Master's thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities
Department of Art and Media Studies

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Thrown Into the Deep End

Phenomenology, Haptic Visuality, and Coming-of-Age in Queer, Contemporary Cinema

Master's thesis in Film Studies
Supervisor: Julia Leyda
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Ylva Jonsdatter Haagensen-Løkke

Abstract

During the 1970s and 1980s there were major efforts exerted to legitimise film theory as an academic discipline. To do this, leading theorists borrowed from other fields of study, among which psychoanalysis, Marxism, and semiotics were most popular. Vivian Sobchack wanted to distance herself from these branches of film studies when she in 1992 reintroduced phenomenological philosophy as a way of understanding the filmic experience. Her theories regard film as a physical, acting body, and they spawned a subsection of film theory that dealt with what Laura Marks named "haptic visuality" which seeks to answer questions such as: what if films have bodies that act upon the audience and produce multi-sensory experiences in a way that optical visuality does not account for? This thesis uses haptic visuality as a methodological guide combined with theories of touch proposed by Jennifer Barker and the queer phenomenology of Sara Ahmed to answer two questions: *What audiovisual elements best exemplify queer haptics in contemporary cinema, and how do the elements affect the spectator's understanding of queer characters' lived-body experiences?* Through analysis of mise-en-scène, cinematography, narrative elements, and haptic sound in Sciamma's films *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011), this thesis argues that the haptic elements incite the feelings of queerness and lived-body experiences of the characters in the audience. Haptic cinema is a fruitful gateway into accounting for the multisensory representations of queerness on screen, and it allows for a more multifaceted understanding of on-screen bodies than traditional, optical visuality.

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Sammendrag

På 1980-og 90-tallet ble det lagt ned stor innsats for å legitimere filmteori som akademisk disiplin. Del av legitimeringen innebar lån av teorier fra andre fagfelt. Spesielt populært var lån fra psykoanalytiske, Marxistiske, og semiotiske teorier. Filmteorietiker Vivian Sobchack ville distansere seg fra disse teoriene da hun i 1992 reintroduserte fenomenologisk filosofi til filmteorien. Hennes teorier som anser filmen som en fysisk, aktiv kropp, og teoriene førte til en underkategori av filmvitenskapen som tar for seg det Laura Marks døpte «haptisk visualitet». Haptisk visualitet prøver å svare på spørsmål som: hva om filmer har en kropp som er i kontakt med publikum og som fører til flersanselige opplevelser på en måte optisk visualitet ikke tar for seg? Denne oppgaven bruker haptisk visualitet kombinert med teorier om berøring foreslått av Jennifer Barker og Sara Ahmeds skeive fenomenologi som metodologisk pekepinn for å svare på to spørsmål: *hvilke audiovisuelle elementer karakteriserer det haptiske i skeiv samtidsfilm, og hvilken effekt har de haptiske elementene på publikums forståelse av skeive karakterers kroppslige opplevelser?* Gjennom analyse av mise-en-scène, kinematografi, narrative elementer og haptisk lyd i Sciammas *Water Lilies* (2007) og *Tomboy* (2011), argumenterer jeg for at de haptiske elementene oppfordrer til kroppslige opplevelser knyttet til de skeive karakterene. Haptisk film er en fruktbar innfallsvinkel for å forstå de flersanselige representasjonene av skeivhet på skjermen, og det tillater en mer flersidig forståelse av skeive kropper enn tradisjonell, optisk visualitet.

Antall ord: 36 416

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction and Research Question

"Beautifully observed", "… a delightful insight", "…can't wait to see what Sciamma will do next". These are but a few of the reviews printed on the covers of the films this master's thesis will consider. Notice a trend, perhaps? The world of film has an arguably understandable preoccupation with seeing, watching, observing. Vision is at the top of the "… sensory hierarchy that subtends Western philosophy, in which only the distance senses are vehicles of knowledge, and Western aesthetics, in which only vision and hearing can be vehicles of beauty" (Marks, 2008, p. 123).

After writing a bachelor thesis influenced by writings on theories of optical visuality and Laura Mulvey's male gaze theory, I had scratched the surface of queer film representation to explore what queer films *look* like. Additionally, I investigated how films produced within the Hollywood-led zeitgeist often look back at the audience with that very same, gendered gaze. However, after writing my bachelor thesis I felt inclined to explore other avenues of filmic experience because I found it almost counterintuitive to reduce filmic experience to gendered gazes. Why is gender the most prominent dimension for determining film experience, and how does it affect our understanding of queerness on screen? And why is vision the primary sense investigated in relation to viewer engagement? Additionally, I refused to accept that psychoanalysis can effectively defend for its intense use of gender to describe filmic experience; it seemed to be segregated based on gender purely out of tradition. Problematically, psychoanalysis also diminishes the cinematic experiences of women and genderqueer people in a male-dominated business. In my experience, my engagement with and enjoyment of films has never been a result of my gender (of course, psychoanalysts will argue that my denouncement of gendered looking is purely denial), and psychoanalytic traditions of describing female spectatorship are soaked in the heteronormativity, sexism, and misogyny of traditional psychoanalysis.

These perspectives on psychoanalysis have not gone unnoticed amongst other queer scholars and filmmakers. Limiting the filmic experience to a gendered gaze seems reductive. In many ways it diminishes the affective value of non-visual mediums like music, but also the experiences of those without vision who still enjoy and engage with audiovisual mediums like film. Interestingly, the language used to describe visual experiences often give attributes of other senses to the act of seeing: caressing gazes, wandering eyes, stink eye, etc. And thus, scholars have been attempting to explain viewership in other ways than dictated by the gendered gaze, but also by understanding how all our senses work together to form the film

experience. The result has been decades of research, a phenomenological approach to film, and attempts to understand how film can be haptically, rather than optically, engaging.

Recently, I went to an art exhibit where the Scottish artist Katie Paterson had made a necklace out of fossils, carved into tiny, colourful beads (*Fossil Necklace*, 2013). The necklace hung from the ceiling by invisible strings and almost appeared to be floating in the air. I did what I always do when examining something closely, and I removed my glasses - the only physical barrier between me and the necklace. Somehow, however, I felt limited in my ability to experience the piece in front of me. Regardless of what the artist intended for it to mean or symbolise, I felt restricted in my experience because I could not touch it, feel it, or hold it closer to my eyes. I am not even sure I was not allowed to touch it; there were no signs and no boundaries, only the societal assumption that art is not to be touched, only viewed with curious, yet respectfully inactive eyes.

Scholars (and I) are not convinced that experiencing film is accurately described by understanding how it relates to Hollywood's intertwinement with patriarchal social structures through Lacanian psychoanalysis, Marxist film theory, or structuralism. Laura Mulvey's most influential piece on the male gaze, *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,* was published in 1975 in *Screen* magazine. Her research was meant to be generalised to Hollywood as an industry, however, her writings primarily analysed the works of Alfred Hitchcock, who was active in Hollywood during the 1950s and 1960s. Psychoanalysis thrived in film theory in the years following Mulvey, despite psychological researchers renouncing especially Freud's theories about gender and sexuality, but also of Lacan's during those years. It seems like film theory is lagging when we keep relying on theories based on research most other fields have actively distanced themselves from. Mulvey's theories have held up within film theory because they are insightful and point to a problem that is objectively visible in the film industry. It is heavily male-dominated, and women have been treated unfairly both on and off screen. In more recent years, however, film theory is moving away from trying to describe the political and industrial effects upon film. There are attempts made to instead describe the experience of the viewer through amongst other things a return to phenomenology and through other branches of psychology like cognitive film theory.

One scholar who has decidedly moved away from the tradition is Vivian Sobchack, whose work reignited the interest in phenomenological film theory. She presented the film in an entirely different way, not as a passive object that we inactively gaze upon for our own

pleasure, but as its own subjective body that interacts with us just as we interact with it. Her work influenced a wave of theories based on the idea that audiences are not passive viewers, but in a reciprocal interaction with film that activates all the senses, not only vision. Part of the thesis will be dedicated to explaining and understanding how haptic imagery affects the viewer's experience and to describing the queer haptics that are relevant to my chosen artefacts. I intend to look specifically at the use of haptic aesthetics and haptic imagery in films portraying young queer people coming to grips with their identities.

My bachelor thesis was an analysis of Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019) and described how the film tries to break away from the gendered and heteronormative ways of looking. Sciamma herself is a vocal opponent of the male gaze and its chokehold on the film industry. She actively works to distance her films from its traditional elements. Her stated distancing from the tradition of filmic gazes inspired me to take a closer look at some of her other works in this thesis. I saw similarities between two of her earlier films that revolve around queer people, *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011). Interestingly, both the films are stories about young people, and so I thought there might be a way to avoid analysing these films through the lens of the gendered (and sexualised) gaze and instead focus on how their experiences are conveyed with haptic imagery and sound.

Therefore, in this thesis I want to investigate how queer films appeal to our corporeal, as opposed to just visual, engagement with film. The thesis will be a phenomenologically based amalgamation of various theories regarding the corporeal and haptic audience reactions, applied to films with queer storylines. *What audiovisual elements best exemplify queer haptics in contemporary cinema, and how do the elements affect the spectator's understanding of queer characters' lived-body experiences?*

Chapter 2: Film Phenomenology, Haptic Visuality, and Queer Orientations

2.1. Search process

To start the process of undertaking the massive world of film phenomenology and haptic cinema, I want to introduce the works that mark the forefront of phenomenological film studies. These are the works that have defined this field of research and in this chapter my main goal is to give a brief introduction to the theories and discuss how they have been essential to this thesis and to answering my questions about queer haptic cinema.

The process of finding literature for my thesis started with taking a closer look at haptic engagement and corporeality in queer cinema as an alternative to visual engagement. I used Laura Marks' distinction between haptic and optic cinema as a starting point. Arguably, Marks' most cited and discussed piece of literature is her book *The Skin of the Film* from 2000. The book, which is not the first work to mention haptic visuality, but it is arguably the most prominent within haptic film theory. Marks' book is first and foremost a book on diaspora film and tries to explain how haptic imagery can connect people haptically to the memories of their homes. Despite the difference in subject matter, I find Marks' book to be an essential part of my research because it allows me to see how haptic cinema studies can be applied to films.

Sobchack's book *The Address of the Eye* (1992) is another fundamental work within film as a multisensory medium, and it arguably is the basis for some of Marks' research. It marked a divergence in the history of film theory as she reintroduced phenomenology as a gateway to understanding film experience. Sobchack's texts, including not only *The Address of the Eye*, but also her later works about how bodies make sense of visual imagery, like *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004), are important parts of the beginner syllabus when reading about phenomenological film theory, and thus, acknowledging her role in the study of haptic cinema is obligatory. Sobchack's phenomenological research has been both a source of inspiration and a bane during the writing of this thesis, because her theories are philosophical in nature rather than practical methodologies.

Jennifer Barker's book, *The Tactile Eye* from 2009, appears as a continuation of Marks' work on haptic cinema and is an incredibly comprehensive text detailing the various ways in which films provoke tactile engagement to film narratives. I quickly decided it is going to be a massively helpful tool when understanding how one can use phenomenological

and haptic film theory to analyse films and the elements of film that are haptic in nature. Additionally, the book is more preoccupied with tactile cinema in general, where Marks' work is more limited to the theories concerning diaspora film, which lets me more easily apply Barker's methodology to my own thesis and to the topic of queer cinema. Barker addresses both Sobchack and Marks in the acknowledgements in her book, and their academic, thematic connections seem to be strong. I do, however, find that applying it directly to queer haptics is difficult and thus, I have also decided to include the works of the British-Australian writer and scholar Sara Ahmed. It became quite clear when reading phenomenological film texts that she was an important source when discussing queer phenomenology. Her book *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* published in 2006 focuses on the phenomenological concept of orientation towards objects, which she relates directly to how it can be applied to *sexual* orientation. Thus, the book perfectly provides this thesis with a stronger connection to the phenomenology from which haptic cinema originates while also joining it with queer discourse.

Following are brief introductions the works I have mentioned and that I will make us of to support my thesis and answer my research questions. I have decided to present the texts in chronological order to show how they are all connected and build upon one another, starting with Sobchack and the resurgence of phenomenology, followed by Laura Marks whose work continued the understanding of viewer and film as two bodies, intertwined in the same experience. Then I introduce the writings of Jennifer Barker, who extended the idea of the film body further, before describing the queer phenomenology of Sara Ahmed. Finally, I will be ordering the elements of haptic cinema that I will use to conduct my analysis of *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011) in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 consists of the analyses of the two films based on what I describe in the following two chapters.

2.2. A Return to Phenomenology in *The Address of the Eye* (Sobchack, 1992)

Vivian Sobchack is one of the most prominent writers within film phenomenology, if not the most prominent. As she explains herself, her mission when writing her arguably most well-known work, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (1992), was to supply an alternative field of thought to the dominant film theory culture of the late 20th century (Sobchack, 1992, p. xiv). Prior to Sobchack, film theory was saturated with the effects of massive development within the field in the 1970s through to the 1980s. There had been a distinct shift from attempting to academically legitimise film theory, to fast intellectual progress drawn from developments in other fields, particularly philosophy. Film theorists

drew from psychoanalysis, Marxism, and semiotics to understand the "… ideological functions" (McDonald, 2016, p. 91) of film. In moving closer to semiotics and structuralism, film theorists did what the structuralists had done, and they moved away from pre-war branches of philosophy like existentialism and phenomenology (McDonald, 2016, p. 59). In short terms, film scholars of the 1970s and 1980s wanted to deconstruct films and understand them in the context of their zeitgeist in a way that the theorists preceding them did not.

Sobchack writes her book in the aftermath of these poststructuralist developments, and she attempted to distance film theory from the traditional and dominant ideas that sprouted in the decades prior; she mentions, mainly, Lacanian and Neo-Marxist theories. Seemingly, Sobchack's train of thought resembled mine: optical visuality seen in the context of societal power structures does not accurately account for the extreme diversity in viewer experience. The two dominant schools of thought cover both the "inside" and "outside" of human existence - the psyche and society. Lacanianism and Neo-Marxism are both rooted in the same fascination with structuralist discourse. At the heart of both is a desire to unravel how the power imbalance in society is reflected in cinematic representations of life (see, for example, feminist film theory, queer theory, and of course, Marxist film theory). Sobchack mentions two main reasons for why Lacanian psychoanalysis and Neo-Marxism are inadequate at fully capturing the film experience, and both reasons seem to be hinting at the same essential lack.

Psychoanalysis, according to Sobchack, might be good for describing the unconscious of texts produced in an inherently patriarchal world, but it cannot account for sexual difference, nor can it account for the pleasure derived from watching film in an adequate (according to Sobchack) way. By «sexual difference» Sobchack refers to the differences in physical being that exist in the world, or as she calls it an "adult polymorphousness" (Sobchack, 1992, p. xv). She does not necessarily talk about actual biological differences in the sexes or sexuality. However, her phrasing does work well for my analysis of queer cinema; queer people arguably are different in the way they exist in the world. This idea of embodied differences in queer people will be discussed further later in the essay. I agree with her assessment of the deficiencies of psychoanalysis when it comes to describing differences in experience related to bodily (and mental) differences.

Marxism is, similarly, effective at describing aspects of film that relate directly to ideological objectives in cinematic representations. But, again, Sobchack believes Marxist

theory is insufficiently equipped to accommodate the embodied feelings of its terminology; what is the embodied feeling of labour and alienation experienced in film, for example? Sobchack's main issue with the theories used by her contemporaries seemingly boils down to this: they do not account for the "… dynamic, synoptic, and lived-body experience" (Sobchack, 1992, p. xvi).

Sobchack's rebuttal of these traditions is based on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology. I have found that her writings serve as a good cornerstone for my thesis and for understanding the origins of haptic film theory. I will now briefly summarise the main arguments Sobchack presents in her book, *The Address of the Eye* (1992).

Sobchack's main point is that film theory up until the 1990s had disregarded the actual felt experiences of film audiences. She suggests that the film is more than merely "…brute material" (1992, p. 6), but a subject with the ability to equally perceive and express in a process she calls "… the double embodiment of film" (1992, p. 307). By granting film the power of perception, Sobchack claims that films have a figurative "body" and that film experiences are the interactions between viewer and viewed where both roles are played by the spectator and the film itself. There is little doubt that Sobchack's book is an important addition to film theory, as it presents a return to a phenomenological approach previously abandoned. My thesis will assume that film interacts with the spectator through the reversible relationship between embodied experience.

Sobchack argues, in structuralist fashion, that film uses modes of embodied existence like hearing, vision, and physical movement as the material of filmic language and our existence in relation to the actual world as the structure of that same language. What Sobchack introduces is a semiotic phenomenology where physical aspects of existence (the senses) are what the father of structuralism, Ferdinand de Saussure, called parole or speech. They are without meaning until they are placed within the structures of experience called langue or language. This distinction made by Sobchack allows her to argue that the significance of all film emerges from the shared (between viewers and creators) evidence of the material of the film combined with the structure of experience. Film audiences understand this significance as both the conveyed experience of an unknown "other" and as the immediate experiences of that "other". Sobchack argues that the film is a lived-body experience "… realizing itself in the world" (1992, p. 7). The film is, in other words, not only images on a screen for viewers to gaze at, but capable of both perception and expression, of

both *having* sense and *making* sense; film can both have significance and perform the act of signification.

During my search for literature Sobchack is referenced in all but a few texts regarding haptic film experience, simply because she was by and large responsible for the re-emergence of phenomenological film theory on which haptic theories are based. Sobchack's focus on describing the experience of film engagement is exactly what my thesis needs. Particularly useful is her idea of the film/audience relationship as reciprocal; accounts of viewership that rely on a hypothetical, disembodied audience seem to insufficiently explain differences in viewer experience. Phenomenological film theory differs from other theories trying to understand audience experience because it, like the philosophical branch, is uninterested in analysis and objective understanding of phenomena.

When writing about viewer engagement and experience, it is impossible to do so without considering the alternative theories and academic sources that explain why audiences feel engaged with fictional characters on screen. During the 1990s, at the same time as Vivian Sobchack returned to phenomenology, other film theorists similarly tried to move away from the structuralist theories of the 1980s by turning to psychology. Cognitive film theory, or cognitivism, pays special attention to film's ability to produce and transmit emotions to the viewer. In the same way as Sobchack, cognitivists agree to some extent that film's ability to induce real emotions in viewers through narratives we as viewers know are fictional is a result of the interplay between the viewers cognition and the elements of the film.

Cognitive theory is concretised enough through years of application to different films, elements of narrative structures, character aspects, and other elements. You can easily find good, straightforward analyses of films explained by cognitive theory. Phenomenology on the other hand, seems harder to grasp and apply to films, and there are no recipes for how to use haptic visuality to analyse specific films. This distinction points to the most fundamental difference between phenomenology and cognitive film theory: phenomenology is not a method but a lens to understand film experience, whereas cognitive film theory is a well-established methodology with clear guidelines. What I find most challenging, and perhaps most exciting about phenomenology, is that there are very few rules as to how you describe experience, in contrast to other branches of film theory that have stricter rules and more defined sets of terminology. Sobchack herself has described her book *The Address of the Eye*

(1992) was "… historically necessary polemic" (2004, p. 6). To remedy this, her second book is far more, as she says, "… user friendly" (p. 6).

Regardless of the polemic nature of Sobchack's phenomenology, I believe that her research will be a beneficial gateway to understanding and describing queer film experience because it accounts for the lived experience of queer people as a separate form of existence. As Ahmed says: "Phenomenology helps us to consider how sexuality involves ways of inhabiting and being inhabited by space" (2006, p. 67). I believe that a phenomenological approach to queer cinema might give insight into how lived-body experiences of queer characters is conveyed to an audience.

Phenomenological film theory continued to develop as the millennium ended. Film theorists' eyes were opened to investigating the viewer experience through Sobchack's theories of the film as a two-sided artefact that is both subject and object in its interaction with viewers. Another prominent figure in the field of this corporeal understanding of our relationship with film is Laura Marks whose work on haptic visuality is essential to my thesis and its understanding of the effects of queer audiovisual elements. I will now move deeper into the phenomenological understanding of film and briefly explain how Laura Marks not only explains viewer engagement with haptic imagery, but also how she uses it in various examples that can guide my analysis of my chosen artefacts later in the thesis.

2.3. Introduction of Haptic Visuality in *The Skin of the Film* (Marks, 2000)

Laura Marks' book *The Skin of the Film* follows Sobchack's train of thought in many ways, and it is widely acknowledged as the starting point for haptic cinema, though others, like Antonia Lant (1995) had introduced the concept previously. Antonia Lant used Alois Riegl's theories and applied them to film in her 1995 article *Haptical Cinema*. She writes that Riegl's distinction between haptic and optic cinema is founded on the "… distinction referring to knowledge of artistic space through the senses of touch and vision" (p. 50) and that this distinction has been made stronger by the early cinema's adoption of Egyptian art influences. Arguably, her most prominent point is that the potential of cinema to expand upon and create space is one of the most haptic abilities of the moving image.

However, *The Skin of the Film* differs from Sobchack's work in three very important ways when relating to my master's thesis. Firstly, its main theme of intercultural cinema anchors it more firmly in the realm of cinema concerning minority groups, though of course,

minority groups differ wildly depending on what part of them characterises their marginality. Sexual minorities, the subject of this thesis, are not directly comparable to ethnic minorities or racial minorities. One could argue that diaspora film might be completely different in its use of haptic visuality compared to queer film, but for the sake of the argument, their status as minority film makes them comparable. Secondly, Marks introduces the terminology I will use as my primary description of the type of imagery discussed in my thesis, most importantly haptic visuality, and following that, haptic imagery/aesthetics. Thirdly, Marks introduces a comprehensive list of elements to look out for as being especially haptic in nature. When adapting these elements to better fit my chosen artefacts, the result will be a set of shared expressions of distinctly queer haptic imagery to use when analysing the two films.

Laura Marks, while located firmly within the realm of continental philosophy, relies on the works of different philosophers than Sobchack. Especially present in *The Skin of the Film* book is Gilles Deleuze, a French philosopher who in the 1970s already strongly rejected psychoanalysis as a field of study. Later he released several works discussing the nature of cinema. His work with what Marks calls "… cinematic philosophy" (2000, p. 150) consists not of theories explaining viewer engagement, but that attempt to find fundamental building blocks of cinematic images. He divided film into a vast number of categories, the broadest of which are the "movement-image" and the "time-image" (McDonald 2016, p. 147).

