

# **CINEMATIC SUBJECTIVITY IN FIRST PERSON CINEMA**

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Master of Research

This thesis is presented as a partial fulfilment to the requirements for the degree of Master of Research (by creative practice and exegesis).

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## ABSTRACT

The main objective of this screen-based research thesis is to investigate cinematic subjectivity in first person cinema, paying special attention to the role of the artist as storyteller, director and filmmaker. My interest is to explore cinematic devices and conventions that underpin first person storytelling. I interrogate what is commonly understood as the device of the subjective point of view (POV) from the first person perspective.

I discuss Deleuze's various categories of cinematic subjectivity particularly his referencing of Pier Paolo Pasolini's *free indirect discourse* and Mitry's *semi-subjective shot*. I focus on the importance of Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem and demonstrate the strength and value of his contribution to film theory over and above apparatus theory and film semiotics. This thesis also investigates the contributions to the concept of cinematic subjectivity of key theoreticians and filmmakers such as Metz, Wilson, Pasolini and Varda.

I differentiate the ways in which subjective POV is utilised and its implication for the power of narration, including how images are used to extend cinematic language and how a spectator is positioned within the narrative framework. I engage with Varda's approach to first person storytelling in my analysis. I validate the idea that subjective and objective POV are fluid, sometimes interchangeable categories, attributing this interchangeability to Varda's imaginative approach to narrative.

My practical screen-based outcomes, in the form of two short films about my personal experience of forced adoption in Australia in the late 1960s, are made with different approaches to first person cinematic subjectivity. *Moment of Truth (MOT)*, produced by the ABC, is influenced (with limitations) by Varda's style, whereas *Without Consent* is more experimental and incorporates Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem.

I compare the production methods of both films and argue that artists and practitioners, through demonstrating their thinking in practice, supersede and extend the notion of first person cinematic subjectivity.

## **STATEMENT OF CANDIDATE**

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Cinematic Subjectivity in First Person Cinema” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Diane Busuttil 43906893  
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## THESIS OUTLINE

The exegesis consists of three chapters. Chapter one addresses various modes of cinematic subjectivity. It outlines apparatus theory and interrogates the relationship between subject and object as a dynamic cinematic function. I discuss various categories of cinematic subjectivity by way of Deleuze and Wilson. Chapter two goes deeper into the theories of Deleuze, Metz and Pasolini and how they assemble cinematic meaning, with particular attention to Pasolini's *im-segni* (image sign) theorem. I demonstrate the strength and value of his contribution as it applies beyond apparatus theory and film semiotics. Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem is evident in his cinematic works, which were renowned for their resistance against bourgeois Italian values. Strong aspects of his personal and political identity mark his films as subjective.

Chapter three introduces Varda and highlights her complex narrative structures. I argue that the artist (director as storyteller) engages with the spectators' understanding of aural and visual syntax, and utilises this syntactical understanding to expand the experience of cinematic subjectivity. To conclude I break down the creative process of the two films made as part of this screen-based research. I compare the industrial approach to film production in *Moment of Truth*, (*MOT*) (2016) to an *im-segni* aesthetic in *Without Consent*.

## PREAMBLE

In December 2015, at approximately the same time I began my MRes programme, I was approached by a production company commissioned by the ABC to share my experience of forced adoption. The production company wanted ten people to tell their personal stories for a short film series called *Moment of Truth*, (*MOT*). One episode was to be aired on free-to-air television each week<sup>1</sup>, and the entire series would be available online through ABC iview. After a few phone conversations with the assistant producer, I recorded several five-minute video grabs of myself talking directly to the camera. They chose my story for the series and provided me with a film pack consisting of a digital camera, tripod, and a folder full of how-to instructions in order to go about filming my story from a first person perspective.

The *How-To* manual stressed the importance of the before, during and after moment of each scene, addressing the camera directly (with which I initially felt uncomfortable), and ways to make the narrative dramatic and emotional. I followed their instructions and asked the producer many questions throughout the filming process to gain an insight into the ABC's preferred methods of first person filmmaking. The producer was pleased he had found someone he could mentor.

During production, the producer would look at the rushes and come back to me with notes. He observed that my responses, both verbal and physical, were lacking in emotion. He came to my house to give a filming demonstration and proceeded to film me from, in my opinion, the worst possible angle (under the chin) and incorporated what he called the 'shaky hand' (amateurish handheld camera movement) to make the film look 'authentic and home-made'. I was the only practising filmmaker in the series and found these techniques disturbing and restrictive but also amusing as they assumed that authenticity and subjectivity could simply be produced through camera placement and camera movement. For the ABC, in its attempts to appeal to a broad demographic, these techniques also enabled identification with a 'non-professional' (read unsophisticated) audience.

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<sup>1</sup> *Moment of Truth* (2016), episode *Will I Find My Birth Father?* (ABC, 2016). See link below.

<http://iview.abc.net.au/programs/moment-of-truth/DO1512H009S00>

Here is a brief breakdown of the ABC's formulaic process for first person storytelling:

- In the first two minutes, the main character must be introduced;
- The topic must be revealed at the two-minute mark, inferring a question that can be answered;
- Between three and seven minutes the back story is summarised, including other key characters in the narrative;
- The passing of time needs clearly to be shown, established in post-production with inter-titles such as "three weeks later";
- The material must indicate a clear process or journey of how one reaches a resolution in the search, and;
- In the last few minutes there needs to be a climax indicating whether or not the 'moment of truth' was accomplished, which answers the question proposed at the two-minute mark.<sup>2</sup>

The process led me to my argument that film apparatus alone cannot conceive of cinema as an art form. Art cannot be achieved without the human consciousness and its active engagement with creativity and poetic notions of expression. It is simplistic to believe that cinematic subjectivity is a function of technological outcomes alone.

*Without Consent*, the principal creative component of this thesis, utilises the artist's first person voice to strengthen the approach to cinematic subjectivity. This first person voice asks the spectator to think about the material being laid out before them by emphasising the artist's perspective throughout the creation of the film. The practice of filmmaking and therefore, thinking through these artistic processes, is thus revealed.

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<sup>2</sup> Refer to Appendix 1 for a concise breakdown.



## INTRODUCTION

The thesis interrogates what is commonly understood as the cinematic device of the subjective point of view (POV) from the first person perspective. I achieve this through an integration of cinematic theory with screen-based research practice. This thesis illustrates a fluid enquiry between research and practice, each one feeding the other throughout the various points of my investigation.

On the *Observations of Film Art* web blog shared by film scholars Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell, the term *cinematic subjectivity* is defined as “either sharing the characters’ eyes and ears (properties) or getting right inside his or her mind (conditions)” (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). These two possible definitions clarify the difference between perceptual and mental subjectivity. In cinematic terms, the ‘subject’ is the character whose POV creates the cinematic world, which often includes internal thoughts and feelings. The ‘object’ is what the subject sees. Throughout this thesis I explore attributes of mental subjectivity whereby the images and sounds reference the artist’s inner feelings rather than what they see and hear. In regard to terminology, I use the word ‘artist’ to refer to the shared roles of the storyteller, director and filmmaker.

My specific interest is what happens when the artist inserts themselves as a character, seen or unseen, within their films. The task of the artist is to create cinema that portrays their personal vision of the world, including intangible elements of human emotion and cultural references to support their story; use of the artist as a character within their own film creates a blurred boundary between the story and reality. This boundary is already compromised by the tension of the artistry and memory in first person cinematic accounts of real events. My deeper interest is to understand the cinematic devices and conventions that underpin first person storytelling but also to explore various methods that engage the spectator through narration and imagination. The artist must use nuanced messages and sub-texts within the audio and visual content, encouraging the spectators to “‘read’ or ‘think’, to reflect on the images when watching a film” (Zahn, 2011, p. 465).

