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*Transformative Fictions in France: Futurities for Trans/Queerness in Rachilde, Céline
Sciamma, and Sophie Calle*

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

Comparative Literature

by

Ashley Merryman

June 2024

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Heidi Brevik-Zender, Chairperson

Dr. Michelle Bloom

Dr. Brandon Robinson

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The Dissertation of Ashley Merryman is approved:

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Transformative Fictions in France: Futurities for Trans/Queerness in Rachilde, Céline Sciamma, and Sophie Calle

by

Ashley Merryman

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in Comparative Literature
University of California, Riverside, June 2024
Dr. Heidi Brevik-Zender, Chairperson

This dissertation explores how twentieth- and twenty-first-century French representational works depict futurities for trans/queerness. The three primary objects – a novel, a film, and a photography project – present possibilities alternative to cis-heteropatriarchal norms. By paying critical attention to close readings and the orientation work of phenomenological objects, this dissertation finds that new possibilities for being and connecting with others emerge from disorienting encounters that reorient subjects, an insistence on prioritizing pleasure, and a capacity for invention (of new identities, relations, structures). Each chapter demonstrates how fiction may work to transform reality and how these French works encourage their audiences to enact the queer, trans, and Black life affirming worlds they envisage. The concept of “enby-futurity” is put forth and developed to describe how a belief in the power of fiction to transform the material

world and an orientation towards synchronicities can grant a subject access in the here and now to glimmers of the future they long for. These French fictions offer vital strategies to effect transformation at the individual, societal, and institutional levels – proffering a timely hope to the marginalized masses.

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Introduction

Storytelling to *Transform* the Here and Now

French popstar Chris (1988-) – born Héloïse Adélaïde Letissier and known professionally as Chris, Christine and the Queens, and Redcar – has been topping music charts in France over the last decade with songs exploring themes of heartbreak, grief, and transness.¹ In interviews, Chris is outspoken about his trans identity and his views on approaches to trans identities. In a 2022 interview with Miranda Sawyer of *The Guardian*, Chris explains:

“I am in resistance to the approach of trans identity that there has to be hormones and operations . . . It’s abiding by a binary system that I don’t believe in. Binarism has been made to control. The system itself imposes a lot of performance on everybody from birth and I want to free myself and everybody else in the conversation. I am sick of having to define myself with their grotesque tools of oppression. And I don’t think I owe anyone scars, to be precise [...] since I’ve been talking about it, and understanding from inside who I was, I’ve been fighting sometimes trans people, who want me to formulate myself to be a ‘proper’ trans man. Who are we doing this for? Everyone’s different. I know people who have been blossoming and thriving on hormones, reaching their proper incarnation, and I respect that, but my approach is I want to thrive in that contradiction. I want to make it a poem, to help deconstruct the violence of a system.”

¹ I use the name “Chris” because it is the name he goes by in his most recent music video (Christine).

In Chris' articulation of his trans identity is an insistence on possibilities for transness alternative to those he considers oppressive. In his view, there are as many ways to experience and express transness as there are trans people. However, as he points out, many people do not hold this belief and are disoriented by non-binary expressions of gender. From the above quote, we can gather that Chris is committed to honoring his experience of gender in the face of oppressive systems and social scrutiny.

In 2023, the journal *Contemporary French Civilization* published a special issue on Christine and the Queens. In this issue, French and Francophone scholars approached Chris and his works through the foci of nonbinary genders, queer sexualities, cultural hybridity, and public celebrity.² The articles unanimously agree that Chris' gender, sexual, and cultural identities are fluid and always evolving.³ Special issue contributor and film scholar Romain Chareyron argues that in Chris' œuvre: "what could easily pass as gimmicks – the use of English in his lyrics, the myriad of musical influences, the adoption of a new persona to accompany the release of each new album – turn out to be an effective and meaningful way for the artist to convey his ever-evolving and dissenting identity with a view to contest societal norms and constructs" (313). We may think of Chris' music and performances then as sites where he is working out his own identity theories.

The ways in which Chris expresses and insists on his trans identity resonate with my project. This dissertation is invested in futurities for trans/queerness, and his

² This Introduction discusses articles in the special issue of *Contemporary French Civilization* about Chris' relationship to gender. See Timothy Lomeli on Chris' queer sexuality. On Chris' hybrid cultural identity, see Deborah Hooper and Lomeli.

³ For an interview with Chris addressing his cultural hybridity, see Steven Bellery and Aymeric Parthonnaud.

representations of a fluid experience of myriad identities offer alternative possibilities for transness that echo the possibilities I locate in French representational works. On several of Chris' identities, Sawyer writes:

He often uses different characters and names to locate himself: Christine and the Queens and Chris are an expression of where he was at the time. Chris was a sexual woman playing with masculine identity, while Christine and the Queens came out of his blossoming away from being a serious music and theatre student in Paris, through hanging out on the London drag scene (hence 'and the Queens') [...] He uses his birth name too, on occasion. "Héloïse Letissier is my parents' provenance and I love my parents. I sometimes use Héloïse to reconnect me to my childhood, but my inner child name is Manamané. I just have many names for all the layers." Redcar is another iteration, then; in his first Redcar video . . . he plays a sailor, limping because of his leg, moving between enormous rooms, gesticulating and posing.

In this description, we can begin to hear how embodying various identities opens possibilities for Chris to be and connect in evolving ways.⁴ In his contribution to the special issue of *Contemporary French Civilization*, Francophone studies scholar Timothy Lomeli observes that: "Redcar's public experience of gender exploration works to deconstruct the idea of a static gender and instead demonstrates how gender is always in a process of renegotiation" (335). This conceptualization of gender that Lomeli attributes

⁴ Lomeli draws a connection between how celebrities like Chris and the drag performers who inspired him exist "beyond assigned social and gendered categories" (341). According to Lomeli, Chris exists like this – beyond social categories for gender – through his personas (341).

to Chris – gender is not fixed but is constantly renegotiated – is an example of what I mean by an alternative possibility. Chris embodies the possibility that gender can be endlessly renegotiated, and I agree with Lomeli’s observation that for Chris, “gender is not simply one or the other but something that is in flux and something we are always discovering and learning about” (348).

Chris’ recently released music video “Stayin’ Alive ! Chris Version” (2023) offers an excellent example of how he represents possibilities for transness (Christine). “Stayin’ Alive ! Chris Version” opens with a leather clad Chris striking power poses while singing a gentle soprano. He is joined by an ensemble of costumed and masked figures including a Victorian era woman and a plague doctor. Chris is in the center of the frame and the crowd of characters as he sings the lyrics “stayin’ alive” with a hint of desperation that transforms these iconic lyrics into an arduous goal. The camera angle makes it appear as though Chris is smaller than and nearly subsumed by the crowd of costumed characters – intimating that he is one with the crowd. The choreography is jerky, and his arms shoot up towards the sky in quick frantic intervals as though he is pleading for his life. The unpanicked costumed figures touch him supportively, appearing to understand that he needs them to stay alive. This paints the work of staying alive as character work in the senses of becoming someone new, invention and reinvention, repurposing cultural images, and embodying myriad selves.

The one character who invokes fear in Chris is the plague doctor who shakes him by the shoulders and hunts him towards the end. Considering that Chris feels he must fight with the approach to trans identity that views medical transition as “proper,” we

may consider the plague doctor as a representation of this view. The other characters help him escape from the plague doctor. I interpret this as representative of Chris' experience of transness, which he expresses through numerous identities. These identities, it appears, offer him relief and safety from the medicalization of transness. This is not to say that Chris is against gender-affirming medical care; rather, he is representing his personal disagreement with the idea that trans people "must" receive medical care to be "proper."⁵ The plague doctor is included in the crowd in every shot of Chris dancing with the group of characters. This shows that, for Chris, the plague doctor is among the many identities he experiences.

Sawyer describes Chris as finding himself through different characters. And, in the "Stayin' Alive ! Chris Version" music video, one senses that Chris is expressing an experience of trans identity that involves being and becoming many selves. As I will show, the theme of being, embodying, and becoming multiple selves is a through thread in this dissertation. These chapters, like the "Stayin' Alive ! Chris Version" music video, illuminate possibilities for being beyond the imperatives of cis-heteronormativity. At the end of the music video, Chris and his entourage of supportive characters sail away into the sunset together. The plague doctor pursues them in a second gondola, but the tension is cut by Chris making silly faces at the plague doctor as though to say, "you can't catch me!" I interpret the nearness of Chris and these characters on the small gondola as visually representing a form of cohabitation with one's myriad selves. Furthermore,

⁵ See Sawyer for the full interview with Chris on this subject.

sailing into the sunset together evokes the narrative trope of the happily ever after ending, imbuing the gondola scene with its pleasurable affect.

The final shot lingers on a view of the horizon, and I interpret this as directing viewers towards futurity. The “Stayin’ Alive ! Chris Version” music video visually insists on possibilities for plural identities and directs viewers to a happily ever after on the horizon that is free from plague doctors. The lyrics represent “stayin’ alive” as at stake, speaking to a dire need for conceptualizations of queer- and trans-affirming possibilities. By representing a fluid conceptualization of identity that is capacious enough to house multiplicities, Chris’ music video proffers a futurity for transness.⁶

As an artist, Chris is known for embodying multiple identities and self-reinvention. In his interview with Chris for *The New Yorker*, Hanif Abdurraqib describes Chris as:

an artist who, like many queer artists before him, expands the possibilities of his work by choosing to become someone new. But he is also stepping into a new self to better make sense of all that his past selves have been through. [...] Letissier’s constellations of identities move toward and away from one another, forming fresh, evolving shapes and building space for others yet to come.

Abdurraqib describes Chris’ relationship to identity as creating new possibilities, as facilitating an understanding of his past, and as an ongoing future-oriented practice. In this way, Chris represents embodied practices that would be at home in my project.

⁶ Lomeli similarly identifies that Chris’ work is invested in creating possible worlds for gender expansiveness and reads the shifting pronouns in the lyrics of “iT” from Chris’ 2014 album *Chaleur humaine* as creating: “a world where personal gender identification can overcome societal expectations of gender [...] destabilizing the perception of which is true: chosen or assigned identity” (344-5).

In this dissertation I have sought to demonstrate how each work examined – a French novel, film, and photography project – portrays alternative modes of being and connecting with others. In seeking to excavate representational strategies for bringing about queer and trans futurities, this dissertation identifies three features shared by its primary objects: reorientation as the result of disorientation; a willful insistence on pursuing one’s own desires and pleasures; and a capacity for invention represented as imagining and enacting new identities, life paths, and relational structures. In each chapter, I demonstrate how these three features appear with varying degrees of saliency.

Chapter One lays the groundwork for my study by attending to the histories, theories, and scholarship that informs my work. This chapter offers a brief history of how the word “queer” and queer theory were received and conceptualized in France before turning to the queer theory that informs my approach. I discuss how Sara Ahmed’s queer phenomenological method offers a helpful starting point for thinking about the ways subjects come to be oriented. Building on her work, this dissertation queries the ways subject may come to be reoriented and finds representations of a utopian hope that subjects can become reoriented towards trans/queerness.

To study utopian hope, I turn to José Esteban Muñoz’s influential work, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), on queer utopian longing. Putting Muñoz’s work in conversation with trans of color studies, Chapter One discusses the interdisciplinary body of scholarship invested in alternative futures. In their article “Time to Come: Materializing Trans times,” Jian Neo Chen and micha cárdenas propose that transness can be felt as a horizon like queerness is felt as a horizon in Muñoz’s

formulation (475). Black studies scholar Ashon T. Crawley's work speaks to the importance of imagination for bringing about horizontal possibilities, which he calls "otherwise worlds of possibility." Additionally, the works of trans of color scholars SA Smythe, C. Riley Snorton, and Kara Keeling have been indispensable to thinking about the ways experiences of Blackness and transness inform alternative methods for resisting hegemonic imperatives at the institutional, symbolic, and individual levels.

Finally, Chapter One discusses works by French studies scholars who are leading the way in a field shift to thinking with frameworks informed by trans/queerness. For example, Elliot Evans, in their book *The Body in French Queer Thought from Preciado to Wittig: Queer Permeability* (2020), argues that a utopian thrust characterizes twenty-first-century queer thought, and they locate this kind of thinking in French representational works. Additionally, Rachel Mesch's book *Before Trans: Three Gender Stories from Nineteenth-Century France* (2020) encourages us to think about the ways historical figures expressed transgender identities before the term transgender entered the lexicon. These books and others have inspired me to seek utopias and expressions of gender variance in French representational works. Chapter One concludes with a hopeful forward glance at future directions for French studies.

Chapter Two analyzes the ways in which French author Rachilde's (1860-1953) novel *La jongleuse* (*The Juggler*, 1900) portrays the reorientation of a cis-hetero male character, named Léon, towards trans/queerness. My framework for understanding expressions of trans/queerness in this novel is informed by Mesch's biographical work on Rachilde that illuminates the many ways Rachilde expressed a fluid experience of gender.

In Chapter Two, the feature of reorientation resulting from disorientation is most salient. Through close readings of the directions Léon takes and the objects proximal to him, I show how his orientation shifts towards queer and gender expansive possibilities for embodiment and kinship structures. Léon's transformation asks readers to reconceptualize marriage, fatherhood, kinship structures, and family legacy. In this way, Rachilde's writing breathes queer- and trans-possibilities into cis-heteropatriarchal kinship structures. Through *La jongleuse*, Chapter Two elucidates how subjects may become reoriented and how being orientated towards trans embodiments and queer pleasures may create alternative possibilities for ways of being and relating to others as well as for the institutions of medicine and marriage.

Chapter Three analyzes French film director and screenwriter Céline Sciamma's (1978-) coming-of-age film *Bande de filles* (*Girlhood*, 2014) and takes the feature of a willful commitment to one's own desires and pleasures as its primary focus. I demonstrate how the film affectively engages viewers to empathize with its protagonist, Marieme, who insists on flourishing despite feeling the oppressive forces of racist capitalism and cis-heteronormativity. Building on Muñoz's formulation of queer utopian longing, Chapter Three demonstrates how Marieme's utopian investment in her own pleasure functions to sustain her in times of tribulation. An analysis of *Bande de filles* offers this project an example of how the medium of film can touch real lives by affectively engaging viewer empathy. Chapter Three argues that *Bande de filles* charges viewers with the work of imagining possibilities for queer-, trans-, and Black- lives to flourish.

Chapter Four turns to several projects in French artist Sophie Calle's (1953-) catalogue book *And So Forth (Ainsi de suite, 2016)* to draw similarities between her world-building practices and experiences of nonbinary gender. Her explicit goal in the three-part project *Where and When* is to catch up to her future. To accomplish this, she collaborates with the clairvoyant Maud Kristen and is advised to seek out "synchronicities" or meaningful coincidences. The feature of invention gains primacy in this chapter as I explore the ways in which Calle represents and orients readers towards alternative modes of meaning making inspired by Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung's (1875-1961) concept of synchronicity. This chapter demonstrates how the acausal connecting principle of synchronicity extends beyond *Where and When* to connect this project to several others included in the catalogue.

Guided by Micah Rajunov and Scott Duane's writing on nonbinary experiences of gender, this chapter locates similarities between embodiments of nonbinary gender and Calle's artistic body. Conceiving of Calle's artistic body in this way, I query how the temporality of synchronicity in Calle's work lends itself to thinking about how to enact utopian possibilities for being and meaning making now. Through *And So Forth*, I conceptualize "enby-futurity" to describe how a belief in the power of fiction to transform the material world and a mode of meaning making that finds glimmers of future possibilities in the present may contribute to imagining and enacting hospitable futures for nonbinary people now.

Each in their own ways, these chapters demonstrate that it is possible for fiction to transform the material world. The dissertation title, "*Transformative Fictions in France*,"

comes from this possibility. This project concludes by looking to the ways that the French language is evolving to recognize and be inclusive of gender-neutral pronouns. Ending on a hopeful note, I discuss the possibility for shifts in language to shift gender ideologies in turn. This dissertation seeks to draw our attention to the alternative possibilities for trans/queerness represented by Rachilde, Sciamma, and Calle. In offering these queer- and trans-affirming imaginaries a home in my dissertation, I hope to extend the reach of their transformative capacities.

Chapter One

Alternative Possibilities in French Representational Works

This study asks about futurities for trans/queerness envisaged by French cultural productions. I first examine the alternative possibilities put forth by a novel from 1900 to ground my exploration of the utopian thrust of film and art of the twenty-first century.⁷ In these works, I locate three shared features that I argue are characteristic of queer and transgender thinking in France.⁸ We may think of these features as the ingredient taken up time and time again, over time, in the creation of alternative possibilities.

The first feature is an emphasis on the capacity of disorientation to reorient subjects and spaces over time and through repetition. The second feature is the presence of resistance, which is often enacted through a willfulness manifesting as queer desire that looks something like agency, like making a willful choice to prioritize one's own

⁷ Utopianism as a characteristic of contemporary French works was first identified by Elliot Evans and is discussed below.

⁸ Rachel Mesch has conceptualized what she calls "thinking with transgender" or thinking with a trans framework ("Trans"). Evans similarly refers to what they call queer thinking and transgender thinking. Both Mesch and Evans are referring to kinds of thinking informed by the diversity of both expressions and experiences of queer and transgender people. Inspired by the gender variant historical figures she researches, Mesch encourages thinking with transgender as an approach to producing alternative kinds of knowledge about history and literature. She has published axioms for approaching scholarship with a trans framework ("Trans"). In this chapter, I discuss the axioms proposed by Mesch that inform my work. Evans refers to queer and transgender thought performed by the queer and/or transgender authors of the representational works they analyze and views this thinking as informed by one's experiences of queerness and/or gender expansiveness. My references to thinking with transgender and uses of the terms queer, trans, and nonbinary to describe forms of thinking and imaginaries share the meanings outlined above and are informed by the queer and gender fluid characters explored in these chapters as well as personal essays authored by nonbinary people. Like Mesch and Evans, I have found it important to let expressions of transness and queerness in representational works shape what trans/queerness means. My work with subject orientation in this project has illuminated the capacity of embodied experiences to shape perception and processes of meaning-making. Thinking with trans then is a critical pathway to a knowledge production that does not reproduce hegemonic epistemologies. I discuss scholarship that conceptualizes and offers practices for trans and nonbinary knowledge productions later in this chapter.

desires over the pressures exerted by external structuring forces. Resulting from these first two features, the third feature is the invention of new possibilities. New paths, structures, and relations emerge from disorientation and resistance. I call this newness futurity.

These works are each expressing a vision and a theory of a future that does not yet exist but that is felt in the present. With this focus, my work contributes to an emerging body of scholarship in French Studies that homes in on how sexualities and gender expansiveness have been expressed pre-language in cultural productions.⁹ The methodologies that guide my identifications and analyses of these queer and transgender futures are close reading and a queer phenomenological attention to orientations, objects, and spaces. Close reading as method is part and parcel of the queer and transgender French scholarship that informs my own, and I will discuss the reasons that have been given for its necessity.

The queer phenomenological method of analysis has helped give a structure to the queer and transgender murmurs of alternative possibilities in these works. Additionally, it has co-facilitated my identification of the three characteristics shared by these works that bridge the fin de siècle and contemporary France. This project demonstrates the value a queer phenomenological approach adds to the burgeoning toolkit for understanding queer and transgender thinking in French studies.

Attending to transgender thinking has led me to attend to nonbinary thinking. I will discuss this thinking and scholarship tending to nonbinary experiences in this

⁹ The work of Mesch, Michael Lucey, and Evans has meaningfully guided my own. Their groundbreaking publications are discussed in depth below.

chapter. Additionally, I use a shortened version of the term nonbinary – *enby* – throughout this project. I explain the term enby and provide my reasons for using it later in this chapter. Informed by expressions of nonbinary gender experiences, my approach has been encouraged by Rachel Mesch’s recent call for a field shift to what she calls “thinking with transgender” in French studies.¹⁰ Mesch describes thinking with transgender as a scholarly approach that is informed by diverse expressions of gender fluid experiences, and I refer to her concept throughout this project. One of the aims of this project has been to shed critical light on nonbinary thinking in French representational works. I am indebted to the trailblazing works of nineteenth- and twentieth-century French and English scholars invested in gender expansiveness, as well as twenty-first-century Black, queer, and transgender studies scholars whose interdisciplinary works probe utopian possibilities for marginalized lives. In this chapter, I discuss this body of work and how my project is in conversation with it.

QUERYING POSSIBILITY

This project draws on American and Anglophone scholarship invested in queer and transgender world-making practices. World-making appears in the representational works I study as the production of social, sexual, and gender practices that create forms of knowing, feeling, and belonging. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has offered a definition of

¹⁰ I address Mesch’s call for a paradigm shift in French studies to thinking with transgender in detail later in this chapter.

queer as: “the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically” (*Tendencies* 8). Sedgwick’s description is inspiring, not only for its attention to possibilities but also for its attention to gender. It is this attention to gender as part and parcel of queer theory that translates well to thinking about transgender theory too, which this project turns to in Chapter Four.

In *After Queer Studies*, Tyler Bradway and E.L. McCallum describe queer theory as a mode of thinking, of thinking sideways or thinking in unexpected ways (3). Queer theory then is born of queer sideways thinking and is to an experience of being queer what literary theory is to literature. And, there are literary ways to be queer. In the Anglophone context, queer theory and literary theory – together called queer literary studies – have a history of enmeshment as earlier queer theorists like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Leo Bersani, and Michael Warner turned to literature to think about queerness (4). French literature is especially fertile ground for queer sideways thinking, because as Elliot Evans, a scholar of twenty-first-century French studies, illuminates, cultural productions provide an important abode for queer thinking in France.

In their book *The Body in French Queer Thought From Preciado to Wittig: Queer Permeability* (2020), Evans identifies where queer theory surfaces most generatively in France. They show that queer theory is not predominantly housed in universities in France but rather in cultural works and activism, which lends these works “a particular

political focus and dynamism.”¹¹ Part of the reason for this, according to Evans, is how embedded French Republican universalism is in French thought. Where the logic of universalism is held in universities, queer, transgender, and feminist studies are considered bad subjects that are too concerned with identity and minority issues, and as threats to the institution of the university (Evans 6). Within this context, Evans argues that politically charged queer and transgender thinking makes its home in the arts and is more readily found in cultural productions than in the Academe.

Evans’ argument that French queer thinking is housed in cultural productions necessitates then a particular understanding of queer French works as at once creative and theoretical, and as vital pathways to understanding queer and transgender thought in France. In other words, letting these cultural productions do the talking is charged with social, cultural, and political importance. This call by Evans to rethink our approach to French works is echoed by Mesch, who researches transgender thinking in nineteenth-century France and argues that “thinking with trans requires scholarly paradigms that allow gender variant voices to speak on their own terms” (“Trans” 3). Inspired then by the work of Evans and Mesch, close reading is my primary method for attending to the queer and transgender thinking in French representational works.¹² Giving ample space to

¹¹ “The specificities of French queer thought are inextricably linked to the marginal position of queer theory in France. Queer thinking is still embedded in activism rather than entrenched in universities as it increasingly is in the United States and the United Kingdom. This lends French queer texts a particular political focus and dynamism, influencing their style (often unconventional in terms of language, register, or genre)” (Evans 4).

¹² Representational works housing gender expansive thinking has been attributed to English cultural objects as well by long nineteenth-century British scholar Kristin Mahoney. In *Queer Kinship after Wilde: Transnational Decadence and the Family* (2022), Mahoney attributes her primary objects – photo albums, diaries, novels, and others – with having their own theories of queer kinship, gender expansiveness, and connection (9). For Mahoney, these objects reveal the most compelling thinking done by the queer Decadent figures of the twentieth century, a period during which queerness was not allowed in the public

close readings of literature, art, and film has allowed me to hear the kinds of thinking these works enact. They are each working out their own queer and transgender thinking and theories which has made staying with close readings vitally important.

The word queer is also a verb and staying with close readings helps illuminate the work performed by the verb “to queer.” Bradway and McCallum offer the following definition of to queer: “To queer is to distance oneself from norms and to embrace that distance” (3). Queer identity is often discussed as unintelligible or incoherent. The queer fails to perform normative ideals properly, and in this failure queer theorists have found “a skillful subversion of intelligibility” (3).¹³ The subversiveness of queerness in this sense, according to Bradway and McCallum, lies in how identities and social practices can *be queered* through language, irony, and parody. In my analyses of French works, I locate representations of the *queering* of identities and social practices. My work is invested in this capacity of queer as a verb to alter surrounding people and the social. Bradway and McCallum describe the word queer in active terms and as a subject orientation: “Queer marks an opportunity for reinterpretation. In this sense, queer is not an identity, a thing, or an entity but an *activity*. Queer names a practice, an approach, a way of relating” (3). Similarly, I consider and define the word queer in this lively way: as an activity, a practice, an approach, and a relational mode.

Sara Ahmed’s work on queer orientation in *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (2006) offers a comprehensive study of queerness as an active orientation

sphere (29). What we find then, is that gender expansive thinking makes its home in representational works in socio-political climates that do not offer this thinking a mainstream residence. Put another way, gender expansive thought persists or endures in representational works and personal artifacts.

¹³ See, for example, Jack Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure* (2011).

with a capacity to queer, and I am deeply indebted to her work. Queer, in Ahmed's use of the term, refers to both people who practice nonnormative sexualities and describes what is out of alignment with the life directions normalized by society. Taking the method of queer phenomenology developed by Ahmed, my work further explores queerness as an orientation that disorients and reorients people and spaces. We may call the reorientation of people and spaces *queering*. In this project, especially in Chapter Two, I explore queer reorientation, asking: *how* a queer orientation reorients others and spaces; over what duration; with what tactics, literary devices, and linguistic deployments; does it work, and if so, what sorts of people and spaces emerge from this?

Ahmed's queer phenomenology offers queer studies a productive way to practice phenomenology. She writes: "Phenomenology can offer a resource for queer studies insofar as it emphasizes the importance of lived experience, the intentionality of consciousness, the significance of nearness or what is ready-to-hand, and the role of repeated habitual actions in shaping bodies and worlds" (*Queer* 2). Already in Ahmed's description we can hear how a queer phenomenology can produce knowledge about queer world-making practices by attending to the roles of repetition and orientation in shaping "bodies and worlds." Ahmed does not claim to be doing phenomenology "proper" and instead begins by reading the works of phenomenologists Edmond Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty on how bodies are shaped by spaces and take shape by being in space to then pose the orientation of sexual orientation as a question.

Orientation, for Ahmed, refers to the direction of bodies in space, where spaces direct bodies towards certain lines that have been created by bodies repeatedly following

these lines (*Queer* 16). A queer phenomenology is concerned with bodies that do not follow these commonly followed lines, which Ahmed refers to in this context as heterosexual lines. Ahmed explores how spaces disorient bodies that do not align with the heterosexual line and render these bodies more visible than those aligned with heterosexuality (*Queer* 66). She finds it can be disorienting for queer bodies to interact with straight spaces. My work takes a special interest in the reverse of this in Chapter Two, that is in how straight bodies are disoriented by queer spaces. Ahmed writes that one effect of being “out of place” is creating disorientation in others; however, she does not explore this point in detail (*Queer* 160). My work dives into Ahmed’s observation of disorientation here and explores the orienting capacities of a queer space and queer bodies on straight spaces and straight bodies. In doing so, I locate a literary utopian imaginary in works that depict or effect reorientation.

Both queer and straight are orientations, and Ahmed explains that “to become straight means that we not only have to turn toward the objects given to us by heterosexual culture, but also that we must ‘turn away’ from objects that take us off this line” (*Queer* 21). In this way, objects may work to produce a heterosexual orientation (Ahmed, *Queer* 87). These objects are straight objects, and they are often the most available, most proximal objects in spaces. A queer phenomenology, according to Ahmed, would turn towards less proximal objects that she refers to as queer objects. Taking this directive, I turn to queer objects – objects that do not direct bodies to align with heterosexual paths – to focus on how queer objects are represented as producing a queer orientation in French works. Ahmed examines the work of “straight” objects in

producing straight bodies and queer bodies. Taking her work as a starting point, I instead examine how queer objects produce queer bodies in each chapter.

The queer phenomenological method further informs my approach to futurity as future-oriented queer and transgender world-making. In my readings, queer objects in French works function to queer a straight orientation through repeatedly disorienting a subject (as in Chapter Two), sustain an already queer orientation by offering a receptacle for queer desire (as in Chapter Three), provide sites of convergence for a present psychic state and a future event (as in Chapter Four). Queer objects do a lot of work on bodies and spaces, and the foremost marker that this work is occurring is disorientation that produces a reorientation.

Ahmed briefly touches on reorientation, and my work picks up this thread. She discusses deviant paths that “help generate alternative lines . . . where people have taken different routes to get to this point or to that point” (*Queer* 20). My study focuses on representations of deviant paths and the possibilities they create. Encountering these deviant paths has the potential to reorient bodies. On this, Ahmed shares a personal anecdote about becoming aware of her own queer sexuality and writes: “Becoming reorientated, which involves the disorientation of encountering the world differently, made me wonder about orientation and how much ‘feeling at home,’ or knowing which way we are facing, is about the making of worlds” (*Queer* 20). I agree with Ahmed that orientation is about world-making. For this reason, a queer phenomenological approach may be useful to scholarship invested in queer and transgender world-making. In my study of world-making in French works, I begin by tracking moments of disorientation in

order to elucidate the kinds of reorientation work that occur when subjects repeatedly encounter queer objects and spaces, because reorientation is a remaking of a world.

While Ahmed does not explore the world-making referenced in the above quote in depth, she does leave utopian lines of inquiry to be picked up, writing: “When queer bodies take up spaces that they were not intended to inhabit, something other than the reproduction of the facts of the matter happens. The hope that reproduction fails is the hope for new impressions, for new lines to emerge, new objects, or even new bodies, which gather” (*Queer* 62). I pick this up by asking French works what emerges when norms fail to reproduce and, similarly to Ahmed, I find the hope of new possibilities which I refer to as futurity. Engaging with Ahmed shapes what I mean by futurity, where futurity refers to new potentialities in the field of action, as “the possibility of changing directions and of finding other paths” (*Queer* 178). The subversive capacity of queerness to reorient dovetails nicely with futurity – what is reorientation if not reinvention, if not the birthing of new worlds?

In the early 2000s, Anglophone queer theorists took to queering temporality and discussing futurity.¹⁴ Lively debates about whether or not there was a future for queers ensued and splintered into utopian and dystopian approaches.¹⁵ These debates did not gain traction in the French context but merit brief contextualization as I position French works in conversation with queer utopianism. Perhaps the most famous publication on

¹⁴ Some of the more influential works from temporal queer theory are: Lee Edelman’s *No Future* (2004), Jack Halberstam’s *In a Queer Time and Place* (2005), Heather Love’s *Feeling Backwards* (2007), José Esteban Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia* (2009), Elizabeth Freeman’s *Time Binds* (2010), Juana María Rodríguez’s *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (2014), Alexis Lothian’s *Old Futures* (2018).

¹⁵ See, for example, the 2006 debate between Robert L. Caserio, Lee Edelman, José Esteban Muñoz, Jack Halberstam, and Tim Dean published in PMLA as “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory.”

queer time is Lee Edelman's *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (2004).

Inspired by Leo Bersani's work connecting homosexual sex and the death drive, Edelman described queer time as a departure from normative timelines and social expectations for heterosexual reproduction, the nuclear family, and ideals of good citizens and productive capitalists. In his dystopian formulation, queer desire, by challenging a norm of procreation, is opposed to futurity within the context of the United States where futurity is politically positioned as a future that is for the children. In this way, Edelman's work exemplifies the anti-relational thesis in queer theory, which calls for a nihilistic engagement with the present in response to the heteronormativity of reproductive futurity.

In *Old Futures: Speculative Fiction and Queer Possibility* (2018), Alexis Lothian observes that Edelman's anti-relational concept of no future did not consider what she argues it is capacious enough to address, namely "that vital queer alternatives may lie at the end of linearly projected, even reproductive, futurist imaginaries" (4). Lothian's assertion that queer possibilities may be found in linear narratives in Anglophone speculative fiction has encouraged my own search for queer and transgender possibilities lingering in seemingly normative locales in the French context. Additionally, Mesch's research finds queer alternatives within heteronormative structures in France by showing how the heteronormative institution of marriage has been subverted by gender creative individuals.¹⁶ And, Ahmed reaches a similar finding in *Queer Phenomenology*, observing that "some deviations involve acts of following, but use the same 'points' for different

¹⁶ See Mesch's book *Before Trans* and "Trans Rachilde" article.

effects” (177). Following the claims of Lothian, Mesch, and Ahmed, my work identifies queer and transgender subversions of cis-heteronormative lines thereby adding to the body of work accounting for the capacities of queer and transgender thinking and practices to alter cis-hetero institutions.

The work of José Esteban Muñoz on queer futurity in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009) has been vital to thinking through future-oriented queer and transgender world-making in twenty-first-century French works. Muñoz rejects the emphasis on negativity of the anti-relational thesis espoused by Edelman and instead argues that queers must enact futures that are better than the negativities of the present. He is furthermore critical of how Edelman’s focus on sexuality as the prime marker of difference neglects other markers of difference like race, class, and gender. In response, he calls for attention to how queerness, blackness, and brownness share in a failure to be “normal” in society.

Muñoz’s utopian thrust gained inspiration from Sedgwick’s call for reparative readings of queer texts. For Sedgwick, the reparative reader is open to the affect of hope on the basis that the future may differ from the present (*Paranoid* 24). In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz offers a hopeful reading of queerness as a future-oriented mode of being and doing. In describing queerness as a mode of being and doing, Muñoz, like Ahmed, engages queerness as an orientation. Drawing on the work of Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch, Muñoz shows how queer desire in American cultural productions allows us to feel the future.

For Muñoz, “queer world-making, then, hinges on the possibility to map a world where one is allowed to cast pictures of utopia and to include such pictures in any map of the social” (*Cruising* 40). Queer cultural productions address what is missing in heteronormative world-making and so offer glimpses into what that missing something could be. In past cultural productions where their pastness mingles with futurity, Muñoz locates a utopian imaginary that offers a critical perspective on the present. I borrow Muñoz’s conceptualization of how failing to reproduce social norms can result in forms of queer world-making that are future-oriented. And, I both expand this concept to describe transgender world-making and show how utopian possibility is sometimes situated in the present (not the past). Building on Muñoz’s assertion that queer desire is a structuring mode, I show how queer and transgender desires in French representational works structure new futures.

By tending to queer utopias in French works and beginning to ask after transgender utopias, this project enters the current conversation in Black, queer, and transgender studies about alternative world-making practices. Thinking through the connections between blackness and transness, C. Riley Snorton has emphasized the importance of bringing to light “different ways of knowing and being” and of “reviving and reinventing strategies for inhabiting unlivable worlds” (7). My work joins the interdisciplinary body of scholarship working to bring these alternative ways of knowing and being as well as strategies for “inhabiting unlivable worlds” to light.

Ashon T. Crawley put forth the concept of “otherwise worlds of possibility” to describe the existence of alternatives to the normative that already exist in this world and

can be imagined. In *Blackpentecostal Breath: The Aesthetics of Possibility* (2016), Crawley showed how aesthetic practices of noisemaking in the Christian sect of Black Pentecostalism generate alternative modes of social organization. In his formulation, aesthetic practices are linked with material modes of relating through the practice of imagination. Informed by Muñoz's work on utopian ways to inhabit a normative world, Crawley's concept of "the Otherwise" describes ways of thinking and acting that fall outside of hegemonic and violent ways of being. His formulation of otherwise worlds of possibility has been helpful to my project, which similarly asks about the otherwise worlds of possibility that have been imagined by French creatives for queer, nonbinary, and transgender lives.

SA Smythe has built on Crawley's concept of otherwise worlds of possibility to formulate the "black nonbinary method." According to Smythe, the black nonbinary method acknowledges that "honoring negative preferences (i.e. 'neither X nor Y, but something yet to come') can be a platform into possibility" (167). Possibility here refers to Crawley's otherwise worlds of possibility. To insist on "something yet to come," Smythe states that this method "takes in information from the marginalized, steals resources (including knowledge) from hegemonic spaces to posit a calculated disruption that irrefutably asserts the capacity for black life to flourish against the antiblackness that structures and contributes to the bedrock of modernity" (167). Similarly, the works I examine in this project depict an insistence on something yet to come that is disruptive. We may think about the creators of these cultural productions as thieves in Smythe's sense of stealing resources, because the creation of and circulation of their disruptive

productions used available information and resources towards exposing possibilities alternative to structuring norms. Smythe advocates for European and transgender studies scholarship that acknowledges both the possibility and imminence of another world (165). My work rallies under this call.

Kara Keeling has also written about how future possibilities can be accessed in the present. In “Looking for M–,” Keeling interprets Karl Marx’s “poetry from the future” as marking an “impossible possibility.” To explore impossible possibilities, Keeling then connects Marx’s formulation of the organization of time with Franz Fanon’s work on the temporality of the colonial mode of representation of otherness, which considers the possibility of Black liberation within colonialism. With this framework, Keeling puts forth the possibility of impossibility for Black trans bodies in American cinema, exploring moments of affective surplus as indices of “a time to come in which what today exists potently – even if not (yet) effectively – but escapes us will find its time” (567). Similarly to Crawley and Smythe, Keeling encourages us to feel the existence of impossible possibilities now.

Recent scholarly interest in alternative possibilities has led to the publication of *Otherwise Worlds* (2020), a collaborative and interdisciplinary book that gathers essays by scholars, artists, and activists seeking to generate new futures by exploring new modes of living and organizing. *Otherwise Worlds*, which Crawley contributed to, is invested in the possibilities that emerge through critiques of the relationship between settler colonialism and anti-Blackness. Its recent publication testifies to increasing scholarly attention to how our world may be imagined otherwise in more livable ways. Focused on

representations of queer and transgender alternative possibilities in France, I see my project in conversation with this thrust of scholarship attending to alternative modes of being and relating that have been imagined by marginalized people.

Jen Manion has similarly illuminated gender expansive possibilities in *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (2020). Manion discusses how the existence of female husbands – people assigned female at birth who “assumed a legal, social, and economic position reserved for men” – challenged essentialist views on sex and gender (1). By way of existing, female husbands created alternative possibilities for being and relating in the United Kingdom and United States during the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries. Borrowing from Keeling, we may think of female husbands as people whose existences testified to alternative possibilities for being and relating.

Likewise invested in queer and gender expansive alternative possibilities, Kristin Mahoney has recently shed light on queer kinship practices in *Queer Kinship after Wilde: Transnational Decadence and the Family* (2022). Mahoney explores how a community of queer Decadent modernists who sought refuge on the island of Capri developed “alternative modes of intergenerational nursing, community archiving, and inheritance” (8). These innovative models of connection are in tension with conventional tendencies. Like Lothian and Mesch, who have spoken to the merits of studying alternative possibilities that do not accomplish the kind of radical difference espoused by Edelman, Mahoney argues that this community’s alternative “modes of living, loving, and connecting [. . .] are startling and worthy of our attention” (13).

That the academic conversation about alternative possibilities is interdisciplinary and collaborative gives cause for hope. Ahmed has argued that a queer politics:

would have hope, not even by having hope in the future (under the sentimental sign of the ‘not yet’), but because the lines that accumulate through the repetition of gestures, the lines that gather on skin, already take surprising forms. We have hope because what is behind us is also what allows other ways of gathering in time and space, of making lines that do not reproduce what we follow but instead create wrinkles in the earth. (*Queer* 177)

The accumulation of scholarship invested in alternative possibilities for Black, queer, and transgender lives is, as Ahmed puts it, creating wrinkles in the earth. By gathering French representational works that have made new lines, I hope to offer my reader hope in the otherwise worlds and impossible possibilities that these works have put forth.

THE FRENCH CONTEXT

Given contextual differences between the United States and France, the viability of importing American queer theory and the English word “queer” has been widely debated in twenty-first-century France. In the United States, “queer” emerged from the social, historical, and political contexts of feminism, gay liberation, and the AIDS epidemic. To further complicate matters, in the American context, the definition of the term queer is necessarily unstable; however, most agree that queer refers to “a flexible

identity that's constantly in motion, constantly becoming, constantly transgressing” (Gunther 23).

In his article “Alors, Are We ‘Queer’ Yet?”, Scott Gunther identifies two defining characteristics of “queer” – anti-assimilationism and rebellion against fixed, binary identities – and studies how these characteristics have been received in France (23). Gunther finds the American emphasis on identity has not been well-received in France where the social model is of universalism. Universalism holds that all French citizens are equal on account of being French citizens. By this assimilationist logic, the social categories a citizen may have membership in – such as those for religion, sexuality, and race – do not matter. This social model results in an attitude of antagonism towards identity politics and a dismissal of minority concerns in politics. The focus on queerness as an identity in the United States then opposes the goals of universalism. This is not to say that France lacks its own conceptualization of queerness, however.

Founded in 1997, the French organization *Le Zoo* published a book titled *Q comme queer* (1998) querying the viability of importing American queer theory. Gunther interprets contributor and *Le Zoo* founding member Catherine Deschamps’ argument about what “queer” means in the French context as a call to understand queerness as a strategy of resistance (24). And, in his overview of queer theory in France, Gunther draws on the writing of another similarly minded *Le Zoo* contributor, Marie-Hélène Bourcier, to describe the meaning of “queer” in France as anti-assimilationism and anti-bourgeoisie:

The point is not to defy pre-existing identities but to establish a distinct new identity, one that's constructed in opposition to French bourgeois heteronormativity. As explained by self-proclaimed French queer activist Marie-Hélène Bourcier (1998): 'Our presuppositions are the opposite of those of the assimilationists: we are different and our difference allows us to resist discourse, practices and laws which do not want us to be different. We are different and we want to live differently and thereby invent new social and cultural forms.' (24)

Gunther's reading of Bourcier enriches our understanding of the meaning of the word queer in France as distinctly informed by French social and political contexts. I would expand his conception of what the word queer means in France as against bourgeois heteronormativity to attend to and include the finer features highlighted by Bourcier.

I interpret Bourcier, as quoted above, as imbuing queer difference with three capacities: to perceive differently, to resist assimilationist tactics, and to invent new social and cultural forms. Additionally, I read these three capacities as critically invoking subject orientation as how one perceives their world, resistance as strategy, and futurity – whose lifeblood is the invention of “new social and cultural forms.” Bourcier gives primacy to difference, described as a difference in orientation, in order to stand against assimilationism. Her description testifies then to the remarkable and even revolutionary potential of querying queer orientation.

As aforementioned, I argue for three shared features that characterize queer and transgender thinking in French works: a focus on orientation, reorientation, and disorientation; the presence of resistance tactics (often as willful desire); a commitment to

futurity. This overlap between my findings and Bourcier's description of what the word queer means in France calls for further French studies scholarship that is attentive to the ways queer and transgender expressions can surface in the aesthetic as modes of perceiving, resistance, and invention.

Critical engagement with queer and transgender lives and representational works is still relatively young in French studies. This may be linked to the mixed reception American queer theory has received in France. The queer theory that boomed in the United States during the 1990s was not wholesale accepted in France – and for good reason given France's different social, political, and historical contexts. In the late 1990's, queer thinking in the French context was viewed as a productive strategy for resisting the assimilationist logic of French universalism. By the early 2000s, multitudinous debates on the importation of American queer theory erupted following the translations of several seminal texts by Jonathan Katz, David Halperin, Leo Bersani, and others into French.¹⁷ Gunther offers a detailed account of these debates, which I briefly summarize.

One criticism of queer theory, voiced by Maria Klonaris and Katerina Thomadaki in *Queer: repenser les identités* (2003), is that it is inextricably linked with American imperialism. Conversely, defenders of queer theory such as philosopher Beatriz Preciado argue that queer theory's concepts are anti-American and work to critique American imperialism. Another issue is that the word queer has no history in the French language and so the term risks relegation to a select few who are "in the know." Additionally,

¹⁷ Works by Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick were not yet translated into French.

American queer theory is sometimes criticized as being a watered-down imitation of French thinkers like Foucault. And, finally, others argue that thinking about nationalism and free market globalization is more important than thinking about gender and sexuality (Gunther 24-6).

Gunther closes his history of queer theory's reception in France by arguing that regardless of the debates, queerness feels very French. He writes:

It is perhaps a bit of a caricature, but the French are often thought of in the following queer ways: as people who recognize the primacy of desire and pleasure; who are reluctant to build social identities around sexual practices; who value the absurd, the irrational, the superficial, and the frivolous – in short, a culture that understands and appreciates the performative aspects of social behavior. (26)

I am inclined to agree with Gunther that French culture is queer in these ways and must wonder if in some ways this cultural queerness has contributed to the fertile soil French cultural productions are to queer analysis. And, indeed, queer theory has a home in French studies as it is practiced today.

Over the last decade, scholarship attending to queer French studies and, even more recently, to transgender French studies has grown. These field shifts are needed and ongoing with scholars like Mesch illuminating ways of knowing that get overlooked by cis-heteronormative approaches to gender variant figures and their works and, ultimately, calling for a paradigm shift through transgender studies ("Trans" 1). Here I offer a discussion of this body of work in French studies that has informed my own.

My work is situated at the overlaps of queer studies and transgender studies. On the similarities and distinctions between queer studies and transgender studies, Heather Love explains:

If *queer* can be understood as refusing the stabilizations of both gender and sexuality implied by the categories gay and lesbian and opening onto a wider spectrum of sexual nonnormativity, *transgender* emerged as a term to capture a range of gendered embodiments, practices, and community formations that cannot be accounted for by the traditional binary. (173, original emphasis)

Taking Love's description of these fields (which is in no way an impermeable parameter), queer French studies then may attend to a spectrum of nonnormative sexualities. Similarly, transgender French studies may attend to gender outside the gender binary in numerous ways. And, the two fields overlap as I will discuss.¹⁸

In queer French studies, Michael Lucey has expanded the field by shifting away from the identity categories of gay and lesbian, and even away from queer in his book *Someone: The Pragmatics of Misfit Sexualities, from Colette to Hervé Guibert* (2019). Informed by sociology and linguistics, Lucey puts forth the term misfit sexualities to describe nonnormative sexualities expressed through idiosyncratic speech in the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Duras, and others. Lucey's work on misfit sexualities in twentieth-century France participates in a critical expansion of our understanding of sexuality and how sexuality has been expressed in the French context to include

¹⁸ For additional scholarship addressing the overlaps between queer studies and transgender studies, see Chu. See Mesch, "Trans" for this discussion within nineteenth-century French studies.

sexualities that do not fit neatly into the categories of gay or lesbian. I have taken inspiration from Lucey's concept of misfit or idiosyncratic expressions of sexuality – this idea that some “thing” is being expressed in spite of lacking a stock vehicle for its expression. Where Lucey locates this expression of misfit sexuality in a linguistic register, I locate future-oriented expressions of nonnormative yearnings related to sexuality and gender in narrative moments of disorientation.

Additionally, Evans's materialist work has contributed to an expanding queer French studies by focusing on queer thinking in twenty-first-century France. Evans enters French studies into the debates within Anglophone queer theory on utopia by finding that queer French cultural productions are utopian. They write: “The rich history of socialist and feminist utopian thinking in the French context, as well as the commitment of French queer writers to activism and politics (for why engage in politics if you have no hope of a better future?) tips the balance towards the latter [utopianism] in French queer work” (Evans 158). For Evans, the utopian impulses of queer French thinking stand out from the “somewhat jaded outlook” of queer theory in the Anglophone academy (169). Their study of the utopian impulses of queer French works has encouraged and affirmed my attention to the utopian investments in the works I've gathered.

In France, some view queer theory as an unwelcome Anglophone import; however, Evans urges readers to consider queer thought in France as “a specific, *particular* incarnation produced *within* and *as a result of* the political and theoretical context . . . It is not a ‘subset’ of a global, universal queer theory, but – in its specificity – offers new perspectives and new possibilities for queer thinking more widely” (10,

original emphasis). Following Evans, my work is interested in the kinds of queer and transgender thinking French works offer, the socio-political possibilities they birth, and how reading for queer and transgender strategies may expand how we approach literature, art, and film in French studies.

Love describes the fields of queer studies and transgender studies as: “linked through shared histories, methods, and commitments to transforming the situation of gender and sexual outsiders. While *queer* is associated primarily with nonnormative desires and sexual practices, and *transgender* is associated primarily with nonnormative gender identifications and embodiments, it is both theoretically and practically difficult to draw a clear line between them” (172, original emphasis). Shared by queer studies and transgender studies is an investment in “challenging discrete categories of identity” (Love 173). Queer studies and transgender studies then are not mutually exclusive.

In *Transgender History: The Roots of Today’s Revolution* (2017), Susan Stryker defines the term transgender as: “the movement across a socially imposed boundary from an unchosen starting place” (1). One can hear resonances with the term queer in this definition for how both terms – transgender and queer – describe actively moving from an unchosen social origin. As a field in the Anglophone context, transgender studies has necessarily focused its attention on the violence and difficulties faced by the transgender community.¹⁹ In American universities, transgender studies is predominantly housed in Social Science disciplines and is engaged with the material stakes of transgender lives.

¹⁹ For example, see: Eric Stanley’s *Atmospheres of Violence* (2021), Laurel Westbrook’s *Unlivable Lives* (2021), Gayle Salamon’s *The Life and Death of Latisha King* (2018), Snorton’s *Black on Both Sides* (2017), Keeling’s “Looking for M–” (2009), Dean Spade’s *Normal Life* (1977).

Attention to the turbulent discourse and sometimes life-threatening context of being transgender in the United States has been urgent. And, perhaps, as a result of the overwhelming violence against transgender lives in the United States, conversations about transgender futurity in this context can feel far off at times. Legal scholar and activist Dean Spade argues for what he calls “a critical trans politics” that is located “in a shared imagination of a world without imprisonment, colonialism, immigration enforcement, sexual violence, or wealth disparity” (16). Spade’s politics may offer a hopeful opening in thinking about transgender utopias, where a transgender collective imaginary may reshape social infrastructures in democratic and healing ways.

In French studies, an historical approach to transgender experiences has been merited as scholars identify the myriad expressions and embodiments of transgender experiences in France before the term transgender entered the lexicon. As mentioned, scholars of nineteenth-century French studies have pioneered a shift towards thinking with transgender in the field. For example, art historian Kirstin Ringelberg has readdressed nineteenth-century French artists and their works of art with a trans framework. By thinking with trans beyond the gender binary, Ringelberg illuminates how these figures and works of art tell stories not of normative gender but of non-normative identities and engagement.²⁰

²⁰ For example, in “The Court of Lilacs, The Studio of Roses, The Garden at Réveillon: Madeleine Lemaire’s *Empire of Flowers*,” Ringelberg offers a fresh reading of nineteenth-century French artist Madeleine Lemaire’s flower paintings and their role in Marcel Proust’s oeuvre. Ringelberg argues that Lemaire’s flower paintings must not be simply associated with feminine identity; rather, these paintings are symbolic of queer transformation insofar as they create possibilities for nonnormative engagement and identification. Ringelberg encourages French studies scholars to think critically about how our own enculturation may create binary thinking that affects the kinds of knowledge we produce.