The movement-image describes cinema in the first half of the 20th century and is part of Deleuze's idea that cinema did not emerge as a signifying art form until formal techniques of editing were established. His argument for this claim (with which I do not agree) is that by introducing editing techniques like montage, the film went from being single unit images to shots that are seen in relation to one another and as a result they create the illusion of a whole unseen world outside the frame. The theory speaks to Deleuze's preoccupation with understanding the relationship between cinema and imagination/thought. Most important to Marks, however, is the time-image. The time-image is difficult to grasp, and even more difficult to explain, but I believe what is most essential about them is that they allow Marks to argue that (1) cinema is a multisensory (as opposed to a simply ocular) experience and (2) that memories are "… embodied in the senses" (2000, p. xiv). Unlike many who study film, Deleuze was not as interested in the analysis of film as much as the film's ability to create meaning and contain knowledge and be tools for philosophical afterthought. With that background information in mind, I will delve into Marks and her most important contributions to the world of haptic imagery.

Marks' main goal with her book is to understand how intercultural cinema reproduces memories of senses in a way that connects people in diaspora to their pasts. Marks emphasises that film is not "… merely a transmitter of signs; it bears witness to an object and transfers the presence of that object to viewers" (2000, p. xvii), and the statement is very reminiscent of the claims made by Sobchack. Marks believes that ways of producing knowledge are constricted to those found in the Western world and that attempts at representing other ways of living are still bound to those regimes of knowing. Especially important is what she refers to as the "… hierarchy of senses" (Marks, 2000, p. 119) in Western capitalist societies, where seeing (and sometimes hearing) is placed above all other senses in its ability to produce truth and knowledge. Marks wants to investigate how films, through visual means, can activate a sense of touch, smell, and taste and create a more wholistic, embodied film experience. She wants to show how cinema, as a representation of the real world, can activate synaesthesia in viewers.

My main reason for including Marks in my thesis is that she gives numerous examples of haptic imagery and uses real films and videos to show what kinds of imagery can lead to feelings of embodied viewing. Some of her examples also point to textual elements that can evoke feelings other than vision and hearing. These examples of haptic aesthetics will assist me in describing and exemplifying how queerness "feels" in contemporary cinema. I will now present a few of those visual aspects that I believe will be particularly relevant for my analysis of my chosen artefacts.

Marks argues that some cinematographic qualities are particularly sense-inducing. They are often related to adding texture to the screen and thus bringing attention to the screen itself, which Marks argues is like a skin that the viewers "… brush up against like another body" (2000, p. xii) when watching a film. Graininess, focus-changes, unfocused images, exposure settings, choice and condition of film stock, or camera choices, after-effects, and camera position. She mentions films where the camera pans across different kinds of fabric to incite the feeling of the fabric, for example, and argues that this will trigger "sense memories" of the past. Her argument is also that the textures on the screen evoke memories of real-life textures. Additionally, she argues that the lack of images, black or white screens, also incite hapticity because it connects our thoughts to images that simply cannot be represented directly. This links very directly to Deleuzian ideas of the relationship between film and the imagination and recreation of memories.

Secondly, there are the aspects that I think might be most fruitful for my analysis of queer cinema: the narrative elements of haptic cinema. And though Marks believes haptic images are less "complete" than other images because they require the interaction of viewers, they can nevertheless be part of the structured narrative of the film. Some examples of such textual images include shots of nature that evoke memories of senses and images of characters that emphasise *their* senses, for example images of characters smelling, eating food, touching objects, or otherwise explicitly sensing on screen. Senses can be evoked through the mise-en-scène as well, for example through costumes, character blocking, and colour choices. According to Marks, cinema can evoke other senses through character actions, however, exactly what kinds of actions is left up to interpretation. These kinds of images, that in some ways try to incite physicality by showing it and encouraging mimicry, are the ones I am especially interested in looking closer at in my investigation of queer cinema. I believe that because they are part of the narrative, written into the script, they might differ in films about queer people. Different narratives might equal different haptic imagery. Are the invitations to feel specific to queer cinema or are they results of patriarchal, capitalistic discourse in the way Mulvey suggested optic visuality is?

I will be adding aural experiences as a part of my thesis to expand upon the work already done within haptic film theory. Neither Sobchack nor Marks are particularly preoccupied with the idea of film sound's effect on the haptic experience of a film, however, Marks does mention that the sound design of a film can have an effect that is similar to that of the images. Her primary thoughts about haptic aurality are that the film's sound blends in with the sounds of the body and the boundary between the two can be difficult to distinguish when in the audience. She says that "… the rustle of trees may mingle with the sound of my breathing, or conversely the booming music may inhabit my chest and move my body from the inside' (2000, p. 183). Marks thus acknowledges that there is a link between the viewing body and the sound of the film where the internal sounds of the body mix and intermingle with the sounds of the film. I will get back to the effect of sound on the lived-body experience of film later in this chapter.

When it comes to my interest in Marks concerning queer haptic engagement, it comes down to a question of understanding Marks preoccupation with reorienting film experience. In a text about queer, haptic sound Davina Quinlivan writes that Marks' understanding of viewership is fundamentally reliant on questions of orientation because "… haptic visuality is the orientation of viewers towards an oscillation between passivity-activity, subjectivity-

objectivity" (2015, p. 67). However, as Quinlivan also remarks, adopting a sexualised perspective will bring Marks' theories back into the realm of sexed and gendered experience Marks tried to avoid initially. But as I will mention later, Marks' ideas of the disoriented spectator are aligned with the ideas of queer phenomenologist Sara Ahmed, and thus, queering Marks' theories seems necessary and unproblematic given their alignment with existing queer phenomenology.

While Marks did distance herself from Sobchack's original philosophical background, their theories are distinctively similar because they treat the film as a body that the viewer interacts with when experiencing a film and that equally interacts with the viewer. Marks' preoccupation with film's ability to recreate the feeling of memories in people who are displaced and far from home is essential when trying to understand the ways in which film directors use film to convey lived experiences and allowing viewers to reexperience them through the skin of the film. However, I argue as many have done before, that Marks' theories are transferrable to other kinds of cinema, characters, and viewers as well. Her theories are broad enough to be generalisable to films that have nothing to do with diaspora whatsoever largely because all films are to some degree about recreating or at least representing reality on screen.

Jennifer Barker is another film theorist whose work on film is based in haptic visuality, though she seems to have taken it a step further than Marks and assumes that not only does the film have a skin, but it also has musculature and organs. I introduce her as an important theorist because her theories are based on those of Marks, but they are more widely used by Barker to analyse films outside the realm of diaspora film.

2.4. The Layers of Tactile Cinema in *The Tactile Eye* (Barker, 2009)

Jennifer Barker writes that her intentions when writing *The Tactile Eye* were to follow the "… deepening of touch from surface to depth, from haptic touch to total immersion" (2009, p. 2). What I assume then, is that Barker's book is an extension of the work Marks did on haptic visuality. While Marks introduces the idea of haptic cinema to film theory, her focus is on the connection between the haptic and memory. Barker believes that the hapticity of film can be *deeper* than what Marks describes. Her main argument assumes that "… touch is not just skindeep but is experienced at the body's surface, in its depths, and everywhere in between" (Barker, 2009, p. 2). She takes this literally and her book is divided into three parts:

"Skin", "Musculature", and finally, "Viscera". The levels travel deeper and deeper into body of the film following in Sobchack's footsteps of comparing film to a human body.

Her main arguments about the nature of film are similar to those of Marks. There is interaction between the screen/film and the viewer where textures are felt by the audience as they experience the film. Her terminology differs from that of Marks. The term "tactical" is used by Marks, however, very sparsely and as a direct synonym of "haptic". But haptic film is a description of a surface-level experience of touch. Tactile cinema is, according to Barker, a deeper sensation not only related to the skin, but related to the whole body. I will briefly explain what Barker means the most essential part of each layer of the film's body from skin to viscera is, because this division brings up a few interesting themes that are relevant to my thesis.

The film's skin is the first layer the viewer encounters. Here she seems to agree with Marks' definition of hapticity and the visual elements of film that produce it which I will discuss in detail later in the thesis. Barker argues that cinematic textures and effects are the boundary between the viewer and the film, and it engages us with the story and the characters. One of her examples is from *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1995) where she argues that adult viewers are engaged to the story not only because they remember what being a child is like and reminisce their youth, but because the textures of the story allow for sense memories:

> "…we may remember what it feels like to dip our fingers into the box of yellow plastic facial features and stick just the right ones into the smooth, rotund face of Mr. Potato Head, or to shake the piggy bank in hopes of feeling the rolling, tumbling weight of a few coins in its hollow belly" (Barker, 2009, p. 45).

The theory matches up well with Marks, but I find that Barker's explanations and distancing from the concept of intercultural cinema makes it easier to imagine the possible applications to queer film and raises the question: what textures can evoke feelings or an understanding of queerness? I find that imagining haptic cinema as a reminder of queer memories especially fruitful given the subject matter of this thesis. How can a film's texture be reminders of queer childhood and a search for your identity?

The second layer of the film body is the musculature. Barker claims that "If the film has a body, it must also have body language" (2009, p. 69). The musculature of the film body, then, is composed of the "… movement, comportment, and gestures" (Barker, 2009, p. 69) of

the film in relation to the viewer. With this level of the film body, Barker tries to explain how viewers react with movement to certain kinds of images in acts of bodily mimicry. Just as there is a direct relationship between the viewer's skin and the skin of the film, there is a direct link between the movement of the film and the movement of the viewer: "… a form of mutual engagement that dates back to at least the fabled panicking spectators of early cinema described in decades worth of historical accounts of the Lumière Brother's *Arrival of a Train at a Station* (1885)" (Barker, 2009, p. 72). Barker proceeds to connect the musculature to viewer empathy, and that really opens a massive rabbit hole of research from Linda Williams' "body genres" to cognitive theories on empathic engagement. The theory that emotion and motion "spread" between the screen and the viewer is reminiscent of theories of emotional contagion and facial feedback within cognitive film theory. Here I want to mention that haptic cinema in the case of this thesis will evoke experiences of queerness, but historically hapticity has been used to explain both our connection to our memories like in Marks' text, but also viewer engagement and emotional response to films. One example is Linda Williams' texts on body genres that encourage feeling of sadness, horror, or arousal, which I will mention in more detail later. And so, connecting the phenomenological and cognitive aspects of spreading emotion/motion is a possibility for further investigation.

The final layer of the film body is the viscera. Barker's definitions of the viscera of film are connected to the internal rhythms of the body like breathing and pulsating blood. It describes both the guts, the intestines of filmic rhythm, but also gut-feelings that arise within and draw attention to our insides. She writes that the viscus of the film serves the same function as our insides in that they "… sustain life, animate us, and regulate themselves without our notice in order to maintain the continuity of our movement and activities" (2009, p. 127). The film's viscera, according to Barker's theory, consists of elements structures that enable the film to act: "… the power source, light source, sprocket holes, projector's gate, and other parts of the mechanism" (2009, p. 127). These are elements that are essential for the film to exists and to keep moving but are out of the control of the film itself (and the crew, of course). Her theory here, is not that the films' ability to provoke haptic feelings comes from changing the mechanisms of the film, but that the film allows the viewer to look inward at their own viscera and acknowledge them. The films viscera remain the same, but elements of the film can engage our own sense of our innards: "Films appeal to the more immediately accessible musculature and skin, inviting their participation in a way that evokes the temporal rhythms of the viewer's viscera, which in many ways match those of the film's viscera"

(Barker, 2009, p. 128). Problematically, however, Barker does not mention how the viscera of the film reveals itself when it is projected to audiences in other ways than mechanically. Most contemporary films will never be projected mechanically. They will rather be viewed either through a streaming service or, in my case when viewing the films discussed in this thesis, on DVD.

Barker writes mainly about time in her discussions of viscera and about how we perceive cinematic time in the same way that we perceive our own natural, smooth movements. This despite us knowing the cinema is fractured and consists of single images, just like our bodies are not continuous either because our heartbeats and our respiration involves "… intermittent and separate motions" (2009, p. 128). This aspect of the viscera of film, I find to be applicable even to digital films. Digital films might not have projectors or sprocket holes, but they certainly have an internal rhythm in the same sense as films shot on celluloid. I find that the cinematography and the editing is most important when discussing the viscera of contemporary films, because the internals of these films still exist because of the internal workings of the mechanisms that bring the film to life. The only difference is the mechanisms themselves have been replaced with digital ones. Where you would cut and tape filmstrips together to edit, you now use software to do the same thing. Cameras are still devices that simply expose frames of films with light at a given pace, the only difference is the medium on which the light is stored.

According to Barker, just like when our own insides draw attention to themselves through hiccups, increased heart rate, or the rumbling of your stomach, the film's viscera can present itself on the outside of its body. This is why I also believe this part of Barker's theory of the three-layered structure of the film body is relevant to my analysis of queer, haptic experience. Visceral expressions by the film are disruptions from the normative expectations, just like queerness is defined by its distance from the normative.

Barker's book develops Marks' theories in a way that can be fruitful to my thesis while still returning very strongly to Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Barker's theory of tactile cinema is relevant to my research because the artefacts and examples used in her book are quite similar to those I will use in my analysis. I believe that Barker's focus on the erotic and sexual might give more insight into queer film than Marks who, as I mentioned, focuses solely on intercultural cinema. However, the theories proposed by Sobchack, Marks, and Barker all lack (some do mention it briefly, but never fully discuss it) one important aspect to

fully cover the scope of this thesis: queer hapticity. To cement my writing as a queer phenomenological text, I will now describe the writings of Sara Ahmed that concern queer phenomenology more broadly speaking and anchor it to the haptic film theories I have already introduced.

2.5. Queerness and Disorientation in *Queer Phenomenology* (Ahmed, 2006)

The subtitle of Sara Ahmed's book *Queer Phenomenology* from 2006 summarises in three short words why I believe her queer phenomenology can cement my thesis well within both the world of film and queer phenomenology. "Orientations, Objects, Others" reads the subtitle to her book, and admittedly I am particularly interested in the first word "Orientations". In *Queer Phenomenology,* Ahmed analyses the spatiotemporal aspects of the queer experience by looking at how society physically orients people in environments that support heteronormative social standards. She associates heteronormative forces with straight lines. To be accepted in society you need to be "in line" or aligned with its standards, and thus, queerness is characterised by disorientation, perfectly exemplified by the Norwegian word "skeiv". If one looks at the etymology of the term "queer", its origins too are something along the lines of "twisted" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 67). Ahmed describes the normative axis of experience as a vertical one. The normative is an "… effect of the repetition of bodily actions over time, which produces what we can call the bodily horizon, a space for action, *which puts some objects and not others into reach*" (2006, p. 66). Now what does this mean, exactly? Queer people deviate from the lines of social and spatial relations laid out by the straight world; they exist and perceive in different directions than those on the normative axis.

Ahmed writes that we can only perceive objects "… insofar as my orientation allows me to see it" (2006, p. 27). Phenomenology concerns itself with the orientation of objects in the world and how we perceive and understand them. There is a physical element to the perception described by Ahmed here, in that you must be oriented toward an object to see it and perceive it. You cannot see a chair in a room you are not in, and you cannot see something that is far away from you, or something behind your back. Naturally, there has been writing about objects that are out of line and that appear queer in the sense that they appear out of place or out of order. Merleau-Ponty hypothesised that subjects will reorient their perception to "correct" and straighten objects that appear queer in order to "… extend into space" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 66). Ahmed uses Merleau-Ponty's understanding of queer objects to explain how sexual queerness can cause people's relation to space to be reoriented (2006, p. 65).

Ahmed uses an analogy first introduced by Husserl to explain the idea of the space we inhabit and act within and how we relate directionally to objects in the world. In this hypothetical, you are sitting at a table. Maybe the table is a desk in your office, or maybe it is your kitchen table where you eat breakfast in the morning. On the table are objects you have placed there, in my case as I write this thesis I have a computer, a variety of pens and pencils, a notepad, and my baby blue reading rest with a book resting on it. The objects allow me to engage in a specific kind of action. They allow my body to extend into the space if both they and I are in the correct orientation. If my desk were the height of a coffee table, it would be impossible for me to perform my intended actions here, or if it were made from cardboard it could not hold the weight of my things. Of course, that is through no fault of the table, the object and I are simply orientated in the "wrong" way and the object does not allow me to extend myself into the space it is creating. Ahmed writes of her experience writing her book at her kitchen table:

> "Objects and bodies 'work together' as spaces for action; so here I type as I face this object, and it is what I am working on. I am touching the object, as well as the keyboard, and I am aware of it, as a sensuous given that is available to me… I write, and in performing this work I might yet become my object – become a writer, with a writer's body, and a writer's tendencies" (p. 57).

Luckily, my desk has adjustable legs, and thus, me and it are made for each other. Ahmed suggests that some objects and spaces are "… made for some kinds of bodies more than others" (2006, p. 51) and emphasises that "… the failure of something to work is a matter of failed orientation" (p. 51). Our creation and use of these spaces because of the objects that inhabit them direct our perception in a certain direction. We orient ourselves towards the objects and interact with them, which further allows us to orient ourselves to act further. Ahmed suggests that "… the orientation of objects is shaped by what the objects allow me to do" (p. 52) and the lines between objects and us are direct. Queer people inhabit space in a different way that other people because our bodies inhabit sexual spaces and because "… bodies are sexualized through how they inhabit space" (Ahmed, 2006, p. 67). The direct lines that orient us towards objects can be disrupted to created what are called queer moments. Therefore, queer phenomenology can "… offer an approach to sexual orientation by rethinking how the bodily direction 'toward' objects shapes the surfaces of bodily and social space" (p. 68).

Another way of connecting Ahmed's work to haptic film experience is to understand the film as an object (even if it sounds counterintuitive after describing the film as both an object and subject earlier in the thesis). Ahmed says that "We are turned toward things" (2006, p. 27) and that this being turned towards something is understood as perception. Of course, the body of the film is an object that is defined by our being turned towards it and perceiving it with all our body's sensory equipment. The object which we orient ourselves towards is the body of the film, with its ability to both perceive and express, not the film as a physical artefact. Ultimately, my thesis is an analysis of the queer moments that occur between viewer and the film (the object).

Ahmed's work is not focused on film. However, her work has, for example, been used to look at physical representations of verticality in films where queerness is thematised and can be helpful when trying to look at distinctions in queer visuality and haptic imagery in my chosen artefacts. In addition, orientation towards the film is discussed in Barker, as well, when she claims that "… our bodies orient and dispose themselves toward the body of the film itself" (2009, p. 75). For the most part, I will apply her theories about the disorientated nature of queerness to the artefacts while continuing the phenomenological tradition of looking at representations of lived experience in Sciamma's films.

2.6. Clarification of Terminology

Given the field's rather fresh roots, the terminology used to describe the kind of bodily experiences hypothesised in research on haptic film is difficult to traverse and demands some clarification. In this section, I will go over some of the most prominently used vocabulary and establish a precedent for the remainder of the thesis.

Sobchack's book *The Address of the Eye* (1992), which for all intents and purposes functions as the starting point for my investigation of haptic film aesthetics, tries to explain the "embodied" nature of film experience (p. xiii). Embodied film experience to Sobchack is the dialectical interplay of two, empirical bodies – the viewer's and the film's. The prefix "em-", as in "empower" or "embryo", means "in" or "within", and so embodiment describes the act of taking some phenomenon and integrating it *into* your body.

Marks (2000) and Barker (2009) both describe the film experience as "tactile" (Barker's book is titled *The Tactile Eye)*. However, their understanding of tactility varies somewhat. Marks starts her book by terming the "… way vision itself can be tactile, as though

one were touching a film with one's eyes" (2000, p. xi) as "haptic visuality", and thus, immediately replaces the term tactile in favour of her own. Both the word haptic and the word tactile come from words that originally just meant "to touch." The only thing that separates them etymologically, is their language of origin – haptic comes from Greek and tactile comes from Latin. And Marks is quite consistent in her use of haptic visuality to describe what Sobchack called embodied spectatorship. Important to notice is that Marks' understanding of haptic cinema is largely focused on the idea of film as a skin that touches the skin of the viewer and vice versa. Ahmed (2006) also describes the tactile in terms of phenomenological research in her book: "The tactile object is what is near me, or what is within my reach" (p. 54). Tactility, according to Ahmed, is described by the nearness of objects and is a result of our orientation in its direction. Her descriptions of tactility are connected to her understanding of phenomenology to describe how objects and others leave impressions on the skin, so again, tactility remains a term to describe skin-level interactions.

Barker, on the other hand, describes that embodiment of film "…is not just skin-deep but is experienced at the body's surface, in its depths, and everywhere in between" (Barker, 2009, p. 2), and the film body is not purely a haptic phenomenon, meaning pertaining to direct touch, but one that penetrates the skin of the film and viewer and goes much deeper. Barker instead uses the word "tactile" to describe embodiment that goes beyond Marks' definition of the haptic. Generally, Barker notes, the term haptic "… includes tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive modes of touch" (2009, p. 37), which she understands as working at the three different depth levels of skin, musculature, and viscera, respectively. Barker thus uses haptic as meaning concerning only the surface-level experience of film. The "…tactile structures of embodied cinematic and perception and expression" (p. 4) are divided into three layers of depth that are defined by various elements of the film's body, structure, and aesthetic.

So, unlike Marks, Barker uses tactile because it encompasses more than just the superficial touch of skin against skin. However, just because Barker uses is as meaning more than skin-deep, that does not mean it is interpreted as such by readers. Tactile, in layman's terms, still implies the simple act of touch, and so I find the term to be too widely used for describing other phenomena than those relevant to this thesis. As a result, I will bring Barker's theories concerning the ability of viewers to experience the film's body at deeper-than-skin levels, but I will mainly be using Marks' distinction between optic and haptic visuality starting now. It is important to mention that while Marks is credited with the

adoption of the term haptic in film theory, the term is not exclusive to the field and has been used to describe visual arts before her book.[1]

To summarise, I will be using the term haptic in its historical form to mean tactile, kinaesthetic, and proprioceptive modes of touch, unlike both Barker and Marks, who both use it to exclusively cover the surface of filmic experience.

2.7. Conclusion

The research being done on haptic cinema has roots in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and was reintroduced to film theory in the early 1990s by Vivian Sobchack. According to phenomenologists, film can both have meaning and create meaning. Additionally, Sobchack introduced the idea of the body of film, which sounds metaphorical but is not. Viewers experience film as a lived-body experience that has been materialised on screen. Laura Marks continued the use of the film body and introduced the term "haptic visuality" to describe how film audiences can experience film through other senses than just vision. Marks' work with haptic cinema allows me to identify which stylistic and textual elements of the film evoke other senses than just vision. Jennifer Barker similarly identifies elements of cinema that evoke feelings of embodiment, but she takes it a step further by claiming that there are levels of haptic cinema that go beyond skin-deep. Sara Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology can be used to connect these three fundamental theorists' works to queerness. My analysis of *Water Lilies* (Sciamma, 2007) and *Tomboy* (Sciamma, 2011) will be an attempt to use the theories presented to find specifically queer haptic imagery and in doing so I will also use Ahmed's work on the importance of disorientation.

