

Loving Vincent: the audiovisual perception of intermediality.



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Abstract

This research analyzed the visual and auditory elements of the animated film *Loving Vincent* in order to investigate the sensory perceptions that it offers to the viewer. The intermedial relationships between painting, photography, and film allowed *Loving Vincent* to readdress the original paintings of Vincent Van Gogh to a wider audience through animation which transforms the apparent motion of the still images to real visual motion on the screen. On the visual level, the film presented references to the original paintings of the Dutch artist accompanied by film techniques, such as transitions, or cuts rendered through painting. The analysis of the effect of motion in the animation allowed to identify the focus areas on the frame, therefore, to demonstrate where film directs the eye of the viewer, thus the contrasting visuality of film and painting. On the auditory level, each image was accompanied by diegetic or nondiegetic sounds: this research identified the type of sound and determined its visibility, thus if it was onscreen or offscreen. The investigation of sensory experiences offered by *Loving Vincent* related to the discourse of art perception through senses which is developing; art should not be experienced only through sight but also through other senses since the viewer is a sensing subject. In this regard, *Loving Vincent* adapts the original paintings in the animated film and offers to the viewer a new multi-sensory experience of art.

Introduction

The animated film *Loving Vincent* (2017) presents the characteristics of intermedial relationship between photography, painting and film through which it offers a different experience from the original paintings of the Dutch artist Vincent Van Gogh. The Dutch painter is considered “one of the greatest of the Post-Impressionists” in the Western world.¹ His works are characterized by “bold colours, and dramatic, impulsive and expressive brushwork” that lead to what art historians call Expressionism.² The animated film offered tribute to the artist and his works by reproducing his artistic style, in fact most of the scenes include elements or subjects from the original paintings. Each frame and animation present the expressive brushstrokes and colors of Van Gogh, which are applied also in the rendering of film techniques such as transitions. In fact, the film is made of paintings that have been photographed to digitalize them and put them in sequence to create the film, thus there are three media at the base of the form of the film: painting, photography, and film. The media involved in *Loving Vincent* are related to each other through an intermedial relationship where one medium presents the characteristics of other media. As a consequence, the features transferred from one medium to another produce changes in the perception offered to the viewer. The original paintings of Van Gogh are presented to the viewer with changes in the form and content: the paintings shift from still to moving images through animation, and the content of each image is adapted for a coherent storyline. In considering the changes in a medium, it is necessary to consider how the changes affect the viewer’s experience. In fact, the sensory perception that *Loving Vincent* offers to the viewer is different from the experience of the original paintings.

This research focused on the question: how does the film *Loving Vincent* (2017) readdress the paintings of the Dutch artist Van Gogh through intermediality to offer a multi-sensory experience to the viewer? In order to answer the research question, I divided the audiovisual analysis in three chapters: the first part focused on how the original paintings are adapted in the film from still images to moving images. Secondly, I focused on how the visuality of film contrasts with the visuality of painting where I included the analysis of film techniques realized through painting. Lastly, I analyzed the auditory elements in order to understand how the sound is related to the images in the animated film.

¹ Vincent V. Gogh, "Introduction," in *The Letters of Vincent Van Gogh* (London: Penguin UK, 2003).

² Idem.

The analysis of the scenes of *Loving Vincent* contributed to the understanding and the expansion of the academic knowledge regarding sensory perception in art and its developments. As stated by Francis Halsall, “all sensory experience forms part of an interconnected experiential continuum,” thus it is not possible to explain sensory perception by considering each sense individually.³ Halsall argues that art history should not be limited by prioritizing the visual perception, which would be “an unnecessarily blinkered perspective,” but to widen the concept of art perception to multiple senses.⁴ Therefore, in art, instead of prioritizing only visual perception it is necessary to expand the discourse of perception to multiple senses. In this regard, *Loving Vincent* offers a different sensory experience from the original paintings through animation and the effect of motion, but also sound.

Chapter 1 - Theoretical Framework

1.1 Intermediality

The definition of intermediality by Irina Rajewsky refers in a broad sense to the “crossing of borders between media” thus finding the characteristics of one medium in another medium.⁵ In a narrow sense, Rajewsky identifies three subcategories based on their qualities: medial transposition, media combination, and intermedial references and all three subcategories can be identified in the different scenes of *Loving Vincent*.⁶ Medial transposition refers to the production: it refers to “the way in which a media product comes into being,” for example, film adaptations. In the film, an example could be the scenes that are narrated by the letters written by Vincent to his brother Theo where the narrating voice reads the actual letters they exchanged.⁷ Secondly, media combination focuses on “the result or the very process of combining at least two conventionally distinct media or medial forms of articulation” such as in *Loving Vincent*, where the combination of painting, photography, and film resulted in a new multi-

³ Francis Halsall, "One Sense is Never Enough," *Journal of Visual Art Practice* 3, no. 2 (January 2014): 110, doi:10.1386/jvap.3.2.103/0.

⁴ Halsall, “One Sense is Never Enough,” 114.

⁵ Irina O. Rajewsky, "Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation: A Literary Perspective on Intermediality," *Intermédialités*, no. 6 (2011): 46, doi:10.7202/1005505ar.

⁶ Rajewsky, “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation,” 51.

