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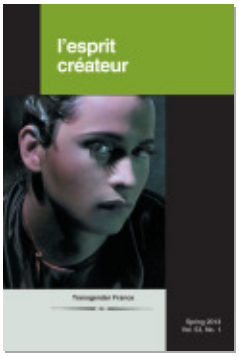

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AS ITS TITLE INDICATES, *Tomboy* (2011), Céline Sciamma's critically acclaimed second full-length feature, centers on gender nonconformity in a young girl.[1] However, *Tomboy* is as concerned with the experiences of a girl who passes as a boy as with those of 'boyish' girls. It recounts a significant moment in the life of ten-year-old Laure (Zoé Héran) who attempts to pass as Michaël among the friends she makes in her new neighborhood.[2] Historically controversial because it threatens to disclose the failures of biological determinism, the figure of the gender nonconformist child is a relatively recent addition to the identities portrayed within visual culture. The most famous French language filmic representation of a child who does not identify with their prescribed gender remains *Ma vie en rose* (Alain Berliner, 1997), which shows the experiences of Ludovic (Georges du Fresne), a seven-year-old boy who wants to be a girl. Stylistically, *Tomboy* could barely be further removed from *Ma vie en rose*, with its incandescent primary colors and forays into Ludo's fantasy world of Pam, his fictional television heroine. In her version on a similar theme, Sciamma adopts a naturalistic approach and sets her nonconformist protagonist firmly within the material reality of her lived existence. As such, *Tomboy* removes the cushion of camp parody that Berliner offered his audience to soften the blow of the suburban intolerance he depicted.

This article probes how, through its style and content, *Tomboy* departs from hyperbole and theatricalisation as modes of (re)presenting gender nonconformity in visual culture. Despite its passing narrative, *Tomboy* is not preoccupied with 'putting on a gender' because Laure's behavior obtains a permanence and sense of authenticity, which she then reaffirms so that she can be taken for a boy by her new friends. This is not to argue that *Tomboy* constructs Laure's gender as innate. On the contrary, as will be shown, the film reveals the conditionality of all gendering by highlighting the performative strategies undertaken by boys to comply with compulsory masculinity. *Tomboy* underlines the problem of aligning anatomy with performance by focusing on the body as the site of discontinuity between sex and gender. As I will argue, it privileges a construction of gendered identity that is akin to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological conceptualization of embodied

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subjectivity.[3] Such a representation of the self and the world as they are experienced through the body is amplified by the film's form, which inscribes the spectator as an anonymous participant in the children's community. By way of outlining the social, political, and cultural contexts, the article begins by considering the increasing interest in gender nonconformity in children in Western public discourse and visual culture since the turn of the century.

Waking up to "sideways growth": gender nonconformity in children in public discourse and visual culture

The subject of gender nonconformity in children is a prominent concern in public discourse, particularly in the United States.[4] Much has been written by parents of transgender and/or 'gender fluid' children and published on the web, thereby revealing the importance of the Internet in providing a forum for articulating and transmitting alternative narratives of child development and rearing. Parents whose children do not identify with their prescribed gender have acquired a stronger voice, while the experiences of their offspring have received greater exposure. Such testimonies convey the frustration of many parents at a broader inability to accommodate the forms of self-identification claimed by their children. These accounts reveal the paradox of democratic societies that found themselves on the principle of freedom of expression, but in which gender nonconformity is actively discouraged, even vilified. A number of documentaries have depicted these issues on the big and small screens. On October 19, 2009, UK terrestrial Channel 4 showed an episode of its *Bodyshock* series that featured an eight-year-old American Josie, who had been born a boy, but who had been living as a girl for two years. US broadcaster ABC aired a similar story, entitled *My Extraordinary Family*, on August 31, 2011, about Jackie, who had also been born a boy, but who informed his parents, John and Jennifer, that he wanted to be a girl one week after his tenth birthday.[5] This program reveals that, in parts of the United States, treatment is available for transgender children. Since her parents' acceptance and with the aid of therapy, Jackie has transitioned from a withdrawn 'boy' to an ebullient girl. Dr. Johanna Olson, who manages the transgender youth clinic at Children's Hospital Los Angeles, urges early intervention to avoid depression and, in some cases, suicide.[6]

