

# Performing Authorship in Cinema: The Self as Counterdiscourse

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# ABSTRACT

To claim the position of author is an act of cultural power, and for those whose subjectivity has been historically marginalised, that claim has never been straightforward. This thesis argues that the directors it examines – marginalised across the axes of class, queerness, and gender – do not simply make personal films but perform authorship: a deliberate, conscious, and politically charged act of self-inscription, shaped at every level by their awareness that the position they are claiming has long been denied to people like them.

This distinction, between being an author and performing authorship, sets the thesis against the classical auteur, whose identity was understood as an intrinsic and transcendent creative essence. It sets it, too, against the documentary and avant-garde traditions that have dominated the scholarship on personal filmmaking, and against the preoccupation with genre definition that has so often excluded fiction film from the discussion. Fiction film, this thesis contends, is a powerful medium for the performance of a creative self, precisely because its directors work through – and sometimes against – the affordances of genre, narrative, casting, and *mise en scène*.

This performance is never contained within the films alone. It extends across an intermedial field of self-presentation encompassing memoirs, poetry, interviews, and public persona, and these director's films are read alongside this wider field. Through case studies drawn from British and European cinema, the thesis demonstrates that the performance of authorship, for these directors, is always an act of counterdiscourse: a refusal of cultural silencing, and an assertion of the right to speak from one's own experience.

## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is a presentation of original work and I am the sole author. This work has not previously been presented for a degree or other qualification at this University or elsewhere. All sources are acknowledged as references.

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# Introduction

## The Performance of Authorship

To claim the position of author is an act of cultural power. It is to assert the right to define one's own experience, to speak from one's own perspective. For those whose subjectivity has been historically marginalised, this claim has never been straightforward. The position of author, with its connotations of creative sovereignty and intellectual authority, has been constructed and maintained by the dominant culture as a position of exclusion. It is against this background of exclusion that this thesis situates its central argument. The directors studied here do not simply make personal films, they *perform* authorship. This performance is a deliberate, conscious, and politically charged act of self-inscription that is shaped at every level by their awareness that the position they are claiming is one that has been historically denied to people like them.

This distinction between being an author and performing authorship is the conceptual foundation of this thesis, and it is worth establishing from the outset what it means and why it matters. Classical auteur theory, as developed by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* critics in the 1950s and expanded in the anglophone context by Andrew Sarris, understood the director's authorial identity as an intrinsic quality – a creative signature that could be read in the recurring stylistic and thematic motifs of their work. The auteur, in this formulation, is a Romantic genius whose personal vision unified every film they made. This thesis proposes a fundamentally different understanding. The directors studied here are performers of authorship – individuals who construct, stage, and project an authorial identity in full awareness of the cultural forces that have sought to prevent them from doing so. To understand these films fully is to understand the conditions under which their directors claimed the right to make them.

This performance of authorship does not take place only within the films themselves. It extends across an intermedial field of self-presentation that encompasses written memoirs, poetry, interviews, public persona, and extra-filmic creative work. The directors studied here are not only filmmakers but are cultural figures whose identities as authors are constructed and maintained across multiple media simultaneously. Pier Paolo Pasolini was as much a novelist and political commentator as he was a filmmaker; Derek Jarman was as much a painter, diarist, and gardener as he was a director; Joanna Hogg's authorial identity is shaped as much by her interviews and her relationships with collaborators (e.g. Tilda Swinton) as it is by the films she has made. In each case, their filmic work cannot be fully understood in isolation from these

other medial contexts. It is one site, and in some cases the primary site, within a wider intermedial performance of authorial identity. The methodology of this thesis takes this intermedial aspect and reads each director's films alongside the broader field of their self-presentation in order to understand how their authorial identities are constructed, performed, and contested across multiple platforms of cultural expression.

The focus of this thesis on fiction film, rather than documentary or the avant-garde, is deliberate and requires some justification at the outset. The scholarly discourse on personal filmmaking has been dominated, since its inception, by analyses of documentary and essay film. This dominance has its roots in a set of assumptions about the relationship between the filmic image and biographical truth that have proved remarkably persistent. The indexical nature of the photographic image – its capacity to record the world as it actually exists – has been taken to guarantee a connection between the filmmaker and their subject that the staged world of fiction film supposedly cannot replicate. From Elizabeth Bruss's foundational 1980 claim that “there is no real cinematic equivalent for autobiography,”<sup>1</sup> to the documentary-centred studies of Michael Renov, Jim Lane, and Laura Rascaroli, fiction film has been marginalised within this scholarship, treated as a semi-autobiographical form that lacks the “documentary impulse” which supposedly authenticates the filmmaker's self-presentation. This thesis expands on the study of the subject within cinema developed within these works. The directors studied here use the affordances of fiction – genre, narrative, performance, casting, mise en scène - not in spite of their personal investments but precisely because of them. It is through the conventions of fiction, and sometimes against those conventions, that these directors find the most powerful means of performing an authorial self: a self that is more nuanced, more politically charged, and more formally inventive than the straightforwardly confessional modes that documentary scholarship has tended to privilege.

This is not to dismiss the insights that documentary theory offers into the performance of subjectivity in film. The work of scholars such as Michael Renov and Stella Bruzzi on the performing subject within documentary provides some of the most productive theoretical tools available for understanding how directors construct and project a sense of self through the filmmaking process. Bruzzi's concept of the performative documentary is directly applicable to the fiction films studied here, even though those films operate within a different generic mode. The performance of authorship, as this thesis understands it, shares with Bruzzi's performative

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Bruss, ‘Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film’, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 296-320 (p. 296).

documentary a fundamental understanding that the self presented on screen is not a reflection of a pre-existing biographical reality but a creative construction, shaped by the medium through which it is expressed and the cultural conditions under which it is produced.

The political stakes of this argument are most clearly visible when considered in relation to the communities from which this thesis's primary case studies emerge. Feminist and queer critics of autobiography have long argued that self-narration is never merely a private act. It is always implicated in the social and political structures that determine whose stories are told, whose experiences are considered worthy of representation, and who is granted the cultural authority to speak. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, in their influential theorisation of autobiography in *Reading Autobiography*, observe that the act of self-narration is shaped at every level by the social positioning of the narrator: by their gender, sexuality, class. As they argue,

"autobiographical acts have always taken place at conflicted cultural sites where discourses intersect, contradict, and displace one another, where narrators are pulled and tugged into complex and contradictory self-positionings through a performative dialogism."<sup>2</sup> This "performative dialogism" – the understanding that self-narration is always a negotiation with the social and cultural structures that determine whose voice is authorised to speak – connects directly to this thesis's understanding of the performance of authorship as a politically charged act of self-inscription.

For Smith and Watson, the history of life narrative is inseparable from the history of marginalised subjects asserting their right to be heard. From the female medieval mystics who "claimed the power to shape the meaning and form of their experiences"<sup>3</sup> within a religious tradition that denied them formal authority, through to the coming-out narratives through which "gay, bisexual, lesbian, and transgendered subjects inscribe stories of the costs of passing as heteronormative subjects."<sup>4</sup> In each case, the autobiographical act is understood not as the transparent expression of a pre-existing self but as a means of constructing a subjectivity that the dominant culture has sought to prevent – what Smith and Watson describe as the desire to "splinter monolithic categories" and "reassemble various pieces of memory, experience, identity, embodiment, and agency into new, often hybrid, modes of subjectivity."<sup>5</sup> In this way, autobiography acts as a form of counterdiscourse. This is the theoretical notion which undergirds this thesis. The directors studied in this thesis are making personal films as an act of

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<sup>2</sup> Sidonie Smith, Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 113.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 109.

resistance – claiming the position of author, and all the cultural legitimacy that position carries, in the face of structures that have sought to deny them that claim.

This thesis is organised around three areas of marginalisation – queerness, gender, and class – each of which produces a distinct mode of authorial performance. The relationship between these areas and the ways in which they intersect and diverge across the case studies, will be developed in detail in the chapters that follow. What unites them, and what gives this thesis its coherence as a study, is the shared understanding that the performance of authorship in fiction film is never merely an aesthetic act. It is always, for these directors, a negotiation with the cultural forces that have shaped the conditions of their creative existence, acting as a means of asserting the validity of their own experience.

### The Problem of Genre

Central to this thesis's reframing of personal filmmaking around the performance of authorship is a move away from the generic definitions that have dominated the study of autobiography since its inception as an academic discipline. Understanding why this move is necessary requires a brief engagement with the history of those definitions and the problems they have generated. The tendency to approach autobiography through the lens of genre has, as this section will outline, produced an uncertain landscape, resulting in a focus on generic definition which has often excluded fiction film from the discussion. By understanding the limitations of this approach, we can more clearly see why a framework centred on the performance of authorship offers a more productive and politically engaged way of approaching the films studied in this thesis.

Autobiography and genre have always had a difficult relationship. As scholars began to recognise that the act of self-writing (for it was only theorised as a literary endeavour to begin with) was a prevalent creative form that deserved further study, labelling and definition became an important priority. The dominant term for this genre became 'autobiography.' As Paul de Man observes, "by making autobiography into a genre, one elevates it above the literary status of mere reportage, chronicle, or memoir and gives it a place, albeit a modest one, among the canonical hierarchies of the major literary genres."<sup>6</sup> Someone who offered a definition for this new genre was the French academic Philippe Lejeune who, seeking to codify the form defined

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<sup>6</sup> Paul de Man, 'Autobiography as De-facement', *MLN*, 94:5 (1979), 919-930 (p. 919).

autobiography as “a retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.”<sup>7</sup>

Yet the problem of genre has continued to impact the understanding of life narrative. James Olney, one of the first scholars to dedicate their academic life to the study of the form, noted that: “although I have in the past written frequently about autobiography as a literary genre, I have never been very comfortable doing it...I have never met a definition of autobiography that I could really like.”<sup>8</sup> This difficulty has only become more acute over the subsequent years. As new technologies and media have been introduced – cinema being the most obvious example – over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into our current one, coupled with the growing understanding that the subject of life narrative – the self – is fluid and unstable, attempting to locate autobiography as a definable genre has become an increasingly futile pursuit.

Genre, in its very essence, denies any space to move. As Jacques Derrida observes regarding the construction of all genres, “as soon as genre announces itself, one must respect a norm, one must not cross a line of demarcation, one must not risk impurity, anomaly, or monstrosity.”<sup>9</sup> However, in every respect, life narrative refuses any kind of “norm.” As Linda Anderson makes clear, “autobiography, we could say, turns itself into a genre in order to ‘place’ the subject, the ‘I’, only to be undone by the instability and difference already instated within the law.”<sup>10</sup> What this means is that, as Olney admits, there may be “no way to bring autobiography to heel as a... genre with its own proper form, terminology, and observances.”<sup>11</sup> Any attempt to do so only introduces problems rather than solutions. One such problem of attempting to define life narrative as a genre is found when attempting to locate its limits. As Paul Jay states, “though critics may argue at length about a generic definition of autobiography in the abstract, the problem begins in earnest when we move from defining the genre to listing the actual texts it includes.”<sup>12</sup> Rather than limiting the number of texts collected under the label autobiography, the fluid nature of life narrative has combined with the obsession for definition to create an explosion of generic terms and labels. This is reflected in the recently published *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction*, which lists thirty distinct “autobiographical forms and

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<sup>7</sup> Philippe Lejeune, ‘The Autobiographical Pact’, trans. Katherine Leary in *On Autobiography* ed. Paul John Eakin (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), 3-30 (p. 4).

<sup>8</sup> James Olney, *Memory & Narrative: The Weave of Life-narrative* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. xv.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘The Law of Genre’, trans. Avita Ronnell, *Critical Inquiry*, 7:1 (1980), 55-81 (p. 57).

<sup>10</sup> Linda Anderson, *Autobiography* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 11-12.

<sup>11</sup> James Olney, ‘Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction’, in *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical* ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3-27 (p. 7).

<sup>12</sup> Paul Jay, *Being in the Text* (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 15.

genres.”<sup>13</sup> Listing such categories as ‘Confessions,’ ‘Diary,’ ‘Epitaph,’ ‘Memoirs,’ ‘Metaautobiography,’ ‘Self-narration,’ and ‘Testimony,’ the handbook highlights the nature of life narrative as being a form that is “on the borderline between fact and fiction, the personal and the social, the popular and the academic, the everyday and the literary.”<sup>14</sup> Even in *Reading Autobiography*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson similarly approach the problem of genre from the perspective of expansion, with the 2010 edition listing sixty “genres of life narrative.”<sup>15</sup>

The recent turn towards an expansive approach to defining life narrative is undoubtedly a response to the limiting nature of definitions such as Lejeune’s. Observing that the creative act of autobiography encourages a range of approaches, as well as the desire of scholars to highlight examples from an array of cultures and identities, it has been impossible for autobiography to adhere to simply one definition. However, it is also true that, as the list of forms expands, so the ability to comprehend the form decreases. Genres always require a definition; with this promoting an analysis that focuses on how a text does or does not conform to said definition. Although this can be seen to aid understanding, any kind of restriction is necessarily reductive. Rather than illuminating the form, this explosion of generic terms only works to constrict a form which is always in flux. As John Sturrock correctly observes, “autobiography will find itself being defined by consensus and differently from age to age.”<sup>16</sup> The self as conceived in 1925 is far different to how it is conceived in 2025, and any generic definition that cannot keep pace with this change risks becoming quickly outdated. Therefore, rather than approaching my case studies from the standpoint of generic definition – which would, as Derrida warns, draw a “line of demarcation” from which these works must fall behind – this thesis instead proposes that the most productive approach to understanding how these directors have asserted their identities through film lies not in genre but in authorship. It is to the theoretical framework of authorship within cinema, and its recent reframings, that this introduction now turns.

### Auteurism and Authorship

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<sup>13</sup> See: *Handbook of Autobiography/Autofiction Volume 1: Theory and Concepts of Autobiography/Autofiction*, ed. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Boston; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield, ‘Introduction’ in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* eds. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, Penny Summerfield (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-21 (p. 1).

<sup>15</sup> Smith and Watson, *Reading Autobiography*, p. 253.

<sup>16</sup> John Sturrock, *The Language of Autobiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 285-286.

Having established why genre definition is an insufficient framework for the study of personal filmmaking, and why this thesis proposes instead a focus on the performance of authorship, it is necessary to situate that proposal within the theoretical tradition that has most directly shaped how authorship in cinema has been understood: auteur theory. Any study that places the performance of authorial identity at its centre must consider the concept of the auteur, since it is within the framework of auteurism that the question of the director as a self-expressive subject has been most extensively theorised within film studies. This thesis does not simply adopt the auteur model, however. As the following pages will outline, classical auteur theory rests on assumptions about creative identity – its transcendence, its unity, its implicitly masculine character – that are fundamentally at odds with the understanding of authorial identity as a performed, contested, and politically charged act that underlies this thesis's argument. Engaging critically with auteur theory is therefore a central part of the theoretical work this introduction undertakes.

The broad history of the auteur theory is varied and well documented, and I do not wish to go over ground that has been extensively analysed elsewhere. For a comprehensive account of the early history of the theory, I direct the reader to John Caughie's collection *Theories of Authorship*, to David Bordwell's analysis of the art-cinema auteur in *Narration in the Fiction Film*, and to the overview provided by Timothy Corrigan in *A Cinema Without Walls*. What matters here, for the purposes of this thesis, is the core assumption underlying auteurism in its classical form: that the director's authorial identity is an intrinsic quality, a transcendent creative vision whose personal signature can be read in the recurring stylistic and thematic motifs of their work. The theory's origins lie in Alexandre Astruc's notion of the *caméra-stylo* and its elaboration by the critics of *Cahiers du Cinéma*, for whom, as Marilyn Fabe summarises, cinema could be "a form in which and by which an artist can express his thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate his obsessions exactly as he does in a contemporary essay or novel."<sup>17</sup> As Linda Haverty Rugg observes, "this theoretical move claimed the cinematic medium for the realm of high art, making it possible for the concept of artist as Romantic genius to migrate into new technological media."<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Marilyn Fabe, *Closely Watched Films: An Introduction to the Art of Narrative Film Technique* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), p. 121.

<sup>18</sup> Linda Haverty Rugg, "'Carefully I Touched the Faces of my Parents": Bergman's Autobiographical Image', *Biography*, 24:1 (2001), 72-84 (p.73).

At its foundation, the auteur model is a Romantic conception of creativity. As Fabe puts it, auteur theorists "had simply revived the nineteenth-century Romantic tradition of viewing the artist as a creative genius who stood apart from society," a conception that assumes "the artist is a unified subject, who consciously inscribes a profound meaning upon his or her works."<sup>19</sup> In its earliest form the theory was deployed almost solely in relation to the directors of classical Hollywood, precisely those working within the most industrial and collaborative of systems. As V. F. Perkins observes, the auteurists wrote "against the belief in a Hollywood where the director was a mere functionary more or less effectively processing material imposed by the studios, producers, writers, and stars."<sup>20</sup> Names such as Alfred Hitchcock, Douglas Sirk, and John Ford were reclaimed as auteurs whose signature could be traced across their films by the critic. Andrew Sarris, who translated the *politique* into an anglophone "auteur theory," defended it as "the most efficient method of classifying the cinema: past, present and future" – with there being a requirement for the critic to see "all their work before you can be authoritative on any one of their films."<sup>21</sup>

It was this understanding that the directors of European art cinema embraced. As András Bálint Kovács explains, the "conception of the film auteur was rooted in the same understanding of film as a form of artistic expression of the same intellectual quality as literature."<sup>22</sup> Where the auteurist reading of classical Hollywood had to be performed retrospectively, against the grain of the studio system, art cinema built the figure of the author into the film's very address. As Bordwell states, the "art cinema foregrounds the author as a structure in the film's system ... the author becomes a formal component, the overriding intelligence organising the film for our comprehension ... the art cinema uses a concept of authorship to unify the text."<sup>23</sup> The director-as-author becomes, in this tradition, the guarantor of the film's coherence and the point at which the work opens onto the personal – a connection that has made autobiographical readings of art cinema seem almost inevitable, and that this thesis seeks to reframe.

Yet even in its classical articulation the auteur was never quite the self-evident expressive essence it appeared to be. Sarris himself concedes that "the auteur theory is ultimately a critical

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<sup>19</sup> Fabe, *Closely Watched Films*, p. 122.

<sup>20</sup> V.F. Perkins, 'Film Authorship: The Premature Burial', *CineAction!*, 20-21 (1990). 57-64 (p.59).

<sup>21</sup> Andrew Sarris, 'The Auteur Theory and the Perils of Pauline', *Film Quarterly*, 16:4 (1963), 26-33 (p. 28).

<sup>22</sup> András Bálint Kovács, *Screening Modernism: European Art Cinema, 1950-1980* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 220.

<sup>23</sup> David Bordwell, 'The Art Cinema as a Mode of Film Practice', in *The European Cinema Reader* ed. Catherine Fowler (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 94-102 (p. 97).

theory, and not a creative theory," and that "the point of view of the critic is always different from the point of view of the creator."<sup>24</sup> The auteur, therefore, is something the critic constructs through an act of reading, not something the director simply possesses and emits. Nicholas Godfrey, in relation to the New Hollywood, makes the point that the directorial canon is retrospectively assembled rather than expressed, its distinguishing features "discerned, defined, and enshrined in print retrospectively"<sup>25</sup> by critics. His formulation for that canon applies equally to the auteur – "an historically specific industrial phenomenon transformed into an ahistorical critical category."<sup>26</sup> This recognition moves the auteur away from the Romantic model, instead theorising it as an effect of criticism, a construction, rather than a pure and self-authorising origin of meaning.

It is the assumption that the auteur is a transcendent creative personality that Peter Wollen also began to unsettle in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*. Wollen's central move is to relocate the auteur from the realm of the biographical to the realm of the structural. Rather than understanding the director's authorial identity as the expression of a transcendent creative personality, Wollen proposes that it should be understood as a set of recurring structural oppositions – what he calls, drawing on Lévi-Strauss, the "principle of variation"<sup>27</sup> that governs a director's body of work. As he argues, "a great director must be defined in terms of shifting relations, in their singularity as well as their uniformity,"<sup>28</sup> with the critic's task being to reconstruct "this film" from the whole of the director's corpus. The auteur, in this formulation, is not a person but a pattern, a set of structural relations that organises the films rather than a biographical subject who expresses themselves through them.

Wollen's relocation belongs to a broader structuralist reframing on the sovereign creative subject. Structuralism from its beginnings set itself against the idea of the self as a consciousness fully present to itself; for Lévi-Strauss, "the final goal of the human sciences is not to constitute 'man' but to dissolve him," and myths, like all utterances, "think themselves out in men and without men's knowledge."<sup>29</sup> Read through Lacan, the self becomes not a unified ego

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<sup>24</sup> Sarris, 'The Auteur Theory', p. 30.

<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Godfrey, *The Limits of Auteurism: Case Studies in the Critically Constructed New Hollywood* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), p. 6-7.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 84.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>29</sup> Pam Cook, 'Auteur Theory and Structuralism' in *The Cinema Book* ed. Pam Cook (London: BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 446-460 (p. 446).

but a subject "constantly produced and transformed by the activity of the unconscious."<sup>30</sup> Applied to film, this is what David Andrews describes as the reconception of the director as an "unconscious catalyst" for forces the auteur "neither created nor controlled."<sup>31</sup>

The expressive auteur, on this account, seems to collapse altogether – the personal signature exposed as an effect of structures operating beneath and beyond the director's intention. And yet Wollen's structuralism carries within it a more productive understanding. His distinction between the auteur and the *metteur en scène* – the director who merely executes a pre-existing text without transforming it – is particularly helpful here. For Wollen, the auteur uses the source material not as a script to be faithfully rendered but as what he calls a "catalyst" that "reacts" with the director's own preoccupations "to produce a radically new work."<sup>32</sup> As he argues, "the manifest process of performance, the treatment of a subject, conceals the latent production of a quite new text, the production of the director as an auteur."<sup>33</sup> This formulation begins to introduce the performative understanding of authorial identity that this thesis develops. The auteur, for Wollen, is not something the director simply is but something produced through the creative act – an identity constituted through practice rather than expressed by an essence that precedes it.

Yet, despite this obscuring of the subject, auteur study "precisely depends upon the presence of an authorial (authoritative) voice as the prime source of meaning in the work," and the attempt to redefine the auteur as a structure or "effect" rather than a source "nonetheless retained the notion of the underlying intention present in the basic structures, and therefore failed to displace conventional auteur theory."<sup>34</sup> The author kept returning, smuggled back in as the intention the structures were taken to express. This failure is instructive to the focus of this thesis. In severing the auteur from the biographical subject – in relocating the director's identity from the realm of lived experience to the realm of structural pattern – Wollen removes from his framework precisely the dimension of authorial identity that is most politically significant for them. The queerness, the class background, the gender of these directors are not structural patterns to be decoded from their films, they are the conditions of the authorial performance that the films enact. Wollen's auteur cannot account for this because it has no framework for understanding

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<sup>30</sup> Cook, 'Auteur Theory', p. 447.

<sup>31</sup> David Andrews, 'No Start, No End: Auteurism and the Auteur Theory', *Film International*, 8:6 (2010), 37-55 (p.43).

<sup>32</sup> Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, p. 93.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>34</sup> Cook, 'Auteur Theory', p. 447.

the political stakes of creative self-inscription, or for understanding why the performance of authorship matters differently depending on who is performing it, and from what position of cultural power or marginalisation they do so.

The most radical form of this dissolution is Roland Barthes's announcement of the death of the author. In Fabe's summary, once the work is complete "the author disappears behind the text," so that "meaning is determined not by the intent of the author, but by the mind of the reader or receiver of the text;" Barthes, she notes, "was far more concerned with the fiction of the author than he was with the author of the fiction."<sup>35</sup> Followed through Foucault's author-function, the poststructuralist auteur becomes little more than "a system of relations among several films bearing the same signature"<sup>36</sup> – a categorising device rather than a person. There is, however, a political juxtaposition in this pronouncement that is central to this thesis's argument. The author is declared dead at precisely the historical moment when subjects who had been excluded from the position – working-class, queer, and female filmmakers among them – begin to claim it. The dissolution of authorship is not politically neutral but arrives as a levelling gesture just as the marginalised move to occupy a position that had, until then, been reserved for others. For the ideologically minded critics Fabe describes, the identity of the director was almost beside the point: "it matters little who is directing the film"<sup>37</sup> if every film reproduces the same patriarchal structures. Furthermore, Andrews characterises auteurism's "Great White Man approach" and the charge that the theory was "complicit with the hegemonic power,"<sup>38</sup> noting that for some critics the auteur amounted to a "white, male, heterosexual mistake."<sup>39</sup> What matters here is the recognition, at the level of the authorship debate itself, that the auteur was never a neutral category but one organised around the assumption of male, and implicitly white and heterosexual, creative authority.

Andrews's central observation is that while the auteur theory could be attacked and "left for dead," auteurism as a practical phenomenon "never really left the scene"<sup>40</sup> – the auteur is "an atavistic, revenant meme that will not stay dead."<sup>41</sup> It survives because it is institutionally useful: "auteur status is the fuel in the workings, the clearest power source for the entire machinery"<sup>42</sup> of

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<sup>35</sup> Fabe, *Closely Watched Films*, p. 124.

<sup>36</sup> David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> Fabe, *Closely Watched Films*, p. 123.

<sup>38</sup> Andrews, 'No Start, No End', p. 44.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 47.

festivals, distribution, and prestige. The auteur is now understood as "a fictional assemblage, a cast of characters, a viewership, and a sometimes massive apparatus, both technological and economic, subsumed under an individual's name...and yet at the same time, the author is a living person, or a person who once lived."<sup>43</sup> Even the reframing of the auteur as an economic commodity, Rugg argues, "does not really challenge the idea of auteur as person. It only extends the idea of personhood into the sphere of economy."<sup>44</sup>

It is this survival – the auteur as a constructed yet embodied figure, neither the transcendent genius of the classical model nor the empty function of its poststructuralist formulation – that opens the space that this thesis looks to occupy. If the auteur is at once a construction and a living person, then the pertinent question is no longer whether a director is an author but how a director constructs and projects themselves as one. This is the shift from being an author to performing authorship. The auteur, in this framework, is a persona: a presence deliberately staged across and through the work rather than a personality passively legible within it. Fabe's account of Truffaut's self-reflexive style illustrates this. In the swish pan that announces the medium, "we become aware not just of a tale but of a 'teller,' the auteur behind the camera, whose style is every bit as important as the content."<sup>45</sup> Rugg names the same operation as an "assertion of a presence: the presence of the director, the auteur, who is identified as the source of the vision on the screen."<sup>46</sup> The director does not merely make a film but embeds an authorial persona within it and asserts, through style, address, and self-inscription, that there is an authorial presence.

Understood in this way, authorial identity is, in Rugg's terms, "constructed and contingent and mediated and collaborative, not coextensive merely with a single body, or even with a single lifetime."<sup>47</sup> It is performed rather than possessed, staged rather than expressed – and, for the marginalised directors studied here, this performance is inseparable from the political act of claiming a position that had historically been withheld. To perform authorship, for these directors, is to insist on a presence that the dominant culture has been reluctant to grant. This understanding of the auteur as a performed and staged persona, rather than an intrinsic creative essence, is the foundation on which the rest of this thesis builds. It also requires, however, a

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<sup>43</sup> Linda Haverty Rugg, *Self-Projection: The Director's Image in Art Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 176.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 179.

<sup>45</sup> Fabe, *Closely Watched Films*, p. 132.

<sup>46</sup> Rugg, *Self-Projection*, p. 176.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 181.

theory of how such performance operates – of how a subject is constituted through the act of making rather than expressed by it – and it is to documentary scholarship, which has theorised the filmmaker as a performing subject more fully than any other body of film theory, that the argument now turns.

### The Autobiographical Documentary and the Performing Subject

The theorisation of personal filmmaking within film studies has been dominated, since the early 1980s, by scholarship focused on documentary and the essay film. This dominance has its roots in the assumptions about biographical truth and the indexical image – the understanding that only the nonfiction filmmaker, whose camera records the world as it actually exists, can provide a legitimate and verifiable connection between the biographical subject and the film that results. Yet the most significant contribution of documentary scholarship to the study of personal filmmaking is not, as this thesis argues, its theorisation of truth and indexicality but its theorisation of the filmmaker as a performing subject: a figure whose identity is constituted through the act of filmmaking rather than simply expressed by it. It is this dimension of documentary scholarship that is most directly relevant to the argument of this thesis, and it is from this dimension that the most productive theoretical resources for the study of authorial performance in fiction film can be drawn. The following section traces the development of this theorisation of the performing subject within documentary scholarship, from Michael Renov's pioneering work on the autobiographical impulse in film and video through to Stella Bruzzi's foundational account of the performative documentary, identifying both the contributions and the limitations of each approach in relation to the framework of authorial performance that this thesis develops.

The dominance of documentary as the privileged site of autobiographical film practice is not incidental and it is worth examining how this has been formalised. Jim Lane's historical account of the American autobiographical documentary movement offers a useful overview of the assumptions at work. Lane traces the emergence of autobiographical documentary to a convergence of three forces in 1960s American cinema: the autobiographical experimentation of the avant-garde, the rejection of observational direct cinema, and the turn toward reflexivity, particularly under the influence of European practitioners such as Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin. What is telling about this genealogy is that the question of autobiography in film is framed, from

the outset, as a documentary question, with these developments narrated as internal to the nonfiction tradition, as if the problem of self-inscription in film existed alongside the problem of documentary truth.

Lane is clear about the institutional basis of this assumption. Because so many autobiographical documentarists were trained within the tradition of direct cinema or in film schools shaped by documentary practice, their use of sound and image, as Lane puts it, "functioned on a register far removed from the avant-garde."<sup>48</sup> The consequent emphasis on indexicality as the guarantor of autobiographical legitimacy is precisely what has made documentary the default mode for discussions of filmic self-inscription. Where direct cinema had policed the filmmaker's presence as a contamination of the real, autobiographical documentary repositioned that presence as the real's authorising condition; but in both cases the referential status of the image remained the field within which selfhood in film was intelligible. The tendency, as Lane observes, was "to view documentary as a fundamentally referential form,"<sup>49</sup> a tendency that marked a foundational difference from the autobiographical avant-garde and, by extension, from fiction film.

This exclusion reflects a deeper assumption about where the self is located in film. The move from observational to autobiographical documentary, as Lane describes it, repositions the filmmaker as subject; but the filmmaker's authority remains derived from their documentary function, their standing as someone who records rather than fabricates. The autobiographical subject of documentary is a subject whose self-narration is continuous with the world the camera attests to. Fiction film cannot make this claim, and it is precisely this condition – the mediation of subjectivity through invention, performance, and representation – that documentary-centred accounts of film autobiography have treated as disqualifying. What Jay Ruby identified as lacking in documentary before the autobiographical turn, namely "an examination of self and one's own culture,"<sup>50</sup> was supplied by repositioning the camera inward, but the camera itself, and the referential logic it carried, remained unchanged. Fiction film's relationship to selfhood operates on different terms entirely, and it is those terms that the present study sets out to theorise.

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<sup>48</sup> Jim Lane, *The Autobiographical Documentary in America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34.

However, documentary theory does provide access to a framework of the subject as it exists within film that is directly applicable to the argument of this thesis. Michael Renov's *The Subject of Documentary* – a collection of essays which frame Renov's approach to the personal in film – offers an enlightening approach to the subject in cinema which this thesis looks to expand on. Renov's central contribution is his concept of "the new autobiography" in film and video: a body of work he characterises as marked by "the construction of subjectivity as a site of instability – flux, drift, perpetual revision – rather than coherence."<sup>51</sup> This formulation represents a decisive departure from the earlier approaches to filmic life narrative examined in the preceding section. Where Sitney's theorisation of avant-garde autobiography had remained wedded, in certain respects, to a notion of the filmmaker's self as a knowable and relatively stable entity whose presence could be registered directly in the film image, and where Bruss's classical autobiography had demanded the kind of unified and verifiable subjectivity that poststructuralist theory had already rendered untenable, Renov's new autobiography embraces the understanding of the self as irreducibly constructed, relational, and constituted through practice rather than given in advance. It is this understanding – of authorial subjectivity as always in process, never complete, produced through the act of filmmaking rather than expressed by an essence that precedes it – that provides the most direct theoretical precedent within documentary scholarship for the performative framework this thesis develops.

Renov develops this understanding through the concept of "the essayistic" – a mode of filmmaking derived from the literary tradition of Montaigne and Barthes, and defined as a writing practice that "couples a documentary impulse – an outward gaze upon the world – with an equally forceful reflex of self-interrogation."<sup>52</sup> The essayistic filmmaker is not a unified authorial subject who expresses a pre-existing self through the film but one whose subjectivity is constituted through the act of filmmaking itself – through the encounter between the filmmaker's perceptual and creative apparatus and the historical and social world it engages with. Renov draws on Montaigne's formulation that "we go hand in hand at the same pace, my book and I"<sup>53</sup> to establish this constitutive relationship between the filmmaker and their work. The self and the film produce each other through their interaction, neither reducible to the other, both always provisional and subject to revision.

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Renov, 'The Subject in History: The New Autobiography in Film and Video', in *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), pp. 104-119 (p. 105).

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 110.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 110.

The political stakes of this constitutive understanding of authorial subjectivity are most clearly visible in what Renov describes as the new autobiography's "embroiling of subject in history" – the insistence that the filmmaker's subjectivity and the social and historical world in which it is formed are "mutually constitutive: self and other/self through other."<sup>54</sup> Renov draws on feminist historiography to establish the political dimension of this mutual constitution, noting that "feminists, for example, have reminded us that the attention in standard history texts to military milestones rather than to the transmission of societal values merely replicates the patriarchal bias."<sup>55</sup> From this he draws the conclusion that "if we can say that history belongs to those with the power to re-present it, little wonder that film and video practitioners have come to share the revisionist historian's suspicion for top-down institutional accounts."<sup>56</sup> The new autobiography, in this reading, is not a retreat from history into private self-absorption but a revisionist act – a claiming of the authority to represent one's own experience as part of the historical record, against the dominant culture's systematic exclusion of certain voices and certain perspectives from that record. The "works in question thus undertake a double and mutually defining inscription – of history and the self – that refuses the categorical and the totalizing."<sup>57</sup> This is a refusal that is, in the terms of this thesis's argument, precisely the counterdiscursive act through which the directors studied here assert their right to speak from their own experience against the structures of cultural power that have sought to deny them that right.

Renov's account of the "ineradicably split diaristic subject"<sup>58</sup> – the gap between the filming self and the narrating self, between the experiencing subject and the subject who retrospectively gives that experience its meaning – also anticipates the intermedial dimension of this thesis's framework in important ways. For Renov, the documentary filmmaker who revisits their own past is always constituted by a temporal and epistemological gap: "the temporal and epistemological syncopation of selves (the writing versus written self)"<sup>59</sup> produces a subject that is always divided, always constituted by its own returning in relation to the experience it seeks to represent. In the fiction films studied in this thesis, this split operates not within the temporal structure of a single film but across the wider intermedial field of the director's creative and public life. The film presents one dimension of the authorial identity, while the diaries, the interviews, the poetry, and the public statements present other dimensions, and the

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<sup>54</sup> Renov, 'The Subject in History', p. 114.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p. 112.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 109.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 111.

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 112.

relationship between these is always provisional, always subject to revision, never fully coherent. The intermedial framework of this thesis is, in this sense, an extension of the split subject that Renov theorises within the documentary tradition into the broader field of the fiction filmmaker's creative and public practice – a field in which the performance of authorship is always distributed across multiple media and multiple contexts of self-presentation, never contained within any single work or any single act of creative self-inscription.

Following on from Renov's formulation of the subject, it is Stella Bruzzi's work that provides the basis for the notion of performativity with which this thesis seeks to develop. Across two major works – *New Documentary* and *Approximation* – Bruzzi develops a framework for understanding film as a performative act. Her central thesis in *New Documentary* is that "documentaries are performative acts whose truth comes into being only at the moment of filming."<sup>60</sup> Drawing on J.L. Austin's speech act theory – specifically his distinction between the constative, which "simply refers to or describes," and the performative, which "performs what it alludes to"<sup>61</sup> – and on Judith Butler's account of performativity in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, Bruzzi argues that the documentary does not record a pre-existing reality but produces its subject through the very act of representation. The film, in her formulation, is not a record of the real but "the result of a collision between apparatus and subject"<sup>62</sup> – a constitutive act through which both the subject and the filmmaker's authorial identity are produced simultaneously.

This constitutive understanding of film is the most direct theoretical precedent within documentary scholarship for the understanding of the performance of authorship developed in this thesis. Where Bruzzi applies it to the documentary filmmaker, this thesis applies it to the fiction filmmaker: the directors studied here do not express a pre-existing authorial identity through their films but constitute that identity through the act of making them. What is particularly productive for this thesis's argument is Bruzzi's insistence that this constitutive understanding does not invalidate the documentary – or, by extension, the fiction film – as a form of truth-telling. Rather, she argues for "a new definition of authenticity" that replaces the "traditional adherence to observation or to a Bazinian notion of the transparency of film" with "a multi-layered, performative exchange between subjects, filmmakers/apparatus and spectators."<sup>63</sup> The truth of the performative film is not diminished by its constructedness but constituted through it – and this understanding is precisely what this thesis applies to the

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<sup>60</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction* (London: Taylor & Francis, 2006), p. 186.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 186.

<sup>62</sup> *ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 208.

fiction filmmaker's mediated, formally complex, and intermedially constructed modes of authorial self-inscription.

Bruzzi's analysis of filmmaker-performers such as Nick Broomfield, Molly Dineen, and Errol Morris demonstrates how the director's authorial identity is a construction, produced and maintained through the act of filmmaking itself. Her application of Peter Wollen's auteur theory formula to Broomfield is particularly illuminating: "Nick Broomfield ≠ 'Nick Broomfield'"<sup>64</sup> – the inverted commas signifying the version of the auteur discovered within the films as distinct from the biographical individual beyond them. This distinction provides a productive documentary theory precedent for the understanding of the performance of authorship as always involving a negotiation between the director as biographical subject and the director as the authorial identity constructed within and through the film. Bruzzi's further observation that the "author-performer documentaries reiterate the twin notions that a documentary is its own document and that the interventionist documentary filmmaker is a fluid entity defined and redefined by every context in which he or she appears"<sup>65</sup> anticipates this thesis's intermedial framework, with the authorial identity of the directors studied here being similarly fluid, constituted not within any single film but across the full range of their creative and public self-presentation.

Bruzzi's more recent *Approximation* extends this performative framework beyond the documentary tradition and into the terrain of fiction film. Her concept of "approximation" – a process whereby a subject or event is evoked through "bringing together contrasting versions and interlocking points of view"<sup>66</sup> – is explicitly described as "performative in that it is generated and comes into being as its multiple elements connect and collide."<sup>67</sup> This formulation extends the constitutive understanding of film from the documentary to the fiction filmmaker, arguing that the meaning of any film is never fixed within the text but produced through the active engagement of multiple perspectives, media, and contexts of reception simultaneously. Crucially, *Approximation* also challenges the hierarchical opposition between documentary and fiction that has dominated the scholarship on filmic autobiography, arguing that the relationship between nonfiction and fiction images is not hierarchical but fluid, and that

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<sup>64</sup> Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 208.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>66</sup> Stella Bruzzi, *Approximation: Documentary, History and Staging Reality* (London; New York: Routledge, 2020), p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

"approximation grants fictionalisation"<sup>68</sup> the same power to access truth as the indexical documentary image. This challenge to the documentary/fiction binary provides direct theoretical support for this thesis's argument that fiction film is not a lesser but a different and in certain respects more powerful medium for the performance of authorial identity than the documentary modes that have dominated the existing scholarship. Taken together, Bruzzi's two major works constitute the most sustained and theoretically productive engagement within film scholarship with the performative, constructive, and inter-medially distributed nature of authorial identity in film. Her work provides the essential bridge between the documentary scholarship reviewed in this section and the framework of the performance of authorship that this thesis develops.

### Personal Filmmaking and Authorship

Having established the theoretical framework through which this thesis approaches the performance of authorship – and having situated that framework within the critical tradition of auteur theory and its reframings – it is now necessary to trace how the question of the personal in cinema has been theorised within film scholarship itself. The history of this theorisation is one that has been shaped, from its earliest formulations, by a set of assumptions about the relationship between the filmic image and biographical truth that have proved remarkably persistent, and that have consistently worked to marginalise fiction film from the discussion of personal filmmaking. Understanding this history is essential to appreciating what is at stake in this thesis's reframing of the question around the performance of authorship. For it is only by understanding how film scholarship has approached the personal that we can fully grasp why a different approach has the potential to be so fruitful, being one that begins not from the question of how the filmmaker's life is represented, but from the question of how the filmmaker's identity as an author is constituted and performed through the act of making.

Despite the dominance of documentary and essay film within the scholarship on personal filmmaking, there has been a consistent strand of film scholarship that has engaged directly and productively with the question of autobiography and the personal in fiction film. This scholarship has developed largely at the margins of the mainstream discourse on filmic autobiography, in the form of individual essays, edited collections, and monographs that have sought to carve out a legitimate space for fiction film within the discussion of personal

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<sup>68</sup> Bruzzi, *Approximation*, p. 5.

filmmaking without always having access to a fully developed theoretical framework through which to do so. It is from this body of work that this thesis will also look to draw from in developing a framework of authorial performance and intermediality. The following section traces this scholarship, identifying its key contributions and the ways in which it anticipates the understanding of the fiction filmmaker as a performing subject whose authorial identity is constituted across an intermedial field of creative and public self-presentation.

The notion of film as being a medium which can allow for investigations into the personal begins with Alexandre Astruc and his notion of the “caméra-stylo” (camera pen), first introduced in his 1948 essay ‘Naissance d’une nouvelle avantgarde: La caméra-stylo’ (‘The birth of a new avant-garde: the camera-pen’). In terms of the position of film as an autobiographical medium, Astruc’s approach proves highly relevant since it presents an early discussion of film as a ‘new’ media, arguing for its position as a medium that provides a “new way of seeing.” First appearing in the journal *L’Écran français*, in the essay Astruc highlights the recent progress in cinema aesthetics – demonstrated by directors such as Orson Welles and Jean Renoir – as well as the exciting future possibilities that exist with the advances in technology such as the introduction of the 16mm film format. Thanks to these advances, Astruc argues that film is quickly transitioning from purely a medium of entertainment, “an amusement analogous to boulevard theatre,” into “a form in which and by which artists can express their thoughts, however abstract they may be, or translate their obsessions exactly as they do in the contemporary essay or novel.”<sup>69</sup> Astruc also argues that this new technology represents a liberation for both the making and consumption of film, allowing the filmmaker to break away from the industrial studio system and focus on a more personal artistic approach, meaning “the filmmaker will say “I” like the novelist or poet.”<sup>70</sup> And, since “the day is not far off when everyone will possess a projector,”<sup>71</sup> the public will be able to consume these films like they would a work of literature or poetry. In short, as Bjørn Sørenssen states, Astruc’s 1948 essay makes a clear statement: “by developing new media technology there is also created a new and changed pattern of production and distribution and, subsequently, a new aesthetics.”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Alexandre Astruc, ‘The Birth of a New Avant-Garde: La Caméra-Stylo’, in *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks* ed. Peter Graham with Ginette Vincendeau (London: Palgrave Macmillan; BFI, 2009), p. 32.

<sup>70</sup> Alexandre Astruc, ‘The Future of Cinema’, in *Essays on the Essay Film* ed. Nora M. Alter and Timothy Corrigan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), p. 96.

<sup>71</sup> Astruc, ‘The Birth of a New Avant-Garde’, p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Bjørn Sørenssen, ‘Digital Video and Alexandre Astruc’s *caméra-stylo*: The New Avant-garde in documentary realized?’, *Studies in Documentary Film*, 2:1 (2008), 47-59 (p. 48).

Although Astruc's essay is full of a somewhat utopian vision on how the wider public will make and consume cinema – and the subject matter this cinema will contain – at its heart there is an intriguing notion of how technological development brings with it an aesthetic development. However, in his essay Astruc remains relatively abstract in his prediction of how this new aesthetic will manifest itself, claiming that “the cinema will gradually break free from the tyranny of what is visual, from the image for its own sake... to become a means of writing just as flexible and subtle as written language.”<sup>73</sup> He does not go on to give examples of how this break from “what is visual” will occur, instead leaving us with a tantalising premonition of what cinema can become. Nonetheless, what this essay represents is an acceptance of the medium of film as being a legitimate format for self-reflexive practice, “the filmmaker/author writes with his camera as a writer writes with his pen.”<sup>74</sup>

Filmic autobiography is explicitly tackled as a concept for the first time by P. Adams Sitney and his study of the personal turn within the work of America's avant-garde. Published in 1978, his article ‘Autobiography in Avant-Garde Film’ marks the beginning of film being theorised as an autobiographical medium within a scholarly context. Understandably, Sitney takes a generic approach to his analysis since – just as was the case for the scholars who introduced autobiography as a legitimate area of academic study – this as yet untapped scholarly endeavour needed an entry point. As he states: “a coincidence of structural patterns within the films of several major artists in the span of less than a decade calls forth a generic and historical analysis.”<sup>75</sup> Noticing a trend within the films of the American underground towards a style of filmmaking that required more than just the epithet of ‘personal’ filmmaking, Sitney found autobiography as a suitable theoretical foundation for his study. Interestingly, he not only uses the preface to outline autobiography as the entry point in which to tackle his case studies, but he also quickly dismisses narrative cinema as an equivalent autobiographical medium. It is here that one can begin to see the origins of the ‘truth problem’ within analyses of filmic autobiography. When he speaks of the options open to the filmmaker as to how to render a life on film, Sitney claims that “he can, of course, invent an autobiographical fiction, as Truffaut is said to have done in *Les 400 Coups* or Fellini in *Amarcord*, but the ontological status of these films is fundamentally different from that of autobiography: they are fictions made under the same rules which operate in all novelistic films.”<sup>76</sup> From this foundational understanding, Sitney

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<sup>73</sup> Astruc, ‘The Birth of a New Avant-Garde’, p. 32.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>75</sup> P. Adams Sitney, ‘Autobiography in Avant-Garde Film’, in *The Avant-Garde Film: A Reader of Theory and Criticism* ed. P. Adams Sitney (New York: Anthology Film Archives, 1978), pp. 199-246 (p. 199).

