

**Corporeality and Imageness, Intermediality and Intersensuality
in Céline Sciamma's *Portrait of a Lady on Fire***

***Corporalidade e imagística, intermedialidade e inter-sensualidade
no filme Portrait of a Lady on Fire, de Céline Sciamma***

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Abstract

Céline Sciamma's 2019 romantic drama film places in focus painterly representation accompanied by the female gaze. It addresses femininity not only by employing almost exclusively female characters, but eminently by delving into the power of the female gaze. Departing from the possibilities of intersectional analysis (Wilson 2021), this article proposes to think further on the ways in which the female gaze is related to intermediality and intersensuality, inviting the senses and the other arts to a symbiotic dialogue. In the connection between painting and film, the collaboration of the painter Hélène Delmaire is also investigated. Sciamma's work dramatizes the process of becoming an image, implying objectification, and the role of the female perception and attachment in resisting to it. The process of painting becomes a mediator in processing emotions, giving voice to the unspeakable in an overflow of sensations and intermedial transformations.¹

Keywords: Intermediality – Intersensuality – The female gaze – Corporeality – Imageness

Resumo

O drama romântico de Céline Sciamma de 2019 dá ênfase à representação pictórica relacionada com a questão do olhar feminino [*female gaze*]. O filme aborda a feminilidade ao empregar de modo quase exclusivo personagens do sexo feminino, mas também ao enfatizar manifestamente o poder do olhar feminino. Partindo de uma análise interseccional (Wilson 2021), o artigo propõe pensar mais a fundo os diferentes modos como o olhar feminino se encontra relacionado com a intermedialidade e a intersensualidade, convidando a um diálogo simbiótico entre os sentidos e as outras artes. Na relação entre pintura e cinema também se abordará o contributo da pintora Hélène Delmaire. O filme de Sciamma dramatiza o processo de transformação em imagem, o qual implica uma objectificação, e o papel da percepção feminina na tentativa de resistir a esse

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resultado. O processo de pintura torna-se mediador no processamento de emoções, dando voz ao indizível num extravasamento de sensações e de transformações intermediais.

Palavras-chave: Intermedialidade – Intersensualidade – Olhar Feminino – Corporalidade – Imagística

Author's short bio

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| Introduction

Céline Sciamma's 2019 historical romantic drama film, *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* [*Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*], foregrounds entanglements between painterly representation and the female gaze. Sciamma's fourth feature film – following *Water Lilies* (2007, *Naissance des pieuvres*), *Tomboy* (2011) and *Girlhood* (2014, *Bande de filles*) – explores multiple artistic and cultural topoi, including the dynamics between an artist and a muse, the tension of love versus marriage, and doomed lesbian love. In a similar fashion, the film bridges multiple cinematic genres, in the spirit of “hybrid cinema” as the filmmaker herself has called it in an interview,² fusing heritage film with arthouse cinema, biopic with queer cinema, period drama with resonances of contemporary art. “That was my compass: to make the most contemporary film I could,” she says in the same interview, having this “contemporary compass” in view when envisioning a historical romance imbued with overtones of sociopolitical treatise, in which she formulates her manifesto of the female gaze.

The choice of the film's title also resonates in multiple directions, from literary *Portraits* also turned into film, (e.g. Jane Campion's *The Portrait of a Lady*, 1996) – although the French original title of Sciamma's film, *Portrait de la jeune fille en feu*, sounds less Jamesian – to the tradition of painterly portraiture. Similarly, the film's cinematography is situated at the intersection of a variety of painterly traditions. It draws from the painting styles

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNIGRXP7g0>. Last accessed 9 November 2024.

of the late 18th century that provides the setting for the film, but also reaches back, in the form of both overt and covert references, to the Dutch Golden Age or Claude Lorrain's Baroque landscapes, and extends forwards into the 19th century, embracing the sublime aspirations of Romanticism.



Figure 1 – *Portrait of a Young Woman* (Jean Honoré Fragonard, 1770–1779)³

The painterly impression of the portrait of Héloïse (Adèle Haenel) in the course of being painted by Marianne (Noémie Merlant) is perhaps the closest to Rococo painter Jean Honoré Fragonard's *Portrait of a Young Woman*, created in the 1770s [Fig. 1], an almost floating portrait sensitively captured with fluid brushstrokes, wrapped around in plaited drapery. And not only, since the film's visual-representational pastiche continues, through modernist form-breaking reminiscences, into radical, performative gestures of contemporary art, as will be discussed later in this article. Thus, the film creates a delicate balance between the style(s) of the portrait, acquiring ever newer forms in the course of being painted, and the overall style of the film in which it is embedded, folding upon each other the intimacy of the singular portrait and the impressiveness of Romantic landscape painting, the sensual and the spectacular.