The ABC film prompted commentary in the *Société* pages of French weekly *Le Point* published on September 16, 2011.[7] The article argues that France lags behind the United States, Canada, and the Netherlands in its provision of treatment and support for transgender children. In the article, psychologist Françoise Sironi criticizes the lack of agencies that deal specifically

with the experiences of children who do not identify with their prescribed gender. In the absence of specialist help, visual culture provides a useful source for accounts of gender nonconformity. Documentaries are beginning to broach the subject of how children are gendered through cultural practices, such as the manufacture of toys that perpetuate the hegemonic gender binary (*Pêche mon petit poney*, Thomas Riera, 2011). As for *Ma vie en rose*, its durability as a seminal representation of a transgender child is evidenced in an article published in *Le Monde* on October 16, 2012, in which Chloé, married with three children, evokes the film to speak about her transsexuality.[8]

Most of the web blogs, documentaries, and fictional films mentioned focus on gender nonconformity in boys; narratives about girls who do not identify as feminine make a rare showing. *Ma vie en rose* includes a 'tomboy' character in Christine Delavigne (Raphaëlle Santini), Ludovic's new neighbor, but she appears only in the final scenes. Such a preoccupation with boys is noted in an article published on the *New York Times* website on August 8, 2012, about Alex, a 'gender fluid' child. The piece, which is concerned with boys who identify with typically feminine and masculine attributes, ascribes the absence of accounts of 'gender fluid' girls to the fact that "departures from traditional femininity are so pervasive and accepted" (Padawer 2012).[9] Such a view mirrors a broad perception expressed by Berliner after the release of his film: "un garçon qui pense être une petite fille, ça remue une peur assez profonde chez les hommes de ne pas être à la hauteur d'une image, celle de la virilité."[10] The persistence of this belief is reflected in comments made by Sciamma following the release of *Tomboy*. Claiming that her film depicts "une situation exceptionnelle d'une petite fille qui se fait passer pour un petit garçon," she affirms that *Tomboy* reveals the pressures boys endure to prove their masculinity.[11] Even when a film addresses gender nonconformity in girls, then, it is the gendering of boys that is viewed as pressing. Her comments are surprising given that, as she reveals, her film is informed by personal familiarity with some of Laure's experiences.[12]

The various contributors to the blogs and documentaries portray and defend ways of growing that differ from the traditional narrative of child development. Dr. Olson's clinic and John and Jennifer arrest forward growth by prescribing and administering medication that defers puberty. While the actions of parents and doctor may result in their child's eventual conformity with the traditional gender binary, they are nonetheless fostering alternative ways of growing. The parents discussed in the *New York Times* article specifically encourage modes of development that withstand the established dichotomy. Such stories exemplify what Kathryn Bond Stockton has coined

in her work on the queer child as "sideways growth": "the child who by reigning cultural definitions can't 'grow up' grows to the side of cultural ideals."[13] Stockton notes that "we are in a time that does not officially recognize children as growing sideways instead of up" (16). In Stockton's book, sideways growth is often understood retrospectively. By contrast, the child who evolves on the margins of hegemonic gender definitions in the examples cited above lives and is encountered in the present. Similarly, Laure's gender nonconformity in *Tomboy* also unfolds in the present. We see how she portrays herself as Michaël and participates in her environment as it is materially and socially constituted, and in accordance with her identifications. Such temporal immediacy is reinforced by the immanence of the cinematography, which intensifies the exigency of the gender issues at stake.

The world through the body and the body through the world: situating gender nonconformity

In an interview following the film's release, Sciamma reveals her concern with and emphasis on embodiment and self-other relations in her approach to representing gender nonconformity: "j'essaie beaucoup de faire des films [...] de personnages habités par quelque chose et qui ont une relation entre eux et de pousser à bout ces relations-là." Her first feature, *La Naissance des pieuvres* (2007), locates this gender nonconformity in adolescent females, whereas *Tomboy* figures it firmly within the body of a pre-pubescent girl. For Sciamma, the issue at the heart of the film is "'comment je joue à être le corps d'un garçon?'"; she adds, "le corps c'est les limites [et] l'objet du film" (2011).