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p. 200.

relies mostly on comparisons with literary models of autobiography – in particular he discusses the notion of the diary film in direct relation to definitions of the written diary. His approach builds from his earlier theory of “participatory cinema” which “calls upon or addresses itself directly to the audience.”<sup>77</sup> This is evident in the work of Stan Brakhage who, in the film *Blue Moses* (1962), “explicitly postulates an epistemological principle: that there can be no cinematic image without a filmmaker to take it and that the presence, or even existence, of the filmmaker transforms what he films.”<sup>78</sup> This relationship between the filmmaker and the image they are filming, alongside the time inhabited by the viewer, is at the heart of Sitney’s reading of autobiographical film: “it is the autobiographical cinema *per se* that confronts fully the rupture between the time of cinema and the time of experience and invents forms to contain what it finds there.”<sup>7980</sup>

It is Elizabeth Bruss’s essay ‘Eye for I: Making and Unmaking Autobiography in Film,’ published in the 1980 collection *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, that provides the most sustained and rigorous engagement with the question of the filmmaker as subject within the early scholarship on filmic autobiography. Bruss argues that film fails to replicate the conditions of “classical” autobiography, suggesting that ultimately “there is no real cinematic equivalent for autobiography.”<sup>81</sup> This reading, which she applies to all forms of filmmaking, is based upon her notion that This comes out of the medium’s failure to comply with Bruss’s parameters which define classical autobiography: “truth-value,” “act-value,” and “identity-value.” In terms of the focus of this thesis, it is the treatment of “act-value” and “identity-value” which are most productive here. “Act-value,” in Bruss’s formulation, refers to the unbdertsanding that autobiography is “a personal performance, an action that exemplifies the character of the agent responsible for that action and how it is performed.”<sup>82</sup> This notion of autobiography as performance – as an act that constitutes rather than merely represents the identity of its author – anticipates, in significant ways, the performative framework that this

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<sup>77</sup> P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 201.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>79</sup> Sitney, ‘Autobiography in Avant-Garde Film’, p. 246.

<sup>80</sup> Sitney’s theorisation of filmic life narrative also led to his involvement in the first coordinated exhibition of filmic autobiography, curated by John Stuart Katz, at the Art Gallery of Ontario in Toronto in 1977-1978. The accompanying catalogue to this exhibition (John Stuart Katz, ed. *Autobiography: Film/Video/Photography* (Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1978)) offers a list of several works of autobiography on film and video, marking the first attempt at creating a detailed filmography for the genre. The articles included in the catalogue by Jay Ruby, Peggy Gale, and Katz himself also added to the existing studies made by Sitney, making avant-garde cinema the leading scholarly focus for filmic autobiography during the 1970s.

<sup>81</sup> Bruss, ‘Eye for I’, p. 296.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 300.

thesis develops in relation to Judith Butler's formulation. When Bruss argues that autobiography must be understood as a "personal performance," she is gesturing toward an understanding of authorial identity as something that is enacted and constituted through the act of self-narration, rather than simply expressed by it. This is precisely the understanding of the performance of authorship that underlies this thesis's argument – though Bruss herself does not develop it in this direction, remaining committed to the assumption that such performance requires the kind of direct and unmediated self-presentation that she associates with the avant-garde filmmaker rather than the fiction film director.

"Identity-value," Bruss's third criterion, raises the question of how the filmmaker establishes and maintains the identity between the biographical subject and the authorial voice – the "I" that speaks in and through the film. For Bruss, this is a problem that is unique to cinema, since the medium lacks the self-referential "I" of literary autobiography. As she argues, "the unity of subjectivity and subject matter – the implied identity of author, narrator, and protagonist on which classical autobiography depends – seems to be shattered by film."<sup>83</sup> The fiction filmmaker cannot simply use the first-person pronoun to assert their identity as the subject of their own narrative; they must find other means of establishing and performing that identity, means that are specific to the visual and temporal properties of the cinematic medium. It is precisely here – in the question of how fiction film directors establish and perform their authorial identity within a medium that lacks the literary "I" – that the most productive theoretical questions for this thesis arise. The directors studied here have developed a range of strategies for performing this identity – through bodily self-inscription, through inter-medial self-presentation, through the deployment of genre and casting as forms of authorial performance – and it is the analysis of these strategies, in their specific historical and cultural contexts, that the subsequent chapters undertake.

In the closing sections of "Eye for I," Bruss acknowledges that film's apparent failure to replicate the conditions of classical autobiography is not simply a limitation but a revelation – an indication that the medium points toward a different and more radical understanding of identity and self-presentation than the classical autobiographical tradition has been able to accommodate. She observes that film illustrates the post-structuralist understanding of self as dependent on language and representation rather than pre-existing it: "if it is impossible to characterise and exhibit selfhood through film, then the apparent primacy of the self – its very

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<sup>83</sup> Bruss, 'Eye for I', p. 297.

existence – is called into question.”<sup>84</sup> And she notes, crucially, that “the cinematic subject cannot precede the cinematic apparatus,” meaning that “even the most ‘personal’ film is logically the product of a person whom the film itself creates.”<sup>85</sup> This formulation – the understanding that the film does not record a pre-existing self but actively produces one – is, as this thesis argues, not a limitation of cinema as a medium of personal expression but its defining characteristic as a site of authorial performance. It is through the act of making the film, and through the wider intermedial performance of authorial identity that surrounds and extends that act, that the directors studied here constitute themselves as authors, and in doing so claim a cultural identity and a political legitimacy that dominant structures have sought to deny them.

Barbara Kosta, in her 1994 study of autobiography within contemporary German literature and film, shifts the focus onto “subjective stagings of personal histories” in which “the borders once drawn between life and text, fact and fantasy, documentary and fiction have increasingly blurred.”<sup>86</sup> Dismissing the notion of autobiographical truth, Kosta reframes the analysis of filmic life narrative towards a foundation which places self-representation “in the realm of self-invention.”<sup>87</sup> A primary case study for her examination of the filmic dimension of autobiography is Helma Sanders-Brahms’s *Germany, Pale Mother* (1980). A restaging of Brahms’s childhood reminiscences of World War Two, Kosta observes how the filmmaker employs a first-person voiceover to elicit a connection between author/auteur and the subject of the film, Brahms’s mother. As Kosta asserts, “in *Germany, Pale Mother* the voiceover cuts between the filmic image and the viewer, who is often challenged to reassess the visual information and fill in the gaps. The narrator is the author as well as the speaking subject, she reconstructs and narrates her mother’s part.”<sup>88</sup>

Working within a medium that has traditionally been excluded from formulations of the autobiographical genre, cinematic autobiographers must “reformulate their relationship to the cinematic apparatus, especially when establishing strategies to secure an “I.””<sup>89</sup> Brahms achieves this, in Kosta’s view, by adopting a documentary-style gaze within her approach to narrative cinema. In the film, the camera “visually explores its subjects, creating the effect that

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<sup>84</sup> Bruss, ‘Eye for I’, p. 298.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>86</sup> Barbara Kosta, *Recasting Autobiography: Women’s Counterfictions in Contemporary German Literature and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>88</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 132.

someone is looking in from outside.”<sup>90</sup> In this way, the camera evokes an “autobiographical curiosity” as the perspective of the camera “emphasises the process of looking or watching.”<sup>91</sup> This approach prioritises a relational understanding of identity that simultaneously questions the concept of a unified subject. Narrative cinema’s ability to confront historical narratives – the reconstruction of a mother and child’s life during war – through the lens of a present-day viewing subject – the first-person voiceover – extends the borders of the self beyond firsthand experience. This presents the self as “an extension of other selves, as a weaving of stories.”<sup>92</sup> As Kosta argues, narrative cinema transforms the narrating subject into a “composition of narrative strands that precede and succeed the awareness of an “I”...[showing] that the self has no point of origin and that it conceives itself through language.”<sup>93</sup>

Wendy Everett was also one of the few to carve out a legitimate space for the form within this discussion. Her 1995 essay ‘The autobiographical eye in European Film’ builds on the approach of Kosta through its concerted effort to tackle life narrative in narrative cinema, directly countering its dismissal by Bruss in 1980. In this essay Everett moves away from a genre focussed approach, instead recognising that “autobiographical films are inevitably ambiguous”<sup>94</sup> And arguing that “film constitutes a privileged medium for the expression of autobiographical memory.”<sup>95</sup> Taking a range of case studies, the majority of which are from the tradition of European Art Cinema, that include Terence Davies’s *The Long Day Closes* (1992) and Claire Denis’s *Chocolat* (1988), Everett investigates the way in which they handle a subjective view of history. She dismisses the prevalent understanding of autobiography as a non-fiction genre among critics and scholars, suggesting that “critical reactions to these reveal little understanding of the nature and concerns of the genre or of the narrative strategies being employed.”<sup>96</sup> Through close textual analysis, and deploying a heavily auteurist approach, Everett contends that narrative cinema allows for a recreation of subjective memory that is not open to the documentary filmmaker. She prioritises examples which focus on childhood, highlighting how narrative film allows directors to concentrate on visual details that appear through the act of remembering. In her view, and in direct contrast to Bruss’s earlier contention, this ability even elevates it above literary autobiography, suggesting that film “can show the

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<sup>90</sup> Kosta, *Recasting Autobiography*, p. 137.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, p. 137.

<sup>92</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>94</sup> Wendy Everett, ‘The autobiographical eye in European Film’, *Europa: An International Journal of Language, Art and Culture*, 2:1 (1995), 3-10 (p. 3).

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>96</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

viewer the world exactly as the director remembers it, without recourse to the elusive ambiguity of words.”<sup>97</sup> Everett also directly tackles the truth problem present in filmic autobiography scholarship by highlighting that “autobiographical memory is composed of endlessly shifting viewpoints and parameters,”<sup>98</sup> implying that any search for ‘truth’ by the scholar is a failure in understanding how any life narrative functions because “the reality they portray is subjective, autonomous and entirely self-contained.”<sup>99</sup> Echoing the sentiment of Paul de Man, Everett concludes by showing that life does not prefigure the autobiography but is instead both a part and a result of the creative act. Narrative cinema finds its autobiographical legitimacy in the way it allows “the director to recreate his or her memories” meaning “the film itself becomes part of the process of self-discovery.”<sup>100</sup>

Everett consolidates her reading of filmic autobiography with her 2007 article ‘Through the I of the camera: Women and autobiography in contemporary European film,’ where she again focuses on filmic autobiography’s ability to recreate a remembered world “as a complex inner/outer topography, contoured by experience.”<sup>101</sup> This concludes with a final illustration of how film must be regarded as the autobiographical medium *bar none*:

It is possible to identify in the nature of the filmic image the key not merely to film’s ability to articulate the self, but to its unparalleled ability to do so. For what separates autobiographical films from their literary counterparts is not their objectives, given that in both the open-ended and continuous exploration of the self is marked by the same shifting viewpoints and the same desire for understanding, reparation, or reconciliation, but the fact that filmic discourse is grounded in the visual, and thus able to reflect the fundamental correlation between eye and I, between seeing and identity.<sup>102</sup>

Everett’s approach to filmic autobiography, which is also reflected in her monograph on Terence Davies,<sup>103</sup> can also be found in Clodagh Brook’s 2004 study of life narrative in Italian cinema which, despite aligning with some of the more traditional theories of autobiography with her formulation of “implicit and explicit” autobiographies, does see film as a subversion of that tradition. Brook echoes Everett’s sentiment when she states: “cinematic autobiography finds

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<sup>97</sup> Everett, ‘The autobiographical eye’, p. 6.

<sup>98</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>99</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>100</sup> *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>101</sup> Wendy Everett, ‘Through the I of the camera: Women and autobiography in contemporary European film’, *Studies in European Cinema*, 4:2 (2007), 125-136 (p. 128).

<sup>102</sup> *ibid.*, p. 128.

<sup>103</sup> See: Wendy Everett, *Terence Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004).

its more fragmented, diaristic mode reflected in the style of recent prose autobiographies which do not use the traditional mode of narration and may concentrate on briefer, less monumental periods of life, leaving aside the development of character that Lejeune suggests as integral to autobiography.”<sup>104</sup>

With European Art Cinema dominating the scholarship on the personal turn within narrative cinema, Kathleen McHugh saw to expand the discussion to include examples from a mainstream context. However, her 2001 essay ‘Where Hollywood Fears to Tread’ claims that “in both commercial cinema and television, autobiography is almost, if not completely, non-existent.”<sup>105</sup> Using the approaches of Sitney and Bruss as her foundation, McHugh regards the commercial Hollywood framework at odds with the kinds of self-representation evident in experimental and independent cinema. This is due to the fact “Hollywood solicits a universalised identification from its audiences, efficiently combining narrative and aesthetic interests in compelling, seductive characters with the economic bottom line.”<sup>106</sup> Noting this, McHugh turns instead to Cheryl Dunye’s *The Watermelon Woman* (1996), a film which is made within an artisanal mode of production but which crossed over into independent distribution, “thereby “appearing” on Hollywood turf.”<sup>107</sup> McHugh observes how, echoing Kosta’s reading of *Germany, Pale Mother*, Dunye “collapses public and private history as they relate to media, documentation, and desire in such a way as to challenge the distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, autobiography and fantasy.”<sup>108</sup> The film tells the story of a lesbian experimental filmmaker named Cheryl who is recoding an account of her search for details about an elusive African American film actress named Fae Richards. Uncovering the details of an actress whose life mirrors her own in many ways, Dunye “skilfully constructs her autobiography as one in which her “moment of artistic vocation” is inseparable from her search for an obscure African American actress.”<sup>109</sup> Yet, by the film’s end, it is revealed that the character of Fae Richards is a fiction, a figure conjured up from the imagination of Dunye to illustrate her desire for a history that does not exist. In this way, McHugh observes how the film directly comments on its

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<sup>104</sup> Clodagh Brook, ‘Screening the Autobiographical’, in *Italian Cinema: New Directions* ed. William Hope (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 27-51 (p. 29).

<sup>105</sup> Kathleen McHugh, ‘Where Hollywood Fears to Tread: Autobiography and the Limits of Commercial Cinema’, in *The End of Cinema As We Know It: American Film in the Nineties* ed. Jon Lewis (New York; London: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 269-276 (p. 269).

<sup>106</sup> *ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>107</sup> *ibid.*, p. 272.

<sup>108</sup> *ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid.*, p. 273.

position outside of the mainstream production context, one that is emphasised by Dunye's position as a black lesbian filmmaker. As she highlights:

Its insinuation of fiction within a "documentary" of black women's stories testifies to the truth of their representational absence in history, in industry cinema, in mainstream cultural narratives more forcefully than any "truthful" account could have done.<sup>110</sup>

This formulation – the understanding that the deliberate blurring of documentary and fictional modes can be a more powerful means of asserting a marginalised subjectivity than straightforwardly confessional autobiography – is one that resonates strongly with the argument of this thesis, even though the mainstream Hollywood context that Mchugh addresses is not the primary focus of the chapters that follow.

The study of the personal in the filmic developed further in 2006 with the publishing of a special edition of the journal *Biography*, 'Self-Projection and Autobiography in Film', edited and introduced by Linda Haverty Rugg. This volume breaks new ground by focussing primarily on fiction film – albeit while including some articles that continue the investigation into the documentary impulse. But by considering the significance of directors such as Bill Douglas, Fritz Lang, François Truffaut, and Rainer Werner Fassbinder – alongside articles on avant-garde filmmakers such as Jonas Mekas and Maya Deren – this collection marks the first multimodal study of filmic autobiography. However, lacking any unifying foundational theory to work from, each author approaches their case studies from a different methodological standpoint. Moreover, when combined with the essays focusing on other forms, this volume of *Biography* illustrates filmic life narrative's tendency to avoid easy categorisation.

This varied nature is anticipated by Rugg in her introductory essay. Questioning whether filmic autobiography should "exist as a category,"<sup>111</sup> she recognises that generic definition is not a helpful pursuit. It is in this moving away from the genre dilemma that the study of the form can begin to flourish, since scholars are able to concentrate on how the self, which has a myriad of forms, is presented in the filmic medium. Rugg recognises this in her evaluation of the articles in the volume, observing that:

The impossibility of cinematic autobiography discussed in the work of Bruss and Lejeune seems underscored in many of the essays in this volume, but only insofar as we accept at the same time the impossibility of identifying and representing an individual,

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<sup>110</sup> McHugh, 'Where Hollywood Fears to Tread', p. 274.

<sup>111</sup> Linda Haverty Rugg, 'Keaton's Leap: Self-Projection and Autobiography in Film', *Biography*, 29:1 (2006), v-xiii (p. ix).

free-standing, fully integrated self. It is precisely the impossibility of cinematic autobiography, in other words, that aids in the discovery of a more implicated, complex, and unrepresentable subject.<sup>112</sup>

Understanding life narrative as an act that is diverse in its possibilities, one can find a blueprint for an intermedial approach within these essays. Taking the different analyses of fiction film, we see each author utilising the term 'self-projection' in different ways.

Julie F. Codell's article found in the volume begins to introduce a new way of understanding authorial performance as a facet of personal filmmaking. Taking François Truffaut as her focus, Codell considers the notion of impersonation within an autobiographical context. Thanks to his debut feature *Les quatre cents coups* (1959), which utilises aspects of his own childhood in its narrative, Truffaut is no stranger to being the subject of autobiographical study. However, Codell takes a later film as her case study: *L'enfant sauvage* (1970). The interest in *L'enfant sauvage* lies in Truffaut's choice to cast himself as Dr. Itard, the doctor at the National Institution for Deaf Mutes who studies and teaches the titular 'wild child' Victor of Aveyron, who had spent the first eleven years of his life with little or no human contact. Codell argues that:

Truffaut expands the "I" in *L'enfant sauvage* by play-acting, a child's activity, and impersonating Itard. He wants to be like or inhabit Itard, who has the power to tame another and himself. Truffaut plays a self he would like to be, a cultural ideal- the mature adult he has become both as actor and as director in this film.<sup>113</sup>

Subverting the notion of the self-reflexive camera, Codell observes how Truffaut places himself in front of the camera while still maintaining his position as auteur director. Rather than having to turn the camera on himself to ensure his position of director is intact, this is maintained by "impersonating Itard in voice and body, narrative and image," allowing Truffaut to make "the godlike director a godlike doctor, his various self-referentialities existing in and created by intimate mingling of the pictorial and the narrative."<sup>114</sup> Codell reads this impersonation of Itard as an autobiographical act that creates and reaffirms a self through its relation to a historical identity. These parallels are heightened by not only Truffaut's presence onscreen but also the narrative itself. Codell highlights convincing links between the relationship of Itard and Victor and that of Truffaut and Jean-Pierre Léaud, the young star of *Les quatre cents coups*. In this

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<sup>112</sup> Rugg, 'Keaton's Leap', p. xiii.

<sup>113</sup> Julie F. Codell, 'Playing Doctor: François Truffaut's *L'enfant sauvage* and the Auteur/Autobiographer as Impersonator', *Biography*, 29:1 (2006), 101-122 (p. 109).

<sup>114</sup> *ibid.*, p. 114.

relationship, Truffaut acted as mentor to the young Léaud, taming a ‘wild child’ who had been an unmanageable school student and prone to rebellious acts. Codell observes that, through this mirroring, “Truffaut dramatically changes the film from a rather pure history to a personal performance full of coded social identities from French history, politics, film history, and his own past and present lives.”<sup>115</sup> This anticipates this thesis’s understanding of the performance of authorship as an act that is always embedded within and shaped by the wider social and historical contexts in which the director operates. Film offers an outlet for this kind of autobiographical investigation precisely because it allows for the fusion of selves through the process of ‘acting’ as another. In this way, “this permeability between the way we conduct our lives and the films we see blurs identities and invents them, as films offer a kind of auto/biographical channelling.”<sup>116</sup> This notion of impersonation as a mode of authorial self-construction is directly relevant to the case studies examined in Chapter 2 of this thesis, where Pasolini’s casting of himself as Chaucer and other historical figures is read as an analogous act of authorial performance: a means of constructing and performing an authorial identity through the deliberate citation and inhabitation of existing cultural and historical positions.

Other articles in this issue dealing with fiction film similarly seek to reframe the discussion of life narrative as a creative act. Michael Tratner, analysing the final two films of director Fritz Lang, *The Indian Tomb* (1959) and *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* (1960), explicitly questions the way autobiographies have been traditionally formulated. He states:

to call these films autobiographical, we would usually expect to find in them more than just remakes of earlier aesthetic works: we would expect them to represent real events in Lang’s private life... However, there is another way to see these movies as an effort to re-envision Lang’s most private affairs, and thus another way to see them as autobiographies of a very distinctive kind.<sup>117</sup>

Tratner investigates the way in which autobiography can be present through the conscious structuring of a director’s career, linking again to the notion of authorial performance. Taking the relationship between Lang and his second wife Thea von Harbou as his case study, he argues that Lang’s final two films show his attempt to “revise the stories he found himself living out by remaking the stories he had created.”<sup>118</sup> Von Harbou had collaborated closely with Lang

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<sup>115</sup> Codell, ‘Playing Doctor’, p. 114.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>117</sup> Michael Tratner, ‘Lovers, Filmmakers, and Nazis: Fritz Lang’s Last Two Movies as Autobiography’, *Biography*, 29:1 (2006), 86-100 (p. 86).

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*, p. 99.

during their marriage, writing the screenplays for several of his films but, following their divorce, went onto become an active member of the Nazi party, working within their filmmaking department. For Lang, who fled Nazi Germany for a successful career in Hollywood, this connection to a Nazi collaborator was difficult to make sense of. However, Lang sought to take control of this narrative through his final two films, which as Tratner observes, “are revisions and extensions of the very first and very last movies which von Harbou and Lang worked together.”<sup>119</sup> With *The Indian Tomb* being a remake of an earlier film in which they were both screenwriters and *The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse* a sequel to their final collaboration – 1933s *The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* – Tratner suggests that Lang is designing it so “their movies no longer “lead up to” and end with the rise of Nazism; but rather their collaboration transcends the Nazi years.”<sup>120</sup> Tratner’s approach demonstrates that it is not only the analysis of narrative but also the production context that can be considered when approaching a study of life narrative in film. This opens up further space for narrative cinema within this discussion, with the collaborative nature of cinema production also allowing for relational readings. In Lang’s case, his ability to deliberately structure the final years of his career allowed him to take control of the autobiographical narrative – specifically his relationship with von Harbou. In doing so, “he can retell it in a way that makes it appear that the relationship had a sequel which never occurred.”<sup>121</sup> Lang is performing an authorial identity across time, using the medium, and the institutional and cultural contexts within which his films circulate, as a means of constructing a public identity that manages and controls the meaning of his own biographical history. In this way, the performance of authorship is not confined to individual films but extends across the full arc of a director’s creative and public life in a manner which forms an intermedial web of identity.

The most recent and theoretically ambitious attempt to develop a framework for the study of personal filmmaking across media is Nadja Gernalzick’s *Temporality in American Filmic Autobiography: Cinema, Automedia and Grammatology with ‘Film Portrait’ and ‘Joyce at 34.’* Published in 2018, this work draws on various developments from autobiography studies, some of which were still new to anglophone scholarship, and applies them directly to the study of film. The most notable of these is the term ‘automediality,’ introduced by the scholars Jörg

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<sup>119</sup> Tratner, ‘Lovers, Filmmakers, and Nazis’, p. 87.

<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>121</sup> *ibid.*, p. 89.

Dünne and Christian Moser,<sup>122</sup> which Gernalzick defines as “any engagement in the materiality of media by agents, including respective relational components and processes.”<sup>123</sup> Crucially, automediality must be treated as a hypernym within the discussion of life narrative. The genre explosion which I outlined earlier can be mitigated by such a term, since “automediality may be other than autobiography; for example, literary fiction, new writing, photography, game playing, driving a car, or eating are automedial.”<sup>124</sup> This can be seen as an answer to Bruss’s call for a new formulation of life narrative that has resulted from the introduction of film as an expressive medium. Automediality answers the call because it places emphasis on the materiality and technology of the medium involved in the life narrative act. It understands the narrative constructedness and facticity of the form while considering “the participation, or even determining influence, of the medium in the way the life is displayed, performed, or constructed.”<sup>125</sup> Automediality also presents the scholar with a term that avoids media-specific terms which can hinder life narrative studies. Terms such as ‘life writing’ or ‘autography,’ introduced to widen the scope of texts studied, still have medial connotations that limit the film scholar. Automediality presents a “semiotic and medial opening” which can keep pace with the everchanging and adaptable digital media landscape of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>126</sup> Her work also places the need on a reframing of the focus of personal creative output outside of purely biographical analysis. As she makes clear, “what is called the self depends on the act of signification and does not exist outside or prior to language or writing.”<sup>127</sup> This thesis approaches this question through the question of authorship specifically, especially since “the categorical distinction between fiction and nonfiction, or between narrative film and documentary film, is semiotically mute. Fictionalisation is a technique of self-processing like any other medial or semiotic

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<sup>122</sup> See: Jörg Dünne, Christian Moser, ‘Allgemeine Einleitung: Automedialität’, in *Automedialität: Subjektkonstitution in Schrift, Bild und neuen Medien*, ed. Jörg Dünne and Christina Moser (München: Wilhelm Fink, 2008), pp. 7-16.

<sup>123</sup> Nadja Gernalzick, *Temporality in American Filmic Autobiography: Cinema, Automediality and Grammatology with ‘Film Portrait’ and ‘Joyce at 34’* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2018), p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>126</sup> Recent scholarly focus on automediality has specifically revolved around studies of social media and the construction of self on the internet. Some of these works include: Umit Kennedy, ‘Arriving on Youtube: Vlogs, Automedia and Autoethnography’, *Life Writing*, 18:4 (2021), 563-578; Ellen Wynne, William Wright, Donna Alvermann, ‘Creating Gaps in Understanding: How Gen Z Disrupts Gender Norms on TikTok’, *The International Journal of Critical Media Literacy*, 3:1 (2021), 1-23; Emily Van der Nagel, ‘Alts and Automediality: Compartmentalising the Self through Multiple Social Media Profiles’, *M/C journal*, 21:2 (2018).

<sup>127</sup> Gernalzick, *Temporality in American Filmic Autobiography*, p. 12.

pursuit.”<sup>128</sup> This understanding of life narrative as primarily a “medial pursuit” allows also for the notion of the intermedial to be placed at the forefront.

### The Performance of Authorship: Cocteau and Fellini

Before turning to the primary case studies of this thesis, I think it is instructive to consider two earlier examples that illuminate with particular clarity the modes of authorial performance that will recur throughout the following chapters. Jean Cocteau’s *Le Sang d’un poète* (1930, released 1932) and Federico Fellini’s *8 ½* (1963) each offer, in different ways, a model of how fiction film directors have used the medium to construct and perform an authorial identity – one through the director’s bodily presence within the film as a form of direct self-inscription, the other through the careful curation of an intermedial persona that extends across film and extra-filmic contexts simultaneously. These two modes are not mutually exclusive, but examining them separately in these two foundational examples provides a useful framework for understanding the range of strategies through which the directors studied in this thesis have performed their authorial identities, and the political and cultural stakes that those performances carry. Cocteau and Fellini are not themselves among this thesis’s primary case studies, but their work establishes a lineage of authorial performance within European fiction film that the later directors examined inherited, developed, and in many cases explicitly contested.

The cultural and intellectual context within which Cocteau made *Le Sang d’un poète* is essential to understanding the film’s significance as an early act of authorial self-inscription within the cinema. The Paris of the late 1920s and early 1930s was a cultural landscape shaped by the twin forces of Surrealism and psychoanalysis – two intellectual movements that had fundamentally transformed the understanding of identity, the self, and the relationship between conscious experience and unconscious desire. Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899), though published three decades earlier, had by this point become a foundational text of modernist culture, and its influence on the artistic avant-garde was pervasive. As Liran Razinsky has argued, psychoanalysis and autobiography share a fundamental resemblance in being “forms of an attempt at self-knowledge or understanding,”<sup>129</sup> and in *The Interpretation of Dreams* this resemblance is taken to its extreme with Freud being simultaneously the explorer

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<sup>128</sup> Gernalzick, *Temporality in American Filmic Autobiography*, p. 13.

<sup>129</sup> Liran Razinsky, ‘Psychoanalysis and Autobiography: Leiris, Freud and the Obstacle to Self-Knowledge’, *Journal of modern literature*, 44:1 (2020), 129-147 (pp. 129-130).

and the object of exploration, analysing his own dreams in order to develop a generalisable theory of the unconscious. As Carolyn Laubender observes, "psychoanalysis is, in other words, a modern science born of Freud's deconstruction of self-narration; it is a generalisable theory of mind catalysed by Freud's experiment with autobiography."<sup>130</sup> It is within this psychoanalytic culture – with its privileging of the inward turn, its understanding of identity as layered, unstable, and irreducibly shaped by unconscious forces – that Cocteau's film is situated. His description of *Le Sang d'un poète* as "a descent into oneself, a way of using the mechanism of the dream without sleeping"<sup>131</sup> is a statement of its psychoanalytic ambition – an attempt to use the medium of film to perform the kind of self-examination that Freud had undertaken through the analysis of his own dreams.

What distinguishes Cocteau's approach from that of his Surrealist contemporaries, however, is his explicit turn toward the personal and the authorial. The experimental films of Man Ray, Fernand Léger, and Marcel Duchamp, as Stuart Klawans has observed, "may be described as personal in some sense; but none of them is concerned with an actual person. Instead they are non-narrative (or barely narrative) *jeux d'esprit*, full of puns and anagrams."<sup>132</sup> Even Luis Buñuel, whose *Un Chien Andalou* (1929) had directly inspired Cocteau to begin experimenting with film, was driven by a more impersonal approach to his subject matter – one oriented toward the collective unconscious of bourgeois society rather than the particular psychology of the filmmaker. Cocteau's film, by contrast, places the figure of the poet – and by extension, the figure of Cocteau himself – at its centre.

The most striking manifestation of this is Cocteau's decision to appear in the film's opening sequence in person, disguised in a plaster cast mask and classical robes. It is his likeness that constitutes the film's first image. This choice is significant on multiple levels. Most immediately, it establishes the film as a work in which the boundary between director and subject, between the maker of the film and the person it is about, is deliberately blurred. Cocteau does not stand behind the camera, he steps in front of it, placing his body within the text he is creating. In doing so, he enacts precisely the kind of authorial self-inscription that this thesis understands as the performance of authorship. It is the active constitution of an authorial identity through the act of cinematic self-presentation, with his body functioning as a

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<sup>130</sup> Carolyn Laubender, 'Speak for Your Self: Psychoanalysis, Autotheory, and The Plural Self', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 76:1 (2020), 39-64 (p. 40).

<sup>131</sup> Jean Cocteau, *The Difficulty of Being* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2013), p. 45.

<sup>132</sup> Stuart Klawans, 'Narcissus Sees Through Himself: On Jean Cocteau and the Invention of the Film Poet', *Parnassus: Poetry in Review*, 32:1/2 (2011), 321-333 (p. 328).

visual signature for the film – a physical mark of authorial presence that precedes and frames everything that follows.

This authorial presence is underscored by Cocteau's gesture, during the opening sequence, toward the apparatus of film production arrayed behind him: cameras, lights, and equipment that mark the space as a film set rather than a narrative location. In drawing attention to the machinery of filmmaking, Cocteau is simultaneously claiming his position as the director of that machinery – the intelligence that organises and controls the apparatus of representation. He is both art and artist, seer and seen, the subject of the film and the authority behind it. This dual positioning – inside and outside the text simultaneously – is one that will recur throughout the case studies examined in this thesis, most explicitly in the work of Pasolini, who appears within his films as a series of historical and literary figures, and Jarman, who stages himself as auteur-witness within the experimental structure of films such as *The Last of England* (1987). What Cocteau establishes in nascent form is the understanding that cinema's unique capacity to place the director's own body within the text offers a form of authorial self-presentation unavailable to the literary autobiographer – for whom the self is always, as Paul de Man observed, an "effect of language"<sup>133</sup> – and that this capacity can be harnessed as a means of performing an authorial identity that is both aesthetically and politically significant.



Fig. 1. Jean Cocteau, in a mask and classical robes, presenting the apparatuses of production at the start of *Le sang d'un poète* (1932)

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<sup>133</sup> Paul John Eakin, 'What are we reading when we read autobiography?', *Narrative*, 12:2 (2004), 121-132 (p. 125).

The authorial inscription of the opening sequence is reinforced shortly afterward by a title card, written in Cocteau's own hand, that reads: "How I got trapped inside my own film – Jean Cocteau." The written signature – a concept central to theories of literary autobiography, most notably in Lejeune's theory of the autobiographical pact, where the identity of author, narrator, and protagonist is guaranteed by the author's name on the cover of the book – here enters into the filmic medium in a form that combines the textual and the bodily. Cocteau's signature is not merely a name printed on a title card but a handwritten inscription, a trace of the physical act of writing that carries with it the presence of the body that performed it. This combination of the handwritten signature with the director's physical appearance in the preceding sequence constitutes a double act of authorial self-inscription anticipating the inter-medial performances of authorship that this thesis traces across its primary case studies. The author does not merely stand behind the film; he inscribes himself within it at multiple levels, making the performance of authorship a visible, legible, and emphatically embodied act.

The film's narrative content reinforces this authorial performance. The poet at the film's centre – played by the actor Enrique Rivero, but closely shadowed by Cocteau's own presence in the opening sequence – is instructed to "enter the mirror," both literally and metaphorically, embarking on a series of peepshow visions that reflect back the fears, desires, and psychology wounds of the artist who has conjured them. The film's use of the mirror – six years before Lacan would introduce the notion of the "mirror stage" to psychology in 1936 – is particularly resonant in this context, anticipating the psychoanalytic understanding of identity as something that is formed through an act of reflection and misrecognition rather than given as a natural or essential property of the self. The peepshow visions that the poet encounters within the mirror have demonstrable links to Cocteau's own biography: the shadow play of an opium pipe references his well-documented addiction, while the figure of Dargelos – a playground bully who appears in the film's second half – is drawn directly from Cocteau's childhood experiences. But these autobiographical references are not presented as straightforward confessions or self-revelations. They are filtered through the mechanisms of dream, surrealist imagery, and psychoanalytic symbolism in a way that simultaneously exposes and conceals, that makes the authorial self visible while insisting on its irreducible complexity and instability. This is autobiography not as the transparent record of a life but as the performance of a self in process – a self that is constituted through the act of artistic creation rather than expressed by it.

Federico Fellini offers a contrasting but equally instructive example of authorial performance, one in which the construction of identity is oriented not primarily toward the interior landscape

of psychoanalytic self-examination but toward the deliberate curation of a public persona across an intermedial field of creative and extra-filmic self-presentation. Where Cocteau performs his authorial identity through the direct inscription of his body within the film, Fellini performs his through the more diffuse and culturally mediated process of constructing what John C. Stubbs has called "Fellini's autobiographical legend."<sup>134</sup> This is a carefully managed public identity in which the boundaries between the director's life and his films are deliberately blurred, and in which the extra-filmic statements and interviews that surround each film become as important a site of authorial self-construction as the films themselves.

This intermedial dimension of Fellini's authorial performance is immediately apparent in his account of the making of *8½*. It is well documented by Fellini himself, in the numerous interviews and public statements he gave surrounding the film's release, that he had suffered a creative block during the writing and production of the film, a block that found its narrative mirror in the film's protagonist Guido, a director played by Marcello Mastroianni who is similarly unable to begin his next project. Fellini recounted the resolution of this crisis in characteristically theatrical terms, describing the moment in which "the small voice of creativity within me" revealed that the story he would tell was of "a writer who doesn't know what he wants to write."<sup>135</sup> The veracity of this account is, as Fellini was surely aware, impossible to verify. What matters is not its truth but its function within the wider performance of his authorial identity. By publicly narrating the relationship between his own creative crisis and the film's central narrative, Fellini was constructing a specific vision of himself as a particular kind of artist – one whose work emerges from a direct and unmediated engagement with his own psychological and creative experience. The extra-filmic statement and the film itself become mutually reinforcing components of a single intermedial act of authorial self-construction.

The complexity of this construction is revealed, however, by the discovery, documented by Fellini's biographer John Baxter, that certain scenes in *8½* presented as autobiographical reflections of the director's own experience were in fact drawn from the experiences of his brother Riccardo, whose school memories Fellini had, as Baxter records, "simply co-opted."<sup>136</sup> What appears to be biographical truth is revealed as calculated self-construction, an amalgamation of selves. In this way, his imagined ideal of himself as artist is shaped into a

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<sup>134</sup> John C. Stubbs, *Federico Fellini as Auteur: Seven Aspects of his Films* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006), p. 72.

<sup>135</sup> Federico Fellini, *I, Fellini* ed. Charlotte Chandler (New York: Random, 1995), p. 148.

<sup>136</sup> John Baxter, *Fellini* (New York: St. Martin's, 1993), pp. 26-27.

coherent and marketable public identity. This revelation does not undermine the authenticity of Fellini's authorial performance, however, rather it illuminates its true nature. The Fellini legend is not a record of a life but a construction of one – a performance of authorial identity that draws on biographical material, creative invention, and carefully managed public self-presentation in equal measure. It is, in precisely the sense that this thesis proposes, a performance of authorship rather than an expression of it.

Within *8½* itself, this intermedial construction of identity is given formal expression through the opening dream sequence – a sequence that draws on the same psychoanalytic influence that shaped Cocteau's film, while deploying it in the service of a very different kind of authorial performance. The dream begins with Guido suffocating within a car that is filling with smoke, unable to move due to being stuck in traffic. After escaping, he glides magically across the tops of the surrounding cars before taking flight, only for his ascent to be curtailed by a rope held by business associates who drag him back to earth, demanding that he commit to his next film. This dream of creative aspiration and institutional constraint – of the desire to transcend the demands of the film industry and the reality of commercial obligation – is as much Fellini's dream as it is Guido's, and the film's opening sequence establishes this identification before the narrative has properly begun. Crucially, throughout this sequence, the face of the protagonist is deliberately masked through careful camera placement and shadow. What is visible, however, is his costume: a long dark coat and black fedora that precisely replicate the signature image of Fellini himself, an image that had been carefully constructed and disseminated through years of public appearances, photographic portraits, and journalistic profiles. The masking of Mastroianni's face creates a space into which the viewer, primed by the intermedial construction of the Fellini persona, can project the director's own image. Auteur and protagonist are conjoined through the deliberate manipulation of visual motifs drawn not from the film itself but from the wider medial landscape of Fellini's public identity. The identification is established before the illusion can be broken – before the audience has had the chance to register that it is Mastroianni and not Fellini who inhabits the character.

Together, Cocteau and Fellini establish two of the primary axes of authorial performance that this thesis traces across its case studies: the director's body as a site of direct self-inscription within the film, and the construction of an authorial identity across an intermedial field that encompasses both the cinematic and the extra-filmic. These modes are, as the subsequent chapters will demonstrate, available to all directors regardless of their cultural positioning, but their political stakes are transformed when they are deployed by directors whose claim to the

position of author is not straightforwardly given by the structures of cultural power within which they operate. For Cocteau, writing from a position of considerable cultural prestige within the Parisian avant-garde, the performance of authorial identity was an act of aesthetic provocation – a challenge to the conventions of both cinema and literary autobiography that could be undertaken from a position of relative cultural security. For the directors studied in the chapters that follow, the same act of self-inscription carries a very different charge. The performance of authorship becomes, for these directors, an act of political necessity as much as aesthetic ambition, a means of asserting a subjectivity that dominant culture has sought to suppress, and of claiming a cultural legitimacy that has been systematically withheld. It is this dimension of the performance of authorship – its function as counterdiscourse, as a refusal of cultural silencing – that this thesis will seek to illuminate.



Fig. 4. The figure of Guido (Marcello Mastroianni), in hat and coat, flying over the traffic during the opening dream sequence of *8 1/2* (1963)

## The Thesis

This thesis argues that the performance of authorship in fiction film is, for directors from marginalised positions, always also an act of cultural claiming – a refusal of the invisibility that dominant structures have sought to impose, and an assertion of the right to be recognised as a creative artist with the authority to speak from one's own experience, on one's own terms. The framework of the performance of authorship as counterdiscourse, developed across the introduction's preceding sections, provides the conceptual foundation from which this argument proceeds: an understanding of authorial identity as something that is constituted through performance rather than expressed by a pre-existing essence, that is constructed across an intermedial field of creative and public self-presentation rather than contained within any single medium, and that carries its fullest political charge when it is performed by directors whose claim to the position of author has never been straightforwardly given by the structures of cultural power within which they operate.

The three chapters that follow develop this argument through a series of case studies that are organised around three axes of marginalisation – class, queerness, and gender – each of which produces a distinct mode of authorial performance and a distinct set of political stakes. The chapters are arranged in a progression that moves from the most explicitly autobiographical to the genre-mediated – from the directly personal to the formally complex – in a way that demonstrates both the range and the depth of the performance of authorship as counterdiscourse across the history of British and European fiction film.

Chapter 1 establishes the argument through the explicitly autobiographical work of two British directors – Bill Douglas and Terence Davies – whose films engage most directly with the conditions of their own biographical experience. The chapter begins with a brief examination of Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* (1933) as a proto-example of the performance of authorship through formal and stylistic manipulation of the medium, before moving to its three primary case studies. Douglas's *Bill Douglas Trilogy* (1972-1978) is examined as an act of working-class authorial performance – conducted through a formally austere and aesthetically ambitious mode of self-inscription that asserts the right of the working-class subject to speak in the most demanding formal language available. Davies's work – spanning the *Terence Davies Trilogy* (1976-1983) and the feature films *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992) – is examined as an act of queer working-class authorial performance, in which the intersection of class and queerness produces a mode of formal self-inscription that encodes a

doubly marginalised identity within the sensory and affective texture of the films. The chapter traces the intermedial dimension of each director's authorial performance – Douglas's "The Palace of Dreams" and Davies's interviews – demonstrating how authorial identity is constituted not within the films alone but across the wider field of each director's creative and public life.

Chapter 2 develops the queer strand of the thesis's argument through a comparative study of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Derek Jarman – two directors who share a fundamental sensibility and approach to the performance of queer authorial identity despite having worked in different national contexts and different historical moments. The chapter traces the ways in which both directors use a transhistorical and intermedial mode of authorial self-inscription – reaching back to medieval literature, Renaissance painting, and the history of Christian martyrdom – as a means of constructing a cultural lineage for their own queer present and asserting the legitimacy of a queer subjectivity that the dominant culture has sought to render invisible or criminal. Through close readings of Pasolini's *The Trilogy of Life* (1971-1974), *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1963), and *Teorema* (1968) – and of Jarman's *The Last of England* (1987), *The Garden* (1990), and *Blue* (1993) – the chapter demonstrates how both directors perform their queer authorial identities through a combination of bodily self-inscription, intermedial persona construction, and generic subversion that is shaped at every level by their awareness of the political stakes of their authorial claiming. The chapter also examines the deep creative and political kinship between the two directors through the lens of Julian Cole's short film *Ostia* (1987), in which Jarman plays Pasolini – an act of inter-subjective identification that represents the fullest expression of the transhistorical queer authorial tradition that both directors' work constructs and performs.

Chapter 3 extends the thesis's investigation into the domain of gender, examining how three British women directors – Margaret Tait, Charlotte Wells, and Joanna Hogg – have used their films and their wider intermedial creative practice to perform female authorial identities within and against a film culture organised around the assumption of male creative authority. The chapter introduces the concept of new relational realism – a mode of filmmaking that combines the formal strategies of contemporary British social realism with the relational mode of female authorial performance – as the specific institutional and formal context within which the three case studies' authorial performances are conducted. Through close readings of Tait's *A Portrait of Ga* (1952) and *Blue Black Permanent* (1992), Wells's *Aftersun* (2022), and Hogg's *The Eternal Daughter* (2022), the chapter demonstrates how each director uses the daughter's relational

search for the identity of a lost or inaccessible parent as the primary mode through which female authorial identity can be constructed and performed – a relational mode of authorial self-inscription that is simultaneously personal and political, rooted in the specific conditions of each director's biographical and institutional experience and oriented toward a universal claim for the cultural legitimacy of female creative authority. The chapter situates this argument within the feminist film theory tradition – drawing on the work of Johnston, Mulvey, Mayne, Kaplan, and de Lauretis.

The conclusion turns to the counterpoint of Steven Spielberg's *The Fabelmans* (2022) – a mainstream Hollywood example of the performance of authorship that illuminates, by contrast, the specifically countercultural and politically engaged dimension of the performances of authorship examined across the thesis's three chapters. Where the directors examined in the thesis's three chapters perform their authorial identities from positions of marginalisation – using the resources of fiction film, and the wider intermedial field of their creative and public lives, as means of asserting subjectivities that dominant culture has sought to suppress – Spielberg's performance of authorship operates from a position of cultural power and commercial authority, serving the consolidation of a brand identity and a cultural legacy rather than the assertion of a counterdiscursive presence. The contrast between these two modes of authorial performance illuminates with particular clarity what is at stake in the performance of authorship as counterdiscourse, and why the films examined in this thesis continue to matter as acts of cultural claiming in the fullest and most political sense of that term.