⁷ Idem.

media product with a unique aesthetic form.⁸ Lastly, intermedial references are “meaning-constitutional strategies that contribute to the media product’s overall signification,” thus it consists of evocations or imitations as in the scenes where it is possible to observe film techniques painted by artists in the realization of the animated film.⁹

Chiel Kattenbelt expanded on Rajewsky’s definition of intermediality by defining it as the “co-relation between different media [...] which in turn leads to a refreshed perception,” therefore he connected intermediality to the sphere of perception.¹⁰ Kattenbelt stated that intermediality allows the viewers to perceive and explore “new dimensions of perception”.¹¹ Although the text by Kattenbelt referred to the field of theatre and performance studies, this research considers intermediality in the field of film to connect the production aspect to the perception sphere of the viewers, hence to investigate what the film offers to the viewer in terms of sensory experience.

Gaudreault and Marion discuss intermedial relationships in their text about the explanation of media genealogy in cinema. In discussing the problems of the medium’s birth, they start from the emergence of cinema as their case study and draw their model of the genealogy of film which brought to the conclusion that demonstrate the constant presence of intermediality in the medium of film. The authors demonstrate that in film it is possible to identify other media or their characteristics and that “it is through intermediality, through a concern with the intermedial, that a medium is understood.”¹² Therefore, the understanding of *Loving Vincent* requires the understanding of the relationship between the media involved in it, namely painting, photography and film. Through this source it is possible to argue that the animated film is an example of intermediality since all three media are identified and recognized for their characteristic features; they are at the base of the film production which coincide with the premise of this research.

In presenting the concept of intermediality, Faquin and Araujo argue that cinema uses an hybrid language through “different aesthetics in its forms of production” and they connect their argument to

⁸ Rajewsky, “Intermediality, Intertextuality, and Remediation,” 52.

⁹ Idem.

¹⁰ Chiel Kattenbelt, "Intermediality in Theatre and Performance: Definitions, Perceptions and Medial Relationships," *Cultura, lenguaje y representación: revista de estudios culturales de la Universitat Jaume I* 6 (2008): 25.

¹¹ Idem.

¹² André Gaudreault and Philippe Marion, "The Cinema as a Model for the Genealogy of Media," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 8, no. 4 (2002): 15, doi:10.1177/135485650200800402.

Loving Vincent.¹³ Regarding the animated film, the authors discuss its form by stating that *Loving Vincent* is a hybrid medium due to its intermediality and it offers a new experience: “the convergence of diverse media [...] contributes to the generation of new aesthetic effects and meaning.”¹⁴ Moreover, they argue that “the contribution of the painting completes the aesthetic experience that the film conveys,” thus the use of Van Gogh’s style of painting enriched the sensory experience of the film.¹⁵ The intermedial relationships of the involved media in *Loving Vincent* allow to experience the original works to an aesthetically fuller level, which this research tried to investigate by including sensory experience to the study of media. Faquin and Araujo pointed out the innovative form of the *Loving Vincent*, which are the characteristics of intermediality and intertextuality, but in this research, I analyzed the links between the intermedial aspects of the film to the sensory experience it offers.

1.2 Medium/Media

In discussing the concept of intermediality it is important to identify the media included in it to understand the whole intermedial relationship. Lars Elleström supported the necessity of defining the medium before its relationship with other media: “if the notion of medium is not specified, the notion of intermediality cannot be understood.”¹⁶ Similarly this research considers the individual medium involved in *Loving Vincent* with its own medium features to explain the intermedial relationships between the three media.

Before the birth of the concept of intermediality, John Berger connected painting and film by finding their differences in his book *Ways of Seeing*.¹⁷ In presenting the idea of looking, Berger presented the differences between looking at a film and at a painting: in film, “the way one image follows another [...] constructs an argument which becomes irreversible” thus the sequence of images builds the story

¹³ César B. Faquin and Denize Araujo, "Visual Hybridizations in Two Audiovisual Productions," *Novos Olhares* 9, no. 1 (2020): 145, doi:10.11606/issn.2238-7714.no.2020.171999.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Faquin and Araujo, "Visual Hybridizations in Two Audiovisual Productions," 152.

¹⁶ Lars Elleström, "The Modalities of Media: A Model for Understanding Intermedial Relations," in *Media Borders, Multimodality and Intermediality* (Basingstoke: Springer, 2010), 35.

¹⁷ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (Peter Smith Pub, 1972).

that the filmmaker is offering, and the viewers cannot change it.¹⁸ On the other side, “in a painting all its elements are there to be seen simultaneously. The spectator may need time to examine each element of the painting” that does not change in time.¹⁹ Therefore, a film leads its viewer throughout a fixed sequence of images that contributes to the building of the storyline, while a painting allows the viewers to explore the elements in their ways. In the case of *Loving Vincent*, the paintings are used as frames for the animation thus the viewer does not have the time to observe in detail each hand painted frame, but he or she can experience the series of paintings that are presented in order to tell the story. After determining the difference between painting and film as separate media, Berger discusses the reproduction of images: “[w]hat the modern means of reproduction have done is to destroy the authority of art.”²⁰ Therefore, in terms of intermediality, the copy of a work of art reduces the value of the original work by destroying its essence.

According to Walter Benjamin, all the aspects related to the essence of an artwork can be named aura: “the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place” and also its authenticity.²¹ He discusses that these elements that form the aura are lost when a work of art is technologically reproduced. Furthermore, he states that “by means of reproduction, it extracts sameness even from what is unique” that leads to the destruction of the aura.²² Therefore, for Benjamin, art, and its authenticity are strictly related to tradition and technological reproduction destroys them. In the case of *Loving Vincent*, the position of Benjamin would translate into the film as the destroyer of Van Gogh’s original paintings due to the digital reproduction of the artworks.