Dissimulation, discovery, and confrontation structure *Tomboy*, which replays the familiar narrative of passing. The film opens with scenes of Laure and her family—her father (Mathieu Demy), pregnant mother (Sophie Cattani), and younger sister Jeanne (Malonn Lévana)—as they move into their new apartment in the Seine-et-Marne department a few weeks before the end of the summer holiday. The day after her arrival, Laure ventures out and, when she meets a local girl named Lisa (Jeanne Disson), introduces herself as Michaël. Nothing contradicts Laure's self-construction as a boy: she has short hair and a dimpled chin, walks with a swagger, wears a grey t-shirt, shorts, and trainers. Yet, a few moments of reel-time later, Laure's anatomy is revealed as female when she stands up naked in the bath. She continues to perform activities and gestures associated with young boys: she plays football, spits, fights, and, more audaciously, inserts a prosthetic penis made of green modeling clay into trunks that she has formed from her swimsuit. Suspense is steadily interwoven into an otherwise seemingly ethnographic series of representations of

self-other relations. The spiral descent towards revelation and humiliation is triggered when Jeanne discovers Laure's secret. Laure assaults a boy for pushing Jeanne over. The boy's mother complains to Laure's mother about her violent behavior, referring to Laure in the masculine, which the boy confirms using her assumed name Michaël. The complaint exposes Laure's lie and, as a punishment, Laure's mother makes her wear a dress and drags her to the boy's apartment to apologise and to Lisa's home to reveal that she is actually a girl. The boys round Laure up and force Lisa to confirm her anatomical sex. *Tomboy* ends ambiguously. When Laure spots Lisa outside her apartment, she descends and, when asked her name, replies "je m'appelle Laure" and smiles.

Given that *Tomboy* figures the gender nonconformist child as an embodied subject defined by her relations to the outside world, corporeal phenomenology proves a fruitful theoretical framework for analyzing the film. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty reveals, it is through our bodies that we experience the world, and it is through our embodied experience of the world that we find ourselves: "nous sommes au monde par notre corps [...]. Mais en reprenant ainsi contact avec le corps et avec le monde, c'est aussi nous-même que nous allons retrouver."[14] In her work on corporeal feminism, Elizabeth Grosz takes up this position, arguing that the body constitutes "the condition and context through which I am able to have a relation to objects."[15] In his adoption of phenomenology in trans studies, Henry S. Rubin acknowledges his debt to Grosz, while critiquing her essentialist interpretation of transsexual embodiment.[16] For Rubin, in phenomenology "essences are always already constituted in relation to embodied subjectivity, hence they are unnatural and malleable" (267).

The construction of the body as the medium through which we relate to and understand external objects and ourselves is sutured within the film's form. *Tomboy* constantly places us at the height of a child's gaze. A predominance of close-ups and medium shots maintains us in proximity to the child characters. Often, we see only their waists, framed from the knees up and chest down, or their legs or torsos. Sciamma rejected hand-held filming techniques for a fixed Canon 7D camera and pre-set the frames because she sought a stable aesthetic (2011). The adults are mainly forced to bend down to enter the shot, and the image-track barely leaves the children. Laure features in almost every shot, centrally positioned as the camera tracks her actions and movements. We stay with Laure when her mother reveals her secret to the mothers of Lisa and the boy—the adult's discussion is heard only as a background murmur. Even on the rare occasions when the shot focuses on the adults, their conversation is difficult to hear, as evidenced in the early scene in which Laure and Jeanne eat their spaghetti dinner. Occasional cuts to

their parents interrupt the scene's primary focus, Laure's attempts to teach her younger sister how to suck spaghetti through her lips, and Jeanne's loud protestations obscure the adults' chat.