For the next part of the thesis, I will present my approach to the analysis of the films in greater detail. My main goal is to concretise the theories and present the elements of the screen that can be used to look for queer moments and that can lead to a greater understanding of how queer films feel.

[1] Marks herself says her use of it is taken from art historian, Alois Riegl (Marks, 1998, p. 335), whose work was based primarily within the realm of textiles – arguably a particularly haptically engaging art form.

Chapter 3: Phenomenology as a Theoretical Lens and Queer Haptics

I find it helpful to look at phenomenology through analogy (distinctly influenced by one used by Merleau-Ponty in *Phenomenology of Perception*). Imagine you are sitting opposite another person at a table. Your hand rests on the table when the other person reaches out and places their hand on yours. Immediately, you might describe your part in the action as the object of touch: you are being touched, not touching. However, the phenomenology of perception presented by Merleau-Ponty discusses the reversibility of perception. Your hand being touched is not mutually exclusive of you touching someone else. Both the people in the scenario are the objects and subjects of touch, and the resulting sensation is, according to Merleau-Ponty, an oscillation between the feeling of touching and the feeling of being touched. If you look at this through the analogy of the desk filled with objects that allow for action, the same reversibility is apparent. Your desk allows you to experience, and the interplay between you and the objects will constitute the object of study for a phenomenologist. This is the same reversibility mentioned in *The Address of the Eye* as film and viewer's "… mutual capacity for and possession of experience" (Sobchack, 1992, p. 5) and perception.

Additionally, this analogy works well to describe Sara Ahmed's idea of the orientation of perception when taking a position in relation to an object (you place your hand on a table and sit facing someone), but you also "… take different directions toward objects" (2006, p. 27). This does not necessarily mean that they are facing you or grabbing your hand, but that your orientation towards them allows you to perceive them and evaluate them and then proceed to change your orientation based on that evaluation. You face someone and put your hand out. Then you might assess what you feel about the person across from you. Do you like them? Do you want their hands touching yours? You do? Okey, then you allow their hands to rest on yours without moving. And the person opposite you will do the same assessments. Ahmed's point is that our position towards objects will rely on our perceptions of that object: "We move toward or away from objects depending on how we are moved by them" (2006, p. 28).

The investigation of our orientation is fundamental to the study of film spectatorship. What is spectatorship if not orientation towards a certain object or subject? In the analogy I just presented the connection between orientation and hapticity is quite clear. When studying the touch between two people, describing, understanding, and considering their orientations to one another and to themselves will be essential to capture the entirety of the interaction.

Haptic film theory deals primarily with our relation to the film as an object. How are we situated in the relationship between us and the film? The interconnectedness and orientation between film and spectator is as a result unequivocally connected to queerness because queer people exist in the world in another way than people who are not queer.

I want to direct the attention of this thesis, just for a moment, to the large number of female theorists whose work is fundamental within the field of phenomenological research. Sobchack, Marks, and Barker are at the forefront of phenomenologically based film theory, and Sara Ahmed likewise in queer phenomenology. There seems to be something about phenomenology that draws in women, queer people, and people of colour to a larger extent than to other fields of science. My hypothesis is that the phenomenology of the 1990s and forward to today is distinctly marked by its distancing from the academic discourse of the past, and that as a result, it has attracted theorists who have wanted to develop new ways of understanding the world away from the influence of white, cis-gendered, straight men. Historically, academic research in pretty much every discipline has been male dominated since its inception. This, of course, includes phenomenology as evidenced by the theorists used as inspiration for the female theorists discussed in this thesis: Merleau-Ponty, Husserl, Deleuze, and Heidegger. As more women become prominent figures in their respective disciplines, research will distance itself from the unexamined assumptions of "founding fathers", just like with Sobchack and film phenomenology.

My main goal with this thesis is twofold. First, I wish to clarify how the film body can be considered a queer one and how this comes to affect the aesthetic and aural choices made by directors. Second, through a close analysis I want to investigate how Céline Sciamma uses haptic imagery to convey the emotions and experiences of her young, queer characters.

Theories of haptic visuality are originally a product of phenomenological film theory that was developed as a counterargument to the ocularcentrism that dominated film theory in the past (Marks, 2000, p. 133). While there is no single phenomenological method, it is a distinct hermeneutic approach that I will be applying to my artefacts in this thesis. Following the phenomenological theories I have presented, I will now describe the process of applying examples of haptic imagery described by Laura Marks and Jennifer Barker, as well as phenomenological understandings of orientation to pieces of audiovisual media. I wish to identify the effect haptic imagery and sound elements have on the representation of queerness.

I will then use the process described to conduct a close reading of Céline Sciamma's *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011).

3.1. On Identifying Haptic Elements of Audiovisual Media

Laura Marks argues that haptic perception of film implies an understanding of film not "…as something that must be analyzed and deciphered in order to deliver forth its meaning but as something that means in itself" (2000, p. 145). All the theories about haptic visuality are fundamentally discussions of epistemology and the creation of meaning and the transfer of knowledge. Jennifer Barker says that a phenomenological approach to cinematic experience "… focuses neither on the formal or narrative features of the film itself, nor solely on the spectator's psychic identification with characters or cognitive interpretation of the film" (Barker, 2009, p. 18). What, you may ask, remains to be addressed if formal, narrative, audience, and character concerns are not the focus of phenomenological research? Well, Barker describes the target of phenomenological descriptions of film as the interplay between the film and its audience, "… the film and its viewer as acting together, correlationally, along an axis that would itself constitute the object of study" (Barker, 2009, p. 18). She wants to show that by paying careful attention to the haptic imagery of a film, to the "…tactile surfaces and textures" (2009, p. 25) you can gain insight and understanding that you would overlook if you focused purely on visual or narrative aspects of the film. The relationship between film and viewer is fundamentally described by the reversibility and dialectical nature of the film experience. It is not about describing the hands across the table or the people at each end of them, but about the touch itself, and the interaction between the people and their experiences of said touch.

Phenomenological film theory, like that of Sobchack, is fundamentally rooted in a defiance of the analytical traditions of past film theory and rather focuses on the description of subjective experience when faced with various artefacts. Marks' theories, based on the film philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, applies phenomenology to his work, because she believes it to be inadequately armed with only "… states, histories, and circumstances of the individual people experiencing cinema" (2000, p. 150). She argues that we need more information about the direct experiences of the audience. I believe phenomenology can be a fruitful way of looking at specifically queer cinema because it can account for the differences in experience rather than just social and political difference covered by other branches of film theory. To focus the thesis, I wish to look at a handful of audiovisual elements that I understand as particularly good at conveying queer, haptic experience.

I have felt a need to concretise haptic film theory in order to use it productively in the analysis of artefacts with phenomenology as my ontological and epistemological template and lens. The following will be an attempt to create a "recipe" for applying phenomenological theories to my specific artefacts to understand the effect they might have on the audience. While identifying strict elements to search for might seem slightly detached from the puritan ideology of strictly experience-based writing, as Sobchack writes experience cannot "… be reduced to fixed essences" (2004, p. 2), I still believe my text rests quite comfortably within the realm of phenomenological research. My methodology is taken from Sobchack herself, who also says that experiences have "… provisional forms and structures and themes and thus are open to new and other possibilities for both being and meaning" (p. 2). Sobchack's methodology, commonly used in anthropology, is based on a method called thick description, which is exactly what it sounds like. Thick description is a phenomenological methodology, and it entails very detailed personal descriptions of experiences. According to an article in *Qualitative Inquiry*, thick description "… is often invoked by qualitative researcher as a form of representation after analysis such as coding has been completed" (Freeman, 2014, p. 827)

In the case of Sobchack, this methodology is especially present in her book *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (2004), where she writes a number of essays and relates films to her own experience and her own body through "… use of the autobiographical anecdote" (p. 6). My text will refrain from being autobiographical to the extent that Sobchack's is. However, ignoring my background as a queer, non-binary person seems impossible (and unnatural) when writing an analysis of films that deal with both queer sexual orientations and genderqueer people. Freeman argues that the role of the researcher or hermeneut is to understand what we see "… *in* contexts – physical, emotional, geographical, political, social, cultural, and historical" (2014, p. 833), and I (and other phenomenologists) believe that the way to do that is through descriptions of lived-body experiences. And so, this thesis is a phenomenological one, but with a few guidelines to more easily identify elements of film that both Marks and Barker have used to explain haptic feeling through several examples in their texts.

There are similarities in the ways Marks and Barker present the elements of cinema they consider to be especially haptic in nature. Barker, as mentioned earlier bestows film with physical aspects of human bodies by describing three locales for modes of tactile behaviour: skin, musculature, and viscera. The first of these, *skin*, corresponds with Marks' descriptions of haptic cinema. There are two things I wish to mention that are important facts to keep in

mind when working with haptic aesthetics in an analytical capacity. Most importantly, haptic elements rarely exist by themselves, and the complete aesthetic is an amalgam of narrative, cinematographic, editorial, and audio elements. Thus, the division of elements into categories is purely done to ease the presentation of them and to guide the following analysis. Additionally, the list is a limiting factor when writing this analysis, because trying to capture and describe all elements of a film that can be experienced as haptic would be a major task, one far too great to fit within the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, Marks and Barker both emphasise that haptic and optic visuality are "… a matter of degree" (Marks in Barker, 2009, p. 61) and when we watch films, we are engaged in several ways of seeing. What this means is that when identifying the haptic elements of a given film, there are other dimensions of seeing that I am forced to exclude; you can never fully understand and reexplain the experience of watching something, every experience can only be partially perceived and understood. Just as theories of the gaze can be lacking, haptic cinema is not a precise science or an all-encompassing way of describing the cinematic experience. As Marks remarks: "Objects, bodies, and intangible things hold histories within them that can be translated only imperfectly" (2009, p. 131). The same is true for this thesis; it can only translate parts of the hapticity of *Water Lilies* (Sciamma, 2007) and *Tomboy* (Sciamma, 2011). My goal is not to perform a complete analysis of the films, but to show the validity and usefulness of haptic film theory as an analysis tool. Looking at a few elements will sufficiently give insight into how phenomenological and haptic film theories can provide important knowledge of the effect of queer cinema.

In the next part of my thesis, I want to concretise the elements of film that allow me to account for the images' ability to project haptic feelings of queerness to the audience. I will use elements proposed by Laura Marks in her book *The Skin of the Film: Intercultural Cinema, Embodiment, and the Senses* (2000) and by Jennifer M. Barker's book *The Tactile Eye: Touch and the Cinematic Experience* (2009). I view Barker's book as an expansion of Marks' work, and so, my analysis will use both the theory of surface-level haptics proposed by Marks (and expanded upon by Barker) and the additional levels of corporeal cinematic experience proposed by Barker. Though, I have chosen to combine the elements proposed by Marks and Barker into a single category (rather than by *skin*, *musculature*, and *viscera*) because they all belong under the same category of filmic experience: haptic visuality. The result will be a conclusive list of physical image components and characteristics. It can be applied to any audiovisual media to judge to what level it encourages haptic engagement with

queer experiences and to describe how phenomenology can help us understand these experiential aspects of queerness on screen through theories proposed by Sara Ahmed. Part of my intention with this thesis is to analyse the haptic characteristics of queer films and the elements of the cinematic experience, both visual and audible, that convey the phenomenologically theorised disorientation that comes with sexual and gender queerness. I have decided to separate the elements into four parts: narrative, cinematography, post-production, and haptic sound.

3.2. Presenting the elements of haptic visuality

"The skin is a meeting place for exchange and traversal because it connects the inside with the outside, the self with the other" (Barker, 2009, p. 27). The skin (of both humans and film) is the boundary between the inside and the outside, Barker writes. It both disguises our fleshy insides and simultaneously makes them visible to the outside world through physical manifestations of internal processes – we pale, we blush, we bruise, and lack of sleep can give us visible, dark circles under the eyes, and so on. It is both a biological border to keep our bodies functioning, but also a symbolic border between us and the world – both expressive and perceptive. As Ahmed also observes "… the skin connects as well as contains" (2006, p. 54). Barker argues that the skin of the film similarly cannot be reduced to a single characteristic. So, what aspects of film are defined as its skin? Well, the film expresses through a few mediums: the celluloid, videotape, or other medium on which it is transported, the screen on which it is projected, the projector itself, the camera that records it onto a medium. The skin of a film is the fusion of all the aspects that allow for it to express and perceive, "… all the part of the apparatus and the cinematic experience that engage in the skin's activities… and constitute its texture" (Barker, 2009, p. 29). So, the skin of the film is not really a skin in the obvious sense, but it is a physical surface through which meaning is expressed and perceived.

The level of the skin is described by Barker as the result of "… textural analysis – not 'readings' of films so much as 'handlings'" (2009, p. 25). There are a vast number of visual elements present that add to the texture of a film. Barker's descriptions oscillate between descriptions of filmic experience well within the realm of phenomenology to pure textural analyses of concrete elements of filmic examples. What follows are some of the elements Barker uses to exemplify the texture of films. Note that Barker's descriptions of the haptic imagery of film are divided by the emotions they elicit in the viewer, either pleasure, disgust, or horror. My thesis will not discuss the elements of film in this manner. The focus of my

thesis is expressed sexual queerness and gender queerness in the young main characters. Neither film's goal is to elicit feelings of disgust or horror, but rather to convey the feelings queer people experience removed from the sexualised nature of the term "pleasure", and neither disgusting nor horrifying. The feelings the young protagonists experience are far more nuanced and cannot be described by in such limited categories as pleasure, disgust, and horror. Representation of queerness as sexualised, pleasure-driven, disgusting, and horrific is plentiful, and thus, I try to refrain from labelling the exact emotions the haptic elements will produce, like Barker has done.

Barker's definition of the tactile contains the elements that work to engage the surface of the viewer's body. In her introduction, she uses a handful of verbs (caress, prick, shock) as well as mentioning "…texture and temperature" (2009, p. 21) to describe the qualities of "looking" through the skin. Later she expands upon the vocabulary of verbs with which we interact with film and with which film interacts with us: "… films can pierce, pummel, push, palpate, and strike us; they also slide, puff, flutter, flay, and cascade along our skin" (Barker, 2009, p. 36). Sara Ahmed believed that phenomenology was uniquely qualified to explain how objects leave "… impressions on the skin surface" (2006, p. 54), and the verbs as presented by Barker allows us to understand how and why they leave impressions on the skin.

Later Barker also describes the ways in which films obscure their objects and focus the viewer's vision inward. This aspect of the haptic is also very present in the writing of Marks who often writes of how the obscuring of images and sound can summon memories of the past. She writes for example of "… still images so close as to be unrecognizable" (2000, p. 154) and later of the same film "… tactile markings on the surface of the image" (p. 155). Combined these effects are, according to Marks, indicative of "… sadness and desperation, the inadequacy of one kind of touch substituting for another" (p. 155) as the main character of the film (who is part of the Palestinian diaspora) described by Marks desperately tries to contact her home from far away. What both Barker and Marks describe here is directly connected to Ahmed's theories of disorientation as a characteristic of queerness. Marks and Barker do not use this kind of obscuring of images to explain how haptic imagery is queer. Marks uses it to describe the physical connection that haptic visuality and obscuring of images can create between displaced people and their homes. Barker, on the other hand, uses it to describe how these kinds of images can engage viewers to feel pleasure, disgust, and horror in a corporeal way. I am suggesting that the same techniques can have different effect when played to different audiences. What triggers memories of home for some can be

reminiscent of queer experiences to others. My thesis is not an attempt to describe how queerness is presented through memories nor how haptic visuality evoke feelings of pleasure, disgust, or horror in queer audiences, because those effects of haptic imagery are already well-documented and theorised by Marks and Barker. I instead want to look at how haptic imagery may act as a catalyst for embodied experiences of queerness and queer affects. My research is not an attempt to lessen the theorised effect on haptic engagement with films belonging to the diaspora or to undermine Barker's theory of how pleasure, disgust, and horror are haptically induced, but to show how the elements *additionally* can foster and encourage queer affects.

Now, the elements of cinema that are described as haptic by Barker and Marks are quite easily divided into the traditional elements of filmmaking, and I do this for the sake of simplicity and order when conducting the analysis. Firstly, the haptic elements of film can be narrative and present information about the characters, themes, or about the plot. Narrative and textual elements seem to be largely part of the mise-en-scène in the form of prop textures, parts of the sets or the sets themselves, make-up or costume designs used to change or distort the look (and feel) of the characters, and the lighting. Secondly, the haptic imagery can come from cinematographic choices. Digital film contra film stock is an essential element that can have massive effects on the level of haptic imagery present within a film, for example. Additionally, any changes in camera to affect light intake or colour can sometimes influence the haptic level of the final film. Thirdly, the elements of haptic cinema can be a result of decisions made during post-production, either as after-effects like adding graininess to digital film, editing speed, superimpositions to highlight or remove the depth of the images, transitions between images, or any visual effects to the film's general aesthetic. Finally, the elements can be part of the audio track of the film, through what Barker describes as "… audible grime that sticks to the skin of the viewer who comes into contact with it" (2009, p. 51). Understandably, this list of elements is useless without further explanation of what and how they function in practice as the skin of a film. So, let me explain.

3.2.1. Narrative elements

First, I want to discuss the hapticity present in the narrative and textual structures given as examples by Barker. In *Pather Panchali* (Ray, 1955), the characters display an affinity for collecting beautiful objects, little trinkets, the textures of which are emphasised to the viewer through the actions of and adoration shown by the characters in the film. The same characters show a love of food and nature in general, a love which is highlighted by the

cinematography that brings it to the forefront of the visuals. In another example, *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1995), the texture of the toy characters will spur on memories of the viewer's childhoods – we know exactly what that cheap plastic feels like. The haptic imagery is a part of the characters' lived experiences and tactile interactions with objects in the story. Importantly, the film's representations of texture are related to the themes of the film and the characters themselves, rather than just being a stylistic choice (Barker, 2009, p. 44). This is not unique to haptic cinema as the visual aspects of any film is somehow related to the narrative. Form and content are always connected. But the kind of imagery discussed by Barker "… encourages us to indulge our delight in textures and surfaces" and with "… the stuff of life" (Barker, 2009, p. 45). Barker also mentions here how textures can evoke tactile memories, and how the textures hinted at in films can produce several different reactions, not just visual pleasure, but also disgust or horror. In horror films, the narrative elements that produce haptic reactions and "make your skin crawl" are often elements that are part of the abject and thus classic horror elements: gore, oozing liquids of unknown origins, wounds, or otherwise violated humans. I think this is an essential element to look into in terms of my chosen films, because they are both situated in very specific environments, and naturally, one would expect there to be textures and tactile elements within those environments to allow the viewer to engage haptically to the characters. Later I will argue that particularly *Water Lilies* (Sciamma, 2007) is particularly effective in its use of contrasting wetness and dryness to express the feelings of its young, queer main characters.

Integrating Barker's descriptions of objects and textures into the film to allow for haptic experiences and the triggering of memories is identical to several examples used by Marks to describe how textiles allow people to connect with the memories of their past homes. In one example, Marks writes about the images of a silk sari where the camera follows "… the folds of the silk as they dissolve into grain and resolve again" (Marks, 2000, p. 127). The camera watches the fabric and the way in which the fabric is presented allows the director to use audiovisual media to "… convey the tactile memory of her mother's skin" (2000, p. 127). The interaction between the camera and the objects on screen are of course important to the hapticity of an image, which I will discuss below. For now, though, the most important aspect to take away from the examples used by Marks and Barker is how haptic cinema tends to rather intensely put into frame the interaction between humans and objects, but also the camera and objects. Focus on the textures of objects and the incitement of memories of touch

is an incredibly important element of haptic cinema that I believe is essential to the representation of queerness in the following analysis.

In fact, the presentation of humans on screen and their engagement with their own skin and the skin of other characters is another important trigger of haptic engagement. Touches between characters can, of course, have significance on the narrative; it is how humans interact, show affection, or create connections. The touches between two characters can show how them slowly falling in love, while the rejection of touch can show them slowly falling out of love. An example of a film where the touching of characters is not only highlighted, but also an essential part of the plot, is Sciamma's 2019 film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire.* In fact, there seems to be a trend in queer filmmaking of setting the film in an environment where the act of queer touch is forbidden. In *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, the main characters are women in eighteenth-century France. One is engaged to be married to a man. The other is a woman secretly hired to paint her wedding portrait. They fall in love and slowly but surely their longing gazes evolves into desperate touching. *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* is far from the only example of queer film using touch (or the lack thereof) to replicate the desperation of queer people living in conditions where they are kept from being themselves. Sara Ahmed speaks about how heterosexuality is considered the "compulsory orientation" (2006, p. 71), and the character's compulsion to conform is a textual device in queer films that produces situations where touch means more than just the physical connection between two bodies; it means exposing yourself to others, risking dire consequences, and often it means having to come to terms with your own identity as I will argue in the case of *Water Lilies* (Sciamma, 2007).

An important element of the mise-en-scene that is discussed in detail by Barker is the composition of physical elements and actors on screen. These elements are particularly important when it comes to the level of haptic engagement that Barker calls the "musculature" of the film. The physical performance of the film is dictated by three elements: "… structure, composition, and editing" (Barker, 2009, p. 70). I want to specifically look at how the movement of characters can engage us haptically through the mirroring of physical action.

"If the film has a body, it must also have body language" (Barker, 2009, p. 69). Being well-versed in the metaphorical (though never admittedly metaphorical) body of the film, this still seems like an abstract statement. We have seen that the elements of film that constitute its skin and that activate the haptic sensations of the viewer, are largely elements that do one of

two things. They either obscure the vision of the viewer to force haptic engagement or they texturize the screen, either through visuals or through audio, to criticise the limitations of vision. Barker's descriptions of the muscular engagement with film are about how the viewer can "… straddle that threshold between 'here and there', body and image" (Barker, 2009, p. 71). She argues that the threshold becomes the space "… we and the film negotiate with muscular movements and behaviors" (2009, p. 71). So, what exactly does she mean by this and how is it visible in the aesthetics of a film?