At the same time, Marianne's figure as a fictitious painter connects to those hundreds of women painters that Céline Sciamma discovered during her research for the film, including,

³ Source: <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436320>. Last accessed 10 November 2024.

foremost, Élisabeth Vigée Le Brun, whose serene *Self-Portrait*, painted in 1790, looking back on the viewer,⁴ may evoke the 17th-century Dutch painter Judith Leyster, who is also looking back joyfully and self-confidently as she stands next to the canvas.⁵ Besides her, there is a whole series of better-known and lesser-known women painters, from the Italian Baroque painter Artemisia Gentileschi, through the Venetian portraitist Rosalba Carriera, to the Swiss Neoclassical painter Angelika Kauffmann. The figure of Marianne is a distilled synthesis of existing female painters whom Sciamma gave face and voice in her “innovative eighteenth-century drama” (Wilson 2021, 86). In this way, Sciamma’s film constructs a cinematic universe from a carefully elaborated art-historical collage, that is at the same time classical and contemporary, in a live dialogue with both the representational traditions of the Ancien Régime and present-day forms of artistic expression.

Thus, the film positions itself at a juncture in many respects. The historical romance set in the late 18th century, in pre-revolutionary France, does not only occasion a reimagining of feminine art and affect but also an incursion into a revolutionary stage of art history, significant for the later evolution of optical media, when, at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, the art of seeing gained new impetus, and innovative optical media technologies boundlessly multiplied. This was the period when “the battle between the Enlightenment and superstition simply meant wresting optical media away from the Counter-Reformation and giving them a better purpose” (Kittler 2010, 93). Also, this was the period that paved the way for the making of a new kind of observer “as the active, autonomous producer of his or her own content” (Crary 1988, 5) that was to be born in the 19th century, being “immanent to the elaboration of new empirical knowledge of vision and techniques of the visible” (5). Hungarian art historian László Földényi F. refers to the same period as a significant stage in the modern history of vision, when the interdependence of the spectacle and the gaze comes to the fore, when it is discovered that the act of gazing is not merely a means of assembling a spectacle, but also that of constituting one’s own subjectivity (Földényi 2010).

Portrait of a Lady on Fire primarily explores themes examined in depth by Céline Sciamma’s monographer, Emma Wilson: “[t]he female gaze, sexuality, and specifically how to look at, and make a portrait of, young women” (Wilson 2021, 1). After briefly addressing the female gaze as a constitutive force in the film’s “feminist intervention” (1), this essay intends

⁴ Source: <https://www.lib-art.com/imgpainting/5/1/55715-self-portrait-vig-e-lebrun-lisabeth.jpg>. Last accessed 10 November 2024.

⁵ Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Judith_Leyster_-_Self-Portrait_-_WGA12959.jpg. Last accessed 10 November 2024.

to move away from the possibilities of intersectional analysis, and focus on the ways in which the emotional purport, the affective resonance of the film arises from the presence of the other arts, most notably painting. The romance between the two protagonists, Héloïse⁶ and Marianne, unfolds via the transmission of the act and process of painting, in the dynamics between the gaze and the spectacle, the body and the image, the perception of “reality” and the conventions of representation. The ensuing analysis will be centred on the encounter between art(s) and affect, on the ways in which this connection, as old as art itself, is refilled with a new impetus, as well as on the role of painting and portraiture in shaping the “emotional landscape” (Plantinga and Smith 1999, 1) of the film.

| **“Regardez-moi” – The Sensitive Power of the Female Gaze**

The film is famously about the female gaze (Scateni 2020; Syme 2020; Li 2024). The relationship between the painter and her model unfolds as an egalitarian friendship in which they equally cooperate, exploring “the possibility of thinking about looking, and erotic apprehension of the body, outside structures of domination” (Wilson 2021, 8). Aimed at subverting the male gaze and empowering the female gaze by shifting the emphasis on empathy, subjectivity and mutuality, Sciamma’s film engages with themes of female autonomy, creative collaboration, and the transformative power of desire, crafting a narrative that prioritizes the perspectives and inner lives of its female characters while challenging traditional cinematic conventions. It employs almost exclusively female characters – “Sciamma’s most radical stroke is to remove men from the picture” (Stevens 2020) – and brings female concerns to the fore. The appearance of secondary male characters, one at the beginning of the film, leaving Marianne at the beach in Bretagne, and another at the end, picking her up when she leaves Héloïse’s residence, frames a space inhabited by women.