The camera often assumes an anthropomorphic quality, particularly during the second football match and when Laure attacks the boy who pushes Jeanne over. It functions like an anonymous child observer who scrutinizes Laure's behavior and its reception. Editing amplifies this implication of the spectator within the film as an unseen extra child. Sciamma reveals that she structured her film, which consists of only fifty sequences, by emulating the cadence of children: "j'avais envie de travailler sur une énergie qui était nouvelle pour moi, qui était un film beaucoup plus découpé, un film qui soit sur les pulsations de l'enfance" (2011). Rapid cutting followed by longer takes at the football pitch and on the floating platform in the lake replicate a child's oscillation between hyperactivity and rest.

Casting enhances the film's appropriation of an internal perspective with regards to the children's community. Only two professional adult actors feature: Cattani and Demy. Although reluctant to cast professional child actors, Sciamma nonetheless recruited Héran and Lévana from agencies because of a tight production schedule; she wrote the screenplay in three weeks and shot the film in twenty days. Initially concerned about whether she could find a young actress who would match the "troubling androgynous" figure she sought, she was relieved that Héran already boasted 'tomboy' qualities. Héran's impact on the production was significant, as Sciamma recalls: "une fois que j'ai trouvé Zoé, j'ai tout fait autour d'elle en réalité" (2011). Héran's real friends were recruited as extras to play all but one of the local children; Lisa was found through the process of *casting sauvage*. The Seine-et-Marne location is Héran's actual neighborhood. Through its actors and setting, then, Sciamma maximizes her film's projection of realism and authenticity. At times, reality appears to feed fiction. Sciamma occasionally filmed the children while they were engaged in natural play, in which she also participated (2011).

The naturalistic impression and sense of authenticity transmitted by Sciamma's immanent techniques conjure both documentary and social realist cinema. Recollections of Nicolas Philibert's *Être et avoir* (2002) are elicited. Jeanne's playing with the modeling clay evokes the little girl in the yellow sweatshirt who complains about a boy pinching her eraser. Moreover, the sequences of the children running around in a familiar location recall the films of Laurent Cantet, including *Ressources humaines* (1999) and *Entre les murs* (2008), which set their narratives in a real factory and an actual school. In fact,

like Sciamma, Cantet prefers to cast people who actually perform the roles he features. And yet, *Tomboy*'s aura of spontaneity is undercut by Sciamma's intentional filming techniques and frequent deployment of suspense to dramatize her narrative. She is always just beyond the frame instructing her actors how to perform. Despite her cast of mainly nonprofessional actors, Sciamma opted for a directive approach over improvisation: "je leur demande d'incarner [...] d'être dans les enjeux du personnage, dans la continuité du film, dans la pensée de ce qu'ils jouent sur l'instant" (2011).

The child community pre-exists Laure's arrival in her neighborhood, and she adopts strategies to integrate and participate within it. This pre-pubescent environment is constructed as strictly gendered. Lisa is excluded from playing football and, when she protests, a boy dismisses her "t'as qu'à faire la pom-pom girl." Color is deployed to reinforce the visual gendering of space: blues, greys, and reds are used in the costumes, which underline the predominantly masculine constitution of the group. The grey blue of the wall at the side of the football pitch is replicated in Laure's bedroom, characterizing public and intimate zones as masculine, which are juxtaposed with the luscious, natural greens of the forest and deep pink in Jeanne's bedroom. Gender identification is signified by color. Laure removes the pink strap attached to the bunch of keys her mother gives her and replaces it with a white lace.