# Chapter 1 –

## Reclaiming the Marginalised Subject in Autobiographical

### Film

The relationship between autobiography and fiction film has, as the introduction to this thesis outlined, been a contested and frequently fraught one within film scholarship. The dominant tendency within studies of filmic life narrative has been to approach autobiography as a genre – to ask whether a given film meets the conditions of autobiographical legitimacy established by the literary tradition, and to measure its success or failure as a work of personal filmmaking against those conditions. This tendency has produced a body of scholarship that is, in many respects, more concerned with the question of what autobiography is than with the question of what autobiographical filmmaking does – with categorisation rather than analysis, with the policing of generic boundaries rather than the illumination of the specific formal and political strategies through which directors have used the medium of film to construct and perform their identities as authors. It is against this tendency that this chapter's approach is oriented. Rather than asking whether the films examined here are legitimate works of autobiography in any generic sense, this chapter asks how their directors use the autobiographical tradition – its conventions, its formal strategies, its cultural associations – as a means of performing an authorial identity that is shaped at every level by their positioning within the structures of cultural power that have sought to marginalise or silence them.

Wendy Everett's observation that autobiographical filmmaking in European cinema "may be seen as an essentially European phenomenon"<sup>1</sup> provides a useful starting point for situating the case studies examined in this chapter within their broader cultural and institutional context. Everett's work on autobiographical fiction film in European cinema – most fully developed in her 1995 essay 'The Autobiographical Eye in European Film' and her 2007 article 'Through the I of the Camera' – has established the most sustained and theoretically developed account of how European fiction film directors have used the autobiographical tradition as a means of constructing and performing a subjective vision of their own experience. Her insistence that

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<sup>1</sup> Wendy Everett, 'The autobiographical eye in European Film', *Europa: An International Journal of Language, Art and Culture*, 2:1 (1995), 3-10 (p. 4 ).

autobiographical films are "inevitably ambiguous"<sup>2</sup> – that they resist the kind of generic definition that scholarship has sought to impose on them – and her understanding of film as "a privileged medium for the expression of autobiographical memory"<sup>3</sup> are positions that this chapter develops. What Everett's account does not fully address, however, is the political dimension of the autobiographical act – the question of what is at stake, beyond the aesthetic, when a director claims the authority to speak from their own experience within a cultural tradition that has systematically denied certain voices that authority. It is this political dimension – the performance of authorship as an act of counterdiscourse – that this chapter places at the centre of its analysis.

Clodagh Brook's 2004 study of life narrative in Italian cinema similarly provides a theoretical context for this chapter's argument, particularly her observation that "cinematic autobiography finds its more fragmented, diaristic mode reflected in the style of recent prose autobiographies which do not use the traditional mode of narration and may concentrate on briefer, less monumental periods of life, leaving aside the development of character that Lejeune suggests as integral to autobiography."<sup>4</sup> Brook's recognition that cinematic autobiography departs from the conventions of the literary tradition – that it develops its own formal strategies and modes of self-presentation that are specific to the medium of film – anticipates the argument of this chapter in important ways. The directors studied here do not use film simply as a vehicle for delivering an autobiographical narrative that could equally have been told in another medium. They use the specific formal properties of film – its capacity to render the texture of memory, to juxtapose images in ways that generate meaning beyond narrative exposition – as the primary means through which their authorial identities are constructed and performed. It is through film, and through the specific formal choices that the medium makes available, that these directors define their position as authors.

Autobiographical filmmaking represents, in this sense, the most explicit mode of the performance of authorship in fiction film. It is the mode in which the connection between the director's biographical experience and the film they have made is most directly acknowledged – by the director themselves, by critics, and by audiences. Its strength lies in the directness with which it asserts the director's claim to the position of author – the unambiguous declaration that this film speaks from a specific subjective position, rooted in a specific biographical

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<sup>2</sup> Everett, 'The autobiographical eye', p. 3

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Clodagh Brook, 'Screening the Autobiographical', in *Italian Cinema: New Directions* ed. William Hope (Bern; Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), pp. 27-51 (p. 29).

experience, that the director is entitled to claim as their own, what Brook labels as “explicit autobiography.”<sup>5</sup> Its limitation lies in the fact that this directness can obscure the more complex and mediated dimensions of the performance – the ways in which the autobiographical film is not simply a record of a life but a construction of one, shaped by the formal properties of the medium, the institutional contexts of production and reception, and the wider intermedial field of the director's creative and public life. It is precisely these dimensions that this chapter seeks to illuminate.

The chapter is organised around two primary case studies, each of which demonstrates a distinct mode of autobiographical authorial performance and a distinct set of political stakes. To begin with, the chapter provides a brief examination of Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* (1933), a film that occupies an important position in the lineage of personal filmmaking in European cinema and that provides an early and illuminating example of how the performance of authorship can operate through the manipulation of the filmic medium itself – through formal and stylistic choices that encode the director's subjectivity within the very texture of the film rather than simply its narrative content. It is from this foundation that the chapter will expand into an analysis of its two main case studies.

The chapter's two primary case studies are Bill Douglas and Terence Davies – two British directors whose explicitly autobiographical work is shaped by their positioning as subjects and identities which have been othered. Douglas's *Bill Douglas Trilogy* (1972-1978) is examined as an act of working-class authorial performance, claiming the right to tell a story of poverty, deprivation, and creative aspiration through coopting the techniques of the European art cinema mode to frame this subject in a new and affecting way. Davies's work – spanning the *Terence Davies Trilogy* (1976-1983) and the feature films *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992) – is examined as an act of queer authorial performance, a construction and performance of a queer identity within and against the structures of Catholic guilt, social repression, and cultural silencing that have sought to render that identity invisible or shameful. Together, these case studies demonstrate that the performance of authorship in explicitly autobiographical fiction film is never merely a personal or aesthetic act but often a political one – shaped by the director's awareness of their own positioning within the structures of cultural power that have determined whose stories are told and whose are not. The chapter also traces, across the two case studies, the intermedial dimension of the performance of

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<sup>5</sup> Brook, ‘Screening the Autobiographical’, p. 29.

authorship: the ways in which each director's authorial identity is constructed not only within their films but across the wider field of their creative and public self-presentation, through written texts, interviews, and public persona that establish and complicate the authorial identity performed on screen.

The case studies are presented in roughly chronological order, a sequence that reflects not only the historical development of explicitly autobiographical fiction film within the British context but also a progression in the formal sophistication and self-consciousness with which the autobiographical act is undertaken. Douglas's *Trilogy* has the quality of urgent and unmediated testimony – a stark and formally austere rendering of childhood experience that uses the specific properties of the filmic medium to convey what language alone could not. Davies's work is more formally elaborate and aesthetically mediated, using the properties of film – sound, image, editing, the manipulation of time – to construct a more layered and self-conscious account of the relationship between memory, identity, and the act of creative self-presentation. This progression mirrors the broader development of the autobiographical tradition in both literature and film, and demonstrates how the performance of authorship in fiction film has become increasingly self-conscious and theoretically sophisticated over the period that separates Douglas's first film from Douglas's *The Long Day Closes*.

#### Jean Vigo: Autobiography as Authorial Performance

Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* (1933) occupies a distinctive position in the lineage of personal filmmaking in European cinema. Made two years after *Le Sang d'un poète* – a case study covered in the Introduction – and drawing on some of the same Surrealist and psychoanalytic influences that shaped Cocteau's film, *Zéro de conduite* nonetheless represents a fundamentally different mode of authorial self-inscription – one that is oriented not toward the inward turn of psychoanalysis but toward the outward expression of a political and aesthetic identity that is rooted in the director's own biographical experience and cultural positioning. Where Cocteau performs his authorial identity through the direct inscription of his body within the film and the deliberate blurring of the boundary between director and subject, Vigo performs his through the formal and stylistic properties of the film itself – through a mode of filmmaking that is shaped by his own anarchic sensibility that the film becomes, in a very direct sense, an expression of who he is rather than simply a story he is telling. It is this mode of authorial performance – the director's subjectivity encoded within the formal texture of the film – that

makes *Zéro de conduite* an instructive early example for the argument of this chapter, even as the political stakes of Vigo's authorial performance differ significantly from those of the chapter's primary case studies.

At its foundation, *Zéro de conduite* takes a more traditional approach to the autobiographical form, presenting a narrative of childhood experience through vignettes of boarding school life. In terms of the 'facts' that frame the film's depiction of boarding school, there are some that are known. As Bruno Vanobbergen, Ian Grosvenor and Frank Simon have found, "the opening scene on the train, the surveillants, the peripetia in the dorm with its 30 beds, the refectory, the food, the friends, the student Tabbard... are drawn from Vigo's memories of boarding school life mainly at the college Millau. Two of the main characters in the film, Bruel and Caussat, were named after college friends of Vigo."<sup>6</sup> However, viewed through the lens of authorial performance, the film becomes a reflection of Vigo's identity as an anarchic creative voice. Unlike in the case of Cocteau, who, through the implementation of a dreamlike structure that can be analysed through Freudian psychoanalysis, used film to explore the essence of the creative life of a poet – including the despair and suffering this may bring – Vigo structures his filmic life narrative around his own anarchic beliefs and sympathies.

Born into a well-known militant family in 1905, Vigo's journalist father Migual Almeyreda was regularly imprisoned and died in suspicious circumstances in 1917. Due to this anarchist background, Vigo was forced to school under a false name, with it being said that he was "more of an anarchist than his parents throughout his life."<sup>7</sup> When it came to filming his first piece of narrative cinema, this same sense of anarchy can be seen to have filtered through. *Zéro de conduite* is filled with experimental and playful uses of the camera, some of which was still new to the medium. One of the more prominent scenes depicts a pillow fight conducted by the kids within the dorm. Already an illustration of anarchic spirit in its display of wanton destruction of the regimented and sterile dorm, Vigo takes this further through the use of slow motion to show the children parade out of the room in an act of revolution. The shot begins with one of the children somersaulting onto a chair held aloft by his fellow classmates, this figure acting as the head of the procession. The full-frontal nudity that accompanies this moment – with the boy's nightshirt riding up as he flips onto the chair – is accentuated by this use of slow motion, highlighting Vigo's manipulation of the medium to further the anarchic nature of his film. There are other playful moments throughout the film. At one moment a mirror reflection moves out of

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<sup>6</sup> Bruno Vanobbergen, Ian Grosvenor, Frank Simon, 'Jean Vigo's *Zéro de conduite* and the spaces of revolt', *Paedagogica Historica*, 50:4 (2014), 443-459 (p. 447).

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, p. 448.

synch with the figure standing in front of it and at another a drawing turns into an animation, the animated man transforming himself into Napoleon. There is also manipulation of the camera when expressive editing is employed to make a football disappear. The film is constructed around a subversive cinematic style that values spontaneity over discipline and conformity. Therefore, in *Zéro de conduit*, what could be framed as poetic freedom, or a reference to the Cocteauian surreal dreamscape, turns into a visual representation of Vigo's anarchist identity.



Fig. 3. Children show their anarchic spirit in the destruction of their dorm in *Zéro de conduit* (1933)

The experimental use of a slow-motion camera, full-frontal male nudity, the inclusion of whimsical animation, pushing the limits of what a film camera can do and what a narrative film is, can be seen as Vigo flexing his authorial voice. Taking advantage of the material nature of film, he transcends the notion of an autobiographical narrative, instead creating what is best described as an authorial vision – where every aspect of what is depicted on screen represents his own subjective view of the world. The search for an autobiographical “I” no longer falls on aligning it with a character within the film but is instead found within the images themselves: it

is the filmic image that is the “I” of the autobiographer. By the end of the film, when we see the students escape their captivity across the roof of the school – presenting revolution as a tool for freedom – we are in no doubt that we have witnessed one person’s desire to overthrow the system. Framed through their own personal experience of that same system, this revolution is ultimately executed through the anarchic manipulation of the filmic medium.

This mode of authorial performance – the director's subjectivity expressed through formal manipulation of the medium rather than biographical narrative – represents a significant and instructive departure from the more conventional modes of autobiographical filmmaking. In the chapter's primary case studies, the performance of authorship involves a complex negotiation between biographical narrative and formal mediation. The directors use both the content of their films and the formal properties of the medium to construct and perform their authorial identities, and the relationship between these two dimensions – between what is shown and how it is shown – is central to the meaning of the authorial performance. In *Zéro de conduite*, the film's anarchic identity is expressed through its formal strategies, enhancing the autobiographical content. The authorial “I” of the film is not only found in the narrative content but is present in the film's entire formal construction – in what Vigo described, in his own discussion of his filmmaking, as a cinema of “social fantasy” that takes reality as its starting point only in order to transform it through the creative possibilities of the medium.

It is this understanding of the filmic medium as a site of creative transformation – as a means of asserting a personal and political identity through the manipulation of the image rather than simply the narration of a life – that connects Vigo's example to the case studies that follow, even as the specific political stakes of those case studies differ significantly from his. Douglas and Davies each share with Vigo an understanding of film as a medium whose formal properties are active in the construction of the authorial identity the film performs. Each uses the specific capacities of film as the primary means through which their authorial identities are constructed and performed. What distinguishes their authorial performances from Vigo's is the awareness, in each case, that the claim to the position of author is not merely an aesthetic act but a political one and a refusal of the cultural silencing that dominant structures have imposed on working-class, queer, and female subjects respectively. It is to these performances, and to the political stakes that give them their fullest significance, that the chapter now turns.

### Bill Douglas – Class, Memory, and the Authored Self

Bill Douglas approached autobiography through his celebrated series of films that were later grouped together under the title of *The Bill Douglas Trilogy* – *My Childhood* (1972), *My Ain Folk* (1973), *My Way Home* (1978). The protagonist of all three films is the character Jamie, a child who lives an impoverished life in the Scottish mining village of Newcraighall – the same village on the outskirts of Edinburgh which Douglas was born into in 1934. This mirroring between the lives of Jamie and Douglas continues throughout the *Trilogy*. It begins with Jamie and his cousin Tommy – who he believes to be his brother – living with their maternal grandmother since Tommy's mother is dead and Jamie's is incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital. Both fathers, despite living in the village, want little to do with their sons. As a result of this situation, the main narrative arc of the *Trilogy* focuses on Jamie's desire to escape the extreme poverty of life in Newcraighall alongside the blossoming of his desire to become an artist – chiefly a film director. Along this journey Jamie has to contend with the death of his maternal grandmother, Tommy being taken to a children's home, the abusive temper of his paternal grandmother, Jamie himself being moved to a children's home, and finally being left with no choice but to enlist in the army.

This vivid depiction of childhood development and the need to break free from a system that was failing him naturally led critics to a personal reading of the film's narrative. From its very conception, the *Trilogy* was labelled as explicitly autobiographical, with Douglas himself, at the initial London release of *My Childhood*, stating that “the autobiographical factor is the main component. The childhood of the title is literally my childhood and the incidents that I recount are with a few variations things that actually happened to me.”<sup>8</sup> This understanding of the films was also present within contemporary criticism surrounding their release. In a Radio 4 interview conducted during the release of *My Ain Folk* with the director Lindsay Anderson, who Douglas had consulted during the writing of *My Childhood*, the interviewer Paul Vaughn asks: “Do you think, I mean can you see him stepping beyond this, oh I shouldn't say beyond it, that implies a criticism in a way, but stepping away from this kind of autobiographical picture, into something less personal?”<sup>9</sup> Although this displays a clear prejudice towards the autobiographical that Vaughn implies Douglas can ‘grow out of,’ it still demonstrates that autobiography was at the centre of discussion on the films from the start. This view has dominated subsequent critical

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in: Guy Barefoot, ‘Autobiography and the Autobiographical in *The Bill Douglas Trilogy*’, *Biography*, 29:1 (2006), 14-29 (p. 14).

<sup>9</sup> Interview transcript. *Kaleidoscope*. BBC Radio 4. 6 Dec. 1973. British Film Institute Production Files.

analysis, with Duncan Petrie, in his paper on autobiography in British film, describing the *Trilogy* as “the apotheosis of autobiographical filmmaking in British cinema.”<sup>10</sup>

The biographical context is also essential to understanding the *Trilogy* not merely as autobiography – as a narrative account of events drawn from Douglas’s experience – but as a performance of authorship in the fullest political sense. For Douglas, to claim the position of author, coming from a background of extreme poverty, was not a straightforward act. The British film industry of the early 1970s was not a hospitable environment for working-class voices – its institutional structures, its critical frameworks, and its cultural assumptions were all oriented toward the reproduction of a specifically middle-class vision of British life and British cinema. The social realist tradition of the early 1960s – the ‘kitchen sink’ films of Karel Reisz (*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960)), Tony Richardson (*A Taste of Honey* (1961)), and Lindsay Anderson (*This Sporting Life* (1963)) – had made space for working-class experience within British cinema, but had been executed largely from the perspective of middle-class filmmakers looking in rather than working-class subjects speaking for themselves. Douglas's *Trilogy* represents something fundamentally different. It is not a middle-class rendering of working-class life but a working-class director's claiming of the right to tell his own story, in his own formal language, and on his own terms. It is a refusal of the cultural silencing that dominant structures had imposed on working-class subjects, and an assertion of the right to be seen and heard as a creative intelligence with something of value to say.

This can be elaborated through looking at the work of cultural theorist Stuart Hall, who provides a theorisation of how the dominant culture maintains its authority through the control of representation. In the edited collection *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, Hall outlines how – through its capacity to determine whose experiences are deemed worthy of representation, whose stories are told, and whose identities are rendered visible or invisible within culture – the dominant culture is seeking to maintain its power. For Hall, representation is never a neutral or transparent act but is always a site of power. As he puts it, meaning “does not survive intact the passage through representation. It is a slippery customer,”<sup>11</sup> and attempting to fix it “is exactly why power intervenes in discourse.”<sup>12</sup> It is a means through which dominant ideologies reproduce themselves by naturalising certain

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<sup>10</sup> Duncan Petrie, ‘Autobiography and British Art Cinema: The Films of Bill Douglas, Terence Davies and Derek Jarman’, in *Biography as religious and cultural text* ed. Andreas Schüle (Munster; Hamburg; London: Lit Verlag, 2002), pp. 55-66 (p. 55).

<sup>11</sup> Stuart Hall, ‘The Work of Representation’, in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* ed. Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1997), p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

identities and marginalising others. In Hall's framework, the working-class subject which Douglas tackles is not simply absent from cultural representation but is present in a distorted and disempowering form. It is represented in ways that confirm the dominant culture's assumptions about working-class life rather than speaking from the lived reality of working-class experience.

Hall's insistence that meaning is never simply "found" but is always "produced – constructed,"<sup>13</sup> and that representation "is conceived as entering into the very constitution of things,"<sup>14</sup> is directly applicable to the context of Douglas's authorial performance. This constructedness is precisely what makes representation a site of struggle rather than reflection: because "there is always a great diversity of meanings about any topic, and more than one way of interpreting or representing it,"<sup>15</sup> the question of who does the representing, and in what terms, becomes consequential. The British cinema of the 1960s and early 1970s had developed a specific and limited vocabulary for the representation of working-class life – one rooted in the social realist tradition, with its emphasis on gritty authenticity, documentary-style observation, and the narrative of aspiration and escape from class constraints. This vocabulary, however apparently sympathetic to working-class experience, was fundamentally a middle-class construction. It represented working-class life from the outside, through the observing eye of a director whose own position within the class structure gave them the authority to look and to represent. Douglas's Trilogy disrupts this representational regime from within – not by offering a more accurate or authentic account of working-class life but by insisting on the right of a working-class subject to represent their own experience in their own terms, using a formal language that was not prescribed by the conventions of social realism or the expectations of middle-class audiences.

That such representations are never neutral but are bound up with power is central to Hall's account. Drawing on Foucault, he stresses that representation is caught up with "relations of power, not relations of meaning,"<sup>16</sup> and that discourse "governs the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about," while it simultaneously "'rules out', limits and restricts other ways of talking."<sup>17</sup> For Douglas, whose childhood had been marked by a systematic failure of recognition – by parents who refused to acknowledge him, by institutions that failed to protect him, by a culture that had no language for the experience he had lived – the

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<sup>13</sup> Hall, 'The Work of Representation', p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44

act of making the *Trilogy* was precisely such an insistence. It is a claiming of the right to constitute his own experience as meaningful within a representational field that had been structured to exclude it. Meaning, as Hall observes, "is a dialogue – always only partially understood, always an unequal exchange."<sup>18</sup> The performance of authorship in the *Trilogy* is, in this sense, an act of self-representation as much as an act of authorship – a claiming of the right to be seen as a subject with a perspective and a history, and thus to intervene in the "struggle" over meaning through which power circulates. By using autobiography in an explicit manner, Douglas positions himself as the direct subject of this political act.

By engaging in working-class autobiography, Douglas continues a tradition which sort to give a voice to this class struggle. However, the tradition of working-class autobiography – the memoirs, life-narratives and testimonies produced by labouring people from the early nineteenth century onward – has long occupied an uncertain place between the disciplines. It has been, as Kelly J. Mays observes, a corpus "more interesting to historians than to literary critics,"<sup>19</sup> mined for the empirical detail it yields about childhood, society, work and faith, but rarely examined as a set of formal and rhetorical strategies through which working people constructed themselves as speaking subjects. Yet it is precisely as a mode of self-construction – as a performance of authorship undertaken by subjects to whom the position of author was not readily granted – that this tradition speaks most directly to the case of Douglas, whose *Trilogy* is a working-class claiming of the authorial position within a medium and an industry structured to withhold it.

Regenia Gagnier's study of nineteenth-century British working-class autobiography argues that where the canonical autobiographer enjoyed a secure "critical distance from their objects of reflection,"<sup>20</sup> for the worker "subjectivity – being a significant agent worthy of the regard of others... - was not a given."<sup>21</sup> Where the middle-class memoir opens by asserting a hereditary right to be heard, the working-class narrative typically opens with "an apology for their authors' ordinariness,"<sup>22</sup> with the consequence being that "Cartesian subjectivity was not assumed by most working-class writers,"<sup>23</sup> so that the very act of writing a life became, for them, an act of self-authorisation rather than the natural expression of an already-secured self. Following this,

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<sup>18</sup> Hall, 'The Work of Representation', p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly J. Mays, 'Domestic Spaces, Readerly Acts: Reading, Gender, and Class in Working-Class Autobiography', *Nineteenth Century Contexts*, 30:4 (2008), 343-368 (p. 343).

<sup>20</sup> Regenia Gagnier, 'Social Atoms: Working-Class Autobiography, Subjectivity, and Gender', *Victorian Studies*, 30:3 (1987), 335-363 (p. 338).

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 343.

Nan Hackett's study uncovers the distinctive style of that subject's self-representation. Hackett's premise is that working-class autobiographers' "techniques of survival have caused their works to be ignored as literary works,"<sup>24</sup> left to social historians whose conclusions are drawn from content rather than form. Hackett's approach reads the genre's apparent stylistic poverty as expressive rather than deficient. Working-class autobiography, she argues, was "primarily 'testimonial'"<sup>25</sup> – aimed at documenting a way of life rather than presenting a unique individual – with the result that "even in this very personal, subjective, and supposedly egocentric genre, the 'I' is minimized and even depersonalized."<sup>26</sup> Writers slip into the third person, efface themselves behind documentary padding, and plead pathos "for compassion for others rather than themselves,"<sup>27</sup> producing narratives that "seem remarkably static", in which "the scene is set, but nothing happens."<sup>28</sup> Hackett reframes this effacement as method: "what has often been dismissed as an absence of style ... may instead be an effective method of indicating the psychological and social effect of economic deprivation."<sup>29</sup> In this way, such texts become "'metaphors' of a different form of self," legible as selfhood "because of, not in spite of, emphasis on the author's class."<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the austerity and reticence of Douglas's *Trilogy* – its refusal of psychological exposition, its silences, its documentary starkness – can be read not as the limits of an amateur filmmaker, but as the formal signature of a specifically working-class mode of self-representation.

However, existing scholarship on the *Trilogy* has questioned the validity of labelling the films as autobiography – asking how closely the narrative follows the events of Douglas's life, and to measure the films' authenticity based off this comparison. Andrew Noble suggests that "although the *Trilogy* is often seen as autobiography, this is too simplistic a response."<sup>31</sup> Noble hints at the need to expand the generic definition, especially around how the life *as lived* is reflected in the work itself, but doesn't go so far to suggest how this can be formulated. In his assessment of the films, he observes that "certainly many of the events occurred. If one relates Bill's life to the films, however, it soon becomes apparent that he either radically changed

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<sup>24</sup> Nan Hackett, 'A Different Form of "Self": Narrative Style in British Nineteenth-Century Working-class Autobiography', *Biography*, 12:3 (1989), 208-226 (p. 208).

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 209.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 210.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 216.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p. 214-215.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p. 223.

<sup>31</sup> Andrew Noble, 'Bill Douglas, 1934-1991: A Memoir', in *Bill Douglas: A Lanternist's Account* ed. Eddie Dick, Andrew Noble, Duncan Petrie (London: BFI, 1993), pp. 13-28 (p. 24).

chronological sequence or that several key elements did not happen to him at all.”<sup>32</sup> Noble’s desire to look further than just the “simplistic” reading of autobiography gestures towards the need for a more nuanced approach to Douglas’s autobiographical work, looking more closely at how he positions himself as a subject and his subversion of the traditional approaches to the depiction of working-class life within mainstream British cinema. This chapter proposes that the most productive framework for understanding the *Trilogy* is to investigate its position as an example of counterdiscourse.

Douglas’s refusal of the conventions of social realism can be seen in his formally self-conscious and aesthetically demanding approach. In this way, Douglas’s formal choices can be seen as a political statement. He refuses any kind of narrative comfort and resolution that popular filmmaking demanded, instead opting for a mode that transcends traditional approaches to naturalism. As Petrie points out, “[the *Trilogy*] displays a mastery of the powers of montage, a collision of images generating ideas and emotions far more complex than any surface naturalism could possibly convey.”<sup>33</sup> By deploying the formal language of the European art cinema tradition – exemplified by his adoption of the montage editing style of Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein – Douglas is claiming membership of an international cinematic tradition, placing a working-class story from a Scottish mining village within its ranks. This positioning of the *Trilogy* against the mainstream is also developed through a playful approach to intertextuality.

This assertion is established from the very opening of *My Ain Folk*, in which the film begins with a sequence of luscious Technicolor imagery drawn from the Hollywood film *Lassie Come Home* (1943). The effect of this opening is immediately and deliberately disorienting. Having been familiar – from the preceding film *My Childhood* – with the stark black and white cinematography that characterises the *Trilogy*’s visual world, the sudden intrusion of rich Technicolor imagery is shocking in its artificiality. It is a Hollywood vision of Scotland that bears no resemblance to the Scotland in which Jamie lives, and whose very lushness underscores by contrast the colourlessness of the world the film will go on to depict. The choice of *Lassie Come Home* is, moreover, carefully chosen. As Guy Barefoot has observed, the film “suggests both another world (Hollywood) and a version of a landscape that is closer to home,” with the Hollywood film’s Highland setting offering “a stark contrast to the literally and metaphorically colourless Scotland presented in the rest of *My Ain Folk*.”<sup>34</sup> The idyllic view of the Scottish

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<sup>32</sup> Noble, ‘Bill Douglas’, p. 24.

<sup>33</sup> Petrie, ‘Autobiography and British Art Cinema’, p. 59.

<sup>34</sup> Barefoot, ‘*The Bill Douglas Trilogy*’, p. 23.

Highlands constructed by the Hollywood machine has an immediate and complex effect on the meaning of "home" in *My Ain Folk* and in the *Trilogy* as a whole. Home, in *Lassie Come Home*, is a place of warmth, beauty, and belonging. Home, in the *Trilogy*, is a place of poverty, violence, and abandonment – a setting from which escape is the only ambition for Jamie.

Taking again Hall's theorisation of the politics of representation, with the dominant culture's representations of marginalised groups always serving the interests of the dominant order by naturalising particular visions of social reality, highlights the constructed nature of *Lassie Come Home*. It depicts a land that has been romanticised through its appropriation by the Hollywood industrial machine, transforming it in accordance with its own needs and assumptions, and stripping it of the social and economic realities that shape the experience of those who actually live there. In this way, Dougals's juxtaposition of this Hollywood image with the stark reality of Jamie's Scotland is an attempt to demystify the ideological image constructed by the dominant culture.

This intertextual opening to *My Ain Folk* – a film within a film – is also a strategy that has no equivalent in literary autobiography. It works through the material properties of the filmic medium – through the juxtaposition of different visual registers, different colour palettes, different cinematic traditions, in a way that generates meaning through the collision of images rather than through narrative exposition or description. This medial specificity is something which Barefoot, in a 2006 study of the *Trilogy*, looks to consider within his analysis of filmic autobiography. In his essay, he examines "some of the complexities in the autobiographical nature of [*The Bill Douglas Trilogy*], and how differences between film and the written word can be illuminating."<sup>35</sup> Although his analysis ends up being structured around Elizabeth Bruss's strict parameters for autobiography, I think it is helpful in understanding the filmic *Trilogy* as a work of authorial performance.. By directly comparing literary and filmic forms of life narrative, he is able to provide an illuminating reading of the *Trilogy* that embraces the unique aspects of film as a medium. Beginning by using Bruss's parameters – "truth value," "act-value," "identity value" – Barefoot concludes that the *Trilogy* is "outside the parameters of autobiography" and that it "invokes autobiographical fiction as opposed to autobiography."<sup>36</sup> Yet, in his final section, which looks at "identity-value," he transcends Bruss's argument by comparing *My Ain Folk* directly with an example of Douglas's written account of his childhood, analysing the differences between the two forms of media and how this impacts the way autobiography is

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<sup>35</sup> Barefoot, 'The Bill Douglas Trilogy', p. 15.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

executed. The text that Barefoot uses to compare against *My Ain Folk* is “The Palace of Dreams,” a work that was written by Douglas to accompany viewings of the *Trilogy*.

“The Palace of Dreams” is directly comparable to the beginning of *My Ain Folk* due to their allusions to cinema and the impact it had on a young Douglas. The memorable beginning of *My Ain Folk* opens with the luscious Technicolor imagery of *Lassie Come Home*. Similarly, in “The Palace of Dreams” Douglas recounts being transfixed by the image of Sabu riding his elephant in *The Elephant Boy* (1937) and being “hypnotised by the play of light.”<sup>37</sup> As Barefoot points out, although both film references are linked by the sheer spectacle they provided to a young Douglas, they differ in the type of landscape they depict.<sup>38</sup> Sabu riding his elephant links to the spectacle of a foreign land, giving a glimpse of a paradise that can take Douglas out of his reality as it is lived in Newcraighall. These are images of a dream rather than reality. This sense of wonder is reinforced by Douglas in the written text, describing how “it was paradise sitting there in the cosy dark... [while] up there was the best of all possible worlds.”<sup>39</sup> Yet, whereas one is distinctly foreign in its setting, albeit filtered through a Western lens, the other – at the beginning of *My Ain Folk* – is a landscape that is, at least in theory, closer to home. However, rather than reminiscing on a memory, as is the case in the written text, Douglas uses the medium of *My Ain Folk* to create a distinct juxtaposition which asserts his position as author, commenting on his position as an ideological subject – a working-class boy from Scotland – rather than simply maintaining a position as autobiographer.

Read together, “The Palace of Dreams” and the *Bill Douglas Trilogy* constitute a single intermedial act of authorial self-construction that demonstrates, with particular clarity, the way in which authorial identity is constituted not within a single medium but across multiple media simultaneously. The written text and the films are not simply parallel accounts of the same experience – they are complementary performances of the same authorial identity, each accessing dimensions of that identity that the other cannot reach. The written text provides the reflective, contextualising, and explicitly autobiographical dimension of the performance – the director’s own account of the biographical and cultural conditions from which the films emerged, and of the relationship between those conditions and his identity as a filmmaker. The films provide the formal, sensory, and affective dimension – the enactment of those conditions through the specific properties of the cinematic medium in ways that go beyond what language

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<sup>37</sup> Bill Douglas, “Palace of Dreams: The Making of a Filmmaker” (1978). The Bill Douglas Cinema Museum. 7<sup>th</sup> December 2022. <https://www.bdcmmuseum.org.uk/about/palace-of-dreams-the-making-of-a-film-maker/>

<sup>38</sup> Barefoot, ‘*The Bill Douglas Trilogy*’, p. 25.

<sup>39</sup> Douglas, ‘Palace of Dreams.’

can achieve. Together, they construct an authorial identity that is simultaneously personal and political, rooted in a specific class experience and oriented toward a universal claim for recognition and representation.

Its existence as a filmic text also prompts how the narrative of the *Trilogy* is told, with Douglas again opting for intertextual influences to construct his autobiographical work. This is evident in the use of the Soviet-style editing technique of montage to link together shots and scenes. This editing style, which had seen its height 50 years prior to the making of the *Trilogy* within the work of the director Sergei Eisenstein, lifts the films above the realist mode of cinema which had dominated British film in the previous decade. By utilising this technique, meaning is conveyed through the juxtaposition and combination of images which relies on a level of visual literacy and an understanding of images' communicative power. In this way, it is undoubtedly an approach to narrative formation that has no antecedent in literature, with this aspect grounding the *Trilogy* as an example of *filmic* autobiography. The use of montage, along with the utilisation of what Jamie Chambers describes as "delayed decoding,"<sup>40</sup> in which aspects of the narrative are presented in such a way that their meaning only becomes clear in retrospect, demonstrates a construction of subjectivity through careful control of exposition. In literary life narrative, the author is able to use the certainty of language, in which interior voices can be made manifest to the reader, to provide a recollection of childhood experiences which may include the uncertainties and naivety experienced during that part of life. In the case of the *Trilogy*, childhood is instead recollected through an expressive use of the camera lens, distilling emotions and experiences through the juxtaposition of images. The result is as much about what is left for the audience to imagine than there is any attempt at spacial, temporal, or biographical realism. This technique has a dual function within the *Trilogy's* authorial performance. On one level, it is a means of rendering the specific quality of childhood memory – the way in which the significance of events is often not understood at the time they occur but only later, in retrospect, when the child has acquired the perspective and the vocabulary needed to make sense of what they experienced. On another level, it is a means of asserting a formal intelligence and a cinematic sophistication that challenges the dominant culture's assumptions about the kinds of filmmaking that a working-class director from Newcraighall might be capable of.

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<sup>40</sup> Jamie Chambers, 'Exploring Questions of Theory and Practice within the *Bill Douglas Trilogy*', in *Bill Douglas: A Film Artist* ed. Amelia Watts, Phil Wickham (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 2022), pp. 109-139 (p. 127).

The relationship between formal strategy and political content is perhaps most clearly visible in one of the *Trilogy's* most disturbing and formally distinctive sequences: the scene in *My Ain Folk* in which Jamie's father beats him and thrusts his face against a burning hearth. In the scene, Jamie's father beats him because he won't tell him where his mother's pearls are hidden, with Douglas employing a creative use of editing and sound to form an almost snapshot sense of the encounter. This ends in what is arguably the most shocking shot of the whole film: a static camera is held on the image of Jamie having his head thrust upon the burning hearth, his face contorted in an expression of extreme pain. There is no sound of his screaming to accompany the image but rather pure silence, the image itself enough to encompass the experience. Douglas takes an atypical approach to this scene through eschewing any depiction of the build-up to this climactic moment. One would expect to see the struggle between father and son along with the realisation from Jamie of what his father is about to do to him. These moments are all absent and instead replaced by a single silent image that encompasses the entire notion of the violence Jamie experienced at the hands of his father. This mirrors the way that memory relays these moments, with single moments replacing the succession of detailed exposition. It can also be seen as Douglas's refusal of the dominant culture's expectation that working-class suffering be made narratively comprehensible and emotionally manageable. By stripping the scene of its narrative context, Douglas is refusing to explain or justify the violence – refusing to situate it within the kind of cause-and-effect narrative that would make it legible to an audience



Fig. 4. Jamie (Stephen Archibald) has his head thrust upon the burning hearth in *My Ain Folk* (1973)

accustomed to the conventions of social realism. Film, therefore, through its ability to capture the distillation of images that occurs through the act of remembering – a foundational part of any life narrative act – provides the ability to reframe and construct new meaning of these memories through placing these images in conversation with each other. Douglas can be seen to utilise this aspect throughout his *Trilogy*.

The final film of the *Trilogy*, *My Way Home*, extends the authorial performance in a direction that is particularly significant for the notion of working-class authorship. As James R. Barrett notes, working-class history has traditionally “concerned themselves with the collective – the community, social movement, union, or crowd,”<sup>41</sup> often masking “the identities of thousands of purposeful individual actors.”<sup>42</sup> To ignore this inner history ultimately leads to the objectifying of the subject which, when attending to the personal, is replaced by an investment in a “humanity often denied them in their own societies and times.”<sup>43</sup> Class, Barrett insists, is “not only a material and social, but also an emotional experience.”<sup>44</sup> Douglas’s recovery of the working-class subject as an author of their own experience, rather than an object of another’s representation, places the emphasis on this ‘inner history.’ In *My Way Home*, the film follows Jamie’s enlistment in the army and his eventual posting to Egypt, where he forms a close friendship with Robert, a middle-class English national serviceman played by Joseph Blatchley. This friendship – across class lines, across cultural difference, and charged with an emotional intimacy that the film leaves deliberately ambiguous – is the emotional and political centre of *My Way Home*, and it is here that the *Trilogy*’s authorial performance reaches its most complex and self-aware expression. The friendship between Jamie and Robert is not merely a narrative event but a formal and political statement: an assertion that working-class experience is not confined to the world of poverty and deprivation that the first two films have depicted, but extends into relationships of intellectual and emotional richness that was rarely depicted within the context of working-class subjects. In depicting this friendship with such tenderness and care, Douglas is performing an aspect of his authorial identity that goes beyond the documentary testimony of the earlier films – an assertion of the capacity for feeling, for connection, and for growth that is as much a claim on cultural legitimacy as the stark formal language of *My Childhood* and *My Ain Folk*.

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<sup>41</sup> James R. Barrett, *History from the Bottom Up and the Inside Out: Ethnicity, Race, and Identity in Working-Class History*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), p. 1.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> *ibid.*, p. 4.

### Terence Davies – Deforming and Reforming the Queer Catholic Self

This ability for film to provide a nuanced rendering of the inner workings of memory is also utilised by the director Terence Davies, who followed in the footsteps of Douglas in similarly regarding film as the primary medium for constructing personal narratives. With his first five films – three short films and two feature films – Davies treated time and memory as an “architectural thing.”<sup>45</sup> Undergirded by this concept, Davies constructs the autobiographical through the use of the camera as a tool for both subjective and collective expression. Each of his first three short films – *Children* (1976), *Madonna and Child* (1980), *Death and Transfiguration* (1983) – feature a clearly defined central character, named Robert Tucker, who acts as an on screen alter-ego for Davies. Grouped together under the title of *The Terence Davies Trilogy*, the narrative follows Tucker from childhood and school life, through middle age and the drudgery of daily life, and onto an imagined old age and death. The *Trilogy* sets forth a unique approach to the construction of a life narrative that would be continued into his later feature films – *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992) – with the imagined scenario of *Death and Transfiguration*, in which Davies confronts his own fears around death and the vulnerabilities that occur during old age, demonstrating how he doesn’t seek to be restricted by traditional understandings of the autobiographical genre.

Davies was born in 1945 in Liverpool, the youngest of ten children in a working-class Catholic family. His childhood was shaped by two dominant forces: the terror of a violent and unpredictable father, whose death when Davies was seven brought a relief so intense that it was accompanied by guilt, and the consolations of a rich cultural life – cinema, music, the rituals of the Catholic Church – that offered a means of transcending the material conditions of his upbringing. Davies is also a gay man, and his homosexuality, formed within the context of a devout Catholic upbringing and a social and legal culture that regarded homosexuality as both sinful and criminal, was a source of guilt, shame, and self-division that would remain central to his creative work throughout his career. What distinguishes Davies's experience from that of many queer artists, however, is the specific intersection of class and queerness that shaped it. To be gay in working-class Catholic Liverpool in the 1950s was not simply to be gay in a hostile environment – it was to inhabit a specific and historically particular form of double marginalisation, in which the structures of class and the structures of sexuality combined to produce a condition of almost total cultural invisibility. The dominant culture of British cinema had no framework for this experience – neither its working-class tradition, which was oriented

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Farley, *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (London: BFI, 2006), p. 9.

toward the masculine heterosexual subject, nor its queer cultural tradition, which was largely middle-class and metropolitan in its orientation, could accommodate the specific reality of Davies's experience. The films he made at the beginning of his career are, in a very direct sense, the product of this double marginalisation. They are acts of authorial self-inscription in which the performance of a queer working-class identity is the central political and creative act.

What is most distinctive about Davies's authorial performance, and what distinguishes it most sharply from Douglas's, is its formal orientation toward texture, sensation, and communal feeling rather than toward the urgent testimony of poverty and deprivation. Where Douglas's authorial performance is driven by the need to make visible the material conditions of working-class poverty – to insist on the reality of an experience that the dominant culture has rendered invisible through romanticisation or neglect – Davies's is oriented toward the beauty that can be found within those conditions: the play of light upon a domestic surface, the sound of a mother's voice, the warmth of a shared communal ritual. This is not an evasion of the political dimension of working-class experience but a different mode of engaging with it – one that insists on the richness and complexity of working-class cultural life rather than simply its deprivation, and that finds in the textures and rituals of that life the means of constructing an authorial identity that is simultaneously rooted in class experience and oriented toward a queer aesthetic sensibility that those textures and rituals both enable and constrain. It is this combination – the working-class texture and the queer gaze – that gives Davies's authorial performance its distinctive quality and its specific political charge, exemplified through his approach to autobiography.

The *Terence Davies Trilogy* represents Davies's first and most direct act of queer authorial performance, and the one in which the queer dimension of his authorial identity is most explicitly and unambiguously present. Robert Tucker's trajectory across the three films – from the bullied and isolated child of *Children*, through the middle-aged man suffocating under the weight of Catholic guilt and unfulfilled desire in *Madonna and Child*, to the imagined old age and death of *Death and Transfiguration* – provides a unique rendering of queer experience. *Children*, the first film of the *Trilogy*, establishes the queer dimension of Davies's authorial performance through a formal strategy that will recur throughout his work: the encoding of queer desire through the deployment of the queer gaze. The film's treatment of the male body – the way in which the camera lingers on the bodies of the older boys at school, framing them as objects of desire – is an early and instructive example of Brian Loftus's observation that gay cultural producers have frequently developed strategies of obliqueness and indirection as a means of encoding queer experience within works that could not openly declare it. As Loftus

argues, queer autobiography is, in the first instance, “a tradition without a base of reference,” a form whose subject has been so thoroughly barred from representation that the genre “cannot exist, properly speaking, except as silence.”<sup>46</sup> The queer autobiographical act, on this account, is one that “attempts to make the text say precisely what it cannot say,”<sup>47</sup> with Davies encoding this through deployment of the queer gaze. The most striking instance of this comes during the scene in the swimming baths, where the camera lingers on the body of an adolescent boy (played by a young Trevor Eve) in the showers, with the camera’s gaze intercut with an image of the young Tucker watching on. The queer gaze in *Children* does not announce itself as such – it is present in the quality of the camera’s attention, in the duration of its holds on certain figures and certain moments, in the way certain (male) bodies are lit and framed in ways that distinguish them from the neutral visual treatment of the film’s other subjects. For Loftus, this is the defining paradox of the queer autobiographical “I”: barred from the coherent first person that the genre presumes, the queer subject can appear only by forcing the documentary “I” to become “figural,” to signify through obliquity and juxtaposition rather than direct statement.<sup>48</sup>

*Madonna and Child* represents Davies’s most direct rendering of queer authorial identity – the film in which the queer dimension of the authorial performance is closest to the surface, without artifice. The film depicts Tucker’s daily life in Liverpool – his relationship with his elderly mother, his experience of Catholic worship, and the guilt-laden encounters with other men that constitute the only available expression of his queer desire – with a formal austerity that mirrors the emotional and psychological austerity of Tucker’s existence. Yet, throughout this direct depiction of queer emotional desire – shown through Tucker’s indiscriminate sexual encounters – there is contrasted a life connected to the Catholic faith. The film’s most formally striking sequence is the one in which a telephone call – in which a male voice enquires about getting a penis tattoo – is intercut with images of a church interior. Davies has spoken about this sequence in interviews as one of the most personally significant moments in his filmmaking – a direct expression of the specific experience of being simultaneously a devout Catholic and a gay man, of inhabiting a religious tradition that condemns your desire as mortal sin while finding in the rituals of that tradition the only available means of transcendence and belonging. This is illuminated by Daryl White and O. Kendall White’s study of gay spiritual autobiography, which observes that such works are “defined by the difficulties inherent in reconciling Christian and

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<sup>46</sup> Brian Loftus, ‘Speaking Silence: The Strategies and Structures of Queer Autobiography’, *College Literature*, 24:1 (1997), 28-44 (p.31).