Barker's first example of our muscular relationship with film I have mentioned before; the story goes that viewers of the first film screening ran out in fear when they saw a train hurtling towards a station, and towards the camera. The story has reached almost mythical proportions in popular media as we laugh at the ignorance of these first spectators. However, the story is likely not true, or at least highly exaggerated. Nevertheless, it is an entertaining story, and it connects directly to the engagement Barker discusses regarding her idea of a kinaesthetic mode of engagement. Barker calls the reciprocal relationship we have with the musculature of the film "muscular empathy" (2009, p. 73). She claims that viewers experience film in their "…muscles and tendons as much as in our minds" (2009, p. 73).

Barker mentions Linda Williams' essay "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess" (2003), which is arguably one of the more famous works on physical mimicry and emotional engagement with characters. Linda Williams accounts for what she (as an expansion of theories already proposed by Carol J. Clover) calls "body genres", which are films that show "…bodily excess" and "… the spectacle of a body caught in the grips of intense sensation or emotion" (Williams, 2003, p. 143). Films within the body genres are characterised by the way in which their characters provoke us to mimic their reactions exactly. We might scream when victims in slasher films are being chased with a machete, or we might cry when the main couple of a melodrama are in a heated fight with their disapproving families. Barker argues that this direct mimicry of emotion might be possibly expanded to include more than just viewer responses to characters. She believes that all films, regardless of genre, are met with a corporeal response from viewers because we cannot separate vision from the rest of our senses. Furthermore, Barker argues that viewers do not mimic the characters on screen, but the film itself.

I believe the theory of muscular mimicry is somewhat relevant to the analysis of queer cinema because queerness is inherently bodily. Williams (2003) discusses several different

body genres, and she pays some extra attention to the concept of sex and sexuality on screen. Her discussion regards pornographic displays of sex; however, I feel it is applicable to some degree to any kind of sexual representations on film. So, while Barker discusses "… a pair of muscular 'encounters' – the handshake and the chase" (2009, p. 72), I want to do the same but with a different pair of muscular encounters – the synchronised swimming routine and children's play fighting. I want to see how these acts are mimetic and how they cause the audience to interact with the film's characters as if part of the acts themselves.

Haptic examples of touch rarely exist by themselves. They are often emphasised by other elements of the film, like close-ups of contact between skin, the sounds of skin against skin, or elements of the mise-en-scène. So, to further understand how films engage their viewers in haptic experience, I will move to the next essential element of haptic film imagery and take a closer look at how cinematography is used to enhance the effect of, for example, narrative elements.

3.2.2. Cinematography

Second, I want to explain how elements of the cinematography can be haptic. Like the title of Marks' book, *The Skin of the Film* (2000), suggests, the skin level of tactile cinema is comparable to what Marks terms haptic visuality. The descriptions of the haptic elements also overlap somewhat with those used by Marks. In an article written for *Screen*, Marks writes about the erotic nature of video haptics, and she explains that filmmakers "… make use of the medium's haptic qualities" (1998, p. 333) to encourage erotic re-conception of non-erotic images. Out of several haptic elements, she mentions the "…electronic texture" (p. 333) of the film itself. Here it is important to notice that Marks' research on haptic visuality is most often based on video rather than film as a medium, and thus, the electronic texture she mentions is that seen in videos filmed on old video cameras, rather than on modern digital cameras for use in large-scale film production. That does, however, not exclude modern cinematic visuals from expressing electronic textures like those of digital video. Marks argues that the texturization of the "window" into the film will work to distance the viewer and the film from one another, through "… denial of depth vision" (Marks, 1998, p. 333). This denial of depth perception is according to Marks an attempt to show the weaknesses of optical visuality, and to force viewers to engage with the film in a multisensory way. In practice, it functions like putting a piece of cloth between the skin of two people to force them to interact through other senses. Another effect of this, Marks argues, is that the viewer is protected from the action of the narrative, especially if the narrative includes horrific or unpleasant actions. Both Marks

and Barker mention this idea of denial of depth perception and a more "forced" corporeal experience of the film. Barker writes of a scene in *Hiroshima mon amour* (Resnais, 1959), where the intermingling of bodies makes them indistinguishable to us, and these images, as a result, "… compromise vision … forcing us to experience them as skin and to *become* skin in order to make sense of them" (Barker, 2009, p. 60).

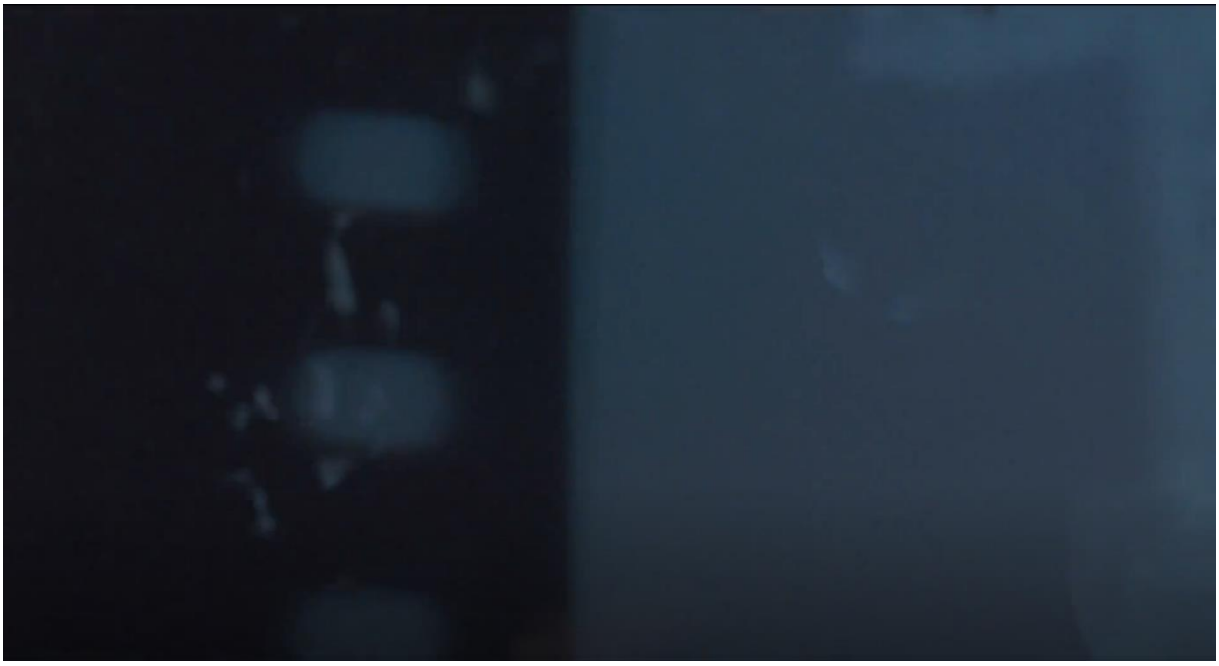

Image 1: Shot from Call Me by Your Name (Guadagnino, 2017). You can barely catch a glimpse of the plant-covered archway Elio sits beneath under the image of the exposed perforations in the 35mm film stock.

I want to add a queer example to give further evidence of the haptic effects cinematography can have when portraying queerness on screen. In Luca Guadagnino's *Call Me by Your Name* (2017) there is a now well-known scene that comes immediately after the main character Elio has implied to his mother that he has fallen in love with his father's student, Oliver. The story takes place in a small Italian village in the 1980s and 17-year-old Elio struggles to come to terms with his attraction, but eventually initiates a romantic and sexual relationship with the older and more experienced Oliver. In the scene I want to bring attention to, Elio's mother has clearly understood that her son is struggling with his identity and after their conversation, Elio sits under an arch on some steps. The screen flickers as he sits, thinking, playing with his necklace. *Call Me by Your Name* was shot on 35mm film with a single lens, and it appears that during this specific scene light seems to have leaked in and created effects that obscure the action. At some points, you can clearly see Elio's face in the darkness, at others the screen in bright green or blue. In the image above (Image 1), you can clearly see the sprockets of the film strip obscuring our vision.

The idea proposed by both Marks and Barker is that this kind of video texture can provoke haptic reactions to the film, because the viewer is forced to use senses other than vision to analyse the scene. In the scene, Elio is at a crossroads in many ways. His vision is blurred, just like ours, as he tries to navigate his exploration of queerness and his new relationship with Oliver that he knows cannot last. At the same time, there is joy in his experience with Oliver: love, pleasure, and the acceptance he has received from his mother in the previous scene. The effects in the scene functions almost as a visual break from the visually stunning film. It is perfectly situated in the middle of the film after Oliver and Elio share their first kiss only a few scenes earlier. It marks a distinct before and after for Elio's life and identity and allows the viewer to sit quietly for a few seconds to process what has come before and imagine what comes next for the characters. Additionally, it very directly is an example of the viscera of the film appearing to the viewer. Barker writes that when the celluloid slips from its sprockets "… it gives us a sudden glimpse at an optical soundtrack and destroys the illusion of real bodies walking and talking in real time" (2009, p. 129).

Marks believes this distancing from the visual allows for embodied spectatorship because it "… puts into question cinema's illusion of representing reality by pushing the viewer's look back to the surface of the image" (1998, p. 341), or in other words, texture brings our vision from the action and onto the skin of the film. Marks additionally argues that the films that are haptic in nature often function as critique against traditional ideas of the importance of optical visuality. As a result, the elements of cinematography that are considered haptic are often chosen for their ability to obscure regular vision, whether this be through choice of filmstock, through superimpositions of several images at the same time, the addition of scratches or dust to the film, distance from the objects of the film (either very far away or incredibly close), or through the "… low light, heavy shadow, dirty windows, and oblique angles" (Barker, 2009, p. 51) of soft-focus cinematography.

3.2.3. Post-production

The post-production elements that are mentioned as particularly haptic all serve similar purposes to those of the cinematography. Barker mentions particularly two dimensions of the editing that can obscure our vision and compel us to use our other senses instead. The first element concerns the transition between shots. Barker argues that generous use of lap dissolves is particularly haptic because it has the effect of a caress from the film. The argument is that viewers caress the film "… by moving the along an image softly and fondly" (Barker, 2009, p. 32) and that the film reciprocates through soft-focus cinematography, but

also through gentle and softening lap dissolves, for example. Barker also mentions transitional shots added to the action to emphasise texture as examples of haptic use of editing.

Editing speed is the second dimension. By increasing the frequency of cuts, the vision is once again disrupted and must yield to a more multisensory experience. The second Barker's three-part structure that describes the body of cinema, is part of her process of expanding Marks' work on the appeal of cinema on the senses. I have already combined the elements used by Barker to explain the levels of the "skin" and the "musculature". The final one, "viscera", explains how the film has innate, natural mechanics just like bodies have an internal clock, internal rhythms of heartbeats, and breaths – "… the murky, mysterious interior, the viscera of the spectator and the cinema, whose vital organs share a remarkable capacity for expression and perception" (Barker, 2009, p. 120). One important aspect of the post-production that is essential to the haptic experience is the editing of the film, particularly important is the speed of the editing, because it is part of what creates the rhythm of the film.

This is an aspect of corporeal film experience that Barker would describe as part of the viscera of the film, or as behaviours "… performed primarily, but not exclusively, through editing" (2009, p. 121). She also claims that editing is an important part of the musculature of the film because it comports itself by means of "… dollies, camera tracks, zoom lenses, aspect ratios, and editing patterns" (p. 77). The editing patterns work to express the emotions and intentions of the film's body. They can show the attitudes of a film towards the world, towards the film's own subjects, or towards the viewer. The film expresses its attitudes towards the spectator largely through how it presents its story because the editing pattern decides what parts of the film the spectator gets to experience, what they get to see, hear, and feel, and what is hidden from us. The film's editing pattern, in short terms, determines how the film is orientated towards the spectator (or away from the spectator). How the film acts opens up for viewer responses in the form of muscular engagement, that corresponds with the muscular movements of the film. A very simple example of this correspondence between the movements of the film, its characters, and the audience comes from the second installation of the Hunger Games-franchise, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire* (Lawrence, 2013).

The Hunger Games: Catching Fire is the continuation of the dystopic tale of Katniss Everdeen, a resident of a future USA called Panem. Every year 24 children are selected to fight to the death in the so-called Hunger Games, a sick show of power and capital that is run from the aptly named Capitol where the Hunger Games are consumed as a fun, action-packed

reality show. In the scene I want to mention, main character, Katniss Everdeen, has been drafted to fight in the games and is being transported into the arena via lift. As she ascends in the lift, the screen widens (or rather the scope widens, the entire film is shot in the same aspect ratio) to reveal the arena. As Katniss starts to get a lay of the land, the audience automatically do the same, wildly moving their heads back and forth as if in the actual arena. Our actions are dictated by the movements of the film and we mirror it to do what the character does in this particular example: we move our heads and try to take in as much information about the surroundings as possible.

Barker's definition of the visceral experience of the film, as I understand it, often relies on mechanical failures. These mechanical failures are often attributed to the projectionist, which is not a relevant part of my viewing of *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011). Both films were exceptionally difficult to obtain, even in the days of online streaming, and so purely out of necessity, I have acquired physical copies of both films on DVD. In terms of the visceral effects caused by watching DVD copies of film, Barker has one small note. When things are obscured on screen, we tend to make physical changes to clarify the images before us by squinting or leaning forward to get a better look. The same is true for the viewing of DVDs as the viewer "… exert a similar force on the image by manipulating the controls on their VCR or DVD player to slow, pause, or fast-forward a film's images" (2009, p. 37). My haptic experience of the films could therefore potentially be influenced by the medium through which I consume them even if there is no projectionist to blame for mechanical failures. Moments like these are according to Barker very rare, however, but it will be at the back of my mind for the duration of this writing process.

3.2.4. Haptic Sound

I recently went to the movie theatre to see *Avatar: The Way of Water* (Cameron, 2022), and in the newly renovated theatre they already boasted about their new sound system with one of those sequences where the screen is black, but there are sounds of birds and rain and nature all around you a sample of the quality sound to come. What struck me about this little introduction to the sound system was the way they introduced it. The screen went black, and the theatre went quiet before large, white letters appeared – "At the heart of cinema is great sound." Our language is often connected to the thing humans arguably know the best: our bodies. And this was no exception, if cinema has a body, then Barker has argued it has body language and this Dolby Atmos presentation argues that sound is its heart.

I have found the research on haptic sound limited, though not non-existent. It has been, however, rather experimental unlike the work done on haptic visuality. I have found this quite strange as, even though, vision is the predominant sense in humans and the one through which we obtain the largest amounts of knowledge about the world around us, hearing is a close second. In addition, when it comes to phenomenology, where the subjective experience of the scientist is an essential part, it is odd that they seem to have neglected hearing.

Vincze (2016) argues that hearing is a more subjective sense than vision (p. 110). A 1980 article by Christian Metz strengthens her argument as he argued that vision allows for adjectival recognition of objects: you see a car and you know it is a car, and so all you "… could add would be adjectival in nature" (p. 25). With sound, on the other hand, the recognition of the object is not as simple, because hearing something does not mean you have any knowledge of what produced the sound or where the object is located, so Metz argues that when it comes to sounds our description is never simply adjectival – there are always extra steps to describe the source of the sound and the taxonomy of the sound. Because of this argument, I find it important to include sound in this discussion of hapticity in film. If sounds are, by nature, more subjective because they require an extra level of internal processing, then they must play an important role in a field of study that rests solely on internal experiences.

It is easy to believe that the haptic visuality experienced by viewers in not exclusively brought on by the visual imagery of the films. Just like vision which is a result of electromagnetic radiation travelling towards our eyes, our sense of hearing is made possible because we are literally touched by the objects around us; waves reverberate of a medium like air or water and physically cause our ear drums to vibrate. Despite this, the importance of sound in haptic film research is a subject that has long been overlooked in favour of haptic, visual aesthetics and imagery. Marks rarely mentions sound at all in her book *The Skin of the Film* (2000), though as mentioned previously she acknowledges that sounds of the film can intermingle with the sounds of the audiences' body. Marks herself writes that her book "… remains largely silent on the question of sound" (2000, p. 182). However, she does note that "haptic hearing" involves the "… brief moment when all sounds present themselves to us undifferentiated" (p. 183). She further writes that haptic hearing is especially prominent in environments where the boundaries between nature and the body is blurred. I believe this can be useful when looking at both *Water Lilies* (Sciamma, 2007) and *Tomboy* (Sciamma, 2011), because both these stories take place in environments where the atmospheric sounds can cause the body's sounds and the films' sounds to blend into one another – a public swimming pool

and a suburban neighbourhood bordering the woods. Quinlivan (2015) suggests that there is great potential in connecting haptic sounds to queer phenomenology, because the soundscape of a film can help (dis)orient us (p. 70). This idea is backed by Barker.

Barker returns to the importance of texture in inciting haptic visuality. The layers of meaning produced by the sound, both diegetic and non-diegetic, become an added "screen" of texture that disrupts the viewers' vision. Barker describes for example the soundscape in *Eraserhead* (Lynch, 1977) where the soundtrack "… seems coated with a layer of audible grime" (Barker, 2009, p. 51) by means of the soundtrack, but also through industrial sounds, the cries of his monster baby, etc. She argues that the soundtrack's muted and flat qualities combined with the inconsistency of the sound levels and the ambient racket "… make it difficult to identify what we see" (Barker, 2009, p. 52). How does sound make it harder to see? Well, it does not physically obstruct our vision, but it makes difficult the process of understanding, analysing, and processing of the objects on screen and the action of the narrative. There is "aural texture" on-screen, and it disorients us as we are watching the film.

Finally, before moving on, I want to emphasise again that the elements of film are rarely effective on their own. The amalgamation of all the elements is what makes film such an incredible conveyer of emotion and empathic engagement with characters. Without the combination of narrative, mise-en-scene, cinematography, editing, sound, and so on the film would not be able to communicate the massive amount of knowledge it can when its elements are perfectly orchestrated.

3.3. Introduction to Céline Sciamma and the process of selecting artefacts

To utilise my newly developed list of elements, I will conduct a close reading of two films. I have chosen to look closer at the films of one director, Céline Sciamma. Céline Sciamma is a French director whose films often tell stories of queer people dealing with difficult questions of identity and who end up in situations where their identity is challenged by the people around them. Sciamma is openly queer and passionately engaged in (and loudly outspoken about) queer and feminist issues, especially within France. Her films have been acknowledged both nationally and internationally with amongst other nominations a 2008 César Award for Best Debut for *Water Lilies* (2007) and a win for Best Screenplay at the 2019 Cannes Festival, where her film, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (2019), also received the Queer Palm. Her latest film, *Petite Maman* (2021), also received critical acclaim. Sciamma has been vocal about her efforts to distance herself from the ingrained and seemingly

unavoidable male gaze filmmaking of the past. Most famously, her film *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* (Sciamma, 2019*)* was intended as a direct attack on the male gaze and a strong example of the queer, female gaze.

In her so-called "Coming of age"-trilogy, Sciamma tells three different stories about children searching for a place to belong. The films, *Tomboy*, *Water Lilies*, and *Girlhood* (2014) have main characters that struggle with altogether different, but nonetheless similar problems. In *Tomboy* a child moves to a new town and starts living and presenting as a boy despite being assigned female at birth. In *Water Lilies* a young girl struggles to understand her romantic attraction to one of the other young girls on her synchronised swimming team. Finally, Sciamma rounded off her trilogy in 2014 with *Girlhood,* which I have chosen to exclude from this thesis with the intention of investigating the other two more closely. Additionally, *Girlhood* is not a film about queerness, though it does deal with specifically gendered issues related to crime, poverty, and social identity within a group.

Sciamma's films are important additions to the growing corpus of films that highlight the fluidity of sexuality and identity in the lives of young women and genderqueer people. I find the role of the director to be quite interesting, because while this thesis is much too short for a discussion of the role of auteurship, the director's role is very much to lead the film's production. The word director even means to "lay straight" or to put something in line, and so in a thesis where orientation is a fundamental part, that seems like a good starting point to begin the discussion of queer, haptic cinema. There are, given the title of the role, expectations for the director to keep things going in the right direction. There are historical expectations for that direction to be of a heteronormative, cisgendered, male orientation. When choosing a director, it was therefore important to me that I chose an openly queer director, but more importantly, that I chose a director whose work reflects an understanding of how one can defy the heteronormative to create distinctly queer stories. Given my history with *Portrait of a Lady on Fire,* I believe Sciamma is at least attempting to counter the effects of the male-dominated film industry. In a sea of directors that do as the title demands and put the film in line with traditional, heteronormative values, I wanted to look at someone who might wish to follow other paths.

Céline Sciamma has for almost two decades made queer films, with the most popular being *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. Before she wrote and directed *Portrait of a Lady on Fire,* she had already made a name for herself in the French film industry with *Water Lilies* which

garnered critical acclaim and three César nominations. Her films are all semi-biographical taking different aspects of her life, though admittedly most often her queer identity, to the screen. *Water Lilies* was based on Sciamma's own encounters with synchronised swimming during her experiences with her own burgeoning sexuality. Because her films are based on her real experiences there are some themes that are often recurring in her art. Queerness, identity, and feelings of exclusion or isolation are common themes in her films, and in her earlier films, these themes are often illustrated through the eyes of mild-mannered and polite (and thus more vulnerable) children and teenagers. The feeling of being left out of clearly established groups (like a synchronised swim team or cis people) is also a common theme in her films.

My reasons for deciding to analyse Sciamma's films are several. First, I wanted to choose a director whose name is quite commonly known and whose films are part of contemporary, popular culture. The hope is that by using films that have a wider appeal, I can argue that more mainstream films also full of haptic imagery and expand the areas of use for Barker's and Marks' theories. One of the main goals of the thesis is to make haptic film theory more accessible to more people. Arguably, Sciamma's mainstream appeal is nowhere near the levels of Hollywood fame and blockbuster traditions, but she is highly regarded within arthouse filmmaking, especially after the release of *Portrait of a Lady on Fire*. She is on her way to becoming a household name, at least in queer households. The decision to include only two of her films is based purely on the fact that this is a thesis that describes queer children in Sciamma's films, and *Girlhood* does not fit the bill.

Secondly, I found few concrete examples of haptic visuality being used to analyse queerness, and even fewer examples of attempts to understand queer children and teenagers. There are examples of Sciamma's films being used in analyses of haptic imagery, however, none that use *Water Lilies* and *Tomboy* as extensively as my thesis.

Thirdly, one of my main concerns when choosing what artefacts to look closer at for this thesis, was choosing a film because I already knew it had haptic qualities. It would defeat the purpose of the whole thesis to choose films that are widely known to be haptic (or films that belong specifically to what Williams called body genres), because I want to show that all films have haptic qualities. Jennifer Barker already claims this in her book *The Tactile Eye* (2009) when she writes that "… every film, regardless of genre, evokes some kind of bodily response" (p. 74). When choosing the artefacts to discuss in this thesis, I wanted to avoid

deliberately picking films that confirm my suspicions about haptic imagery. It seems to me that developing a tool for analysing films' degree of hapticity would be useful only if it can be applied to *all* films, not just those that are already considered and hypothesised to be haptic in nature, even if this does contradict how phenomenology has traditionally been used to write about film. Therefore, I deliberately chose films that arguably do not belong in any of the more well-known genres that rely on hapticity. Additionally, I chose films that I had not seen before starting this thesis because it would allow me to enter the analysis with no preconceived ideas of what I would find.

