

Because although the notion of Méliès'cinemagician comes to mind in its jump cuts, and especially with Pucill's appearance as a magician herself, *Phantom Rhapsody* is clearly concerned with illusion and the image as it intersects with the representation of woman throughout all of these genres. The artistic trope of the nude Venus is also a recurring focal point of the film and appears in several of her classically recognised forms; arising from the seashell; reposed on her side; kneeling down in order to look at her own reflexion in the mirror. In each case however, the phallic gaze that is endemic to these histories and poses of Venus is challenged, because in each of these set-pieces, in each pose, there is another woman to hand; another woman to re-position the gaze, and even another woman to exchange positions with, as the magician and the nude are roles that are interchangeable between the two performers. The nude figure is turned away from the camera to face the female magician who takes control of the view and the viewing; the lesbian inferences are clear but not as present as in Pucill's earlier films *Cast* (1999) and *Swollen Stigma* (1998). In this moment we may glimpse what Terry Castle refers to as *The Apparitional Lesbian*, yet the apparition herself is here playful, changing and questioning. A particularly poignant moment arises toward the close of the film when the magic passes from one of the magicians to the other, at that moment, as if knowing her visual presence is imminently fading she gestures invitations to look at parts of her body before they disappear entirely from view forever. Of course, the concept of the phantom as both a signifier of the dead and of the return of the dead in another form is not insignificant to Pucill's recent work.

As the closing film to the retrospective, *Phantom Rhapsody* draws not upon closure, but rather turns upon the fluidity and uncertainty of the image as a fixed point for identity, whether that is in terms of feminine subjectivity or lesbian subjectivity. Although the playful and unpredictable nature of the magical work echoes many of her earlier films, it also differs considerably as it situates itself and its concerns more compellingly in its silent but rapturous re-positioning of the otherwise cacophonous canons of cinema and art.

Sarah Pucill's DVD can be found here:

<http://shop.lux.org.uk/index.php/pucill-selected-fims.html>