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p. 30.

gay identities.”<sup>49</sup> As they highlight, faith and sexuality entangle in the queer subject, growing “around each other, in tension and in consonance,” so that one may form “by deforming the other.”<sup>50</sup> This notion structures Tucker’s existence in *Madonna and Child*, where the rituals that condemn his desire are also the only available means of transcending it. In this way, Davies is inscribing the film with the specific quality of queer Catholic experience through this juxtaposition of image and sound. The film inhabits the visual conventions of Catholic devotional imagery – the beauty of the church interior – while subverting them from within by juxtaposing them with the reality of queer desire, insisting on the coexistence of these two dimensions of experience that the dominant culture – both Catholic and secular – has sought to keep separate. The self Davies inscribes is one produced at the point where devotion and desire deform one another, and the film becomes the site at which that deformation is made visible rather than resolved.

*Death and Transfiguration*, the final film of the *Trilogy*, extends this queer authorial performance into the realm of imagination and fantasy — Davies constructing an imagined old age and death for Tucker at a point when Davies himself was only 38. The film’s title – with its explicit theological resonance – situates Tucker’s imagined death within the Catholic framework of redemption and spiritual transformation that has run through the *Trilogy* from the beginning, while the visual treatment of Tucker’s final moments transforms that framework into a queer vision of transcendence. The film’s existence as imaginative projection rather than autobiographical narrative is itself significant for the argument of this thesis: it demonstrates that Davies’s authorial performance in the *Trilogy* is not confined to the recording of lived experience but extends into the realm of creative imagination — the performance of an authorial identity that includes not only who Davies has been but who he might become, and what form of transcendence might be available to a queer Catholic man whose tradition has simultaneously shaped and condemned him.

This engagement with the autobiographical form is developed with his first feature film *Distant Voices, Still Lives* (1988), in which Davies moves outside of purely his own identity and instead encompasses the wider family group in which he grew up. Unlike with his *Trilogy*, *Distant Voices, Still Lives* contains no protagonist representing Davies himself, with the focus transitioning to a relational approach to the autobiographical form. This is executed through a rendering of memory that highlights how identities are formed both through and by our relationship to

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<sup>49</sup> Daryl White and O. Kendall White, Jr., ‘Queer Christian Confessions: Spiritual Autobiographies of Gay Christians’, *Culture and Religion*, 5:2 (2004), 203-217 (p.204).

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 209-210.

others. This approach naturally questions the notion of authenticity within the life narrative form since the narrative provides a distillation of the family as it actually existed – there are fewer children in the family than was the reality and there is no character to represent Davies himself. However, in reducing the number of children in the family, the position of the patriarchal father is emphasised within the first half of the film. His aggressive, abusive, and controlling nature is given far more prominence, while the sibling relationship, and the safety this brings, is given greater emotional power through this distillation to only three children (Davies was the youngest of ten). This careful deconstruction of the biographical facts means that, as Paul Farley states, “reality is rearranged to achieve formal truth.”<sup>51</sup>

The opening shot of the film, in which the camera first enters the family home through a long tracking shot, also demonstrates how film, through its combination of image and sound, can present autobiography as a form of relational authorship. Once the camera enters the hallway there begins to be heard the sound of people coming down the stairs in conversation. However, no figures can be seen, only the sound of their movement. This mixing of presence with absence imbues the scene with a ghostlike atmosphere, as if the sound is appearing outside of time. As Farley observes, “being in that hallway at the beginning, with the rain pouring down outside, feels like we’re haunting a space, outside of time, looking in.”<sup>52</sup> With this opening sequence, Davies illustrates the ability for spaces, particularly *familial* spaces, to contain memories and maintain a presence when there is absence – with the revisiting of these spaces often sparking the types of recollections which can be the foundation of the autobiographical form. From these remembered moments the narrative of a life is often constructed since, as Wendy Everett points out, “remembering is less a matter of retrieving a single record than of moving gradually through a highly complex structure in which each remembered fragment may lead to others.”<sup>53</sup> This is exactly how the narrative of *Distant Voices, Still Lives* plays out. In a space such as the family home, where histories and experiences are shared and relayed, the relational experience of a life is undeniable.

Through this opening shot, Davies highlights how the interconnectedness of lived experience allows for the navigation of personal history, evidenced here through the emphasis on shared spaces. This beginning also introduces one of the most important characters in the film: the family home. This space acts as an anchor, holding the fragments of memory together. As Farley argues, “even though *Distant Voices, Still Lives* temporally turns back on itself and moves fluidly

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<sup>51</sup> Farley, *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, p. 17.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 14.

<sup>53</sup> Wendy Everett, *Terence Davies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 21.

across time and space, it is always adding to and reinforcing this sense of a dwelling space.”<sup>54</sup> Davies is able to combine the private and collective consciousnesses, blending memories of his own with those of his wider family. Through this mining of shared experiences, especially regarding the contrast of the maternal and paternal figures, this enables a grounding of identity that forms the narrative line of this filmic autobiography. This recursive, non-linear structure is also itself a queer strategy rather than simply a departure from the traditional autobiographical mode. As Alex Chatterjee argues, “narrative is a condition of possibility for queerness,” a form through which marginalised subjects forge and sustain relationality rather than a merely heteronormative imposition of closure.<sup>55</sup>

This was followed by *The Long Day Closes* (1992), a film which similarly harnesses the materiality of film – its ability to depict the physical flow of time and movement – to represent the active nature of remembering, emphasising the reality that “the remembering subject actively creates the meaning of the past in the act of remembering,”<sup>56</sup> while simultaneously commenting on his position as a working-class subject. The foundation for the film comes from Davies’s remembrances of an idyllic family life following the death of his father and, in contrast to *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, he returns to having a character who acts as his alter-ego, as was the case for the *Trilogy*. The character of Bud encompasses many aspects of Davies’s childhood persona as we see him regularly going to the cinema, struggling with life at school, and his burgeoning understanding of his sexuality and the subsequent Catholic guilt that arises from this. He develops meaning through this display of the memory act, an aspect that is eloquently executed in the famous long tracking shot that appears in the middle of the film. Placing the camera above the action, the shot begins with the character of Bud swinging on a rail and tracks from right to left, dissolving between different scenes which represent important spaces and rituals within his childhood: the cinema, the church, and school. Visually, each scene is linked through its repetition of a congregation of people, sitting in rows, staring ahead and sharing in a communal experience. Their placement within a succession of images emphasises their analogous nature as places of ritual, both for Davies himself and for society more widely. Although these three areas would have remained separate in day-to-day life during his childhood, through the act of remembering Davies can bring them together and highlight how they relate to each other, creating meaning out of the past.

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<sup>54</sup> Farley, *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> Alex Chatterjee, *Queer Autobiography: Acts of Reading and Ways of Belonging* (London: Routledge, 2025), p. 15.

<sup>56</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), p. 22.

These memory acts also focus on the physical sensations that create memory as much as the memories themselves. In many ways, *The Long Day Closes* acts as a meditation on the sensations of childhood experience, pausing on moments that lie outside the main progression of the narrative. Eschewing the grander themes that can dominate autobiography, it is often the quieter, more subtle moments that Davies wishes to bring out in this memory act. This is evident in one moment where, having focused on a shot of Bud and his mother sitting together, the camera pans down onto a close-up shot of a patterned rug in the house. The rug is illuminated by light being cast from the window above and, with the camera remaining static on this image for around two minutes, the focus of the scene switches to witnessing the interplay of light and shadow upon the rug, the light shifting as the weather changes outside. What starts as heavy rain quickly transitions to sunlight, its different levels slowly fading and increasing as time passes. The camera then pans up to show Bud under the curtain and staring out of the window. Davies manipulates film time through this act, suggesting that time is subordinate to sensation within memory. The thick weave of the carpet alongside the dancing of the light upon it means the focus of this scene is placed firmly on the senses of sight and touch, both of which are important factors in the creation of memory.

The distinctive nature of the carpet's pattern also reinforces the sense of time and place which Davies wished to meditate upon within the film. However, this notion of the quieter aspects of memory has been criticised by critics who view this as a failure to conform to traditional notions of autobiography. In a contemporary review published in *Sight and Sound*, John Caughie argues that the film is not strictly autobiographical because it shows "the fantasy of memory rather than the reality of experience."<sup>57</sup> This assertion by Caughie clearly demonstrates a narrow understanding of autobiography as a genre and the way it functions as a form of self creation. Famously, Caughie dismissed the film for its lack of historical awareness; "history in the shape of Suez or Hungary or the break-up of the left, is almost totally absent."<sup>58</sup> It should go without saying that the nature of life narrative transcends the kind of objective historical context Caughie is searching for. *The Long Day Closes* is all about the details: the play of light upon a carpet, the play of light upon a movie screen, the taste of candy floss at the fair, the sound of a mother's voice when singing to her child. It is Davies's own subjective history. He is not interested in these details for their historical accuracy, but rather because they represent a specific moment of the remembered past that is unique to him. As Everett elaborates, "it is not Liverpool in the fifties that Terence Davies shows us, despite the authenticity of the architecture

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<sup>57</sup> John Caughie, 'Halfway to Paradise', *Sight and Sound*, 2:1 (1992), 11-13 (p. 12).

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

and the nostalgic radio voices, but his Liverpool, the Liverpool of his memory.”<sup>59</sup> The moment when the camera holds on the light changing upon a rug captures the essence of what Davies’s early films are looking to achieve. Each film takes the concept of time and memory, the foundation of any autobiographical act, and uses sound and image – alongside a carefully constructed editing style – to present a narrative as if it was being remembered in front of the audience’s eyes.



Fig. 5. Sunlight shining from a window moves across the textured carpet in *The Long Day Closes* (1992)

Approached in this light, Davies’s compulsion to return to the same childhood across the *Trilogy*, *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives*, and *The Long Day Closes* can be seen as what Chatterjee, writing on queer life writing, terms the production of a “renewed and renewable”<sup>60</sup> queer subject – a self remade through the act of “making it new, imagining it anew”<sup>61</sup> with each successive work. The autobiographical self, for Davies, is never fixed or fully recovered but continually reconstructed, each return to the remembered past constituting a fresh presentation of an authorial identity that the conditions of queer working-class Catholic life had denied him. To perform that identity at all – to claim the authority to render this experience in the formal language of art cinema, and to do so repeatedly – is, in itself, an act of counterdiscourse. It is a

<sup>59</sup> Everett, ‘The autobiographical eye’, p. 5.

<sup>60</sup> Chatterjee, *Queer Autobiography*, p. 15.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

refusal of the silence to which Davies's queerness, class, and faith has jointly consigned him, and an insistence that the queer Catholic self is a legitimate subject of, and authority over, its own representation.

## Conclusion

The case studies examined in this chapter have been explicitly autobiographical – films in which the connection between the director's biographical experience and the narrative they have constructed is acknowledged, in varying degrees of directness, by the directors themselves and by the critical culture surrounding their work. This explicitness is what makes them the appropriate starting point for this thesis's investigation of the performance of authorship as counterdiscourse. It is in the explicitly autobiographical mode that the political stakes of the authorial claiming are most legible, most directly connected to the specific conditions of the director's marginalisation, and most clearly visible as acts of resistance to the cultural structures that have sought to silence the director's subjectivity. The chapters that follow will move into less explicitly autobiographical territory – into the more oblique and genre-mediated modes of authorial performance where the connection between the director's biographical experience and the film they have made is less directly acknowledged but no less politically significant. What the explicitly autobiographical mode has established, through the case studies examined here, is the foundational argument of this thesis: that the performance of authorship in fiction film is always, for directors from marginalised positions, an act of claiming – a refusal of the cultural silencing that dominant structures have imposed, and an assertion of the right to be recognised as a legitimate creative subject with the authority to speak from one's own experience.

The directors examined in this chapter – Bill Douglas and Terence Davies – share a common impulse to use the autobiographical tradition as a means of claiming a legitimate position as a subject within a culture that has systematically sought to deny them that position. Each has approached this claiming through a different mode of authorial performance, shaped by the specific conditions of their marginalisation and the specific formal resources of the medium through which they have chosen to work. But what unites them, across the considerable differences of their formal strategies and their political contexts, is the understanding that autobiography – the assertion of the right to speak from one's own experience, to claim the authority of a self that has been formed within conditions of marginalisation and exclusion – is not merely a personal act but a political one.

The intermedial dimension of each director's authorial performance is equally significant in this respect. Douglas's "The Palace of Dreams," and Davies's interviews each provide the extra-filmic dimension of an authorial identity that is constructed not within a single medium but across multiple media simultaneously – the spoken and written articulation of a creative identity that the films encode in visual and affective terms. Read alongside the films, these extra-filmic performances of authorial identity constitute the intermedial field within which the full political dimension of each director's authorial claiming becomes visible. It is the assertion, in multiple registers and across multiple platforms of cultural expression, of the right to be recognised as a legitimate creative subject with the authority to speak from one's own experience and to have that experience taken seriously as a contribution to British cultural life.

Douglas's use of the autobiographical tradition is the most direct and unmediated – the most urgent and the most explicitly rooted in the specific material conditions of working-class deprivation that shaped his childhood in Newcraighall. His *Trilogy* uses the formal resources of the cinematic medium – the juxtaposition of images through the use of montage – to claim the position of author for a working-class subject. The autobiographical tradition, for Douglas, is a means of asserting the legitimacy of his own experience as a subject worthy of cultural representation – of insisting, against the dominant culture's romanticisation or neglect of working-class life, that his story matters and deserves to be told in the most formally ambitious cinematic language available. His claiming of the autobiographical tradition is, in this sense, a claiming of cultural legitimacy, an assertion that the working-class subject has the right to speak from their own experience with the full authority of the author.

Davies's use of the autobiographical tradition is more formally mediated and more complex in its political stakes – shaped by the intersection of class and queerness that gave his experience of working-class Catholic Liverpool its specific history and character. Where Douglas uses autobiography to assert the legitimacy of working-class experience as a subject for cultural representation, Davies uses it to assert the legitimacy of a doubly marginalised subjectivity – queer and working-class simultaneously – within a cultural tradition that has no adequate framework for either dimension of that experience, let alone their intersection. The *Terence Davies Trilogy* performs this assertion in its encoding of queer experience within the formal texture of the films with a simplicity that borders on testimony. The later feature films develop this assertion into a more formally complex and aesthetically mediated mode of authorial performance, locating the queer dimension of Davies's authorial identity within the specific textures and rituals of working-class life in ways that demonstrate how the intersection of class and queerness produces a mode of cultural experience that isn't unique to either

category alone. Through both the *Trilogy* and the later features, Davies uses the autobiographical tradition to claim a legitimate position as a queer working-class subject within a culture that has consistently denied such subjects the authority to speak from their own experience - asserting, through the formal intelligence and aesthetic ambition of his filmmaking, that the intersection of class and queerness is as worthy of serious cultural representation as any other dimension of human experience.

## Chapter 2 –

### The Author/Body as Political Text in the Films of Pier Paolo Pasolini and Derek Jarman

The directors examined in Chapter 1 – Bill Douglas and Terence Davies – share a commitment to the explicitly autobiographical as the primary mode through which their performances of authorship are conducted. Their films draw directly and legibly on the events, relationships, and experiences of their own lives, situating the authorial self within a narrative framework that acknowledges its roots in biographical reality. It is this explicitness that makes these films the appropriate starting point for this thesis's investigation of the performance of authorship as counterdiscourse. But the explicitly autobiographical is not the only mode through which fiction film directors have performed their authorial identities. The chapters that follow move into modes of authorial performance in which the connection between the director's biographical experience and the film they have made is less directly acknowledged, mediated through genre, through historical and literary materials, and through the formal conventions of the art cinema tradition, in ways that are no less politically significant.

Where Douglas and Davies perform their authorial identities primarily through the direct engagement with their own biographical experience, the two directors examined in this chapter, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Derek Jarman, perform theirs through a more oblique and formally sophisticated engagement with the historical, literary, and cultural materials through which their own identities as queer artists have been formed. Both directors look to the past – to medieval literature, to Renaissance painting, to classical mythology, to the history of Christian martyrdom – as a means of constructing a transhistorical understanding of their own queer experience. This is a mode of authorial self-inscription in which the present is illuminated by the past, and the past is reclaimed and reinterpreted through the perspective of the queer present. This transhistorical approach is not a retreat from the political urgency of the autobiographical mode but an amplification of it, situating their own queer identities within a historical and cultural tradition of their own construction. In doing so, both directors assert the legitimacy and the depth of a subjectivity that the dominant culture has sought to constrict.

What unites Pasolini and Jarman is the understanding, shared by both, that the performance of authorship as a queer man is always also a political act. To claim the position of author is, for

the queer director working within a culture that has historically criminalised and pathologised queer identity, an act of defiance as much as an act of creation. Both directors were acutely aware of this political dimension of their authorial performances. Pasolini understood his filmmaking as inseparable from his broader identity as a radical intellectual, a Marxist, and a gay man living in a culture that condemned each of these aspects of his identity in different but related ways. Jarman understood his films as acts of queer activism – as means of asserting a queer presence within the public sphere of culture at a time when the British government was actively seeking to suppress that presence through legislation such as Section 28. For both, the performance of authorship was not merely an aesthetic act but a form of political survival.

The chapter begins by looking briefly at the work of these two directors as a whole, considering how their respective oeuvres, including their contributions to both film and literature, engages with a sense of self that is at once both personal and political. It will consider how both directors achieve this through a transhistorical, allegorical form of self-representation which subverts the generic definition of traditional autobiography. It will then move on to look at how Pasolini figured as a creative influence for Jarman, emphasising why a comparison of their work is so enlightening to a study of queer forms of filmmaking. Following this, the chapter will investigate firstly the work of Pasolini, beginning with an analysis of his choice to cast himself in various roles within *The Trilogy of Life*, with particular emphasis on *Il Decameron* (1971) and *I racconti di Canterbury/The Canterbury Tales* (1972). This will focus particularly on how this form of self-projection is deployed in a manner that allows Pasolini to comment on the role of authorship within the medium of film, and his role as both a director and adapter of an existing text.. This will be followed by a consideration of the way Pasolini achieves presence through absence, looking at two films in which he does not appear onscreen. This section will consider the casting of his mother, Susanna, in *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1963) and *Teorema* (1968). In both cases Pasolini uses the presence of his mother to invoke particular aspects of his own identity, while also highlighting the intersubjective and relational nature of his relationship with Susanna.

Having considered the work of Pasolini, the chapter will then focus on the films of Derek Jarman, investigating how he employed similar techniques in his later films. This will begin with analysing *The Last of England* (1987) and *The Garden* (1990), both of which portray Jarman onscreen. This will investigate how his approach is used to localise the self in a medium that lacks the self-referential “I” of literature, as well as analysing how self-projection is also achieved through Jarman’s careful choice of location in both films. The final section will also focus on presence through absence, concentrating on his final film *Blue* (1993). The section will

look at how he deliberately denies the viewer any image of his body as a way to subvert the AIDS critical imagery that dominated the period, imagery that was both de-humanising and exploitative. It will also look at how the blue screen relates directly to the increased blindness he was suffering towards the end of his life as a result of his HIV+ diagnosis, while elaborating on how the narration in the film is used to give agency to queer identities and subjectivities.

### Political and Personal Filmmakers

Pier Paolo Pasolini and Derek Jarman are two directors who are – despite having never met and having worked during two separate generations (Pasolini was murdered in 1975, a year before Jarman released his first feature film) – often linked together as directors who share the same sensibility and approach to filmmaking. One of the main reasons for this is due to Jarman’s own writings on the subject who, in his notes and diaries, would often comment on the affinity and connection he felt to the late Italian director. Such a feeling is evident in Jarman’s book *The Last of England* in which, after having watched a documentary on Pasolini, he reflects on their similarities:

Pier Paolo’s enemies saw him as a radical, but in fact he fought for traditional values, he even wrote against the students of ’68 throwing stones at the police. Why didn’t these students, the fortunate ones, throw stones at the real source of repression: the bankers and the judges?... Pasolini got his targets right. I wonder if he would like my films; like his, they are made in an older tradition.<sup>1</sup>

Critics and scholars have also been quick to pick up on these similarities, with Jim Ellis saying that out of any other filmmaker “the most important debt” to Jarman’s filmmaking style “is to Pier Paolo Pasolini, who would be a lasting influence.”<sup>2</sup> One of these lasting influences, as I will argue in this chapter, is the strand of authorial performance that runs through both of their works. Both directors lived a life that combined the personal with the political, something which unsurprisingly filtered into their creative output. More than this, however, both directors utilised the medium of film, and particularly their physical presence within their films, as a way to construct and confirm their sense of self. As I will go on to outline, both looked to the past to create a transhistorical understanding of their own lived experience. As Alexandra Parsons highlights in reference to Jarman’s work, “[his] understanding of the past, which inflects all his

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<sup>1</sup> Derek Jarman, *The Last of England*, ed. David L. Hirst (London: Constable, 1987), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Ellis, *Derek Jarman’s Angelic Conversations* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 32.

work, is reflected through his own body - always understood as linked to a history of other queer bodies.”<sup>3</sup> This statement can also be applied to Pasolini, albeit with perhaps more of an emphasis on the bodies of the lower classes, whose identities have been repressed by the dominant bourgeois class. It is clear, therefore, that film, being a visual medium, is vital to both Pasolini and Jarman’s authorial approach due to its ability to *represent*, allowing them to experiment with representing the past while also incorporating moments of self-representation. In this way, both directors see art as a way to experiment with this form.

In his book *At Your Own Risk*, Jarman outlines the driving force behind why he looked towards life narrative in his art. He comments:

It was very important to me to find the “I”: I feel this, this happened to *me*, I did this. I wanted to read that. My obsession with biography is to find these “I”s. The subtext of my films has been the books, putting myself back into the picture.<sup>4</sup>

It was this sentiment that drove his political identity. This was centred around his identity as a queer man and, post 1986, his identity as an HIV+ queer man. With the introduction of the homophobic policies of the Margaret Thatcher government during the 1980s – including the infamous Section 28 which banned the promotion and dissemination of ‘homosexual material’ – Jarman became an increasingly vocal activist against such discrimination. Being one of the few openly gay members of British society to speak candidly about his HIV+ diagnosis to the media, he regarded his position as an important one to give a voice to those who were being persecuted in society. As I will go on to outline, this political identity would be displayed in Jarman’s films. In doing so, not only was he attempting to put himself “back into the picture,” but he was looking to reimagine what that picture looked like. In this way, Jarman was not only looking into the past with his films, but also outward into the future. As Parsons outlines, “repeatedly using his own life as material in his art is a practice that works towards a future in which queer lives are no longer a cause for public concern or debate.”<sup>5</sup>

Queer sexuality is also something which links Pasolini and Jarman together. Although this was not something which influenced Pasolini’s films in a political sense in the way it did for Jarman, it was undoubtedly an intrinsic part of his identity. Ellis outlines the surprising similarities between the two director’s sexualities, commenting that “Pasolini’s passion for rough trade and

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<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Parsons, *Luminous Presence: Derek Jarman’s life-writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2021), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Derek Jarman, *At Your Own Risk: A Saint’s Testament* (Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1993), p. 30.

<sup>5</sup> Parsons, *Luminous Presence*, p. 2.

Jarman's for cruising on Hampstead Heath made them controversial figures for certain sectors of the gay community, and well-nigh demonic for parts of the straight world... Both had deaths that were read as emblematic of their lives and sexual practices: Pasolini was purportedly murdered by a hustler, and Jarman died of AIDS."<sup>6</sup> Speaking less openly about his sexuality than Jarman, Pasolini was still an openly gay individual living during a time of pervasive discrimination. Despite this, during his lifetime Pasolini never became the outspoken political activist and advocate of gay liberation that Jarman did.

Pasolini's political activism manifested itself in his radical left-wing politics, one which was defiantly anti-bourgeois and anti-capitalist. He officially joined the Communist party in 1948 and was named secretary of the Communist Section of San Giovanni, a town close to his mother's birthplace of Casarsa. He took part in numerous demonstrations and debates during this period. Pasolini also took great influence from the figure of Antonio Gramsci, one of the founders of the Communist Party of Italy. Born in 1891, Gramsci rose to become the leader of the Italian Communist Party in 1926, leading to eleven years of Fascist imprisonment under Mussolini's rule. During his confinement, and before his death in 1937, he produced the *Lettere dal carcere* and the *Quaderni del carcere* – the latter developing the concepts of cultural hegemony, the 'organic' intellectual, and the 'national-popular' for which he is now known. These texts entered Italian intellectual life only after the Second World War, from 1949, when the then Italian Communist Party fashioned Gramsci into its theoretical patron and, in the process, into an "object of near-hagiography."<sup>7</sup> It was this Gramsci – martyr to Fascism, theorist of culture – that the young Pasolini encountered and remade into, in Wallace P. Sillanpoa's phrase, "il suo Gramsci."<sup>8</sup> Throughout the 1950s, Gramsci's example was central to "Pasolini's pronounced conflict between the pull of a visceral and esthetic passion and a call to rational, ideological exactitude."<sup>9</sup>

Yet, as would happen throughout his lifetime, the combination of his political and lifestyle activities brought with it its fair share of adversaries. It was this which triggered the "scandal" that would see him lose his livelihood and position in the Communist party. As Naomi Greene outlines, "a number of Catholics who, naturally, supported the Christian Democrats and may have hoped that Pasolini would prove a friend rather than a Communist adversary viewed his political activities with hostility."<sup>10</sup> In October 1949, still only a young teacher and intellectual (it

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<sup>6</sup> Ellis, *Angelic Conversations*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>7</sup> Wallace P. Sillanpoa, 'Pasolini's Gramsci', *MLN*, 96:1 (1981), 120-137 (p. 128).

<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, p. 120.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>10</sup> Naomi Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Cinema as Heresy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p. 13.

would be more than ten years before he would become a filmmaker) Pasolini was convicted of obscene acts after he was accused of “disappearing into bushes with three teenage boys.” This accusation, whether it was true or not, was quickly taken by his political enemies and escalated into legal charges. He was expelled from the Communist party and forbidden from teaching in state schools. Following this, he moved from political activism, in the shape of protests and demonstrations, to political activism and social comment in his art. By the 1960s, film became the dominant artistic medium for Pasolini to express his ideology and authorial urges.

The films of Pasolini begin with his Roman features: *Accattone* (1961) and *Mamma Roma* (1962), with both focusing on the lives of lower-class petty criminals, pimps, and sex workers, following on from similar subjects explored in his 1959 novel *Regazzi di vita*. These films are often regarded as being thematically linked to the Italian neo-realist movement exemplified by early work of directors such as Roberto Rossellini, Luchino Visconti and Vittorio de Sica. However, in placing the emphasis on the amoral and depraved nature of his sub-proletariat characters, Pasolini certainly moved away from the typical neo-realist impetus of depicting social injustice. What these early films do demonstrate is Pasolini’s political allegiance as a radical Marxist intellectual, who took hold of the neo-realist mode – which by the beginning of the 1960s was no longer the exciting and innovative filmmaking form it was during the immediate post-war period – and pushed it to its extreme. Yet, the immediate reaction to Pasolini’s venture into filmmaking was treated in some quarters with scepticism. As Naomi Green notes, even those on the left felt that “Pasolini’s poetic and fatalistic vision actually subverted the Marxist impetus for social change and improvement.”<sup>11</sup> Yet Pasolini’s early films are undoubtedly politically and socially subversive in their desire to present those on the margins of society.

His next focus, starting with *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1964), turns towards a biblical or classical past as a way of offering resistance to the repressive conformism of bourgeois society. A figure misunderstood and persecuted during his own time, Pasolini wished to align himself with the figure of Christ, carrying on the alignment that is found in the earlier short film *La ricotta* (1962). The Christ in this film has also been described as a Marxist Christ through Pasolini’s emphasis on desire for social justice and preaching to the under classes alongside a very strong critique of the establishment and upper classes who are characterised as corrupt and greedy. *Edipo re* (1967) and *Medea* (1969) similarly utilise the mythical setting to create, as Ellis explains, “a world of unsettling strangeness, a foreign world of the past where some version of

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<sup>11</sup> Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, p. 23.

peasant values still exists.”<sup>12</sup> The intermingling of timeframes is made explicit in *Edipo re* through the insertion of a prologue and epilogue set in the modern day, with the prologue being influenced by the director’s own childhood. This narrative insertion fulfils Pasolini’s desire for the film as being a form of “metaphoric and therefore mythicised autobiography.”<sup>13</sup> Both actors who play the mother and father in the prologue also play the father and mother in the central narrative of the film set in ancient Greece. The past functions as a form of Freudian unconscious, allowing him to create a transhistorical form of identity.

Jarman would take a similarly transhistorical approach to the representation of queer lives – looking to the past to influence the future – in his very first feature film, *Sebastiane* (1976) (co-directed with Paul Humphress). Here, Jarman sought to push the boundaries of the time of what could be shown on screen. The film relishes in the array of nude male bodies which dominate the screen, celebrating acts of queer love (in an outpost of the Roman empire) which were unheard of in British cinema up to this point. Ellis argues that it is Pasolini’s *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* to which *Sebastiane* is “most obviously indebted,” particularly “for the way in which Jarman remythologises the life of the Christian martyr and reimagines the outlines of Christian faith.”<sup>14</sup> I would also argue that the film is indebted to Pasolini’s *Edipo re* and *Medea* in the overall aesthetic of the film’s style, especially in its desert setting, costuming, and focus on the male body.

Jarman acquired a Super-8 camera in 1970 and immediately began to use it to film the people he was encountering and the parties he was giving during this period. As Laurence Normand argues, in doing so he “discovered the autobiographical subject that was to become the driving force of all his subsequent films and books.”<sup>15</sup> His early films tackle his own identity in a way that engages with the discriminatory political atmosphere of the time, his work acting as a subversion of the dominant ideology which allowed a space for his queer identity to exist. Although this engagement with the political would persist throughout his career, his films took a far more explicit turn towards the personal after he was diagnosed as HIV+. He was diagnosed in December 1986 during the production of *The Last of England* (1987), a work that combined his anti-Thatcherite political sympathies along with an engagement with his own past, particularly through the use of family home movies. Although this turn towards personal

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<sup>12</sup> Ellis, *Angelic Conversations*, p. 33.

<sup>13</sup> Oswald Stack, ed., *Pasolini on Pasolini* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 120.

<sup>14</sup> Ellis, *Angelic Conversations*, p. 35.

<sup>15</sup> Laurence Normand, ‘Jarman, Derek’ in *The Gay and Lesbian Literary Heritage: A Reader’s Companion to the Writers and their Works, from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Claude J. Summers (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 405-406 (p. 405).

material was something new in Jarman's feature film work, this approach has its precedence in the early 1970s and the short films he created on Super-8 depicting the London underground arts scene of the time. This aesthetic is mirrored in *The Last of England*, which is almost entirely shot on Super-8, with some shot by Jarman alone, and some by a crew with up to four cameras shooting simultaneously. This is punctured throughout by home movie footage shot by Jarman's father and grandfather. A similar technique is also employed in his later film *The Garden* (1990). Tony Rayns suggested that both these films are exponents of the genre of the "I-Movie," a cinematic form which began with Jean Cocteau's *Le sang d'un poète* and which Jarman revived with *The Last of England*. Rayns defined this genre as films which feature:

filmmakers who place themselves at the centre of more-or-less fictional worlds in which the settings, characters and events are both an expression of the author's psyche and a distorted reflection of aspects of the real world... The filmmaker ransacks his/her own mind in search of its hidden archetypes and then tries to match them with objective correlatives in the world around.<sup>16</sup>

Jarman places himself at the centre of the filmic worlds in both *The Last of England* and *The Garden* by depicting himself as, what Alexandra Parsons describes, a "dream poet,"<sup>17</sup> presented as if the images depicted on screen are flowing out from his mind. This self-representation also has its precedence in the films of Pasolini, especially in his series of films of the early 1970s that he labelled *The Trilogy of Life*. It is this notion of self-representation in the work of both director's that I will now analyse in greater detail.

#### Self-Representation in Pasolini's *The Trilogy of Life*

The question of how the queer director makes themselves present within their own films – how they inscribe their authorial identity within a cinematic work that is not, in any straightforward sense, autobiographical – is one that runs through the entirety of this chapter's analysis. In the case of Pasolini, this question finds its most explicit rendering in *The Trilogy of Life*: the series of three films – *Il Decameron* (1971), *I racconti di Canterbury* (1972), and *Il fiore delle Mille e una Notte* (1974) – that Pasolini made at the beginning of the 1970s as a celebration of pre-modern sexuality and a lament for what he regarded as the destruction of authentic human experience by the homogenising forces of capitalist modernity. In the first two films of the trilogy, Pasolini

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<sup>16</sup> Tony Rayns, 'The "I-Movie"', in *The Garden: Salesbook* (London: The Sales Company, 1990), n.p.

<sup>17</sup> Parsons, *Luminous Presence*, p. 105.

casts himself in roles that are, in the most direct sense, performances of authorship: he plays Giotto's apprentice in *Il Decameron* and Geoffrey Chaucer in *I racconti di Canterbury*, inhabiting the figures of a visual artist and a literary author respectively in a way that makes his own identity as director and adapter the explicit subject of the filmic text.

To understand the full significance of these acts of authorial self-inscription, it is necessary to situate them within the broader context of Pasolini's inter-medial creative practice at the moment of the Trilogy's production. By the early 1970s, Pasolini had established himself as one of the most prominent and provocative intellectual figures in Italian cultural life – a poet, novelist, filmmaker, and political journalist whose work spanned a range of media and whose public persona was as much a site of cultural controversy as his films. His theoretical writings on cinema – most importantly the essays collected in 1972 in *Empirismo eretico*, published in the same year as *I racconti di Canterbury* – provided the explicit intellectual framework within which his filmmaking practice was situated, articulating his understanding of film as a "language of reality" that was fundamentally different from literary language in its relationship to the material world. His political journalism – the "corsair writings" that he would publish in *Il Corriere della Sera* and subsequently collect in *Scritti corsari* in 1975 – gave voice to the increasingly pessimistic view of capitalist modernity that runs through the Trilogy of Life. It was his sense that the post-war economic boom had destroyed the authentic popular cultures of Italy's sub-proletariat and peasantry, replacing their vitality and sensuality with the homogeneous consumer culture of the bourgeoisie.

Continuing his fascination with pre-modern culture, at the start of the 1970s Pasolini embarked on *The Trilogy of Life*, a series of films that were thematically linked around the notion of uninhibited sexuality which he believed characterised the culture of the ancient and early modern world, with each film being an adaptation of an important piece of literature from the period, each originating from a different culture.. In casting himself as both an artist and a literary author, as well as acting in a film he is directing, Pasolini can be seen to be representing all the aspects that encompass his identity as a creative artist. As I will demonstrate, his depiction on screen provides a synthesis, and commentary, on all three disciplines.

Pasolini's casting of himself as Giotto's apprentice (who I will now refer to as the Artist) can be read as an explicit act of authorial self-inscription for reasons that go beyond simply self-representation. As he will also go on to do in *I racconti di Canterbury*, Pasolini manipulates and appropriates works of medieval art in a way that directly comments on his presence within the film, and which emphasises his position as an auteur who is interpreting these works of

medieval literature. Although he claims that he cast himself as the Artist only because he was unable to find anyone else to take the role, Pasolini incorporates the Artist into the *Decameron* narrative in a manner which suggests a deep level of self-reflexivity. The scenes that include the Artist deviate from the original medieval text and have been inserted by Pasolini, with each scene being a meditation on the relationship between art and film in Pasolini's view. The link between visual artist and film director is a clear one in Pasolini's mind and is exemplified by his choice of having the Artist work on a triptych within a church – the relationship between different pictorial frames and the narrative arc that runs through them mirroring the interrelationship between frames in a spool of film. However, Pasolini utilises one scene with the Artist to fully outline the relationship between art and film and which also cements his inclusion within *Il Decameron* as one that is emphasising his position as author..



Fig. 8. Pier Paolo Pasolini as The Artist in *Il Decameron* (1971)

During the second half of the film, the Artist is shown to have a vision – or more accurately a moment of artistic inspiration – of the last judgement, with the Virgin Mary as judge. It begins with the sleeping Artist suddenly waking up in fright and sitting up. There is then a cut to a mountainside on which can be seen a tableau of the Virgin Mary flanked by rows of angels either side. Below on both sides are shown the virtuous and the damned. The camera moves in and

focuses on different parts of the scene including: a close up of the Virgin Mary's face, a tracking shot along the chorus of angels, screaming men and women being led into hell, and a congregation of worshippers who have been accepted into heaven, one of which is holding a model of a church as a demonstration of their offerings to the Virgin. The entire scene is based off Giotto's fresco *The Last Judgement* in the Scrovegni chapel in Padua however, importantly, Pasolini replaces the central judge of the composition. In the original it is Christ, while in the filmic reimagining it is the Virgin Mary holding an infant Christ. This is important because it is the face of the Virgin that the camera comes back to most, suggesting that this was a conscious change made by Pasolini. In having the Virgin Mary as the judge, Pasolini is able to play with the notion of his identity as both artist and director.



Fig. 9. Scene of the Artist's/Pasolini's dream in *Il Decameron*.



Fig. 10. Giotto, *Last Judgement*. Scrovegni Chapel, Padua. 1306.

Firstly, the emphasis on the Virgin's face allows Pasolini to comment on the position of the 'icon' in visual art – in this case both painting and film – by casting Silvana Mangano as the Virgin Mary in the vision. This choice plays on the film's existence as both an adaptation of a work of medieval literature and a Pasolini film. The first level of inspiration for this dream sequence is medieval religious art, particularly frescoes and altar pieces, like the one the Artist is painting during the film. The term 'icon' here would refer to the image of the Virgin Mary, as well as the wider tableau that is depicted at the beginning of the vision. In this first image Pasolini uses the overlapping of figures and their position upon different levels of the landscape to imitate the approach to perspective found in medieval Italian art, which does not employ the use of the vanishing point to create perspective – a technique not developed until the Renaissance. This leads to a flattening of the film frame, the static shot giving the illusion that this is a still image. The choral chant on the soundtrack that accompanies this image only heightens this sense of religious fervour. Having established this scene as a work of medieval religious art, the camera then moves onto a close-up of the Virgin Mary, played by Mangano, who is framed in a mandorla

at the centre of the image. This edit imitates the gaze of the viewer of a religious painting who, due to her position in the centre of the frame, would be drawn immediately to the face of the Virgin.

As Arianne Francoise Conty explains, this push towards the face of the saint characterises the composition of the medieval icon: “the viewer of an icon is magnetically drawn to the face of the figure(s) portrayed, which is always depicted with a thin nose and mouth and enormous and luminous eyes, which often gaze directly at the viewer.”<sup>18</sup> Mangano certainly fulfils these physical traits which suggests that Pasolini was intent on creating this sense of spiritual transference between the religious idol and the viewer - the viewer being both Pasolini/the Artist and also the viewer of the film. These physical features are important for the effectiveness of a religious icon because, as Leonid Ouspensky explains, “[a]n excessively thin nose, small mouth and large eyes- all these are a conventional method of transmitting the state of a saint whose senses have been “refined” as they use to call it.”<sup>19</sup> By holding the gaze of the large eyes of the icon, the viewer is called into, as Conty describes, “its depths and thus into an invisible dimension.”<sup>20</sup> Pasolini is therefore successful in creating an authentic religious icon on film. He is literally the ‘artist’ of the filmic frame in the same way that his Artist character is the creator of the triptych which this vision inspires. However, Pasolini plays on this doubling even further through the casting of Mangano.

Roland Barthes had already theorised the idea of the filmic icon in his short essay titled ‘The Face of Garbo.’ Barthes picks up on the same physical features that characterise Ouspensky’s description of the medieval icon, suggesting that Barthes felt cinema to be the canvas for the 20<sup>th</sup> reinvention of this form. Barthes highlights “the eyes alone, black like strange soft flesh” piercing this “deified face,”<sup>21</sup> again demonstrating the importance of the shared gaze between icon and viewer. It was the eyes that transported the medieval viewer to “an invisible dimension,” and this is equally the case for a film audience. The close-up has supplanted the medieval portrait, albeit in a manner which still maintains the importance of the held gaze between icon and viewer. This notion of Mangano/Virgin Mary as filmic icon is taken further by the intertextual nature of Mangano’s position as a major *Italian* film star. The face of Mangano is one familiar to viewers of Pasolini’s films, having played prominent roles in both *Edipo re* and *Teorema* (1968), while also being an icon of Italian cinema having played the character of

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<sup>18</sup> Arianne Francoise Conty, ‘Bending Heaven Down to Earth: The Medieval Icon’, *Religion and the Arts*, 19: 1-2 (2015), 1-30 (p. 10).

<sup>19</sup> Leonid Ouspensky, *The Meaning of Icons* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary, 1982), p. 38.

<sup>20</sup> Conty, ‘Bending Heaven’, p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage, 2009), pp. 61-62.

Silvana in the classic neorealist film *Riso amaro* (1949). Her brief but impactful appearance as the Virgin Mary in the artist's vision is therefore imbued with a sense of Pasolini as auteur and artist.

This relationship of Mangano to Pasolini's own films is also vital in understanding Pasolini's presence in *Il Decameron* as a performance of authorship. As Colleen Ryan-Scheutz explains, this intertextual appreciation is vital to understanding Mangano's role as the Virgin Mary:

This choice compels the viewer familiar with Pasolini's films to consider its multiple layers of meaning. One recalls, for instance, the same actress playing both the autobiographical mother and the mythical Jocasta, in *Edipo re*. Her presence at this particular point in the *Decameron* appears very strategic, because it joins Pasolini's nostalgic vision of the past with the psychological implications of the mother-figure. Denoting at once the pivot point in the Oedipal triangle that binds the male subject in a struggle for separate identity, and the inviolable source of human creation, the mother-figure is the vehicle through which discourses of homosexuality and female subjectivity, origins and future meanings, are brought together in the representation of self.<sup>22</sup>

This links to Pasolini's view of the earlier *Edipo re* as being a form of "metaphoric and therefore mythicised autobiography." However, instead of using the framing technique employed in *Edipo re* which juxtaposes the modern-day scenes inspired by his early childhood with mythical scenes of the ancient text to create a literal visual link between reality and myth, the self is



Fig 11. Silvana Magnano as The Virgin Mary in the Artist's/Pasolini's dream in *Il Decameron*

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<sup>22</sup> Colleen Ryan-Scheutz, 'The Unending Process of Subjectivity: Gendering Otherness as Openness in Pasolini's "Decameron"', *Annali d'Italianistica*, 18 (2000), 359-374 (p. 369).

instead represented in *Il Decameron* through Pasolini's literal appearance onscreen both as artist and auteur.

Following his role as the Artist in *Il Decameron*, Pasolini went on to cast himself as iconic author Geoffrey Chaucer in *I racconti di Canterbury*. *The Canterbury Tales* was written by Chaucer during the 14<sup>th</sup> century, with each tale told by a pilgrim walking from Southwark to the shrine of Thomas Beckett in Canterbury Cathedral. The tales act as entertainment to pass the time, resulting in a competition to see who can tell the best story. Although the original Chaucer text contains twenty-four tales, Pasolini's film contains only eight: the Merchant's tale, the Friar's tale, the Cook's tale, the Miller's tale, The Wife of Bath's tale, the Reeve's tale, the Pardoner's tale, and the Summoner's tale. There is also, as is the case with the original text, a prologue and epilogue. This was the first and only time Pasolini would play the role of literary author onscreen, suggesting Pasolini felt a close affinity with his medieval English counterpart. As Kathryn Lynch adeptly highlights, "there is poetic justice in the modern Italian writer filming in the English countryside, turning to the English poet who had at least twice travelled to Italy and who had built his own national literature on the backs of such Italian masters as Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio."<sup>23</sup>

The choice to film *The Canterbury Tales*, and to cast himself in the role of Chaucer, is interesting because of how the structure of the original text works to place the author at the forefront of the narrative. As Sam Rohdie outlines regarding the medieval text, "the two crucial voices are that of the one who frames (Chaucer) and those who are framed (the pilgrims), a single voice governing multiple ones."<sup>24</sup> Chaucer introduces the setting and various pilgrims who will come to recount their tales in the prologue which begins the text. He immediately frames himself as both originator of the text but also recorder of the tales he hears from the people he meets. This pretence disguises Chaucer as the author of the tales but the framing device places him in plain sight. He pushes this to its limits when, placed intermittently throughout the pilgrims' tales, Chaucer includes himself as pilgrim riding along with the company and tells two tales: Sir Thopas, and The Tale of Melibee. Pasolini shot, edited and dubbed a version of The Tale of Sir Thopas but this was removed from the final cut and the footage now lost. Chaucer's "fiction of multiple voices,"<sup>25</sup> as Rohdie describes it, highlights the position of the author, an aspect of the

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<sup>23</sup> Kathryn Lynch, 'Idols of the Marketplace: Chaucer/Pasolini', in *Chaucer On Screen: Absence, Presence, and Adapting The Canterbury Tales*. Ed. Kathleen Coyne Terry, Tison Pugh (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2016), pp. 130-148 (p. 132).

<sup>24</sup> Sam Rohdie, 'I racconti di Canterbury (Pier Paolo Pasolini)/ The Canterbury tales (Geoffrey Chaucer)', *Screening the Past*, 34 (2012), (n.p.).

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, (n.p.).

original text which Pasolini embraces. This hybrid position of Chaucer/Pasolini as both author of the text and character within the fiction is introduced by Pasolini in the film during the prologue, which depicts his character entering the marketplace in which he will meet the pilgrims. As Agnès Blandeau observes, the design of the market immediately highlights the constructed nature of the portrayal of this medieval world which “anchors the film narrative in a theatrical performance.”<sup>26</sup> In the Southwark marketplace, the pilgrims “make up a sort of popular chorus announcing the show, namely the series of tales to come.”<sup>27</sup> The use of a gate for Pasolini/Chaucer to pass through also offers a visual threshold, an explicit liminal space, for the author/auteur and the fiction to combine.