Chapter one begins with a discussion on subjective, objective and apparatus theory. I then explore Gilles Deleuze’s (1983) chapter on perception-image in his foundational book, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image*<sup>3</sup> with particular attention to his exploration of *free indirect*

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<sup>3</sup> Original French title: *Cinéma 1. L'Image- Mouvement*

*discourse* which was influenced by Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem. I also explore philosopher George Wilson's categories of the subjective shot (Wilson, 2006) then discuss what is beyond these categories to support my argument over and above apparatus theory and film semiotics.

Chapter two introduces and explores the function of Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem, which simultaneously weaves theory and practice. Pasolini's theorem is applied in consideration of his Marxist beliefs and homosexuality, which are key factors and influences in his films. The combination of the political with the personal serves to extend cinematic subjectivity, allowing the writer to be 'present' in the narrative of their films.

Chapter three explores narrative in Agnès Varda's cinema with particular attention to *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008). Varda adds to our understanding of cinematic subjectivity through her complex narrative structures and imaginative cinematography. Her approach of *being-with* the camera suggested by Mitry and Deleuze (Mitry, cited in Deleuze, 1983b) demonstrates a *semi-subjective* communication with the spectator. I discuss how Varda inhabits spaces and re-imagines them from their historical origins into the present. Varda incorporates *im-segni* devices such as voice and performativity as message receptors.

I consider *Without Consent* to be *my* film. I wrote, produced and devised the entire production from beginning to end. *Moment of Truth (MOT)*, on the other hand, is not my film although it tells part of my story. I shot the film and the ABC produced and edited it according to a commercial, digestible style of storytelling. As such, an analysis of *Moment of Truth* can serve as a counter point to *Without Consent* with respect to the methods of creating and interpreting cinematic subjectivity. The films represent a counter point of *produced* cinematic subjectivity versus a more experimental approach, which I believe enables a more nuanced and dynamic expression of subjectivity.

*Without Consent* is a personal account of being an adoptee within the political landscape of 1960s Australia. The film uses images of the Australian landscape as a metaphor to provoke the spectator's imagination. This artistic choice is aligned with Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem using metaphorical images as visual language signs to support the narrative.

## CHAPTER ONE

1. Subject and Object
2. Apparatus theory
3. Categories of the subjective shot according to philosopher, George Wilson
4. Mitry — the semi-subjective shot
5. Deleuze and his image categories
  - a. Perception image — Deleuze on Pasolini's *free indirect discourse*
  - b. Affection image — camera (spectator) as character

In this chapter I will explicate how the spectator makes sense of cinematic images in terms of their subjective and objective positioning. I give a brief overview of apparatus theory and its limitations as an expression of cinematic subjectivity. I critique Wilson's categories of subjective shot and address Mitry's semi-subjective shot. I introduce Deleuze and his perception and affection image with specific reference to his views on Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem.<sup>4</sup>

## 1. Subject and Object

The definition of subjective and objective, of how the spectator/reader experiences POV has long been discussed throughout history and dates as far back as Aristotle, "who distinguished between two distinct modes of narration: showing and telling, mimesis and diegesis" (Tomasulo, 1987, p.109). Cinema needs subjects to be looked at, analysed and experienced through the author, narrator, characters and reader (Branigan, 1984). It also needs the objective POV to allow for exchange of perspectives between the subjective and objective view, between internal realities and external events. As John Titford in *Cinema Journal* states, "Like all art forms which believe that only the subjective, the interior life is real, it can ultimately never avoid the paradox that for creation to take place, the inner experience must be externalized, and thereby partake of the world of objective reality" (Titford, 1973, p.17).

## 2. Apparatus theory

In *Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematographic Apparatus*, Jean-Louis Baudry (1974) developed the idea of film as an apparatus. Baudry argues that the function of cinema is ideological, and that we must turn toward the 'technological base' of the medium in order to understand its truly ideological function (Baudry, 1974). Apparatus theory originates in Marxist film theory, semiotics, and psychoanalysis in its attempt to politicize, structure and psychoanalyze the position of the viewing subject. Cinematic apparatus includes the camera, the projection, the film stock and the process of editing — everything involved in the production of the cinematic object.

Baudry's ideological interpretation of the cinematic apparatus positions the audience in a passive, dream-like state and assumes coercion in the darkened atmosphere of the movie theatre, blurring the audience's ability to distinguish what is real and what is fiction. This is what Baudry, referring to Plato, calls "forced immobility" (Baudry, 1976, p.108).

The strength of Baudry's idea is the importance of the relationship between the camera and

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<sup>4</sup> Pasolini will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

subject in creating cohesive meaning. But this position is problematic as the “cinematic apparatus aligns the spectator’s look with the ‘all-seeing’ look of the camera” (Young, 2015, p.1).

According to Feminist film theorist, Laura Mulvey (1975) the placement of the viewer in a passive position elicits a voyeuristic approach to cinema that is highly gendered, favouring the male perspective (Mulvey, 1975), which she believes removes agency from the female viewer, forcing them to see the world through the narrow view of the (mostly) cis-gendered white male perspective. The body of a woman, represented on screen, becomes objectified through the male gaze. The ‘male gaze’ perspective articulated in her book *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Mulvey, 1975), positions female viewers in a pseudo-male position of observing female objectification via the film itself.

Since apparatus theory defines meaning through apparatus, it gives limited options in understanding how cinema is experienced. Meaning cannot simply be generated through a technique or aesthetic alone. Cinema cannot be understood without the dynamic voice of the artist who attempts to transcend the apparatus towards an unmediated exchange between herself and the work, and between the work and the spectator.

Another problem with apparatus theory is its validation of the machine over human endeavor. The presence of the human body with its ability to breathe, move and experience emotions is not applied to the apparatus, voiding it of human consciousness and affect. For example, when a subject is intentionally looking directly into the camera while acknowledging they are being looked at, it could be argued that the apparatus is rendered ineffectual. This direct look reverses the spectator’s position and gives agency to the subject (Berger, 1972), ultimately inviting deeper intimacy with the spectator via direct eye contact.

### 3. Categories of subjective shots according to philosopher George Wilson

Wilson discusses four categories of subjective shots and describes how these constructions alter the audience’s inter-subjective positioning. Despite Wilson’s laudable attempt at unpacking the different subjective positions available, his thinking is still embedded in the logic of apparatus. Wilson’s first classification of the subjective shot is the *veridical point-of-view shot*. He believes the spectator must imagine the circumstances as their own experience by viewing the fictional world through the character’s eyes (Wilson, 2006). This is commonly achieved by shots that are taken from the same height as the main character, assuming that the spectator is in her/his skin as the camera moves. Wilson’s second category, *subjectively inflected shots*, portrays a character’s psychological condition. What cannot be seen or stated

directly in the veridical POV shot can be inferred in the *subjectively inflected shot*, where the character's and the viewer's POV remain the same; for example, if the character is drunk, the camera movement will wobble to depict the character's mental state and kinesthetic<sup>5</sup> experience. His third category, *subjective saturation*, most commonly used in dream sequences and hallucinations, relies heavily on tricks of perception such as visual distortion and camera movement, which imply an hallucinatory experience from the character's field of vision. Wilson's fourth category is *unmarked subjective inflection* where neither the viewer nor the character is aware of the significance of what they are viewing. This could occur in the case of a temporal shift in the narrative which will make sense to the viewer much later in the film.