The period drama tells the story of Marianne, a painter in 18th-century France, commissioned to secretly paint a portrait of Héloïse, a young woman unwilling to pose because the portrait is intended for a marriage that she does not desire. As Marianne observes Héloïse, their relationship deepens, evolving into a profound and forbidden romance. Héloïse’s servant, Sophie (Luàna Bajrami), is also involved in the intimate bond formed by the aristocratic Héloïse and the middle-class Marianne, which transcends class boundaries as they experience a short-lived utopia. The moments of exhilaration, when they discuss art and mythology, are disturbed

⁶ The choice of Héloïse’s name is not accidental, as it may evoke the ill-fated medieval love affair between Abélard and Héloïse, or its retelling by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in his *Julie; or, The New Heloise* (1761).

by Sophie's abortion, which the two protagonists assist. Upon witnessing the torments of abortion, Marianne tends to look away but Héloïse insists that she keep looking. Marianne will later paint the scene of abortion, re-enacted by Héloïse and Sophie.

In the intricate dynamics of observation – Marianne first having to secretly observe Héloïse, then the model giving her consent to be observed – the power of the female gaze is reshaped in a frame that “favours dual participation of artist and model, and no duality of activity and passivity, of looking and ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’” (Wilson 2021, 91). Emma Wilson's interpretation highlights how the film's concept overwrites binary oppositions: “Sciamma's work explores ways in which looking may no longer impose a gendered binary of activity and passivity. Looking and being looked at are collaborative, shifting, unfixed” (20). In this process, the role of the painter and the model become interchangeable in the sense that, in the opening scene, the painter sits as a model for her students, while her later model, Héloïse, looks back, reclaiming agency. The model that looks back overturns the traditional division of the owner of the gaze and its objectified property; in this way, agency is shared by the two, it becomes transferable and reversible in a performative, egalitarian act of creation.

The female gaze is not only about the optical, though, but also about the haptic. Sciamma's work perfectly fits into what Martine Beugnet calls “the cinema of transgression” or “the cinema of the senses,”⁷ with reference to French films made by women filmmakers that “show their characters engaged in an intensely tactile relation to the world around them and, by extension, offer themselves to spectators as heightened sensory experience” (Beugnet and Mulvey 2015, 192). Her work celebrates the hapticity of the image not only through the subtle feminine spirituality and corporeality wrapped into a costume drama but also through the ways in which the scrutinizing gaze is complemented by the brushstroke on the painterly canvas, in a similar progression as “the haptic and optic are not opposite but continuous: often, in film, haptic effects happen through the passage from one mode of vision to the other” (Beugnet and Mulvey 2015, 197).

In what follows, I propose to look at the ways in which the sensitive power of the female gaze manifests through the expressive power of the arts. Sciamma's film not only appeals to the senses but also invites the other arts – painting and drawing, foremost, but also literature and music – into a sensuous, symbiotic dialogue. I will examine the sensuous excess

⁷ “The films generally associated with the French ‘cinema of the senses’ characteristically offer themselves to the spectator as deeply sensuous universes in which the audio-visual medium of film is used to evoke other senses (taste, smell, and, crucially, touch) so that they can be said to encourage a ‘tactile,’ ‘haptic’ gaze and empathetic involvement from the viewer.” (Beugnet and Mulvey 2015, 191).

provided by the presence of the other arts in the film “wrestling with art and feeling” (Wilson 2021, 103), the affective potential of intermediality⁸ and intersensuality,⁹ and also, how the process of painting and being painted becomes a mediator in processing emotions, giving voice to the silence of the unspeakable in an overflow of sensations, remediations, and intermedial transformations.

| Becoming an Image – Intermedial Transformations

The sensual richness of Sciamma’s film emerges from its dynamic interaction with the history of painting. The depicted landscape appears in the form of sublime picturesque *tableaux*, painterly compositions,¹⁰ which combines the female figure with the sea and cliffs. Among these compositions are the dual portrait of the protagonists inextricably folded upon each other in close-up, or the picturesque placing of the female figures at the sea edge, reminiscent of the recurrent motif of the Skagen school of painting are salient. Literary references may also be associated with the film’s cinescape, especially the gothic of the Brontë sisters or the new gothic of Daphne du Maurier. The film also activates the iconography of reclining nudes such as Titian’s *Danaë* (1544–1546) or Gustave Courbet’s *Sleeping Nude* ([*Femme Nue Endormie*] 1858). Besides, it also elaborates an innovative, exoticizing cine-painterly iconography such as in the sequence of the protagonists sitting on the sand, with their mouths covered by scarves to protect themselves from the wind.

