Spaces of Critique & Transformation in *Bande de filles*
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ABSTRACT

In Sciamma's 2014 *Bande de filles*, cinematic articulations of space have multiple significant functions. Drawing from Augé's "non-place" and Deleuze's "any-space-whatever," a close reading of *Bande de filles'* cinematography synthesizes the film's blend of *banlieue* cinema, bildungsroman, and superhero archetypes with notions about gender and identity within an anticolonial critique. This synthesis, in turn, contributes to our appreciation of emerging conversations about French identity and its intersections with gender, urban space and the legacy of colonialism.

Keywords: Anti-colonialism, banlieue, cinema, film, feminism, Céline Sciamma, urban non-space

Espacios de crítica y transformación en *Bande de filles*

RESUMEN

En *Bande de filles* de Sciamma, (2014) las articulaciones cinematográficas del espacio tienen múltiples funciones significativas. Partiendo del "no-lugar" de Augé y del "cualquier-espacio-lo que sea" de Deleuze, una lectura atenta de la cinematografía de Bande de filles sintetiza la mezcla de la película de arquetipos de cine *banlieue*, *bildungsroman* y superhéroe con nociones sobre género e identidad dentro de una crítica anticolonial. Esta síntesis, a su vez, contribuye a nuestra apreciación de las conversaciones emergentes sobre

la identidad francesa y sus intersecciones con el género, el espacio urbano y el legado del colonialismo.

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《女孩帮》中批判和转变的空间

摘要

导演席安玛的2014年作品《女孩帮》（Bande de　filles）中，关于空间的电影艺术表达具有多个重要功能。基于奥西(Augé)的"非场所"（non-place）和德勒兹（Deleuze）的"any-space-whatever"概念，本文对《女孩帮》的电影摄影术进行细致解读，用反殖民式批判视角下关于性别和认同的观念，与电影对"郊区"电影艺术、成长小说以及超级英雄原型的整合进行综合分析。这篇综合性论文反过来帮助我们理解关于法国认同及其和性别、城市空间、以及殖民主义影响之间的交叉（intersections）的新兴讨论。

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M ichel de Certeau's distinction between "space" (*espace*) and "place" (*lieu*) is a fascinating one. A *place* is characterized by an order in which elements are distributed in "proper" coexistence; it is a concept ruled by stability, its contents set in relation to the powers that be. In contradistinction to this entropic arrangement, *space* is an effect that arises from a location's polyvalency, its elements in constant movement, conflict and rearrangement.[1] But if *place* is a stable set of coordinates that keep things "where they are supposed to be," what kind of reversals may occur in a *non-place*? And if *space* is a complex equation of time, speed and direction, what combination may give rise to *any-space-whatever*? What if these notions coincided, and therein one were to find a young black girl as full of potential as she is of uncertainty? This is—or could be—Marieme, the protagonist of Céline Sciamma's 2014 coming-of-age film, *Bande de filles,* which vividly depicts places whose properties are so overdetermined as to be oppressive, but which also portrays spaces whose vectors are so fluid that their state is one of potential, if not perpetual, transformation.

Marieme is a French teenager of African descent and lives in a poor suburban apartment complex outside of Paris, one of the (in)famous *cités*. She struggles academically and socially in a milieu where the male gaze is made manifest, her mother

is mostly absent, and her elder brother rules the household with physical and verbal abuse. While in despair about being tracked to a vocational school rather than "being like everyone else," Marieme is approached by a gang of girls, the titular *bande*: Lady, Fily, and Adiatou invite Marieme to join them for a day in the city center. This is no innocent shopping trip; the girls clash with other gangs, shoplift, drink, and do drugs in a rented hotel room. All of this seems as much rebellion as escape, but the bonding moment with gang is profound. At the hotel, Lady encourages Marieme to stand up for herself and gives her a necklace with the name Vic - for Victory.

This is the first step in a series of transformative moments for Vic/Mariem as she explores different ways of defining herself, many of which we can understand as donning and then shedding a costume or mask. She brawls in an empty lot to reclaim the lost honor of her friend; she takes charge of her own sexuality and defies her brother to sleep with the boy that she likes, Ismaël; she leaves the *bande* and runs away from home to deliver drugs; she fights with Ismaël and ultimately breaks up with him over his patronizing objections to her independent (if dangerous and illegal) behavior. Ultimately, her journey comes full circle. Having fled the lecherous drug-dealer, Abou, Marieme returns to her family's apartment building. She uses the intercom to be buzzed in but cannot bring herself to open the door. She leaves in tears but finally regains her resolve, straightens her shoulders and walks away off camera to an uncertain future, one that is at least her own.