The list of queer haptic elements applied to the films has been an attempt to make available theories that before have been restricted to those who have gone looking for them; it is an attempt at continuing Sobchack's work of making film phenomenology more user-friendly. The popularisation of film theory is dependent on the concretisation and utilisation of its most popular theories in a broader context than just an academic one. There will be no development of film theory if it is contained within the sphere of academia. This point again supports my choice of both a somewhat popular director and her films as I do not consider neither *Water Lilies* nor *Tomboy* to be more or less haptically inclined than most other movies produced for popular consumption. I believe all films are haptic to some degree, and this thesis will investigate how these two films are haptic in their expression and provocation of queer, embodied experiences from their viewers.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Unsynchronised Swimming and Living

4.1. Two Brief Synopses

Before diving into the analysis, I want to give a brief introduction to each of the two films analysed in this thesis.

4.1.1. Water Lilies

Water Lilies or *Naissance des Pieuvres* from 2007 is Céline Sciamma's debut film. The story revolves around 15-year-old Marie (Pauline Acquart). She is a quiet, slightly awkward, and very cautious girl, who while watching a synchronised swimming[2] recital is introduced to the joys of budding sexuality and pubescent love. Marie becomes infatuated with the swimming team's captain, Floriane, played by Adèle Haenel, with whom director Céline Sciamma has had both a personal and professional relationship with following the production of *Water Lilies*. Floriane is decisive and a clear leader-type, and additionally, she acts and dresses more adult and provocative than both Marie and the other girls around them. As a result, rumour has it that Floriane is more sexually experienced than the rest, and as is often the case with teenagers, the other kids are cruel and label Floriane as a "slut". The film's English title is indicative of its characters' ultimate goal: losing their virginity (being deflowered). Simultaneously, we are shown the story of Marie's best friend, Anne, who also does synchronised swimming, but whose narrative is largely separate from Floriane and Marie's story line as she is preoccupied with her crush on a boy named François. François pursues Floriane, however, who seems to be faking an interest to conform to people's image of her as a "slut". The result is a love triangle (more of a love square, really) between the girls and François.

Marie wants to join the swimming team but cannot to participate during practices due to lack of skill. Instead, she swims around and watches as the team practice. However, she does develop a quiet, yet charming friendship with Floriane and the viewer is nudged to assume that at least Marie wishes the relationship was a romantic one. All the three girls struggle with variations of the exact same issues of puberty, sexuality, and identity, and thus, the film presents its viewers with their three insecure and uncomfortable bodies to inhabit for an hour and a half. When the film premiered in 2007 it was relatively well received as a "…nice, watchable, attractive, minor" (Dargis, 2008) coming-of-age work and a film that is

[2] There have been efforts to popularise synchronised swimming by the IOC, and one of which was to rename the sport to "artistic swimming" to closer relate it to artistic gymnastics. I have chosen to ignore this name change.

"… a humid, self-enclosed universe… that Sciamma endows with frantic crushes, angst, yearning and frantically sexualised status-envy" (Bradshaw, 2008).

4.1.2. Tomboy

Following her debut film, Sciamma directed 2011's *Tomboy*, which is the story not of girls going from teens to adults, but the story of a small child at the doorstep of teenagerhood. *Tomboy* is Céline Sciamma's second feature length film. In an interview Sciamma said that when making *Tomboy* she wanted to make a lighter film than *Water Lilies*. It was to be a film about queer childhood, and *Tomboy* is just that. Given the themes presented in *Tomboy*, I want to make a small digression here. So, following is a disclaimer regarding how I want to address the main character in *Tomboy*, because when writing about genderqueer characters there are several matters to take into consideration.

When discussing her own character, Sciamma consistently uses she/her pronouns and "Laure" to refer to the main character. The title of the film would suggest the main character is simply a girl dressing more masculine and engaging in more masculine activities. In newspapers and other academic texts, I have seen abundant use of the combination "Laure/Mickäel" to include the character's two identities. The actress who portrays the main character, Zoé Héran, uses she/her pronouns as evidenced by her Instagram account. However, I want to address the main character of *Tomboy* by what seems to be the character's preferred pronouns and their preferred name. Traditionally, tomboys simply dress more masculine and exhibit more masculine behaviour. They usually do not change their social identities, names, or pronouns. This means that as of now, I will address the main character as he/him and his name is Mickaël, despite several characters knowing him as Laure. I have made this decision based on my limited knowledge of the character's gender identity, because while it is never stated in words that the character is transgender, my reading of the character is one where his identity is revealed through us in the way he addresses himself and presents himself when given the opportunity to start fresh. Thus, for the sake of this thesis, his identity is what he has expressed through the majority of the film. His "final" identity is not a concern when writing this thesis, despite Sciamma arguing that the final scenes indicate that Mickaël is simply an identity created to hide an actual identity and not an attempt at expressing genderqueerness.

Returning to the plot of *Tomboy*, the film tells the story of a 10-year-old who recently moved to a new block of flats somewhere in the suburbs of Paris with his pregnant mother,

his father, and younger sister, Jeanne. When he meets a girl in the neighbourhood, Lisa, he introduces himself as Mickaël and firmly establishes an identity as the new boy on the block. The story is quite simple from there as Mickaël tries to create a new identity as a boy with the regular struggles of boyhood. He quickly becomes friends with the other boys in the area. They play football, swim in the lake, and play games in the woods behind their home – it's really the recipe for a perfect summer holiday. Mickaël struggles to keep his secret from the other kids. The film is quite short but consists of numerous situations in which his identity is almost revealed, but he narrowly escapes every time. Until, of course, he doesn't. His identity is revealed in the end after Mickaël beats up another boy to protect his little sister. Suddenly, the boy and his mother are at the family's door where Mickaël's mother finds out her kid has been living as a boy throughout the entire summer. The story ends with Mickaël reintroducing himself to Lisa as "Laure" after his secret has been revealed. Ultimately, *Tomboy* is a film about childhood identities and struggles to fit in and decide how you want to be perceived by others.

4.2. Queer, Haptic Elements in *Water Lilies* (2007) and *Tomboy* (2011)

When conducting this analysis of the queer, haptic elements of *Water Lilies* and *Tomboy* I looked back to my initial research questions: *What audiovisual elements characterise haptic cinema in a sample of contemporary queer films, and how do the elements affect the spectator's understanding of queer characters' lived-body experiences?*

To answer the first part, I am interested in showing how the elements of the haptic can be examined in a broader sense to convey and create engagement and understanding and to evoke multisensory experiences of the queer moments in films. When conducting the analyses of queer haptic elements in film, I noticed a pattern in how haptic elements are spaced throughout the films. There seems to be a peak in the use of haptic elements when the characters are experiencing queer moments of disorientation. Here, I am interested in returning to Sara Ahmed's theories of disorientation because moments of disorientation are, after all, "… vital" (2006, p. 157). When the characters are involved in narratives that put their questions of identity front and centre, the haptic effects are especially evident and potent. Therefore, I want to introduce this part of the thesis by showing examples of moments or narrative elements that are directly connected to these queer moments.

When it comes to answering the second part, I have chosen one scene from each film that shows how the culmination of all the haptic elements of the audiovisual can evoke feelings of queerness that transcend and challenge even the intentions of the director.

4.2.1. Un, Deux, Trois, Quatre…: Synchronisation in Water Lilies

One of the main themes in queer phenomenology is answering questions of alignment, orientation, and synchronisation. Queer stories hinge on the idea that you need to belong to a pattern, be in line with others, and conform to the rules of a cis-heteropatriarchal society. Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology argues that straightness is the opposite of queerness. Straightness is inherently understood as orderly and contained in a way that queerness is not. Ahmed writes about the idea of the "… collective direction" (2006, p. 15). The collective direction is the orientation of any given community, and it determines what gets attention from the majority. Moving, standing, and looking in the same direction as the society of which you are a part is expected from all its members. Conformity allows society to stay "on track" without disruptions. Straying from the "straight and narrow", being "out of line", or being unsynchronised is one of the key elements of understanding Ahmed's orientational phenomenology and its connection to queer experiences. The queer questions of orientation and synchronisation are apparent in the aesthetic choices made by Sciamma in *Water Lilies* and *Tomboy*.

4.2.1.1. Introducing: Marie. One of the most distinct experiences in this world might be the feeling of entering a large, public swimming pool. There is something memory-inducing about the smell of chlorine that hits your nose the second you enter the building, the dampness of the dressing rooms filled with naked strangers with slicked-back, wet hair, the feeling of forcefully putting on wet swimwear after the mandatory shower required before you enter the pool, the feeling of your feet on moist, tiled floors that are sure to give you some kind of foot fungus, and the echoing sounds of children and adults splashing around in the water. Public pools bring back memories of swimming lessons and rainy summer days when indoors was the only place to swim, and they play an essential part of the aesthetic signature of Sciamma's *Water Lilies*. Already, there is an indication that *Water Lilies* can evoke multi-sensory memories, however, my main argument is that water is crucial in the establishment of queerness and disorientation in the two main characters.

The film starts with a title sequence with what seems to be colourful leaves of some sort at first but given the translation of the film's French title to mean "birth of octopuses",

one can assume they are octopus arms reaching in towards the names of the production company and director, Céline Sciamma. Over the music you hear the voices of children speaking excitedly as the screen cuts to a dressing room at the pool. Girls dressed in colourful and bejewelled bathing suits are practicing their synchronised swimming routines before a recital, acting out the motions of their routines above water in a sort of flailing and chaotic, dry performance. The girls are counting loudly and synchronised as they do their moves on land, and the dressing room seems to be buzzing with anticipation. Main character, Marie, is in the audience, looking a stark contrast to the girls in swimming suits we have just seen in her polka-dotted polo and jeans. Her face is covered in disinterest.

Marie's character is, within mere minutes, set apart from the other girls in the story by means of the visual elements of the narrative. She says very little, but the audience quickly gets a sense of who she is. Two other prominent characters, Marie's best friend, Anne, and swim team captain/love interest, Floriane, whom we have not directly been introduced to at this time, are simply two girls of many competing for their teams, and they both blend into the background not distinguishing themselves as part of the main cast at all in those first shots from the dressing room. Marie's role as apart from the other girls is already clear; she is not synced to the other characters, and she stands apart. The audience grows attached to her, not only because she is the odd one out, but because she continues to be the watcher throughout the entire film. She is the audience's stand-in.

Of course, this initial introduction to Marie is an example of a queer moment of disorientation, not only because Marie is the odd one out visually, but because she is for the first time experiencing queer feelings of desire and curiosity towards another girl. This is reflected in the haptic elements of the scene. The editing speed is an interesting insight into the bodily experience of the main character. It is intense in this first swimming scene - rhythmic and perhaps a bit threatening to the viewer. To me, it feels reminiscent of a very, aggressively beating heart. Marie is in the middle of developing an infatuation with Floriane during this scene, and understandably her body is responding to it by raising her heartbeat. Additionally, it could signal the speed at which her thoughts must be moving while she watches the girls swim. Regardless of the symbolic explanations for the editing speed, the fast pace is disorienting, and it forces viewers to focus less on watching the performance as if one were in the audience looking down on the pool. Instead, your position as the viewer is within Marie (and yourself) and you experience the atmosphere of the performance rather than the surface of it.

There is something deafening about the sounds of the pool in this first scene. *Water Lilies* has almost exclusively diegetic sounds, and most of them are natural sounds, with one notable exception being the overwhelmingly loud, classical opera being played at the recital that draws Marie's attention to Floriane at the very beginning of the film. It literally catches her as she is about to leave the swimming pool, presumably because she is bored or because Anne's team has already performed. The opera is integral to the story because it allows Marie to almost stumble into her queer storyline. The sounds of the splashing of the pool itself is another integral part of evoking feelings of disorientation for Marie and the audience. The sounds from the swimming pool serve as a constant reminder of the social groups of which Marie are not a part; she is on land, while the girl she likes is in the pool. The splashing of the performers in the water mix and serve as a reminder for Marie that she is different. It is almost comparable to a sort of internal, continuous nagging at the back of your mind, which I would describe as an accurate representation of what being a young, queer person questioning themselves feels like. There is no escape from the questions with which you are in a perpetual battle to answer. The splashing brings to the surface all that bubbles and tries to escape from beneath the surface.

The distance between Marie and the other girls is taken directly from director Céline Sciamma's life, and within the very first few minutes, haptic elements of the film evoke feelings of otherness. In an interview Sciamma says that she, like Marie, attended a synchronised swimming recital and watched the girls in the water from the dryness of the stands: "… those girls were so accomplished; they were so feminine while I was still childish in appearance and they were part of a team while I felt alone" (Wood, 2014, p. 129). She, as a queer woman, is familiar with the experience of disorientation that Marie is facing during the first scene and says that the synchronised swimming recital is a perfect anecdote to show the "… confusion you feel at that time of your life, when you are confused by your desires" (p.

129).

Image 2: Main character, Marie, transfixed on the performance by Floriane's team.

4.2.1.2. Synchronised Swimming Creates Queer Moments. I want to look more at synchronised swimming as a narrative element that exemplifies the societal expectations to be "in line" with heteronormative standards, and how they affect those who trail off. In *Water Lilies,* the synchronisation is obviously most prominent in the swimming pool when the girls' routines are meticulously planned out and performed almost perfectly in sync. The level at which the girls perform reflects their age and their entry into the world of sex, romance, and puberty. During the opening scenes of the film, there is a short segment where we see the unsynchronised and clumsy performance made by three girls, significantly younger than the main characters, to perform in the competition. Their lack of synchronicity is evidence of their lack of experience and understanding of the adult world. The little girls are flailing and uncoordinated, but they are also young and so their inexperience is excused and rather endearing. The clumsy and uncoordinated attempts are reminiscent of Marie's attempts to fit in with the older girls on the synchronised swim team. But as Marie flails around in the bathtub wearing her swimsuit, she is clearly investigating what it is like for the other girls and trying to see if she could be like them.

Both Anne and Floriane seem comfortable in the water, despite Anne's seeming lack of ability. Anne swims on a team with girls much younger and smaller than her, but unlike Marie she is at least part of a team. Anne and Floriane both seem comfortable dressing and

undressing in the company of others. They also dress more provocatively in general, whereas Marie dresses like a child despite being the same age as Anne and Floriane. They seem more inclined to discuss and investigate their sexualities later in the film, like when Anne undresses completely, and waits, arms outstretched, hoping her crush will burst in to see her naked. My claim is that their connection to the water is essential in understanding how they interact with their own identities. The water in *Water Lilies* induces feelings of comfort, of synchronicity, and of a desire to be part of a majority. These feelings are introduced and strengthened by Floriane's and Anne's connectedness to the water.

For Marie, who is arguably coded as a queer person, being a part of the synchronised swim team would get her back in line with what is expected from her as a young woman in a heteronormative society, but she remains an outsider even when she is in the water. She wears a different bathing suit, she does not wear goggles or a swimming cap, and of course, she does not know how to do synchronised swimming. While the other girls jump and dive into the pool, Marie awkwardly climbs down the ladder. Her distance to her peers is evident in every aspect of how she interacts with them. The water is an essential part of the storytelling in *Water Lilies*, and it functions as a tool to separate Marie from the other girls, because she is in many ways different from them. Her queerness is shown not only in her interest in watching Floriane, but in how she interacts with the world in which the story takes place. Her experiences are grounded in the distinction between me/them, dry/wet, and synchronised/unsynchronised. My main claim here is that the water creates what Sara Ahmed refers to as "… queer moments of deviation" (2006, p. 179) where the characters deviate from the cis-heteronormative expectations surrounding them.

Water is not the only haptic element of synchronised swimming that strengthen the feeling of disorientation and asynchronicity. Being in a swimsuit in a public place feels vulnerable even as an adult, and there have been made massive efforts on the part of Sciamma to intensify that feeling to let the viewer experience the body of an insecure 15-year-old. There are practical reasons why girls doing synchronised swimming wear swimsuits, of course, but swimsuits are also the perfect outfit to show the exposed position girls (and other young people) are in when entering the public space. The fabric of a swimsuit is slick. It is tight-fitting, designed to be hydrodynamic, to not weigh you down when you are in the water, and to dry as quickly as possible when you leave the water. The skin-tight suits are like the skin of a seal and wearing one is as close to nudity you can get while being covered up.

We see the main character of the film visibly upset and uncomfortable in her swimsuit, which is not only just as exposing as that of the other girls, but it is also a different colour, and she sticks out like a sore thumb. She crosses her arms in the changing room and her discomfort is palpable. It is a gloomy reminder of the differences in expectations for men and women. The swimsuits are, like the uniforms for a majority of women's sports, incredibly sexualised, even for the little girls. Their bathing suits cling to their bodies and the experience they produce is one of restriction. Seeming freedom from lack of fabric is, in fact, forced conformity and discomfort. One scene where this is emphasised almost to the extreme shows a team of girls lined up with their arms raised (Image 3). An older woman inspects their armpits to ensure they have shaved. They are all dressed the same, have the same make-up, and are positioned similarly in the same direction. The scene is uncomfortable because it visualises the expectations of conformity that is place upon all people, but especially on women to be a certain way. Sciamma said about synchronised swimming as a sport: "It reveals a lot about the job of being a girl" (Wood, 2014, p. 129).

Image 3: Inspection of the team before a performance

Marie is only synchronised when she is alone with Floriane and away from the water. For example, when the two walk towards some industrial looking installations and Floriane confesses to Marie that a man once sexually assaulted her. The girls walk along a deep indent in the ground, one on each side of the line, so in a sense divided, but they walk in synchronisation toward some tall structures and a flight of stairs. Marie and Floriane are

portrayed as very different. Floriane is a part of the herd, very much orientated in the same direction as everybody else, while Marie on the other hand is always out of place, always queer in comparison to her peers. Her clothes are different, either slightly, like with her bathing suit, or dramatically, like when she wears colourful polo shirts clearly meant for children while Floriane dresses provocatively and looks very mature. Marie's expressions are different to those of the other girls, and her abilities are different. She is often seen walking or swimming in opposite directions to those of the other girls, or maybe Marie is walking while the others are sitting still. At one point, Marie is fully dressed in a narrow dressing room where all the other girls are dressed in swimsuits and running towards the exit to the pool, while Marie stands quietly being pushed to the side (Image 4). She is quite consistently orientated in a different direction compared to her peers, not only physically, but presumably in terms of her sexuality as well. There are too many examples of this physical and visual distance between Marie and the other girls to name them all. They are arguably the strongest inducer of queer, haptic engagement.

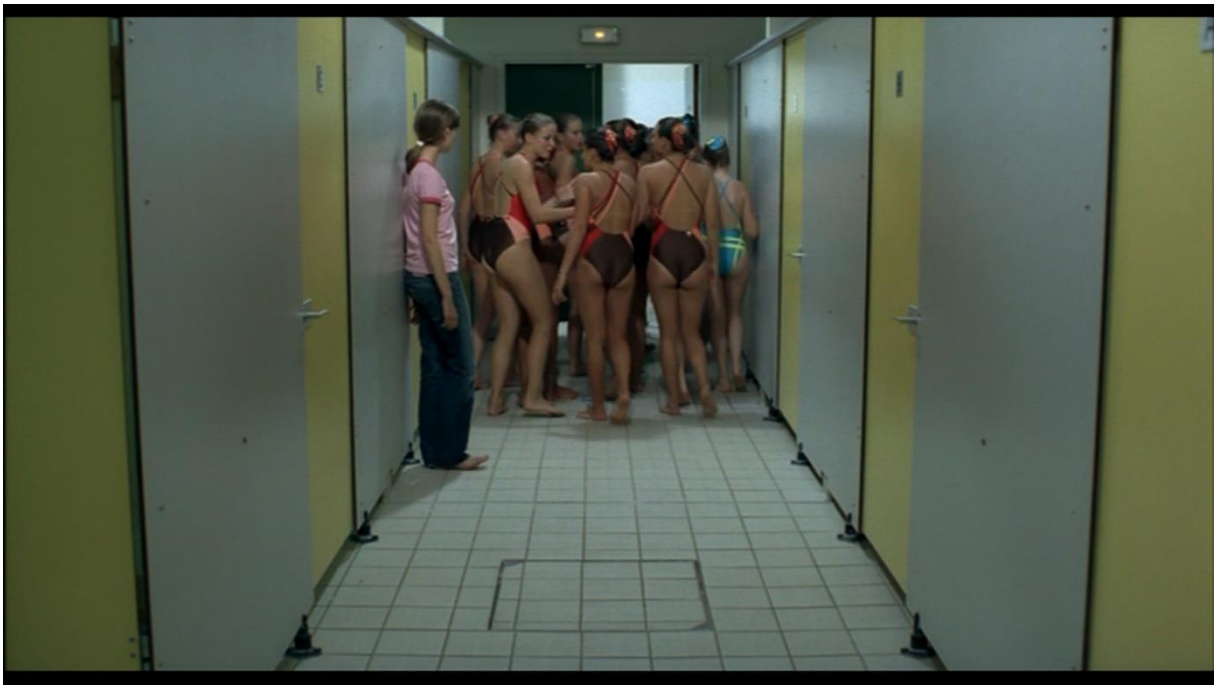

Image 4: Marie stands fully dressed in the dressing room. She stands still as the other girls move out of the room as a group.

Interestingly, the film seems to also hint at the similarities between Marie and the other girls, perhaps to show the commonality of feeling like an outcast as a teenager. The cinematography of the swimming pool scenes always shows the viewer the individual elements of the entire routine rather than the routine as a whole composition. Instead of

placing the entire ensemble in a wider shot, Sciamma only provides medium close-ups of the girls, allowing for no sense of the synchronisation that literally defines the act they are performing. Closing in on individual swimmers brings the audience closer to all of them, not just the main characters, giving the impression that the problems the main characters face are not exclusive to them. All these girls struggle with the same feelings of separation and loneliness within their social groups. Some might struggle with identifying their queer feelings like Marie or they might experience difficulties conforming to standards for women in a patriarchal society like Floriane who is labelled a slut for receiving sexual attention from boys and men.

