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The Pamela Davies Collection: Continuity Supervision in British Widescreen and Colour Cinema

Steven Roberts

Abstract: *Film continuity supervision is a craft historically dominated by women. Yet, several years since Melanie Williams's pathbreaking article on David Lean's continuity supervisors, scholarship on this deeply gendered area of film production expertise remains lacking. In response, this dossier contribution will introduce Pamela Davies' film continuity stills, catalogued by the author at the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum during an AHRC-funded placement (2018–2019). Davies secured the desired consistency of dialogue, cinematic staging and special effects in British cinema from 1948 to 1985, beginning with the post-war cycle of historical drama in widescreen and colour. Taking a multi-faceted archival approach, I discuss how photographs in the collection snapshot Davies at work and the stills photographers who collaborated with her during a transformative period in British cinema. Examining the stills in their material, craft and commercial contexts will raise new questions about continuity work and make the collection more accessible for researchers.*

The Pamela Davies Collection of photographs illuminate her craft as continuity supervisor in British cinema between 1948 and 1985. The photographs were referred to by Davies during film production and posthumously donated by her sister, Gillean Slade, to the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum at the University of Exeter. This historically significant acquisition was recently catalogued by the author with the assistance of Museum volunteer Ellen Mitchell. Individual items have since featured in museum displays and seminar materials, for example, in Exeter's taught BA module on "Female Screens". The collection contains over six hundred individual photographs and contact sheets that provide an overview of Davies' career trajectory, from an autographed monochrome still of Kieron Moore in costume for London Films' *Anna Karenina* (Julien Duvivier, 1948), on which Davies served as continuity assistant, to colour Polaroids of *Steaming* (Joseph Losey, 1985) in production, among her last films as continuity supervisor. Thirty film titles represented in the collection encompass the popular post-war genres of comedy, crime, science fiction and historical drama, as well as independent cinema directed by Joseph Losey, Laurence Olivier, Carol Reed, Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger.

This report takes a revisionist historical approach to film continuity supervision while making the collection more navigable and hopefully encouraging readers to access it for their research. I will provide a contextual overview of the collection's photographs, which attends to their authorship, material format and special functions. Selected production stills of history films will be examined in more detail to provide an archival trace of Davies' craft. Historical war films, literary adaptations and adventure romance mark Davies' early cinema career, which directly followed her training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art and Auxiliary Territorial Service in the 1940s. These films showcased international locations, star actors, widescreen and colour

formats in order to attract audiences during a period of declining cinema attendance, suburbanisation and competition from home television or other post-war pastimes. Behind-the-scenes snapshots of Davies at work and her sophisticated notes regarding film continuity reveal her responsiveness to aesthetic developments that energised the British film industry.

Continuity supervisors and their assistants have the vital role of ensuring films cohere with the shooting script, hence their alternate "script supervisor" title. Any changes to the planned action, dialogue, costume, cosmetics, props, staging, framing, lighting and sound are documented by the continuity supervisor, providing an essential reference point for the director and editor. The continuity supervisor's familiarity with the script also qualifies them to lend an ear to directorial ideas, join in location scouting, or refer actors to their required lines, all of which can demand stamina and tact. Davies is captured in an industrious light by her photographer colleagues. She confers intently with Reed as they stand knee-high in a river when in Sri Lanka for *Outcast of the Islands* (Carol Reed, 1951), studies the script of *Judith* (Daniel Mann, 1966) alongside Sophia Loren, or assists Judy Garland for *I Could Go on Singing* (Ronald Neame, 1963). Working across studio spaces and remote locations, Davies exudes preparedness when pictured with her stopwatch, typewriter and copious notes.

The collection's photographs fulfilled various standard functions beyond documenting Davies' continuity work, including casting, action shots, industry-reflexive work relating to the making of the film, and marketing (Marchant 172). These different types of image were known to and repurposed by Davies in her role as continuity supervisor. For example, Arthur E. Lemon's still of Jack Hawkins, posing with bow and arrow on Fox's "runaway" British production of *The Black Rose* (Henry Hathaway, 1950), a Technicolor romance shot partly at Warwick Castle, exemplifies the unit stills photographer's promotional angle, which Davies could appropriate for wardrobe continuity. Continuity supervisors Elaine Schreyeck, June Randall and Pamela Mann-Francis also speak in interviews about the usefulness of sketching and photographing scenes, particularly after Polaroid's rapid-developing cameras entered the market in 1948. However, Mann-Francis recalls one stills photographer who forbiddingly cited trade union rules when she snapped Polaroids rather than relying on his photographs, and whose routine duties were safeguarded by the British Association of Cine-Technicians (later ACTT, now merged to form BECTU, the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Communications and Theatre Union), whereas Mann-Francis had to argue for union membership.