A close analysis of film form and the ways it is used to depict place and space in *Bande de filles* helps to illustrate Sciamma's anticolonial feminism: her method of cataloging locations of masculinist control in the Parisian *cité* and then using of cin-

ematic practices to transform them, mirroring the evolution of the movie's protagonist. Of particular interest is what Sciamma places before the camera as well as the way she employs cinematography to examine it closely, frame it, and associate ideas. To begin this analysis, it is necessary to more closely examine anthropologist Marc Augé's definition of a "non-place" and its implications. For Augé, among the most significant attributes of contemporary urban life are anonymous, undifferentiated and homogenizing locations like hotels chains, metro stops and supermarkets, all of which are characterized by a dominance of wordless communication and commerce unmediated by personal interaction (*Non-places* 78). Non-places in *Bande de filles* can be empirical, ironic, or anthropological, and it is this latter, paradoxical category that illustrates the "visible rules" of masculinist surveillance in the film's dysphoric milieu. Three characters embody this surveillance and domination: Marieme's brother, Djibril; her love-interest, Ismaël; and her drug-dealing boss, Abou.

Yet even the rigid, violent "proper" of a non-place is malleable. Close-ups, shallow-focus long shots, *hors-champs*, and tracking shots can transform a super-determined place into any-space-whatever, which philosopher Gilles Deleuze defines as a "perfectly singular space, which has simply lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its proper parts, so that the linkages may be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure site of the possible" (109). The fade-to-black transitions that punctuate and organize *Bande de filles'* narrative are the film's quintessential embodiment of this notion, codifying a grammar of transformation that destabilizes the masculinist "proper" of non-places and illustrates Marieme's burgeoning agency and evolving sense of self.

Finally, taking into account Sciamma's stated goals for the film's message and form, along with the provocative language of its critical response in the press, the eventual aim here is to build upon Claire Mouflard's insightful analysis of Sciamma's "artistic anticolonial practice of feminism" (115), expanding upon an examination of the film's characters and narrative to better appreciate its simultaneous critique of suburban non-places and deployment of any-spaces-whatever in order to both describe Marieme's journey of self-discovery in a specific milieu and also to empower every young woman like her in every place and space.

NON-PLACES

Indeed, studying symbolization and its role in the construction of individual and collective identities is an important objective of Marc Augé's work (Colleyn & Dozon 28). In his 1992 *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity*, Augé champions an "anthropology of the near" (7), shifting the object of his analyses from France's former colonies to the urban spaces of Paris: its metro stations, airport terminals, and peripheral highways.[2] Augé's "near" is marked by "supermodernity,"—a globalized world in which technology, economics, and politics merge to transform history into current events, spaces into images, and the individual into a mere gaze (Augé, *Sense* 103). This contemporary condition may lead to a strange kind of collective imaginary, for as the old myths of modernity have crumbled and faded, nothing has come to take their place except a growing indistinction between reality and fiction characterized by an overabundance of disconnected images and ideas, a symbolic landscape ill-suited to create a stable universe of shared signification (Colleyn & Dozon 28). Instead, Augé assigns to supermodernity three excesses: that of events (the 24-hour news cycle), that of

space (cookie-cutter urban and suburban locations of transportation and commerce), and that of time (the compulsion to ascribe meaning to every moment) (*Non-places* 40).

Excess of space, ironically, leads to one of the most significant attributes of supermodernity: the non-place (*non-lieu*). This concept stands in contradistinction to "anthropological place," which is a site of profound origin, and of active belonging and being that Augé describes as "one occupied by the indigenous inhabitants who live in it, cultivate it, defend it, mark its strong points and keep its frontiers under surveillance, but who also detect in it the traces of chthonian or celestial powers, ancestors or spirits which populate and animate it private geography" (*Non-places* 42). Although places and non-places are "porous" and exist more as poles of spectrum than distinct categories (O'Bierne 42), non-places are quite different from *lieux de mémoire*. A property and product of supermodernity, they can include locations as heterogenous as hotel chains, holiday clubs, refugee camps and supermarkets, but they are linked by a dominance of wordless communication and commerce unmediated by personal interaction (Augé, *Non-places* 78).

Indeed, supermodern non-places are more than "defined [...] by the words and texts they offer us"—rather, they displace the personal in favor of an anonymous and anonymizing authority; they are "spaces in which individuals are supposed to interact only with texts, whose proponents are not individuals but 'moral entities' or institutions" (Augé, *Non-places* 96). Users of non-places, whom one might more accurately describe as "passers-through," create a shared but anonymous temporary identity, for they are in constant "contractual relations" with the non-place (and, by extension, the powers that govern it), contracts that can be represented by

such things as ticket booths, shopping carts, and turnstiles (101).[3] This imposed identity connects to a final characteristic of non-places: because of their imposed contractual nature, "the user of the non-place is always required to prove his [sic] innocence" (102). A user's identity is checked by gatekeepers of various sorts: key cards, drivers' licenses, parking passes, boarding tickets, etc.