Sciamma uses synchronised swimming to create queer moments that are dense in haptic elements all throughout *Water Lilies*. But they are far from the only queer moments in *Water Lilies*, and I want to discuss another example to show how queer moments also are created outside the symbolic realm of synchronised swimming, because while it is a brilliant analogy, queer disorientation is not always as literal as not being a synchronised swimmer. Queer moments of disorientation are not always as apparent as those I have described. To widen the usefulness of my approach, I want to show how moments of disorientation can be found in parts of the narrative away from the water as well.

4.2.1.3. The Taste of Queerness. Around the midway point of *Water Lilies*, the friendship between Marie and Floriane is blossoming, and Marie has spent the night at Floriane's house. A few scenes prior their pinkies touched while they laid in bed together, and there is obviously something more than friendship between them. On her way home from Floriane's house, Marie steals a bag of rubbish from the bin outside and brings it home. She empties the contents into a drawer in her desk at home, and later, when she has calmed down from the adrenaline rush of stealing Floriane's rubbish bag, she brings the content up to her desk.

The contents are very reminiscent of the daily lives of teenagers: pieces of paper with scribbled notes, empty soda cans, used cotton pads, and an old, browned apple. Marie smells some cotton crunched up into a ball. The cotton has stains on it, most likely from make-up, wiped off Floriane's face – a physical trail marking Floriane's path. In a close-up, Marie touches it and rolls the cotton between her fingers for a second before putting it down. We see her face as she focuses on something outside the frame we cannot see, but we hear the crinkling of a piece of paper. She unfolds it, sort of tenderly, and runs her hands across it. We

see her as she sits reading it or maybe analysing the contents of it. Finally, an abrupt cut to her hands. She is holding an apple core. The core is browning. She turns it in her hands before rather sharply bringing it to her mouth (Image 5). She takes a bite and chews. She looks disgusted as she tastes the apple, and later brings her hand up to her mouth as if she is about to throw up. But the experience you have as a viewer is not only disgust. It might be shocking to see her eat something out of the rubbish, but it feels warranted. To a viewer, the apple seems to be pulsating because we know it is Floriane's. It conjures up the intensity of discovering one's identity and sexuality through the act of being in love. There is a special kind of force associated with a deep desire to be close to someone you like, which one can assume is why Marie steals the rubbish in the first place. Her feelings towards Floriane are concentrated as an intense desire to be near her and to experience what she experiences, which I argue is why this moment qualifies as a moment of disorientation. Marie wants to know not only what Floriane thinks and writes about, or how her hands feel when clearing her face of make-up after a competition, but what Floriane has tasted and what she felt when doing so. In a sense, she is taking Floriane into herself.

Through the intensity of the cinematography, Sciamma manages to induce the desperation and intensity of her young main character's actions in the audience, and rather than being disgusted by the scene, it is fully understandable and reasonable when experiencing the kind of emotions Marie is experiencing. Though, I must admit this realisation came only after wincing at the thought of tasting an apple that has been in the rubbish.

Image 5: Marie eats the apple she found in Floriane's rubbish bin.

Additionally, the scene evokes the memory of texture. The viewer will be able to identify with the textures present on screen. While Marie is experiencing what Floriane experienced, we are equally experiencing it as her touch evokes memories of textures from our own pasts. We all recognise the feeling of cotton, and the way paper tries to fold back in on itself when it has been crumpled up and thrown away. Another scene that has that same sense of sensory intensity comes much later in the film as Anne, after Marie makes several cruel comments about her weight and appearance, digs a hole in the ground with her bare hands and buries her bra in François' yard. It seems like a futile attempt to bury her feelings of self-doubt and maybe even her unrequited feelings towards François. She buries it with such intensity that a viewer cannot avoid being sucked into the distinctly teenage feeling of being all at once incredibly happily in love and deeply unhappy about it being one-sided. Both Marie collecting and examining Floriane's rubbish and Anne's bra burial are deeply private acts presented to an adult audience to signal how teenagers often experience a kind of excess of intense emotion and desire. Unlike adults, they have no way of understanding or dealing with the emotions, so they come out in these kinds of obsessive behaviours that are relatable to adult audiences.

The scene has a similar effect on the viewer as one in *Tomboy* where Mickaël plays with the plasticine clay, which I will describe in detail later, because it engages our memories of textures, taste, and touch. The plasticine is directly connected to the memories viewers will

have of childhood, and the rubbish is very reminiscent of that found in the bedroom of any teenage girl, and the scene shows Marie's infatuation with Floriane. It is important to remember that while the characters in both *Tomboy* and *Water Lilies* are children, the films are not meant for children. Young main characters are a very good way of showing recognisable problems to adults while allowing them to empathise to a larger degree than with adult characters. Children are more vulnerable, and thus, it is much easier to make people emotionally invested in their well-being, while at the same time conjuring up memories of what it was like to be in that vulnerable place.

While Marie's struggle is primarily one of trying to understand queerness and her own feelings of attraction, Floriane is engulfed in the standards and expectations that burden young women. There are many things that set the girls apart and that highlight this important distinction between them: their wardrobes, their activities, interests, how they express themselves in words and actions, and how their identities are challenged and portrayed on screen. In a scene that engages the sense of taste and texture in a way that mirrors the apple scene, Floriane is quietly eating a banana after practice. She is in the locker room, her hair still wet, and she is just having a snack after a workout, maybe before she is picked up to have dinner at home. One of the other girls asks Floriane how she can eat a banana before further explaining that she always mashes her bananas into a pulp before eating them, to which Floriane responds with a warranted reaction: "That is stupid". The girl is clearly implying that when girls eat bananas, it can be reminiscent of oral sex – a classic joke in schools all around the globe. The other girl tells Floriane that, of course she does not care about eating bananas, she has already gone over to "the other side". The rumour that is circulating is that Floriane is sexually active, so "the other side" is clearly a reference to this rumour. Again, there is a discussion of positioning in *Water Lilies*.

As a member of the audience, you know that Floriane is in no way different to the other girls. She no doubt gets more sexual attention from boys and men, but her sexual experience is exaggerated, and the other girls keep placing her in a different category than themselves. As I have already mentioned and will continue to bring up later in this analysis of *Water Lilies*, Marie is firmly placed, both physically and socially, apart from the other girls. The same is true of Floriane. However, I believe they are misaligned in unlike ways. Both Marie and Floriane are othered in a way that I perceive as based in sexuality. While Marie's struggle to reconcile with her own queerness, she seems rather unfazed by the expectations that are put upon women, at least for now. She is more preoccupied being a young teen in

love, and less busy trying to conform to female standards for sex and gender. Floriane, on the other hand, seems to have a hard time adjusting to the stark contrast between childhood and adulthood, and we see her constantly struggle to adjust herself to the expectations others place upon her. I argue that Floriane's attempts to align with the norm are indicative of her feelings of queerness as well as her struggles with expectations related to her sex, and I see the moments where she tries to conform as distinctly queer ones.

4.2.1.4. Conclusion. As described here, the queer moments in films are not always connected to the symbolic elements of a film, but they can be brought on by elements of the film that engage our sense of texture and taste. In the case of *Water Lilies*, the synchronised swimming and Marie's investigation of Floriane's rubbish are inducers of haptic engagement with the queer moments in the film. Moving on, I will show yet another example of a queer haptic moment of disorientation in *Tomboy*.

4.2.2. Inside and Outside – Queer Orientation in Tomboy

The contrast between the inside and the outside is part of creating queer, haptic moments in *Tomboy.* The story is set in a Parisian suburb in the early 2010's. Almost all the film's scenes take place outside in nature. The entire narrative rests on the safe, free, unsupervised play that the main character engages in. This setting allows Mickaël to express and reinvent himself as one of the boys. Whether on the football pitch, in the forest behind the massive concrete blocks of flats, or at the lake, nature is important in the world of haptic cinema, because it acts as a great unifier of people. We all experience nature and have distinct memories of interacting with nature. For Mickaël, nature in general is an essential part of his coming of age. His physical orientation towards the outdoors produces most of the queer, haptic moments in the film, and they naturally show the audience his orientation towards the world. Your orientation and the spaces you exist within influence how you are allowed to exist in the world, and thus there is strong symbolism in the division between inside and outside.

4.2.2.1. Places and Identity. For Mickaël, the outside is his place of freedom, clearly marked by his literal change in identity when stepping outside. Outside with his friends, he has constructed his entire identity as he wishes, while indoors, he is strictly limited by the identity that is expected of him from his family. His family seems loving and close, and Mickaël's freedom to express himself does not appear limited to begin with. His mother's reaction to finding out about his secret, however, is far from supportive and is instead a rather

frightening foresight into the difficult process he will potentially go through to live as himself in the future. Unlike his mother, Mickaël's father is a strong supporter when Mickaël paves his path into a life as a queer teenager. In general, his parents are an essential part of the narrative haptic elements of the film because they are physical manifestations of two opposing identities within Mickaël.

His father is linked with the exterior, with nature, play, and with Mickaël's ability to exist in his chosen identity. He is present during moments of great discomfort for Mickaël and provides a great deal of comfort for his child, before disappearing before the situation has really been resolved. The mother, however, is initially a place of comfort as well, though she is clearly closer to Jeanne throughout the film. She does allow Mickaël to do as he pleases, however, and entrusts him with keys to their house and time to explore. Neither her nor the father seem to take any issue with how he dresses or keeps his hair. There are really no verbalised expectations for Mickaël to be anything other than what he already is. At the film's climax, though, she becomes a clear obstacle for her child's identity when forcing Mickaël to put on a dress and go apologise to all his friends. She represents the hurdles Mickaël will have to clear to be himself. This unexpected shift in the mother is even more upsetting given how the family dynamic has been presented up until his secret is revealed. As a viewer, your allegiance to Mickaël makes you hope that his parents will accept him whenever his identity is revealed, but alas, things do not go as the audience hopes.

In one scene, Mickaël's father allows him to drive a car, presumably with all their packed belongings in the back, down a few streets while on his dad's lap. The parallels to Sara Ahmed and orientation are clear in this scene. The whole film is about Mickaël finding his way in life, about him finding a way to exist, and paving a path to follow that suits him and his identity. In this scene, he is being guided by his father. In the beginning of the film, the family moves into this new neighbourhood, and it marks a new beginning for them all, but in particular for Mickaël. Their fresh start is not only evident in the family's move to a new home, but in the excitement of the baby that they are expecting at the end of summer. The baby is really the story's catalyst because they outgrow their previous home with this new baby, and the gender of the baby starts conversations of gender within the household.

Mickaël and his family are at the exact place in the world where they need to be for Mickaël to start exploring his own identity. Sciamma has said that she wanted the story of Mickaël to appeal to both queer and non-queer people, and that the story is primarily a generic

tale of childhood. As a queer person then, I might be projecting my own experiences onto Mickaël (who is most often referred to as Laure when written about), I see a queer child where others might only see a child experimenting with their gender performance without any presumptions about their gender identity. Nature plays a less haptic part of *Water Lilies*, because the entire point of setting the story in a swimming pool is to emphasise how artificial the social world of these teenagers is.

Another example, which could also be related to the relation between nature and identity, comes early in the film where Mickaël has just met Lisa, who brings him along to play with the other kids in the neighbourhood. During his turn, Lisa throws the game and allows Mickaël to win and thus impress the other kids immediately. It is the first step to establishing himself as Mickaël within this group of kids. Directly following the scene is one of the most intimate scenes in the story.

4.2.2.2. Revealing Mickaël – Projecting Discomfort Through Haptics. At this point, to the audience, Mickaël is only Mickaël. He does not yet have the double identity of Mickaël/Laure. Mickaël is in the bath with his younger sister presumably getting ready for bed after a long day. The siblings play pretend. Mickaël is a journalist interviewing a famous star named Jaqueline. They play with action figures, and finally wash each other's hair. Mickaël is presented as an incredibly kind, nurturing, and empathic sibling. After the bath, Jeanne is taken away by the mother who, from the hallway, calls for "Laure". His identity has been revealed to us. We see Mickaël hesitate; he looks down into the tub as if dreading what is about to come next. His naked body is exposed for a brief moment, just long enough for the audience to notice that his body, at this point in the story, does not match how he presents his gender identity. His body is visibly tense. The body of *Tomboy* reflects Mickaël's physical body. He moves the story along, and we follow him and the images of it in motion. However, this shot is disturbing, and his feelings of discomfort are taken on by the viewer.

Barker argued that our muscular relationship with the film is an act of mimicry. Not a mimicry of the characters, "… but of the film itself" (2009, p. 74). The film's body presents its movements through elements such as editing, aspect ratio, and framing. I experienced the scene in the bathroom as particularly uncomfortable because of the way the film's body allows me to identify with Mickaël. Firstly, the framing of the scene is important to the engagement a viewer feels with Mickaël. The cinematography in Tomboy is intimate, and as a viewer you expect a certain intimacy with Mickaël. Our expectations are met throughout most

of the scene. The shots are close to the kids playing, and they are close when the mother comes to wrap Jeanne in a towel and carries her away. We are a part of the play, a part of this small family and all seems peaceful, calm, and good. When Mickaël is left alone in the bathtub, the camera and the audience are still intensely a part of the situation, and the expression on his face is the first sign that something is amiss. His mother calls him by a name thus far unknown to the audience, and the feeling of disruption is palpable. Then the camera pulls back. Not smoothly, but in a jolt, as if the camera is pulling back in disbelief, shocked at the reveal it has just delivered. I felt myself mimic the movement when initially watching the film, retreating into my seat as I watched, as if trying to get a better look at a situation that was unexpected, trying to regain relationship with the characters who so far in the film have felt very close and familiar. The image of Mickaël's body against the pale tiles is shocking, not because of what is revealed, but because of how the film reacts to it.

The discomfort felt by Mickaël is in many ways the archetypal feeling of queerness. It seems like discomfort is a birthright when you are genderqueer. Mickaël has expressed a need to identify as a boy, but his body is mismatched with his gender, and one could argue that he is experiencing what is known as gender dysphoria. The term implies distress or deep discomfort tied to gender identity. This discomfort, regardless of whether Mickaël experiences actual gender dysphoria, is expressed in the camera's distancing and almost disgusted realisation that his body does not match his social identity. Additionally, the colour of his skin almost perfectly matches the colour of the tiles in their plain, dark, and damp bathroom. The usually colourful Mickaël who wears primary colours and stands out in his red shorts and swim trunks is suddenly closed in and anonymous in his home. He is at this point unequivocally reminded that here, in this bathroom, in this family, and in this home, he is still Laure.

Image 6: Mickaël sits alone in the tub, looking anxious when his mother calls him by his thus far unknown name "Laure", and his double identity is revealed to the audience.

He quickly covers up to dry off. Bedtime is ended by Mickaël being given a house key by his mother, so he can roam around freely during the day. The pattern of comfort and freedom intertwined with discomfort and Mickaël's feeling of being isolated when with his family continues throughout the entire film. There is a constant back and forth for both Mickaël, the film, and the audience between comfort and discomfort like the one discussed in relation to the bath scene. I will provide more examples of this sandwiching of comfort/discomfort later in my analysis of *Tomboy*. For now, I can say that the oscillation has an unnerving effect on the audience, almost in the same sense as in horror films, though admittedly much less intense. Going between the intensity of being hunted or stalked in dark hallways to the relative safety of daylight is part of the appeal of horror films, and in Tomboy that change in the film's mood is strengthened by what is one of the most common tropes in queer cinema: moments of hate and ignorance.

4.2.2.3. Wrapping Up. In this part of the analysis, I have given concrete examples of how haptic elements are a key part in the understanding of queer moments related to the main characters.

Now, I want to take this even further by combining all the single elements of the films and conducting two more comprehensive analyses of scenes from both films. Through means of

narratives, mise-en-scène, cinematography, sound, and through evocation of texture, tastes, and touch, Sciamma's films give an insight into how haptic film theory can strengthen arguments when conducting phenomenological analyses of queer films. I want to move onto how these analyses can provide us with a deeper understanding of the lived bodies of queer characters by analysing two scenes from the chosen artefacts.

4.2.3. Hidden Under the Sheets – Queer Haptics and Sex in Water Lilies

You cannot really separate the different parts of the filmic experience. the elements always work in tandem with one another. To further show how to apply my approach to film, I want to conduct an analysis of one scene from both *Water Lilies* and *Tomboy* to show how the haptic elements of the film are always connected and work together to induce feelings of queer, haptic engagement with characters. With this first analysis, I will how the sex scene between Marie and Floriane is engaging because it induces haptic feelings of texture and temperature to signify the experience of the girls. It also uses haptic sound to further allow the viewer to inhabit the girls' lived bodies.

4.2.3.1. A Brief History of Queer Sex on Screen. I would say that there are two categories of queer sex scenes. The first category I name "Shamefully Shy". While films showing heterosexual relationships culminating in sex are familiar and abundant, scenes that show sex between queer people are often cut short, only implied, or simply not there. Queer couples sometimes get to kiss, hug, or hold hands, but are often infantilised and desexualised on screen. They love each other, but there is no room to show sexual desire and queer lust. I want to return to *Call Me by Your Name* (Guadagnino, 2017).

In a now infamous scene, main character, Elio, masturbates using a particularly plump-looking peach. The scene is quite graphic as Elio ejaculates into the peach, which his love-interest, Oliver, later eats. However, when the two have sex later in the film, there is a pan away, and the audience is left to imagine it for themselves. The peach scene shows an intimate situation between the two lovers, but as is often the case with queer film, sexual desire and sexual intimacy is hidden from the viewer. Especially in the case of sex between men, there is a tendency for the camera to shy away from the action. Showing a man ejaculating into a peach is shown in favour of sex between two consenting men.

In addition, this category includes the many queer sex scenes that are soaked in shame. In *Moonlight* (Jenkins, 2016), the audience follows main character, Chiron, through various

stages of his life. As a teenager, Chiron struggles with his queerness in an environment riddled with drugs, crime, and poverty, but finds comfort in his friend, Kevin. *Moonlight* does not pan away from the boys as Kevin gives Chiron a handjob. However, the act is concluded by Chiron apologising for ejaculating, to which Kevin responds: "What do you gotta be sorry for?" This rather sweet and tender moment is overshadowed by the guilt Chiron feels for his sexual desires. The "Shamefully Shy" collection of queer sex scenes is in many ways reminiscent of efforts made to hide sexually explicit scenes in films during the Production Code era even between heterosexual couples. But unlike sex between heterosexual cis-people, queer couples are still hidden away behind questions of morality.

The other category speaks for itself: "The Fetishising Male Gaze". Lesbian sex on screen is infamously graphic. There are numerous examples of lesbian sex being fetishising rather than a physical expression of love or desire between two characters on screen. The yearning lesbian couple that fulfils the audience's sexual desires rather than their own is very reminiscent of the sexualised looking Mulvey proposed with her male gaze theory. But it is, unfortunately, an industry standard. In her book *Vampires and Violets: Lesbians in the Cinema* from 1992, film theorist Andrea Weiss describes the short and hidden, yet important, influence of lesbianism on Hollywood from the very first moving images. She writes that films depicting lesbians tended to have "… voyeuristic cinematography which bombards the viewer with close-up fragmented body parts in 'the current style of fashionably fetishized female bodies constructed to the measure of male desire'" (p. 74). The fetishising of lesbians on screen is a recurring issue in the film industry, and I argue that it is still an ever-present concern, even in 2023.

A striking and famous example in more contemporary cinema that comes to mind is the not-so-humble seven-minute sex scene in the 2013 film *Blue Is the Warmest Color* (Kechiche). The film has later been soaked in controversy after the actresses who play the two main characters accused the director violating various labour laws, but more importantly the sex scene caused an uproar after the film initially received praise for its representation of a queer relationship. The seven-minute scene marks a distinct aesthetic change in the very much intimate and beautiful arthouse film. From naturally lit close-ups of acts of desire to wide shots of sex acts in what appears to be the set of a pornography, the film is a perfect example of how lesbian sex has been used (abused) to satisfy viewers other than queer ones. Many accused the director of satisfying his own sexual desires by using (again, abusing) his cast and crew (Silman, 2013).

While researching this part of my thesis, I came across a list titled "9 Best Queer On-screen Love Scenes" (Walker, 2020)[3]. It was published in 2020, and I could not help but notice that it quite beautifully illustrates my issues relating to queer, on-screen sex. Four out of the nine I see no issue with. There are, of course, good examples of queer sex that shows lust, desire, and love in a shameless and representative way. But the remaining five films on the list, all fit within the two categories I have presented. One scene is cut short when the father of one of the women enters the room, and the situation goes from sweet to aggressive. The second is the aforementioned scene in *Moonlight*. The third is a scene from *Black Swan* (Aronofsky, 2010), which was criticised at the time of release for the same reasons as *Blue Is the Warmest Color*; people argued Aronofsky's gaze was a straight, male one. Another scene is from the 2013 film *Tangerine* and shows a transgender sex-worker having sex with a regular client of hers, which is intimate, but which also puts the issue of consent into question. Finally, number nine on the list is the reunion scene from *Brokeback Mountain* (Lee, 2005), which is not a sex scene at all, but a scene where the two main characters kiss after being apart from one another for a long time. The wife of one of the men spots them kissing, and again, there is the blanket of shame and secrecy that hides away queer identities in film.

Water Lilies is arguably part of the first category: "Shamefully Shy". Despite Marie and Floriane being the same age as the main character in *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*, the scene that is subject to analysis in this part of the thesis is different to that in *Blue is the Warmest Color*. Film is all about balancing what is shown and what is hidden. In *Water Lilies*, it seems Sciamma has made a conscious choice to hide the sexual acts of the film, though the level of hiddenness varies between scenes. The scene involving Marie and Floriane shows basically nothing. The girls are as clothed as they can be while still engaging in sexual acts, and they are obscured by a white sheet. Marie and Floriane share several failed attempts at intimacy both before and after this scene, and feelings of queer intimacy are remarkably absent through all of them because they are all overshadowed by Floriane's intense attempts to stick to the heteronormative expectations she is burdened by. When they have sex, it is on the pretext of preparing for a heterosexual experience to come. When the two share a kiss later in the film, Floriane quickly returns to a party to flirt with some boy. The queer moments between these characters are always drowned out by the heteronormative.

[3] I guess they couldn't even find one more good scene to include for a more conventional top 10.