Sciamma’s work dramatizes the process of becoming an image, which implies objectification, and the role of the female perception in their active resistance to it. Marianne intrudes into the living space of Héloïse in remote Bretagne, being commissioned to create a painting of her to be sent to her future husband in Milan. The completion of the painting progresses from clandestine observation to the model’s cooperative participation, while an affective bond is formed between the two. Marianne’s first attempt to complete the painting fails. After receiving Héloïse’s criticism on the furtively painted result, Marianne impulsively erases the face of the portrait. She feels she needs to stay in Bretagne longer to be able to

⁸ On the grounds of the “affective turn,” gaining prominence in the humanities in the 1990s, Ágnes Pethő’s latest research on intermediality in cinema has evolved in the direction of exploring the affective potential of intermediality. Connecting the in-betweenness of media with the idea of “affect” “leads us towards new areas of in-betweenness, reaching beyond media, representation, text, and even beyond us, humans” (Pethő 2023).

⁹ In his analysis of the adaptation of Patrick Süskind’s famous novel *Perfume*, Ádám Dávid defines intersensuality as a montage of scents, as “a higher dynamics of perception and a particular complexity of reception” (Dávid 2008, 92).

¹⁰ The composition of painterly *tableaux* in the film praise the work of Claire Mathon DP.

accomplish the commission. The second attempt, which arises out of passion, is more successful, culminating in the moment when the model looks back: “*regardez-moi*” (“look at me”). The process of depiction extends to a miniature that Marianne paints on Héloïse’s volume of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, on page 28, as a memento for her. This page number will return, indicated by Héloïse’s finger between the pages, on a painting exhibited in the Salon and discovered by Marianne. Finally, in the opera house scene, the ‘painting’ becomes alive in Héloïse’s pose, while Marianne observes her, again clandestinely, in her state of being profoundly touched by the music and especially by her memories connected to it, only to disappear forever. Now I propose a closer look at the stages of the painting process.

The first part of the film is emphatically about the gaze that furtively steals fragments, Héloïse’s body details, facial expressions, gestures to be transformed into an image. The camera shows Marianne’s POV, and the shot also discreetly prepares the image through painterly *tableaux* and close-ups of portraits. At this stage, Héloïse is still a mystery for Marianne, reinforced by images where she stands with her back to the observer. In this way, her gaze contemplating the sea remains absent, hidden for Marianne, while she looks at the sea perceivably with her entire body. The scene carries “the tension between the sensual, experienced body and the distancing order of strictly regulated gazes” (Vincze 2021, translation mine). Just as the moving images are perceivably formed along an archeology of the painterly tradition, in a similar manner, Marianne’s portrait is driven by professional knowledge, unlike the immediate experience itself. Diegetically, her gesture of erasing Héloïse’s face foreshadows loss and *dégagement*, the recognition that painting the portrait along pre-concepts, models, ideas and conventions is more about objectification than rendering the essence of the person. Her erasure is a gesture of rejecting to turn the female face into the object of male vision, to reiterate the hegemony of representation. Metadiegetically, it powerfully redirects attention to imageness.

The painting part of the film is carried out through the collaboration of the contemporary painter Hélène Delmaire.¹¹ Marianne’s gesture of erasure is made in the manner of Delmaire’s *Eyeless* series.¹² Delmaire paints female figures whose eyes and facial parts are erased, blurred, masked, made unrecognizable with radical gestures and brushstrokes. Relying on a long tradition of masking, from René Magritte through Francis Bacon to contemporary

¹¹ Sciamma admits that she has found contemporary painter Hélène Delmaire on the Instagram; they had not cooperated before. The filmmaker has acknowledged the rewarding cinematic potential of Delmaire’s art.

¹² <https://www.helenedelmaire.com/albums/blind/>. Last accessed 10 November 2024.

artists such as Henrietta Harris, the performative gesture of erasure raises far-reaching questions of corporeal representation, female voice and corporeality, identity and impersonality.