Augé's concept this concept has "had a significant impact across the humanities and social sciences" (Merriman 17). It is perhaps such a popular tool because of what it can reveal by its deconstructive nature: the non-place turns a modern wishlist on its head. Who wouldn't want to be more productive, better informed, and have more elbow room in an environment tailored to one's needs? Augé interprets these excesses as creating spaces not of leisure, joy, or particular meaning—but quite the opposite: the urban landscape is most characterized by carbon-copied locations of quiet power.

NON-PLACES IN *BANDE DE FILLES*

Non-places in *Bande de filles* are largely a matter of *mise-en-scène* and tend to fall into one of three categories: empirical, ironic, and anthropological. The term "empirical non-place" is Augé's own ("Retour" 171) and refers to locations that easily fit within his original concept. In Sciamma's film, such locations include the anonymous office building where Marieme's mother works, or the mini-golf range were the *bande* escapes to play, a dull copy of any such location from nearly anywhere in the world whose use is clearly dictated by the very arrangement of its elements.

Of particularly import is Marieme's school. Early in the movie, the camera frames her in a medium close-up, just her head and shoulders, wearing a purple hoodie and a grey t-shirt. The

distant wall behind her, quite out of focus, is a soft institutional cream with a thin mauve stripe running horizontally across its entirety. She looks slightly off-camera right, a classic shot/reverse-shot set up—save for the lack of a clear interlocutor. That clarity never comes; the entire scene, Marieme converses with a disembodied female voice, one that calmly, firmly, and anonymously declares the "rules" of Marieme's future with a series of denials and challenges. The young woman's grades are too low to continue high school; she has to select some kind of vocational training. Marieme objects, but no, she can't repeat this year of school a third time. No, it's not the school's fault. No, pleading won't help. When Marieme refuses to even consider choosing a vocational school, she pleads "I want to be like everyone else," she says. "Normal." The voice replies firmly: "Well, you should have thought about that before now." Cut to—a bland and anonymous hallway, darkly lit with the same institutional cream paint and chipped blue accents. There are no posters, no other students or faculty; the only sign visible simply marks the exit with a bland green pictogram. Angrily, Marieme continues to obey the contract, pushing through the exit doors and then, cut to—a long shot of the school's exterior courtyard, empty of people, containing only inflexible concrete, steel and glass.

It is important to note that labeling somewhere a non-place can also be subjective. What is just another Starbucks to a customer can be a vital place of belonging to a long-time employee. For Marieme and her friends, the shopping mall and a hotel room they visit are what I call "ironic" non-places. Purely through Augé's lens, a mall's squawking televisions, mass-produced goods, and quietly racist store employees are clear evidence of its quiet, anonymizing power. Yet for the *bande*, it's an outing of excitement, joy, bonding, and economic resistance. Equally, the hotel room they stay

in (and return to) is a place of belonging, despite the idea that most such locations are crushingly homogenous. Far from non-places of anonymous and anonymizing power, Marieme and company experience these settings as singular destinations of temporary escape from the "anthropological non-places" they inhabit.

Anthropological places are, more colloquially, "home." But where Marieme and her peers live, with its shadowed court-yard and aggressive masculine surveillance, is more prison than place of profound identity and belonging. After the energy of the opening sequence, *Bande de filles* declares itself with bombast; the "Néon" theme by ParaOne blares, and then fades with the image into to a night-time street. With lively, almost raucous chatter, a large group of young women emerges into the light, moving towards the camera in a long-distance shot. They are recognizable as the same people in the previous American football montage. The camera begins to track backwards, keeping pace with them.

Cut to—the group from behind; the camera tracks to follow them as they mount a short flight of steps. The lively chatter continues for a moment but begins to fade—then it stops abruptly as the group arrives a concrete entrance. Beyond that shadowed but clearly masculine figures at this portal, a lit building is just barely discernible. The architecture and spatial décor here clearly place us with a Parisian *cité*. The young women's chatter is replaced with masculine murmurs from off-screen. The group carefully files past the first male shadow who is sitting on a second set of steps that lead into a large courtyard, typical of the *grands ensembles*.

Cut to—the group from ahead. The women now all walk in silence. The camera tracks backward again, keeping pace with their advance. There is a soft set of "Byes" (*Salut*) and a

responding chorus; a small group peels away while the others continue to traverse the dark courtyard. Next is an ominous insert: three looming male silhouettes in a long shot from below, watching like prison guards. The camera tracks left, its movement and position mimic the young women's point of view.