Once her self-identification as Michaël is articulated, Laure perpetuates the belief that she is a boy through her corporeality and actions. As Merleau-Ponty claims, "le corps [...] est *notre point de vue sur le monde*, le lieu où l'esprit s'investit dans une certaine situation physique et historique."[17] Laure's embodied consciousness invests in the corporeal strategy of mimesis. She studies the boys' movements and practices them at home. In one scene, she is filmed from behind in the bathroom in a medium shot, framed from the waist up. Deep focus editing shows her reflection in the mirror. She contemplates herself, pulling up her grey vest to look at her torso, before removing the garment altogether. She pushes her left shoulder back with her right hand, prods her bicep muscles, and twists round to view her back. The silence of the scene is ruptured by audible sighs that belie her anxieties about not matching up to an ideal of masculinity. Body detritus is implied as an externalized sign of masculinity. She spits into the sink and gazes down at her saliva, which we do not see. Satisfaction is subtly suggested, as the beginnings of a smile emerge and a swagger is just discernible.

Such scenes reveal the performative strategies that children undergo to be seen to comply with their prescribed gender. As Judith Butler has famously argued, "gender is a kind of imitation [...] that produces the very notion of the

original as an *effect* and consequence of the imitation itself."[18] Butler is interested in "the normative conditions under which the materiality of the body is framed and formed, and, in particular, how it is formed through differential categories of sex."[19] The "norm of sex," according to Butler, "takes hold to the extent that it is 'cited' as such a norm, but it also derives its power through the citations that it compels" (13). For Butler, "the practice by which gendering occurs, the embodying of norms, is a compulsory practice, a forcible production, but not for that reason fully determining" (231).

By swaggering, spitting, playing football, and fighting, Laure implies that the outward signs of masculinity have no innate grounding in boys. The film takes the embodiment of masculinity further, boldly suggesting that the most potent signifier of virility, the phallus, can be inventively annexed in the form of Laure's carefully constructed prosthesis that she inserts into her newly adapted red trunks. When she contemplates her reflection in the wardrobe mirror, she scrutinizes her groin in both left and right profile. The sequence humorously transposes the familiar story of penis rivalry in boys. Yet it also reveals the lengths to which boys are prepared to go to be seen to comply, as amply as possible, with their prescribed gender identity. Shot composition underlines the seriousness of the scene's meanings. The mirror is initially filmed straight on, giving the impression that Laure's gaze reaches beyond the screen to confront the spectator directly with the absurdity of a system that sustains its naturalistic effects only through performance.

Sciamma's shift of emphasis in depictions of gender nonconformity to the body is most explicitly—and arguably disruptively—depicted in the bath scene. The brief shot of Laure as she stands naked confirms to the audience what is implied aurally as her mother calls out off-screen "Laure sors du bain." The bathroom scene recasts the moment, common to films about transgender or transvestite characters, in which their anatomical sex is revealed. As Judith Halberstam observes, "the exposure of a trans character [...] causes the audience to reorient themselves in relation to the film's past in order to read the film's present and prepare themselves for the film's future."[20] For Halberstam, "whenever the transgender character is seen to be transgendered, then he/she is both failing to pass and threatening to expose a rupture between the distinct temporal registers of past, present, and future" (77). The body, and particularly the sexual organ, becomes the site upon which the juxtaposition between the past reading of Laure's sex as a boy and the present understanding of her anatomy as a girl is played out. This quick shot, quite literally, strips the discontinuity between gender and sex back to its most fundamental corporeal signifier, recalling the boldness with which Sébastien Lifshitz opens

Wild Side (2004), with its fragmented close ups of Stéphanie's (Stéphanie Michelini) pre-operative transsexual body.

The overriding strength of *Tomboy* in undermining hegemonic conceptualizations of gender emerges from its lack of any signs of obvious theatricalisation of sexual identity. Laure's demystification of masculinity is so potent precisely because her appearance and behavior are represented as uncontrived and abiding. She is depicted as experiencing the world and living her body in ways that are typically masculine before she meets her new neighbors. There is barely any discernible difference between her physicality and gesturality from the opening sequence in which she stands up in her father's car, her torso sticking up through the sunroof, and when she passes as Michaël. The modifications to her gender performance that she practices in the bathroom are thus minor and comparable to those required of the boys of the neighborhood in order to comply with hegemonic masculinity. Moreover, she is shown to embody superior physical strength, overwhelming male children on two occasions—at the lake and when she fights the boy who pushed Jeanne. Laure's seemingly natural 'boyishness' is so convincing that the cultural markers of femininity when applied to her seem incongruous, even though we know that she is anatomically female. It appears odd when her mother refers to her using gendered nouns, tenderly calling her "ma chérie." Similarly, after Lisa applies make-up to her face, it seems as if her identity has been violated, *Tomboy* thus twisting the ploy of cross-dressing and its effects. The seamlessness of her embodiment of 'boyishness' is such that Jeanne declares to her new friend Cheyenne (Cheyenne Lainé) that she loves having an older brother. The boys' anger when they round Laure up attests to the cogency of her assumption of the conventional codes of masculinity. Their shock serves as a later inscription within the film of the spectator's elicited surprise at the bath scene. Laure thus confirms through her embodied performance that gender does not naturally derive from sex, and she projects this disruption of the established binary to the audience.