Pasolini highlights this layering of authorship further by carefully appropriating medieval scribal iconography. This lifting of earlier forms of pictorial art is one which characterises Pasolini’s approach to filmmaking since, as Rohdie suggests, “Pasolini’s references are essentially pictorial from medieval, baroque and mannerist paintings.”<sup>28</sup> Literary works during this period were intrinsically linked to the visual arts, with illuminations often working alongside the written text within medieval manuscripts. This included the insertion of scribal portraits within a manuscript, either at the end or the beginning. This iconography was a visual representation of the author/scribe at work, highlighting the manuscript as a physical item that has been created. This same form of self-reference is co-opted by Pasolini in the design for the scene of Chaucer at work. Of course, here Chaucer is also Pasolini, the director of the film, meaning the scene creates the same kind of pictorial autograph which characterises a medieval scribal portrait within a manuscript. Pasolini is using the visual idea of authorship found within medieval art to reinforce his position as both author of this particular telling of *The Canterbury Tales* and auteur of the film *I racconti di Canterbury*. It is also this version of the tales which reinforces Pasolini’s position as author/auteur. He has adapted the original medieval text by changing the original order of the tales - as well as recounting only eight of them - to provide them with a new meaning. As Lynch outlines, “while the figure of Chaucer/Pasolini is explicitly inserted into several transitions between tales to remind us of his presence, it might be said that he is just as present when two tales bump up against each other abruptly with no transition. Far from being a sign of clumsiness, as some have thought, such visible quilting in the film is meant to startle the viewer and focus attention on implicit linkages between stories and scenes.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Agnès Blandeau, *Pasolini, Chaucer and Boccaccio* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2006), p. 13.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Rohdie, ‘The Canterbury Tales’, (n.p.).

<sup>29</sup> Lynch, ‘Idols of the Marketplace’, p. 139.

Read together, the Giotto's apprentice sequence in *Il Decameron* and the self-casting as Chaucer in *I racconti di Canterbury* construct a performance of authorial identity that is simultaneously personal and intertextual, biographical and transhistorical. Furthermore, Boccaccio's celebration of human sexuality and Chaucer's engagement with the body and desire, align with the queer dimension of identity which Pasolini wished to present. By inhabiting these texts, Pasolini performs a transhistorical queer authorial identity that reclaims a tradition of literary and artistic production which acts as a form of counterdiscourse in the contemporary era in which Pasolini was working.



Fig. 12. Pasolini as Chaucer sitting upon his writing desk in *I racconti di Canterbury* (1972)

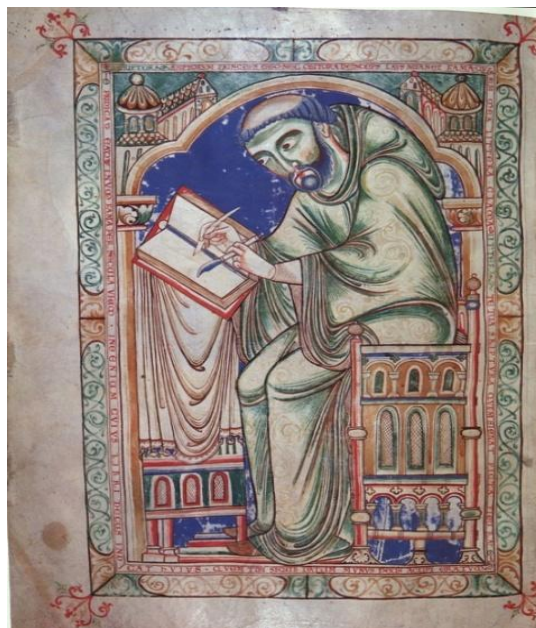


Fig. 13. Image of Eadwine, the Scribe. Cambridge, Trinity College, R. 17. 1, c. 1160

### The Intersubjective Self – Susanna Pasolini in *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1963) and *Teorema* (1968)

The acts of authorial self-inscription examined in the previous section is not the only mode through which Pasolini inscribes his authorial identity within his films. Running alongside the transhistorical dimensions of the self-casting found in the *Trilogy*, is an inter-subjective and relational approach to authorial performance – one that operates not through the director's own bodily presence but through the presence of another: his mother, Susanna Pasolini. In casting his mother in two of his films – *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1963), in which she plays the aging Mary, mother of Christ, and *Teorema* (1968), in which she appears as the matriarch of a peasant community – Pasolini develops a mode of authorial self-inscription that is relational rather than individual. This acts as a means of performing dimensions of his authorial identity – emotional, ideological, and political – that expands on authorial performance found in the *Trilogy*. This relational mode of authorial performance is, as this section will argue, as significant and politically charged as the more explicit self-inscriptions examined earlier. It also illuminates an aspect of Pasolini's intermedial creative identity – the centrality of the maternal and the intersubjective to his understanding of selfhood and cultural authenticity – that is essential to understanding the full complexity of his authorial performance.

It can be argued with some justification that Susanna Pasolini was the most important person in the Italian filmmaker's life. She was also the only constant presence, since they shared a household throughout his lifetime, with Susanna always taking a great interest in her son's work. Susanna came from a modest background, spending the majority of her early life in the northeast area of Italy known as Friuli. She spent her early career as a schoolteacher in and around her home village of Casarsa della Delizia, ending up marrying Carlo Alberto Pasolini – a member of the ancient nobility of Ravenna – due to social pressures following their affair and losing a child to miscarriage. This led to a fraught marriage and eventually a difficult upbringing for the young Pier Paolo, who wholeheartedly took his mother as his role model due to her compassion, constancy, and her determination to avoid oppression in her marriage.<sup>30</sup> Susanna also fostered her son's talents, teaching him poetry. This would go on to form an important facet of Pasolini's relationship with his mother, with him writing a number of poems that dealt with his emotional connection to her, culminating in 1961's 'Prayer to my Mother,' where he relays explicitly his fear of her death and future life without her. Yet, it was not only Susanna but also

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<sup>30</sup> Colleen Ryan-Scheutz, *Sex, The Self and the Sacred: Women in the Cinema of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 16.

her rural birthplace that had a decisive effect on Pasolini's emotional and intellectual development. As Ryan-Scheutz observes, "together, they formed the roots of his poetic concepts of marginality and social difference."<sup>31</sup> This is evident in the fact that Pasolini's first published collection of poems were not written in standard Italian, but in the Friulian dialect that was spoken by the peasant class of his mother's birthplace. This choice represents not only a sense of nostalgia for the days spent in his mother's village during the second world war, where they could be out of the crossfire, but also a defiance of fascism, which scorned marginal regions and dialects. It was also the first manifestation of Pasolini's lifelong nostalgia for past civilisations and cultures, which he felt were being wiped out by the rise of capitalism in post-war Italy. The result of these feelings meant Pasolini regarded his mother as not only a close maternal influence but also a representation of the purity and authenticity characteristic of the rural peasant class. In this way, it is clear that Pasolini's relationship with his mother contained not only emotional but also ideological components. This close bond between Pier Paolo and Susanna suggests clearly that Pasolini's own identity and sense of self was formed out of this relationship. With this in mind, I think it is compelling to consider in some detail Susanna's inclusion in his feature films.

*Il vangelo secondo Matteo* is an almost verbatim retelling of Matthew's Gospel, with all dialogue originating from the biblical text. Therefore, Susanna appears in all the scenes one would expect to find the aging Mary, including the depictions of the crucifixion and the resurrection. She is also featured briefly in a scene earlier in the film when Christ is returning to Nazareth. At this point I think it is important to note that Susanna's name is included in the opening credits for the film. This means that from the start of the film the audience are fully aware that the actor playing the older Mary is a one "Susanna Pasolini," the surname suggesting a relation to the director. And, when seeing Susanna on screen, it is simple for the audience to surmise that this is Pasolini's actual mother playing the mother of Christ. The link between Mary and Susanna, as well as between Pasolini and Christ, is therefore made explicit from the outset.

Scholars have been quick to highlight this alignment Pasolini makes between himself and Christ. As Pia Friedrich suggests, "the autobiographical component in the figure of Christ, radically 'diverse' in that he is socially heretical, inflexible, and vehement, is evident."<sup>32</sup> This is supported by Naomi Green who states, "Pasolini's Christ shares his own "rage" against the philistines and the powerful, his love for the poor and oppressed."<sup>33</sup> Susanna's casting can also

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<sup>31</sup> Ryan-Scheutz, *Sex, The Self and the Sacred*, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Pia Friedrich, *Pier Paolo Pasolini* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> Greene, *Pier Paolo Pasolini*, p. 72.

be placed within this same context, representing a further facet in Pasolini's desire to align himself with Christ: Christ's mother is played by Pasolini's mother, and therefore Pasolini *is* Christ. The figure of the persecuted heretic is a template through which Pasolini understood his own marginality, both politically and sexually, having been expelled from the Communist Party in 1949. It is clear that he found a kindred spirit, in the same way he had done with Gramsci, in the persecuted figure of Christ.

Beginning with the second scene in which Susanna appears – when Mary witnesses Christ's return to his hometown of Nazareth – it is clear that Pasolini included Susanna in his film because he wished to appropriate the Mary/Christ narrative in a way that would both comment on and formulate his own relationship with his mother. The scene begins with Christ and his disciples walking to a town. Although the exact location of Christ's return is not mentioned in Matthew's Gospel, it is presumed to be Nazareth. We then see Mary come out of her house and notice the group. She comes forward and looks towards Christ, still some distance away. Christ looks back and they acknowledge each other. Christ and the disciples are then shown entering Nazareth.



Fig. 14. Scene inserted by Pasolini showing Christ and Mary sharing a glance before Christ enters Nazareth in *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* (1963)

What makes this scene important, and somewhat of an anomaly within the film, is that it does not refer directly to the biblical text. At no point within the biblical verses which recount this return to Nazareth is there any reference to Jesus interacting with or seeing Mary. Matthew 13, 53-54 simply reads “And when Jesus had finished these parables, he went away from there, and coming to his hometown he taught them in their synagogue.” Therefore, this brief but touching moment of distant intimacy between mother and son is a moment inserted into the Christ narrative by Pasolini. The reason being, as I will make clear, that it allows the filmmaker to develop the Mary/Christ relationship in a way that relates directly to his own relationship with his mother.

This is evident because Pasolini inserts this scene directly before a moment when Christ's integrity is called into question. When Christ enters Nazareth, the inhabitants do not believe he is the son of God. This is clear in the biblical text where it says, in Matthew 13, 57, that the inhabitants "took offence at him," and verse 58 which states, "and he did not do many mighty works there, because of their unbelief." This same questioning by the inhabitants is shown in the film immediately after the scene with Mary. Having already aligned himself with the figure of Christ, Pasolini clearly saw a similarity between the doubters that faced Christ and the doubters which he faced throughout his career, creating a need to fight for survival within his society. As Ryan-Scheutz observes, "Pasolini perceived himself as a victim of strategically and hypocritically conformist society, and he viewed his life as a long survival within it."<sup>34</sup> This feeling was solidified in a poem of 1959, 'Appendice alla "Religione": una luce,' where Pasolini writes:

Still surviving, in a long extension  
of unexhausted, inexhaustible passion  
-that almost has its roots in another time-

Pasolini's point of view, what Ryan-Scheutz describes as his "passion-based instincts,"<sup>35</sup> represented a way of life that society no longer accepted nor understood. His only redemption, as the poem goes on to state, is the "light of goodness" represented by his mother Susanna:

-I know that a light, amidst the chaos, of religion,  
A light of goodness, redeems my  
excessive love in desperation.

It is her presence within Pasolini's life that gives him strength. Therefore, at the moment when the Christ/Pasolini figure is confronted by scepticism and unbelief in the film, Pasolini inserts the figure of Mary/Susanna to suggest this "light of goodness" which the filmmaker found so

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<sup>34</sup> Ryan-Scheutz, *Sex, The Self and the Sacred*, p. 21.

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*, p. 21.

essential for his own survival. Had he stuck to the original biblical text, then such a reading would have been absent.

Pasolini can also be seen to use the Mary and Christ relationship to represent his own relationship with his mother in his direction of the crucifixion scene. One would expect Pasolini's handling of this to be primarily focused on Christ's body, especially since he has spoken of the quasi-erotic fantasies he'd had as a teenager regarding the Passion. In one instance he described how:

I saw myself hanging from the Cross, nailed to it. My thighs were scantily covered by a light piece of cloth and a huge crowd was looking at me. That public martyrdom became for me something voluptuous and sometimes I was nailed to the cross completely nude... with my arms spread out, my hands and feet nailed, I was utterly defenceless, lost.<sup>36</sup>

One might expect, therefore, an equally voluptuous depiction in his film, that highlights Christ's physical pain and anguish during this bodily sacrifice. However, in the finished edit, the crucifixion scene focuses far more on the figure of Mary/Susanna than it does on the body of Christ, highlighting Mary's emotional pain and anguish at witnessing the execution of her son. The scene cuts between images of Christ being raised upon the cross and images of Mary running to reach her son before he is executed. Once she arrives below the cross, and realising she is too late, the camera lingers on Mary's face in close-up, as she looks up in disbelief at what she is witnessing. Pasolini does not linger on depictions of bodily mutilation but rather on emotional mutilation, as the mother and son relationship is ripped apart. Through this approach, Pasolini places all the focus on the mother – his own mother – to allow the audience to fully comprehend the extent of the suffering that Christ's execution inflicts on her. In doing so, Pasolini works from his own personal fears around the spectre of death, and the fact that this will eventually tear himself and Susanna apart.

Early in the crucifixion scene, Pasolini highlights the intersubjective mode of the mother and son relationship which he felt characterised his own relationship with his mother. By cutting immediately from a shot of a nail being hammered into Christ's hand to one of Mary falling over as she rushes to reach her son, Pasolini emphasises the link between the bodily pain of Christ and the emotional pain of Mary, suggesting that Mary feels every blow her son receives. The identities of mother and son therefore mesh as both are seen to succumb to bodily anguish. As

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<sup>36</sup> Pier Paolo Pasolini, 'Dal laboratorio (Appunti *en poète* per una linguistica marxista)', in *Empirismo eretico* (Milan: Garzanti, 1972), p. 68.

noted above, Pasolini had already highlighted the intersubjective nature of his relationship with his mother in the 1961 poem 'Prayer to my Mother.' Despite being written primarily from the standpoint of Pasolini's worries surrounding his mother's inevitable death (at one point it reads: "You're irreplaceable. And because you are, the life you gave me is condemned to loneliness"), the poem can equally be seen to relate to a more general fear of death and its ability to tear apart a bond which is sustaining both his own and Susanna's life. This is clear in the final two lines:

I pray you, oh, I pray: Don't die.

I'm here, alone, with you, in a future April...

These are words that could be being spoken by either Pasolini or Susanna, the identities again enmeshing into a single self. So, in depicting the crucifixion scene with such an emphasis on the figure of Mary/Susanna, Pasolini is characterising the Christ/Mary relationship in a way that speaks specifically to his own relationship with Susanna, an aspect that is only enhanced by the medium of film allowing him to cast his mother as Mary.

Turning to *Teorema*, the second and final film to feature Susanna in an acting role, we can see Pasolini utilising the figure of his mother in a slightly different way. Whereas Susanna's inclusion within *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* encapsulates the emotional component of Pasolini's relationship with his mother, her inclusion in *Teorema* can be seen to capture the ideological component outlined at the start of this section. The plot of *Teorema* follows a bourgeois Italian family – consisting of a mother, father, son, and daughter – who get a visit from an unknown figure, played by the British actor Terence Stamp. This character, who is referred to only as "a boy," and whose origin is unknown, is welcomed as a visitor into this bourgeois family but is quickly shown to form both a strong emotional and sexual relationship with each member, including the family's maid. There is no explicit seduction on the visitor's part but rather the family members are drawn to him by some kind of spiritual or supernatural connection. However, just as quickly as he had arrived and disrupted the dynamic of the family, the visitor leaves. It is at this moment that each member of the family experiences a personal crisis and a questioning of their selfhood, not knowing how to go on now that the visitor is no longer in their life.

*Teorema* represents Pasolini's conception of where the self exists within the modern Italian bourgeois family. With the bourgeoisie being a class Pasolini viewed from the inside, the film has been described as being driven by, as Pia Friedrich describes, an "autobiographical hatred."<sup>37</sup> For Pasolini, the bourgeois family is one that is characterised by laws of repression - particularly against homosexuality and promiscuity. It is important to note, however, as Bart Testa suggests, "paradoxically, selfhood under this law is at once denied and sustained by these laws of repression."<sup>38</sup> This is because, despite these laws repressing the ability for an individual to express their own sense of selfhood, they nonetheless sustain the order and stability of class and of a 'personality' within that class. Therefore, despite it being a tightly controlled selfhood, it is a selfhood nonetheless. Pasolini introduces the disruptive presence of the mysterious visitor into this family dynamic for a very specific reason. As Testa explains, "the visitor smashes these laws, ending the daughter's attachment to her father, the son's and father's heterosexuality, the mother's chastity, and they then confess to their new, 'authentic,' but unsustainable identities or selves."<sup>39</sup> These new, 'authentic,' selves are unsustainable because they have abandoned the laws which defined and structured their bourgeois social identities; and when they are destroyed, so is the self.

It is here that we turn to the maid Emilia, the only character whose sexual encounter with the visitor does not cause a disintegration but rather a transcendence of the self, a transcendence which is facilitated by her return to the rural community of her childhood. When the visitor leaves, Emilia quits her job and returns to the peasant village of her youth and it is here that she becomes a saint-like figure, eventually performing miracles including healing the sick and levitation. It is only this peasant community, which for Pasolini represents an authentic, pure form of Italian culture and community with its ritualistic and spiritual values, that could encourage and maintain the transformation of Emilia into a martyr. Emilia had to escape the city and the bourgeois family, following the enlightenment she received from her encounter with the visitor, to be able to complete her transcendence.

Significantly, it is within this strand of the story that we encounter the character played by Susanna Pasolini. She is cast as an unnamed peasant woman, seemingly the matriarch of the community, brought out to witness Emilia's miraculous acts. The woman is depicted as being someone of devout and pure faith who is ready and willing to dedicate themselves to Emilia the

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<sup>37</sup> Friedrich, *Pasolini*, p. 22.

<sup>38</sup> Bart Testa, 'To Film a Gospel... and Advent of the Theoretical Stranger', in *Pier Paolo Pasolini: Contemporary Perspectives* ed. Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), p. 201.

<sup>39</sup> *ibid.*, p. 201.

saint. Unlike in *Il vangelo secondo Matteo* where Susanna was playing a role that already held a certain level of cultural importance – and one which would allow Pasolini to use the casting as a way to align himself with characters in the film – her appearance in *Teorema* is better understood as fulfilling Pasolini's view of his mother as a romantic archetypal figure of the Italian sub-proletariat. She represents the filmmaker's own ideological formulation of this class, especially its 'authentic' spiritual components. Pasolini represents this aspect by utilising Susanna's character as a form of mediator between the film camera and Emilia's miraculous transcendence – in that the audience view the miracles through Susanna's eyes.

This mediation can be seen in the moment depicting Emilia's levitation. The scene begins with an upward tracking shot that leads to the levitating Emilia. This is followed by a shot depicting the crowd congregating to witness the event, with a boy then running to the bell tower to mark the miracle. During these opening shots, the camera depicts the miracle from an omniscient position above the gathered crowd, rather than presenting anyone's particular point of view. Immediately following this, however, the camera then switches to the point of view of Susanna's character from within the crowd. It begins with a close-up of Susanna reacting to the miracle which is followed by another shot of the levitating Emilia. This shot of the miracle is taken from near ground level looking up towards it. When one considers the angle of this shot and its proximity to the miracle, it is clear we are witnessing the miracle from Susanna's point of view. Out of all those gathered to see the miracle, Pasolini elects to show the audience Susanna's perspective. This is no coincidence, and I think it highlights the way in which Pasolini used Susanna's unnamed character as a mediator between the real world of this rural community – and the real world of the audience watching the film – and the spiritual world represented by Emilia.



Fig. 15. Scene of Emilia's miraculous levitation in *Teorema* (1968)

We again find this mediation in the depiction of Emilia's final miracle and ultimate martyrdom. Venturing back into the city and walking to a construction site, Emilia is joined by Susanna's character. Emilia, with the help of the Susanna, buries herself within the soil – the same soil which is being excavated to build new high-rise buildings. From her tears a well begins to spring. Emilia, this saint from Italy's underclass, weeps for the loss of a past world that is being bulldozed and built upon due to post-war Italy's desire for innovation and a march towards modernity. This aligns with a trend that had characterised much of Pasolini's work up to this point. As Sam Rohdie suggests, "in Pasolini's work, the purity and innocence of primitivism were the victims of a modernity that had forgotten its primitive past, hence its soul."<sup>40</sup> This can also be seen as a divergence from the socialist values exemplified by the figure of Gramsci. Where Gramsci sought the entry of the subaltern masses into national culture through avenues such as education, Pasolini was adverse to such assimilation. Where Gramsci had a developmental optimism, Pasolini mourned the archaic peasant world Gramsci hoped to emancipate. As Sillanpoa states, Pasolini's desire was to "demand a "preservation" of the subaltern classes."<sup>41</sup> The filmmaker had voiced similar concerns in his poem 'The Lament of the Excavator,' which concerns an excavator's cry out against the destruction of an old world that his own hands are inflicting:

This was the centre of the world,

As my love for it was at

The centre of history: and in this

maturity only the beginning, there was

love nonetheless; everything was

about to become clear- in fact everything

was clear! Those slums, naked

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<sup>40</sup> Sam Rohdie, *The Passion of Pier Paolo Pasolini* (London: British Film Institute, 1995), p. 130.

<sup>41</sup> Sillanpoa, 'Pasolini's Gramsci', p. 132.

in the wind, not Roman, not Southern,  
not working class, were life

in its most pertinent light:

life, light of life, full

of a chaos not yet proletarian

This same sentiment is lamented by Emilia as she lays buried in the earth. The only witness to this lament, and to the miraculous spring, is Susanna's character. She again acts as the mediator between the camera and the miraculous, framing what the audience sees and how they see it. Again, Pasolini uses the figure of his mother in his film to suggest the intersubjective and relational nature of their relationship, only this time the focus is on the ideological component. Despite his absence onscreen, Pasolini's presence is embodied through his characterisation of Susanna's peasant as a figure who witnesses and exemplifies the sentiments towards Italian culture which Pasolini had actively expressed in his poetry. The mother's body becomes the site of an authorial self-inscription that is no less powerful for being indirect.

#### Derek Jarman's Self-Projection in *The Last of England* (1987) and *The Garden* (1990)

The transition from Pasolini to Jarman within this chapter's analysis marks a shift not only in national and historical context but in the specific mode of authorial self-inscription through which the performance of queer authorship is conducted. Where Pasolini's authorial performances in the films examined above operate primarily through the inhabitation of historical and literary figures – the displacement of his own identity onto the bodies of Giotto's apprentice, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the Christ of Matthew's Gospel – Jarman's approach to authorial self-inscription is more direct and more formally diverse, encompassing his own bodily presence within the film, the deployment of personal locations as sites of authorial identity, the incorporation of family home movies as a form of inter-medial autobiographical testimony, and the use of extra-filmic context within which the films' authorial performances acquire their fullest political resonance. Both directors are engaged in the same fundamental act – the performance of a queer authorial identity within and against the structures of cultural

power that have sought to suppress it – but the formal strategies through which that performance is conducted are, in Jarman's case, more explicitly personal and more directly connected to the immediate political conditions of his own historical moment.

Although Jarman had appeared in small cameo roles in his historical films such as *Caravaggio* (1986) – in which he played a cardinal – it was with *The Last of England* (1987) and *The Garden* (1990) that this self-projection reached its apex. These two films are often paired together within his filmography because they both utilise a range of techniques that are not often found in narrative cinema – most notably the refusal of any traditional narrative and the collage nature of their final execution. It is these aspects which make both films intriguing examples of authorial performance. As Parsons outlines, in both these films “expressive artefacts, self-representations and symbols take up difficult, troubling and complex meanings, pointing to politically crucial counter-memories.”<sup>42</sup> When approaching the performative nature of both films, it is not only about how Jarman represents himself within the film frame but also it is vital to understand how this self-projection was “politically crucial.”

It is no coincidence that Jarman's turn towards self-projection in his films, presenting himself explicitly as *author*, came during a time of great unrest, both politically and personally. Political unrest manifested itself during the development of the AIDS crisis of the 1980s, in which the ‘moral panic’ and spread of misinformation propagated by the tabloid press led to the introduction of Section 28 banning the ‘promotion of homosexuality.’ Jarman himself was diagnosed HIV+ in December 1986. Having already produced a range of films of historical subjects that looked to reframe the past through a queer lens – in an attempt to, as Jim Ellis describes, “wrest them away from the official guardians of the past,”<sup>43</sup> – in both *The Last of England* and *The Garden* Jarman focuses on the personal in the present. Both films can be seen as ‘state of the nation’ films in regard to their direct attacks on the forces of power prevalent at the time, but also ‘state of the body’ films in the way they act as an outlet for Jarman to document his corporeal self at a time when he knew his body was failing.

Rather than simply turning the camera upon himself, Jarman achieves this focus on the body through a combination of techniques. As Parsons states in regard to both films: “he plays with his role in the action: at times, he is present on screen, at times, he is the cameraman and at times, he is filmed holding a camera. He makes us unsure of what exactly his roles might be,

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<sup>42</sup> Parsons, *Luminous Presence*, p. 105.

<sup>43</sup> Jim Ellis, ‘Queer Period: Derek Jarman's Renaissance’ in *Out Takes: Essays on Queer Theory and Film* ed. Ellis Hanson (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 288-315 (p. 288).

refusing to be contained by any particular activity in the collaborative enterprise of making a film.”<sup>44</sup> These multiple forms of representation also manifest themselves through Jarman’s deployment of family home movies in *The Last of England*, allowing him to reframe the past in a similar manner to his earlier historical films such as *Sebastiane*, albeit in a manner that is intrinsically linked to his own upbringing. Furthermore, the use of location in both films, particularly his home and accompanying garden at Prospect Cottage in Dungeness which features in *The Garden*, and the depictions in *The Last of England* of Jarman writing at his desk in his flat in Phoenix House in Charing Cross Road, can be regarded in themselves as forms of self-projection. Both settings are extremely personal to Jarman and can be seen to reflect his diverse and multilayered sense of identity. I will now begin to analyse how each film takes these various techniques and synthesises them into single works which engage with both the personal and the political.

### *The Last of England*

As Daniel Humphrey notes, “the spectre of authorial enunciation is everywhere apparent in *The Last of England*.”<sup>45</sup> This aspect is made explicit by the opening shot of the film in which we see Jarman at his desk making notes from various notebooks. Throughout this scene the emphasis is on writing, with the camera focusing on the inkpot, the quill, and Jarman’s hand as he writes in his notebook. Above these images a narration, spoken by regular Jarman collaborator Nigel Terry, recites a paranoid and doom-laden poem that brings up images of “dead souls,” “leaden hail,” and “black frost.” This narration immediately instils an atmosphere of apocalypse and decay, a theme that runs throughout the entire film. He is shown as a tired and fatigued writer, rubbing his eyes as he struggles to stay awake, suggesting that the decay he writes of is depleting both his physical and creative energy. The fact that Jarman is depicted as an author, depicted in the act of writing as the poem is being recited, instantly grounds the words as originating from his mind. His appearance in the very first shots of the film suggests that Jarman is both author and auteur, and that the collage of images that are about to follow all originate from him and him alone. His presence is a visual reminder that he, as Parsons outlines, “not only participates in the action of the film, but sparks off its visions and determines its events.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Parsons, *Luminous Presence*, p. 109.

<sup>45</sup> Daniel Humphrey, ‘Authorship, history and the dialectic of trauma: Derek Jarman’s *The Last of England*’, *Screen*, 44:2 (2003), 208-215 (p. 210).

<sup>46</sup> Parsons, *Luminous Presence*, p. 106.

However, it's not as simple as saying that, just because it is Jarman as an actor on screen, that this is the 'real' Jarman. As Humphrey suggests, what we see in these opening scenes is "Jarman the actor playing 'Jarman' the onscreen author."<sup>47</sup> In this case, Jarman differs in his execution from that which is found in Pasolini's approach to self-projection. Pasolini is always playing a fictitious reimagining of himself, with his presence always fused with the identity of a historical character. As I have demonstrated, it is through this fusing that Pasolini is able to enunciate his own sense of a creative self. In Jarman's case, there is no direct fusion with another identity, it is a version of Jarman himself. The setting also plays an important part in his display this self being a political one, one which opposed the neoliberal ideological push promoted by the Thatcherite government of the day. As Mark W. Turner argues regarding the filming of the London Docklands in *The Last of England*, "the use of this location is no accident. The redevelopment of the Docklands was a flagship project for Thatcher's radically neoliberal, market-driven restructuring of Britain."<sup>48</sup> For Jarman, this was the perfect setting for his apocalyptic vision of the present.



Fig. 16. Derek Jarman as author/auteur at the beginning of *The Last of England* (1987)

<sup>47</sup> Humphrey, 'Derek Jarman's *The Last of England*', p. 210.

<sup>48</sup> Mark W. Turner, 'Derek Jarman in the Docklands: *The Last of England* and Thatcher's London', in *Taking Place: Location and the Moving Image* ed. John David Rhodes and Elena Gorfinkel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), pp. 77-97 (pp. 78-79).

This vision of his present home is also combined with the vision of his past home, through the use of his family home movies. These visual ‘memories’ act on a few different levels. They simultaneously comment on Jarman’s own childhood – with the contrast between his militaristic father and the domesticity of his mother – and the notion of Empire, since his Father, who was born in New Zealand, was in the RAF during World War II. These scenes include shots of Jarman’s mother and father before he was born and domestic scenes of the young Jarman with his sister and mother. The inclusion of home movies can be seen as a move towards traditional autobiographical reminiscence, searching for how the boy became the man. However, the home movies do not stand on their own within the wider narrative of the film, they are part of it. There is rarely any accompanying voice over to these scenes to provide any sense of analysis or investigation, meaning this is not simply nostalgia. Jarman is not wishing to look back for the sake of reminiscing. The home movies are incorporated within the dream-like film narrative of *The Last of England*, and their inclusion makes them a part of this apocalyptic dream, part of the flow of images that spill out from the author/auteur’s mind, linking him directly within a history of empire. This synthesis allows for a combining of the personal with the political since Jarman can merge his family life, a space which Michael Renov describes as “the most fundamental crucible of psychosexual formation,”<sup>49</sup> with the scenes of moral decay which exemplify Thatcher’s political experiment into neoliberalism. This allows for a direct comment on Jarman’s own history as a gay man alongside an ideology and power construction which fundamentally limits his ability to be his authentic self. As Justin Wyatt points out, “using home movies matched to fictional worlds and literary autobiography, Jarman can address issues related to the family, its institutional supports, and gay people.”<sup>50</sup>

However, home movies are not simply reserved for depictions of his childhood. Also interspersed within *The Last of England* are sequences featuring Mark Adley – known as Spring – which work effectively as home movies of Jarman’s then lover. The incorporation of Spring is yet another way Jarman brings the personal into the film. Spring is portrayed as an object of both emotional and physical desire and, when he is later shown as a junkie within a barren apocalyptic wasteland, his decline prefigures and personalises the image of the nation’s decline in the film. Spring is also depicted stomping on and masturbating over a reproduction of Caravaggio’s ‘Amor Vincit Omnia,’ a signifier of Jarman’s previous film *Caravaggio*. This

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<sup>49</sup> Michael Renov, ‘Family Secrets: Alan Berliner’s “Nobody’s Business” and the (American) Jewish Autobiographical Film’, *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media*, 49:1 (2008), pp. 55-65 (p. 57).

<sup>50</sup> Justin Wyatt, ‘Autobiography, Home Movies, and Derek Jarman’s History Lesson’, in *Between the Sheets, in the Streets: Queer, Lesbian, and Gay Documentary*, eds. Chris Holmlund and Cynthia Fuchs (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), pp. 158-172 (pp. 158-159).

aggressive desecration of his creative past aligns with the aggressive and chaotic editing style that covers the whole film, adding further power to the juxtaposition of image and sound. In this way, as Kamila Kuc argues, *The Last of England* “mourns the loss of youth and hope and rails at a society grown sick and cruel.”<sup>51</sup>

### *The Garden*

Released three years after *The Last of England*, *The Garden* develops the modes of authorial self-projection established in the earlier film while shifting the emphasis from the apocalyptic to the personal. In many ways, *The Garden* is far more overt in its preoccupation with the notion of the persecution of queer lives and identities throughout history – and especially within the climate of the AIDS crisis and Section 28 – compared with *The Last of England*. However, like with the earlier film, Jarman’s presence is placed at the forefront of the narrative through his depiction in its opening scenes. Although this time he is an artist presented as working in Prospect Cottage, he is again presented as effectively dreaming the film into being. This is also a version of Jarman that frames the director as author/auteur, or what Stephen Carr describes as the role of “seer.”<sup>52</sup> As Carr explains, the role of seer is “enacted in several dimensions of the film - healing wisdom for fractured times, apocalypticism and a vision of paradise.”<sup>53</sup> This self-projection recurs throughout the entire film, with Jarman shown as filmmaker and gardener. His bodily presence is also brought to the forefront in one scene where he appears naked on a hospital bed in the sea, contorting himself in a range of positions that suggest extreme discomfort and fevered dreaming. These scenes frame the central narrative of the persecution of two gay men and their search for safety. This persecution is instilled with overt references to the persecution of Christ, bringing with it layers of meaning to their suffering. Yet, these framing scenes of Jarman’s self-projection provide a counter narrative to the scenes of persecution of the two gay men that emphasises Jarman’s own lived experience in his home and accompanying garden. It is here that he demonstrates his personal defiance against his own persecution, which is shown in this film through its emphasis on a specific location.

As I outlined with *The Last of England*, Jarman uses location in his films as a form of self-projection due to their ability to represent a link to selfhood. As Turner makes clear with the use

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<sup>51</sup> Kamila Kuc, ‘The Last of England (1987)’, *BFI Screenonline* <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/490045/index.html> [accessed 5 September 2025]

<sup>52</sup> Stephen Carr, ‘Doing Queer Theology in *The Garden*: Derek Jarman and Christianity’, *Theology and Sexuality*, 8:1 (1998), 9-26 (p. 12).

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 12.

of setting in *The Last of England*, the London Docklands represent “an endpoint of industrial modernity, a contemporary social struggle in the context of Thatcherite neoliberalism, a paradoxical sight of both spiritual malaise and artistic freedom at the city’s margins, a place of departure (even possibility?) for those set adrift in the film’s conclusion.”<sup>54</sup> As for *The Garden*, the setting here is Prospect Cottage, the home Jarman moved into in 1987 in Dungeness on the Kent coast. Jarman and Prospect Cottage offer an interesting example of how place can be used to construct and reinforce a sense of self. As Matt Cook explains, Prospect Cottage “was a place of rest, retreat, writing, filmmaking, and companionship... it was a tool in his politics and activism and had a distinctive place in his queer life and in the ways he marked out his queerness.”<sup>55</sup> This link was not only personal but also public. Since moving to Prospect Cottage, the house and the man became intrinsically linked in the public consciousness, with the house and accompanying garden being regarded as a physical manifestation of Jarman’s identity. Many of the publicity photos of Jarman in the last years of his life would show him either at home or at work in his garden. Unsurprisingly, the cottage has become a monument to Jarman after his death and, after a public campaign in 2020 to purchase the property for the nation, it is now offered as a space for artists to work via short term residencies.

The title of *The Garden* brings with it a double meaning, one which combines the personal narrative with the persecution narrative. Both aspects combine to create a film that is characterised by the differing themes of safety and expulsion. *The Garden* is both the garden at Dungeness – which represents a safe haven for Jarman against both the hostile political environment of the time and his ever-increasing illness – and the biblical gardens of Eden and Gethsemane – which represent paradise/expulsion and sacrifice respectively, as well as the site of Christ’s betrayal by Judas. When regarding the importance of Dungeness to the film and what it represents, it is also vital to include Prospect Cottage within this. Being a renovated fisherman’s hut that acted as Jarman’s home for the final years of his life, it is in the interior of the cottage that we first see Jarman’s presence on screen in *The Garden*, sitting at his desk – within what he labelled “the spring room” – playing the ‘role’ of poet/artist/author. Therefore, the first encounter with him in these films is not only through his bodily presence but also through the representation of his home. As Cook states, “he opens the rooms out to his audiences and invites them to read him through them and through their contents.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Turner, ‘Jarman in the Docklands’, p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> Matt Cook, ‘At Home with Derek Jarman’, *Studies in Gender and Sexuality*, 15:3 (2014), 244-249 (p. 244).

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 246.

A similar approach is taken for the garden at Prospect Cottage. Scenes of Jarman tending to his garden highlight its unique setting on the beach shingle. Although the beaches of Dungeness can be viewed as a point of no escape – the end of the land offering no further room to move away from the insidious homophobia instilled by the British government – the garden itself is always framed as paradise, an Eden before the Fall. Its position on the outskirts of society allows it to become, as Carr explains, “a space of otherness.”<sup>57</sup> Its location also increases the ‘otherness’ of this garden, since the Kent coast on which it is located is a stony and barren landscape. As Chris Steyaert observes, the garden at Dungeness “reverses and upsets the concept of garden itself.”<sup>58</sup> The location of the garden is “a sandy in between space where nobody would ever expect anybody to start gardening- not only for reasons of fertility and barrenness but because of its vicinity to a nuclear power station.”<sup>59</sup>

This sense of an individual at the edge of society is heightened by the Dungeness setting. Not only does the looming nuclear power plant offer a sense of post-apocalyptic isolation, but the presence of the sea throughout the film suggests that this is a film which exists on the outskirts. The question of whether this push towards the outskirts is one of choice or one of necessity is a crux of the entire film – clearly outlined by the contrast between domestic comfort and biblical sacrifice. The recurring images of the waves on the shingle also emphasises this space as a peripheral or liminal zone where land meets the sea. In the case of Jarman, his home at the edge of England can be seen to speak, as Cook outlines, to “his sense of himself in relation to English culture.”<sup>60</sup> There is an emphasis on water and the sea throughout *The Garden*, with these aspects holding numerous meanings within the film. Water is represented as both a means of escape, a barrier, and a means of cleansing and nourishment - at one point we witness Jarman watering his garden in a classic scene of domestic care. The sea itself plays an important role in one iconic scene in which Jarman is shown lying naked in a foetal position upon a hospital bed that has been placed in the shallows of the sea. Around him circle five topless ‘angels’ each holding aloft a burning torch. Parsons reads this scene as a “politically inflected reminder of the shockingly inadequate governmental responses to HIV/AIDS in the UK.”<sup>61</sup> In the beginning of the film the narration states that this is a journey “in search of... self.”

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<sup>57</sup> Carr, ‘Doing Queer Theology in *The Garden*’, p. 23.

<sup>58</sup> Chris Steyaert, ‘Queering Space: Heterotopic Life in Derek Jarman’s Garden’, *Gender, Work and Organization*, 17:1 (2010), 45-68 (p. 50).

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>60</sup> Cook, ‘At Home with Derek Jarman’, p. 247.

<sup>61</sup> Parsons, *Luminous Presence*, p. 125.

What is emphasised in *The Garden* is the notion that the self has to be searched for because it has been historically silenced and suppressed as a legitimate identity.



Fig. 17. Derek Jarman lying in a hospital bed in the sea in *The Garden* (1990)

#### Presence Through Absence in *Blue* (1993)

If *The Last of England* and *The Garden* represent Jarman's most direct and formally diverse performances of queer authorial identity, then *Blue*, his final film, represents something different and in certain respects more radical: a performance of queer authorial identity through the deliberate denial of the visual image. Released in 1993 only six months before Jarman died of illnesses resulting from AIDS, *Blue* is a transcendental meditation on the themes of love, loss, and mortality that is embedded with Jarman's experience of living with the effects of the virus. Yet, despite its far-reaching scope, it has also been described as an instance of "creative puritanism."<sup>62</sup> Utilising a form of saturated ultramarine created by the artist Yves Klein, the film presents visually nothing more than this one shade of blue for its entire 79-minute running time. Accompanying this unchanging image is a soundtrack that acts as the material for the viewer to

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<sup>62</sup> Andrew Moor, 'Spirit and matter: romantic mythologies in the films of Derek Jarman', in *Territories of desire in queer culture: Refiguring contemporary boundaries*, ed. David Alderson and Linda Anderson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), pp. 49-67 (p. 49).

conjure images that they can then project onto the screen, thereby transcending the apparent limiting nature of a film that is nothing more than a single colour. The script, later published in Jarman's book *Chroma* within the chapter titled "Into the Blue," combines his own diaristic accounts of visits to the clinic as he is being treated for AIDS related illnesses, with reminisces of those loved ones who have already been lost to the virus. This is then interwoven with meditations on the colour blue and its links to love, death, and the beyond.

The film utilises four different voices to recite the narration. Jarman himself, who by this point had a voice that was increasingly frail due to the effects of the illnesses taking its toll, and Tilda Swinton, Jarman's 'muse', are used sparingly on the soundtrack but are still recognisable. The majority of the narration is spoken by Nigel Terry and John Quintin, both previous collaborators in films such as *Caravaggio* and *Wittgenstein* (1993). Nigel Terry (who was cast as the transgressive renaissance painter in *Caravaggio*) had provided a similar role as Jarman's 'voice' in *The Last of England* and therefore *Blue* can be seen as a continuation of Terry as being a surrogate voice for Jarman. The soundtrack is also filled with music and diegetic sound that was produced primarily by long-time collaborator Simon Fisher Turner which, combined with the narration, creates an aural 'image' for the viewer. Therefore, despite its apparent "puritanism" towards the visual nature of the cinematic medium, it is nonetheless a film which contains an array of material that has as its source Jarman's own lived experience. Due to the nature of the film undoubtedly being something which is embedded within notions of the subjective, *Blue* is a film which is regularly read by critics as being autobiographical. In the view of Steven Dillon, *Blue* is "straightforwardly autobiographical,"<sup>63</sup> and this is corroborated by Kate Higginson when they term *Blue* as "gay autobiography."<sup>64</sup> Such readings are certainly grounded in the traditional definition of autobiography being a narrative which recounts moments from an individual's life. However, *Blue* can be seen to take this notion of subjectivity even further, confronting what it really means to depict a life on screen.

Taking the static blue screen that runs for the entirety of the film, it is more than simply an avant-garde artistic statement – its self-referential quality cannot be denied. Jarman was nearly blind when he made the film, and this comes through in his monochromatic choice. Blue was the colour that overtook his vision as his treatment became more invasive and pushed him closer to blindness, with this reference being so targeted that it has led Richard Porton to

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<sup>63</sup> Steven Dillon, *Derek Jarman and Lyric Film: The Mirror and the Sea* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), p. 228.

<sup>64</sup> Kate Higginson, 'Derek Jarman's "Ghostly Eye": Prophetic Bliss and Sacrificial Blindness in *Blue*', *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, 41:1 (March 2008), 77-94 (p. 87).

suggest “the film’s monochromatic screen evokes Jarman’s AIDS-induced failed eyesight more than it does some ahistorical existential void.”<sup>65</sup> Porton’s view is supported when you look at how *Blue* begins. The film opens with the line “You say to the boy open your eyes”<sup>66</sup> and in doing so he “sees the light.”<sup>67</sup> By having the opening of the eyes as the first act of the narrative, Jarman is positioning the theme of sight and vision at the forefront of the film. Through the same action he is simultaneously instructing the viewer to open their metaphorical ‘inner’-eye and forcing us to look beyond the blue screen and instead project our own images which will be conjured up by the soundtrack of the film. The light that the character Blue is being asked to see corresponds to the light from the projector that is showing the film in the auditorium, the audience similarly being urged to open their eyes to it. It is Jarman’s lack of vision which he utilises to heighten the vision of others. In this way *Blue* can be seen to act both as a meditation on his literal failed eyesight while also positioning itself within an ahistorical evocation on the power of the ‘inner’-eye. As Higginson says in reference to the film, “while he does eventually lose his *eyesight*, his work testifies to the preservation or augmentation of his *insight*.”<sup>68</sup> *Blue* is designed to hold plural meanings within its many details. Therefore, rather than saying that the choice of colour represents Jarman’s failed eyesight *more* than an ahistorical void, the film is designed to represent *both* and for a link to be made between the two. *Blue* not only represents this call towards subjective insight but also represents a political act of defiance against the British ruling class that was subjugating his identity. Similarly to how he depicted queer figures of history in his work, *Blue* can be seen as Jarman employing transverse tactics as a way to decentre the dominant cultural view which othered queer identities, while also subverting the critical language that surrounded the AIDS virus during the period.

In *Blue*, Jarman implements the figure-less blue screen as a means of denying the potential for exploiting the HIV+ body. The careful deployment of International Klein Blue (IKB) as the film’s ‘image’ “conveys” as Higginson outlines, “all the resonances of the body without actually having to represent the body on screen.”<sup>69</sup> This is done through utilising the connotations of Klein’s deep blue pigment with the sensual and sexualised body. These connotations developed from Klein’s performance art pieces where he had young female nudes coat themselves in IKB and writhe around on the canvas. Sidra Stich suggests that with these works of performance art “the

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<sup>65</sup> Richard Porton, ‘Language games and aesthetic attitudes: style and ideology in Jarman’s late films’, in *By angles driven: The films of Derek Jarman*, ed. Chris Lippard (Trowbridge: Flicks Books, 1996), pp. 135-160 (p. 149).