Depicting the group from the front again, the camera once more moves backwards to keep them in a medium shot from the thighs up. Under the watchful eyes of their male wardens, the women exchange knowing and nervous glances. There is another call and response of "Byes" and a few more young women peel away. The remaining group is small enough to count easily now: only five survivors. Cut to the women from behind, the camera still tracking. A final chorus of "Byes" and three more peel away—now there are only two. From off-screen, a male voice calls "Farida!" Cut to—a medium close-up of "Farida" and Marieme from the front. The heckler calls again, and the two women exchange uncomfortable glances. The male voice calls a third time and Farida mutters to herself that he should go and shut his face (*"Vas-y, ta guele"*). She and Marieme say their final "*Salut.*"

Cut to a medium-long-shot of a colonnade at the base of an apartment building; in silhouette, the two survivors separate, and Marieme mounts a third and final set of steps. The gauntlet has been run—she arrives at its end in the fluorescent light alone. Cut to a medium close-up of Marieme from the front, advancing towards the camera. The courtyard behind her is a soft blur as the camera tracks backward to keep pace. Shots from behind and front alternate as she walks, always tracking with her movement along the colonnade: down one side, around a corner, and along the back of the building— to discover a young black man, later identified as Ismaël.

After some light flirtation with Ismael, and the revelation of Marieme's name, she walks to the building entrance. There is still the sound of young men in the courtyard talking aggressively among themselves. Marieme buzzes up and declares "*C'est moi.*" It's me, she says: her journey of self-identification begins.

This sequence is composed almost entirely of medium tracking shots (the young women from the thighs up). The camera alternates its position either in front of or following the group, but it is always moving to keep pace with them, as if the audience were part of the crowd. It creates a sense of continuous space, that is moreover a clear representation of an Augéan non-place: its features are unremarkable, the "signs" are ominous male silhouettes, the woman are effectively nameless, and the change in their volume and mannerisms demonstrates how much control is being asserted here. Even Marieme's identity is checked before she is granted ultimate access to her own home.

THE "VISIBLE RULES" OF MASCULINIST SURVEILLANCE

The presence of all of these kinds of non-places in *Bande de filles* serves to illustrate a persistent dysphoria in which its characters exist, one that manifests the "surveillance" of anthropological place in sinister ways. Surrounded mostly by non-places that enforce a temporary, homogenous identity, Marieme and her friends are denied escape into private and empowering zones of family and repose, for as Sciamma declares: "Misogynists are everywhere. The *cités* are a territory where the rules are more visible, but they exist everywhere, in every setting" (Laïreche).[4]

These rules seem to be:

1. Women don't matter unless/until men want them to.

2. Women must unquestioningly obey figures of authority (who are mostly men).

3. Women must be sexually pure, but also be sexually available upon command; furthermore, this availability must be exclusive to a single man.

4. Consequences for disobedience include verbal abuse, physical harm, and exile.

It's interesting to consider these rules in light of de Certeau's "place," which is centered upon notions of order and a side-by-side arrangement of elements (117). What is missing from this static "configuration of positions" is a clear sense of just who establishes a place's "proper" (117). Like in Augé's non-place, these mandates seem to emerge from the place itself, as if naturally.

Indeed, these rules are never overtly codified or declared. But they are pervasive, and it's clear that both the film and its characters understand the "Parisian periphery as a symptomatic postmodern space within which the nomadic itineraries of women have been annihilated in favor of a controlled, prison-like surveillance system" (Mouflard 113). Though it may be tempting here to call upon Foucault's panopticon, the metaphor doesn't quite fit. Marieme and her *bande* are not intermittently surveilled; they are constantly surrounded by Augean "texts" that homogenize their identities and control their interactions and movements.

These texts are not billboards or ATM screens, but men, and *Bande de filles* develops three male characters in particular:

Marieme's brother, Djibril, her love-interest, Ismaël, and the drug-dealer and pimp, Abou. Each of these men is an exemplar of the imbrication of surveillance, colonialist thought, and masculinism. For the fundamental power inequities and racist and misogynist categorization inherent to colonialism required carefully watching both colonists and the colonized (Sa'di 152; Smith 21). This practice continues today, as post-colonial nation-building and the inequities of colonialism are intertwined with the development of modern surveillance systems (Ogasawara 727), systems which are often aimed at migrants and other subalterns (Berda 629). Moreover, toxic masculinity and political power are tightly imbricated with this legacy, where powerful masculine figures rule by violence, exceptionalism, and a blurred distinction between governing and civilizing (Baker 246). In *Bande de filles*, one objective of this colonialist and masculinist surveillance is the control of Marieme's sexuality, and this control is systematically associated with the use of *hors-champ*, creating a visual metaphor for misogyny's paradoxical unspoken omnipresence in the film's setting.