Towards self-determination: affirming gender nonconformity in the world

It could be argued that, in striving to be seen as a boy, Laure adheres to rather than defies the hegemonic division of gender. Yet *Tomboy* establishes a dialectic configuration of space between the domestic interior and communal exterior through which biological determinism is disrupted. Within the confines of the home, Laure is known to be a girl. Her behavior here is not received as a menace. Her father countenances alternative modes of being that

external institutions and dominant moralities inhibit and prohibit. If, as Butler suggests, the "naming of the 'girl' [...] initiates the process by which a certain 'girling' is compelled" (232), Laure's father, it seems, is not preoccupied with inculcating compulsory femininity in his daughter. He encourages her participation in typically masculine activities. He offers her a swig of beer and declares "vivement que tu peux jouer au poker." Unlike her mother, he refrains from gendering her as feminine through language, referring to her as "mon petit singe." Her mother is more ambivalent. While she welcomes the news that Laure has made a new female friend and appraises her as pretty when she wears make-up, it is mainly the fact that she has lied that triggers her anger when her secret is revealed. She is initially violent; she slaps Laure and drags her screaming out of the apartment in her dress. And yet, in the film's most significant monologue, she holds society's incessant desire to govern gender responsible for her daughter's disarray. The monologue comes as she takes Laure to Lisa's apartment. She tells her, "l'école c'est dans deux semaines, on n'a pas le choix [...] je ne fais pas ça pour te faire du mal ou pour te donner une leçon, je suis obligée [...] ça me dérange pas que tu joues au garçon, ça me fait même pas de la peine, mais ça peut pas continuer," before tenderly kissing her on the head. Laure's self-determination is thus thwarted by external regulations; she cannot continue to identify as Michaël—or indeed as anything but a girl in the outside world—because state institutions fix her gender. Such an impasse is used, within the film's deployment of suspense, as the ultimate means through which Laure's secret must be revealed. When Lisa tells Laure that she has not seen the name Michaël on the class list, we know that the protagonist's boyhood in the external world is doomed. By placing blame squarely on the shoulders of society, *Tomboy* underlines how that society straightjackets gender within two modes. Laure's mother articulates through the medium of a fictional film some of the real frustrations of parent bloggers and contributors to the documentaries mentioned above.

However, it could be argued that the film's thriller effects dilute its political message. The crosscutting to Lisa and the other children as they receive Laure's behavior shifts *Tomboy* from a critique of the hegemonic policing of gender to a dramatization of difference. Camerawork and editing combine to build suspense in the sequence at the second football match. The focus of the camera—and thus our gaze—moves from Laure to Lisa, from object to onlooker, which locates the success of Laure's gendered performance in her beholder. Given that Lisa has earlier described Laure as "pas comme les autres," the film implies, through its form, that she may harbor suspicions. Suspense is deliberately amplified in the continuation of the sequence. A

quick cut ensues from a series of shots showing Laure dribbling the ball past the boys and scoring a goal to a reverse shot of her, again in medium close up, as she contemplates the boys urinating in the grass. The rhythm of the sequence is abruptly slowed as we see an inert Laure anxiously looking on. The camera then follows her as she runs into the forest, but it remains at its original height as she crouches to urinate, the sound of her peeing clearly audible off-screen. Suspense climaxes when Laure hears a child shouting Michaël and spots a boy standing behind her. For an instant, neither she nor the spectator knows whether he realizes that she is female, but he simply mocks her for urinating on her shorts, using the masculine personal pronoun "il s'est pissé dessus." As one reviewer whose tone and comments are otherwise laudatory observes, "en tirant sur le suspense *Tomboy* perd un peu de l'audace qui le caractérisait."[21]