The theory of looking of Berger and the concept of aura of Benjamin are contrasted by André Bazin, who states that film is “far from compromising or destroying the true nature of another art, is, on the contrary, in the process of saving it, of bringing it to general attention.”²³ Bazin considered film as a “new form of existence” of painting, thus the reproduction of painting in a film makes the original work accessible by a larger audience.²⁴ *Loving Vincent* presents the artworks of Van Gogh to a wider audience

¹⁸ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 26.

¹⁹ Idem.

²⁰ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 32.

²¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 21.

²² Ibid, 24.

²³ André Bazin, *What Is Cinema?: Volume I* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2005), 168.

²⁴ Idem.

through a new form: instead of inviting the viewers to the museums to experience Van Gogh's paintings, the film release allows people around the world to experience the artworks in different geographical locations through screens, thus, it brings art to the viewers. In doing so, the changes in the form - from painting to animated film - involved the realization of film techniques through painting which offered a different experience of the known art pieces. Since the study of a medium involves the consideration of its audience, this research has analyzed the intermedial elements of *Loving Vincent* in relation to the sensory experience it offers to the viewer.

1.3 Perception

This research focused on intermediality in *Loving Vincent* and the sensory experience that it offers to the viewer. Film as a medium offers certain experiences to the audience, thus when studying the changes in one medium it is necessary to consider the changes in the experience it offers to the viewer, namely perception. Regarding the experience of media, Elleström introduces the concept of compound media characteristics that refer to "features of media products that are apprehended and formed when a structuring and interpreting mind makes sense of the mediated sensory configurations" therefore it refers to the cognitive sphere of the viewer used to understand media.²⁵ In this regard, Elleström defines form as "an essential general compound media characteristic that covers a complex web of more specific structures of all types of sensory inputs," such as pattern or rhythm.²⁶ The elements introduced by Elleström contribute to the investigation of the film on the level of audience perception by providing insights regarding the analysis of the form of the film and the original paintings, such as the relationship between images and sounds.

Previous studies in the field of cognitive neuroscience have researched the movement of the human eye when looking at images. Barbara Anderson explains the positions of Bazin and Eisenstein in relation to eye movement in cinematic experience: on one hand, Eisenstein argues for the importance of

²⁵ Lars Elleström, "The Transmedial Basis," in *Media Transformation: The Transfer of Media Characteristics Among Media* (Basingstoke: Springer, 2014), 40, doi:10.1057/9781137474254.0006.

²⁶ Elleström, "The Transmedial Basis," 42.

montage, while on the other, Bazin supports the importance of the mise-en-scene.²⁷ In presenting the development regarding the viewer's eye, Anderson mentions Eisenstein's conclusion about how the filmmaker can predict and direct the eye of the audience.²⁸ Additionally, Anderson states that the eye "scans a scene or an image in a series of successive fixations, selecting those areas of the visual array that yield the most information" thus the area that provides most details.²⁹ This aspect of cinematic experience is used in the analysis of *Loving Vincent* in order to identify the focus areas that provide the most information in the frames, thus attract the viewer's eye. Additionally, the animation in the focus areas was compare to the motion in the surrounding area of the frame to demonstrate the difference in the level of motion thus the amount of information of the specific parts of the frame in the visual perception of the viewer.

Accordingly, Arthur Berger explains the reaction of a viewer during the act of looking which is influenced by the work of art. Berger states that "lines and shapes direct our eyes to move in certain directions. When we look at an image, our eyes tend to start in the upper left corner and then move around the image as we are directed by lines, shapes, and other phenomena" thus all the elements presented to the viewer.³⁰ Berger's theory connects to Van Gogh's paintings as Vincent's technique expresses dynamism through the linear brushstrokes and thus allow the viewer to perceive an apparent motion. A similar observation was presented in an article about motion rendered through painting where the authors explain in the introduction how the brushstroke orientation allows the artist to "express real movement but also provide rhythm and energy that help the viewer's perception."³¹ This observation supports the analysis of the film *Loving Vincent* in identify the differences in experiencing Van Gogh's paintings and his brushstrokes in still images and moving images where the brushstrokes are animated.

Chapter 2 – Methodology

²⁷ Barbara Anderson, "Eye Movement and Cinematic Perception," *Journal of the University Film Association* 32, no. 1/2 (1980): 25, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20687502>.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 23.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 24.

³⁰ Arthur A. Berger, *Seeing Is Believing: An Introduction to Visual Communication* (California: Mayfield Pub, 1998), 58.

³¹ H. Lee, C. H. Lee, and K. Yoon, "Motion based Painterly Rendering," *Computer Graphics Forum* 28, no. 4 (2009): 1207, doi:10.1111/j.1467-8659.2009.01498.x.

This research focused on the concept of intermediality and its role in the experience of the paintings of Van Gogh through the animated film *Loving Vincent*. In examining the film, I selected five scenes that include elements from the well-known paintings of Van Gogh through film techniques: the initial scene (00:03:54 - 00:04:26), the final scene (01:27:19 – 01:28:16), the first (00:08:32 – 00:09:02) and second (00:50:18 – 00:50:55) flashback of Armand Roulin, and finally the scene at the wheatfield (01:08:05 – 01:08:38). The initial and final scenes presented the elements that revealed the cyclic flow of the story as they brought the viewer to the center of the story and out of it. Visually, the two scenes used the same subject – *Starry Night* – with the tilt movement downwards to guide the viewer towards the story, and upwards to suggest the end of it. The flashbacks of Armand are peculiar for their representation in color while the other flashbacks in the film are filtered in black and white to emphasize the time difference. Finally, the wheatfield scene was selected due to the combination of three paintings of Van Gogh in one frame; other frames present one or two paintings, but the frames at the wheatfield show the landscape, and the two characters of Armand and Marguerite Gachet with the clothes in which Van Gogh portrayed them.