Marieme and her sisters live in fear of their brother's wrath, and for good reason. Large and imposing, his deep voice delivers gruff commands, just before his hands surge from out of frame to deliver physical abuse. These characteristics make Djibril an obvious target of feminist critique; he is the personification of toxic masculinity, for he sees Marieme's sexuality as a liability—and not for her, but for him. Her sexual purity (or at least the public perception of that purity) reflects upon his status in the local community, which in turn seems to be at least partially determined by his ability to control the women in his household. Djibril is reacting to a larger context of social aggression and venting his anxiety upon Marieme, an emotion that he has only ever learned to express

through violence—which one could consider to be an ironic parallel with Marieme and her *bande*, who also express their own anxieties and frustrations through verbal and physical violence.

Ismaël seems in many ways the opposite Djibril. His voice is soft, his bearing timid. He internalizes his anxiety, though he is clearly subject to the same "charter" of masculinist domination as Djibril (Sciamma "Je vois").[5] While Ismaël plays an important role in Marieme's development, helping her to explore the sensual side of her sexuality, in the end he becomes both powerless and patronizing. He is unwilling to openly defy Djibril, and unable to convince Marieme to make a new life with just him. She sees through his romantic gesture to run away together; it's not devotion or love that motivates him, but rather a hollow sense of chivalry.

Like Isamël, Abou offers Marieme a kind of escape and, along with it, a new identity. Interestingly, being in his employ enables Marieme to simultaneously exploit her sexual appeal when she is working (cf. the red dress drug delivery) and to adopt a gender performance that mutes her physical sexual attributes when she is off duty. However, it seems almost inevitable that Abou is less interested in Marieme as a mule than as a (non-consenting) sexual partner.

Beyond the common concern with controlling Marieme's sexuality, the aesthetic representation of these characters makes significant use of *hors-champ*. As Marieme innocuously plays a video game, we hear Djibril arrive. He demands the controller and orders Marieme to bed. When she resists, his reaction is powerful—his upper body surges into frame as he slaps the back of her head and wrests the controller from her grip. There is no reason or conversation here, just the sheer deployment of brute strength and it is in this context

that we understand a later conversation where Djibril warns Marieme away from Ismaël under the guise of maintaining her reputation (and his own). While Ismaël himself is often figured in the center of the image, his sexual desire for Marieme is also depicted by his hand emerging from the top of the frame to caress and undress her. The parallel with Djibril is unsettling, a comparison that continues with Ismaël's weak offer to marry, or at least run away with, Marieme in some misguided attempt to save her from Abou and a dissolute life. The association of drug-dealer Abou with hors-champs reverses the procedure of intrusion and then control but may be all the more powerful for it. Abou spends not a little time appearing to help Marieme, providing employment and housing, methods of escape from Djibril's and Ismaël's domination. So, when Marieme is dancing at a party with one of her co-workers (a woman Abou pimps out), it is truly unsettling for him to slip into frame from behind, pinning her between his body and the other woman and demanding sexual favors. Once again, Marieme's quest for freedom and self-identity stumbles, and she flees —this time, back to her housing complex, but not back home.

Hors-champs can have many connotations, but in the aesthetic unity it gives these scenes Sciamma demonstrates that misogyny doesn't just lurk in the shadows of *Bande de filles'* visual universe, but rather it is omnipresent, a pattern of behavior that literally shapes Marieme's path.

ANY-SPACES-WHATEVER

If non-places in *Bande de filles* are largely a matter of what is placed before the camera, its any-spaces-whatever are an effect that arises from the way in which the camera frames, focuses, and associates what is seen. Gilles Deleuze's two

tomes on cinema have less overt political engagement, but a much wider scope than Augé's "anthropology of the near." Rather, Deleuze seeks a total philosophy of film, a language to describe cinematic form and comprehend its potential as a reflection of human thought. It's a grand, winding work that theorists are still teasing apart more than three decades after its publication. One of its most enduring contributions is the notion of any-space-whatever (*espace-quelconque*): "A perfectly singular space, which has simply lost its homogeneity, that is, the principle of its metric relations or the connection of its proper parts, so that the linkages may be made in an infinite number of ways. It is a space of virtual conjunction, grasped as pure site of the possible" (Deleuze 109).[6]

This conception of cinematic space may at first appear most at home in the abstract experimental films that abound with time-images and crystalline regime, but any-spaces-whatever are a product of film form that can appear in nearly any movie. For Deleuze, the concept begins with the close-up, a technique to which he assigns three conventional functions: individuality, socializing, and relational or community (141). However, it achieves these often by abstracting its subject (usually the human face) from all spatiotemporal components (Bogue 48). This decontextualization "extracts affects " (50); it imbues the cinematic image with particular emotive power that Deleuze parallels with religious iconography (50). Sciamma's propensity to stay close to her subjects illustrates these functions and their paradoxical effect. Marieme is alone in her school, even when speaking with an instructor. The camera's unflinching gaze simultaneously exalts her expressions and isolates her. Yet when it lingers on her shy flirtations with Ismael she is connecting—socializing. When Lady gazes into the camera, lip-syncing to Beyoncé's "Diamonds," the shot creates a complicated relationship

between the character and the audience, bringing us into the bonding experience of the hotel room. In their framing and composition, all of these moments abstract their subject from her surroundings. The emotional affect often overpowers a clear sense of space and time. Where is Marieme? Who is she talking to? Why is Lady suddenly bathed in blue? What does her intense stare mean? Where is this place? Where are the other girls? No longer grounded in a clear place and time, anything could happen.