In his journal article, *Transparency and Twist in Narrative Fiction Film*, (Wilson, 2006) Wilson's perspective on apparatus theory highlights the role of the audience's emotional and/or psychological identification with various shots, yet at the same time he questions the validity of the subjective shot as being truly subjective. Wilson argues that merely positioning the audience at the same vantage point of the character may not be enough to warrant subjectivity. It is the audiences' imaginative, inter-subjective relation to the shot that is needed to validate even the veridical POV (Wilson, 2006). Wilson concedes there are limitations to his categories and believes that knowledge from the spectator is needed to convincingly interpret visual information. This reliance on input from the audience negates the truthfulness or subjective nature of the subjective POV shot. The audience is aware that they are watching a narrative and accepts the unspoken rules to accommodate cinema's power of illusion. However, for Wilson subjectivity is only important if it is narratively inflected. He asks, "What difference, if any, does it make to what the viewer imagines seeing in a subjective segment when it is not immediately identified as such in its broader narrational context?" (Wilson, 2006, p.83). As such, Wilson fails to account for the non-narrative inflections of subjectivity within cinematic texts.

#### 4. Mitry — the semi-subjective shot

Jean Mitry (1907-1988), a film theorist, critic and filmmaker, was one of few major film theorists who also worked in film production. Mitry's analysis enhances our understanding of subjective positioning by enveloping the subjective and the objective POVs. His category of the semi-subjective shot became highly influential to theorists such as Deleuze.

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<sup>5</sup> The sensation of moving in space. "To orient ourselves with and around objects" (Hope, 2010, p.97).

What Mitry calls the semi-subjective shot anticipates a character's action or perception, thereby offering the spectator insight into the scene "so that the camera seems to become a consciousness accompanying the character" (L. G. Schwartz, 2005, p.110). A semi-subjective shot refers to an anonymous POV that exists within the character's world, allowing the spectator to simulate the perspective of someone viewing the character, and what the character is seeing. According to Mitry, this 'double viewing' gives the spectator a stronger empathetic understanding of the character by providing visual insights into the character and story (L. G. Schwartz, 2005). Film critic Tobias Schwartz describes Mitry's semi-subjective image as "an image in which the camera sees the character and what the character sees at the same time, so that the subjective reaction is always given in the objective image" (T. Schwartz, 2015). Mitry believes that the semi-subjective shot arose to surpass a limit in the ordinary POV shot. Shots without a character looking cannot communicate feelings about the events from their optical POV (L. G. Schwartz, 2005).

## 5. Deleuze and his image categories

Deleuze moves away from the technological obsessions of apparatus theory towards an attempt to understand the dynamic materiality of cinema. In *Cinema 1*, Deleuze (1991) establishes three main categories for images: the perception image, the affection image and the action image (Deleuze, 1983b). Perception and affection images are strongly relevant to this thesis and will be described in further detail. I will not discuss the action image as it is less relevant to this thesis.

### a. Perception image — Deleuze on Pasolini's *free indirect discourse*

Deleuze's perception image is heavily influenced by Pasolini's notion of *free indirect discourse* which reflects Deleuze's ideas on cinematic subjectivity. The perception image oscillates between subjective and objective images creating a semi-subjectivity or *free indirect discourse*. Deleuze believes the camera's consciousness is the essence of cinema (Pisters, 2003). The camera's consciousness cannot exist without the consciousness and/or movement of the person holding or directing it, and is thus dependent partly on the subjective body of that person. Deleuze argues that "We are no longer faced with subjective *or* objective images; we are caught in a correlation between a perception-image and a camera-consciousness which transforms it (the question of knowing whether the image was objective or subjective is no longer raised)" (Deleuze, 1991, p.74).

Deleuze understands that Pasolini's mimesis (stemming from Aristotelian mimesis) is what unites and transcends ideas of subjectivity. According to Professor Silvia Arlorosi in *Time-Image*, Deleuze applies Pasolini's mimesis as pertaining to genuine cinema:

Pasolini, for his part, drew out the consequences of ... 'cinema of poetry', in contrast to the so-called cinema of prose. In the cinema of poetry, the distinction between what the character saw subjectively and what the camera saw objectively vanished, not in favour of one or the other, but because the camera assumed a subjective presence, acquired an internal vision, which entered into a relation of *simulation* ('mimesis') with the character's way of seeing. It is here... that Pasolini discovered how to go beyond the two elements of the traditional story, the objective, indirect story from the camera's point of view, and the subjective, direct story from the character's point of view, to achieve the very special form of a 'free indirect discourse'. Of a 'free, indirect subjective' (Arlorosi, 2009, p.257).

Deleuze understands that Pasolini transforms the semi-subjective shot into a reflexive image, which "no longer marks an oscillation between two poles, but an immobilization according to a higher aesthetic form. The perception-image finds here the particular sign of its composition" (Deleuze, 1983b, p.76). To surmise, Deleuze was one of the only film scholars that supported Pasolini's theorem and approach to cinema at the time<sup>6</sup>.

a. Affection image — camera (spectator) as character

For Deleuze, the close-up image is the epitome of the affection image (Deleuze, 1983a). He believes the face to be an all-revealing platform for nuanced expressions in cinema. He claims that the close-up is "the affection-image: it has as its limit the simple affect of fear and the effacement of faces in nothingness. But as its substance it has the compound affect of desire and of astonishment - which gives it life - and the turning aside of faces in the open, in the flesh" (Deleuze, 1983a, p.101). Deleuze notes that Pasolini is one of the few directors who executes the quintessential affection image by using the close-up shot.<sup>7</sup> The characters in Pasolini's close-up shots look directly into the camera, inviting eye contact between the character and spectator. For example, in *Teorema* (Pasolini, 1968) Terence Stamp plays the main protagonist who briefly visits a wealthy Italian family living in a large castle. He

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<sup>6</sup> This statement is backed up by the fact that other scholars such as Christian Metz, Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes, who attending the Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema in Pesaro, Italy in 1965 all disputed Pasolini's theorem. Please refer to section 2. The Language debate between Metz and Pasolini on page 20 for further information.

<sup>7</sup> Deleuze strongly attests Hitchcock as a master of the close-up shot.



seduces all the family members and the maid, leaving behind a violent wave of revived sexualities. His erotic gaze, executed through close up shots of his face, reveals his lustful appetite for the other characters. At the same moment as Stamp desires members of the wealthy Milanese family, the spectators are drawn into his seduction, sympathetically identifying either with Stamp or the other characters. This close-up device is a concise example of how images can oscillate between subjective and objective POVs. Through the use of the affection image we are witness to the character and simultaneously identify with what that character is drawn to.



Figure 1: Terence Stamp's seductive close up shot, and direct gaze, in *Teorema* (Pasolini, 1968).

## CHAPTER TWO

1. Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem
2. The language debate between Metz and Pasolini
3. Aesthetic traits OR the (active) spectator

## 1. Pasolini's *im-segni* (image signs) theorem

“He [the filmmaker] must first draw the im-sign from chaos, make it possible and consider it as classified in a dictionary of im-signs (gestures, environment, dreams, memory); he must then accomplish the very work of the writer, that is, enrich this purely morphological im-sign with his personal expression. While the writer's work is esthetic invention, that of the filmmaker is first linguistic invention then esthetic” (Pasolini, 1976, p.2).