Such ambivalence appears amplified in the film's penultimate sequence showing the discovery of Laure's secret by the children and their confirmation of her anatomical sex. The composition and content of the scene recall a key moment from *Boys Don't Cry* (Kimberly Peirce, 1999) in which John Lotter (Peter Sarsgaard) and Tom Nissen (Brendan Sexton III) force Lana Tisdel (Chloë Sevigny) to pull down Brandon Teena's (Hilary Swank) pants to identify him as a woman. Laure is cornered, her back against a tree much like Brandon who is pressed against a wall. Like Lana, Lisa is called upon to verify the protagonist's sex. In *Boys Don't Cry*, as Halberstam notes, the transgender subject is "dependent upon the recognition of a woman" (89), who allows Brandon to remain a man in her eyes by refusing to look. Similarly, Lisa attempts to prevent the revelation of Laure's sex and opts for the masculine object pronoun, shouting "laisse-le." However, Lisa is made to comply with the lead boy's demands since she kissed Laure, which, he forces her to admit, is "dégueulasse." This moment signifies a brief triumph for the boy who, as the film subtly suggests through crosscutting editing at the first football match and at the lake, may be a rival for Lisa's affections.

The selection of Lisa as the character authorized to reveal and confirm Laure's sex heightens the ambiguity of the film's ending. Of all the children, including Laure, she is the most queerly constructed. She does not pretend to be a boy, but is represented as 'tomboyish.' Although she wears a denim skirt and black top with short puffy sleeves, she is assertive and hangs around with the boys. Lisa is also a narrative agent. It is her act of calling at Laure's apartment when she is not in that triggers the denouement. As mentioned, she recognizes Laure's difference early on; she eyes her up and down at the first football match and comments "t'es bien en fille" when she applies make-up. And

yet, she still seduces Laure, leading her into the forest and kissing her. This frank depiction of same-sex desire in children radically distinguishes *Tomboy* from *Ma vie en rose*, which restricts childhood sexuality to child's play; Ludovic tells his grandmother (Hélène Vincent) that he will marry Jérôme (Julien Rivière) when he grows up, and the two pretend to get married.

Sciamma structured the revelation scene along the same lines as the kiss. Lisa and Laure are filmed in a medium close-up, and both stare into each other's eyes. Although Lisa's look conveys her sense of betrayal, their exchange also implies the continuation of their affective connection. Lisa maintains her gaze at the level of Laure's eyes, and the sound of shorts being quickly yanked down can be heard before she peeks at a point below the frame, seemingly the location of Laure's naked pelvis. Lisa's punishment for her queer attraction does not prevent her from visiting Laure at the end of the film. In fact, Lisa's persistent attraction to Laure, irrespective of her sex, is confirmed in the sole line of the film's song, "I Love You Always." Such a perpetuation of their sentimental affinity is intensified in the continuation of the scene that was cut from the final version of the film; Laure moves closer to Lisa and both girls stare at each other and laugh.

Although Laure identifies herself with her given name at the end of the film, *Tomboy* refrains from depicting this self-identification as a return to conformity. For Sciamma, Laure's act of telling Lisa her true name is one of "affranchissement et [...] pas [...] un retour à la norme" (2011). Such a defiance of norms is triggered by the preceding scene in which Laure, her mother, and Jeanne coo over the newly-born male addition to the family. The stakes are explicit; now the family boasts a biological male child, Laure's function as a surrogate son for her father and as brother for her sister is threatened. Consequently, Laure must seek her identity out in the world, hence why she goes down to meet Lisa. The final exchange with Lisa suggests that, for the duration of that particular moment, Laure manages to surmount the challenges of her existence by identifying herself with her given name, without compromising her preferences in terms of appearance, behavior, and attractions.