To analyze the scenes, I conducted an audiovisual analysis to investigate the visual and auditory elements offered to the viewer. I based the analysis on the phenomenological approach that consists in “an attempt that describes invariant structured of the film viewer’s lived experience when watching moving images in a cinema or elsewhere,” which in this case was at home.³² Therefore, through an phenomenological approach I limited the elements to analyze in the film which were the visual and auditory perceptions, and the audiovisual analysis allowed to demonstrate how the film offers those sensory experiences through intermediality.

The first chapter of the analysis focused on the form of the film which compared the original paintings to the images in the film. Thus, I demonstrated the contrasts between the media features of film and painting. I started by identifying the original painting of Van Gogh in the selected scenes and then I presented how they were adapted in building a coherent storyline; therefore, I demonstrated the differences between still images and moving images.

In the second chapter of the analysis, I investigated the characteristics belonging to the medium of film, such as animation, the black and white representation of the flashback, mobile framing, and the

³² Christian Ferencz-Flatz and Julian Hanich, "Editor's Introduction: What is Film Phenomenology?," *Studia Phaenomenologica* 16 (January 2016): 13, doi:10.5840/studphaen2016161.

transitions. Furthermore, I identified the moving elements in relation to how the eye is directed on the frame. In comparison with the flashbacks of Armand, I used the flashback of Lieutenant Milliet (00:06:35 – 00:08:27) since the two scenes present the same technique in different styles: they are flashbacks, but one is in black and white while the other one is in color.

The last chapter focused on the auditory analysis to investigate the relationship between sound and image in the animated film. I focused on how the sound related to the visual images in the film, thus how sound accompanies the animation. This analysis contributes to the research on the sensory experience offered by *Loving Vincent* by providing insight on the development in sensory perception of art.

On one side, the selected approach provided a frame to the research context by emphasizing on the sensory experience of *Loving Vincent*. According to Hanich, the viewer is a sensing subject, thus he or she experience film through the senses.³³ Additionally, Hanich states that the strategy of expansion allows to develop the ideas of previous phenomenologists “into different and new directions,” but it also does not necessarily rely on the precursors.³⁴ This research applied this approach in conducting the audiovisual analysis in order to focus on the lived experiences, thus sensory perception offered by *Loving Vincent*.

On the other side, regarding the methodology, Chion provided the elements to determine the relationship between sound and image.³⁵ According to Chion, “the ear analyzes, processes, and synthesizes faster than the eye” which means that the visual elements can be interpreted based on the sound that accompanies the image.³⁶ Specifically, I used the concepts presented by Chion to conduct the analysis of the selected scenes in terms of audiovisual relations: diegetic and nondiegetic sounds, acousmatic and visualized sounds, and finally onscreen and offscreen sounds.³⁷ These categories are analyzed in relation to the moving images to investigate the additional sensory stimuli offered to the viewer. The selected scenes presented auditory effects that enhanced the experience of the paintings through sound effects accompanying the animations. Most of the elements in motion on the frames are accompanied by specific sounds, for example when the wind is moving the leaves the viewer can hear

³³ Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich, "Editor's Introduction," 50.

³⁴ Ferencz-Flatz and Hanich, "Editor's Introduction," 21.

³⁵ Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 73.

³⁶ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 10.

³⁷ Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 72-73.

the sound of wind. In fact, this research investigated the multisensory experience offered by *Loving Vincent* by connecting intermediality to the sensory perception of art.

Chapter 3 – Original paintings and *Loving Vincent*

The first part of the analysis investigated the relationship between still and moving images by identifying the original paintings of Van Gogh in the scenes of the film, thus by discussing the technological reproduction of images. The animated film allowed the audience to see the world through Vincent's perspective, specifically through his artistic style, namely Post-Impressionism. Initially, Van Gogh learned the techniques of Impressionism and pointillism that taught him to paint in dots and strokes. However, he was able to develop these techniques and use them in his own way: he "used the individual brushstrokes not only to break up the colour but also to convey his own excitement," thus his brushstrokes expressed his emotions.³⁸ According to Gombrich, the Dutch artist "used colours and forms to convey what he felt about the things he painted, and what he wished others to feel," hence the natural representation of the world was subordinate to the transmission of the emotions through his brushstrokes.³⁹ In order to render tribute to the artist and his art, the film was fully painted following Vincent's style. Each element in the film was painted with thick brushstrokes that are recognizable by the viewer who has seen at least one or two paintings of the artist.

The change of the original paintings of van Gogh into moving images in *Loving Vincent* does not make the artworks of the Dutch artist unrecognizable to the viewer. In fact, it is possible to identify the original works in most scenes of the film, especially because of the stylistic form in which the film has been produced. Accordingly, the initial scene of the film (00:03:54 – 00:04:26) starts with the image of the moon from where the camera zooms out and tilts downwards through the clouds until it reaches the landscape and then the street of the urban area. In this scene, the film shows two paintings of Van Gogh which are *Starry Night* (1889) and *The Yellow House* (1888), and it coincides with the moment in which the viewer enters the storyline. Through the film, the two paintings are combined in one scene where the viewer experiences the harmonious transition from one painting to another that provide a spatial context

³⁸ E. H. Gombrich, "In Search of New Standards. The Late Nineteenth Century," in *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon, 1950), 547.