Pier Paolo Pasolini<sup>8</sup> (1922-1975), Italian film director, poet, writer and intellectual, was an outspoken Marxist and openly homosexual. His films critique narrative cinematic language, and in the words of Professor Arlorosi he “is perhaps the most important theorist of the idea that cinema can stretch beyond the apparent limits of the objectivity of things, thus destabilizing the more central point of view of narrative-based films” (Arlorosi, 2009, p.256). Pasolini's ‘image signs’ *im-segni* — also referred to as *cinema of poetry* — “depend more on the power of images rather than on that of spoken words... concrete because they reproduce the real, but at the same time irrational because they come from the infinite world of possibilities, showing the subjective points of view of characters or authors” (Arlorosi, 2009, p.257).

Pasolini proclaims that poetic or ‘vertical’ narratives<sup>9</sup> are created by using components of the real but allow the spectator more scope to notice nuanced elements within a scene (Pasolini, 1976). These elements could include the dialect spoken by a character or a gesture executed with a specific intention behind it, revealing insightful information linked to a cultural or social reference. Such narrative elements thus become symbolic, challenging the spectator to go beyond what language communicates and gain a deeper meaning in each scene. In literature, the term *free indirect discourse* describes a way of presenting multiple layers of the character's perspective by indicating the character's inner world and mental processes as well as what they are saying (Ghaffary & Nojournian, 2013). It can also involve intermingling first and third person voice. Cinema's equivalent is what Pasolini terms *free indirect subjectivity*, whereby “The cinema author has no dictionary but infinite possibilities”

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<sup>8</sup> “Pier Paolo Pasolini was both a Catholic and a Marxist; a modern-minded, openly gay man who looked to the distant past for inspiration and comfort; a staunch leftist who at one point in the late sixties famously spoke out against left-wing student protests (sympathizing instead with the working-class police) — was matched by the multifariousness of his professional life, as a filmmaker, poet, journalist, novelist, playwright, painter, actor, and all-around intellectual public figure. He is best known for his subversive body of film works” (Criterion, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> Vertical narrative may best describe his description of an “autonomous vision of the content” (L. G. Schwartz, 2005, p.126).

(Pasolini, 1976, p.2). This representation of subjectivity can include social and political opinions of the artist themselves. Pasolini's voice in his cinema represents his social and political ideologies either directly through the character's intonation or by the interjection of a narrator's voice. Pasolini was, as a poet, well versed on integrating implicit information into his works. He was influenced by his predecessors Giovanni Verga and Carlo Emilio Gadda, who were well known for their experimental and polyphonic use of dialect in writing (Sangalli, 2006), and wrote comprehensive essays about them in the late 1950s. Pasolini's writing and cinematic works simultaneously reveal his personal and political voices, which are uniquely interwoven and embedded in his cinematic works.

The basis of film semiotics is constructed using language, however Pasolini's cinema uses signifiers beyond language to constitute *im-segni*'s meaning. He states "In sum, there is a whole complex world of significant images — formed as much of gestures and of all sorts of signs coming from the environment, as of memories or of dreams which is proposed as the 'instrumental' foundation of cinematic communication, and prefigures it" (Pasolini, 1976, p.2). Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem stands as a guide to understanding the creative nuances in his cinematic works. Through *im-segni* Pasolini celebrates the inclusion of the lower classes and outcasts (whom he identifies with) and blends the combination of movement, gesture and intention as visual codes. These codes express layers within a character as well as social and cultural contexts. An example in Pasolini's first feature film, *Accattone* (Pasolini, 1961), occurs when the main character, Vittorio 'Accattone'<sup>10</sup> Cataldi, played by Franco Citti, is having a meal with friends at a restaurant. He talks with food in his mouth and uses a fork in an unconventional manner. He drops food from his mouth and belches, indicating that he has no regard for social etiquette and is from a lower socio-economic background. By choosing non-professional actors in this film, Pasolini enacts what Deleuze classifies as *the active factor*, whereby the actors on screen are part of the real life narrative construction. To surmise, Pasolini's *im-segni* devices intensify the experience of the *real* in cinematic subjectivity.

## 2. The language debate between Metz and Pasolini

In 1965, Christian Metz, Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes, all structuralist semioticians, gathered at the Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema in Pesaro, Italy, for a series of panels and seminars to discuss film semiotics "as the dominant discipline of academic film study" (Dunghé, 2013). It was at this seminar that Metz concedes Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem

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<sup>10</sup> English translation: scoundrel, beggar or no-hoper.

relates to cultural signs and symbols as a cognitive image construction; however, he disagreed that *im-segni* belongs to a cinematographic language. Metz argues that these signs and symbols already exist within a language construct and are not specific to cinema. He refuses to believe that the artist has the ability to create cinematic form through *im-segni*. Metz states that “There is no governing system specific to cinematographic language” (Metz, 1991, p.215 footnote), and believes that the audience creates meaning directly from the image, or filmed object, rather than their cultural context. Metz’s opinion disregards any nuanced information or sub-texts in the narrative that do not explicitly exist on screen, and by doing so ultimately denies cinema as an artistic expression.

According to *Desistfilm* blog (2013), Metz “adopted the terminology of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure to differentiate between *langue*, a language system with its own clearly delineated rules of organization, and *langage*, a language of style (i.e., a jargon), characteristic of an art form, which may contain its own set of structural rules but which lacks a formal vocabulary or proper grammar” (Dunghe, 2013). According to de Saussure, language is constituted of two separate elements. *Langue* is formal language underpinned by a system with its own rules of organisation — grammar and syntax — while *parole* is language spoken by individuals (Feldman & Landtsheer, 1998). *Parole* may contain its own form or style (jargon) or characteristics of an art form but is lacking in grammar and formal vocabulary (Dunghe, 2013). “Metz concludes that...cinema may be regarded as a *langage* but cannot be labelled a *langue* (Dunghe, 2013, p.3). He attests that “*im-segni* existing prior to the cinema, is to my mind a dubious, burdensome artifact”<sup>11</sup> (Metz, 1991, p.213). Metz refuses to believe that there is anything that precedes language, yet Pasolini’s cinematic works are strong examples of how an artist can create a cinematic *langue*. Their debate also extends into the notion of reality, where Metz believes that cinema represents an impression of reality, while Pasolini believes that cinema is its own reality, which is integral to recognising cinema as *langue* (Dunghe, 2013).

According to Pasolini, the process for creating *im-segni* is two-fold: aesthetic and linguistic. The artist must first artistically arrange the material, possibly from a state of chaos, in a way that allows the signs to clearly communicate to the spectator via visual and audio language — an unfolding of the artist’s subjective POV. The unfolding process uniquely articulates the artist’s vision or impression of the world. Secondly, the artist must structure the material

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<sup>11</sup> Metz’s *Film Language*, volume 1 was published in 1971. More than twenty years later, in a later edition, Metz reiterates his stance on Pasolini’s *im-segni*, declaring that his ideas on photo and phonographic analogy are subtler. Nevertheless, he still remains opposed to the idea of *im-segni* belonging to film semiotics.

using cinematic tools to create a recognisable form, such that the spectator understands visual stimuli and metaphors (Pasolini, 1976).

Pasolini believes there is no inherent pre-existing language or lexicon for cinema as exists in the context of language and literature. This void is the driving element that inspired him to create a unique cinematic aesthetic, and which motivated him to move from literature to cinema. Pasolini strongly repudiated that film semiotics is the dominant discipline in cinema.

