

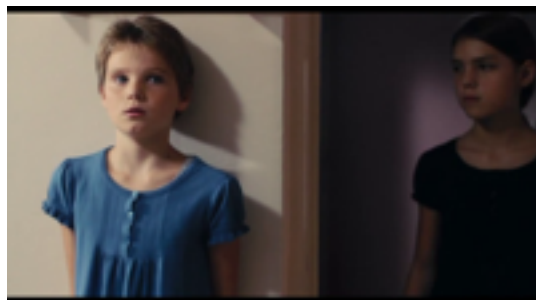


Cinema Cent Ans de Jeunesse
Exploring the world of Hidden / Shown

An analysis of two films, Céline Sciamma's *Tomboy* (2011) and Fritz Lang's *Moonfleet* (1955), which explore the question of Hidden / Shown.

Tomboy

Céline Sciamma (2011)



Introduction

The plot of *Tomboy* revolves around a secret, that of the true identity of Laure / Michael.

This secret is first explored in the 12th minute of the film.

The audience is complicit in sharing the secret with the central character, who both fear and expect the untimely revelation of the secret.

The film is constructed around 6 successive sequences of revelations / unveilings, first to the audience, then to the little sister; then the mother, after which the badly beaten boy, then Lisa and finally to the group of friends. These 6 sequences are punctuated with 5 strong moments of concealment, tension and suspense. Shooting in tightly cropped shots with a shallow depth of field the director remains close to the characters, choosing to reveal the key information by the use of cutting, the space out of shot, and suggestion as a tool to explore the violence linked to the redefinition of Laure / Michael's identity. At the end of the film, if the secret is lifted and the lie revealed, the character literally laid bare, the mystery that it carries still remains.

The Bath Scene: The reveal of Laure / Michael's true identity [11:49 – 14: 27]

Michael, 12 years old, has just moved to a new town with his parents and his little sister.

He meets Lisa, who introduces him to her band of friends.

This is a key scene: the character we've seen as a boy since the start of the film is, in fact, a girl called Laure.

"It is the gaze of the other who decides what we are" Céline Sciamma (press pack)

But what do we actually see? In the bath we see a little girl who sings stories of girls and boys.

A simple camera move shows us the character that has been identified to us as Michael, the protective big brother with his little sister, washing her hair. The camera shoots from a very low angle, the framing is very tight, and the scene bathed in soft light. Sat in the tub, the characters seem almost the same size.

Play & Make Believe

The two children play together, creating new identities – Who are you? What's your name?

Enclosed and protected by close ups they create their own, tiny universe: the shower head becomes a microphone, Jeanne becomes 'Jacqueline' a star being interviewed by a journalist.

In the previous scene, similarly, it is Lisa's belief that allows Laure to give birth to Michael, with more dramatic consequences than the everyday bath-time game, which comes to a stop when the mother intervenes.

The Revelation

It is the mother who unveils the principal revelation of the film to the audience, just as much as what the audience actually sees. It is also through dialogue that the truth is revealed. The voice of the mother from off screen works in two ways – it is a command to stop playing in the bath, and also a command for the film to stop playing with the audience – the bath is finished, Michael is actually called Laure and she's a girl.

It is a double reveal – that of her name, which we hear for the first time, and that of her nudity. A sudden camera move shows us Laure / Michael, the bathtub no longer hiding anything from view. The vision of Laure's naked body could be seen as ultimate proof of their actual biological identity, but we do not really see her fully naked form, she quickly wraps herself in a towel before looking at herself in a mirror which is set out of shot, in which she questions her own reflection.

However, following the signs the audience is given, the name, the fact that we see a naked human form, the audience is left in no doubt – their gaze has been transformed, a metamorphosis has occurred and they see a little girl standing before them.

Link to extract and other resources around the film:

<http://www.transmettrelecinema.com/film/tomboy/#video>

Other Clips for Analysis

The revelation to Lisa: Off screen sound and the interplay between sharp and soft focus [1:06:58 – 1:08:11]

The final explanation, or reveal, takes place with Lisa. We hear neither what Laure's mother explains to Lisa's mother, nor what is said to Lisa, all that is said remains off screen. Laure comes in and out of the shot, hunted, a prisoner of the frame. The interplay of soft and sharp focus highlights the real challenge of the scene – what she fears, much like the viewer, is not what the two women say, but the imminent arrival of Lisa, who will arrive through the door, which stands out in sharp focus, deep in the shot, at which Laure casts anxious glances. Lisa appears and Laure tries to hide by flattening herself against the living room wall. They are both contained within the same shot, but they can't see each other. They are separated by a wall that divides the screen, which Laure knows and dreads, but to which Lisa remains oblivious.

Laure remains out of focus until the moment of the final revelation to Lisa, when they come face to face.

The opening and closing of the door partly masks Laure's flight down the stairs, at once both hiding and showing her escape.