Inspired by Ringelberg, Mesch has shed critical light on transgender experiences of gender in the context of nineteenth-century France from historical and literary perspectives. Additionally, she has published methodological principles to support a field shift towards transgender studies. This vital motion towards a transgender French studies has opened the proverbial door for scholars to continue to probe where and how expressions of transgender experiences emerge in France. At this time, French studies conferences regularly call for papers engaged in transgender studies. And, as time passes, we are likely to benefit from more publications that think with trans.

Because Mesch's work offers a model for thinking with transgender in literary studies, her scholarship has gifted me language with which to pursue a transgender-informed approach to the fin de siècle author Rachilde's writing and methodological principles for engaging in transgender French studies. Mesch's book, *Before Trans: Three Gender Stories from Nineteenth-Century France* (2020), offers three biographies of nineteenth-century French figures assigned female at birth (AFAB) who each express a transgender identity over a century before the term transgender entered the lexicon. *Before Trans* exemplifies the kinds of knowledge scholars can produce when undeterred by traditionalist concerns like presentism which is reading the past with today's queer and transgender theories. In conversation with young scholars about gender in our field, Mesch has explained: "For me, modern notions of trans allowed me to see that certain nineteenth-century writers were trying to articulate and embody nonbinary identities, before there was a language for such things" (Foss et al. 2006). Her idea of subjects expressing transgender identities before terms for these experiences existed has

encouraged me to hear expressions of nonbinary experiences in unexpected places, such as in the work of contemporary, cis-hetero artist Sophie Calle. And, in paying attention to expressions pre-language, Mesch's work tends to gender in nineteenth-century France similarly to how Lucey's work tends to sexuality in twentieth-century France. By focusing my last two chapters on twenty-first-century works, I hope to extend this line of thinking.

I follow in the thinking laid out by Mesch and Lucey that invests in expressions of gender variance and nonheteronormative sexualities. For Mesch, thinking with transgender allows scholars to hear these expressions because we are meeting these subjects and works on their own terms. Axiom 2 of her methodological principles for transgender studies is that we center "individual experiences and voices, and [privilege] self-expression over dominant . . . discourses (medical, legal, political, literary) that sought to act on bodies and produce meaning from them" ("Trans" 4). This framework privileges self-knowledge above other forms of knowledge and encourages sitting with our sources to hear their thinking. As mentioned, close reading as a method of analysis facilitates giving priority to self-knowledge and the knowledges transmitted by a work, as well as allows these works to weave their own theories and speak their own stories.

Like Evans' finding that French queer thought lies in cultural productions, Mesch locates transgender thinking in the cultural objects she studies. Unlike in the Anglophone context – where cultural productions may support a theory, but theory is a distinct entity – the vehicle for queer and transgender theorizing in France *is* cultural productions. Mesch's second axiom shows that if we want to understand expressions of transgender

gender experiences in France, we must set our theoretical and methodological biases aside and truly listen to the objects themselves. This axiom has informed the generous space I give in each chapter to understanding these French works on their own terms through close readings which in turn gives access to the futures they imagine and enact prior to an existing model for the modes of being and perceiving they transmit.

Mesch's Axiom 4 further informs my transgender approach to this project. Axiom 4 states: "Borrowing from José Esteban Muñoz's directive that '[q]ueerness is often transmitted covertly,' thinking with trans means similarly analyzing 'ephemera as evidence' and seeking out indirect signs of trans existence and expression, reading both for affect and with affect" ("Trans" 11). Drawing on Muñoz's work on how queerness leaves traces, Mesch asserts that "[g]ender expression and its suppression also leave an affective trace, often in relationship to what cannot be spoken—not just because it is stigmatized, but because it eludes language" ("Trans" 11).²¹ Following Mesch's fourth axiom, I engage Muñoz's concept of 'ephemera as evidence' in relation to gender expression and gender roles in Chapter Three.

These two methodological principles offered by Mesch have aided my identification of utopian transgender thinking in French works. As mentioned, Evans has identified utopianism as characteristic of contemporary queer French works. Taking Mesch's methods and Evans' work on utopianism, I find connections between expressions of gender variance and futurity in twenty-first-century French works, offering a new site of inquiry into transgender thinking in France. I hope, in bridging

²¹ For Muñoz on ephemera, see *Cruising Utopia* and "Ephemera as Evidence."

scholarship on the nineteenth and twenty-first centuries, to infuse twenty-first-century French studies with the richness of thinking with transgender occurring for the nineteenth century.

WHY NONBINARY, WHY ENBY

The main term I use to refer to transgender experiences that do not fit into a gender binary is “nonbinary.” Stryker wrote that the term nonbinary refers to: “people who do not conform to binary notions of the alignment of sex, gender, gender identity, gender role, gender expression, or gender presentation” (24). My project uses the term nonbinary in accordance with Stryker’s definition and towards a contribution to thinking with transgender in French studies.

The term nonbinary provides a more nuanced description of the gender expansiveness I locate in French works than the term transgender. While the term nonbinary does not yet appear frequently in transgender French studies, its use in academic writing is increasing.²² For example, trans ethnographer Brandon Robinson has explored how nonbinary knowledge production offers a new epistemology that challenges the academy’s preexisting ways of knowing (“Non-Binary” 441). SA Smythe’s work on the black nonbinary method echoes Robinson’s assertion that

²² See Foss et al. for an example of a publication in French studies that uses the term nonbinary.

nonbinary knowledge production challenges academic norms. For Smythe, nonbinary method is about “eschewing the will to institutionality” (162).

Still, nonbinary is a relatively new term, and it will take time for the term to circulate further. Stryker observed: “*nonbinary* is an emerging terminological preference among younger generations who consider binary gender to be something more relevant to their grandparents than to themselves” (24-5). Seemingly exemplifying the contemporaneity of the term nonbinary, Columbia University Press published a collection of memoirs in 2019 simply titled *Nonbinary*, creating a space for expressions of nonbinary gender experiences and their corresponding concerns and pleasures. As the first university publication attending to nonbinary gender experiences specifically, *Nonbinary* has been critical to my thinking, and I regularly draw upon it to develop a theoretical frame informed by nonbinary gender.

A focus on nonbinary gender has been fruitful for engaging French works because of the close relationship nonbinary gender has to disorienting moments. In the introduction to *Nonbinary*, Micah Rajunov and Scott Duane address how disorientation is part and parcel of nonbinary gender experiences. They write: “Nonbinary people wrestle with many of the typical questions that many trans people face, such as coming out, changing their name and pronouns, opting for hormones or surgery. But the answers come in a murkier package, as there is still no paradigm for how nonbinary gender can coexist within the established male/female dichotomy” (xxvii). This murkiness matters in a study of orientation because murkiness – as a lack of social norms and structures – is fertile ground for disorienting experiences. Indeed, one striking aspect of tending to

nonbinary experiences in French works is the unavailability of a social blueprint or map to the subjects of the works. While some subjects try to follow available social and cultural roadmaps, none stick and none fit, resulting in map-less or lost subjects.

Being lost is a through thread in these works. What has captivated me about these lost subjects is how each one, when faced with a durational experience of being lost, commits to world-making – to inventing new selves and new forms that may better extend their shape. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz described being lost as a feature of queer lives, writing: “Queerness is illegible and therefore lost in relation to the straight minds’ mapping of space . . . [O]ne’s queerness will always render one lost to a world of heterosexual imperatives, codes, and laws” (72-3). Here Muñoz describes a multidirectional meaning of being lost whereby queerness is lost in spaces ordered by heteronormativity and queers are lost in this structuring logic. Following this, I extend Muñoz’s discussion of queer people being lost in a heterosexual world to address how nonbinary people get lost in a cisgender world.

Finally, I use the term “enby” in lieu of nonbinary in many instances. The term “enby” is derived by shortening the term “nonbinary,” sounding the letters N and B in NonBinary. The term enby is used in the United States, generally by younger folks in the transgender community. I prefer the term enby for how it muddies its origins. Where nonbinary must define itself negatively, as *not binary* gender, enby functions as a once removed trace of an insufficient label. In French, as in English, the term *les genres nonbinaires* (translated as nonbinary genders) exists in the negative of what it is not.

While the term enby is not in circulation in France, we may opt to glean the letters N and B here too to find *-enne-bé* in the French language.

Rajunov and Duane address the failings of the myriad terms that have come into our lexicon to signify nonbinary genders, stating: “What all of them fail to capture is the nuanced humanity of those whose gender ventures into the unknown. Nonbinary individuals are more than simply both, neither, or in between. Stepping beyond male and female leads us into the infinite universe of gender” (xix). While enby still suffers its ties to nonbinary and the inherent failure of a label always already conjuring binary gender, its sonic ingenuity frees it from legibility. As Kara Keeling has observed, “whatever escapes recognition, whatever escapes meaning and valuation, exists as an impossible possibility within our shared reality” (566). Of the myriad terms in our current lexicon, enby appears as the greatest escape artist. Enby is two syllables banged together to form a new molecule; a four-letter powerhouse sounding out N.B. – the mysterious initials of NonBinary – denying access to its origins with a wink and deriving power from slipping recognition.

LOOKING AROUND AND AHEAD

In their survey of the rhetoric of French Republican universalism in the twenty-first century from its tokenization of the heterosexual family, anti-gay marriage propaganda, and transphobic campaign against “la théorie du genre” (gender theory),

Evans observes that France is not as liberal as it is sometimes esteemed. For instance, until new legislation was adopted in October 2016, transgender individuals seeking to legally change their gender were required to present proof that they had undergone medical sterilization (Evans 8). Eugenicist laws like this offer insight into the exercise of state power over trans bodies, revealing whose bodies get to reproduce and whose bodies threaten a Republican commitment to the heterosexual family unit.

The current state of LGBTQ* issues in France lends nineteenth-century nonbinary author Rachilde's work increased contemporaneity with twenty-first-century queer and transgender cultural productions. For example, Rachilde's novel *La Jongleuse* (*The Juggler*, 1900), analyzed in Chapter Two, performs a queering of the heterosexual family unit by a queer, transgender protagonist who must die in the end to achieve said queering. In my reading of this series of events, the death of the protagonist imbues the novel with contemporary political stakes: the eugenicist thinking that mandates the death of the queer or transgender subject to preserve the heterosexual family unit *fails* to save the heterosexual family unit from queerness reshaping the possibilities of what a family unit could be. Rachilde's work, by engaging contemporary concerns with eerie accuracy, offers this otherwise twenty-first-century study an anchor point for understanding queer and transgender thinking in France.

In *Old Futures*, Lothian asks: "What if, instead of a queer present reshaping the ways we relate to past and future, turning to the futures imagined in the past can lead us to queer the present" (4)? Lothian dedicates one chapter of her book to nineteenth-century literature in an otherwise twenty-first-century study to answer her own question

of how “futures imagined in the past can lead us to queer the present.” Following Lothian’s compelling example, I dedicate one chapter to exploring how Rachilde’s imaginary can lead us to queer the present. In this way, Rachilde’s literary imaginary and queer and transgender thinking inform my approach to twenty-first-century works.

Furthermore, because Rachilde is one of the few French figures who has received scholarly attention informed by transgender studies, and because studies of transgender thinking in French works are so scarce, their inclusion offers my project a helpful starting point or model for how to identify queer and transgender thinking in French cultural productions that I then apply to the twenty-first-century.²³ I consider Rachilde to be something of a respected ancestor to the queer and transgender works that follow, regardless of whether the later works were informed by Rachilde, because all of the works gathered here share certain characteristic modes for expressing queer and transgender thinking.

Beginning in 1900 with enby ancestor Rachilde shows that queer and transgender thinking have endured a century.²⁴ Eric Stanley, in his book *Atmospheres of Violence* (2021), finds hope in “the ways trans/queerness has and continues to spectacularly endure, and how this persistence is marked by a generativity that finds form in artistic and organizing practices, and in quotidian acts of getting by in a world that wishes our end [. . .] resistance might not necessarily get us free, but freedom surely won’t come with anything less” (17). While the aesthetic cannot save the material, it circulates

²³ For transgender scholarship on Rachilde, see Mesch’s *Before Trans* and “Trans Rachilde.” See Chapter Two for a discussion of why I use the pronouns “they/them” to refer to Rachilde.

²⁴ This is not to say that queer and transgender thinking “began” in 1900. Mesch’s biographical work, for example, identifies figures and stories from earlier centuries that inspired the transgender historical figures she writes about (*Before*).

trans/queerness. And under a logic of universalism that dismisses and privatizes these voices, the public lives of queer and transgender literature, art, and film become all the more important.

That the queer and transgender strategies of reorientation and futurity have a history in French creativity and have resurfaced in various media of the twenty-first century creates the sensation that these kinds of thinking and world-making are still needed and felt. By studying these works and letting them do the talking, we stand to gain new insights into queer and transgender thinking in France as it emerges and has emerged. The three characteristics of queer and transgender thinking I have identified – disorientation reorienting, desire-informed resistance, and futurity – are only a beginning. I hope by contributing to our developing understanding of queer and transgender thinking in France and the alternative possibilities imagined by this thinking that further attention is given to the remarkable worlds these works propose, and that a field shift to thinking with transgender will expand the transgender genealogy that has taken shape in the last few years and is reinforming our approach as a field.

Chapter Two

“The Dawn of the Other World”: Queer Reorientation in Rachilde’s *La jongleuse* (1900)

To understand the alternative futures imagined by French representational works, this chapter looks to a Decadent novel published at the fin-de-siècle. Decadence was a literary movement of the late nineteenth century invested in “pleasures and practices linked to cultural decline” (Mahoney 15). Historian Alex Murray describes Decadence as “a literature that looked forward” (7). Similarly, Victorian scholar Kristin Mahoney draws attention to the forward-looking legacy of Decadence. In *Queer Kinship After Wilde* (2022), Mahoney illuminates how a community of queer Decadent modernists: “reached into the fin-de-siècle past for ideas that might allow them to operate outside of the heteronormative boundaries restricting the practice of marriage and the family” (11). This queer community, according to Mahoney, found inspiration in the fin-de-siècle for: “alternative modes of living, loving, and connecting” (13). Like the queer community in Mahoney’s study, I find alternatives modes of “living, loving, and connecting” represented in a Decadent novel. For Mahoney, there is a utility in Decadence: “in assisting the conceptualization of alternative ways forward, in enabling rebellion, and more specifically modes of queer rebellion” (15). The utility Mahoney identifies in Decadence undergirds this chapter’s exploration of the ways in which a Decadent novel conceptualizes “alternative ways forward.”

Nineteenth-century French studies has similarly turned its attention to the queer and gender expansive imaginaries enacted by historical figures and portrayed in a range

of representational works.²⁵ Literary scholar and historian Rachel Mesch has been outspoken in calling for a paradigm shift in the field towards what she calls “thinking with trans.” For Mesch, thinking with trans offers a framework that aims to understand the stories of gender expansive historical figures and their representational works on their own terms.²⁶ A trans framework resists gender essentialism, according to Mesch, by taking “seriously the infinite ways in which a person might not identify with masculinity or femininity” (“Trans” 2).

Informed by trans and queer frameworks, this chapter offers a queer phenomenological reading of the novel *La jongleuse* (*The Juggler*, 1900) by French author and playwright Rachilde (1860-1953), whose biography I will discuss.²⁷ As I will show, Rachilde’s 1900 novel proposes gender expansive and queer alternatives for kinship and ways of being that anticipate modes of being and relating that would still be considered alternative practices today. Additionally, I focus this chapter on *La jongleuse*

²⁵ See for example, Gretchen Schultz’s study of lesbian literature in France that was written almost exclusively by men, who she refers to as “sapphic fathers.” According to Schultz, this corpus inflicted representational violence on the people it claimed to portray and likely contributed to the objectifying formulation of same-sex identities in culture (5). See Foss et al. for a roundtable conversation on the field’s turn towards a trans framework. Additionally, for examples of scholarship in the field with a trans framework, see: Kirstin Ringelberg, Christopher Robinson, Lojo Tizon and María Del Carmen, Teresa Stankiewicz, Kadji Amin, Jen Manion, Rachel Mesch.

²⁶ “The vibrant gender diversity of the nineteenth century is obscured when we privilege discourses that had no way of acknowledging that diversity. Fundamentally, then, thinking with trans requires scholarly paradigms that allow gender variant voices to speak on their own terms” (Mesch, “Trans” 3). For Mesch’s proposed axioms for a transgender-informed French studies, see “Trans Rachilde.”

²⁷ Queer phenomenology was developed by Sara Ahmed to study the orientation of sexual orientation through how bodies take shape by tending towards objects that are reachable. According to Ahmed, queer phenomenology is not “properly” phenomenological and would relish in its failure to be “proper” (*Queer* 2).

In Melanie Hawthorne’s introduction to *The Juggler*, she states: “*The Juggler* is at once one of Rachilde’s most carefully constructed novels, a simultaneous expression and parody of Decadence, and a meditation on female power, desire, and sexuality” (Rachilde xvii). While I do not read the novel in terms of female power, I do analyze the modes of being, perceiving, and relating proposed by the novel’s “meditation” on desire and sexualities.

to show that representational practices that imagine queer and gender expansive futurities in France have a centuries long lineage that predates the terms queer and trans. Mesch's biographical work on Rachilde in *Before Trans* (2020) illuminates the myriad ways in which Rachilde experienced gender beyond a binary framework. By demonstrating that Rachilde was trans before the term trans existed, her biography has fundamentally changed the way scholars think about Rachilde and encouraged new engagement with the author's corpus. Along this line, I consider Rachilde to be a transgender ancestor, or "trancestor" to borrow S.A. Smythe's term, to the figures whose works I explore in later chapters (163).

Following the examples of Mesch and historian Jen Manion, I will be using the gender-neutral pronouns they/them/their to refer to Rachilde. Manion uses the pronouns they/them/their to refer to the subjects of her book *Female Husbands: A Trans History* (2020) and argues that using the pronoun "they" for historical figures is: "a powerful, gender neutral way to refer to someone whose gender is unknown, irrelevant, or beyond classification" (14). Mesch cites Manion's reasoning as motivating her own use of they/them pronouns. And, in regards to Rachilde, she adds that:

Using they/them pronouns for Rachilde is not meant to suggest that they would have chosen these pronouns, but rather to acknowledge Rachilde's gender non-conformity. Linguistically, these pronouns compel an important switch in mindset within the reader, guiding us to think of gender non-conforming writers who were

assigned female at birth beyond the feminist frameworks through which they have been chiefly known. (“Trans” 4)²⁸

Likewise, by choosing gender neutral pronouns to refer to Rachilde, I motion to acknowledge their gender fluidity in lieu of pinning them to a gender assigned at birth that they never fully identified with in life. Mesch asks us to consider that: “throughout their long life, Rachilde rejected the category of woman in myriad ways, sometimes insisting that they were a man, and other times that they were a werewolf” (“Trans” 1). In choosing to use they/them pronouns, my goal is to honor Rachilde’s expansive identities as best as possible with the imperfect and ever-evolving language available to me.

Rachilde was born Marguerite Eymery and gained literary celebrity with the publication of their novel *Monsieur Vénus* in 1880. This novel caused such a scandal it was banned in Belgium, where it had been published as pornography. Rachilde, who then faced a prison sentence in Belgium on account of the novel, left for Paris where the ordeal was lauded as a credential in literary circles.²⁹ A prolific writer, Rachilde’s calling card infamously read “Homme de Lettres” (“Man of Letters”), and their novels likewise explored expansive notions of gender as well as nonprocreative sexualities in ways that baffled or intrigued their contemporaries.³⁰ Depictions of expansive genders and sexual

²⁸ For examples of Rachildean scholarship with a feminist framework, see Janet Beizer’s reading of the subversion of patriarchal discourse in Rachilde’s œuvre as a feminism (258). Also, see Hawthorne’s biography of Rachilde which centers feminist concerns in its discussion of how Rachilde negotiated the cultural norms placed on fin-de-siècle woman writers (11). Mesch points out that feminist scholarship is why scholars of French literature are familiar with Rachilde; however, she finds a feminist framework insufficient for understanding Rachilde “on their own terms” and cautions against assuming Rachilde’s behaviors and beliefs were rooted in the female identity they were assigned at birth (“Trans” 1).

²⁹ See Hawthorne’s account of these events in her introduction to *The Juggler* (Rachilde xi).

³⁰ See Mesch (*Before* 146-8) on Rachilde’s calling card.

See Tizon and Del Carmen for a discussion on how most of Rachilde’s novels deconstructed the cisgender heteronormative constructs of her time, and their characters highlighted the myriad possibilities for

practices are characteristic of Rachilde's œuvre and are often presented as perversions. For example, Raoule in *Monsieur Vénus* and Marcel(le) in *Madame Adonis* (1888) cross-dress in the pursuit and enactment of their socially "taboo" sexual desires and pleasures. Responding to the medical and psychological discourses of their time, Rachilde often linked perversion and madness, such as in their novel *La Tour d'amour* (*The Tower of Love*, 1899), a horror story set in a lighthouse, as well as in *La jongleuse* as I will discuss. *La jongleuse* and their novel *La Marquise de Sade* (1887) levy critiques at the medical and psychological discourses disliked by Rachilde for the misogyny and pathologizing rhetoric they identified in these fields.³¹ Through these critiques, an alternative mode of valuation emerges in Rachilde's writing that lauds sexual desires that were thought to be perverse, a fluid understanding of gender and sex, and animals as well as animality.³²

Approaching Rachilde and their works with a trans framework as Mesch does illuminates the ways in which they experienced and expressed a gender that differed from the feminine gender assigned to them at birth. According to Mesch, Rachilde: "recognized her difference as a fact. But she always worked to give shape to that difference in her writing, trying to translate the precise nature of her gender variance into

sex/gender/sexualities as well as fluid gender identity and expression. Also, see Stankiewicz for a consideration of how Rachilde's transgender experience of gender is evident in their playwriting.

³¹ See Hawthorne's introduction to *The Juggler* on Rachilde's disdain for the medical and psychological discourses of the late nineteenth-century (Rachilde xxiii).

³² Mesch identifies a sense of gender plurality and fluidity throughout Rachilde's writings (*Before* 154). I will later discuss Rachilde's investments in animal ethics and animality in-depth. Here, I would like to note that *La Marquise de Sade* portrays scientists as violently anthropocentric and misogynistic. For an excellent analysis of this, see C. Robinson. *La jongleuse* portrays these themes similarly as forms of violence; however, as I will show, the character representative of scientific violence transforms by the end where he is portrayed as an animal invested not in "scientific rationality" but in dreams and queer possibilities for kinship.

words and invoking the various discourses of her time to do so” (*Before* 127).³³

Rachilde’s writing then becomes a space for them to explore these experiences of nonnormative gender and sexuality (Mesch, “Trans” 5).

In her consideration of Rachilde’s life and literary works, Mesch proposes a trans historical approach that collapses the distinction between life and text, writing:

But what if the distinction between life and text is actually a fiction that protects heteronormative readings? What if trans writers, like many writers, used their texts to make sense of their lives? This concern about a critical blurring between life and text suggests that there is a neutral way of reading, one in which the author is a clean slate, outside of body or gender. Yet our supposedly objective reading practices tend to assume heterosexual norms and gender normativity. The imperative to maintain a distinction between life and text thus disproportionality targets writers who are not (white) heterosexual men. (“Trans” 5-6)

According to Mesch, many gender variant figures turned to writing to work through their sense of self (“Trans” 8). Informed by this compelling argument for collapsing Rachilde’s life and literary works, this chapter draws connections between *La jongleuse* and Rachilde’s life throughout.³⁴ Inspired by the kinds of knowledge produced by Mesch’s trans historical approach, my readings of *La jongleuse* are informed by

³³ In *Before Trans*, Mesch uses she/her pronouns to refer to Rachilde. Post-publication, she decided to use they/them pronouns instead. I have referenced her reasoning for using they/them pronouns from her article “Before Trans,” since it has informed my choice of pronouns. When quoting *Before Trans* as well as Rachildean scholarship in general, I leave the pronouns as they were written and appreciate how the pronouns used to refer to Rachilde in scholarship tell a story about self-reflexivity, an ongoing commitment to revision, and the exchange of ideas.

³⁴ Rachilde often wrote their own life into their protagonists (Mesch, *Before* 169).

Rachilde's life towards gaining a fuller understanding of the queer and gender expansive knowledges portrayed.

Literary practitioners of queer studies have turned their attention to Rachilde's œuvre in recent years.³⁵ Katherine Gantz calls Rachilde's presence in queer French literary scholarship "indisputably vital," asserting that: "Rachilde offers her readers of today an unflinching view of the subversive potential of 'queerness,' daring to embrace forbidden desires otherwise considered deviant, dangerous, or unproductive" ("The Difficult Guest" 129). In this chapter, I locate this "subversive potential" in subject orientation and read *La jongleuse* with a focus on how Léon Reille, a cis-hetero male medical student, is worked on and transformed by his encounters with the novel's queer protagonist Eliante Donalger and the objects proximal to her. My reading is the first to identify and attend explicitly to the reorientation of Léon in the novel. As this chapter will show, the reorientation I argue the novel represents proposes alternative possibilities for ways of being and structures of kinship.

To study orientation I turn to Sara Ahmed who has theorized that subject orientation can shift, meaning people can become reoriented (*Queer* 101). This is a minor point in her book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006) and is discussed within the context of how she became reoriented after self-identifying as queer – noticing people, interactions, and objects that were previously invisible to her in the background. These experiences revealed to her a connection between a subject's desires and their orientation more broadly. She writes: "These differences in how one directs desire, as well as how one is

³⁵ See Alexander Pugh, Gantz, Hawthorne, and Mesch.

faced by others, can ‘move’ us and hence affect even the most deeply engrained patterns of relating to others” (*Queer* 101). I pick up this point and build on Ahmed’s assertion that even engrained orientations *can* shift by exploring what *La jongleuse* represents as becoming possible through the work of reorientation.

Ahmed addresses how bodies and spaces may come to be reoriented, writing: “bodies can take up spaces that do not extend their shape, which in turn can ‘reorientate’ bodies and space” (*Queer* 61). In this passage, she is concerned with how queer bodies that take up spaces that do not extend their shape come to reorient those spaces. Drawing on Ahmed’s observations, this chapter asks the inverse question: what forms of reorientation occur when a straight body takes up a queer space? Through *La jongleuse*, this chapter works to answer this question and expand the kinds of knowledge we stand to gain from attending to orientation.

The futurity portrayed in *La jongleuse* results from disorienting experiences that work to reorient bodies and spaces. For Ahmed: “Disorientation involves contact with things, but a contact in which ‘things’ slip as a proximity that does not hold things in place, thereby creating a feeling of distance” (*Queer* 166). She describes these things that slip as “queer objects.” Queer objects, in her formulation, “support proximity between those who are supposed to live on parallel lines, *as points that should not meet*” (*Queer* 169, original emphasis). As this chapter will demonstrate, *La jongleuse* portrays Léon as reoriented by his pursuit of queer objects – what initially slips away from him – and disorienting experiences. Seemingly echoing Ahmed’s assertion that queer objects bring together “points that should not meet,” objects in *La jongleuse* support meetings between

characters with membership in seemingly incompatible social categories. Informed by Ahmed's formulation of queer objects, I refer to objects that support these kinds of meetings as queer objects.

Focusing my readings on queer objects has offered a method for hearing the queer and gender fluid desires and possibilities represented that predate a shared terminology for their linguistic expression. Mesch draws attention to how gender expression and its suppression: "leave an affective trace, often in relationship to what cannot be spoken—not just because it is stigmatized, but because it eludes language" ("Trans" 11). French studies scholar Michael Lucey is similarly invested in sexualities that could not be expressed in language in twentieth-century France. In *Someone* (2019), he explores nonlinguistic expressions of sexualities that he calls "misfit" in context with the socio-historical norms of the twentieth-century. Lucey puts forth the concept of "practical knowledge" to describe a not-yet-lexicalizable knowledge resulting from the experience of not fitting with one's place or time that he locates in idiosyncratic speech. Practical knowledge offers a helpful framework for thinking about how not-yet-lexicalizable knowledge gets expressed in representational works. Following Mesch and Lucey, I propose an attention to objects in representational works as possible sites for the expression of practical knowledges. In representational works, objects can function symbolically as receptacles for preferences, desires, and hopes. As such, I read the objects that are near characters as indicative of the orientations taken by the characters. This chapter demonstrates, through *La jongleuse*, how critical attention to proximal

objects in fiction can yield insight into experiences of gender and sexuality that did not yet have a linguistic vehicle for their expression.³⁶

ELIANTE, NOT “ONLY A WOMAN”

La jongleuse follows the relationship between the wealthy widow Eliante and the poor medical student Léon. Léon is confounded by and enamored with Eliante and the objects in her home. He pursues a sexual relationship with Eliante; however, she does not desire heterosexual sex acts and tries to arrange a marriage between Léon and her niece Missie. *La jongleuse* plunges into a finale in which Eliante tricks Léon into having sexual intercourse with Missie, Eliante commits suicide, and Léon and Missie are married with a newborn. My reading of these events will illuminate the ways in which the Léon of the novel's end does not perceive or desire in accordance with the expectations of cis-heteronormativity. In my reading, this breathes a queerness into what appears to be a cis-heteronormative family and thereby offers alternative models for identity, love, and kinship.³⁷

³⁶ While I distinguish between sex, gender, and sexuality at times to describe the practices represented by *La jongleuse*, I am aware that sex and gender in nineteenth-century France: “were overlapping modes that could be intimately connected to a sense of self beyond heteronormative, heterosexual ones” (Mesch, “Trans” 8). I have taken care to avoid foisting contemporary classifications onto the novel while navigating the language available to me.

³⁷ The depiction of queer kinship relations appearing like a heterosexual family is perhaps an autobiographical extraction from Rachilde's marriage fictionalized in *La jongleuse*. Mesch's biography explores Rachilde's marriage in 1889 to the cis-hetero male Alfred Valette in the context of their gender narrative (*Before* 176). I will return to this autobiographical connection later in this chapter.

Previous scholarship on *La jongleuse* has focused on the relationship between Eliante and Leon.³⁸ However, the emphasis of these critical inquiries is largely on Eliante, turning to Léon in his function of illuminating Eliante. My analysis takes Léon as the primary subject, and my critical engagement of Eliante facilitates my thinking on Léon and his transformation. Similarly focused on representations of young men and masculinity in fin-de-siècle French literature, François Proulx observes a shift in late nineteenth-century literature towards social anxieties about masculinity and the impressionability of the young male reading public. Proulx shows that in a plethora of novels about young men: “earlier discourses about the dangers and pernicious effects of reading were redeployed around a new object of concern, the young man” (3). Rachilde would have been aware of these French novels which circulated in the 1890s. Given this, we may consider *La jongleuse* in context with fin-de-siècle anxieties about masculinity and the impressionability of young men. While *La jongleuse* is not in the corpus of literature Proulx references, its portrayal of a young man similarly bestows him with the characteristic of being influenceable and, as I later discuss, describes him as a “reader” of Eliante and positions his masculinity as at stake.³⁹

Other scholars have observed that Léon appears to be influenced by Eliante. In her reading of Eliante as a kind of feminist artist, Guri Ellen Barstad observes that Eliante transforms Léon into an *objet d’art*. Attending to Eliante’s Creole identity and the novel’s portrayal of exoticism, Gantz posits in her article “Une Langue étrangère” that Léon is

³⁸ See Barstad and Gantz’s “Une Langue étrangère.”

³⁹ Mesch observes that *Monsieur Vénus* was perceived as an attack on masculinity by the French public (Before 142-3). While *La jongleuse*’s engagement with masculinity is more subtle than in *Monsieur Vénus*, the two novels reflect the author’s investment in engaging masculinity.

affected by exoticism. While my reading similarly views Léon as influenced by Eliante, I focus explicitly on Léon's transformation and the futurity it makes possible.⁴⁰ Before turning to Léon and in service of understanding the character who influences him, I first offer a reading of Eliante that takes into consideration Rachilde's gender fluidity and tendency to imbue their protagonists with autobiographical details.

I follow Mesch's suggestion: "that in order to truly understand them [gender expansive historical figures], we should stop thinking about them exclusively as women but rather as individuals pushing against that very identity, for whom the appropriate gender designation remains an open question" (*Before* 11). As mentioned, Rachilde's work often contained autobiographical elements, and *La jongleuse* is no exception.⁴¹ With this in mind, I suggest we explore the ways in which Eliante rails against easy categorization as a woman in ways that do not champion nineteenth-century feminism.⁴² Like many of Rachilde's female protagonists, Eliante takes up the familiar avatars of monster, hysteric, and animal.⁴³ Furthermore, Eliante is nonreproductive and does not desire penetrative hetero-sex.⁴⁴ I come to question a simple identification of Eliante as a

⁴⁰ Both Barstad and Gantz gesture at a reshaping of Léon by Eliante, though neither takes Léon as their primary subject. Barstad alludes to Léon transforming into an *objet d'art* in an analysis of Eliante as a feminist artist. In Barstad's reading, Léon's transformation ends with his union with Missie, which saves him from the fate of being one of Eliante's statues. While I do not share Barstad's understanding that Léon is saved, her chapter offers a detailed comparison of the novel with relevant myths to explore artistry. Gantz too identifies a transformation in Léon in connection with Eliante's Creole identity ("Une Langue étrangère"). Gantz reads Léon as affected by Eliante's exoticism, and similarly to my reading, this transformation increases in severity and is at times encouraged by objects and spaces. My analysis, however, is not of race or exoticism but of a queer orientation as I read Léon as progressively redirected by Eliante's unwavering queerness.

⁴¹ See Hawthorne and Mesch on Rachilde's autobiographical insertions.

⁴² For an in-depth biographical account of why Rachilde was not a feminist, see Mesch (*Before* 189-97).

⁴³ See Mesch (*Before* 4 and 128). To offer a few examples, these avatars are also taken up by characters in *Monsieur Vénus*, *La Marquise de Sade*, and *Madame Adonis*.

⁴⁴ Rachilde rejected the procreative role assigned to women and viewed it as a form of violence (Mesch, *Before* 155).

woman through the novel's over insistence that she *is* a woman and her identity as a divine vessel. In consideration of the above, I wonder if Eliante is only a woman because only "woman and man" existed in nineteenth-century France. I wonder if, in some part, Eliante "is a woman" similarly to how Rachilde "was a woman." Mesch has argued that Rachilde refused to identify entirely as a woman (*Before* 190). The intention of my line of inquiry is not to deny Eliante and Rachilde membership in the identity category of "woman." Rather, my questioning is open to Eliante as a portrayal of gender variance – a "woman . . ." – who folds question marks into, as Léon says to her, "what stuff women like you are made of" (Rachilde, *The Juggler* 61).⁴⁵

The sheer volume of references in *La jongleuse* to Eliante as a "woman" acquire a parodic affect. And Eliante's easy designation as a woman is played with very early on when Léon asks Eliante if she is "the god" in question, and she replies: "I'm only a woman, nothing more . . . nothing less" (13).⁴⁶ The addition of "nothing more . . . nothing less" collapses boundaries between being a woman and being a god, as though "woman" can fluidly be or harbor a god. I read this as pushing the boundaries of the category of woman, asking the reader to question what "woman" even is. In the same scene Léon says to Eliante: "And you claim that you're only a woman? Indeed" (14)!⁴⁷ This uncategorizable boundless depiction of "woman" further suggests that while Eliante is claiming to be a woman, the certainty of this is elusive. It may be that Rachilde pushes

⁴⁵ Amin has read Colette's *The Pure and the Impure* as demanding "a form of literary close reading attuned to the text's ellipses, limits, and contradictions, its abrupt and unexplained shifts in tone and affect" (114). I am proposing reading Eliante similarly with attunement to ellipses and contradictions.

« Ou je t'apprendrai de quel bois on chauffe les femmes de ton espèce » (Rachilde, *La jongleuse* 91)!

⁴⁶ « Je ne suis qu'une femme, rien de plus... rien de moins » (*La jongleuse* 39).

⁴⁷ « Et vous prétendez que vous n'êtes qu'une femme ? Fichtre » (*La jongleuse* 40) !

against the parameters of “woman” here, dissatisfied with what a woman was allowed to be in nineteenth-century France.⁴⁸

La jongleuse couples the parody of Eliante being a woman with Eliante’s deification as either a vessel for or embodiment of a god of love. We may make an autobiographical link to Rachilde here who learned Spiritism from their grandparents and became a vessel for spirits to speak through (Mesch, *Before* 125). Their *nom de plume*, Rachilde, comes from a séance they held in which a seventeenth-century Swedish count named Rachilde spoke through them (Mesch, *Before* 125). Mesch argues that Spiritism was one of the discourses Rachilde invoked to try to give shape to their gender variance (*Before* 127). I propose considering the descriptions of Eliante as human and divine along these autobiographical lines. Thinking about Eliante’s divinity as informed by Rachilde’s relationship to Spiritism tells a different story in which Eliante’s gender identity is beyond the scope of “woman.” As shown above, it is Eliante’s link with a god that begins the question of her womanhood. The day that Eliante is home, described as “*her day*,” is Friday (*vendredi*), and *vendredi* acquires its name from the Roman goddess of love Venus (150, original emphasis).⁴⁹ Furthermore, each day of the week has a planetary association in astrology, which was practiced at the time, and Friday’s planet is Venus, symbolic of love. This is just one of many ways Eliante is subtly associated with a deity in ways that seem to permeate her being and habits.

⁴⁸ See Mesch for historical accounts of Rachilde’s dissatisfaction with a normative woman’s role and life.

⁴⁹ Eliante to Léon: “I’m at home on Fridays” (*The Juggler* 31) and “You’ll come back next Friday” (44). « Je reçois le vendredi » (*La jongleuse* 59) and « Vous reviendrez vendredi prochain » (73). « bien que ce ne soit pas *son jour* » (*La jongleuse* 193, original emphasis). Similarly, the English term “Friday” was named after a Norse/Proto-Germanic goddess of love – gaining “Fri” from Frigg or Freyja.

Another example of the Eliante's inexorable link to the divine is in the scene where Eliante goes to Léon's apartment in the costume of a 40-year-old widow. Here, Eliante is stripped of her usual accoutrements and magic. This makes the appearance of the number three – a divine number in numerology – even more striking as the number three functions to assert Eliante's godliness. Rachilde would have learned of the number three's divine association from their early education by the local Christian abbots their parents had hired as tutors (*Before*, Mesch 128). In Christianity, three is associated with the divine triple nature of god: father, son, and holy spirit. Eliante rings Léon's doorbell at three o'clock (143), and when she leaves and Léon hurries after her, the narrator observes that: "She was already on the *third* floor when he leaned over the banister" (150, my emphasis).⁵⁰ That Eliante and divinity are always one and the same in the face of her claim to be "only a woman, nothing more . . . nothing less" complicates woman as an identity category befitting her (13).⁵¹

Mesch illuminates how Rachilde expressed their experience of gender through the inter-species dual identity of a werewolf, writing: "Rachilde came to see herself as resembling that creature: an abnormal being, neither one thing nor the other, perhaps a wild animal. This very doubleness would define her, both in person and in writing, because gender presented itself as a question for which it seemed impossible to formulate a definitive answer" (*Before* 131).⁵² We may consider an identity that is both human and divine as evoking a similar dual embodiment. Given the text's hyperbolic emphasis on

⁵⁰ « L'était trois heures » (*La jongleuse* 183).

« Elle était déjà au *troisième* étage quand il se pencha sur la rampe » (*La jongleuse* 192, my emphasis).

⁵¹ « Je ne suis qu'une femme, rien de plus... rien de moins » (*La jongleuse* 39).

⁵² The werewolf myth is from the folklore of Rachilde's hometown in Périgord, France. See Mesch (*Before* 131, 197-205; "Trans" 10) as well as C. Robinson 122.

Eliante's womanhood and the autobiographical connection with dual embodiment as a way Rachilde expressed their gender variance, I propose reading Eliante's gender as expanding beyond a binary understanding.

LÉON'S DEBUT: SPLIT ORIENTATION/S

Taking queer phenomenology as my method for approaching Léon's transformation, this section works to establish Léon's orientation at the beginning of *La jongleuse*. I find his beginning orientation already aware of and open to queer objects. Ahmed observes that: "what is reachable is determined precisely by the orientations that we have already taken" (*Queer* 55). Given this, I examine the orientations taken by Léon prior to his reorientation to excavate the ways in which his orientation was already queer. I describe Léon's beginning orientation as "split" because it is queer in some ways and what Ahmed calls "in line" in other ways. For Ahmed, an in line orientation is normatively directed towards compulsory heterosexuality and the social "good." In this way, we may think of the roles of objects and spaces in processes of socialization by which social values come to be internalized.⁵³ An in line orientation is aligned with social values and as such is both repeated by the majority of bodies and is in line with the lines taken by others. According to Ahmed: "We are 'in line' when we face the direction that is already faced by others" (*Queer* 15). The direction faced by many is what Ahmed calls

⁵³ For a seminal text on the socialization of gender, see Judith Lorber.

the “vertical line.” Queer orientations are those that do not line up with the vertical line. In Ahmed’s words, queer orientations are “off line.” Additionally, the lines that we follow function as: “forms of ‘alignment,’ or as ways of being in line with others” (*Queer* 15). This chapter shows how by following some lines and not others, Léon comes into better alignment with Eliante. In this way, *La jongleuse* adds to our understanding of what kinds of alternative worlds become possible when queer orientations align.

Queer orientations, “by seeing the world slant wise allow other objects to come into view” (Ahmed, *Queer* 107). How one is oriented affects the objects that come into view. In line objects, or what Ahmed calls “straight objects,” direct bodies towards the vertical line. An example Ahmed gives of a straight object is a photograph of a heterosexual nuclear family displayed in a home which has the effect of directing bodies towards reproducing the heterosexual nuclear family. These objects come to appear natural by their repetition and do not cause disorientation for people with in line orientations. Queer objects go less noticed by people or are “straightened” by people with an in line orientation who can only “see straight” (Ahmed, *Queer* 72).⁵⁴ Straightening, or seeing straight, refers to instances where a person with an in line orientation perceives a queer object, body, or space in a way that makes it conform to or make sense within the logic of heteronormativity.

Following Ahmed’s formulation of orientation as shaping what a subject can see, I begin by positing Léon’s starting orientation is split – occupying a space of limbo

⁵⁴ Ahmed gives the example of how her neighbor assumed that she and her female partner, who she cohabitated with, must be “sisters” (and not romantic/sexual partners). Ahmed points out the absurdity of leaping to the conclusion that the cohabitating couple must be sisters given that she has brown skin and her partner has white skin (Ahmed, *Queer* 72). People who perceive the world in ways that straighten it can only “see straight” according to Ahmed.

between an in line orientation and a queer orientation – to account for how he *sees* and *seeks* queerness from the novel’s beginning as well as attempts to straighten this queerness at times. By following his desires, Léon follows what Ahmed calls deviant paths. “Deviation leaves its own marks on the ground, which can help generate alternative lines, which cross the ground in unexpected ways. Such lines are indeed traces of desire; where people have taken different routes to get to this point or to that point” (Ahmed, *Queer* 20). As I will show, Léon’s orientation shifts over time as he follows deviant paths.

The novel opens with Léon seeking out Eliante, not the other way around, thereby establishing Léon as a seeker of queer objects through Eliante.⁵⁵ Ahmed writes that: “The temporality of orientation reminds us that orientations are effects of what we tend towards, where ‘toward’ marks a space and time that is almost, but not quite, available in the present” (*Queer* 20). Along these lines, we can think of Léon’s seeking as an indication of what he tends towards. Additionally, seeking and tending towards share a temporality of what is almost but not quite available in the present. Repeatedly tending towards certain paths and objects is how bodies acquire direction and orientation in Ahmed’s formulation, and so identifying what Léon tends towards is important to the complication I am proposing of this character whose dialogue throughout the novel – rife with rape references and male entitlement – offers a different, reprehensible portrayal of

⁵⁵ See Hawthorne’s introduction to *The Juggler* for an analysis of Eliante’s sexual activity with a Tunisian urn as indicating “an inclusive bisexuality” (Rachilde xxiii). In my own references to Eliante’s sexuality, I prefer to describe it as queer in the context of a queer orientation.

him. Closely examining his first tendency – towards queerness and towards Eliante – illuminates a different story.

The very first page of *La jongleuse* establishes Eliante as a supernatural entity described in otherworldly and animalistic terms, situating Eliante as occupying the periphery not only through socio-historical markers as she is a widow and Creole but internally as a peripheral being.⁵⁶ After the first paragraph, dedicated to a Baudelairean description of Eliante with a painted doll's face atop an undulating dark ocean dress referred to as a funeral envelope, the second paragraph begins: "She was alive, however, since she stopped in front of a mirror" (3-4).⁵⁷ Already a curious paradox looms as it is Eliante's cessation of animation that designates her as "alive." In this mirror Eliante watches "someone over her left shoulder" who appears to be a "marble statue of a nymph holding a candelabrum" (4).⁵⁸ This moment, and not the infamous orgasm with the Grecian urn, is the first instance of Eliante interacting with inanimate objects in a way that lends them animacy, speaking to her queer orientation as she moves through the space of the scene interacting exclusively with peripheral objects in unexpected ways.

Ahmed has ascribed queerness to moveable furniture objects, because: "Queer becomes a matter of how things appear, how they gather, how they perform, to create the edges of spaces and worlds" (*Queer* 167). In my reading of this scene, the objects Eliante interacts with similarly shape the narrative world. Eliante and this statue are described as "two twins, turning their back on each other" thereby establishing their intimacy and

⁵⁶ For an in-depth analysis of Eliante's otherness, see Gantz's "Une Langue étrangère."

⁵⁷ See Baudelaire. For an analysis of how Eliante differs from a Baudelairean *femme*, see Constable. « Elle vivait cependant, puisqu'elle s'arrêta devant une glace » (*La jongleuse* 26).

⁵⁸ « quelqu'un par-dessus son épaule gauche » (*La jongleuse* 26).
« la statue de marbre, là-bas, une nymphe tenant une torchère » (*La jongleuse* 26).

kinship (4).⁵⁹ When coupled with Eliante's associations with animals, especially felines, the act of these twinned statues turning their backs on each other further denotes their closeness.⁶⁰ Felines occupy the dual positions of predator and prey, and a prey animal would not turn its back to a predator. Statues, being the most proximal objects to Eliante, work like her dress to establish her queer orientation towards peripheral inanimate objects that remain proximal to her throughout the novel and coincide with the object of Eliante's sexual desire – the urn.

In the very same scene, Léon, who is following Eliante, is conflated with one of the marble nymphs Eliante interacts with: "The somebody watched by the woman in black was following her" (4).⁶¹ Eliante, in her descent down a long staircase, proceeds to interact with more marble nymphs before the someone watching transforms from statues into Léon. In the moment just prior to Léon's verbal intrusion, Eliante as a *human* being is called into question: "Skirt and bodice floated on her. Nothing stuck properly to this human form, molded a moment ago in its silken scabbard. This hermetic dress [. . .] did not protect her from the possibility of appearing beautiful" (4).⁶² Here, the human form seems ill fitting for Eliante. In this human form nothing sticks *properly*, giving the impression that in some other form her garments might stick as they should. And, as Eliante is no longer molded in her scabbard at this moment, the beautiful sword of her body is made visible to Léon who is watching her throughout this scene.

⁵⁹ « deux jumelles se tournant le dos » (*La jongleuse* 26).

⁶⁰ Later in this scene, Eliante "draped herself with the few movements of a cat getting under the bedcovers" (Rachilde, *The Juggler* 5). / « Elle se drapa en quelques mouvements de chat qui pénètre sous la couverture d'un lit » (Rachilde, *La jongleuse* 28).

⁶¹ « Le quelqu'un guetté par la dame en noir la suivait » (*La jongleuse* 27).

⁶² « Rien n'adhérait sérieusement à cette forme humaine, moulée tout à l'heure dans son fourreau de soie. Cette robe hermétique [. . .] ne la défendait pas contre la possibilité de se montrer belle » (*La jongleuse* 27).

Léon's voice intercepts the no longer protected sword of Eliante: "Excuse me, madam!" said the voice of a man hissing slightly" (4).⁶³ The hiss of his voice harkens back to a mere moment ago, where Eliante's long gloves ring her arms with "viperine folds" (4).⁶⁴ That Léon's voice takes on the serpentine attributes of Eliante's gloves offers the first hint of his moldability. Léon, who is a medical student by profession, proves a good study indeed of Eliante. The third person narrator fixates on Eliante's every movement and trapping, placing the reader with Léon as we watch her intently. And so, Léon observed the viperine gloves and, affected by them, *hisses* his first words to Eliante like a newborn of the accouterments of her, his re-maker's, world. This further lends to Eliante's divinity as she remolds Léon in her image beginning with his first words.

At Léon's words, Eliante "deigned to turn around," in the fashion of a deity superior to the mortal Léon, and she proceeds indifferently as she is likened to an animal, appearing: "more *animal* [. . .] one could see her eyes, naked and black beneath a silky fringe of bits of fur" (5).⁶⁵ While I will later detail the transition of animality from Eliante to Léon, what is of note here is the response Eliante's animality elicits in Léon who described only as "the man," "stopped hypnotized, short of breath" (5).⁶⁶ The hypnosis indicated here, a hypnotism so strong it alters the very breath Léon breathes, is a striking description of a man taken by Eliante for the servitude and helplessness it implies. As

⁶³ « Pardon, madame ! dit une voix d'homme, sifflant un peu entre les dents » (*La jongleuse* 27). Hawthorne's translation of "sifflant," or whistling, as "hiss" beautifully conjures the image of the viperine gloves which would likely color how a French reader would understand "sifflant."

⁶⁴ « de plis vipérins » (*La jongleuse*, 27).

⁶⁵ « Alors elle daigna se retourner . . . » (*La jongleuse* 27).

« plus *animale* [. . .] on vit ses yeux, nus et noirs sous une frange soyeuse en brins de fourrures » (*La jongleuse* 28).

⁶⁶ « L'homme s'arrêta hypnotisé, le souffle court » (*La jongleuse* 28).

mentioned, Léon is conflated with the statues (a likeness which continues throughout the novel), and the marble nymph statues are described as *servants*. Here Léon, like the nymphs, assumes the role of servant as the one who is under hypnosis.