With this context in view, the initial portrait with Héloïse's erased face shines as a contemporary artwork in the context of the period drama, initiating a dialogue between creation and undoing, between the repression of emotion in the Age of Reason and the affective turn in contemporary scholarly thinking, between 18th-century aesthetics and concepts of deconstruction, defacement, deletion, of creation "*sous rature*" (i.e., under erasure) that Derrida uses to suggest that something is "inaccurate yet necessary" to say (Spivak 1976, xiv). Associated with the feminine, facelessness becomes the expression of unrepresentable identity. The act of erasure involves more than simply elimination; it gives rise to a new form of expression through the very act of removal. What is more, the smeared portrait is reframed by blurring the image in a manner that may evoke Gerhard Richter's art. It reinscribes the invisible into the visible, redirects attention to the unspeakable, to the unfathomable otherness of the other that always withholds something radically unattainable.

In Delmaire's own interpretation,

The subject is often swallowed or hidden by its pictural environment; truncated or erased with a swipe of the brush. The face and the eyes [...] are turned away or masked, turned towards an inner world that can never be wholly communicated to another, despite a shared depth.¹³ (qtd. in Wilson 2021, 90).

According to Emma Wilson, "This removal is tantalising and erotic, as the loved one is never fully touched. It is also reflective and ethically conscious, as the other always stays, despite alliance and collaboration, autonomous, ethereal" (2021, 90). It is also radically performative, the gesture of performing it implies not only spontaneous impulse but also a conscious choice.

The second version of the portrait, painted not only with the allowance but also with the contribution of the model, is the result of a utopian balance and equality. It is the result of the dialogue between the painter and the model, between the touch and the gaze, and between gazes, since it is not only the painter who looks at the model, but the model also looks back, breaking taboos of representation and making possible the immediacy of connection.

¹³ https://www.helenedelmaire.com/pages/a-proposabout/?base_folder=/. Last accessed 18 November 2024.

The difference between the initial, erased portrait and the second one implies the difference between the optical and the haptic:

Optical visibility requires distance and a center, the viewer acting like a pinhole camera. In a haptic relationship our self rushes up to the surface to interact with another surface. When this happens there is a concomitant loss of depth—we become amoebalike, lacking a center, changing as the surface to which we cling changes. We cannot help but be changed in the process of interacting. (Marks 2002, xvi).

The touch of the brush on the canvas reiterates the touch of the hand on the skin and also the touch of the gaze, in an intersensual, haptic manner, also conveyed by the textuality of the skin of the film. It is the live presence of both women as co-creators, the inspired simultaneity of corporeality and imageness that allows for success this time, as an example of creation without objectification, in which female bodies equally matter on both sides of the canvas. The success of the moment is measured not only by the completed painting but also by the released affection between Marianne and Héloïse, which is attained through the mediation of art. The awareness of brief temporality and imminent loss strengthens the affect between them.

While preparing for Sophie's abortion, the three young girls experience exhilarating moments by playing cards together in the absence of the mother and reading and discussing Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. They interpret the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice differently: Sophie does not understand why Orpheus looks back; Héloïse says he has gone mad; Marianne interprets it as a conscious choice of death for the sake of memory, that is, the choice of the poet over the choice of the lover. In a series of painterly scenes of affective encounter before the lovers are separated from each other, quite reminiscent of Hélène Delmaire's canvas *Cocoon* (2013, *Cocon*),¹⁴ Marianne draws a self-portrait in Héloïse's copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, on page 28. In the spirit of equality, this time she is the model, reflected in a circular mirror set against Héloïse's genital organ. It is an intimately (self-)reflexive moment condensing the film as a *mise en abyme*, where nevertheless roles, body parts and identities are reversed, the two becoming monstrously one, an ontologically impossible hybrid composed of reality and its reflection, the self and the other. Marianne's hair not only replaces Héloïse's pubic hair but also forms a Medusa head, whose death-bearing look folds back on the creator herself. "It is like an

¹⁴ Source: <https://www.helenedelmaire.com/albums/nus/>. Last accessed 18 November 2024.

optical illusion, a self-reflexive image of the circled involvement of sex, art, memory, loss, and retrieval that the film captures” (Wilson 2021, 96).