However, the close-up is not the only way to construct any-space-whatever; indeed, it can be seen in the shadows of German expressionism, the lyrical abstraction of Dreyer, Bresson, and Hitchock, and the riotous color of Varda or Antonini—wherever film form decontextualizes space itself, disrupting conventional human vision and logic (Rizzo 76). Sciamma achieves this effect with shallow-focus long shots and careful framing. The very first image of the film is a disorienting one—a blurred riot of gold, black and red as amorphous forms bound slowly towards the camera. It takes a few moments for these forms to become clear: players of American football in full uniforms and gear. (Here, a sense of spatial disorientation gives way to a cultural one. Isn't this a French film?) A little more than halfway through the movie, after a cut-to-black transition, the screen is filled by a blurred field of white with soft specks of color; slowly, the camera tracks left to reveal Marieme, and then the *bande*, and then even more young women, all of whom seem to be having a wonderful time. It is only when the film cuts to a very long shot of the courtyard around *La Défense* that the location and situation of this scene becomes clear. Until that moment, again, anything is possible.

The very last scene of the film makes particularly powerful use of this technique. Marieme has walked away from the en-

trance to her family's apartment building; the camera, once
following behind her, now continues past her, but maintains
its focal distance. Instead of a crisp urban landscape, there are
only mottled blotches of white, blue, and green. It is into this
"pure site of the possible" that Marieme emerges, stepping
back into frame and perfectly in focus; she dries her tears,
sets her shoulders in determination, and walks into the fu-
ture, transformed. Importantly, this transformed state is just
as fluid as the soft-focus horizon that is the film's ultimate
image: "This is no moral to the story," says Sciamma, "The
ending can seem strange but anything can happen, it leaves
place for a bunch of things" (Laïreche).[7] The film may end,
but Marieme's story continues, ever-changing.

TRANSITIONS

The transitions mentioned above have particular impor-
tance. Sciamma divides her film into five parts (one
is tempted to consider them "acts" in the neoclassical
sense), signaling the transition from one to the next with
a pulsating electronic theme (Para One's "Néon"), and a
cut to black. This interstitial, filled only with darkness and
a sound like a rapid heartbeat, is the movie's quintessential
any-space-whatever, and it is interesting to explore the trans-
formations that occur in these virtual conjunctions by exam-
ining the shots that immediately precede and follow them.

For the first transition, Marieme is hunched over the sink in
her kitchen, washing dishes, speaking briefly with her moth-
er, and pocketing a knife (to use against her brother, per-
haps?). The transition proper begins with a medium close-up
of the back of her head—already an unconventional use of
this technique. As the staccato beats of "Néon" fade in, the
camera tracks backward, and Marieme's posture grows more

upright, more defiant. Cut to black. Hold on the black frame for 14 seconds as the music continues to throb. The music fades—cut to a field of blue green bisected by a lighter line of the same color. A shadow appears from off-camera right, and the field moves, almost a cinematic wipe: the field is an extreme close-up of an elevator door! Marieme, still seen from behind, mirroring the earlier shot, steps into frame and turns to face the camera as the elevator door slides closed.

This process repeats three more times, with some variation. The second transition visually parallels Marieme's memory of Lady's defeat (especially the latter's prone, fetal-position body) with a close up of a sweatshirt zipper, one which is slowly, desirously, undone by a hand reaching in from off screen. The third transition features Marieme (now Vic) from behind again, this time in Ismaël's bedroom; she takes control of her sexuality and their relationship, and the musical theme does not begin until after the cut to black. When the film returns to the light, it is the soft-focus field of white and grey outside *La Défense* examined above. The fourth transition begins with a roving camera that traces the sleeping *bande* in the hotel room and ends with Marieme now absent. After the cut to black, the next image is a close-up of a red-carpeted stairway and black heels in a golden light. A very long take follows those shoes up the steps to a landing, finding Marieme, from behind once again, in a red dress and white wig. The take continues through a loud, posh party as Marieme finds her client and completes her delivery of illicit drugs.