³⁹ Gombrich, "In Search of New Standards," 548.

to the story. Similarly, the final scene (01:27:19 – 01:28:16) presents a second version of the night landscape painted by van Gogh entitled *Starry Night over the Rhône* (1888), which becomes Van Gogh's *Self-portrait* (1889). (See figures 1 and 2)

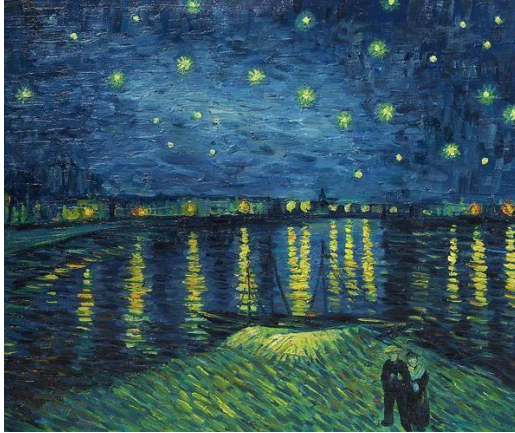


Figure 1. "Starry Night Over the Rhône," oil on canvas, 1888, Musée d'Orsay (Paris)

https://www.musee-orsay.fr/en/collections/works-in-focus/search/commentaire_id/starry-night-7190.html

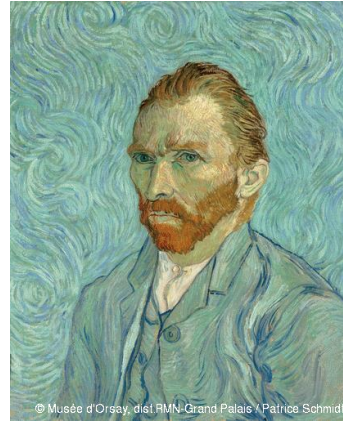


Figure 2. "Self-Portrait", 1889, oil on canvas, Musée d'Orsay (Paris)

The use of the same subject at the beginning and at the end of the story – *Starry Night* – offers a sense of cyclicity to the story that starts from the night sky and takes place on the streets, but also when the story finishes the frame is elevated again from the street to the night sky. And finally, the self portrait of the artist in color is the last image that the viewer sees until it fades to black. The elements of moving images allowed to blend one still image to another and create a story line, which cannot be experienced through paintings. The film provides a new form to paintings that enhances the visual experience through the effect of motion.

A similar effect is visible in the scene at the wheatfield (01:08:05 – 01:08:38) which is the only scene that combines more than two paintings in one frame: the film presents the painting *Wheatfield with Crows* (1890) as a background and positions the characters Armand and Marguerite Gachet as they were portrayed by Vincent in two paintings: *Portrait of Armand Roulin* (1888) and *Marguerite Gachet at the Piano* (1890). (Figures 3 and 4) Although, the landscape is represented without the crows, the characters are represented as Van Gogh painted them, but they are represented from various perspectives to adapt them to the framing. Most scenes of the film included one or two original paintings in one frame, but the scene at the wheatfield used and adapted one landscape and two portraits for the storyline. The scene at the wheatfield shows how film can use still images to achieve a different visual experience from the

original paintings through the medium's features such as animation. Therefore, *Loving Vincent* applied the film features in the use of the paintings and through intermediality it presented a different visual experience to the viewer.



Figure 3. Portrait of Armand Roulin (1888) by Van Gogh and final keyframe in the film

<http://lovingvincent.com/the-cast.29.pl.html>

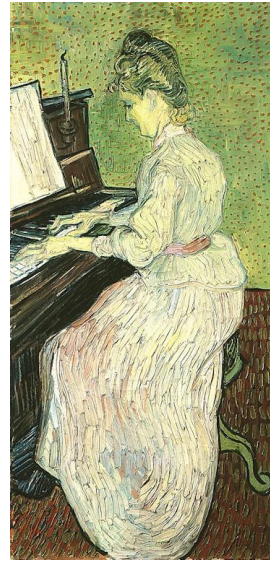


Figure 4. Marguerite Gachet at the Piano (1890), oil on canvas, Kustmuseum Basel (Switzerland)

The scenes of *Loving Vincent* are reproduced in the same artistic style of Van Gogh but in motion, thus the apparent motion that the paintings transmit to the viewer is transformed into real motion through animation and is visually perceived by the viewer. The film was inspired by the paintings of Van Gogh, but it used the hand-painted versions by contemporary artists, whose works have been photographed and through digitalization they have been organized into sequences to create the film. Therefore, *Loving Vincent* is the result of the intermedial relationship between painting, photography, and film, that demonstrate how film provides a new form to the original artworks while offering an enhanced visual experience through the effect of motion the apparent motion in the paintings is visually experienced in reality by the viewer.

The original paintings have been reproduced technologically through photography and film which destroyed the aura of the original paintings. However, the film maintains Van Gogh's artistic style in the representation of images thus it is possible to consider the film as an artwork itself with an aesthetic value and its own authenticity. In this regard, the film has destroyed the aura of the original paintings through the technological reproduction, but it is a new form of art that is unique, thus *Loving Vincent* has its own aura.