You need only watch a few minutes more before Anne and François have sex. It occurs very shortly after Marie and Floriane have had sex to "prepare" Floriane ahead of François' arrival. He expects them to have sex. Floriane, however, rejects him, and he goes to Anne's house, presumably because she is some sort of "plan B" after Floriane rejects him. The scene between Anne and François is decidedly more visual, though the action itself is hidden by means of camera placement; all the action happens just off-screen, and the audience only sees Anne's face. The reason I claim it is more visual is simply because the actions are more pronounced and more aggressively performed compared to the timid, mild, consenting, and equal actions between Marie and Floriane. Both scenes and the way the film contrasts them only serve to remind me of what is arguably the most discussed and problematised issue in queer cinema when compared to heterosexual and cis-gendered cinema: queer people are always the ones being hidden away. Locked in closets or hidden under sheets, it makes very little difference. The sheets in the sex scene induce many strong emotions and feelings of both discomfort, desperation, distance, and fear. Most of all, however, at least to a queer viewer, it induces an emotion queer people have spent the last 70 years trying to distance themselves from using outspoken pride: shame.

4.2.3.2. The Textures of Queer Sex. Preceding the scene where Floriane and Marie have sex, the girls sit together after swimming under large towel. Marie sits on a bench, visibly cold, covered in a towel. Floriane comes running over only in her bathing suit, just out of the pool. She sits down, shivering, and pulls Marie's towel over herself. Floriane has been gifted a heart necklace from François (that he previously received from Anne as a present) and asks Marie to put it around her neck. Floriane takes off her old necklace, and Marie places the new one around her neck. This is an exceedingly delicate act, and when their skin touches, it is intimate and tender. Floriane confesses that she is "… in deep shit" because François is coming over to her house and there is an implication that he will want to have sex as she is home alone. Marie responds by saying that she is willing to "… do it… what you asked" referring to when Floriane has asked Marie to take her virginity in an earlier scene. Given the following sex scene, you would assume this conversation to be almost transactional. However, it does not feel clinical or transactional at all. It feels intimate and as if these two girls share something deeply personal and secret. The camera is up close and very personal without being intrusive. There is an immediate feeling of closeness when the girls sit next to each other under the towel; they obviously like each other as more than friends. Their connection is felt by the audience, and the feelings of fondness between them are emphasised

by the change in temperature. There is a feeling of warmth and comfort when Floriane covers herself in Marie's towel that is starkly contrasted in the later sex scene.

Image 7: Floriane and Marie share a towel as Floriane shows Marie the necklace she received from François.

During the sex scene between them there is a shift in the cinematography and in the behaviour of the main characters. The camera is on a tripod, pointed towards the top end of the bed. The audience is less included in the action than in previous scenes. Hapticity, I have found, can be induced both by closeness but also by distance. Closeness to the subjects is intimate and the detail of a given situation allows the director to point the viewer in the direction of haptic elements like textures, skin, or character reactions. Distance, however, can be inducing because it pulls the viewer away from the action and encourages us to let our eyes rest on the screen, rather than intensely focusing on detail. In the previous examples, the closeness of the camera allowed for close inspection of the objects presented in the scene like the apple Marie tastes. It also allows for identification with the individual swimmers during their routines to show how all the teenagers in the scene struggle with conformity and a deeper understanding of Mickaël's dread when exiting the bathtub. In this scene, you are distanced physically and emotionally, so you are forced to imagine for yourself, and it leads to bodily introspection.

There is no desire or passion depicted in the scene, despite the girls clearly feeling warmly towards each other. The white sheets are almost hotel like. Or maybe they remind me of a hospital? The bed is unmade, the sheets are messy and crumpled. The fabrics in this scene remind me of a much-cited passage in Marks' *The Skin of the Film* (2000, p. 127) where she writes that close-up images of a silken sari invite our bodies to "feel" the fabric with our eyes. While this example does differ in the cinematographic presentation of the fabric, it does make me wonder about the effect of the sheet in this scene. We are invited to feel it both through evocation of the fabric's textures, but as I will discuss later, also by the sounds in the scene. Importantly, it obscures the action in the scene, even later when the camera moves closer to their faces. Regardless, the sheets add to the clinical feel of the scene and enhances the feeling of an unpersonal and almost forced act. The sheet acts as shield in the scene, and they are a haptic signifier of the complex web of emotions within the scene.

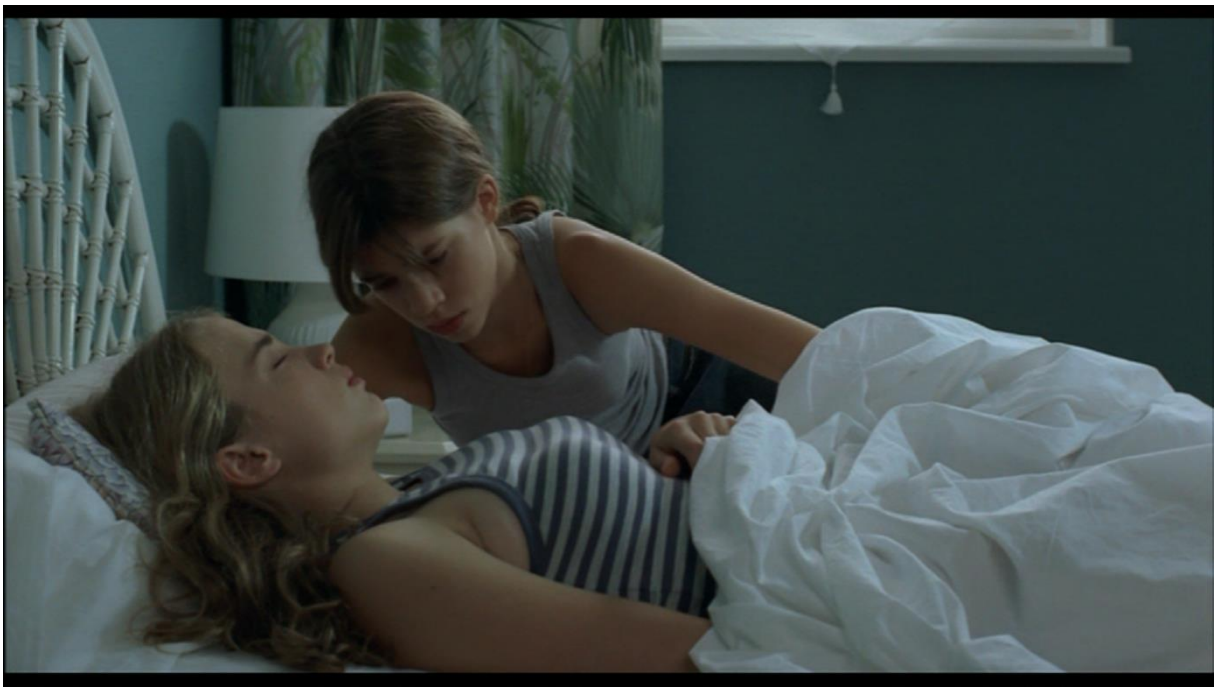

Image 8: Marie and Floriane in bed together. They actions are shielded by the white sheets.

Firstly, the audience understands Marie is infatuated with Floriane and that she is attracted to her, and so having sex should be a deeply emotional and exciting experience for her. However, she remains emotionless throughout the affair. Marie is visibly tense and stays at an arm's length from Floriane who clearly feels that losing one's virginity is something to just get done. It is difficult to understand fully why Marie does not show any emotion towards Floriane in this scene, but I argue that the sheet here signifies yet another important factor in showing queer experiences.

Being a queer person, as I have mentioned, is often connected with feelings of shame and a need to hide, bury, and supress your feelings of desire. Marie's feelings towards Floriane are never spoken before they have sex, and they are rarely shown in clear detail. We only get small hints at her true emotions through narrative elements of the film, like when she rummages through her rubbish or when she joins the girls at swim practice only to watch them. But she is never allowed to loudly desire Floriane in the same obvious way that François likes Floriane or in the way Anne expresses her desire for François. So, the sheets are a reminder of everything that she is hiding beneath the surface. All her emotions are always just below the surface of her skin, sheet-deep, perhaps, but they are never allowed to be experienced or expressed. Here, I argue, lies the most important moment of queer disorientation for Marie and Floriane; they are as intimate as two people can be, yet they are constrained by whatever ideas of heteronormativity and male ideals they harbour in their teenage minds.

Secondly, the sheets seem to protect Floriane from facing the discomfort of the situation directly. Given that the girls are typically very comfortable being around each other, and not just that, but being in various stages of undress around one another, the timidity of the girls in the scene is a shift from the usual way they act. They have previously touched each other in more intimate ways, like only a scene prior where Marie buckles Floriane's necklace with a tenderness that is evocative of love and kindness. Floriane remains tense throughout the entire act and consistently avoids looking at Marie or herself, so the sheets serve as protection from facing head on the situation she is in. In the same way as Marie, you could argue that she is inhibited from showing her feelings on the outside because she is queer. As I mentioned before, Marks argued that haptic elements that obscure our vision allow us to distance ourselves from unpleasant images, like Floriane and Marie do in this scene.

As a viewer, I feel trapped in the situation. The scene cuts to a close-up, and Floriane is on the verge of tears for a while, until we see a small teardrop run down her cheek. There is no escape from the bed, and it seems to go on forever. The tense body language of Marie mirrors mine as we both fight our way through the scene. It reaches the peak of discomfort when Floriane starts crying, maybe out of pain, maybe out of shame, or confusion, or perhaps relief. It is hard to tell why she is crying, but being emotionally overwhelmed is kind of a staple of being a 15-year-old. Regardless, Floriane's face is the focus of the scene, and it is almost impossible to look away. If the scene were any different, if the sheets were not there,

the effect of her emoting would be lessened, and the focus of the scene would be the act, rather than their reactions to the act.

Finally, it is clear to any viewer that the sexual act is not one of passion or love, but one Floriane and Marie want to get out of the way. Maybe Floriane feels a need to live up to her reputation, or maybe she wants to rid herself of her past experiences by rewriting them with someone she at least likes a little bit before François arrives. When watching the scene, it is obvious that this not an act of love or desire, but one that the girls deem necessary. The act can barely be called sex in the sense that most people understand and expect sex to be. It seems more like a medical procedure to intentionally break her hymen. The act itself is mediated, but the girls seem unprepared and hesitant. The girls are at first, out of frame, only their bodies showing. Their body language is as tense as the situation, and it is very much a reflection of my experience watching the scene. Watching the scene, you can feel your teeth clenching and your body stiffening up to mirror that of the characters. The sense of closeness and intimacy that is associated with idealised sexual experiences is non-existent in this scene. Floriane's staggered breathing is unsettling and allows us to experience directly what she is experiencing. The normal rhythm of our breaths is disrupted, and her raw nerves are exposed to the audience.

4.2.3.3. Deep Breaths – The Sounds of Queer Sex. Breathing is an important motif in relation to the scenes concerning and showing sex in *Water Lilies.* It is an interesting motif to investigate, simply because no one is unfamiliar with breathing. You breathe in to pull oxygen into your lungs that is transported through the tissue in the lungs, into your blood, and then through the heart. From there it travels out to every single cell in your body. Then the blood returns the way it came (through different blood vessels, of course), and we breath out some of the biproducts of our own bodily functions. Our breathing is usually controlled by our autonomic nervous system, which means it really does its own thing to keep us constantly breathing even when unconscious. However, we also have, unlike with other autonomic processes like our heartbeat and the functioning of our internal organs, some control of our own respiration. We can slow our breath to calm ourselves. We can inhale to ready ourselves for a task, to get a whiff of a smell, or exhale quickly to show contempt or anger. Some of the ways in which our body expresses itself are reliant on our breathing. Heavy breathing can be a sign of illness or exhaustion. Quick breathing can be a sign someone is on the alert or scared. In *Midsommar* (Aster, 2019), breathing is used as a motif and a way of communicating to show the main character's slow incorporation into a cult. Safe to say, inhaling and exhaling is

not only necessary to keep our cells alive, but also a way of interacting with the spaces around us, a way of expressing emotion, and a way for our bodies to make external the emotions we tend to keep internal (like anger, arousal, anxiety).

It makes sense, really, in a film about swimming and water, that the director has paid special attention to breath. Controlled breathing is essential when going in water. It shows bodily discipline and massive effort to perform in the way that the swimmers do in *Water Lilies*. Their bodies are synchronised, and as a result, their breathing will be synchronised too. Breath is, like the swimming itself, a sign of synchronisation for the characters in the film, and uneven, unsynchronised breathing is a hint that something is amiss. Breathing is incredibly effective when showing the internal processes of a film's characters. The pattern of breathing in this scene is an incredible tool for understanding the haptic engagement one feels when watching the sex scene between Marie and Floriane. It is an integral part of connecting the audience to the girls as they cross an important threshold in their young lives. It is especially important because the scene is without music, without sound effects, and completely without dialogue.

In the beginning of the scene, the sound of the girls is drowned out by the deafening sounds of the now much discussed white sheets. There is a sort of swishing sound as the sheets rub against themselves and against Floriane as she undresses. The sounds are familiar to anyone and evokes a strong sense of the texture of the fabrics that surround the girls. The sheets have a clinical feel to them. They are reminiscent of those found in hospitals or hotels and do not look like the sheets used by a 15-year-old girl (mine were, and still are, always patterned and somewhat mismatched). When describing these kinds of sheets, the ones that are pulled so tightly around the bed that you have to fight them to get into bed, I think of two adjectives to describe them: stiff and cold. In addition to reminding me of cold nights spend under a single, stiff sheet, the sheets in the scene function as a way of covering up the actions in the scene. Not only then, are the sheets a visual barrier between the viewers and Marie and Floriane, but they produce audio clues as to how the textures of the scene feel. The textures of the sheets function in the same way as in the last part of this analysis: it highlights the incredible array of emotions connected to the sheets.

Additionally, the swishing of the sheets blends well with the sounds of breathing. They seem to be in the same range of sound, and thus, the sheets not only block our vision, but also restrict our ability to hear the girls clearly. That is not to say that we do not hear

them, because we very much do. The breathing of Floriane is most prominent in the scene. Her breaths are shallow and almost like gasps. Her eyes are closed as if she is trying to imagine herself elsewhere. She sniffles, and we hear the spit in her mouth as she swallows loudly. It is as if the audience is in the bed with them. The sound of Floriane's breathing drew my attention away from the screen, simply because it is incredibly uncomfortable to be faced with her pain and discomfort. It instead allowed me to realise that I was holding my breath as if I was in the situation myself.

The breathing in this scene is starkly contrasted by the following two scenes. During the sex scene between Anne and François, the breathing serves much the same purpose, but it engages other mechanisms within the viewer. The rhythmic breathing of François and the breathing of Anne are signs of pleasure and fulfilled desires rather than the discomfort of "necessity". Their breathing contrasts that of Floriane, which is staggered, uneven, and strained. Sometimes it feels as if she is holding her breath for a while, from discomfort or pain, we do not know, and then she seems to suddenly remember to breathe again.

4.2.3.4. Conclusion. The haptic elements in this scene, in particular the sheets and the sounds, combine to emphasise and strengthen the feeling of discomfort the audience experiences. There is a tenseness to the scene that transcends the screen between the audience and the action. The obscuring of the act itself does nothing but emphasise all the secrets, shame, and pain that hide beneath the cold, clinical, whiteness of the sheets. In the next part, I want to show that these many of these same elements can be inducers of happy queer moments just as effectively as they here were used to create great discomfort.

4.2.4. Thrown into the Deep End – On Shaping an Identity in Tomboy

Like with the sex scene from *Water Lilies*, I want to do a closer analysis of a scene in *Tomboy*. But in this case, I also want to show that haptic engagement can result in positive feelings of queerness, and not only shame and discomfort. In this part of the chapter, I will continue to present concrete examples of how to utilise my approach to the haptic to analyse an entire scene, rather than looking at the elements as separate, haptic inducers of queer feelings.

4.2.4.1. A Note on Queer Anxiety in *Tomboy*. Queerness is often presented as both traumatic, emotionally draining, and almost intolerable in contemporary media. In queer cinema, common narratives include the stress of coming out to people who do not accept you,

surviving hate crimes, being able to live happily as a queer couple, and general loneliness. As Larry Gross put it (twenty-two years ago) there are no normal, happy queer people on screen, only people who are "…an anomaly that must be explained, a disappointment that might be tolerated, or a threat to the moral order that must be countered through ridicule or physical violence" (2001, p. 16). These tropes are not only present in the films discussed in this thesis, but they are part of a larger institutional tradition in Western cinema when it comes to queer films. Incidents where you have experienced high stress emotions or where you have feared for your life have an impact on you long after the initial incidents occur. The corpus of queer cinema and stories of queer people in other contemporary media like literature and television is growing fast, and it is undoubtedly heading in a new direction where queerness is no longer punished to meet with censorship laws or society's moral code. The Motion Picture Production Code characterised "… lesbian, gay, and otherwise queer representation… as 'sexual perversion'" (Lugowski, 2021, p. 188), and the representation was constrained to minor characters, negative stereotypes, homophobic jokes, and unhappy endings. The ban lasted until 1968, but the effects of the moralisation of film representation is arguably still present in media tropes like "Dead Lesbian Syndrome" (also called "Bury Your Gays"). Queer characters are killed off to appease the heteronormative expectations of advertisers and viewers – you can be queer and happy, but "…it is short-lived and perhaps requires a bulletproof vest" (Waggoner, 2018, p. 1879).

Thus, as a queer viewer in the shadow of the Production Code era and the history of queer invisibility, it is easy to expect the worst when watching films with queer characters. I believe the lived experience of queerness will colour the haptic engagement you feel with Mickaël in *Tomboy*. The film is haptically engaging because you expect there to be discomfort and pain, and so your body tenses up and prepares for Mickaël to be exposed, shunned, or otherwise mistreated. The memories of queer discomfort are constantly brought to the forefront of the viewer's mind as Mickaël moves between inside and outside, between a life as Laure and a life as Mickaël. The feeling is particularly prominent during the swimming scene which I analyse in this part of the thesis, because the audience has seen the care Mickaël has taken to pass as a boy, but as an adult you know that his plan has many pitfalls. When he swims, you keep expecting the clay phallus to slip out, to dissolve into green goop in the water, or to stain the front of his swim trunks and expose him. Especially when the scene gets quite physical you expect the worst to happen. He gets knocked around and he wrestles the other kids, but nothing bad happens. Because queerness on screen is often defined by

shame, tragedy, and discomfort, the joy you feel when Mickaël's plan works and he is victorious, is tenfold what it would otherwise be.

4.2.4.2. Preparing to Pass – Shaping an Identity Out of Clay. In an interview included on the DVD version of Sciamma's *Tomboy*, the director explains that filming childhood is about trying to capture something which is disappearing: "It's the final moment, the moment when her body will still allow her to do that – and so the film has a physical dynamic – not in the narrative which unfolds, but in the question of 'What body do I have?'" (Sciamma, 2011). [4] The film's movement reflects this urgency to capture what is slowly developing into something brand new. The haptic elements are intimately interwoven with the film's theme of identity and the sort of exploration only possible when you are a kid, and Mickaël's body is particularly important in the scene I want to analyse in this part of the thesis because it initially raises questions of passing as a boy and causes some trouble, but in the end, it experiences a victory and the acceptance from the other kids that he desperately craves.

Mickaël has been invited to swim with some of the local kids, but before he can join them, he needs to figure out how to convincingly pass as a boy in a new environment. And so, motif of the swimsuit is one that also occurs not only in *Water Lilies*, but in a pivotal scene in *Tomboy*. Again, swimsuits are small, cold, and revealing, and so using it to show that vulnerability is very effective. Swimsuits reveal what is underneath the body's only shield from the outside world.

To keep his secret, Mickaël finds a bright red one-piece girl's bathing suit in one of the many boxes yet to be unpack in the family's home. The discomfort is immediately palpable both for Mickaël and for the audience. Mickaël removes the top half of the bathing suit to create himself a new pair of swim trunks that will go with his new social identity. Cutting and reshaping the old bathing suit is an act of defiance, and he is quite literally cutting ties to his old personality and to the girl he left behind when the family moved. The new swimming trunks with their uneven, jagged edges become symbolic of his new self, which is also uneven, self-made, and even made from something that once was very different. He tries it on in the mirror, but it is obvious that he is bothered by the flatness of the swim trunks. Even without words, Mickaël's thoughts are obvious to an adult viewer. In the next scene, we see him joining his little sister, who is doing a puzzle at the dinner table. He has a large box

[4] Sciamma is referring to Mickaël here, but she consistently uses she/her pronouns throughout this entire interview included on the DVD version of *Tomboy*.

filled with toys, and he pulls out a small jar of plasticine clay. It is obvious that he has found a way to remedy the flat appearance of his genitals in the swim trunks.

Mickaël shapes his own phallus out of plasticine clay, and it is immediately reminiscent of the haptically induced memories of childhood I have presented earlier in the text. I used an example from Barker's *The Tactile Eye* (2009) where she explains how textures can conjure up memories of the past, and that the 1995 film *Toy Story* (Lasseter) does this when recreating the plastic feel of old toys through computer generated animation. Barker also argued that the narrative, haptic elements of a film "… encourages us to indulge our delight in textures and surfaces" and with "… the stuff of life" (Barker, 2009, p. 45). One can assume that most viewers will have played with Play-Doh or some kind of modelling clay in their childhood. It has a very specific feel when you roll it in your hands and when you squeeze it through molds to make long strands of plasticine spaghetti. Additionally, it has kind of an infamous smell to it that can take people belonging to a specific part of the population back in time.

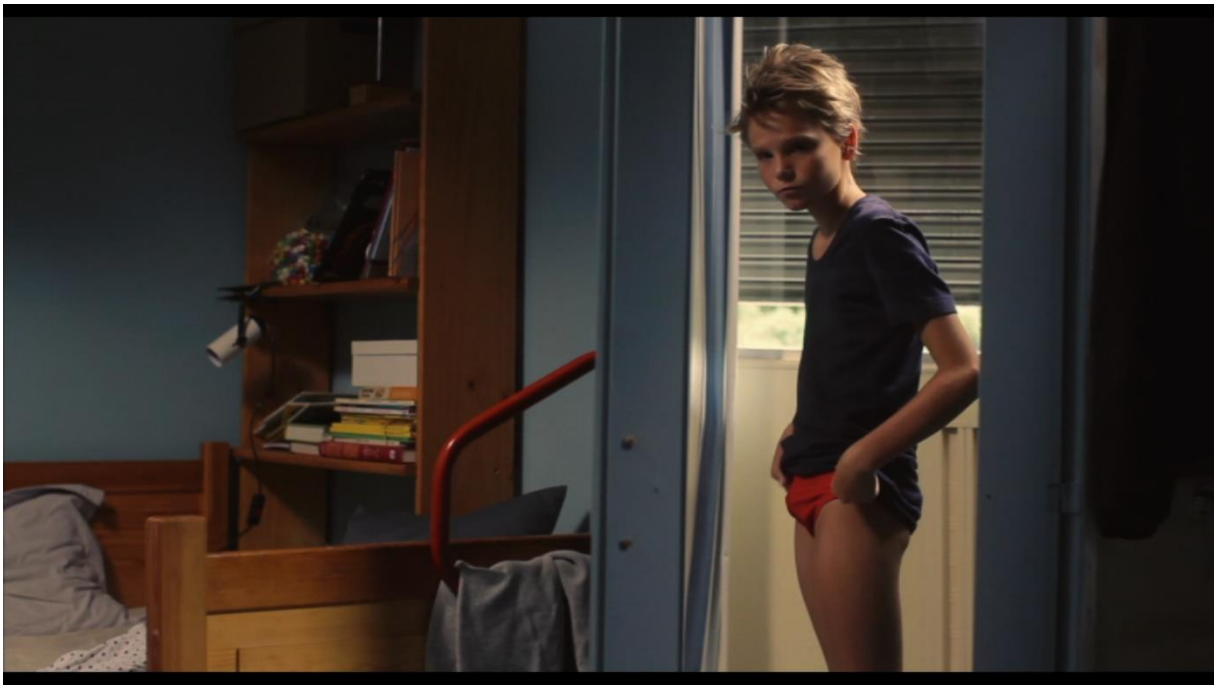

Image 9: Mickaël examines his plasticine phallus in the mirror.