The Pamela Davies Collection enriches our knowledge of a filmmaking role predominately occupied by women that has historically been overlooked or erroneously regarded as a non-technical role. It has been overlooked partly because "good" continuity supervision is paradoxically signalled by the absence of perceived bloops such as misplaced props, which would otherwise commonly materialise, particularly as scenes are filmed out of narrative sequence in rationalised production schedules that minimise call time and so forth. Whereas a sweeping crane shot might suggest a camera unit working in harmony, the overarching contribution of continuity supervisors is difficult to spot unless errors arise in the film. Exacerbating the onscreen (in)visibility of continuity work is the underappreciation of women behind the scenes: even seasoned technicians have been referred to as "script girls" and elided with secretarial personnel because of gender bias in trade discourse. The unofficial scope of continuity supervision has included unsociable overtime spent with production notes and uncredited acts of diplomacy,

leading to Maggie Unsworth's problematic reputation as David Lean's unobtrusive "sounding board" (Williams 610). Similarly, biographer Edith de Rham writes that there was "virtually no one on whom Losey relied more than Pamela Davies" over the course of twelve films that they made together (280). The director stated in the preface to James Leahy's monograph, published in the release year of *Accident* (Joseph Losey, 1967), that Davies' "dedication as well as her work have made such an enormous difference" (8). The continuity supervisor's ideal interpersonal qualities of reliability and dedication are tellingly distinguished from "her work", which is praised only indirectly (Leahy 8). But direct evidence of Davies' craft labour survives in her photograph collection.

Complementing the mannered style of promotional portraits and "candid" behind-the-scenes reportage in Davies' collection are annotated photographs indicative of the continuity supervisor's technical expertise. The photographs have an idiomatic resolution, scale, hue and surface texture, which is informed by their mode of production and intended purpose. For example, the subdued browns of early Polaroid might not replicate the Technicolor palette of *Zarak* (Terence Young, 1956), but they did provide an efficient surface for Davies to number film colours in pencil, with explanations on the plain reverse side. In one Polaroid of the Elstree soundstage, costumed acting doubles on a balcony set are flanked by plants that are categorised, in Davies' familiar cursive hand, as "(1) bright pink azaleas, (2) pink & white petunias, (3) green only" (Figure 1). The flora echoes Salma's (Anita Ekberg) pink dress and background drapes (Figure 2), which visually soften the mood as she soothes the exiled Zarak (Victor Mature). Comparing further annotated photographs and film shots suggests that Davies adopted a taxonomic vocabulary for colour continuity. A Polaroid of Zarak's horse, which is seen in Morocco directly after the above scene, bears descriptions of its "chestnut" coat and "rose red saddle" topped with "scarlet" fabric, which Davies distinguishes from the "tomato red cotton turban" of Larkin (Patrick McGoohan) in another wardrobe still.



Figure 1: Polaroid of *Zarak* in production at the Elstree Studio.
Image sourced from the Pamela Davies Collection, Bill Douglas Cinema Museum, UK.



Figure 2: Victor Mature and Anita Ekberg star in *Zarak*. Warwick, 1959. Screenshot.

Davies adapted to a widescreen mise en scène which extended the image area and added materially to the complexity of her role. From 1953, Steve Chibnall describes how the cost of widescreen technology to British independents was mitigated by Hollywood coproduction and distribution deals (150–1). As such, Warwick's *Zarak* and London Films' *Storm Over the Nile* (Terence Young and Zoltan Korda, 1955) could be captured on 35mm film in the aspect ratios of 2.35:1 and 2.55:1 (width to height) respectively, by squeezing the wide image through the anamorphic lens of Twentieth Century-Fox's CinemaScope format. The manner in which Mature and Ekberg are surrounded by ornate arches, drapes and the flowers noted by Davies belies what C. S. Tashiro calls the "saturated" design of historical widescreen cinema (51–4). John Box's ornamental art direction in *Zarak* aims to focus attention on the characters through blocking and reinforce the film's production values, mercilessly exposed in widescreen. Through her repeat association with independent cinema, Davies would again encounter Box on *Oliver!* (Carol Reed, 1968), whose yawning London sets were lensed in Panavision at Shepperton studios and produced by Warwick and Romulus, with stills by Bob Penn.