<sup>66</sup> Derek Jarman, *Chroma* (London: Vintage Classics, 2019) p. 84.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>68</sup> Higginson, ‘Derek Jarman’s “Ghostly Eye”’, p. 79.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 197.

body is made manifest as the vital and vitalizing centre of human existence.”<sup>70</sup> The body is therefore present in *Blue* without it being depicted, allowing Jarman to take a more nuanced approach to his own personal relationship with the virus, while simultaneously reversing the dominant discourse surrounding AIDS related imagery. The exploitation of the HIV+ body in the media, and the supposed ‘shallow’ gestures of support from those who are not suffering from the virus, was something which he rallied against. He makes clear his mistrust of wider society’s approach to AIDS in the narration to *Blue*, saying: “the virus was appropriated by the well – so we have to live with AIDS while they spread the quilt,”<sup>71</sup> a clear reference to the NAMES memorial quilt first shown in 1987, which for Jarman represents a damaging image about how society needs to react to the growing AIDS epidemic. The quilt does not help those who are truly suffering but rather is an opportunity for the “well” to present an *image* of care and compassion, supporting the dominant discourse. He goes on to make his view clear when he says, “the rich and powerful who fucked us over once fuck us over again and get it both ways,”<sup>72</sup> with the insinuation that the rich and powerful “fuck both ways” providing a sense of humour through irony since it’s being applied to an overtly homophobic ruling class. The denial of image in *Blue* is therefore a clear tactic to reverse the dominant discourse surrounding AIDS imagery which is both damaging in its portrayals, and worthless in its images of support. As Paul Julian Smith says, the subversive nature of *Blue* as an AIDS film lies in how it is “bearing witness to illness but avoiding... the invasive intrusions of the documentary gaze. We learn to stop looking and start listening instead.”<sup>73</sup>

Jarman did not wish to conform to the idea of representational realism, or even follow the line of self-projection he had utilised in earlier films, because it meant risking his body being seen as something that is “diseased,” both in terms of his physical health and his sexuality. He instead expresses his agency through a denial of this critical gaze, with the narration highlighting his understanding of the self as being something which is inherently unstable, a fact which lends itself to the collaborative medium of cinema. As I outlined earlier, the film utilised four separate voices as narrator on the soundtrack, all of which are narrating as Jarman’s own voice. Instead of this having the effect of making *Blue* more impersonal, the multiple voices as one voice work to reinforce Jarman’s approach to agency that he sets out within the content of the soundtrack. In the second half of the film, he begins to outline the fluid nature of his sexuality, and of sexuality in general. He begins by saying “I am a mannish, muff diving, size queen” before then

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<sup>70</sup> Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein* (Ostfildern: Cantz, 1994), p. 175.

<sup>71</sup> Jarman, *Chroma*, p. 87.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p. 93.

<sup>73</sup> Paul Julian Smith, ‘Blue and the Outer Limits’, *Sight and Sound*, 3:10 (October 1993), p. 19.

going on to state “I am a cock sucking, straight acting, Lesbian man,” before then finishing off by saying “I am a Not Gay.” These seemingly contradictory terms demonstrate Jarman’s desire to counteract the language of the dominant discourse that labels him as “homosexual,” instead highlighting the fluidity of meaning contained within the term.

He also demonstrates the plural nature of agency through the incorporation of a range ‘I’s, or identities, within the text of the film. As is commonly accepted within current discourse surrounding autobiography studies, the ‘I’ present within life-writing is in fact, as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe, “comprised of multiple ‘I’s.”<sup>74</sup> The ‘I’ of *Blue* takes three main forms: the ‘I’ of lived experience: “I am sitting with some friends in this café,”<sup>75</sup> the ‘I’ of imagined experience: “I present to you the universal Blue,”<sup>76</sup> and the ‘I’ of the character Blue: “O Blue arise, O Blue ascend.”<sup>77</sup> The ‘I’ of lived experience places Jarman within the recognisable world and can be regarded as the more diaristic sections of the soundtrack which provide the chronological spine of the narrative. This use of the diaristic voice provides a sense of the passing of time, and a journey towards an end – the end being death as a result of his illness. This theme of a ‘journey’ is reinforced by the many references to walking that are made in the soundtrack.

At the beginning of the film Jarman (or at least the ‘voice’ of Jarman spoken through Nigel Terry) says “I’m walking along the beach in a howling gale.”<sup>78</sup> This image immediately suggests a sense of movement combined with an atmosphere of contemplation. Walking alone on the beach, he is able to use this time to look within and process the situation he and the wider gay community find themselves. Yet the following line, “Another year is passing,”<sup>79</sup> reminds the viewer of the relentless passing of time, a notion that is temporarily lost while watching the static blue screen. It also reinforces the contemplative nature of *Blue* as an personal film that is being made by someone who is facing death and the end of their ‘journey’, at least in terms of his mortal life. He utilises the ‘I’ of lived experience, and the limits of it, to juxtapose it against the wider contemplations he is making around life and the afterlife (another ‘journey’ to come after death). He goes on to say that “Blue transcends the solemn geography of human limits,”<sup>80</sup> suggesting that, through the embodiment of the more abstract notions surrounding blue, the

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<sup>74</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 58.

<sup>75</sup> Jarman, *Chroma*, p. 84.

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>77</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

<sup>78</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>79</sup> *ibid.*, p. 85.

<sup>80</sup> *ibid.*, p. 86.

film - this act of contemplation - is an opportunity to break out of the limiting nature of the lived 'I.' And yet Jarman is forced to return back to the "solemn geography of human limits", as is clear in his humorous play on the teachings of the Gautama Buddha whose instructions are to "walk away from illness."<sup>81</sup> Yet, looking at it from his literal position, he asks "How can I walk away with a drip attached to me?"<sup>82</sup> As much as he wishes to transcend human geography, he is clear in his understanding of where his journey will end. His humour comes through again at the moment he accepts he is reaching the end of his journey. As he stops himself from buying a new pair of shoes, he remarks that "The shoes I am wearing at the moment should be sufficient to walk me out of life."<sup>83</sup>

The 'I' of lived experience may be limited to merely "walking" through life but this is contrasted with the imagined 'I' which looks to transcend physical time and place as well as transcending the physical body itself, one that leads instead to "the fathomless blue of Bliss."<sup>84</sup> Being presented with a body that is failing, Jarman turns to the imagined 'I' as a way to give voice to a form of subjectivity that lies past the reality of living with an illness. Immediately following his realisation that the shoes he is wearing are "sufficient to walk me out of life," we are transported to a location that seems outside of any exact geography. What seems like the end of Jarman's lived journey now turns into an ecstatic vision of "Pearl fishers, in azure seas."<sup>85</sup> The 'I' of lived experience is now also not alone and "I" becomes "We." Through the implementation of an imagined 'I,' he imagines himself in some kind of paradise (possibly the afterlife) in which he can witness "deep love drifting on the tide forever." Through the imagined 'I' Jarman removes the illness from his identity – for this is the defining part of the 'I' of lived experience – and allows himself to be an individual who can express love and act on love without judgement. Suffering from an illness that was tied up within public perceptions of his sexual activity, the 'I' of imagined experience can ask to be kissed "on the lips," "on the eyes."

The final 'I' is that of the character Blue. This character gives voice to Jarman as an individual that is defiantly queer. At the time he was working, the queer individual had been denied any position within the dominant culture, ridding him from a consistent ability to understand the location of his subjectivity. The queer 'I' had been outlawed until 1967 and, especially with following the outbreak of the AIDS "epidemic," it was still a subjectivity that was suppressed during the 1980's and into the 1990's. With the queer 'I' being one that is historically denied, the

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<sup>81</sup> Jarman, *Chroma*, p. 87.

<sup>82</sup> *ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

<sup>84</sup> *ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, p. 98.

character of Blue offers a chance to redeem the notion of a queer subjectivity in language. Through Blue, Jarman deploys a subjectivity that lies outside of gender and therefore sex. Furthermore, this subjectivity also lies outside of image, with the character of Blue being embodied by the static blue screen. Blue is not a gendered name, and the figure of “a boy” carries with it links to androgyny. The ‘I’ of Blue, alongside the two other narrated ‘I’s of the film, work to collapse this suppression of queer subjectivity, providing Jarman a space to define his selfhood.

*Blue* is a film that is simultaneously a record of a dying man’s experience of illness and a defiant assertion of the right to speak from a queer subjective position that the dominant culture has sought to render invisible; simultaneously a meditation on the limits of vision and an exploration of the imaginative and political possibilities that open up when those limits are transcended. As such, it provides the most radical expression of queer authorial identity in the way it actively subverts the notion of *performance*. This act of counterdiscourse is a refusal of the cultural silencing that dominant structures have imposed on queer subjects, and an assertion of the right to be present within the cultural field, in one’s own formal language and on one’s own political terms, regardless of the personal cost that such a presence demands.

### Conclusion – Jarman’s Body as Pasolini’s Politics

The body as artistic and political text is central to the performance of queer authorial identity in the work of both Pasolini and Jarman. Through a combination of presence and absence, both filmmakers are able to formulate an understanding of self-representation which argues for a space of legitimacy for their queer identities while simultaneously celebrating their position as self-expressive artists. For Jarman, this mirroring of ideals comes out of a conscious cultivation to continue Pasolini’s artistic approach, with Alexandra Parsons noting that he housed a “deep identification with Pasolini.”<sup>86</sup> Jarman was presented with the opportunity to play Pasolini onscreen through his friend Julian Cole, a student at the Royal College of Art. When Cole discussed his idea for his graduate film, *Ostia* (1987) – a reconstruction of the events on the night of Pasolini’s murder – it was Jarman himself who suggested he play the lead role. Clearly inspired by Pasolini’s embodiment of the artistic figures who inspired him in films such as *I racconti di Canterbury*, Jarman understood the potential for this embodiment to work as a political act, while also representing an opportunity to build on themes he had wanted to

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<sup>86</sup> Parsons, *Luminous Presence*, p. 80.

explore in his unrealised project *The Assassination of P.P.P. in the Garden of Earthly Delights*, which intended to cover the same topic. The narrative of *Ostia* covers the final night of Pasolini's life, depicting him cruising through a suburban landscape and watching young men as they leave a gay club. Having picked up a young man, Pino Pelosi (David Dipnall), the pair drive through the city and eat in a café. Once they reach a secluded beach, Pelosi attacks Pasolini/Jarman before hitting him with a rock. A gang, who have evidently been following the pair, subsequently arrive and proceed to bludgeon him to death. As Parsons observes, "Cole chooses to present as fact the convincing theories that Pasolini's death wasn't an accident of cruising, but a political plot."<sup>87</sup>

*Ostia* was made at a point in Jarman's career when self-representation begins to form a central facet of his filmmaking approach – as highlighted through my case studies in this chapter. It is interesting, therefore, to consider that this turn towards self-representation begins with the one notable example in which he acts in a traditional role within another person's film. This opportunity to literally 'act' as another allows Jarman to synthesise this desire for self-representation with his focus on historical queer identities – an aspect that runs as a strand throughout his entire oeuvre. It continues the engagement with historical figures found in films such as *Sebastiane* (1976), *The Angelic Conversation* (1985) and *Caravaggio* (1986) and that would be developed in subsequent works such as *War Requiem* (1989), *Edward II* (1991) and *Wittgenstein* (1993). However, in *Ostia* this synthesis is achieved through the literal fusing of



Fig. 18. Derek Jarman (right) as Pier Paolo Pasolini with David Dipnall as Pino Pelosi in *Ostia* (1987)

<sup>87</sup> Parsons, *Luminous Presence*, p. 80.

Pasolini and Jarman's identities onscreen. In this way, "the film enacts Jarman's way of doing queer history, which involves using himself in relation to the history of queer experience."<sup>88</sup> This active embodiment foreshadows the kinds of activism Jarman would undertake during the latter half of the 1980s. The body – and the self – as a political tool characterises Jarman's activism during this period, especially in his involvement with direct action groups such as Outrage! and his continued media presence following his HIV+ diagnosis. In presenting a retelling of the murder of Pasolini through both celebrating the "deviant" nature of his queer sexuality and showing his death as a violent act administered by those holding power in society, *Ostia* reinforces the position of Jarman as queer activist through his depiction of Pasolini as a queer martyr - allowing it to speak directly to the same struggles he faced in Britain. In this way, it upholds a "refusal to excise the controversial aspects of some people's queer experience."<sup>89</sup>

Jarman's embodiment of Pasolini is not only achieved through physical presence but also through his voice. Interspersed throughout the narrative are moments where Jarman reads from Pasolini's poetry, further demonstrating the alignment of their multimodal approach to the creative process while also aligning both figures as authors. In one scene Jarman reads 'Prayer to My Mother,' arguably Pasolini's most personal poem and one which, as I have demonstrated, links to his execution of filmic life narrative in the way he uses his mother as a relational figure onscreen. The images which accompany this recitation stand outside of the main narrative of *Ostia*, providing a lyrical dimension to the film as well as highlighting the intersubjective nature of the relationship between Pasolini and his mother. It is this same kind of relational alignment that underpins Jarman's relationship to Pasolini. The inclusion of the poems in *Ostia* relates to Jarman's own authorial practice in which word and image combine to construct a sense of self which counters dominant societal norms and foregrounds the self as a political and artistic act, suggesting a kinship in the way the body acts as text within the work of both filmmakers.

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<sup>88</sup> Parsons, *Luminous Presence*, p. 82.

<sup>89</sup> *ibid.*, p. 84.

## Chapter 3 –

### Authorial Presence in Women's Relational Film

The two preceding chapters of this thesis have traced the performance of authorship as counterdiscourse across a range of directors whose marginalised identities – working-class, queer – have shaped the specific conditions under which they have claimed the position of author. Chapter 1 examined the explicitly autobiographical mode of authorial performance in the work of Bill Douglas and Terence Davies, demonstrating how each director used the autobiographical tradition as a means of asserting the legitimacy of a subjectivity that dominant culture had sought to render invisible. Chapter 2 moved into the more oblique and genre-mediated territory of Pasolini and Jarman, tracing how both directors deployed a transhistorical and intermedial mode of authorial self-inscription as a means of performing a queer authorial identity within and against the cultural structures that sought to suppress it. This third and final chapter turns to the dimension of marginalisation that has run as an implicit thread through both preceding chapters – gender - and places it at the explicit centre of the analysis, examining how three women directors - Margaret Tait, Charlotte Wells, and Joanna Hogg – have used their films and their wider creative practice to perform female authorial identities within and against a film culture that has historically been organised around the assumption that the authoritative creative voice is male.

The transition from Chapter 2 to Chapter 3 marks not only a shift in the specific axis of marginalisation under examination but a shift in the mode of authorial performance through which the performance of counterdiscourse is conducted. Where Pasolini and Jarman performed their queer authorial identities through a transhistorical and allegorical engagement with the past – reaching back to medieval literature, Renaissance painting, and the history of Christian martyrdom as a means of constructing a cultural lineage for their queer identities – the directors examined in this chapter are oriented toward the immediate conditions of female creative authority in contemporary life, towards the specific institutional barriers, critical assumptions, and representational conventions that have shaped the conditions under which women filmmakers have claimed and performed their identities as authors within contemporary British cinema, and cinema more widely. This is not to say that their films lack the historical dimension that characterises the work of Pasolini and Jarman – on the contrary, as this chapter will demonstrate, each of the films examined here is deeply concerned with the question of how

the past shapes and inhabits the present, of how the experiences and identities of previous generations continue to exert a determining force on the creative and personal lives of those who come after them. But the historical dimension in these films operates at the level of the personal and the familial rather than the transhistorical and the allegorical: it is the history of the family, the history of the parent/daughter relationship, and the history of women's creative marginalisation that provides the framework within which the performance of female authorial identity is conducted.

The relational mode of authorial performance examined in this chapter takes a specific and formally distinctive form. Each of the three directors examined here has made films centred on the relationship between a daughter and a parent – a mother in the cases of Tait and Hogg, a father in the case of Wells – in which the daughter's search for the identity of the lost or inaccessible parent becomes simultaneously a search for her own authorial identity and a means of performing that identity within and through the medium of film. This daughter-as-searcher structure is not merely a narrative device but an authorial one: by placing a female subject at the centre of a search for the identity of another, each director performs her own authorial identity through the act of artistic inquiry, making the film itself the site at which the relational bond between self and other, between the living and the dead, between the present and the past, is both explored and enacted. The film is not simply a representation of the relational bond but a performance of it – a creative act through which the female filmmaker claims the authority to investigate, and to interpret.

The chapter is organised around three case studies that are presented in chronological order - an ordering that reflects not only the historical development of the relational mode of female authorial performance within British cinema but a progression in the formal sophistication and self-consciousness with which that performance is conducted. The chapter begins with Margaret Tait – the earliest and in many respects the most formally innovative of the three directors – whose work in the 1950s through to the 1990s established the terms within which the relational mode of female authorial performance in British cinema has subsequently been understood. It then moves to Charlotte Wells's *Aftersun* (2022), in which the relational search for the identity of the lost father is conducted through the technological resources of the home movie and the digital archive in ways that extend and transform the formal strategies Tait developed. And it concludes with Joanna Hogg's *The Eternal Daughter* (2022), the most formally self-conscious of the three – a film in which the relational connection to the dying mother is conducted through the conventions of the gothic ghost story in a way that makes the performance of female authorial identity the explicit subject of the film as well as its method.

Together, these three case studies demonstrate that the relational mode of female authorial performance demonstrates a tradition of women filmmakers claiming the right to tell stories of female experience, familial connection, and creative identity in ways that celebrate their agency as authors.

### Relationality – Locating the Self in the Other

The notion of relationality was pioneered by the feminist psychoanalyst Nancy Chodorow in 1978,<sup>1</sup> in which she argued that during childhood boys and girls develop their identities differently due to the fact that women typically act as the primary child carer. For Chodorow, this meant that boys formed their identities in opposition to women, and emerge with closed-off, autonomous selves; girls, in contrast, define themselves in relation to women, and emerge with an identity that is therefore relational. The relationship between parent and child that structures each of my case studies can be understood more fully in this light, approaching it as a way of rethinking the self. This work provides a useful foundation for my approach in this chapter. As Christine Koggel, Ami Harbin and Jennifer Llewellyn explain, relational theory can be set against the “Western liberal accounts of the human being that take the primary unit of analysis to be the individual,”<sup>2</sup> and instead understands people as “necessarily born into and shaped by and acting in and through relationships.”<sup>3</sup> The starting point for much of this work is the notion of the ‘second person’, a term introduced by Annette Baier. Baier argued that a person is best understood as “one who was long enough dependent on others to acquire the essential arts of personhood,” and that “persons essentially are second persons, who grow up with other persons ... Persons come after and before other persons.”<sup>4</sup> What Baier presents as a condition of personhood itself – that the self is formed by, and comes after, others – later theorists have developed into a broader claim, arguing that “relationship and connection with others is essential to the existence of the self” and that “the human self in this view is constituted in and through relationship with others.”<sup>5</sup> The self, in this account, is not the origin from which relationships extend but is instead produced by them, an argument that mirrors, at

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<sup>1</sup> See: Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> Christine M. Koggel, Ami Harbin and Jennifer J. Llewellyn, ‘Feminist Relational Theory’, *Journal of Global Ethics*, 18:1 (2022), 1-14 (p. 1).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Annette Baier, *Postures of the Mind: Essays on Mind and Morals* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), p. 84.

<sup>5</sup> Jocelyn Downie and Jennifer Llewellyn, *Being Relational: Reflections on Relational Theory and Health Law* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012), p. 4.

the level of philosophy, the dismantling of the autonomous individual that autobiography scholars had been carrying out within their own field. It is this understanding of the self as something formed through its relationships with others that I want to carry into my reading of the films.

Through close analysis of my three case studies, I will consider how the notion of relationality can be used as a tool to investigate the interaction between the self of the author and the self that they *project* onto their chosen other. This is an important fact that needs to be understood when approaching relationality within authorial performance: the self of the ‘other’ is a self that is *constructed* by the author, with this construction working to illuminate aspects of their self. This construction, therefore, functions slightly differently from the notion of the “autobiography creating the life” that I have discussed earlier in the thesis since, as I will demonstrate, the self that is projected onto the chosen other will have been formed prior to the act. As Nancy K. Miller asserts, “the challenge that faces autobiographers is to invent themselves despite the weight of their family history, and autobiographical singularity emerges in negotiations with this history.”<sup>6</sup> Family history dominates the narratives of each of the three case studies within this chapter. Each approach the topic from the standpoint of a child’s – in each of the three cases a daughter’s – relationship with a parent. In each film we see a child attempting to understand their own identity through this connection with their chosen other, as well as their position as a woman within the wider culture.

The most developed version of this argument is found in the work on relational autonomy, and in particular in Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar’s work. Mackenzie and Stoljar use ‘relational autonomy’ as an umbrella term for a range of approaches that share the conviction “that persons are socially embedded and that agents’ identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity.”<sup>7</sup> Their target is the same autonomous individual that classical auteur theory takes for granted: the self imagined as “the self-sufficient, rugged male individualist, rational maximizing chooser of libertarian theory.”<sup>8</sup> What is most useful for my analysis, however, is that this work repeatedly models the relational self on the relationship between a mother and a child. Drawing on Nancy Chodorow, Mackenzie and Stoljar note that

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<sup>6</sup> Nancy K. Miller, ‘The Entangled Self: Genre Bondage in the Age of Memoir’, *PMLA*, 122:2 (2007), 537-548 (p. 543).

<sup>7</sup> Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar, ‘Introduction: Autonomy Refigured’, in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency, and the Social Self*, ed. Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 3-31 (p. 4).

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

feminine development “involves identification with the mother and so promotes capacities for connection and interdependence,”<sup>9</sup> and that theorists such as Jennifer Nedelsky have gone on to “argue for a reconceptualization of autonomy modeled on the mother-child relationship.”<sup>10</sup> Virginia Held makes a similar point, locating the self’s “need for recognition and a need to understand the other” in needs that “are created in the context of mother-child interaction.”<sup>11</sup> That the relational self should so often be theorised through the parental bond is significant for a group of films whose authorial voice is constructed precisely through a daughter’s return to a parent. It is important to note, however, that this work does not present the bond as straightforwardly positive. As Koggel, Harbin and Llewellyn make clear, feminist relational theory begins “from a commitment to clearly understanding and representing dynamics of oppression and privilege as structural features of all social relationships,”<sup>12</sup> a reminder that the parent/daughter relationship explored in my case studies is also one through which gendered expectations are passed down and, at times, resisted.

Finally, this philosophical work offers a distinction that is helpful for thinking about the kind of authorial self that emerges in my case studies. Mackenzie and Stoljar distinguish between accounts in which agents are “intrinsically relational because their identities or self-conceptions are constituted by elements of the social context in which they are embedded” and accounts in which they are “causally relational because their natures are produced by certain historical and social conditions,” a distinction they summarise as one between “constitutively (or intrinsically) relational conceptions and causally relational conceptions” of the self.<sup>13</sup> The authorial self that emerges in these films is relational in the stronger, constitutive sense: the daughter’s identity is not merely shaped by her relationship with a parent as one influence among others, but is bound up with that relationship at its core. This is why, as I have suggested, the daughter can author herself only by authoring the parent, and why the self she projects onto that parent is one that the relationship has already formed. Understood in these terms, the relational self is not a limitation placed upon the author but the very ground of her authorship, which is also why feminist relational theorists insist on an understanding of the agent as “emotional, embodied, desiring, creative, and feeling, as well as rational.”<sup>14</sup> Their aim, moreover, is not only to describe such a self but, as Koggel, Harbin and Llewellyn put it, “to

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<sup>9</sup> Mackenzie and Stoljar, ‘Autonomy Refigured’, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Held, *Feminist Morality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), p. 60.

<sup>12</sup> Koggel, Harbin and Llewellyn, ‘Feminist Relational Theory’, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> Mackenzie and Stoljar, ‘Autonomy Refigured’, p. 22.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

transform harmful dimensions of structures and networks of relation,”<sup>15</sup> and it is in this active sense that I understand the performances of authorship examined in this chapter.

This relational self – the self that emerges not as the autonomous individual of classical autobiography but through its bond with a chosen other – bears directly on the question of authorship with which this thesis is concerned. The authorial subject that emerges across the films of this chapter is not the sovereign, self-originating author of classical auteur theory but a self constituted in and through relation and, in particular, through the relation between parent and daughter. If the feminist film criticism I have outlined above worked to dismantle the fantasy of the unitary authorial subject, it did so largely by relocating the question of the author within structures of representation and address; what remains to be specified here is what happens to the performance of authorship when the relation that constitutes the self becomes itself the matter of the work. To speak of a performance of authorship in this context is to describe something other than the inscription of an individual signature upon a body of films. It is to describe a self that can author itself only by authoring another: the daughter who takes up the position of maker does so by turning her attention to the figure of the parent so that the assertion of her own authorial presence becomes inseparable from the recovery of a parental presence. The performance of authorship, here, is thus a relational act before it is an individual one, and it is this relational condition that distinguishes it from the self-expressive gesture with which auteurism has conventionally been identified, and which marked the case studies of my previous chapters. But this also raises an important question on the notion of woman as author.

### Women Directors as Authors

The case studies analysed in this chapter focus on the personal, familial, relationship that has formed an important facet of the directors’ understanding of themselves as authors and as daughters. However, to claim the position of author as a woman filmmaker is a fraught and contested pursuit, and one that has carefully theorised by feminist critics. In this section, I will look at the notion of women directors as authors in film, placing in context the performance of authorship that I will outline in my case studies. One of the primary aspects of approaching female filmic authorship is through the lens of the personal. In her important study of women and autobiography in contemporary European film, Wendy Everett argues that European film

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<sup>15</sup> Koggel, Harbin and Llewellyn, ‘Feminist Relational Theory’, p. 6.

production in the last quarter of the twentieth century has been “dominated by autobiographical discourse, by first-person memory narratives in which personal experiences of the past are articulated as a means of attaining a clearer understanding of the present.”<sup>16</sup> However, Everett goes on to observe that “one of the most fascinating and least studied aspects of this phenomenon is the contribution that has been made by women filmmakers.”<sup>17</sup> Although the number of studies on this topic is increasing, it is still true that analyses of life narrative in films directed by women is still few and far between, and certainly does not show the kind of development that exists in equivalent studies of literary autobiography. As I outlined earlier in this chapter, studies of women’s autobiography increased in the 1980s through the pioneering work of feminist scholars such as Mary G. Mason, who introduced the notion of relationality into the field. From this foundation, feminist literary scholars have seen in autobiography studies an opportunity for discussions around female subjectivity and identity within the context of its suppression within patriarchal society. As Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield outline, “if women have been categorised as ‘objects’ by patriarchal cultures, women’s autobiography gives an opportunity for them to express themselves as ‘subjects,’ with their own selfhood.”<sup>18</sup> Witnessing how women expressed this selfhood within their autobiographical acts also allowed for an investigation into the way in which this selfhood has been formed and developed over the modern era, while also feeding into the feminist notion of gender as performance.<sup>19</sup> This has meant that women’s autobiography has remained at the forefront of studies of the genre, with particular emphasis on its literary form.<sup>20</sup>

Life narrative in women’s film, however, has not had the same emphasis put upon it. Arguably one of the primary reasons for this is the systematic relegation of female directors within the film industry and in subsequent studies of the medium. It has been the assumption that women were denied access to many creative roles within the film industry during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly the position of director. Albeit certainly true, especially during the ‘golden age’ of Hollywood, recent work by feminist scholars has aimed to highlight how, rather than not existing at all, the role of women, especially during film’s early years, has been underappreciated and

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<sup>16</sup> Wendy Everett, ‘Through the I of the camera: Women and autobiography in contemporary European film’, *Studies in European Cinema*, 4:2 (2007), 125-136 (p. 125).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>18</sup> Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield, ‘Introduction’, in *Feminism and Autobiography: Texts, Theories, Methods* eds. Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury and Penny Summerfield (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 1-21 (pp. 5-6).

<sup>19</sup> See: Stanton, *The Female Autograph*; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed bibliography of scholarship on women’s autobiography see: Cosslett, Lury and Summerfield (eds.), *Feminism and Autobiography*.

largely, some would say deliberately, forgotten.<sup>21</sup> Pioneers such as Mabel Normand and Lois Weber during the silent era, and Dorothy Arzner and Ida Lupino during the 1930s and 40s – whose positions within the history of film began to be appreciated through the work of feminist critics starting in the 1970s – demonstrated that female directors played an important role in the history of film.<sup>22</sup> However, even as these forgotten names have been reassessed, and there has been a more concerted effort to embrace women directors within both the industry and academic circles, their position within studies of cinematic life narrative still remains underappreciated.

This systematic relegation is not incidental but bound up with the way the very category of the film author has been gendered. As Terri Murray observes, the scarcity of women directors has meant that the title ‘director’ has itself become “a gendered term, associated with males in the same way that the word ‘surgeon’ or ‘pilot’ or ‘millionaire’ connotes masculinity, although ‘male’ is not part of the definition of any of these terms.”<sup>23</sup> The masculinity of the director is so thoroughly naturalised that it need not be named; only the woman requires the qualifying prefix that marks her as a deviation from an unspoken norm. If authorship in the cinema is coded masculine at the level of its founding assumptions, then for a woman to occupy the position of author is never the neutral assumption of an available role but a claim staked against the grain of the medium’s own conventions. This is precisely why the framework of the performance of authorship is so important to women’s cinematic practice: these directors do not simply become authors, they perform authorship in full awareness that the position has historically been withheld from them.

The understanding of women’s filmmaking as an oppositional practice was first theorised by Claire Johnston’s founding essay ‘Women’s Cinema as Counter-Cinema’. For Johnston, the dominant cinema does not reflect woman but constructs her as a sign within a sexist ideology, so that in a text organised around the female image “the woman as sign ... becomes the pseudo-centre of the filmic discourse,” her otherness repressed in order to secure the man at

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<sup>21</sup> See: Lizzie Francke, *Script Girls: Women Screenwriters in Hollywood* (London: BFI, 1994); Mark Garrett Cooper, *Universal Women: Filmmaking and Institutional Change in Early Hollywood* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Helen O’Hara, *Women vs. Hollywood: The Fall and Rise of Women in Film* (London: Robinson, 2021); Melanie Bell, *Movie Workers: The Women Who Made British Cinema* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2021).

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of these early endeavour by feminist film scholars see: Gwendolyn Audrey Foster, ‘Looking in the Mirror: A Bibliographic Essay on Women Filmmakers’, *Transformations: The Journal of Inclusive Scholarship and Pedagogy*, 6:1 (1995), 39-59.

<sup>23</sup> Terri Murray, ‘Feminist Film Theory: An Introduction’, in *Studying Feminist Film Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), pp. 7–29 (p. 19).

the centre of the frame.<sup>24</sup> The woman's film could not, on this account, content itself with substituting positive images for negative ones, since to do so would leave the underlying language of the cinema intact; rather, "new meaning has to be manufactured within the text of the film."<sup>25</sup> Any effective strategy, Johnston insisted, "must challenge the depiction of reality," so that "the language of the cinema/the depiction of reality must also be interrogated, so that a break between ideology and text is effected."<sup>26</sup> Women's cinema, understood in this way, is not simply a body of films made by women but a counterdiscourse: a strategic intervention into the very signifying practices through which women had been objectified and, in Johnston's terms, rendered absent.

That women's cinema should have to manufacture new meaning against the grain of its own medium points to a difficulty that has attended the feminist theorising of film authorship from the outset. As Catherine Grant observes, the term 'author' – unlike 'writer', 'painter' or 'dramatist' – "raises intrinsic questions about authority and about whether the individual is the source or the effect of that authority,"<sup>27</sup> questions made all the more acute for feminism by the poststructuralist dissolution of the authorial subject that coincided with women's first sustained claims upon it. This is a recognisably poststructuralist predicament: the feminist wish to credit women with authorial agency ran directly counter to the contemporary announcement of the author's death, and much of the theoretical labour of the period consists in the effort to hold the two together. The political necessity of retaining the category was nonetheless widely assumed. As Judith Mayne puts it, "[v]irtually all feminist critics who argue in defence of female authorship as a useful and necessary category assume the political necessity for doing so."<sup>28</sup> Kaja Silverman's insistence that "it is clearly not the same thing, socially or politically, for a woman to speak with a female voice as it is for a man to do so, and vice versa"<sup>29</sup> registered that necessity, yet located the female author largely in a voice detected by the spectator within the libidinal economy of the text. It was Mayne who most decisively widened the terms of enquiry, calling for "an expanded definition of textuality attentive to the complex network of

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<sup>24</sup> Claire Johnston, 'Women's Cinema as Counter-Cinema', in *Feminist Film Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sue Thornham (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp. 31–40 (p. 34).

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>27</sup> Catherine Grant, 'Secret Agents: Feminist Theories of Women's Film Authorship', *Feminist Theory*, 2.1 (2001), 113–130 (p. 114).

<sup>28</sup> Judith Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole: Feminism and Women's Cinema* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 97.

<sup>29</sup> Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 217.

intersections, distances, and resistances of “woman” to “women””,<sup>30</sup> and, in her later study of Dorothy Arzner, reading the director through Judith Butler’s account of gender as “an identity tenuously constituted in time, ... through a stylized repetition of acts.”<sup>31</sup> The effect of this move is to relocate authorship from the interior of the text to the whole field of a director’s self-fashioning, so that feminist criticism, as Grant argues, must “broaden [its] notion of what constitutes a “primary text””, adopting the more rigorous ‘interactional’ and ‘inter-subjective’ methods of analysis that Timothy Corrigan brings to the commerce of contemporary auteurism.<sup>32</sup> Grant is careful to warn that such attention risks colluding with “a much wider commerce in film auteurism ... with increasingly reificatory and commodifying processes,”<sup>33</sup> but it is precisely this expanded and performative conception – in which the author is neither the romantic origin of meaning nor its mere textual effect, but a position performed across films, images and personae – that my account of the performance of authorship takes up.

In the studies of women’s cinematic life narrative that have been made, the focus has been on the way in which women directors used notions of the self and identity to craft an authorial voice that had historically been suppressed both within the film industry and wider society. Following on from feminist literary critics who saw that, due to their position within patriarchal society, women were unable to enunciate an ‘I’ that was defiantly individualistic, feminist critics similarly placed an emphasis on the notion of relationality. Catherine Portuges finds this kind of dismantling of the unified subject in women’s experimental film, such as in the works of Yvonne Rainer and Jackie Raynal with the films *Lives of Performers* (Yvonne Rainer, 1972) and *Deux Fois* (Jackie Raynal, 1969), both of which “challenge the notion of identity itself.”<sup>34</sup> When applied to narrative cinema, Portuges witnesses a similar challenging of the unified subject through the display of familial relationships. Observing how the exemplary examples of cinematic autobiography from male directors often display a narcissistic protagonist whose relationship with women is brought to the fore – she gives Federico Fellini and Woody Allen as her primary examples – Portugese notes that examples from women directors, although arguably equally

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<sup>30</sup> Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole*, p. 98.

<sup>31</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 140, as applied to Arzner in Judith Mayne, *Directed by Dorothy Arzner* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Grant, ‘Secret Agents’, p. 128; see Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema without Walls: Movies and Culture after Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 101–36.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>34</sup> Catherine Portuges, ‘Seeing Subjects: Women Directors and Cinematic Autobiography’ in *Life/Lines: Theorizing Women’s Autobiography* eds. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (Ithaca; London: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 338–350 (p. 340).

narcissistic, seek to subvert this trope. She makes a cogent observation, and one that is important to my analysis of the three case studies in this chapter, when she states:

The women's films, by their very insistence on a multigenerational rendering of autobiographical material and by their tendency to situate the female protagonists in a scenario that highlights links among people rather than the isolated heroine surveying her world suggest a sensibility at once more attuned to and more embedded within a social world than those of their male counterparts.<sup>35</sup>

Each of my three case studies – *Blue Black Permanent* (1992), *The Eternal Daughter* (2022), and *Aftersun* (2022) – demonstrate how this “intergenerational testimonial” mode is a vital mark of women's approaches to the performance of authorship in narrative film, especially in recent times. Although this is of course not reserved to solely women filmmakers, it is marked how these works explore an expansion of the self through relationships to others, particularly through the parent/daughter axis. As Judith Mayne argues, because cinema is marked by a patriarchal domination which embodies “distance from the *female* self” through a “mockery of female authorship,”<sup>36</sup> the cinema “obstructs the writing of female self-representation.”<sup>37</sup> Ultimately, this means that “the difficulty of saying ‘I’ for the woman filmmaker is far greater than for the woman writer.”<sup>38</sup> This turn towards the relational nature of lived experience can therefore be regarded as a notable tendency when considered in the context of female authorship within the cinema and the location of the ‘I’ in women's life narrative. Since both were suppressed by the dominant patriarchal order, women's autobiographical cinema can be regarded as an attempt to both give representation to the historically ‘silent’ woman through the depiction of intergenerational familial relationships, while simultaneously “locating the filmmaker as a speaking, seeing subject.”<sup>39</sup>

If the parent/daughter axis gives these films their characteristic relational form, it also engages one of the most closely policed sites in the patriarchal ordering of the cinema: the figure of the mother. In her account of the classical Hollywood film, E. Ann Kaplan argues that the male gaze, “in defining and dominating woman as erotic object, manages to repress the relations of woman in her place as Mother.”<sup>40</sup> The very films that fetishise the female form, Kaplan notes, thereby expose “the link between male attempts to fetishize woman and the repression of

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<sup>35</sup> Portuges, ‘Seeing Subjects’, p. 342.

<sup>36</sup> Mayne, *The Woman at the Keyhole*, p. 91.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p. 92.

<sup>39</sup> Portuges, ‘Seeing Subjects’, p. 350.

<sup>40</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Women and Film: Both Sides of the Camera* (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 2.

mothering in patriarchy.<sup>41</sup> Patriarchy, on this reading, permits only “the symbolic aspect of Motherhood, which is, in effect, a repression of the aspects that would bind woman to woman were they permitted release,”<sup>42</sup> foreclosing precisely the mother/daughter continuity that Julia Kristeva describes when she writes that, “by giving birth, the woman enters into contact with her mother; she becomes, she is her own mother.”<sup>43</sup> The maternal is thereby consigned to “silence, absence, and marginality,”<sup>44</sup> the very condition in which the woman author’s own predicament has been cast. This silencing of the mother, in contrast to how this was handled by the figure of Pasolini, is a theme I will expand in my analysis of *The Eternal Daughter* in this chapter. That the mother and the woman author should be relegated in the same terms is not a coincidence: both name a subjectivity that patriarchal representation must keep from speaking on its own behalf. Yet Kaplan locates in this same figure a resource for resistance. Because the Mother “has not been totally appropriated by dominant culture’, she ‘offers a possible way to break through patriarchal discourses.’”<sup>45</sup> This notion can be seen to be embraced by Margaret Tait in *Blue Black Permanent*. The feminist avant-garde had already sought to speak from this position, as in Mulvey and Wollen’s *Riddles of the Sphinx*, which Kaplan reads as situating “the film in the mother’s consciousness and language, looking from her position.”<sup>46</sup> The intergenerational testimonial mode of my case studies can be understood as an appropriation of exactly this. In returning to the mother – in *Blue Black Permanent* and *The Eternal Daughter* – these films reclaim a bond that the classical cinema had laboured to repress, converting the maternal from an object of the gaze into a ground of authorial speech. The impulse is already legible in the European feminist tradition Kaplan surveys, from Marguerite Duras’s *Nathalie Granger*, which she reads as “an effort to subvert the patriarchal, symbolic construction of mothering,”<sup>47</sup> to Chantal Akerman’s durational cinema of the domestic interior; my case studies carry it into the register of life narrative, where the recovery of the maternal relation becomes inseparable from the filmmaker’s own claim to say ‘I’.

If reclaiming the maternal bond is one axis of this authorial project, the reclamation of the look is another, and the two converge in the recent work of Andrea Arnold. Terri Murray reads Arnold’s

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<sup>41</sup> Kaplan, *Women and Film*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>43</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Motherhood According to Bellini’, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez, in Leon S. Roudiez (ed.) *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), p. 239.

<sup>44</sup> Kaplan, *Women and Film*, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 8–9.

*Red Road* (2006) as a film in which the director “very self-consciously reverses the male gaze,”<sup>48</sup> narrating events so completely through its surveillance-operator protagonist that the man she pursues becomes “a pure object of a female gaze’ and ‘all three of Mulvey’s cinematic “looks” are constructed as female.”<sup>49</sup> Arnold makes that protagonist a figure for her own authorial activity: in operating the cameras that determine what is seen, and for how long, “Jackie is a metaphor for Andrea Arnold (the film director).”<sup>50</sup> Here the reversal of the gaze and the assumption of authorship are a single gesture – the woman behind the apparatus reclaiming the very look through which the classical cinema had constituted her as image. The point is not that a female author guarantees a female gaze, but that Arnold makes the organisation of looking itself the object of her authorial signature. Her *Fish Tank* (2009) folds this reversal back into the maternal terrain that concerns me, aligning the spectator with the adolescent Mia against the “dysfunctional, abusive relationship”<sup>51</sup> she shares with her mother, so that the mother/daughter bond is refracted through a gaze that is emphatically the daughter’s own. Working within a resolutely working-class milieu and a realist idiom, Arnold is by these means “quickly establishing herself as an auteur director;”<sup>52</sup> her example – like the reversed, child’s-eye configurations of my own case studies – suggests that the performance of authorship in women’s cinema is enacted not only in the choice of relational, intergenerational material but in the seizure of the look itself: a point to which Wendy Everett’s account of the female autobiographical filmmaker continues.

Following on from the work of Portuges, Wendy Everett, in her study of women’s autobiography in contemporary European film, similarly regards women’s cinematic life narrative as a political act of enunciation against the dominant patriarchal force. As she makes clear, moving out of the repressive domestic sphere through the act of “exchanging needle for camera,” enables the female filmmaker to “assert herself as subject rather than object of the gaze, to seize control, to find her own voice and create her own images.”<sup>53</sup> However, this does not mean that the domestic space, despite its apparent position as the barren ground for women’s creativity, was vilified by female filmmakers. Instead, this was brought onto the screen as an attempt to reframe the classical Hollywood formulation of male led action – the most famous example being Chantal Akerman’s *Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). This

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<sup>48</sup> Terri Murray, ‘Exploring the “Male Gaze”’, in *Studying Feminist Film Theory* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), pp. 31–44 (p. 39).

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p. 43.

<sup>53</sup> Everett, ‘Through the I of the camera’, p. 126.

move towards traditional 'feminine' settings, and the activities contained within, demonstrates the way in which feminist film practice contains within it a sense of the personal, and a certain framing of experience which is connected to a specific authorial voice. Everett, corroborating Portuges's view, also sees that women's autobiographical cinema demonstrates an "articulation of a multiple and fragmented subject," while also revealing "a good deal about the fluid female subjectivity and the flexibility of the autobiographical medium to express it."<sup>54</sup>

To frame women's autobiographical cinema, and its authorial performance, in these terms is to recognise that what is at stake is not simply representation but self-representation, and here Teresa de Lauretis's account of cinema as a "technology of gender" is instructive. For de Lauretis, gender is not a property of bodies but a construction which, "both as representation and as self-representation, is the product of various social technologies, such as cinema."<sup>55</sup> If the cinema is one of the apparatuses through which gender is produced – such that "the construction of gender is both the product and the process of its representation"<sup>56</sup> – then it is also a site at which the terms of that construction can be contested and rewritten. The woman filmmaker who turns this technology towards the articulation of her own experience does not step outside representation into some unmediated authenticity; she works, rather, within and against the very apparatus that has historically constructed 'Woman' as image, in order to fashion a gendered subject on her own terms. Self-representation, in this sense, is inseparable from the performance of authorship, and it answers directly to the difficulty of saying "I" that Mayne identifies as the woman filmmaker's particular predicament.

De Lauretis's crucial reformulation is that women's cinema is best understood not as a cinema made by women who portray women "positively or negatively," but as one that may "address the spectator as female" – a cinema for, not only by, women.<sup>57</sup> Its project, she argues, is "no longer that of destroying or disrupting man-centered vision by representing its blind spots"; rather, "the effort and challenge now are how to effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject."<sup>58</sup> Drawing explicitly on Johnston's "non-formalist view of women's cinema as counter-cinema," de Lauretis insists that feminist practice should "reclaim, rather than shun, the use of

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<sup>54</sup> Everett, 'Through the I of the camera', p. 131.

<sup>55</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, 'The Technology of Gender', in *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 1–30 (p. 2).

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Teresa de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 135.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid.*, p. 135.

film as a form of mass culture,”<sup>59</sup> shifting the emphasis from “images of” women “to the axis of vision itself – to the modes of organizing vision and hearing which result in the production of that ‘image’.”<sup>60</sup>

It is in this sense that the performance of authorship in women’s cinema can be understood as an act of enunciation in the fullest sense: not the mere insertion of a female presence before or behind the camera, but the construction of a place from which a differently gendered subject might speak and see. Such a subject, de Lauretis suggests, is en-gendered “elsewhere” – in the interstices and margins of dominant discourse, in the “chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus.”<sup>61</sup> It is precisely this elsewhere that my three case studies stake out: through their relational, intergenerational narratives they do not merely picture women but fashion an authorial ‘I’, that the patriarchal order of the cinema had rendered unspeakable. In tackling my three case studies in this chapter, I will also interrogate how this “articulation of a multiple and fragmented subject” is achieved through a relational approach to life narrative, while also questioning whether relationality is marked by a desire to return to a self that is in fact stable and unified, and what kind of authorial voice this provides.