### 3. Aesthetic traits OR the (active) spectator

Pasolini's cinema uses elements of *im-segni*, such as signs, cultural references and visual metaphors to construct narrative. Film critic Bryant George believes that Pasolini's films are 'open texts', multi-referential objects which resist closure in a conventional narrative sense, that are excessive and irreducible to dominant ideological scenarios (George, 1993). Pasolini has the ability to lay himself bare in public and question his own existence within the context of his cinematic works. He has the courage to be vulnerable and invite confrontation. His cinema reflects upon his place within society and invites ideological questioning from his spectators. Robert Gordon (1996), in his book *Pasolini: Forms of Subjectivity* reinforces this dialogic function of Pasolini's, arguing that he "saw everything he did in terms of a civic duty, and that this duty, this compulsion to be different and oppositional, emerged not only from a deep personal questioning of the role of the 'intellectual' and the 'artist' in history, but also from a careful examination of his own 'self' (Gordon, 1996, p.8). Ultimately, Pasolini's theorem introduced a form that stood in opposition to the privileged language of bourgeois society, common to films of that time.

Pasolini intentionally broke away from an assumed hegemony of language and used anarchistic images to construct his aesthetic. For example, in *Salò*, or the *120 Days of Sodom* (Pasolini, 1975), originally written by novelist and playwright Marquis de Sade in 1785, four main characters — the duke, president, magistrate and the bishop — take on the role of fascists, inflicting their desires on a group of young men and women. These oppressive and abusive libertines perform acts of sexual abuse, coprophagy and necrophilia toward the young cast as a way to remove their innocence and induct them into a new regime. As film critic Richard Brody states, "Pasolini suggests that the classical values of Western civilization and the ostensibly progressive modernity that's based on them are steeped in the blood of innocents" (Brody, 2011). Pasolini uses images of torture and abuse to show the decay of humanity. He forces his audience to reflect on the scene they are watching and to question

their moral roles within society. Are they sleeping and allowing these atrocities to take place? Have they become so immune to images of violence that they have allowed themselves to normalise the violent dysfunction of humanity? Pasolini forces his audience to enliven their capacity for empathy and have an opinion. His images provoke revulsion and disgust, yet the film shows how society is accustomed to seeing acts of violence as leisure, turning abusive atrocities into entertainment. His uncompromising images stimulate an opinion in exact opposition to the conclusions of apparatus theory.





Figure 2: A screenshot taken from Pasolini's *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (Pasolini, 1975).

Pasolini proclaims the basic characteristic of reality to be action, calling it the “first and foremost language of mankind” (in Dunghe, 2013, p.6), which would mean that cinematic works have, by extension, an underlying if unarticulated structure, rendering them *langue*. Italian novelist and semiotician Umberto Eco strongly disputes this point, arguing that cinematic language is not an innate component of human action (Dunghe, 2013). Action as an embodied gesture and an empirical experience will always translate into a deeper, more kinesthetic understanding of a visual scene for the spectator. It allows the spectator a way in, and a possibility to see themselves, or a similar situation to their own, portrayed on screen. As the eyeballs of the young boy are being pierced in *Salò*, the audience is understandably squeamish as they endure empathetic, psychic pain.

What makes *im-segni* inherently subjective is how the spectator must engage with the material in a two-way process: the images invoke memories as well as the imagination, and vice-versa, revealing “an intimate form of communication with the self and between the author and the viewers” (Arlorosi, 2009, p.256).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

1. Agnès Varda
2. Varda's complex Narrative structure
3. Varda the essayist
4. Varda's imaginative approach

## 1. Agnès Varda

Agnès Varda is a Belgian filmmaker credited with ‘inventing’ new wave (Nouvelle Vague) cinema (Vincendeau et al., 2007), and often referred to as the godmother of the French New Wave (Anderson, 2001). Her bold experimental approach continues to influence filmmakers across the world. She began her career as a still photographer and has maintained a keen and scrutinising eye in the making of her films. She was married to the well-known French film director Jacques Demy, and is now acknowledged as the only female filmmaker in the French New Wave. However, she was previously omitted from discussions of this movement because of her gender. Her last and self-proclaimed final film, *The Beaches of Agnès (Les Plages D' Agnès)* (2008), is set along the coastal towns of Western France where she grew up. The film is about her life and includes theatrical re-enactments of her childhood memories delivered with a childlike sense of discovery. Varda uses the camera with a unique playfulness to communicate an intimate tone on themes of happiness, loss and aging. Her fluid approach to story-telling reveals an instinctive curiosity that opens up her cinema to the lives of her loved ones as she wanders through her story, challenging formal distinctions between documentary and fiction. Varda’s complex narrative structures form the key to her unique cinematic style, which challenges apparatus theory and technology. Her discovery of the digital camera presented versatile possibilities that she gracefully integrated into her unique personal filmmaking style. Varda gives the impression that the technology of the hand-held digital camera is moving with her rather than observing or monitoring her movements in an objective manner.

Varda argues for the necessity of integrating the subjective with the objective. In the context of her film *The Gleaners and I* (Varda, 2000), she states that “The objective is the facts, society’s facts, and the subjective is how I feel about that, or how I can make it funny or sad or poignant” (Anderson, 2001, p.26). In this statement Varda makes a strong claim of the artist’s perspective as a subjective POV. Her desire to intertwine her own story with the community’s is blended into an event of participation rather than separation, whereby she enters the community’s world and includes her opinions with the film’s characters and events. This personal participation and involvement in her films paint the overall aesthetic with her personal touch and individual character. Her strength lies in the way she elicits the confidence and courage to state her impressions of the world around her as subject and narrator, thereby including the consciousness of the artist within the film’s narrative.

## 2. Varda's complex narrative structure

Varda's cinema combines various modes of narration within its narrative structure to convey its meaning. She introduces stories from the past and re-imagines them in the present. She reflects on her experiences and invites the spectator into her narrative constructions to inhabit her world. She does this using narration of history, inner reflections and in-the-moment experiences. This is what Finnish social psychologist Vilma Hänninen suggests are the three modes of narrative circulation: the told, the inner and the lived, demonstrated in the Figure below (Hänninen, 2004). In Varda's cinema these modes are interwoven.

The told narrative refers to the audible narration of the story, and is according to Hänninen “an individual's interpretation of his/her life, in which the past events, present situation and future projects are understood using cultural narrative models as resources” (Hänninen, 2004, p.71). Hänninen's inner narrative

... can be grasped as a continuous mental process consisting of a multitude of sub-narratives of varying time-spans and varying degrees of self-reflectedness. The inner narrative can be seen to serve several functions: it makes sense of the past, provides a vision of the future, defines the individual's narrative identity, articulates values and moral standards, and helps to regulate emotions (Hänninen, 2004, p.74).