The painting process is all about transformation: appearance and disappearance, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, turning up and getting lost, in rhythmic alternation. There is a counterbalance between the picture and the body: in a Poean fashion, the more the painting gets completed, the closer Héloïse gets to departure; once the painting is ready, she disappears for good from Marianne’s life. But before that, when the painter leaves, a reenactment of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is performed, “a retelling of the myth in the feminine” (Wilson 2021, 104). The phantom image of Héloïse turns up as a vision, dressed in white that simultaneously signals her imminent wedding and Eurydice’s death in the Underworld. “Her lover is already pictorial, a vision, a shade lost like Eurydice” (Wilson 2021, 105). The vision is otherworldly, the spectral image merges various representational traditions: it is at once symbolic, gothic and like a Pre-Raphaelite painting. Like Orpheus, Marianne looks back, and the vision disappears: Héloïse/Eurydice is lost, she descends to the Underworld. However, she is lost for the lover but not for the artist. It is Marianne’s conscious choice, just like Orpheus’s, to choose the memory image. By instructing and executing the order of turning around, the material image turns into an immaterial one, carried on within the body. In her act of turning back, the power of the gaze is located in the possibility of decision. Thus, though the living body is lost, disembodied, it gets transformed into a mental image, it is interiorized and relocated into the body as a medium, it is appropriated as a corporeal experience in the sense of Hans Belting’s anthropology of images: “The images of memory and imagination are generated in one’s own body; the body is the living medium through which they are experienced” (Belting 2001, 11). In this way, the desired Other becomes part of the self, *in absentia*, in a form that can be carried away in one’s own body as a locus of image.

Yet, the course of Ovidian metamorphoses continues. Héloïse turns up once again for Marianne, this time in the form of a painting, exhibited in the Salon, painted by another. It is an affective moment when Marianne notices in the pictorial image a book, supposedly Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, in Héloïse’s hand, with her finger placed on page 28. It is a secret message easily decipherable for Marianne, a sign that she has not been forgotten. In this way, the painted

body gets transubstantiated, becoming a represented corporeal medium, a reified living body, a painted carrier of memory images.¹⁵

Lastly, another stage in the transformation process, another remediation occurs, when Marianne sees Héloïse at the opera house. Discretely observed from afar by Marianne, Héloïse is a mere image for her. However, an image that, again, resists objectification and the status of “to-be-looked-at-ness” as Héloïse is looking and listening to the performance of Vivaldi’s *Summer*, immersed and profoundly affected. The lifeless painting is revitalized, animated. She becomes a live image, returning to the living, flooded with emotions stirred by memories and art, since this was the piece of music she used to be tinkling together with Marianne on the piano. In Teréz Vincze’s (2021, n. p.) phenomenological approach,

The power of the intensive long take mostly comes from the energy generated as powerful emotions literally keep the almost gasping body moving, as it struggles to resist the outburst of sobbing: we are witnessing the embodiment of emotions. All this results in an overflowing visibility of the body, the heightened materiality of being embedded in the visible existence playing an important role in this mechanism of action. (translation mine)

The camera pans along Héloïse’s sobbing figure for long, cathartic moments, creating “a prolonged portrait in film, a study in emotions” (Wilson 2021, 106), accompanied by music as an elicitor of repressed emotions, while the subjective camera position implicitly suggests Marianne’s connectedness and similar state of mind. Thus, the figure of Héloïse becomes a layered compound of in-betweenness, being at once body and image, stasis and motion, the self and the other, live presence and recollected absence, immediacy and distance, grasping and letting go. It is a moment of heightened intermediality, in which, in the opera house, spectacle, music and painting merge, framed by the moving image.

| Endnote

The entire film can be regarded as the re-enactment of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, framed by Marianne’s flashback in the opening studio scene, a retelling of the story of lost love, immortalized and synthesized on the eponymous painting. Céline Sciamma’s film creates affect through the dramatization of the art of painting and exploring its cinematic potential. It does not only incorporate the becoming of the portrait in a multitude of variations,

¹⁵ Sciamma admits that it took her a long time to figure out what would be the secret message in the painting. “I want people to get ‘page 28’ tattoos”; “I know that now when I want to hide something in a book, I’ll put it on page 28” (Stevens 2020).

but also remediates the painterly portrait in its own medium. Thus, the feminine portrait emerges in Sciamma's art in-between painting and film, in the dialogue between the gaze and the spectacle, life and mythology, art history and contemporary art, allowing the painterly and the cinematic to fold upon each other through the affective, sensual modes of intermediality.

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