spaces.

Chapter three examined the way Sciamma uses the element air in her films, from her focus on the breath and silence in addition to her use of sound and music. This chapter begins by examining the audio-detail of the breath and how it often dominates the soundscape in Sciamma's films playing an important and expressive role which is often favoured over words and music. I argue that Sciamma's use of breath is queer as she uses it to communicate the emotions and desires of her characters, queering the normative forms of expression, communication and dialogue. Additionally, Sciamma's focus on the breath queers the traditional eye-oriented focus within cinema. The breath is expressive and often eroticised, adding sensuality in a completely queer way as Sciamma inflects meaning and conveys emotions through the breath adding hapticity. The breath subverts heteronormative ways of displaying sex and eroticism and Sciamma uses it to focus on the pleasure, desire and emotions of her characters. It occupies a queer liminal space of resistance which I argue is inherently political as she defies the eye-oriented gaze of cinema, displaying the queer desires and emotions of her characters through silence and breath as it builds tension and eroticism. By examining the breath, this leads onto exploring the role of smoking within Sciamma's films and how she uses it as a transgressive queer act within *Portrait* as well as an erotic act focused on the breath, orality as characters exhale and share smoke and each other's breath. Smoking is also used to demonstrate escapism and freedom. *Bande de filles* uses smoking weed to transform a scene into a slowed down, blue tinged, music-video style scene which is stretched out and surreal. In contrast to the eroticism of the breath, the audio-detail of the breath is also used to display the pain of characters as they fight in *Tomboy* and *Bande de filles* or breath under water in *Naissance*. The breath within these scenes demonstrate the desire to achieve masculinity/femininity and the lengths that characters go to in order to conform and align with societal pressures and expectations.

Whilst examining the role of the element air, this chapter explores how diegetic sound and silence are a vital part of Sciamma's work, focusing on her use of slow cinematic conventions and techniques as she focuses on territory sounds and silence throughout her films. Sciamma uses territory sounds and silence to create a vivid and rich soundscape which transport the spectator into the worlds of her characters. She often uses silence to create scenes of intense discomfort and awkwardness as she displays the confusion and difficulties of adolescence and their desires, specifically through their sexual encounters. Sciamma's use of silence and sound offers a space to observe the rhythms of her characters. This use of sound ultimately contributes to the realism and intimacy within Sciamma's films as well as

engaging with hapticity. Sciamma creates sensations of touch and texture through her carefully created soundscapes filled with territory sounds and silence. Due to this detailed and purposeful use of sound, Sciamma's rare use of music is particularly impactful and poignant and at times is allegorical of queer desire, demonstrating the depths of characters' emotions within *Portrait*. The Diamonds scene in *Bande de filles* is a particularly vital scene within Sciamma's filmography which queers classical cinema but also moves away and contrasts from the realism present throughout her work.

Chapter four investigated the destructive and creative potential of the element fire by exploring heat, food and light. Fire is allegorical within *Portrait*, demonstrating a building burning passionate romance and relationship between Marianne and Héloïse whilst also displaying its warmth and comfort. By exploring Sciamma's use of food within the *mise-en-scène* in her films, I argued that Sciamma dismantles class distinctions in *Portrait*, as she brings characters together and builds a queer utopia of sorority, equality and intimacy. Sciamma uses food to reject heteronormativity and to create intimacy and nourishment which mirrors queer desire as well as being an allegory for sexual appetites. Food inherently links to hunger, desire, orality and satisfaction demonstrating allegories for sexual desire and longing within Sciamma's films as Marie eats Floriane's browning apple and waits for her whilst eating sweets.

Fire within Sciamma's films ultimately demonstrates passion and desire. It burns and transforms throughout the length of *Portrait*, acting as a symbolic manifestation of the romance, desire and passion between Marianne and Héloïse. But Sciamma also uses it in *Portrait* as a means for destruction as Marianne destroys two paintings, mirroring her rejection of the patriarchal rules and conventions within both art and society. Sciamma uses the destruction of paintings to demonstrate defiance and a rejection of how women are presented and looked at within art. As Marianne develops and changes her approach to painting, she forges a new relationship with Héloïse, queering her paintings as well as liberating herself, and her art, from the rules of repressive heteronormative society and its expectations. As she defies conventions within painting, she also defies society's expectations of her and her queerness. Painting transforms into a collaborative effort which ultimately works to dismantle the one-dimensional act of looking, defying society and traditional expectations of women and the act of painting. Fire and light are used to demonstrate the passion, independence and defiance of Sciamma's characters, as they disrupt

heteronormativity and gender norms. By doing so, Sciamma queers the rules of epoch drama imposed by heteronormative expectations and male filmmakers.

In summary, Sciamma's filmmaking is inherently political through its exploration of queer narratives interlinking with the symbolism and imagery of nature throughout. Within her filmography, Sciamma creates allegories within nature which demonstrate the fluidity of queerness and the desires of Sciamma's characters, as they explore their queerness. Sciamma's films are a form of activism as she uses nature and the four elements to examine and tell queer narratives which disrupt societal expectations and heteronormativity, ultimately naturalising queerness and demonstrating universal aims of ecofeminism. Sciamma dismantles heterosexist notions of nature whilst also dismantling heteronormative expectations and norms within French society by queering and rewriting history within *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, queering banlieue cinema within *Bande de filles* and queering the coming-of-age story in *Petite Maman*, *Tomboy* and *Naissance des pieuvres*.

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