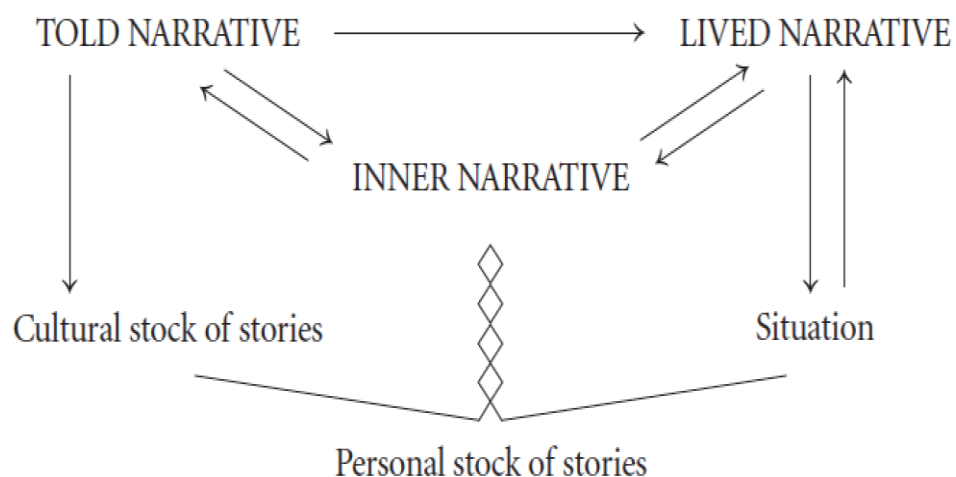


Figure 1

*The model of narrative circulation*

Hänninen's model of narrative circulation. (Hänninen, 2004, p. 73)

This description perfectly describes the synthesis of narrative, form, and reflection evident in Varda's work. Lived narration refers to real-life drama or the concept that our lives follow a natural order pertaining to a narrative (with a beginning, middle and end).

In Varda's cinema the intertwining of Hänninen's model can be seen as she creates a world that is simultaneously being shown, remembered and created. An example of this from *The Beaches of Agnès* is when Varda places old black and white photographs from her childhood in the sand. She then walks into a re-created scene where three young girls, one of them wearing the swimsuit in the style of her photograph, are playing with hand-made flowers planted in the sand. Although Varda directed this childhood re-enactment she is clearly perplexed at its significance and candidly comments directly into camera "I don't know what it means to recreate a scene like this. Do we relive the moment? For me, cinema is a game" (Varda, 2008). This scene demonstrates one of many where Varda shows, remembers and creates the narrative simultaneously, encompassing all of Hänninen's narrative modes. Varda is playing with memory and questions the validity of a new temporal zone that her cinema creates. She is directly engaging and asking her spectators to do the same, opening up her narrative to the spectator's imagination.

It is precisely this sense of recognition and inclusion that allows Varda's complex narrative structures to be re-imagined as a personal experience by the spectator. For Bordwell, this is what makes cinema "highly subjective, telling us details of his or her inner life.... In any case, the viewer's process of picking up cues, erecting expectations, and constructing an ongoing story out of the plot will be governed by what the narrator tells or does not tell" (Bordwell & Thompson, 1990, p.68).

### 3. Varda the essayist

First person reflexive filmmaking is an identifying trait of the essay film, and Varda is one of its major proponents in the world today. French filmmaker Jean-Luc Godard believes that the essay film is a "form that thinks and thought that forms" (Giannetti, 1974, p.26), underlying its subjective aspect and immediacy. Varda has the ability to narrate in the present moment and simultaneously to think about that moment. This approach allows her own curiosity to interrupt the story and opens the spaces she inhabits to new meanings.

In the early part of *The Beaches of Agnès*, she visits the house where she was brought up and is disappointed by the lack of historical connection it provides. However, the current resident is an avid toy train collector, and Varda becomes fascinated with his collection, keeping the footage of the two of them together in the film. She avails herself of other characters and weaves them into the fabric of her story. This method simultaneously weaves other narratives into her story as her thinking changes and forms new narrative directions. Together we witness how a new resident has occupied the site of her history and reclaimed the space for himself, leaving no trace of what she had come to find. She discovers that she can never reclaim the past. Her desire to re-trace her childhood history in its original location remains in the past, yet her interest remains in the present and she quickly moves on. There is another interruption when she visits *Palais des Papes* (*The Popes' Palace*) at the Avignon Festival, one of the world's most renowned theatre festivals set in a grand location full of ancient sandstone buildings used for theatre, performance and visual art. As Varda walks through a large, open public space she encounters a Brazilian drummer and films him. Varda's choice to include this scene demonstrates her attitude toward life and art, where at any moment an unexpected event can enrich and educate us. This trait is a unique testament to her creative immediacy. Her new encounters with the space and the people in them launch the spectator from the story of her past into the re-contextualised present moment.

Varda's encounter with the objects and spaces around her shows how she experiences the world. When Varda inhabits the spaces, she creates an environment that reflects her own experiences of them, and in some instances directly politicises the spaces with her actions and opinions. Her subjective approach reassigns meaning to the objects and spaces she inhabits, through her kinesthetic awareness of them and her cinematic representation of that awareness. Jonathon Hope, a specialist in aesthetic cognition and biosemiotics, suggests that objects and subjects reciprocate the same idea and stem from knowledge gained through the mind's perception of worldly interactions. He believes a sensory experience with the environment is subjective as it is experienced through the body (Hope, 2010). In Varda's cinema, we witness her lived kinesthetic experience that creates a subjective window through which we, the spectator, view her world.



Figure 3: Screenshot taken from *The Beaches of Agnès* (2008).



In the opening scene of *The Beaches of Agnès*, we see Varda and her crew arranging mirrors along the shore to set up the shot. In this scene she reveals her process and the performativity of its construction, giving the spectator an insight into her deconstructive approach to the spaces she inhabits. The beaches where she grew up are transformed into a theatrical mirrored playground in the present moment, where Varda uses the location of her childhood as the landscape in which to reflect upon the past and re-create it in the present. In so doing, she becomes part of the landscape.

The trope of the mirror as a reflective tool is common in cinema, important not only because it allows the character to reflect upon themselves, but also because it serves as a way for the spectator to enter into this reflection. According to film theorist Edward Branigan in his book *Point of View in the Cinema*:

The mirror device becomes subjective when a character looks into it and sees himself. The reason is that the mirror image allows us to imagine ourselves at the other end of the sight line — to trace back through the mirror to the character who sees, reflects himself in space. We construct a sight line which coincides with the sight line of [the] character. Metaphorically, we are able to locate ourselves with the character as the origin of the mirrored image (Branigan, 1984, p.127).

Varda begins *The Beaches of Agnès* with this scene to set expectations of how it should be viewed, and suggests that the world is a reflection of memories and experiences. Importantly, this film is an invitation for the spectator to enter Varda's subjective world.

#### 4. Varda's imaginative approach

Varda delivers her story in the moment of narration and physically experiences events as they happen, inviting the spectator to fill the gap between temporal modes of the past (the image on screen) and the present (her narrated voice). They must consider what has happened to allow the present moment to unfold. Varda's cinematic process of imagining time and space between the visual (past) and first person (present) narrative is what gains empathetic engagement from her spectator. Varda's narration is strongly subjective because her presence, seen or unseen, creates a character that draws the spectator into her story.

Film theorist and historian Bordwell believes that "As the viewer watches the film, she or he picks up cues, recalls information, anticipates what will follow, and generally participates in

the creation of the film's form" (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p.59). Bordwell strengthens the validity of narrative by suggesting the spectator's involvement, rendering the viewer as an independent agent with individual curiosity and desires, which allows them to participate in cinema's narrative journey.

Imagination is the strongest creative link between the artist and the spectator. Deleuzian film theorist Patricia Pisters states that it is "a process and an attempt to think differently, to see or feel something new in experience by entering into a zone of proximity with somebody or something else" (Pisters, 2003, p.106). Varda is able to re-contextualise memories into the present moment where they demand a response, demand they be felt and personally experienced. Pisters states that "Spectators no longer can confirm their identity by identifying with subjects on screen but have to negotiate between the images presented to their minds and the memories induced by their own bodies. Body, brain, and perception work together to establish a sense of self in each point of time" (Pisters, 2003, p.43).