The question of how docile a servant, how knowing a pupil, is raised by the following line: “[Léon] had trodden on the skirt because he could see nothing but the woman” (5).⁶⁷ This sets up a core tension of the novel between fleeting moments of Léon understanding Eliante and intrusions in which Léon does not understand at all, only seeing the woman in this visual play on words.⁶⁸ For Léon to see “nothing but the woman” so immediately after hissing his first words reveals a character who shows capacities for both seeking and straightening queerness. This dual perception makes my analysis of a queer transformation possible. Léon is drawn to Eliante because he has already taken queer orientations. The novel establishes Léon’s dissatisfaction with the world of straight objects and the expectations of compulsory heterosexuality. Somewhere along the way, Léon strayed from an altogether in line direction, and it is at this point that we intercept him.⁶⁹ Later I discuss possible contributing factors to this.

⁶⁷ « Il avait marché sur cette jupe parce qu’il ne voyait plus que la femme » (*La jongleuse* 28).

⁶⁸ This tension is toyed with throughout the novel, for example, still in this first chapter, in the description of Léon stealing Eliante’s calling card, it is said of him wanting to know who Eliante is that: “It was not enough for him that it was a woman” (*The Juggler* 6). « Cela ne lui suffisait pas que ce fût une femme » (*La jongleuse* 30).

⁶⁹ The narrator, from Léon’s perspective, on why he follows Eliante around: “But she deployed, at the end of these *monotonous official evenings*, a violent stole, an *adventurer’s stole*, like a firework” (Rachilde 6, my emphasis). « Mais elle déployait, à la fin de ces *monotones soirées officielles*, une écharpe violente, une écharpe *d’aventurière*, comme un feu d’artifice » (*La jongleuse* 29, my emphasis). Here, in the first of many similar descriptions, we understand Léon’s view, through the third person close narration, of the status quo as monotonous, harboring a disdain for the official, and as seeking adventure. Also of importance is the object attributed with causing Léon to follow Eliante: an oriental stole. The oriental stole colors the adventure Léon seeks as mystical adventure given that the history of oriental stoles is steeped in divine imagery, donned by angels in orthodox iconography, and donned by Eliante in *La jongleuse*. For an historical account of oriental stoles in religious art see McNamee (43).

Another example of Léon's dual dwellings in both in line and queer orientations comes with his reasoning for following Eliante into her coupé. Léon does not escape the narrator's mystical affinities as "his destiny drove him after the black train" of Eliante's dress and his primary concern, in this moment, is that Eliante by returning home would "extinguish her magic glow," positioning the magical and mystical qualities of Eliante as those Léon most yearns to preserve (5).⁷⁰ Though Léon will oscillate between trying to extinguish Eliante's magic and preserve it, it is his desire to preserve it established in the first chapter that holds fast throughout the novel. This strong desire of Léon's to preserve magic is coupled on this page, however, with a rather crude social calculation about Eliante: "She always wore black: a serious woman. She had a discreet carriage: a rich woman" (5).⁷¹ This forces the reader to occupy the same dual orientation as Léon, simultaneously welcoming a nonnormative character while asserting normative social values. Through this lens, the paradoxical coupling of following mysticism and social calculations reads rather pessimistically. However, the social calculation sets the stage for the important role objects have in shaping perception as well as for Léon as a competent reader of objects.

Ahmed describes orientation as: "how we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes. If we know where we are when we turn this way or that way, we are oriented. To be oriented is also to be turned towards certain, recognizable objects so we know which way we are facing" (*Queer* 1). While Ahmed does not theorize the "split

⁷⁰ « Sa destinée le roulait derrière la traîne noire » (*La jongleuse* 29).

« . . . éteignait ses lueurs magiques » (*La jongleuse* 29).

⁷¹ « Elle était toujours en noir : une femme sérieuse. Elle avait une voiture discrète : une femme riche » (*La jongleuse* 29).

orientation” I develop here, her description of orientations does not preclude its possibility. I interpret Ahmed’s work on orientations as leaving open a space for theorizing the ways subjects can be oriented in simultaneously in line and queer ways. I suspect that Ahmed would welcome this kind of reading as her work on orientations is celebratory of disorientation and deviant paths. Following my interpretation of Ahmed, I will show how a split orientation works in *La jongleuse*. Léon tends towards both queer and straight objects in succession and is an excellent reader of object associations. His tendency towards disorienting experiences triumphs over those tendencies of his that are in line when *instinct* foists him *into* Eliante’s coupé. In the following passage, Léon enters Eliante’s coupé for the first time since he began following her. Of importance to my reading of this passage is the language of “split” motivations applied to Léon and the supremacy of instinct as the driving force:

He felt such a strong desire to go up to her, such a brutal urge of instinct, that he took several more steps in spite of himself; he plunged his polished shoes into a mud puddle, reached the carriage door, put his hand on the handle, firmly resolved to prevent the horrible box from closing, to ravish its toy.

At that very moment, the man was split, he wanted, on the one hand, quite frantically *to look at her* again and, on the other hand, he was mentally calling himself a fool, thinking that she would give him some spare change, as one does to street urchins who run up to carriage windows.

The woman drew aside the silk veiling her mouth, and she asked, quite naturally:

“Would you like to get in, my dear sir?”

Would he like to get in? Good heavens! His instinct alone answered. He bounded, settled into the dark silks, scattered the oriental lights, ravaged, with his muddy feet, the underlying foam, sat down and gestured in vexation [. . .] (7, original emphasis)⁷²

First, Léon moves “in spite of himself” here and appears guided by less articulatable urges. These urges confound and frustrate him, as he is haunted by a social knowledge which tells him he must look like a beggar to Eliante. The entitled voice that endeavors to ravish the toy of the box, Eliante, is disempowered by this *split* man. Here, Léon is split in that he is prostrate to his idea of social exchange and bounding forward in spite of some self he believes to be himself. Nevertheless, he enters Eliante’s carriage, marking the triumph of his instinct which answers *for* him. He settles into the dark silks, quite at home in this foreign coupé in which the oriental lights interact with his presence, and I would add, this at homeness in the unfamiliar is aided by his muddy feet. That Léon was so determined to enter Eliante’s coupé that he plunges his “polished shoes into a mud puddle,” aids in stripping Léon, for a fleeting moment, of the decorum required of men in polished shoes. The mud *enables* Léon to push onward as a beggar of Eliante’s image.

⁷² C’était un tel désir de la rejoindre, une poussée si brutale de son instinct, qu’il fit encore plusieurs pas malgré lui; il plongeait ses souliers vernis dans une flaque de boue, atteignait la portière, posa la main sur la poignée, bien décidé à empêcher l’horrible boîte de se refermer, de lui ravir son joujou.

A ce moment précis, l’homme était double, voulait, d’une part, frénétiquement *la regarder* encore et, d’autre part, se traitait mentalement d’imbécile, supposant qu’elle allait lui donner quelque monnaie, comme on en donne aux voyous qui courent aux portières.

La femme écarta la soierie voilant sa bouche, et elle demanda, tout naturellement :

– Voudriez-vous monter, cher monsieur ?

S’il voulait monter ? Grands dieux ! Son instinct fut seul à répondre. Il bondit, se blottit dans les soies sombres, éparpilla les feux d’orient, ravagea, de ses pieds boueux, la mousse des dessous, s’assit et eut un geste de dépit [. . .] (*La jongleuse* 30-1, original emphasis)

Léon's own plurality of orientations lends to his intense attraction to Eliante who is always multiple. How though, does Léon acquire a plural direction to begin with? I locate one possible origin in his medical studies which bring him into contact with uncommon objects. His study of medicine is not exclusively depicted as the witch hunt for the hysteric that Rachilde may very well have esteemed the medical field to be.⁷³ While being a medical student seems at first to be very much at home with an in line orientation – a patriarchal authority on “correct” bodies and ways of being – we are given a rather queer glimpse of Léon at work in chapter nine that does not match the many instances of the novel's dialogue in which he pathologizes and diagnoses Eliante. While by this point in the novel, Léon has shared enough encounters with the objects and world of Eliante to attribute his medical reverie to his contact with her, the scene in his apartment nevertheless depicts the kinds of objects Léon would have been in contact with prior to meeting Eliante. The scene that follows opens chapter nine at Léon's apartment, and Eliante has just rung at his door while he is working:

He came to open it, not thinking in the least, of her [Eliante], his mind very preoccupied by the molding of an anatomical piece, a curious deformity of the ear presenting the exact circumvolutions of the shell called *auricula*, half flesh, half conch, and he was wondering if man before the flood . . .

⁷³ In Hawthorne's introduction to *The Juggler*, she sheds light on Rachilde's awareness and criticisms of the medical field in the nineteenth-century that focused on hysteria. Hawthorne connects Léon with the observer occupying the medical lens (Rachilde xxi).

“Man is descended from the octopus. Unless it’s the oyster! By thunder, who is going to disturb me to smoke all my tobacco while telling me idiotic things?”

“Here I am,” she [Eliante] said simply. (144, original emphasis)⁷⁴

We catch Léon fantasizing very unscientifically about humans descending from sea creatures with shell-like ears. This conjecture is inspired by the medical *object* he is crafting, an anatomical mold. The anatomical piece, however, is not of any ear; rather, it is of an ear with a deformity that sends Léon’s imagination into absurd territory. And so, even objects proper to the medical field (an anatomical model) are here aligned with a queer direction (imagining the origin of humans otherwise). Black studies scholar Ashon T. Crawley identifies imagination as that which makes alternative worlds possible. Along this line, we may consider the narrative’s investment in depicting Léon’s imagination as an investment in portraying him as capable of imagining the narrative world differently.

While Léon writes his own musing off as idiotic, the narration depicts Eliante answering Léon’s question of: “who is going to disturb me to smoke all my tobacco while telling me idiotic things?” She says: “Here I am . . .” In this way, Eliante is positioned as the instigator of such queer associations. However, Léon maintains his personal connection with the queer object of the anatomical model, despite the narrative connection with Eliante, through his attempt to hide the anatomical model from her:

⁷⁴ Il vint ouvrir, ne pensant pas de tout, à elle [Eliante], l’esprit très préoccupé par le moulage d’une pièce anatomique, une curieuse déformation de l’oreille présentant les exactes circonvolutions du coquillage dit *auricule*, moitié chair moitié conque, et il se demandait si l’homme avant le déluge...

– *L’homme descend du poulpe*. A moins que ce soit de l’huitre ? Sacré tonnerre, qui va me déranger pour fumer tout mon tabac en me contant des choses imbéciles ?

– Me voici, dit-elle [Eliante] simplement. (*La jongleuse* 183-4, original emphasis)

“Léon threw himself on the molded ear, letting slip a terrible piece of bloodless flesh. He covered the whole thing, ear and plaster, with a cloth, wiped his hands and brushed his jacket with a furious gesture” (144).⁷⁵ I read this revocation of the queer object amidst his normative and expected student’s abode as a testimony to his closeness with such imagination-provoking objects as well as a failed attempt to cover up, quite literally, a queer orientation he has already taken. How would Léon blame Eliante for his forays into her imaginative world if it were to be discovered that he had been drawn to queer objects before her? Indeed, it is Léon’s attempt to hide his queer object of the model ear, which briefly replaced Eliante in his thoughts, that offers insight into the Léon who arrives in chapter one with a split orientation.

THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS

Among the objects I will analyze in this section that affect characters’ orientations in *La jongleuse* are flowers which play a prominent role in the communications between Eliante, Léon, and Missie. Floriography, or the language of flowers, was popular in nineteenth-century France. While flowers have a history in communication in many cultures, floriography reached peak popularity in nineteenth-century France with the publication of numerous books on the language of flowers. One of the most influential floriography books was *Le langage des fleurs* (*The Language of Flowers*, c. 1800) by

⁷⁵ « Léon se jeta sur l’oreille moulée, laissant passer un affreux bout de chair exsangue. Il couvrit le tout, oreille et plâtre, d’un linge, s’essuya les mains et brossa sa veste d’un geste furieux » (*La jongleuse* 185).

Charlotte de Latour, the pseudonym of Louise Cortambert (see figure 1). Latour's book was translated from French to English and contributed to popularizing floriography in England. Art historian Kirstin Ringelberg observes that books on floriography were mass produced and became so popular that they shaped interior design trends. By the fin-de-siècle, most home interiors included floral imagery in either accessible or expensive forms (Ringelberg 180). Ringelberg describes how a bustling market for cut flowers emerged in nineteenth-century France from the elevated status of flower painting and the popularity of books on the language of flowers (180).



Fig. 1. Title page of *Le langage des fleurs* by Charlotte de Latour.
Source: Latour, Charlotte de. *Le langage des fleurs*. 18---. BHL Collections, 2019,
<https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.160093>.

Rachilde lived in Paris during the zenith of floriography's cult following and would very likely have encountered one of the numerous books on the subject. Indeed, the inclusion and repetition of flowers in *La jungleuse* indicate Rachilde's knowledge of the subject as flowers take on the burden of communication in their writing. Rachildean scholarship has illuminated the historical significance of the fashion and furniture in *La jungleuse*. However, the significance of the language of flowers in their œuvre has not yet been analyzed.⁷⁶ I cross-reference multiple nineteenth-century floriography texts to analyze the flowers in *La jungleuse* because these texts were well-known to occasionally offer differing interpretations.⁷⁷ I have found many of these texts agree on at least part of the meaning of the flowers analyzed here. As such, I address the agreed upon meanings of each flower and discuss differing interpretations where relevant.⁷⁸

Ringelberg has engaged floriography through the nineteenth-century French flower painter Madeleine Lemaire's œuvre and offers a compelling reading of flowers with a trans framework that pushes back on the view that Lemaire's paintings expressed a feminine identity. According to Ringelberg, flowers are symbolic of queer transformation and create possibilities for nonnormative engagement and identification (178). In Ringelberg's formulation, flowers symbolize transformation over time because they are living organisms that are born, grow, and die (185). Like Ringelberg, I read flowers as symbolizing transformation over time and as opening possibilities for nonnormative

⁷⁶ For a discussion of decadent décor see Brevik-Zender's "Decadent décors." For scholarship addressing fashion in *La jungleuse*, see Brevik-Zender's "Fashion and Fin-de-siècle" and Schechner.

⁷⁷ See Goyet, Latour, and Leneveux.

⁷⁸ All translations of the French floriography texts into English are my own.

engagement. This section will show how *La jongleuse* portrays flowers as signifying objects that affect subject orientation in queer, possibility-opening ways.

The first instance of language through flowers in *La jongleuse* occurs in chapter one, as Léon and Eliante arrive at her private dining room where the table is lit by a single yellow tulip: “They found themselves in a round dining room, lit by a huge yellow tulip, that bloomed over a delicately set table at the touch of Eliante’s forefinger” (Rachilde, *The Juggler* 11).⁷⁹ This is the first flower to share the attention of both Eliante and Léon. In the language of flowers, the tulip represents a declaration of love.⁸⁰ An emblem of inconstancy and the most violent love with petals of fire and a burning heart (Latour 24), tulips signify: “that a lover sighs for her; and that if she deigns to show herself for a moment, the sight of her sets his face on fire and his heart in charcoal” (Latour 21).⁸¹ Another floriography text also associates the language of tulips with fire and describes tulips as communicating: “If you do not share my flame, my heart will be consumed” (Leneveux 114).⁸² This floriography text offers the story of a young Turk presenting a tulip to his mistress, saying the he burns like the tulip petals when he sees her and, if she does not share his flame, his heart will be reduced to charcoal.⁸³

Reading the tulip through the floriography of nineteenth-century France recolors the dining room scene and begins the fire conceit of the novel, which I will argue in the following section entails a transference of heat from Eliante to Léon. By showing Léon

⁷⁹ « Ils se trouvèrent dans une salle à manger ronde, éclairée par une grosse tulipe jaune, que l’index d’Eliante fit s’épanouir au-dessus d’une petite table délicatement servie » (*La jongleuse* 36).

⁸⁰ See Latour 21 and Leneveux 114.

⁸¹ Original French: « qu’un amant soupire pour elle ; et que, si elle daigne se montrer un moment, sa vue mettra son visage en feu et son cœur en charbon. »

⁸² Original French: « Si vous ne partagez pas ma flamme, mon cœur sera consumé. »

⁸³ See Leneveux 114.

the yellow tulip light at the tip of her forefinger, by *pointing to* the tulip, Eliante communicates her burning heart and violent passion, and is in effect saying to Léon that if he does not rise to return her flame of Love then Love will cease. If understood through Leneveux's text, Eliante's physical heart will be extinguished which alludes to the stakes of Eliante's suicide at the end of the novel. If understood through Latour's text in which the tulip represents a love that must cease, then it may be Léon's heart that is metaphorically extinguished. Both interpretations begin with the flame of passion and end with extinguished hearts. As such, the tulip is an early foreshadowing of the end of a love shared by beating hearts. As a phenomenological object, the tulip establishes a narrative direction for Eliante and Léon.

After the encounter with the tulip, in Léon's first letter to Eliante following their first night together, Léon too communicates in the language of flowers – possibly encouraged by that first yellow tulip pointed to by Eliante. With Léon's letter, both parties have at this point revealed an understanding of flower language and continue to communicate thusly. Léon's letter reads: "I am not sending you flowers. (Do you like tuberose?)" (31).⁸⁴ In the language of flowers, the tuberose represents *volupté* or voluptuousness and passion with an element of danger (see figure 2).⁸⁵ Tuberose is an autumn flower, the season Léon later associates Eliante with in a letter, and a season associated with dying and the last good times before winter (Latour 149).⁸⁶ The tuberose is a fitting choice for Léon to consider (not) sending Eliante because it would

⁸⁴ « Je ne vous envoie pas de fleurs. (Est-ce que vous aimez les tubéreuses ?) » (*La jongleuse* 58).

⁸⁵ See Latour 160 and Leneveux 114.

⁸⁶ In a letter from Léon to Eliante: "Eliante, my beloved, you are walking in the autumn of a world . . ." (Rachilde, *The Juggler* 97) / « Eliante, mon aimée, tu te promènes dans l'automne d'un monde... » (Rachilde, *La jongleuse* 133).

acknowledge understanding her, the relationship they are beginning, and speaking the same language if only for a moment. Tuberoses, while beautifully fragrant, also caution great danger. It was believed that inhaling the fragrance of a tuberose for too long could cause accidents and asphyxiate people (Leneveux 114), and that to enjoy their seductive scent free from danger one must stand at some distance (Latour 162). In choosing the tuberose for Eliante, Léon communicates his understanding of both the beauty and the danger of their relationship. In not sending tuberoses, Léon at this point in the novel preserves just a bit of distance. However, knowing the risk, Léon repeatedly *chooses* to return for encounters with Eliante and is encouraged, I argue, by a hope represented by tuberoses which signify: “Our pleasures will surpass our sorrows” (Latour 162; Leneveux 114).⁸⁷ Ahmed writes about how the lines one chooses to follow bring different worlds into view, and if one follows a line repeatedly over time, “then bodies acquire the very shape of such directions” (*Queer* 15). This element of repetition – Léon repeatedly chooses to encounter Eliante and her world – is key to understanding how his orientation shifts over the course of the novel. By choosing this direction repeatedly over time, he comes into alignment with the queer direction faced by Eliante. In Ahmed’s formulation, “the ‘line’ one takes does not stay apart from the line of one’s life, as the very shape of how one moves through time and space” (*Queer* 17). In thinking about how *La jongleuse* depicts reorientation, I look to directions Léon takes repeatedly to understand how he moves through narrative time and space.

⁸⁷ Original French: « Nos plaisirs surpasseront nos peines. »



Fig. 2. Illustration of a tuberose (tubéreuse).
 Source: Latour, Charlotte de. *Le langage des fleurs*. 18---. BHL Collections, 2019,
<https://doi.org/10.5962/bhl.title.160093>.

Léon does eventually bring tuberose to Eliante; however, at this later point in the novel, Eliante's niece and ward Missie – whom Eliante wants Léon to marry – is ever-present in the novel's juggling of symbols and is implicated in the language of tuberose. Léon makes his way to Eliante's home to return the fur muff she left at his apartment, and he has stuffed tuberose inside the muff (*The Juggler* 154-5). This fur muff, from its first description, is likened to Missie, both described as shivery animals. The first appearance of the muff was in Léon's apartment, where it was worn by Eliante costumed as an aged widow. Missie is the topic of the conversation between Eliante and Léon as the muff is described: "Eliante [. . .] stroked her little astrakhan muff, a muff which had the

appearance of a shivery little animal” (145).⁸⁸ In an instance of metonymy, Eliante strokes a shivery Missie who is party to the conversation apropos Missie’s and Léon’s impending nuptials via the shivery muff. The attributes of the muff further match the very first appearance of Missie in the novel, in which she, through a third person narrator nearest Léon’s perspective, “. . . reminded one a bit of a thin, shivering greyhound . . .” (37).⁸⁹ That Léon stuffs the substitute Missie, the muff, with tuberoses for Eliante serves as bawdy foreshadowing of the mix up to come in which Léon unwittingly engages in sexual intercourse with Missie thinking she is Eliante. This means, then, the night of sexual intercourse is the *second* instance of Léon putting his passion *inside* Missie while thinking of Eliante. And so, the tuberoses of dangerous pleasure also signify the novel’s end in which Missie’s hope for the infant born of that night – who gestated in her body like tuberoses in a muff – is that Léon will come to love their child and forget the “horror” of how the child was conceived (206). Missie’s hope can be read with the meaning of tuberoses as hoping that Léon’s “sorrows” about being deceived into sexual intercourse with Missie will be “surpassed” by the “pleasure” of the newborn. She hopes *their pleasures will surpass their sorrows*. As I will later demonstrate, Léon’s affective responses to these events indicate his reorientation. While he rejects the way the child was conceived, he does not reject the child and harbors queer hopes for the newborn.

Eliante appears to understand the significance of the tuberoses inside the muff, even if Léon is not fully conscious of what his placement of the tuberoses has *said*. This

⁸⁸ « Eliante [. . .] caressait son petit manchon d’astrakan, un manchon qui avait l’air d’un petit animal frileux » (*La jongleuse* 186).

⁸⁹ « Elle rappelait un peu ces levrettes maigres, grelottant, la queue entre les jambes » (*La jongleuse* 64).

jumble of significations was not uncommon in the nineteenth-century between those who communicated with flowers. The placement, presentation, and position of flowers given and received held great significance but was not always understood in the same way by all involved. Upon Léon's arrival at the public living room space of Eliante's home, a conversation ensues with Monsieur Donalger, Missie's deaf uncle, to arrange Missie's and Léon's marriage. Léon, unamused, states to the deaf uncle that he has come to court Eliante, which the deaf uncle, of course, does not hear (156). At this, Eliante bursts with laughter and: "In front of the mirror, she slid the tuberose into the helmet of her black hair, as a warrior's crest. Ah! it would be audacious, but it would be fair, since he loved her enough for that" (156).⁹⁰ Léon's assertion that he is courting Eliante during the marriage arrangement discussions seems to give her permission to wear the tuberose of dangerous passion for a moment. The narrator from Eliante's perspective describes this act as "audacious" but "fair" on account of Léon's love for her, and so here the object of the tuberose from the muff were never meant for Eliante but are audaciously and fairly borrowed by her.

For the first of two times, Eliante transfers flowers given to her by Léon to Missie. And it is significant that Léon watches this occur twice as he is watching objects

⁹⁰ « Devant une glace, elle glissait les tubéreuses dans le casque de ses cheveux noirs, en cimier de guerrière. Ah ! ce serait audacieux, mais ce serait juste, puisqu'il l'aimait assez pour cela » (*La jongleuse* 200).

In the original French text, one tuberose falls from Eliante's hair after Léon asserts that a woman's maiden name is the *real* one: « Eliante secouait la tête. Une tubéreuse tomba » (*La jongleuse* 202). This is inconsequentially omitted in the English translation, but I read the fall of a single tuberose at this moment as performing the extinguishing effect official documents have on passion.

of passion move from one object of desire to another.⁹¹ We could add this to the ways we think about juggling in the novel: Eliante's juggling of flowers and their meanings and this movement of flowers affect Léon's direction. To conclude the tuberose scene, Eliante takes the tuberose from her hair, her warrior's crest, and gives them to Missie:

Eliante removes the last branch of tuberose remaining in her hair.

"Here, my little girl, the flowers of illusion, try to keep them a bit longer than I did and don't forget that love goes before pride in real women." (She turned to Léon.) "Aren't I pretty as a noble mother? . . . Goodbye, sir."

And she ran away, for she was suffocating. (162)⁹²

Reading the tuberose as a symbolic object, Eliante removing "the last branch" marks the moment that her passion for Léon is extinguished. This act of relinquishing comes immediately before another symbolic death of that passion where she shares that her black Eros statue, a symbol of passion with a prominent position in her bedroom, had smashed (167). And, she accuses Léon of wanting: "very sincerely to marry me [Eliante], to *regularize* love" (169, original emphasis).⁹³ To Eliante, marriage is the death of *Love*,

⁹¹ The second transfer of flowers is of the roses sent from Léon to Eliante. Missie wears some of these roses in a corsage, presumably given to her by Eliante, and she does not know they were sent to Eliante from Léon. Léon takes a rose bud from Missie's corsage and places it in his buttonhole, which causes Missie to accuse Léon of stealing the very roses he sent earlier that day (Rachilde, *The Juggler* 179-80). While I do not analyze the roses and rosebud through floriography here, they too hold significant meaning in the context of the novel.

⁹² Eliante ôte la dernière branche de tubéreuses qui restait dans ses cheveux. – Voici, ma petite fille, les fleurs de l'illusion, tâche de les garder un peu plus longtemps que moi et n'oublie pas que l'amour passe avant l'orgueil chez les varies femmes. (Elle se tourna vers Léon.) N'est-ce pas que je suis jolie en mère noble ? ... Au revoir, monsieur. Et elle sa sauva en courant, car elle étouffait. (*La jongleuse* 208, original emphasis)

⁹³ « Tu as voulu très sincèrement m'épouser, régulariser l'amour » (*La jongleuse* 214).

and this is conflated in the same passage with the death of the antique Eros.⁹⁴ By giving the flowers of dangerous passion to Missie, Eliante chooses Love over pride as she symbolically hands her passion-object, Léon, over to Missie via the tuberose. That the tuberose is “the flowers of illusion” speaks to the lurking danger of the sweet perfume. As proof that Eliante has been affected by the tuberose, she runs away because she is suffocating. Tuberose, as mentioned, were known to cause asphyxiation.

A shift occurs between Léon and Missie now that Missie is the rightful owner of the tuberose. It appears as though Léon having witnessed the above scene and Missie’s physical contact with the tuberose of passion affect their relationship. Following Eliante’s exit, Léon and Missie attempt to clarify the ordeal of their nuptials. Léon’s protest to their union is framed within a heteropatriarchal logic whereby they would have needed to gain his parents’ blessing prior to marriage (163). The third-person narration continues: “We’ll wait!” sighs Missie, whose pride was not her main shortcoming” (163).⁹⁵ The allusion to Missie’s pride recalls the tuberose bestowed upon her by Eliante a mere moment ago. Her response to Léon appears affected by the flowers as she puts love before pride as she was instructed to. Léon neither protests nor verbally agrees to this; however, the two are coupled in the narrative that follows through the plural pronoun “they” and through their shared nearness to the object of cigarettes: “They both sat down [. . .] putting their chins on their palms. Then, mechanically, seeing that Eliante

⁹⁴ “And from that [document verifying] our love died. (I mean: *the antique Eros*.)” (*The Juggler* 169, original emphasis). « Et de cela notre bel amour est mort. (Je veux dire : *L’Eros antique*.) » (*La jongleuse* 214, original emphasis).

⁹⁵ « – Nous attendrons ! soupira Marie, dont l’orgueil n’était pas le principal défaut » (*La jongleuse* 209).

would not come back, they each lit a cigarette” (163).⁹⁶ This redirection of Léon and Missie away from Eliante and towards each other is emphasized by them observing the finality of Eliante’s absence. The duo is united in the public living room through the tuberoses and is a mere chapter away from an irreversible union in Eliante’s bedroom, a chapter also marked by the regifting of flowers – this time roses.

REORIENTATION PLOT

The novel is not shy about its re-schooling plot, which I approach in this section through a queer phenomenological account of Léon over narrative time. The changes I track here are made possible in the narrative because Eliante is so steadfastly herself and as a result functions as a teacher of her way of existing. Indeed, there are numerous references to Léon *learning* Eliante who is often described as a priestess and teacher, as “the one who teaches love” (73).⁹⁷ A direct reference to learning occurs in chapter five, in which Léon visits Eliante’s private quarters on Christmas day. Léon asserts his desire to possess Eliante, and she replies: “I want you to know what I know, for you to go as far as me, I demand and I have the right to demand that you choose me as I choose you. You

⁹⁶ « Et ils s’assirent tous les deux [. . .] mettant leur menton sur leur paume. Puis, machinalement, voyant qu’Eliante ne rentrait pas, ils allumèrent chacun une cigarette » (*La jongleuse* 209).

⁹⁷ « *la maîtresse*, celle qui enseigne l’amour » (*La jongleuse* 104, original emphasis). I’ve included “*la maîtresse*” here because it is a play on words understood as mistress or teacher.

must *learn* me before you *earn* me” (69-70, original emphasis)!⁹⁸ Eliante’s agenda is clear, and Léon, by the repetition of his encounters with Eliante, does display that he is endeavoring to learn her. With his orientation affected by these encounters, Léon’s choices change as he repeatedly chooses to seek deviant paths. Ahmed notes that: “The work of repetition is not neutral work; *it orients the body in some ways rather than others*” (*Queer* 57, original emphasis). Following Ahmed’s observation, this section traces the development of four orientation changes with bodily components that occur in Léon over the course of his interactions with Eliante and the objects and spaces near her. These are, in short: tears, heat, inhuman qualities, and dreams.

The first example of Léon physically changing is set up as a personal challenge from Eliante in the Christmas scene mentioned above. Léon changes from someone who never cries into someone crying from his heart. The challenge is stated when, in the Christmas scene, Eliante says to Léon, “you are a very attractive boy, with a serious mask, pure features, you don’t make faces easily, with eyelids veiled as though they are about to cry, and you never cry, do you, you are too proud? My ambition would be to see you cry with love . . .” (69).⁹⁹ And she: “seemed to be staring at something inside him, something other than himself” (69).¹⁰⁰ What Eliante’s observation of Léon offers us is a physical way to trace the change that occurs in him. Throughout the novel Léon’s eyes are described as veiled. The above quote suggests that crying would lift the veil on his

⁹⁸ « je veux que vous sachiez ce que je sais, que vous alliez aussi loin que moi, j’exige et j’ai le droit d’exiger que vous me choisissiez come je vous chois. Il faut que vous *m’appreniez* avant de me *prendre* » (*La jongleuse* 99, original emphasis) !

⁹⁹ « vous êtes un fort joli garçon, de masque sérieux, de traits purs, difficile à faire grimacer, aux yeux qui se violent comme s’ils allaient pleurer, et vous ne pleurez jamais, n’est-ce pas, vous êtes trop orgueilleux? Mon ambition serait de vous voir pleurer d’amour . . . » (*La jongleuse* 98).

¹⁰⁰ « et semblait dévisager en lui autre chose que lui » (*La jongleuse* 98).

eyes. The veil speaks to his in line orientation as a boy “with a serious mask.” It would be untoward of Léon to cry so long as he wishes to remain a “man.” Léon does confirm: “I never cry, as you say . . . you won’t have that pleasure” (69).¹⁰¹ However, he is altered too much over the course of the novel to deny Eliante the pleasure of his tears.

Léon’s eyes are first described in the novel’s open as: “dark grey eyes that seemed to be searching, scouring, dreaming, and as though veiled with a bluish film, a transparent curtain drawn across the passions that lay dormant deep down within him” (13).¹⁰² This initial state of his “searching” eyes that are “dreaming” and veiling dormant passions speaks to the split orientation I have argued for. Furthermore, this description details what would be revealed should the blue veil be lifted from his eyes through tears of Love: passions. Because the surfacing of these dormant passions is positioned as possible through “crying with love,” this genre of passion aligns with Eliante’s conceptualization of passion which deviates from socially acceptable passion (69).

As I will show, this veil later stands in for desires suggesting that Léon’s formal desires are veiling his true passions, creating a tension between desire and passion. Eliante appears to believe, very earnestly, that Léon *desires* Missie. This perceived desire is representative of the continuation of a heterosexual line involving marriage and procreation. The novel offers a logic for Eliante’s belief in how Léon so frequently desires to marry her, to force her into a marriage system that would render her subordinate. I draw the connection of the blue veil over Léon’s eyes to desire from a

¹⁰¹ « je ne pleure jamais, en effet... vous n’aurez pas ce plaisir » (*La jongleuse* 99).

¹⁰² « aux yeux gris foncé, fouilleurs, chercheurs, rêveurs et comme voiles d’une taie bleuâtres, d’un transparent rideau tire sur des passions sommeillant en lui, tour au fond » (*La jongleuse* 38).

letter written by Eliante to Léon that reads: “No, I haven’t the wit, I will perhaps never have the wit to amuse you *according to your desires*. You said, no doubt, as you left us: *Farewell* for my niece Missie” (55, original emphasis).¹⁰³ The “wit” remarked upon is a call back to the narration of the scene of Missie’s and Léon’s first meeting in the public living room, which described Missie interacting with Léon as: “trying to stick the point of her burgeoning simpleton’s wit into the bluish depths of the eyes of the passionate young man” (36).¹⁰⁴ Missie appears to be speaking to the blue veil with her wit because Léon’s true eye color is not blue but grey. In Eliante’s letters, it is a “wit” belonging to Missie, who is invoked in the next line, which speaks according to Léon’s desires. Because her wit never penetrates the blue veil to discover the grey of passion, Missie and Léon are stuck together at this level of desire.

This all changes though with what I consider a parting gift from Eliante. In the scene where she visits Léon’s apartment as a widow of forty years, she insists that Léon marries Missie according to Missie’s desire, and Léon finally cries: “scalding tears rose from his heart to his eyes. Madame Donalger got up from her armchair, appearing paler than the palest ivory, and her pupils became phosphorescent” (148).¹⁰⁵ That the tears rise from his heart testifies to these tears being tears of love. Furthermore, Eliante paling recalls descriptions of her experiencing pleasure as *paling with pleasure*. The pleasure derived from Léon’s tears color her “the palest ivory” which signals the utmost pleasure.

¹⁰³ « Non, je n’ai pas l’esprit, je n’aurai peut-être jamais l’esprit de vous amuser *selon vos désirs*. Vous disiez sans doute, en nous quittant : *Adieu* pour ma nièce Missie » (*La jongleuse* 83).

¹⁰⁴ « essayant d’enfoncer la pointe de son naissant esprit de niaise dans la profondeur bleuâtre des yeux du jeune passionné » (*La jongleuse* 62-3).

¹⁰⁵ « des larmes brûlantes montèrent de son cœur à ses yeux. Mme Donalger se leva de son fauteuil, paraissant plus pale que le plus pale ivoire, et ses prunelles devinrent phosphorescentes » (*La jongleuse* 190).

Her pupils becoming “phosphorescent” describes Léon crying for the first time as an illuminative moment that sets her pupils aglow with this specific type of photoluminescence. With Léon’s tears, Eliante declares that Léon is cured, and Léon still roused by tears and stammering, asks: “. . . and you believe in my cure” (149)?¹⁰⁶ I read this “cure” coming only with Léon’s tears as a parting gift from Eliante to Léon, a gift that lifts the veil of normative desire and permits his passion to surface in hot tears. That Eliante declares a cure offers an interesting reversal of their roles. Here, it is not the medical student but Eliante who is the authority on the human body and its needs. Given Rachilde’s disdain for the medical profession, we can read this reversal as the author reconceptualizing what constitutes a cure and which conditions may require curing.

The effects of Léon being moved to tears appear short-lived as he very speedily announces to himself after Eliante has left: “How stupid I was to cry in front of her. That won’t happen to me a second time . . .” (150).¹⁰⁷ However, he is already at this point so oriented towards queer objects that he celebrates in the same paragraph that Eliante left behind “something *of the décor*” (150, original emphasis).¹⁰⁸ The piece of *décor* left behind is the muff discussed in the previous section involving tuberoses. And so, the momentary freedom from normative desire and being a serious boy that he experiences through tears is coupled with his joy at finding the fur muff which is a stand in for Missie. Being in possession of the muff is joyful for Léon because it has been in contact with Eliante just as Missie has been. The conflation I am gesturing towards here – this

¹⁰⁶ « ... et vous croyez à ma guérison » (*La jongleuse* 191)?

¹⁰⁷ « Ai-je été bête de pleurer devant elle. Ça ne m’arrivera pas une seconde fois... » (*La jongleuse* 193).

¹⁰⁸ « quelque chose *du décor* » (*La jongleuse* 193, original emphasis).

metonymy with Missie repeated throughout the novel – shades the eventual union of Missie and Léon with a queerness, because it is never truly a union free of Eliante and Léon's queer passion for her.¹⁰⁹

The second development with physical effects on Léon has to do with heat, and the divine fire that burns in Eliante's body begins to burn in Léon's body as well. The novel first introduces us to the divine fire in Eliante's body during the scene in which she orgasms with the Grecian urn. Eliante interrogates what Léon, who is described as a passerby, could ever offer her in comparison to the orgasmic joy of the urn, stating: "A flame? That is too little for someone who is a whole furnace! My malady? I admit it: I am dying of love and, like the phoenix, I am reborn, after burning up, with love" (22)!¹¹⁰ Her description offers increasing degrees of heat, the highest of which consume her as she is a "whole furnace" that is "burning up with love." This quote serves two important functions: it introduces the specific type of heat in question as well as details how this heat functions. The type of heat is linked to love and gains divine qualities through the mythic phoenix. Through this first connection with the phoenix and its rebirth motif, we

¹⁰⁹ I read eggs as a conceit that stands in for Missie throughout the novel. Eggs are a symbol of Spring, and it is during Spring that Léon and Missie experience the conjugal horror at the end of the novel. Spring, a fitting season, as it heralds a time of new life, budding, blooming, and reproduction. Eggs are obviously physically linked to the cycle of sexual reproduction as a post-conception cell form. The egg connection begins in Eliante's chambers, where she serves Léon "innocent fresh eggs, mother hen's eggs" (Rachilde, *The Juggler* 70) / « des œufs frais ingénus, des œuf de mère poule » (Rachilde, *La jongleuse* 100). Missie is a fertile virgin under Eliante's charge. This meal functions like a kind of communion, in which Léon eats Missie. Later Léon compares Missie to poached eggs in a letter: "P.S. –Missie disgusts me as much as poached eggs in cream" (*The Juggler* 170)! / « P.S. – Missie m'écœure comme des œufs à la neige » (*La jongleuse* 215, original emphasis). And, finally, in the last chapter, Missie is described in a third person narration aligned with Léon as: "Ever the poached eggs in cream" (*The Juggler* 178)! / « Toujours les œufs à la neige » (*La jongleuse* 221)! The egg conceit is yet another example of an object with effects on Léon's orientation, coloring his direction.

¹¹⁰ « Une flamme ? C'est trop peu pour une qui est toute la fournaise ! Mon mal ? Je l'avoue : je me meurs d'amour, et, comme le phénix, je renaiss, après avoir brûlé, de l'amour » (*La jongleuse* 50) !

are taught by Eliante *how* the heat of love functions. No ordinary heat like that of a flame, the heat of love kills those who burn with it to rebirth them like the fiery phoenix. The nature of this process is cyclic, because to be reborn as a phoenix, a mythic fire bird, is to be reborn as one who burns with the fire of love again and again. This heat does eventually kill Eliante, and as I will detail in the final section, she undergoes a rebirth of sorts. Here, the transfer of this heat of love from Eliante to Léon implies that Léon, who burns in his turn, must also experience a rebirth – the finale towards which my reading is heading.

The first account of this heat transferring from Eliante to Léon is through an object: the first letter Eliante writes Léon after their first evening together in which Eliante points to the yellow tulip and orgasms with the Grecian urn. When Léon pays a call to Eliante in her public living room, they discuss the letter she wrote him. Eliante asks if he has the letter on his person intending to return it to her:

“Here it is!” admitted the young man simply, and he held out to her the frosted card which had been burning his skin for two days above his heart.

“No, sir, I never take back what I give.” (She exclaimed, slightly surprised.) “Oh!

How hot it is, is that how hot you are inside your chest? No, no, keep my letter . . . or burn it, but I think you already have.” (41-2)¹¹¹

¹¹¹ – La voici ! Avoua simplement le jeune homme, et lui tendit le carton glacé qui lui brûlait la peau depuis deux jours à l’endroit du cœur.

– Non, monsieur, je ne reprends point ce que je donne. (Elle s’exclama, légèrement étonnée.) Oh ! comme c’est chaud, vous avez donc si chaud que cela dans la poitrine ? Non, non, gardez ma lettre... ou brûlez-la, mais je crois que c’est déjà fait. (*La jongleuse* 69)

The letter from Eliante, a frosted card, had been burning his skin specifically above his heart. And so, in combination with the letter being from someone who burns with love, the location on Léon's body of the burning sensation signals, through the heart's symbolic link to love, that the heat he is physically experiencing is the heat of love. The experience of burning with the heat of love transfers from Eliante to Léon through the object of the letter. And Léon's body is affected by the nearness of this object.

Eliante, noticing the heat of love burning in Léon's chest, orders him to keep or burn the letter, noting that both actions appear to be one and the same considering how hot his chest is. This dialogue highlights the effect of this queer object, marked by the divine heat of love, on Léon who is not only physically near the burning letter but has kept it over his heart, indicating a very intimate nearness. The effect is that he too burns with the heat of love like a furnace, burning with a heat strong enough to impact the physical realm. Curiously, Léon has kept the letter over his heart for "two days," giving a duration to his exposure to and experience of burning up with love. This duration, I argue, works to reorient Léon towards heat, which was previously absent from his life, as heat develops into a normal and expected sensation in relation to his encounters with Eliante and the objects proximal to her and now to him.

In this same scene, the fire of love takes the form of a violet liqueur prepared by Eliante and served to everyone in the living room: Léon, Missie, Monsieur Donalger, and Eliante herself.¹¹² The reactions of Missie and Léon to the violet liqueur work to clarify

¹¹² My use of the term "queer objects" when applied to some of the "foreign" objects presented in *La jongleuse* is only to discuss those objects as less proximate to Léon and not to imply a collapse of foreignness and queerness.

the physical effects of their closeness to the heat of love in the form of the uncommon liqueur. The following passage entails the discussion surrounding the fiery exotic drink:

“The nuns taught me that recipe, and they made a big fuss about it, like a confessional secret,” said Eliante simply.

“As for me,” declared Missie sneezing, “I think it burns the chest, you have to be my aunt to swallow that . . . or my uncle! Goodness gracious! I’m having some because I want to go out this evening, but what a fire. You’d think it had all the fires of hell in it, your nun’s cream.”

“Good lord,” breathed Léon, annoyed. “A recipe found in the bottom of the Tunisian vase.”

For all that he spoke softly, Missie heard and raised her eyes, her eyes which wept from the cold and the liqueur. (46)¹¹³

That the recipe was passed to Eliante like a confessional secret by nuns, links the type of heat found in the violet liqueur to divinity, and so they are drinking of the fire of love. The divinity here invoked however is linked by Missie to “all the fires of hell.” And so, the dangerous qualities of the fire, already described in the phoenix quote as a heat that

¹¹³ – Ce sont des religieuses qui m’ont appris cette recette, et elles en faisaient grand cas, comme d’un secret de confessionnal, dit simplement Eliante.

– Moi, déclara Missie éternuant, je trouve que ça brûle la poitrine, il faut être ma tante pour avaler ça... ou mon oncle ! Oh ! la ! la ! j’en prends parce que je veux sortir ce soir, mais quel incendie. On dirait tous les feux de l’enfer, votre crème de religieuse.

– Parbleu ! souffla Léon impatienté. Une recette trouvée au fond du vase tunisien !

Si bas qu’il eût parlé, Missie entendit et leva les yeux, ses yeux qui pleuraient son rhume et la liqueur. (*La jongleuse* 75)

causes death, are iterated upon here by Missie who intuitively feels a lot of the heat's characteristics for someone who claims not to like the "nun's cream." Whether or not Missie enjoys the drink is of less importance however than whether she drinks it, which she does. Missie is shown as physically affected by this liqueur and the heat of love when her eyes weep "from the cold and the liqueur." Keeping in mind that passion is narratively linked to crying, I read Missie's weeping as an opening for passion. Missie, here affected by the queer object of the violet liqueur, shows the physical sign that unlocks passion when she weeps after imbibing. And so, regardless of Missie's condemnation of the liqueur, the liqueur works on her as she works on the liqueur.

Furthermore, this fire also burns the chest, once again connecting the heat to the heart, a symbol of love, and connecting the reader to the letter that set Léon's chest ablaze for days. Léon, upon drinking the exotic liqueur, connects the fire to the Grecian urn further specifying the kind of heat. That he remarks, "A recipe found in the bottom of the Tunisian vase," referring to Eliante's urn, reveals his ease in forming connections supported by the heat of love. He has no trouble connecting this heat with Eliante's object of desire, the urn. Narratively, this connection causes the reader to recall the queer passion enacted in the Grecian urn scene. And Léon's rapid familiarity with and repeated nearness to this heat work on him such that the heat of love, linked with rebirth, becomes *normal* to the young doctor to be. It is curious such a fever burns within Léon, a medical student, without prompting him to consider medical causes for his altered physical state. This reveals that Léon's orientation is shifting away from the medical discourse and towards an affective logic of causality governed by passion and physical sensations.

Léon's comfort with the intense heat of love is depicted in the scene of the white ball held by Eliante. After Eliante finishes her juggling performance, she retreats to her quarters to change. Léon follows her to her dressing room and surprises her. Eliante burns with passion after her juggling performance and tells him: "there's a furnace inside me. I'm inhabited by a god" (113).¹¹⁴ The furnace is a direct reference to the first heat of love quote. And Eliante being inhabited by a god offers another link to her divinity. Eliante decides to *show* Léon the heat and incites physical contact with him such that Léon is not simply proximal to this fire but is *touching* it:

"Here," she said sadly, "give me both your hands . . . and swear to be good . . . it's the doctor I'm talking to."

Looking into his eyes, she placed his hands on her sides. They were burning, and he was so surprised that he didn't even think to smile.

"But, darling, it isn't reasonable. One isn't hot like that when one wants to live alone!"

"One is hot like that when one is *Love* . . . and when one is love one can live alone. Come on, leave . . ."

He didn't go away, his arms hanging. (113, original emphasis)¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ « il y a une fournaise en moi. Je suis habitée par un dieu » (*La jongleuse* 150).

¹¹⁵ – Tiens, dit-elle tristement, donne-moi tes deux mains... et jure d'être sage... c'est au médecin que je m'adresse.

Les yeux dans les yeux, elle lui posa ses mains sur ses flancs. Ils brûlaient, et il fut si étonné qu'il ne songea même pas à en sourire.

– Mais, chérie, ce n'est pas raisonnable. On n'a pas chaud comme ça quand on veut vivre seule !

– On a chaud comme cela quand on est *l'Amour*... et quand on est l'amour on peut vivre seule. Va-t'en,

First, Eliante specifies here that she is talking to “the doctor” Léon, and so his professional orientation is invoked. Léon, as a doctor, is not surprised by how hot Eliante’s body feels. Rather, his surprise is followed by an explanation of what is unreasonable about the heat. What “isn’t reasonable” is not that Eliante is so hot; rather, it is that Eliante is “hot like that” *and* “wants to live alone.” This highlights two components of how Léon, at this point in the novel, perceives the world around him. The first is that, for all the waving around he does of his knowledge of medicine, he has deviated from an orientation shaped by medical studies. Even though he was invoked as the doctor in this scene, he does not diagnose Eliante with any heat related ailment; rather, he is confounded by her wanting to live alone without him. This change is emphasized by the juxtaposition of Eliante speaking to the doctor and Léon responding expectedly with surprise but for unexpected reasons as he links heat to passion and passion to something that ought to be shared. In a way, the passion was shared in this scene: Léon’s hands touch the furnace of Eliante’s side body.

Eliante takes this opportunity to teach Léon about the nature of this passionate heat more precisely as she explains that the heat is of a capital L “Love” that permits the burning person to live alone. I interpret living alone here as living without heterosexual sex acts as Eliante instructs Léon to leave performatively so that she, Love, can be alone. Léon, however, appears to fail this lesson on heat and does not “go away.” Instead, he stands there with “his arms hanging,” and the final emphasis in this scene is placed on the part of his body that was in direct contact with Eliante’s burning sides. This narrative

dis...

Il ne s’en allait pas, les bras tombés. (*La jongleuse* 150-1), original emphasis)

transfer of focus from Eliante's burning sides to Léon's hanging arms mimics the transference of heat between the two body parts. Even though Léon never becomes an exact stand in for Eliante and her Love, his orientation *does* change and is shaped by his proximity to her and her world.

The most significant space of Eliante's world may be her bedroom which is described as bathed in fire from the topaz windowpanes. Topaz is associated with fire in each description of the three oval windows of her bedroom. And the kind of light that enters the space is affected by topaz and fire. The first description of Eliante's bedroom occurs when she invites Léon to enter it for the first time so that he may understand her better through this space and its objects:

This bedroom, vast and dark, looked like a temple. The windows overlooking the garden were three in number, yellow and oval like precious stones, topaz jewels cut with large facets like windows panes; they let in no daylight, only sunshine, whether there was any outside or not, a sort of murky sunlight mixed with smoke from a fire. (73-4)¹¹⁶

This space is immediately given mystical properties as it "looked like a temple," and it is no coincidence that there are *three* windows. As mentioned, three is a number of divinity and is repeated throughout the novel in association with Eliante as a trace of *her* divinity. So, it is only right that her temple bedroom would have three fiery windows. These windows do not let in "daylight" as a normal window would. Due to the topaz of the

¹¹⁶ Cette chambre, vaste et sombre, avait un air de temple. Les fenêtres donnant sur le Jardin, étaient au nombres de trois, jaunes et ovales comme des pierres précieuses, des topazes taillées à facettes larges comme des vitres ; elles ne donnaient point de jour, mais du soleil, qu'il y en eût ou qu'il n'y en eût pas dehors, une espèce de soleil trouble mêlé d'une fumée d'incendie. (*La jongleuse* 104)

windowpanes, they only let in pure “sunshine,” and the sun is a symbol of fire. The bedroom then is entirely colored by – since light permits human vision and perception of color – the fire of sunshine and smoke.