Laure's Escape to the Forest: Jumps in time and camera movement [1'09"17 – 1'10"34]

Laure takes refuge in the forest to shelter from the ever present gaze of everyone she's cheated. Seated at the foot of a tree she takes off her blue dress, which her mother had earlier forced on to her. The camera leaves her in a slow tilt up towards the treetops and sky, hiding her actions, creating a jump in time which reinforces the mystery linking the last shot of the sequence – to the first sequence – that of the blue dress, hanging on a branch, while Laure walks off in to the distance. This poses at least two questions: What is the actual length of this scene? How are we to interpret Laure's actions?

"It seems that you're a girl... Lets see if that's so" Lisa is forced to undress Laure / Michael before the group: Hiding nakedness [1:12 – 1:13:09]

Mirroring the scene in the bath, nudity must once again 'prove' Laure / Michael's biological identity, but this time to her friends. We hear Lisa yank Laure's trousers down. Neither the audience nor Lisa and the gang seem to need to look to know. By framing of the shot from the chest up any nudity is hidden from our view. The panning shot across the implacable faces of the children hides the real challenge of the scene. The challenge is not just to overcome each other's disbelief but to restore both a social and symbolic order to their world, identifying Laure as a girl and to 'punish' Lisa for having kissed her.

Moonfleet

Fritz Lang (1955)



Introduction

Moonfleet is one of the key films which invites an investigation of *Hidden / Shown*, operating, as it does, on many levels. The telling of the tale is itself essentially about what is hidden and what is shown, specifically the identity of John Mohune's father, and **the enigma** of Barberossa's treasure. The principles of *Hidden / Shown* are explored through **delay** and **reveal** by way of tightly structured sequences and the manner in which story is filmed.

The first meeting of John Mohune & Jeremy Fox [3:17 – 6:40]

At the start of the film, at 2mins 30 seconds in, John Mohune arrives in the village of Moonfleet, where he is kidnapped by a band of smugglers. John has been sent by his mother, Olivia, who entrusts him, by way of a letter, to an individual named Jeremy Fox, who she thinks her son would benefit from spending time with. This scene marks the first meeting between John & Fox.

The delayed appearance of Jeremy Fox

John is desperate to meet Fox. The smugglers seize the letter from him and one of them reads it aloud. On reading the name *Fox* the smugglers' faces drop. The viewer's curiosity is pricked, and suddenly both John and the audience await the arrival of Mr Fox.

The noise of a door opening off-screen is heard.

They all turn to face the man who has strode in to the room – is he the man mentioned in the letter?

Is he the head of the smugglers? As the new arrival quarrels with one of the bandits regarding the details of a delivery we discover that he is in fact, their chief. When the letter is handed to him the viewer is left in no doubt that the mysterious Fox and the chief of the smugglers is one and the same person.

Fox – A character linked to the theme of secrets

Mentioning Jeremy Fox's name in the letter has the effect of creating an air of mystery and suspense. Although the film starts with the kidnapping of her son by his band of smugglers, John's mother's letter identifies Fox as a friend for her son. Who is Fox? What has been the link between Olivia, John's mother and this man? Is Fox the boy's father? The scene merely hints at this, but, like the rest of the film, it never lifts the lid on this particular secret.

Who knows what?

This scene plays on the character's different levels of knowledge of the secret links between Fox and John's mother: On one level reading the letter aloud makes the bandits aware of the link between Fox, John and his mother, and arouses their curiosity. On another level Fox is troubled by the letter which entrusts the boy to his safe keeping. He looks around the room for John, who comes out from behind the bandits and stands, encircled there in front of the long awaited Fox. The audience come to realise that John is taken in to Fox's trust by way of a smile, seen in close up at the end of the scene. The audience's gaze moves between the different characters and their different levels of knowledge. The question of whether Fox is John's father will play on the audience's mind throughout the whole film. These different degrees of knowledge create a dynamic in the *mise en scene* of the shots - the way they are composed and executed, exposing the interplay between who understands what is shared, hidden and known or unknown in relation to the secret.

[Link to film excerpt and other resources on this film:](#)

<http://www.transmettrelecinema.com/film/contrebandiers-de-moonfleet-les/#video>

Other Clips for Analysis

The meal scene: To see without being seen [12:52 – 20:00]

Jeremy Fox commands his cronies to put John in a carriage and to send him far away from Moonfleet. But John escapes and arrives at the Mohune's manor at night. He approaches the manor under cover of darkness while music from a party in the manor is heard from off screen. Getting closer, John keeks through a window at the feast and festivities taking place inside.

He sees the wild dance of a beautiful gypsy girl, and discovers another face of Fox, who is now surrounded by friends and women. The young boy enters the manor and confronts Fox.

The nightmare sequence: Hiding violence [20:00 – 22:10]

One stormy night, the boy wakes up and tells of his nightmare.

The nightmare ties in to an episode from Fox's past that John's mother, Olivia, had related to him. One day, when she was a young woman, members of her family, the Mohunes, unleashed the dogs on a person who had come in to their home. The scene that John has dreamed of is very similar to an incident that his mother had related to him. Jeremy Fox denies that this scene ever took place to suppress the truth – that he was rejected by Olivia's family, who were much richer than he was, and that their relationship was broken off. Lady Minton, who has heard all of this, bursts in to the scene and strips Jeremy of his shirt, revealing his scarred back.

This scene rests on the idea that a dream can at times reveal that which is hidden or repressed.