### New (Relational) Realism?

Before turning to the close readings of the three case studies, it is necessary to situate them within the specific institutional and formal context of contemporary British cinema within which their authorial performances have been conducted. Having shaped my first two chapters around an effort to outline the development of authorial performance during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, I am now looking to bring this analysis to the present day. In doing so, I want to ensure that this dialogue of development is continued, making a clear connection between the approaches to authorial performance evident in recent examples of the form and the films that came before it. For this reason, I have chosen three case studies that straddle the divide between the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Alongside this, the three case studies also share a direct connection to each other, whether it’s through one influencing the other, or their positions as examples of modern British art cinema. Taking up this last point, it is particularly their positions in relation to David Forrest’s term of new realism that warrants close consideration. Forrest utilises the term “new realism” to describe the contemporary approach to the social realist tradition of British cinema.

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<sup>59</sup> de Lauretis, *Technologies of Gender*, p. 135.

<sup>60</sup> *ibid.*, p. 136.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*, pp. 25–26.

To demonstrate this new approach, he examines the work of five filmmakers active in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Joanna Hogg (who is the focus of one of my case studies), Duane Hopkins, Andrea Arnold, Shane Meadows and Clio Barnard. What he views as being consistent across their work is “a commitment to rendering depictions of the familiar and the tangible in ways that are best described as realistic, or, indeed, realist.”<sup>62</sup> Yet, they transcend the traditional approach to the realist form by introducing a strand of “everyday poetics” into the narrative, meaning “they are bound too by a meticulous, rhythmic poeticism, inculcated through recurring motifs of quotidian sound and imagery, constructing a mode of realism which we might understand as both image-led and attendant to the aural and to the other forms of sensory engagement.”<sup>63</sup> This relationship between image and sound, and the way this is linked to issues of space, place, and identity, is something that is vital to my analysis in this chapter, and suggests that the films I will analyse not only fall comfortably into Forrest’s remit, but expand on this form to create what I would tentatively call new relational realism: a mode of filmmaking that combines the formal strategies of new realism – its everyday poetics, its image-led sensibility, its attention to the textures of domestic and personal experience – with the relational mode of authorial performance described in the preceding sections, producing films in which the performance of female authorial identity is conducted through the formal resources of a realist tradition that is simultaneously inhabited and transformed from within. Interestingly, Forrest also states that new realism is marked by “directors frequently drawing on their personal biographies as stimuli,”<sup>64</sup> again demonstrating that my case studies fit comfortably into this lineage. Furthermore, for the women directors examined in this chapter, the autobiographical dimension of new realism is not merely a formal or thematic feature of their films but a political act, a means of asserting the legitimacy of personal female experience as a subject for serious artistic investigation within a tradition – social realism – that has historically been dominated by male directors telling male stories.

The emphasis on lineage and development that I wish to advance in this chapter means that I am beginning with an analysis of the work of Margaret Tait. This is because not only is Tait a direct influence on the two later directors I will study in this chapter – Joanna Hogg and Charlotte Wells (as well as many of the other directors of new realism) – but she also provides a link back to the European Art Cinema tradition that was the focus of my previous chapters. For my analysis of Tait’s work I will pay particular attention to her sole feature film *Blue Black*

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<sup>62</sup> David Forrest, *New Realism: Contemporary British Cinema* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), p. 1.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p. 2.

*Permanent* (1992), focusing on its expansion of relational bonds to encompass not only familial ties but also an individual's connection to landscape, both of which are combined within a daughter's search for her mother's identity. However, I have chosen to begin my study of Tait's feature film by accompanying it with a study of one of her earlier short films, *A Portrait of Ga*, from 1955. Since this is a single-person-produced filmic portrait of Tait's own mother, I will use the analysis of this work to question how Tait plays with the notion of film as a representational medium. In doing so, I will demonstrate how Tait enacts a similar search to "find" her mother, performing an act of authorship that simultaneously frames her mother's position as a female authorial voice. ... Starting with an analysis of this short film will also foreground Tait as a female creative who struggled to be accepted into the industry during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, being left to make independent short films such as *A Portrait of Ga* using leftover or recycled filmstock. Following this analysis, I will undertake a detailed study of *Blue Black Permanent*, exploring how narrative cinema negates the opportunity for an active engagement with the representation of the chosen other as was capable in *A Portrait of Ga*. I will then show how Tait, in understanding these limitations, switches the focus to depicting the intricacies of this search, rather than engaging with it herself. This will be framed within an exploration of Tait's approach to the notion of intergenerational relationality and its links to the cyclical nature of time.

After outlining how the search for a unified self in a chosen other can be approached in the medium of film through my study of *Blue Black Permanent*, I will then move on to study how Tait's approach has been developed in two recent films by British female directors. The first will be *Aftersun* (2022), directed by Scottish filmmaker Charlotte Wells. This story of a father and daughter's relationship as played out through time spent together on holiday, tackles notions of familial regret and an inability – particularly for men – to express or show emotional vulnerability. Framed around the daughter's memory of the time spent with her father, the film questions what occurs when the self of your significant 'other' is inaccessible due to this emotional denial. The film includes direct references to Tait's work – a copy of the Tait anthology *Poems, Stories and Writings* being clearly visible during one scene – with Wells taking a similarly poetic approach to the use of sound and image. Following on from this, I will explore a similar parent and daughter relationship through an analysis of *The Eternal Daughter* (2022), directed by Joanna Hogg. This film similarly tackles notions of emotional denial, this time focusing on a daughter's inability to let go of the memory of her mother. Exploring how creative expression can help to temper this loss of connection that comes as a result of the death of a parent, the film also utilises the form of the ghost story to allow for an exploration of how memory can 'haunt' the living during the process of mourning.

### Margaret Tait – Portrait as Self-Portrait in *A Portrait of Ga*

Margaret Tait was born in Kirkwall, Orkney in 1918. The daughter of a successful merchant family, J&W Tait, this inherited wealth would contribute greatly to Tait's ability to remain an independent artist throughout her lifetime. She was sent for schooling in Edinburgh at the age of eight and it was these two locations, Edinburgh and Orkney, that would provide the backdrop – and sometimes the focus – of all her short films and her single feature film. She studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh before joining the Royal Army Medical Corps, serving in India, Sri Lanka, and Malaya between 1943 and 1946. Following this service, she travelled around Europe and spent time in London, Paris and various areas of Italy. In 1950, having already developed an interest in photography, she enrolled at the Centro Sperimentale di Cinematografia in Rome to study filmmaking. After completing her studies in 1952, she moved back to Scotland and established Ancona Films with Peter Hollander and Fernando Birri, two of her fellow students from the Centro Sperimentale. The main headquarters for Ancona Films was 91 Rose Street in Edinburgh, with Tait living in the capital until 1968 when she moved back to Orkney. During her time living in Edinburgh during the 1950s and 60s Tait was not only producing independent films but also writing poetry and painting – a multi-disciplinary creative practice constitutes the intermedial context within which her films' authorial performances need to be understood, and that establishes her, from the outset, as a filmmaker whose identity as an author is constructed not within any single medium but across the full range of her creative and public life.. Tait remained in Orkney until her death in 1999, and her archive now resides in her hometown of Kirkwall.<sup>65</sup>

The majority of scholarship around Tait has up to this point focused on her position as a marginalised woman filmmaker during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, with this work being an attempt to understand and counteract the relative lack of appreciation that her films have received within both academic and popular film circles. It is this institutional context of Tait's filmmaking career that provides the most direct illustration of the gendered structures of power that denied her agency as an author, providing a foundation for her work as examples of counterdiscourse. The current scholarship has re-evaluated her position within British film history. Not only was she the first female feature film director from Scotland, but she was also one of Britain's leading avant-garde filmmakers during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as well as one of the first. She has been

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<sup>65</sup> For a comprehensive biography of Tait's life and career see: Sarah Neely, *Between Categories: The Films of Margaret Tait – Portraits, Poetry, Sound and Place* (Oxford; Bern: Peter Lang, 2017).

described as “Britain’s oldest experimentalist,”<sup>66</sup> with her earliest short films pre-dating the London Filmmaker’s Co-operative by almost twenty years. Yet, her name remained on the periphery of discussions of 20<sup>th</sup> century British film, experimental or otherwise. The vital reassessment of Tait’s position within British film history began with the work of Peter Todd and Benjamin Cook,<sup>67</sup> and culminated in Sarah Neely’s 2017 book *Between Categories: The Films of Margaret Tait – Portraits, Poetry, Sound and Place*. Off the back of these studies, a range of celebrations were organised to mark Tait’s centenary in 2018, including a retrospective of her films at the BFI. As a result, Tait’s work now holds an important position within the Scottish film industry, with the awarding of the Margaret Tait Award – an annual moving image prize awarded to Scottish or Scotland-based filmmakers – being a significant date on the Scottish film calendar.

This earlier reluctance from the wider industry to embrace her work was certainly influenced by the context of post-war Scottish film. As Neely states, “what Tait encountered on her return to Scotland... was an industry led by the successes of the documentary movement under the formidable John Grierson,”<sup>68</sup> who led the reestablishment of the Films of Scotland Committee. The Committee “held the express remit to encourage the production of films of ‘national interest.’”<sup>69</sup> Tait would never receive the full backing of Grierson, whose occasional praise of her “artistic” films never led to any kind of commission or funding. Grierson’s opinion is clear when looking at his assessment of Tait’s film portrait of the poet Hugh MacDiarmid, which he described as “unsuitable for broadcast.”<sup>70</sup> It is also important to note that although Grierson did at one time offer Tait some work, it was only if “she was prepared to work according to his rules.”<sup>71</sup> As Neely outlines, according to Tait’s notebooks, Grierson made it clear that “if she did not conform to his methods... she would never survive as a filmmaker in Scotland.”<sup>72</sup> This made funding for her films difficult, and led to all her short films being self-funded, with the exception of *A Drift Back* (1956) which was assisted by the Orkney Education Committee and Rural Cinema. If it was not for her continued work as a general practitioner during this period, and the fact she was born into a wealthy merchant family, then it is unlikely she would have had enough funds to make any films. Although she was undoubtedly an experimentalist from the beginning, her avant-garde independence was as much a result of this dismissal as it was any desire to

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<sup>66</sup> David Curtis, ‘Britain’s Oldest Experimentalist... Margaret Tait’, *Vertigo*, 1:9 (1999), n.p.

<sup>67</sup> See: Peter Todd and Benjamin Cook, *Subjects and Sequences: A Margaret Tait Reader* (London: Lux, 2005).

<sup>68</sup> Neely, *Between Categories*, p. 17.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>70</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>71</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

remain outside of the mainstream film industry. It also demonstrates how, rather than accepting the terms on which the British documentary tradition offered women a conditional and subordinate place within its institutional structure, Tait continued to make films in the manner with which she felt was most expressive of her authorial agency, with this institutional independence itself being a performance of female authorial identity. My study of *Blue Black Permanent* will look to continue this existing reassessment of Tait's work through placing it within the wider context of women's cinematic life narrative. However, I will begin my study of Tait's work of authorial performance with an analysis of her early short film *A Portrait of Ga* from 1955. This provides a foundation to my argument that relational mode of authorial performance is centred around the resurrection of the authorial position that is located within the endeavour.. This will then be developed in my analysis of Tait's subsequent feature film.

*A Portrait of Ga* displays the relational nature of lived experience through its depiction of intergenerational familial bonds, represented by the connection between the female line of Tait's family. At the centre of the film, and the only person depicted within it, is Tait's mother. This choice to depict the maternal image begins to demonstrate the counterdiscursive nature of Tait's filmic practice. Since patriarchal culture is, in E. Ann Kaplan's formulation, "not monolithic, not cleanly sealed," motherhood can become a place "to start rethinking sex difference, not an end."<sup>73</sup> Yet, Tait expands this depiction beyond the direct mother/daughter relationship. Because of its title – it is a singular *portrait* of Ga – analyses of the film have focused on how Tait depicts her elderly mother, placing it within studies of the 'portrait' form within the visual arts. However, I would argue that there are actually *three* subjects to this filmic portrait and, furthermore, that these three subjects each exist on separate levels of representation. This melding of separate subjects, ranging from, as Neely outlines, "intimate meditations on loved ones to what might be seen as more iconic subjects,"<sup>74</sup> within a single relational work is something that would remain a marker of Tait's work throughout her career, and is also central to the execution of *Blue Black Permanent*.

When I refer to 'levels of representation' I mean the separation between the visual, the aural, and the linguistic. In understanding that *A Portrait of Ga* has three subjects, the film transforms from a simple portrait of a mother, into a meditation on intergenerational experience and relational connection. Tait's mother, who as I mentioned earlier is traditionally regarded as the primary subject of the film, is represented visually – it is her physical presence that takes up

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<sup>73</sup> Kaplan, *Women and Film*, p. 201-202.

<sup>74</sup> Neely, *Between Categories*, p. 54.

almost the entirety of the four-minute film. However, alongside this visual representation of her mother we also have an aural representation of Tait herself, since it is her voice that we hear on the narration that accompanies the images. Since the 16mm filmstock that Tait used would have had no audio track, it is also important to note that this voiceover narration was constructed after the images had been recorded, with none of it being live sound. Tait is also always behind the camera, controlling everything that is seen. Therefore, this means that although we see Tait's mother, we do not hear her; and likewise, although we hear Tait, we never see her. This makes the representation of Tait's mother *purely* visual and the representation of Tait *purely* aural. The third subject of the film, and the subject who is represented *purely* linguistically, is Tait's grandmother. This subject is not seen or heard, only spoken of and described.

It is the moment when Tait's grandmother is introduced as a subject that the apparent singular nature of the film's title starts to become complicated – with *A Portrait of Ga* beginning to slip into *A Portrait of Ga's*. About one minute into the film, as the camera holds on Tait's mother smoking a cigarette, Tait's voiceover recites: "it's her grandchildren who call her Ga; and I suppose I called her mother Ga. But I only dimly remember that grandmother, my mother's mother. An old lady quietly dressed in black." In understanding that there are actually *three* subjects to this filmic portrait, it opens up the need to reassess the way in which representation is executed within the film, while also highlighting the unique way the filmic medium can be used to embody relational bonds. I will demonstrate this by comparing the representations of Tait's mother and grandmother – the two Ga's.

It is with the two subjects of the mother and grandmother that Tait is looking outward in a relational sense – these are her chosen others within this particular act of authorial performance. As I have argued, these two subjects are represented in two contrasting ways: one visually and one linguistically. In doing so, Tait highlights the way in which image and text differ in their ability to represent. If we understand relationality as an endeavour that is marked by the desire to project the illusion of a unified self onto the chosen other, then, what we see in *A Portrait of Ga* is Tait understanding the limits that are present when that other is distant or obscured versus the certainties that are available when that other is close and clear.

Tait is aware that she is unable to sufficiently project a unified self onto her grandmother because, as she admits in the narration, she only "dimly remembers" her. The transitory and uncertain nature of memory means she is only left with a partial image – a partial self – from which she can create a representation. All she can do is describe her, through language, as "an

old lady quietly dressed in black.” Since she is only a dimly remembered subject, it can be presumed that her grandmother is no longer alive to be filmed. This also suggests that there is no memory of her grandmother that is sufficient to project a unified self onto. Her grandmother is, therefore, relegated to only the linguistic level of representation. I say ‘relegated’ because linguistic representation is never certain. The arbitrary nature of language – a description of “an old lady quietly dressed in black” will conjure up a different image for each person who hears it – exemplifies Tait’s relationship to her grandmother: one that is distant and transitory.

In contrast, rather than being elusive, Tait’s mother is depicted in the film as a self that is known and close to Tait. In representing her visually, Tait is able to highlight her mother’s ‘truth.’ Importantly, especially when thinking in a relational sense, this is a truth that exists from Tait’s perspective. Since we cannot hear her mother, she focuses the camera on her mother’s actions, with a particular emphasis on her hands. These actions include the way she drinks a cup of tea, the way she smokes a cigarette, the way she cares for her garden, or the way she opens a boiled sweet. Alongside this, there is also an emphasis on the material her mother wears. The tightly woven and highly patterned materials, particularly her scarf and jacket that are worn in numerous shots, are often framed in close-up, cutting off the face of her mother. Although Neely reads this approach as a deliberate obfuscation and splintering of the representation of her mother, since certain shots often leave her face partially obscured,<sup>75</sup> I would argue that this instead works to further unify the self of the subject. As Barthes posits in *Camera Lucida*, it is not just the physical likeness that can be used to “find” the truth of your chosen other, but also the objects and actions one associates with that person. For Barthes and his mother it was “the objects she kept on her dressing table, an ivory powder box (I loved the sound of its lid).”<sup>76</sup> Similarly, the distinctive clothing connects her mother’s identity to the island of Orkney, with the thick material providing protection against the island’s winds. Both actions and clothing are aspects which can only be truly represented visually, they are aspects that are intrinsically linked to the character of that one individual. They contain the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of a subject and, therefore, require certainty in their representation. This is a factor that Tait fully understood. Neely expands on this point further when she explains:

the camera’s tendency to linger on details such as Ga unwrapping a boiled sweet imbues the gestures with an importance generally linked to feelings of intimacy and

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<sup>75</sup> Neely, *Between Categories*, p. 72: “Tait’s approach in *A Portrait of Ga* emphasises her subject’s elusiveness rather than the certainty of representation.”

<sup>76</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: A Note on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 72.

familiarity, casting small everyday moments on a great emotional scale... they are gestures that, for someone who knows the subject intimately, will know through their repetition, that they provide something that captures an ineffable quality of who they are as a person.<sup>77</sup>



Fig. 17. Tait's mother carefully opens a boiled sweet in *A Portrait of Ga* (1952)

Furthermore, when reading Barthes' *Mourning Diary*, a selection of his diaries written immediately after his mother's death, but not published until 2010, Neil Badmington made the pertinent observation that "the *punctum saliens* [the starting point] of the *punctum* lies in film, not in photography. Its heart first flickers upon a screen, in images that move."<sup>78</sup> This is based on comments Barthes makes in his diary in which he observes that "all of her leaped before my eyes"<sup>79</sup> after seeing a certain detail of the décor in a film. In Badmington's view, Barthes had

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<sup>77</sup> Neely, *Between Categories*, pp. 67-68.

<sup>78</sup> Neil Badmington, 'Punctum Saliens: Barthes, Mourning, Film, Photography', *Paragraph: A Journal of Modern Critical Theory*, 35:3 (2012), 303-319 (p. 307).

<sup>79</sup> Roland Barthes, *Mourning Diary*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), p. 125.

such a reaction because “the enigmatic reserve of writing is lost.”<sup>80</sup> Similarly, Tait utilises the referential nature of the filmic image to exemplify her formulation of her mother’s self, illustrating the relational bond they have. Far from being elusive, *A Portrait of Ga* emphasises the certainty of the visual through its depiction of Tait’s mother, demonstrating how the relational mode is defined by its reclaiming of the unified and stable self. Tait, as author, does not leave the film as a simple portrait of her mother, however, but places this connection within the wider context of the intergenerational female bonds that connect her family. Despite not being able to represent her grandmother with the kind of certainty that she can for her mother, the inclusion of her as a subject places Tait herself within the context of this lineage – while also looking forward to the future generations that see her mother as their grandmother. This emphasises the plurivocality that is embedded within the name ‘Ga’ in a manner which transcends generations. *A Portrait of Ga* is able to depict this aspect of relationality because of film’s ability to combine three separate planes of representation.

#### Searching for the Self in *Blue Black Permanent*

Having foregrounded Tait’s approach to representing the chosen other in her experimental filmic portraits, I will now turn to an analysis of how this topic of relationality is executed in her sole feature film *Blue Black Permanent*. Afforded the opportunity to direct a feature film – she was the first Scottish woman to do so – allowed Tait to broaden her approach to the way in which she intermingles the different subjects and perspectives of her intergenerational narrative. Being a narrative feature film, *Blue Black Permanent* lacks the kind of direct representation that she employed in *A Portrait of Ga* and her other single-person-produced work – neither Tait’s likeness or voice feature in the film and she does not use a particular family member as a subject. Instead of direct representation, Tait tackles the topic of relational bonds through the depiction of a daughter’s desire to find the ‘essence’ of her dead mother, hoping it will help to provide some perspective to the formation of her own sense of self. This search is played across three different generations of the same family, all of which have identities that are formed by the boundary between land and sea.

The narrative is framed predominantly by Barbara’s (Celia Imrie) desire to find answers to the reasons why her mother drowned in the sea off the Orkney coastline when Barbara was only a child. This search is framed predominantly through discussions with her partner Philip (Jack

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<sup>80</sup> Badmington, ‘Punctum Saliens’, p. 308.

Shepherd), who at times seems oblivious to the emotional hardship Barbara is going through. This first timeline, set in Edinburgh during the 1990s, is interspersed with a second timeline that shows Greta (Gerda Stevenson), Barbara's mother, as an adult and mother to three young children. As this timeline progresses it is clear that Greta is experiencing emotional turmoil, seemingly unhappy in her domestic life in Edinburgh and being constantly drawn back to the Orkney coast of her childhood. This aspect of being torn between land and sea ultimately leads to her tragic death. Whether it was an accident or suicide forms part of Barbara's search for closure. A third brief timeline is also included in the narrative that depicts Greta as a child living on Orkney with her parents and brother. This timeline provides the further revelation that Greta's mother – Barbara's grandmother – also drowned in the sea off Orkney, having been swept off the rocks after getting too close to the waves. This mirroring of familial tragedy adds a further layer to Barbara's search and reinforces the family's connection to the Scottish landscape.

The relationship between land and sea, and the connection these landscapes have to the formation of the self, is an aspect that runs through the centre of *Blue Black Permanent*, acting as the spine that holds the three timelines together. This juxtaposition between land and sea is emphasised from the opening moments of the film, where shots of the Orkney coastline are contrasted with shots of the Edinburgh rooftops. This opening not only works to introduce the two main settings of the film, but also highlights the contrast between land and sea – the fluid shapes of beach, sea, and stone vs. the structured and angular city architecture – that marks the identity and relationship between Barbara and Greta. It is in this way that the relational can be seen to work on two levels within the film: the intergenerational connection between mother and daughter, and the symbiotic relationship between identity and landscape. Tait does not present these as two separate relational bonds, however, but instead intermingles these connections in a way that emphasises some of the film's key concerns, notably: the repetitive and cyclical nature of time, and the illusory nature of the unified self.



Fig. 18. The contrast between the city and the sea is at the heart of Greta's (Gerda Stevenson) sense of self in *Blue Black Permanent* (1992)

Barbara's search acts as the central framing device of the narrative, with the film itself being presented as an act of memory work, the images springing forth from a series of remembrances. The narration, as spoken by Barbara, makes this explicit. In one scene, when Greta is shown travelling on a boat to Orkney to see her elderly father who is unwell, Barbara's voice is heard on the soundtrack saying: "I remember it all, exactly as she told me it." This gives the film the illusion of a flashback form, with the story always returning to the 'present' of Barbara's conversation with Philip. However, the film constantly shifts this potential reading, with Greta's voice also being heard on the soundtrack, acting as a witness to both past and future. There is also a literal witness between the two generations in the figure of Andrew (Sean Scanlan), an Edinburgh artist who is friends with both Greta and the adult Barbara. He is the only physical link, outside of landscape, between the two timelines, with Barbara's father and siblings being absent from the later segments. Andrew observes both of their uncertainties around identity – both familial and creative – while also acting as a physical contrast through his position as a *male* artist. Since *Blue Black Permanent* also tackles questions of female creative identity, Andrew stands as a consistent reminder of the artistic ambition that is withheld from both Greta and Barbara.

Although it is the inter-generational familial connections that underpin Barbara's investigations into her mother's identity, landscape also plays a crucial part in this understanding. During Greta's timeline, it is the landscape – particularly the sea – which is at the forefront of identity formation, with Greta being explicit about her relational connection to it. This is brought to the fore when Greta returns to Orkney to care for her father, a return which brings with it a sense of belonging and calm that is lacking when in Edinburgh. As she walks along the Orkney cliff-tops looking out to sea, she spots a flower on the cliff that she recognises from her childhood. Through Greta's narration we learn that this flower only grows on these Orkney cliff-tops, with any attempt to move it always unsuccessful. This symbiotic relationship between life and landscape is mirrored in Greta, who states towards the beginning of the film that "I lost something when I left home." Yet, this moment when she finds kinship in the native flower, which relies so heavily on its relationship to its setting, is also the moment when she is reminded of her mother's death from drowning. This memory, sparked by the return to the landscape where the tragedy occurred, complicates Greta's relationship to the sea, while simultaneously providing a through line to Barbara's attempts to reconcile familial trauma.

During this search, Barbara rarely turns to traditional means of familial reminiscence, such as photographs of the home movie. However, intriguingly Barbara is a professional photographer herself. Because of this, it can be argued that she does not turn to photographs because she is

sceptical of the artifice that she is all too familiar with in the medium. This is clear when she is shown at work towards the end of the film, taking portraits of Andrew – the physical connection between past and present – for his upcoming retrospective. During this sequence, the artificial nature of photographic ‘portraits’ is brought to the fore. Barbara implores that Andrew wears his artist’s smock, which contains the memories of “paintings past.” He reluctantly agrees. In a later shot, Andrew is shown holding a light reflector to ensure the perfect ‘atmosphere’ for the shot. Being dissatisfied with the results, she asks him to switch the reflector over from the silver side to the gold. All this demonstrates that Barbara would know not to be fooled by a photograph’s apparent rendering of ‘reality.’ She wouldn’t be able to find her mother there.

Barbara doesn’t look to the indexical images for her search but instead turns to her family’s connection to the sea – which contrasts with her own personal connection to the land – as well as her mother’s poems, which speak to this coastal connection. Although Barbara has access to a poem of her mother’s, one of the only ones that has survived the passing of time, her mind always seems drawn to the ones she’ll never get to read. The loss of Greta’s poetry over time also speaks of the dismissal of women artists through the 20th century – an aspect that Tait was very familiar with – which led to work being neglected and forgotten. This is contrasted to the figure of Andrew who, when he is reintroduced in the modern-day timeline, is preparing for a career retrospective in an Edinburgh art gallery. This notion of an opportunity lost, and a creative output lost, is emphasised in the moment when the young Barbara is led into her mother’s writing room after her death. The tranquillity of the space contrasts starkly with the tragedy that has just occurred – it is setup and ready for Greta to return to her writing – with the camera focusing on a pile of notebooks laid on the table. These are presumably filled with Greta’s poems. The young Barbara sees these notebooks but does not say anything to her father. As they leave the house the notebooks are left too. She had the opportunity to pick up the notebooks, to have a glimpse at a side of her mother she never got to know and the opportunity to give new life to her mother’s creative output. But the notebooks are left, and she is instead left with unanswered questions about not only her mother’s identity but also her own. It is these questions that drive Barbara throughout the film.



Fig. 19. Greta's desk following her death at the end of *Blue Black Permanent*.

Greta's connection to the sea and her identity as a poet is complicated by her existence as a mother. In a way, the mutual existence of her identity as an artist and mother is mirrored by the depiction of land and sea within the film. Greta states that she needs her domestic life to "keep her feet on the ground," providing stability to her "wild" creative force – the same force that would lead her out into Edinburgh storms and eventually the Orcadian sea. The solid footing of motherhood is both a foundation and a hinderance to Greta's creativity, highlighting the duality facing many women who enter into an artistic – or any – career. This is a choice not faced in the same way by men – an aspect made clear by the fact that Greta is speaking to Andrew about the relationship between these two sides of herself. In being "torn between languages," Greta presents a non-unified self that is at odds with Barbara's search as well as her own identity. Barbara places herself in contrast to her mother's identity, as she views it, when she says that "I'm my father's daughter, land's woman." This distancing from her mother can be seen as an attempt to absolve her inability to find the 'essence' of her mother that is at the heart of her search. Yet, as is evident through Greta's timeline, distilling her mother's identity into a single form is reductive, with Barbara needing to understand her mother as someone who was "torn between languages."

### *Aftersun* – Locating the Past Within the Present

Charlotte Wells occupies a distinctive position within the landscape of contemporary British cinema – one that is, in certain respects, analogous to the position Tait occupied within the landscape of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century Scottish film. Wells came to filmmaking as an outsider to the dominant institutional culture of the British film industry, developing her authorial identity through a combination of personal creative determination and the specific institutional resources available to independent filmmakers at the margins of the mainstream. Like Tait, she has developed a formally distinctive and personally rooted mode of filmmaking that engages with the textures and relationships of female experience in ways that the dominant conventions of commercial cinema have no adequate framework for accommodating. Her debut feature film *Aftersun* follows the story of a father and daughter, Calum (Paul Mescal) and Sophie (Frankie Corio), as they go on holiday together to a resort in Turkey. Calum, who had Sophie when he was very young – he is often mistaken for being Sophie’s brother – and is separated from her mother, is an introspective and reserved character who it is suggested has suffered with bouts of depression and problems with alcohol. When he admits to another holiday goer that he “doesn’t expect to make it to 40,” it is clear that he is conscious of the importance of any time he can spend with his daughter, while also accepting that the things keeping her away from him have often been the result of his own troubles. Sophie, a young girl who relishes any time she can spend with her father but is also carefully aware of the troubles that lay below his aloof exterior, takes a video camera along with her to capture her experiences of this holiday, perhaps consciously aware that the time she has with her father is finite. As the film progresses, the narrative begins to move between the past and the present with the introduction of an older Sophie (Celia Rowleson-Hall) looking back at this holiday she spent with her father, who has since passed away, through viewing the old camcorder footage. The older Sophie uses the footage as a tool to spark these reminiscences. However, the audience hold a privileged position in being able to witness aspects that are not available to all the characters in the film. Although it can be argued that the young Sophie holds the primary focus of the narrative – she is shown attempting to navigate the difficulties of transitioning into adolescence – it is not a narrative solely from her point of view. There are numerous moments where Calum is shown alone struggling to cope with the pressure of being a father while also agonising over the fact that he only gets to be with her on rare occasions. These are moments we know Sophie never gets to see.

Similarly to *Blue Black Permanent*, *Aftersun*’s narrative works on a number of different temporal levels. The focus is split between the past – Sophie and Calum’s holiday during the early 2000s –

and the present- Sophie, now an adult, reliving the holiday through watching the old camcorder footage. These two timelines are also combined – in a sequence that represents the older Sophie’s dreams or inner psyche – in scenes set in an imaginary club/rave setting where we see both the older Sophie and Calum. Unlike in Tait’s film, in which the various temporal planes are never explicitly combined, the rave scene in *Aftersun* provides a fictional space in which the past and present can combine, offering a visual representation of Sophie’s desire for connection and reconciliation with her father and the transcendent nature of relational bonds.

Like Tait, Wells also started to embed her work with an aspect of self-reflexivity from the start of her career, with many of her earlier short films incorporating specific aspects that were expanded in *Aftersun*. Having not pursued film as an academic subject during her undergraduate study, Wells was originally taken by the opportunity to enter the business side of the industry, graduating from a joint business and film graduate programme with the intention of becoming a producer. It was during this graduate program that she created three short films: *Tuesday* (2015), *Laps* (2016), and *Blue Christmas* (2017). It was the success of these films – *Laps* won the Special Jury Award for Editing at the 2017 Sundance Film Festival – that gave Wells the opportunity to direct a feature. In her 2015 short film *Tuesday*, Wells mines the same familial trauma – the death of her father when she was a teenager – that would mark the narrative of *Aftersun*. The film focuses on the sixteen-year-old Allie (Megan McGill) who, living with her mother and stepfather, visits her father every Tuesday after school. With her passing comment to her mother that she’s “going to see dad” after school because it’s Tuesday, it suggests this is a regular occurrence and is simply an aspect of life for a child with separated parents. The film follows her on the bus to school and then her walk to her father’s house. However, instead of being greeted by her father as she enters, she is instead shown sitting alone, at times going upstairs to look at and touch her father’s possessions. It is only now clear that her father has died, and that his death was recent. This revelation changes Allie’s original comment to her mother and stepfather that she’s “going to see dad.” This innocent comment now reveals itself to be one filled with grief and trauma, speaking to the difficulties present within a teenager’s ability to process such an event. Wells elaborates on this process in *Aftersun*, investigating how it develops over a longer period of time. As Graham Fuller observes, “*Tuesday*’s haunting of an impressionable girl by the memory of her dad augurs *Aftersun*, in which the haunting is a permanence.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Graham Fuller, ‘*Aftersun*’, *Cineaste*, (2023), 48-50 (p. 49).

This permanence is made manifest within *Aftersun* through the use of the contrasting timelines, which are combined through the added layer of the camcorder footage. This allows for a direct connection between the past and the present to be made, while enhancing the sense of searching. The adult Sophie can replay the camcorder footage as a supplement to her fading memory yet, as with memory, the lens is unable to penetrate the psyche of her father, whose persona often changes when the camera was aimed towards him. It was this kind of ‘posing’ facilitated by the camera that Barbara was wary of in *Blue Black Permanent*. However, for Sophie, it is the only connection she has to her father.. As Anna Poletti states, “home movies, like amateur photography, are commonly held to have this indexical relationship to what they depict.”<sup>82</sup> Similarly, Roger Odin highlights how home movies function in a particular way when viewed within the private sphere: “home-movie images function less as representations than as *index* inviting the family to *return to the past already lived*.”<sup>83</sup> It is this return to the past, undertaken within a private setting, that marks the older Sophie’s approach to the home video footage. What can Sophie, both young and old, understand from the camcorder footage? Fuller believes it to be very little: “the video footage offers only fragments of actuality and most of it has a goofy performative quality that tells adult Sophie nothing about Calum’s underlying mood: films and videos are, after all, myths incarnate.”<sup>84</sup> But Wells’s film does not present this limitation as a failure – it presents is as a condition of the relational search itself, and as the very quality that makes the search meaningful. The fact that the footage cannot deliver the truth of Calum’s inner life is precisely what motivates the older Sophie’s continued engagement with it – her refusal to accept the surface image as the totality of her father’s identity, and her insistence on reading against the grain of the footage in search of what will deliver the deeper truth that the surface of the image cannot provide. This reading against the grain – this refusal to accept the dominant representational convention as adequate to the complexity of female relational experience – can be read as a form of female authorial performance: a claiming of the right to see beyond what the image shows, and to assert the significance of what the image fails to capture. Furthermore, it is clear that Wells sees film, as a medium, as being able to bridge the gap between past and present, transcending the notion of the indexical image. Nowhere is this

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<sup>82</sup> Anna Poletti, ‘Reading for Excess: Relational Autobiography, Affect and Popular Culture in *Tarnation*’, *Life Writing*, 9:2, 157-172 (p. 163).

<sup>83</sup> Roger Odin, ‘Reflections on the Family Home Movie as Document: A Semio-Pragmatic Approach’, in *Mining the Home Movie: Excavations in Histories and Memories*. ed. Karen L. Ishizuka and Patricia R. Zimmermann (Berkley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 255-271 (p. 259).

<sup>84</sup> Fuller, ‘*Aftersun*’, p. 50.

more evident than in the apparent ‘imaginary’ space that combines the past and the present within the film.

The fictional space of the club in which the older Sophie discreetly watches Calum dancing into oblivion acts as a liminal space between the past and the present while also acting as a metaphor for cinema’s ability to represent and recreate moments and memories – albeit artificially. These scenes, which are interspersed at random moments throughout the narrative, begin with Sophie acting as a *viewer*, in much the same way that she is the viewer of Calum the camcorder footage. The older Sophie watches Calum dancing erratically and unselfconsciously, highlighting the desire for a loss of self that can occur in such moments. This aligns with how Calum is shown during the holiday, where he is clearly struggling to maintain a coherent connection with Sophie and at one point abandoning her and searching for an “escape.” The dream sequence in the club is accompanied by strobe lighting, adding a disorientating effect to the setting. It also links the scene directly to cinema, mirroring the kinetic nature of a film strip running through a projector and highlighting the physical nature of the filmic image – since the strobe isolates certain frames while blanking out others. By emphasising this dream sequence as a filmic object, Wells demonstrates how the medium can work as a tool for reconciling relational absence. At the end of the film, the older Sophie approaches Calum in the club and begins to dance with him, providing a physical connection between the past and present. In doing so, *Aftersun* works to show how film is both an indexical medium that can provide a relational *punctum* – in the case of the camcorder footage – and also a creative medium in which relational bonds can be reconciled.



Fig. 20. Calum (Paul Mescal) and the older Sophie (Celia Rowilson-Hall) embrace at the end of *Aftersun* (2022). This moment occurs within a liminal space that combines both the past and present timelines.

### *The Eternal Daughter* – Authoring Relational Trauma

*The Eternal Daughter* is a film that is haunted – quite literally – by the death of director Joanna Hogg’s own mother, which occurred just prior to the film’s production. The knowledge of this context imbues the film with a layer of self-reflexivity that takes it beyond a simple gothic ghost story. As with the case studies analysed in the previous sections, *The Eternal Daughter* is a film about a daughter’s search for the identity of a parent – a search conducted through the formal resources of a specific genre, the gothic ghost story, that the film simultaneously inhabits and subverts as a means of asserting a female authorial presence within a cultural tradition that has

not always been open to the complexity and seriousness of women's creative vision. Mothering and motherhood, and the many facets that are contained within, is a central theme that runs throughout the film, with the foundation being the relationship between the characters Julie – a middle-aged director and screenwriter – and Rosalind – the elderly mother of Julie who is nearing the end of her life. The fact that both characters are played by long-time Hogg collaborator Tilda Swinton adds a further dimension to this self-reflexivity and rumination on motherhood, emphasising the notion of matrilineal connection, while simultaneously calling back to Hogg's earlier autobiographical work *The Souvenir* parts 1 and 2 (2019 and 2021), in which Swinton plays the character of the mother. However, whereas the earlier *Souvenir* films took an autobiographical approach that was more explicit in its recreation and remodelling of Hogg's own experiences as a young woman and aspiring filmmaker – going as far as meticulously recreating the flat she lived in during this period through the incorporation of possessions such as her own bed – *The Eternal Daughter* relies on, as I will argue, a more intertextual approach to the form that uses references and tropes of the gothic horror genre to explore her relationship with her mother while coming to terms with her recent death. In doing so, Hogg can also be seen to invoke the notion of the *objet petit a* that marked both Tait and Wells's films on parental loss.

Hogg's interest in filmmaking came out of a chance encounter with Derek Jarman in Soho, with him giving her a Super-8 camera with which she began shooting experimental short films. Through these filmic experiments, she was able to win a place at the National Film and Television school, creating her graduation film *Caprice* in 1986 – a film which also starred Swinton. Following her graduation, she directed several music videos for artists such as Alison Moyet – an aspect of her career which is referenced explicitly in *The Souvenir Part II* – and eventually gaining a number of directing roles in television during the 1990s. She began her feature film career with *Unrelated* (2007), followed by *Archipelago* (2010) and *Exhibition* (2013). Since then, her subsequent feature films have all explicitly dealt with concerns surrounding the performance of authorship, with *The Souvenir*, *The Souvenir Part II*, and *The Eternal Daughter* forming an unofficial trilogy of relational life narrative. It is the final film of this trilogy which offers an intriguing experiment in the form.

In its setting of an English country house, cut off from the outside world, in which mysterious sights and noises emanate from its innumerable rooms and hallways, *The Eternal Daughter* evokes parallels with two other classic British horror films: *The Innocents* (1961) and *The Haunting* (1963). These references in turn link *The Eternal Daughter* back to the literary works the two earlier films were adapted from: *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James and *The*

*Haunting of Hill House* by Shirley Jackson respectively. Both literary works have the notion of motherhood at its centre and, in witnessing and understanding this aspect, I would argue this illuminates Hogg's decision of a gothic horror setting for her film. Furthermore, this adaptation of genre also speaks to the maternal relationship present within the film since, as Lucy Fischer argues, "in the process of redefining mothering it is also necessary to redefine genres."<sup>85</sup> This genre setting also allows Hogg to play with the notion of 'haunting,' expanding the word to refer to more than simply supernatural occurrences. In this way, the recovery of the maternal and the reworking of genre become a single authorial gesture.

The narrative of *The Eternal Daughter* centres around Julie and Rosalind visiting a stately home that has now become a hotel. As they settle into their stay, which gets off to a difficult start thanks to a rather apathetic receptionist, it becomes clear that the house once belonged to Rosalind's family and that this was where she grew up. This visit, therefore, is actually a revisit, planned by Julie as part of Rosalind's birthday celebrations. Julie is also using this time away as an opportunity to continue work on a film treatment, the isolated location of the house acting as a suitable writing retreat. Yet, Julie's desire for calm is frequently disturbed by both the fabric of the house - she hears unexplained banging in the, supposedly empty, room above each night alongside possible sightings of the 'ghosts' that haunt the building - and difficult familial interactions - her elderly mother is often the centre of her attention and at one moment they receive an unwanted visit from a cousin, who Julie tries to dismiss in the politest way possible. All this leads to an atmosphere of tension and uncertainty in Julie that is only broken when she breaks down during her mother's birthday meal. However, it is also at this moment that it is revealed Julie is in fact alone, causing the audience to question the veracity of the prior scenes. J. M. Tyree reads this denouement as a revelation that the film has actually presented two separate visits to the house, one where Julie visits on her own following her mother's death and one a year earlier when Rosalind and Julie visit together.<sup>86</sup> The earlier timeline is, therefore, a reminiscence from Julie about the time spent in the house with her mother. The climactic birthday dinner scene melds these two timelines, with the latter showing an attempt from Julie to commune with her mother's memory on what would have been her birthday. Julie's emotional breakdown during this moment suggests this attempt to commune with her memory, as an act of gaining some sense of acceptance of her mother's death, was a failure.

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<sup>85</sup> Lucy Fischer, *Cinematernity: Film, Motherhood, Genre* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> J. M. Tyree, 'Specters of Brexit in Recent British Horror', *Film Quarterly*, 77:2 (2023), 10-19 (p. 16).



Fig. 21. Tilda Swinton as both the mother Rosalind and her daughter Julie in *The Eternal Daughter* (2022)

Following this revelation, the focus of the film – and in turn the authorial process – turns to the act of mourning, reframing the scenes between Julie and Rosalind that appear earlier in the film. The mourning process is developed through Julie’s desire for connection and reconnection, and ultimately a search for a reclaiming of her mother’s identity. This is a theme that is highlighted in Barthes’s *Camera Lucida*, in which he is enacting a similar act of reclaiming of the identity of his dead mother. He describes how he is looking for “the *air* (the expression, the look)... the *air* (I use this word, lacking anything better, for the expression of truth) is a kind of intractable supplement of identity... the *air* expresses the subject.”<sup>87</sup> Rachel Gabara expands on this by suggesting that what Barthes is hoping to find through photographs of his mother, “in Lacanian terms,” is “his mother’s *objet petit a*... the *objet petit a* is what is in us and more than us, what guarantees our coherence and uniqueness at a moment of lack such as that of the mirror stage or, for Barthes, that of autobiography.”<sup>88</sup> Framing it within Lacan’s theory places the emphasis not on the revitalisation of the unified self, however, but on the aspect of *desire* that is present within this revitalisation. As Lewis A. Kirshner notes, by his later seminars, Lacan saw the *objet petit a* as a “symbol for a hypothetical or virtual construct: namely, the ephemeral, unlocalizable property of an object that makes it especially desirable. It is therefore a fantasy.”<sup>89</sup> Although still an illusion, the unified self that is projected onto the parent by the child can act as a comfort, especially when that parent has died or is dying. This is the process that is depicted in *The Eternal Daughter*, especially in Julie’s return to the house in the later timeline. In a time of mourning and confusion, the grieving child can find the ‘other’ they have lost through a reclaiming of the unitary self that is so often denied through fraught familiar connection. Relationality is defined by this desire – a desire which is also deeply subjective and personal.

Seeing *The Eternal Daughter* as two separate timelines fused together places the central focus on Julie’s search for the *objet petit a* of her mother. Much like Barbara in *Blue Black Permanent* and Sophie in *Aftersun* – as well as Barthes in *Camera Lucida* – Julie’s desire to commune with the memory of her parent is sparked by the finality of death and the dissolving of the relational self that occurs from this. Whereas Barbara turns to obsessive questioning and Sophie returns to the recorded image of her father, Julie’s method of reconciliation is framed around the revisiting and re-treading of past moments. This is not only reserved to her second visit, however, but is also the catalyst for the original visit. Clearly Julie is hoping that a return to her

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<sup>87</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, pp. 107-109.

<sup>88</sup> Rachel Gabara, *From Split to Screened Selves: French and Francophone Autobiography in the Third Person* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), p. 55.

<sup>89</sup> Lewis A. Kirshner, ‘Rethinking Desire: The *objet petit a* in Lacanian Theory’, *Journal of the American Psychoanalytical Association*, 53:1 (2005), 83-102 (p. 84).

mother's family home for her birthday will offer a nostalgic comfort to Rosalind while simultaneously increasing their own familial connection. However, 'ghosts' of the past are brought up both times Julie enters the house.