Varda uses first person narration to tell a story that evokes a sense of private intimacy between herself and the spectator. This intimacy elicits trust from the spectator and is enhanced by Varda's conversational tone. The spectator's willingness to participate in the story is their active role in the inter-subjective transaction of cinema. The intimacy and trust between Varda and the spectator gathers momentum throughout the film as they weave themselves into the role of her character and empathise with her journey (Branigan, 1984).

Varda's narrative voice gives the material a stronger sense of authenticity as she reflects the world around her. Film critic Julio Moreno attests that there is a fundamental problem in first person narration and believes "it is a matter of imitating, in cinematographic terms, a form of literary narration that can function with almost complete disregard for the content of the story: this is first person narration. Here, theory has preceded practice." (Moreno, 1953, p.349). His assertion attempts to separate the objective world from the person talking about that world. In Varda's case this is not possible. Moreno's assertion that first person narration is an 'imitation' is a reminder of the Metz versus Pasolini debate; both Metz and Moreno valorize written language over cinema. Varda, (and Pasolini) challenge clear cut distinctions by asserting that the subjective and the objective are always imbricated. It is spurious to suggest that *any* image could accompany Varda's narration — as if her unique vision and craft are not essential components of her cinema.



Figure 4: Varda, in a photo shoot, re-enacting a scene in *Beaches of Agnès* (2008), where she is walking backwards along the beach. (Pizzoli, 2008)

In *The Beaches of Agnès*, Varda states, “I’m playing the role of a little old lady telling her life story. In my mirrors, I met others” (Varda, 2008). In the first sentence, she walks backwards along the beach to signify herself revisiting the past to find stories of her younger self. This action demonstrates Varda’s awareness of the performative nature of cinematic subjectivity, where she consciously designs, with first person narration and images, the frame in which the spectator views her cinema. It is not possible for cinema to place itself outside of a visual or aural language to express itself. In the second sentence, there are images of people from her past shown on screen in framed box inserts. ‘The others’ play relevant and influential roles in her film and in her life journey. Her vision is reflected in them and vice-versa, each person’s role complementing Varda as artist, filmmaker, mother and wife, once again referencing the reflective nature of her life in her films and of art in her life.

In opposition to the formulaic documentary style delivered through the pansophical *voice of god*, Varda’s voice, throughout *The Beaches of Agnès*, has a comforting tone that welcomes the viewer into her world, much like an old friend’s salutation as you enter their house. It elicits a compassionate and trustworthy feeling — once again contradicting Moreno’s statement that narration must function with almost complete disregard for the content of the story.

## CONCLUSION

As part of the conclusion please view *Without Consent* here:

<https://vimeo.com/207400350>

password:

MRES2017

My aim for this screen-based research thesis has been to find a way to express a personal story through a deeper understanding of cinematic subjectivity. This was inspired through my disappointment after researching various script writing methods such as those suggested in *Save the Cat* by Blake Snyder (Snyder, 2008) and *Story* by Robert McKee (McKee, 1999). While both were informative, I found them inadequate, as they structured the story, *every* story, into a neat running order of events. This narrative form was too rigid and impersonal for me. In telling my own story, it was my creative ambition to portray the cinematic images very clearly as the internal environment (inner narrative) of an experience. Through research and reflection, I arrived at an understanding of the ways in which my intimate spoken voice as author could be suitably conveyed through cinematic techniques rooted in the methods of Varda and Pasolini.

The study of the various theoreticians on subjective POV in cinema has made a valuable contribution to the depth of my investigations. It is evident, however, that these theories do not constitute the full power of first person cinema. The inclusion of the artist's unique personal and political vision interwoven into the creative fabric of the story is vital. My conclusions have been supported by the writings and films of Pasolini and Varda, both of whom articulate strong subjective POV in their cinematic works. These artists employ powerful methods in their cinema that go beyond the basic theoretical and practical apparatus usually identified as the classical means for creating first person cinematic subjectivity.

Pasolini's personal views ran starkly counter to the prevailing political climate in which he lived. His art exposed issues considered taboo in polite, bourgeois society. More significantly his cinematic language resisted conventions of film semiotics of the time. I believe that the content of his films was instrumental in developing a new cinematic language that foregrounds the artist's subjective vision. Pasolini's *im-segni* theorem strongly influenced my creative screen-based practice when making *Without Consent*. Visual images correspond to the internal thought patterns and feelings expressed in my story and in my voice. I use the camera to express my vision of the world, both personal and political.

Pasolini and Varda express cinematic subjectivity through their fluid approach to cinema. They allow space and time for reflection — their own and the spectator's — by integrating insight, intuition, interruption and strong opinions throughout their visual journeys. They have created new cinematic codes that go beyond apparatus theory and traditional film semiotics by weaving objective and subjective into a fluid form that invites the spectator into their cinematic world.

*Without Consent's* narrative structure swings between expressing my personal experience of being an adoptee, and a portrayal of Australia's late 1960s political climate. It invites the spectator into the artist's personal and therefore subjective point of view, engaging with all three categories of Hänninen's narrative modes: the told, the inner and the lived.

In *Without Consent*, I approach the visual language using poetic elements of imagery, text and later sound. One of the first tasks was to create a 'colour palette' of emotions to tell the story. In order to do this, I dissected the story into emotionally themed 'chapters' such as *Hope*, *Loss* and *Abandonment*. I then matched each chapter to landscape footage of Australia that intuitively corresponded with the prevailing emotional landscape. These moving images of the Australian landscape, the cultural heritage of my birth place, are a symbolic metaphor of the borderless terrain of my past.

I use the Australian landscape to illustrate the journey of my history, and in turn my identity. Drawing on my understanding of Varda's statement from *The Beaches of Agnès* that "If we opened people up, we'd find landscapes" (Varda, 2008), my *im-segni* of the landscape image is divided into two sections. The first represents the past and the second the present, with the horizontal line in the middle dividing them (see image below). The past is the background image above the horizon. It is unmoving and impossible to change. The present is the foreground image below the horizon. It is constantly moving and changing.



Figure 5: Screenshot from *Without Consent* (2016). A landscape image with a cross fade of Susan's face.

I shot the landscape images from the passenger POV of a moving car. A large number of my Australian viewers have experienced car journeys throughout the country during obligatory school holiday ‘adventures’, and thus this POV resonates as part of an Australian rite of passage. Viewers are thus encouraged to understand the *im-segni* suggested in this image on a personal level, as a reminder of travelling with their parents or classmates on a road trip. In reality and in memory, these trips allow time for games, relaxation and thought. The repetition of the image inspires free-flowing thoughts and references the experience of gazing out of the car window at the seemingly endless landscape. The journey appears to exist outside regular time constraints and allows one’s thoughts to go deeper into contemplation.

Each emotional chapter or scene in *Without Consent* was chosen to illustrate a textural affect with a symbolic significance pertaining to the story. For example, the hard brown stone (08:50 > 09:15 in the film) refers to the wall of secrecy that my birth grandmother maintained before revealing my identity to her sons. This image breaks the flow of the horizontal image and represents a thematic turning point in the narrative. The density and texture of the wall represent my birth grandmother’s ability to stoically keep her secrets and block out elements of her past.





Figure 6: Screenshot from *Without Consent* at 9:17.

Another deviation from the horizontal shot is the only reverse shot in the film. It comes after the above shot to signify a reversal of feelings from anger and frustration — about being kept a secret for so long — to forgiveness and hope.



Figure 7: Screenshot from *Without Consent* (2016) at 9:23. The only reverse shot in the film.