The space of the bedroom lit by the fiery topaz windows – evocative of the heat of love, numerologically connected to the divine, and elementally connected to sun fire like the phoenix – affects the bodies that occupy it. Léon returns to this space repeatedly, and as abovementioned, repetition does the work of orienting bodies. Through repetition, this space becomes *familiar* to Léon and orients his body. In the final chapter during the party in Eliante’s bedroom involving Léon, Missie, and the musician Mademoiselle Fréhel, the bedroom is very much Léon’s natural habitat, and the narrative indicates that Léon’s body is affected by heat and that his perspective is affected by the topaz windowpanes.

The second description of these windows in the final chapter reads: “The high chamber was lit by its three oval windows, all gleaming with sun; the three topazes were streaming with magnificent fires without the slightest indication of landscape and bathed in a warm light all the dark furniture” (183).¹¹⁷ Here, the description of three windows as “gleaming with sun” is replaced by the description of “three topazes” that stream “with magnificent fires” that bathe all of the furniture objects in the space. This space is again completely covered in fire. Fire is literally *the light* source of the room. And, to add more fire to the temple party scene, the fiery violet liqueur from earlier is brought back. Before entering Eliante’s bedroom, Missie tells Léon, “we’ll drink cream of violets,” and the

¹¹⁷ « La haute chambre était éclairée par ses trois fenêtres ovales toutes rutilantes de soleil ; les trois topazes ruisselaient de feux magnifiques sans aucune indication de paysage et baignaient d’une lumière chaude tous les meubles sombres » (*La jongleuse* 227).

drink sets everyone ablaze in Eliante's infernal temple (181).¹¹⁸ Léon's temperature is affected by this space. Drunk with exuberance in this fiery space, he orders Missie and Mademoiselle Fréhel to: "fan me, for I'm very warm" (191).¹¹⁹ We can infer, given the nature of the heat of love and the space's fiery light source, that being fanned does not provide relief.

A final reference to the blazing topaz occurs in the third person narration from Léon's perspective during Eliante's suicide. Léon wonders: "What was this light which was penetrating through the topaz window panes? Dawn or fire" (204)?¹²⁰ Here Léon consciously contemplates the topaz windows of fire for the first time, able to truly perceive the once peripheral objects. In the original French, the word *jour* is in place of the word *light* in the translation. The word *jour* could be read as the day or daylight breaking through the windows to set the stage for Eliante's suicide at dawn. It is as though the room transforms at the whim of its priestess. In this final topaz light, during Eliante's suicide, Léon "was breathing fire" (205).¹²¹ Léon, who has repeatedly taken queer orientations, has a significantly altered body that is on fire with the heat of love and can now really *see* the fire of the three topaz windows. This reoriented Léon, I argue, has experienced rebirth like a fiery phoenix in the space of Eliante's bedroom. French studies scholar Heidi Brevik-Zender observes that in Rachilde's fin-de-siècle novels: "The decadent chamber can be seen as a symbolic womb in which the protagonist can develop and prepare herself for a kind of metaphorical rebirth" ("Decadent décors" 117). This

¹¹⁸ « nous boirons de la crème de violette » (*La jongleuse* 224).

¹¹⁹ « éventez-moi, car j'ai bien chaud » (*La jongleuse* 238).

¹²⁰ « Qu'était-ce que ce jour qui pénétrait à travers les vitres de topaze ? L'aurore ou le feu » (*La jongleuse* 252) ?

¹²¹ « [Léon] respirait de feu » (*La jongleuse* 254).

proves true in *La jongleuse*, as Eliante commits suicide in her temple preparing for her rebirth through Léon and the child conceived that same night. And, I would add Léon to the protagonists accorded “a kind of metaphorical rebirth” in the decadent chamber.

The third metamorphosis I explore in this section involves the inhuman qualities Léon takes on throughout the novel: those of a statue and of an animal. In Léon’s first encounter with Eliante’s bedroom, he experiences a queer kinship with the Eros statue prominently displayed atop a swan tuffet:

Opposite the bed, emerging from a swan tuffet, a circular divan entirely covered with that miraculous down, stood a black *Eros*, an antique marble statue, with green contours, having no doubt long remained exposed to the biting winds and tears of rain. This Eros must, at one time, have held a metal bow, but his right arm, bent back at eye-level, now displayed only a stump; the hand had gone off with the taut string, and the left arm was completely missing. The child, pitiful and wild at the same time, flashed emerald pupils set in two white cameos and he opened wide, in the middle of his Negro face of regular ferocity, eyes of a real, divine existence.

Léon Reille drew back in the presence of the naked lad who seemed to threaten him with his terrible stump.

“Oh!” he said, “It’s horrible! I prefer the pot. At least it’s blind. That one must see you as you are.” (74-5, original emphasis)¹²²

¹²² En face du lit se dressait, sortant, d’un pouf de cygne, un divan circulaire entièrement revêtu de ce miraculeux duvet, un *Eros* noir, une antique statue de marbre, Verdier aux contours, sans doute restée fort longtemps exposée aux morsures du vent et aux larmes de la pluie. Cet Eros avait dû, jadis, tenir un arc de métal, mais son bras droit, replié à la hauteur des yeux, n’exhibait plus qu’un moignon ; la main était partie

Léon's repulsion at the black Eros reveals his kinship with it, as he could only be threatened by the state of the statue by empathizing with it and fearing the same fate for himself. Eros is a fitting statue for the swan tuffet altar and for Léon, as Eros is a god of Love and desire and assistant to Aphrodite, goddess of love and fertility. Eliante bears similarities with Aphrodite, preaching love and facilitating a conception, and Léon as Eros assists these plans most obviously through sexual intercourse with Missie.

What I find most compelling however in the description of the black Eros and Léon's reaction to its physical state, is that Léon fears the weathered features of the Eros who is missing an arm having "long remained exposed to the biting winds and tears of rain." Put another way, Léon is afraid of "the stump," the physical indication that the Eros has been shaped by the environments it has been in. Also, the Eros has been affected by *tears* of rain, and as I've already demonstrated, Léon at this point never cries but will come to. His concern that the Eros "sees you as you are" suggests that Léon is already undergoing change, he is *changing* and the Eros perceives this. I read Léon's reaction, therefore, as an early fear of the ways he is already changing through his contact with Eliante and her private spaces and objects. It appears as though Léon knows he is physically changing and will continue to change should he remain in the fire temple bedroom. Furthermore, the most frightening change of the Eros, according to Léon, is that the arm that is missing would have held a bow. Eros is missing a weapon and so

avec la corde tendue, et le bras gauche manquait totalement. L'enfant, à la fois lamentable et farouche, faisait resplendir des prunelles d'émeraudes serties en deux camées blancs et il ouvrait, grands, au milieu de sa face nègre régulièrement féroce, des yeux d'une réelle existence divine.

Léon Reille recula en présence du gamin nu qui semblait le menacer de son affreux moignon.

– Oh ! fit-il, c'est horrible ! Je préfère la potiche. Au moins elle est aveugle. Celui-là doit vous voir telle que vous êtes. (*La jongleuse* 105-06, original emphasis)

finds itself defenseless in the bedroom, twinning with Léon whose defenses and offenses crumble in this space. As I have shown, his identification with the Eros and fear are valid as he is indeed changing in and changed by this space. Finally, the final chapter revives this moment between Léon and Eros when: “Léon sat on the swan tuffet [. . .]” (185).¹²³ The Eros statue is no longer in the room, but in myths Eros sometimes rode swans, and so the swan tuffet is akin to Eros’ vehicle. When Léon sits on the vehicle of the swan, like Eros, his transformation completes. I read the action and choice of sitting on the swan tuffet as sealing Léon’s fate with that of the Eros statue – both irrevocably altered.

As mentioned, bodies acquire orientations “through the repetition of some actions over others, as actions that have certain ‘objects’ in view” (Ahmed, *Queer* 58). Ahmed observes:

The nearness of such objects, their availability within my bodily horizon, is not casual: *it is not just that I find them there, like that*. Rather, the nearness of such objects is a sign of an orientation I have already taken toward the world as an orientation that shapes what we call, inadequately, ‘character.’ Bodies tend towards some objects more than others given their tendencies. These tendencies are not originary but instead are effects of the repetition of ‘tending toward.’”

(*Queer* 58, original emphasis)

Ahmed draws our attention to how proximal objects signal orientations that have already been taken as well as to how orientations have a history in that they are acquired over time. In this way, paying attention to orientations in narrative imbues quotidian moments

¹²³ « Léon s’assit sur le pouf de cygne [. . .] » (*La jongleuse* 229).

with significance. As I demonstrate, Léon's reorientation is not most evident in shocking narrative moments like the conception scene but rather appears most saliently in the nearness of objects and a choice that may at first appear banal.

The second inhuman change Léon undergoes occurs in the final chapter's party scene *after* he sat on the swan tuffet like the maimed Eros. Throughout the party scene Léon is described as an animal, specifically a cat. As mentioned previously, Eliante is described as possessing feline qualities throughout the novel. However, it is Léon who becomes the cat in the end. I interpret Léon being described as a feline as Rachilde paying a complement to this reoriented character. Rachilde adopted animal qualities for herself, preferring animals to humans and personally identifying with cats, werewolves, and rats amongst other animals (Mesch, *Before* 197-201).¹²⁴ Mesch reads Rachilde's collapse of the human/animal divide as an expression of their gender variance (*Before* 197-201).¹²⁵ Drawing on Eva Hayward and Jami Weinstein's conceptualization of Trans* Animalities, which likens the deconstruction of the human/animal binary to deconstructions of gender and sex binaries, Mesch proposes that Rachilde's self-identification with animals provided an escape from the constraints of binary gender and

¹²⁴ Robinson describes Rachilde's textual ego as the writerly *loup-garou* (werewolf) given Rachilde's self-identification with the *loup-garou* stemming from the folklore of Périgord, France where they spent their childhood. For Robinson, the writerly *loup-garou* fuses Rachilde's lupine kinship and "Decadent aesthetic value system, which sees in animal life a radical individualism and a feral beauty that is at odds with the ugly, vivisectioning brutality lurking beneath positivist, bourgeois ideals" (C. Robinson 122). This fusion, Robinson argues, shows that Rachilde's approach to literary Decadence was fundamentally shaped by their investment in animals and animal ethics (C. Robinson 122). For biographical work on Rachilde's self-identification with the *loup-garou*, see Mesch (*Before* 17, 197-205).

¹²⁵ Mesch additionally discusses how inter-species identities appear in Rachilde's animal fictions like *L'Animale* (*The Animal*, 1893) and *Le meneur de louves* (*The Shewolf Leader*, 1904) where young women transform into cats and wolves (*Before* 200-1). According to Mesch, the animal fiction was a way for Rachilde to explore their sense of being a "strange creature" who was alternately special and terrifying" (*Before* 201).

For an analysis of bestiality as a form of transgressive violence in *L'Animale*, see Simon Porzak.

binary sex (*Before* 197). Given Rachilde's tendency to insert autobiographical details into their novels, I read their endowing Léon with animality in context with their cross-species expression of gender and their preference for cross-species identities.

French studies scholar Christopher Robinson argues that for Rachilde: "A heightened sense of animality is by no means a degrading state, but rather one to which humans should aspire" (127).¹²⁶ Rachilde's high esteem for animality as a state humans should aspire to encourages my reading in which they elevate Léon by giving him feline attributes. I interpret this elevation as further evidence that Léon has a queer orientation by this point in the novel. Additionally, I read Rachilde bestowing Léon with feline qualities as a form of permission for Léon to share the spotlight of a *protagonist* in *La jongleuse* – the reader need not like Léon for him to embody the lauded fluidity of animality here.

Additionally, this testifies to how reoriented Léon has become by the novel's end. The medical student who, in his first letter to Eliante, expressed fear that the passionate caterwauling of tomcats is contagious, becomes the tomcat.¹²⁷ The first description of Léon as a cat is through the point of view of Mademoiselle Fréhel, who: "found him pleasing, this handsome wild boy, who snuggled up in their skirts with the sly joy of a

¹²⁶ On Rachilde's animal ethics, Robinson notes that Rachilde: "was an unwavering vegetarian whose animal liberation résumé (virtually peerless among nineteenth-century French novelists) includes the vandalizing of laboratory vivisection equipment, the freeing of trapped wolves and lab mice, an arrest for obstructing a bullfight, the establishment of a makeshift animal sanctuary in her country home during the two world wars, and a medal from *La Société Protectrice des Animaux*" (C. Robinson 121).

¹²⁷ In his first letter to Eliante, Léon writes: "I have almost a nervous terror of hearing certain tomcats caterwauling, on cat carnival nights, the example, invisible though it may be, seems to me so contagious" (*The Juggler* 28). / « j'ai presque la terreur nerveuse d'entendre miauler certains matous, les soirs de carnaval chez les chats, tellement l'exemple, fût-il invisible, me semble contagieux » (*La jongleuse* 54). This excerpt characterizes the caterwauling of cats as contagious, thereby depicting the Léon of the novel's end as having caught the caterwauling ailment of cats.

great voluptuous cat” (186).¹²⁸ Here Mademoiselle Fréhel observes Léon’s joy in being a cat, linking Léon’s pleasure with animality. Additionally, through the description of Léon as a “wild boy,” a narrative connection emerges between him and the Eros statue which was described as: “The child, pitiful and wild . . .” (75). This description works to align Léon with the Eros statue and inter-species embodiment.

Another allusion to his feline rebirth occurs in the party scene. This rebirth occurs after he grabs Eliante who is wearing a white dress and escapes his grasp. Léon threatens her with a beating and is described in this moment of self-assertion as such: “The wild cat was beginning to try out its claws on the white furs” (187). “Beginning,” here, signals the newness of this cat’s claws, of Léon’s claws. The newly born Léon-cat is “beginning” to “try out,” as though for the first time, “its” new claws. The original French elides the use of a possessive pronoun for these claws entirely: “Le chat sauvage commençait à se faire les griffes sur les fourrures blanches” (*La jongleuse* 232). Here the claws, though belonging to the Léon-cat, are *les griffes*: *the* claws. While *le chat* is gendered masculine, Rachilde’s elision of gendered possessive pronouns translates to “its claws.” The English translation by Hawthorne highlights this well, and Léon acquires a new pronoun: its. And so, significantly, Léon’s possessive pronoun in this scene *changes*. A radically queer shift from the possessive pronoun “his,” used for Léon throughout the novel, occurs when he embodies the Léon-cat. Either Léon escapes the limits of signification part and parcel of possessive pronouns in French or acquires the possessive pronoun “its” in English. For

¹²⁸ « il lui plaisait, ce joli garçon sauvage, qui se blotissait dans leurs jupes avec la joie sournoise d’un grand chat voluptueux » (*La jongleuse* 230).

this reason, I believe the Léon-cat to be the most linguistically queer account of a reborn and queerly oriented Léon.

This identity fluid Léon-cat is extremely at home in the queer space of Eliante's bedroom and amidst the queer objects Eliante proffers. At the party, when Eliante brings out the chests housing her oriental dresses, Léon draws these objects near to him: "the young man, with the awkward satisfaction of a ravaging animal, pulled to himself velvets, silks [. . .]" (188).¹²⁹ While Léon is "the young man" here, he is also "a ravaging animal," and so Léon becomes part man part animal. Far from his split orientation of the debut, devoid of animality and possessing stable pronouns, Léon's species becomes *fluid*, evoking the abovementioned autobiographical connection between Rachilde's inter-species identity as an expression of their transgender experience of gender. We may consider the Léon-cat's gender to be similarly fluid.

It is additionally worth considering that Léon was a "man of science." Hawthorne has shown that "the evil man of science" is a recurrent trope in Rachilde's œuvre (190). Similarly, Robinson observes that Rachilde's writing framed the violence done to animals and to women as products of the same "masculine scientific institution" (C. Robinson 126).¹³⁰ In my interpretation of *La jongleuse*, informed by trans scholarship, Rachilde depicts a man of science transforming into a cross-species subject. Mesch argues that by privileging self-knowledge over other forms of knowledge, a trans lens "calls into question epistemologies borne of nineteenth-century medicine" ("Trans" 5). I argue that

¹²⁹ « le jeune homme, avec une maladroit satisfaction d'animal qui ravage, tirait à lui des velours, des soies [. . .] » (*La jongleuse* 234).

¹³⁰ See C. Robinson for analyses informed by a trans-framework of how this appears in Rachilde's autobiographical writing as well as in their novel *La Marquise de Sade*.

La jongleuse demonstrates the critical questioning Mesch is referring to. Because Rachilde deplored the scientific institution and lauded animality, the two should not in theory exist in the same character – and yet, they do in Léon. When we consider how animality was one way Rachilde expressed their gender variance, the contradiction presented by Léon testifies to the queer reorientation that I have argued for.

We could additionally read the Léon-cat as Rachilde's challenge to the hegemony of nineteenth-century medicine because Léon, who embodies inter-species fluidity, does not go on to quit the field of medicine. It is as though this inter-species character will go on to infiltrate the medical field. Considering the novel's investment in the possibility of orientations shifting that I have demonstrated, we can read this infiltration as perhaps a hopefulness on the author's part for the possibility of a reoriented medical field. Additionally, we may further factor a hopeful investment in the possibility for reorientation into our thinking about Rachilde. While Rachilde was openly opposed to the feminism of their time, this novel reveals they may have harbored their own hopes for social and institutional changes as well as ideas about the shapes such change could take.¹³¹

Finally, the last shift in Léon's orientation is found in dreams, specifically in Léon learning to speak in the language of dreams and premonitions. The idea of Léon learning to speak Eliante's language is raised during Léon's first formal visit to Eliante's public living room. Léon asserts that he will come to hate Eliante, and she replies: "That's

¹³¹ See Mesch for an account of Rachilde's fraught relationship with nineteenth-century French feminism and an analysis of their relationship with feminism in context with their transgender experience of gender ("Trans" 2).

because we don't *yet* speak the same language? That will come" (46, original emphasis)!¹³² Here, "yet" is emphasized in italics, foreshadowing Léon's learning of and demonstration of having learned Eliante's cryptic language. While it would be far-fetched to say Léon becomes a native speaker of Eliante's language as he still experiences confusion, he does show language acquisition. In the Christmas day scene in which Léon visits Eliante's private rooms, Léon is described as "beginning to get used to the unusual language of this creature" (72).¹³³ This moment, though brief, marks a pivotal shift in Léon's orientation: even the language he understands has changed. Eliante's "unusual language" becomes familiar to Léon, and what is familiar shapes one's orientation.

Léon's greatest display of this language occurs in chapter six, in a letter written after he visits Eliante's bedroom for the first time and prior to the white ball. In his encounter with Eliante in advance of this letter and mentioned in the letter, Eliante had kissed him while Missie knocked at the bedroom door. The opening lines of Léon's letter to Eliante read: "My lips retain the unusual fruity taste of your [Eliante's] mouth, and the bitter taste of your [Eliante's] saliva lingers on my tongue [. . .]" (93).¹³⁴ Tongue (*langue*) offers a play on words. In French, *langue* can mean either tongue or *language*, as in the French language (*la langue française*) and not just language in general (*le langage*). Hawthorne's translation of *langue* as *tongue* beautifully retains this play on words with language. Eliante's saliva then could be read as lingering on Léon's language. Here, Léon is still physically connected to Eliante's mouth through his sense of taste and *langue*, and

¹³² « C'est que nous parlons pas *encore* la même langue ? Cela viendra » (*La jongleuse* 75, original emphasis) !

¹³³ « [Léon] commençait de s'habituer au singulier langage de cette créature [. . .] » (*La jongleuse* 103).

¹³⁴ « Mes lèvres conservent le singulier gout de fruit de votre [Eliante's] bouche, et la saveur amère de votre [Eliante's] salive se perpétue sur ma langue [. . .] » (*La jongleuse* 127).

seems to gain, with the contact of Eliante's saliva on his *langue*, the ability to communicate in the language of dreams like she does. Léon's letter officially begins with him describing himself as what I read to be the Eros statue he had just met in Eliante's bedroom: "I am like a little child naked in a strong wind" (93).¹³⁵ That Léon assumes the identity of Eros, the "naked" "child" Eros altered by "wind," signals to the reader that this letter marks a key change in Léon because the Eros statue functions as a harbinger of Léon's direction. Compounding this is Léon's temperature, he writes: "I have a fever, I shiver, I'm too hot or too cold" (93).¹³⁶ I interpret this as Léon oscillating between the heat of love and the coldness of an inanimate object. These first couple of lines establish Léon's tendencies at this point in the novel which have changed, as I have shown, and he tends towards fever, shivering, and a kinship with the weathered Eros. His orientation has shifted so far from that of a simple man of medicine that he speaks in the pseudo-science of dreams. And it is at this point that Léon's dream account begins. This dream resembles a premonition of Eliante's disappearance at the novel's end, dually functioning to show not only that he now speaks in dreams but that he has premonitions like a divine priestess or mystic like Eliante.

In Léon's dream, Eliante is a tall column of distant smoke. He describes the dream premonition of Eliante's departure in terms that bear a striking resemblance to her later suicide which is also narrated like Léon is dreaming it and functions as his second dream account. His first dream is as follows: "Your face, a distant little face of agony, was transparently pale, all illuminated by two stars . . . then, the stars went out, the face

¹³⁵ « Je suis comme un petit enfant nu dans un grand vent » (*La jongleuse* 127).

¹³⁶ « J'ai la fièvre, je grelotte, j'ai trop chaud ou j'ai trop froid » (*La jongleuse* 127).

was dead, eyelids closed and mouth twisted, your feet left *the declivity of the globe*, and you disappeared . . . completely” (94, original emphasis).¹³⁷ From Léon’s first dream, the pale face, shining eyes, stars imagery, and twisted face all map onto the third person close narrative aligned with Léon’s view of Eliante’s suicide. The suicide is narrated as Léon’s dream, and he tells himself: “No, he was dreaming” (204)!¹³⁸ However, this time it is not a dream. The two paragraphs following this declaration of a dream begin with the anaphora: “He was dreaming” (204).¹³⁹ And, Eliante’s costume and face recall the stars, eyes, and twisted face of Léon’s first dream. Eliante, during the juggling suicide, was: “so beautiful in her dark costume all sparkling with stars [. . .] Her staring pupils were flaming, making her ivory face, her red mouth with the accentuated dimples, more tragic” (205).¹⁴⁰ While the actual suicide description – with the costume possessing the stars and Eliante’s face tragic – is not an exact replica of Léon’s first dream, Eliante’s eyes are flaming like stars with the heat of love before her life is extinguished in the first dream thereby connecting the two dream narratives. That Eliante’s face is described as *more* tragic in the suicide description further connects the suicide with Léon’s dream by forging a comparison.

Furthermore, Léon mistaking Eliante’s real suicide for a dream and his lack of surprise at the suicide vision are justified by the third person narrator: “And Léon Reille, yawning a little, propped himself up on his elbow, watching her juggle without much

¹³⁷ « Votre visage, un lointain petit visage d’agonie, était d’une pâleur transparente, tout illumine par deux étoiles... puis, les étoiles s’éteignirent, le visage fut mort, paupières closes et bouche tordue, vos pieds lâchèrent *la déclivité du globe*, et vous disparûtes... complètement » (*La jongleuse* 129, original emphasis).

¹³⁸ « Non, il rêvait » (*La jongleuse* 253) !

¹³⁹ « Il rêvait » (*La jongleuse* 253).

¹⁴⁰ « si belle dans son costume sombre tout scintillant d’étoiles [. . .] Ses prunelles fixes flambaient, faisant sa face d’ivoire, sa bouche rouge aux rides accentuées, plus tragiques » (*La jongleuse* 254).

surprise because, this nightmare, he had had it very often, and it seemed natural to him to find her at the same time quite naked laying near him, and standing up in front of him, juggling in a black silk leotard” (205).¹⁴¹ The casualness of Léon yawning performs his comfort with the scene unfolding before him. That Léon has seen Eliante juggle before at the white ball surely contributes to his comfort in the suicide scene because the original juggling act involved the performance of death. However, the first juggling act is not the only nightmare meant by “this nightmare,” because he saw that once and has had this nightmare “very often.” The frequency attributed to this nightmare implies a multitude of dreams Léon has had involving Eliante, and so this quote reveals that Léon often visits the land of dreams which makes Eliante’s doubled whereabouts to seem “natural.”

If we think of dreams as a space that can be travelled to and dreams of Eliante as a queer space, Léon, through dreaming often, establishes a new queer tendency that transforms his perception of reality. His lack of surprise signals that he is calmed by already having a routine of nightmares. Oriented thusly, Léon can no longer distinguish between wakefulness and dreams at the point of Eliante’s suicide. The once reliable boundary between reality and dreams becomes fluid to Léon as the preexisting line between the two is queerly blurred in this scene. For Léon, dreams – from the moment he speaks in the language of dreams to his final dream of the novel – are his new normal.

While I conclude my account of Léon’s relationship with dreams here, I will return to this

¹⁴¹ « Et Léon Reille, bâillant un peu, s’accouda, la regardant jongler sans trop d’étonnement, parce que, ce cauchemar, il l’avait eu bien souvent, et cela lui paraissait naturel de la trouver à la fois toute nue couchée près de lui, et debout devant lui, jonglant en maillot de soie noire » (*La jongleuse* 254).

letter in the final section to show how Léon's portent extends into a hoping for a queer future.

A QUEER VISION

Before analyzing the final scene of the novel in which Léon and Missie are coupled and have a child, I want to examine Léon's own account of how he has changed found in the chapter six letter explored in the previous section. Léon's account describes how his experience of sexual desire has changed, no longer the in line, heteronormative desire he debuted with. His new experience of desire foregrounds my final claim because Léon's gender and sexual desires no longer align with cis-heteronormativity. At this point, Léon's gender has expanded beyond that of a man through embodying the Léon-cat, and his sexuality and desire fall off the heterosexual line. Léon no longer sexually desires cis-heterosexual women even though this would be the "appropriate" desire for a "man." Instead, he desires the complex heat and queerness of Eliante, whose expression of gender resists easy categorization and who rejects heterosexual sexual intercourse.

Further along in his letter, he writes of how he has changed like it is an illness, signaling both the newness of this change and its contagious or transferrable property (94). Then he gives the example of how he set a theatre girl's fractured ankle, writing: "I looked at that theatre girl's leg with relative interest [. . .] Moreover, she's very pretty, quite young, much younger than you [Eliante]. Now, she uses funny language . . ."

(95).¹⁴² In justifying the attractiveness and youth of the girl, Léon signals that by all heteronormative standards he *should* experience sexual desire for the girl. And, in comparing the girl's youth to Eliante's age, he signals that he *should* prefer the theatre girl to Eliante to align with heteronormativity. However, Léon only experienced "relative interest" which flopped when he heard the girl's "funny language." That the language of this girl was funny to Léon further reveals just how different Léon's orientation is from a heteronormative one. It appears that the once familiar language of heteronormativity has become strange to Léon who no longer understands or speaks it. He can no longer function in "good" society with relative ease as he once did.

Léon attributes his failure to act in line and lack of normative heterosexual desire to: "Probably, the habit I'm acquiring of making someone of your acquaintance tell me stories makes me difficult on the choice of subjects" (95).¹⁴³ Gantz has examined this passage as Léon succumbing to the contagion of Eliante's exoticism such that he struggles to comprehend ordinary social exchange.¹⁴⁴ I read this passage as similarly marking a change in Léon; however, not through encountering exoticism but rather through encountering queerness. In other words, he is comfortable with and now *prefers* Eliante's idiosyncratic speech – as a "habit" implying a solidification of repeated acts and preferences. Because habits shape orientations, it is noteworthy that in Léon's account he ceases to reproduce his former in line orientation. He chooses for himself and by himself,

¹⁴² « j'ai regardé cette jambe de demoiselle de théâtre avec un intérêt relative [. . .] D'ailleurs, elle est très jolie, toute jeune, beaucoup plus jeune que vous [Eliante]. Maintenant, elle a un drôle de langage... » (*La jongleuse* 129-30).

¹⁴³ « Probablement, l'habitude que je prends de me faire conter des histoires par une personne de votre connaissance me rend difficile sur le choix des sujets » (*La jongleuse* 130).

¹⁴⁴ See "Une Langue étrangère."

as Eliante has chosen so many times, to deviate from the vertical line of compulsory heterosexuality. Furthermore, sexual desire is not solely determined by the object of desire; rather, one's direction or orientation determines the objects available to desire.¹⁴⁵ I read Léon's failure to experience heteronormative desire for the theatre girl as an effect of the queer orientation he has taken which views Eliante, who is queer and non-reproductive, as most desirable.

In the same passage Léon elaborates on his desire for Eliante, stating: "Having scarcely skimmed you, I come away from my reading with my brain scrambled, my back burning, swearing no one will catch me at it again, and the moment I come across simpler stories, I declare them to be very boring, bland as the fillers in the local newspaper" (95).¹⁴⁶ Here Léon refers to the effects of reading Eliante as a text he's "skimmed."¹⁴⁷ The heat motif returns as his contact with Eliante as a text leaves his "back burning." And, the text is "taboo" as he swears not to be caught reading it only to return to it when faced with other female bodies, which he compares to "very boring, bland" fillers found in a common mass produced text: "the local newspaper." What Léon is describing here then is a change in sexual desire. The bodies he desired when he had a split orientation are no longer the bodies he desires in chapter six. Léon's experience of sexual desire is no longer compulsorily heteronormative.

¹⁴⁵ See Ahmed (*Queer* 68-70).

¹⁴⁶ « Vous ayant feuilletée à peine, je sors de mes lectures le cerveau en marmelade, les reins cuisants, jurant qu'on ne m'y repincera plus, et dès que je retombe sur des récits plus simples, je les déclare très ennuyeux, fades comme un rez-de-chaussée du *Petit Journal* » (*La jongleuse* 130, original emphasis).

¹⁴⁷ We may consider here how *La jongleuse* depicts Léon as a reader in light of Proulx's work on the fin-de-siècle anxiety about young males being influenced by reading books.

Later in this letter, Léon begs Eliante to serve as her interpreter and to teach the next generation what she has taught him like a zealot who has just discovered *the path*. Indeed, Léon *has* discovered a new path and understands that he is new to this path while Eliante is in the process of leaving. He writes: “Eliante, my beloved, you are walking in the autumn of a world . . . and I am arriving for the dawn of the other world” (97).¹⁴⁸ This reveals an understanding that Eliante is in a season of dying, and he is associated with arriving at the birth of a new world like the arrival and fertility of spring. Connecting this quote to Eliante’s suicide then, which occurs at dawn, I read Léon’s experience of Eliante’s suicide as the moment he *arrives* “in the dawn of the other world.” In this other world Léon has a new direction, which he pleads for in this letter: “I beg you to choose me as an interpreter. I come to ask you for my share of pleasure to affirm *to them* [the youth of tomorrow], later, in front of the dissection tables, the fertilizing joy of dream . . . when I will have stopped dreaming” (97, original emphasis).¹⁴⁹ Léon’s ardent request to serve “as an interpreter” of Eliante’s queer ways of being shapes the effect he will have on his and Missie’s newborn child. Like a disciple, Léon begs to give his testimony to a new generation about the “joy of a dream,” the joy of his queer orientation as shaped by his encounters with Eliante and the objects and spaces near her. Finally, a temporality is attributed to when he will begin his testimony: in the future when he “will have stopped dreaming.” This further connects to his arrival as an interpreter at the dawn of Eliante’s

¹⁴⁸ « Eliante, mon aimée, tu te promènes dans l’automne d’un monde... et j’arrive pour l’aube de l’autre monde » (*La jongleuse* 133) !

¹⁴⁹ « Je te prie de me choisir en qualité d’interprète. Je viens te demander ma part de volupté pour *leur* affirmer, plus tard, devant des tables de dissection, la fécondante joie du rêve... quand j’aurai cessé de rêver » (*La jongleuse* 133, original emphasis).

suicide because he fully wakes up to comprehend the “sacred horror” he has seen and is not described as dreaming afterwards as the novel concludes one brief scene later (206).

The final scene of *La jongleuse* does not occupy its own chapter and is only separated from the conception evening by a paragraph. Its formal attachment to chapter twelve signals that the newborn child scene is a continuation of the night of conception and suicide. The last scene is as follows:

Less than a year later, Marie Chamerot [Missie] could think that her husband would forget, for he had smiled as he kissed the little girl who had just been born.

“You’ll love her, our child?” said the new mother, all happy. “She’ll be pretty . . .”

“Yes,” answered Léon, “I hope she’ll have *her eyes*, the eyes of a dream.”
(206, original emphasis)¹⁵⁰

These few short lines establish that Léon *has not* forgotten Eliante and remind us of the queer orientations he has taken. Missie hopes the child will be “pretty,” a cisnormative hope for a “new mother” to have for a girl, and so when she asks Léon if he will “love her, our child,” she does not mean the love that sets chests on fire.¹⁵¹ Léon does respond affirmatively that he will love her. However, Léon harbors a queer hope for the newborn.

¹⁵⁰ Moins d’un an après, Marie Chamerot [Missie] put croire que son mari oublierait, car il avait souri en embrassant la petite fille qui venait de naître.

– Tu l’aimeras, notre enfant? dit l’accouchée tout heureuse. Elle sera jolie...

– Oui, répondit Léon, j’espère qu’elle aura *ses yeux*, les yeux du rêve. (*La jongleuse* 255, original emphasis)

¹⁵¹ It is worthwhile to consider that Missie is represented as a progressive young woman who would likely have spoken to the fear in fin-de-siècle France that progressive women were a threat to the traditional French family (Mesch, *Before* 16). Considering this, each member of this family possibly poses a threat to “the traditional family” in their own way.

He hopes the child will have “*her eyes*,” Eliante’s eyes, that are emphasized and repeated as “the eyes of a dream,” performatively revealing that Léon’s queer tendencies remain, and he will continue to seek *the Eliante* in this child.

For Rachilde, the eyes of a newborn may have been a significant indication of who the child would become. As a newborn, Rachilde was described as having “les yeux ardents du loup-garou” (the burning eyes of a werewolf) (Hawthorne 17).¹⁵² As I have discussed, the *loup-garou* identity figured heavily in Rachilde’s sense of self throughout their life. By connecting the description of Rachilde as born with the eyes of a *loup-garou* with *La jongleuse*’s description of the newborn’s eyes as Eliante’s eyes, I read “her eyes” as a portent that the newborn will align with queerness and gender variance like Eliante did. Through Mesch’s biographical work on Rachilde, we may additionally question *who* is married at this point in the novel. Rachilde described their own marriage as a kind of death (Mesch, “Trans” 10). Mesch describes that for Rachilde, dying was a metaphor for a new way of being in the world (*Before* 167). Following this, we may consider Eliante’s death as her way of participating in Léon’s and Missie’s marriage since Eliante is heavily implicated in this marriage by her role in the conception night, the memory of her suicide, and Léon’s hope that the newborn has her eyes.

Other scholars have read the birth of this child and Leon’s wish for the child as an optimistic gesture at the future, securing the Decadent artist’s eternity through a child with Eliante’s perspective.¹⁵³ I would add that the child secures a future for queerness and gender variance through Léon’s wish. By looking for Eliante in the child, Léon is

¹⁵² Translation is my own.

¹⁵³ See Barstad, Brevik-Zender’s “Fashion and Fin-de-siècle”, and Gantz’s “Une Langue étrangère.”

portrayed as looking to the past. Ahmed writes: “Looking back is what keeps open the possibility of going astray. This glance also means an openness to the future, as the imperfect translation of what is behind us” (*Queer* 178). I read the backwards glance in Léon’s future-oriented wish for the newborn as demonstrating both the possibility of straying from cis-heteronormative paths and an openness to a future shaped by this kind of deviation. Additionally, because of the queer orientations Léon has already taken, he does not straighten in his new roles of father and husband and so will not raise a normatively oriented child. There is a modicum of hope in the repetition of queerly oriented characters refusing to straighten. Eliante’s refusal to straighten when called to by Léon and Missie affected Léon who slowly became directed towards queerness as I have shown. At the novels end, this reoriented Léon functions to discontinue the line of cis-heteronormative inheritance in families and functions as a breaking point in that lineage.¹⁵⁴

Ahmed writes that: “Some deviations involve acts of following, but use the same ‘points’ for different effects” (*Queer* 177). I consider Rachilde’s portrayal of this family along this line. As mentioned, the depiction of queer possibilities for kinship relations may be an autobiographical insertion. On Rachilde’s marriage to Alfred Valette, Mesch argues:

When we acknowledge Rachilde’s gender variance, however, their marriage to Alfred Valette hardly represents a confirmation of heterosexuality. Instead, their relationship invites us to think about the institution in new ways, reframing the

¹⁵⁴ See Ahmed on breaking points (*Queer* 90).

conventional marriage plot that structures so much biographical analysis. As part of an evolving gender story, marriage becomes a potential subject of inquiry rather than a marker of sexual and gender norms – a structure through which multiple gender and sexual dynamics were possible. (“Trans” 10)

Similarly, *La jongleuse* asks readers to think about marriage and parenting in alternative ways.¹⁵⁵ Like my reading of *La jongleuse* as disrupting cis-heteronormative ideas about marriage, Mesch reads the marriage depicted in *Monsieur Vénus* as: “a kind of middle finger to the institution itself, showing how unrecognized gender variance could subvert marriage even while appearing to adhere to its strict rules” (“Trans” 10). Rachilde’s own marriage, as well as the marriages they wrote into *La jongleuse* and *Monsieur Vénus*, challenge cis-heteronormative assumptions about marriage and kinship structures.

Rachilde has written a shift in the most unlikely character: Léon. They present readers with an inter-species medical student who boldly threatens the continuation of the cis-heteropatriarchal family system and conclude *La jongleuse* with a family that *appears normative* and yet is not. The juggling of expectations is delightfully insidious as queerness triumphs stealthily in the end. Though Eliante commits suicide and leaves a world that was hostile to her, she does indeed achieve eternity through the orientation shaping encounters that reoriented Léon – her disciple reborn in her image – who queerly hopes his child has *her eyes*. *La jongleuse* gestures at a queer and identity fluid futurity possible when queer bodies refuse to straighten and take deviant paths together.

Additionally, *La jongleuse* demonstrates the critical role of objects in how subjects

¹⁵⁵ Mahoney has similarly revealed innovations on conventional models of kinship practiced by the twentieth-century queer Decadent modernist network she studies (13).

become oriented. Through this novel, we gain a representation of reorientation that conceptualizes a futurity made possible by deviating from cis-heteronormativity with others. In fin-de-siècle France, the belief that literary texts could corrupt readers was “a time-worn platitude” (Proulx 3).¹⁵⁶ While *La jongleuse* portrays only one fictional instance of the possibility for queer reorientation, the distributed material novel itself functions as a queer object whispering this possibility into any mind split or queer enough to hear.

¹⁵⁶ Towards this point, Proulx references an entry in Flaubert’s *Dictionary of Received Ideas*, written in the 1850s and posthumously published in 1911, which reads: “Novels – Pervert the masses” (qtd. In Proulx 3). This entry, in the context of my chapter, reads more like a Rachildean hope.

Chapter Three

Sustaining Utopian Longing in Céline Sciamma's film *Bande de filles* (2014)

French film director and screenwriter Céline Sciamma (1978-) is best known for her queer coming-of-age films. *Bande de filles* (*Girlhood*), which debuted at the Cannes Directors' Fortnight in 2014, follows two other of Sciamma's coming-of-age films: *Tomboy* (2011) and *Naissance des pieuvres* (*Water Lilies*, 2007).¹⁵⁷ All three of these films, in addition to Sciamma's most recent film *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* (*Portrait of a Lady on Fire*, 2019),¹⁵⁸ engage themes of queer desire, sorority, and navigating a

¹⁵⁷ *Tomboy* tells the story of a young AFAB (assigned female at birth) protagonist, Laure (Zoé Héran), who goes by Mickaël, and introduces *himself* to the neighborhood children as a boy, wins both playful and real fights, kisses the neighbor girl Lisa (Jeanne Disson), and eventually is outed as "Laure the girl" by his mother (Sophie Cattani). The film generates a hopeful affect on behalf of Laure/Mickaël through encouraging scenes with his father (Mathieu Demy) and sister Jeanne (Malonn Lévana), who seem to better understand his relationships with his own sex and gender. One hopes that he might sustain boyhood, and the film's ending does entertain this reading as Laure/Mickaël continues to present as a boy. The end marks a change, however, as Mickaël must now go by Laure and navigate being a trans child without a vocabulary for this experience. Characteristic of Sciamma's films, there are close shots brimming with haptic energy and the bodies on screen often overflow from the frame. This style of cinematography also characterizes *Naissance des pieuvres*, which depicts the adolescent crushes of two best friends Marie (Pauline Acquart) and Anne (Louise Blachère). The school's swimming pool is a prime location in this film as Marie's crush, Floriane (Adèle Haenel), is the captain of the girls' synchronized swim team. Anne's crush, François (Warren Jacquin), is on the boys' swim team. There are tactile shots of bare limbs splashing in and sweeping through the pool's contained waters, creating a sensory experience of young female bodies "in control." The control of teenage girls' bodies is juxtaposed with the frame breaking, free, and ecstatic bodies of teenage boys. Marie and Floriane are given much of the focus as intimacy grows between them. In the end, however, both lesbian and straight desires are frustrated, as Marie realizes Floriane will not give up male attention, and Anne realizes the insincerity of François' attention.

¹⁵⁸ Set in eighteenth-century France, *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu* depicts the love affair between the young aristocratic woman Héloïse (Adèle Haenel) and the painter Marianne (Noémie Merlant). As in Sciamma's other films, their queer desire is frustrated when Héloïse is married to a man; however, through a shared secret, their desire too is sustained in a changed way – making the evolution of queer desire being key to its sustenance a feature of several of Sciamma's films.

patriarchal society.¹⁵⁹ However, of Sciamma's feature films, "*Bande de filles* is the first [...] not to attend explicitly to queer and trans identities, yet in its presentation of girlhood it subtly challenges normative concepts of gender and sexuality" (McNeill 330). And, in less explicitly portraying a queer or trans coming-of-age narrative, the film foregrounds the ways queer and trans identities intersect with other social categories like race and class to structure institutional and social spaces and affect experience at an individual level.¹⁶⁰

When casting *Bande de filles*, Sciamma sought non-actors whose lives might more closely resemble those of the film's characters. Darren Waldron has observed that in both *Bande de filles* and *Tomboy*, Sciamma blurred reality and fiction by casting people who were real life friends and shooting in locations that were familiar to the cast (65). For Waldron, the blurring of reality and fiction in Sciamma's films invites phenomenological analyses. I agree with Waldron and, as I will later show, a phenomenological attention to objects facilitates my analyses of desire and longing in *Bande de filles*. Sciamma's explicit reasons for her casting choices however differ from Waldron's observations of the effects of these choices.

Both Sciamma and her director of photography Crystel Fournier have expressed that their aim was to represent Black girls like the film's protagonist, Marieme (Karidja Touré), in cinema in light of their conspicuous absence from screens as well as to show

¹⁵⁹ Additionally, interest in gender nonconforming children in France's visual culture increased in the twenty-first century (Waldron 61). Sciamma's films *Tomboy* and *Bande de filles* speak to the public's increased interest as both offer representations of gender nonconforming children.

¹⁶⁰ See Patricia Hill Collins on interlocking systems of oppression.

the sheer number of similar girls.¹⁶¹ The film received criticism in France surrounding the racial politics of representation, specifically that Sciamma, who is white and economically privileged, portrayed Black girls from a Parisian *banlieue*. Frances Smith has pointed out that many critics disapproved of the universalism implicit in Sciamma's goal of bringing Black girlhood to the screen. Smith, however, acknowledged that Sciamma succeeded in bringing portrayals of Black girls to cinema and sparked interest in Black youth films like *Divines* (Houda Benyamina, 2016), *Mignonnes/Cuties* (Maïmouna Doucouré, 2020), and *Les Misérables* (Ladj Ly, 2019) ("The films" 116).¹⁶² Sciamma disregarded the critiques, arguing in an interview with *Libération* that she collaborated with her actors and should not be precluded from portraying nonwhite people on account of being Caucasian (Smith, *Bande 2*). Scholarship on the film has pointed out that by centering the experiences of Black adolescent girls from the *banlieue* in this coming-of-age genre film, *Bande de filles* works to disrupt heteronormative imperatives on girlhood.¹⁶³

Bande de filles follows a Black teenage girl, Marieme, living in a Parisian *banlieue* (Bagnolet, on the eastern fringes of Paris), through a series of roles taken on and taken off which are separated into five "episodes" by cuts to a black screen.¹⁶⁴ Marieme journeys from being a middle school student in charge of caring for her two younger

¹⁶¹ See Smith (*Bande 2*).

¹⁶² Ginette Vincendeau has described *Bande de filles* as praised for its beauty and critiqued for being outside of Sciamma's cultural competence (236).

¹⁶³ "As a result, the construction of adolescent girlhood on screen would seem to have significant potential to deconstruct – or at the very least, question – heteronormative, white girlhood. Gesturing towards the general then, in its depiction of a group of girls from Bagnolet, Sciamma's film can be seen to displace these restrictive norms of girlhood" (Smith, *Bande 5*).

¹⁶⁴ In a 2015 interview, Sciamma uses the term "episodes" as she had originally pitched the film as a TV series to Canal+ (Mayer).

sisters, joining a gang of girls and gaining the name “Vic,” and finally escaping domestic violence through drug running. Throughout the film Marieme refuses each role, and the film’s temporal arrangement with cuts to black is guided by this series of refusals and novel lives. As in Sciamma’s other films, the shots in *Bande de filles* are often tactile and intimate, generating a palpable closeness between the viewer and the bodies on screen.¹⁶⁵

In a film so governed by constant change, I am interested in what is sustained, in what remains. I locate the constant in *Bande de filles* in its insistence on utopian possibilities. This chapter will argue that the film’s utopian logic combines powerfully with its engagement of viewer empathy to encourage viewers to imagine possibilities for Black lives to flourish and queer- and trans-affirming alternative worlds. While previous scholarship has shed light on the film’s portrayal of queerness, its forward-looking ending, and some of its synesthetic qualities, a reading prioritizing its political utopian stakes has not previously been offered.¹⁶⁶ Building on José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of queer utopian longing to develop a phenomenologically informed mode of analysis that follows sites of utopian desire to their ephemeral residues, I track utopian longings through Marieme’s series of refusals to illuminate a sustaining quality that, as I will show, encourages viewers to imagine political possibilities.

¹⁶⁵ “Such aestheticizing moves, and avid attention to the bodies and skin of adolescent and small girls, are salient features of all Sciamma’s work to date. This focus on the body as lived, sensed, felt, is a fundamental part of the writer-director’s feminist politics” (Wilson 10). For additional phenomenologically informed accounts of the film’s haptic register, embodied politics, and emphasis on lived and felt experiences, see McNeill, Pember, and Smith (*Bande*).

¹⁶⁶ All scholarship included in this chapter pays attention to queerness in *Bande de filles*. For scholarship with attention to futurity, see Smith (*Bande*) on futurity in the coming-of-age genre and Wilson on the unknowability of futurity. For accounts of forms of synesthesia in *Bande de filles*, see McNeill on the musical scores and Wilson on the film’s affective excess.

For Muñoz, queer utopian longing and queerness are indelibly linked, as queerness “is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (*Cruising* 1). Following this, this chapter defines queer utopian longing as an insistence on the possibility for other worlds and ways of being and connecting. Muñoz argues that: “Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough” (*Cruising* 96). For Muñoz, queer utopian longing is living inside straight time and asking for, desiring, and imagining another time and place.¹⁶⁷ This longing, or mode of desiring, is utopian in that it imagines future possibilities and is queer in its refusal of heteronormative timelines. I locate this desire for alternative modes of being in the world and time as propelling *Bande de filles*’s protagonist Marieme through each segment of the film to ask what happens when this desire, this queer utopian longing, is all that remains.

My use of utopia follows Muñoz’s suggestion, “to think of utopia as flux, a temporal disorganization, as a moment when the here and now is transcended by a *then* and a *there* that could be and indeed should be” (*Cruising* 97). Building on Ernst Bloch’s formulation of utopia as a critique of what is present and Theodore Adorno’s conceptualization of utopia as located in the determined negation of what is, Muñoz asserts that pictures of utopia let us critique the present, “to see beyond ‘what is’ to worlds of political possibility, of ‘what might be’” (*Cruising* 38). In my analysis of *Bande*

¹⁶⁷ “Indeed, to live inside straight time and ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place is to represent and perform a desire that is both utopian and queer” (Muñoz, *Cruising* 26).

de filles, I identify moments of desire and longing that I describe as utopian. Informed by Muñoz's work, these moments are utopian because they enact future possibilities and encourage what Black studies scholar Kai M. Green has aptly described as thinking "toward possibilities outside of those that have been deemed permissible by the state" (196). Additionally, these moments are utopian because they reveal the inadequacies of the filmic present and represent a desire for alternatives to what Muñoz calls the here and now.

Muñoz describes the present as not enough. The present is "impoverished and toxic for queers and other people who do not have the privilege of majoritarian belonging, normative tastes, and 'rational' expectations" (*Cruising* 27). However, queer and minority subjects cannot simply turn away from the insufficient present. Rather, the present "must be known in relation to the alternative temporal and spatial maps provided by a perception of past and future affective worlds" (*Cruising* 27). Ashon T. Crawley has similarly written about subjects who must insist on alternatives. Describing the intimate relationship between Black people in the United States and the practice of imagination, Crawley writes:

Black folks have had to practice imagination as an urgent mode of resistance to and against dominance, to and against violence. Black life is an imagined life insofar as white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, insofar as racial capitalism as a form of exploitation, would have us all dead and spiraling towards death without attempts to live, without attempts to breathe, without attempts to say no to these

conditions, without attempts to create alternatives in the here, in the now. (“It’s OK)

We may consider this practice of imagination described by Crawley as like a sustained practice of utopian longing. I interpret Crawley’s emphasis on imagination as inviting utopian possibility into the insufficient present. This imagination work further informs what I mean by utopian longing. In my formulation, utopian longing involves the sustained desire for and insistence on possibilities imagined by a subject or collective. As I will discuss, my work with the concept of utopian longing considers this kind of imaginative practice as offering sustenance. Both imagination as resistance and utopian longing insist on possibilities to breathe, to reject hostile conditions for life, and to create alternatives now. In thinking alongside Muñoz and Crawley, it stands out that *Bande de filles* emphasizes the same conditions, affects, and actions both describe. On the importance of imagining futures for Black trans women, LaVelle Ridley wrote: “no matter the outcome, the gesture of daring to imagine itself might be a productive move toward collective liberation and personal joy” (488). I read the film as invested in this kind of imagination work and will show how the film generates viewer-empathy to engage its viewers in the political work of imagining livable alternative possibilities for its gender expansive Black protagonist.