Chapter 4 – Visibility in film and painting

The selected scenes present techniques that belong to the film medium such as the mobile framing, the use of flashbacks, and transitions. In the initial scene, it is possible to notice the mobile framing since it is the element that brings the viewer to the center of the story world. The imaginary camera that is framing the moon zooms out and an apparent crane shot moves the frame from the sky to the landscape of *Starry Night* (1889), from where the camera starts to zoom in on the street passing *The Yellow House* (1888) and reaching the right side of the building where there are two people fighting at the entrance of a bar. Although, since the film is painted, the crane shot is visually represented through painting.

The series of paintings show the movements of the elements in the frame through the changes in the brushstrokes, and their photographs in series produced the effect of animation. Regarding the tilt movement, the final scene presented a shot that moves from the bottom to the top. The imaginary camera zooms out from Armand and his father, and the viewer is presented with the landscape of *Starry Night over the Rhône* (1888). Then, the camera keeps going upwards while again zooming on the stars that slowly fade and change into the background of the self-portrait of Van Gogh, where the frame fades out slowly from the outside towards the center of the frame. The painted fade out shows each darker brushstroke applied on the self-portrait until all the frame becomes black. The painted mobile framings directed the eye of the viewer as in film by its mise-en-scene, thus by what is in the frame. Therefore, the movements of the apparent camera guided the viewer in different temporal and spatial areas within the story world.

In terms of temporal movement in the film, the painted transitions can be noticed in the scenes of the two flashbacks of Armand, that differ from the other flashbacks in the rest of the film. The ones presented from Armand are represented in color while the flashbacks presented from the other characters are presented in black and white. In fact, in Armand's first flashback, when Vincent was in bed after the self-harming episode, the frame is shown in color although the event happened in the past. In contrast, Lieutenant Milliet's flashback scene (00:06:35 – 00:08:27) is presented in black and white. The frame moves horizontally towards the left while shifting to the past, thus this is the transition to the flashback where the frame is slowly blurring due to the movement and also changing into black and white instead of showing the scene in color. The flashback of Lieutenant Milliet ends with a fade out, thus only the

first transition is represented through a mobile framing. An interesting element of the black and white framing in the flashback of the lieutenant is the representation of the painting *The Yellow House* (1888) presented through a different perspective since the colors that Vincent used cannot be perceived anymore in the film. For Van Gogh, colors were important as they express certain emotions that he wanted to transmit to the viewers of his paintings. Accordingly, the film destroyed the aura of the painting by removing its colors and reproducing it as black and white, but on the other hand, the film is maintaining Van Gogh's own style of representation. The film used paintings to represent the images which are put in motion through film techniques; the animation reproduced the paintings by providing them a new form. Therefore, although paintings are at the base of the production, they are subordinated to the filmic conventions in *Loving Vincent* due to the experience of the viewer who does not directly and personally explore or interpret the still image but he or she receive the moving images presented by the film.

Film techniques are also used to direct the viewer's eye towards areas of the frame that contain the main information for the story. Opposed to paintings, film offers the details and images that the viewer should see, thus it directs the viewer to see the specific elements within the frame. Therefore, the viewer receives what the filmmaker presents in the limited time frame of the shot. In the scene at the wheatfield, the eye of the viewer is directed towards the main areas of the frame through the effect of motion and through the combination of elements. The main motion effects are in the characters that talk and move, but there are also minor movements in the landscape such as in the wheatfield and the light parts of the sky. In this regard, it can be observed that most of the visible effects of motion are perceived in the parts of the frame that are colored in lighter shades. In the wheatfield scene, the motion is mostly visible in the lower part of the frame where the viewer sees the wheatfield colored in yellow with some green and brown, but it is a lighter and warmer color than the sky that shows dark and light blue. Additionally, the characters are on the path near the wheatfield thus on the lower part of the frame, and their clothes are also yellow and white, so they catch the attention of the viewer's eye; the elements presented here are the points of the frame that show the most movements. In contrast, the sky, especially the darker parts on top, show minor changes in brushstrokes that produce a minor motion effect on the frame, thus it does not attract the attention of the viewer, but it still provides a coherent effect of motion to the rest of the frame.



Figure 5. Wheatfield scene with Armand and Marguerite from *Loving Vincent* (01:08:22).

Loving Vincent is realized through still images, namely painting and photography. Still and moving images present differences in their purpose and the way they are perceived. According to Berger, still images present a captured moment that is fixed in time and does not change, and it allows the viewer to explore the image and built his or her own narrative in understanding the image.⁴⁰ On the other side, film represents a series of images in motion that present an event that unfold in time; thus, it offers the viewer the images it wants to show and the story in the order that the filmmaker intended, as argued by Berger.⁴¹ However, *Loving Vincent* is blurring the line between the two types of images through the creation of moving images through still images: painting is the core medium that was digitalized and put in motion to produce the animated film. In fact, in each sequence of paintings that form a scene it is possible to visually perceive the changes in the brushstrokes that offer the effect of motion, thus animation. *Loving Vincent* presents film elements used for different purposes: the mobile framing is used to move the eye of the viewer spatially in the story world as in the initial and final scenes. Furthermore, the effect of motion within the frames provides the effect of animation while it directs the eye of the viewer in a specific area of the frame. The focus area tends to present a major level of motion while the rest of the frame tends to show minor changes in motion representation in order to provide coherence in the frame without catching the attention of the viewer's eye. The viewer has limited time to collect information from the screen thus the visual experience differs from seeing still images that can be observed in detail. This chapter demonstrated the contrasting visuality of film and painting: film shows

⁴⁰ Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (Peter Smith Pub, 1972), 26.