Davies' craft was brought closer to theatrical staging in *Richard III* (Laurence Olivier, 1955), which uses uncluttered sets and widescreen composition to foreground Shakespearean performance. Davies precisely recorded actor placement for a large speaking cast (the 2012 film restoration runs just over 160 minutes) within the 1.85:1 frame, as standardised by Paramount's VistaVision format. To capture the deep staging of actors in high resolution VistaVision, Norman Hargood supplied Davies with glossy photographs of the soundstage and filming locations. The inclusion of lighting rigs, camera dolly and costumed doubles provide a novel view of noteworthy scenes, for example the sequence in which Gloucester (Olivier, here substituted) observes his schemes unravel at court from the exterior parapet, framed by tall windows. Hargood's labour-intensive panoramas are another special contribution that combine two to three photographic panels of the Battle of Bosworth sequence in Spain, most likely created for promotional purposes but allowing Davies an overview of army placement and uniform. Although no chromatic annotations by Davies appear, she would have been conscious of the colour-coded costumes which are used to distinguish factions throughout the film.

New archival, trade and oral history sources nuance the scholarly appreciation of marginalised continuity supervisors. Recent research includes Melanie Williams on Lean's continuity supervisors, an AHRC project locating women in British film and television led by Melanie Bell (2014–2017), and monographs by Erin Hill and J. E. Smyth on women's work on diverse rungs of the Hollywood studio hierarchy. Practitioners have also offered their definitions of continuity supervision: on the website of *Script Supervisors UK* (sadly now defunct), cofounded by Diana Dill, Jane Jackson and Anwen Bull; in trade manuals by Avril Rowlands and Pat P. Miller; and in interviews and memoirs, such as that of Tokyo-born continuity supervisor and production manager Teruyo Nogami (translated into English in 2006), who assisted Akira Kurosawa. The Pamela Davies Collection makes several contributions to this field of discourse. Firstly, as craft objects, annotated photographs provide material clues about Davies' detailed examination of film colour, costumes, sets, widescreen staging and special effects. Secondly, the collection underscores how continuity supervision and cinema technology coevolved during Davies' career. Thirdly, the archived images embody an underreported collaboration between continuity supervisors and the stills photographers who bolstered Davies' reference materials and shaped her trade image. Fourthly, research into British studio culture, star branding, set design and other filmmaking roles will find considerable value in consulting the Pamela Davies Collection and help to contextualise continuity supervision. Future archival research will be further strengthened by my three-fold approach to the authorship, format and function of stills photography in the film industry.

Collection Filmography

All thirty films cited below are linked to the Pamela Davies Collection in the Bill Douglas Cinema Museum's online catalogue.

Accident. Directed by Joseph Losey, Royal Avenue Chelsea, 1967.
Anna Karenina. Directed by Julien Duvivier, London Films, 1948.
The Black Rose. Directed by Henry Hathaway, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1950.
Britannia Mews. Directed by Jean Negulesco, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1949.
The Corn is Green. Directed by George Cukor, Warner Bros. Television, 1979. (TV movie).
Dragonslayer. Directed by Matthew Robbins, Paramount Pictures/Walt Disney, 1981.
The Elusive Pimpernel. Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, London Films, 1950.
Gorgo. Directed by Eugene Lourie, King Brothers, 1961.
The Guns of Navarone. Directed by J. Lee Thompson, Highroad, 1961.
High Flight. Directed by John Gilling, Warwick/Columbia Pictures, 1957.
I Could Go on Singing. Directed by Ronald Neame, Barbican Films, 1963.
The Intruder. Directed by Guy Hamilton, Ivan Foxwell, 1953.
Judith. Directed by Daniel Mann, Command/Cumulus, 1966.
Julia. Directed by Fred Zinnemann, Twentieth Century-Fox, 1977.
The Mouse that Roared. Directed by Jack Arnold, Highroad, 1959.
Mr Denning Drives North. Directed by Anthony Kimmins, London Films, 1951.
Oliver! Directed by Carol Reed, Romulus/Warwick, 1968.
Outcast of the Islands. Directed by Carol Reed, London Films, 1951.

Richard III. Directed by Laurence Olivier, Laurence Olivier/London Films, 1955.
The Road to Hong Kong. Directed by Norman Panama, Melnor Films, 1962.
*S*P*Y*S*. Directed by Irvin Kershner, Twentieth Century-Fox/Dymphana/American Film Properties, 1974.
Steaming. Directed by Joseph Losey, World Film Services, 1985.
Storm Over the Nile. Directed by Zoltan Korda and Terence Young, London Films/Twentieth Century-Fox, 1955.
Superman II. Directed by Richard Lester and Richard Donner, Dovemead/International Film Production, 1980.
These Dangerous Years. Directed by Herbert Wilcox, Everest Pictures, 1957.
The Tales of Hoffman. Directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, London Films, 1951.
Top Secret. Directed by Jim Abrahams, David Zucker, and Jerry Zucker, Kingsmere, 1984.
A Touch of Larceny. Directed by Guy Hamilton, Ivan Foxwell, 1960.
Wonderful Things. Directed by Herbert Wilcox, ABPC/Herbert Wilcox, 1958.
Zarak. Directed by Terence Young, Warwick, 1956.

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