While developing *Without Consent*, I was fortunate to undertake an artist residency at Arthur Boyd's Bundanon property in Nowra, NSW, with the purpose of synthesising the audio and visual elements of my adoption story. The majority of the images had been shot and I experimented with ways the material could be used to express the inner journey of the story.<sup>12</sup> I drew inspiration from Australian artist Tracey Moffatt's video work, *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1990). Moffatt is influenced by Pasolini's *im-segni* (Summerhayes, 2007), evident in the way she uses vivid colours and landscape images in her work. Coincidentally *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* also uses *im-segni* to relay a personal history laden with family secrets and complexities. (refer to image on the following page).

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<sup>12</sup> Refer to Appendix 5 for early notes pertaining to shades and colour of the narrative palate in *Without Consent*.



Figure 8: A vivid image that is a screen shot from Moffatt's video work, *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1990), taken from *The Moving Images of Tracey Moffatt* (Summerhayes, 2007, p.95).

The absence of a physical body in *Without Consent* invites the spectator to assume the narrator's voice as the author of the story. As the director, storyteller and narrator, I deliver my memories through audio and visual language, inviting the spectator into a dialogue with the film whilst casting myself as a conduit for the autobiographical story. The tone of my voice is an *im-segni* that elicits feelings to communicate how I am affected by and experience the story in its re-telling. At the time of recording, I had recently arrived back in Australia after fifteen years living in Berlin, Germany. There is an irregular tone in my voice and indications of German syntax in my speech. It was my intention to remain true to the history embedded in my voice rather than trying to sound Australian. The affecting power of first person voice in cinema allows the spectator to understand emotional elements such as anger, frustration and excitement. These elements give the story its multi-faceted textures and contours, the *im-segni* that creates the film's context and aesthetic. The artist performs subjectivity through the narrated voice that validates and strengthens authorship of the material.

In contrast to the open creative process for *Without Consent*, the process of filming *MOT* was dictated by the ABC producer. In the case of *MOT*, I was instructed on the technique of first person camera by placing myself in the position of *I*, the storyteller, with camera in hand. *MOT* could perhaps be called 'a selfie film'. It assumes the distinct subjective positions between the first person position of 'I', and the second person position of 'you'. This method does not leave space for the spectators to enter into their own inter-subjective relation to the work.

*MOT*'s producer disregarded scenes that used images to reflect a deeper understanding of the journey towards finding my birth father. For example, I filmed people walking along a busy Sydney street from inside a café with the camera placed behind a glass jug full of water. The image was distorted to represent people with unknown identities. I intended this image to match the part of the story where I talk about looking into strangers' faces on the street when I was a child, wondering if any of them were my relatives. The ABC were not interested in shots with a metaphorical meaning or my feminist concerns regarding the mistreatment of birth mothers. The producer suggested a simplified version of this information to accommodate an audience who wanted direct answers, rather than a challenge to think.

The ABC uses an approach to cinematic subjectivity that negates the more personal or political aspects of a story. They produce cinematic subjectivity through techniques of shaky camera, uncomplimentary angles and other devices that reveal a naïve approach to

filmmaking which is (artificially) projected onto their storytellers.<sup>13</sup> Their emphasis on these devices negates a personal, subjective enquiry by relying on formulaic tricks to massage the spectator's experience, rather than using emotive content that is specific to the storyteller and the story being told. During the process I came to understand how the industry uses 'tricks' to market subjective storytelling.

For Andrei Tarkovsky, the inclusion of the artist's personal point of view is the linchpin of cinematic art. He states "Only when his personal view point is brought in, when he becomes a kind of philosopher, does he emerge as an artist, and cinema — as an art" (Tarkovsky, 1987, p.60). It is this power that substantiates first person storytelling.

My research and practice strongly suggest that the presence of the artist also reflects the role of the spectator within the narrative framework. There is a transparency that results from this approach that is otherwise missing from most mainstream cinema. When the artist's presence is felt and experienced in the story, the spectator is invited to perform their own subjectivity in cinema. For example, Varda's narration encourages her spectators to believe in the world she inhabits. She does this through her presence in the narrative that suggests a veridical and authentic experience. The performative nature of her work employed in *MOT* is a distinguishing factor that allows the artist to share their presence, intimacy and ultimately their sense of vulnerability. If I had not been so constrained by the ABC's formulaic guidelines, more of Varda's influence would be visibly apparent in the film.

When the artist is free to express their voice and creativity through cinematic subjectivity, there is a synthesis of understanding and communication between artist and spectator, and therefore, a personalisation of the story. The presence of the artist integrates human qualities that spectators empathise with. It is through the senses that we understand the world and make judgment on things we see, hear, smell, taste and touch. This aspect allowed me to create a method that synthesises imaginative thinking between the artist and spectator by interweaving theoretical and practical research methods.

Artists have long been celebrated for their visionary abilities to examine and present society's unspoken issues through art. The implications of my research findings conclude that artists and practitioners supersede and extend a simplistic notion of first person cinematic subjectivity by executing their thinking in practice. By intertwining the mimetic and the

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<sup>13</sup> Refer to Appendix 1 for a breakdown of the MOT story structure.

diegetic, the objective and the subjective, and through the layering of cinematographic techniques, first person cinematic films can render the complexities of human experience.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: ABC's formulaic process of first person storytelling. Action breakdown:

1 – 2 minutes

- an introduction of the character and the circumstances/topic to be explored
- the moment of truth needs to be revealed at the two minute mark i.e.: "will I find my birth father"

3 – 7 minutes

- the back story opens up to introduce other character involved in the story
- Locations are visited and research is presented
- The passing of time should be represented throughout (real or fake<sup>14</sup>)
- Show research so far – heading towards the climax

8 – 10 minutes

- Build toward the climax of the story, revealing
- whether or not the moment of truth has been realized.

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<sup>14</sup> A fake timeline is set up by placing word titles on the images such as "three months later" etc.

	Hännington 1. fold 2. inner 3. lived	Mulvey 1. what camera records 2. the audience watches 3. the character lives	Deleuze 1. Perception (fractured images) 2. Affection (images as connected) 3. Action Image	Metz 1. Aesthetic 2. non- realistic 3. Veridical pos.	Wilson 1. subjectively inflected
Moment of Truth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Without Consent	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
The Beaches of Agnès	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Pasolini Theorem	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

\*\*\* - corrections

11/11

## The Story:-

1:48 - parents told me when I was 8 - discovery  
 - mum did not give birth to me & they were not my blood.

① P.T.O. explain the jewelry they gave me here:

\* when I was 17 my mother died, we were very close, so this was a huge & sudden tragedy.

\* when I ~~was~~ turned 18, I was eligible to seek my natural family, although I never wanted to replace them.

\* Curiosity & a need to understand where I came from were driving forces.

2:10 - I ~~signed up~~ registered with a few adoption agencies & hope  
 'adoption triangle' contacted me when I was living in Melbourne, saying they had some info regarding my natural family.

2:23 - I was excited, I went to their office & they handed me a file. It was full of info my gm had been sending me since my birth.

2:50 - 1st b'day card - newspaper article SHOCK:- sadness: loss all over again!

open up card \* \* - How long was it EXACTLY before Susan's 18<sup>th</sup> b'day? & how long was it after I was born? (7 months after my birth)

2 - she was only 17 when she died, still a child in my ways!??

3:38 - Her & some friends were driving back to Brisbane after seeing the original "HAIR" musical in Sydney, 1969.

3:45 - I <sup>visited Bonnie,</sup> contacted my GB. off the bus - we knew it was us.

she cooked spaghetti - I forgot to tell her I was a veg, so I spent