⁴¹ Idem.

the details directly to the viewer while painting offers the whole image and allows the viewer to explore the details. In conclusion, film techniques represented through painting put still images in a subordinate position to the main medium of *Loving Vincent*, namely film, to offer an enhanced visual experience of the paintings by building a story and adding motion.

Chapter 5 – Auditory Elements

Loving Vincent integrates the original paintings in its story, and it provides an enhanced sensory experience of the artwork, not only on the visual level but also on the auditory level. In fact, the animated film has integrated auditory elements to the scenes; each series of painting is accompanied by sounds that can be diegetic and nondiegetic, and onscreen or offscreen. Among the diegetic sounds it is possible to identify onscreen and offscreen sounds that have different purposes. The onscreen sounds are those that match the visual image and are visible to the viewer, for example when the characters are talking the image and sound are synchronized, or when the imaginary camera passes through the clouds and the viewer can hear a sound similar to the wind. The synchronization of image and sound is a fundamental part of film experience as it is an audiovisual medium. On the other side, the offscreen sounds anticipate the image, such as in the initial scene where the sound of the fight between people can be heard before it appears on the frame, thus it is acousmatic.

The use of sound can offer information regarding the scene, such as the voice of a character, the topic of a conversation, the ambient sounds if the scene is outdoor, or the atmosphere of the scene. In the initial scene, the tilt movement guides the imaginary camera downwards through the clouds, and the film presents the diegetic sound of the wind that matches with the visual element in the frame. While the camera moves closer to the street, the film introduces the ambient sound of crickets in crescendo that are heard until the shot ends. Additionally, with the approaching of the camera to the side of the Yellow House, the film introduces the sound of people fighting that is not visible on the screen, thus it suggests to the viewer what he or she will see soon on the frame. The diegetic and nondiegetic sounds are the elements that provide additional understanding of the story to the viewer through their synchronization with the visual elements. Similarly, in the final scene, during the zooming out from the characters to the landscape the viewer hears the voice of Vincent reading a letter accompanied by the nondiegetic background music: the background music is introduced in a slow crescendo from the beginning of the

letter and after the voice of Vincent, which is offscreen, reads “Yours Loving Vincent” there is a more explicit crescendo that builds up until the image of the self-portrait starts to fade out where also the music slowly ends with the fade out of the image. Therefore, the nondiegetic sound accompanies few transitions: the movement of the apparent camera when it tilts upwards, the transition from the starts in the sky to the background for the self-portrait, and finally the fade out of the frame. In the initial and final scenes, the nondiegetic sound dominates the scenes by suggesting the initial atmosphere and the closure to the story. The diegetic sounds are present at the end of the initial scene and they are acousmatic, thus offscreen, but they anticipate what will be onscreen. The two types of sounds are related to the images, but they are used in different ways. The nondiegetic sound is used in relation to the film techniques such as motion but also to suggest the atmosphere. The diegetic sounds are directly related to the story and its characters, and it can help the viewer to predict what is going to be shown on the frame, as in the initial scene.

In the scene of the first flashback of Armand, the sound is nondiegetic and onscreen since it is not part of the story, but it is a sound effect for the transition from present to past and it is visible by the viewer. The transition is rendered with a sound similar to wind that accompanies the change of time but also the movement of the imaginary camera. The moment when the father Joseph looks outside the window and sees Armand talking with the people outside, the sound of their voices matches the perspective of the frame, thus the voices are heard in distance so their conversation cannot be understood. Thus, the diegetic sounds in the film follow the perspective of the frame, or of the character’s point of view and it considers their spatial positioning. As in the initial scene, the diegetic sound offers the sounds in direct relation to the visuality: what is seen is presented also auditorily as the viewer would perceive it in real life.

In the second flashback of Armand, the dream is accompanied by nondiegetic sound that expresses the dramatic atmosphere following the shooting of Vincent, which builds up till the door is open and the viewer sees the wounded Vincent walking in the empty space. On the other side, the diegetic sounds express the state of Vincent such as the sound of his heavy breathing. Additionally, the sound of the dry grass accompanies the visual image of him moving and walking to reach and open the door. In the case of the two flashbacks, the nondiegetic sounds are secondary as they accompany the visual effects such as the transition or set the atmosphere that is already understood visually. But the diegetic sounds are covering the important role of filling the gaps that only the visual images would create in the viewer

in watching the animated film. For example, without the sound of the breathing it would seem that Vincent is just standing up and walking slowly to a door, but the sound of the breathing adds an information in the mind of the viewer which is regarding the physical state of Vincent. Therefore, the auditory elements added and synchronized to the visual images provide a new experience to the film and a deeper understanding of the situation in the viewer's mind.

In the scene at the wheatfield, the first part where Armand is alone is accompanied by nondiegetic sound that provides the background music in low volume that does not disturb the image. The diegetic sound is onscreen, and it reflects the ambient sound of the wind on the wheatfield, and the crows flying away after Armand throws a wooden stick in the field. But the nondiegetic music slowly fades away until 01:08:15, when Marguerite enters the scene. The first part of the scene ends with the arrival of Marguerite which coincide with the end of the nondiegetic music (01:08:15). The second part presents only diegetic sounds: the onscreen voices of the two characters, the offscreen ambient sound of crows, and Marguerite walking on the path and stepping on the grass which is also onscreen. The absence of nondiegetic sounds allows the viewer to focus on the conversation between Armand and Marguerite; in this scene it is not necessary to set a specific atmosphere as it is not a dramatic moment, and there are no intense emotions to provoke or offer to the viewer.