An aspect of the gothic horror genre that aligns with Hogg's meditation on motherhood is the notion of mirroring. As a narrative device within gothic horror, mirroring adds to the uncertainty and therefore the terrifying nature of the ordeal. As Dawn Keetley notes regarding *The Turn of the Screw*, "a close examination of some of [the governess's] sightings reveals that the ghosts terrify her in large part because they mirror her."<sup>90</sup> The use of consistent mirroring throughout *The Turn of the Screw* also adds to the sense of psychological breakdown of the governess, putting into doubt the reliability of what she sees. Keetley suggests this is evident in "the 'white face of damnation' that [the governess] sees in the culminating scene with Miles" which "could very well be her own."<sup>91</sup> When transferred to the mode of authorial performance found in *The Eternal Daughter*, the use of mirroring, while still providing suspense to the horror aspect of the narrative, provides numerous facets to the mother/daughter relationship while also providing a self-reflexive dimension to the story. By casting Tilda Swinton in both roles, Hogg immediately foregrounds the text as focusing on the mirrored nature of the character's lives and emotions, while also highlighting their differences. This allows Hogg to play on the various notions of motherhood, highlighting how they exist within Julie and Rosalind respectively. As Tyree states, "through its narrative repetition and its casting of Swinton in her double role, the film also portrays, with ambivalence and poignancy, the mothering of mothers, the mothering of oneself, and the mothering of one's art."<sup>92</sup> In being touched by Rosalind's admission that she sees the passion in her daughter's work as a form of 'alternative mothering' - since Julie does not have any children - it is hinted that Julie was searching for this acceptance from her mother throughout her adult life while also demonstrating Hogg's desire to open up the definition of motherhood to include other endeavours outside of simply the act of childrearing. This last dimension - the mothering of one's art - connects the film's relational exploration of the mother/daughter bond to the question of female creative authority, asserting explicitly that the woman who chooses to devote her life to her art is not denying the maternal within herself but expressing it in a different and equally valid form. This is, in the terms of Kaplan's theory of the maternal in cinema, a refusal of the dominant culture's insistence that the maternal and the

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<sup>90</sup> Dawn Keetley, 'Mothers and Others: Anxieties over Substitute Mothers in *The Turn of the Screw*' in *Approaches to Teaching Henry James's Daisy Miller and The Turn of the Screw* ed. Kimberly C. Reed and Peter G. Beidler (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2005), p. 145.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid.*, p. 145.

<sup>92</sup> Tyree, 'Specters of Brexit', p. 16.

creative are mutually exclusive. It is an assertion of the right to claim both the position of mother and the position of author. The fact that Hogg also has no children adds a further layer to this self-reflexive notion.

This influence of the house on the two central characters places it as a third ‘character’ within the family dynamic. Similarly to the way Terence Davies meditates on how the fabric of a family home can contain the memories of a family’s history – memories which often spark a retelling of that history – at the beginning of *Distant Voices, Still Lives*, Hogg also places the family home at the centre of familial dynamics. Through recollections that are given by Rosalind throughout the course of the film, Julie learns that the house brings up both happy and traumatic memories from her mother’s past. One of the more traumatic events Rosalind recounts, and that Julie was unaware of, was that she had experienced a miscarriage while living there. A clearly emotional Julie, distraught at the fact that she has brought her mother back to a place that brings up such painful memories, begins to understand the power a house can have for resurrecting old ‘ghosts.’ It is here that Hogg demonstrates how life narrative – the writing and telling of one’s past – can find a form of mirror image in the act of telling a ghost story, since both forms of narrative construction, as Kalliopi Nikolopoulou outlines, “has to do with the summoning of spectres.”<sup>93</sup> Despite Rosalind’s revelation of her miscarriage seeming to be the film’s most devastating moment of relational disruption, complicating Julie’s projection of her mother’s *objet petit a*, it is ultimately a moment of restoration for Rosalind, since “telling stories about the past, our past, is a key moment in the making of our selves.”<sup>94</sup>

Although being mother and daughter – who are played by the same actor – Julie and Rosalind are contrasting in the way that they are presented as authorial agents. As noted above, Rosalind can be seen to engage in an autobiographical endeavour within the film through her retelling – her “summoning” – of her past in her discussions with Julie. She enters into this form of autobiographical act because of a seeming need to find a release for the trauma that she has clearly suppressed, having not even been able to discuss it with her daughter up to this point. By giving her mother this opportunity to speak, Julie – and Hogg – recovers the repressed maternal position, restoring to the mother, as Kaplan contends, “the voice she has so long been denied.”<sup>95</sup> Yet, this silencing is not only a trauma experienced by the mother, but is a fundamentally relational position, since the daughter is also implicated in this silencing. To

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<sup>93</sup> Kalliopi Nikolopoulou, ‘Autospectrography: On Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 28:1 (2004), 1-24 (p. 1).

<sup>94</sup> Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (London: Verso, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>95</sup> Kaplan, *Women and Film*, p. 188.

restore the maternal voice is thus, for the daughter-author, also to reconstitute the ground of her own subjectivity, and to acknowledge her own position in this silencing.

For the audience, this release of past trauma is shown to be the primary emotional effect the house has on Rosalind – a catalyst for autobiographical exploration that may have also been triggered by an understanding of her own mortality, a sense of either now or never for this information to be revealed to her daughter. However, an aspect that is intriguingly left out of the film is Rosalind's experience of the house itself. Whereas Julie is often shown reacting to the sounds and sights that emanate from its walls, the audience are not shown a similar reaction from Rosalind. Does she also hear the sounds coming from the room above? Did she have any spectral sightings similar to that of Julie? The lack of any explicit answer to these questions places Julie as a separate authorial agent within the film, specifically her position as the primary perspective of the narrative. Any sense of a supernatural occurrence is always framed from Julie's perspective, and these occurrences are never corroborated by other characters. This complicates the veracity of Julie's perspective, placing her as an unreliable narrator – aligning her with the character of the governess in *The Turn of the Screw*.

This questioning of Julie's perspective, and the splintering of the two timelines throughout the narrative of the film, demonstrates the kind of destruction and questioning of the self that can occur through the loss of the chosen other – an aspect that was also displayed in the narrative of *Blue Black Permanent*. For Julie, however, this destruction can be seen to occur even before her mother's death. Rosalind's revelation of her miscarriage clearly shatters Julie's sense of her mother's identity, the revelation complicating her projection of her mother's *objet petit a*. This feeds into the splintering of Julie's own sense of self, evident in her position as an unreliable narrator and the breaking down of a coherent narrative chronology in the story. The lack of self denies any kind of articulate authorial enunciation. Although Julie attempts to reconstruct that self through revisiting the house a second time, her failure to achieve this through ritual – the repetition of the birthday meal – shows this cannot be achieved through communing with the dead, suggesting that the 'ghost' Julie saw was never actually there. However, she can be seen to reclaim her sense of self at the end of the film when her creative practice – the aspect of her life that Rosalind believed made Julie a mother – gives her control of the narrative. As Julie is seen finishing the screenplay which she has been working on during her time at the hotel, a close-up of the computer screen shows what she's written for the final scene. As the camera holds on these words, an edit slowly fades to reveal an exact recreation the scene described in the screenplay, this becoming the final shot of *The Eternal Daughter*. In this way, Julie acts as the protagonist to the words we have just seen her writing. This final intermingling between

Julie's screenplay and the film itself provides both a self-reflexive bond between Julie and Hogg – a connection that is only further emphasised by the relationship between Swinton and Hogg mentioned above – while also demonstrating how film, and creative practice, can allow for authorial enunciation.

## Conclusion

The three films examined in this chapter – Margaret Tait's *A Portrait of Ga* and *Blue Black Permanent*, Charlotte Wells's *Aftersun*, and Joanna Hogg's *The Eternal Daughter* - constitute a tradition of relational female authorial performance in British cinema that is, as this chapter has argued, both formally distinctive and politically significant. Each film is, in the most direct and unambiguous sense, a performance of female authorial identity: a claiming of the right to tell stories of female experience, familial connection, and creative self-determination through a formal language that is entirely each director's own, developed across the full intermedial field of their creative and public lives in sustained and politically engaged acts of counter-cinema that challenge the dominant culture's assumptions about whose stories deserve serious artistic attention and whose creative vision deserves cultural recognition.

What unites these three directors across the considerable differences of their historical moments, their formal strategies, and their specific biographical and institutional contexts is the shared understanding that the performance of female authorial identity in fiction film is always also a relational act – that the female filmmaker who turns the camera toward the chosen other, toward the parent whose identity she seeks to recover and understand, is simultaneously asserting her own authorial identity and performing the specific mode of female self-construction that the feminist autobiography tradition has identified as central to women's experience of identity formation.

The *objet petit a* framework drawn from Barthes's *Camera Lucida* provides the theoretical foundation for understanding the specific mode of relational authorial performance that characterises not only *The Eternal Daughter*, but also each director's work. Each film is organised around a daughter's search for the *objet petit a* of a lost or inaccessible parent – the elusive and ultimately ungraspable essence of the other's identity that the relational bond simultaneously demands and denies. For Barbara in *Blue Black Permanent*, this search is conducted through the landscape, through the language of her mother's poetry, and through the

obsessive questioning that drives her throughout the film, a search that ultimately reveals not the unified self of the mother but the complexity of an identity that has been shaped by forces – domestic constraint, creative suppression, the specific conditions of female life in mid-twentieth-century Scotland – that the dominant culture rarely acknowledged. In doing so, Tait excavates the lost creative labour of an earlier generation of women, authoring the mother as an artist in her own right rather than the artist's origin or muse. For Sophie in *Aftersun*, the search is conducted through the home video footage – the indexical images that deliver her father's surface appearance while denying access to the inner life that lies beneath – and through the imaginary spaces of the film's most formally distinctive sequences, in which the creative resources of the cinematic medium are deployed as a means of constructing a form of relational connection. Here, Wells carries the same relational recovery across to the paternal figure, authoring the lost parent retrospectively, through the mediated gaze of her past self. And for Julie in *The Eternal Daughter*, the search is conducted through the literal revisiting of the spaces of her mother's past – through the physical act of returning to the family house and retracing the steps of a shared history – and through the creative act of writing the screenplay that becomes the film's final formal statement of female authorial identity. Hogg collapses mother and daughter into a single performing body, turning the ghost story against its generic tropes and instead laying the dead to rest.

In each case, the search for the *objet petit a* of the chosen other is also, simultaneously, a search for the director's own authorial identity – a means of constituting, through the relational act of creative inquiry, a female authorial self that the dominant culture has sought to deny. This is the most politically resonant dimension of the relational mode of female authorial performance examined in this chapter: the understanding that the search for the other is always also a search for oneself, that the female filmmaker who investigates and represents the experience of another is simultaneously asserting her own right to be seen, to be heard, and to be recognised as a creative intelligence with the authority to speak from her own experience on her own terms. The relational act is, in this sense, always also an authorial act – a performance of the self through the representation of the other that is constitutive rather than merely expressive, that produces the female authorial identity it appears merely to document.

## Conclusion –

### Securing a Legacy Through Authorship

Across its three chapters, this thesis has examined the performance of authorship as an act of counterdiscourse – a claiming, by directors positioned at the margins of cultural power, of an authorial legitimacy that had been withheld from them. It is instructive to close by turning to a director for whom that legitimacy was never in question. Steven Spielberg, arguably the most commercially powerful Hollywood director of his generation, offers a revealing counterpoint: with *The Fabelmans* (2022) he performs authorship not in order to claim a position denied him but in order to consolidate one long since granted – to convert a career into a legacy, and a self into a brand. Where the directors examined in this thesis perform authorship against the structures of cultural power, Spielberg performs it from within them, and from the summit of them.

What makes *The Fabelmans* a particularly instructive counterpoint is the way it reaches back to the most traditional figure of film authorship – the auteur – and performs it across the transmedia landscape of the contemporary industry. Spielberg belongs to the New Hollywood generation that institutionalised the ‘celebrity director,’ a category he mobilises with *The Fabelmans* both to cement his position as a ‘great’ director and to secure his longer-term legacy through the transmedial present of the industry. Where the marginalised directors of this thesis distributed their authorial performance across an intermedial field because no single medium would grant them the position they sought, Spielberg distributes his across a transmedial field in order to entrench a position already secured. The same structural gesture – authorship performed across, rather than within, a single work – serves, in his case, the opposite end: not counterdiscourse but consolidation. As the following pages demonstrate, what allows Spielberg to secure this legacy is his understanding of his own self as a brand, and his ability to nurture that brand through careful engagement with the convergent media landscape that encompasses the Hollywood industry of today. The commercial viability of his performance of authorship is, in this sense, inseparable from its transmedial distribution.

Spielberg’s ability to position himself as a brand comes from his position as a central figure in the development of Hollywood during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He emerged as part of the film school generation who defined the New Hollywood but has pioneered the next phase of popular Hollywood cinema with a return to a cinema driven by

traditional genre elements, exemplified by the success of films such as *Jaws* (1975) or *Jurassic Park* (1993). Creating films that are not only spectacles on a visual scale, but also major cultural events, this makes the pivot towards explicit authorial self-portraiture in *The Fabelmans* an even more intriguing shift. In a society that is becoming ever more focused on identity and formations of the self as mediated through the camera lens, I wish to investigate how Spielberg utilises the medium of film alongside the use of various media platforms unique to the 21<sup>st</sup> century to perform his authorship.

During the era of social media when commodified presentations of the self are commonplace, it is enlightening to question how this is present in a work such as *The Fabelmans* and how it aligns with the wider aspects of selfhood curation in the modern age. One way this can be quantified is through the notion of neoliberal selfhood, a concept that has allowed the potential for the self to be framed as a stable and knowable brand. This emerges from the pervasive influence of the predominant economic ideology, which fundamentally relies on promoting what Andrew Ross describes as “entrepreneurial selfhood.”<sup>1</sup> This concept underscores the idea that individuals are encouraged to view themselves as self-reliant entrepreneurs, constantly managing and optimizing their own lives as if they were businesses. This aligns with work undertaken by Christina Scharff, who found that “research participants referred to themselves as a business.”<sup>2</sup> In this way, neoliberalism’s impact on individuals extends beyond economic behaviour; it permeates social and personal identities, promoting an ethos where self-worth is tied to economic productivity and personal achievement. This ideology redefines freedom and autonomy in market terms, where individual choices are framed as entrepreneurial decisions.

This self-conception as an entrepreneur promotes a form of autonomy that is compatible with governance because it aligns personal goals with the broader objectives of the neoliberal state. For instance, individuals are motivated to constantly improve their skills, optimize their productivity, and compete with others, all in the name of personal freedom and self-improvement. Furthermore, as Scharff points out, “conducting its life as enterprise, the enterprising self is bound by specific rules that emphasize ambition, calculation, accountability and personal responsibility.”<sup>3</sup> Yet, these activities simultaneously serve the interests of

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew Ross, ‘The new geography of work: Power to the precarious?’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 25:7-8 (2008), 32-49 (p. 32).

<sup>2</sup>Christina Scharff, ‘The Psychic Life of Neoliberalism: Mapping the Contours of Entrepreneurial Subjectivity’, *Theory, Culture & Society*, 33:6 (2016), 107-122 (p. 111).

<sup>3</sup>*ibid.*, p. 109.

neoliberal governance by fostering a highly efficient and self-regulating society. Furthermore, the indirect regulation of social practices under neoliberalism extends to various aspects of life, including education, healthcare, and employment. Policies and practices in these areas are designed to cultivate a sense of personal responsibility and entrepreneurial spirit, fostering the view of the self as a business that needs to be kept viable. Individuals are guided towards behaviours that are deemed economically beneficial, such as investing in their education, maintaining their health, and constantly adapting to changing job markets. “This shift,” as Scharff points out, “changes the relationship of the self to the self where one becomes a subject for oneself. By relating to itself as a business, the entrepreneurial subject establishes a distance to its self and can subsequently work on it.”<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, under neoliberalism, the concept of autonomy is reshaped to align with governance rather than, as in classical liberalism, being its absolute limit or the point at which governance fails. Classical liberalism traditionally viewed autonomy as a boundary that governance should not overstep, emphasizing individual freedom as a fundamental principle that limits governmental intervention. However, neoliberalism reconceptualizes autonomy in a way that integrates it into the fabric of governance itself. Instead of seeing autonomy as a constraint on power, neoliberal governance harnesses individual freedom as a mechanism for exerting control and influence. In this way, the rhetoric of freedom and autonomy is used to subtly direct individuals’ actions, making them active participants in their own regulation. For the entrepreneurial self, this aspect is seen by Scharff to manifest itself in the “disavowal of structural inequalities,” meaning that “desires for change are directed away from the socio-political sphere and turned inwards. The self becomes the locus for change so that social critique is increasingly replaced by self-critique.”<sup>5</sup> This transformation of autonomy into a tool of governance exemplifies the sophisticated nature of neoliberal power, which thrives on the illusion of freedom while ensuring that individual choices remain within the parameters set by market-driven policies and societal norms. Thus, autonomy under neoliberalism becomes a strategic means of control, intricately woven into the very essence of governance.

It is from this context that neoliberal authorial performances arise. In simple terms, these personal narratives often reflect themes of self-determination, individualism, and economic rationality, emphasizing personal success and self-made identity. The neoliberal author, therefore, becomes a tool for illustrating and reinforcing the values of autonomy,

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<sup>4</sup>Scharff, ‘The Psychic Life of Neoliberalism’, p. 112.

<sup>5</sup>ibid., p. 116.

competitiveness, and personal responsibility inherent in neoliberal thought. And, as this approach to self-narrative becomes more prevalent, it feeds into a cycle in which the entrepreneurial self becomes the ‘norm.’ As Shani Orgad observes, “in the absence of narratives of collective action, solidarity, community, and justice,” people “reverted to the individualised accounts of empowerment, confidence, grit and resilience as a way to make sense of their lives.”<sup>6</sup>

One way to understand how *The Fabelmans* personifies certain aspects of the mainstream performance of authorship as a commodity, and particularly its link to neoliberal selfhood, is to look at contemporary reactions to the film. Coming in the twilight of his career, the reaction to *The Fabelmans* is often placed within the context of Spielberg’s identity as a Hollywood director, with critics pulling out relations between the film and his wider filmography. Alex Godfrey, writing for *Empire*, makes this explicit when he says, “after previously seeing them all wrapped up in genre, it feels gently shocking to discover so candidly where some of the thematic elements in Spielberg’s work stem from, especially the fractured family storylines threaded through *Close Encounters* and *E.T.*, with their search for connection from elsewhere.”<sup>7</sup> Similarly, Owen Gleiberman writes in *Variety* that the film is “a drama about how Steven Spielberg got to be a genius.”<sup>8</sup> Looking at it from this angle, it can begin to reveal how *The Fabelmans* exists as a 21<sup>st</sup> century Hollywood performance of authorship in the sense that it works to develop Spielberg’s identity as a filmmaker, feeding into the continued notion of ‘Spielberg’ the brand. Rather than the film speaking to the *life* of Spielberg, it speaks to the *films* of Spielberg. In this way, *The Fabelmans* frames Spielberg as an entrepreneurial self, his life story mythologized within the context of his success. This portrayal aligns with the concept of neoliberal autobiography, where personal narratives are constructed to reflect individual triumphs within a competitive framework. Spielberg’s journey, as depicted in the film, embodies the ideals of self-reliance, creativity, and entrepreneurial spirit that are hallmarks of neoliberal thought. The film’s positioning within this ideological framework is further reinforced by its exploration of Spielberg’s early encounters with filmmaking and his burgeoning passion for the craft. These elements underscore the narrative of personal agency and the pursuit of

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<sup>6</sup>Shani Orgad, ‘The Sociological Imagination and Media Studies in Neoliberal Times’, *Television & New Media*, 21:6 (2020), 635-641 (p. 638).

<sup>7</sup>Alex Godfrey, ‘The Fabelmans review’, *Empire*, 16<sup>th</sup> January 2023, <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/the-fabelmans/>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2024].

<sup>8</sup>Owen Gleiberman, ‘Ignore the Sitcom Title – ‘The Fabelmans’ is the Rare Great Movie About the Ecstasy of Making Movies’, *Variety*, 26<sup>th</sup> November 2022, <<https://variety.com/2022/film/columns/the-fabelmans-ecstasy-of-cinema-steven-spielberg-1235442334/>> [accessed 21<sup>st</sup> June 2024].

one's passion, both of which feed into neoliberal ideology. However, the film is also filled with moments that reveal the values underpinning Spielberg's cinema, especially the tendency to favour fantasy and myth over reality. This is clearly demonstrated in the moment he transforms his schoolyard bully into a celluloid hero, a moment which is framed as an integral within his filmmaking development. Through this combination, *The Fabelmans* aligns his personal story with the broader cultural narrative of achieving success through individual effort and innovation.

### The Auteur/Author in the Transmedia Landscape

It is important to understand *The Fabelmans* as a work executed and presented within a convergent media landscape and, I would argue, its existence within such a landscape means it is the first example of this kind of mainstream authorial self-portraiture to explicitly utilise transmedial platforms to enhance its reading as a performance of authorship. Henry Jenkins describes media convergence as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.”<sup>9</sup> He goes on to state that “in the world of media convergence, every important story gets told, every brand gets sold, and every consumer gets courted across multiple media platforms.”<sup>10</sup> In this way, it is important to consider how Spielberg wishes to present himself as a director, both in a creative and branding sense. What allows Spielberg to curate his self as a brand is that he comes out of a generation that has engendered the notion of the ‘celebrity director.’ This notion originates directly from the New Hollywood generation and their embracing of the auteur theory while also encouraging a persona that is well versed in cinema history – a knowledge which also allows them to place themselves within this history. Whereas a figure such as Chaplin cultivated his celebrity through his onscreen image – carefully curated to ensure instant and repeatable recognisability – for the directors of the New Hollywood their celebrity is cultivated through their off-screen image.

Being the first generation of film school graduates (or film school dropouts in Spielberg's case), the likes of Scorsese, Coppola, Lucas and Spielberg pride themselves on their cineliteracy. This sense of cinema knowledge is vital in the construction of the celebrity director image. For this

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<sup>9</sup>Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 2.

<sup>10</sup>*ibid.*, p. 3.

reason, when these directors are given the opportunity to curate their own identities as directors – often in their own forms of authorial self-portraiture such as memoirs, interviews, or documentaries – the act of going to the cinema, typically during the formative years of childhood, is often at the forefront of this construction. Martin Scorsese, for example, regularly recounts his memory of the first film he saw at the cinema: King Vidor’s *Duel in the Sun* (1946). This story forms a central part of the 225-minute documentary *A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies* (1995), itself a form of filmic memoir that works to only further legitimise Scorsese as a ‘great’ director who is continuing the lineage of the figures and films he is analysing in the documentary. The advent of social media and its ability to disseminate content across a variety of different societies and groups can also be seen to have cultivated the notion of the ‘director as brand.’ Following a similar route to the kind of content present in Scorsese’s *A Personal Journey* documentary, social media platforms such as Letterboxd have provided a platform for these directors of the New Hollywood era and beyond to cement their legacies. Furthermore, like with all brands, the concept of legacy and the continuation of their product into the future is at the forefront of these director’s approaches as they come to the end of their careers.

Again, Scorsese can be seen to be at the vanguard of understanding how engaging with these platforms can work to further construct the image of himself as a director whose films should be regarded as an artform which deserves to be placed alongside the greatest examples of the medium. Alongside this, social media platforms also allow the likes of Scorsese to provide insight into their filmmaking practice, further legitimising their position as auteurs. This is evident in the social media campaign, presented through Letterboxd’s YouTube channel, that ran alongside the release of Scorsese’s film *Killers of the Flower Moon* (2023). In one of these videos, titled ‘Martin Scorsese Lists His Companion Films for Killers of the Flower Moon’,<sup>11</sup> he links films such as William Wyler’s *The Heiress* (1949), George Stevens’s *Giant* (1956), and Elia Kazan’s *Wild River* (1960) with his own most recent film. Framed not only as a display of Scorsese’s own film knowledge – further supporting his brand identity – but also as a form of film school for the viewer, this is content directly aimed at being consumed alongside the film itself. It also works to provide *Killers of the Flower Moon* a position of authority since it is being

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<sup>11</sup> *Martin Scorsese Lists His Companion Films for Killers of the Flower Moon*, online video recording, YouTube, 26 October 2023, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9hck1PfGLk>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

placed as an equal to this esteemed heritage of American cinema that stretches back to the birth of the medium (the earliest film referenced in the video is *The Last of the Line* from 1914).

Similarly, Francis Ford Coppola can be seen to use these platforms to enhance his brand. In a video, also released on Letterboxd's YouTube channel, made to coincide with the release of his film *Megalopolis* (2024), one can again see an emphasis on Coppola's position as a craftsman whose films deserve a legacy (despite *Megalopolis*'s poor reception from audiences and critics). Titled 'Francis Ford Coppola Speaks to the Style of His Films from the 1980s to *Megalopolis*',<sup>12</sup> the video has him discussing the design approaches he took for his films over this period. With little reference to the other crew members who would have had an impact on the final design and style of the films such as production designer, cinematographer or costume designer, the video feeds heavily into the notion of individuality that is an aspect of the auteurist vision of cinema. The fact that this video also focuses on the post-1970s era of Coppola's career, an era that is less respected compared to his 1970s oeuvre, also highlights how this video is being utilised as a tool to aid the re-evaluation of his later career. In this way one can see how these directors are utilising media convergence to maintain their identities as 'great directors' while simultaneously ensuring their legacy is intact.

It is this kind of engagement with transmedial platforms which Spielberg uses to accompany *The Fabelmans*, helping to develop its existence as a performance of authorship. The use of YouTube as a supplementary platform to offer background information into the making of the film, and also the life that inspired the narrative, is an aspect of authorial self-presentation that was not open to earlier practitioners, and especially not to the filmmakers examined across this thesis. The videos available on YouTube straddle both a focus on Spielberg's childhood and early life, adding extra layers of context that will enhance and encourage repeated viewings of the film, and his overall career and art as a filmmaker. An example of the latter can be found in the video 'The Fabelmans – Steven Spielberg & John Williams Featurette',<sup>13</sup> available through the Universal Pictures YouTube channel. Rather than covering in detail John Williams' contribution to the soundtrack of *The Fabelmans*, the video instead casts a wider net, placing emphasis on the fact that they have a working relationship that has lasted 50 years. Providing clips and snippets of music from a range of their collaborations, including *E.T. the Extra-*

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<sup>12</sup>*Francis Ford Coppola Speaks to the Style of His Films from the 1980s to Megalopolis*, online video recording, YouTube, 26 September 2024, <[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LC\\_5j6ieRFw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LC_5j6ieRFw)> [accessed 3 March 2025].

<sup>13</sup>*The Fabelmans – Steven Spielberg & John Williams Featurette*, online video recording, YouTube, 19 December 2022, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PE9DJfiy6es>> [accessed 3 March 2025].

*Terrestrial*, *Jurassic Park* and *Schindler's List* (1993), the video is framed as a reminiscence while also ensuring the viewer comprehends the scope of Spielberg's successful career. Despite *The Fabelmans* appearing in the title of the video, the film is only mentioned briefly towards the end. Therefore, this featurette works to further the brand identity of Spielberg, a brand whose origins are outlined in the film this video is a supplement to. Despite containing little information about the film it is a featurette for, it adds to the authorial performance the film is entering into in the way it emphasises the passage of time through the context of a career. It is further adding to a legacy that *The Fabelmans* is looking to cement.



Fig. 22. Despite being a featurette for *The Fabelmans* (2022), 'The Fabelmans – Steven Spielberg & John Williams Featurette' focuses on the 50-year collaboration between Spielberg and Williams through archival footage

It is not only online platforms which are utilised to supplement the personal, authorial nature of the film. Home video is also utilised to provide contextual information and insight into the director as artist. One of the supplements that accompanies the physical blu ray release of the film is titled 'The Fabelmans: A Personal Journey.'<sup>14</sup> The title alone highlights the personal nature of the film, ensuring that the viewer is aware that the journey taken by the central character of Sammy Fabelman is one that is personal to Spielberg himself. The content of the featurette includes behind-the-scenes footage of the making of the film alongside interviews with Spielberg and members of the cast. The interviews themselves provide explicit discussions of the personal, authorial nature of the film, with Spielberg bringing up his decision-making process of what he included and why alongside the cast giving their sense of working on a project that was clearly so personal to the director. Watched as a supplement alongside the film itself, 'A Personal Journey' acts as a kind of exegesis to the film, offering insight to the creative process while simultaneously furthering the brand identity of Spielberg as a craftsman. This emphasis on self as brand is not something which was introduced through the rise of media convergence but rather is an aspect that has been allowed to flourish through the access to multiple media platforms. What these platforms have allowed for is a foundation for the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideology on constructions of the self to become further entrenched within culture, with this ultimately informing the way performances of authorship are executed.

The contrast with the thesis's case studies is instructive precisely because the gesture is, formally, the same. Douglas and Davies, Pasolini and Jarman, Tait, Wells, and Hogg each perform authorship across an intermedial field, staging an authorial self that neither a single medium nor the dominant culture would grant them. Spielberg performs authorship across a transmedial field too – but in order to entrench a legitimacy already conferred, and to convert it into a brand and a legacy. Where their performance is counterdiscourse, a refusal of cultural silencing, his is consolidation: the auteur affirming, from a position of unassailable cultural power, a standing that was his all along. It is this difference – not in the mechanics of the performance but in its stakes and its direction – that throws into relief what is most politically significant about the performances of authorship this thesis has examined. For those to whom the position of author has been denied, to perform it at all remains an act of cultural claiming in the fullest and most political sense of that term.

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<sup>14</sup>*The Fabelmans: A Personal Journey*, home video supplement, *The Fabelmans* blu-ray, 2023.

## Afterword

When I began this research, my intention was to explore autobiographical cinema within a specifically British context. This original focus was inspired primarily by my own personal route in discovering filmic autobiography. It was as I was introduced to the early films of Terence Davies – specifically *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988) – that I became conscious of the possible alignment between life narrative and film, with this discovery triggering a desire to investigate further examples. This search led me directly to two of Davies's British contemporaries: Derek Jarman and Bill Douglas. It was the relationship between this trio of filmmakers – notably their links to 20<sup>th</sup> century British production contexts such as the BFI Production Board – that drove my original research proposal. I was intrigued by the notion of a national production board that encouraged such personal approaches to filmmaking, with a focus on the social and cultural contexts which led to such opportunities. However, in beginning my research into autobiographical film as a genre, it quickly became apparent that the topic lacked a foundational theoretical approach, with the validity of narrative film as an autobiographical medium often coming into question. As I read further, I became increasingly uncomfortable with this reliance on genre definitions, and with the lack of sustained critical engagement with narrative cinema within scholarly discussions of filmic life narrative. It was this discomfort that informed my decision to shift the ground of my thesis away from genre and towards authorship – from the question of whether these films qualify as autobiography to the question of how their directors use fiction film to construct and perform their identities as authors.

It was this aspect which developed into the foundation of this thesis. Rather than an analysis which focused on evaluating how case studies conform to a set of pre-existing generic constraints – an approach which has traditionally shut fiction film out of the discussion – I moved instead towards a methodology which privileged authorship over genre: not how a filmmaker's life is represented, but how a filmmaker's identity as an author is constituted and performed through the act of making. This was informed by my engagement with critical and theoretical work from literary and autobiography studies which reframed self-narration as a socially situated act, including that of Paul John Eakin, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, and James Olney. It was Smith and Watson's account of autobiography as counterdiscourse – the means through which marginalised subjects claim the authority to represent their own experience – that proved decisive, reorienting the thesis around the political stakes of authorial claiming. Regarding its application within film, it was the reframing of the auteur as a performed

and staged persona, rather than an intrinsic creative essence – developed in the work of Linda Haverty Rugg and Stella Bruzzi – that represented the biggest development in my understanding of how film functions as a site of authorial self-inscription. From this emerged the central proposition of the thesis: that the directors studied here do not simply make personal films but perform authorship, and that this performance carries its fullest political charge when it is undertaken by those to whom the position of author has historically been denied.

Chapter 1 lays the groundwork for the thesis by establishing the performance of authorship in its most explicit form – the directly autobiographical film, in which the connection between the director’s biographical experience and the work is most openly acknowledged. Through its two primary case studies, Bill Douglas and Terence Davies, the chapter demonstrates how the claiming of the authorial position is, for the marginalised director, never merely a personal or aesthetic act but a political one. Douglas’s *Bill Douglas Trilogy* (1972-1978) is examined as an act of working-class authorial performance – a claiming of the right to tell a story of poverty, deprivation, and creative aspiration in the demanding formal language of the European art cinema, framed through Stuart Hall’s account of representation as a site of power and through the tradition of working-class self-writing. Davies’s work – the *Terence Davies Trilogy* (1976-1983) alongside the feature films *Distant Voices*, *Still Lives* (1988) and *The Long Day Closes* (1992) – is examined as an act of queer working-class authorial performance, in which the intersection of class and queerness produces a mode of formal self-inscription that encodes a doubly marginalised identity within the sensory and affective texture of the films. In taking the focus away from questions of biographical ‘truth’ and placing it instead on authorship as a constructed and performed act, the chapter illuminates several strands that run through those that follow. This includes the establishment of the self as relational and fluid – demonstrated most clearly in the work of Terence Davies – in a manner which directly counters the classical understanding of the self as unified and solid.

Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 contain the most natural link between each other, with Chapter 2 acting as an elaboration on the key points raised in the first chapter. Both chapters emerge from the tradition of personal filmmaking in British and European fiction film, with Chapter 2 extending the thesis’s argument through the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini. Despite being a contemporary of Fellini and Truffaut, Pasolini is a name conspicuously absent from the existing scholarship on personal filmmaking, and so, through my discovery of his films during my research, I thought it important to secure his place within the discussion. This was achieved through placing his work alongside that of Derek Jarman, whose films are celebrated for their personal nature. The original focus of this chapter was to be solely on Jarman – a topic carried

over from my original proposal. I had elected him as sole focus originally, rather than Davies or Douglas, because of the interdisciplinary nature of his body of work. As a filmmaker who identified simultaneously as a poet, writer, artist, and gardener, he offered an enlightening case study for the intermedial dimension of the performance of authorship, highlighting how authorial identity is constructed across multiple media at once. The relationship between these different forms, and how film functions within it, was to be the focus. Framing this through Jarman's queer identity also allowed for an analysis of the performance of authorship as a form of counterdiscourse for a community who had historically been sidelined within existing studies of autobiography in narrative cinema. Opening the discussion to a mode of authorship that can be performed across a variety of media, the chapter looked to expand on the notion of the mediated queer self. Yet, as research for the chapter developed, the connection between Jarman and Pasolini became increasingly apparent, especially regarding their analogous performances of a transhistorical queer authorial identity. Jarman's affinity with Pasolini's experience – evident most notably in his portrayal of him in *Ostia* (1987) – and appreciation of his oeuvre suggested a comparative chapter focus would be beneficial. This suitability is reinforced by their shared practice across various media, with poetry being a specific point of comparison, allowing Pasolini's work to be persuasively framed as a performance of queer authorship.

Chapter 2 not only developed the argument of Chapter 1 through introducing new case studies into the thesis's account of the performance of authorship but also expanded the question of the 'body as text.' In opening the focus to allow for relational uses of the body to be examined, Chapter 2 begins a study that is continued in Chapter 3. This chapter switches the focus onto a series of British female directors for whom the relational aspect of child/parent relationships is at the centre of their authorial performance. I made the decision to concentrate on the work of women directors in this chapter because this is another area in which scholarship needed to be expanded, especially within the domain of narrative cinema. Canonical examples of cinematic life narrative, especially in the European art cinema tradition, are dominated by the work of male filmmakers, and so it was important to develop an account of the performance of authorship that did not continue this bias. I chose Chapter 3 for this focus because the concept of relationality was the primary facet through which the work of women entered the critical discussion of autobiography in literary studies – as exemplified in the 1988 study *Life/Lines* edited by Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck – so, since Chapter 3 was to look at the relational as a key aspect of the performance of female authorship, it felt suitable to frame this around the work of women directors.

An interesting comparison between Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 can be found in the way the relational is formulated in regard to mother/child relationships in the work of Pasolini and in particular Joanna Hogg. In both their films, the figure of the mother is invoked as a mirror for the protagonist of the personal work, with this mirroring implemented through the use of genuine familial connection. In *Il Vangelo secondo Matteo* (1963), Pasolini's alignment with the persecuted Christ is ensured through the onscreen presence of Susanna as Mary. Embodying – and also foreshadowing – the fear of separation from his mother, the relational body is employed to mirror the relationship that is at the centre of Pasolini's sense of self. Similarly, in *The Souvenir* diptych (2019, 2021), Hogg utilises a layered mirroring of the mother/child relationship in a manner which encourages intertextual readings, ultimately intensifying the personal nature of the work. This film cycle covers Hogg's young adulthood as she navigates a difficult relationship and attempts to enter film school so that she can achieve her desire to become a director. Throughout the two films, familial connection is at the centre of the narrative structure. Tilda Swinton, who plays the mother in both films, directly mirrors Hogg's own mother through the use of possessions, most notably with a hat owned by Hogg's mother being used as part of the costume for Swinton's character. Much in the same way that Hogg looked to recreate her student flat onscreen by reusing objects that were present in the real-life equivalent – the ornate bedframe being the most notable example – as a way to provide a mirror onto that period of her life, possessions are also used to 'transform' Swinton into a mirror of the real mother. This 'mother as mirror' is intensified by the real-life mother/daughter relationship of Swinton and Honor Swinton Byrne, who plays the protagonist Julie. The final layering that is achieved through Swinton's inclusion is the intertextual readings that are represented by her presence in the film. Not only is she representing the mother, but she also provides connection to the student-self of Hogg while simultaneously embodying the personal turn within cinema that is symbolised by the figure of Derek Jarman. In acting as a 'muse' for both Hogg – she featured in her graduation film *Caprice* (1986) – and Jarman – she appeared in all his films from *Caravaggio* (1986) onwards – Swinton's body as relational text allows for Hogg to be present onscreen even when there is an absence, while also calling back to her formational relationship with Jarman – he gave Hogg her first film camera. This is similarly reflected in Susanna's presence within Pasolini's *Teorema*, in which her body acts as an intertextual reference to his formulation of nationhood and the Italy of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that was reflected in his novels and poetry.

In assessing the links between each chapter, I think it is also important to pause and take stock of what my research has sought to achieve. I have set out to gain further insight into the

performance of authorship within the medium of fiction film through an exploration of critical approaches applied to a range of case studies from the history of British and European cinema. I have examined a series of films that each take a different approach to the construction and performance of an authorial identity – albeit approaches that are linked by analogous themes – demonstrating the need to take an adaptable approach to the study of such work. Personal filmmaking in fiction film has been a topic tackled by film scholars, albeit not one that has been studied deeply. Responding to the promptings of Elizabeth Bruss and building on the developments of Wendy Everett, I have attempted to map out a new framework for approaching this form. I have understood the need to look past these works as merely autobiographical, and to approach them instead as performances of authorship. These case studies each demonstrate the array of creative ways the self can be constructed and staged to propel and influence the production of narrative. Rather than beginning from the point of genre, I have instead paid close attention to the decisions which directors made as they produced their work and the processes of composition required to construct and perform a self within this creative act. This mode of analysis has opened up a range of questions, but I have been drawn towards the images, narratives, and arguments surrounding the body onscreen, the relational, fluid, and contingent nature of the self, and the production contexts in which these works exist. These aspects feel like particularly pressing features of each case study, and of the performance of authorship more widely.

The self-as-brand that Spielberg's mainstream performance of authorship exemplifies is not confined to the cinema. In a broadly Western culture of influencers and social media, self-presentation functions primarily as a conduit for promoting the self as brand within the dominant capitalist marketplace, developing the notion of the 'body as text' to include the entrepreneurial turn towards the body as marketable commodity. These platforms provide the ultimate arena for constructed and mediated selves that forego any direct connection to the life as lived. Jettisoning any need for an association with biographical truth, the self presented on social media is selective and dictated by immediate reaction from the consumer – provided through direct feedback avenues such as 'likes' and comments. Driven by the possibility of this online self to be monetised, this feedback directly influences the construction and evolution of the self that is offered online. Online video-sharing platforms such as YouTube extend this further, offering the possibility of a life that is constantly mediated, the self defined by how it is displayed in front of the camera. If the performances of authorship examined in this thesis stake a claim to the position of author as a form of counterdiscourse, this emergent mode points the opposite way: towards a self-construction in which authorship dissolves into brand,

and the claiming of a voice gives way to the courting of a market. It is a shift that will only become more pronounced as the digital landscape progresses, suggesting a dramatic transformation in the way the self is constructed – and performed – within the 21st century.

There is also a great need to understand the performance of authorship in other cultural contexts – especially in regards to the notion of counterdiscourse. I elected to take a Western focus for my thesis because it allowed for a clear mapping of a mode of authorial self-inscription within a cultural context which shared a theoretical and psychological understanding of the self. Bringing in case studies from outside this context, in which the understanding and development of the self as a quantifiable idea may differ, would have required a detailed outline of the history of the self in that context that would have been unsustainable for the scope of my thesis. However, the performance of authorship as counterdiscourse is not a concept reserved for use in a Westernised context, and it is important that it be applied to further examples. A foundation for a study of authorial performance in the cinema of India could begin with the films of Ritwik Ghatak, whose work has been discussed under the label of autobiography. Taking a historical approach similar to the one found in this thesis could help to give a greater understanding of how the performance of authorship has featured in this important and popular cinematic context. Similarly, there is scope for the notion of the ‘body as text’ to be investigated within non-Western examples. There is intriguing potential for this area to be studied in the work of filmmakers from sub-Saharan Africa, especially in the work of Ousmane Sembène, with films such as *La noire de...* (1966) where he appears in front of the camera. This would offer a particularly rich area for investigation and open up an as yet neglected facet of the performance of authorship among directors working from positions of cultural marginalisation.

## Filmography

*Un Chien Andalou*, dir. Luis Buñuel (1929)

*Le sang d'un poète*, dir. Jean Cocteau (1932)

*Zéro de conduite*, dir. Jean Vigo (1933)

*The Elephant Boy*, dir. Robert J. Flaherty/Zoltan Korda (1937)

*Lassie Come Home*, dir. Fred M. Wilcox (1943)

*Duel in the Sun*, dir. King Vidor (1946)

*The Heiress*, William Wyler (1949)

*Riso amaro*, dir. Giuseppe De Santis (1949)

*A Portrait of Ga*, dir. Maragret Tait (1952)

*A Drift Back*, dir. Margaret Tait (1956)

*Giant*, dir. George Stevens (1956)

*Les quatre cents coup*, dir. François Truffaut (1959)

*The Indian Tomb*, dir. Fitz Lang (1959)

*The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse*, dir. Fritz Lang (1960)

*Wild River*, dir. Elia Kazan (1960)

*Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*, dir. Karel Reisz (1960)

*A Taste of Honey*, dir. Tony Richardson (1961)

*Accattone*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1961)

*The Innocents*, dir. Jack Clayton (1961)

*Blue Moses*, dir. Stan Brakhage (1962)

*La ricotta*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1962)

*Mamma Roma*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1962)

*This Sporting Life*, dir. Lindsay Anderson (1963)

*8 ½*, dir. Federico Fellini (1963)

*Il Vangelo secondo Matteo*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1963)

*The Haunting*, dir. Robert Wise (1963)

*La noire de...*, dir. Ousmane Sembène (1966)

*Edipo re*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1967)

*Teorema*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1968)

*Medea*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1969)

*L'enfant sauvage*, dir. François Truffaut (1970)

*Il Decameron*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1971)

*I racconti di Canterbury*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1972)

*My Childhood*, dir. Bill Douglas (1972)

*My Ain Folk*, dir. Bill Douglas (1973)

*Il fiore delle Mille e una Notte*, dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini (1974)

*Jaws*, dir. Steven Spielberg (1975)

*Jeanne Dielman 23, quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles*, dir. Chantal Akerman (1975)

*Children*, dir. Terence Davies (1976)

*Sebastiane*, dir. Derek Jarman (1976)

*My Way Home*, dir. Bill Douglas (1978)

*Germany, Pale Mother*, dir. Helma Sanders-Brahms (1980)

*Madonna and Child*, dir. Terence Davies (1980)

*Death and Transfiguration*, dir. Terence Davies (1983)

*The Angelic Conversation*, dir. Derek Jarman (1985)

*Caprice*, dir. Joanna Hogg (1986)

*Caravaggio*, dir. Derek Jarman (1986)

*Ostia*, dir. Julian Cole (1987)

*The Last of England*, dir. Derek Jarman (1987)

*Chocolat*, dir. Claire Denis (1988)

*Distant Voices, Still Lives*, dir. Terence Davies (1988)

*War Requiem*, dir. Derek Jarman (1989)

*The Garden*, dir. Derek Jarman (1990)

*Edward II*, dir. Derek Jarman (1991)

*Blue Black Permanent*, dir. Margaret Tait (1992)

*The Long Day Closes*, dir. Terence Davies (1992)

*Blue*, dir. Derek Jarman (1993)

*Jurassic Park*, dir. Steven Spielberg (1993)

*Schindler's List*, dir. Steven Spielberg (1993)

*Wittgenstein*, dir. Derek Jarman (1993)

*The Watermelon Woman*, dir. Cheryl Dunye (1996)

*Red Road*, dir. Andrea Arnold (2006)

*Unrelated*, dir. Joanna Hogg (2007)

*Fish Tank*, dir. Andrea Arnold (2009)

*Archipelago*, dir. Joanna Hogg (2010)

*Exhibition*, dir. Joanna Hoog (2013)

*Tuesday*, dir. Charlotte Wells (2015)

*Laps*, dir. Charlotte Wells (2016)

*Blue Christmas*, dir. Charlotte Wells (2017)

*The Souvenir*, dir. Joanna Hogg (2019)

*The Souvenir Part II*, dir. Joanna Hogg (2021)

*Aftersun*, dir. Charlotte Wells (2022)

*The Eternal Daughter*, dir. Joanna Hogg (2022)

*The Fabelmans*, dir. Steven Spielberg (2022)

*Killers of the Flower Moon*, dir. Martin Scorsese (2023)

*Megalopolis*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola (2024)

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