FAILURE AND LONGING

Marieme's series of rejections appear bound up with failure according to the heteronormative and racist capitalist logics critiqued by the film. Queer utopian longing can be identified in the acts of rejection sprinkled throughout the film – acts that often appear as rejections of pragmatism and of the social order of the film and its corresponding rules. Muñoz asserts: "Utopia's rejection of pragmatism is often associated with failure. And, indeed, most profoundly, utopianism represents a failure to be normal" (*Cruising* 172). Following this connection, this section excavates moments that appear as failures "to be normal" to draw out instances of queer and utopian desires. We may connect Muñoz's description of failure as "failure to be normal" with Jack Halberstam's formulation of failure in *The Queer Art of Failure*. For Halberstam, failure is a way of unbeing that proposes different relationships to knowledge. The failures Marieme experiences appear to motivate her constant pivoting towards the possibilities of unsettled paths rather than prompt her to settle into any one readily available and societally acceptable role. Following Halberstam's suggestion that failure offers the subject nonnormative ways of knowing, we can think of Marieme's failures as informing her relationship to the social, her desires, and the directions she takes.

Marieme's first refusal to cohere occurs in the "vocational training" scene of the film's first segment, in which an off screen authority figure tells Marieme she cannot

attend high school.¹⁶⁸ The scene opens on a close shot of Marieme's face, remaining on this still shot of Marieme the entire scene to linger on the emotions that flicker across her face and insist that this is *her* scene even as one future, that of attending high school, is taken away from her. There are no other voices or context preceding Marieme's first line: "Not vocational training." The original French line begins: "Je pas faire" as in "I not do." That the first word spoken is "I" further emphasizes the focus on Marieme's inner world. And so, the viewer is clued into the scene as being about Marieme and her refusal of vocational training as its introductory context. Marieme's posture and face are tense, her head making subtle nods "no" as she almost imperceptibly leans forward, giving the impression of a tightly wound spring, the sensation that if Marieme were permitted to by the voice of the gatekeeper, she would lunge forward into high school as she'd always imagined. Her expression is resolute, and one gains the impression that Marieme is both capable and determined. Then, the sensation of spring tension breaks after Marieme insists that her failing grades are not her fault, and the voice demands to know whose fault it is. At this, unable to account for everything the viewer already knows – her negligent mother, physically abusive brother, and role of caretaker for her two younger sisters – Marieme's eyes look down, look downcast. Although her posture breaks a little here, Marieme makes one final push for the possibility of high school, setting the authority figure's logic aside to insist: "Let me go there."¹⁶⁹ When this fails, Marieme lets out an audible exhale, then again, an audible inhale and exhale coupled with the visible

¹⁶⁸ Smith has noted how the removal of the authority figure from the screen participates in tropes of the coming-of-age genre (*Bande 11*).

¹⁶⁹ « Laissez-moi y aller. »

rise and fall of her diaphragm, steadying herself and establishing the film's connection between Marieme's breath and pivoting forward into the unknown. The connection between breath and moving towards alternatives made by the film is evocative of Crawley's assertion that: "Black life isn't lived in absence of fear but is a kind of courageous wisdom fashioned in the face of fear to continue to breathe and become otherwise" ("It's OK"). We may consider Marieme along these lines in this moment – breathing and becoming otherwise in the face of fear.

Refusing to look at the literature on vocational training offered to her, Marieme asserts that she wants to be like everyone else: to be "normal." The authority figure's voice concludes the vocational training scene, indicating that it is too late for Marieme to realize her desire to be "normal". This furnishes the appearance of failing to be normal, in a scene riddled with failures, with a temporal dimension. Here, although Marieme desires to be normal, she has missed the timeline to fulfill this desire. Just prior to this moment, we are made aware that Marieme had already repeated her grade, and so was not, at the time of this scene, cohering to normative time in any case. That Marieme knew this and insisted on, pushed for, a future in which she could still be normal in normal time is rather queer insofar as it still does not suggest fidelity to normative time, revealing Marieme as someone who operates within an alternative temporality. And so, we are faced with a protagonist who, already outside of normative time, fails to bend or to queer her world in a way that would align her already temporally queer longing "to be normal" with the idiosyncratic timing she exists within.

As viewers, we know why this failure was not Marieme's fault as well as why she could not express these to the authority figure who is disconnected from the realities of Marieme's life and would not share an embodied understanding of the reasons blocking Marieme's achievement of her definition of "normal." The film inscribes the viewer as a witness to this injustice and creates viewer-empathy for Marieme. Allison McGuffie has written on how "narrative cinema holds the unique potential to absorb audiences in the sensory world of its characters" (563). Because of this, the medium of film can generate deep empathy for people with membership or perceived membership in social categories that may differ from the viewer's own (McGuffie 563). According to McGuffie, when the viewer is situated in the protagonist's audiovisual perception, they experience the protagonist's hardships and feel the same feelings of sadness, isolation, fear, hope, and pleasure (578). In the vocational training scene, the viewer hears the offscreen voice while gaining visual information about Marieme's feelings. This creates the sensation that the offscreen voice is speaking to the viewer, who is experiencing the same feelings as Marieme in response. This audiovisual configuration generates viewer-empathy for Marieme – we are cozied up to and aligned with Marieme's perception, feelings, and situation – as close as the close shot and made helpless by our inability to interject into the world of the film on her behalf.

Sciamma plays with the trope of a young person overcoming obstacles by creating empathy for a character who does not overcome this obstacle. By rendering the invested and empathizing viewer helpless, Sciamma provokes the imaginative capacities of the viewer. This experience repeats throughout the film and returns with a tour de force at the

end of the film. As I will show, the viewer's closeness to Marieme's perception, feelings, and circumstances combines with an affective experience of powerlessness to encourage the viewer to enact queer utopian longing for and with Marieme in the real-life present.

In the vocational training scene, amidst Marieme's "failures" to cohere to normative time, to go to high school, to account for her circumstances – we, the viewers, experience a failure of our own through the affective engagement of empathy. We too fail to offer an account of Marieme's circumstances to the authority figure, an account which is called forth from our short-term memories by Marieme's silence in the face of the authority figure's insistence that such an account be offered lest Marieme be unfairly labeled culpable. All this because it simply is not possible to enter a film, to interject in a film world. And so, the viewer mimes a very queer desire here—propped up by our tendency to "root for the underdog," made possible by our omniscience, and destined to fail by the limits of material possibility – yet, longing all the same.

The camera does not linger on Marieme receiving the edict of it being too late to be normal. Rather, the camera quickly cuts to a shot of Marieme's back as she briskly walks away from the camera down a school hallway towards a double doored exit. The sign over the doors, always hovering above Marieme in this full body still shot, depicts an arrow pointed down and a human stick figure miming running or walking. While the stick figure is immobile and miming motion, Marieme is the only figure in motion in this shot—drawing a connection between the two figures in which the figure on the sign that cannot move directs the viewer towards the mobility of Marieme's body, which bursts through the double doors and exits the frame. The shot that follows is of Marieme coming

out on the other side of the double doors, outside the inner world of the school and its ordering logic, forming a visual transition of worlds in which the school is now *behind* Marieme. No literature on vocational training is in hand, and so Marieme, without another option, has thoroughly rejected the option presented to her, leaving it in the background like the school building. That Marieme leaves behind the life path offered to her without an alternative speaks to the intensity of her desire for something other than her present. Marieme longs for and imagines another place and time so ardently that she rejects the pragmatism of a preapproved substitute plan (vocational training). While Marieme's hope for high school is disappointed, she is reanimated by her utopian desire for something *else*. In other words, she insists on alternative possibilities in the present that are not yet clear.

Another manifestation of Marieme's utopian desire appearing as failure is in the office cleaning sequence occurring in the second "episode" of the film. By this point, Marieme is integrated into the girl gang and goes by the name Vic, the gang's leader Lady (Assa Sylla) has lost the fight against an unnamed girl, and Marieme has shared her first kiss with her crush Ishmaël (Idrissa Diabaté). Marieme walks towards the camera down a hall lined with doors. She is wearing her "girl gang uniform:" white Air Jordan sneakers, tight black pants, a denim shirt overlaid with a black leather jacket, her gold Vic necklace, and long straight hair. She stops midway in the hallways to speak to an employee and identifies herself as "Asma's daughter," then is directed to where her mother, Asma, is working, cleaning an office meeting room. Asma stands in a dark room, faced away from the camera, and almost spotlighted by the sole harsh white light of the

room. Behind her lies the city lights at night – contrasting an expanse of possibility outside the windows with the closed off order of the meeting room, its uniform chairs stationed around U-shaped desk tables. The abundance of chairs and their lack of humans provides a second contrast to the standing bodies of Marieme and Asma who are denied “seated” work.

Marieme greets her mother with a *bisou*, both of their faces barely visible and cast against the cityscape at night. In lieu of a “*salut*,” Asma tells Marieme that she is late and orders her to hurry up—providing a temporal demand on work done in an immobile and quiet space nearly devoid of human activity. Marieme offers Asma her reason for being late, that the bus was late, recalling the vocational training scene in which Marieme cannot offer her reasons. That Marieme can and does offer her reasoning establishes Asma as someone who might better understand Marieme’s circumstances for arrival. In aligning the two in this way, the film gives us a clearer understanding of the life Marieme is rejecting when she eventually turns down the cleaning job offered to her by Asma’s boss: the attainable and available life of her mother, and a life subject to the timing of public transportation.

From the meeting room shot, the camera cuts to the back of Marieme’s shoes, offering a close shot of the tiny Air Jordan figure on the heels of the sneakers, the wheels of a cleaning cart, and the baggy beige pants of a cleaner’s uniform. Marieme’s movements in this floor-level close shot appear hindered by the cart, as she walks slowly behind it, placing one foot in front of the other for just over six seconds. Her footsteps appear slow compared to the energetic Air Jordan figure leaping up, basketball in hand,

for an infamous Michael Jordan slam dunk. This tension makes her pace in the six second shot feel painful, somehow wrong, as though the leaping basketball player on her sneakers should not move at such a comparatively slow and labored pace. While the cleaning cart at first feels like a hindrance, it appears that Marieme enacts a rebellion here against her mother's earlier mandate to "hurry up." In walking so slowly, Marieme embodies a tempo that differs from the normative capitalist time which mandates that she is not late and that she hurry up.

In *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Freeman discusses how institutional time comes to be embodied as natural and calls this phenomenon "chrononormativity." We may consider the tension between the energetic basketballer on Marieme's shoes and the shot of her shoes moving unhurriedly as a resistance of chrononormativity. Furthermore, Marieme appears to be walking *forward* as the camera is low behind her as though she is walking towards her future. Her pacing creates her own timing, idiosyncratic with the normative temporality imposed upon her. That the tension in this shot generates a pained and impatient affect offers a glimpse into how it might feel for Marieme to step out of capitalist institutional time. Or, put quite literally, how it might feel to be in Marieme's shoes. In this way, the film couples embodying an idiosyncratic tempo with a pained affect – a slow drudge against normativity – to represent one alternative possibility for forward motion, towards a potential future that escapes the ordering force of institutional tempos and is out of step with the present.

The camera relieves the viewer from Marieme's footsteps, cutting to a frontal shot of Marieme pushing the cleaning cart, her hair fastened up similarly to Asma's. Now

Marieme walks towards the camera as though she is walking towards her role as a cleaner. The hallway she walks down is indistinguishable from the hallway that opened the scene; however, in this shot, it is Marieme who dons the cleaner's uniform and cart. And, in her uniform, Marieme becomes indistinguishable from a cleaner, from Asma, save for her Air Jordan sneakers and gold "Vic" necklace which shimmers as the hallway lights glint off it. These two shots, through the two distinctly different wardrobe elements, call attention to Marieme's difference in an otherwise homogenizing environment and uniform, visually informing the viewer that this role is a bad fit for Marieme. When she arrives outside the door of a restroom in which Asma is cleaning the vanity, the camera lingers on Marieme's expression: a comingling of sadness for Asma and repulsion at a cleaner's life is evident in the downward slope of her eyebrows which are at once heavy and incredulous.

This is followed by a still shot of Asma cleaning alone, then Marieme enters the frame cleaning next to Asma. Marieme's cleaning body blocks out Asma's at times, visually melding the two into one – hinting that *this* life, Asma's life, is now Marieme's life as they become one cleaning body. The viewer does not get to linger here as the camera abruptly cuts to Marieme at the lockers, changed out of the cleaning uniform she embodied a mere moment ago. Asma's boss enters the frame asking Marieme if she is Asma's daughter, to which Marieme replies affirmatively, in repetition of how Marieme identified herself to the anonymous cleaner at the beginning of the office cleaning sequence. This same Marieme who is Asma's daughter is changed this time around, however. After the boss tells Marieme she will begin her summer cleaning job tomorrow,

Marieme calls back out to her, appears to offer her a handshake, and pulls her towards her body tightly and aggressively. The camera is at handshake level, and the dark back of the boss fills the entire right side of the screen as she is dragged in towards Marieme's grip. Like the boss who, with surprise, may have looked down to her hand in Marieme's grip, then up to Marieme's face, the camera rapidly pans up into a close shot of Marieme's face hovering authoritatively just above the boss's face which is shown in a rear side profile hiding her expression. The boss's expression does not matter here, as this shot is about Marieme's assertion of her own will, her own desires, and her insistence on imagining a future other than this present one. Marieme asserts: "Tomorrow, you tell my mother you were mistaken," and the boss silently nods affirmatively and motions to exit the frame, only the top of her head from eye level visible.¹⁷⁰ She looks back briefly at Marieme, whose face is resolute and threatening in its firmness, then leaves. This shot establishes that Marieme can both be Asma's daughter and long for a different future – breaking the sort of manifest destiny march towards cohesion in a heteronormative capitalist social order – rejecting a world in which Marieme and Asma are unified and the same. On this scene, Frances Smith has aptly noted in *Bande de Filles: Girlhood Identities in Contemporary France* that while girls may possess queer possibilities, women do not, and so it was essential for Marieme to reject the female futurity espoused by Asma (81). This scene then offers another instance of Marieme rejecting an insufficient present in favor of an unknown alternative, propelled forward by the tenacity of her desires.

¹⁷⁰ « Demain, vous direz à ma mère que vous vous êtes trompée. »

As mentioned, because the viewer is encouraged to empathize with Marieme, the viewer experiences the socially acceptable life paths presented to Marieme as institutionalized cages and dead ends. In touch with Marieme's affective world, the viewer senses that these life paths are unrelated to Marieme's desires and therefore would preclude flourishing. While this scene appears as a failure to cohere – to the normative life plotted out for Marieme by her mother and by the societal norms for working class Black women – it marks a victory for Marieme and testifies to her strong will to pivot through the imposing close shots of Marieme's body that render her resoluteness almost palpable.

Mary Harrod has argued that Sciamma's films, "in inviting identity-fluid engagement through an appeal to embodied yet socially situated subjectivities, offer intersubjectivity without erasing the specificity [...] Sciamma's work reminds us that walking in another's shoes through fictional creativity can be interpreted as both a queer and feminist act" (226). Along these lines, I consider this scene to encourage an experience of "walking in another's shoes." By presenting a Black protagonist who refuses institutional paths to "acceptability" and by engaging the viewer's empathy for this protagonist, the viewer must realize and contend with hegemonic norms as violent and over deterministic, or at least as not universally fitting for entire social categories of people. Furthermore, this scene is utopian in Muñoz's sense of pointing out the insufficiencies of the present and insisting on the possibility of alternatives. This utopianism, in combination with the film's engagement of viewer empathy and intersubjectivity, generates the political possibility that viewers may imagine what

Crawley calls “otherwise worlds of possibility” for young Black girls living in the *banlieue*. In this way, Sciamma’s narrative cinema powerfully and politically encourages people to invest in and imagine desirable possibilities for people across social categories.

At the conclusion of this scene, after Marieme rejects the cleaner job, the camera lingers a moment longer on Marieme’s face before cutting to the city lights of Paris at night, unobstructed by windows even though the cityscape is shot through them. The presence of windows is made evident only by the occasional silhouette of a support beam. The city lights burn with promise and potential as the camera pans left, creating a sense of movement that one could hope to find in the twinkling cityscape at night. Marieme enters the frame facing the cityscape and walking left as the camera continues to pan left – out of sync with the pan yet in fluid motion – calling attention to Marieme as an idiosyncratic figure. Both the camera and Marieme stop moving, and Marieme gazes out at the city before the camera cuts to grainy video footage of Lady’s earlier fight. The transition from cityscape to fight footage forges a connection between Marieme surveilling the cityscape, its affect of possibility, and the direction Marieme will now head: towards her longing to readdress the fight scene, a longing that goes against the expressed norms of her girl gang in which only Lady can right the loss. In this way, the viewer is given a glimpse inside Marieme’s mind and into the formation process and shifts that shape Marieme’s longings. The past fight scene lingers here, specifically a replay of Lady’s defeat as signaled by the grainy footage separating it from its “real time” occurrence in the film. That Marieme cannot shake the defeat of Lady, whom she appears

to idolize, creates the fodder for her next expression of utopian longing and its corresponding rejection and failure.

The mini golf scene in the beginning of the third “episode” offers an encouragement to buck rules and follow the path one envisions. In this scene, all four members of the girl gang are present as Adiatou (Lindsay Karamoh) and Fily (Mariétou Touré) play mini golf while Marieme and Lady watch. On Fily’s turn, Adiatou stands behind her and says Fily is aiming the wrong way and should aim in the center through a tunnel (see figure 3). Fily, aiming to the left, points out that there is *un chemin* there. Fitting the context of mini golf, *chemin* is translated as “track” in the subtitles, yet *chemin* also conjures less context specific images of a path or a way. All of the girls get involved in the debate, Marieme and Lady entering the frame to stand between Adiatou and Fily. Marieme agrees with Fily that she should aim left, while Lady agrees with Adiatou. Adiatou excitedly exclaims that there are rules,¹⁷¹ and Fily, undeterred, says she will show Adiatou “crazy golf.” In the next long shot of the girls and the mini golf course, Fily tees up with Marieme standing closely behind her, giving the impression that Marieme is in Fily’s corner as the other two girls are slightly off to the left of them. Fily hits the golf ball to the left, gets a hole in one, and everyone except Adiatou explode in celebration.

¹⁷¹ « Il y a des règles ! »



Fig. 3. Adiatou (left) and Lady (center) stand behind Fily (right) as she tees up during mini golf.
Source: Sciamma, Céline. *Bande de filles*. StudioCanal, 2014.

Smith has investigated the ways the rules of sports and games intersect with those of gender and sexuality in Sciamma's youth films to depict both constraint and resistance. The mini golf scene, for Smith:

demonstrates the complexity of the group's relationship to the rules of the game: Fily's questioning of, and attempt to deviate from, the rules of the game are thwarted here. Nevertheless, the scene shows that such conventions might also be undermined by lightly ridiculing those who, like Adiatou, hold them in such high esteem. ("The rules" 145-6)

I agree with Smith's assertion that the scene depicts how rules may be undermined. Rather than reading the rules like Smith does as undermined by lightly ridiculing those who esteem them, I read the scene as showing that rules can be undermined by disregarding other people's esteem for them and choosing to act in accordance with one's own desires and pleasures like Fily does. While the laughter can make this scene appear

lighthearted, I read it as indicative of Marieme's orientation away from rules.¹⁷² Marieme does not hesitate to side with Fily, who saw *un chemin* where the others did not. Similar to Fily, who played "crazy golf," Marieme takes paths others may not see or support. That Fily, who failed to follow the rules, is rewarded with a hole in one stokes a hope that success can be had on alternative tracks.

The mini golf scene, in my reading, gains new life when considered in its proximity to Marieme's first vocal advocacy for getting revenge for Lady. I read Marieme as encouraged by Fily's rule-breaking mini golf success to break rules herself. Marieme goes on to break the social rule of the girl gang which stipulates that one cannot get revenge on another's behalf. After mini golf the girls encounter a group of boys who shame Lady about losing the fight with the girl from another group and who frame the loss in slut-shaming terms such as *sale* (dirty). There is a close shot of Marieme's face in an embittered snarl as she listens to the slanderous boys. The four girls must literally pass through the boys, and in the next shot the girls, now in a collectively bad mood, walk towards the camera down an outside corridor with Lady in the lead and Marieme close behind. It is in this scene, under the reason of concern with how the group looks to others, that Marieme urges Lady to get revenge, but Lady refuses and establishes that she will be the one to decide. Lady then walks away from the other three girls. While Marieme's

¹⁷² In her 2015 interview with Mayer, Sciamma considered the mini golf scene as adding a moment of humor. While Sciamma did not offer reasons for why this scene adds humor, Smith's reading of the scene offers a compelling interpretation of its humor. For Smith, mini golf occupies a position between sport and play. Its parent sport, golf, is about order and is associated with upper middle-class Caucasian men. Mini golf, however, due to its colorful obstacles and short putting distances, emphasizes "the focus on light-hearted fun, and suggests its suitability for young children" (Smith, "The rules" 146). For this reason, Smith reads the group of girls laughing at Adiatou as caused by the "incongruity in being a Black teenager playing said, starchy golf, but also because her [Adiatou's] seriousness contravenes the supposed fun, light heartedness of mini golf" ("The rules" 146).

desire for revenge was already available for the viewer, this scene marks the first externalization of this desire, a desire that gets shot down by Lady, is not shared by Fily and Adiatou, and fails to cohere to the way things work in their group. Marieme, however, longs for another *chemin* as she reflects on the past fight and is critical of the group's present passivity.

The following café scene further stokes Marieme's desire to take action. Marieme, Adiatou, and Fily are seated with food at a café table. Marieme sits at the head of the table although there is an empty chair across the table from Adiatou and Fily, foreshadowing Marieme's victory to come in her revenge fight. The café scene provides a second close shot of Marieme's disgruntled face as this time the three girls are shamed for Lady's defeat by another girl gang at the café. The rival group of girls invokes the same gendered rhetoric of shame used by the boys earlier. Marieme remains silent, appearing to soak it all in, appearing to understand that without getting revenge her group will face ridicule from all who circulate in its world.

Marieme does not accept this and begins her own sort of "crazy golf" as she arranges a meeting for a revenge fight without informing Lady – going rogue in her group and tricking Fily and Adiatou into accompanying her to the meet. On the rooftop, where Marieme, Fily, and Adiatou meet up before the revenge fight, Marieme tells Fily, "Lady has to kill her [the rival girl]."¹⁷³ Fily responds casually, "Don't worry, she will."¹⁷⁴ That Marieme says this knowing that they are on their way to a meeting in which Marieme, not Lady, will fight the rival girl, performs a sort of substitution of Marieme for

¹⁷³ « Il faut que la tue, Lady. »

¹⁷⁴ « T'inquiètes, elle va la tuer. »

Lady leading the other two girls into battle. Marieme goes on to win the revenge fight, reaching the zenith of girl gang glory in Lady's stead. Through the succession of scenes that build to Marieme's victory in the revenge fight, I read a parallel between Fily's victory in "crazy golf" and Marieme's victory in the fight. Both Fily and Marieme, while failing to cohere to the rules, each chose their own *chemin* and experienced success where their peers did not perceive a path to victory.



Figure 4. Marieme (right) is holding the red lace bra and running in the rain with Adiatou (center) and Fily (left).

Source: Sciamma, Céline. *Bande de filles*. StudioCanal, 2014.

Post victory, the three girls return to the rooftop in celebration, splashing around the rain that's collected in the cement basin of the roof (see fig. 4). The rain, the girls' ecstatic engagement with the water, and their rain-soaked bodies create a feeling of renewal. The girls are cleansed and restored in the rainwater, and the rooftop basin – its pool of fresh water – births their spirits anew, refreshing the three girls. The post-victory celebration scene is the first scene in which the girls are laughing since Fily's "crazy golf" hole in one. And, as in the mini golf scene in which Adiatou did not participate in

celebrating, only three of the girls are celebrating post-fight. In this version Lady, who arrives during the celebration, is not sharing in the ecstasy of the other three girls.

The celebrations stop at Lady's arrival, and the next shot frames Marieme and Lady facing each other on either side of the frame's center. The red bra Marieme cut off the defeated girl pokes out of her pocket – a token of her triumph, and Lady is wearing the same tie dye sweater she wore the day she lost the fight against that same girl. Furthermore, Marieme's long braided hair contrasts with Lady's cropped hair, which was cut by her father after she lost the fight. Visually, Marieme surpasses Lady as the leader and victor in this shot. This is an ironic development as it was Lady who gifted Marieme the name she goes by at this point in the film: *Vic comme victoire* (Vic as in victory), thereby pre-anointing Marieme the victor. However, the two girls are framed as equals, signaling that even though Marieme has achieved greater success than Lady in this environment, she respects and looks up to Lady. In this scene Marieme tells Lady she fought the girl for her [Lady]. Lady stops the idea in its tracks, stating as fact that Marieme did it for herself. At this, Marieme is framed closely, center-screen, looking downcast, and Lady enters the frame to give Marieme an impassioned hug, a silent gesture of gratitude for ending the public ridicule brought about by Lady's loss.

So emerges, at the end of the revenge fight sequence, a Marieme who is not deferential to Lady's authority, and who has transformed into a self-sufficient and capable ally – making decisions based on *her own* desires, asserting *her own* authority. While this sequence represents Marieme failing to be a “normal” member of the girl gang, her deviance is not looked down upon insofar as it restores the social status of the

girl gang in the social order. Both Fily and Marieme imagined alternative possibilities to the rules. By imagining a possibility outside of the rules in the present, both girls enacted utopian possibilities in that same present. We learn then from Fily and Marieme that it is possible to act otherwise – in unpredictable and rule-breaking ways. Additionally, acting outside of the rules may even be rewarded if the rogue action is successful. It follows that defiant and utopian actions that are successful alter the scope of what is possible and even normal in turn. And, winning is represented as within the horizon of possibility for wayward subjects. We learn, in this sequence, about the world-making potential of insisting on alternative possibilities and gain an affective taste of the possibilities for jubilation and for another world to successfully supplant an insufficient present. In a film riddled with detours and tribulations, this sequence functions to stoke the hopefulness of the viewer with its tease of a utopian insistence on possibility fulfilled as success, celebratory reunion, and joyful restoration – training the viewer to hope for utopian possibilities with Marieme. As I will show, this hopefulness transforms into a political act of imagination at the film's end.

FROM DESIRE TO RUMOR

There are several objects in *Bande de filles* that function as sites for queer and utopian desires that reappear as ephemeral traces of these longings. These objects are further characterized by their transcendence of the film's temporal arrangement, as they

appear at first as repositories for desire and reappear later as ephemeral objects, crossing the thresholds of the cuts to black segmenting the film. In this section, I take inspiration from Muñoz's finding that queer utopian desire can be detected in objects and moments full of promise, and couple this with his suggestion to look for traces and not evidence of queerness to scaffold my analysis of objects in *Bande de filles*.¹⁷⁵ For Muñoz, "Queerness as utopian formation is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring. This desire is always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (*Cruising* 26). Following Muñoz, I begin by locating objects that "burn with anticipation and promise" in *Bande de filles* to aid my identifications of where desire is directed. Building on Muñoz's utopian formulation of objects as sites of desire and desiring, I track these objects to the moment they are called back upon as ephemera to locate and analyze "the things that are left, hanging in the air like a rumor" (Muñoz, *Cruising* 65).

While objects in *Bande de filles* have been explored in scholarship through queer phenomenology, my approach differs in its investment while being similarly informed by Sara Ahmed's method of queer phenomenology which emphasizes how objects orient subjects.¹⁷⁶ Rather than an investment in how phenomenological objects bring people

¹⁷⁵ "The key to queering evidence, and by that I mean the ways in which we prove queerness and read queerness, is by suturing it to the concept of ephemera." (Muñoz, *Cruising* 65).

¹⁷⁶ Waldron has argued that Sciamma's film *Tomboy* represents the phenomenological view that the world is experienced through the body, through embodiment (61). And, Harrod has advocated for the merits of a phenomenological approach to Sciamma's films. I agree with Waldron and Harrod that Sciamma's films invite phenomenological readings and emphasize embodiment. Relevant to *Bande de filles*'s representation of a gender expansive protagonist, Henry S. Ruben has argued for the utility of the phenomenological method for studying transgender embodiment. Ruben wrote: "a phenomenological method can return legitimacy to the knowledges generated by the experiencing 'I.' This I confronts the world as a series of essences contingent upon an embodied location. The phenomenological method has the added benefit of theorizing these essences as they unfold from the perspective of the I" (267). Ruben's emphasis on the

together in queer ways, my analyses are invested in how phenomenological objects reinfuse the film's latter portion with the utopian desires they represented.¹⁷⁷ The method of analysis I develop here – of tracking objects imbued with a desire for alternative possibilities to their affective and visual moments of reemergence – offers a portrait of the life of such objects and desires in the film. Inspired by Muñoz, my method utilizes the backward glance of ephemera to substantiate that the objects identified in association with utopian desires did indeed correspond to a future-oriented desire. By finding in the film's latter portion a manifestation of an earlier desire for “that thing that is not yet here,” to borrow from Muñoz, this approach furnishes the evidence necessary to call an object in a film utopian and is facilitated by the medium of film which allows a viewer to fast-forward and rewind to perform this tracking work. After tracking objects in the way I have described, it appears in retrospect that these objects were portentous – clues into the protagonist's desires for otherwise possibilities that shape her direction. My attention to how these objects shape Marieme's direction applies a queer phenomenological approach to the importance Muñoz attributed to utopian objects and ephemera. Ultimately, attention to the filmic lives of utopian objects lends to a richer understanding of the alternative possibilities imagined in *Bande de filles*.

importance of theorizing from the perspective of the “I” seems to have anticipated Rachel Mesch's assertion in *Before Trans* that studies of transgender figures and their writing must stick with their perspectives to meet these figures and works on their own terms. Building on Ruben's work, Gayle Salamon has argued that theorizations of transgendered bodies would benefit from phenomenological understandings of the body, citing the phenomenological understandings of gender and sex as gestural rather than morphological (*Assuming*).

¹⁷⁷ For scholarship analyzing objects through the lens of Sara Ahmed's formulation of a queer phenomenology, see Johnston. See Waldron and Harrod for scholarship taking a phenomenological approach to Sciamma's films more broadly.

The first object colored by anticipatory promise that I analyze here is the knife. The knife first appears as Adiatou's in the first "episode" when the group of four girls board the metro after their shopping excursion in the Forum des Halles, an underground shopping center in Paris. This is Marieme's first outing with the girls, and her clothing does not yet reflect her membership in their group – she is learning about this girl gang and its promises. When a rival gang appears on the opposite side of the tracks, a verbal fight breaks out between the two groups. Marieme does not verbally engage the rival group, but she does stand up to join her three new friends. The verbal fight continues even as the metro fills the screen and even after Marieme and the girls have boarded it – becoming closer to the rival group but separated by the metro. On either side of closed glass metro doors, the rival gang and Lady, Fily, and Adiatou bang on their respective sides continuing the verbal sparring. The camera is inside the metro, so close to the back of Adiatou that only her shoulder and a sliver of the back of her head are visible. Abruptly, Adiatou's fist, wrapped around a knife, flies into the frame to bang against the glass barrier. The metal sidings where the closed doors meet appear as though directly in front of Adiatou, as though she could step right out if not contained and attack the rival gang. The camera stays still on Adiatou posed in this way as the world outside the metro begins to whirl by.

When the rival gang is no longer visible through the glass doors, Adiatou, knife still raised, turns her head in profile and begins to laugh. The camera cuts to Lady and Marieme with big grins. Lady calls our attention to the absurdity of Adiatou drawing her knife while inside the metro, physically separated from the rival gang, by asking Adiatou

specifically about drawing her knife. The camera stays on Lady and Marieme as Adiatou insists she could have beat the rival girls through glass, as though her actions were perfectly logical because the impossible *was indeed* possible through the glass.

Marieme's smile grows even bigger at this suggestion, and Lady, noticing this, remarks on Marieme's enjoyment. I find meaning in the timing of Marieme enjoying herself aligning with the absurd promise of the knife capable of defying physical laws in the group's discussion. The camera cuts to Adiatou and Fily, who in continuing to talk about the knife, couch Marieme's enjoyment in the conversation world of the knife.

That the physics-bending knife burns with the promise of possibility for Marieme is made evident by her positive reaction to its reveal. The knife becomes a receptacle for Marieme's utopian desire, a desire for a world that is not yet here, a longing for a world in which Marieme too possesses the logic-defying agency promised by the knife. In the next scene at Marieme's home, she pockets a knife that looks just like Adiatou's while doing the dishes. One of the first actions that Marieme takes after witnessing Adiatou wield a knife is pocketing a knife of her own. The priority given to obtaining this knife further sets it ablaze as an object filled with anticipation. The knife is a receptacle for desires that, through ownership of the object, become possibilities. In the shot where Marieme pockets the kitchen knife, the camera is still and focused on the sink with Marieme's forearms and hands visible. While it looks like Marieme will scrub the knife as she habitually would, she pauses, sets the sponge down, and contemplates the knife in her hands before folding it closed. The camera pans right as Marieme slips the knife into her back pocket, and the knife seems to disappear entirely as she adjusts her shirt over the

top of her back pocket. Slowly and silently the camera pans up to Marieme's face as she stands still leaning against the sink then cuts to a shot of Marieme's back center screen framed by the kitchen. Her head is angled down towards the sink, then lifts up perceptibly, creating the feeling that she has resolved to do something – resolved to walk out of this domestic space, where she is inscribed as a homemaker and exposed to sanctioned domestic violence within heteropatriarchy, and into another world where she imagines agency is possible and promised by the knife. This shift is further emphasized by the Para One musical score that becomes an anthem of change, repeatedly preceding the cuts to black and creating an audio-visual break.¹⁷⁸ The physical act of pocketing a knife for herself confirms that for Marieme the knife is a site of possibility.

As mentioned, utopian desires in *Bande de filles* transcend the cuts to black, flowing freely through them. We encounter the knife again after this cut to a black screen in the revenge fight scene, where it is used to cut off the bra of the rival girl. The film establishes through the first fight scene with Lady that typically, in a fight, the person who pulls the shirt off the other girl to *expose* their bra is the winner. However, in Marieme's fight scene she goes one step further in cutting off the other girl's bra. I argue that this excess, made possible by the knife, is the ephemeral counterpart to the desire for an imagined agency represented by the knife. In the revenge fight scene, Marieme pulls off the other girl's shirt, and the defeated girl raises her arms to her chest defensively, vulnerably, attempting to cover her bra. Only the defeated girl occupies the frame until Marieme leaps into the frame and punches her to the ground. She further kicks her down

¹⁷⁸ McNeill has shown how the Para One score bridges the gaps between "episodes" and offers "an indeterminate affective experience that moves while resisting legibility" (330).

to the ground and out of the frame such that only Marieme's hips, the pockets of her sweatpants, are in the shot. This shot of Marieme's pockets mirrors the kitchen shot in which Marieme first pocketed the knife, harkening back to the desire for utopian agency represented by the knife. Having already defeated the rival, Marieme pulls the knife from her pocket, flips its blade open and, standing over the defeated girl, removes her bra in three cuts then raises the bra in the air as a prize or token of her victory. Celebration ensues from this point and so, in the revenge fight, the excessive act of removing the rival's bra concludes the fight. That the object used to levy this extra blow is the utopian knife points the viewer back like a trace to the desire Marieme imbued it with. Her utopian desire for world-bending agency is manifest in this victory as she acts beyond the structure of girl fights and wins agential status through a victory ensuring that her girl gang will no longer be socially shamed.

The red lace bra of the defeated girl that becomes the token of Marieme's victory becomes another utopian object through the act of its removal, an act full of the promise of dominance. Marieme waves the red bra throughout the celebratory scenes that follow its capture. The red bra in Marieme's possession is the material proof of her dominance over the structure of her social world and stands out in stark contrast to the cool tones and concrete of the *banlieue*. It is important to keep in mind that Marieme obtained this object, promising dominance, by *removing* it from another girl who felt exposed after her shirt was pulled off. Smith has read the red bra as exposing femininity: "That the revelation and removal of this underwear is the principle signifier of winning the fight indicates not only the clear humiliation and violation of having one's clothing removed in

public, but also the fact that it reveals anew the participant's femininity" ("The rules" 155-6). We may then think of the dominance promised by the red bra as both a dominance over social structures and a dominance over how femininity is structured in the social.

The removal of the red lace bra as the action linked to its promise of a world in which Marieme has dominion is key in tracking the red lace bra to its future ephemeral residues. The bra appears from Marieme's pocket in the two scenes that follow the fight scene: in the girls' rooftop celebration and at home when her older brother Djibril asks her about the fight. Its residence in Marieme's pocket offers a visual progression in Marieme's desires. As the bra replaces the knife, Marieme's insistence on utopian possibilities moves from imagining and desiring world-bending agency towards structure-bending dominion.

The red bra no longer appears after these two scenes, but a trace of its promise of dominance is felt in the scene on the night of the revenge fight where Marieme goes to Ishmaël's house uninvited and orders him to remove his clothing in a sexual context.¹⁷⁹ That Marieme determines the removal of clothing in this scene creates the first trace of the desire signified by the red bra as she holds dominion over Ishmaël's male body, its exposure, and their sexual encounter. Marieme's moment of dominance over the male body is brief, however, as the scene where Djibril physically assaults Marieme for having a sexual relationship with Ishmaël swiftly follows her victory. It is no coincidence that when Marieme leaves her home to go to a café after Djibril's physical assault, she is

¹⁷⁹ I agree with Smith's reading of a queerness in this sex scene occurring at the experiential and haptic levels (*Bande* 86).

wearing the same grey sweatpants and blue hoodie that she wore for the revenge fight. The viewer is offered here an alternative world in which Marieme, in her fight clothes, loses. This gains importance because she first meets Abou, the leader of a drug dealing and prostitution operation she will come to work for, at the café in this scene. Her wardrobe here catalogues her next role working for Abou in the visual economy of the revenge fight scene – Marieme will once again fight for dominance.

There is a cut to black before the next trace of the red bra's removal, generating again a temporality for utopian longings that is unaffected by breaks and is characterized by flux. Residue of the red bra appears in the opening shot of the final "episode," lending a transcendent quality to the utopian desire it represented as it lives through these visual breaks. In this first shot, black stilettos walk up red carpeted stairs. The red of the carpet whispers of the red of the lace bra, and as the camera pans up Marieme's backside, red is everywhere – the bright red first glimpse of the hem of her minidress to, finally, its lacy red backing. The red lace of Marieme's minidress directly recalls the color and texture of the red lace bra after the bra itself has disappeared from the film. When Marieme arrives in this outfit at a door, there is a pause and the bottom of the frame cuts off exactly where a bra strap would on Marieme's back, such that Marieme appears to be *wearing* a red lace bra. Recalling that the original wearer of the red lace bra was vulnerable and exposed, this shot forces the viewer to linger on that vulnerability. The scene's insistence on recalling the red lace bra only intensifies with the first chest-up shot of Marieme's frontside, revealing a "sweetheart" neckline of solid fabric shaped like a bra connecting to the lace material on her clavicles. In the environment of the Parisian party where

Marieme delivers drugs, she wears this red lace dress as a camouflage, much like how a bra exists unseen beneath clothing, undercover. These bra-like shots of Marieme's dress confirm that it is not red lace that promises dominance; rather, red lace is associated with vulnerability and is a visual token of a body exposed by another. It is the *removal* of red lace that promises another world in which dominance over the social and its structures of gender are attainable.

In the next scene, Marieme is in a car driven by Kader, one of Abou's male employees. Her first act is to remove the platinum blonde wig, then to inquire after her change of clothes. She begins removing the red lace dress in the backseat of the car, and her body, still in contact with the red lace, experiences involuntary exposure to Kader's lingering gaze as he ogles her in the rearview mirror. This is the only instance of Kader subjecting Marieme to an objectifying gaze, and the camera cuts to a shot of Marieme in male clothing, presumably the attire she changed into. By *removing* the red lace from her own body, Marieme reestablishes dominion over her own body and its gendered inscription in the social sphere.¹⁸⁰

The final trace of Marieme's utopian longing for dominion occurs at Abou's party near the end of the film. In the first shot of Abou, there is a woman seated behind him and to his right in the shot. This woman, likely employed by Abou, wears a red minidress underneath a black jacket and appears focused on Abou, in service of Abou. Her red minidress parallels the red minidress Marieme wears for work, and the camera cuts from

¹⁸⁰ Insofar as the red dress must be worn for a specific job and is disliked by Marieme, I agree with Smith's reading of the rapidity with which Marieme changes out of the red dress as pointing to its status as a costume (*Bande* 84). However, I aim to complicate the dress as *only* a costume by highlighting the importance of its removal and excavating its affective tie to vulnerability in the film's visual economy.

the shot of Abou and the woman in red to a close shot of Marieme's face grimacing at the sight of them. The woman's jacket covers the top of the dress, ushering in the question of its material composition: lace? This woman, in her attention towards Abou, fits Marieme's roommate Monica's earlier deduction that all women who work for Abou are his *putes* (whores). Marieme needn't have ever met this woman to be visually connected to her through the red cloth of exposure. In this way, the film subtly aligns the heteropatriarchal social order of Abou's world and Marieme's place within this structure with the vulnerability visually tied to red by the original context of the red lace bra.

Later in the scene, Marieme rejects Abou's demand to dance and his sexual advances. In this still shot, Marieme and Abou fight for a place in the frame as Marieme repeatedly shoves Abou out of the frame. The revenge fight outfit Marieme was wearing when they first met is resurrected here – *this* is the fight Marieme must win to sustain her insistence on other ways of being and connecting. The party attendees break up the fight and Marieme flees. By leaving the party and the imperatives of red lace, Marieme is enabled to sustain her desire for dominance as well as sustain the hard-won victories of self-governance and a practice of imagination.

Another of the film's utopian objects concerns a desire for mobility and returns as one sort of portrait of queer collectivity. The Air Jordan sneakers, which Marieme begins wearing after joining the girl gang, are the focus of several low close shots. In the above-mentioned cleaning scene, the sneakers' energetic logo figure of Michael Jordan was in tension with Marieme's slow-by-comparison footsteps. This offered one example of how the cinematography loads these sneakers with promise, as the sneakers are the vehicle for

Marieme's pacing. Here, I further explore how the cinematography codes the Air Jordan sneakers as promising a world where Marieme has unhindered mobility within its visual economy of desire before exploring a latter trace of this longing.

The first appearance of the sneakers occurs seconds after the film's first cut to black. In a hint at Marieme's new life, Marieme, shot chest up, boards an elevator wearing the girl gang's uniform: a leather jacket and straightened hair. Then, the camera cuts to a ground-level close shot of Marieme walking or, rather, of the Air Jordan sneakers walking on the ground. The steps are quick, almost blurring the white sneakers. The camera pans up Marieme's legs to her face as she walks on purposefully. That the first full reveal of Marieme's girl gang outfit begins with the Air Jordan sneakers in motion creates the sensation that through the sneakers Marieme walks into her new life. The blurred motions and quick pace of the sneakers in this low shot speak to the rapidity with which Marieme's path and possibilities are shifting as she walks purposefully to a school she no longer attends. We may think of her walking towards the unknown with purpose as a form of escape from the racism structuring the education system. Muñoz considered escape to "not be a surrender but, instead, may be more like a refusal of a dominant order and its systemic violence" (*Cruising* 172). This is not to say that Marieme escapes institutional racism; rather, Marieme retains a robust capacity to imagine possibilities for her life beyond the institution even as she is disadvantaged by institutional racism. In other words, Marieme imagines and finds alternative lifepaths at the site where an institution denied her opportunity. In this way, she enacts the kind of fantasy Muñoz connects with utopian longing. For Muñoz, fantasy and utopian longing,

taken together, “can become contributing conditions of possibility for political transformation” (*Cruising* 172). While the hope of attending high school has been extinguished, the Air Jordan sneakers carry Marieme to an alternative world of possibility that exists at and thereby transforms the familiar location of the school. In the alternative world mapped onto the site of the educational institution, Marieme is part of a social collective in the gang of girls. In this way, the sneakers offer Marieme a form of mobility that empowers the movement of pivoting and maps new ways of being and connecting onto existing spaces.

Furthermore, the sneakers are a spotless white shot against the brown ground, visually signaling that this desire for mobility is new. The whiteness of specifically Marieme’s sneakers is further emphasized in the second “episode” when Marieme returns home after the “Diamonds” sequence and removes her shoes at the door. The camera is low, at floor level. To the left of the frame are Djibril’s and her younger sister Bébé’s sneakers – both Air Jordans like Marieme’s but worn and scuffed. The door opens and Marieme’s new white sneakers step through in contrast to the worn shoes of her siblings. She slips her feet out of the sneakers, leaving them staggered and facing the door as though still in step by the door and ready to leave. Marieme leaves the frame, but the camera lingers on the three pairs of Air Jordans. Then, Marieme’s sock-clad feet reenter the frame and, this time, the camera leaves with her panning left.

The low shot calls attention to the visual importance of sneakers in the film. And, the camera lingering on the three pairs of sneakers by the door – Marieme’s white, staggered, and in the foreground – gives the impression that Marieme could leave at any

time if needed, further promising mobility. Additionally, Béb  s Air Jordans share the same color palette as Marieme’s, building anticipation for a mobility B  b   may come to desire after Marieme does indeed leave and B  b   inevitably becomes her substitute at home as the next oldest female in a family structured by normative gender roles. The danger of Djibril’s physical violence looms literally in the background of this shot, as his sneakers are positioned to the right of B  b  s and behind Marieme’s and are the most beat up shoes there. Furthermore, Djibril threatens Marieme in this scene, associating the sneakers with escape and further flushing out the precise kind of mobility longed for. That Marieme walks shoe-less, past the shoe rack, to Djibril’s threat of violence marks sneakers as an offensive mobility – if Marieme had been wearing her sneakers she could have, perhaps, left. And, to arrive at Djibril, Marieme passes her youngest sibling, Mini, who is too young yet to *need* Air Jordan sneakers. As a prepubescent child, Mini is safe and does not yet need mobility. This is further affirmed when Mini, by waking up from her nap, thwarts Djibril’s violence and causes him to release his chokehold on Marieme. The sneaker-less Mini is safe, but Marieme is not and longs for mobility towards another time and place, a safer space through the newness and travel of her Air Jordans. In this way, the Air Jordan sneakers promise mobility through a tempo alternative to capitalism (the cleaning scene), a new life world (their first low shot reveal and whiteness), and an offensive mode of escape (waiting staggered in the foreground by the door).

The Air Jordans occur as ephemera in the final “episode.” At this point Marieme is working for Abou delivering drugs and lives with Monica who works for Abou as a prostitute. After a gathering with Marieme, Monica, Kader, and an unnamed male

coworker, Marieme and Monica walk back to their apartment. It is quiet, except for the clacking produced by Monica's stilettos. Marieme comments on the noise made by Monica's shoes, and Monica responds that the stilettos harm her feet. The two are in the distance walking towards the camera, the whiteness of Marieme's Air Jordans is visible even in the distance, and Monica stops to remove her heels. The camera cuts to a waist up shot of Marieme and Monica, Monica walks out of the frame and Marieme calls her back into the frame, telling Monica to climb atop her for a piggyback ride. Smiling, Monica jumps on, and Marieme zooms off towards their door, both girls laughing. In this scene, the mobility promised by the Air Jordans is used to literally carry a shoeless Monica. Enabled by the sneakers, Marieme shares her mobility with Monica, who cannot wear sneakers in the cisnormative logic of Abou's world. The sound and dialogue of this scene are focused on the stilettos. This focus calls upon the utopian promise of the sneakers like a trace. If Monica had new sneakers of her own, perhaps she could have walked with ease or even been the body sprinting, unhampered by the weight of a second body on its back. That the girls laughed as they piggybacked home shows there is fun and freedom in mobility. And, that Marieme calls Monica back into the frame to share the benefits of Air Jordans, creates a moment of collectivity and connection between the girls, as though Marieme is inspired to share her mobility. In this scene, the Air Jordans carry two bodies because one lacked sneakers. And, in this way, the trace of the sneakers via their absence from one body comes back as a utopian possibility for collectivity and alternative modes of connecting. This further characterizes the desire for mobility as for a collective

mobility that enacts new modes of connecting in the queer bringing together of two bodies moving *as one*.

Smoke also appears as an ephemeral trace of a former promise in Marieme's and Monica's apartment. The scene of the morning after the piggyback ride opens with a shot of Marieme and Monica in their kitchen. Marieme stands to the right over the oven cooking breakfast, and Monica is positioned to the left smoking a cigarette. The camera cuts to a shot of Monica from her shoulders to the top of her head, the cigarette foregrounded and its smoke filling the right of the screen and wafting out of the frame towards Marieme. The camera cuts to Marieme, who steps left into the cigarette smoke. At Monica's implication that Abou did well in recruiting Marieme, Marieme asserts that she is not like Monica. Smoke lingers between the two as Monica tells Marieme that even though Marieme dresses like a man, she is Abou's *pute* too.¹⁸¹ The camera lingers on Marieme as Monica's voice is heard challenging Marieme's self-perceived exclusion from being a *pute*. Smoke from Monica's cigarette envelopes Marieme's head, then Marieme responds simply, "Exactly (Exactement)," she is not Abou's *pute*. Monica continues to assert that Marieme is indeed Abou's *pute* just like her. Marieme eats her breakfast calmly with a cloud of smoke surrounding her head; she is unbothered by both the smoke and Monica's cis-heteropatriarchal policing.

¹⁸¹ "Pute" is translated as "bitch," which does a good job of calling attention to the subjugated and servile status of a "pute" in the film, which Marieme rails against. The French word "pute" is also slang for "prostitute" like the English slang word "whore." Monica works as a prostitute for Abou – one of two available jobs Marieme is aware of: prostitute or drug runner. So, when Marieme tells Monica that she is not like her, and Monica responds by labelling that likeness as "pute," Monica is both referring to herself as a prostitute and their gendered subjugation under Abou.

In a critique of the conditions set by the nation state in France that cause transgender to stand out, Todd W. Reeser draws attention to how the figure of the mother in Sciamma's film *Tomboy* frames her reasons for imposing gender norms on her child with the cisnormative logic of the education system (5). Similarly, Monica's reasons for policing Marieme's gender expansive self-presentation speak to the conditions of the social system they are in whereby a person assigned female at birth may only occupy gendered roles for women – here, the role of a prostitute. Marieme does not self-present in normatively feminine ways and does not work as a prostitute, calling attention to and critiquing how the ontologizing violence of this ideology is divorced from the lived realities of the people it claims to define. This also indicates that Monica failed to imagine the kind of alternative collectivity offered by Marieme the night before. It is as though Monica understood their bodies moving as one within this limiting cis-heteropatriarchal framing: they are both *putes*. Monica, like Adiatou in the mini golf scene, cannot imagine possibilities outside of hegemonic structures. The irony of Monica foisting this possibility-limiting view on Marieme, who binds her chest and wears men's clothing, is that Marieme is already embodying and enacting trans possibilities that Monica perceives as impossible. Marieme *is already* engaged in practices beyond normative gender ideologies. In this way, Monica's attempt at policing Marieme's gender nonconformity is powerless in the face of the modes of being Marieme imagined and came to embody for herself. I argue that the smoke enveloping Marieme's head, the locus of her thoughts and belief-forming capacities, visually allows Marieme to evade

Monica's assertion of her world view by harkening back to the utopian associations of smoke from the "Diamonds" sequence.