Formally, all of these transitions feature close-ups, Marieme from behind, people and body parts emerging from off camera, and long-take tracking shots. This is the vocabulary and grammar of Marieme's transformative decisions, and it should not be surprising to associate them with any-spaces-

whatever. For when this element appears in conventional narrative films, it often establishes an "intensive grounding of the characters [who traverse] its coordinates from perception to action" (Deamer 86). Indeed, any-spaces-whatever often emerge when a character makes an existential choice, "choosing to choose" (Bogue 50).

CONCLUSION

Sciamma herself has said a number of interesting things about what she wanted to do with *Bande de filles* and how she went about this cinematic project. The film was always a matter of critical engagement, and place and space were integral to its critique: "It was a conscious decision that the form of engagement of the film would include choices about mise-en-scène, including color, creating beautiful images, and circulating motifs" (Sciamma, "Je vois").[8] The aesthetics of place and space were essential for Sciamma because they were tied to the people at the center of her story: "With this film, I wanted to survey (*arpenter*) the space. I found nothing more interesting in France today than to watch these girls that I passed every day in the streets. I wanted to speak with them, to learn to know them" (Laïreche).[9] There are two interesting things for us to consider with this last statement. Firstly, the term *arpenter* is ambiguous in French; it can mean both "to take the measure" of a space, but also to "roam" it, and Sciamma's camera both roams and measures the Parisian landscape. Secondly, Sciamma depicts her ultimate objective, to "learn to know" the young women of the *cités* (*apprendre à les connaître*), in a fashion that replaces masculinist and colonialist notions of surveillance, violence, and control with a humble acknowledgement of the humanity of her subject(s), setting up *Bande de filles* to acknowledge Chandra Talpade Mohanty's criticism of "the production of

the 'other' or 'Third World Woman' as a singular, monolithic subject" (17), and to answer Mohanty's call for an "antiracist feminist framework, anchored in decolonization and committed to an anticapitalist critique" (3).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, this approach did not sit well with some.

Bande de filles had a mixed reception with French critics, many of whom were openly uncomfortable with, or even suspicious of, a white woman from an affluent neighborhood making a movie about the experience of black girls who live in the shadows of the *cités*. Writing for the *Nouvel Observateur*'s website, Vincent Malausa bemoans that *Bande de filles* is "a girl-movie like any other," filled with clichés that reduce a serious subject to inconsequential fun. He critiques the film for the incongruity of its desire to be "cool" and "natural" with a heavily artificial production and a heavy-handed social message. While Romain Le Vern, with TF1 applauds Sciamma for featuring under-represented minorities and capturing the "brilliant spontaneity" of the cast, he accuses her of merely sketching characters, which reduces the potential reach of the film's progressive social message and seems confined to (rather than transcended by) the "pop pose" of the "Diamonds" scene.

Jêrome Momclivoc, writing for *ChronicArt*, is one of the film's most virulent critics; he mocks Sciamma's declared intentions to engage a serious social issue by means of a fictional narrative. He describes the film as a series of rigid and programmatic scenes "corseted" with unnatural dialogue, which "condemn" the actresses to play-acting themselves. His conclusion is particularly stinging: "With its powdered reconstitution of Parisian suburban lifestyle, *Bande de filles* is a spectacle of choice for lovers of National Geographic and of

those nostalgic for colonial rule."[10] Interestingly, both Malausa and Momcilovic go out of their way to mention the tracking shot in the courtyard of *La Défense*. While Malausa sees it as reductive and exoticizing, Momcilovic accuses it of being the "desire at the heart of the film, a purely erotic urge for faces, postures and silhouettes encountered on the street and redrawn as sexual fantasies." He connects this sexualization of the film's characters to the "Diamonds" scene, wherein the "four heroines undulate."

However, in her article "*Il y a des règles*: Gender, Surveillance, and Circulation in Céline Sciamma's *Bande de Filles*," Claire Mouflard rebuts these kinds of accusations with an analysis of the film's characters and narrative, demonstrating that Sciamma "performs an artistic anticolonial practice of feminism [...] unveiling signs of surveillance" and investigating the "viability of various performances to evade [it]" (115). For Mouflard, while the film's coming-of-age story makes it accessible, its complex characterizations deconstruct "the fixed and subjective 'noire' identity associated with *cité, sexe, couleur*," a common paradigm in depictions of young *banlieusardes*, especially those of African descent (114). Indeed, Sciamma sees her characters as "activists who don't think of themselves as such, and for whom violence is a response to a kind of global hostility" (Sciamma "Je vois").[11] This helps to avoid seeing Marieme and her friends only as victims, instead recognizing in them a modicum of agency whose central burning ember is a discontentment with their assigned nonplace. Moreover, in interviews, Sciama describes Marieme as "a contemporary heroine, because she's narrowing her refusals. It's not what she says 'Yes' to, it's what she says 'No' to" (Sciamma "Flavorwire").