The tactile memories can conjure up memories of queerness in childhood for audience members because Mickaël's identity is externalised through the act of playing and shaping the dough. When watching Mickaël shape a ball of clay first into a long snake, then slowly shaping it into a small, green packer it is reminiscent of childhood play, after school programs, and of days spent making small sculptures out of brightly coloured clay that slowly

turns that familiar brownish, grey colour that you get when they all unavoidably mix. What is extra interesting about this scene and its haptic, memory-conjuring abilities is that while it does conjure up images of childhood, it also is an important part of Mickaël's journey to discovering and expressing his identity. The queerness in the moment comes from the obvious question Mickaël struggles to answer as he sits at his own dining table with his sister fashioning himself a new set of genitals to go with his identity. The phallus itself is symbolic of the struggles queer people go through to become who they are, but it is the act of showing its creation that I argue is an example of queer, haptics within the scene. The scene is quite intimate with numerous close-ups of Mickaël's hands and face as he forms the clay in his hands. He has dirt underneath his nails, very evocative of the outdoor play that governs his everyday life. There is a strong haptic connection to the audience in this scene. It does what Sciamma intended and evokes feelings of childhood while simultaneously allowing the audience to *feel* Mickaël's identity in our hands.

After finishing his craft session, Mickaël goes to his room to try on the new swim trunks. He fits the plasticine penis and examines himself in the mirror (Image 9). Mirrors are important and well-used plot devices because they obscure and confuse our vision. It allows us to gain different perspectives, and they change the direction of our vision. The whole point of mirrors is to allow us to look back at ourselves, so they are often used to signify characters looking to ponder their own existence, for example. It allows the viewer to *see* characters' introspection by use of a physical prop. It additionally places us in the position of the character because we are allowed to fully see what they see. Mickaël often poses and examines himself in mirrors through the film. He flexes his arms and spits quite aggressively into the sink and takes his shirt off to make sure his upper body will allow him to physically pass as a boy. The mirror becomes a link between Laure and Mickaël because it allows for him to practice the gestures he perceives as male. It is similarly a link between the viewer and the character, because it allows us insight into Mickaël's understanding of gender and what makes a boy in his mind. He watches the boys around him, practises their actions and gesticulations, and then performs them later. It is a great reminder that gender is a performance, and it has spectators. The complexities of social gender identity might be lost on Mickaël, but the viewer knows because Mickaël consistently concentrates on mimicking the physical traits and actions of the boys around him. And for a child, that is more than enough, and so it is enough for the viewer as well. Our engagement with Mickaël is tied to the idea

that he simply needs to physically pass; he needs to be shirtless, he needs to have short hair, the outline of a penis, spit, and he needs to be strong and fast.

In another scene in *Tomboy*, his sister is cutting his hair short for him, and he fashions himself a moustache out of the cut hair, and in this final mirror scene, he shifts his body back and forth to look at his creation from every single angle. The mirror scenes are good tools for introspection and understanding the internal aspects of Mickaël's gender journey, but they are additionally effective inducers of texture. We see Mickaël connecting with his own body, touching it, feeling his way into a new identity. There are examples of this kind of using physical touch and texture to try and understand you own emotions in *Water Lilies* as well. Mickaël fashions himself a penis to confirm his identity and then examines his creation in a mirror, while Marie engages in other activities like picking through Floriane's rubbish to understand and concretise her feelings. Both Marie and Mickaël engage in haptic rituals to better understand themselves, and through them, we engage in those same rituals. The effort Mickaël exhorts to pass is emblematic of the film's affect. The care with which Mickaël shapes his identity and presents it to the world is lived by the audience and the viewer goes into the swimming scene that follows with the same feelings of anxiety, exhilaration, and joy that Mickaël feels when he looks at his creation in the mirror.

4.2.4.3. Wet Behind the Ears – Mickaël's First Victory. For Mickaël, the water similarly evokes feelings of a desire to fit in. Mickaël is a younger child. His main goal is to fit in with the boys in his neighbourhood, and while Marie's main concern is being liked by Floriane, *Water Lilies* also deals with the broader perspective of societal norms and expectations of young women. *Tomboy* refrains from including the societal norms placed on young children to conform, and it makes sense given the young age of the main character. The world of children is in many ways very limited. They rarely travel large distances, and they almost never meet people outside their immediate circle of family and friends, especially during the summer vacation when the story takes place. This is seemingly vital when it comes to my understanding of Sara Ahmed when she says that: "… disorientation is an ordinary feeling" (2006, p. 157). Her argument is that moments of disorientation are very common, and they can occur many times within the span of a day particularly when you are concentrating, like for example when Mickaël plays football with his friends or as he swims. His concentration is wholly within the game and the pitch is his entire world, like Ahmed says: "What is before you becomes the world" (p. 157). Until he is ripped from that "…dimension" (p. 158) when the other boys go to pee, and Mickaël is reminded, suddenly, that he is not like

them. Children are, to a larger extent than adults, present in themselves and not too bothered by the outside world and perhaps they are thus more susceptible to these kids of small, everyday disorienting moments. Marie is just crossing the threshold between childhood and adulthood and is finding the bridge difficult to cross. Mickaël on the other hand is trying to figure out for himself who he wants to be, regardless of how the world wants him to be. The swimming scene is a crucial part of his journey inhabit his boy-ness.

The water plays a massive role in *Tomboy* despite only being the setting for one of many scenes where Mickaël's identity is put to the test. The neighbourhood kids invite him to join them for a day of swimming at the lake, and he is initially hesitant to join them because of the ever-present fear of being found out. The intimacy of undressing is as evident here as it is in *Water Lilies.* Being physically exposed in the way nakedness exposes you is terrifying. The swimming scene in *Tomboy* is different to the ones in *Water Lilies* despite the water and water adjacent activities being intimately tied to the main characters' search for their newly established and discovered identities in much the same way. Mickaël and his friends swim in a lake, a far cry from the public, institutional, chlorine-smelling, moist tiles that surround Marie. The different aquatic environments have very different corporeal expressions on the audience. The swimming pool exemplifies everything that Marie is not because she is not synchronised with the other girls there. She is set apart and othered at the pool, and the water becomes symbolic of everything she "lacks" because she is struggling with her queer identity. There is a strong sense of belonging in the swimming scene in *Tomboy*. Mickaël is not othered or set apart from the neighbourhood kids. As they swim together out to a floating dock, he is indistinguishable from the others. There is a strong sense of belonging. However, I argue that water still plays a significant role in creating queer moments of deviation from the cis-heteronormative while simultaneously establishing Mickaël's feelings of belonging. Additionally, it plays with the audience's constant fear that he will be revealed.

When the kids are out swimming, the camera is quite close to the children. It catches the glaring sun reflecting off the kids' skin every time they exit the water and sit down on the dock. It looks warm until you see Mickaël on the floating dock shivering and holding his knees. He is smiling through it though, so maybe the wind just picked up for a second? To begin with, there are very few shots of all the children on the floating dock at the same time. They all seem to blend into this huddled mass of children alternating between swimming around, jumping off the dock, and watching the others. The children are this indistinguishable unit of people, Mickaël included. There are no expectations of children on summer holiday,

and the beginning of this scene is reminiscent of that fact. But then, there is a shift in the scene. Not as much in the general mood of the scene - they are still children during summer having a very good time, laughing, playing, and smiling.

The shot is suddenly wider as we see Mickaël, Lisa, and another child standing up on the dock as the rest of the children watch them. Mickaël and the other boy wrestle on the dock, both trying to push the other one off. The children have gone from simply jumping off to play fighting, and it is a perfect opportunity for Mickaël to prove himself to the group. Mickaël loses the first fight it seems. He gets kicked off the dock but saves himself from falling completely into the water, but not without slipping awkwardly. It honestly looks quite painful, but he keeps his cool and pulls himself onto the slippery, black, plasticky dock. The others are egging him on asking if he is going to get his revenge and challenge the kid to a rematch, which Mickaël does.

The rematch is a return to the cinematography of the beginning, closer and concerned with the details of the children rather than the action of the fight. There is noticeable attention given to the float itself. Its black, slippery, but texturized surface looks cold and wet, though most likely its surface retains heat well in the sun. It is a physical platform for Mickaël to prove himself. And just as you would expect, proving yourself to your peers is no easy feat, even on land. While on the water, he is literally on shaky ground as he fights to maintain his standing with the other kids. To an audience, the scene is clearly a test of manhood for a queer kid whose identity is always at stake and always subject to his own questioning. The constantly moving camera in the scene is disorienting, and it is not always clear which of the kids is involved in the wrestling. The whole situation is chaotic, but then again, so is questioning your own identity. Mickaël wins the wrestle and raises his arms triumphantly in the air. In a wide shot of the entire dock, floating on the lake, Mickaël seems larger than life and incredibly proud and pleased with himself (Image 10). He has proven himself worthy.

Image 10: Mickaël, in his red swim trunks, throwing his arms up triumphantly.

But then, there is a rather abrupt shift in the body language of Mickaël as the shot goes from his triumph to him standing, arms dangling by his side, next to a cross-armed Lisa (Image 11). He breathes heavily, visibly drained from the tussle. Despite his previous victory, Mickaël now looks rather defeated. His entire body shivers, and his lip quivers. It almost seems as if he is not just shivering because he is cold, but because he is about to start crying. Maybe he is relieved after his victory? Or maybe he feels sad that his belonging now is not a thing that can last? Like Sciamma mentions, Mickaël's body is at the very final stage where he can quite easily present as a boy without altering his body. His body still looks like that of the others because it is a child's body. He is stronger than the other boys, even taller than many of them. But that will soon change. Maybe Mickaël knows this, as he stands shivering on the floating dock under the summer sun. Or perhaps he is nervous because Lisa is there? The shivering in the scene is a bodily expression of internal emotion, and it is felt by the viewer. The shivers are reminiscent of nervousness as well as coldness. There is no way to decipher why he is shivering, but it does make an impression on the viewer. The following scene depicts his first kiss with Lisa. Like with Marie, the presence and closeness of his crush stops him shaking. Lisa and Floriane provide warmth, both physically and emotionally for the main characters. As a member of the audience, seeing the characters shiver easily induce feelings of cold and nervousness, and in my case, imagining coldness gives me actual goosebumps.

The swimming scene is a stark contrast to the previous scene where Mickaël is examining himself in the mirror. *Tomboy* is full of these pairs of scenes where one establishes him as part of a larger group, as Mickaël fitting in and being part of the crowd, and the other firmly reinforces the loneliness, isolation, and introspection he is experiencing. Scenes of isolation are often sandwiched between scenes of belonging and play, and it is effective in creating a feeling of isolation in the viewer. It feels like being on a rollercoaster - the twists and turns of being Mickaël. The moments are also distinctly queer in nature because they put to the forefront of the viewers how fluid, weak, and easily challenged the normative masculine ideals of a cis-heteronormative society are. In one moment, Mickaël is every bit as much a boy as the others. He is a good footballer, he is shirtless, and he spits in one scene, but the second the kids go to pee, his identity is not so easily performed simply because he has different sexual organs.

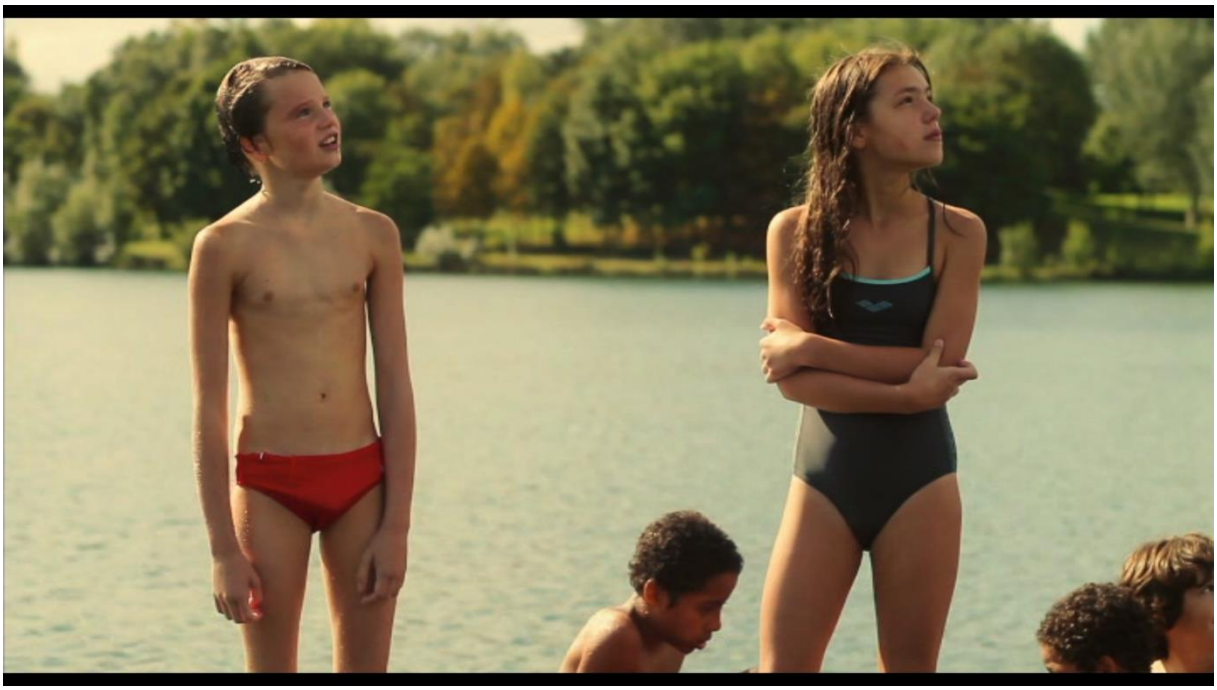

Image 11: Mickaël and Lisa stand together on the dock after Mickaël's victory.

4.2.4.4. Sounds of Childhood. The soundscape of *Tomboy* shares similarities with that of *Water Lilies*. Both films favour natural sounds rather than a heavy soundtrack. In *Tomboy*, the sound works in cooperation with the natural feel of the cinematography to mirror the feeling of a childhood summer, and so in short, the sound in *Tomboy* is driven by its setting. The idea of play is essential to the story and to Mickaël's search for his identity. Unlike in *Water Lilies*, however, there is no sound that I would argue is as deafening and overwhelming as the sounds of the pool, the sheets, or the breathing. The atmospheric sounds

present in *Tomboy* are considerably calmer and lower in volume, which evokes entirely different feelings of haptic engagement. There is a noticeable lack of non-diegetic music throughout the entire film, and it thus relies on the natural sounds of Mickaël's everyday life. When he drives the car with his father, their dialogue is almost drowned out by the sound of the car. When the family enjoys their first dinner in their new home, the sound of the cutlery is a prominent feature in the scene as they eat. As a viewer, you are engulfed in the sounds of the mundane and the ordinary. Mickaël's world is very much reflected in the sounds of *Tomboy*.

The sound in *Tomboy* functions as a tool to establish Mickaël's position in the world and within his family, but it is also a tool to pull the viewer into a state of childhood. While both *Water Lilies* and *Tomboy* are films featuring child protagonists, the films' main demographic is adults. And so, a vital element of the viewer engagement is to allow adults to return to a child's state of existence. *Tomboy* does this partly through its use of haptic sounds. It does this by separating the sounds of Mickaël from the sounds of the adults in the film. For example, in the film's very first scene, as Mickaël stands in the seat of a car sticking his head out the sunroof, there is very little sound. You would expect there to be sounds of the car's engine, the tires rolling on the asphalt, or maybe some sounds from the radio. But there is relative silence save the sounds of a bird chirping. And there is a sense of warm summer air flowing through hair as the car drives.

This kind of concealment and obscuring of the sounds of the adult world is prominent throughout the film, as the intimacy presented by the cinematography allows us to always remain closely related to Mickaël. The same is true for the swimming scene. The sounds of the lake and of the children is all you can hear. There is nothing else but the kids - they might as well be the only people on earth. There is no way of separating the sounds of the struggling kids, the water splashing, and the cheers and comments from the other children. The sound surrounds us and fully includes us in Mickaël's inclusion to the group. I argue that this is an example of a kind of denaturisation of the naturally occurring sounds in their world. The sounds of Mickaël's everyday life are so loud that they can be said to "…dismantle our reliance on the verbal or the linguistic to ground our understanding of what is happening in the narrative, and instead encourages (or rather insists upon) an embodied, phenomenological, engagement with the scene" (Lovatt, 2013, p. 62). What are supposed to be natural elements of the film's universe, become unnatural because they force the viewer to abandon the sense of sight, which is naturally how we receive most of our information about our surroundings,

and instead it forces us to listen. Combined with the at times very intimate camera, the swimming scene is a wholly immersive sensory experience of how queer anxiety can become pure joy and victory.

4.2.4.5. Conclusion. To conclude this discussion of swimming as an inducer of queer, haptic feeling. There is a rather famous speech from the 2002 film *Catch Me If You Can* (Spielberg). The main character's father is giving a speech to his Rotary Club about perseverance. He tells the story of two mice drowning in a bucket of cream. One mouse gives up immediately and dies. The other mouse keeps fighting and swimming until it has churned the cream into butter, and he walks out. Queerness is often presented as a struggle and an obstacle to be overcome. I think Mickaël had the potential to end up as both the mice in that story, but in this scene, he churned that cream into butter. He was thrown into deep water (or cream), and he had no choice but to swim or sink. His identity was on the line, and he could have been exposed, but he was not. Just like the cream in that story represents opposition and difficulty, water is an essential part of the narrative in *Tomboy* and an essential inducer of haptic engagement with the characters. Queer, haptic cinema can be used to show joy and victory just like it showed shame and discomfort in *Water Lilies*, because the approach is distanced from the restraints of gendered, psychoanalytic approaches that look simply at pleasure.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

My refusal to accept that filmic experience is a bigendered one led me on the path to explore an alternative avenue of queer film. In traditional queer fashion, and with a hope of distancing the thesis from the abundance of film research grounded in theories concerning vision, I ended up delving into theoretical accounts written as counters to the psychoanalytic and cognitive research that was popular during most of the 20th century and that remains popular to this day. Film experience is not merely a visual experience. Humans are haptically inclined. We want to touch and feel the world presented to us, and this yearning to experience the world with all our senses at the same time is activated when in the audience of a film, as well. Our senses always work in cooperation, never isolated, and film has the unique quality of being able to produce and encourage multisensory experiences in the audience.

This thesis is both an introduction to a somewhat, in my brief experience with film studies, undervalued theoretical branch, and a deep dive into the forced heteronormative, murky waters of young, queer representation in contemporary cinema. My attempt to concretise and utilise the tools afforded to me by Sobchack, Marks, and Barker resulted in a thesis that explores queer moments in two Parisian suburbs in the 21st-century and investigates how those queer moments are shared with the films' audience. I have shown that numerous cinematic elements like cinematography, mise-en-scène, sound, and narrative structures have haptic qualities, and that they can be inducers of feelings of disorientation as described by Sara Ahmed's queer phenomenology. Moments of disorientation are fundamentally queer-coded, and they engage the audience in a way that transcends optical visuality and allows us to feel the lived-body experiences of the queer characters on screen.

The final scene in *Tomboy* shows Mickaël reintroducing himself to Lisa. Mirroring when they first met, Lisa asks his name, but this time instead of responding with his chosen name, Mickaël sighs and answers: "Je m'appelle Laure." According to Sciamma, this ending is not a definite one. It is meant to be hopeful and be yet another fresh start for the character. Mickaël gets to start over with Lisa, one experience richer after the affairs of the summer. I disagree, strongly. The entire film and its haptic elements have given the audience a corporeal door into Mickaël's queer body. The joy he feels when he passes and expresses his boy-ness mixed with the deep discomfort and pain he feels when he is exposed leaves very little room to believe Sciamma's claim that this is simply a tomboy; the gender euphoria is experienced by the viewer as well as by Mickaël all throughout the film. The haptic elements of the film establish the character as a genderqueer person and considering the mother's reaction to

finding out about his secret, the ending feels anything but hopeful. Mickaël has been forced to apologise to his friends and Lisa has expressed disgust after finding out Mickaël is not who he claimed. Combined the final images of *Tomboy* feel like being kicked hard in the chest and falling backwards into a closet you have tried to leave. As Mickaël backtracks and names himself "Laure" once again, Sciamma's intentions to show a hopeful, new beginning are bulldozed by all the preceding haptic imagery. The same can be said for *Water Lilies*, where Sciamma intended the intimate scenes to be distanced from the traditional male gaze and from Hollywood's standards for sex, but instead ended up with intimate scenes that make queer sex out to be a shameful act that needs to be hidden.

The ending of *Tomboy* does not read the way Sciamma intended, and I argue that this describes the most fruitful use for haptic visuality in queer cinema. I believe haptic cinema can help the audience see past the intentions of the auteur, and instead be corporeally connected to the action on screen. Additionally, experience-based understandings of film can account for the many different readings of films such as *Water Lilies* and *Tomboy*. Phenomenology is an approach to cinema that can more accurately describe the wide range of individual perceptions of film and other art forms. Art can never be entirely objective, and perhaps our scientific approach to art should not be either. Sciamma intended her film to be a story about a tomboy, but the haptic elements of the film tell a very different story. I believe haptic visuality can create meaning in an entirely different way than optical visuality, and it is a field of research that is often overlooked and described as being unscientific. In this thesis, I have shown that it is far from unscientific, in fact, it shows hidden meanings and expose auteuric intentions to an audience by way of multisensory cinema.

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