In the "Diamonds" sequence, after all four girls have changed into stolen dresses, Fily smokes from a hookah. The camera lingers on a close shot of Fily and Marieme, and the smoke from Fily's drag envelopes Marieme's smiling face. Then, the camera cuts to a close shot of Adiatou lighting a joint and back to Fily blowing an orb of smoke. Marieme takes the hookah from Fily, takes a drag, and exhales smoke – participating in smoking like a communion. Then, finally, Lady, the leader, is the last to smoke and is given a close shot exhaling smoke from the hookah. This dense smoke completely blocks Lady's face from view, fills the frame entirely, and functions as the transition into the beginning of the "Diamonds" musical sequence which, through its color transition into blue tones, exists distinct from the warm toned reality of the hotel room.¹⁸² Other scholarship has briefly noted the hallucinatory properties of smoke in this scene, and how the smoke seems to lead the way for the dreamlike music video that follows.¹⁸³ I analyze the smoke here as a utopian object, burning with the possibility of creating one's own world like how the "Diamonds" dance scene is accorded its own world in *Bande de filles* through color and the music video style cinematography.¹⁸⁴ The utopian promise of smoke from the "Diamonds" sequence then returns to enable Marieme to thwart Monica's implication that she is also Abou's *pute* in the apartment kitchen scene. Indeed, Marieme does not

¹⁸² In a similar play with color, the night club scene in *Naissance des pieuvres* is shot in red tones.

¹⁸³ See Wilson.

¹⁸⁴ For an in-depth analysis of the music video quality of the "Diamonds" sequence, see McNeill 336-8.

take on Monica's world view and so sustains the longing represented by smoke to create her own future.

The last object I track to its reoccurrence is diamonds, turning again to the "Diamonds" sequence for an origin. This sequence has received the most critical attention from scholars who have shown its blending of ecstatic and melancholic affects, drawn connections to the singer Rihanna's life, and called attention to the synesthetic function of the film's musical scores.¹⁸⁵ Aided by these illuminations, I locate an anticipatory ecstasy in diamonds. The music video-like scene begins with a blue-toned close shot of Lady's face, who wears diamond stud earrings. Rihanna's lyrics start "Shine bright like a diamond," and on the second repetition of these lyrics, Lady's face lifts, looking directly into the camera as she lip syncs "shine bright like a diamond" (see figure 5). Her direct gaze as she lip syncs makes the words and the shot hers and proper to her. Furthermore, Lady's diamond earrings mime the lyrics to "Diamonds" as they shine brightly amidst the melancholic blue and black tones of the scene.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ For scholarship on the musical scores, including "Diamonds," in *Bande de filles*, see McNeill, Pember, and Wilson.

¹⁸⁶ For a discussion of the blue and black color palette of this scene, see Wilson 15-6.



Fig. 5. Lady, wearing diamond earrings and awash in blue tones, begins lip syncing to “Diamonds” by Rihanna.

Source: Sciamma, Céline. *Bande de filles*. StudioCanal, 2014.

Marieme sits to the side, watching the three girls dance to the song “Diamonds,” and as an onlooker she is not shaded in the blue tones of the “music video.” Bobbing her head to the music, she watches the girls with a hint of a smile – seemingly longing to join them, and she does join them in time with the lyrics: “a vision of ecstasy.”¹⁸⁷ It does not appear casual that Marieme joins the other girls in dancing at *these* lyrics, with their future-oriented promise of ecstasy, or transcendental happiness, that is not yet here but exists presently as a vision. Rihanna’s song repeats “shine bright like a diamond,” and this insistent repetition coupled with Lady’s diamond earrings bobbing in time with her ecstatic dance, work in tandem with the world-building blue tones and distinct cinematography to connect diamonds with the utopian possibility of an alternative time and place. In this formulation, diamonds shine with the power to transcend the engulfing

¹⁸⁷ McNeill, who writes at length about this scene, titled her article “Visions of Ecstasy.” While she does not explicitly reference “a vision of ecstasy” as the lyrics at which Marieme joins the music video like scene, I find a connection between her choice of title and the queer and utopian longing for ecstasy that I locate here.

blue-black melancholy. This is not to say that the diamonds evade melancholy; rather, they shine *through* it.

We may think of the “Diamonds” sequence along the lines of fantasy as the only segment of the film in which the audiovisuals resemble a music video. Drawing on Muñoz’s conceptualization of queer utopian longing, Juana María Rodríguez has written on the utopian work of fantasy. In Rodríguez’s formulation, fantasy functions as: “a way to conjure and inhabit an alternative world in which other forms of identification and social relations become imaginable” (26). It appears then that in this fantasy-like sequence – where the girls dance and sing with each other in the microcosm of a rented room – the group inhabits an alternative world where they are empowered to imagine other ways of identifying and relating such as being the stars (like Rihanna) of their own worlds and moving their bodies freely and ecstatically while together.

Similarly, Ridley has put forth the concept of “imagining otherly” to think through how the reprieve of being able to catch one’s breath structures possibilities for thinking about Black trans knowledges and futures (482). For Ridley, imagining otherly is “both a survival tactic and epistemological framework for addressing the possibilities that lie in moving beyond the polarizing ways of engaging with power: to resist or comply. Imagining otherly attempts to reveal the pathways to other radical forms of possibility for black trans women’s futurity” (482). I consider the “Diamonds” sequence as representing the kind of reprieve Ridley identifies with imagining otherly. In this sequence, the girls need neither resist nor comply, which offers a moment of respite from the hegemonic systems of oppression that structure the backdrop of their lives. In

standing apart from the violence and structuring norms for Black girlhood in the rest of the film, this sequence proffers its own knowledge about the possibilities for being and being with others for Black teenage girls in the *banlieue*.

In consideration of Pember's work on the resilience discourse she believes is present in much feminist scholarship on *Bande de filles*, I would like to acknowledge how diamonds shining through melancholy might first appear to participate in a resilience or overcoming discourse.¹⁸⁸ The film complicates this possible reading, however, because Lady's diamond earrings *do not overcome* the blue tones of the scene. Rather, the diamond earrings are tinted by the blue and remain their shiny selves *in* the blue-black world, and so I argue that diamonds are a call, if anything, to remain true to oneself in any light. The diamond earrings visually enact the reprieve from resisting and complying described by Ridley – they neither resist the blue (which tints them) nor comply with the blue (which cannot dim them). The utopian promise of diamonds set up by this scene then is the possibility of reprieve from dominant systems of power that offers the ecstasy of remaining true to oneself in every environment by shining bright like a diamond.

Traces of this promise can be found in three diamond objects from the film's final "episode": Marieme's diamond earrings, Kader's diamond earrings, and Monica's diamond ring. The opening shots of the final episode show Marieme, in her drug running costume of the red dress, wearing disco ball-like diamond earring studs. Up to this point in the film, she did not wear these earrings unless in costume. Near the end of the film, however, she wears them to Abou's party. And so, in their first appearance, her diamond

¹⁸⁸ See Pember's argument against celebratory readings of "overcoming" in *Bande de filles* (303).

earrings call back to the “Diamonds” sequence as a visual reminder that even though Marieme opens this new and final “episode” sporting the red dress, associated with vulnerability as previously established, she will somehow remain true to herself. The diamond earrings make a visual promise to the viewer, and perhaps to Marieme, of a future yet to come in which it is safe to reveal and be herself. As the trace of the “Diamonds” sequence, Marieme’s diamond earrings cut through her costume to show a mode of being that entails a willful commitment to herself.

In the car scene that follows, Kader, who drives, wears diamond stud earrings, signaling that diamond earrings are a gender fluid object. As mentioned, at this point in the film, Marieme does not wear her diamond earrings while wearing men’s clothing. I read this as Marieme not needing diamonds to be true to herself when she is in men’s clothing, because the men’s clothing is aligned with Marieme’s felt sense of self. Later, at Abou’s party when Marieme does wear both men’s clothing and diamond earrings, she is also wearing makeup. There is an entire preceding scene dedicated to the making up of Marieme’s face for work that night. First, there is a close shot of Marieme’s eyes as Monica coats them in mascara, followed by a close shot of Marieme’s lips as red lipstick is applied. The inclusion of these shots ensure that the viewer is keenly aware of Marieme wearing makeup from this point to the end of the film. Marieme also wears diamond earrings in these shots and through to the end. I read this pairing of makeup and diamond earrings as indicative of Marieme requiring access to the diamonds’ promise of happiness through being herself in times where her face is literally colored differently with makeup. The trace diamonds, like those of their origin scene, do not overcome Marieme’s

costumed and painted self as they appear to be a part of it. Rather, the diamonds shine bright with their original promise in this new visual context.

Marieme removes neither her makeup nor her diamond earrings between work and Abou's party. Just before Marieme arrives at the party, there is a shoulders up shot of her standing outside washed in blue tones, her diamond earrings shining brightly, evoking the blue toned "Diamonds" sequence. At the party Marieme slow dances with Monica, recalling Marieme and her former friend group dancing to the song "Diamonds." A shot of Monica's hands on Marieme's shoulders shows that Monica is wearing a large diamond ring, and for a moment the viewer is permitted to hope that Marieme and Monica might share an experience of queer intimacy even in a social setting governed by heteropatriarchal logic. The camera stays still on Marieme's back, her diamond earrings visible, and Monica's ring adorned hand on Marieme's shoulder. As the two dance, their respective diamonds sparkle near each other in the dark blues and blacks of the night. The diamonds visually bring Marieme and Monica together for a second time, this time kindling collectivity in the sign of diamonds and the trace of their utopian promise of ecstasy and social connection – recalling Rihanna's lyrics "you and I, we're beautiful like diamonds in the sky." Marieme and Monica gaze intimately into each other's eyes for nearly twenty seconds as they slow dance. In these twenty seconds, a potential world where they can be intimately together is born, but this version of ecstasy, like its origin

world's, is fleeting and taken away by the intrusion of Abou's face in the frame, breathing on the back of Marieme's neck.¹⁸⁹

As previously addressed, Marieme rejects Abou's advances in this scene. Of note here is that Marieme wears diamond earrings when she rejects Abou – staying true to herself and sustaining her longing for alternative forms of being and being with others. Furthermore, Marieme wears diamond earrings for the remainder of the film: while rejecting Ishmaël's idea of a good future for her, when rejecting returning to her original home, and, lastly, in the final scene of *Bande de filles* as she faces an unknown future. The promise illuminated by diamonds of a future ecstasy made possible by staying true to oneself, by shining as oneself regardless of the environment, is so essential to the film's desiring economy that its trace colors each of the film's final scenes. In this way, diamonds and the "Diamonds" sequence in *Bande de filles* do even more work than existing scholarship has given credit for. In the final close shot of Marieme's face in profile, her diamond earrings visually stand out, burning with the utopian possibilities from the "Diamonds" sequence such that Marieme's desire to radically be herself amidst hegemonic systems of oppression is sustained – shining brightly, brighter even in the daylight of the final scene.

¹⁸⁹ Smith offers a queer reading of this scene in which Marieme's and Monica's bodies being turned towards each other signifies their rejecting the heterosexist gazes of the surrounding men, and Marieme's rejection of Abou shows how Marieme's bodily instantiation of queerness prevents certain possible futures (*Bande* 85). Additionally, Pember reads this scene as expressive of a black queer desire that articulates a counter-resilient rejection of anti-blackness as Marieme embraces the figure of the black female sex worker (312).

LOST AND FOUND / NOT FOUND

We may think of Marieme as being lost in a queer sense. For Muñoz, loss is part and parcel of queer utopian longing. He writes: “Being lost, in this particular queer sense, is to relinquish one’s role (and subsequent privilege) in the heteronormative order. The dispossessed are particularly adept at critiquing possession as illogical. To accept the way in which one is lost is to be also found and not found in a particularly queer fashion” (*Cruising* 73). Throughout the film, Marieme loses people, spaces, identities, and life paths. Ultimately, she possesses nothing, nowhere, and no one – only a longing for alternatives remains. Marieme rejects the cis-heteronormative patriarchal order of the filmic world, dropping out and moving on when normative imperatives threaten her sense of self without knowing where to go next. Through experiencing loss via rejections of untenable life courses, identities, and social connections, she slowly finds herself.

One example of queer loss in *Bande de filles* is Marieme’s rejection of Ishmaël’s marriage proposal. The proposal scene occurs in the fifth and final “episode,” after Abou’s party where Marieme rejects Abou’s advances and is consequently out of a job and place to live. Marieme goes to Ishmaël’s apartment immediately after leaving Abou’s party. The scene occurs in Ishmaël’s dimly lit bedroom awash in mysterious blue and black hues. Marieme and Ishmaël sit side by side on the bed, framed from hip level up. Both sit with their legs splayed and their elbows resting on their thighs with their hands respectively joined together in the gap between their spread thighs. Their postures are identical and masculine coded, which is further emphasized by Marieme’s masculine

self-presentation. Their likeness makes it appear as though this is a shot of two brothers sharing a moment of fraternal kinship. That Marieme and Ishmaël are twinned in the first shot of this scene further positions the two as not only physically alike but as equals. This visually alerts the viewer that Marieme does not occupy the normative subject position of a cis-hetero woman within patriarchy thereby foreclosing the possibility of Marieme being possessed by a man within the film's logic of heterosexual marriage.

Marieme's embodiment of alternatives to the subject position expected of her generates an opening for possibilities. This opening speaks to the radical world-building potential of embodying alternative ways of being and relating that do not exist in the social structures and norms of the present. Writing on the potential of trans practices, Jian Neo Chen and micha cárdenas observe that: "Trans practices of body-mind-sense and gender transformation stage and potentially rework binary cisgender-structured through whiteness—as a fundamental fault line defining the human" (474). Along these lines, I read the empathy viewers feel for Marieme as encouraging a reworking of this hegemonic definition of the human. Indeed, Marieme's insistence on alternatives to normative roles, relations, and structures keeps the possibility of imagining and enacting other worlds open. Combined with the film's affective engagement of empathy, viewers find themselves hoping for the alternative world Marieme imagines and creates.

In the proposal scene, the camera stays still framing the two twinned bodies of Marieme and Ishmaël as he apologizes for having previously rejected Marieme for binding her chest. While Ishmaël's apology might appear to foster a more collaborative relationship, the camera undermines this notion as he proposes a plan for Marieme to

move in with him, and the camera cuts to a close shot of his face, signaling that this is his desire and his alone. Ishmaël says, “We can get married,”¹⁹⁰ and the camera cuts to a similarly framed close shot of Marieme’s face who asks if he is joking. The shots flit back and forth between Marieme and Ishmaël depending on who is speaking until staying close on Marieme while Ishmaël suggests she could become *une fille bien* (a decent girl) through their marriage. The cinematography engages the viewer’s empathy for Marieme by visually connecting the viewer to her emotions (her face emotes) and situating the viewer in her field of auditory perception. At Ishmaël’s suggestion, we see Marieme’s facial expression turn sour. She incredulously repeats “une fille bien?” as though it had been levied at her as an insult. The camera stays with Marieme at this point, prioritizing her reaction to the proposal of being a decent girl. She interrogates the off-camera Ishmaël, stating: “I’ll be your little wife? Then you give me a kid? And that’s my life?”¹⁹¹ Her tone makes the insult of *her* future being written by Ishmaël and the insufficiency of that life palpable.

When Ishmaël asks Marieme what her life is now, she does not respond, refusing any definition of her present circumstances. By not responding to his prompt for an account of what her life is, Marieme highlights the violence of the demand to make an account of oneself. Situated in her emotional world, viewers may experience a sinking feeling or flinch at trying to answer his question themselves. Marieme’s life now is marked by impending homelessness which could very well give rise to feeling afraid. Crawley describes the practice of imagining possibilities as recognizing fear and “moving

¹⁹⁰ « On puisse se marier. »

¹⁹¹ « Je ta petite femme à la maison ? Puis tu fais un gamin ? C’est ça ma vie ? »

in the direction of the alternatives anyway, anyhow, in spite of” (“It’s OK”). By choosing to imagine possibilities, Marieme reveals a logic whereby knowing what one doesn’t want and imagining what one does want are more important than an insufficient and even fear-provoking present.

After this silence, Marieme kisses Ishmaël, expressing what appears to be genuine appreciation for his proposal before the camera lingers on her face as she contemplates him for several seconds before saying that she cannot accept his proposal because she does not want that life: “Je ne veux pas de cette vie de fille bien.”¹⁹² The viewer, who has been feeling what Marieme feels throughout this conversation, protests the possibility that she might accept his proposal in the space between the kiss and the delivery of her decision. In this way, the film calls upon viewer empathy to encourage viewers to hope for possibilities beyond heteronormative life paths and relational structures. The viewer, whose real life is lived in a patriarchal society, hopes for the failure of heteropatriarchal norms. In this way, the film’s engagement of viewer empathy is political and encourages viewers to invest in queer- and trans-affirming alternatives.

There is so much care in Marieme’s face for Ishmaël as she delivers the rejection, testifying to the intensity of this loss that she must accept to sustain her desire for alternatives. By rejecting him she loses her relationship with him, their intimacy, and the version of herself who gained definition through their relation. Marieme also loses a place to live and financial support by rejecting the heteronormative life path of

¹⁹² “I don’t want that life.”

heterosexual marriage, homemaking, and sexual reproduction.¹⁹³ Through these losses though Marieme is found by affirming for herself that she does not want the life of *une fille bien*. However, Marieme is also “not found” as she is directionless from this point. She neither answered Ishmaël’s question of what her life is now nor has an alternative life course charted. Marieme represents the dispossessed Muñoz described, and to Marieme, being possessed and possessing in this heteronormative relational model are illogical. Her queerness in this scene manifests as “the rejection of normal love that keeps a repressive social order in place” (Muñoz, *Cruising* 134).

By clearly laying out each activity appropriate to the life of *une fille bien* – the homemaking, the baby – Marieme displays a foreknowledge that reveals the repetition work behind heterosexual coupling that in turn makes it appear as the norm. Ahmed would describe heterosexual marriage as a well-trodden path, and because so many have taken this path and repeated its norms and conventions, everyone knows its route (*Queer* 16). She writes: “For a life to count as a good life, then it must return the debt of its life by taking on the direction promised as a social good, which means imagining one’s futurity in terms of reaching certain points along a life course. A queer life might be one that fails to make such gestures of return” (*Queer* 21). We may consider Marieme’s life to be queer in Ahmed’s sense of a queer life here. And, because viewers are encouraged to support Marieme’s refusal of the social “good” of becoming *une fille bien*, the film implicates viewers in an alternative value system where what is good does not necessarily align with social norms of goodness.

¹⁹³ McNeill has noted how Marieme’s relationship with Ishmaël is “circumscribed by its position within the grid of the *cite*, where female desire is only tolerable within the confines of marriage” (331).

For Marieme, the expected “milestones” of the heteronormative life path are undesirable. Her choices would not be her own if she married Ishmaël; rather, she would be expected to conform to social norms for being a wife and mother. Similarly, Smith has read Marieme’s rejection of Ishmaël as a refusal of a coming of age where the process ends with heteronormativity (*Bande* 87). Like Smith, I read Marieme as rejecting heteronormativity as a destination. By rejecting the kind of life offered by Ishmaël, Marieme rejects a heteropatriarchal social order. While she loses someone she cares for, she is also empowered to imagine other ways of living for herself.

In moving on from Ishmaël, Marieme accepts the kind of loss in a queer sense that Muñoz describes: “To accept loss is to accept the ways in which one’s queerness will always render one lost to a world of heterosexual imperatives, codes, and laws. To accept loss is to accept queerness—or more accurately, to accept the loss of heteronormativity, authorization, and entitlement” (*Cruising* 73). It is this acceptance of loss in a queer sense, I argue, that shapes the theme of impermanence in *Bande de filles*. Depicted in these final scenes of the film is a version of Marieme who, through cycles of loss and being simultaneously found and not found, accepts losing heteronormativity. Marieme emerges in the final scene occupying this queer position with her longing for alternative ways of being and being in relation to others intact.

WHAT REMAINS SUSTAINS

I turn to the end of *Bande de filles* to further explore the sustaining quality I locate in queer utopian longing and to argue the film's engagement of empathy encourages viewers to contend with an intersectional politics and imagine Black-, queer-, and trans-affirming possibilities. To this point, I have shown how queer utopian longing is sustained in objects, moments, and ephemera throughout the body of the film and move here to analyze what remains of this form of desire. The etymology of "sustain" colors in the work of this verb, a verb as active as the longing it works with. Sustain originates from the Latin *sub* (from or below) and *tenere* (hold), lending to the definitions of sustain as: "1. strengthen or support physically or mentally; 2. bear (the weight of an object) without breaking or falling; 3. undergo or suffer (something unpleasant, especially an injury); 4. cause to continue or be prolonged for an extended period or without interruption; 5. uphold, affirm, or confirm the justice or validity of" (*Oxford Languages*). In attributing a sustaining quality to utopian longing, I call on the origin of the verb "sustain" to illuminate how Marieme's longings, in being sustained, do the work of strengthening and supporting her (i.e. to move forward), helping her to bear various sufferings (i.e. loss), prolonging hope (an affect affiliated with utopian longing), and affirming her course. As I will show, focusing on what sustains Marieme at the end of the film offers a novel point of analysis.

To explore sustenance, I turn to what remains of Marieme's desires in the final scene by returning to the traces discussed in this chapter. According to Sciamma,

Marieme's final costume is an amalgamation of lives lived. Speaking on the last shot of the film, Sciamma stated that Marieme is: "[wearing] the braids of childhood, the makeup of a diva, and the clothing of a boy. She's possibly everything or none of those" (Mayer). We gain a portrait of a fluid Marieme who resists stable categorization in a queer fashion as her costume oversignifies. Furthermore, Marieme does not wear the gold "Vic" necklace and so ends the film nameless in a sense. Marie Puysségur has read Marieme's identity in this scene as unsettled, aptly pointing out that Marieme does not respond when Béb  asks *who* is ringing the family apartment from the intercom outside (127). We cannot say, easily, *who* Marieme is. Avery Gordon has conceptualized what is absent, neglected, and ghostly as able to catalyze new ways of imagining the world. She wrote: "it is essential to imagine their [absent, neglected, ghostly] life worlds because you have no other choice but to make things up in the interstices of the factual and the fabulous" (196). In the absence of stable identity and in the signifying excess of Marieme's costume, it appears imagination is all that is left to turn to.

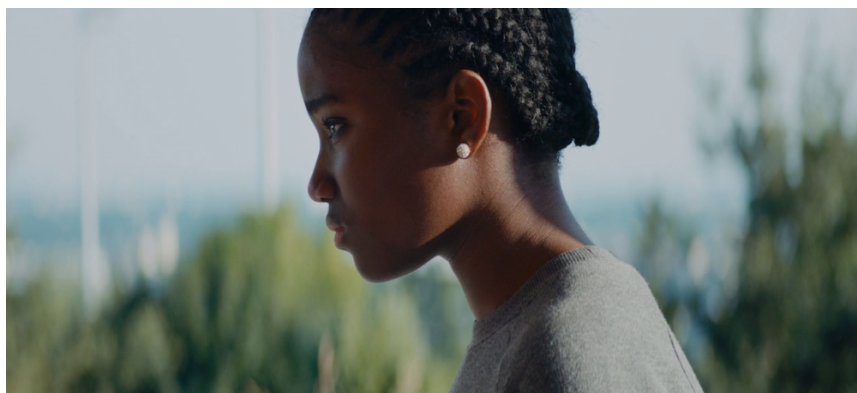


Figure 6. Marieme in profile wearing diamond earrings with the blurry daytime cityscape in the background.

Source: Sciamma, Céline. *Bande de filles*. StudioCanal, 2014.

In addition to the costume described by Sciamma, Marieme wears diamond earrings (see fig. 6). Even as Marieme cries for the first time in the film, her diamond earrings shine brightly with the promise that staying true to herself may open the possibilities of ecstasy, social connection, and respite. This hope gains poignancy in the final scene as Marieme is homeless, unemployed, and without social support.¹⁹⁴ That Marieme wears the diamond earrings after losing so much signifies that she is sustained by her queer longing for the alternative possibilities of another time and place.

Furthermore, while not shown on screen, Marieme still wears the Air Jordan sneakers. Knowing that these sneakers carry Marieme out of the frame infuses the final scene with her hope for mobility and permits the viewer to hope that Marieme will once again walk into a new life. The hidden sneakers also harken back to the possibility of collectivity as they once brought Marieme and Monica together. These remaining traces of utopian longing offer a glimpse into what sustains Marieme in this final scene, signaling that Marieme is and will be sustained by her insistence on it being possible to exist in alignment with her own pleasure and desires from within an oppressive structure as well as by her mobility into the unknown future gestured towards. In his analysis of

¹⁹⁴ In Brandon Robinson's ethnographic study of LGBTQ youth homelessness in the United States, they offer a new understanding of LGBTQ youth homelessness that connects it with processes of gender, sexuality, and embodiment. Robinson finds that LGBTQ youth homelessness "involves the policing of expansive expressions of gender and how these practices intersect with sexuality, race, and class to influence youth's lives. These lives are simultaneously often marked by familial abuse, bullying, rejection, relegation to state child custody systems, drug use, violence, sex work, mental health challenges, encounters with police, criminal records, failure to get an ID card, the lack of a safe place to shower and sleep, and a host of other cumulative disadvantages" (B. Robinson, *Coming Out* 4-5). This description of LGBTQ youth homelessness intersects with the film's depiction of Marieme becoming unhoused. This chapter has discussed various instances of the policing of Marieme's gender expansiveness and sexuality, and how her life was impacted by multiple forms of violence, familial abuse, working as a drug mule, and proximity to sex work. Robinson's findings then help us to understand Marieme's homelessness as linked with processes of gender, sexuality, and embodiment.

Tomboy's ending, Waldron observed that *Tomboy* "avoids falling into the trap of recuperating Laure's [the protagonist'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" (71-2). I see *Bande de filles* along similar lines and will add an analysis of the political work encouraged by empathizing with a nonconforming character. The forms of sustenance represented by the above objects communicate a "determination to be who she desires to be" and leave the viewer assured that Marieme's fidelity to herself and her capacity to be mobile remain intact. This feeling encourages the viewer to begin imagining a futurity for Marieme.

Scholarship has identified the future gestured towards by the ending of *Bande de filles* as an "unknown" one, and ambiguous endings are characteristic of French film.¹⁹⁵ While I agree that Marieme's future is unknown insofar as it is not made explicit, the work the film asks the viewer to practice as it ends is neither unknowable nor ambiguous. Following Sciamma's assertion that the ending is "not that open" (Mayer), I will show how the ending is simultaneously unambiguous and open to future possibilities and argue against describing this openness to possibility as the kind of open or ambiguous ending one might expect of a French film.

Smith has read the film's ending as a question: "the film invites the question of whether the mobility with which the narrative concludes grants the possibility of radical freedoms or perpetual precarity" (*Bande* 89). While Smith does not follow up on this question, I find it extremely relevant that scholars have repeatedly concluded that the

¹⁹⁵ See Wilson 18 and Smith (*Bande* 89).

film's ending poses a future-oriented question. I argue that this act of ponderance – repeatedly cited by scholars as their affective experience of the film's ending – is highly specific and constitutes the political work performed by the film. In a 2015 interview, Sciamma stated of the film's ending:

“I’m finishing my movie where I know it should be finished. It’s really about leaving her [Marieme] on the side and going to that blurry horizon and you expect the credits to roll because it’s like ten seconds. But she’s getting back in the frame and you’re going to have to put up with her in the frame. It’s not that open, it’s really saying something. It’s the most political shot I ever did in my life.” (Mayer)

Coupling Sciamma's assertion that the film's ending is political and “not that open” with the tendency in scholarship on *Bande de filles* towards pensive future-oriented readings of the ending, I locate the political in how viewer empathy transforms into a practice of radical imagination while pondering the final scene.

Like the readings of others, my own reading of the ending's filmic present prioritizes futurity, and this tendency further speaks to the utopian thrust of the film. On utopia, Muñoz argues that: “It is productive to think of utopia as flux, a temporal disorganization, as a moment when the here and now is transcended by a *then* and a *there* that could be and indeed should be” (*Cruising* 97). This temporal disorganization is ever present in the final scene, as the narrative loose ends and traces of utopian longings point the viewer to a future, to a “then and there” that transcends the filmic present. This temporal disorganization lays the groundwork for the final affective engagement of

viewers who watch the filmic present with their thoughts directed towards the future, and as I will show, towards sustaining possibilities for Marieme's future.

In previous shots of the cityscape preceding a cut to black, the city was cloaked in night, its lights glimmering with unknowable possibilities. The last shot of the film, however, is of a blurry cityscape behind treetops in broad daylight.¹⁹⁶ The viewer is no longer offered the excitement and mystery of Paris' city lights at night. This visual revocation forces the task of sustaining possibilities onto the viewer, who is aided by the blurriness of the cityscape but confronted with the sobriety of daylight. The film further emphasizes the blurry sunlit city as the camera pans beyond a crying Marieme to the city in daylight, moving beyond Marieme and emphasizing the viewer's own affective experience in her absence. While daylight hampers imagination in its stark illumination of the visible as it appears, the viewer is permitted to hope in these new circumstances by their blurriness and its effect of unknowability and lack of definition. Following Marieme stepping back into the frame and almost as soon as Marieme exits the final frame, the screen cuts to black and the blurry city vanishes, leaving the viewer to ponder Marieme's future in the space and duration of the lengthy black void that forestalls the roll of credits. The harshness of daylight, in how daylight communicates that "*this is how it is*," ushers in anxiety about Marieme's precarious circumstances immediately before the viewer is asked to imagine a future for her in the black void. Empathizing with Marieme, we plot out, under the sun, the "facts of the matter." Marieme is homeless, financially vulnerable, and without community – a portrait which then lingers in the black screen.

¹⁹⁶ Blurred trees are also a feature of *Tomboy*, where many scenes transpire in the simultaneously cloistered and open world of a forest.

Anxiety, however, is followed by a hopeful affect which further encourages the viewer to engage in a practice of imagination. When Marieme steps back into the frame with visible determination, she is no longer crying and shoves the blurry city into the background, reclaiming authority over the affective narrative and, momentarily, dominion over her narrative. Marieme, in profile, takes a final breath, appearing to swallow the air and exhale, finishing the breath motif here in which her breath precedes a new chapter. Habituated to the pattern established by the film of Marieme breathing (as in the vocational training scene) before beginning a new life cycle, the viewer is encouraged to identify Marieme's final deep breath with hope, a hope that she will indeed exist on in the future. Again, the viewer is directed towards the future, this time by the significance of Marieme's breath in the film's affective economy of signs. A utopian hope lingers in the air after Marieme finally leaps left out of the frame. The viewer is habituated to the film's routine of episodic cycles, which through their repetition permit a hoping with and for Marieme throughout the film as she always returns and pushes forward somehow. And so, in reentering the frame and insisting on alternative possibilities for her life, Marieme pushes her own utopian insistence into tension with the starkness of "the facts."

McGuffie has associated the capacity of films to generate empathy with imagining alternative possibilities. In her article "Falling into Pam's World," McGuffie showed how the film *Ma vie en rose* (1997) generated empathy for its young transgender protagonist and argued that this is how the film invests viewers in "a trans*-affirming ethic built on affective engagement of empathy" (563). In McGuffie's utopian reading,

Ma vie en rose, by engaging viewer empathy, insists on alternative ways to understand childhood development by valuing a gender nonconforming child and holds “space to imagine trans*-affirming alternatives” (581). Empathy functions comparably in my analysis of *Bande de filles*, and I see this film as important to thinking about the power of empathy to spark viewer imagination in utopian and political ways. Similarly to McGuffie, I read the ending of *Bande de filles* as not open but as opening space to imagine Black-, queer-, and trans-affirming alternatives.

The viewer is invited, I argue, to cling to Marieme’s utopian longing for other possibilities as they carry out their task of attempting to write a future for Marieme prompted by the duration of the final black screen. Each “episode” of *Bande de filles* has encouraged the viewer to long for a different future along with Marieme and, the end of the film, asks the viewer to experience a queer utopian longing *for* Marieme as she exits the final shot of the film.¹⁹⁷ The film calls on the viewer’s imagination, such that it is not Marieme who must deal with her precarious circumstances or future; rather, the viewer is tasked with conjuring Marieme’s next steps and possibilities. This harnessing of empathy for imagination is political in that the viewer, to sustain their own investment in the possibility of Marieme flourishing, must perform logical cartwheels to determine a future for Marieme in which her hopes can live on. Faced with Marieme’s unwavering commitment to queer and utopian alternatives, and the precarious circumstances set in broad daylight, the viewer grapples with these contending forces to sustain hope, to imagine a livable and pleasurable future. The difficulty of imagining a hospitable future

¹⁹⁷ I draw a parallel here with the viewer’s task to long on behalf of Marieme with how Marieme longed for victory on behalf of Lady. This parallel further teases the viewer with the potential of success in longing.

for Marieme begs the question: What kinds of ideologies and institutional and social structures would be required for Marieme to live in alignment with her desires? And, the penetrating stillness that ensues in the final black screen, with its resistance to respond, becomes the point. In the present hegemonic order, there simply is not an easy or safe future for Marieme and, sustaining utopian longing, it seems, *is* the only option. To staunchly, or rather defiantly, hold fast to the same longings that sustained Marieme such that we, the viewers, begin to imagine an alternative social order is to participate in the political ending of the film.

Sciamma has made it clear that she aimed to tell the story of girls like Marieme and the gang of girls.¹⁹⁸ To participate in the affective task of the film's ending then is also to ask after the life possibilities for people with membership or perceived membership in similar social categories in our material world and to be confronted all the same with the stark illumination of how insufficient our present is – a hopelessness thwarted only by imagining entirely different ways of being, relating, and structuring the social. While the film offers viewers a safe distance from the material stakes of its politics, it demands viewer engagement with possibilities for Black, queer, and trans lives in the space of the black screen. In this void, one contends with the intersectional web of precarity depicted in *Bande de filles*, involving race, class, gender, sexuality, barriers to collectivity, and physical violence, to name a few. And, finally, the film dares the viewer to imagine beyond intersecting oppressions towards a livable futurity. The viewer practices, rather didactically, how to desire pleasurable possibilities for people who may

¹⁹⁸ See Smith (*Bande 2*).

or may not look like them, live like them, or love like them.¹⁹⁹ In this way, *Bande de filles* ends by asking viewers to imagine and invest in possibilities for Black, queer, and trans people to flourish. The hope is that we, the viewers, will imagine alternatives that are informed by empathy and will map these possibilities onto Marieme's world and, most critically, onto our world. The final question of *Bande de filles* then is whether we will uphold an insufficient status quo or dare to imagine and enact more humane alternatives. In the end, the work formerly carried out by Marieme – of insisting on the possibility of pleasurable alternatives for being and connecting from within an oppressive present – is ours to continue.

¹⁹⁹ When interviewed by Mayer, Sciamma stated that her goal for audiences with this ending is that: "They can't leave the story in the room, they have to take it back home with them." This further lends to my argument for a sympathetic political finale in the film.

Chapter Four

Enby-Futurity in Sophie Calle's Project to Meet the Future

This chapter asks how we can think twenty-first-century French artist Sophie Calle's (1953-) world-building practices and Swiss psychologist C.G. Jung's (1875-1961) concept of synchronicity together towards new methods of making the future now in nonbinary, queer, and trans studies. While Calle's work is most often exhibited in a gallery or museum prior to publication, it finds an easy home in books for its narrative and archival structures. This chapter takes one such book, *And So Forth* (*Ainsi de suite*, 2016), as its object with an interest in how Calle utilizes the formal structure of a book to perform narrative work as well as what a collection makes manifest that individually published books do not.

Several of Calle's projects catalogued in *And So Forth* work to transform reality by collapsing binary notions of reality/fiction and true/false. The destabilization of reality is characteristic of Calle's oeuvre, and I will show how this characteristic lends to thinking with enby.²⁰⁰ Synchronicity in these works performs a temporality like that of what film scholar Kara Keeling has called "impossible possibilities." For Keeling, "whatever escapes recognition, whatever escapes meaning and valuation, exists as an impossible possibility in our shared reality" (566). Glimmers of impossible possibilities exist in the present, revealing "a time to come in which what today exists potently—even

²⁰⁰ For scholarship identifying destabilizing reality as characteristic of other works by Calle, see *Sophie Calle: the Reader*.

if not (yet) effectively . . . will find its time” (Keeling 567). In moments representing not yet recognizable future possibilities, I locate a new method for ushering in the future now, which I call enby-futurity, and find critical resonances between Calle’s artistic practices and experiences of nonbinary gender.

And So Forth is a collection of Calle’s work post-2003 and was published thirteen years after *Did You See Me (M’as-tu vu)* which comprises Calle’s projects from 1979 to 2003. Her two large catalogues are connected by a project titled *Unfinished*, which concluded *Did You See Me* and begins *And So Forth*, suggesting at the outset a theme of beginnings from endings. The last project in *And So Forth*, *Because (Parce que, 2012)*, similarly gestures at more to come because it is a work-in-progress.²⁰¹ Focusing on the ending to arrive at beginnings, this chapter takes the last three sections of *And So Forth* as its objects of formal and critical analysis. These sections are: *Where and When (Où et quand?)* which houses three projects, *Rachel Monique* which houses an interview and two projects, and *Because* which stands alone.

The form of a catalogue – a collection of works – encourages the reader to forge connections across works that are otherwise not possible. In this way, collections transform the parameters of possibility. Formerly distinct projects converse with one another when brought together in the container of a catalogue book. We may think of collecting similarly to collaging, as a banging of unlike things together that creates new groupings of things or even new things. Kadjji Amin, Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez have encouraged us to think on how “form informs queerness,” writing that the queer is

²⁰¹ *Because* is identified as a work-in-progress in the Appendixes.

“enmeshed within – and indeed, activated and enabled by – the structures of aesthetic form, social inequality, and conceptual categorization within which the work of engaged artists takes shape. *Form informs queerness*, and queerness is best understood as a series of *relations* to form, relations not limited to binary and adversarial models of resistance and opposition” (228, original emphasis). I would like to think about Calle’s collected works along these queer lines. By gathering these projects together, *And So Forth* creates new conceptual categories and forges its own relations to form. The queer and trans possibilities depicted in these works are facilitated by the transformative form of a collection which allows us to think about and connect these projects in new ways. I will return to this point in connection with Michel Foucault’s formulation of heterotopias. For now, let us consider the form of a collection as fertile ground for the emergence of new possibilities.

Of the final three projects in *And So Forth*, I spend the most time with *Where and When* because, as I will show, this three-part project is both expansive and leaky, lending itself to thinking on gender expansiveness as well as shading the collected works that follow. *Where and When* spans the years of 2004 to 2012 and documents Calle’s collaboration with the clairvoyant Maud Kristen. The three parts are titled: *Where and When, Berck* (*Où et quand? Berck*, 2004-2008); *Where and When, Lourdes* (*Où et quand? Lourdes*, 2005-2008); and *Where and When, Nowhere* (*Où et quand? Nulle part*, 2008-2012).

Calle’s goal for her collaboration with Kristen is to catch up to her future such that she meets her future in the present by following Kristen’s clairvoyant insights. Very

often, Calle's projects are collaborative, enlisting an other to take control.²⁰² In *Where and When*, Calle initially attempts to enroll Maud Kristen in giving her orders based on clairvoyant insights from the Intelligence (a metaphysical source power) accessed through tarot card readings. Kristen denies Calle's petition for orders and rules, asserting that Calle is a free agent, but ultimately agreeing to offer suggestions and so beginning the joint venture.

Each of these three projects has been published as a book distinct from the abridged versions collected in *And So Forth*. This calls attention to the compositional differences of *And So Forth* insofar as its abridged renderings of these projects both required paring down and structurally function as chapters in a larger book thereby interacting with the surrounding projects. My readings of this three-part series identify the form of "books as chapters" as enhancing the utopian thrust of their composition. Everything is given to the reader in quick succession, as one chapter after another, moving the reader more swiftly into the future found within the abridged *Where and When* series. The reader is also moved beyond *Where and When* to the futures it alludes to throughout that manifest in *Rachel Monique* (2007-2014), *North Pole* (2009), and *Because*. It appears that Sophie Calle herself is transformed by her experience of the *Where and When* series as evidenced in its repeated reemergence in her projects during and post-*Where and When*. As I will show, Calle's own transformation is one of orientation: she perceives differently in *Where and When* and assimilates this mode of perception into herself as perceiving subject, never purging it post-project.

²⁰² See Blazwick, Tarsia, and McFadden 173.

On the temporality of Sophie Calle's oeuvre, Ernst van Alphen, in his book *Staging the Archive*, argues that Calle's works are always future oriented: "Her projects never have, and never produce, a past time; they are radically positioned in the present and teleologically focused on the future" (130). According to Alphen, these commitments to the present and utopian purpose are effects of Calle's utilization of lists whereby the past is always usurped by the priority of the present, and the present is in service of a future as Calle's archival style creates new futures. Alphen states: "she produces an archival list by probing the transformation of scenarios into a sequence of fictional situations – but fictional situations that subsequently become new realities" (134). Because Calle's works have the capacity to create new realities from fiction, her works lend themselves to critical thinking about alternative world-building practices. Additionally, Alphen's description of Calle's temporal locales not only maps onto her projects as explored here but also adds to the fascinating work of *Where and When* in my formulation, because Calle's future-oriented art practice is combined with her explicit goal to meet her future.

Given Calle's collaboration with a clairvoyant, *Where and When* is invested in metaphysical and psychic phenomena. One of its foremost guiding logics is the future-oriented Jungian concept of synchronicity which is an acausal connecting principle sometimes referred to as meaningful coincidence. We may think of *Where and When* then as, in part, an archive of synchronicities. Importantly, synchronistic phenomena possess a unique temporality whereby the future shows up in the present, allowing a person to consciously realize that they did indeed catch up to and meet their future in a present

moment – Calle’s exact goal. This chapter demonstrates how by reading for synchronistic phenomena across the final three sections of *And So Forth*, both Calle and her reader meet the future. Through Calle’s work, I discuss the effects synchronicities have on subject orientation and time in relation to my concept of enby-futurity to show how an openness to synchronicities adds to the current interdisciplinary conversation about alternative and utopian possibilities which exist in the present, or what Ashon T. Crawley would call the possibilities of an otherwise world. Like synchronicity, otherwise worlds exist now and entail alternative forms of being and connecting that are future-oriented insofar as they differ from existing normative models. In otherwise worlds, people imagine and practice possibilities for being and connecting that facilitate inhabitable spaces for marginalized subjects. As I will show, Calle’s representation of an orientation towards synchronicity in these works generates alternative possibilities that are fruitful to thinking about trans livingness and enby flourishing.

THINKING SYNCHRONICITY, EXPÉRIENCE, & ENBY TOGETHER

In Sara Ahmed’s formulation of a queer phenomenology, she explains how for individuals with heterosexual orientations, the significance of heteronormative objects recedes into the background where these objects perform normalizing work unnoticed.²⁰³ Ahmed gives the example of a displayed photograph of the heterosexual couple seeming

²⁰³ For an in-depth study of background objects and the work they perform, see chapters one and two of Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology*.

normal as though it has always been normal and forever will be, meriting no special attention while working to normalize heterosexuality. However, a queer orientation may bring those very same background objects to the foreground where they signify differently. In thinking through the role of subject orientation in *Where and When*, I locate a parallel to Ahmed's formulation of the effects of subject orientation on what recedes to the background and what is drawn forth to the foreground. In *Where and When*, both Calle and her clairvoyant accomplice Kristen are directed and oriented by a nonnormative metaphysical source called the Intelligence. Oriented by the Intelligence, objects cross time and space to signify differently, often through synchronicities. And so, I consider an Intelligence-informed orientation as functioning similarly to a queer orientation insofar as both orientations privilege nonnormative modes of perception that constitute foreground and background in nonlinear and unorthodox ways.

The objects called to the foreground by the Intelligence in the *Where and When* series are archived in the last three sections of *And So Forth*, allowing the reoriented reader to draw connections across these sections to reveal breadcrumbs of the future in the project's present. These meaningful coincidences, referred to by Calle and Kristen as synchronicities, are the communication style of the Intelligence. This chapter contends that it is with Calle's method of admiring, tracking, and archiving synchronicities in *Where and When* that Calle's reader experiences meeting the future in the present as a possibility. With this assertion, I rethink an attention to Jungian synchronicities here as orientation devices that functionally reorient the perceiving subject due to the free associative, acausal connections such synchronicities depend on and are defined by. This

new orientation is part of enby-futurity. To a project concerned with welcoming queer, trans, and enby-futures now, a rethinking of the acausal connecting work of synchronicities represented in Calle's *Where and When* series offers a new method for arriving at that future in the present.

As mentioned, the concept of synchronicity was first introduced by Jung, who defined it as an acausal connecting principle “whereby internal, psychological events are linked to external world events by meaningful coincidences rather than causal chains” (Cambray 2). Jung’s formulation positions synchronicity as part and parcel of the nature of reality, going so far as to argue that synchronicity is a “pattern-making tendency of our universe that emerged as a fundamental property of reality even before light/matter/gravity and other laws of physics came into being” (Cambray 3). Jung described how:

under certain conditions space and time can be reduced to almost zero, causality disappears along with them because causality is bound up with the existence of space and time and physical changes, and consists essentially in the succession of cause and effect. For this reason, synchronistic phenomena cannot in principle be associated with any conceptions of causality. Hence the interconnection of meaningfully coincident factors must necessarily be thought acausal. (29-30)

This description emphasizes then that synchronicity is an equally naturally occurring alternative to causality, that all things are interconnected, and furthermore that synchronicity is among the laws of physics. Jungian synchronicity has a complex relationship to time and space in which it works with and against these laws. During a

synchronistic phenomenon, a physical event coincides with what Jung calls a psychoid process in preconscious time. Psychoid here describes the deepest level of reality where psyche and matter become indistinguishable. And so, a synchronistic event may only be recognized later as such because in that moment there is not yet consciousness for it.²⁰⁴

The temporality of synchronicity then facilitates Calle's aim to meet the future and offers itself to queer and trans studies as a new way to think about accessing alternative possibilities for queer and trans folks now. We might then think of a synchronicity as a future consciousness, or a consciousness-to-be that is not yet, occurring now in a preconscious present. This temporality of consciousness has a kinship with an experience of nonbinary gender, which is often traced back to a once inexplicable feeling in preconscious time.²⁰⁵ In the field of psychology, the clinical utility of Jung's concept is still probed today for its model of exploring the transformational value of synchronistic phenomena (Cambray 4). In other words, whether field experts agree with Jung's concept of synchronicity or not, synchronistic phenomena can and do affect the experiencing subject and their reality in transformative ways by offering comfort, ideas,

²⁰⁴ I offer here a rather on the nose and true anecdote: A few days prior to deciding to write about Jungian synchronicities in Calle's *Where and When* series and therefore pre-research on Jung, I was out to lunch with a friend and colleague, seated outdoors and discussing none other than the project this chapter belongs to. A large green beetle landed on a plant maybe 5 inches from my head and hung around for a while, long enough for me to carefully observe its appearance. The size and shape of this beetle made me think of the luck and protection of scarab beetles (my associations as an Egyptian). Upon returning home, I identified that my beetle friend was indeed a figeater beetle (*Cotinis mutabilis*) from the scarab beetle family (Scarabaeidae). Fast forward to me reading Jung's *Synchronicity* and discovering his well-cited explanatory anecdote of catching a common rose-chafer beetle (*Cetonia aurata*, a green beetle in the scarab family) as a patient was telling him about her dream of a golden scarab beetle. A-ha!—the very beetle I encountered just days prior! Or, at least, its closest local relative, as photographs of Jung's beetle are indistinguishable from those of my beetle, who found me in preconscious time to tell me of the writing of these very words. This synchronicity leads me to believe, in the spirit of this project, that I am indeed onto something with this thread . . .

²⁰⁵ Maia Kobabe's graphic novel *Gender Queer: A Memoir* offers an excellent representation of this experience.

solutions, and understandings among other observable effects (Cambray 4). Following suit, we might think synchronicity and gender together, and how Calle's work illustrates the capacity of synchronicity to transform reality. Thinking with enby, Calle's work represents synchronicity as a transforming and affirming force that could be nurturing for enby-individuals who live their everyday in a binary world structured to erase their experiences of gender. Being oriented towards the possibility of synchronistic phenomena may offer enby folks access to the above-mentioned benefits.

Helle Brøns has written on the presence of synchronicity in *Where and When* in relation to the characteristic of Calle's art to blur reality and fiction. Brøns writes:

[Jung] argued that coincidences – if allowed – can provide a sudden insight or flash of inspiration which can be used artistically, intellectually or personally.

Sophie Calle's work evolves from such coincidences, which assume such intense symbolic significance that you begin to doubt their authenticity. Did they happen in reality, or merely in art? *Where and When?* is located in this intersection between reality and fiction, art and life, chance and control. (158)

Similar to Brøns' observation of Calle's art, I advance that for some individuals living a nonbinary gender experience in a world that asserts there are only two genders "in reality," existing may at times feel like living at those very same intersections where Brøns locates Calle's three-part project: between reality (as self-knowledge) and fiction (as an impossible life), art (as self-creation) and life (the everyday), chance (circumstances, contexts, encounters, etc.) and control (when? how much? whose? over what?).

In this way and others, nonbinary scholarship finds an ally in Calle's oeuvre and, more specifically, in Calle's meticulous archival practice and commitment to experiencing her art, practices which lend themselves to a study of world-building methods and alternative possibilities for ways of being and relating. In her chapter "Orchestrated Reflexivity: Sophie Calle's Narrative Body as Artist," Cybelle McFadden aptly notes that Calle's work "exemplifies *par excellence* the double meaning of *une expérience* in French as both an experiment and an experience" (148, original emphasis). McFadden continues:

Both the experimental and experiential elements of daily life and self-representation are the underpinnings of the ambiguous relationship between fact and fiction in Calle's work. Shirley Ann Jordan has used the term 'process-driven project art' to describe Calle's artistic endeavors since her work does not merely foreground a concept but also depends on the experiential elements of the happening. In an interview, Calle explains that she provokes situations but importantly attempts to *live* them. (148, original emphasis)

This process is visible in *Where and When* as Calle sets out to real locations, on a lived journey, as an experiment experienced that turns reality into art (and vice versa) via its documentation and generates disorientation at every turn in the doing of it.