Indeed, Sciamma replaces an exoticizing and reductive frame of reference with, somewhat surprisingly, a superhero arche-

type: "The movie is actually looking at how Marieme is try-
ing out different hypotheses of herself, identities as outfits,
like a superhero journey—what power the outfits or cos-
tumes give her" ("*Bande*"). Certainly by the time of *Bande de
filles'* release in October of 2014, contemporary mainstream
interest in superheroes was well established: Marvel Studios
alone had already released 10 films. Sciamma is interested in
pushing beyond the monomyth:

> "It's also about: When you get the power,
> you have the responsibility of the power.
> The movie is a complex journey around
> those questions, the fact that her intimate
> space is controlled by her brother, and
> school doesn't allow her to be 'normal', that
> society doesn't want to look or live with
> [this kind of] character. It is a whole pro-
> cess of oppression that leads her to find her
> own way." ("*Bande*")

Marieme's super-power isn't repulsor beams or magical ham-
mers, but rather something more real: a sense of self derived
from a series of experiments and interrogations bound up and
within her milieu, with its homogenizing non-places that she
discovers can be equally fluid in their identity—for "*space is
a practiced place*" (de Certeau 117). Indeed, de Certeau's dis-
tinction between *lieu* and *espace* is more path than fixed coor-
dinates; and beyond vectored motion, *narrative* is the privi-
leged function that connects these two ends of a spectrum. In
Eisenstein's awakening of lion statues, Renoir's transgression
of political and gender boundaries, or Sciamma's roaming
frame, stories "carry out a labor that constantly transforms
places into spaces" (de Certeau 118). Given that *Bande de
filles* borrows heavily from the *bildungsroman* and superhero

archetypes it is unsurprising to observe that change is an important theme but the representation of non-places and the creations of any-spaces-whatever in the development of that theme is remarkable. Sciamma's goal to overturn the misogynist rules of the game so visible and powerful in the *cité* proceeds in an "artistic anticolonial practice of feminism" (Mouflard 115) by first quietly but critically cataloging places of control and annihilation, and then using cinema to transform them, creating spaces of virtual conjunction, pure sites of the possible where a young woman can rise to meet her destiny, or make it her own.

NOTES

1 "A place is the order [...] in accord with which elements are distributed in relations of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being the same location. The law of the 'proper' rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are beside one another, each situated in its own 'proper' and distinct location, a location it defines. A place is thus an instantaneous configuration of positions […] A space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables. This space is composed of the intersection of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it. Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. […] In contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a 'proper' (de Certeau 117).

2 Drawing from de Certeau (118), Augé privileges narrative in his anthropology of the near, for "any representation of the individual is also a representation of the social link consubstantial with him [sic]" (Augé, *Non-places* 19).

3 Importantly, especially for understanding the role of non-places in *Bande de filles*, while this identity may be anonymous, it is still gendered and defaults to a male one (Merriman 16).

4 All translations are my own unless otherwise noted in the Works Cited: "Les misogynes sont partout. Les cités sont un territoire où les règles du jeu sont plus visibles, mais elles existent partout, dans tous les milieux. Les règles du jeu sont faites pour être détournées" (Laïreche).

5 "Les liens de domination qui régissent ces quartiers sont les mêmes que partout ailleurs. Sauf qu'ils sont davantage à découvert. Pour la domination masculine, par exemple, il y a quasiment une charte" (Sciamma "Je vois").

6 The relation of this concept with de Certeau and Augé seems initially self-evident, and indeed many scholars have mistakenly attributed a kind of causal link between Augé's non-place and Deleuze's concept. But Deleuze never met or read Augé (who published nearly a decade after Cinema 1 appeared anyway).

7 "Y a pas de morale de l'histoire. La fin peut paraître étrange mais tout peut arriver, elle laisse place à un tas de choses" (Laïreche).

8 "C'était une volonté consciente que la forme d'engagement du film passerait par des choix de mise en scène, du côté de la couleur, faire la part belle aux visages, faire circuler des motifs" (Sciamma "Je vois").

9 "Avec ce film j'ai voulu arpenter l'espace. Je ne trouvais rien de plus intéressant en France aujourd'hui que de regarder ces filles que je croisais tous les jours dans la rue. Je voulais leur parler, apprendre à les connaître" (Laïreche).

10 "Avec sa reconstitution poudrée des moeurs de la téci, Bande de filles est, de fait, un spectacle de choix pour les amateurs du National Geographic comme pour les nostalgiques de l'indigénat" (Momcilovic).

11 "Mais je vois mes personnages comme des activistes qui ne se le formulent pas et dont la violence est une réponse à une violence globale" (Sciamma, "Je vois").

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