The use of diegetic and nondiegetic sounds in the film is in relation to the various images on the frame; the auditory elements follow the film techniques, the visual elements presented to the viewer, but also elements that are not seen on the frame but could be heard in those environments, thus they provide the ambient sound. According to Chion, hearing can elaborate the stimuli faster than sight, thus in experiencing a scene of the film the viewer first hears the sounds that set the atmosphere and then see the image.⁴² Therefore, presenting image and sound at the same time does not undermine the perception of one or the other sense, instead, the viewer as a sensing subject can elaborate various stimuli at the same time which can enrich the experience as in the case of *Loving Vincent*. Therefore, as argued by Bazin, the animated film *Loving Vincent* and its use of sound in relation to moving images can offer an enriched experience to the viewer as opposed to the merely visual experience that the original paintings offer through diegetic and nondiegetic sounds.⁴³ The nondiegetic sounds set the atmosphere of the scenes in the film which in the case of paintings the viewer can only deduce from the visuality, such as the

⁴² Chion, *Audio-Vision*, 10.

⁴³ Bazin, *What Is Cinema?*, 168.

subject or the use of colors. The diegetic sounds offered voices to the characters, ambient sounds to enrich the sense of realism of the story and increase the sense of immersion of the viewer.

Conclusion

The animated film *Loving Vincent* is the first hand-painted film and it included three media in its production: painting, photography, and film. The intermediality of the three media is present in all the scenes of the film and it can be perceived throughout the film, where the viewer can recognize the most known paintings of the Van Gogh. The original paintings inspired the film and provided the landscapes and characters to build the story, and for the realization of *Loving Vincent*, contemporary artists hand painted each frame in his style. Therefore, the paintings of the film are reproductions of the originals, but they formed a new artwork through animation; they were still images that became moving images and accompanied by sound. *Loving Vincent* sensorially enriched the paintings of Van Gogh and provided a new form to the original artworks.

On the visual level, the intermedial relationship between paintings, photography and film provided a new form to the original paintings and offered a visually enriched experience through motion. In fact, still images became moving images through animation thus the apparent motion of the paintings was turned into real motion. Although the original paintings are technologically reproduced and their aura is destroyed, it can be argued that the film maintains the stylistic form of Van Gogh thus it carries the aura of the original paintings. Furthermore, in considering the film as an authentic and unique art, *Loving Vincent* possesses its own aura.

Secondly, the animated film was able to reproduce the techniques of film and animation through series of paintings. The analyzed scenes showed the presence of mobile framing, transitions, and flashbacks through painting. In this sense, *Loving Vincent* blurs the line between still and moving images due to the use of paintings and photographs to create animation. The use of animation enabled the film to include the film techniques to guide the viewer within the story world, or from one scene to another. Additionally, animation within a scene, allows the film to direct the eye of the viewer to a specific focus area through a higher level of motion within the area in the frame. Therefore, film techniques and the effect of motion were fundamental in achieving the feature of film of showing to the viewer what he or she should see, although each frame could be observed and explored as an individual painting. The visual

elements of the film are characterized by motion which depended on color as demonstrated in the scene at the wheatfield: the parts of the frame with the lighter shades of color present higher level of motion compared to the darker parts, but the effect of motion is coherently present in most of the scenes. As a moving image, the film presented specific information in an area of the frame that attracted the viewer's eye. Since transitions and film techniques move in the story world for the viewer, he or she does not have to explore the frame as in painting. Therefore, the visuality of film presented the details that the viewer would have to search for in the paintings.

On the auditory level, the animated film used sounds to accompany the visual elements and provided an enriched sensory experience. The use of nondiegetic sound was to suggest the type of atmosphere of the scene to the viewer, as in the initial and final scenes; thus, it matched the visual elements in terms of rhythm. On the other side, the diegetic sound matched the visual elements of the frame or anticipating what would be seen. Additionally, it provided details about the story such as the character's voice or ambient sound to increase the realism and immersion in the viewer, which cannot be offered through painting. The audiovisual analysis demonstrated that the visual and auditory elements can enrich the experience of the film when presented together, and that they do not necessarily have to be synchronized. In fact, the sound can precede the image to suggest the viewer what he or she will see.

In conclusion, the intermediality of painting, photography, and film in *Loving Vincent* has offered to the viewer an enriched experience of the original paintings of Van Gogh through the effects of motion and the use of sound in relation to the images. The animated film allows the viewer to experience the stylistic perspective of Van Gogh in actual motion and as real events through sound effects and dynamism, but also to see the paintings from a different perspective through the positioning and adaptation of the original artworks in different contexts. In fact, the film included the original paintings within the storyline of *Loving Vincent* and presents it to the viewer by providing a new sensory experience. Van Gogh's paintings and his style are not only experienced as still images but as images in real motion that offer visual and auditory perceptions to the viewer.

This research has demonstrated how art can enhance the sensory experience of the viewer by stimulating multiple senses instead of focusing only on sight. Although, it is important to consider that the phenomenological approach is based on sensory perceptions which are subjective. Therefore, the film experience might differ in other viewers. I believe that further research could offer a less subjective

insight regarding the sensory perception of the animated film *Loving Vincent*, that will contribute to the developments in art and its sensory perception.

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