McFadden's central argument is that because Calle's experiments occur in lived reality, in the everyday, fact and fiction collapse thereby rendering the experimental and the experiential interchangeable (149). McFadden's finding of an interchangeability of experimental and experiential resulting from Calle's artistic process bears important

resonances with experiences of nonbinary genders. By way of existing, of persisting in being alive, nonbinary people functionally collapse fact and fiction. The “impossible” fact of nonbinary lives collides with the fiction that only two genders exist every day in myriad spaces, contexts, and interactions. That genders beyond the binary are lived and experienced now collapses the fact that gender expansiveness exists and the fiction that binary gender is absolute in moments that are both mundane and critical.

Additionally, from this position, living nonbinary is experiential and experimental – *une expérience*. Some nonbinary individuals have no choice but to experiment as experience (a lack of choice is certainly not to imply a lack of pleasure found in experimentation).²⁰⁶ Unlike the templates expounded by cisnormativity whereby one’s sex assigned at birth corresponds to either a masculine or feminine gender that is accompanied by predetermined norms for gender expression (that are variable over time and by culture), nonbinary has no template.²⁰⁷ What purportedly “does not exist” cannot have a template; there are no right or wrong “ways” to be nonbinary. Nonbinary then is gender unscripted, it is itself a space of possibilities that could be lived, akin to Calle’s artistic practice, as an experiment and experience in the context of daily life. It is for this reason that I draw Calle and nonbinary together. We may consider here SA Smythe’s black nonbinary method, which “shifts into a neither/nor divestment from any of the currently presented options in favor of something else yet to be presented or embodied” (162). While Calle herself has never claimed a gender experience other than cisgender,

²⁰⁶ For stories by nonbinary authors addressing experimentation as part of an experience of nonbinary gender, see Kobabe as well as Rajunov and Duane.

²⁰⁷ Cisnormativity is the privileging of the template described.

Calle's artistic process is generative of the disorienting, future-oriented, experimental-experiential forces that feed the critical protentional of nonbinary analyses which favor "something else yet to be."

As mentioned, one method of Calle's for creating possibilities beyond what was thought possible is documentation. Alphen has analyzed the possibility-opening effects of Calle's documentation style, which he calls listing, alongside Gilles Deleuze's theorization of "becoming." For our purposes, we may also draw a connection between listing and Jungian groupings in which synchronicities could possibly occur. More precisely, there is something in the bringing together of things that highlights synchronistic phenomena. The form of a collection, as mentioned above, offers fertile ground for the emergence of new possibilities by fostering new connections between unlike things. In *And So Forth*, the reader can track Calle's documentation of these meaningful coincidences both within and beyond their formal confines as distinct projects because they have been collected, grouped, and listed. For Alphen, Calle's listing practice:

is used as a device for becoming: something not or not yet existing, something nonsensical – you could call it a fiction – that comes to happen, comes into being, or simply, *becomes*. During the formulation of the scenario the imagined situations were still fictional. But in the realization of the scenario and the listing of one planned situation after another, fictionality has become reality because it has been transformed into it. (135)

Alphen and McFadden dovetail on the point of a collapse of reality and fiction in Calle's oeuvre; however, Alphen pushes the point to a more utopian purpose by arguing that *fictionality has been transformed into reality*. In other words, while both Alphen and McFadden describe a collapse of reality/fiction, Alphen's phrasing identifies the process of this collapse as *transformation*.

Such transformative power however – for nonbinary individuals as well as for Sophie Calle – never goes unpoliced. In interviews, Calle is regularly asked for the “truth,” to demarcate which portions of her art belong to reality and which are fabrications. In thinking enby-embodiment alongside Calle, it becomes striking how many interviewers attempt to stabilize Calle's work, trying to fit and fold her expansive projects into binary boxes of fact and fiction. We could consider this in terms of background and foreground as Ahmed would. This obsession of the interviewers with a notion of stable truth is called forth from the background (where it masquerades as public interest or engaged art criticism) to the foreground where its violence (explain yourself, define yourself, box yourself, yield yourself) is exposed. Pushing back on this hunt for “truth,” McFadden asserts that Calle's “artistic body is in constant flux and formed by the stories she tells. At the interstices of text and image, her narrative body is chameleon in form, changing with each idea she has” (177). Drawing on McFadden's description, I argue that Calle's artistic body effects enby embodiment. A body in flux and formed by narrative, a chameleon body, is the corporeal gender experience of some nonbinary individuals, who, like Calle, are overwhelmingly bombarded by prompts for the truth meant to file their fluctuating bodies into box number one or box number two. While

Calle's female body experiences the cisgender privileges of binary gender coherence, it ought not be looked over that Calle's *artistic* body is questioned, policed, and frustrates interviewers by slipping classification. Approaching Calle then from a nonbinary perspective, offers a new access point into understanding and embracing her *artistic* body.²⁰⁸

With these stakes, I turn to *Where and When* as catalogued in *And So Forth* to further explore the value holding Jung, Calle, and nonbinary together could offer to critical thinking about gender expansive possibilities. This chapter first examines the effects of disorientation produced by the Intelligence as an orientation device in *Where and When* before exploring the synchronicities documented in the last third of *And So Forth* in relation to enby-futurity.

DISORIENTATION, OR THE HOPE IN VIOLENT TRANSFORMATION

Within the context of Calle's archival practice, disorientation illuminates its own potential for effecting transformation. Documentation practices have historically performed violent work as a totalizing and categorizing force that is purportedly

²⁰⁸ I am further encouraged to think Calle's artistic body and enby embodiment together by the line of thinking in the Introduction to *Nonbinary* that places the joys and struggles of nonbinary individuals as neither in opposition to nor the same as those of cisgender and binary transgender lives (Rajunov and Duane xxix). Messy thinking, in this way, presents with more opportunities for empathy and curiosity – pathos critical to this project indebted to Black Feminist thought for its investment in particularities as well as points of overlap.

Art historian Kirstin Ringelberg has advocated for trans informed re-readings of artists and their works like my reading of Calle and her works.

On the importance of empathy and curiosity, see Patricia Hill Collins.

On the critical necessity of acknowledging particularities, see Chandra Talpade Mohanty.

empirical.²⁰⁹ And yet, Calle chooses to employ listing as a structuring form in many of her projects. *Where and When* reveals that Calle's form of choice, far from being coincidental, grapples consciously with its own violent potential. In *Atmospheres of Violence*, Eric Stanley's detailed study of violence against trans people and strategies for their existing, Stanley positions structuring violence as both a generalized field of knowledge that maintains violence and as "a tactic of communal interdiction, anticolonial struggle, and trans/queer flourishing against an otherwise deadly world" (9). When we think of Calle's archival practice as engaged with one form of structuring violence as described by Stanley, then her work radiates with this tension of violence as both a structuring force and tactic for resisting that force. Foregrounding the complexity of violence, Calle's archival practice infuses her ordering form with an unyielding disorientation that upends order at every turn. Calle's deployment of disorientation functions as a strategic counter violence to the inherent formal violence of listing – holding the two, order and chaos, in suspension rather than resolving one or the other. By residing in this unresolved tension, *Where and When* offers an account of and formal experiment in disorientation as violent counter-tactic.

Disorientation in Calle's three-part project is transformative. Ahmed has suggested that "If we stay with moments of disorientation instead of overcome them, we might achieve a different orientation toward them; such moments might be the source of

²⁰⁹ See Vartija's consideration of the racism of the European Enlightenment which includes a discussion of how Diderot's *Encyclopédie* contributed to modern racial classification. See also Rothstein's article on how the Eurocentrism of the Enlightenment lives on in the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris. The Quai Branly opened in 2006 as former French President Jacques Chirac's attempt at post-colonial recompense. Its objects come from an imperial museum (the Musée des Arts Africains et Océaniens) and a natural history museum (the Musée de l'Homme). Rothstein is critical of the Musée du Quai Branly for preserving the colonial categories it was intended to displace.

vitality and giddiness” (*Queer* 4). This section documents the disorientation Calle experiences and generates in *Where and When* to show how these violent moments are fragments of the future lived out in the present that perform orientation work. Even the title *Where and When* hums with disorientation, breathing questions into the basic orientation markers of *where* a subject is and *when* this is. Orientation, according Ahmed, “is how we come to find our way in a world that acquires new shapes. If we know *where* we are *when* we turn this way or that way, we are orientated” (*Queer* 1, my emphasis). In *Where and When*, Calle poses these orientation markers as questions to the clairvoyant Kristen to catch up to her future in the present – an objective already brimming with potentiality as it forgoes fidelity to normative linear time.

The first project in the *Where and When* segment of *And So Forth, Where and When, Berck*, begins differently than its book length counterpart *Where and When, Berck* (*Où et quand? Berck*, 2008). The first third of the stand alone book is a flipbook of Kristen spreading out the tarot cards before the title page appears (Calle, *Où et quand? Berck* 1-67). In this way, the stand alone book *Where and When, Berck* juxtaposes two meanings of “where.” The certainty of Berck as “where” this project is located is in tension with the title’s question of “where.” Furthermore, the guiding logic of divination (and the Intelligence) is centered by the series of moving pictures that determine the where and the when thereby foregrounding both orientation (the cards orient) and futurity (the cards as a tool for divining the future). Formally, the flipbook performs rapid forward motion over time as the illusion of moving pictures depends on the reader quickly flipping the pages forward. Opening this book with a command that the reader do

an activity (make the flipbook pictures move) enrolls the reader in physically and sensorily enacting future-making over time.

In the *And So Forth* variation, the flipbook is left out and the reader is called to engage through other means. In the center of the thick yellow first page of *Where and When, Berck*, three holes are punched out in the form of an ellipses offering a glimpse of the following page (see figure 7). In Alphen's reading of Calle's listing practice as engaged in Deleuze's concept of becoming, he remarks on the work of ellipses, noting: "This stuttering logic of 'and . . . and . . . and' revolves around the problem of expressing something that does not yet exist. It is imbued with the awareness that there is a world of possibilities *beyond* the existing forms. In this stuttering new and potential forms are introduced" (135). The hole-punched ellipses of the yellow title pages invite considerations of becoming, because they formally direct the reader's gaze to the possibilities lying just beyond them (the page revealed through the peep holes). Furthermore, the hole-punched ellipses direct the reader to their own immediate future of turning the page. Finally, this form, like its stand alone book counterpart, engages the reader in an activity of page flipping marked by anticipation: the peep holes on the first page, the mysterious contents of the page to come (Calle, *And So Forth* 343).²¹⁰

²¹⁰ Each project collected in *And So Forth* begins with a thick yellow page with three elliptic holes in the center. *Where and When* especially, however, through the questions of its name, plays with the cryptic quality of and game of peekaboo enacted by the cut outs.

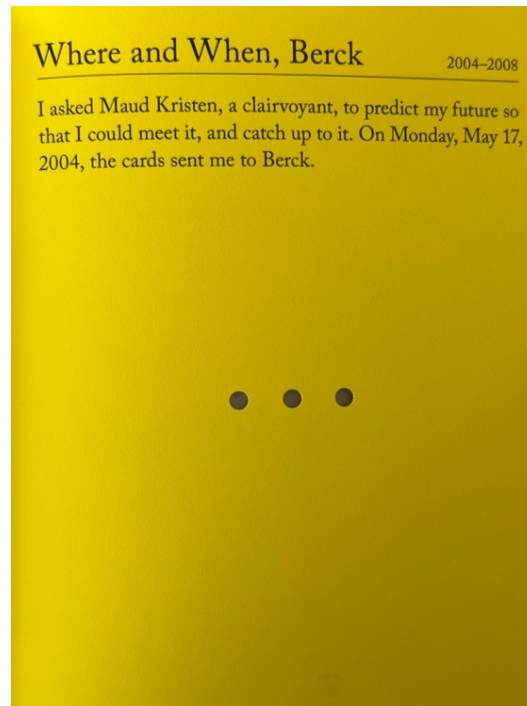


Fig. 7. Yellow title page with three holes.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 343.

Fidelity to the juxtaposition of a disorienting series' title with a corrective, orientating measure is also present in the *And So Forth* rendering. Here, however, the orientation work is doubled down on, as though to say: "no time, because abridged, let's get right to it." Above the elliptic holes, in black text, is the title "Where and When, Berck" followed by "2004-2008," answering its own questions in a single, underlined, line of text. Below this, brief context is given: "I asked Maud Kristen, a clairvoyant, to predict my future so that I could meet it, and catch up to it. On Monday, May 17, 2004, the cards sent me to Berck" (Calle, *And So Forth* 343). This text alerts the reader that the material they are encountering in their present is the past tense of Calle's future as divined by Kristen. Furthermore, the juxtaposition of "2004-2008" with the starting date

of “May 17, 2004” calls attention to the role of post-project composition in this future-oriented yet already complete project. The reader is given both the end year and the starting date on the very same page. These hyper-orienting moves function to parody normative linear temporality and rather than situate the reader, serve to disorient the reader, who must now move forward in the project accepting the fraudulence of “when” committed at the debut.

On the temporality of tending forward, Ahmed observed: “The temporality of orientation reminds us that orientations are effects of what we tend toward, where ‘toward’ marks a space and time that is almost, but not quite, available in the present” (*Queer* 20). It is as though the first page of *Where and When*, Berck performs this temporality of orientation. The elliptic windows toward a not-yet present page invite the reader to move towards the next page now, a visual-temporal directive that has by this point become routine and normalized for the reader by its appearance throughout the first two thirds of the book. Combined with the contradictory textual hyper-documentation of “when” functioning to deny the reader any stable notion of when, this title page stands out from its yellow predecessors by shocking the reader with an almost dare-like challenge to continue toward the “almost, but not quite” in a state of disorientation, a shock that relies on how the reader has already been oriented by the previous yellow title pages up to this point. The reader then may immediately ascertain this section’s investment in orientation and disorientation, and how the book will work to direct its reader in unexpected and nonlinear ways. Through calling on the reader to engage, *Where and When* is a lively section in that it works on reorienting the reader in ways akin to how

Calle was reoriented by her experiences of the Intelligence and divinatory frame of the project.

In this three-part project, the Intelligence is a natural and sentient force who, far from offering direct orders, is found in synchronicities, paradoxes, metaphors, signs, and symbols. We may consider the Intelligence then to be both a metaphysical force and a literary force. By literary force I mean one dealing in literary devices (paradox, metaphor, symbol, etc.). And, these literary devices are also orientation devices as they shape perception, and perception “involves orientation; what is perceived depends on where we are located, which gives us a certain take on things” (Ahmed, *Queer* 27). Throughout *Where and When*, Calle (located where the Intelligence, speaking through Kristen, suggests) and the reader (located in the book) must both perceive through the literary logic of the Intelligence, always with meeting the future in mind.

As mentioned, Kristen refused to give Calle direct orders. This back and forth is presented as text: “She refused to give me orders. I insisted” (*And So Forth* 347). Then Kristen agrees not to give orders but rather to “use my visions and my knowledge of the divinatory arts to propose avenues, directions that you can freely choose to explore, to follow and interpret in your work as an artist” (*And So Forth* 347). The element of free choice, in combination with Calle proceeding from this point, position Calle as a unique experiencing subject to have documentation of insofar as she is fully committed to being directed and oriented by the Intelligence. At the conclusion of the project in Berck, Kristen is quoted saying, “I told you, Sophie, I didn’t want to order you, let alone make

you obey. I just wanted to admire the coincidences” (*And So Forth* 352).²¹¹ Kristen’s quote offers readers insight into how to perceive meaning with the logic of the Intelligence, which is to pay attention to meaningful coincidences, or synchronicities, in which seemingly disparate signs or events appear aligned. For the reader, however, the opportunity to “admire the coincidences” conflicts with reading a composed book purportedly containing coincidences. Here lies one of the series’ many challenging paradoxes: to seek synchronicities in a heavily mediated form. To approach this challenge, I sought out Calle’s deployments of paradox to locate signs of synchronistic phenomena. In doing so, I found that Calle’s project formally reorients readers to face the nonnormative modes of perception, connection, and meaning making proffered by the Intelligence.

To use an object for alternative means is a reorientation device. An example of this kind of reorientation device offered by Ahmed is: “To use the table that supports domestic work to do political work” (*Queer* 61). We may consider then the use of an art book that passively displays art for actively enrolling the reader in novel modes of perceiving and meaning making to be a reorientation device. And, on a more micro level, the moments of paradox in *Where and When* function as reorientation devices because paradoxes are disorienting. To borrow Ahmed’s phrasing: some thing does not line up, some thing is off line. To fully account for the reorientation work of paradox and to enact the nonlinear interpretive mode and acausal connecting principle required by the

²¹¹ Coincidences here refers to synchronicities or meaningful coincidences.

Intelligence, this chapter connects the three sections of *Where and When*, *Rachel Monique*, and *Because*.

We begin in Berck as all journeys begin: with a departure. Upon turning the first yellow title page, the reader discovers that the elliptic holes overlay a three-inch-by-five-inch photograph of the *Where and When*, *Berck* installation view (see figure 8). The installation view shows a finished project – documented, composed, installed, and displayed. Photographs sit on a wall ledge arranged linearly on the horizon line and leading to a neon blue sign of the word “berck” in lowercase letters situated to the right of the vanishing point. The eye is guided right down the line of photographs to the corner of the room, the neon sign is small in comparison and too blurry to read. This perspective mirrors the endeavor of meeting an unknown future – we can see the future presently on the horizon, but it is fuzzy, still unclear. And so, even before we arrive in Berck with Calle, as the title suggests we will, we have arrived at the future of the Berck project as an art installation. However, while the reader meets the future here, it is made unclear by the blurry neon sign – a telling irony in a project concerned with reading signs to know the future.

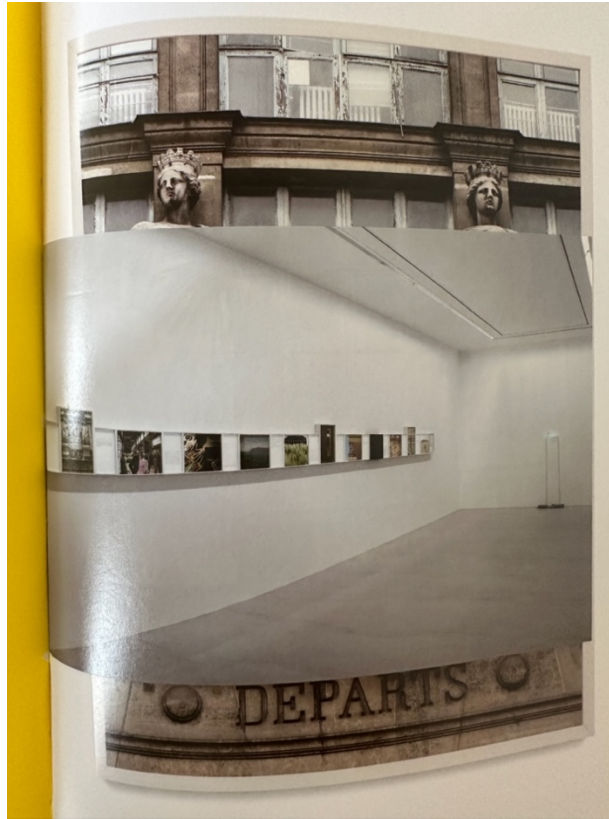


Fig. 8. Installation view photograph on top of the “DEPARTS” photograph.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 345.

We can think of the blurry sign in this photograph as another reorientation device: the sign used for clarification is used for obfuscation. The effect of which is that we are not fully meeting the future. Instead, what we meet is a potentiality on the horizon. In fact, we already met this blurry future on the yellow title page through the holes. Put in other words, from the first page we are always formally encountering potentiality in the present. And so, again, the reader is encouraged to tend towards the future, towards a not-quite-manifest present as Calle does in this project, but this objective gains more specificity here: we are seeking potentiality on the horizon.

What Calle and the reader will meet again and again in the *Where and When* series is a horizon of potentiality. While we meet the future in the present through psychic events, it follows the temporal attributes of synchronicity as a preconscious manifestation of the future in the present. By documenting these encounters, Calle transforms her own preconscious encounters with the future into a new reality, manifest in book form, in which readers consciously meet futurity again and again. *Where and When* asks readers to repeatedly move towards potentiality, which I will describe as the resulting orientation of this section. The reorientation work of paradox is in service of facing the reader in the direction of the horizon. Enby-futurity involves facing the horizon; it is a life direction towards possibility. Calle's work demonstrates how an orientation towards possibility generates possibilities in turn. For enby lives, the generativity of being oriented towards the horizon is hopeful. It is the hope that livable possibilities for being and connecting emerge for nonbinary subjects oriented towards horizontal or, to borrow Crawley's phrasing, otherwise worlds.

Beneath the installation view photograph on the full page is a photograph of the exterior of the Gare du Nord with the word "DEPARTS" ("DEPARTURES") carved in stone (Calle, *And So Forth* 345).²¹² This word is mostly visible behind the gallery view photograph, suggesting that we must depart from this horizon if we are to bring it into focus. The sizes and overlaying of these two photographs ensure that the reader cannot view the installation's blurry horizon without viewing "DEPARTS;" however, the departure photograph may be viewed without the installation view (see fig. 8). Towards a

²¹² The Gare du Nord is a large mainline railway station in Paris, France.

blueprint of how enby-futures emerge, I read this arrangement rather didactically: we must act towards a not-yet present potentiality in the present moment; this requires departures. Calle seems to ask: what must we depart from to meet the future? And, *where* and *when* do we experience the hope of its blurry horizon in the present? This hope, evoked by the installation photograph, propels us to the departure as the reader flips the photograph over to move forward in the book to the temporal past, the departure site of the full page behind it.

The departure becomes the reader's new present, and we leave the installation's incomplete future glimpse behind. Ahmed writes, "The 'new' is what is possible when what is behind us, our background, does not simply ground us or keep us in place, but allows us to move and allows us to follow something other than the lines that we have already taken" (*Queer* 62-3). The formal composition of these pages performs this movement described by Ahmed, where the photograph we leave behind moves us to follow a new line. While it may appear that Calle is showing the reader the gallery view, we are also asked to leave the gallery behind to go on the journey of Berck. The reader is moved to the Gare du Nord, a site of movement and departures, of train lines and novel directions, places, and voyages.



Figure 9. Photograph of two statues at the Gare du Nord in Paris, France.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 345.

The “DEPARTS” photograph further offers a glimpse into the future of not only *Where and When* but also of *Rachel Monique* and *Because*. Two sculptures of women stand proudly over the “DEPARTS” sign, their heads are adorned with crowns, and they each hold a shield (see fig. 9). This image is a portent: each project of the final three sections of *And So Forth* centers Calle and another woman. *Where and When* begins by centering Calle and Kristen in Berck before becoming about Calle and her mother in Lourdes and “Nowhere” as well as Calle and the Virgin Mary in Lourdes. *Rachel Monique* is extensively about Calle and her mother as is its second project *North Pole*. Finally, *Because* documents Calle’s second trip to the North Pole with the woman Marie

Desplechin (who is also her interviewer in the *Rachel Monique* section).²¹³ Due to the pervasive presence of Calle's mother throughout these projects, I read the "DEPARTS" photograph as a harbinger of Calle's preoccupation with her mother's impending death, the passing of her mother, and her departure for the North Pole to fulfill a wish her mother had to travel there. The photograph comes alive in retrospect as a glimpse into Calle's future as it relates to her mother – a future marked by several departures on journeys and from the world of the living.

Departures then perform a lot of work ushering in the new, work that may only become clear to a subject with a retrospective glance. In past departures, one discovers fodder for the future – leavings birth clearings. In her study of subject orientation, Ahmed too observed how departures write futures. Specifically, how departing from a heteronormative orientation makes space for new ways of being oriented which might involve a sort of wandering: "risking departure from the straight and narrow makes new futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer" (*Queer* 21). We can similarly understand Calle as departing from "the straight and narrow" as she is guided by the Intelligence. What ensues in *Where and When* is a getting lost that imbues the spaces Calle moves through with the queerness of *being* lost, of *being* in unmapped territory.

The interior of the Gare du Nord is the first space queered by Calle's wandering movements. Following the "DEPARTS" page is a photograph of the installation view

²¹³ For an interesting analysis of the interplay between presence and absence in Calle's tendency to position an Other as a central figure, see McFadden 173. Also see Bishop on how the uncertainty and fragility of presence and absence in Calle's work "allow for that freedom of truth that is art" (104).

which consists of two images adjoined by white frames. The framed photograph on the right was taken inside the Gare du Nord and is of Jack Lang – a French politician in the Socialist Party who formerly served as Minister of Culture and of National Education. Framed to the left is the accompanying French text (see figure 10).



Fig. 10. Photograph of Jack Lang.
 Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 346.

Beneath this photograph, which I will refer to as the Jack Lang photograph, at the bottom of the page, is an excerpt from the text in the above photograph that reads: “On the platform I met Jack Lang. ‘I don’t mean to be indiscreet, but may I inquire where you’re going?’ he asked. I told him I didn’t know. All I knew was that I had to go to Berck and, when I got there, contact my clairvoyant so she could give me instructions as to what to

do next [...]” (*And So Forth* 346).²¹⁴ This text calls attention to how Calle does not occupy the space of the train station with the clear sense of purpose expected of a traveler. In responding to the question of where Calle was going first and foremost with “I don’t know” and second with her destination, Berck, she creates a paradox of knowing one’s destination within a space dedicated to a certain certitude of destination. When a person boards a train, they know where that train is going. The destination of the train is clearly posted on signs and tickets such that “I don’t know” disrupts the very logic by which this space is governed.

Additionally, Calle’s refusal to know throws the stability of having an imminent destination, here Berck, into question. Calle has made it clear in this project that her destination, the “where” she is going, is the future. The unexpected and intangible place of the future as a destination disrupts the expectedness of social time. One cannot respond to “where are you going?” with “the future.” But, are we not all going to the future in a sense? Calle’s disorienting relationship to social time here makes space for possibility to emerge.

Luc Sante has described an uncertainty principle in Calle’s oeuvre whereby:

Uncertainty, in short, is the footprint of truth. It is the only aspect of any piece of information that can always be relied upon, and, of course, it is the aspect that diminishes information’s value as a commodity. It is nearly always inconvenient;

²¹⁴ Sur le quai, j’ai croisé Jack Lang. «Sans indiscretion, puis-je savoir où vous allez?» a-t-il demandé. J’ai répondu que je ne savais pas. Je savais seulement que je devais me rendre à Berck et, dès mon arriver, contacter ma voyante afin qu’elle me donne de Nouvelles instructions sur la suite du programme. [...]

it is unproductive and inefficient; it is often dangerous. And that is why it is so beautiful, as Calle repeatedly demonstrates in her work. (74)

In not committing to the material concrete in *Where and When, Berck*, represented as uncertainty about her destination, Calle questions the enterprise of certainty altogether and in so freeing herself she remains committed to futurity, inviting the future into her present locutions, actions, and orientation. Riki Wilchins has likened an experience of nonbinary gender to off-map travelling, asking: “But what if one is not travelling anywhere? Or is entirely off the map of intelligible binary genders” (xii)? Calle’s travelling with uncertainty can be read informatively alongside Wilchins’ account of nonbinary gender, responding to Wilchins’ question with a bit of hope: uncertain travelers invite new possibilities into the now.

In the context of this train station, we can think of Calle’s uncertain body as taking up a space not intended for her: a train station is not for bodies that do not know where they are going. In the Jack Lang photograph, Calle’s body is hidden from view yet implicated by her subject, Jack Lang, who looks directly at the camera lens and so is looking at Calle as she captures this photo. By covertly placing her body in the space of the train station captured by this photo via Jack Lang’s gaze, Calle emphasizes the out of place-ness of her body in this space. Ahmed has explored what occurs when bodies take up spaces that were not intended for them in *Queer Phenomenology* and finds that in these instances the expected effects of bodies in spaces are not reproduced. To envisage both expected and unexpected effects, we might think of a pond and how we’ve come to see ducks floating on its surface as natural and expected. We expect the ducks to be there

on that pond, going about their routine business, and nothing of our concept for the ecosystem of ponds is challenged. However, when we replace the ducks floating on the pond's surface with, say, a kangaroo floating on the pond's surface, a queer effect is produced. That is, the kangaroo is not intended to float on the surface of the pond and by doing exactly that, fails to reproduce what has become naturalized: the effect of ducks floating on a pond. The absurdity of the kangaroo is absurd in its foreignness and queer in its challenge to what we have come to expect of the space (here, ponds).

While the stakes of this example are innocuous and even silly (though most serious for the ecosystem of the pond!), the stakes for human bodies are vital and urgent as society has preconceived codes for who is welcome where that structure inequality and disproportionately disadvantage some bodies more than other bodies. And so, by generating new possibilities for spaces and bodies, a failure to reproduce the status quo may become hopeful. For Ahmed, "The hope that reproduction fails is the hope for new impressions, for new lines to emerge, new objects, or even new bodies . . ." (*Queer* 62). Lines, objects, and bodies participate in orientation work, these shape spaces as they are shaped by spaces, and therefore participate in the work of world-building. The emergence of new lines, new objects, and new bodies then carries the hope of new worlds.

This hope is present in the Jack Lang photograph as social norms for how a person interacts with a train station are foiled by both text and image. This page is riddled with paradoxes that seemingly bounce between and feed on one another. Within the visual frame of the Jack Lang photograph, Jack Lang is frozen in the foreground – at a halt for the capture of this photo. The still foreground contrasts with an active

background crowded with bodies captured in motion: walking, towing suitcases, their legs blurry with these actions. These bodies in motion are using the space of the train station as expected. Calle's absent-yet-implied body and Jack Lang's still and posing body are not by the comparison drawn here using this space as expected. A still body in a train station may be a waiting body; however, it is unexpected that a still body in this space would be a posing body like Jack Lang's or a purportedly directionless body like Calle's.

Furthermore, the camera lens is angled slightly upward such that the two Departure boards in the background loom over all of the bodies like skyscrapers, imbuing these boards with a sense of authority, of governance. The Departure boards display platform numbers, city names, and times – meant to order a space that feels otherwise chaotic with its mass of bodies in motion. The paradox of these larger-than-life ordering Departure boards and Jack Lang's and Calle's place-based rebellious bodies causes a momentary failure of the Departure boards to bring order, to govern. This paradox and its corresponding failure function to queer the space of the train station with the hope of the unexpected, the whimsy of the chance encounter photographed, and the unknowability of Calle's known destination. In *Time Binds*, Elizabeth Freeman put forth the concept of “chrononormativity” to describe how institutional forces come to be experienced as natural corporeal tempos and ordinary routines that in turn determine both the value and meaning of time. Freeman's formulation of chrononormativity speaks to the stakes of what Calle disrupts in this photograph. Where are the busy bodies going if the Departure boards have failed in this moment? What is possible and what is impossible now? The

temporal peculiarity of Calle's mission to catch up to the future queers bodies, spaces, and social time along the way. Paradox, as archived here by Calle, forces a sort of coexistence of incompatibilities: the violence of the Departure boards lives together with the violence of Calle's and Lang's disorderly bodies.

Similarly, in their introduction to *Nonbinary*, Rajunov and Duane locate a certain peace in accepting paradox: "Accepting the paradoxical duality means it is no longer a battle between the binary and the spectrum—they coexist in the same space" (xxx). Reading Calle's paradoxical train station in this nonbinary way, the reader stands to gain a sense of peace in accepting and living in these paradoxes as presented. Housed in paradox, new ways of thinking and being at peace in disorientation are put within reach of Calle's reader. Where the dual forces of order and disorientation coexist, new possibilities for spaces and bodies emerge that reveal the well-concealed reality that multitudinous modes of being and interacting already exist in the present. Disorientation, in this formulation, offers one method of resistance fighting towards incorporating the already present reality of myriad possibility into the awareness of the social body. For nonbinary lives, disorientation may be a way of existing that preserves the self. What Calle's formulation adds to this is the hope that in self-preservation lies a transforming force.

TRAVELLING TO THEN NOW WITH SYNCHRONICITIES

As mentioned, part of Calle's artistic practice is a commitment to experiencing her experiments as *une expérience*. Perhaps it is this hyper-commitment to experience that is responsible for her being oriented in certain directions *by* her projects. As we will see in what follows, Calle's orientation towards synchronicities in the *Where and When* series proves enduring – manifesting in the projects that follow it in *And So Forth* such that Calle is able to meet the future represented in the latter projects. This section charts the temporal maneuvers and acausal connections, or synchronicities, between projects in the final third of *And So Forth* effected by this orientation.

Time and place, in addition to constituting the series' title *Where and When* (time as the question of when; place as the question of where) are important variables in each of Jung's three categories of synchronistic events, which are:

1. The coincidence of a psychic state in the observer with a simultaneous, objective, external event that corresponds to the psychic state or content (e.g., the scarab), where there is no evidence of a causal connection between the psychic state and the external event, and where, considering the psychic relativity of space and time, such a connection is not even conceivable.
2. The coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding (more or less simultaneous) external event taking place outside the observer's field of perception, i.e., at a distance and only verifiable afterward (e.g., the Stockholm fire).

3. The coincidence of a psychic state with a corresponding, not yet existent future event that is distant in time and can likewise only be verified afterward. In groups 2 and 3 the coinciding events are not yet present in the observer's field of perception, but have been anticipated in time in so far as they can only be verified afterward. For this reason I call such events *synchronistic*, which is not to be confused with *synchronous*. (Jung 110, original emphasis)

In short, Jung's first category involves simultaneity of time and place, making the event synchronous. His second category may have simultaneity of time but lacks simultaneity of place. And, his third category of synchronistic phenomena lacks simultaneity of both time and place as the psychic state has an acausal connection to an event in the future. According to this logic, we may find the future most readily in the third category. Calle only offers explicit depictions of synchronicities from the first category in the *Where and When* series; however, the reader may identify third-category synchronistic events – only identifiable as such “afterward” – by analyzing *Where and When* in conjunction with the few projects that succeed it. Herein lies the key to catching up to the future.

Of the countless instances of Calle meeting her future in advance through synchronistic phenomena, I narrow my selection here to several third-category synchronistic happenings from Berck and Lourdes, because the text-heavy third project, *Where and When, Nowhere*, requires and receives its own meditation. In *Where and When, Berck*, Calle provides documentation of the first type of synchronous event according to Jung (simultaneity of time and place) and the acausal connections that constitute it as such. Kristen instructs Calle to go to a war memorial and find the names

of two brothers who loved boats (*And So Forth* 350). Calle notes in text, on its own line, that there are not names at the war memorial she has gone to (350). Then, on the next page, while Calle is at the war memorial, she documents offering a candle in the sand and immediately receiving a text message from Emmanuel Berque, who is the twin brother of Maximilien, both of whom love boats and challenges (351). The juxtaposition of the nameless war memorial with Calle's named acquaintances who not only inexplicably fit Kristen's description of the brothers Calle should find but possess a surname pronounced "Berck" offers the first formal documentation of a synchronous event. Here, the Intelligence seemingly fills in for what reality appears to lack, as though to say: the names you were seeking here were always Emmanuel and Maximilien Berque. As a synchronous phenomenon, the simultaneity is immediately recognized by Calle and Kristen. Kristen determines that this synchronicity is a sign that the cosmos approve of Calle's and her game, and Calle calls Berck a success, thus closing out the Berck portion of her project (352).

The final image in the Berck segment is a photograph of the neon blue "berck" sign rendered clearly from the front (see figure 11). When flipped over, a photograph of the backside of the same sign appears (see figure 12). The neon sign itself depicts two spellings – berck and berque –with only "berck" lit up in the first photograph. The inclusion of both spellings further emphasizes the importance of synchronicity in Berck, visually communicating that the synchronous communication with Emmanuel Berque is *behind* Berck's success which green lit this endeavor for Calle and Kristen. Put another way, the synchronous event of Berque-Berck illuminates the success of this project and

lights the way for this collaboration to continue. Furthermore, the cutout offering both front and back views appears to say we have found Berck and we are putting Berck behind us.



Fig. 11. Sign reads “berck” from the front.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 352.

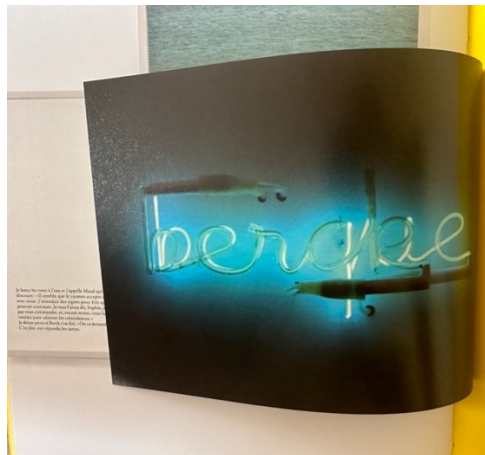


Fig. 12. Sign reads “berque” from the back.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 352.

What stands out most, however, is neither Calle's synchronicity as served up to the reader nor the symbolic closure of the Berck chapter as meeting that once blurry neon sign here with stunning clarity – head on and behind. Rather, the last full-sized page of the Berck segment performs more work than these more accessible visual narrative maneuvers. This page shows a photograph of the project's installation as a series of framed photos of text and image in a line on a white wall (352). The photograph framed is of a gravel road that leads into the sea (see figure 13). The gravel is indistinguishable from the sand and fine rocks one would expect at a beach; however, there is a solid vertical white line that clearly signals "road." This line fades into the sea, eventually disappearing into its blue-green depths.



Fig. 13. Photograph of a road leading into the sea.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 352.

If one were to read this photo at the end of *Where and When, Berck* on its own within the context of this project, the photo reads as a memorial of sorts, representative of the end of the road in Berck and offering closure: this is where the journey of Berck ended – here at the sea with that candle and that synchronous text message. When read in the context of *And So Forth* where this page and this project are in conversation with surrounding collected works, however, the road to the sea photograph transforms into a synchronistic event.

In this latter formulation, the road to the sea photograph marks a departure and a beginning. As a meaningful coincidence, this photo comes to signal that Calle's road leads to the sea as the sea determines the horizon line and disappearing point in the photograph. Put another way, this present moment in Berck signals to a preconscious Calle that she will meet her future (always on the horizon) at sea, thus allowing Calle to meet her own future in that present moment on the beach at Berck. It is no coincidence that the text in which Kristen declares Berck over is situated on this very page to the left of (in French) and beneath (in English) the photo of the road to the sea – marking this image, as opposed to the others, as Berck's open ending. This, I argue, is the understated success of synchronicity in Berck, as the sea not only reappears in Calle's future as documented in the succeeding projects of *North Pole* and *Because*, but also these two projects are the final two collected in *And So Forth*. Additionally, the last photograph in the book is a full double-paged photo of the sea. Put in other words, the sea is the final destination and last visual locale of the entire book which is emphasized by its occupation of two full pages. This future was met by Calle years prior in Berck.

For readers, the road to the sea photograph offers a similar experience (although no longer a naturally occurring synchronistic phenomenon) whereby the reader meets the end of the book, their future as a reader, on this page in *Where and When, Berck*, hundreds of pages prior to the book's final double-paged photograph of the sea. This generosity of verisimilitude of experience, from Calle to her readers, offers readers a glimpse at the structural insides of Calle's collected projects from Berck onwards and so gives itself to a study of synchronistic phenomena that lack simultaneity. The temporality of enby-futurity is similarly connected with experiencing now the possibilities of what is not yet here. Noticing acausal connections provides a way of identifying moments in which a person experiences a fragment of the future existing in the present. And, as mentioned, identifying these moments may benefit a person's emotional well-being by providing comfort and increased understanding.²¹⁵ As I will later show, the synchronistic temporality of enby-futurity in combination with a commitment to one's own pleasure transforms the future by infusing the present with its possibilities.

In the second project of the *Where and When* series, *Where and When, Lourdes*, the catalogue form endows readers with the agency necessary to identify third-category synchronistic phenomena. The Lourdes project itself concludes in failure – Kristen urges Calle to return home quickly and says the events of Lourdes are not synchronizing. Read in *And So Forth*, however, the reader may find third-category synchronicities between Kristen's card reading at the start of *Where and When, Lourdes* and Calle's later works in *Rachel Monique*.

²¹⁵ See Cambray for a more detailed discussion within the field of psychology about how synchronicity may benefit subject well-being.

Beginning *Where and When, Lourdes*, on September 30, 2005, Kristen's cards respond to Calle's questions of where and when as follows: "The cards: *Land...corpses. Women... a woman to exhume. Layers of contrasting images: a world of purity and a place of debauchery. You make a dead woman speak... Cunning, deceit, investigation*" (*And So Forth* 357, original emphasis). At this point, Lourdes has not been selected as the destination, and Calle jumps to fill in the blanks, stating: "Like a fool, instead of keeping quiet and letting the cards do their job, I tell her [Maud Kristen] I am invited to the island of Moustique next year, to a villa where someone was murdered" (357). Calle's admission of interference stands out considering that Moustique was not selected and Lourdes, the winner, is deemed a failure by Kristen and Calle. Adding to this, in terms of third (and not first) category synchronistic phenomena, the archived experience of Lourdes is poorer than its Berck and Nowhere counterparts, giving credence to Kristen's words at Lourdes' end that "it's not synchronizing" (371). Even the third-category synchronicity analyzed here comes from the beginning of *Where and When, Lourdes* before Calle sets off for Lourdes.

An acausal connection exists with part of the Intelligence's response to the questions of where and when: "[...] *Layers of contrasting images: a world of purity and a place of debauchery. You make a dead woman speak... Cunning, deceit, investigation*" (357, original emphasis). These words form an acausal connection without simultaneity of time or place with the *Rachel Monique* section in "Rachel Monique. Private Diaries" (2012). In this one-time experiment, Calle literally makes a dead woman speak by reading her deceased mother's diaries aloud in the Église des Célestins (Celestine

Church, built in the fifteenth century) in Avignon. We may also consider the setting, a church, to sign both as a world of purity (a holy site) and place of debauchery (Église des Célestins was burned during the French Revolution, and religious corruption factors heavily in Avignon's history as the site of the Palais des Papes (Papal Palace)).²¹⁶ Thus in 2012, the physical event of Calle reading her deceased mother's diaries at a church in Avignon aligned with the psychic event of Kristen's 2005 premonition from *Where and When, Lourdes* through an acausal connection.

Finally, a photograph of a wall of the Église des Célestins constitutes the background of the page where the "Rachel Monique. Private Diaries" text is found (see figure 14). Fully visible from a large hole in the old church wall is a photograph atop an easel of Calle's mother posed gleefully in the sea.²¹⁷ In the context of acausal connections across projects, this image of Calle's mother in the sea functions as a synchronistic *mise en abyme* of sorts – a discreet nod to the reader of *And So Forth* that we are still travelling on that road to the sea photographed in Berck. Whether intentional or not, this photograph of Calle's mother as catalogued in *And So Forth* exists in a web of synchronistic phenomena connected to the sea.

²¹⁶ The Avignon papacy was highly controversial and papal corruption dating back to the fourteenth century is well-documented.

²¹⁷ Presented by Perrotin, this photograph is titled "Dead in a good mood" (2013).



Fig. 14. “Rachel Monique. Private Diaries” page.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 432.

Revealed then in this third-category synchronistic phenomenon is that on September 30, 2005, pre-Lourdes, Calle caught up to her future July 2012 in Avignon. The where and the when posed by Calle as questions in 2005 truly are transformed by a commitment to synchronicity whereby the where becomes Avignon and the when becomes seven years in the future. *Where and When* is a series whose goal gains success only in conjunction with others of Calle’s projects that took place during or following it. In this way, reading *Where and When* as catalogued in *And So Forth* provides the archives extra to this series that are necessary to show that Calle did meet the future. This connection between events that are separated by seven years shows that the fodder for future possibilities exists in the present.

THE WHERE OF NOWHERE

Calle has spoken about how the literary permeates her work and the importance of coupling photography and text, stating: “I have very few ideas that are not related to texts; it seems that images are not enough for me. In my work, text is primordial; it is a sensual pleasure, even if I don’t feel I’m a writer at all, and therefore can’t give up images, photographs or films” (Macel). When thinking nonbinary together with Calle, it stands out that she describes the textual in terms of sensuality and pleasure. Utopia and pleasure go hand in hand and, as I will delve into, sensuality and pleasure serve as points of access to enby-futurity.

That Calle describes text in her work as a primordial sensual pleasure draws attention. Many ancient cultures believed that words – spoken and written – had magical properties and could affect reality. We are enculturated to this belief such that “the magic words” is a common phrase. Belief in words holding some level of power to affect reality has persisted and is readily evident in, for example, the book bans occurring in the United States at present. In a way, banned books testify to the belief that words and stories have the power to affect reality. Why ban books if words do not affect reality? Writing about transgender activism, Laurel Westbrook has spoken to the power of story. Westbrook suggested that we move away from identity-based anti-violence activism, because the stories deployed by this approach risk creating a homogenized transgender category and over-emphasizing transgender folks’ vulnerability to violence (17). In place of this, Westbrook suggests transgender activism that acknowledges the diversity of transgender

people and shares stories that call attention to transgender joy (17). Westbrook's argument emphasizes the effects of stories about transgender lives. Story, the product of words, is a powerful tool for reshaping reality in transgender activist work.

Taking Calle's description of the role of text in her work to heart, I consider text as a sensual pleasure that persists through time and holds the power to birth new meanings. *Where and When, Nowhere*, with its haptic photographs of Calle's fingers touching the text-filled pages of books, emphasizes the sensual pleasure to be found in text. In this last project in the *Where and When* series, Kristen tells Calle that this time they will put the where and the when to the Intelligence directly in lieu of consulting the tarot (*And So Forth* 375). Calle's method for communicating with the Intelligence is touching a line of text on a randomly selected book page with her thumb. This line of text functions as the answer to whatever question she posed. The method is sensual in tactile and psychic ways, offering not only the pleasure of touch but additionally the pleasures of potentiality in unknowing and of acquiring knowing, which is in part the pleasure of being oriented.

Where and When, Nowhere begins with a photograph of Calle touching a book in which the index finger of her right hand, paralleling the vertical lines created by the book's contours, directs the eye to a the French word *dans* (in), as if to say this is where we are going: we are going into text (see Figure 15).

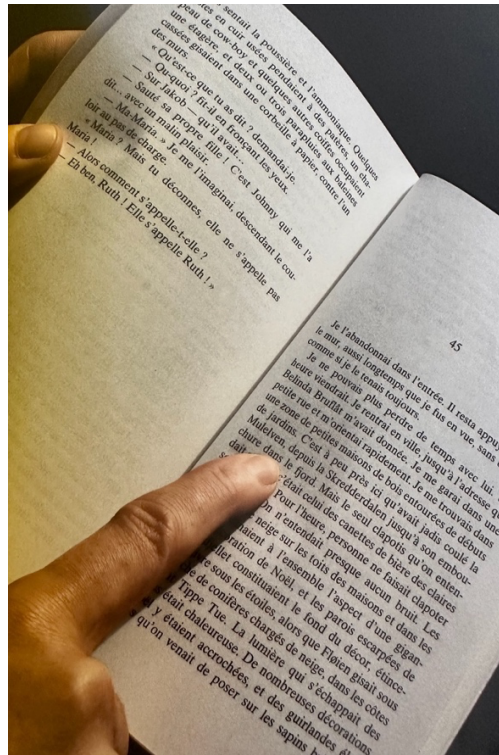


Fig. 15. Sophie Calle points to the word “dans” in a book.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 377.

On the following two pages is a double spread photograph of the inside of a book, its spine aligned with the spine of *And So Forth* mimicking the reader’s physical and visual experiences of reading *And So Forth* (see figure 16). Additionally, the book in this photograph has metal silver trim on the edges of its cover and on the two pages displayed, paralleling the silver edges of the front and back covers of *And So Forth*. It appears then that Calle is sanctioning a collapse of the physical copy of *And So Forth* and the photograph here such that the photograph, not the catalogue, is the book we are reading. Through this textual-visual *mise en abyme*, the reader plummets into this new *And So Forth*.

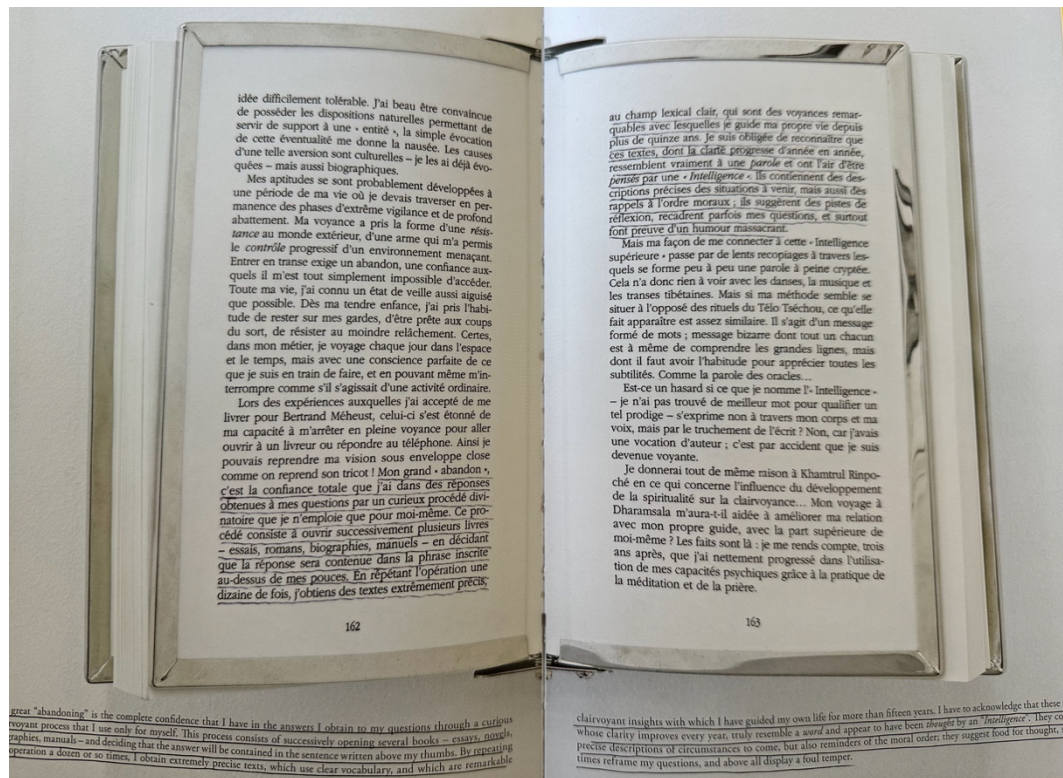


Fig. 16. The appearance of a book in a book.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, pp. 378-9.