At the beginning of *L'Être et le néant*, Jean-Paul Sartre claims that modern thought has realized considerable progress by rejecting the dualism between interiority and exteriority. For Sartre, "il n'y a plus d'extérieur de l'existant," while, the presupposed "véritable nature [...] n'éxiste pas non plus."[22] It is this phenomenological 'truth,' that the subject is the series of appearances through which it manifests itself, that *Tomboy* articulates. Laure behaves in ways that allow her to pass as masculine, and yet these codes and identifications are the extension of traits that already characterize her. By focusing on the present of

her experiences as they unfold and through the film's immediate camerawork, *Tomboy* brings the phenomenological situation of gender nonconformity in children into sharp relief. The ending denies its audience any lasting resolution. And herein lies a further strength. For *Tomboy* avoids falling into the trap of recuperating Laure's nonconformity. All we are left with—and it is substantial—is her determination to be who she desires to be, irrespective of how she is viewed externally.

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Notes

1. *Tomboy* received the Teddy Jury Award at the Berlin International Film Festival in 2011 and the Audience Award at the San Francisco International Lesbian and Gay Film Festival of the same year (among other distinctions).
2. After hestitating, I have chosen feminine pronouns, partly to mirror how Sciamma refers to Laure in interviews and to avoid collapsing transgender subjectivities within an account of gender nonconformity.
3. For the purposes of this article, I have concentrated on Merleau-Ponty and the application of his work in corporeal feminism. On the adoption of phenomenology in film studies see Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton U P 1991) and *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2004). On the use of phenomenology in queer studies see Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke U P, 2007).
4. See http://pinkisforboys.wordpress.com/ (accessed November 11, 2012).
5. Melia Patra and Edward Lovett, "Transgender Kids Pioneer Early Changes to Identity, Body," http://z.umn.edu/cq9 (accessed November 11, 2012).
6. Melia Patra and Edward Lovett, "Transgender Kids Pioneer Early Changes to Identity, Body," http://z.umn.edu/cq9 (accessed November 11, 2012).
7. Gwendoline Dos Santos, "Le Petit Garçon qui était une fille," http://z.umn.edu/cqa (accessed November 11, 2012).
8. Anon., "La Justice valide la nouvelle identité de Chloé, transsexuelle mariée," http://z.umn.edu/cqb (accessed November 11, 2012).
9. See "What's So Bad about a Boy Who Wants to Wear a Dress?", http://z.umn.edu/cqc (accessed November 11, 2012).
10. Anon., "Alain Berliner: rencontre avec le réalisateur," http://www.enrose.com/alainfe1.html (accessed August 10, 1998).
11. Unless otherwise stated, quotations from Sciamma come from an interview that accompanies the film on its French DVD, filmed on June 21, 2011. The DVD was released by TF1 and Pyramide Video on September 21, 2011.
12. In Emmanuèle Frois, "Filmer à hauteur d'enfant," *Le Figaro*, April 20, 2011.
13. Kathryn Bond Stockton, *The Queer Child or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke U P, 2009), 13.
14. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 249.
15. Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana U P, 1994), 86.
16. Henry S. Rubin, "Phenomenology as Method in Trans Studies," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 4:2 (1998), 207-08.
17. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Un inédit de Maurice Merleau-Ponty," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 4 (1962), 403.

18. Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin, eds. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 313. I am aware of criticisms of theories of gender performativity within trans studies (see Jay Prosser, *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* [New York: Columbia U P, 1998], 27-34). However, these sequences highlight the contingency of gender, and Butler—and later Judith Halberstam—provide a useful theoretical framework for interpreting them.
19. Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 17.
20. Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York U P, 2005), 77-78.
21. Almeida Daniel, Review of *Tomboy*, http://z.umn.edu/cqd (accessed November 11, 2012).
22. Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'Être et le néant* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), 11.