This book in the book presents the new rules which govern the project, emphasized by its underlined text that reads:

My great “abandoning” is the complete confidence that I have in the answers I obtain to my questions through a curious clairvoyant process that I use only for myself. This process consists of successively opening several books – essays, novels, biographies, manuals – and deciding that the answer will be contained in the sentence written above my thumbs. By repeating the operation a dozen or so times, I obtain extremely precise texts, which use clear vocabulary, and which are

remarkable clairvoyant insights with which I have guided my own life for more than fifteen years. I have to acknowledge that these texts, whose clarity improves every year, truly resemble a *word* and appear to have been *thought* by an “*Intelligence*”. They contain precise descriptions of circumstances to come, but also reminders of the moral order; they suggest food for thought, sometimes reframe my questions, and above all display a foul temper. (378-9, original emphasis)²¹⁸

The text in the photograph is in French, and an English translation is below the image similarly underlined with black ink. It is worth noting Calle’s curious translation choice of *parole* as *word*. The French *parole* refers to what is spoken, to an utterance, a speech, lyrics sung, etc. The English *word* may also be used in this way. Take for example the phrase, “Your words touched me” when it means the speaker was moved by what the other person said out loud. In Calle’s sentence, however, *word* sits uncomfortably in the phrase “truly resemble a *word*.” The English translations of *parole* as “an utterance” may even refer better to the idea expressed here that these words are communicating, these are words that speak. The closest use of *word* to this meaning is in the English phrase “may I have a word with you / I need to have a word with you” where *word* refers to a conversation prompted by an *I* who has things *I* must say to you. This use of *word* is

²¹⁸ Mon grand « abandon », c’est la confiance totale que j’ai dans des réponses obtenues à mes questions par un curieux procédé divinatoire que je n’emploie que pour moi-même. Ce procédé consiste à ouvrir successivement plusieurs livres –essais, romans, biographies, manuels – en décidant que la réponse sera contenue dans la phrase inscrite au-dessus de mes pouces. En répétant l’opération une dizaine de fois, j’obtiens des textes extrêmement précis, au champ lexical clair, qui sont des voyances remarquables avec lesquelles je guide ma propre vie depuis plus de quinze ans. Je suis obligée de reconnaître que ces textes, dont la clarté progresse d’année en année, ressemblent vraiment à une *parole* et ont l’air d’être pensés par une « *Intelligence* ». Ils contiennent des descriptions précises des situations à venir, mais aussi des rappels à l’ordre moraux ; ils suggèrent des pistes de réflexion, recadrent parfois mes questions, et surtout font preuve d’un humour massacrant.

highly particular, and so the quirky English translation of the French *parole* works to color in the latter's contents. The Intelligence is having a *word* with Sophie Calle. Put another way, the Intelligence is the speaker with a speech to make, a speech event imbued with the importance and authority of "having a word" with someone. Additionally, *word* is an English noun that can take both the descriptors spoken and written, thus lending Calle's translation choice the fluidity of dealing in speech and writing.

The two pages that follow depict the project's installation view (see figure 17). Couplets of framed photographs appear in a horizontal line. The top photographs show Calle's fingers touching various books. The lower photographs depict these open books straight on, corresponding to the photo above such that the viewer can read the text that was selected by Calle's fingers above underlined in the book itself below – garnering active viewer engagement and further prompting her reader to go *dans* the texts.



Fig. 17. Installation view photographs.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, pp. 380-1.

The serial, processional nature of the horizontal line of framed photographs communicates a temporal process: first this book, then this book, next this, and so on resulting in a display of the process by which Calle arrives at the Intelligence's textual collage response. Calle's meticulous documentation in combination with the number of books touched to reach an answer evokes a sense of dutifulness: Sophie Calle, *dutiful servant of the Intelligence*. This display of willingness is in tension with the project's willful conclusion however in which Calle decides she will go to the North Pole alone – without the Intelligence (*And So Forth* 392). Perhaps then meeting the future now requires both willingness and willfulness. Taking Calle's paradoxical *expérience* as our model, willingness is seen to make futurity accessible and willfulness to make manifest what is only now possible. So, meeting the future now requires a subject both to be open and to act, specifically towards their pleasure as Calle acts towards her pleasure of fulfilling her late mother's dream of visiting the North Pole. Brandon Robinson writes that a nonbinary knowledge production would center pleasure ("Non-Binary" 441). Calle's prioritization of her own pleasure over what she perceives as the demands of the Intelligence mirrors the importance of valuing pleasure in the face of structuring norms for nonbinary people. Applied to enby-futurity and flourishing then, we must add willful action towards pleasure to an orientation towards the future.²¹⁹

The Intelligence's textual response to Calle's questions sprawls across two pages and contains, as I will show, the fodder for many synchronicities. Although *Where and When, Nowhere* is more visually static than Berck and Lourdes, it proves the most active

²¹⁹ For an exceptional and detailed book on willfulness in philosophy and literature, see Ahmed's *Willful Subjects*.

time traveler, serving as a lynch pin between all of the collected works considered in this chapter. These temporal and spatial maneuvers are made possible by the *where* of this iteration, located nowhere, in the non-place of language. The text constituting the *parole* of the Intelligence, produced by Calle's method of collaging found sentences, evokes Foucault's meditation on the twentieth-century fiction of Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges. In the preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault, inspired by Borges' writing, described new knowledge as born of the clash of unlike things.²²⁰ Foucault was invested in the spatiality of order, as in where order is produced, as well as sites that both disrupt order and in so doing reveal order, which he called heterotopias. Art historian Kirstin Ringelberg has implicated Foucault's concept of heterotopia in thinking with transgender. Ringelberg argued that trans-informed recontextualizations of the works of certain artists open "important heterotopic possibilities for non-normative identification and engagement" (178-9). Similarly, I find the concept of heterotopia helps articulate how new possibilities emerge and consider the emergence of new possibilities necessary to enby-futurity. Heterotopia is a minor concept in Foucault's work and scant writing by Foucault himself on the concept exists. The preface to *The Order of Things* is the sole instance of Foucault situating heterotopia as existing in text, making it the most relevant to the Intelligence's *parole*.²²¹

What stands out in his observations here, in relation to Calle's project, is the site of this clash of opposites which generates new knowledge. Foucault wrote:

²²⁰ For a detailed analysis of Foucault's conceptualization of new knowledge and heterotopias, see Topinka.

²²¹ Heterotopia was discussed in some detail only once by Foucault in a 1967 lecture. His lecture notes were later printed in 1984 as "Des espaces autres" ("Of Other Spaces") without his review pre-publication.

We are all familiar with the disconcerting effects of the proximity of extremes, or, quite simply, with the sudden vicinity of things which have no relation to each other; the mere act of enumeration that heaps them all together has a power of enchantment all its own [...] What is impossible is not the propinquity of the things listed, but the very site on which their propinquity would be possible [...] where could they ever meet, except in the immaterial sound of the voice pronouncing their enumeration, or on the page transcribing it? Where else could they be juxtaposed except in the non-place of language? (*The Order of Things* xvi-xvii)

Textual collage as method mashes unlike things together into a new order – sentences strung together into a paragraph – where they meet and speak. This method, in the nowhere of language, makes the impossible reality – it *transforms* the fringes of what possibilities are real. In nowhere then lives the power of transformation and evidence of language’s capacity to shape the real.²²²

Uncategorizable, *nowhere*, like *nonbinary*, is defined by what it is not. In my formulation, nowhere and nonbinary share a kinship. In Calle’s collaged text, nowhere belongs to multiple spaces, to no spaces, and to all spaces. This textual non-place steps out of familiar space to create its own world with its own groupings of things. Similarly, “Nonbinary individuals are more than simply both, neither, or in between. Stepping

²²² The power of the written word to transform reality has a home in contemporary French thought. This transformative capacity was remarked upon by twenty-first-century French author and Nobel Laureate Annie Ernaux, who stated in her Nobel lecture: “Literature was a sort of continent which I unconsciously set in opposition to my social environment. And I conceived of writing as nothing less than the possibility of transforming reality” (Seven Stories Press). This quote was chosen by Seven Stories Press as a teaser in their September 2023 Newsletter announcing that Ernaux’s Nobel lecture is forthcoming to print, emphasizing the currency this ideology may have with their reading public.

beyond male and female leads us into the infinite universe of gender” (Rajunov and Duane xix). This experience of gender at times factors into experiences of communities and spaces, where gender effects the spaces a person may or may not find belonging (Rajunov and Duane xxiii).

Drawing the non-place of language and enby gender together allows us to rethink the hegemonic categorizations of bodies. Like the resonances discussed between Calle’s artistic body and enby embodiment, there exists a compound shared experience between enby embodiment and the Intelligence’s collaged textual body. The collaged textual body born in *Where and When, Nowhere* is irreverent of its origins. This, I argue, is the future; this is the hope of enby-futurity. Binary gender narratives bombard human beings as soon as and even before they are born such that no gender expansive person’s story exists without memories of cisnormativity.²²³ The ideological motivations for baby gender reveal parties for example proceed to shape the parameters of acceptable (socially, religiously, ethnically, etc.) gender expression and the contours of gendered contexts for the human born. Enby individuals, like the textual body found in *Where and When, Nowhere*, require a certain irreverence towards these origin stories to birth themselves in their own image and create their own stories. C. Riley Snorton has written that transness and blackness articulate “the paradox of nonbeing, as expressed in its deployment of appositional flesh” (5). We may think of trans in this way, as Snorton has, and I would add attention to enby to this. The heterotopic practice of collage coupled with the

²²³ See Judith Lorber on the social construction of gender.

transformative power of words then offer those whose existence “articulates the paradox of nonbeing” one possible shelter.

Calle turns to nowhere when Kristen indicates there is nowhere else to go. This experience of turning to language in times where we have no physical place to go is a shared one, and, in language, one does go somewhere even if that somewhere is a non-place. Language creates worlds, microcosms with their own realities. The turn of *Where and When, Nowhere* to language is another way in which Calle’s work transforms fiction into reality. The textual body of the Intelligence is portentous, as Calle asserted and I will show, and engaging its language with synchronistic phenomena in mind stirs a hope that enby textual worlds may too be portentous, may too transform reality. Introducing a collection of memoirs by nonbinary writers, Micah Rajunov and Scott Duane put forth that: “When a nonbinary person opens up their life to one or hundreds or millions, they contribute to rebuilding our shared mental model of gender” (xxi). The locale of their statement is language. Another way to read this then is: when a nonbinary person expresses in the non-place of language they contribute to transforming reality.

Language, then, can be characterized as an *active* non-place. While the lower line of photographs on the installation view page of *Where and When, Nowhere* evoke passivity – books laid open, their still contents captured – the upper line of photographs are energizing. Calle’s fingers move about from photo to photo. The books too are held in this way and that way, shot at various angles and proximities to the camera lens. This juxtaposition reveals that language is active when one goes there – *dans* language. When we venture into the non-place of language, we activate its reality. To double down on this

idea that touch (with fingers, with sight) activates an object's reality, near the end of the *Where and When, Nowhere* project, Calle gives Kristen a necklace to touch that purportedly belonged to her mother. The reader learns that this necklace is a replica of the necklace her late mother wore. Kristen, in touching the replica, could not sense a story. Calle responds: "It's a fake, it's normal, the whole story is in the other" (*And So Forth* 391).²²⁴ While the object is not textual, this exercise still lends itself to the idea developed in *Where and When, Nowhere* through its images of Calle touching books that the touching (a sensual verb) of an object activates story.

With this in mind, I turn to the *parole* of the Intelligence to parse out the synchronistic phenomena activated by Calle's sensual touch. The text travels forwards and backwards in time and was composed over time from 2008-2012. Calle's mother had passed away by 2008. That this point is referenced numerous times by the Intelligence informs my close readings of the more morbid sentences. And, as I will show, the time travelling work of this text demonstrates characteristics of enby-futurity. The full text reads:

Maria? But you're kidding, she's not called Maria! / It's about here that the Mulvelven sank long ago, from the Skredderdalen to its mouth in the fjord. / There also, thanks to their size and their longevity, all the plants create a landscape that serves as a living environment for most of the fauna, humans included. / The old woman still had to take two more trips, from one to the other, to adjust the interview's location. / Then, there were

²²⁴ « C'est faux, c'est normal, toute l'histoire est dans l'autre. »

still more greetings. The beautiful Lisa, going beyond even the kindness agreed to in advance, / wanted to accompany the beautiful woman from Normandy to the pavement. / He politely tilted his head as a thank you for the purchases, then went on his way. / But how could you do something like that... / The body of Octave Parango was never formally identified. / All alone, the useless idiot who we had also got rid of in the ground, had for company only the parallel lines of his mute colleagues, / these stretched out regiments of the silent who were alive, alone in the dark silence, the corpse, laughing with his head from another world, / A sweet thought, it's only now and dead, she is no longer Jewish and as they can no longer do anything to her, nothing scares her anymore. / What would I do to survive? Marsden thinks: Koggelmander, I would juggle and you would be a gigolo. / Jake's fingers transmit a new warning to me. / The creature is abject. What else to do but destroy or forgive her? / You and yours have never allowed us anything else. / I do not understand your stony sky: sometimes it freezes us, sometimes it suffocates us. / Chosen, what do you mean? / But by dying, I would be on time for the meeting that I took with my loved ones, my brothers who are thinking about me at the moment. / To pray would be to betray them. / The script in question is called Lancelot of the Lake and Robert Bresson had spoken to me more than once about this film project, / which no producer would touch and which was so important to him; / but who would produce a film that no

one wanted to make for 20 years. It's over, this story! You will never do it!
/ And, for God's sake, do you really think with all that, he still refuses to
believe it's Quinn. / The first to go around the world, the second because
the office took the matter away from him. / Mr. McEwan cannot
understand how the mind that created the map of Middle Earth could have
been born in such a deserted and lost place. / He was wrong, perhaps, you
are wrong... / He was sleeping, and you, you were waiting for him, in the
cruel night... (Calle, And So Forth 384-5)

The first seven lines of the *parole* forge acausal connections between Lourdes and Calle's two trips to the North Pole. Beginning with the first exclamation, "Maria? But you're kidding, she's not called Maria!" the text travels to Lourdes where Calle was sent to ask a question of *la Vierge Marie* (the Virgin Mary). In this interpretation, we come to understand why Lourdes failed to synchronize: the Intelligence, conflated in Lourdes with *la Vierge Marie*, is not called *Maria*. The psychic event related to a Marie that sent Calle to Lourdes was the sense that "*There is something you [Calle] must ask the Virgin Mary*" (*And So Forth* 358, original emphasis). An acausal connection to an important Marie who is not the Intelligence then is found in the first name of Calle's interviewer and companion on her second trip to the Pole: Marie Desplechin. Perhaps Calle needed to ask Marie to join her in the Pole, because in *Because*, Calle's unplanned project documenting this second trip to the Pole with Marie, one reason offered for why Calle took a photograph of the sea there (a photograph that, as I will show, unites the projects examined in this chapter) is because she "was with Marie / who doesn't take pictures"

(*And So Forth* 481). Furthermore, Calle's query to *la Vierge Marie* in Lourdes was: "Dear Mary, I have come to Lourdes looking for an idea. Can you inspire me" (*And So Forth* 367)? In my formulation, Calle's question is answered by a different Marie – Marie Desplechin, who inspired the photograph Calle took in *Because* by not taking pictures herself. While one could draw connections between the Virgin Mary, as a mother figure, and Calle's mother – the connections then made in Calle's work become flat with causality: the mother is dead, so the art enacts grieving. With this human Marie, motioned to by the Intelligence's assertion of who they are not, the psychic event concerning a *Marie* in Lourdes and Calle's prayer to *Marie* synchronize with the physical events of *Because*.

The acausal connections between *Where and When, Nowhere* and the North Pole continue. While in Greenland, Calle herself seems to draw a connection to the *paroles*: "It's about here that the *Mulvelven* sank long ago, from the *Skredderdalen* to its mouth in the fjord," as her narrative text in *North Pole* states: "We were lucky: had the boat dropped me / a few meters south, they would have ended up / on Starvation Glacier" (*And So Forth* 464). The *Mulvelven* is a river in Norway, positioning us at least proximal to Greenland, a country with many fjords. Calle writing about the ship's near-shipwreck experience harkens back to the description of the river *Mulvelven* as "sank," indicating that these words may have travelled with Calle to the North Pole despite her assertion that she'd be travelling to the Pole alone – "*Without the Intelligence*" (*And So Forth* 392, original emphasis).

Calle's assertion of travelling alone is heavy handed, with the word SEULE (ALONE) appearing in all uppercase letters. To be alone here is defined as without the Intelligence, and "Intelligence" is the final word of *Where and When, Nowhere*. This is to say, Calle formally and quite literally gives the Intelligence the last word, paradoxically adding to her willful assertion the quality of an invitation: *I'm going with or without you. You are begrudgingly but nevertheless invited*. This concluding paradox is one of several cautions to the reader that fact and fiction have indeed collapsed here in service of an extension of Calle's game with the Intelligence. Furthermore, the Intelligence reveals that "*the old woman still had to take two more trips,*" which I read as Calle's two trips to the Pole. I will offer an in depth reading of the importance of her second trip to the Pole in the next section, so suffice it to say here that Calle has met her two future trips (one planned, one yet unrevealed) in these words, and this game of Calle's with the Intelligence is far from over.

Next, the Intelligence says "*there were still more greetings,*" a beautiful woman named "*Lisa*" accompanies "*the beautiful woman from Normandy,*" and Calle's cabinmate in *North Pole*, whom she had never met prior, is a woman called "L." And, rounding out the first seven lines, the Intelligence appears to thank Calle before shifting focus: "*He politely tilted his head as a thank you for the purchases, then went on his way.*" In Berck and Lourdes, Calle purchased candles as offerings, and it appears here that the Intelligence acknowledges and accepts Calle's offerings here before signaling that their conversation will now shift directions.

This is where the *parole* takes a morbid turn, and the following lines travel to the projects catalogued in the *Rachel Monique* section of *And So Forth*:

All alone, the useless idiot who we had also got rid of in the ground, had for company only the parallel lines of his mute colleagues, / these stretched out regiments of the silent who were alive, alone in the dark silence, the corpse, laughing with his head from another world, / A sweet thought, it's only now and dead, she is no longer Jewish and as they can no longer do anything to her, nothing scares her anymore. (384-5, original emphasis)

The parallel lines of mute colleagues in the first line refers to the lines of graves marked by tombstones in cemeteries. *Rachel Monique* is rich in images of tombstones, housing countless photographs of tombstones in lines – each stone only a parallel line of ground away from the next. In one of these images, Calle is pictured seated at the end of a long line of tombstones (see figure 18).²²⁵ The tombstones, photographed laying sideways, create a visual pathway to where Calle is seated, as though to mark Calle's unburied body as next in this line of the buried dead. Her body is emphasized by its position in the center and on the horizon line, where it is illuminated by one of the few light sources, redeeming it from the background. Strikingly, the words of the Intelligence could very well be used as a caption for this tombstone photograph which mimes its contents all too well.

²²⁵ Photograph taken by Victoria Clay of Sophie Calle at the Église des Célestins during the 2012 Festival d'Avignon in France.

This is the second connection to Calle's future in 2012 at the Église des Célestins, because this was where and when Calle made "a dead woman speak" by reading her mother's diaries out loud.

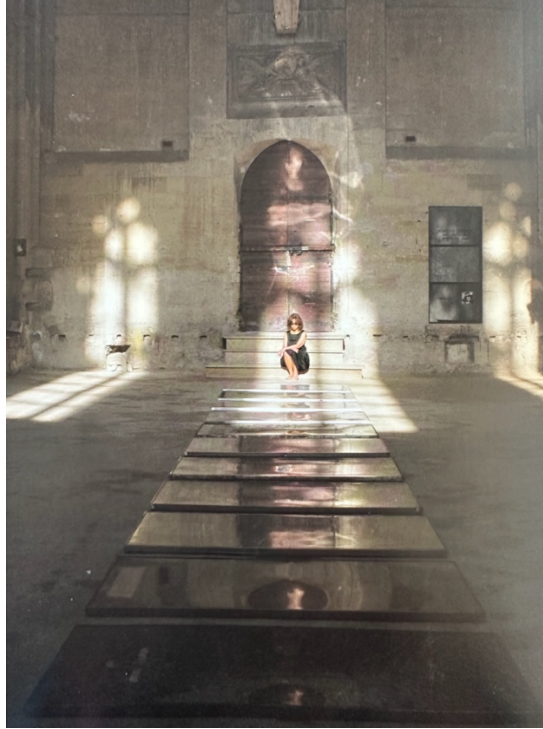


Fig. 18. Calle sits at the end of a line of tombstones.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 436.

An additional connection to this line can be made with the procession of coupled photographs in the installation view photograph of *Where and When, Nowhere* which, by resembling lines of graves, imbues the gallery space with a cemetery-like quality in which “*the silent who are alive*” are housed. And, in the instance of this installation view photograph, the alive silent could be read as the very books displayed in the lines of framed photographs. These two connections, read together, group the potentials of exhibition spaces and those of cemeteries. Both exhibitions and cemeteries are places a person goes to observe the afterlife which may take the shapes of art post-work displayed or a life post-alive etched into a gravestone.

Indeed, through her art, Calle is able to keep something of her parents alive. Although Calle is alone in the world of the living, she has the company of *the silent who were alive*, who she venerates not in cemeteries but in her art, in her exhibitions. In Desplechin's interview with Calle in the *Rachel Monique* section, Desplechin asks Calle if she goes to her mother's tomb. Calle responds, "Not often. I've replaced cemetery visits by my own work. I spend a lot of time with her. Talking about her, thinking about the exhibition, designing the poster: that's my living way of going to her grave" (*And So Forth* 404). The *parole* of the Intelligence then, in speaking to Calle's relation to the dead, speaks of Calle's art which takes on the function of a visit to a loved one's grave. This connection further adds to the merits of reading these sections of *And So Forth* together.

Writing about queer and Black utopian possibility, Avery Gordon described a way of knowing acquired through contact with what she called "ghostly matters." Ghostly matters, for Gordon, are echoes of the past that exist in the present as hints, suggestions, and portents. Gordon suggested we are haunted by these ghostly matters and formulated haunting as instances in which the familiar is unfamiliar, we lose direction, or the past comes to life (xvi). These hauntings alter the temporal experience of being and prompt the subject to do something differently. This is the "something-to-be-done" characteristic of haunting (Gordon xvii). For Gordon, being haunted and thinking with what has been lost and what never was can lead us to a utopian form of longing in the present, because ghostly matters can help us picture what was lost but never existed. Drawing on Walter Benjamin's concept of profane illumination, Gordon likened the utopian potential of

ghostly matters to Benjamin's description of the discerning moment called profane illumination that initiates a longing for the moment we realize it could have been otherwise (205).

The utopian longing generated by ghostly matters prompts a subject to do something differently and so furthers thinking on alternative possibilities. For Gordon, "To imagine beyond the limits of what is already understandable is our best hope for retaining what ideology critique traditionally offers while transforming its limitations into . . . utopian possibility" (195). By valuing an imagination that exceeds "the limits of what is already understandable," Gordon's concept encourages us to think about alternative possibilities for nonbinary people as products of this sort of limitless imagination. We may consider Calle as engaged in the kind of utopian longing Gordon describes. For example, Calle longs for the trip to the North Pole with her mother that never was. She is haunted by ghostly matters (as the Intelligence's portents) in *Rachel Monique* and *North Pole*, and the past that comes to life in these works is *Where and When, Nowhere*. Gordon wrote: "Such endings that are not over is what haunting is about" (139). In my selection of Calle's works, the endings are never over. Thinking with Gordon's concept of ghostly matters allows us to consider that the post-*Where and When* projects may be imaginative responses to the "something-to-be-done" prompt of being haunted.

On this track, I read the line, "*the corpse, laughing with his head from another world,*" as "haunting" a photograph in *North Pole* (*And So Forth* 476). The image in question constitutes one full page and depicts, under a rock and buried in snow, the three

objects Calle buried in the North Pole: a photograph of her late mother, a Chanel necklace, and a diamond ring (see figure 19).



Fig. 19. Objects buried in the snow.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 476.

Calle's mother's head peeks out from under the rock and just above the snow under which it is partially buried. Only her head is visible. And, her head is smiling, perhaps even laughing from this other world of the photograph. Reading the corpse's laughing head as Calle's mother is further substantiated by part of the next line: "*it's only now and dead, she is no longer Jewish.*" Calle's mother was Jewish and, by the time of this project, is deceased (*And So Forth* 402). Here again, I find the *parole* of the Intelligence from *Where and When, Nowhere*, with stunning accuracy, could serve as a caption to a photograph in a later project.

By evoking the text from *Where and When, Nowhere*, Calle creates the sense that this image and this moment in the North Pole were foretold by that text. The relationship between the *Where and When, Nowhere* text and this photograph feels causal even if it is acausal. Upon seeing this photograph, the reader experiences a sensation of having seen it before. Then, the reader realizes they did not see the photograph, but they did read a description of the photograph. This in turn creates the feeling that the *parole* brought us to this exact photograph. It is disorienting for Calle's reader to confront what they thought was and was not possible. The order of the collected projects leads the reader to believe that the Intelligence divined this moment and brought Calle to this future. This would mean that Calle accomplished her impossible goal of meeting the future in *Where and When, Nowhere*. Calle's commitment to experiencing this synchronistic logic, combined with the inexplicability of the *Where and When, Nowhere* text describing this moment, ask the reader to rethink what is possible. To borrow Keeling's phrasing, Calle presents readers with an impossible possibility. In this way, *North Pole* represents the capacity of words to world-build and the possibility of what was once thought to be impossible.

The instances of synchronistic phenomena in *Where and When, Nowhere*, whose origins are language, really do appear to transform reality. The acausal connections forged between the *parole* and Calle's other projects elide any interrogation into cause and effect; rather, these works are simply *connected*. And, through these connections, Calle and her reader repeatedly realize they'd already met the present moment or the current page as a future foretold by the Intelligence. In the non-place of language – the

where of *Nowhere* – the *word* transforms the real. *Where and When, Nowhere* serves as a touch point between the three sections of *And So Forth* examined in this chapter, such that reading across these sections with synchronicity generates new kinds of knowledge and possibilities as well as attests to the power of *a word* to forge a world. These findings speak to how Calle’s work demonstrates what I mean by enby-futurity. Enby-futurity involves: a commitment to pleasure, an imaginative longing that prompts “something-to-be-done,” utilizing the power of words to shape reality, an openness to the possibilities of acausal connections. Like how the non-place of language invents forms and acts on the real, enby-futurity transforms the future by enacting possibilities in the present.

BECAUSE BELIEVING IN THE HORIZON . . .

Concluding *And So Forth*, *Because* sits at the horizon of the book. Consisting of only four pages, this project stands apart in its brevity. *Because* documents Calle’s second trip to the North Pole with Desplechin and is catalogued in *And So Forth* across four pages as: one poem divided onto two pages on either side of a two-page photograph of the sea. Thinking with synchronicities across projects, as mentioned above, I read *Because* as the second interview location described by the Intelligence in *Where and When, Nowhere* (the first location being Calle’s first trip to the North Pole): “The old woman still had to take two more trips, from one to the other, to adjust the interview’s location” (384-5). My reading is inspired by the connection the photograph of the sea in

Because has with the sea imagery from Berck. In addition, the second portion of the poem enacts the synchronistic logic of the Intelligence.

Because, in my formulation, is one stop on Calle's road to the sea which is a metaphorical road to the future. The success of Berck was the success of meeting her future in the road to the sea photograph and is simultaneously the success of being oriented towards synchronistic phenomena. Taking the road to the sea photograph of Berck and the sea photograph in *Because* together, I read *Where and When*, *Berck* and *Because* as bookends of an interconnected project.

As it happens, Calle exhibited the finished *Because* series at the Fraenkel Gallery in San Francisco, California in 2018. For the exhibition, Calle covered framed photographs with felt curtains embroidered with text, and the road to the sea photograph was included under the title *The White Line*. The text on its felt cover reads: "Because of the temptation to follow it." So, years after the publication of *And So Forth*, Calle exhibits *The White Line* (originally from *Where and When*, *Berck*) with new text in the style of *Because* (but not included in *And So Forth's Because*) signaling that Calle believed, as I do, that the road to the sea photograph has a home in the larger *Because* project. Furthermore, this confirms that the photograph from Berck functioned as *her* road, the road Calle was tempted to follow, thereby strengthening my argument in this chapter that this photograph in particular is especially meaningful and a portentous bookend from Berck to *Because* that both facilitates successfully meeting the future in the present and affirms the importance of reading these works together.

On formal world-building, Ahmed has observed that: “Queer becomes a matter of how things appear, how they gather, how they perform, to create the edges of space and worlds” (*Queer* 167). Turning to *And So Forth*, we may think of the work of things appearing, gathering, and performing to create the edges of worlds as composition work. With this in mind, the order and formal positions of *Where and When*, *Rachel Monique*, and *Because* are significant. It is not that *And So Forth* is ordered linearly – other projects simultaneous to these final three come before them. Rather, the three segments were grouped to form the contours and horizon of the book. Connected by an orientation, by an openness to synchronicity and a tendency towards the sea, these segments bleed into each other in chorus and create new meanings.

As mentioned, this final project was purportedly unplanned. In the interview with Desplechin, Calle stated that she did not have plans to take photographs during this second trip to the Pole (Desplechin in bold): **“We’re both setting out for your second trip to the far North and you’re not taking any photos...”** – That’s because others took too many” (406, original emphasis)! The poetic text of *Because* works to explain the presence of this unplanned project in the lines: “because I was with Marie / who doesn’t take pictures, / because I had a camera in my hand, / because that’s what you do / when you’re at the edge / of the world, because of habit” (481). The poetic I, in presenting so many reasons for its own existence, sounds guilty of following its own compulsions. These lines, combined with the interview quote, are further marked by paradox because Calle’s initial reason for not planning to take photographs is that others have taken too many; however, Desplechin does not take photos (who are these photo-zealous others?)

and Calle, aligned with the poetic I, has a camera in hand (why carry a camera if not for photography?). These paradoxes in the poem's first portion effect a game of fiction/reality that lends this segment a fraudulent quality while imbuing the second portion of the poem with a feeling of sincerity.

The two-part untitled poem, each portion on its own page, is presented in plain white text on a black background. The full poem is reconstructed here:

Because I was there,
on the bridge,
because I was with Marie
who doesn't take pictures,
and I had a camera in my hand,
because that's what you do
when you're at the edge
of the world, because of habit,
because of this story
of a passer-by gushing at a baby
in a stroller, whose mother
exclaims, "And you haven't
seen his picture!",
because I won't be back at
the North Pole anytime soon, (Calle, *And So Forth* 481)

because of memories,
because of silence,
because of majesty,
because of day when
in fact it was night,
because of that blue,
the bright sky, the dark sea,
because it was the night
of September 11,
because we were alone,
because I couldn't resist,
because I wanted to believe
in that image,
because you never know. (Calle, *And So Forth* 484)

The anaphora of “because” creates a chant-like rhythm, an explanatory refrain, however unevenly. In the first portion of the poem, the anaphora occurs every 2-5 lines and then accelerates in the second portion to every 1-2 lines, beginning most lines. The first portion of the poem presents with a rational and rationalizing poetic I who offers mundane reasons and causal logic. In the second portion of the poem, the poetic I shifts into acausal connections thereby signaling synchronistic potential. This, in combination with the increased anaphoretic use of “because,” lends the second portion of the poem a

dreamy trance-like quality. It is this latter portion that reads similarly to how the photograph feels – awesome, mystical.

One way to read this sequence, considering *Where and When, Berck* and *Because* as bookends, is as representative of Calle's transformation over time. Calle begins *Berck* still partially oriented towards causal connections and control (part one of the poem); however, Calle leaves the North Pole oriented towards acausal connections and potentiality (part two of the poem). Between these two modes of perceiving and formally at the heart of this transformation is the two-page photograph of the sea – imbuing this image with excessive symbolic value: the sea begins *Berck*; the road to the sea concludes *Berck*; the sea concludes *And So Forth*.

The page of *Where and When, Berck* that signals Calle has arrived in *Berck* includes an installation view photo of the sea (see figure 20). Above it is the text: "It started promisingly. I was taking the train to a seaside station. The cards saw the North, cliffs, the ocean" (Calle, *And So Forth* 348). It is worth noting that Calle's arrival in *Berck* is heralded by an image of the sea and the clairvoyant insight of "North, cliffs, the ocean" (348). While cliffs and ocean are present in this arrival at sea photograph, a more striking connection to the psychic event of Kristen's tarot reading is found in the sea photograph of *Because* where the most northward ocean is framed by cliff-like glaciers.

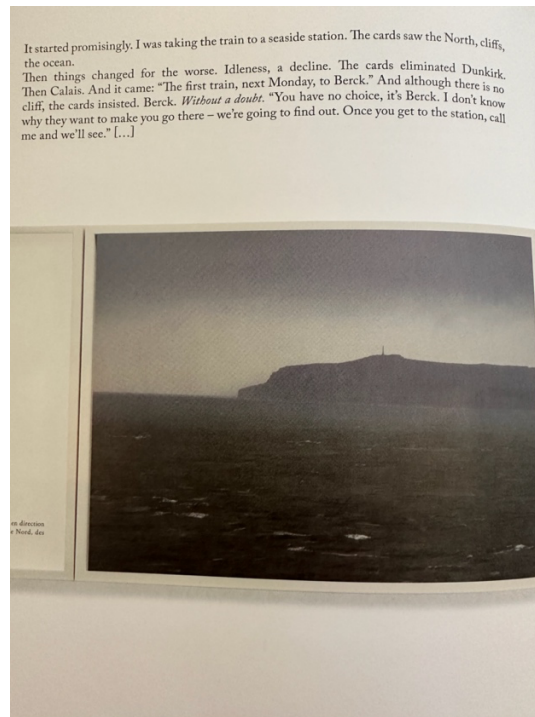


Fig. 20. Installation view photo of the sea.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, p. 348.

Calle offers readers a parasymphathetic transformative experience in the structure of *Because*. We begin in the mundane first poem whose last line ends in a comma and then we flip the page and are struck by the deep blue double-spread photograph of the sea (see figure 21). We pause here, meditative.



Fig. 21. The sea framed by glaciers.
Source: Calle, Sophie. *And So Forth*. Prestel Publishing, 2016, pp. 482-3.

The photograph, situated between poetic text, becomes part of the poem – both pages’ vertical edges flanked by two symmetrical glaciers like the columnal form of the poems. Directed by the framing of the glaciers, we gaze into the open horizon in the center. The sea narrows towards this vanishing point, and the sky too vanishes at this point framed by the glaciers. Two roads, sea and sky, meeting and fleeting at this horizon. When we move forwards, this experience is affirmed by the reverent tone of the second poem, who whispers breathlessly, *yes, this is what we saw, how we felt*. We forget the last two lines of the first poem, “because I won’t be back at / the North Pole anytime soon,” as we are mesmerized by the image. And so, it is nearly impossible to approach the first line of the poem’s second half, “because of the memories,” with the fact of not returning to this place. The photograph captures this place, offering a site of return that frees the reader to experience the poem’s second part innocently, as new or renewed. In this order, Calle

invites the reader to move through emotions with her, proffering a moving experience of the sea and concluding the catalogue with a deep reverence, a certain breathlessness that renews our belief in the horizon.

The concept of the horizon here is furnished with the energy of renewal. In this photograph, the sea and the sky meet one another to die, to disappear as something else. This visual death of each element is transformative, because in their merge they become the horizon. One can see the horizon yet cannot capture it. This rationale of horizons additionally demarcates the possible and impossible of Calle's goal of meeting the future. As I have shown in Calle's works, one can indeed meet the future. That future, however, may lack simultaneity of time and place and may be most easily recognized in a feeling. Where the present and the future merge through synchronicity, time and space suspend by way of becoming unthinkable, allowing one to sense connections across time and space (Jung 103). In these horizontal moments, we glimpse and even greet the future.

For enby individuals, these horizontal moments are critically nourishing. Where present circumstance meets potentiality, as the sea meets the sky, distinctions between temporality and spatiality die, however briefly, and emerge anew as a horizon. Queer futurity, in José Esteban Muñoz's illuminative formulation, asserts that queer people have nothing but the future and so queer is utopian (*Cruising* 1). For Muñoz, traces offer ephemeral evidence of queer's utopianism. A trace of queer utopia might be found in campy art, in the practice of cruising, or in a queer nightclub. My study of futurity locates a similar utopian quality for enby genders; however, new lines emerge with my differing

investment (as in enby genders and queer sexuality may overlap but importantly are not the same).

My concept of enby-futurity, informed by Jung's work on synchronicities, reveals *how* the future manifests in present moments. Like the transformative and comforting effects of synchronistic phenomena documented by Jung and modern psychologists, instances of enby-futurity – experiences of the future now – have potential comfort to offer gender expansive people who may at times feel starved of affirmation and/or unseen. By drawing on synchronicity to think enby-futurity, we needn't solely search for traces as Muñoz formulated. Synchronous phenomena collapse time and space to occur in one present synchronous instance such that there is no need to look back. While traces may be appreciated after the fact, somewhat similarly to second- and third-category synchronistic phenomena, synchronicity offers itself to gender expansive utopias as an active experience ever-unfolding. More precisely, as distinct from traces, synchronistic phenomena are active in that they are not the residue of a past event but rather exist and are realized as a physical event in the present with an acausal connection to a past psychic event. Similarly to Gordon's ghostly matters, this connectedness pulls the past out of the past, enrolling it in the present synchronistic event such that it is active and, in a sense, present versus something to be passively observed from a before time. This is the temporality of enby-futurity.

Calle's art demonstrates enby-futurity by documenting her experiences of being oriented towards the future. What enby-futurity offers to queer and trans studies invested in alternative possibilities is an orientation towards acausal connections that makes the

impossible possibility of enby joy accessible now. By committing to pleasure and recognizing when events are synchronizing, enby folks may access an alternative form of affirmation that they are facing the right direction. This affirming quality can be vital to people who may not receive affirmation elsewhere or may not have access to affirming spaces. Folks in these circumstances may turn to the powerful nonplace of writing, and I hope to live in a world transformed by enby words.

In thinking enby together with Calle and Jung, horizontal and synchronistic experiences may be lived as a moment of unbounded pleasure in which one's gender succeeds in being expressed. We might find these joyous moments of potential in the pleasurable touch of another, in a hand placed just so on the body such that it beckons to and affirms one ineffable experience of gender. Pleasurable touch may even call forth preconscious gender, like how in certain synchronistic phenomena one realizes only after contact that the experience (in preconscious time) aligned with a present gender experience such that the individual met their future then. This is to say, enby pleasure may be found in these moments where time and space collapse. And, in these moments, one may even glimpse a future related to pleasure. There is hope here in my conceptualization – a pleasure hope for the livelihood of gender expansive people that one can be oriented towards as alternative ways of being and perceiving. Many queer and trans scholars have associated queer and trans pleasure with hope, and adrienne maree brown has argued that pleasure is itself a form of activism.²²⁶ A nonbinary analysis of

²²⁶ See brown's *Pleasure Activism* (2019) for a politics of healing and happiness with implications for social justice. See Ahmed's *Living a Feminist Life* (2017) on pleasure in communities and hope. See Juana María Rodríguez's *Sexual Futures, Queer Gestures, and Other Latina Longings* (2014) for a discussion of pleasure in sex, archiving sex, and futurity. This is in no way an exhaustive list; rather, my intent is to offer

Calle's projects adds to hopeful scholarship a new locale: the fourth dimensional site of synchronicity (where time, space, and causality constitute what is three dimensional) as a space where gender expansive pleasure may reside now and then.

Returning to *Because* with hope in mind, the poetic I moves from being governed by circumstance in part one to being moved by the natural world in part two. When moved by the natural world, after describing the hues and feelings captured in the sea photograph, the poetic I makes a choice: "because I wanted to believe." This line can be read as an assertion of will. Where the preceding line, "because I couldn't resist," skirts accountability, the line "because I wanted to believe" reveals the speaker's own desire. In so doing, the poetic I achieves what Calle herself perhaps did not during the *Where and When* projects. The poetic I heads Kristen's directive to Calle to make her own choices as a free agent and let the journey inspire her art. The line following "because I wanted to believe" reads "in that image," and refers to the image of the sea and its horizon. Reading with synchronicity, we recall the portent of the road to the sea photograph from Berck: Calle's future is the sea, whom she met in Berck and will continue to work with in *Voir la mer* (*See the Sea*), a project she was engaged in at the time of *Because* also catalogued in *And So Forth*.²²⁷

This connection between the sea and Calle's mother first became evident in "Where and When, Lourdes," when Calle states: "The sea... Soon I'll take her [Calle's mother] to see the sea" (361). This quote from Lourdes – "see the sea" – transformed into

a starting point of pleasure considered hopefully in different disciplines – a starting point that sparked my interest in hopeful thinking so many years ago.

²²⁷ This timeline situating *Voir la mer* as in process just prior to *Because* is established in Desplechin's interview with Calle (*And So Forth* 406). *Voir la mer* is catalogued in *And So Forth* on pp. 85-104.

the title of the project current to this moment in Calle's life. *Voir la mer* involved recording the reactions of people in Istanbul seeing the sea for the first time. Here, Calle takes strangers, perhaps in lieu of or in honor of her mother, to see the sea. The French title of the project in process at the time of *Because*, *Voir la mer*, comes to life considering that *la mer* (sea) and *la mère* (mother) are sonically interchangeable. When seeing the sea, then, we see Calle's deceased mother alive in her art. And, this connection informs the lines in *Because*: "because of memories, / because of silence." Memories here could allude to *North Pole*, since the last time Calle travelled to the Pole was to bury a photograph of her mother and two of her mother's belongings postmortem. The silence takes us back to the collaged text from *Where and When, Nowhere*, where silence referred to the silent dead who were alive.

Additionally, the poem's second portion mentions "night" twice, first as "because of day when / in fact it was night," and second as "because it was the night." The presence of day at night harkens back to the "cruel night" in *Where and When, Nowhere*, because there is a certain cruelty in a night that is also day. Recall the Intelligence's message in *Nowhere*: "He was sleeping, and you, you were waiting for him, in the cruel night..." (384-5). With *Because*, we may retroactively read the "you" who is waiting "in the cruel night" as a hoping linked to the sleeping deceased. And the second mention of night in the poem uses a definite article before night: "it was *the* night" (my emphasis),

imbuing this day-like night with the mystery of the Intelligence's assertion that a "you," referring to Calle, waits for the dead in the cruel night.²²⁸

The last line of the poem, "because you never know," leaves the reader with a lingering sense of hope and in a state of anticipating the possibility of possibilities. It is as if to say: if you believe, then it may be possible. Believing in the horizon is important to an orientation towards alternative possibilities and openness to acausal connections. The poetic I's hope, present in the horizon image, may be that the dead are the silent alive, just out of reach on the horizon such that Calle may *voir sa mer(e)* in this liminal space.

More importantly, however, the poem very clearly illuminates the orientation of enby-futurity expounded here, such that meeting the future is presented as an existing orientation towards the future and the synchronistic connections in which the future may be experienced in the present. One may be left waiting between these moments but so long as an individual is oriented thusly, the transformative potential for imagined possibilities to become reality exists. Calle's parting gifts to reoriented readers are a testimony to the transformative capacity of fiction, inspiration to believe in the horizon, and a model for seeking impossible possibilities now. These gifts are characteristic of enby-futurity and so advance thinking about enby flourishing. To engage in enby-futurity, one needs an openness to both future possibilities and the possibility of the

²²⁸ Yet another peculiar synchronicity has occurred in my own life as I work on this chapter. The second night referenced is "the night / of September 11." While writing this section of the chapter, which was not written last even though the section falls last, I could not shake the feeling that September 11 must connect to something, because it is so specific. While I have not found a conclusive connection in my research, one has appeared in my life. On the night of September 11, I finished writing the first draft of this chapter. Completely by chance! – as anyone who has worked on a project of this length will tell you it is impossible to identify the last writing day of a first draft. This momentous day never reveals itself to me until after I've typed what I come to later realize are the last words of this iteration. So, there I was, in that moment of realization, struck by the additional revelation that my work-in-progress, like Calle's *Because*, concretized on "the night / of September 11."

future manifesting in the present. The temporality of enby-futurity, like that of synchronicity, collapses then and now. In this way, enby-futurity imagines that it is possible for enby people to access today the pleasurable worlds they hope are on the horizon.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored how queer and trans imaginaries in French representational works offer alternative possibilities for ways of being, identifying, and relating with others. I have identified three features shared between these works: disorientation reorienting narrative bodies and spaces, and readers and viewers; the willful prioritization of one's own pleasure; and a robust capacity for invention. My research has demonstrated that fiction (as narrative and/or as modes of living deemed "impossible" by cis-heteropatriarchy) has the capacity to *transform* reality. Each chapter has spoken to how transformations may result from an insistence that alternative ways of being and relating are possible in the present. Each author has divulged representational strategies for making alternative possibilities feel salient: Rachilde wrote about the possibility for reorientation, Céline Sciamma affectively engaged viewer empathy in film, and Sophie Calle lived the experiment of her art. What I have called enby-futurity is invested in transformation and the making of worlds that are hospitable to queer and transgender people. In this way, this project is hopeful that its illuminations of the futurities proposed by these works may contribute to reshaping the stories we tell ourselves about what is and is not possible. Stories, as I have demonstrated, have the power to make worlds.

In France, reality transformed in 2021 when the prominent dictionary *Le Petit Robert* added the gender-neutral pronoun *iel* (a combination of *il* (he) and *elle* (she)) to its online dictionary, defining *iel* as a third person pronoun in the singular and plural to

reference a person of any gender (Cohen and Gallois).²²⁹ Director-general of *Le Petit Robert*, Charles Bimbenet, stated that the dictionary's mission is to account for the evolution of the French language. Put in other words, Bimbenet is asserting that the French language has evolved to necessitate the inclusion *iel* whether people like it or not. The once nonexistent pronoun *iel* is now reality. Indeed, a myriad of gender-neutral pronouns circulate in spoken French, and including *iel* in a dictionary would appear to be a natural progression in a language beginning to acknowledge that a binary gender system is too incomplete to capture the expansiveness and multiplicity of gender experiences. The availability of *iel* in this prominent dictionary is especially significant in France, a country so serious about its language that it has a counsel dedicated to the preservation of the French language called the Académie française. This triumph of gender-neutral language belongs to the language speakers who bravely keep these terms alive in their lives and speech as well as to the allied people who listen to them.

This step forward was met with loud backlash, however. The education minister Jean-Michel Blanquer criticized the addition of *iel* to *Le Petit Robert* as a manipulation of the French language and *wokisme* – a term imported from the United States referring to wokism (also spelled wokeism) that, in both national contexts, is more commonly used in the institutional contexts of universities, media, and politics rather than everyday speech (Cohen and Gallois). Blanquer's remarks resonate with the idea in France that America's gender and racial politics are an assault on and threat to French universalism. French

²²⁹ Similarly, Kris Knisely has spearheaded the Gender-just language education project which offers resources for French language educators about gender-neutral language. This project testifies to a growing investment in using and navigating language in ways that acknowledge and affirm gender variant identities. Furthermore, language as the site of this investment speaks to its capacities to affect subject orientation and how, through language, the social constructs worlds. We may think of language as a site of possibility.

universalism is the Republican belief that because the values of liberty, equality, and fraternity are intrinsic to one's identity as a French citizen, this identity transcends all other identities (i.e. race, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.). First lady Brigitte Macron joined Blanquer in the backlash, asserting that there are only two gender pronouns: masculine and feminine (Cohen and Gallois). Even President Emmanuel Macron joined the chorus against social science theories imported from the United States (Cohen and Gallois).

My work in each chapter has testified to the presence of gender-expansive identities in France as far back as the nineteenth century.²³⁰ The historical existence of French people who experienced genders beyond the binary framework contests the idea that nonbinary gender identities are a twenty-first-century American import. Predating the inclusion of *iel* in *Le Petit Robert*, the representational works analyzed in this dissertation offer their own modes for expressing nonbinary gender identities in French. In this way, cultural productions are fertile grounds for understanding how expansive gender identities have been expressed in France. At present, trans-affirming cultural productions circulate in both France and the United States, and I believe that an international exchange of trans-affirming stories could be a hopeful affair.

In the context of the United States, transgender people have begun to *transform* reality. New possibilities have emerged: an "X" gender marker is available on American passports, there are third boxes on various types of institutional gender identification

²³⁰ I am referring here to the temporal scope of my project. Expressions of gender variance existed in France before the nineteenth century. Rachel Mesch has identified expressions of trans identities in French representational works predating the nineteenth century ("Trans" 10).

forms, and popular media motions to include gender expansive people and characters.²³¹

These transformations were born in no small part because gender expansive people persist in expressing their experiences of gender. The inclusion of options for self-identification beyond binary genders will hopefully reorient gender ideologies. When trans and enby people insist on the reality of their gender experiences, the binary construction of gender is exposed as a violent fiction in a topsy-turvy motion.

We may look back to nineteenth-century France, to the gender expansive individuals assigned-female at birth (AFAB) who obtained pants permits when legal permission was required for AFAB people to wear pants in public.²³² One pants permit at a time, the prohibition on pants was eventually retired. This is not to say that these individuals single handedly abolished the ban on AFAB people wearing pants by obtaining permits; rather, it is to say that their commitment to expressing and experiencing their own lived realities (not only deemed fictitious but made illegal) worked upon reality in transformative ways.

What we learn from the retrospective turn is that movements can and sometimes do gain momentum. Small motions set things in motion. In the case of the French pronoun *iel*, there is reason to hope that the motion to include *iel* in *Le Petit Robert* will shift the gender ideologies implicit in a lexicon. Similarly, we may consider the works gathered in this project as small motions that set changes in motion. By gathering these

²³¹ Many institutions, including educational and medical institutions, are changing their documentation forms to reflect the existences of transgender people.

There is still a long way to go regarding media representations of gender expansiveness. As the American writers Micah Rajunov and Scott Duane point out: “Mainstream portrayals of nonbinary people are scarce. In a ten-year content analysis of thirteen of the most widely circulated U.S. newspapers, only 1.2 percent of paragraphs that mentioned a transgender person were also about a nonbinary individual” (xxi).

²³² See Mesch (*Before*) for biographical accounts of historical figures who obtained pants permits.

small motions, this project hopes to give the queer- and transgender-affirming possibilities imagined by these works additional residences in scholarly discourse and the material world.

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